

Cultural Diplomacy: The Activities of the Bali Gamelan Tunas Mekar Community With I Made Lasmawan in Denver, United States

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Abstract

Balinese gamelan is one of the traditional Indonesian musical instruments that is growing rapidly in the United States, especially in Denver. Gamelan became famous and popular in America in the mid-1950s when the Institute of Ethnomusicology at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) began to introduce a series of Javanese gamelan, and this was followed by a set of Balinese gamelan with several teachers from Indonesia. In its development, gamelan learning was initially only an extracurricular activity, then became an official subject at UCLA and continued to develop at various universities throughout America. I Made Lasmawan became one of the disseminators of Balinese Gamelan education in Denver, especially in the Tunas Mekar community. This is a significant contribution to Balinese cultural diplomacy in the United States. This research uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach to find out comprehensive information about I Made Lasmawan role in the socialization of Balinese gamelan education in Denver which is part of cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and the United States. The results of this research show that non-Indonesian students are able to learn and become lecture in the Balinese Gamelan community. The community also performs a Balinese gamelan show every year in Denver. Cultural diplomacy is a way or one-way communication of direct two-way exchange, one way of promoting Indonesian culture to America. This grows local and global music communities in creating cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: Cultural Diplomacy, Gamelan Bali, Tunas Mekar

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Introduction

Cultural diplomacy is the process of exchanging ideas, knowledge, information, art, and other cultural aspects that have different backgrounds that aim to foster mutual understanding. The concept of cultural diplomacy is a way or one-way communication of a direct two-way exchange. (Nainggolan, 2022: 2). In general, cultural diplomacy is understood as national interest, and the dissemination of culture associated with political and instrumental approaches aimed at advancing national interests and policies (Mark, 2010: 66). This includes educational exchanges, cultural exhibitions, promotion of cultural products (traditional arts) managed by ministries of foreign affairs, embassies, language institutes, and government-backed cultural organizations. Education is one of the accesses in improving the nation's ability and contributing to the welfare of society and strengthening relations between nations (Soesilowati, 2015: 298).

A number of previous studies have discussed cultural diplomacy, but many still focus on the political aspect and do not delve into the educational dimension, specifically education for Balinese Gamelan traditional music. This shortcoming suggests a need to explore more deeply how education, particularly through art practices, can strengthen cultural diplomacy. In this context, the author analyzes the practice of learning Balinese Gamelan initiated by I Made Lasmawan in the Tunas Mekar community in the Denver, United States.

The purpose of this research is to address gaps in the existing literature through an analysis of cultural diplomacy in education, particularly in the learning of Balinese gamelan instruments as well as musical notation as a cultural expression where each culture has its own notation system that reflects different musical values and practices, as seen in the comparison of Balinese and Western notation (Dunbar-Hall, 2000: 144-145).

This research uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach to find out comprehensive information about I Made Lasmawan's role in the socialization of Balinese gamelan education in Denver which is part of cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and the United States. Qualitative is a method of investigating and understanding social or humanitarian problems in different individuals or groups (Cresswell, 2014). This qualitative approach is an approach to human behavior, especially the people to be studied. This research examines human behavior in natural situations seen from a cultural perspective. This approach can be done in detail by examining specific experiences by conducting in-depth interviews, observation, content analysis, and life history or biography.

Result and Analysis

Cultural Diplomacy in Education

Cultural diplomacy is an increasingly important strategy in international relations through soft diplomacy strategies. Soft diplomacy is an attempt by a state or organization to influence another entity through non-confrontational means. Cultural diplomacy is defined as a concept that refers to the process of exchanging ideas, information, art, and other cultural aspects among diverse nations and their peoples with the aim of fostering mutual understanding. The concept of cultural diplomacy can also be more of a one-way street or communication than a direct two-way exchange, such as when one country focuses efforts on promoting its national language, policy viewpoints, distinctive culture, or telling its story to the rest of the world. Cultural diplomacy bridges differences and facilitates mutual understanding. Overall, an

acceptable definition of the current application of cultural diplomacy is to explain the influence of culture on national interests. The author analyzes cultural diplomacy using the concept of soft power written by Joseph Nye.

Through Joseph Nye's concept of soft power in cultural and educational diplomacy, it is believed to increase interest, respect, understanding and greater trust between the two sides. This diplomacy is an effective strategy in an effort to foster mutual attention and common interests. This is partly because cultural diplomacy in education will have a positive effect in reaching the Heart and Mind of a nation (Nye, 2004).

The spread of Balinese gamelan through education began when Balinese Gamelan was sent outside Indonesia for study purposes by Mantle Hood for the University of California at Los Angeles Department of Music. Mantle Hood was an American ethnomusicologist who studied Indonesian gamelan music. At that time, it was considered unusual for students to learn about the music of another culture by actually playing the instruments. This changed when Mantle Hood, a pioneer and director opened the ethnomusicologist program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1956 and mentioned bi-musicality or the ability to play both Western and non-Western music. Ethnomusicologists can learn to play, sing or dance to the music they learn. This is considered one form of acquiring expertise or knowledge of a musical practice (Tenzer, 1998: 126).

Mantle Hood describes ethnomusicology as the study of music everywhere and at any time. Although his teacher Jaap Kunst had written two volumes of *Music in Java* without playing any music, Hood still required his students to learn to play the music they were researching. Mantle Hood was not the first ethnomusicologist to try to learn to play music, but he tried to encourage other ethnomusicologists to learn the instruments they studied, as he stated in his 1960 article on bi-musicality (Hood, 1960: 56).

This approach has been an important ethnomusicological research tool ever since. It allows researchers to learn about music and thus experience technical, conceptual, and aesthetic challenges. Students can also connect socially with the community being studied and have better access to the rituals and performances of that community (Hood, 1960: 58).



Figure 1: Mantle Hood Founder of the Ethnomusicology Program at UCLA
(Documentation: Ethnomusicology UCLA, 2012)

Mantle Hood applied the terms bi-musicality or bilingual to music in the same way that a linguist would describe someone who speaks two languages. He also strongly recommended that students of musicology know the spoken language of the musical culture being studied. This led to the collapse of the pre-existing rule of having to be competent in French and German in many musicology programs (Becker, 1983: 83-84).

The ethnomusicology studies that Mantle Hood established in Los Angeles were not only on individual cross-cultural experiences, but also within a larger framework of cultural negotiation that resonated across the arts and certainly across the United States. Once the territory of clandestine leftists, world music teaching and learning gradually became a more acceptable venue for individual enrichment, cultural exchange, and contested representation.

The production of new knowledge was driven by the Cold War-era competition for military and political control in Asia in general. Intense American investment in academic, military, and aesthetic interactions between the two countries played a role in the replacement of the leftist Old Order of 1947-1965 by the strongly pro-Western New Order of 1966-1998 led by Suharto. The New Order decade was the heyday of Indonesian gamelan, and gamelan ensembles were established on many liberal arts campuses (McGraw, 2015: 144).

Since then a number of Balinese gamelan ensembles have been established between countries and an increasing number of non-Indonesian students have devoted themselves to the study, preservation and performance of Balinese gamelan. Some gamelan groups are based at Indonesian consulates or embassies, as well as at universities with ethnomusicology departments. Balinese gamelan has had a significant influence on international music. Various music groups, both in Indonesia and in the West have played an active role in disseminating and developing gamelan music, thus enriching the diversity of music in the world. (Tenzer, 1998: 126).

History of Balinese Gamelan in Colorado

The history of Balinese gamelan in Colorado dates back to 1974, when the Colorado Women's College purchased a four-tone gamelan angklung, found stored and unplayed in Karangasem, Bali, and shipped it to the college in northwest Denver. The primary purpose of Colorado Women's College bringing gamelan to Denver was to introduce an example of a culture of communal cooperation that, among other things, was to introduce and build relationships of togetherness within differences through the presentation of an artful culture that was outside the culture of each member of the group.

Colorado Women's College maintained an active gamelan program that ended in 1980, at which time the University of Denver took over the instruments. For the second time in its existence, angklung was placed in storage until it was rescued in 1988 by a group of local musicians. One of the members of the Colorado Women's College was Frankie Anderson. After the instrument was brought back, the ensemble was coached by Wayne Vitaly, director of Gamelan Sekar Jaya.

The founding members of Tunas Mekar are Frankie Anderson, Eric Moon, Dane Terry, John Cheney, Glenn Nitta, Mark Harris, Mark McCain and Mark Fuller. In 1990, eight musicians from Colorado traveled to Bali where the ensemble was named by I Ketut Madri of Pengosekan Village. The name Tunas Mekar is taken from the group located in Banjar Pengosekan, Bali. "Tunas" means a little stored life force, like the seed of a flower bud and

‘Mekar’ means to put forward and thus Gamelan Tunas Mekar began. This name has given the group an identity: a seed that was flown far from its mother plant and landed on unfamiliar ground, but still produced a stunning flower.



Figure 2: Tunas Mekar Performance in 1992
(Documentation: Tunas Mekar, 2014)

In 1992, Tunas Mekar was invited to perform in Aspen, Colorado, United States by I Ngurah Suparta who was then working in the Cultural Office of the Indonesian Ambassador in Washington DC. In 1993, Gamelan Tunas Mekar invited I Made Lasmawan, a Balinese musician, composer and teacher who was brought from San Diego State University to help Tunas Mekar accompany Balinese dancers for the first time. I Made Lasmawan decided to move to Colorado in 1993 and teach at Colorado College. Until now, I Made Lasmawan is still active as an Artist-in-residence of Gamelan Tunas Mekar.

Since its inception, Tunas Mekar has had over one hundred members and has performed over four hundred and fifty shows. The group has created a repertoire of instrumental and dance works and has brought many Balinese dancers and musicians to Colorado to perform and conduct public workshops. Tunas Mekar performs traditional and new music from the Indonesian island of Bali. Modeled after village groups commonly found throughout Bali and learning with traditional methods.



Figure 3: Tunas Mekar Performance in Bali in 1996
(Documentation: Tunas Mekar, 2014)

In 1996, the Governor of Bali invited Tunas Mekar to perform at the 18th Bali Art Festival in Denpasar. Tunas Mekar collaborated with up-and-coming Balinese dancers at the time, making Tunas Mekar instantly recognized throughout the island of Bali. The event was broadcast through The Bali Post and Gatra, which were the most popular newspapers at the time. Tunas Mekar's performances were also broadcast on television throughout Indonesia and as far away as Antarctica. This further solidified the reputation of the Tunas Mekar Gamelan group in the global gamelan scene.

The presence of I Made Lasmawan in Tunas Mekar brings novelty to the musical compositions performed, found in the works created by I Made Lasmawan in the musical repertoire performed, namely the combination of traditional Balinese gamelan music and Western musical instruments. The group presents new traditional music for Balinese gamelan at music festivals, schools, private events and special invitations both International and National. I Made Lasmawan also equipped Tunas Mekar studio with various types of Balinese gamelan namely: Gamelan Angklung, Gamelan Gender Wayang, Gamelan Baleganjur, Gamelan Rindik or Rantang, Gamelan Selonding and Gamelan Semarandana.

True to its name, Gamelan Tunas Mekar's influence in bringing I Made Lasmawan to the Denver area has brought to life a number of collegiate gamelan ensembles including Gamelan Tunjung Sari at Colorado College, Gamelan Genta Kencana at the University of Colorado Boulder, Gamelan Manik Kusuma at Metropolitan State University of Denver and Gamelan Candra Wyoga at the University of Wyoming, Laramie.

I Made Lasmawan's Method of Balinese Gamelan in Denver



Figure 4: I Made Lasmawan
(Documentation: Tunas Mekar, 2020)

In the context of cultural diplomacy, it is important to understand the differences in teaching methods between traditional Balinese gamelan music and its adaptation in the United States. I Made Lasmawan presents teaching strategies that not only maintain the cultural essence of Balinese Gamelan but also make learning Balinese Gamelan accessible to students in the United States. Through innovative and adaptive approaches, I Made Lasmawan successfully overcomes the challenges that arise from cultural differences and musical understanding, thus encouraging a deeper appreciation and understanding of cultural heritage internationally. In the context of cultural diplomacy the teaching differences between the Balinese gamelan music tradition and its adaptation in the United States are distinct. I Made Lasmawan presents a teaching strategy that not only maintains the cultural essence of Balinese Gamelan, but also

makes learning Balinese Gamelan accessible to students in the United States. This was expressed by I Made Lasmawan, namely:

I Made Lasmawan considers that Balinese people have been accustomed to Gamelan from an early age, so that the physical and auditory skills needed to play this instrument have been honed naturally, for Balinese people gamelan is part of cultural and spiritual life. Children are introduced to gamelan music from a young age through various community activities, traditional ceremonies and formal education in art schools. Consistent regular practice shapes skills from an early age through motor skills and auditory abilities through tone, tempo variations and dynamics. In the process of teaching Balinese Gamelan outside of Bali, especially in the United States, there are a number of challenges unique to I Made Lasmawan due to cultural differences and musical backgrounds. This adaptation process often encounters difficulties such as the slow progress that students make in understanding and mastering Gamelan music techniques and concepts in learning rhythmic and melodic pieces quickly and efficiently. In the face of these challenges, I Made Lasmawan decided to use a numeric scale system and the concept of Catur Guru which is divided into four namely: Guru Tingal, Guru Panggul, Guru Kuping and Guru Lagu.

Guru Tingal

Guru Tingal, the methodology plays an important role in bringing students closer to an in-depth understanding of Balinese Gamelan by introducing students to visual and symbolic aspects and the basis in a cultural context. The goal is to help students understand and appreciate gamelan in a cultural and aesthetic context. Explanations of carvings, symbols in the gamelan, basic lessons on Balinese culture and clarification that Balinese music is a universal Indonesian cultural heritage and not limited to one religion or belief, help overcome potential resistance and increase appreciation of Gamelan music. In this way Guru Tingal becomes the initial learning that supports a more comprehensive and open learning process.

Guru Panggul

Guru Panggul is an approach to music teaching in which initial practice is the main method in the learning process. The term panggul can refer to the physical and technical aspects of playing including how to play the instrument correctly. It involves practicing hand and finger coordination to produce the appropriate sound. It builds motor skills to produce good sound quality by following rhythmic patterns correctly. Scientifically, the author argues that this approach is based on kinesthetic learning theory which suggests that students can learn better through direct experience. By seeing first-hand how a teacher plays an instrument or practices it, students can gain a deeper and more concrete understanding of the process (Hernandez, et al, 2020). In the context of Guru Panggul, the approach taken in this section involves teaching the students how to play a gamelan instrument including specific playing techniques to be learned such as Gamelan Gong Kebyar or Gamelan Angklung. This method allows students to practice the technique immediately after seeing it which accelerates the learning and understanding process.

Guru Kuping

Guru Kuping is a teaching method that emphasizes active listening as a key component in the process of learning Balinese Gamelan. This learning concept suggests that the ability to listen and analyze various musical elements such as timbre, rhythm, harmony and melody are

essential skills in music education. This involves identifying and understanding musical structures through listening. In this section, the author concludes that the Guru Kuping method focuses on several aspects namely:

Development of Auditory Ability: Students are taught to be able to distinguish and recognize the characteristics of different sounds such as the pentatonic scales typical of gamelan which are different from the Western music scale system.

Introduction to Musical Variations: Gamelan Gong Kebyar or Gamelan Angklung have different styles and playing techniques. Guru Kuping method can help students understand tonal differences and musical structures that may not be apparent in notation or written instructions.

Skill Enhancement: Active listening and analysis of music helps develop skills such as musical memory, understanding of structure and improvisation skills. It supports students' learning process by linking their auditive experiences to music theory and Gamelan playing techniques.

In the context of the research, the author concludes that Guru Kuping approach supports students in learning Balinese Gamelan through listening which can significantly improve musical ability.

Guru Lagu

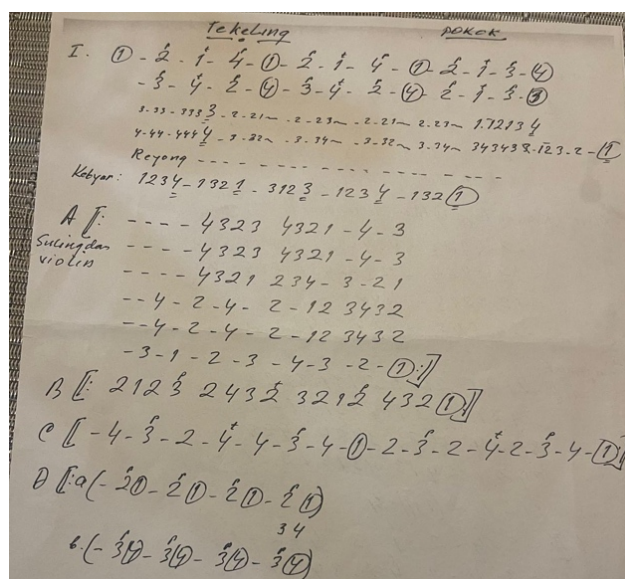


Figure 5: Balinese Gamelan Notation Used by Tunas Mekar
(Documentation by: Lasmawan, 2024)

Guru Lagu focuses on teaching the melodic aspects of the gamelan. The teaching approach in Guru Lagu is that students are taught to understand and master gamelan music notation, whether it is the kepatihan system or numeral notation. Students learn how to play melodies, song structures, and coordinate with other players to create a balanced harmony.

The learning method used by I Made Lasmawan is to use number notation on students in the United States using the concept of Catur Guru which consists of four aspects, namely: Guru

Tingal (visual and cultural recognition), Guru Panggul (technique practice), Guru Kuping (hearing), Guru Lagu (melodic structure and rhythm). Each of these aspects is designed to promote understanding of gamelan in an effective and inclusive way. However, the Guru Maya aspect which deals with the spiritual dimension and charisma or Taksu is not taught outside Bali to avoid potential religious discrimination and ensure that all people regardless of background can learn Balinese gamelan.

This method of learning was acquired and created through the musical experiences gained by I Made Lasmawan while studying Balinese Gamelan in Bali and Surakarta. The learning he received, was re-taught to students at Tunas Mekar, Denver. From observations in the field and interviews, it can be concluded that I Made Lasmawan's efforts in teaching Balinese Gamelan abroad not only introduce music but also build a cultural bridge between Indonesia and the United States.

From Student to Balinese Gamelan Teacher

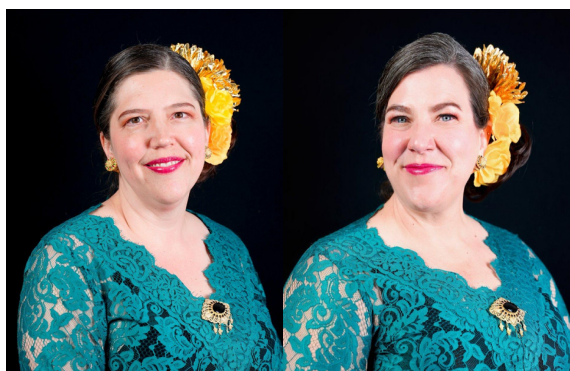


Figure 6: Karen and Liz Member of Tunas Mekar
(Documentation: Tunas Mekar, 2020)

Karen joined Tunas Mekar in 2012 with an interest in the rich musical and communal culture of gamelan. Karen served in the Peace Corps in Moldova and taught at an international school in Honduras. Today she is an active member of the Rocky Mountain Orff chapter of music educators and believes in the power of music education as a way of imparting respect and understanding for other cultures and traditions. With the help of Made Lasmawan, she recently acquired a Balinese gamelan orchestra for her school, and is excited about the possibilities and challenges of teaching gamelan to children.

Liz began studying gamelan with Pak Lasmawan in 1996 while a student at Colorado College. She earned her Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from UCLA. Her current research focuses on I Made Lasmawan and the music and dance traditions of Bangah village, Bali. Together with Pak Lasmawan, she leads a study abroad program on Balinese art and culture in Indonesia at Sanggar Manik Galih. Liz joined Tunas Mekar in 2017 when she returned to Denver as a Visiting Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Denver. Currently, Liz is an Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology at Metropolitan State University of Denver, teaching music and culture courses, supervising the university's global music ensemble, and curating the visiting artist series in the Music, Race, & Social Justice department.

Conclusion

The journey of Balinese gamelan from its origins in Bali to its global presence, particularly in the United States, exemplifies the power of cultural diplomacy. This traditional Indonesian musical form has served as a bridge between cultures, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation.

The author discovered the many activities of cultural diplomacy in education and continuing education in Balinese Gamelan. The efforts of individuals like I Made Lasmawan have been instrumental in shaping the landscape of Balinese gamelan education in the United States.

Through a soft power lens, Balinese gamelan has enhanced Indonesia's global image, promoting its rich cultural heritage. By involving diverse audiences, gamelan performances have created opportunities for intercultural dialogue and fostered a sense of global citizenship and have not ruled out the possibility of non-Indonesians becoming teachers and disseminators of Balinese gamelan.

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