

Community Empowerment in Conservation Work of Angkor Complex



Thibaud Lepage

Keiko Miura, who is engaged in fieldwork in Cambodia, has been working or involved in Siem Reap for more than six years. She contributed this article on the efforts of the local and foreign community in the area of conservation

National and international framework of conservation of Angkor

Following the two decades of war and instability, and prior to the UN-sponsored national elections in Cambodia of May, 1993, Angkor was inscribed on the World Heritage List in December, 1992, when it was also declared a World Heritage Site in Danger for the probationary period of three years. This was the culmination of years of preparatory efforts made by the Cambodian authorities and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Then, the World Heritage Committee (WHC) made an exceptional decision to temporarily lift normally required inscription conditions pertaining to national mechanisms for site protection.¹

Further development concerning the conservation of Angkor heritage site was made through the Tokyo Declaration of October 1993, which led to the establishment of the International Co-ordinating Committee for the Safeguarding and Development of the Historic Site of Angkor or ICC. Japan and France co-chair ICC, with UNESCO in charge of its secretariat. Ever since, the international conservation work in Angkor has been co-ordinated, and a framework to examine on-going projects and new ones has been established.²

Meanwhile, the legal framework for the conservation of the Angkor heritage site has been established by the Government of Cambodia, in co-operation with UNESCO and other international organisations. The foremost important one is Royal Decree 001/NS issued in 28 May, 1994, providing protection of cultural zones in the Siem Reap/Angkor region and guidelines for their management. Another important one is Royal Decree NS/RKT/0295/12 issued in 19 February, 1995, establishing a national authority for the protection and management of Angkor and the region of Siem Reap, named APSARA (Authority for the Protection of the Site and the Development of the Region of Angkor). Other decrees concern the establishment of the Supreme Council on National Culture issued in 19 February, 1995 and the law on the protection of cultural heritage issued in 25 January, 1996. At the same time several sub-decrees have been issued: one specifies the Hotel Zone and the other one establishes the special police corps for the protection of cultural heritage.³

Despite the fact that all the efforts to fulfill conditions necessary for a World Heritage have been steadily made, Cambodia's fragile peace process necessitated the duration of the probationary period to be further extended. In the 23rd ses-



Thibaud Lepage

sion of the World Heritage Committee which was held from November to December last year, it was decided that Angkor would remain on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The Committee asked to be kept informed of the state of conservation of the site and current measures relating to public and private works, "so as to ensure that such undertakings necessary for the social and economic welfare of the communities do not have any adverse impact on the world heritage values of the site."⁴

What is happening in Angkor is alarming in a sense different from the anxiety of the World Heritage Committee: the social and economic welfare of the local community is threatened by

the 'other' stakeholders' welfare and the misconception of the World Heritage values of the site. The current trend is also directly in opposition to the Royal Decree 001/NS guidelines for the management of protected cultural zones in the Siem Reap / Angkor region. The APSARA Authority is a relatively young institution whose policies are

yet to be defined and potentiality to be proved with time while other authorities and concerned parties do not fully respect the new management framework and tend to act without prior consultation with the APSARA Authority.

Angkor is not only a World Heritage Site but also a national and regional heritage site. Moreover, for the local community it is a heritage site of their direct ancestors where their history, religious and spiritual beliefs, and emotions are entwined with memory, and which determine their socio-economic activities of today. The conservation and management of such a vast 'Living Cultural Heritage Site' as Angkor are no easy tasks. To start off with, even the definition of **living** cultural heri-

tage is unclear to the concerned parties, many even unaware that it is considered as such.

UNESCO's 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage only briefly mentions in Article 1 the definition of 'cultural heritage' and in Article 5 (a) measures to be taken for the protection of the cultural and natural heritage. The following are excerpts of relevant parts from these two Articles:

Article 1: For the purposes of this Convention, the following shall be considered as 'cultural heritage':

monuments:.....

groups of buildings:....

Sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and of man and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view.

Article 5: To ensure that effective and active measures are taken for the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage situated on its territory, each State Party to this Convention shall endeavour, in so far as possible, and as appropriate for each country:

(a) to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and

to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes;⁵

The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property in Rome or ICCROM states in *Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites* that one aim of conservation is not to lower the living standards of the occupants of historic areas, and that the final aim and the principles of conservation and restoration must be kept in mind; generally the minimum effective intervention has proved to be the best policy.⁶

If the concerned parties recognise that community empowerment, the importance of involving the local community in the conservation work, and minimum effective intervention are the keys to successful conservation and management of a heritage site and manage the site accordingly, Angkor still has a chance to make an ideal model for the rest of the world to follow.

To what extent the conservation work of the Angkor complex is contributing to community empowerment? The answer should contain, firstly, an understanding of the traditional relationship between the Angkor heritage site and local community; then, followed by examination of the conservation work and the participation of the local community; and, thirdly, identifica-

tion of adversaries and positive efforts made towards community empowerment. The analysis here is mostly based on extensive interviews conducted in the local community around Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat where the conservation work has been conducted intensively, as well as the interviews with relevant authorities and international organisations. At the same time reference is made to ICC reports and other documents.

Traditional relationship between the Angkor heritage site and local community

Angkor is foremost a spiritual and religious place for both the local community and Cambodians as a whole. Angkor temples not only enshrine Hindu or Buddhist icons but also house powerful guardian spirits called *neak ta*, at times appropriating Hindu icons and other times natural objects, as well as *bâng bât* or the owner spirit of ancient temples. During war time in the early 1970s, large Angkor temples and Angkor Thom became shelters for the local people who were fleeing from the fighting between the Khmer Rouge and the army of the Lon Nol Government. Angkor Wat, in particular, represents the highest spiritual value as much as it is a national symbol, but many also recognise the universal value of Angkorean legacy.

When the French took over Battambang and Siem Reap from Thailand in the early 20th century, approximately twenty families had been living in Angkor Wat between the external wall and the moat from the south side of the causeway via south-west corner to the area around the south gate. At that time, there were no monasteries in Angkor Wat, and monks were said to have been living on the north and south side of Kda Baen (or the terrace in front of the first gallery) and prayed in the Gallery of Thousand Buddhas. Then the French moved the monks from there to build monasteries within the compound but further away from the central building mass.



Pun Phnom Ksach at the Khmer New Year, 2000. Wat Tang Tok within Angkor Phnom. The sound mountains represent fire peaks of Mount Meru. They are created to remove sins from people and to receive good fortunes in return.

The people who were expelled from the compound of Angkor Wat moved to live in the areas around it, most notably South Teaksen village located to the south of Angkor Wat and

some in Trâpeang Seh village to the west of Angkor Wat. Monasteries in Angkor Wat also served as schools up to the third grade although some studied there higher than the said grade. The stupas of the two monasteries have also been housing ashes of their ancestors. Monasteries had not been constructed inside Angkor Thom until the 1980s, so most people whose villages lie around Angkor Thom also went to Angkor Wat monasteries for religious ceremonies, both secular and religious studies, and for the Khmer New Year (to enjoy the New Year games and special performances of music, dance and theatre).

Many monks and caretakers of religious statues in Angkor Wat are mostly from the surrounding villages. The government had made several attempts to move the communities of these villages elsewhere away from Angkor Wat, but each time some refused to go, and the majority went back to their original villages. In 1962, these villagers were asked to move by the government to the west of Angkor Wat where the military base is presently located, but some villagers did not go, and others who had gone, returned in 1979. In 1991, the same villagers were ordered to go to live in Dai Thmei village near Siem Reap, but many were unable to make a living there and returned to their old village sites where they had rice fields

and fruit trees. Without doubt, Angkor Wat has played a highly important role in the spiritual and religious lives and education of the local population as well as sheltering them during the war time.

Angkor Thom was the city of Jayavarman VII which lies to the north of Angkor Wat. Due to the nature of its space, the relationship between the local



Wat Tang Tok within Angkor Thom. The chief monk from Angkor Krau village is splashing holy water on a family of visitors.

population and the city is more complex, with not merely religious and spiritual significance but also socio-economic ramifications continuing from the past to the present. Some village origins go back to the royal court of Angkor Thom, whose people have had customary rights to cultivate some of the

land inside the city enclosure and its moat, and collect forest products, including fruits and resin of Yieng trees.

In the memory of senior villagers, some villages existed inside this ancient city, namely Kôk Ta Tru village, which lied in the east of where Preah Se-ar Metrei monastery is presently located; Srah Srei village (some call it Angkor Thom village) in the east of Srah Srei or the Women's Pond within the royal palace compound; Baoeng Ta Trau village to the west of Bapuon; Baoeng Senthmie village to the south-west of the royal palace; and Baoeng Thom village at the south-west corner of Angkor Thom. Some had to leave Angkor Thom when the French arrived. Those who used to live near Srah Srei were said to be related to the royal family, some of whom settled down eventually in Angkor Krau village, just outside the North Gate of Angkor Thom, and others in Baray village and Kôk Ta Chan village in the south-west of Angkor Thom via Baoeng Ta Trau village. Their descendants have inherited lands and trees from some areas within this ancient city.

The moat of Angkor Thom has also been cultivated by the people whose villages are nearby. They are said to have inherited the land from their ancestors. They say that these fields were royal rice fields but some people were given land by the king in exchange of 2kg of

gold. The moat has different names according to the section.

In addition to the rice fields, many villagers of Angkor Krau, Kôk Ta Chan, Baray - Kôk Beng, Kôk Doung, and Trâ peang Seh used to own Yieng trees with grey barks inside and outside Angkor Thom, from which they tapped resin. The ownership of trees was passed down from one generation to another, but it could be sold from one family to another without cutting the trees. For the local community, the forest of Angkor Thom was communal and they consider it as their heritage, thus it has been maintained by these villagers who cared for young trees, and the tapping of resin was conducted regularly in a controlled manner. The ownership of these trees has been fairly well respected. Some families owned more than three hundred trees while others less than a hundred. Likewise, the forest inside and outside Preah Khan had been maintained by the villagers of Angkor Krau. The villagers of Trâpeang Seh owned many Yieng trees in the east of Angkor Thom near the Siem Reap river. While some resin was used to make torches for home consumption and sometimes sold to their fellow villagers, the extra resin was sold mainly through middlemen to business people

or fishermen in Tonle Sap to make boats. The other people went to Siem Reap to sell resin directly at a market or to fishermen in Phnom Krom. The income from the sale of resin constituted an important portion of supplementary income for these families whose main occupation is rice farming.

In addition to the inherited land and trees in Angkor Thom, the local population in general used to collect other materials that the nature of Angkor Thom offered them. They included firewood, bamboo, rattan, rotten trees, resin, vines, wild potatoes, edible insects, herbal medicine, barks of trees, fish, crabs, and birds. The cows there were also provided with plenty of grass to eat.

Apart from the socio-economic importance of the ancient city for the local community, the



Thibaud Lepage

religious and spiritual significance has been enhanced after seven monasteries were reconstructed there in the 1980s. With the exception of Wat

Prampil Lveng, all the other six monasteries are headed by four villagers of Angkor Krau, one from Trâpeang Seh and the other one from Kôk Beng. Many of the monks who stay in these monasteries and their clients are from the villages nearby, in addition to people from Siem Reap and other provinces. The caretakers of Buddha statues at Bayon and Preah Ngok Vihear are among the eight-precept followers of the local inhabitants. The majority of the people are again from Angkor Krau.

Some prominent Angkorean monuments and temples inspired interesting folktales, which enrich the mind of the local population, and provide good explanations about how and when they came to be built and the reasons for the names and specific features.

Another important relationship between the Angkor monuments and local community is that the latter provided important labour forces to the restoration work conducted by the Angkor Conservation Office (ACO) with French managers from the beginning of the twentieth century till 1972 (some continued even after the departure of the French conservators) and new and renewed restoration and conservation work in the 1990s. Some of the

labourers might even be descended from the original constructors of Angkor monuments: at least the majority of former ACO workers among them demonstrate their sense of responsibility to pass down 'their' heritage to posterity in better conditions.

Conservation work and local community

The modification, addition, restoration and conservation work of various Angkor monuments are known to have been implemented during and after the Angkor period through the studies of some experts in the fields of archaeology, architectural history, art history and epigraphy. The restoration of Angkor Wat in particular, was inscribed on ancient stones there by a certain Queen



Thibaud Lepage

Mother, whose son undertook the restoration work in the sixteenth century.⁷ The kings of

the sixteenth century had their primary concern with Angkor Wat as a living shrine rather than as a monument of historic importance. Dagens also suggests that "the few building projects which followed theirs, particularly those instigated by the king of Thailand, were undertaken in the same spirit."⁸ Likewise, the French who did not want the monks to be living in front of the first gallery did not expel them from the compound, recognising the importance of the reality of 'living' temple. The labourers who have constructed these monuments are, however, little known to us, though it is evident that Angkor had a vast number of labourers and fine artisans to match the quantity and quality of work.

Not many French sources mention how they found local population around Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom after 1907 when Angkor was returned by Thailand to Cambodia, together with the whole of Siem Reap and Battambang provinces. Prior to that, the French established Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient (EFEO) in 1898 to study the history, language and archaeology of Far Eastern countries, and in the same year ACO was established and has been managed by EFEO conservators to conserve Angkor monuments until 1972.⁹

As mentioned above, some families who used to live in the compound of Angkor Wat were moved by the French to live outside the moat. Likewise, the people who used to live in Angkor Thom were moved out of the ancient city to live elsewhere. At that time there were many robberies; and some say that the French wanted the local people to live closer to one another.

Concerning the conservation of Angkor, two types of philosophy were used by the French in the early period, which have been more or less followed in the renewed efforts of conservation in the 1990s. The most common type of conservation of monuments is clearing scientifically to the 'original' structure whereas those with ruins and vegetation, having produced a mysterious symbiosis, such as Ta Prohm, Ta Som and Neak Pean were left untouched. It is interesting to note that the latter type was influenced by the view of many visitors to Angkor who opted for mystery to history.¹⁰ Today, the World Monuments Fund's project at Preah Khan clearly follows the path of the second type, limiting the removal of vegetation to the level absolutely necessary.

Again, early French visitors to Angkor did not mention very much the local community but the impressions, conditions, features, and styles of various Angkor monuments and their

carvings and sculptures. However, there are plenty of drawings and photos available of the local people helping the French explorers to carry some of the sculptures down the river, clearing temple compounds or restoring them.¹¹ One thing which has not changed much between the past and the present is that the local community has provided much-needed labour forces to the conservators of archaeological sites in Angkor.

It is not surprising if some of the present conservation staff or restoration workers are descended from some of the original construction workers and experts of the Angkor period, as it is most probable that the majority of workers are recruited from the local community, in addition to the people who were captured as slaves from the mountainous regions or among indebted people, and those who were subjugated by Angkor rulers.¹² Some of the workers, most notably former ACO staff before 1975, are conscious of their ancestors' work and have a strong sense of responsibility for the conservation of their ancestral heritage in order to pass it down to the following generations in good conditions. Without doubt, the local community of Angkor has served as a pool of labourers and artisans for a long time. A few outstandingly dedicated workers see Angkor monuments from the viewpoints of

conservators as to what has to be done to conserve them. Among them, there are three generations of restoration workers who are proud and committed to their work.

While all the former ACO staff remember the substantial



A by-gone view of water buffaloes in the moat of Angkor Wat

income earned during the Sihanouk regime when the French managed the conservation work, today's workers are finding it difficult to make any savings though all recognise a considerable improvement in their lives as compared to the pre-employment period, without employment opportunities. The difference in the understanding of their heritage among different generations is stark: the older generation is more concerned with the restoration work itself whereas the younger one tends to regard it more as an opportunity for employment and a source of income.

At the present time, there is a variety of international restoration/conservation teams working in Angkor. On-going project teams with their project

sites and the number of workers are as follows.¹³

1. The World Monuments Fund (WMF - American) with the conservation work at Preah Khan currently involving 60 workers.
2. EFEO, restoring Bapuon, employs approximately 200 workers.
3. The Japanese Government Team for Safeguarding Angkor (JSA) (restoration of the northern library of Bayon and that of Angkor Wat, and two towers of Prasat Suor Proat) employs 73 workers.
4. The Sophia University (Japan) undertaking emergency measures at Banteay Kdei and restoring the part of Angkor Wat Causeway, employs 35 workers.
5. The German Apsara Conservation Project (GACP) working at Angkor Wat employs eight workers. The German/UNESCO Funds-in-Trust project at Preah Ko, which terminated its Phase 2, hired 23 workers.
6. The Chinese Government Team for Safeguarding Angkor (CSA), restoring Chau Say Tevoda, employs 34 workers.

* Recently, the Indonesian team has completed the restoration project of the gates of the Royal Palace. They hired 32 workers.

The distribution of villages, from which the workers

have been recruited differ according to the team: some from the same village as the chief of labourers, and others from a variety of villages.

As a priority, most of them have been recruited from the local community. Some teams such as WMF and EFEO sought out more former ACO staff with previous experience in restoration/conservation work at the initial stage.

The APSARA Authority has employed 200 to 300 site maintenance workers (the number of workers fluctuates according to the month) and 74 guards (35 in Angkor Wat, 30 in Angkor Thom, 3 at Ta Nei, and 6 at Kbal Spean) from the local community.¹⁴ While some APSARA workers prefer to work with international restoration/conservation teams because of better income, others are just happy to be able to work with the national authority for the conservation and maintenance of the Angkor complex, which are expected to be able to offer them jobs for a longer time than international restoration/conservation projects.

In the villages with employees of restoration/conservation projects, there is a growing gap in wealth and life-styles between those who are becoming better-to-do and those who remain poor. Naturally, there is



APSARA workers clearing the grass in front of the Royal Terrace

some uneasiness between the two groups. Nonetheless, most people interviewed in Angkor Krau, from which many restoration labourers of JSA, WMF, CSA and EFEO have been recruited, recognise some improvement in life in general since four to five years ago. They also recognise the improvement in the village, with more motorbikes, TVs, tape-recorders, rice mills and some students being able to further their education in Siem Reap beyond the primary school in the village as compared to 1995 when there were no children who could further school education.

It is interesting to note that the chief monks of aforementioned six monasteries in Angkor Thom and many *achar* (intermediary between monks and lay persons to officiate religious ceremonies) and their assistants used to be restoration workers of ACO. This situation in Angkor is considered fairly unique in the world – once physical labourers to conserve cultural heritage, they are now preservers of spiritual and moral life and quiet observers

and serious critics of today's conservation work.

Adversities and positive efforts made towards

community empowerment

Community empowerment had, to a certain extent, been promoted by the United Nations Volunteers' project, entitled "Community Participation and Development of Protected Areas", which started in 1995 and terminated in April, 1999. The project was created by UNV in collaboration with UNESCO. The aim of the project was to implement an integrated approach to community development and natural resource management with villagers living in and around Angkor Park, using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology. It was succeeded by a project entitled "Sustainable Community Participation in Angkor Park" in May, 1999, of which organisation was converted to a local NGO called Angkor Participatory Development Organisation or APDO as of 1 May 2000, which is to be supported by UNV for one year. The project aimed at strengthening local level institutions to allow community development and natural resource preservation and conservation activities to continue and expand after UNV phased out its assistance,

and deepening the level of community participation. It initially worked with seven villages located in the Angkor Park, which has further been extended to eleven villages in total. Perhaps the most important contribution of this project is that of placing the local community as the main actor in community development, leading them to recognise their own available resource and formulate plans to implement small-scale village-based activities. These activities were implemented through Voluntary Village Development Committees (VDC) and Activity Committees (AC), a cellular structure created by them in the target villages. VDC and AC members are also helping residents of other villages with VDC formation, PAR and other development activities. One VDC member commented that the UNV project had helped strengthen the unity of his village, and people had learnt how to organise themselves. In addition, the project is helping to promote the mutual help and communications among the villages in the Angkor Park.¹⁵

Although community empowerment is not the main objective, various international restoration or conservation teams operating in Angkor have indirectly been contributing to the improvement of the socio-economic lives of the communities in the Park from the viewpoints of economic benefits and on-site job training of their labourers.

This is also complementary to the UNV-APDO project. Some teams had a target of recruiting labourers from among those who had former working experience with the French conservators through ACO, prior to 1975 and those from poorer families.

Among them the World Monuments Fund (WMF) leads the other restoration/conservation teams in promoting the active involvement of the local community in the conservation work of Preah Khan. They organised a Cultural Heritage Management Workshop from 28 February to 12 March, 2000, inviting the key stakeholders as trainees, including heritage police and staff members of Sokimex (a controversial private company in charge of collecting entrance fees to the Park). WMF is planning a smooth hand-over of the Preah Khan site to local management over the next five years, while ensuring the continuity as a living heritage site, operating in harmony with and for the benefit of the local community, and aiding and enhancing the cultural continuity of the community. It has established strategies for involvement of the local community, learning from the workshop that there was a strong feeling that local people should be involved in major decisions on the management of the site and should, if possible, benefit from legitimate commercial activities relating to the site.¹⁶

Likewise, international NGOs and UN agencies have contributed to community empowerment to a certain extent, by improving the community life in and around Angkor, through projects of road repair, agro-forestry, promotion of literacy, public hygiene, construction of wells or dams, and reconstruction of school buildings. Projects more specifically relevant to the conservation of heritage sites, such as clearing the vegetation of the moat of Angkor Wat or temple sites, had been formerly implemented by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) with food donation from the World Food Programme (WFP), which was transferred by the end of 1999 to the APSARA Authority with some financial and technical support from ILO.¹⁷

In fact, the APSARA Authority is the organisation which has been expected by most to play the key role in community empowerment in the conservation work of Angkor complex. The effective operations of the APSARA Authority have, however, been "fettered by a lack of funds, the inability to recruit a competent senior management team and organisational weaknesses in its departments."¹⁸ External factors which have also indirectly contributed to this state of APSARA include the country's political events of 5 and 6 July, 1997 and a devastating financial crisis in East and Southeast Asia in 1998. With

the establishment of the new government in late 1998 and the following dissolution of the Khmer Rouge faction, Cambodia has regained much needed

Children of Angkor Krau Village with a hind view of Trapeany Ta Chey – north - western moat of Angkor Thom which they still cultivate.



Ta Riet – south-eastern part of the moat of Angkor Wat which had been cultivated for many decades (and probably centuries) is no longer allowed to be cultivated. The left side is the wall of Angkor Thom.

stability and international investment to the country. The APSARA Authority also reorganised itself and received a budget of US\$800,000 for 1999¹⁹ when it began its conser-

vation work in a much more visible and substantial way.

While the APSARA Authority has not yet set out its policies clearly to the concerned parties, the heritage police has recently taken initiatives in 'controlling' the activities of the local inhabitants and those who work in the Angkor Park, based on the decree No. 21 issued by the Council of Ministers in 18 March, 1985 and another decree issued by the Council of Ministers in 1992, twenty-two duties of the police issued by the provincial governor on 31 January, 1996 and sub-decree concerning twelve obligations of the heritage police No. 60 issued in 8 October, 1997. However, the new chief of the heritage police seems to have misinterpreted what the international community expect of Angkor and all the laws, some of which are no longer valid, in order to tighten its control over the activities of the local community and attempt to find justifications for it.

Just before the Khmer New Year in April 2000, the heritage police chief summoned the chiefs and vice-chiefs of villages around Angkor Thom to attend a meeting at Srah Srei; and delivered an order from the government to ban the villagers from felling trees, collecting resin or any other forest products, cultivating rice, entering Angkor Thom with any cutting instruments or catapults, releasing cows for grazing, bringing

firearms or shooting in the air. Although he had assured them that the cultivation of rice fields in the moat would be allowed, the villagers of Kôk Doung were forbidden to cultivate their land in the south-east moat and southern side of east moat, which constitutes the majority of their land. Those who used to cultivate the northern side of the east moat was also banned from cultivating the land there. There have been reports of other troubles between the police and the local inhabitants concerning the cultivation of certain land outside Angkor Thom but within the protected zone. Moreover, the logging of trees in the protected area were carried out mostly by both the Cambodian and Vietnamese military in the late 1980s, which has caused a great loss to the local community as they not only lost their own trees but also have to pay for the consequences. An important implication of the ban is that the villagers were not consulted and provided alternatives. Such action is endangering the socio-cultural continuity and caused a loss of income for the local community.

Realising that tensions were emerging between the local community and the heritage police, the APSARA Authority organised on 20 July, 2000 the first meeting with all the stakeholders to discuss the exploitation of natural resources in Angkor Thom and other pro-

tected areas. The invitees included Buddhist monks from the seven monasteries inside Angkor Thom, a representative of Siem Reap Province, representatives of the heritage police, representatives of fifteen villages around Angkor Thom, selected organisations whose work is conducted with the local community in the area such as FAO, JSA, APDO and some foreign researchers.²⁰ The APSARA Authority emphasised the fact that it, alone, cannot conserve the precious cultural property and natural resources for posterity without the co-operation of the villagers, the heritage police, and other Cambodian authorities. The chief of heritage police emphasised that he was a child of Angkor and was following the laws, and that any wrong-doers would be arrested, including the police. Several village representatives appealed to the authorities that the livelihood of many families in their villages depend on the cultivation of rice fields inside Angkor Thom, and would like assistance. The organisations working in the protected area and researchers generally support the villagers, pointing out the huge discrepancy between what was recommended in the Royal Decree and what is actually taking place. As the APSARA Authority's representative suggested at the beginning, nothing was decided but at least all the concerned parties could have the opportunities to

speak out about their respective concerns. The most important point here is that the villagers were for the first time allowed to talk about their situation in front of policy-makers and the authorities in the presence of foreigners and Cambodians working in the villages. The APSARA Authority plans to have regular meetings with the same stakeholders. One expects to see the development of a mechanism in which the local community is not excluded from policy-making in the conservation work of the Angkor Complex, and no longer bear the brunt of the negative aspects of inappropriate conservation policies and implementation.

Conclusion

The conservation work of Angkor Complex has been promoted to a great extent in the 1990s, especially after the ICC framework of assistance was established in October, 1993. The process of community empowerment, on the other hand, takes time and have serious obstacles as mentioned above. It has also been delayed, in a major part because of the slow peace process of Cambodia, and subsequent delays in the establishment of the APSARA Authority as a truly effective organisation in the conservation and management of Angkor complex. At the same time, the concern over community empowerment is relatively low

among conservators and managers, of Angkor heritage site, who tend to concentrate on concerns relating to the protection of both cultural and natural heritage, at the expense of the local community. While the World Monuments Fund is expected to assume an active role in community empowerment through the conservation work in Preah Khan, which is aspiring to set a model for the rest of the Angkor site, a minority of international organisations and researchers is there to mediate between antagonistic parties. The work on the Angkor complex demonstrates a classic case of a huge gap between ideals and reality, and differing interpretations among a variety of stakeholders on how the heritage site should be managed. All in all, one expects that the concerns of all the stakeholders can be taken into consideration, and a good balance between the protection of natural and cultural heritage and the needs of the local community can be sought. To conclude, it is not difficult to surmise that the community's active participation and its empowerment are the keys for successful conservation and management of the living heritage site of Angkor.

Notes

Selected bibliography

- APSARA. 1998. *Angkor: A Manual for the Past, Present and Future*. Phnom Penh.
2000. *APSARA Authority Activity Report: June 1999 to June 2000*. Paper presented to ICC Plenary Session held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 20 June, 2000.
- Chou, Ta-kuan. 1967. *Notes on the Customs of Cambodia*. Bangkok: Social Science Association Press.
- Dagens, B. 1995. *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Delaporte, L. and Garnier, F. A *Pictorial Journey on the Old Mekong: Cambodia, Laos and Yunnan*. Bangkok: White Lotus.
- Feiden, B.M. and Jokilehto, J. 1993. *Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites*. Rome: ICCROM
- ICC. 1998. *1998 Annual Report of Activities*. Phnom Penh: UNESCO.
- ILO. *Report on the ILO Angkor Clearing and Cleaning Project*. Phnom Penh.
- Jacques, C. and Freeman, M. 1997. *Angkor: Cities and Temples*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Mouhot, H. 1868 (First Edition). 1989. *Voyage dans les Royaumes de Siam de Cambodge, de Laos et Autres Parties Centrales de l'Indo-chine*. Geneve: Editions Olizane Collection Objectif Terre.
- Rooney, D. F. 1994. *Angkor: An Introduction to the Temples*. Bangkok: Asia Books.
- UNDP/UNV. 1999. *Sustainable Community Participation in Angkor Park CMB/98/V04 Progress Report 1st May – 31st July 1999*. Prepared to the Ministry

- of Rural Development, APSARA, UNDP, UNV, Bonn.
- UNDP. *UNDP Project Brief on United Nations Volunteers work with local communities to conserve and develop the Angkor World Heritage Site*.
- UNESCO. 1972. *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage: Adopted by the General Conference at its seventeenth session, Paris, 16 November 1972*. Paris.
- World Monuments Fund. 2000. *Preah Khan Conservation Project The Cultural Resource Management Course. A Summary for Presentation to the ICC Plenary Meeting – 20th June – Phnom Penh*.

The above article is an edited version of a paper presented at the Seminar on Southeast Asian Traditional Architecture held in Bangkok, 24 to 30 July, 2000

All photographs by Keiko Miura except those credited to Thibaud Lepage

The Writer

Keiko Miura is currently involved in fieldwork in Cambodia as a Ph.D candidate for the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, England. For three years (between 1995-1998), she was in charge of the Culture Unit at UNESCO Cambodia as Culture Programme Specialist; and prior to that, performed work in ethno-archaeology for the Japanese Government team for Safeguarding Angkor (JSA). Keiko also has an M.A.

at the Department of Area Studies, SOAS, in Area Studies (Southeast Asia), in which the major discipline was art and archaeology of Southeast Asia (sub-disciplines included social anthropology of Southeast Asia, and Khmer language).

- ¹ See ICC. 1998 *Annual Report of Activities*. Phnom Penh: UNESCO. 1998:10-11 and APSARA. *Angkor: A Manual for the Past, Present and Future*. Phnom Penh. 1998: xv-xix.
- ² ICC. Ibid. Pp.14-16 and APSARA. Ibid. P.170.
- ³ APSARA. Ibid. Pp. 212-249.
- ⁴ APSARA. *APSARA Authority Activity Report: June 1999 to June 2000*. Paper presented to ICC Plenary Session held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 20 June, 2000. P.1
- ⁵ UNESCO. *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage: Adopted by the General Conference at its seventeenth session, Paris, 16 November 1972*. Paris. Pp. 80-81.
- ⁶ Feiden, B.M. and Jokilehto, J. *Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites*. Rome: ICCROM. 1993:3-11.
- ⁷ APSARA. Ibid. P. xvi.
- ⁸ Dagens, B. *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire*. London: Thames and Hudson. 1995: 172.
- ⁹ Rooney, D.F. *Angkor: An Introduction to the Temples*. Bangkok: Asia Books. 1994:38. For general reference, see also Dagens, op.cit.
- ¹⁰ Dagens, B. Ibid. P. 173.
- ¹¹ See illustrations and photos in Dagens, Ibid. Mouhot, H. 1868 (First Edition). 1989. *Voyage dans les Royaumes de Siam de Cambodge, de Laos et Autres Parties Centrales de l'Indo-chine*. Geneve: Editions Olizane Collection Objectif Terre.