

The Center for Khmer Studies

by Dr. Philippe Peycam,
Acting Director

As the Center for Khmer Studies takes shape, its Acting Director introduces the project to the readers of the newsletter and invites your involvement.

The origins of the Center for Khmer Studies

In January 1999 a conference in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, organized by the World Monuments Fund, brought together people with different backgrounds in research and historical preservation, from Cambodia and elsewhere. The participants discussed ways of raising standards in higher education and research in Cambodia through the establishment of a center that would foster international exchange in the social sciences and humanities relating to Khmer cultural heritage.

This conference was genuinely pluralistic in terms of the institutions present, and wide-ranging in its discussion of the possible orientation of the Center. Thanks are due to the initiators of the project, and in particular the organizers of the January conference, for their courage in looking beyond their speciality to embrace the question of 'Khmer studies' in a comprehensive and inclusive fashion.

Among those present from Cambodia were the Ministry of Culture, APSARA, and representatives of the two universities with a special focus on the academic areas covered by the Center: the Royal University of Phnom Penh, and the Royal University of Fine Arts

Among the foreign institutions were representatives of the World Monuments Fund, Cornell University, Hawaii University, the National University of Singapore, Canberra University, the School of Oriental and African Studies (London), Bonn University, the University of Washington (Seattle), the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Paris), the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, the University of Florida, etc. Representatives of UNESCO, the Council of American Overseas Research Center and the director of the US Information Service at the American Embassy were also present.

The conference agreed to establish the Center with a consortium of member institutions drawn from those represented at the conference and elsewhere.

The Mission of the Center for Khmer Studies

The CKS can be best described through its three inter-related objectives: research, teaching, and public service.

The multi-disciplinary programs of the Center are designed to facilitate academic research, teaching, and public service activities which contribute to a broader understanding of Khmer civilization through a regional approach (Southeast Asia). The Center is dedicated to academic inquiry and dissemination of those findings. In developing and sponsoring these programs, the Center aims to foster relations between institutions of higher learning in Cambodia, foreign universities, non-governmental organizations in the humanities and the Cambodian government.

• Research

The future of Khmer studies depends on research. One overarching objective of the Center is to promote research activities in Cambodia by supporting opportunities for ongoing exposure, debate, and collaboration between Cambodian and foreign scholars.

Research will be conducted by the Center's fellows and visiting scholars. Cambodians and international scholars will be invited to apply for support for research at both the junior and senior levels, including advanced graduate studies and post-doctoral investigations. This research must be

tied to Khmer civilization and will be conducted principally in Cambodia or on an exchange basis at institutions abroad where suitable academic collections and scholarly or professional assistance are available. The Center will prioritize under-represented areas of research in its selection of fellows; further, foreign partner institutions will be encouraged to devise and sponsor short term and permanent research fellowships, courses, and chairs to include research in Khmer studies.

Development of the Center's library will permit free exchange of documents and bibliographic resources via the Internet; locally, it will provide a facility for reading, gathering information, attending seminars, and discussing ongoing projects.

- **Teaching**

Teaching is a central component of the Center's mission, and will be based on the presence of fellows, graduate students and visiting scholars. It is assumed that the Center will provide course offerings in a broad range of areas relating to Khmer history and culture.

The CKS aims to contribute to the reinforcement of research education in Cambodia, and will operate in close cooperation with the Royal University of Phnom Penh, the Royal University of Fine Arts and with other Cambodian institutions.

The curriculum will be carefully designed to complement existing programs at Cambodian institutions of higher learning and to take account of the needs of consortium members. It is intended that the curriculum will be flexible and that courses will range from three-day workshops to semester-long graduate seminars.

The granting of certificates by the Center is planned for the future. The framework for accreditation will only be drawn up after coordinated agreement between the consortium members and in full consultation with the ministries concerned.

- **Public Service**

Public service is also key to the Center's mission, considering the many needs tied to education and research in Cambodia which fall outside of the academic domain.

The public service or outreach activities will serve as a vehicle for informing academics, professionals, and the general public in Cambodia and abroad, about research and teaching activities at the Center.

More generally, it is envisaged that the Center will provide a link between foreign and Cambodian-based research initiatives related to Khmer cultural heritage and therefore will undertake to publicize and promote these activities in Cambodia and outside. The information will be disseminated by various means such as the present newsletter, a web site, publications, and lectures. The Center will also house documents, reference material, and basic equipment which will support programs of instruction related to history, language and culture which impact the local community directly through, for example, outreach programs to help enhance teaching skills in local schools.

Organization and management of the Center for Khmer Studies

- **Legal and institutional framework**

The CKS has been registered as an international, non-governmental, not-for-profit, educational organization in Cambodia and in the United States. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on January 22, 2000 between the Royal Government of Cambodia, represented by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, and the Center for Khmer Studies.

The Center is a membership-based consortium with members drawn from leading educational or research institutions in Cambodia and abroad.

Among the Cambodian members of the Center are the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) and the Authority for the Protection and the Safeguarding of Angkor and the Region of Angkor (APSARA).

The founding foreign consortium members include the World Monuments Fund, the Asia Society, Cornell University, the University of Hawaii at Manoa, the National University of Singapore and the University of Washington State. Other interested institutions include the School of Oriental and African Studies from London University, the

University Paris VII Denis Diderot, the University of Bonn, the University of Canberra and the University of Florida.

These academic and professional partners will offer strategic guidance, sponsor Fellows, and foster curriculum development in an ongoing fashion.

The Board of Directors will manage the Center's fiduciary concerns, and the Center's Director and staff will oversee the management of programs on a day-to-day basis. A Steering Committee will work with the Director and staff to derive maximum benefit from consortium members, monitor progress, and select scholarly participants from candidate pools.

Research fellows, scholars-in-residence, interns, and resident graduate students will run the Center's course offerings.

- **Start-up development phase (September 1999 – end 2000)**

Alongside the institutional establishment of the CKS, the team in Cambodia is already working on some of the objectives set for the year 1999-2000.

Among the steps already taken are:

- Identification of a provisional location for the Center
- Compilation of a bibliography of documentation resources
- Preparation of a trilingual newsletter and a web site
- Establishment of contact database on people and institutions working on Khmer studies in Cambodia and worldwide
- *Identification of a provisional location for the Center*

We have focused on the restoration of two old buildings located in the premises of the pagoda Wat Damnak, in the center of Siem Reap town. These buildings used to serve as Buddhist primary schools until they were badly damaged during the Pol Pot regime. We have secured authorization from the Wat authorities, the Ministry of Religion and Cults, and from the different local authorities to restore and use those buildings.

The restoration of the first building, to be used as a library, has already begun. The work should be completed towards

July 2000. The restoration of the second building, to be used as a conference and exhibition hall, could be completed towards November, although the rainy season may cause some delay.

We are also planning to build – or re-build – a third building, which will be erected on the foundations of a wooden house burnt down during the civil war. This building will be used for classrooms and office facilities.

Thanks to a private donor, we will also shortly begin work on building an extension for the Wat Damnak primary school, which is adjacent to the buildings designated for the Center.

- *Compilation of a bibliography of documentation resources*

Fellow William Southworth is compiling a core book list on the social sciences of Cambodia and Southeast Asia. He has so far concentrated on ancient history, art history (pre-Angkor and Angkor period) as well as archaeology, and has already generated a substantial list. We intend to expand to other fields in social sciences such as anthropology, ethnology, sociology, but also in linguistics and modern history. Our aim is to establish a finished list of books by discipline which the CKS should purchase in priority. The small collection of books already acquired by the CKS is being recorded. Much more work is needed especially in terms of method of documentation. For this expansion we intend to seek help from other researchers in Cambodia and abroad. These books will be obtained thanks to financial support from individual and institutional donors.

Among the ideas to fill the library shelves is a program to identify, purchase and record books and periodicals that are being published in Cambodia. Another one is to make accessible to the CKS library users the bulk of recent theses dealing with Cambodia and Khmer Studies (MAs and Ph.Ds) which have come out in the last 10 to 20 years in Cambodia and in other countries.

- *Preparation of a trilingual newsletter and a web-site*

Fellow Michel Antelme has prepared *Siksācaker* as a trilingual newsletter in English, French, and Khmer, aimed at both the academic community and the wider public. The idea behind the newsletter project is to present to Cambodians – and especially to Cambodian students – what is

being achieved outside their country in the field of 'Khmer studies', while at the same time informing foreign students and scholars about the various initiatives within Cambodia. For this program too, we shall be grateful to receive suggestions and contributions from member universities, organizations, and individuals.

The second issue, due in six months, is intended to focus on the various activities that are taking place outside Cambodia, with special emphasis on the consortium members and on the individuals and groups that have been vital in establishing up the center.

Difficulties in accessing the internet from Siem Reap have so far prevented us from setting up a web site for the Center. We hope nevertheless to commence this project in the near future with logistical support from some of the consortium members.

- *Establishment of contact database on people and institutions working on Khmer studies in Cambodia and worldwide*

Ms. Nop Sovanna is presently compiling a database listing people and institutions working on Khmer studies. We would be very grateful for any suggestions of such contacts from readers of *Siksācaker*.

A researcher in the United States will soon be selected to

establish a database of institutions and programmes as a reference tool for scholars. This work will identify the institutions world-wide that are teaching or conducting research relevant to the Khmer culture, and will compile information from these institutions – including general course offerings, syllabi for specific courses, and recommended reference material – as a resource for the Center.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the CKS is an institution that is open and inclusive. One of the key features of the Center is that, as an international organization, it will be able to co-operate actively with the two Cambodian universities and various local institutions, while maintaining its institutional autonomy. This is vital for attracting longstanding programs by various foreign institutions interested in Khmer and Southeast Asian studies.

This project is an example of co-operation, bringing together institutions of various countries and specialities for the common purpose of reinforcing Cambodian academic progress at home, and among its Southeast Asian neighbors, while at the same time promoting worldwide interest in Khmer cultural heritage. In this spirit of integrity and openness, I would like to invite you, readers of *Siksācaker*, to help us make the Center for Khmer Studies a success.

The first CKS team

The establishment of the Center for Khmer Studies as a viable and lively institution after only five months is the result of the dedication of the small first team working in Siem Reap. The presence of fellow researchers in different fields of investigation has enabled us to initiate a variety of programs simultaneously. The current foreign researchers who are helping to establish the Center are the Fellows Michel Antelme, Dr. William Southworth and François Tainturier. They are working with the support of two Cambodian associates: Cheam Phally and Nop Sovanna.

The current team, in alphabetical order:

Michel Antelme: Michel is a Khmer - French Ph.D. candidate at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. His subject is Khmer linguistics. Michel has been working on the current newsletter.

Cheam Phally: Phally is a trained architect from the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. While working full time on restoration work at the World Monuments Fund project at Preah Khan, she makes time to work with Fellow François Tainturier on the restoration of buildings for the Center in the Wat Damnak pagoda.

Nop Sovanna: Sovanna graduated from Siem Reap provincial high school. She assists Michel and William in their respective tasks, and has responsibility for the administration and accounting of the Center.

Philippe Peycam is a Ph.D. graduate in modern history of Southeast Asia from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. As acting director, he is responsible for the establishment of the Center and its programs.

William Southworth is a British Ph.D. graduate in Archaeology and Ancient History of Southeast Asia, also from the School of Oriental and African Studies. William is in charge of compiling a bibliography on archaeology and history on Cambodia and Southeast Asia for the Center's future library.

François Tainturier is a French-trained architect and urbanist in France with an additional MSC from Bartlett School (University College of London) who has specialized in heritage restoration in Southeast Asia. François works with Phally on the restoration of the buildings that will house the Center at Wat Damnak in Siem Reap Town.

To this list must be added the names of others who have devoted time and energy to the Center such as Ph.D. candidate in Anthropology Keiko Miura, Sin Sokhorn and Sin Ho, Julia Bindman, Nerida Aylott, Cindy Colla, and Chhan Chamroeun, the archaeologist from the WMF team. Thanks also to them.