From intangible cultural heritage to collectable artefact: the theory and practice of enacting ethical responsibilities in ethnomusicological research

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Part 1: Theory (Catherine Falk)

Capturing musical performances arising from predominantly oral traditions in a tangible form – sound recordings and audiovisual media - has now been central to the ethnomusicological endeavour for more than a century. The advent of sound recording technology with Edison's invention of the phonograph in 1877 and the subsequent and rapid technological developments in sound recording during the 20th century changed forever the relationships between performers, composers, owners of musical traditions, audiences and consumers, and scholars of music both western and non western.[1] Sound recording removed the performance of music from its source. In 1977 the composer R Murray Schafer coined the now frequently used term 'schizophonia' to refer to the separation of original sound from its electroacoustical transmission or reproduction, which transforms a performance from a unique event to plural existences. [2] In the case of orally transmitted musics, habitus became heritage and ultimately a metacultural artefact in the form of a physical object or artefact: the sound recording (Kirshenblatt – Gimblett 2006).

Sound recordings of musical performances made during field work

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[1] For a history of the recording industry and in particular its use in non western contexts see Gronow 1998 and Brady 1999.
[2] By 1998, for example, the consumer could choose between 108 CD versions and four video versions of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; 54 recordings of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*; 39 sets of the Six Brandenburg Concertos, and 102 versions of Mozart's Symphony no 40.(Day 2000:134)

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have become ineluctably implicated in the social, historical, cultural, intellectual and ideological agendas and contexts of the late 19th and 20th centuries, including colonialism, imperialism, evolutionary theories, the epistemologies of identity, the rise of mass culture, the commodification and consumption of culture, and globalisation (see for example Taylor 2007). As Glass has noted,

> What may have begun in a rich moment of intercultural collaboration—the context of all ethnography to some degree—often ends up simplified and far removed from the source. To track the recurrence of specific ethnographic images as their subsequent translations travel across varied media and contexts of production, circulation, and reception is to uncover the cultural biography of anthropological knowledge, and to promote a critical reflection on the scholarly use of media to re-present and objectify the practices of those with whom we work. (Glass 2006)

The act of making a sound recording in the field and the destiny of the sound recording once it leaves the field raise numerous and diverse issues about the responsibilities of researchers in dealing ethically with the people and communities that work with us. Decisions must be made about who and what to record and how to create an honest representation and a recording of high quality. Once the recording is removed from its source, further decisions must be made about how it is to be preserved, archived, accessed, disseminated and repatriated with sensitivity to the other cultures' and individuals' ethical values, and to proprietary concerns, rights of informed consent, privacy, confidentiality and respect. The recording also has a longer life than both the musicians and the scholar/ collector, and responsible ethical decisions need to be made collaboratively and in anticipation of the future access to and use of sound recordings. As Seeger has pointed out, over time it is likely that it is the recordings we make rather than our scholarly publications that will be of enduring interest and excitement to other scholars and members of the communities in which they were recorded (Seeger 2000).

FROM INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE TO COLLECTABLE ARTEFACT: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF ENACTING ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Ethical issues in ethnomusicological research started to receive serious attention in the literature in the early 1990s (see for example Slobin 1992) and have since gained considerable momentum, particularly with regard to the roles and responsibilities of archives (see Seeger and Chaudhuri 2004; Seeger 1991, 1996,2000), oral traditions, the ownership of knowledge and copyright and intellectual property (see for example Domann 2008, Graber and Burri-Nenova 2008, La Rue 2002, Mills 1996, Seeger 1997, Scherzinger 1999), the politics and ethics of representation and in particular the appropriation of sound recordings (see in particular Feld 1992 and 1997, Lysloff 1997 and Zemp 1996), and issues involved in the repatriation of sound recordings both historical and contemporary (see for example Barwick 2004, Fox and Sakakibara *nd*, Glass 2006, Niles and Palie 2003 and Toner 2003). In 1998 the Society for Ethnomusicology (henceforth SEM) published a position statement on ethical considerations[3]. The final part of this statement notes that

> Ethnomusicologists accept the necessity of preparing students and trainees to make informed judgments regarding ethical matters in field situations, by making sure they acquire sufficient knowledge to understand the social, cultural, political, economic, and legal realities of the communities in which they plan to work, as well as the potential impact of the processes.

Our paper takes a reflective and pragmatic approach regarding these issues by focussing upon how they were addressed during Catherine Ingram's recent twenty months of doctoral research into the music of the Kam people, a minority group resident in southwest China. Although the issues mentioned above and discussed in this paper are not new to ethnomusicology or to research in related fieldwork-based disciplines, discussions of these issues in relation to musical ethnographers' own fieldwork activities only occasionally utilise the fieldwork experiences to further inform more theoretical debates. As our paper demonstrates, ethical issues concerning musical recording play out in particular ways in particular contexts, and examination of

[3] At http://webdb.iu.edu/sem/scripts/aboutus/aboutsem/positionstatements/position_statement_ethics.cfm. Accessed 6 August 2009.

details regarding particular cases or situations offer valuable empirical data for broader-scale theoretical discussions.

In this paper we focus upon two central and broad issues regarding the ethics of creating tangible, static artefacts from intangible and dynamic musical heritage: the process of making sound recordings, and the repatriation of those recordings to the cultural custodians, including the ways that these recordings act as a form of self-representation. Other closely related ethical issues in ethnomusicological research are invoked but not discussed. These include, for example, international copyright law and oral traditions; issues of human rights and social justice, and combining analytic field research with practical advocacy and public ethnomusicology projects (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006 and Seeger 1991 and 2008); and the relationship between the international flow of cultural economics with local identities expressed though performance.

Why make sound recordings?

Sound recordings of orally transmitted musics initially facilitated the collection, preservation and analytical role served previously documented by the highly skilled and subjective processes of musical transcription in the field. Sound recordings made by the scholar in the field also traditionally constituted an important part of the collected data that went back to the “lab” for analysis, including detailed transcription into western notation. The purpose of this scholarship is generally agreed to be the search for greater knowledge and understanding: ethnomusicologists

> seek to advance academic and public understanding and appreciation of music as a cultural phenomenon of unlimited variety and as a resource that is fundamental to the wellbeing of individuals and communities. (SEM Mission and Overview). [4]

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[4] At http://webdb.iu.edu/sem/scripts/aboutus/aboutsem/aboutsem.cfm. Accessed 15 September 2009.

The recording is an unparalleled mnemonic aid to the researcher. Listening to or watching and discussing recorded performances together with the performers, along with participating in music-making, is also such an important way of learning that it is integral to research methodology, as Ingram describes below (see also Feld 1990, especially the postscript, and Seeger 1991).

From real time to virtual time: the destiny of sound recordings

Field recordings are usually deposited in the archives of national museums, libraries, research institutes or universities.[5] Many of these institutions not only store the recordings, but release them on disc, often in collaboration with private record companies (van Peer 1999). Thus in the act of collecting the tangible evidence of musical knowledge – typically unprotected by international copyright law[6] - the ethnomusicologist becomes responsible for the mediation and circulation of ethnographic knowledge, and a complex congregation of ethical issues arise: "Sensitivity to proprietary concerns regarding recorded materials, photographs, and other documentation; awareness of the connection between proprietary concerns and economic interests, as well as anticipation of future conflicts that may be caused by one's research activities". (SEM Ethical Considerations Statement). Ingram describes below some specific effects of the immediate repatriation of her recordings, particularly among Kam women, and how the process of repatriation concurrent with her fieldwork affected the research process itself.

Since the late 1980s ethnomusicologists have inhabited a parallel universe with the creators and marketers of "world music", a commercial phenomenon and label used to market the music of "others" (as defined by the West). Instances of the unethical

[5] For example, the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv was established as early as 1899: part of its mission was to collect "the music of primitives"; the Musée Phonographique in 1900; the Berlin Phonogrammarchiv in 1904; and the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress in 1928.
[6] For further discussion about the relationship between orally transmitted music and international copyright law see, for example, Graber and Burri-Nenova 2008, Mills 1996, and Seeger 1996 and 1997.

appropriation both of original performances and of ethnomusicological recordings of performances as "world music" have been well documented.[7] Further, the great scientific collecting expeditions of the first half of the 20th century have been supplanted in the last two decades by the unmitigated practices of music sampling and collection of unattributed and unrecompensed "world music" sounds for electronic and digital manipulation by composers.[8] Finally, adding to the complexity of the ethical issues involved in recording the unnotated music of others are the activities of sound recordists who are not scholars – cultural tourists or the enthusiasts who, armed with sound recording technology of a sophistication frequently beyond the budget of most academics, and untrammelled by the rigours of institutional or professional academic and ethical scrutiny, sally forth to enjoy, record, collect, capture and disseminate the wonders of the musical universe.[9] In these ways the generalised

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[7] One of the well known examples is the theft by the composers behind the commercial venture *Deep Forest* of Hugo Zemp's 1970 recording of a lullaby sung by Afunakwa, a woman from Baegu, Solomon Islands. In 1992 the song *Sweet Lullaby* which used part of Zemp's original recording in an ambient and then ethno beat track appeared on the eponymous Deep Forest CD. This track has been used as background music for the Discovery Channel, SBS Australia, the Body Shop, Neutrogena, Sunsilk shampoo, Coca Cola, Porsche, and Sony. It has made millions of dollars for its creators, Michel Banchez and Eric Mouquet. No commercial benefit from this appropriation has accrued to either Afunakwa or Zemp (see Zemp 1996). A similar story surrounds the use of a song by Solomon Linda, a Zulu migrant worker who in 1939 recorded a song eulogising the Zulu king Shaka. He called this song "uyimbube." We know it as "The Lion Sleeps Tonight." (see http://www.3rdearmusic.com/forum/mbube2.html) See also Feld 1997 for a description of the [mis]use and abuse of ethnomusicological recordings – for example Simha Arom's recording of a Ba-Benzélé woman playing the flute *hindewhu* and singing. This original recording was the basis for Herbie Hancock's composition "Watermelon Man " (1992); Madonna's 1994 song "Sanctuary", as well as tracks by Zap Mama (1993) and Jon Hassell and Brian Eno. Taylor (2001: 117-135) provides further examples of the appropriation of indigenous music for commercial gain under the "world music" rubric.

[8] See Taylor's description of the collecting and marketing of world music by producer Bill Laswell (2007:130-137).

[9] For example, in the liner notes to the 1973 recording of his work "African Sanctus" David Fanshawe writes:

"Other" is seen as an object of consumption with no reciprocity, and western consumers of the intangible cultural heritage of Others use their consumption as a "strategy of differentiation to fashion the self…[as] an affirmation of individuality." (Thomas 2000:211). Thus the work of ethnomusicologists has become enmeshed in the imperatives of cultural economics, western concepts of identity and aesthetics, consumption, and artistic creativity and license, far removed from the original scholarly intentions As Taylor points out,

> Aesthetics is a kind of commodification machine: it strips everything of history, culture, and the social to render it fit for commodification, or for appropriation. Aesthetics is a major chapter in the history of the commodification of music, the masking of human relations by the reification of music and fetishization of works, recordings, and musicians (2007:1020.

Increasingly ethnomusicologists seek to protect the rights of ownership of musical and cultural knowledge, as well as enable future access by the communities who own such knowledge, by storing it safely in protected digitised formats. Below, Ingram describes how her many hours of recordings of Kam music will be housed in the PARADISEC facility, the process for collaboration with Kam people for verifying the metadata, and the possibilities for access to this archive in the future.

The raw material for this section I discovered quite by accident one moonlit night when I was riding my camel across the Mara mountains in West Sudan… On top of the mountain under a full moon I saw four men on a prayer mat. They were in a trance swaying backwards and forwards reciting the Koran in a strange mixture of local dialects and Arabic. I recorded them for half an hour and they never knew I had been there.
And in his book:

> …I jumped into a hole beside the hut and peeped over the top Already the recorder was running…I crept forward and, unnoticed, placed my microphones on a small tripod right in the middle of them…The four men [in trance] on the prayer mat carried on all night and never even knew I had been there (Fanshawe 1975:137).

Part 2: Practice (Catherine Ingram)

Making recordings

As part of my PhD in Ethnomusicology and Chinese Studies, during 2004-2008 I carried out twenty months of musical ethnographic research in rural Kam minority areas of southwest China.[10] I began my PhD fieldwork with two main reasons why I hoped to make sound recordings of Kam music. Firstly, I anticipated that such recordings would be an important tool for my learning, analysis and understanding of Kam music, and that a selection of audio and/or video recordings from my fieldwork would be an important addition to the material presented in my PhD thesis. In this sense the recordings would assist me in fulfilling my ethical responsibilities to both Kam communities and academia in terms of the accuracy of my musical and cultural analysis.

Secondly, I anticipated that the recordings could be of use or value to the Kam people with whom I would be working – perhaps by the repatriation of copies of the recordings to the performers or communities, and/or perhaps through the establishment of an archive of recordings of Kam music with the Pacific And Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures.[11] Again, these pre-fieldwork ideas regarding the possible practical benefits of musical recordings were based on ethical responsibilities that I have as a researcher, which is to make a practical contribution back to the communities I work with.

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[10] The scope of this research will not be discussed here, but is featured or further detailed in a number of other sources (including Ingram 2007, forthcoming; Ingram et al. forthcoming a, forthcoming b; *Ga Lao My Love* 2006; Chen & Meng 2006). The Kam are known in Chinese as *Dongzu* (侗族), and speak a Tai-Kadai language that is completely different from Chinese.

[11] See the PARADISEC website (www.paradisec.org.au), and the following discussion.

Once I began my fieldwork in China, at each recording occasion, or in each community where I worked for an extended period, I discussed with musicians or community representatives about how the recording would later be used.[12] This is a standard research process that is referred to as "gaining 'informed consent'". However, as some of the examples given in both the first section of this paper and in the work of many other scholars illustrate, despite one's best efforts it is doubtful that one <u>can</u> be completely informed about the future uses of a musical recording, a situation that thus complicates the ethics involved in making sound and video recordings as part of musical ethnographic research.

As my fieldwork continued and as I made more musical recordings, not only did both my two preliminary reasons for making recordings prove to be correct, but several other important issues also arose. Firstly, the recordings themselves became a very important part of my research methodology – including various aspects relating to their production, and the many discussions I had with the performers while we watched and listened to earlier recordings. For the Kam people I worked with these recordings became an important means of self-representation not otherwise easily accessible to them, and a source of great enjoyment. For the Kam women I worked with, who are relatively disadvantaged as being both female and members of a minority group, this opportunity for self-representation was particularly significant.

In addition, I was repatriating recordings to the performers not long after the time they were made. This is an ethical practice that is advocated by other researchers and in the guidelines produced by several official organisations such as AIATSIS (see AIATSIS 2000) and the Society for Ethnomusicology (see SEM 1998), but it created unanticipated effects that I outline below.

[12] The advice I was offered by my overseas supervisor Wang Liren (王立仁), based upon his broad-ranging understandings of Chinese culture, history and politics, was particularly valuable in helping plan a suitable way of conducting these discussions.

Repatriating recordings

Evening, May 2008:
Nay Lyang-jyao[13] and I walk slowly in the darkness as we make our way along the narrow pathway between the houses towards Nay Bao-yuun's place. The sound of women's conversation grows louder and louder as we approach Nay Bao-yuun's door.

"*Sa, kay sht dang da guun*!" "Gee, they all arrived before us!" [14] Nay Lyang-jyao remarks, laughing, as we reach the door and step into the darkened central room. She laughs because she knows the reason why on this particular evening so many women have come so early to our regular nightly singing in Nay Bao-yuun's house.

The noise of conversation is emanating from a small room on the left, the door to which Nay Lyang-jyao carefully and slowly pushes open. Since the side room – the living room – is quite small, we have to wait for several women on the other side of the door to move aside before we can open the door fully and step in. The small living room is truly already full of people: eight women are wedged together in a row on the sofa, while at least a dozen more are seated on low stools or

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[13] Kam people practise teknonymy, thus the members of each elder generation are named after their oldest child, grandchild or great-grandchild. "Nay" translates as "mother" and "Sa" translates as grandmother; hence "Nay Lyang-jyao" translates as "Lyang-jyao's mother." Since kinship terms of address are commonly preferred over teknonymy-derived names, the form of address is dependent upon the relationship between the two people who are speaking to each other. For clarity, throughout this paper I have given Kam names of individuals using the teknonymy-derived forms I use to address them.

[14] I use italics for Kam words here and throughout this paper (except for given names and place names, where italics are not used), adopting the transcription system described in the Appendix and using [K.] to indicate English translations from Kam. In this ethnographic description all dialogue and song lyrics are translated from Kam. Words in italics that are accompanied with Chinese characters are transcriptions of the Chinese language (which is quite different from Kam), and are transcribed in the *Hanyu pinyin* system officially used to transcribe Modern Standard Chinese.

benches in a general semicircle around the edges of the room, facing the television.

Despite the noise of many animated conversations several women sitting on the sofa seem to have been dozing, and are jostled by friends to wake up when we arrive. A few women rush forwards to occupy more stools in the centre of the room, in the prime viewing position. Nay Lyang-jyao and I take their vacated seats along one wall.
"*Shyao lee dyair gwair?*" "Did you bring the disc?" ask several women seated beside me, a note of anticipation in their voices.

"*Lee or*," "I've brought it," I reply, taking a VCD from my bag and handing it to Nay Bao-yuun. It is a VCD I have just finished editing that I made together with these women – all sharing roles of performer and of video camera operator, and many of the women also deciding from an earlier viewing of the raw footage which shots and which recordings should be included in this final edition. The disc I hand Nay Bao-yuun is just one of the many copies I have brought along to distribute this evening to the women who participated in its creation. It is edited from footage of several recording sessions of Kam song – at least two late-night sessions at Nay Bao-yuun's home, and one day of videoing singing and scenery on a specially-arranged group visit to nearby Liangsan Mountain. As Nay Bao-yuun turns on the VCD player and loads the disc everyone's eyes are fixed on the TV, and the room is suddenly quiet.

After titles appearing in Chinese, which few of the women can read, the video opens to a scene of about twenty women dressed in their best Kam outfits and seated in an impeccably ordered semicircle in Nay Bao-yuun's central room. Nay Bao-yuun's own voice starts the singing:
"*May woom geng ma*," "The trees move about [in the wind], *ma*,"[15] she sings as a solo introduction. As is typical in this genre of Kam song, the rest of the singing group join in after her opening phrase:

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[15] "*Ma*" is a vocable or semantically unclassified syllable, and like the vocables in the following line of song lyrics is given here in italics and without translation. Although vocables feature in many Kam songs I never

"*Woy woy ding, woy – oy – ding*," the group sing a line of vocables, diverging into two vocal lines just before the unison in-breath that concludes the second phrase.
A number of the women seated on the bench beside me lean forward, trying to see themselves or their friends more clearly on the TV. Everyone in the small room is smiling, and watching with great interest. The camera starts to zoom in and several women let out a gasp of surprise and excitement to see their friends' faces at such close range. They laugh with delight when one of their friends' faces fills the screen.

"[K.] Gee, my hair really looks bad," says the singer whose image features on the screen, her typical Kam modesty concealing her pleasure and pride at seeing herself on the TV.

During the first song the camera continues to slowly pan around the room, showing singers seated together at home. Some of the women watching remark on which singers have the best facial expressions, while others make small comments about the phrasing of certain lines of lyrics, or the melodic decorations sung by the singers taking the upper vocal line. Everyone watches attentively.

As the song ends the image fades into a shot of daytime scenery, and a few moments later shows the same group of women singing on the top of Liangsan mountain posed amongst the flowering azaleas. The rest of the disc features a mix of recordings from both the home and outdoor contexts. In some sections it also features the singing as a soundtrack while the screen shows other images: impressive views of seemingly endless mountain ranges, close-ups of flowers or wild ferns, women walking down the mountainside dressed in their best Kam outfits, or women enjoying lunch together and drinking water from a small, clear spring just below the mountain-top.

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heard them referred to by any generic Kam name. After suffering many of my tedious questions about this issue one of my teachers did suggest the Kam expression *lee ga* ("words in songs") as a translation of the Chinese *chenci* (陈词; "vocable"), but as I never heard the term *lee ga* used in daily conversations I suggest that even if it is used by some Kam people today it is unlikely to be a concept of wide or historically extensive use.

As the time passes even more women arrive at Nay Bao-yuun's place to squeeze into the room as we watch, and some people even stop by outside and stand watching through the open window. During the evening we watch the VCD twice, and when it is finally time to go home to bed each of the women who featured on the recording takes a disc home with her.

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The recording was just one copy of many copies made from more than 40 different recordings that I returned to Kam village singers during my fieldwork in Kam villages. Kam people's escalating interest in the process of creating video and audio recordings gradually initiated a musical resurgence within some Kam communities, with many villagers (mostly women) learning or re-learning songs to make disc of their own singing, and with the re-staging of two several-day-long events especially for filming over New Year 2005 and 2006. In each period that I spent in Kam areas I was unable to satisfy all the requests I had to help with producing recordings of Kam singing. Interestingly, these recorded artefacts then also began to circulate within Kam communities as part of the pre-existing structure of cultural and symbolic capital associated with Kam song repertoires and performances, tangibly validating and valorising musical knowledge that had previously been intangible. While this placed Kam musical culture in a new form and thus introduced new elements into the traditional process, in several communities it also contributed greatly towards sustaining and promoting the singing of Kam songs.

Although in making these recordings I was acting in a way that my research discipline deemed ideal in ethical terms, my research and presence had obvious effects upon Kam communities. It is difficult to predict how these currently positive effects might play out in the future, and whether the researcher can ever be completely certain that the basic research condition of "doing no harm" has been complied with. Such a situation further reinforces the fact that the practical integration of the researcher's various ethical responsibilities is not always simple or clear, and requires ongoing

investigation, study, and communication with other participants in the research.

The recordings I repatriated to members of Kam communities were amongst the 130+ hours of video recordings I am currently archiving with the digital PARADISEC archive (www.paradisec.org.au).[16] As far as I know, this is the first archive of Kam music worldwide, and material is uploaded into this archive from my home city of Melbourne, Australia. The material is deposited into the archive with the consent of the musicians featured in the recordings and also, in many cases, of village representatives of the musicians involved in these recordings. I have explained in Kam to many Kam people how such archives operate, and I have distributed Chinese language translations of the information about the archive to village song experts and other local village leaders.

Although the concept of permanent storage is understood and appreciated by people I recorded, as yet most Kam singers whose performances are stored in the archive do not have direct experience of how the archive actually exists and may eventually be accessible.[17] In the next stage of my research I will be working with Kam singers and song experts to upload bilingual English/Chinese metadata related to the recordings – such as song lyrics and other explanatory material – into the archive.[18] Although this will take many months or

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[16] The video is currently being archived as .dv files. Besides video, I will also be uploading digital audio (.wav) and digital image (.tif & .jpg) files. For additional information about digital archiving see PARADISEC website, and also the various essays contained in Barwick & Thieberger (2006).

[17] At present access to the archive is at the highest level of restriction, and can only be accessed with permission of the depositor (i.e. myself). The first half of this paper outlines many reasons why restricting access to the archive may be in the best interests of the musicians. Since most Kam villagers whose recorded performances are stored in the archive do not have access to the internet, ensuring the archive also be instructed to allow Kam villagers direct access to deposited materials is not yet a relevant concern.

[18] All younger Kam people are literate (at least to some degree) in Chinese. Kam has no widely used written form, thus at this stage it is likely that the only transcription of Kam words included in the archive will be Kam song lyrics that will be transcribed using IPA.

years to complete, it is an important undertaking because the resultant resource offers Kam people and researchers interested in Kam music making a valuable record of music making during 2004-2008. Just as I found during my collaboration with Kam singers to make these uploaded recordings, it is possible that my collaboration with singers and song experts in the creation of metadata to accompany the recordings will also lead both my own research and the music-making of Kam people in new and, perhaps, unexpected directions.

[The presentation concluded with some video excerpts from Falk's and Ingram's fieldwork (West Java and southwest China, respectively), including a brief excerpt from a staged Kam performance of 10,000 people singing what is known in English as 'Kam big song'. This huge state-organised performance was almost exclusively for a television audience, and was broadcast nationally. It shows how the state can also play a role in the commodification of the Other (in this case a minority group) as well as in the production and dissemination of recorded artefacts].

Appendix: Notes on Kam Language Transcription

I have used the following "broad transcription" system outlined below for Kam words that appear in the main body of the paper. Only for words in the song lyrics that appear in musical transcriptions do I give more detailed "narrow transcriptions" of the Kam language using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

For the broad transcriptions of Kam used within the main text I have devised my own practical phonemic orthography using the Roman alphabet and based upon commonly accepted (Australian) English pronunciation. Similar methods have been adopted by other researchers who have also chosen to develop their own "essay phonetics" (Hopkins 1983:19-21) or "reading transcription" (Holm 2002: viii; 2004: xiv-xv) systems to clearly present foreign language terms to a broader audience.

My broad transcription of Kam utilises commonly accepted English pronunciation, including the following:

ai as in "(Th)ai"
air as in "air"
am as in "arm"
ang as in "(y)oung"
ao as in "(M)ao"
ee as in "(s)ee"
oh as in "(t)oe"
ts as in "(bi)ts"
up as in "(c)up"
uu as in "(y)ou"

And also the more unusual transcription:

jyao – pronounced as "jee" (as in "je(ans)") + "yao" (as in y(ellow)" and "(m)iaow")

"Kam" is the currently recognised English transcription of the group's autonym, hence I have retained this spelling of the name. However, according to the system of transcription used here it would be written as "Gam" or "Gum". When spoken by Sheeam residents the word is pronounced using a sharp falling tone.

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N.B. Names of Chinese authors are given in Chinese-language sequence (surname followed by given name/s).

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