

SEMPRE Buck Award 2015

Report



Dr Catherine Grant

Host organisation: Cambodian Living Arts

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

13 June – 12 December 2015

I am very grateful to SEMPRES for funding that allowed me to pursue fieldwork as part of my research project in Cambodia from June to December 2015.

This grant complemented an Endeavour Australia Cheung Kong Fellowship awarded by the Australian Government. That fellowship provided me with a living stipend and international travel expenses for this project, but not fieldwork support.

With support of SEMPRES's Reg and Molly Buck Award, I achieved all professional and academic objectives of my project as per my original research grant application. Key outcomes and achievements are detailed below.

The grant funds awarded by SEMPRES were fully expended on fieldwork-related expenses, as detailed in the separate Acquittal document.

Overview

My research fieldwork aimed to improve understanding of the connection between traditional music and socioeconomic concerns in contemporary Cambodia. Locally, it aimed to help inform strategies of communities, government, and the non-profit sector to support and improve the socioeconomic situation of traditional musicians, and to understand the ways in which this, in turn, may also support cultural revitalisation efforts.

I designed the fieldwork methodology in consultation with host organisation Cambodian Living Arts (CLA). Following a literature review on the intersection of poverty alleviation/socioeconomic development and the performing arts in Cambodia, I undertook around 25 formal and informal research interviews with young traditional-genre musicians in Phnom Penh and the rural provinces.

At the end of the program, I engaged local arts stakeholders (including the host non-government organisation CLA and the Ministry of Culture) in discussions about possible future strategies and priority actions arising from the research. A summary of the project in Khmer was provided to participants and organisational stakeholders.

Publications

The following publications resulted directly from my fieldwork-based research in Cambodia:

- 10,000-word article "Socioeconomic Concerns of Young Musicians of Traditional Genres in Cambodia: Implications for Music Sustainability". Submitted to journal *Ethnomusicology Forum* 25 November 2015.
- Invited encyclopaedia entries "Music and Poverty" and "Endangered Musics". Accepted for publication in forthcoming SAGE *Encyclopaedia of Music and Culture* (ed. J. Sturman) September-October 2015.
- Media article "Re-enchanting the world with the performing arts: Stories from Cambodia". Published in online platform "The Conversation" (co-authored with an Australian New Colombo Plan student to Cambodia) 13 July 2015. Retrievable from

<https://theconversation.com/re-enchanting-the-world-with-performing-arts-stories-from-cambodia-44362>

Conference/symposium presentations

During my fieldwork in Cambodia, I also :

- Gave a plenary presentation and participated as panel member and delegate at the 43rd International Conference of the International Council for Traditional Music in Astana, Kazakhstan (14-24 July)
- Formally presented and participated as panel member at the Australian Alumni Association of Cambodia professional development workshop “Arts, cultures and history: Policy and development implications” (29 August)
- Participated in “International Development Research Centre” annual symposium “Building research capacity for Cambodia” (15-16 September)
- Presented as guest speaker at, and participated in, Intangible Cultural Heritage training workshop at the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (1-2 October)

Professional networking and future Australia-Cambodia collaborations

I used my fieldwork time to build professional academic and research relationships that will flow into future collaborations with Cambodian cultural organisations. I:

- Submitted Australian Research Council Linkage Grant application for a project on music sustainability from 2017-2021 involving four Australian universities (led by Griffith University) and Cambodian Living Arts as partner organisation, and me as Chief Investigator (submitted November 2015; outcome pending)
- Established professional relationships with Director of UNESCO Cambodian Office Anne LeMaistre and Director of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Department of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, His Excellency Hab Touch. Discussed possibilities for future collaborations, both individually through a proposed ARC postdoctoral (DECRA) project and institutionally with Griffith University through research higher degree internships
- Confirmed partnership with ‘Cambodia Sings’ for Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University student mobility project involving travel to Cambodia in 2016
- Discussed with senior Australian Embassy staff possible Cambodia-Australia community-based collaborations following my return to Australia, including through the Embassy’s Direct Aid Program funding scheme
- Established links with directors and/or senior representatives of local arts organisations Champey Arts Academy, Music Arts School, Empowering Youth Cambodia, Epic Arts, Khmer Magic Music Bus, Cambodia Sings, and Sophiline Arts Ensemble; several possibilities for future collaboration arising

Performance activities

Participant observation was a strong component of my fieldwork. During my stay, I:

- took regular small-group and individual tuition in traditional instrument “chapei dong weng”, to better understand this genre and processes of its transmission
- participated in several performances of the *Community of Living Chapei*:
 - Khmer Magic Music Bus festival performance at Battambang Water Festival 25-26 October
 - The Doors restaurant, Phnom Penh, 18 November
 - “Krom Monster” and friends, National Museum, 22 November
 - Bon Kathin (Kathin ceremony), Wat Kul Totoeung, Kandal province, 24 November
 - Closing ceremony, 6th International Film Festival, Chatamouk Theatre, Phnom Penh, 9 Dec (Photos overleaf)

Other activities

During my fieldwork, I:

- supported CLA design and dissemination of a survey assessing the socioeconomic situation of members of three CLA artist ‘troupes’ in Kandal, Siem Riep and Phnom Penh, throughout October-November
- undertook a voluntary consultancy with Intangible Cultural Heritage Department of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts
- took an average 8 hours’ Khmer lessons per week, in group and private classes, at Language Institute of Natural Khmer and the Khmer Language School

I also regularly attended cultural events, including seminars of the Centre for Khmer Studies; and meetings, rehearsals, performances, and other activities of CLA and other local cultural/arts organisations.

Cover photo: Performing with the Community of Living Chapei at Bon Kathin (Kathin ceremony), Wat Kul Totoeung, Kandal province, 24 November 2015