Discourses and Practices on Tradition and World Heritage-Making in Angkor

In nearly two decades after the inscription of Angkor on the World Heritage List, the focus of attention in Angkor by the Cambodian government and the international community shifted from the rescue operation of monuments and sites to how to effectively utilize the heritage for economic development of the country, mainly through tourism development. It also meant how to control people’s presence and activities in Angkor, which necessitated the restriction of some of ‘traditional’ practices conducted by local inhabitants. Many of the restrictions were imposed on them for the sake of tourism development and the assumed ideal conditions of World Heritage to be maintained. There then emerged discourses on which tradition to respect and maintain, and which one to be disregarded or restricted. At the same time new traditions were invented to suit the era of tourism development. This paper considers divergent and somewhat contradictory discourses and practices on ‘tradition’ and ‘World Heritage-making’ in Angkor demonstrated by various social actors; local, national and international.

Sokha Hotels’s yellow balloon seen in the sky beyond the moat of Angkor Wat: a new tradition.

Young models clad in traditional costumes for tourists’ snap shots at Bayon temple: a new tradition.
Biography

Keiko Miura had worked in the Culture Unit of UNESCO Office in Cambodia from 1992 to 1998, with approximately 6-month interval working with UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust project (JSA) for archaeological and anthropological work. After resigning UNESCO, she became engaged in a Ph. D research on the relationship between Angkor heritage and local communities at the Dept. of Social Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. On completing her Ph. D in 2004 she has been teaching at several Japanese universities while conducting a follow-up research in Angkor and a Balinese agriculture and rituals.

List of resent publications related to the presentation topic:


