

# E ditorial

by Michel Antelme

## *Siksācākṛ*, from Sanskrit *śikṣā*

‘studies’ and *cakra* ‘wheel; field, domain, sphere’, i.e. “sphere of studies” or “wheel of studies”, is the name of the newsletter of the Center for Khmer Studies (CKS), the Centre d’Études Khmères in French (CEK), or មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលខេមរសិក្សា (*Majjhamaṇḍal Khemarasikṣā*) in Khmer – a Pāli, Khmer and Sanskrit compound. The word *khemara* is actually a coining by the Khmers themselves, and is a pseudo-Pāli reconstruction of the ethnonym “Khmer” – a term of probably Mon-Khmer origin. Due to a confusion, however, with the spelling of the same word when borrowed back from the Siamese – a confusion charged with cultural implications – the term *khemara* has itself become well established in the literary and poetic language. This name, as a multilingual compound, is ideally suited to our Center, which although dedicated to Khmer civilization – unexempted from outside contributions as we can see – is also open to other Southeast Asian cultures.

A new center is springing up in Cambodia. What might be its relevance when for many years, numerous individuals and institutions have effectively devoted themselves – in spite of all kinds of difficulties – to put this country back on its feet after the destruction caused by several decades of war? Is there not a risk of being superfluous and diluting in an umpteenth organization the skills of Cambodians and non Cambodians alike, who are training, with courage and passion, the future Cambodian élites in the fields of social science?

In his article, Dr. Philippe Peycam, an historian of Southeast Asia and acting director of the Center, reminds us, with his presentation on the history of the project, of its specificity as an institution dedicated to international cooperation in the fields of the social sciences and humanities related to Khmer studies. The key-words here are research, teaching and public service: for a platform of exchange between Cambodian and foreign institutions and scholars working on Khmer and Southeast Asian cultures; for a library and a logistic base for researchers and students; and as a supporting body for Cambodian and foreign students,

etc.

This newsletter will be an essential tool for the Center. It aims to present the activities of the Center, in particular the research conducted by its fellows – published in the form of articles and summaries. However, publication of original research articles will only represent a minor part, as research journals of high scientific quality already exist or are currently being launched in Cambodia and abroad. The main objective is to act as a forum linking Cambodian students and scholars with individuals and institutions abroad working on Khmer studies. It will inform Cambodian students about teaching and research programmes conducted abroad, and will likewise highlight to foreign scholars the various activities currently taking place in Cambodia.

In the field, the Center will use buildings located in the compound of a Buddhist monastery, a traditional place of teaching and transmission of knowledge in Theravāda Buddhist countries throughout the Peninsula. CKS fellow François Tainturier, an architect-urbanist, reports on the renovation of two schools located in the precinct of Wat Damnak near the center of Siem Reap. We thank him for the stylized image on the newsletter cover, which he patiently drew on his laptop computer. This image represents the pediment-lintel of Wat Damnak Buddhist primary school – one of the buildings chosen to house the Center library – which has been disused since the Khmer Rouge period. His assistant, Cheam Phally, architect, provides a brief historical survey of the monastery, and in particular of the buildings now under renovation.

CKS fellow William Southworth, a specialist on the archaeology of Campā, gives an appraisal for future archaeological research in Cambodia, and to finish we give a brief account of some cultural events in Cambodia these past few months.

Let us wish that *Siksācākṛ* may find its place among publications on Khmer studies and that it will be useful to all scholars specialized of Khmer studies and in particular to the Khmers dedicated to the revival of their own culture.