

**CONNECTING COMMUNITIES:**  
**Report on Recent Activities**  
**for the UNESCO-ACCU Expert Meeting**  
**on Community Involvement in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage**  
**held in Tokyo, Japan, 13-15 March 2006**

by Garrett Kam

In safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, my work focuses on how related themes are expressed in different visual and performing arts not only within a country but especially across other cultures. This mostly includes working with dancers, puppeteers and painters. The main idea is to make many kinds of artists see how much they share with each other, and that literary works are not confined to books but are expressed as living aspects of culture. This awareness helps to make the arts more accessible to a wider audience at home and abroad, which can lead to greater understanding between countries and increasing the sense of being a global community. In turn, this can lead to programs aimed at maintaining these traditions among a broader spectrum of the population.

**Community of Students**

Getting new people excited about the arts is important. In Honolulu, Hawaii, I introduced the music and dance of Indonesia to students in world cultures at Kapi'olani Community College in February 2005. Next at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, I was invited to work with students in a class on Indian epics in performance, coaching them on dance, drama and shadow puppetry. This culminated in a public performance of **Ramayana** episodes which blended dance, puppets, live action, martial arts, and Javanese gamelan music. My photo exhibition "Panoramayana: Images of Ramayana Performances in Southeast Asia" which has been shown in many places since 2003 was displayed, and I presented a slide-lecture "Epic Diversity: Performing the Ramayana in Southeast Asia" for the Rudelson Art History Lecture Series, the first in 2 years and the first to ever focus on Southeast Asia.

**Community of Performers**

When dancers and musicians find relationships with the performing arts of other countries, greater understanding is attained. In March I went to Cambodia and did a Javanese dance demonstration at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh and gave master classes to students there, who found many similarities with classical Khmer dance. I presented a complete set of the Panoramayana photos along with a CD of music from **Ramayana** performances in Southeast Asia to the school. For Sovanna Phum Khmer Art Association, I gave a Javanese dance demonstration and workshop to some of its dancers and presented the group with CD recordings of Javanese gamelan music and Southeast Asian Ramayana performances, monkey dance bell anklets, and a complete set of the Panoramayana

photos. I sat in on a class in art history at Pannayasastra University which was taught by Cambodian ethnomusicologist Dr Sam Ang-Sam, a recipient of a prestigious Macarthur Fellowship and who has revived and documented traditional music that was nearly lost during the years of the Khmer Rouge. For several hours we talked about maintaining traditional music and dance. My trip to Cambodia, presentations of exhibition photographs and other items were self-funded as gifts of friendship and sharing to fellow artists there. Later in October, I did a series of master classes in Javanese court dance drama to students in musical theatre at LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts in Singapore.

### **Community of Painters**

Continuity is important to keep artists interested in maintaining culture. In Bali where I live, my work with traditional painters from Kamasan in Klungkung continues since 1994 when I started on my **Ramayana in the Arts of Asia** book that was published in 2000 in Singapore and Thailand. I provide selected talented young artists with high quality natural pigments, and work with them on expanding their repertoire of themes beyond the usual tourist items that they produce as souvenirs, and to organize exhibitions in Indonesia and abroad. I collect quality older paintings to keep these works among those who appreciate them, or completely document them so that photographs and stories are available for the artists.

### **Community in General**

After this meeting in Tokyo, at my own expense I will be going to Thailand to give lecture-demonstrations and workshops in Javanese dance in Bangkok for the Siam Society, Makhampon Community Theatre, and Origin Asia arts organization. After that I will be artist-in-residence until April in Singapore for the Laras Performing Arts Foundation, conducting dance classes, lectures and school programs on the **Ramayana**, Java, Bali, Okinawa and cross-cultural themes within Southeast Asia. Similar lectures and dance demonstrations will be presented for the Friends of the Museum, an organization devoted to art and culture in Singapore. Its members share UNESCO's concerns about safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and many of them are well-positioned to help make this possible. By actively connecting different communities in my activities, I hope to do the same.

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