

Review

Conferences
& LecturesResearch
Activities**ISHIZAWA Yoshiaki and MIWA Satoru,
Cambodia: The Five Great Ruins of
the Forest, Rengo Shuppan, 2014**

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1. Fifty Years of Research on Cambodia in Japan

Yoshiaki Ishizawa is a leader in research on Angkor worldwide who established the foundations of the modern field of Cambodian research in Japan and has led the field for over half a century. He visited Cambodia during his foreign language studies in 1961 for the first time (Ishizawa 2014: 268). As is widely known, a civil war began in Cambodia in 1970, and from 1975 to 1979 somewhere from one to two million people were killed under the Pol Pot regime. During this time foreign researchers were unable to enter the country. Ishizawa wrote about his feelings regarding this situation in *Study on Ancient Cambodia History*, published in 1982, as follows: "For these 12 years it was my dream to visit the ruins of Angkor. The grand temples at Angkor had made such an impact and moved me so much for a period in my youth. I devoted my younger days to the restoration of the ruins and tried my hand at historical research through reading inscriptions. Around 20 years slipped right by doing this. After Cambodia got involved in the Vietnam War, there were 10 years of continual civil war and unrest when Cambodia was closed to the rest of the world. During this time I was in complicated anxieties, feeling indescribable unease and exaggerated fear of the destruction of the ruins and alternating between ups and downs with each report about the Angkor ruins. In order to continue my studies I went to L'École française d'Extrême-Orient and spent all my time deciphering rubbings of inscriptions from the school's underground archives" (Ishizawa 1982: 325). In his (*New*) *Study on Ancient Cambodia*, re-published in 2013, Ishizawa writes of this period, "I took it upon myself to be the supporter for Cambodia, a small nation being pushed and pulled about by international powers, and I took a firm stand for Cambodian peace in magazines and newspapers" (Ishizawa 2013, 695).

In August of 1980, when the civil war had still not reached an end, he entered Cambodia before many others as "an expert on ruins from the West," and made a detailed report of the state of the Angkor ruins (Ishizawa and Uzaki 1981). In (*New*) *Study on Ancient Cambodia* he writes that on this trip he witnessed Cambodians trying to return to their home villages in groups, some of whom had been relocated for forced labor by the Pol Pot regime and others who had fled to Thailand as refugees. Overlaid on these sights were scenes from hundreds of years earlier when Siamese armies invaded Cambodia (Ishizawa 2013: 31–32). From his descriptions we can see that not only is he a scholar conducting research on ancient Cambodia using historical materials on the desk, he also visits the country in person as a supporter of its revival and recovery.

In the early 1990's, as the Japanese Self Defense Force was dispatched to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) in Cambodia rapidly advancing on a path towards peace, there was a surge in concern towards the country in Japan. However, there were very few Japanese researchers studying Cambodia at that time and people could not receive sufficient information. Ishizawa began a project to develop human resources in Cambodia in 1991, preceding for one year the establishment of UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) which is marked as the revival first year of the nation. The project involved bringing Cambodian exchange students to Sophia University, and by 2009 six doctorates and eleven graduate degrees had been conferred through the

program (Ishizawa 2013: 695). Many of these graduates now play important roles in the re-building of Cambodia, acting as leaders in higher education institutions such as the Royal University of Fine Arts, the Royal University of Phnom Penh, as well as National Museum and other institutions for the restoration and preservation of historical ruins. They are valuable connections for those of us in Japan who study Cambodia. Now, 20 years later, at Sophia University and a number of other Japanese universities there are many young Japanese and overseas researchers studying Cambodia. They are daily producing work across a broad range of topics not limited to the Angkor Period, spanning instead from the Pre-Angkorian Period to the early 21st Century. They include Satoru Miwa, the coauthor of this book, who studies architectural history (restoration and conservation of cultural heritage sites).

Today many researchers of Cambodian study choose to study not in France, the former colonial suzerain, but at graduate schools in Japan. They stay in Cambodia for long periods to get experience performing research. With the ability to read and speak Khmer fluently, they have intimate exchange with Cambodian people. These circumstances are the fruits reaped by Ishizawa's fifty years of activity. Additionally, in 1992 the ruins of Angkor became a UNESCO World Heritage Site and came to be often featured on Japanese television. Ishizawa is serving as director of these programs with vigorous and enthusiastic enjoyment, thus contributing to the spread of academic information about Cambodia. As a result of the achievements described above, in November of 2007 he was awarded the Royal Order of Sahametrei by the King of Cambodia, and in November of 2012 the Japanese government awarded him the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Star.

2. Five Great Ruins and the Royal Road

In Part One of the book, “The Mystery of the Khmer Empire’s Prosperity,” we see that Ishizawa made a departure from the typical “theoretical discussions,” going instead “to the actual site and setting up a tent near the ruins, surveying everything in the area, and constructing a working hypothesis of ancient life while performing comparative studies.” As a result of his work, traditional explanations of Angkor prosperity in terms of “high levels of self-sufficiency of villages” and “theories of inland distribution” have fallen out of favor (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 45–49). Ishizawa defines “the infrastructure of Khmer prosperity” in terms of the following three features: ① the creation of temples that served as the foundation for regional social and economic systems; ② the *baray* water supply system (man-made water reservoirs); and ③ the construction of rammed-earth embankments that served as pathways called the “Royal Roads” (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 52–56). Based on current research, the book devotes the most pages to ③, the Royal Roads.

From my perspective, as a researcher of post-Angkorian Period (1432–1863), I would guess that the title “The Five Great Ruins of the Forest” refers to Beng Mealea (about 40 km east of Angkor), Koh Ker (about 100 km northeast from Angkor), Preah Khan of Kampong Svay (about 100 km east of Angkor), Banteay Chhmar (about 110 km northeast of Angkor), and either Sambor Prei Kuk (about 140 km southeast of Angkor) or Phnom Kulen (48 km north of Siem Reap). Upon opening the book I saw that I was correct about all except Phnom Kulen. The reason I was uncertain about Sambor Prei Kuk and Phnom Kulen is that Beng Maelea was constructed from the end of the 11th century to the beginning of the 12th century, Koh Ker in the first half of the 10th century, Preah Khan of Kampong Svay in the 12th century, and Banteay Chhmar from the end of the 12th century to the early 13th century—all during the Angkorian Period. Only Sambor Prei Kuk, the ruins of the capital city of Isanapura that was built in the 7th century, is from the Pre-Angkorian Period. In Part Three, “Field Investigation of the Ruins in

the Forest,” Miwa additionally indicates Phnom Kulen (9th century) and Preah Vihea (140 km northeast of Siem Reap, built from the end of the 9th century to the 11th century), and it should be clear at least to any researcher of Cambodia that these seven sites could be considered “great ruins in the forests of Cambodia.” In this book, the above-mentioned “five great sites” are specially understood as “regional bases” along the Royal Roads. The significance of Ishizawa’s work lies in his efforts to elucidate the “regions” of the Angkorian Period, which had been overlooked in previous research.

The Royal Roads, built in all directions from the capital city Angkor, used “the rammed-earth method of block construction to create embankments endurable to the inundation during the rainy season.” Stone bridges were erected at points where it crossed rivers, and along the route were constructed “houses of light”—that is, rest stations—and “hospitals.” During the reign of Jayavarman VII (around 1181–1218), when Cambodia was at its largest in terms of territory, there were 121 houses of light according to a Preah Khan inscription (1191) and 102 hospitals according to a Ta Prohm inscription (1186). The ruins of 15 of these houses of light and 32 hospitals have been confirmed (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 79–80, 82). At present the following 5 sections of the “Royal Roads” have been identified: ① East Road I, from Angkor via the Beng Maelea Temple to the Preah Khan in Kampong Svay, with a branch going from Kampong Cham to the Champa Kingdom via the old capital-city Sambor Prei Kuk; ② The North Road, from Beng Maelea towards Koh Ker and Vat Phou, which follows the Mekong River from Vat Phou to Vientiane; ③ East Road II, which goes from Angkor southeast along Tonle Sap Lake via Kampong Kdei and Wat Nokor to “the Capital of Champa (Wijaya)” and Phan Rang/Panduranga in the south; ④ Road to Northeast Thailand I, which heads northwest from Angkor across the Dangrek Mountain pass into Northeast Thailand, where it continues to the Phimai Temple via the Muang Tam and Phanom Rung Temples; and ⑤ Road to Northeast Thailand II, which goes west from Angkor along the Banteay Chhmar Temple area to enter southeast Thailand from Phnom Srok and the O Smach isthmus, then heads towards Lopburi via Sdok Kak Thom Temple and finally crosses the border of Myanmar at Muan Sing Temple to reach the port city Tavoy in the Bay of Bengal. In addition to these, there was also an “auxiliary highway at the time” that crossed the border at Sisophon and Poipet into the Thailand side of Aranyaprathet (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 86–87).

The majority of the book is describing the state of research into the “Royal Roads” and “Five Great Ruins” by the Sophia University Angkor International Mission, which has been active since December of 2000, as well as the findings of their research (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 34–35). As one can see from the descriptions of its routes, the Royal Roads are crossing the borders of Cambodia into Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar; thus, cooperation from researchers and authorities in each nation is crucial. It must not be simple to carry out the research projects, even though the research environment that has remarkably developed in Southeast Asia today.

Performing field investigations of the Royal Roads through on-site studies liberates Angkor study from the antediluvian framework of Cambodian historical descriptions, placing it instead in Southeast Asian and world history. This objective is clearly established by the title of Chapter Four of Part One of the book, “All Roads Lead to Angkor: Connecting the South China Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Gulf Coast of Thailand With Land Routes.” The phrase “all roads lead to Angkor” originates from “The Era of Angkor/Khmer (9–13th Centuries),” an essay that was included in *Iwanami Course: History of Southeast Asia 2: Establishment and Development of Ancient Southeast Asian Nations* (2001). The term appears in the last paragraph of chapter six of the essay, titled “The ‘Houses of Light’ and ‘Hospitals’ Built Along Inland Circulation Routes: Examining the Royal Roads of the Angkor Period.” It was also used in *The Rise and Fall in the World History 11: Discovering the Multicivilization of Southeast Asia* (2009) as the title of an item of Chapter Four, Section Six, “Vigorous Commercial Activity.” Each

of these cites the theory that the “Five Great Ruins” served as “major regional bases,” but they stop at calling the Royal Roads a “domestic circulation route,” never going beyond the framework of Cambodian national history (Ishizawa 2001: 72, Ishizawa 2009: 218). Ishizawa’s latest book, however, builds upon the findings of later research to handle the domain much broader than the realm of the “Kingdom of Angkor,” making an explicit effort to locate the Royal Roads in the “routes for circulation of goods prior to the Age of Exploration” (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 78–79). One could say that this book marks a new development in research of Angkorian history.

3. Ruins in the Forest

One last thing I would like to mention is that, as seen in the book’s title, the “Five Great Ruins” and the “Royal Roads” are now mostly covered in forest, making investigation extremely difficult. Even Beng Maelea, which of all the “Five Great Ruins” is closest to Siam Reap, was difficult to access. When Miwa attempted a field investigation on November 15th, 1999, he wrote that he “was impeded by muddy, swamped roads, and, not knowing the condition of the road ahead, was forced to turn back out of concern for safety.” When he told local Cambodians that he was heading there, they were “surprised and concerned.” There is still the possibility that landmines remain in and around the ruins (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 224–226). When the Sophia University Angkor International Mission visited Koh Ker in December of 2000, they reported that the “seven stepped pyramid Prang was overgrown with tropical plants, and viewed from a helicopter it looked like a small mountain of trees and shrubs. We asked locals to clear away some of the shrubs and take down trees, and we climbed to the top” (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 135). There are likely many more ruins hidden in the trees, but the land mines make further examination impossible (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 220, 223). The central hall of Preah Khan is “currently collapsed into a mountain of rubble” (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 158). When Ishizawa visited Banteay Chhmar by helicopter in November of 1993, he wrote that “Looking down at the ruins from above, I first of all noticed the thick, overgrown forest, but upon looking closer I could see a moat and corridors. Since the site had been abandoned for about 30 years, the thick jungle prevented me from entering the premises of the main shrine. After asking people from the village to cut down some trees, I was able to perform an investigation” (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 192). The 2000 Mission also reported that “The hall of the main temple, 25 meters tall, had completely crumbled. The stones had been piled in heaps everywhere. Both the barely standing high tower and the hall were hidden in the shadow of the huge trees that flanked them... In order to enter the main temple we hired 10 villagers to cut through the overgrowth, but we were furiously attacked by wasps, red ants, ticks, and mosquitos during the expedition” (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 195–196). When Miwa visited Sambor Prei Kuk on September 26, 1999, trees were entwined with the bricks of the ruins, making outward observation difficult (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 217).

According to Miwa, a pre-civil war photograph of Koh Ker shows “a complete pyramid temple with no trees at all.” Thus, we can assume that the ruins became covered in forest growth between the time of the civil war and the end of the 20th century (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 221). They fell into disrepair during the civil war when there was no one to tend to them. The effects of the civil war lasted for some time, and surveys of the area did not begin anew until 2000 due to concerns about safety and landmines. At the same time, management of the sites was effectively impossible, leading to great damage from looting. (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 158, 192, 195, 228, 230–232, 233, 235). The cause of these problems is the fact that, whether judging from Cambodia or Thailand, the area is in a remote region far removed from population centers.

For me, the biggest mystery in Cambodian history is the abandonment of Angkor. We have no historical materials for the period from the early 14th Century, when the last Sanskrit inscription was created, to the mid-16th century, when the first Modern Khmer inscription was created and records appeared of visits by Europeans. The most widely known explanation for Angkor's abandonment is the invasion of the Ayutthaya armies. However, this theory is based on descriptions in chronologies compiled later and has no support in contemporary materials.

As Ishizawa indicates, after Angkor, the Ayutthaya Kingdom took control of the continental Southeast Asia distribution networks to India and China, flourishing along the Chao Phraya River (Ishizawa and Miwa 2014: 63). Ayutthaya was located in a remote region under Angkor control at the west end of the Royal Road from Banteay Chhmar. At the same time, Post-Angkorian Cambodia's political and economic center moved to the area around the modern capital city of Phnom Penh. This too was located at the end of the Royal Road along the southwest shore of Tonle Sap Lake in a remote region under the control of Angkor. Four inscriptions spanning from the Pre-Angkorian Period to the Angkorian Period were discovered in a Post-Angkor capital, Longvek, and *lingams* were discovered in another Post-Angkor capital, Oudong (Kitagawa 2006: 120). Though it is not generally well known, the founder of Longvek, King Chan Reachea had a close relationship with the Pursat area on the south bank of Tonle Sap Lake, and in this area there are remains of ancient temples such as Wat Po Mien Bon, Wat Bakan, and Wat Preah Tiet, with modern temples built on some of their foundations (Kitagawa 2006: 128–129). In Srei Santhor region on the east bank of the Mekong River, the site of the first capital after Angkor's abandonment, there are remains of ancient temples such as Prasat Preah Tiet, Wat Chonlueng, and Wat Vihear Suor (Kitagawa 2006: 105, 111–112). As the central area of the former "Kingdom of Angkor" has been consumed by forest, the Post-Angkorian city centers were rising at the end of the Royal Roads, and the remains of ancient temples there were to be covered with modern buildings.

Were these cities, which would flourish anew in the 14th century and beyond, born from the prosperity of the Royal Roads, and eventually gained enough power to surpass Angkor itself? This is my unfounded conjecture at present. I expect Ishizawa's research on the Royal Roads to provide the key to solve the biggest mystery in the Southeast Asian history.

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