**Culture and Society of Asian Countries**

**Cambodia: Angkor and the Khmer temples**



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I) Introduction about history and construction of the site:

Over a period of 300 years, between [900](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/900) and [1200](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1200) AD, the [Khmer empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khmer_empire) produced some of the world's most magnificent architectural masterpieces.

Angkor was the site of a series of capital cities of the [Khmer empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khmer_empire) for much of the period from the [9th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9th_century) to the [15th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/15th_century). The temples of the Angkor area number over one thousand, ranging in scale from nondescript piles of brick rubble scattered through rice fields to the magnificent [Angkor Wat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angkor_Wat), said to be the world's largest single religious monument. Many of the temples at Angkor have been restored, and together they comprise the premier collection of examples of [Khmer architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architecture_of_Cambodia).

During the [15th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/15th_century), nearly all of Angkor was abandoned after Siamese attacks, except Angkor Wat, which remained a shrine for Buddhist [pilgrims](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrim). The great city and temples remained largely cloaked by the forest until the late [19th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/19th_century) when French archaeologists began a long restoration process.

From [1907](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1907) to [1970](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1970) restoration of Angkor was under the direction of the [École française d'Extrême-Orient](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89cole_fran%C3%A7aise_d%27Extr%C3%AAme-Orient), which worked to clear away the forest, repair foundations, and install drains to protect the buildings from water damage.

After the end of the civil war, work began again, and since [1993](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1993) it has been jointly co-ordinated by the French, [Japanese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan) and UNESCO through the International Co-ordinating Committee on the Safeguarding and Development of the Historic Site of Angkor (ICC), while Cambodian work is carried out by the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA), created in [1995](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1995).

Some temples have been carefully taken apart stone by stone and reassembled on concrete foundations. Since the end of the civil war, international tourism to Angkor has increased, posing additional conservation problems but also financial assistance to the restoration projects. Visitor numbers reached 900,000 in 2006.

II) Angkor Wat, the Bayon and Ta Prohm : the 3 main temples:

II.1) Angkor Wat:

Angkor Wat is just one of a hundred or so monuments that remain scattered over an area of about 300 square kilometres in northern [Cambodia](http://www.theangkorguide.com/introduction.htm) - the religious remains of a series of cities, built by a succession of kings from around the 7th to the 13th centuries.

The principal temple, [Angkor Wat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angkor_Wat), was built between [1113](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1113) and [1150](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1150) by [Suryavarman II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suryavarman_II).

Dedicated to [Vishnu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu), it was built as the king's state temple [Hindu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu) cosmology, with the central towers and capital city. With walls nearly one-half mile long on each side, Angkor Wat grandly portrays the representing [Mount Meru](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Meru), home of the gods; the outer walls, the mountains enclosing the world; and the moat, the oceans beyond.

The later capital of [Angkor Wat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angkor_Thom), built after the Cham the traditional enemies of the Khmer sack of [1177](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1177), has at its centre the [Bayon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayon). Construction of Angkor Wat coincided with a change from [Hinduism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism) to [Mahayana Buddhism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahayana_Buddhism). Temples were altered to display images of the [Buddha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddha), and Angkor Wat briefly became a Buddhist shrine. A subsequent Hindu revival included a large-scale campaign of desecration of Buddhist images, before [Theravada Buddhism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theravada_Buddhism) became established from the [14th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/14th_century).

Angkor Wat is often hailed as one of the most extraordinary architectural creations ever built, with its intricate bas-reliefs, strange acoustics and magnificent soaring towers. Angkor Wat, originally named Vrah Vishnulok - the sacred abode of Lord Vishnu, is the largest temple in the world.

The word Angkor is derived from the Sanskrit word 'nagara' meaning 'holy city'. Vatika is Sanskrit word for temple. "The city which is a temple," Angkor Wat is a majestic monument, the world's largest religious construction in stone, and an architectural masterpiece.

The Khmers adhered to the Indian belief that a temple must be built according to a mathematical system in order for it to function in harmony with the universe. Distances between certain architectural elements of the temple reflect numbers related to Indian mythology and cosmology. The sculptures of Indian icons produced in Cambodia during the 6th to the 8th centuries AD are masterpieces, monumental, subtle, highly sophisticated, mature in style and unrivalled for sheer beauty anywhere in India. The scale of Angkor Wat enabled the Khmer to give full expression to religious symbolism. It is, above all else, a microcosm of the Hindu universe.

One of the first [Western](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_world) visitors to the temple was [Antonio da Magdalena](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_da_Magdalena), a [Portuguese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portugal) monk who visited in 1586 and said that it "is of such extraordinary construction that it is not possible to describe it with a pen, particularly since it is like no other building in the world. It has towers and decoration and all the refinements which the human genius can conceive of". However, the temple was popularized in the West only in the mid-19th century on the publication of [Henri Mouhot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Mouhot)'s travel notes. The [French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France) explorer wrote of it:

One of these temples - a rival to that of [Solomon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon%27s_Temple), and erected by some ancient [Michelangelo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo) - might take an honorable place beside our most beautiful buildings. It is grander than anything left to us by [Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece) or [Rome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome), and presents a sad contrast to the state of barbarism in which the nation is now plunged.

Angkor Wat required considerable restoration in the 20th century, mainly the removal of accumulated earth and vegetation. Work was interrupted by the civil war and [Khmer Rouge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khmer_Rouge) control of the country during the 1970s and 1980s, but relatively little damage was done during this period other than the theft and destruction of mostly post-Angkorian statues.



The temple has become a symbol of Cambodia, and is a source of great pride for the country's people. A depiction of Angkor Wat has been a part of every [Cambodian national flag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Cambodia) since the introduction of the first version circa 1863 - the only building to appear on any national flag.

II.2) The Bayon:

The Bayon was the last state temple to be built at Angkor, and the only one to be built primarily as a [Mahayana Buddhist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahayana_Buddhist) temple.

It was the centerpiece of Jayavarman VII's building program, and the similarity of the faces on the temple's towers to other statues of the king have led many scholars to the conclusion that the faces are, at least in part, representations of Jayavarman VII.

Its most distinctive feature is the multitude of smiling faces on the towers which rise up to its central peak. Under the reign of [Jayavarman VIII](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jayavarman_VIII) in the mid-13th century the temple was converted to [Hinduism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism). In later centuries [Theravada Buddhism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theravada_Buddhism) became dominant, before the temple was eventually abandoned to the jungle.

In the first part of the [20th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20th_century) conservation work was led by the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, which restored the temple using the [anastylosis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anastylosis) technique. Since [1995](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1995) the Japanese Government team for the Safeguarding of Angkor (the JSA) has been the main conservatory body, holding annual symposia.

The main current conservatory body, the JSA, has described the temple as "the most striking expression of the '[baroque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baroque)' style", compared to the [classical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classicism) style of [Angkor Wat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angkor_Wat).

II.3) Ta Prohm:

Ta Prohm is a temple at [Angkor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angkor), built in the [Bayon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayon) style largely in the late [12th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/12th_century) and early [13th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/13th_century) centuries. It was built by King [Jayavarman VII](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jayavarman_VII) as a [Mahayana Buddhist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahayana_Buddhist) monastery and university.

Unlike most of the other Angkor temples, Ta Prohm has been left in much the same condition in which it was found: the photogenic and atmospheric combination of trees growing out of the ruins and the [jungle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jungle) surroundings have made it one of Angkor's most popular temples with visitors.

Ta Prohm was one of the first temples begun in Jayavarman VII's massive building program. The temple's modern name means "old [Brahma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahma)", but the original name was Rajavihara (royal temple).

It was centered on veneration of the king's family: the main image (of Prajnaparamita, the personification of wisdom, installed in [1186](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1186)) was modeled on his mother, while the two satellite temples in the third enclosure were dedicated to his guru (north) and his elder brother (south).

Expansions and additions continued as late as the rule of [Srindravarman](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Srindravarman&action=edit) at the end of the [13th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/13th_century). The temple's [stele](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stele) recorded that the site was home to more than 12,500 people, with a further 80,000 in surrounding villages helping to supply the institution. The temple amassed considerable riches, including gold, pearls and silks.

After the fall of the [Khmer empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khmer_empire), the temple fell into neglect for centuries. When the effort to conserve and restore the temples of Angkor began in the early [20th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20th_century), Ta Prohm was chosen by the [École française d'Extrême-Orient](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89cole_fran%C3%A7aise_d%27Extr%C3%AAme-Orient) to be left largely as it was found as a "concession to the general taste for the picturesque" (Glaize).

Maurice Glaize, who was the conservator of [Angkor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angkor) from [1937](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1937) to [1945](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1945), writes that this temple was chosen because it was, "one of the most imposing and the one which had best merged with the jungle, but not yet to the point of becoming a part of it - as but one specimen typical of a form of Khmer art of which there were already other models". Nevertheless much work has been done to stabilize the ruins and to permit access, in order to maintain "this condition of apparent neglect".

III) [UNESCO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO) [World Heritage Site](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Site) :

International program for the safeguarding of Angkor

In Cambodia, the famous temples were in danger because of the war and plundering.

Dealt with by the French School of the Far East ([École française d'Extrême-Orient](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89cole_fran%C3%A7aise_d%27Extr%C3%AAme-Orient" \o "École française d'Extrême-Orient)) of 1907 to 1970, the archeological site of Angkor was the object, throughout this period, of important work of maintenance, restoration and, in particular, anastylose.

The abandonment, consecutive with internal disorders and the war, caused with this site of many and serious damage.

Shortly after the creation of the Bottom-in-deposit with UNESCO, the Japanese government decided to support, like first project, the organization in Bangkok, in June 1990, of the first round Table of experts on the safeguarding of the monuments of Angkor, meeting suggested by UNESCO within the framework of its Action plan for the Conservation of the monuments of Angkor.

This first technical meeting on Angkor, for which about thirty experts, Cambodian specialists as well as representatives in various institutions, organizations governmental and not-governmental met, adopted a series of recommendations for the actions to carry out in the future.

With the return of peace, and following the call launched by the General Manager of UNESCO, Federico Mayor, in 1991, the international community was interested in the safeguard of Angkor. Taking into account the exceptional value and universal range which sticks to this immense site (401 km²), and with its innumerable monuments, the Committee of the world Inheritance decided to register it on the List of the world inheritance in December 1992.



To strengthen the action undertaken in favor of the safeguard of this cultural asset of humanity, the Committee stated in danger.

In October 1993, the Japanese government accommodated the intergovernmental Conference on the safeguard and the development of the historic site of Angkor. Composed of more than thirty governmental representations, in particular that of the Kingdom of Cambodia, international organizations, financial institutions and non-governmental organizations, the Conference adopted the “Declaration of Tokyo” which decided in particular to create, with Phnom Penh, the international Committee of coordination for the safeguard and the development of the historic site of Angkor (CIC), in order to help the Cambodian authorities (APSARA, Authority for the protection of the site and adjustment of the area of Angkor, created by royal decree in February 1995).

The CIC meets regularly since December 1993. It Co-is chaired by Japan and France, and profits from the assistance of UNESCO as permanent secretary.

The four projects major for Angkor recently finished or always in progress, are presented in the following part:

- [Conservation and restoration of the royal Place, Bayon and Angkor Vat](http://64.233.179.104/translate_c?hl=en&langpair=fr%7Cen&u=http://portal.unesco.org/culture/fr/ev.php-URL_ID%3D2675%26URL_DO%3DDO_TOPIC%26URL_SECTION%3D201.html)

Total budget: Phase I (1994-1999): 9,600,000 $  
Phase II (1995-2005): 10,996,479 $  
Arrange host: APSARA

- [Technical aid with the Conservation of Angkor](http://64.233.179.104/translate_c?hl=en&langpair=fr%7Cen&u=http://portal.unesco.org/culture/fr/ev.php-URL_ID%3D2677%26URL_DO%3DDO_TOPIC%26URL_SECTION%3D201.html)

Total budget: 669,500 $   
Duration: 1992-1998   
Arrange host: APSARA

- [Formation for the conservation of the historic buildings](http://64.233.179.104/translate_c?hl=en&langpair=fr%7Cen&u=http://portal.unesco.org/culture/fr/ev.php-URL_ID%3D2679%26URL_DO%3DDO_TOPIC%26URL_SECTION%3D201.html)

Total budget: Phase I-III (1993-1998): 1,283,900 $  
Phase IV (1998-2001): 1,403,754 $  
Arrange host: Ministry for the Culture and the Art schools of Cambodia

- [Inscription with Angkor](http://64.233.179.104/translate_c?hl=en&langpair=fr%7Cen&u=http://portal.unesco.org/culture/fr/ev.php-URL_ID%3D2681%26URL_DO%3DDO_TOPIC%26URL_SECTION%3D201.html)

Total budget: 79,100 $  
Duration: 1997-1998

Currently, the French, American, Japanese scientists work in Angkor.  
The temples suffered relatively little from the war, but several plagues threaten them: the absence of foundations, the infiltrations interior or the bacillus which corrode the stone.   
The international organization envisages to delimit zones reserved for tourism and to move the airport of Siem Reap, too near to the site. It already computerized the whole of the files of the French School of the Far East ([École française d'Extrême-Orient](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89cole_fran%C3%A7aise_d%27Extr%C3%AAme-Orient" \o "École française d'Extrême-Orient)), about all that one knows of Angkor since the beginning it century, to be used as a basis for the future building sites.

The period 1992 - 1999

France contributed:   
 - with the file of inscription of the site of Angkor on the list of the world inheritance in 1992,

- with the installation of an administrative structure APSARA, in 1995,

- with the technical aid with the Conservation of Angkor since 1994 (of which the inventory

of the parts),

- with the mine clearance of the province of Siem Reap of 1992 to 1996,

- with the creation of a police force of the inheritance in 1994,

- with creation in 1998 of a workshop of restoration of the concise statuary to the Museum of Phnom-Penh,

- with the restoration with the assistance of the EFEO, terraces of King Leprous and elephants completed today and temple mountain of Baphuan (in progress),

- with the urban and tourist development ensured by the AFD (in progress).

The period 2000 - 2009

The intervention of France since year 2000 is based on an important engagement within the framework of a FSP “Site of Angkor - Inheritance and development” (assembling 2.937.368 €) which was completed at December 31, 2004, having allowed to federate the actions of the ministries for the Foreign Affairs, Research, the Culture, and the Interior (continuation of the restoration of Baphuan, institutional support with the APSARA, archaeological chart of Angkor Thom, archaeological inventory of the Khmers’ art objects, reinforcement of the police force of the inheritance).

The continuity of this engagement is ensured by the installation into 2005 of a second FSP, heading “Inheritance Angkorian and durable development” (assembling 2.750.000 €) and one 48 months duration (2005-2009) which will allow the presentation and the development of Baphuan, the continuation of the institutional support with the APSARA, the creation of a center of training specialized of conservatives of the inheritance, the modernization of the National Museum of Phnom Penh and the development of the workshop of restoration of this Museum.

To conclude,

Today, more than 600 police officers supervise this site, the greatest archaeological zone in the world. The flights ceased here but the remainder of the country is always victim of a terrible confusion. There is more than 3000 temples in Cambodia, unquestionable completion insulated in the forest. Thus the extraordinary site of Preah Vihear located close to the border inhabitant of Thailand should be classified very soon on the list of the world inheritance.   
 Another danger which UNESCO must face: appetite of the promoters. One of the rare lake villages existing on the site of Angkor is in danger. The project: to transform the village into a kind of large hotel of luxury with bungalows on pile, which would have as a consequence the departure of the inhabitants; but once more, UNESCO makes face. The international organization will put under protection the village and is on the point of developing the schools in order to fix the current inhabitants whose practices of life would go back to the era “pre-angkorian”.