



IN FOCUS

The Center for Khmer Studies

Covid-19 in Cambodia. Read more on <http://blog.castac.org>

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Mission Statement

CKS is an independent American Overseas Research Center supported by international foundations, educational institutions, scholars and individuals. It is a non-profit corporation incorporated in the state of Delaware, USA. It receives partial support for overhead and American research fellowships from the U.S. Government. Its programs in the social sciences, arts and humanities are focused on Cambodia and are privately funded.

CKS SEEKS TO:

- Promote research and international exchange through programs that increase understanding of Cambodia and its region both within Cambodia and at American universities.
- Strengthen Cambodia’s cultural and educational structures, and integrate Cambodian scholars into regional and international exchange.
- CKS’s programs are administered from its offices in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. It maintains a small administrative office in New York and a support office in Paris, Les Amis du Centre d’Études Khmères.
- CKS is a member institution of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC).

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Farewell to Mary Ellen



Dr. Mary Ellen Lane

The Board and staff of the Center for Khmer Studies mourns the loss of our second President and long-time supporter, Dr. Mary Ellen Lane. Mary Ellen was for close to 40 years the founding Director of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers, an institution that links a distinguished group of American scholarly institutions around the world. In that role, she shepherded CKS through the application process that led to our being accepted as a member, making CKS eligible for US Government support for American scholars studying Cambodia. She became such an enthusiastic promoter of our efforts that in her retirement, she joined our Board, and eventually was elected President. Mary Ellen was a dedicated, fun-loving companion, one who brimmed with energy and hope, and shared those qualities amply with all who came to know her. Mary Ellen was particularly dedicated to helping Cambodian scholars to establish relationships with their international colleagues. Our fund that supports Cambodian Ph.D. fellowships is a tribute to her leadership.

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Welcome to CKS!

Dear friends of CKS,

In last year’s In Focus, I wrote to you about the programs CKS has been engaged in since its founding to foster scholarly interest in Cambodia at US and European universities, to strengthen Cambodian universities and to encourage exchanges between young Cambodian, European and American students and faculties. As our longstanding friends know, these programs include:

The CKS Research Fellowship Program, which provides research support to advanced graduate students and scholars who need to spend time in Cambodia for their research.

The Summer Junior Fellows Program, which brings together in residence French, American and Cambodian undergraduates under the tutelage of a senior scholar for a six-week course on Cambodian language and cultural history.

The Khmer Language Program, for those who wish to learn or improve their Khmer language skills.

A series of new programs CKS is now partnering in involve urban studies, with teams of researchers from the University of Chicago coming to Cambodia, and conversely, Cambodian students spending time in Chicago to become familiar with recently developed research tools.

All these programs were possible because, after years of political isolation, Cambodia became accessible. They all involve travel, meetings, exchanges, and the serendipitous enrichment that follows from working together with new colleagues. Covid 19 and the reactions to it have resulted in renewed isolation, and caused us, along with so many other scholarly institutions, to suspend our operations



to protect both our employees and our scholars. CKS Fellows have returned home, those who planned to come have been unable to do so, even our library was closed for several months. So, the name of this page may sound a bit ironic.

But we are busy reinventing our outreach. Our library is now open again and brimming with eager visitors. New opportunities for our mission, and what CKS will be increasingly involved with over this difficult year, are vastly expanded lectures, workshops, and conferences. As we are discovering the wonders of Zoom and other electronic sharing tools, conferences and workshops on multiple topics will be organized not only from our Siem Reap headquarters, but from wherever in the world the speakers are. In the same way, audiences do not have to congregate, but can be reached wherever there is an internet connection. Our younger board members have enthusiastically latched on to these opportunities afforded by technology and are leading the way for the expansion of our scholarly mission. Please visit our website www.khmerstudies.org to discover our new plans.

And Welcome to electronic CKS!

Jacques Hennessy, Chairman



Boards and CKS staff at the CKS Headquarters during the board meeting in January 2020

The Next Generation of CKS Leadership



March 2020 will long be remembered for it was the time when COVID-19 noticeably changed our lives in ways that were thoroughly unpredictable. Indeed, this was true for CKS as well. Instead of holding our quarterly board meeting in Manhattan as we always have, we held our first virtual meeting over Zoom; and instead of attending the annual Asian Studies Association meetings, we had to cancel our flights and hotel reservations when this popular annual gathering of scholars of Asia was abruptly cancelled. But there was yet another significant change for CKS: Andy Mertha, who had served as CKS President and Vice President was offered the prestigious position of Vice Dean at John Hopkins University-- a not altogether surprising promotion to those of us who had shared his knowledge and skills

at work at CKS. With Andy's new responsibilities at John Hopkins, he had to step down from his position as an officer of CKS, although he continues to serve as chair of the CKS Fellowship committee and to lend his remarkable knowledge, experience, and insights in other ways. We all owe a great debt to Andy for leading CKS and we are grateful that he still finds the time in his schedule to serve the interests of CKS.

And so it was, with Andy's moving upward at John Hopkins, that I was elected to serve in his stead as Executive Vice President, an honor that I could only imagine. CKS has long been close to my heart. Since the time I joined the inaugural class of the then Luce-sponsored CKS Junior Fellows Program, in 2001, CKS has not only provided me with financial support to conduct my dissertation research, but it also provided the academic and social support so necessary while conducting research in a foreign country; and later on, to become part of an international community of scholars within and outside of Cambodia. To this day, I continue (and continue to value) the relationships that were established during this critical moment of my academic career, as well as to benefit from CKS's treasure trove of resources-- not least, the CKS library. My hope is that many more scholars, both Cambodian and international, will have the opportunities that I and so many Fellows who have followed since then have shared at CKS. I am excited to do my part in bringing this gift and opportunity for deepening knowledge of and engagement with this very special country, culture, and people that is Cambodia.

Eve Zucker, Ph.D
Executive Vice-President

Director's Note



Now in my fourth year as Director of the Center for Khmer Studies, I pause to reflect on my efforts to build CKS into an institution with a unique capacity to deploy social science and humanities research to explore Cambodia's past as well as the contemporary challenges it faces. We eventually got there.

Major new institutional partners now collaborate with CKS in complex research projects. The U.N. Development Program has asked us to conduct the first study of urban mobility in Phnom Penh—to help Cambodia's capital city avoid the urban challenges faced by its neighbors. We are building important research partnerships with the University of Chicago, tackling issues of rural-urban migration and use of remote sensing to support urban data analysis. And another new venture—to develop an urban curriculum for a leading Cambodian university, together with European partners. We held a global conference on urban resiliency for the International Association of Francophone Mayors. We welcomed a team of geographers and

urban scientists from the U.S., Canada, Switzerland and Cambodia, conducting research on urban economic and social vulnerabilities. We just received a new grant from the Australian Embassy and the Asia Foundation to implement a two-year research project on pressing issues in the twenty-first century. With many exciting projects in the pipeline, I will continue to keep you informed about the good work being done at CKS.

What has made all the difference – in addition to the good work of my colleagues on the CKS staff -- are the dedicated CKS board members who have stepped up, despite other obligations, to lend support. New board members have brought both positive energy and new skills to our efforts. We are also especially grateful for the generous support we receive from committed private donors, who continue to support CKS year after year. And to our student interns and volunteers, who lend their talent to further our mission. CKS programs make a positive difference in the lives of countless students, scholars, and researchers from the U.S., Cambodia, and around the world.

The COVID-19 virus spread across the world. Cambodia was not spared. We immediately took measures to protect both our staff and program participants, taking account of the powerful transmission of the virus and the weakness of Cambodia's health system as well as restrictions on travel. While awaiting the new normal that will allow our programs to reopen, we are taking time to think creatively of new undertakings and new ways of carrying forward our mission.

The years ahead are filled with promise for the Center for Khmer Studies. I am heartened to know we can rely on the support and steadfast commitment of so many of you, as we face the challenges of the years to come.

Natharoun NGO, Director



Mr. Ngo with other speakers and participants of the workshop in Phnom Penh, December 2019

We are grateful for your support!

As you read In Focus, and find out more about what we have been doing, you have perhaps felt a measure of surprise: our ambitions are high, our programs, and the academics who frame them and guide them, are learned and innovative. Our achievements are many, and that is all the more remarkable in that we function in a country where life and research are not always easy. When the Center for Khmer Studies was founded, twenty years ago, Cambodia was barely emerging from the years of genocide and devastation. Today, these terrifying scarcities have ended, but many other difficulties persist.

We can say with pride: we have made a difference. In Cambodia itself, our library, free and open to students and the public, is a much-used instrument of learning. Our varied programs, research, conferences, teaching in several aspects, have not only benefited several generations of students, both Khmer and American, they have also added substantially to the sum of overall knowledge. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the academics on our Board who have framed and overseen our programs; we owe it to those who have carried out these programs; we owe it to our small, devoted staff who, for all these years, have worked hard and well. And we owe it to you.

The support you have given us has enabled us to achieve all this: without you, we could not exist. It may sometimes seem that Cambodia is far away, that Khmer studies do not really matter very much: these are altogether misleading appearances. Now more than ever perhaps, as we live through a devastating pandemic, saving what will survive us and enrich not just the present but also the future matters enormously. The culture we leave for future generations is what defines us, and your name on the list of our donors entitles you to some of the gratitude future generations will feel. You are, of course, receiving innumerable appeals, but don't forget your old friend: as you give to CKS, you help us to continue and consolidate our achievements: remember, they are also yours.

Olivier Bernier, Vice-President

Contribute to CKS!

Support CKS Library Fund

Open to all, CKS's library is the largest free library outside Phnom Penh. It offers unparalleled educational facilities to students of every age, as well as to visiting scholars and the general public.

- **Support Basic Library Operations:** Contribute to our Annual Fund.
- **Support** acquisition of books (\$15,000 per year)
- **Donate a free computer** for our library reading room—annual updating (\$1,500)
- **Reading room** (\$1,500 per year to connect the Library to the **World Wide Web**) Support free internet connection.

Sponsor the translation of essential books into Cambodia's native language, Khmer

In the absence of scholarly books in Cambodia's native language, CKS translates

and publishes key texts. A contribution of \$10,000 will help defray the costs for an average 300-page book and will be acknowledged in the publication.

Sponsor a Cambodian-American undergraduate to discover Cambodia's history and culture by attending our 6-week in-country summer Junior Resident Fellows Program (\$3,500 each).

Support modest Travel Grants to enable Cambodian scholars to participate in regional conferences (\$500 each).

Sponsor a young Cambodian's PhD thesis research (\$5,000 each)

Support CKS public outreach: regular workshops, our Director's talks at US universities and community colleges.

Support any CKS program in honor of our late Trustee Dr. Benny Widyo-no and our former President Dr. Mary Ellen Lane, whose service we honor.



Junior Fellows in front of CKS Headquarters in Siem Reap

Thank You!

CKS wishes to honor a generous friend, the remarkable philanthropist **Louisa Stude Sarofim**, who for so many years has been funding our summer Junior Resident Fellows Program (JRFP). U.S. Government funding is not available to undergraduates. Yet, to promote interest in Cambodia and the next generation of American experts and scholars of the region, it is essential to capture the enthusiasm of undergraduates before they have made their choice of career. There is no program that generates more enthusiasm. Louisa Sarofim's sustained support has opened the door to Cambodia and Southeast Asia. JRFP students tell us repeatedly that this program has changed their lives.

Thank you, Louisa.

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FEATURES

Art and Mythology at Banteay Srei

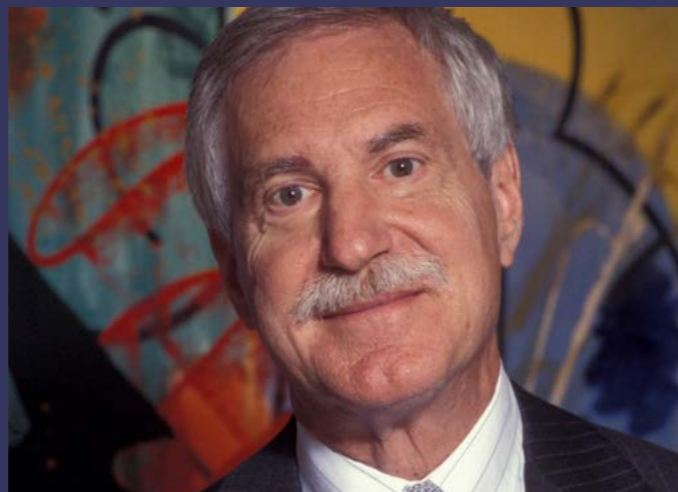
Cambodia over its long history has known several cultures, from the pre-Angkor period (roughly 650 to 800) to the distinguished modernist architecture of Van Molyvann in the 1950's and 60's, and on to the current plethora of large and often unfortunate high-rise buildings in Phnom Penh. There have, throughout the centuries, been looks at neighboring countries, especially Siam after its repeated invasions of the Khmer kingdom.

That the Khmer people themselves have shown a remarkable feeling for art, dance and architecture is evident. What is perhaps less well understood is another of their qualities: the ability to welcome and transform foreign influences and to create masterpieces of their own. Nowhere is that ability seen more clearly than at the temples of Banteay Srei.

It is evident, and uncontested, that the temples of Banteay Srei are among the world's greatest achievements in architecture and sculpture. The site itself is not large; the temples, compared, for instance, to Angkor Wat or the Bayon, are small. What, then, make them so exceptional? One very obvious element is the radiant, golden stone which allows for the most delicate of carvings. The generosity, high taste and clear intent of their patron, Yajnavaraha, the tutor of King Jayavarman V, also made a very great difference. We know the temples were completed on, or around 967. All that is useful information, but it does not tell us why, and how, the architect and sculptors created one of the world's great masterpieces.

Within the walled enclosures, the buildings are perfectly proportioned to the relatively small space they occupy. They form a complex, highly satisfying pattern in which the three main shrines are seen immediately from the entrance of compound. The long, lower buildings on both sides of the site serve as a frame for the temples while, at the same time, like the temples themselves, they are adorned with carvings of extraordinary grace and delicate perfection. As a result, it is only once we have passed these subsidiary buildings that we encounter the full power of the shrines themselves. And that power results, not from a vast size, but from the perfection of their proportions -just tall enough, just wide enough- as well as from the almost startling beauty of the carvings.

This is where the question of authorship becomes compelling -who were the architects? who decided exactly what mythological episodes were to be carved? who were the sculptors? Several archeologists have suggested that this may all have been the work of Indians imported for the purpose; others doubt that possibility. It is, however, fair to say that, even if there were some Indian hands, it takes nothing away from the genius of the Khmer patron or of those, undoubtedly Khmer sculptors, who were hired to work with these possible, if hypothetical Indians. One thing is perfectly clear, however: these are, after all, Hindu temples; the mythical



episodes carved into the facades show us Indian Gods and Goddesses; and what we are seeing is the coming together of a foreign element and the Khmer genius for taking it on and making it its own.

There are, nonetheless, many substantial changes from a potential Indian model: the elegantly wavy pediments, the elaborate details -leaves, animals, figures, the highly refined female temple guardians. Above all, perhaps, there is the sheer quality of the carvings. Figures, animals, landscapes are all amazingly detailed: it is no longer stone we see, but plants, animals, deities, all utterly alive and convincing. The graceful bodies, the lively poses, the perfection of the smallest details, together with the unity of design and composition, all that comes together to make the golden stone alive-- convincing and extraordinarily beautiful. The purpose, of course, is religious. The main temple is dedicated to Shiva, so we are given episodes of Shiva's life, but there is also Indra on Airavata, his three-headed elephant (in India, the elephant has only one head). There are rampant, roaring lions protecting the different buildings; there are many-headed nagas. It is, in fact, the whole world of Khmer Hinduism which is set forth for us on these entrancing monuments.

A careful look will show us all this; and it will also tell us about the astounding level of Khmer artistic inventiveness. Angkor Wat awes us by its vastness; the Bayon and its panoply of majestic sculpted heads shows us yet another moment in the evolution of Khmer art. At Banteay Srei, what we encounter is genius pure and simple.

Olivier Bernier
*Vice President and Senior Lecturer
at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA*



Banteay Srei temple guardian



Banteay Srei Indra on Airavata

In Memoriam

Anne Henderson Bass (1941-2020)



Anne Henderson Bass was a long-time generous and dedicated Trustee of CKS, an active member who loved Cambodia and its culture. As an enthusiast of the Western classical ballet tradition, she initiated a multi-year partnership between CKS and the New York Public Library's Dance Collection to create an in-depth archive of the History of Khmer Dance, including videos of performances and interviews with former and younger dancers, tracing its journey from the Royal Palace through the Khmer Rouge-period refugee camps in Thailand to its contemporary forms. Thanks to Anne's generosity, CKS has one copy of this great contribution to Khmer scholarship in its Library. Anne was one of the first contributors to a new CKS fund to support the Ph.D. research of young Cambodian scholars. She was also an active promoter of a highly successful Cambodian arts festival in the United States, called The Year of Cambodia. We are grateful for the enthusiastic role she played in the development of CKS over many years.

Looking at Cambodia in 2020

China and the U.S. in Southeast Asia



Another year has passed – an eventful one, to say the least. And yet, as far as Cambodia is concerned, much of what I wrote in these pages a year ago still holds true, only more so. The country has become more authoritarian, its history is being further rewritten and folded in under a narrative crafted by Prime Minister Hun Sen, and China remains unrivaled in its influence in Cambodia.

In other words, things have not changed in terms of substance, but the stakes surrounding them have become even more pronounced, suggesting that doing nothing does not preserve the status quo; it makes an already bad situation worse. The US Congress, unfettered by the Trump Administration’s focus on the latest shiny object (as opposed to what many see as the “backwater of Cambodia”), continues to find new ways to punish Hun Sen for his transgressions against political and human rights. The European Union has joined in as well, suspending the Kingdom’s trade preferences. As a result, we have enabled China’s monopoly power in the region to grow, threatening US

(and Cambodian) long-term interests without even being aware enough to care. This has in fact had the opposite effect of what Congress ostensibly seeks: the fate of average Cambodians has grown worse, not better.

Over the last 3 years, the Cambodian Government has effectively silenced the two main independent English-language newspapers in Cambodia-- the Phnom Penh Post and the Cambodia Daily. The Cambodia Daily was closed following taxation maneuvers, while the Phnom Penh Post continues to publish, but under the ownership of a Malaysian crony-- prompting the resignation of its editorial staff. We have in consequence been lulled into believing that Cambodia has largely avoided the COVID-19 pandemic, and that it stands shoulder-to-shoulder with China as an equal partner when it comes to what is transpiring on Cambodian soil. In fact, the COVID situation on the ground seems much worse than what is being reported by increasingly state-controlled media. And China continues unfettered to pursue its interests in Cambodia.

While it is easy to think of Chinese influence as the product of the Politburo leaders sitting around an enormous map of the earth and placing pins on the countries they seek to dominate, the reality is far more complicated. Much of what emanates from Beijing is a general policy orientation, which is then taken up by Chinese state-owned enterprises, policy banks, and subnational governments. Rather than a unitary geopolitical and economic juggernaut, Chinese influence is, in fact, a fractured configuration of a huge number of moving parts that act in often uncoordinated fashion, but which are able nonetheless to get things done, in large part because of the absence of US influence in an increasing number of regions in the world, where China seeks actively to have more influence, including Cambodia. Even the poster child for Chinese debt diplomacy, Sri Lanka’s Hambantota port project, is barely anything of the kind, if one looks closely enough, but rather an iterative process of Sri Lankan domestic electoral politics and China’s delegation of policy, from debt financing to Chinese equity investments, as different actors enter and leave the scene.

Any single deviation from the cartoonish idea of China as a unitary and political entity offers a genuine opportunity to influence social and economic outcomes in Cambodia, with potentially longer-term political benefits for its people. But the US Government has forfeited the game.

This is why you are so important. As individuals who recognize the beauty and the depth of Cambodian history, art, culture, and religion, we count on you to help us ensure that these fragile elements of what make Cambodia singular and unique in the world do not go the way of Chinese-funded infrastructure projects, tycoon-led real estate booms and busts, that increase inequality and asphyxiate political pluralism. Please join us and stand with us to preserve the country we so love.

Andrew Mertha, Ph.D., CKS Trustee

Vice Dean for Faculty Affairs and International Research Cooperation, Johns Hopkins University
George and Sadie Hyman Professor of China Studies, The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies,
Director of the China Studies Program/SAIS China



The Selling of Phnom Penh Post newspaper made headling on The New York Times



Headline about the Selling of Phnom Penh Post on Aljazeera



Immediate announcement of its closure in 2017

Our Friend Dr. Rethy Chhem



Dr. Chhem in his Ministerial uniform

Dr. Rethy Chhem, M.D., Ph.D., was a highly active CKS Trustee for more than 10 years. Five years ago, he resigned from the Board when he was named Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Research and Development (CDRI), the major Cambodian think-tank and a partner institution of CKS. Dr. Chhem is best known as a world-famous radiologist, whose brilliant international career as a scholar and scientist-diplomat took him first to France, then to the U.S. and Canada, and to become Professor of Radiology at the University of Singapore, then back to Toronto, Canada, and finally, as a scientist diplomat, to the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency, in Vienna, where he was notably in charge of the response to the nuclear crisis in Fukushima. A deeply committed humanist, Rethy also had a private passion—research into the history of medicine at the time of Jayavarman VII, whose “national health program” in the 12th century was remarkable. J-7 built hospitals across his vast Buddhist empire, and told the story of medicine in the bas-reliefs and inscriptions at the Angkor temples of Preah Khan and Ta Phrom. As a medical doctor himself, Rethy related this story in international scholarly journals. At CKS, he held several lively international conferences around his research interest in the history of medicine.

Rethy’s deep desire to return to Cambodia and to contribute his far-ranging talents and experience to its people is something that his friends have long been deeply aware of. Rethy had shared personally in the tragedy of the Cambodian people. As a student at the medical faculty in Phnom Penh, his studies had been interrupted by the arrival of the Khmer Rouge. He escaped to Paris to complete his studies on the last flight out of Phnom Penh before the airport was closed. Not long after, both his parents and 2 siblings were killed by the Khmer Rouge. While building his brilliant international career, Rethy never abandoned his dream of returning to Cambodia. His wife Yanny, shared his dream. At the end of his 5 year contract at CDRI, “out of the blue”, as he writes

to me, Rethy was invited by Prime Minister Hun Sen to join the Cabinet as a Minister- without-Portfolio, charged with guiding Cambodia’s future in science and technology, including digital technology and cyber law. We at CKS congratulate the Prime Minister for his choice. Cambodia’s future technological modernization will be in good hands. With characteristic energy and enthusiasm, Rethy muses about Cambodia’s future, “With a young population and a very high penetration of smartphones, there is much potential.”

Congratulations to you, Rethy, for realizing your lifetime dream.

*Lois de Menil, Ph.D.
Founder and Chairman Emeritus*

The Minister of Education’s First Visit to CKS

CKS had the great honor and pleasure to host the first visit of H.E. Dr. HANG Chuon Naron, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, to the Center for Khmer Studies headquarters Siem Reap, on 11 January 2020.

His Excellency Dr. HANG Chuon Naron is a distinguished Cambodian economist, who has served as Minister for Education, Youth and Sport since 2013, and as Secretary of State for Economy and Finance from 2004-2013. Dr. Hang has initiated major reforms focusing on education, social development and the national economy: 1. Personnel reform, including the qualifications of teachers and their salaries. 2. Finance reform at the ministry. 3.Reform of the quality of the education curriculum. 4. Creating a think tank to assist the minister in policy recommendations and evaluation. 5. Reform of higher education. 6. Reform of examinations. 7. Emphasizing new skills for younger students. 8. Reform of physical education and sports. In an online poll, Dr. Hang ranked as the most popular minister.

During Dr. Hang’s visit to CKS headquarters, our staff first provided a brief introduction to current CKS programs and activities, then gave

him a tour of the facilities. While visiting CKS’s research library collection, he was especially interested by the rich collection covering Cambodia and Southeast Asia and in the documentation of the pre- and post-Angkor period inscriptions. He was surprised and pleased to find Le Cambodge-- a three-volume Cambodian history, written from 1906-1910 by Etienne Aymonier--in our rare books collection. Dr. Hang was delighted to find these books after an unsuccessful search for them in Phnom Penh.

Minister Hang expressed his appreciation for CKS’s hospitality during his visit and his gratitude to have discovered the richness of CKS’s library. He departed with several CKS publications, including CKS’s latest academic journal Siksacakr, and a book published by CKS on Angkor Inscriptions by Prof. Ang Choulean. He also borrowed the three volume Le Cambodge, which will be useful for his forthcoming book about inscriptions, to be published later this year. He promised to send his book to the CKS library once it has been published.

We were all delighted by Minister Hang’s first visit to CKS.



Dr. Hang opening the sealed questions to start the annual 12th grade exams across the Kingdom (Photo: Phnom Penh Post)



Dr. Hang in the Library seminar room



H.E. Hang with CKS staff in front of CKS Library reading room

REFLECTIONS



One of my goals is to expand the Cambodian component of the N.Y.Southeast Asia Network (NYSEAN), a community of scholars, students, journalists, and policymakers whose mission is to promote awareness of, Southeast Asia. New York City is home to the United Nations and some of the world's leading think tanks, NGOs and universities, but there was no center for the study of Southeast Asia anywhere in the city. Three colleagues and I created NYSEAN five years ago to fill that gap. NYSEAN is housed at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University, where I am a Senior Research Scholar, but its activities take place throughout our network of partners. NYSEAN's objective is to bring Southeast Asia into the global conversation by promoting collaboration among scholars, policymakers and other professionals in the greater New York region.

Awareness of Southeast Asia in the U.S. is critically important again. During the Cold War, American policy was made with little understanding of Southeast Asia, often with disastrous consequences. Cambodia's tragic genocide was one example of glaring collateral damage. The recognition that the U.S. lacked expertise in regional languages, culture and politics led the American government to provide funding to universities such as Cornell and Wisconsin to create a network of Southeast Asian Study Centers. But study of Southeast Asia has been on the decline in the U.S. in recent decades, as universities have moved away from area studies and the generation of S.E. Asian experts from the Vietnam War era retired and are not being replaced. Today, great-power rivalry between the U.S. and China is rising. Southeast Asia is again becoming a venue of competition. To inform sound U.S. policy toward the region, it is critically important that policymakers and the broader public understand Southeast Asian culture and history, rather than viewing the region solely through the prism of Sino-American rivalry. Both CKS and NYSEAN contribute to this important task.

*Ann Marie Murphy, Ph.D.
CKS Trustee*

Disseminating Knowledge of SE Asia in the U.S.

It has been extremely rewarding to serve on the CKS Board for the past three years. As a political scientist whose research focuses on international politics in Southeast Asia, I had studied Cambodia's tragic Cold War history through the lens of great power politics. From that vantage point, Cambodia was largely a pawn not only of great power politics, but also of regional rivalries between its larger neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam. The opportunity now to spend time in Cambodia, to interact with local scholars, journalists, students and other trustees has enabled me to deepen my knowledge of Cambodia.

Dr. Murphy at CKS Library for the CKS Annual Board Meeting in January 2020

Meet CKS Trustee T.J. Rutkowski



Over the past year, we have made many significant enhancements at CKS, while reducing costs and taking advantage of grants from Google and Microsoft. To enhance security and stability, we migrated the staff to cloud email and the latest Microsoft business software-- two key changes that helped enable secure remote working conditions.

Within the Communications Committee, we are working diligently to modernize our approach to reach key audiences. Working with staff, we will shape a strategy for promoting our local events, recruiting applicants for our summer programs, bringing more scholars together, and engaging new donors. We will leverage our social media accounts, our email list, and form new connections with like-minded organizations to further our mission. We are also taking advantage of a generous grant from Google to promote and advertise CKS, building awareness of our library, events, and programs around the globe.

I have also spent time with our librarians to understand how we use our catalog software. Our current system does a good job tracking our collection and presenting it on desktop browsers, but not much more. The Microsoft grant enabled an upgrade to our online catalog, improving speed and stability; however, it is an outdated platform. We will soon migrate to modern catalog software, adding the capacity to catalog digital assets, enable digital check-outs, cross-list our catalog with related organizations, and meet the needs of online visitors.

CKS is a valuable resource for Cambodians, scholars of Cambodia, and the global community of supporters. I look forward to advancing our mission with new technology and tools. I also welcome your support and encourage like-minded friends and skilled volunteers to join me. Be warned, supporting CKS is addictive.

I made my first trip to Cambodia earlier this year, and I eagerly anticipate many return visits. I took time to explore Angkor Wat, museums and markets; however, my first stop was The Center for Khmer Studies. Its library and headquarters are situated on the grounds of Wat Damnak, an active Buddhist pagoda near the bustling heart of Siem Reap. The setting is both remarkably peaceful and full of positive energy, drawing in visitors to fill the benches, desks, and chairs while reading, studying, and finding shade from the hot Cambodian sun.

I have been working with CKS for some time. I am honored to have been elected to the CKS Board of Directors. In contrast to many of the scholars and Cambodian experts on the Board, I bring deep experience in technology, marketing, and business strategy, along with a passion for continuous improvement. I enjoy working with the CKS staff to understand their needs and challenges, and help guide them to take advantage of new ways to accomplish the mission.



T.J. visiting Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia in 2020

Meet CKS Intern Cole DeVoy



I still remember the way the clouds looked over Siem Reap – soft, wispy, and almost purple from the glow of the setting sun. Our descent into those clouds marked the beginning of my first experience overseas. At twenty, a college sophomore, I was a bit old for my first international excursion, at least relative to my peers in the inaugural Cornell in Cambodia cohort. Several of them had gotten used to long-haul flights as young children. Others had studied abroad as high school students. And me? Having grown up a desert rat in a California border town, the chance to attend Cornell in the first place had seemed wildly exotic. I could scarcely begin to imagine what my first voyage outside of North America would have in store.

Under the leadership of Professor Andrew Mertha (now of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies in Washington) and Dr. Alice Beban-France (now of Massey University in New Zealand), our motley crew of Cornellians trekked far and wide: from Angkor Wat to Phnom Kulen, the Krang Leav airfield to Anlong Veng, Phnom Penh to Angkor Thom, and beyond. Along the way, we learned an immense amount about modern Cambodian history and culture – and even then, we only scratched the surface! We also learned more about ourselves than any of us had thought possible over a two-and-a-half-week period. When I looked back over the clouds on our ascent out of Siem Reap at the program’s close, I was certain of two things: I needed to stay engaged with Cambodia, and I had to find a way to make some contribution to the Center for Khmer Studies – the organization so crucial to making Cornell in Cambodia a reality.

Interning with CKS has been a way for me to give back to this peerlessly generous institution. In serving the communications team, I do my best to help CKS present itself well across a variety of online platforms. Though I work remotely from New Haven, Connecticut, where I am a Master’s candidate at Yale University, I enjoy interacting with my colleagues in Siem Reap and eagerly await their every email. It is truly an honor to assist an organization that has played such a major role in my own intellectual development!



Cornell-in-Cambodia Study Abroad Program

This program was initiated by a CKS Board member and is hosted in-country by CKS.

Professors Sarosh Kuruvilla of Cornell’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations and Vida Vanchan of Buffalo State University brought a group of 11 students to Cambodia during the winter semester to study the role of labor in the Cambodian garment industry. Their objective was to understand the growth of the Cambodian garment industry and how this growth has affected workers’ lives. Following an introduction to Cambodian history, politics, and society at lectures organized by the Center for Khmer Studies, students met with major stakeholders involved with labor issues in garment factories, including senior government officials, such as the Minister of Labor, the Minister of Social Welfare and senior officials from the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Students also met with representatives from the Cambodian Labor Confederation, the Garment Manufacturers Association, and the Cambodian Solidarity Center. A highlight of their experience was talking with Cambodian workers in their homes. After an introduction to Cambodian culture, history, and daily life at CKS, these hands-on experiences provided direct insight into the central role of labor in Cambodia’s development and into contemporary labor issues in its garment industry.



Students explore Cambodia's history and visit Ta Prohm Temple



Students visiting workers' community and conducting interviews to learn about housing issues

Student comments:

"I can only say that I think Cambodia is a beautiful place and that CKS is a wonderful initiative. It is doing amazing work in exposing foreign students to Cambodia, and I really hope that it continues to do that. Academically, this program has helped me to realize an interest in Global Labor Standards and what I can do to increase them as an American consumer. I added a class with Professor Kuruvilla that further discusses global supply chains in Cambodia and other countries around the world and hope to conduct research in this area before I finish college".

"The CKS Staff was extremely welcoming. Not only did we attend lectures, but the fact that we had the opportunity to meet with the ministers of different departments and end off our trip visiting an H&M factory was a once in a lifetime experience. Because of what we learned in class; we were able to question the different officials when it came time to do so. A highlight was visiting EGBOK, a hospitality training center for Cambodia's youth. The students there are full of life, and it was great to interact with them".

"I have a very positive impression of the program. It was very well-designed and was a unique and valuable opportunity. I feel that I got a deep and diverse insight into Cambodia through the program. I think my experiences from the program will contribute to my future education and also to my life outside of school".

“TC3” Cambodia Study Abroad Program

Tomkins Cortland Community College continues partnership with CKS in winter Study Abroad Program

I have had the incredible opportunity to partner with CKS to bring my students to Cambodia for a 2-week study-abroad program since 2016. I teach English, French, and anthropology at Tompkins Cortland Community College in Dryden, NY. My partner in this program, Prof. John Troyer, teaches English, and was a student at CKS’s 2019 summer Khmer Language and Culture Program.

Our goal is to have students gain understanding about a culture other than their own. We focus on areas related to education, gender roles, and family structure. With CKS’s help, we visit several NGOs, a rural village, floating villages, and of course, the temples of Angkor. We learn about Cambodian culture, Buddhism, and take part in a dance workshop!

Our students fall in love with Cambodia immediately. Whether we’ve spent the day with children or simply observed everyday life around town and in the markets, our students are touched by the kindness, generosity, and hospitality of the Cambodian people.

Angela Palumba Martin, Ph.D., Professor

Student voices:

“Amazing Program! Changed my life. I am going to come back to learn Khmer.”

“This will help me with my degree by giving my first-hand experience of another culture.”

“We are so grateful to CKS for this life-changing experience!”

“I’ve been to Cambodia twice, both times hosted by CKS. These experiences were wonderful and have changed my life. Cambodia and its people have captured my heart!”



TC3 Students at the Khmer Dance Workshop

An Academic Journey

By Hunter Watson

I was always fascinated by cultures and languages. Born in Arkansas, I completed a BA in philosophy and religious studies, in 2004. My professor recommended I travel to Asia, so I moved to Bangkok and found work teaching English. I began studying Thai and Khmer languages and made excursions to historical sites across mainland Southeast Asia. In 2009, I enrolled in the MA program in oriental epigraphy at Silpakorn University, Bangkok. We studied the development of scripts in South and Southeast Asia, and multiple languages, including Sanskrit and Khmer.

My Ph.D. research focuses on the first millennium, looking at the early historic period and the transitional period from pre-history to the historic period. My dissertation project is a palaeographic study of early script evolution across what is now Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. To research this, I survey sites where inscriptions are located to document details and take photographs. I then use GIS applications to map the spatial and temporal distribution of inscriptions, which helps put the palaeographic study into perspective. At the National University of Singapore, former CKS Trustee Prof. Emeritus John Miksic, encouraged me to apply for a CKS Research Fellowship.

CKS’s support enabled me to conduct field surveys across Cambodia, to visit museums and archaeological sites. CKS also facilitated the process of requesting permission from government agencies to photograph artifacts. My fieldwork in Cambodia contributes greatly to my dissertation project. I was also able to visit many museums and archaeological sites, which helped to understand the geography of the region and the physical distribution of cultural sites.



Hunter Ian Watson holds a BA in Philosophy from University of Arkansas, Little Rock and an MA in Oriental Epigraphy, Silpakorn University, Thailand. He is currently a CKS Research Fellow 2019-2020 and PhD candidate in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, researching the pre-modern history of Thailand and neighboring countries.



Example of an inscription on the doorframe of a stone temple at Koh Ker archaeological park, Preah Vihear Province.



Example of photography technique, at the Angkor Borei Museum, Takeo Province.

CKS LIBRARY

Since it opened in 2001, CKS's Library, located in the beautiful Buddhist pagoda of Wat Damnak in the heart of Siem Reap, has seen its collection grow from a few hundred to over 20,000 titles stored in 2 buildings—the Reading Room and Scholars Collection Room. A small room next to the Reading Room is the Children's Library.

Our scholarly journal collection has expanded considerably. The Library's research collection also contains important out-of-print publications from local and overseas libraries, a wide selection of M.A. and Ph.D. dissertations from overseas universities, and research papers by Cambodian university students and CKS Fellows. The Library's collection has been carefully built by former Directors, scholars, and Librarians. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, bibliographies, directories, maps, guidebooks, and daily national newspapers in English, French and Khmer are all available for reference.



The Next Generation in Libraries

“This workshop was very useful--I hope it will be organized again in the future.”

More than 20 librarians from universities, high schools, and other institutions in Siem Reap, Phnom Penh, and Banteay Meanchey gathered at CKS headquarters in Siem Reap, in September 2019, for a workshop entitled “The Next Generation in Libraries”.

The gathering afforded local librarians the opportunity to share their experiences. It raised awareness of ‘next generation’ library models in both the developed and developing worlds and explored strategies for libraries to share their resources with a wider audience.

CKS's head librarian and senior advisor, CHHOR Sivleng and OUM Daraneth, led the workshop, describing CKS's resources, including online cataloging tools and library management software. The workshop also featured a presentation on the history of library development in Cambodia by Mr. NETH Wanna, deputy director of the Hun Sen Library at the Royal University of Phnom Penh and current secretary-general of the Librarians and Documentarists of Cambodia. Participants



subsequently discussed structuring a local network of librarians to share information and institutional awareness.

This workshop was notable for the active participation of its attendees, all of whom left the event with both new information and professional connections useful to their future work. Participants urged CKS to hold more workshops for librarians to promote Cambodia's blossoming library sector.

Eighth Annual Cambodian Book Fair

13-15 December 2019



Students checking CKS publications at the booth

The Cambodian Book Fair Committee has sponsored a nationwide annual book fair since 2012, with the goal of improving educational quality and promoting literacy among Cambodia's youth. The eighth annual Cambodian Book Fair was hosted by the National Library of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, December 13-15, 2019, under the auspices of Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, and Ministry of Information. The event featured a high level of engagement by the Cambodian government, with H.E. Khieu Kanharith, the Minister of Information, and H.E. Hang Chuon Naron, the Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, both making personal appearances. The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, alongside other sponsors and partners, also sent senior representatives.

The book fair has seen the number of booths grow with each passing year. In 2019, there were 135 booths administered by local and international organizations, academic institutions, publishing houses, and private companies. More than 180,000 visitors attended the fair over the course of its three-day run. The Center for Khmer Studies featured at its booth the promotion of educational opportunities in Cambodia and showcased its collection of rare books and other Library materials. It encouraged local undergraduates to participate in its summer programs, such as the Junior Resident Fellowship Program, to strengthen their academic capacity.

Drawn by the unique materials on display from CKS's Library, over 2,000 attendees paid a visit to CKS's booth. A majority of these visitors were students from local universities and secondary schools. Many attendees were astonished at the wealth of resources available at CKS's Library, with several remarking that they did not have access to comparable materials, even in Phnom Penh. Multiple visitors inquired

as to whether or not they could access CKS Library materials if they did not live in Siem Reap; in response, CKS staff introduced our inter-library loan service and informed visitors that they are able to check out books from the CKS Library at any of three participating libraries outside of Siem Reap.

CKS's staff provided short briefings on our various programs and provided application instructions for each. Staff noted great interest twinkling in the eyes of each and every visitor, especially when discussing our summer programs, and the attraction we generated through the Library's great resources. Visitors left visibly excited about the potential to study Cambodia and Southeast Asia as a whole at CKS.



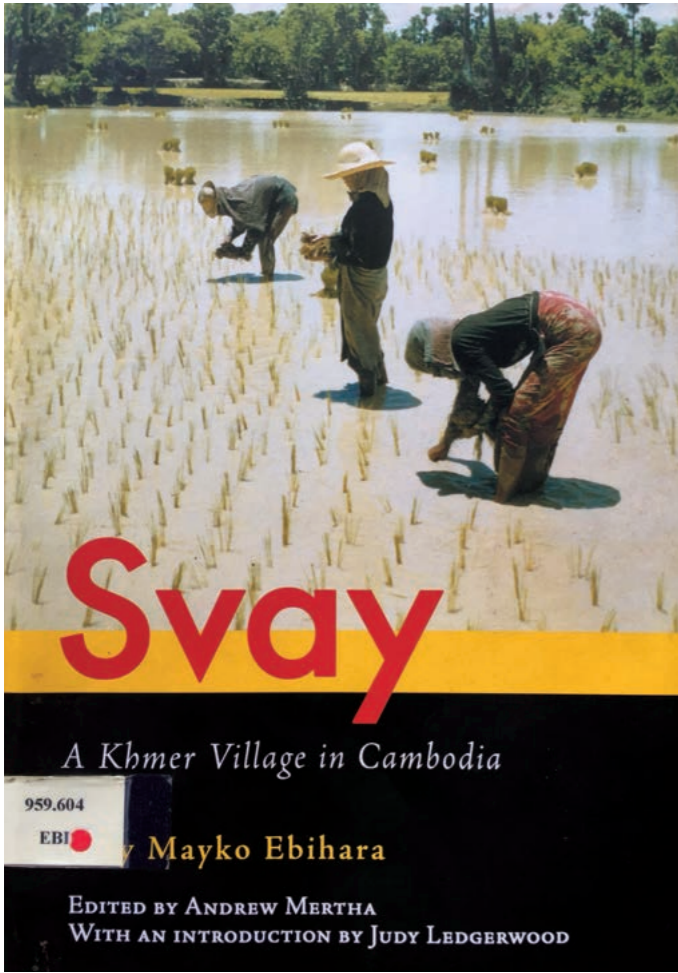
Some displays from CKS's rare book collections

CKS Publishing Program

Svay: A Khmer Village in Cambodia

Svay: *A Khmer Village in Cambodia* was the result of extensive ethnographic research by an eminent anthropologist, the late May Ebihara. The book is unique not only in detailing everyday village life in the Cambodia of 1959, but also in describing movingly the severe disruption to village life incurred during and after the Khmer Rouge period (1975-1979). It explains in vivid detail the social organization and roles of community, gender, and religion in the village. Its significance is well-noted by Prof. Andrew Mertha in his preface to the English edition (p. ix): “Svay is an indispensable window into a particular time and place in Cambodia, one that has long passed into the ether of history. It provides a rich, granular description of a single village just before the country slid into civil war (1970-75) and experienced the horrors of the Khmer Rouge (1975-79).”

Judy Ledgerwood’s take on Ebihara’s prose as “fine description” holds as true for Cambodians as it does for non-Cambodians. To me, Ebihara’s style is powerfully simple, clear, elegant and “sensitive.” It is evident that she wrote this work with “both heart and head,” with the Svay villagers. In reading Svay, we feel as if we were living there



The first English Edition of Svay was published by CKS in 2019



in the village with her. Rendering the delicateness of her prose into Khmer is a challenge, which became clear when I reviewed Svay’s first draft translation. Many passages had to be retranslated, not only to make the translation as understandable and interesting as the original English text, but also to give Cambodian readers a bit of the same sheer pleasure that Ebihara’s prose radiates.

I am the daughter of peasants and was raised alongside all manner of countryside folk and agricultural workers. But I have learned a great deal from the farmers in this book. Hearing their stories through Ebihara has reminded me of lessons I was taught as a child, and that I had forgotten as an adult. I am immensely proud to have participated in this project and to have had the chance to bring these lessons back to the fore for a Khmer-speaking audience.

Svay’s Khmer translation is a reminder of the “long-lost” peasant life of Cambodia’s 1960s. Life is no longer what it once was in the Cambodian countryside. There are simply fewer and fewer people around to work the rice paddies as more and more young villagers head to the cities to make a living, mostly in garment factories. Cambodian society, from people’s mindsets to their spending habits, has changed dramatically. The only thing that remains the same is that villagers still struggle to earn enough to provide for their families; that, and they still depend on the rain.

This is why a Khmer version of Ebihara’s book, aimed at a Cambodian readership, is so valuable. It is a much-needed call back to a rapidly-fading past of a peasant society that, after years of turmoil, is running headlong into modernity and globalization at lightning speed.

A former CKS Fellow, Dr. Kunthea Chhom, M.A., Ph.D. is a specialist in Sanskrit and currently serves as Researcher at Angkor International Center for Research and Documentation, Apsara National Authority.

Words and Images

How do we communicate now? So often in visual images – everyone is a photographer now: cell phones talk to each other as fast as action happens. So, I wanted to offer a course at CKS on Visual Communication, using image and text to communicate complex, challenging ideas – ideas worth thinking about. I’ve spent over three decades in Southeast Asia, as artist, photographer and writer: the first year, before the internet and cellphones, I spoke by phone only twice. Things have changed: now people are in constant communication and creating images daily. But what makes an image compelling – different, better than the others? How do words and images work together? Do we “believe” images? Why? Why not? When? Now that COVID19 has shocked us into a new reality, communication becomes even more fraught, precious. It’s so important to be accurate and understood. One aim of the course is to improve participant’s English language skills, vital in the contemporary job market, and CKS is perfectly positioned to offer this opportunity to young professionals. But we’ve found that other skills are equally important: critical thinking, the ability to assess information sources, to critique and analyze text and image, to be concise, communicate facts, and touch emotions.

Finding their own voices through writing and shooting stories on subjects they care about, participants use interview, survey, research, narrative and images to explore topics from education, libraries, and travel to heritage preservation, organic farming, ecology, tourism, and pollution. The peaceful, well-equipped seminar room at CKS is ideal for meeting, as one student commented, but even after COVID19 forced us on-line, the commitment of these young writer/photographers to their process and their communities is stunning. We’ve been meeting online since mid-March, sharing stories about travel, about the experience of being a monk, about education and entrepreneurship. Participants have conducted interviews in the communities on coaching and mentoring in childhood education, vocational education, entrepreneurship, and on happiness; even one imagined interview with a famous, mid- 20th century photographer, students comment that the course equips them with techniques for writing reports and articles, improves academic writing, and provides relevant techniques for improving writing skills generally. *“We get constructive feedback from classmates and the teacher and we learn from each other, reading the different essays everyone has written.”* Structured with peer review, the move to Telegram has intensified the shared critique. We spend time on-line reading and responding to each student’s writing. After writing and



Children reading at Center for Khmer Studies, The Importance of Libraries, So Keoreaksmeay

shooting four stories: an exhibition review, a personal experience, an interview, and a feature story, participants have learned to identify and write in a voice, to write objectively and subjectively, to conduct an interview and then retell it in a text, and to write about issues that require both research and personal or professional involvement. I’ve been most impressed by the dedication to their communities, their professions and the shared learning experience of the group.

*Barbara J. Anello-Adnani
CKS English Language Fellow (2018-2020)*



A walk past demolished buildings at the river edge by Kimchhay Kol, student



My Research Experience at CKS

Hello! My name is Heather Magnuson. I am a student at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. I hope to be a veterinarian with a career path that incorporates the One Health ideology into my practice. One Health is a multisectoral approach to medicine that works to achieve optimal health and well-being between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment. With this goal in mind, I traveled to Cambodia during the summer of 2019, to understand what effect aquatic biodiversity within a natural system has on household livelihoods and nutrition, using the photovoice research method.

For my colleagues Antara Finney Stable and Mariacamila Garcia Estrella and I to conduct our research, we needed support from the local Cambodian community. Fortunately, Cornell University is affiliated with the Center for Khmer Studies (CKS), which welcomed

us with open arms. Without CKS's help, we would not have been able to carry out our research. We needed to travel to fishing communities throughout Siem Reap province to conduct interviews with members of their communities. CKS staff fully supported our project and provided us with proper documentation and authentication when we were out in the field. They connected us to three hardworking and intelligent translators, who were essential for us to conduct our research. CKS also provided a wonderfully tranquil space for our office work.

My time in Cambodia was one of the most rewarding experiences I have had. I had the opportunity to connect to individuals on a deeper level and understand Khmer culture in a way that most travelers are not able to. Traveling to communities that were not on the typical tourist's path and working with brilliant individuals from Cambodia gave me a wholehearted understanding of Khmer culture. After two months of working alongside everyone at CKS and with my Cambodian co-workers, Siem Reap started to feel like home. I will cherish forever the memory of all of the support CKS gave me and my coworkers, and the kindness and positive memories of my summer in Cambodia.



Research Coordinator Vannarin Sar and Heather Magnuson interviewing a participant



Community leader from Kompong Khleang

CKS Khmer Language and Culture Program

CKS's popular summer Khmer Language and Culture Program (KLCP) in collaboration with the University of Hawaii's Advanced Study of Khmer (ASK) program, headed by Dr. Chhany Sak-Humphry, offers an incomparable opportunity for intensive in-country language training, a home stay and cultural exposure. CKS classes are split into two levels—intermediate and beginner—and take place over 8 weeks both at CKS headquarters in Siem Reap, home to the temples of Angkor, and then in Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital city. Hear the voices of recent participants.



Isabella Myers, 2018

I am a recent US Fulbright Arts Grant recipient to Cambodia, where I studied Khmer Buddhist paper manuscripts. I participated in the KLCP in summer 2018 because CKS offered an intensive program that was responsive to my needs as a researcher. I mastered skills that prepared me to introduce myself and my research to locals. CKS provided field trips to complement my research, such as to the Buddhist Institute or the National Archives. The language skills and knowledge of Khmer culture that I received from this CKS program helped me win my Fulbright grant the following year.



Catriona Miller, 2017

I am a PhD candidate in history at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. In 2017, I received a CKS Research Fellowship to study Khmer and conduct my dissertation research. I wanted to study intensive Khmer in-country, so I chose the KLCP. I especially enjoyed learning from teachers from local universities, as well as living with a host family. I met fellow researchers who became friends during my year of archival research. I would encourage CKS Fellows to join this program during their first few months in the field. It's a great way to improve Khmer language skills and prepare for research!



Anthony Guerrero, 2019

I joined the KLCP to learn more about my heritage and to use what I learned to help Khmer-American children discover their roots. The programs available in Long Beach, California, with the largest Khmer population in the U.S., focus primarily on the refugee diaspora. This limitation made it difficult to learn about Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge regime, including the French Protectorate era. The KLCP offers a comprehensive view of Khmer history, and expanded my understanding of my Khmer heritage through field excursions, cultural exchange opportunities, research, and networking. Visiting Cambodia's nationally recognized research institutions in person, including the Buddhist Institute and the National Archives, was particularly enriching. CKS encouraged me to continue on the path to become an educator. I will one day be a teacher of history.



Ashley Vaznelis-Carlson, 2019

I am a graduate student in the Southeast Asian studies at University of California, Riverside. I study the ancient and modern history of the Khmer and Cham peoples. Introduced to CKS and the KLCP by Neak Kru Chhany, who said that it's best to learn a language from a native speaker, I joined the program in summer 2019. It's the best decision I've ever made. I learned how to speak, read, and write Khmer, which enabled me to read primary sources for my master's thesis, and conduct Khmer oral history interviews. I gained insights into Khmer culture, as I made close friends and talked to people at markets, hotels, and with tuk-tuk drivers. CKS and the KLCP program changed my life.



Ashlen Lemon, 2019

I recently graduated from Brigham Young University with a major in linguistics and a minor in teaching English to speakers of other languages. I received a Fulbright grant to return to Cambodia to teach English this coming year. My experiences with CKS were instrumental in helping me earn a Fulbright award and inspired me to return to Cambodia. I am truly grateful for my CKS experience and the doors it has opened for me.

CKS Junior Resident Fellows Program

Napakadol Kittisenee, Instructor 2019

CKS’s annual summer Junior Resident Fellows Program provides undergraduate students with intensive academic exposure to Cambodia. This program takes place on the CKS campus in Siem Reap and in Phnom Penh for six weeks, is led by a scholar, and includes five participating students from each of three countries – Cambodia, the United States, and France.

I have fond memories of many an important period in my life, but my time with the CKS summer JRFP in 2019 was unlike any other. Serving as an instructor and research supervisor for the fifteen talented students from Cambodia, the United States, and France who had been selected to complete projects in Cambodia was a great joy. The CKS campus at Wat Damnak in Siem Reap became a kind of retreat center; it allowed us to blend ourselves into the local cultural and natural environments while at the same time helping us reflect critically on our understanding of contemporary Cambodia in relation to the wider world. The Junior Resident Fellows Program provided an opportunity for experiential learning in the fullest sense. Lectures, seminars, field trips, one-on-one research consulting sessions, and personal conversations built a strong and vibrant community that inspired all of us to care for one another. The CKS staff became as close to us as family members. This struck me as being truly unique.

The way we have continued to connect with one another both personally and academically, long after the program concluded, is solid proof that participating in a CKS summer program has made a long-lasting impact on each and every one of us. I would like to express my deepest gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to CKS for its commitment and support. I can say with absolute certainty that the Junior Resident Fellows Program genuinely enriches the capacity of young people and is actively contributing to the future of Khmer studies.



Napakadol Kittisenee is a Thai anthropologist and a historian of Theravada Buddhism. He has conducted extensive field research in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, India and Myanmar. After a decade-long engagement with Dhammayietra, the peace walk in the spirit of late Maha Ghosananda, Napakadol is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



CKS Junior Fellows 2019 at CKS Headquarters in Siem Reap

Junior Fellows’ Voices



Leakna Sam, Cambodian, 2016

I now work in communications and marketing. My time as a Junior Resident Fellow was truly inspirational. If you want to engage with, and learn all about Cambodia’s culture and economic revolution, all while developing research and language skills, the JRFP is the best. In just six short weeks, I was able to complete a research project and report that strongly contributed to my academic journey. The Program provided a variety of experiences through coursework, lectures, community conversations, and field trips to historical sites in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. Each participant had the time and opportunity to explore questions they found exciting without the strictures of university requirements.



Younan I, Cambodian, 2019

I am currently a Heinz Graduate Fellow at the University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs working toward a Master’s in international development. I hope to become a social development specialist one day. My JRFP experience has been very influential in my graduate career. In participating in the JRFP, I learned new methods for conducting research and gained knowledge about contemporary Cambodian society. CKS is no ordinary academic institution. It is a place of learning that feels like home. CKS staff is both helpful and supportive. They are there for you 100%. CKS made me feel truly welcome. It is a place where scholars can come together to collaborate and share experiences. My time at CKS was genuinely wonderful; I learned so much and made so many connections with other Fellows, with whom I still keep in touch.



Chloé Houssin de Saint Laurent, French, 2018

I am a master’s student in international public management interested in ecological transitions and food sustainability. I look back on my experience as a CKS Jr. Fellow with nostalgia and gratitude. I learned so much during my time in Cambodia, both socially and intellectually. The JRFP is an amazing opportunity to discover Cambodia and its people, and to learn about its history and culture. I conducted my research with a Cambodian fellow program member. It was rewarding both to interview with her and chat with others to understand our subject. We were hosted in amazing conditions and looked after by wonderful people. I could not have hoped for a better experience. It helped me grow, be more confident, and clarify my professional trajectory.



Ryan Boun, Cambodian-American, 2017

I worked on a project comparing post-independence Cambodian domestic statecraft under Prince Sihanouk with Cambodian state-building under Hun Sen. Primarily focusing on the development of “national monuments” like the national stadium, theaters, hospitals, and universities, I tried to understand how these monuments serve as tools of regime propaganda, bolster the personalities of the regime’s leaders, and function as tools of diplomatic strategy. I graduated from UC Berkeley with a dual degree in political science and Southeast Asian studies in May 2019. Siem Reap is the perfect-sized town in which to spend a summer. After the library closed in the afternoon, I would head into town with other Fellows to have a cold drink and ‘people watch’, or maybe hop on a motorbike and watch the sunset in the rice fields just outside the city. I feel very lucky for the great friendships I’ve made through being a CKS Fellow.

CKS Research Fellows 2020

One of CKS’s core programs is the CKS Research Fellowship Program, intended to support scholarly research on Cambodia, including Ph.D. dissertation research. CKS receives funding for these fellowships from a sub-grant of the U.S. State Department Bureau of Economic and Cultural Affairs through the Council of American Overseas Research

Centers for American scholars; from the Scaler Foundation for French scholars; and from Board of Directors’ contributions for Cambodian scholars. Awardees are chosen from among numerous applications by CKS’s Fellowship Committee of scholars, headed by CKS Senior Scholar Prof. Alan Kolata (University of Chicago).

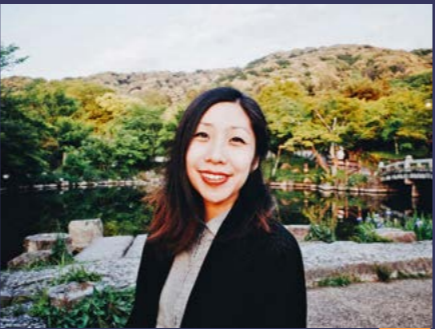
US



Dr. Lisa Arensen is a social anthropologist on the faculty of the School for Field Studies’ Center for Environmental Research in Conservation and Development in Cambodia. Her research focuses on communities that have experienced environmental change, war, and displacement. Her current project: “Mothering and Midwifery During Warfare: Histories of Motherhood on Kulen Mountain during Cambodia’s Second Civil War, 1979-1998,” explores practices relating to pregnancy, birth and post-partum care, and explores the fate of these practices during the intense disruption and displacement that marked periods of the second civil war.



Dr. Judy Ledgerwood is Professor of Anthropology at Northern Illinois University. Her research, “Svay Village 1959-2019: A 60 Year Study of one Cambodian Community” continues the ethnographic work of Dr. May Ebiara. Following on her classic study and subsequent research in the 1990s, the fellowship funds four months of research in Svay conducting interviews to confirm and update previous research. The goal is to produce a manuscript detailing life across the dramatic events of the second half of the 20th century and the reconstruction of social life in the aftermath of the devastation of the Khmer Rouge years.



Dr. Cindy Nguyen is a Postdoctoral Fellow in history at Brown University. Her book manuscript, “Misreading: The Social Life of Libraries and Colonial Control in Indochina, 1865-1958” examines the cultural history of libraries in Hanoi, Saigon, and Phnom Penh from the French colonial period through the decolonization of libraries. As a CKS Fellow, she examines the history of the ‘Cambodge’ Library and practice of reading in Phnom Penh. Her research topic and approach draw on interdisciplinary practice as an area studies specialist, digital humanist, and multimedia artist.



Ashley Thuthao Keng Dam (M.Sc. Oxon.) is a Cambodian-American medical anthropologist and 2nd year Ph.D. Candidate in ecogastronomy, education, and society at Università degli Studi di Scienze Gastronomiche in Pollenzo, Italy. Her research focuses on the use of traditional medicine plants as food and drink during maternity with respect to seasonality. Ashley is the producer of a podcast about food called “Bites of the Round Table”, a contributor to the magazine “The New Gastronome”, as well as a reviewer for The Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine.



Jessica Garber is a Ph.D. candidate in sociocultural anthropology at Boston University. Her dissertation research focuses on the mindsets and attitudes facilitating young Cambodians’ increased participation in higher education in Phnom Penh. The project will consider how young people’s access to higher education has impacted their understanding of what it means to be a morally good, educated, middle-class Khmer person, particularly in gendered terms, and how young people are potentially reshaping gender to fit their aspirations for employment and family life.



Yanni Liang is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Iowa. Ms. Liang’s dissertation research examines the impact of cooperatives and social support on farmers’ mental health. Ms. Liang’s project in Cambodia will explore gender differences in participation in farming organizations and identify stress and the symptoms of “thinking too much” (idiom of stress) and perceived solutions.

French



Dr. Sophie Biard is an associate researcher at the Institute d’Asie Orientale in Lyon, France. Her research project, “Sculptures and Liturgical Furniture in Rājendravarma II’s Temples”, investigates the system of placement of divine statues and liturgical furniture in the temples built during Rājendravarma II’s reign – the most famous being Pre Rup and East Mebon. Her project brings together the sculpture corpus of these temples throughout national collections and archaeological archives. In addition, it seeks to analyze their function inside the temples and compare them with Cambodian epigraphy and Indian prescriptive treaties used for ritual performances.



Dolorès Bertrais is a Ph.D. candidate and teaching and research assistant with the Environmental Governance and Territorial Development Institute (GEDT) at the University of Geneva (Switzerland). Her research focuses on urban production in the Global South. From 2017 to 2019, she conducted urban planning research for the Atelier Parisien d’Urbanisme (APUR), as part of a cooperative project between the municipalities of Phnom Penh and Paris. In her current research, she analyzes new urban projects in the southern districts of Phnom Penh, with an aim to understand how such projects destabilize the city’s natural landscapes.



Magali Bigaud is a Ph.D. candidate in contemporary history at the University of Rennes, France. Her research focuses on Cambodia’s decolonization process and on the new relationships emerging between France and the Kingdom. Through study of postcolonial cooperative policies in sectors such as education, culture, the military, and the economy, her work aims to highlight the tensions within these new relationships: from business continuity and the desire to maintain French influence to the Cambodian desire for emancipation.

Cambodian



Bunleng Se is a Ph.D. candidate in the Khmer Studies Program at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. His research topic is: “The Impact of Rapid Urbanization on the Urban Heat Island Effect in Phnom Penh”. The “urban heat island effect” is the drastic difference between the temperature of urban areas and their surrounding rural areas. His research will evaluate the impact of urbanization on urban surface temperature change in Phnom Penh, and to examine the urban heat island effect.



Sreang Chheat is a Cambodian Ph.D. candidate at the University of Queensland, Australia, School of Political Science and International Studies. His research examines the context of China’s rise and the Cambodian state’s response to its growing influence. His project employs a social conflict theoretical approach to explore relations between civil society and the state as a means of explaining the varying state responses to disputes over Chinese-funded projects in Cambodia. Sreang Chheat was the former Program Coordinator of CKS.



Mech Samphors is a Ph.D. candidate in Khmer studies at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. Her research focuses on the interpretation and potential for action of the Women’s Code—(Chbab Srey in Khmer) which has been heavily criticized for its outdatedness as well as for suppressing women. Instead, it looks beyond the mainstream rejection of the code to evaluate its contributions to individualizing and empowering women and young people in contemporary Cambodia. Her project will take an interdisciplinary approach to examining the origins of and changes in the Chbab Srey.



Savina Sirik is a Cambodian Ph.D. candidate in peace and development research at the University of Gothenburg's School of Global Studies. Her research examines the complex processes of constructing and representing atrocity narratives in post-conflict Cambodia. Her project will explore how Khmer Rouge survivors construct narratives of the Khmer Rouge period in interaction with national and transnational memories, and how their experiences are being represented in post-genocide memorialization. Drawing on her fieldwork in Cambodia, her research provides an empirically rich account of survivors who construct the past in the context of contemporary identity and memory politics.

My Experience in Cambodia as a CKS Research Scholar

When I began my PhD, I sought to acquaint myself with organizations that focus on and support scholarship relating to Cambodia. I strongly believed that although there are many research networks and funding opportunities within the realm of social science and anthropology, a dedicated organization was the best way to go because it would be truly invested in my project in ways that other groups would not be. After some internet research, I was able to find the opportunities described on the Center for Khmer Studies’ website and decided to pursue them.

My research is a unique and exciting opportunity to explore issues of maternal health, food security, traditional medicine, ethnobotany, and gastronomy together. It focuses on how traditional Khmer medicinal plants are prepared and consumed as food and drink by rural women during maternity and whether these recipes change between the rainy and dry seasons. I hope to gather knowledge which will contribute to the growing body of ethno-botanical knowledge, as well as a glimpse of how Traditional Khmer Medicine is evolving in present-day Cambodia.

An important aspect of my CKS fellowship for me personally is that it allowed me to come to Cambodia with little worry about logistics, while I explored and experienced my own Cambodian heritage as a member of the Cambodian-American diaspora. As a first-generation scholar, to be able to continue my studies at a doctoral level with funding is a tremendous honor. CKS is important to my research because it not only provided me the financial and organizational support that I needed to carry out my work, but also gave me confidence that my work is significant within the context of Cambodian scholarship.

During my time here working at CKS, I have formed meaningful relationships with fellow research scholars in Cambodia in the fields of biodiversity, cultural conservation, botany, and anthropology. I was able to access books and texts that were not available abroad, that allowed me to delve further into my research. I have been able to improve my



Khmer language skills and experience cultural dynamics that I haven’t encountered before. These have broadened my understanding of the work I have been doing.

What sets my experience with CKS apart from other organizations I have worked with is how kind and thoughtful all the staff I have interacted with have been. Even during a turbulent time like the COVID-19 pandemic, I always felt that I was thoroughly supported and cared for – especially as a young researcher who had come to Cambodia on my own.

Ashley Thuthao Keng Dam is a Cambodian - American graduate student at University of Gastronomic Sciences, in Pollenzo, Italy, and recipient of a CKS 2020 Dissertation Research Fellowship.





Photo: Christopher Schoenbohm

You can read the full article of “Cambodia in the time of COVID-19: Conceptions, Perceptions, and Approaches to the Covid-19” by Ashley Thuthao Keng Dam on <http://blog.castac.org>

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