

The Director's note

by Dr. Philippe Peycam

Only two years after the workshop which gave birth to the idea of the Center for Khmer Studies, it is now operational! Although our staff have worked hard to achieve this, we are almost surprised that it has happened.

Three main developments attest to our new phase of development: 1/ January 2001's first CKS workshop; 2/ the growth of a vibrant community of scholars in Siem Reap, and an expanding global network; 3/ the beginning of programmes initiated by the Center.

The January Workshop

In the view of virtually all those present, the January 2001 workshop was a success. This workshop would not have happened without the support of the Albert Kunstadter Family Foundation, the Asia Cultural Council, the Asia Foundation, the French Embassy, the French Cultural Center, the Australian Centre for Education, UNESCO and several private benefactors. I take this opportunity to thank them on behalf of CKS.

The official opening of the Center

The center's beautifully restored spaces in the complex of Vat Damnak were formally opened in the presence of HRH Princess Norodom Bopha Devi, and the monks of the monastery. This marked the beginning of our operational capacity. These facilities include a library, the first public academic research library outside the capital, Phnom Penh. It also includes a conference hall, used by the workshop participants for three days, surrounded by the daily life of the monastery. This superb ensemble had been brought back to life thanks to the work of architects François Tainturier, Chhim Phet and Cheam Phally. Again, this would not have been made possible thanks to the generosity of private donors.

Everyone came

Attended by more than 100 participants from more than 20 countries, the workshop was one of these rare occasions when artists, researchers, students, representatives of institutions and philanthropists could meet on 'neutral' ground. The assemblage of people really gave the Center its *raison d'être* as a world-wide network strongly rooted in Cambodia.

Indeed, half of the participants were Cambodian citizens — of whom another half were considered 'promising young talents'. Many contacts were made between people, sometimes meeting for the first time to discover similar interests. This was the result of almost two years of work, linking people and institutions often separated by distance or other kinds of barriers.

CKS succeeded in what Professor David Chandler qualified as the daunting task of 'herding cats'. At the end, almost everyone who counts in Khmer studies — in Cambodia and when possible from abroad — came. This capacity of bringing together people and institutions is what gives the Center its unique role.

Laying out recommendations

The meeting itself, entitled "The State, Practice and Future of Khmer studies", was organised in plenary sessions as well as divided into eleven disciplinary panels. The content of its proceedings have been compiled and edited in a report which has been included with the present newsletter. A set of recommendations was laid out that clearly identifies priorities in the field. For the Center it will help in the shaping of its programmatic planning.

For Center staff, this workshop was really special because it made concrete our formerly conjectural consortium, and brought together the people it aims to serve. We hope it will be the first of many important accomplishments for our field.

A 'Khmer Studies community' in Siem Reap

Following the workshop and the opening of CKS facilities, a vibrant community of like-minded people has begun to take shape, coalescing around the library and the conference hall at Vat Damnak.

Buddhist monks, foreign researchers, tour guides, private individuals, and high school students, all come to read at the Center's library which has become a sort of 'safe haven' for a diversified public. Under the supervision of Chheng Pharin and Oum Daraneth, the library has become a project in itself — cataloguing our growing number of acquisitions, and developing contacts with a wide range of libraries in Cambodia and overseas. We are grateful for the support from these friendly institutions and from all the private donors who have helped to build this library, as a unique place devoted to reading and study.

Recent visits include those of Dr. Hor Lat (Royal University of Fine Arts), Dr. Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, Dr. David Snellgrove, Dr. Steve Heder, artist Marine Ky, and Theatre Director Ong Keng Sen (Theater Work company). The latter put to use the CKS conference hall by recording several Cambodian 'living treasures'. Among them were septuagenarian Em Theay, Cambodia's leading dance teacher, and Shadow Puppet master Mann Kosal (of Sovanna Phum Association). [see picture]

Beyond our visiting scholars, a small community of researchers residing in Siem Reap is exchanging information and resources with increasing frequency.

Ph.D. candidate Tim Winter (University of Manchester) and Tara Mar (M.A. candidate, University of Amsterdam) are both focusing on the growth of tourism at Angkor and Siem Reap. Danh Hong (also CKS' resident computer expert) is completing his long translation of a historical text

regarding Khmer royalty's relations with the Vietnamese court of Huế. Dr. M.C. Ragavan has generously contributed his expertise on library organization to our staff. Ph.D. candidate Denis Gambade (Sorbonne University) is a frequent visitor, researching land planning, while Keiko Mura (also a Ph.D. candidate, School of Oriental and African Studies) has been a constant source of local news and support. Gerard Diffloth (École Française d'Extrême-Orient) has provided us with a wealth of information to expand our library. Friederike Funke, student of Cologne's University of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschule Köln) has been working to clean and restore our library's 1940's mural. I also take this occasion to thank her and the Fachhochschule for their generosity. In August, Professor David Chandler is expected to contribute his expertise to our growing group of academics.

Outside Siem Reap, the number of people and institutions connected with the Center for Khmer Studies is expanding too. My recent travels in the U.S., Southeast Asia and Europe, and also David Chandler's regular trips to various universities have resulted in a growing and diversifying consortium.

Besides our formal institutional membership, a network of CKS 'liaisons and 'friends' who have assisted us is also taking shape nicely. Our growing list of correspondents includes a few names: Dr. Klairung Amratisha in Bangkok, Dr. Michel Rethy Antelme and Nut Suppya in Paris, Alexandra Haendel and Dr. Rachel Harrison in London, Dr. Rethy Chhem in Singapore, Dr. Danny Wong at Malaya University, Dr. Ly Boreth in Berkeley, and Dr. Teri Yamada at U. Long Beach, etc.



In its own ranks, CKS operations and programs are now aided by John Weeks, our new Assistant Director. We are also lucky to have Alessandra Kim as our Overseas Liaison in New York. Her role is to help us with our fast-growing network. More recently, Alessandra has also worked on setting up an updated website for CKS (www.khmerstudies.org), thanks to the support of the Van Waveren Foundation.

As for CKS's Friends, we welcome famous writer Olivier Bernier as chairman of the 'Friends' network. Olivier will work with Alessandra to develop this network of private supporters without whom we would not have accomplished what is today the Center.

New Programmes Underway

Finally, CKS has received four separate grants, ranging from book translations and fellowships to thematic research projects. These projects will be coordinated from / by the Center (see David Chandler's presentation).

The Center is seeking to initiate new projects in the future. Following the spirit of the January 2001 workshop and its recommendations, a strategy to maximise the potential of the Center for this purpose is underway. It is to be carried out in full communication with our Cambodian partners, foundations and the institutional members of the CKS consortium. The approach beyond this remains the same. The Center for Khmer Studies' underlying purpose is to contribute to build human resources in Cambodia, and for that end, must work as a 'match-maker' between cultural institutions and people with expertise who need assistance.

The following institutions have already joined or will soon join the Royal University of Phnom Penh and the Royal University of Fine Arts as permanent members of the CKS consortium, along with its original international founding members. Below is the updated list of international members (by alphabetical order):

Asia Society (New York), Bonn University, California State University of Long Beach, Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok), Cornell University (Ithaca), Institut des Sciences Politiques de Paris/ École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Paris), School of Applied Sciences of Cologne, Humboldt University (Berlin), International Institute of Asian Studies (Leiden), National University of Singapore, Northern Illinois University (De Kalb), School of Oriental and African Studies (London), Thammasat University (Bangkok), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Univer-

sity of Amsterdam, University of California at Berkeley, University of Hawai'i (Manoa), University of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur), University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), University of Wisconsin Madison and World Monuments Fund.

The Center is establishing or has established working ties with representatives of cultural institutions and universities. In Cambodia: the Royal Academy, the Buddhist Institute, the National Archives of Cambodia, the Center for Advanced Studies, the National Library. Outside Cambodia, CKS is in contact with Upsala University (Sweden), the Institute of Asian and African Countries (Moscow U.), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (Japan), U. of Washington (USA), Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, École Française d'Extrême-Orient (France), Passau University (Germany), Australian National University, Monash U. (Australia), and the U. of British Columbia (Canada).