Kachin orature project: Documentation, archiving, and revitalization of oral heritage in northern Myanmar

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1. Introduction

Oral literature, or "orature" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1998), is the main mode of communication, especially in preliterate societies. Preserved across generations, it is a rich source of information about cultural values, beliefs, ideas, knowledge, practices, worldviews, and moral norms. However, it is presently confronting the reality of decline in many places of the world under growing globalization and rapid changes in society, the economy, and technology (Turin, Wheeler & Wilkinson 2013). The same situation holds for the Kachin people, an Indigenous people of northern Myanmar. They have a rich tradition of oral literature, as reflected in myriads of folktales, myths, epics, folk music, and proverbs that have been transmitted orally across generations. For special events, professional narrators, called *jaiwa*, were invited to recount the Kachin creation story and subsequent events, which lasted for three days and nights (Hanson 1913: 109–129, 152–153). Presently, however, very few people can recount these epics. Because of rapid social change in recent years, the oral culture that has been handed down for long periods is currently disappearing.

This paper aims to showcase our ongoing community-based collaborative efforts to document, archive, and revitalize the rapidly vanishing oral literature of the Kachin, based on more than ten years of fieldwork.[1] This paper highlights our Kachin orature project from three perspectives: community-based fieldwork and documentation, which has resulted in a large body of oral literature (§3.1); the archiving of Kachin oral literature with PARADISEC (§3.2); and our collaborative efforts to return collected and archived materials to the Kachin community in and outside Myanmar (§3.3). The present situation of the Kachin oral literature is presented in §2. In the remainder of this section, we provide an introductory background to the Kachin community and their languages.

Within mainland Southeast Asia, known for its diversity of ethnicities and languages, Myanmar is a particularly ethnolinguistically diverse country. Generally, central lowlands are occupied by Burmese, the dominant group, in contrast to upland areas situated to the east, west, and north, which are home to various minority peoples. Myanmar's ethnocultural diversity mirrors its linguistic diversity: Myanmar is home to more than 130 languages belonging to various language families (Hammarström et al. 2021), such as Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, Austroasiatic, Hmong-Mien, Austronesian, Dravidian, and Indo-European.

The Kachin people are Indigenous people who mainly inhabit northern Myanmar. In terms of ethnic composition, the Kachin people make up approximately 1.5% of the population of Myanmar. Some of them live in adjacent areas of China and India, straddling the political boundaries of the modern nation-states of Myanmar, China, and India. The Kachin are traditionally highlanders who occupy heavily forested hill tracts, where they practice slash-and-burn agriculture in non-irrigated mountain fields. They are linguistically diverse people who speak more than ten distinct languages of Tibeto-Burman (TB). The following (1) provides a summary of the major Kachin languages.[2] In this multilingual community, Jinghpaw serves as a lingua franca, being a linguistic bond.

(1) Major languages of the Kachin people (adapted from Kurabe 2021: 404)

Autonym	Exonym	ISO-639-3	Within TB	Subgroup
Jinghpaw	Kachin	kac	Sal	Jinghpaw-Luish
Rawang	Nung	raw	Rung	Nungish
Zaiwa	Atsi	atb	Lolo-Burmese	Burmish
Lhaovo	Maru	mhx	Lolo-Burmese	Burmish
Lacid	Lashi	lsi	Lolo-Burmese	Burmish
Lisu	Yawyin	lis	Lolo-Burmese	Loloish

Despite their internal linguistic diversity, the Kachin people constitute more or less a single socio-cultural complex, sharing many socio-cultural traits that extend beyond the linguistic boundary, including shared religion and rituals, shared ancestry and history, and shared oral literature. *Manau*, a great spirit feast and religious dance, is

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[2] The membership of the Kachin is not always clear-cut due in part to the fluidity of ethnic identities in northern Myanmar (Leach 1954). Additionally, note that the Lisu, whose population is great in China and who have a distinct nationality status there, are often regarded as a group distinct from the Kachin, especially outside Kachin State, Myanmar.

a prominent cultural trait that is held everywhere in the Kachin region across linguistic groups. Another significant trait is the intra-Kachin marriage alliance system, in which there are fixed correspondences between clans that go beyond the linguistic group. All aristocratic clans of the Kachin are believed to be the descendants of the sons of *Wahkyet Wa*, who in turn is the descendant of *Ninggawn Wa*, the eldest brother of the great celestial spirit (Hanson 1913: 13–15, Lehman 1993). Oral literature is also a fundamental component of the Kachin culture. For example, there are many pan-Kachin folktales shared across linguistic groups. For special events such as *Manau*, a professional storyteller called *jaiwa* was invited to recount the creation story and subsequent events of the Kachin, such as the stories of *Wahkyet Wa* and *Ninggawn Wa*. This special storytelling, portrayed in rhythmic and poetic languages, would spread over three days and nights (Hanson 1913: 152–153).

2. Kachin oral literature

For a long time, the Kachin society was preliterate. It was at the end of the 19th century that a Jinghpaw orthography based on the Roman alphabet was introduced by American missionaries. In preliterate times, the main mode of communication was predominantly oral. The Kachin has a long-standing rich tradition of oral literature, circulated through the medium of speech from one generation to the next. This is illustrated not only by the creation lore recited by *jaiwa* but also by a myriad of folktales, legends, mythologies, ritual chants, folksongs, proverbs, and many others. As noted above, oral literature, as a vehicle for conveying cultural values, ideas, and knowledge that transcend linguistic boundaries, constitutes one of the fundamental components of the Kachin culture. As an illustration, let us introduce a summary of a Kachin folktale, "Birds that danced the *Manau* dance," collected by the authors (Kurabe and H. Pri 2016).

> A long time ago, birds flying happily in the jungle saw a big banyan tree with many fruits. One of the birds said, "Before we eat, let's praise by dancing the *Manau* dance for getting a chance to eat these fruits." Then, other birds asked, "Who will lead the dance?" First, they asked the great hornbill to lead the dance because it was the biggest among them. However, as soon as the great hornbill sang "Oh ra ra," the other birds were startled and flew away because its voice was too loud. Then, the birds thought of another way and asked the racket-tailed drongo to take the role. It led the dance with its pleasant and mellow voice. The bird is believed to be the king of the birds among the Kachin. Its tails are put on a traditional headdress of ritual leaders during the *Manau* dance. After the birds danced the *Manau* dance, they happily ate the banyan fruits together. The waiter

birds asked, "How should we apportion banyan fruits to each bird?" Then, the blue-throated barbet said, "Give a small amount of food to small birds, and give a large amount of food to big birds!" The small birds were dissatisfied with this, and they broke the blue-throated barbet's head. That's why the bird has a red head today.

Kachin oral literature, as illustrated by this story, is a rich source of information about cultural values, beliefs, knowledge, worldviews, and moral norms. The oral tradition, shared beyond generations and linguistic groups, is a strong cultural bond that ties the Kachin people together. The same story may be told in different Kachin languages across different generations. Thus, oral literature plays a vital role in sustaining cultural uniformity and linguistic diversity at the same time.

Storytelling was a popular form of entertainment and a substantial part of daily life in the past. In the agricultural off-season, until a few decades ago, Kachin children around the village came together, sat around a fire, and listened to elders' stories in the evening. An old narrator, recalling his younger days, told us how storytelling took place in the past:

"It was around this time when the rice harvest was over. On long nights, the elderly told us stories while we sat around the fireplace eating yams. That's how life was in the mountain. That was when I was a child. When we children heard that someone in the neighborhood was going to tell a story, we would all bring yams and listen while cooking them in the fireplace. We would steam corn and eat it. It was a tradition practiced especially during the cold season."

(Interview in December 2018)

Today, however, the situation has completely changed. The traditional oral culture is facing the reality of decline. Many stories, despite their vital importance to the community, are not being transmitted well to succeeding generations in the face of rapid changes in society, the economy, and technology. New forms of entertainment, coupled with the widespread use of Burmese there, have taken over community gatherings. He continued:

"Young people today don't know folktales. They don't know proverbs. They don't know poetry. Television has replaced oral storytelling by parents and the elderly. Television, videos, and the Internet have taken its place..."

Oral literature has been losing its ground in new ways of life. The context in which they were performed is shrinking. There are currently very few *jaiwa*s who can rehearse the whole creation legends as passed down by ancestors. Additionally, minority languages and cultures have not entered education programs in formal public schooling.

Storytellers have become aged. Children are spending less time with the elderly. The younger people do not pay much attention to oral lores, which sometimes sound irrelevant, uninteresting, or old-fashioned to them. Another narrator, reflecting on her experience, states:

> "My grandfather used to tell us folktales in the evenings after dinner when we had leisure time. We didn't receive much education. We grew up without knowing anything. Nowadays, as education has improved, when an old person like me tells a story, the children no longer listen attentively. So, we no longer tell the tales either."
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> (Interview in December 2018)

Today many traditional stories are under the threat of extinction without record. Their loss is directly accompanied by a loss of cultural values, beliefs, ideas, and knowledge reflected in the stories. Through their fall, the intergenerational and inter-community ties are shrinking. The decline of the Kachin oral literature will ultimately lead to the loss of the diversity and richness of the human culture, experience, practice, insight, wisdom, creativity, and artistry.

3. Kachin orature project

Against the background outlined above, for the past ten years, Keita Kurabe has carried out fieldwork in northern Myanmar to collect vanishing voices of the Kachin oral heritage. Since 2016, the project has become collaborative and community-based, with young Kachin community members (in their 20s at the time), including Lu Awng, joining it. Their direct involvement is now the core component of our research at all stages. Presently, we are working together toward three missions, to document, archive, and revitalize the vanishing oral tradition. In this section, we highlight our ongoing collaborative efforts in terms of these three perspectives.

3.1 Collaborative fieldwork and documentation

Keita Kurabe has been engaged in collecting Kachin oral literature in northern Myanmar since 2009. Initially, he began the project as part of linguistic fieldwork on Jinghpaw for his doctoral dissertation. In the course of the fieldwork, he discovered the voice of younger community members who, worrying about the recent transmission breakdown, wished to retrieve and maintain their own culture. This led to a shift in the approach to the community-based research model, which "is conducted *for, with,* and *by* the language-speaking community" (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009: 24). Increasingly, our project has become community-led and community-centered; as of today, younger

community members have been directly involved as co-researchers. Lu Awng, Ja Seng Roi, Htu Bu, Tu La, Htu Nan, and Seng Nan from the Kachin community have mainly contributed to the data collection in northern Myanmar. Figure 1 shows Ja Seng Roi collecting folktales during her fieldwork. She first looked through her network of contacts for information on people who knew traditional stories well. She then went to their places and recorded the stories. She sometimes slept in the village to simultaneously collect stories from many people.

Figure 1. Ja Seng Roi (left) recording folktales

Our team conducted audio and sometimes audio-visual recordings of oral literature in various parts of the Kachin region in and around Myitkyina, Waingmaw, Hopin, Mohnyin, Bhamo, Putao, Machanbaw, Lashio, Kutkai, and so on. Over 500 narrators (from approximately 230 places of birth) helped us by sharing their invaluable stories transmitted orally by their parents, grandparents, and other elderly. Most of the narrators were elderly people; however, some younger people also contributed stories that they had heard from their parents and grandparents. The narrators' birth years range between 1915 and 2007.

Our team used equipment and tools that allowed high-quality digital recordings, such as Zoom H4n, H4n Pro, H5, RØDE NTG2, SONY ECM-VG1, and audio-technica AT9944. We used a consistent file-naming convention for collected materials to keep all data organized, compatible, and identifiable. We gathered metadata on-site, using the same set of metadata to keep all the data manageable and interpretable. It includes information about content languages, participants, cultural rights, and technical and administrative information. We also collected information on languages ordinarily spoken by the narrators and the linguistic groups to which they belonged, in view of the internal linguistic diversity of the Kachin community. All metadata were then recorded

in a single spreadsheet. This worked well for uniform content searches, despite the diversity of the collectors. Along with materials and metadata, we gathered agreements and consent about access to these materials to ensure that they could be used for multiple purposes.

The outcome of our collaborative fieldwork and documentation is a large body of Kachin oral literature comprising approximately 2,750 stories (more than 230 hours). Collected stories cover diverse genres, including folktales, fables, legends, myths, creation stories, origin stories, trickster tales, morality tales, educational tales, humorous tales, ghost stories, folk epics, historical narratives, oratories, spells, ritual chants, prayers, folksongs, poems, proverbs, sayings, blessings, riddles, jokes, procedural texts, and many others. We sometimes collected the same stories told by different people from different places because they were often conveyed in different versions. We have also collaborated to produce time-aligned transcriptions, translations, and annotations using ELAN. As of April 2022, 2,743 stories have been transcribed, of which 979 have been translated into English. Transcription has mainly been done by Lu Awng, La Ring, Lu Hkawng, Ja Seng Roi, Htu Bu, and Keita Kurabe. Stories have been translated mainly by Rita Seng Mai, Gun Mai, Htoi San, Seng Pan, Mike Tu Awng, Htoi Awng, and Keita Kurabe.

All community co-researchers have participated in the project with a desire to maintain, retrieve, and pass on their own precious culture to succeeding generations, as Lu Awng puts it:

"I joined this project because I was worried about losing our culture and language. I'd like to make more efforts for the maintenance of our precious culture and language for the next generation. It's our responsibility as young people."

Another young collaborator, Tu La, expressed his concern about the vanishing voice and its relevance to the future:

"Today, we are witnessing a decline in the number of cultural bearers who are very knowledgeable in folktales. We're spending less time on storytelling. Day by day, we're losing our oral tradition. It's sad. Our history and folklore are very important to us. Without them, we would not be able to get insights into our future."
(Interview in October 2019)

Ja Seng Roi expressed her desire to engage in more fieldwork and contribute to intergenerational transmission:

"If we don't make a record of them right now, they will be completely lost. Shortly, we should do the recordings in the whole Kachin area. This is because each region has its unique dialect, custom, and culture. We, younger people, should listen to

our folktales, and tell them to our children."

(Interview in October 2019)

Our partnership is mutually beneficial and reciprocal. The community members provide their rich first-hand knowledge of culture and language, while Keita Kurabe, as a researcher and facilitator, provides technical and specialized knowledge. Our collaborative approach has significantly improved the efficiency of data collection. A large body of data from various people would never be possible without collaboration. Finding knowledgeable narrators in the first place was also a challenge given that the setting of traditional storytelling was eroding. Local team members who had the best knowledge of the community individuals facilitated the finding of knowledgeable narrators. Our teamwork sped up the time-consuming practices of transcription, translation, and annotation, which were the bottleneck in the documentation workflow for large volumes of data. We have not only produced deliverables but have also experienced an extensive knowledge exchange, gaining a variety of knowledge and experience that could not have been obtained from only one person.

We delivered copies of collected materials on CDs or USB sticks to several community members, including elderly people without Internet access, for them to be shared for multipurpose use. We sometimes returned copies of legacy materials to the families of the narrators who passed away after telling us stories. We have not only worked together to deliver the collected materials physically but also digitally. Let us now turn to our efforts in digital archiving.

3.2 Archiving

Archiving materials to reliable memory institutions such as libraries, archives, museums, and galleries is important to ensure the long-term preservation and accessibility of field materials (Johnson 2005, Thieberger & Berez 2012). Presently, however, there are no such repositories for hosting the cultural materials of the minority people in Myanmar. During our fieldwork, we often heard that precious pictures and videos featuring traditional events had unexpectedly been lost due to the deterioration of personal hard drives, despite their importance for the Kachin community now and in the future. To safely preserve vulnerable recordings that would otherwise be lost forever or be buried in private collections, we have archived 2,754 stories from our collaborative fieldwork with PARADISEC, an Internet-based digital archive for the secure preservation of and access to minority cultures and languages of the world (Kurabe 2013, 2017). A current view of our collection is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Kachin folktales told in Jinghpaw (KK1)
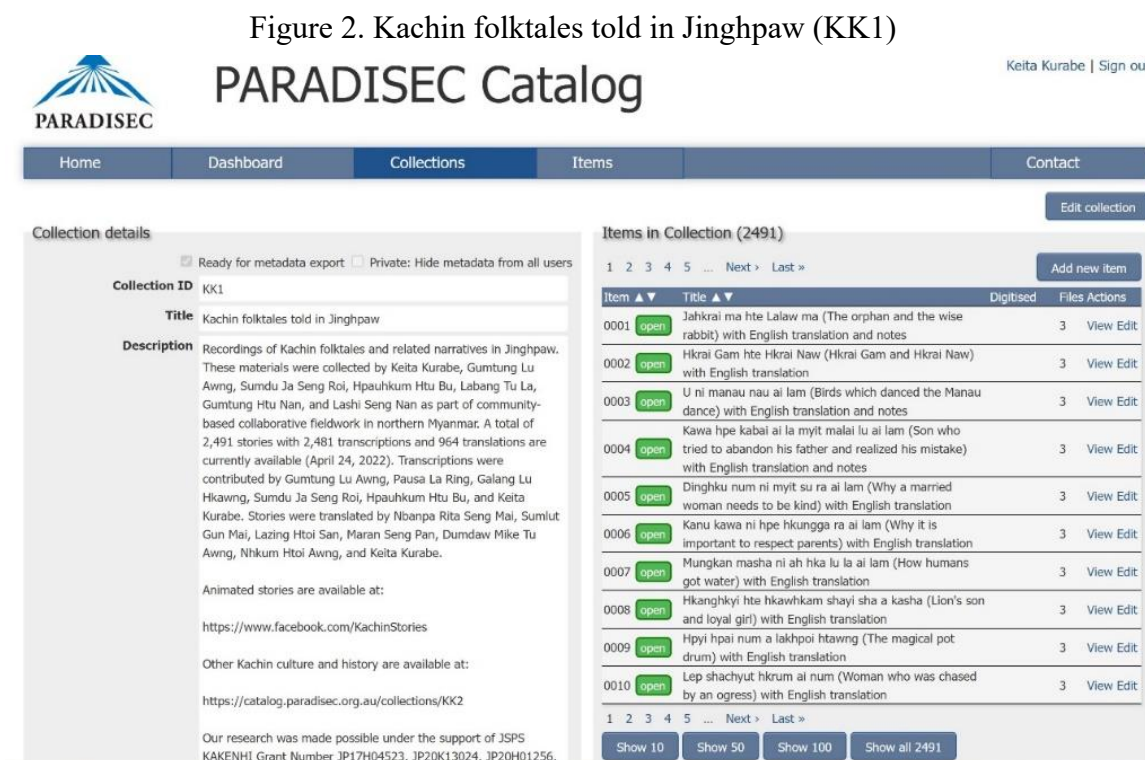
Currently, our collection houses audio recordings representing 2,754 stories, 2,743 transcriptions, and 979 English translations. Each story is approximately three to ten minutes long on average. Some stories are longer than 30 minutes. Audio recordings amount to approximately 230 hours in total. We have two collections in PARADISEC: The first collection (Collection ID: KK1) is named "Kachin folktales told in Jinghpaw" (Figure 2). It contains recordings of Kachin folktales and related narratives told in Jinghpaw, the lingua franca of the Kachin people (2,491 stories). The second collection (KK2) is "Kachin culture and history told in Jinghpaw," which offers recordings of cultural and historical materials (263 stories). Under our collections, there are 2,754 items, each corresponding to a single story with metadata. In most cases, one item contains audio and ELAN files. They are named using alpha-numeric characters, following PARADISEC naming conventions (i.e., CollectionID-ItemID-ContentFile). For example, under the item KK1-0001, we have files such as KK1-0001-A.wav and KK1-0001-A.eaf. Narrators sometimes told one story with a break in between. In such cases, we obtained multiple tracks for a single audio session. These multiple files are enumerated by alphabet characters suffixed to each file name (e.g., KK1-0155-A.wav and KK1-0155-B.wav). ELAN files provide transcription, translation, and annotation. Our collection also provides transcription and translation in plain text exported from ELAN in the "Description" field since they are more accessible to users with no

background knowledge of the specific software. Transcription and translation in this field are updated often (almost every week) and immediately when they are prepared to ensure that they are not lost. Thus, our archiving process is always dynamic and ongoing (cf. Johnson 2005, Thieberger & Berez 2012). We continue to enrich our materials.

Figure 3. Current view of the item, KK1-2010
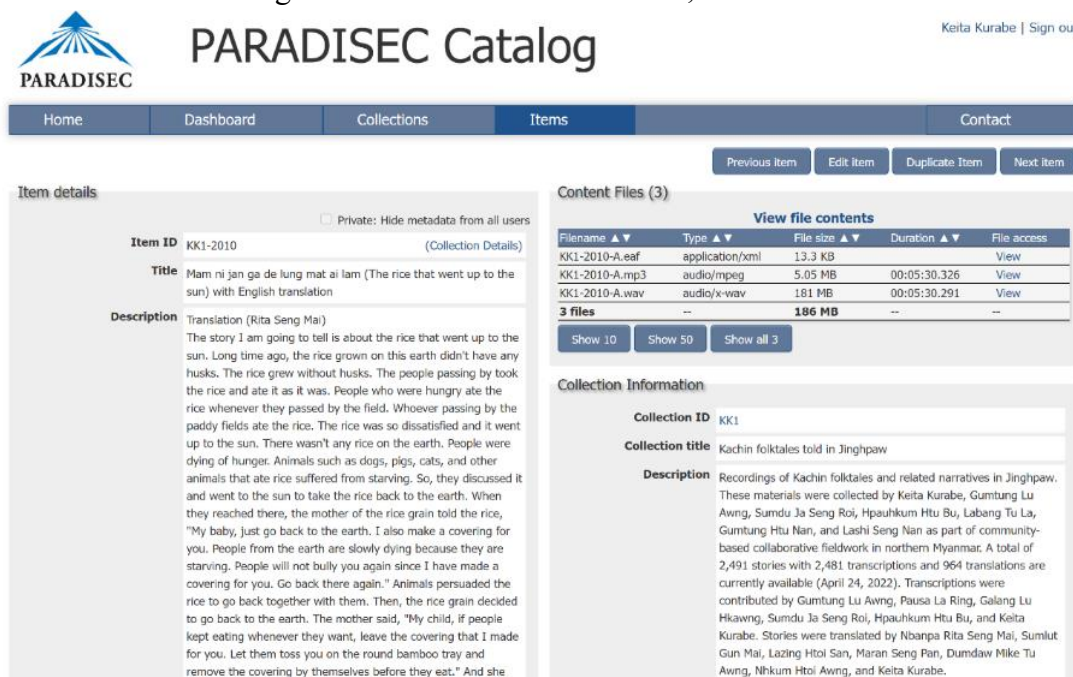
We make almost all our resources open and public to ensure that they are universally accessible to a broad range of potential audiences, including community members, researchers, educators, students, and non-academics. All our field recordings can be listened to online or downloaded from the collection. Since the inception of our collections, we have obtained positive messages from members of the Kachin community who have read, heard, and downloaded their own stories that are archived in our collection. The collections provide many types of local knowledge reflected in oral literature, ranging from a story about how the bile of the king quail became medicine for burns to rituals practiced when lightning strikes that people must not utter a word until the offering to the thunder spirit is completed. Our rich reserve of cultural materials also draws the attention of researchers beyond the field of linguistics. One inquiry about our collection includes information on weretigers represented in Kachin folklore in relation to weretigers and "tiger-shamans" in South and Southeast Asia. One of our future efforts should be to produce more English translations for potential end-users who do not know

the local language.

Archiving with PARADISEC has made our materials findable, citable, reproducible, and reusable. For example, OLAC resources in and about the Kachin (Jinghpaw) language have more than 2,700 entries, most of which are resources in our collection. Since PARADISEC assigns a DOI to every item in the collection, with long-term accessibility, every story in our collection can now be properly cited. Since our data are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, our resources can be reused, shared, and adapted for multipurpose use. For example, our archived stories are reused for educational purposes in the Kachin community. A gathering of parents and children was held in 2020 in Sarhmaw near Mogaung to tell folktales to children using stories from our archived materials. One of the organizers of the gathering told us that parents focused on folktales because children could easily learn culture, morals, and lessons through stories. Seng Pan, our collaborator, applied the translated stories in her English class as comprehension exercises. Since all stories are Kachin stories and the students are Kachins, it is easy for them to understand their context. The stories also help them to learn more about their tradition, which is rarely told in their generation. Based on our archived stories, Keita Kurabe produced reading material for pedagogical purposes and a dictionary with 15,915 collocations and 4,077 example sentences (Kurabe 2020a, 2020b). The materials were used at the Intensive Language Course held between August and September 2019, hosted by ILCAA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. The current authors presented the course using these materials. In the next section, we highlight more on our ongoing collaborative efforts to return collected and archived materials to the Kachin community, with a special focus on the community-driven online social media platform.

3.3 Collaborative delivery and repatriation

Although very well archived, many people from the Kachin community had little idea about where to find the collected and archived stories. Several community members asked us to make our materials available on Facebook, given its status as the most popular social media website in Myanmar. Reflecting on and responding to community needs, we launched a Facebook Page in February 2019, named *Wunpawng Maumwi Mausa*, or "Kachin Stories."[3] The platform was co-created and is co-managed by the current authors, together with several younger community members. We have posted a subset of the archived stories with a citation and a link to the original materials in

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[3] https://www.facebook.com/KachinStories

PARADISEC. The Page has enabled someone who "liked" or "followed" it to see updates in their News Feed in time with every update. We do not intend to use the platform as an archival facility, since proprietary social media does not guarantee sustainable preservation and safeguarding. Instead, the idea is to use it as a dissemination venue that helps facilitate the circulation of our materials to the community in a more accessible manner.

Figure 4. Illustrated story posted on *Wunpawng Maumwi Mausa*

Since December 2020, we have animated popular stories, following a request from the community. The animations are based on our collected and archived materials. Of importance is the fact that many younger people with complementary skills have collaborated to produce a single animation. For example, the story *Ndang Nat Hpe Jahkrit Ai La*, "The Man Who Frightened the Spirits," was illustrated by Shawanang, a young illustrator, from the Kachin perspective. Gun Mai made it into a video. He also retold the story in an easy-to-understand young voice, following requests from our Page's followers. The story was then transcribed and translated into many languages by many contributors (see Figure 4). As of April 2022, we have animated 57 stories. Meanwhile, we have also launched a YouTube channel to share animated stories.[4] Although YouTube is not a popular medium in Myanmar, its subtitle function is more user-friendly. We created multilingual subtitles for a single video to make it accessible to a wider audience. Currently, subtitles include two Kachin languages (i.e., Jinghpaw

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[4] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyRWVcLO4YZlEO_9SWyPPYQ

and Lhaovo), Burmese, English, Japanese, and Chinese. Subtitles were created using ELAN, where each tier corresponds to a single language. SRT files exported by ELAN were then uploaded to YouTube (Figure 5). We are planning to enhance the number of multilingual subtitles, especially in other languages of the Kachin, given the multilingual society. Currently, the stories are only narrated in Jinghpaw; however, we hope to create dubbed versions in other Kachin languages for the community members whose mother tongues are not Jinghpaw.
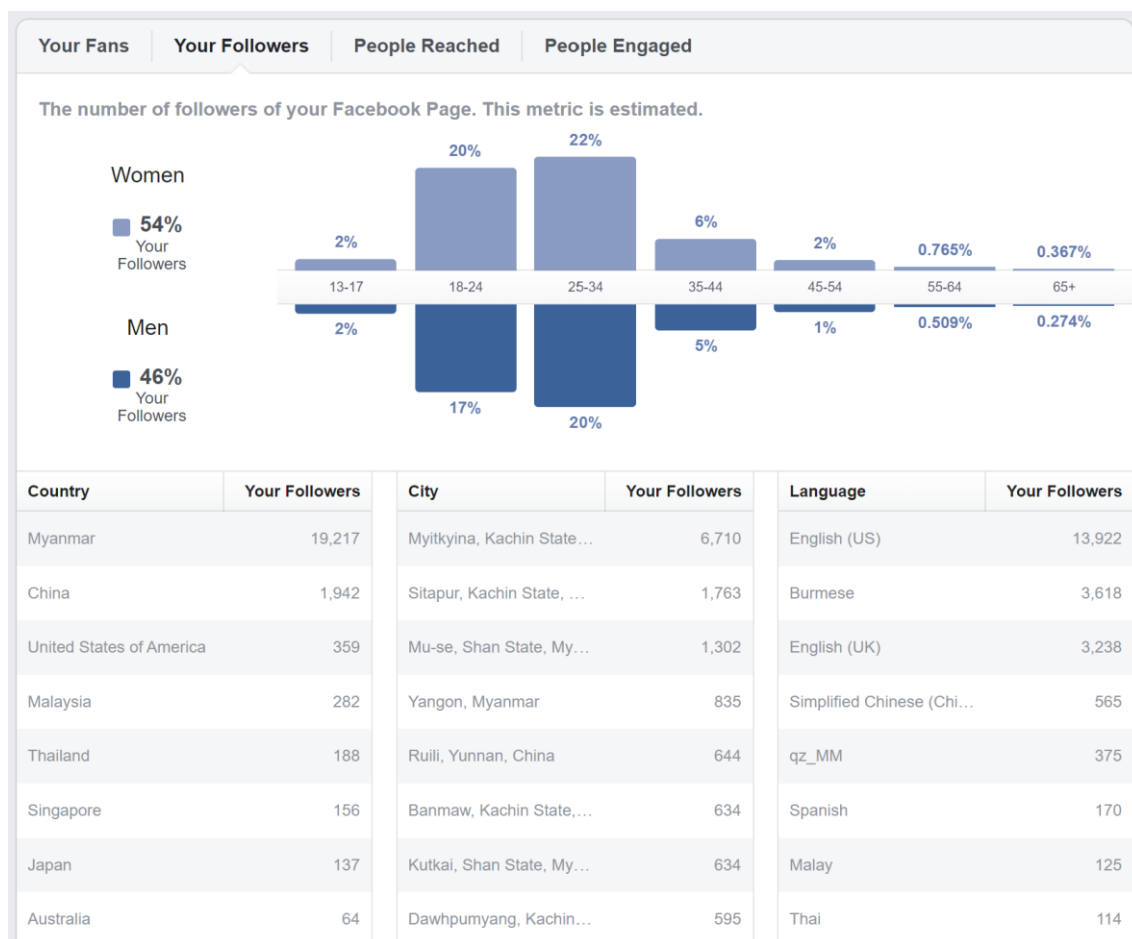
Our platform has gradually attracted community interest and awareness. The recent proliferation of mobile technologies in Myanmar, eliminating the digital divide, has promoted it. Between 2019 and 2022, the number of our Page's followers reached 22,849. What is significant is the fact that our platform has made traditional stories more visible to younger community members. Most followers, as seen in Figure 6, are younger people between 18 and 34 years old. As noted in §2, they are those who are worried about losing their oral tradition. It is our hope that younger people lend their ears to their own invaluable stories again and pass them on to the next generation. Figure 6 also shows that our platform benefits community members not only in the homeland, such as Myitkyina, Muse, Banmaw, and Ruili in Myanmar and China, but also in diasporas, such as the USA, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, Australia, and Yangon. Displaced migrants often face difficulties in maintaining their identity. Kachin children born outside of their homeland are often said to have problems acquiring their mother tongues and culture. It is hoped that our materials contribute to bridging the cultural divide between diaspora Kachins and those in the homeland through the online channel. We hope that our platform offers language learning opportunities to diaspora children as well.

Figure 5. Multilingual subtitles
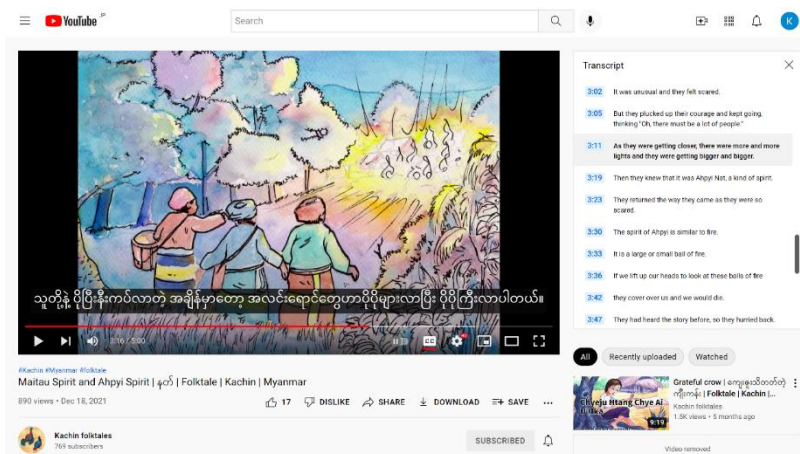
In this regard, direct involvement of the younger community members is also essential. Presently, our facility is mainly driven by younger community members, who are directly involved in curation, arrangement, contextualization, enrichment, and dissemination. Therefore, our facility works as a community-based social networking platform in a similar vein to participatory and community-based models of archiving (Huvila 2008, Linn 2014). Community members choose what stories will be posted and animated (and what will not) to accommodate community needs and desires. They know what kind of stories will be appreciated and acknowledged in the local context. They also respond to requests from the audience.

Figure 6. Demographics of our Facebook Page followers

Country	Your Followers	City	Your Followers	Language	Your Followers
Myanmar	19,217	Myitkyina, Kachin State…	6,710	English (US)	13,922
China	1,942	Sitapur, Kachin State, …	1,763	Burmese	3,618
United States of America	359	Mu-se, Shan State, My…	1,302	English (UK)	3,238
Malaysia	282	Yangon, Myanmar	835	Simplified Chinese (Chi…	565
Thailand	188	Ruili, Yunnan, China	644	qz_MM	375
Singapore	156	Banmaw, Kachin State,…	634	Spanish	170
Japan	137	Kutkai, Shan State, My…	634	Malay	125
Australia	64	Dawhpumyang, Kachin…	595	Thai	114

Our platform has amplified community voices about oral culture. It offers opportunities for community members to communicate about oral literature through likes, shares, and comments. Many people not only give likes and reactions but also

express their opinions in the comment box. For example, one person who heard a story about surprising spirits by clapping large pods of beans said, "This story gave me strength. It made me want to clap the bean pod, too." Another commented, "My children attentively listened to the story and always ask me questions," and another, "My parents used to tell me this story before bedtime. Children today don't have the opportunity to hear such stories. They don't know what *lep* is."[5] The comment field has also become a place for community members to exchange their opinions about oral literature. Here, all followers are potential active players in engaging in communication about oral tradition. The platform also works well as a feedback channel for us. Community feedback has enriched our understanding of the materials. One person commented, "This story was often told to brides-to-be in the past," and another, "This story is related to Lake Indaw, just past the Hopin city." One who heard the story about *kaw yeng* 'cicada' let us know that *kaw yeng* was a different species of cicada from *hkra*, although they were often confused. One person asked us to find a story about the *Ngau Lau* bird through a direct message. Another shared a story in her News Feed, saying, "Fathers and Mothers, LIKE this Page to tell our old stories to our children." A reviewer of our Page commented, "This is an invaluable work. Please keep it up. I always encourage you by listening to the stories."

Figure 7. Comments from followers

4. Conclusions and prospects

This paper showcased our ongoing collaborative efforts to document, archive, and revitalize the oral heritage of the Kachin people, who have a very rich tradition of oral

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[5] The *lep* is a mythical wild-man inhabiting the wilderness, often mentioned in Kachin folklore.

literature but face the prospect of losing their invaluable tradition. The outcomes of our collaborative fieldwork and documentation are over 2,750 stories told by approximately 500 narrators (ca. 230 hours), recorded and cataloged based on a unified set of metadata and conventions. Although Myanmar does not have reliable memory institutions for housing minority groups' cultural materials, the materials from our project are appropriately archived with PARADISEC to ensure their long-term preservation for future generations, to make them accessible to wider audiences, and to facilitate resource discovery. Our collection is used by multiple archive stakeholders, including community members who are interested in their own oral culture, researchers who are interested in Southeast Asian culture and language, and educators, students, parents, and children who use them for a variety of purposes. As a revitalization strategy, we have co-launched a community-driven Facebook Page that was designed to serve as a social media outreach platform to help facilitate the propagation of the Kachin oral literature. Animated stories co-created by younger community members have also been posted on the Page. There has been a surge of community interest, especially from younger people. The platform has allowed the younger community members a greater role in the dissemination of our collection. It has opened a new communication channel on oral literature among community members.

At all levels of our project, the direct involvement of younger community members who wish to maintain and retrieve their oral literature is always the fundamental component. Grand-scale data collection, transcription, translation, and annotation would never be possible without the tremendous efforts they have made in our community-based collaborative project. The creation of animated story videos was also made possible through the collaboration of younger community members with complementary skills. Our social media platform is driven by younger community members who have engaged in curation, processing, and delivery from community-internal perspectives in a way that accommodates community needs and desires. Starting from December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for us to meet in person, and we had to continue working online. However, we have switched to remote collaboration without serious trouble because we had already been collaborating together for years. It is our hope that our efforts will help empower the intergenerational transmission of invaluable Kachin oral literature, leading to the revival of the once-endangered intangible oral heritage.

What we have reported in this work is an interim result of our ongoing project. There remains considerable work to be done. Our collection in PARADISEC is by no means the final product. More translation and annotation should be continuously

updated. This will allow multiple audiences to access the wealth of the Kachin oral literature. We are hoping to animate more stories to mobilize cultural materials among the community, including children. It is also our hope to produce picture storybooks based on our materials for children to learn their own culture and language. The urgency to record more stories from remote areas and different places has become apparent in the course of our fieldwork. We also hope to undertake similar projects on other languages of the Kachin since our current materials are told predominantly in Jinghpaw, a lingua franca in the community. Myanmar is a highly multilingual and multicultural country; however, many languages and cultures are not well documented, maintained, and archived. We hope that our endeavor, serving as a model, will help raise awareness about the intangible oral heritage of other minority communities in Myanmar, encouraging them to embark upon documentation, maintenance, preservation, revitalization, and renewal of their precious languages and cultures.

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