

Comments for Cultural Heritage, Identity and Local Culture

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Good Afternoon participants, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to be here to give opinions on information presented by experts on the topic "Cultural Heritage, Identity and Local Culture". I am pleased to note that this topic is included in this international symposium, which tries to make use of the outcomes of the studies, archaeological excavation and restoration of Angkor as tools to study ways of life, beliefs, customs, traditions, etc., which are regarded as real spirit and cultural roots of the Cambodians. I believe these studies will lead to the appropriate and sustainable preservation and development of Angkor Wat.

I would like to thank Dr. Ishizawa who gave me this significant opportunity by inviting me to this symposium. I have been working with Dr. Ishizawa since 1985 in the project to study historic cities of Southeast Asia; i.e. Bagan, Angkor Wat, Borobudhi and Sukhothai. I also had chances to participate in a number of meetings with Dr. Ishizawa's research team. Though during the past several years I had not participated in symposium like this, Dr. Ishizawa kindly send me the proceedings of every symposium regularly.

Before making any opinion, I would like to give an example of the case of Thailand comparing to the case of Angkor Wat. In the past decade, as a result of globalization, trade competition and influences of foreign cultures, Thailand faced various problems. This is because Thailand is a democracy, widely opens to the changing world, which gives too much significance on economic and tourism promotion. This is one of the factors causing economic and social crises. And as all of us know, economic crisis in Thailand had impacts on many countries in Asia. Such crises made the Thai people review our ways of thinking in various aspects. Administrative, bureaucratic and educational reform, are all initiated to tackle economic and social crises in Thailand. On October 2, 2002, six new ministries were established, namely Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, Ministry of Energy and last but not least Ministry of Culture. We, in Thailand, realize that we may revive our country from economic crisis, but cultural crisis may bring our nation to the end.

As a result of the bureaucratic reform, the government is trying to decentralize administrative power to local governments, allowing local governments to manage and develop their own localities according to the desire and need of the people. Besides, the new educational system allows local governments to draw up their own local curricula to teach local history and wisdoms to the young people so that they will be able to learn about their own cultures and know themselves better.

In Thailand, culture is diverse from region to region. The Ministry of Culture, which has been reestablished for almost two years, has undertaken various projects not only to promote the national culture but also the local cultures. We also promote Thailand to be a learning society so that our people will be able to wisely select appropriate foreign cultures to help develop our country and ourselves.

From my own experience as an architect of the Sukhothai Historical Park Project, I have learned that studies and researches made by various fields of academics, together with archaeological evidences enabled us to learn about the City of Sukhothai in many dimensions. Therefore, we can revive and utilize the wisdoms of the people in the Sukhothai period to serve the present society. Apart from the restoration of the ancient monuments in Sukhothai, we have revived the environment and landscape of the city based on information from archaeological surveys and the stone inscriptions. Also, Sukhothai Festival has been revived based on information from the stone inscriptions. Sangkalok ware of the Sukhothai period, which was exported throughout Southeast Asia, was one of the local wisdoms of that period. As a result of modern scientific experiments, we can now make chemical solution to glaze Ceramics in the same color as the original Sukhothai Sangkalok. We have also created the Suddhiothai dance with movements and costumes based on mural paintings and sculptures of the Sukhothai period.

Ladies and Gentlemen, again, I would like to thank the organizing committee for the invitation to participate in this event. It is one of the most valuable opportunities to be able to study all of the documentary researches presented by six experts who are present here with this afternoon. I must tell you that these papers are very interesting and they are all excellent pieces of research works.

Having listened to these presentations, I ask myself how to integrate all of the knowledge suggested by the experts into the works in cultural field. In my opinion, there are three main issues presented here:

1. Cultural heritage represented as the root of the culture nourished where it is originated.
2. Cultural heritage, tangible or intangible, is considered as the identity of the community.
3. Every human being should realize of the use of cultural heritage and how to preserve them.

Angkor Wat is considered as the cultural heritage that symbolizes the dignity of Cambodian people. It is the life and soul of Cambodia.

Moreover, it is the pride of Asia and the cultural heritage of the world and all mankind.

Therefore, the study and research for the preservation of Angkor Wat that invites experts from all over the world to participate by the government of Cambodia is the conduct that was admired by the international community.

Angkor Wat is the splendor ancient monument. There is so much to explore and learn about. It may need many lifetimes before completion.

One of our experts has presented that the evidences of the edifices, sculptures, bas reliefs as well as artifacts have indicated to us the knowledge on the past technology, rituals, beliefs, customs and traditions of the culture as well as their way of lives, how they ate and cured a disease. The gestures of each Apsara must be the prototype of the dance today.

These are the wisdoms of Cambodian ancestors. These are actually the cultural heritage. How we can make use of this heritage is the question.

I would like to propose that we could use the heritage as tools for the sustainable learning and developing of the quality of lives in Cambodia, as long as we do it with care. Last but not least, I would like to say that nowadays, the integration of technology and IT into the works in cultural field is extremely necessary both in research in public relations.