

You may know MKP as the acronym for MaKhamPom, or for the slogan 'Mad Knowledge Participation', and, this time, we give you MKP the 'Makhampom Kwarterly Periodical'. Welcome to the first edition of MKP News.

In spite of our hard-earned reputation for IT incompetence, we bring you our recently updated website, and this, our inaugural, e-newsletter. We will bombard you with this newsletter every 3 months, which will be something between a blog, a collection of articles, and a gossip column. And open the website www.makhampom.net to read more, with new photos and video clips in the Resources page. We will start up a web board in April for information, discussion and debate on topics and themes of interest amongst us all.

So grab a coffee, settled back, and have a read of the MKP News.

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2008 In Review

When Makhampom became a foundation in 2005, we developed a 5-year plan to become independent and sustainable and to reach our potential in our work in theatre for community cultural development (TCCD). In 2008, our aim has been to become a 'professional' organization in our key areas of work: educational theatre, community cultural development in Chiang Dao, Thai contemporary theatre practice, refugee support and conflict resolution, and regional and international training. 2008 was a very busy year, generally successful in reaching this objective. Here is an overview of the main activities of 2008:

Educational Theatre

This program is the baby of Guay, with Muy, Tom, and Bird some of the active members of the team, and most Bangkok volunteers involved. It has been the major source of funding for Makhampom over several years and has become one of Makhampom's most recognized 'professional' areas of work.

*Makhampom has been variously described as a family, a kindergarten, a university, a community, a troupe, and a movement. Essentially, we are a social organization that works in the medium of theatre, described by the term **theatre for community cultural development** (TCCD). Makhampom was started in 1980 by a collective of activists and NGO leaders with the objective of applying micro media for consciousness-raising. This objective has been expanded to encompass a creative, participatory, justice-based approach to community cultural development, arts practice, social issue prevention and response, and capacity building, particularly for young people. Since becoming a foundation in 2005, Makhampom has consolidated its role and function as one of Thailand's leading theatre groups and an active community development organization. We have a rural-based training centre in northern Thailand and a studio space in Bangkok and run programs and activities throughout the Asia-Pacific.*

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Symphony

Despite the name, this was a festival of theatre at Kasetsart University based on the concept of the 'Symphony musical play'. Makhampom had 3 performances, with volunteers en masse, and the event and shows had a big following amongst Bangkok children and families.

Advanced Learning Theatre Camp

We were a bit concerned about the concept of 'advanced learning' by the scarily named Brain-based Learning Institute, but it was a good fundraiser so we went ahead with this intensive 14-day theatre camp and managed to have 12 Chiang Dao students included in the group. There were workshops in physical theatre, puppetry, music, play writing, directing, and production design, and it was actually a lot of fun, a great success, and a step towards Makhampom being recognized as a leading non-formal theatre training organization.

Media Literacy Camp (3rd Year)

This has been a long-term program run by Guay, working with schools throughout Thailand to focus on building the understanding amongst teenagers of the role, influence, and impacts of modern media. This camp, called 'Vaccine for Life' involved an umbrella of Christian schools, participating in a range of games and visual arts exercises to explore Thai media.

Alongside these programs, we have been involved in many children's projects with partner organizations, particularly in relation to child learning and developing courses such as training for child carers in small centres, theatre production training for Sripatum students in Chonburi province, a Media Literacy course for trainers in the Northern Child Media Network and Youth Network Development, and producing many educational mini-theatre programs.

Community Cultural Development in Chiang Dao

2008 was the first year that our program in Chiang Dao was fully in motion after years of building and forming the team. We now have Jon & Richard coordinating the program, Muay as program manager, Jon's brother Lung Heea as centre manager, Puey as community program coordinator, Gak as Book-Bike coordinator, Tom as schools program coordinator, Mon and Toy as office staff, and Rung and Deuan as grounds staff. We are now heavily involved across various sectors in Chiang Dao district and networking through parts of the North. We sit on the Chiang Dao curriculum committee, the Pang Daeng relocation committee, work closely with Tung Luk and Ban Dong communities, support temple activities, attend funerals and weddings, and join regular Chiang Dao festivals and events. Things are going well. Life is busy. Work is challenging.

Community Classroom Project

The name, Community Classroom is based on the idea of non-formal learning within the community. In 2008, we worked with the Pang Daeng Nok (*daraang*) and Ban On (*pak'yaw*) villages on this project. Starting with 2 months of workshops with kids and adults, monthly courses were designed to be run by community teachers, Makhampom facilitators, or friends in Chiang Dao. This included sword dance, weaving, local foods, traditional architecture, Thai language, diverse religions, and theatre. Some activities were more successful than others, but showed the importance of local knowledge & traditional wisdom and will be continued in various ways.



Children's Theatre Program

Sometimes Makhampom looks like a childcare organization and Gak has become a bit of a popstar amongst the kids in Chiang Dao. There are constant requests for activities in schools and we have conducted a range of activities, some adhoc and some as a series of workshops, from kindergarten to high school. The development of children's theatre troupes to perform in their community is at the centre of this, but other activities in 2008 included photography workshops, visual art exhibitions, and storytelling.

Book-Bike

To give book access to isolated communities, the Bookbike (mobile library) project was started up with the design of library trailer contraptions for our motorbikes. The first one (designed like a train carriage) was so successful, the Plan Foundation in Bangkok had a design project to build a second (a rabbit design). Over a hundred youth and high school volunteers have joined this project working with Gak to develop storytelling performance and creative reading activities for kindergarten and primary schools around Chiang Dao. We held activities at 21 schools throughout the year, including an English language Book-Bike event as part of the Study Tour. Most of Chiang Dao have seen the Book-Bike caravan, with catchy jingle blaring, traveling through town or into the hills at some time or the other on the crazy reading mission.

Children's Day

The Children's Day has been running for 2 years, involving 150-250 primary and kindergarten kids coming to Makhampom on the last Friday of each month to spend a morning of performance, reading, and art making. It starts with performances by Makhampom, the youth theatre troupes, and other visiting performers, and followed by hands-on art sites, where the kids try their hand at traditional toy making, clay sculpture, puppetry, face paint, drawing, kite building, even hula hoop and hip hop, and the Book-Bike is set up as a reading corner. The Children's Days have been so successful that teachers are now replicating the activities and a book of Children's Day activities is being produced, but we have decided that we need to develop our repertoire of performance for kids.

Pang Daeng Relocation

Since we first met the Pang Daeng Nok community in 1998, we have supported their human rights cause in principal, but since we started our Chiang Dao base, we have had to go a step further to help resolve their legal and identity issues. This has been a huge challenge for us, but as of the end of 2008, 8 months of discussion, negotiation, fundraising, and community organizing has led to the 400 Pang Daeng villagers moving to permanent land. Read more on our website or at <http://www.prachatai.com/05web/th/home/15167>.

Refugee & Conflict Program

We have been working with refugees on the Thai-Burma border and with conflicts in various parts of the Asia-Pacific for the past decade and have committed to developing our practice in these fields. This includes objectives of providing training in creative approaches to conflict resolution, exploring the scope of theatre as a tool for peace-building, transferring our theatre approach to refugee activists, devising our next major theatre production on the theme of conflict, and developing post-conflict strategies in Burma.



Art of Peace

In April, we launched our publication, *The Art of Peace – A Toolkit of Theatre Art for Conflict Resolution* as Thai and English versions. This has been written primarily for the conflict around the Islamic insurgency in the Deep South of Thailand and the Burma border refugee context. It includes a background study of the Deep South situation and a description of Makhampom activities. At the launch, we had a panel discussion with Thai peaceworkers and academics, together with performance and music. Most books have been distributed or purchased in the target areas and the rest available to the public. One of the great outcomes, came in an off-the-cuff comment by Jon leading to her being offered a scholarship to study a Higher Diploma in Peace-building and Governance at Thailand's major institution, which she is just completing now.

Conflict Resolution Workshops

The Mahidol University Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies invited us to work on a research project, applying the Art of Peace methodology with young people in the two target communities – Deep South & Thai-Burma border. We translated the Art of Peace into Karen and ran 3-day workshops with each group, opening up discussions on how they understand and respond to conflicts in each context, and what ideas can be brought into the situation to transform aspects of the conflict.

Play Safe

This major project, sponsored by the UNHCR, brought together health workers and youth activists at the Umphiem Mai and Nupo refugee camps, for a 10-month project addressing HIV stigma, response and prevention in the camp communities. The project combined basic HIV education, facilitator training, theatre skills development, performance making and community performance, and community cultural activities in each camp. The request for Makhampom to run the project by the UNHCR was based on their difficulty in opening a dialogue on HIV in camps, and our focus on opening a dialogue on local terms and using theatre as a communication tool proved very effective, leading to an extended invitation to work in all camps along the border.

Homelands

Makhampom is working in partnership with the City of Melbourne on the Homelands project, which is an internet TV project linking resettled Karen refugees in Melbourne with their peers on the Thai-Burma border. Makhampom's role is primarily a support and advisory role, with Willow Kellock, our AVI volunteer, working to develop the Karen project group on the border. This is a long-term project with many possible outcomes in the future. Stay tuned.

Regional & International Training

Since the original Study Tour in 1999, the program has constantly been transformed into an experiential training program in theatre for community cultural development. And with the completion of the Chiang Dao centre, we have tried to strengthen our role as a regional and international training organization in theatre, community development, facilitation, education, and other related areas. These programs are important in fundraising to support our community programs in Chiang Dao and to keep developing our methodology with diverse groups.



Study Tour

The Study Tour is considered to be our special annual program, involving most of Makhampom's senior team. In 2008, we had a big group from Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, the scholarship awardee from Swinburne University, and a Japanese researcher. We also had visual artist from CANSA, Tis Milner and her family, Jai Hartnell from Epic Arts, and Kirsty Baird from the Homelands project, joining parts of the Study Tour. This group was very easy and full of strong performers, so the Study Tour was notable for the smooth program and the terrific performance at the end. The new program with the Book-Bike was a particular highlight and the exchange with Pang Daeng in the midst of their eviction had a powerful impact on the group.

Visiting Schools Program

After hosting the International Schools Theatre Association in 2007, we opened an International Schools program in 2008. This included workshops with PREM school drama students, visual arts and community service activities with KIS middle school kids from Bangkok, and a visitor program for 40 international school principals.

Community Organization Grantee Development Project

Although far removed from our theatre work, we are working with the Thai Health Promotion Foundation on this 2-3 year project, training community organizations throughout Thailand in approaches for developing community projects and writing funding proposals. The 4 courses in writing and planning were focused on groups doing effective public health work but lacking knowledge of techniques and protocols for formalizing and implementing projects. This was a challenge to many of the Makhampom team and a good exercise in mutual learning.

Thai contemporary theatre practice

The Performance Team has consolidated as Tua, Phiao, Eddy, and Tae, although it has been a struggle to combine their role in productions and in managing the Makhampom Studio. The Studio space, close to Makhampom House in Saphan Kwai in Bangkok, has become popular as an independent black box venue, both for Makhampom productions as well as other groups, such as professional artist networks, students and lecturers from many institutions. It is an important space for our volunteers to experiment and a jumping off point for touring and festival performances.

New Director - New Generation

The Makhampom Studio has become an ideal forum for Thai directors exchanging ideas and work, promoting collaborations within the Bangkok Theatre Network. It's also a place for Makhampom volunteers to develop their directing skills. In 2008, new director's productions included Never Ending Imagination, Pleiades, Dao Luk Gai, May 17, My Valentine, Bird's Eye View Concert, Happy Banana Tree, The Knight of Rubbish Town, Jack and the Bean Stalk, and Sperm.

Art Program at Sapan Kwai

In our 13-year history in Saphan Kwai, we have developed extensive local ties, particularly with the children from the canal slum and the Soi 3 community. In 2008, we decided to develop an urban community arts program with the Saphan Kwai community, which included performances based on community stories performed to local audiences, photostory exhibitions of local experiences (including cat and dog tales), and children's theatre activities.



Mahajanok – Never Say Die

The 3-person physical mask theatre performance of Mahajanok, based on the dilemmas of perseverance and humanism after disasters or conflicts, was performed at the ASSITEJ International Festival of Theatre for Young People in Adelaide, followed by a tour of Melbourne, Hobart, Launceston and Perth. The tour was wonderful, from the fun of the festival in Adelaide to the magical experience with our hosts in Hobart to the comic tragedy in Perth. In August, the production was taken to Cambodia, sponsored by Alliance Francais.

Likay – The Message

This contemporary likay production was taken to the Yokohama festival, staged on an old Japanese floating pontoon with a beautiful scenic backdrop. Despite the cold and language differences, the audience found it hilarious, leading to an invitation to return in 2009 with another likay production, based on a Japanese story.

Bangkok Theatre Festival 2008

This year we prepared 8 productions from 6 directors for the festival. Unfortunately, some performances were canceled due to the political instability, with grenades being thrown into the TV station beside the festival park on one weekend, with just 6 pieces shown in the end. And for a bit of personal backslapping, we walked away with 3 prizes for the productions, 'Isara Memory', 'Any Any Day' and 'Sperm'.

This is an overview of a crazy year of work towards our 'professional' goal, and because we ended the year happy, exhausted but on budget, so that's at least half way to the goal. We are very grateful to our old and new volunteers, our supporters and friends, all sponsors and partners, and all beloved family and friends who want to see a change in Thai society and the region around us. 2009 here we come!

Gigi's Asialink Adventure

In September, Georgie Davill, aka Gigi, joined us for her 3 month Asialink residency, which we can only describe as a dramatic experience. She came to delve deep into our training, management, and financial systems, which was very successful, particularly in shaping the direction of the Makhampom Studio. She jumped between Chiang Dao and Bangkok as she pushed around Tua, coached Phiao, gossiped with Muay, pulled Richard into line, misbehaved with Jon, and left her imprint on the mob of staff and volunteers. Here are some of the stories of Gigi's adventure.

1. Princess and the Pea

Muay prepared a new mattress for Gigi in her private apartment cum bamboo hut, but after several sleepless nights (too hard) borrowed another from Cate and Daeng. This one was like a plank of wood. She tried the bed at Richard and Jon's place. In Bangkok, she went off buying a therapeutic mattress, and finally life was good. And life was even better for the masseur in Chiang Dao, who just about moved into Makhampom in Chiang Dao. And now we have this huge pile of mattresses, a memory of Princess Gigi.



2. Dr Doolittle

It is well known the Gigi is a dog lover. And the Makhampom dogs, Mam and Leun, were quick to notice that, setting up house with Gigi. But it was not only the dogs that took a liking to her. The ants prepared a welcome party en masse, moving in with her, even living inside her laptop. The rats too became friends, entertaining her at night, with their musical scampering around floors and ceiling. And her favourites were the snakes. After mentioning that she may meet one or two during her stay, she met one on her first day, then again and again, with one snake so enamoured that it could be seen relaxing in the lake watching her as she moulded her elephant sculptures.

3. The Magic Pudding

All who know Gigi are aware of her skills in the kitchen and she was ready to try many culinary creations. However, after preparing a big pot of spagbog (spaghetti bolognese) during rehearsals for the Bangkok Theatre Festivals, requests in Makhampom kept coming for this dish. The story should be called the Magic Pasta as the saucepan appeared to have this neverending supply of spaghetti. I should note that she did come up with one unique recipe – the charcoal coffee pot.

4. The Year of Living Dangerously

After warnings from the Australian Government, family, and friends about the political conflict in Bangkok in November, Gigi decided that she would be cautious. She steered clear of the conflict sites until on the night of fighting, she got caught with Makhampom and Pang Daeng group at a fundraising performance, in the wrong place at the wrong time. Then she helped to pack up sets and props at the Bangkok Theatre Festival, as the park was overrun by 'yellow' protesters, amidst grenades and gun fire next door. And then when she went to observe a Makhampom performance at a peace rally, she ended up holding a placard front and centre of the media pack. So much for keeping away from the action...

Georgie is being missed by Makhampom (as well as the market women, masseur, and the animals.)

Let Gigi tell you her own experiences in <http://georgieinthailand.blogspot.com/> and see Asialink at http://www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/our_work/arts/arts_management/residencies/past/thailand/georgina_davill_sa

What's Coming Up

The Study Tour

The Study Tour 2009 runs from June 27 to July 13. This year's program will focus on the exchange with Pang Daeng as a celebration of their new village. Read more at http://www.makhampom.net/makhampom/makham2008/detail_en.php?pcoid=24 and please share this weblink around the world.....



Reunion & 30 Year Anniversary 2010

2010 marks Makhampom's 30th Anniversary and we are planning a number of events. In July/August, we will hold a 3-4 day Theatre for Community Cultural Development Seminar. Each day will be dedicated to a different sector of Makhampom's praxis: (1) Educational Theatre, (2) Community Theatre, (3) Contemporary Performance, and (4) Cross-Cultural Exchange. The day programs will involve (i) theatre reproductions from Makhampom's historical works performed by old and new generations and directed by our new generation of directors, (ii) lecturers, seminar, and panel discussions with Thai academics, social activists, and arts practitioners, including overseas guest presenters, (iii) masterclasses and workshops by Makhampom facilitators and international educators/trainers/directors, (iv) community/youth festival and exhibition activities, and (v) anniversary celebrations. The majority of activities will be conducted in Thai, with English interpreters at seminars, and several panels and masterclasses held in English. Dates will be confirmed by mid-year.

In October/November, we will be hosting a reunion for Study Tour participants and other international friends. Initial ideas have been discussed in Makhampom, with Georgie Davill, and with some of our hosts during the recent Australian tour. The general concept is for a get together that is a social gathering in Chiang Dao and Bangkok mixed with a collection of theatre processes and community activities over a period of from 10 to 15 days, culminating with performance at the Bangkok Theatre Festival.

The ideas include:

- a Theatre Workshop Exchange over several with a mix of workshops run by the different people in the group, including the international friends, Makhampom, and Chiang Dao artists;
- Mini-Theatre Devising in small ensembles formed by teams with similar interests, playing with different styles and stories;
- a multi-lingual Book-Bike event in several of Chiang Dao's primary schools, using storytelling, reading, and language teaching activities;
- a Children's Day event with performance and art activities for 200 kindergarten kids;
- a Community Festival with Makhampom's partner communities in Chiang Dao, including activities with or at Pang Daeng's new village, at the Tung Luk temple, and at the Makhampom Living Theatre;
- a Public Forum in Chiang Mai and/or Bangkok on relevant issues such as cross-cultural performance, community development, tourism, indigenous rights, conflict, TCCD, Study Tour model, etc;
- performance of the mini-theatre productions at the Bangkok Theatre Festival in early November;
- a specific Makhampom-Theatre Media Exchange, to commemorate and reflect on the decade of relations between Makhampom and the Charles Sturt University Theatre Media department in Bathurst;
- a publication/documentary based on stories from the Study Tours.

To make things happen, we would like to invite word from everyone who is interested in being part of this event and, most importantly, expressions of interest in joining an organizing committee, to work on shaping the objectives, the program of activities, to make arrangements, and to seek funding to cover parts of the program. We hope this will grow into something special. We welcome all of our friends from around the world to join us.

Thanks for reading and stay tuned for the Hot Season Edition in June, including pieces on 'The Pang Daeng story' and 'The Red and Yellow of Thai politics'. We will also start a column called News from Beyond the Mountains, and we invite, you, our friends, to share your news through the Newsletter.