

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN KHMER EPIGRAPHY

### INTRODUCTION

A final remark: contrary to the impression Bhattacharya seeks to give, the field of Khmer epigraphy seems to be far from moribund since the 1960s. Other than the works of scholars mentioned in the above pages, Michael Vickery's remarkable study of the Pre-Angkorian corpus is evidence of vigour, as is the recent appearance of two new dictionaries prepared by Philip Jenner, and the corpus of recently discovered inscriptions edited by Vong Sothea; and now, thanks to the impetus of the project led by Gerdi Gerschheimer, the *Corpus des inscriptions khmères*, new studies and previously unpublished inscriptions are beginning to appear in academic journals [Goodall 2011: 60].

The text quoted here is a statement made by Dominic Goodall, one of the leading Khmer epigraphy researchers today, when he reviewed the recent work by Kamaleswar Bhattacharya who has been studying the Sanskrit inscriptions of ancient Cambodia since the 1950s. As Goodall stated, a new era of Khmer epigraphy has begun. Known inscriptions are being re-deciphered with new approaches and incorporated into the

recently discovered inscriptions and archeological accomplishments, and the reexamination of existing theories is underway with more renewed vigor than ever before. In this paper, I introduce some papers published after 2000 and summarize the past and future of Khmer epigraphy.

## 1. BACKGROUND

What we call “Khmer inscription” for the sake of convenience roughly refers to post-5th century historical texts engraved on materials such as stone and metal ware found in a wide range of mainland Southeast Asia (the area that includes modern-day Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos). Written in letters originating from India, it mainly uses the old Khmer and Sanskrit languages. Although “Khmer inscription” commonly includes the so-called “modern inscription” engraved after the 16th century, I will not cover it in this paper.

To understand the ancient Cambodian regime (generally called “Khmer Empire” or “Angkor Dynasty” or just “Angkor” that constructed the many stone buildings typified by Angkor Wat) and its society, the more than 1,300<sup>1</sup> materials are nearly the only historical and local text materials from that time.

Whether referencing Hendrik Kern’s paper [Kern 1879], which used the ink rubbing of an inscription<sup>2</sup> and introduced the contents for the first time, or the first full-fledged corpus of inscriptions of Auguste Barth and Abel Bergaigne [Barth 1885; 1893; Bergaigne 1893], there is no doubt that Khmer epigraphy was started by western Europeans during the era of colonialism at the end of the 19th century. Subsequently, *École Française d’Extrême-Orient* (French School of Asian Studies, hereinafter the EFEO) took the lead in the research. However, I will not get into the details of these initial studies here. The explanations by Claude Jaques and Saveros Pou are useful in understanding basic information on inscriptions and the general sequence of research history [Jacques 2002; Pou 1997].

After Barth and Bergaigne, the research framework was created by Louis Finot, George Cœdès, et al. by mainly using the setting of *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient* founded in 1901. The 8-volume *Inscriptions du Cambodge* [Cœdès 1937–1966], completed in 1966, is also widely known to those who study pre-modern Southeast Asian history. The inscriptions numbered from inventory numbers K.1 to K.1005 were sorted by Cœdès. The religious history study by Bhattacharya and the works by Sachchidanand Sahai on the administrative mechanism

of Angkor are remarkable achievements built upon these foundations [Bhattacharya 1961; Sahai 1970]. After Cœdès passed away in 1969, epigraphy was continued mainly by Claude Jacques who published a list that went up to K.1050 [Jacques 1971]. However, with Cambodia entering the era of a long civil war during the same period, they had no choice but to suspend or drastically cut the epigraphy work on site. They did continue to study the ink rubbings of inscriptions previously collected by the EFEO, sort and reexamine known historical materials, and conduct linguistic studies. While there were many important studies among them, the research began losing momentum as compared to the times of Cœdès.<sup>3</sup> Although the civil war in Cambodia tentatively settled down in 1993, a little more time was needed to stabilize the political situation and much time and labor were required to check and reconstruct the situation of the research environment including the protection and restoration of cultural property. As far as the historical inscriptions are concerned, it is easy to imagine that they had to spend a great deal of time cross-checking against the past data since there were materials that were lost during the civil war, were missing the excavation information even though they were stored in locations such as a conservation office (Fig. 1), and had sustained damage to the engraved surface from inadequate maintenance. The study by Thomas S. Maxwell at the University



**Fig. 1**

of Bonn [Maxwell 2007d] is one of the efforts to understand the current state of the inscription left intact in the ruins.

## 2. REBOOT OF KHMER EPIGRAPHY

It was around the end of the 1990s when we began seeing big movements in Khmer epigraphy. What should be noted first is the book *Society, economics, and politics in pre-Angkor Cambodia: The 7th–8th centuries* [Vickery 1998] by Michael Vickery. Having comprehensively reviewed historical inscriptions in the pre-Angkor period (the period before the 9th century when the Kingdom was moved to the Angkor region) and included many new ideas on deciphering inscription, the book can be used as the foundation for research in this field. In particular, his approach to re-deciphering the section written in Sanskrit based on the decipherment of parts written in old Khmer has many points that we should emulate.

The paper published by Jacques in the following year [Jacques 1999b] prompted the resumption after 21 years of the serial publication *Études d'épigraphie cambodgienne*, which he had managed from 1968 to 1978. There, he romanized and provided translator's annotations on ten inscriptions found at Kbal Spean, an archaeological site in Phnom Kulen (Kulen mountain) located in the north of the Siem Reap Province. The existence of these inscriptions was confirmed in a survey in 1968 and, although short by one to seven lines, they allow us to follow the traces of people who performed rituals in the 10th and 11th centuries.

Furthermore, *Nouvelles inscriptions du Cambodge II & III* released in 2001 by Pou is the first collection of translated inscriptions after the civil war [Pou 2001]. Whereas the first volume published in 1989 mainly dealt with modern inscriptions, this book focused on unpublished inscriptions from the pre-Angkor to the Angkor periods and provided French translation and commentary. Although Volume 2 was originally published in 1996, it seemed to have been incomplete because of "financial reasons" and was recompiled in 2001 by combining Volume 2 with Volume 3. As a note, the book is also characterized by the fact that it only translated the old Khmer part without romanizing the Sanskrit part of the inscription.

Under such a trend, it can be said that the working group for Khmer epigraphy called "Atelier de pratiques d'épigraphie khmère," which was held in August 2002 in Siem Reap, was an important milestone for restarting the research. At this conference, in which participants in-

cluded the EFEO, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, and the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA) from Cambodia, Silpakorn University from Thailand, and Sophia University from Japan, the list covering from K.1051 to K.1227 was presented by Jacques and information was exchanged on the methods for collecting ink impressions and organizing materials [Gerschheimer 2002].

In 2004, a program called “Corpus des inscriptions khmères” was initiated under the guidance of Gerdi Gerschheimer from the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (EPHE) and a framework for cooperation was created for researchers from each country to reorganize historical inscriptions and restart Khmer epigraphy. Today, the seeds sown by these activities are bearing great fruits in various forms.

Besides the activities organized mainly through the above-mentioned EFEO, the spread of research in recent years, such as the Greater Angkor Project by the University of Sydney and various results obtained by Cambodian researchers, further makes us anticipate the new golden age of Khmer epigraphy.

In what follows, though there is space constraint, I will introduce some research accomplishments in recent years.

### 3. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

#### 3-1. RESEARCH TOOLS

Old Khmer dictionaries include those by Long Seam, Pou, and Jenner [Long 2000; Pou 2004; Jenner 2009a; 2009b]. In particular, Jenner’s dictionary can be regarded as the ultimate version at this point as it considers the works by the former two and includes several examples. As for grammar, in addition to Jenner’s textbook [Jenner & Sidwell 2010], Khin Sok’s handbook is also useful as it lists basic grammar rules [Khin 2007].

In terms of the works concerning Sanskrit, I will not go into common classical Sanskrit, such as Panini’s handbook on Sanskrit, one by one here. That said, as whether the Sanskrit was used in Southeast Asia in the same way as in the Indian world (especially in literature written in Northern India) should be carefully examined, the interpretation of historical materials in India should not be applied indiscriminately to historical materials in Southeast Asia. From that point of view, since the only glossary that compiled examples of Sanskrit in Khmer inscriptions is the one by Bhattacharya [Bhattacharya 1991], one must find the re-

mainder in individual papers.

Elsewhere, new materials, such as the collection of ink rubbings of inscriptions from Angkor Wat [Ang 2013b] and the collection of ink rubbings from Bayon Temple [Somporn & McCarthy 2012], have become available. In addition, there is much to learn from the list of inscription dates compiled by Roger Billard and John C. Eade [Billard & Eade 2006], which attempted to recover the year, month, day, and sometimes even time translated to the western calendar.

Useful websites have also appeared in recent years. The website of the SEALang Project in the United States provides an old Khmer inscription corpus, allowing users to search for examples (<http://sealang.net/classic/khmer/>). Although it appears that all inscriptions are not posted, it is a great reference. In addition, Corpus des inscriptions khmères mentioned above has its own website (<http://cik.efeo.fr/>). Previously, it was a simplified website; however, it was revamped in May 2017. The latest version of the inscription list was posted and, as of April 2017, users can see data, such as the excavation location, the current location, the date it was engraved, and the papers in which it is mentioned, on inscriptions up to K.1360. Considering the large amount of labor that went into creating the list that extends to 111 pages, I feel great respect for publishing of the list. Because the website also provides detailed tables of inscribed characters by vowel, consonant, and numeral, as well as an extensive list of literatures on epigraphy, those who plan to begin studying epigraphy are encouraged to refer to this reference list. Another website of the EFEO, *photothèque de l'EFEO* (<http://collection.efeo.fr/ws/web/app/report/index.html>), provides the old photographic records kept by the EFEO, allowing users to see numerous ink impressions when they search for “estampage,” for example. Furthermore, the archeological sitemap is also sold, if needed, primarily in Cambodia and the distribution map of inscriptions is included in the same series as well.

Finally, the old Khmer inscription textbook by Ang Chouléan [Ang 2013a] is the first authentic textbook written in Khmer, while Sotheara has also conducted epigraphy using Khmer [Vong 2010; 2011]. These studies are expected to be the cornerstones of the epigraphy written in the Cambodian language by Cambodians. I am looking forward to seeing the younger generations of Cambodian researchers who have learned from these outcomes to publish their accomplishments in the future.

### 3-2. NEW INSCRIPTIONS

In these days, research papers are being released repeatedly regarding

the historical inscriptions that had been known but unpublished, including newly discovered inscriptions from just before the civil war period to recent years. Among them, I will first cover the papers under “Dossier: «Corpus des inscriptions khmères»” published in memorable Volume 100 of the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* in 2016 (the year of the journal's title is 2014) here. This feature can be considered the current level of attainment of organized epigraphy in Cambodia after the civil war.

The Sanskrit inscription (K.1254), which was discovered in Angkor Borei and is presumed to have been inscribed in the 7th to 8th centuries based on the shape of letters, states that King Jayavarman enshrined the statue of Viṣṇu (Hari). Gerschheimer and Goodall developed an interesting discussion regarding this Jayavarman [Gerschheimer & Goodall 2014]. It has been known from the previous studies on Angkor history that Jayavarman I ruled from 652 to around the end of 7th century and Jayavarman II took the throne in 802; however, the possibility that “Jayavarman I<sup>bis</sup>” as another Jayavarman in between these two was presented by Cœdès. Although subsequent studies had rejected the possibility, it gained attention again after the name “Jayavarman” was found in the inscription (K.1236) from the year 763 discovered at Prasat Kampoul Ta Non Temple in Phnom Bayang in Southern Cambodia [Goodall 2012: 353–354]. It is said that this Jayavarman I<sup>bis</sup> might have been the one to enshrine the statue of Viṣṇu referenced in K.1254. While the most commonly accepted theory based on the past studies is that the mark of Jayavarman II can be traced up to around the year 770, there may be a major change to the descriptions of the period around this time. Since they are specialists of classical Indian literature and Tantra study, these two authors also introduced similar examples found in Indian literatures that are useful for deciphering the inscriptions.

Next, Christophe Pottier and Dominique Soutif's article examined in detail vocabulary usage of the inscription (K.1278) discovered in the small building attached to Bakong, the central temple in Roluos Area located in southeast of the Angkor region, which is written in old Khmer and lists individuals and items that might have been dedicated to the temple. Since there has been a discussion of the history of the Bakong Temple's formation from the standpoint of architecture and archeology as this inscription was reused as a building material, it is also interesting in terms of the interdisciplinary interpretation of inscription [Pottier & Soutif 2014].

As I will discuss the re-decipherment of K.237 inscription by Julia Estève in next section, then I will take up Jean-Baptiste Chevance's work

which deciphered a short inscription discovered in Phnom Kulen [Chevance 2014]. He considers the aforementioned paper by Jacques [Jacques 1999b] and shows that various people have performed religious ceremonies at this Phnom Kulen and Kbal Spean from ancient to modern times. In addition, two other studies of modern inscriptions are included in “Dossier: «Corpus des inscriptions khmères»” [Antelme 2014; Weber 2014].

As described, the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* is expected to continue playing an important role as the forefront of Khmer epigraphy. The journal contains many other papers to be read. For example, Estève and Soutif considered the latest inscriptions and reexamined the buildings (āsrama) that King Yaśovarman I had constructed throughout the country at the end of the 9th century [Estève & Soutif 2010–2011]. Arlo Griffiths, who extensively studies not only Khmer inscriptions but also inscriptions from Java, Champā, and Burma, worked with Soutif and examined a privately-owned inscription (K.1238), which was discovered in Bangkok, although the original location is unknown [Griffiths & Soutif 2008–2009]. It is presumed to have been originally located in the northwestern part of current Cambodia based on the examples of place names and individuals mentioned in the inscription. Dated to 1036, this inscription claims the legitimacy of the rights of the individual named Loñ Śriviṣṇu and his family under the rule of King Sūryavarman I in the first half of the 11th century. Like this one, inscriptions on which dignitaries claim the legitimacy of their family lines are found often from around the 11th century. It is probably a reflection of a major social change at this time, and K.1238 will be one of the important clues used to examine this issue.

Griffiths and Soutif had put together a special feature called “Dossier: Mobilier de culte inscrit de l'Asie du Sud-Est ancienne,” which includes four papers on inscriptions from Khmer, Champā, and Indonesia, in Volume 69 of *Arts Asiatiques* published in 2014. In the paper on Khmer inscriptions, Estève and Soutif examined inscriptions on liṅgakośa (metallic cover to decorate liṅga) in detail by researching examples extensively [Estève & Soutif 2014]. Griffiths and Vincent also looked at a vase with a Khmer inscription discovered in central Vietnam and provided a detailed description on new findings related to the Mahīdharapura, blood relatives of King Jayavarman V at the end of the 11th century, and Buddhism at this time by using relevant inscriptions [Griffiths & Vincent 2014].

*Arts Asiatiques* also had a special feature on Khmer inscriptions in Volume 65 published in 2010. It contained three papers, including an

examination on the inscription on a bronze dagger housed at the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston [Gerschheimer & Vincent 2010], a paper on a silver pendant with an inscription that includes a date of 1218 to 1219, which is at the end of the King Jayavarman VII era [Soutif 2010], and a paper that explained the trace of Tantrism in Cambodia, such as vajrasattva, based on inscriptions seen in Buddhist end-pieces [Estève & Vincent 2010]. The inscriptions listed here, like the ones seen on utensils, connect studies of historical text and material culture; the method of multifaceted examination can clarify how people lived at the time more than the content described in the inscription itself suggests. Furthermore, Jacques' examination of the inscription on silverware also presents a previously unknown aspect of the social and political situation during the Jayavarman VII era [Jacques 2003].

In addition to these, Goodall has translated an inscription (K.1049) from the mid-10th century discovered at Phnom Thom in Battambang Province [Goodall 2016]. Although the inscription is short with 10 lines, it is interesting to know the religious practice at the time since the content suggests that the occurrence of Śaiva religious professionals who lived in caves. Furthermore, the onomastic analysis is also conducted in detail, demonstrating that the practice of appending the word “śiva” at the end of a person's name was popular in the 10th century, for example. The note that emphasizes the association with Mantramārga, or Tantric Śaivism, demonstrates the capability of an author who has studied continually initial Tantric literatures, such as *Niśvāsattattvasaṃhitā*. As a note, users can register and download the paper in PDF from the UDAYA: Journal of Khmer Studies website (<http://yosothor.org/udaya/index.php/ujks/issue/archive>). One should also reference this journal when exploring the latest Khmer inscriptions.

The discussion by Maxwell, also published in UDAYA [Maxwell 2009], examined the inscription found at Banteay Chmar, an important archaeological site in the northwestern part of Cambodia.

Elsewhere, Pou, mentioned above, also continued activities and published the fourth volume of *Nouvelles inscriptions du Cambodge* in 2011, translating and annotating 19 Khmer inscriptions from the 8th century to the early modern times [Pou 2011]. As far as modern inscriptions are concerned, Olivier de Bernon also translated in his several papers the inscriptions which had been newly discovered or whereabouts of which had been confirmed anew [Bernon 2001; 2002; 2005].

There are many studies that cannot be mentioned here due to space limitations. At the same time, it seems that there are many studies that have only been presented in the form of handouts distributed

at oral presentations at the workshop and that have not been published yet. Thanks to the decipherments of these new inscriptions, the re-decipherment of known inscriptions is also progressing and a new horizon is appearing through examinations from the perspective of multiple disciplines at the same time. As we further revise the existing historical viewpoints, more probable descriptions will become available.

### 3-3. NEW APPROACHES, NEW DECIPHERMENTS

It is also necessary to re-decipher known, published inscriptions based on newly-discovered historical materials and the development of relevant sciences such as archeology and art history. At the same time, new approaches based on the use of digital databases are emerging. In addition to the aforementioned SEAlang, the EFEO and the University of Sydney are also undertaking digital archiving of the inscription data and exchanging opinions to advance this area [Estève 2010–2011].

*Manuel d'épigraphie du Cambodge* by Ishizawa Yoshiaki, Jacques, Khin, et al. has translations and commentaries on nine inscriptions, which includes new ones [Jacques & Khin 2007]. The collection of English translations of Sanskrit inscriptions by Bhattacharya mentioned at the beginning of this paper [Bhattacharya 2009] has retranslated known inscriptions found at five archaeological sites that are primarily from the pre-Angkor period. As Goodall stated, caution is required when using the translation since Bhattacharya introduced new inscription decipherments without a footnote [Goodall 2011: 49]; however, given that the translation of inscriptions is often done in French, it would attract a wider range of readers in that sense. Likewise, while Ta Prohm Inscription, an important inscription of the Jayavarman VII era, has been translated and published in English [Kapur & Sahai 2007], verification by readers is required as there is no footnote.

In addition, the English translation of Sdok Kak Thom Inscription [Sak-Humphry 2005] has a distinguishing quality particularly in the commentary on the grammar of the Khmer part. Reexamination of Preah Khan Inscription by Maxwell has advanced the research on this inscription thanks to its extensive footnotes [Maxwell 2007a]. His summary of short inscriptions left at the temples from the Jayavarman VII era is also useful [Maxwell 2007c].

Reexamination of inscribed historical materials based on specific viewpoints and interests is also underway. Alexis Sanderson compared Khmer inscriptions to manuscripts from India and Nepal to discuss extensively about Śaivism, which was the dominant religion at the time,

making it fundamental literature for the religious history of the Angkor period [Sanderson 2003].

The re-deciphering of the K.237 inscription (Prasat Preah Khsaet, Siem Reap Province) by Estève [Estève 2014] accompanies discussion about religious mixing, which is the author's area of specialty. Dated to 1066, the inscription shows an interesting case about the relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism at the time. According to the inscription, the statues of Śiva (liṅga), Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Buddha were enshrined and this has been interpreted as a practice for worshiping religiously the combined four deities *caturmūrti*. Meanwhile, Estève elaborates upon the distinction and non-discrimination as well as the mixture and coexistence of each religion by taking into consideration the discussions of *Kaṃraten Jagat*, which is believed to be a deity that reflects the indigenous faith of Cambodia.

Eade, who specializes in Indian and Southeast Asian calendrical systems, described in detail the astronomical interpretation over the age of K.121 discovered in Preah Theat Khvan Pir in Kratie Province [Eade 2005]. Chhom Kunthea is reexamining the famous Vat Luong Kau inscription found near the Wat Phu ruins located in current Laos. While the inscription is about the king named Devānīka (Mahārājādhirāja) enshrining “tīrtha” called Kurukṣetra, this paper reexamines the meaning of “tīrtha” by referring to Indian literature and Khmer inscriptions [Chhom 2005]. She also comprehensively re-decipheres the inscribed historical materials left at the Koh Ker ruins, which was built as an imperial capital during the 8th century [Chhom 2011]. Several “noname” inscriptions not included in the past inventories are noted in the book; however, it seems that these are the ones included in K.1300 to K.1312 in the latest inventory mentioned above. In terms of the Koh Ker ruins, a panel report has been presented by Jacques and others at the 15th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists held in Paris in June 2015 suggesting that new results may be published soon. Ian Lowman re-deciphered the Benteay Chmar inscription (K.227) and presented the possibility that part of the temple's bas-relief was a sacred biography of Jayavarman VII [Lowman 2012]. Michel Ferlus used an old Khmer inscription from a linguistics perspective and published an article on communication in ancient times as seen from names of old places and the exchanges of words [Ferlus 2012a; 2012b]. Amandine Lepoutre, an expert on Champā inscriptions, conducted a comparative investigation of Champā and Khmer historical materials and discussed the relationship between these two countries during the Jayavarman VII era [Lepoutre 2013].

Using the Greater Angkor Project promoted by the University of Sydney as a starting point, Eileen Lustig is developing a quantitative analysis that uses the databases of inscribed historical materials. Analysis of aspects such as the distribution trend of inscriptions related to land transactions done by mapping the number of vocabularies used and their distributions by era [Lustig et al. 2007] is an area these research approaches are good at. While there are many difficulties that need to be overcome, such as the small sample size, the handling of inscriptions with unknown origin, and the measurement of the results of qualitative studies, it is desirable to have more materials that can contribute to examination. As for the quantitative analysis on the so-called “slaves” listed in inscriptions (group of individual names listed on the list of offerings to the temple), it is very interesting since it suggests social changes such as shifts in gender roles from the Jayavarman IV era in the early 10th century [Lustig & Lustig 2013].

As a note, there are some doctoral theses by the researchers mentioned in this article [Estève 2009; Lustig 2009; Soutif 2009a; Vong 2017] that I did not cover although they are included in the Select Bibliography. These studies are the pursuit of each researcher’s main interests and concerns and are themes likely to be addressed in the future. They may be largely revised and further expanded upon as the current research evolves. I will look forward to the day when those results are published as books.

Let me end this section with a brief review of the study of Khmer epigraphy in Japan. The first in-earnest study in the field was done in 1965 by Kanayama Yoshio in his analysis of occurrences in the literature of the term “*pura*” (city) used as a regional territorial unit during the Angkor Period, in order to shed light on one aspect of social structure at the time [Kanayama 1965]. After Kanayama’s untimely death, it was Ishizawa Yoshiaki who took the lead in the study of Cambodian ancient history, also contributing greatly to the preservation of cultural properties and the training of the next generation of scholars, including myself [Matsuura 2014], to expand the field into new areas. In the field of epigraphy, Ishizawa is best known for his study of Angkor social institutions through an investigation of the usage of “title nouns” in the sources [Ishizawa 2013]. My own work has included not only textual analysis of the inscriptions, but also a technological study into the possibilities of making digital rubbings using a three-dimensional scanner (see Fig. 2). To be perfectly honest, however, the present situation of the study of Khmer epigraphy in Japan still remains in the developing stages, including the aspect of information exchange with our American and European colleagues.



**Fig. 2**

#### **4. FINAL REMARK**

Due to space constraints, I was only able to cover some of the discussions of inscription decipherments in this paper. Studies from various fields such as archeology, architecture, and art history are undoubtedly expanding considerably by referring to these inscription decipherments.

Now that it has almost been 140 years since Khmer epigraphy was started, the foundation built by the previous generation of researchers are being comprehensively reviewed, and the history of ancient Cambodia and various aspects of exchanges over South and Southeast Asia derived from inscription decipherments are being reconstructed. However, it only means that we are at the starting line; there are many challenges to be overcome. Although the results of Barth and Bergaigne at the end of the 19th century are a pioneering and monumental achievement, these need to be reviewed from a contemporary perspective including transliteration. Deciphering inscriptions requires much time and labor. At the same time, there are ambiguities in the content and a range of interpretations where the intended meaning cannot be confirmed. In that respect, the fact that many researchers in recent years are carefully supplementing the basis of decipherment by using footnotes and other

means should be highly praised. In addition, the results of these inscription studies further increase its value when used by researchers in other fields. In that sense, various gimmicks are required concerning how the outcome should be presented to those who do not specialize in epigraphy. Many of the accomplishments introduced in this paper are co-authored with researchers such as archaeologists. If this trend continues, a new horizon will open for Khmer epigraphy.

Finally, as is well known, inscriptions are biased historical materials incidentally left by the elite who performed religious acts. The content is full of ambiguity and hints, making examinations from various angles essential. Above all, calm debates are crucial in deciphering inscriptions. I hope open discussions will continue in the future while maintaining an appropriate distance from political situations and nationalism of the modern society as well as academic authoritarianism.

—Originally written in Japanese  
Translated by the Toyo Bunko

## NOTES

- 1 Khmer inscriptions are currently organized by the inventory number starting with “K” and, as described later, up to K.1360 of them have been verified as of April 2017. Since there are cases in which multiple texts are grouped together under one K number, “more than 1,300” is a tentative figure.
- 2 Han Chey inscription (K.81) in Kompong Cham province, Cambodia.
- 3 Then again, according to Bhattacharya, the scholars of the times of Cœdès were too impatient. “The older scholars were in a hurry to make the document available, and they did that with an extraordinary rapidity as we have seen. They, therefore, had no time to acquire that knowledge of the Sanskrit language and culture it was necessary to acquire to understand fully and correctly the texts they were deciphering and translating” [Bhattacharya 2004: 215].

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