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International Coordinating Committee for Angkor (ICC-Angkor): Reflections from Diplomatic Perspectives

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Executive Summary

In 1993, ICC-Angkor was started in order to draw international attention to the fact that the heritage at the Angkor sites was at risk and to encourage international cooperation to address the issue. Subsequently, it has evolved, through regular inter-governmental conferences and bi-annual meetings, into an essential mechanism for international cooperation. As such it has raised international attention, enhanced international cooperation for an extended period, coordinated cooperation among international teams, utilized international expertise and raised the capacity of Cambodian experts. Yet the future of ICC-Angkor will not be without challenges. Work methods need to be constantly reviewed in order to be more inclusive and focus should be adjusted according to the priority needs, e.g., sustainable development, climate change, community-driven heritage management and so forth. Moreover, it is essential for ICC-Angkor to explore ways to communicate expertise and experiences to other teams working in the field of cultural heritage sites elsewhere in the world so that they can utilize the knowledge that has been accumulated. This paper introduces the ICC-Angkor mechanism from the perspectives of a diplomat who has been actually working in it as one of its Co-Chairs from the middle of 2022 to the middle of 2024.

Introduction

Note: The International Coordinating Committee for the Safeguarding and Development of the Historic Site of Angkor (ICC-Angkor/Sambor Prei Kuk), is commonly referred to as “ICC-Angkor”.

“Recognize the exceptional record of international cooperation within the ICC, over the past 30 years for the safeguarding and sustainable development of the Angkor site and its region, ... It will be important to communicate internationally on the occasion of this 30-year milestone, how similar ICC mechanisms could be applied internationally.” (Paragraph 16 of the Angkor/Sambor Prei Kuk Declaration, 15 November 2023)

This message, issued by political-level representatives at the 4th Inter-governmental Conference on Angkor (IGC) in Paris, vividly shows the overall success that ICC-Angkor has achieved during the past three decades and suggests the importance of studying the merits of it

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as an international cultural cooperation mechanism for potential application to other international cooperation initiatives elsewhere in the world.

ICC-Angkor is, perhaps, not very well known by people internationally, but, as Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Japan in Cambodia, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to learn about it and honored to have played a role, as a Co-Chair of its Technical Session, for the past two years from the middle of 2022. In this essay, which I have written from a diplomat's perspective, I would like to introduce the activities, and discuss the significance, of ICC-Angkor and examine the major characteristics of the ICC-Angkor process in order to consider the potential of applying the same mechanism to other international cooperation initiatives.

There have been a number of analyses done on the functions of ICC-Angkor, all of which provide the opportunity for useful reflections on the work of ICC-Angkor. However, it seems that there has not, so far, been a study carried out from a diplomatic perspective. Therefore, this essay will fill this gap by focusing more on an analysis of the ICC-Angkor process as a model for international cooperation among interested states.

An overview of the activities of the ICC over the past three decades



Angkor Wat

The splendid Angkor monuments are the most important symbol of the nation of Cambodia. They were constructed under mighty kings during the 9th to 14th centuries and are the pride of the Khmer people. (Chandler 2008, Ishizawa 2012) In fact, Angkor Wat is so important to Cambodia that it appears on the national flag. That is why King Sihanouk appealed to UNESCO for international collaboration on the safeguarding of the Angkor monuments in September 1991, just before the Paris Peace Agreements were signed in October 1991, signifying the end of the civil war in Cambodia. In December 1992, Angkor was inscribed on

the UNESCO List of World Heritage in danger simultaneously with its inscription on the World Heritage List in Danger. (It was removed from the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger in 2004.) The rebirth of Angkor, which had been abandoned during the civil war, was considered to be a crucially important aspect of Cambodia's national reconstruction process partly because of its unifying and symbolic roles.

Japan had been working to help ending the civil war since the end of the 1980s with the aim of playing a wider political role in peace and stability in the region that is critically important to Japan. (Kohno 1999) Within this context, the Japanese government took the initiative and cooperated with France to convene the 1st Inter-governmental Conference on Angkor in Tokyo on 12-13 October 1993, which many interested countries and international organizations participated in. The Conference adopted the Tokyo Declaration, which stated that the Conference:

- "recognizes the urgent need for international assistance to prevent the Angkor monuments from further decay and destruction" (Paragraph 3),

- “holds this conference for the purpose of mobilizing such international efforts” (Paragraph 4)

The Conference agreed to “establish a coordinating committee (the Committee) at the ambassadorial level in Phnom Penh as the international mechanism for coordination of assistances to be extended by different countries and organizations” (Paragraph 10).

Based on the goals set out in the Tokyo Declaration, the first-ever ICC meeting, which was co-chaired by France and Japan, was held on 21 and 22 December 1993 in Phnom Penh, and ICC-Angkor meetings have been held annually ever since. In addition to these regular ICC meetings, Intergovernmental Conferences (IGCs) are held every 10 years and are hosted by Japan, France, Cambodia and UNESCO in turn. IGCs provide opportunities for the political-level appraisal of past ICC activities and chances to set out strategies for future activities.

The 2nd IGC was hosted by France and took place in Paris on 14 and 15 November 2003. Attendees reviewed the activities carried out by ICC during the previous decade and the active discussions that took place culminated in the publication of the Paris Declaration: Safeguarding and Development of Angkor. This Declaration, includes, among others, the following statements:

- “We reaffirm our intention to pursue international cooperation in the framework of the International Coordinating Committee...” (Paragraph 6),
- “We affirm the need to direct our efforts in keeping with sustainable development as outlined at the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development” (Paragraph 9),
- “...we recommend that development projects in the province of Siem Reap/Angkor be discussed in all their aspects... within the framework of the periodic meetings of the ICC.” (Paragraph 12),
- “We recall the need for the necessary transfer of know-how between international experts and their Cambodian counterparts...” (Paragraph 13).

The Declaration also called for “... the elaboration of a methodological document on the ethics and practice of conservation at Angkor (conservation, showcasing and development)...” (Paragraph 7) and this would eventually lead to the adoption of the Angkor Charter in December 2012.

The 3rd IGC, which took place under the theme of “Comprehensive and Sustainable Management of Angkor, Living Heritage”, was hosted by Cambodia in Siem Reap on 5 December 2013. Then Prime Minister Hun Sen attended the conference to deliver the formal opening speech in which he spoke about the importance of the protection of the Angkor monuments, not only for the conservation of the nation’s cultural heritage, but also for the development of Cambodia. The Conference subsequently adopted the Angkor Declaration, which included the following statements:

- “We reaffirm our intention to pursue international cooperation in the framework of ICC-Angkor...” (Paragraph 7),
- “...the need to guide efforts in the next decade toward the sustainable and comprehensive management of Angkor...” (Paragraph 9),
- “underline(s) once again the necessity for the transfer of expertise and skills between the international experts and their Cambodian counterparts”, and “suggest(s) that the

APSARA National Authority assumes a greater role and responsibility within the framework of the ICC-Angkor”.

The Declaration also included a number of attached Recommendations. These detailed the more practical actions to be followed up, such as the necessity for:

- The development of a natural disaster and risk preparedness management plan for Angkor.
- Local stakeholders and communities to be comprehensively involved.
- The implementation of the “Tourism Management Plan”
- APSARA National Authority to enforce the zoning hierarchy regulations (zones 1, 2, 3) and those governing the issuance of licenses /building permits more strictly.



H.M. King Sihamoni at the 4th IGC

The 4th IGC, which was the latest IGC, was hosted by UNESCO in Paris on 15 November 2023 in the presence of His Majesty King Sihamoni. The Conference, which took place under the theme of “Strengthening Human Capital for the Conservation, Sustainability and Development of Angkor”, consisted of two separate sessions; the Opening Session, which including political representation, and the Working Session, for more detailed discussions. This conference was particularly important as it was held on the 30th anniversary of the ICC. The

Conference ratified the Angkor/Sambor Prei Kuk Declaration. The Declaration included, among other statements, the following:

- “reaffirm(s) (our) desire to pursue international cooperation for the ICC-Angkor-Sambor Prei Kuk” (Paragraph 8),
- “develop a strategy in favor of the local communities” (Paragraph 11).

It also mentions that:

- “(t)he role of transferring knowhow and skills exercised by international experts working on the Angkor site towards their Cambodian partners must be intensified” (Paragraph 8),
- “(i)t will be important to communicate internationally on the occasion of this 30-year milestone, how similar ICC mechanisms could be applied internationally” (Paragraph 16).

The Declaration also recommends “that the Angkor Charter be updated” (Paragraph 9).

As categorized in the Angkor/Sambor Prei Kuk Declaration, if we were to categorize each decade according to the ICC activities carried out during that period, 1993-2003 would be categorized as the safeguarding the monuments period, 2003-2013 would be the renaissance of Angkor period, and 2013-2023 would be the sustainable management period (Paragraph 4). If we are to likewise categorize the next decade, 2023-2033, it would probably be designated the “strengthening human capital” period, as there is to be a real focus on further strengthening

and consolidating conservation and management capacity within the team of Cambodian experts working on the Angkor monuments.

As set out in broad directions issued by the IGCs, ICC meetings have been held twice a year for the past three decades. They were held in Phnom Penh until 1998 and, since then, they have been held in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The ICC meetings are where all the practical recommendations relating to the conservation and sustainable development work being conducted onsite are adopted.

An assessment of the ICC as a diplomatic mechanism

A. The ICC in reality — my personal experience

How does the ICC-Angkor operate in practice? As I have been dealing with ICC-Angkor, as co-chair for the Technical Sessions, from late 2022 until the present day, I would like to draw on my personal experience to explain how the system works.

The arrangement relating to the ICC have evolved over time. In the initial years, following the Tokyo Conference, there was an intergovernmental consultative body, made up of 30-40 representatives from about 30 countries, international organizations and private entities. (Nakagawa 2016) However, by the time of the adoption of the ICC-Angkor Internal Regulations in December 2008, arrangements had become more formalistic and meetings were held in a more “lecture” type style, with more than 300 people attending.

According to the Internal Regulations of the ICC, ICC-Angkor is responsible for:

- Coordinating support made available by different countries and organizations for the safeguarding and development of the historic site of Angkor.
- Keeping abreast of the scientific projects and development operations that are undertaken on the site and in the Siem Reap-Angkor region.
- Seeing to the coherence of the various projects and defining, where necessary, the technical and financial standards that are required.
- Implementing the procedures intended to promote the understanding, assessment and follow-through of the scientific, conservation and development projects proposed for the Angkor site.
- Coordinating the development of a methodological document on conservation ethics and practices at Angkor (that incorporate conservation, showcasing and development).

I observe that these roles continue to capture the essence of the ICC activities today.

According to the Internal Regulations, ICC membership is made up of the participants of the Intergovernmental Conferences in Tokyo (1993) and Paris (2003). Members include representatives from 38 countries, and 12 international organizations and private entities. *(Those are: Germany, Australia, Belgium, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Spain, the USA, Russia, France, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Laos, Luxemburg, Malaysia, Mexico, Norway, New Zealand, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Poland, the UK, the Republic of Korea, China, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Vietnam, the European Union, ADB, FAO, IMF, ICCROM, ICOM, ICOMOS, the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization and Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO / SPFA),*

UNESCO, UNDP, UNV and WMF. States that were not participants at the Tokyo and Paris International Conferences may ask to attend ICC meetings as observers. Non-governmental organizations, foundations, associations and individuals may, exceptionally, be invited as observers.)

However, in practice, there is a considerably smaller number of countries and organizations that actually attend the regular ICC-Angkor meetings. In fact, in general, the countries and organizations that have representatives that attend these meetings are either ones that have substantial involvement in the conservation work or the work relating to sustainable development, or ones that have a high level of interest in the ICC work (e.g., neighboring countries).

The honorary chairman of the ICC is the King of Cambodia, and this is currently His Majesty Norodom Sihamoni. The King's senior representative attends every ICC meeting while the Minister of Culture and Fine-Arts leads the Royal Government Delegation. In addition, it is customary for Cambodia's Minister of Culture and Fine Arts and the ICC Co-chairs, which are the Ambassadors of France and Japan, to be summoned to the Royal Palace every year to report to the King on the state of preservation of the Angkor monuments and ICC activities.

The incumbent Ambassadors of France and Japan to Cambodia are designated as the Co-chairs of the ICC and they will continue in this joint role for the next ten year at the request of the Royal Government of Cambodia. Ambassadors are to co-chair the plenary session of ICC, and they are represented by senior-level representative of each mission at technical session of ICC.

The ICC has two very important bodies which are the Permanent Secretariat and the ad hoc Expert Group. The Permanent Secretariat is composed of a Scientific Secretary appointed by His Majesty the Late King Norodom Sihanouk, then Honorary President of the ICC, a representative of the APSARA National Authority, appointed by the Royal Government of Cambodia and a representative (NPO National Professional Officer) of UNESCO.

One of the notable characteristics of the ICC mechanism is the appointment of ad-hoc experts who assist the ICC in the study of the scientific and technical aspects of project proposals that are submitted and the technical issues relating to the Angkor site and its monuments. The ad-hoc experts are world-renowned experts in conservation (e.g., archaeology, architecture, engineering, etc.) and sustainable development (e.g., sociology, the environment, economics, tourism, etc.).



Site visit by ad-hoc experts

The scientific secretary proposes an expert and the co-chairs and the representative of Cambodia appoint them. (Currently, there are seven ad-hoc experts: four in conservation and three in sustainable development areas.) The ad-hoc experts operate independently and work without any remunerations, other than travel and accommodation fees provided by UNESCO (which are funded by the co-chair countries and Cambodia).

Perhaps the most important function carried out by the group of ad-hoc experts is the carrying

out of site visits to the temples and other sites under the various conservation or other projects, the reviewing of the work being done onsite and the give of independent technical advice onsite. The information gathered during the site visits is reported to the Technical Sessions that are held in June and the Plenary Sessions that are held in December and is used to help formulate the recommendations that are adopted at those sessions.



Plenary session of the ICC-Angkor

representatives from APSARA and Sambor Prei Kuk National Authority (SPKNA), as well as the ad-hoc experts, give activity reports, propose new projects and debate general interest topics. Any recommendations made by the ad-hoc experts and presented by the Scientific Secretary are adopted at either a Plenary Session in December and or a Technical Session in June. These sessions are always well attended, with as many as 250 to 300 people attending on average. Attendees generally include a large number of Cambodian government officials and conservators, as well as the representatives of the international conservation teams.



Technical session of the ICC-Angkor, the author on the right

the ICC through additional resources and not through the Fund that is entrusted to UNESCO.

There are three annual meetings of the ICC. The main meeting is the Plenary Session that is usually held in December. The Technical Sessions are usually held in both June and December. At the Technical Sessions, representatives from each conservation team and APSARA give presentations on the current status of the conservation and restoration at each site and the work relating to sustainable development is also presented. These presentations are usually following up on actions that were recommended at previous ICC meetings. In the Plenary Sessions, the Scientific Secretary,

Quadripartite meetings are held on an ad-hoc basis and are attended by the representatives of the Ambassadors (Co-Chairs), APSARA, SPKNA and UNESCO. This meeting serves as a steering committee where the agendas of the ICC sessions are discussed and decided on, and where other matters pertaining to the work, institutional matters and the finances of the ICC are discussed.

The activities of the ICC are funded by France and Japan, the co-chair countries, and Cambodia. In the case of Japan, the amount contributed comes through the fund that is entrusted to UNESCO. France funds

Cambodia contributes the same amount as France and Japan and contributes directly to the UNESCO office in Phnom Penh.

B. Existing commentaries

How have the ICC activities been evaluated so far? As explained before, the ICC mechanism is generally highly praised by the ICC participants and is considered to be a model for international cooperation in cultural heritage.

According to Dr. Hang Peou, the current Director General of APSARA, “The ICC strategically assists the APSARA National Authority to gain more from this support by coordinating activities and sharing lessons and findings across all of the partners. This international cooperation has also supported the capacity development (theoretical and practical) of many Cambodian staff.” A well respected group of scholars has also observed that “APSARA’s effectiveness has been significantly strengthened by the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) of Angkor”. (Hang, Stakeholders, Hang et al. 2016)

The following observation by Dr. Nakagawa Takeshi, who has been working on the conservation of the iconic Bayon Temple for the past three decades, described the ‘essence’ of ICC-Angkor when he wrote “in the framework of ICC, it is necessary not only to have political coordination but also to have an expert-level discussion among experts on cultural policy and conservation techniques of each country concerning cultural heritage conservation and utilization. The process of such discussion, progress in the conservation projects by each country teams and the results from them would benefit the Cambodian side.” (Nakagawa 2016)

However, there have been complaints in the past from one prominent historian who was the representative of a cultural organization in Cambodia, expressing his opinion that the ICC is monopolized by the permanent Chair countries and takes a “fundamentally technocratic and elitist approach”. He is particularly concerned by “the lack of participation of local authorities and local community representatives.” However, he also acknowledges some of the achievements of the ICC, such as the policy measures concerning emergency conservation actions. (Peycam 2016) I believe that his claim of a French/Japanese ‘monopoly’ is not valid since ICC-Angkor has generally been functioning well, as I explain below, and there is nothing wrong with such arrangements that have been requested by the Cambodian authorities being applied in instances of specific cultural cooperation, in specific places. Besides, I have observed that invitations are always sent to the local authorities and local community representatives, but decisions on whether to attend are up to the invitees.

C. The significance of the ICC

Every international mechanism or conference has merits and limitations. However, I believe that we should look at them on balance and ask ourselves what would happen if such mechanisms did not exist?

As a result of my observations and the many dialogues I have had with international and Cambodian experts, I can say that I consider the ICC-Angkor mechanism to be generally successful and an exemplary international cooperation mechanism for following reasons.

a) Raising international attention / enhancing international cooperation for an extended period

For over 30 years, ICC-Angkor has functioned as focal point for international cooperation on the conservation and sustainable development of the Angkor sites. Countries such China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the ROK, the USA, and New Zealand all have national

teams working on the ground or have programs in place to support Cambodian efforts to conserve the monuments at the Angkor and Sambor Prei Kuk archeological sites. Due to the high level of demand for conservation work in Angkor, and until the Cambodian authority becomes fully autonomous, international cooperation is, and will continue to be, essential. The ICC meetings provide excellent opportunities for each country’s team to present their work and their plans, and these opportunities provide an important incentive to countries to continue investing in such work.

b) Coordination for cooperation

By providing opportunities to meet bi-annually, ICC-Angkor is also providing opportunities for various international teams to discuss strategies for cooperation. Each international team provides updates on their work at the different sites at the meetings and shares their knowledge and experience in order to avoid duplicating work.

c) Utilizing international expertise / raising national capacity

The Scientific Secretary and the ad-hoc experts working with ICC-Angkor are world-renowned experts in their various fields, which include conservation, archeology, tourism management and environment assessment. Moreover, ICC-Angkor is a center of excellence for the international experts that are working in the international teams. The ICC experts work as



capacity building at Bayon Temple

independent specialists and closely cooperate with APSARA and the Cambodian experts on the ground. Through the opportunity to carry out hands on conservation work and the site visits by the ad-hoc experts, precious knowledge and expertise is passed on to the Cambodian team. In addition, ICC-Angkor developed the Angkor Charter, which includes all the principles and rules that have been put in place for conservators to work to. Therefore, ICC-Angkor has successfully managed to engage international expertise and raise national capacity.

There is no question that the increasing capabilities of the Cambodian experts have made it possible to sustain, and even strengthen, efforts to safeguard the Angkor monuments. It is also worth mentioning that Cambodia has allowed the continued engagement of all of the international partners, and France and Japan in particular, and their stance is supported by UNESCO, who cooperates with Cambodia financially and technically. The commitment of the co-chair countries has been unwavering due to the substantial interests they have in Cambodia. This long-term, co-chair model is emulated in ICC-Preah Vihear, where the co-chair countries are China and India.

There have been similar international efforts to preserve world heritages, for example, in Iraq and Afghanistan through the setting up of ICCs, but they ceased to function without any visible success. One can attribute this to domestic instability in those countries, which has inhibited the ability of international experts to sustain their activities, or to the mechanism of those particular ICCs. Further studies to compare the various ICCs may be beneficial.

Of course, ICC-Angkor is not perfect. There may be a room for improvements, such as further enhancing the inclusivity of the civil societies and communities around the Angkor sites, and encouraging more active participation by the Cambodian experts in the discussions at the ICC meetings, etc. It is, therefore, important that all concerned parties do not become complacent about the functions and institutions of ICC-Angkor in the future.

Lastly, an example of an international cooperation established as an affiliation of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP) is the Asian Cultural Council (ACC) which was launched in January 2019 in Siem Reap. There might be a potential for forging cooperation and partnership between the ICC-Angkor, the ACC and UNESCO in articulating the pathways towards promoting the importance and relevance of the ICC in bringing about more positive contributions in its prominent missions.

Future prospects for the ICC — the next 10 years

As I have explained above, the 4th IGC issued future directions for ICC-Angkor in the latest declaration and there are a number of important points that I wish to emphasize:

- 1) The priority for the next ten years, from 2024 to 2033, will be the enhancement of Cambodian capacity.
- 2) Sustainable development, through initiatives such as community engagement, environmental protection, urbanization management, etc. should be given more attention. The Angkor Charter also needs to be updated to incorporate this aspect.
- 3) There is a need to continue mobilizing international support, but attention should also be paid to the sharing of experience and expertise with those working on cultural heritage sites elsewhere in the world.

I believe that the upcoming ICC meetings will provide opportunities to discuss these issues and actions to tackle them will be materialized.

Conclusion

ICC-Angkor was started in order to draw international attention to the fact that the heritage at the Angkor sites was at risk and to encourage cooperation to address the issue. Subsequently, it has evolved, through regular IGC and bi-annual meetings, into an essential mechanism for international cooperation. As such it has raised international attention, enhanced international cooperation for an extended period, coordinated cooperation among international teams, utilized international expertise and raised national capacity.

The future will not be without challenges though. Work methods need to be constantly updated in order to be more inclusive and focus should be calibrated according to the priority needs, for example, sustainable development, climate change, community-driven heritage management and so forth. Moreover, it is essential for ICC-Angkor to explore ways to communicate expertise and experiences to other teams working in the field of cultural heritage sites elsewhere in the world so that they can utilize the knowledge that has been accumulated.

The opinions expressed are the author's own and do not reflect the views of the Asian Vision Institute.

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