

COUNTRY REPORT

National Library of Cambodia for the CDNLAO Meeting on 7. May .2007

National Library:

The National Library of Cambodia (NLC) was established by Royal Ordinance in 1921. In the centre of Phnom Penh and in French colonial style architecture, the Library opened in 1924 with a collection of 2,879 volumes. The Library, which at that time was known as the Bibliotheque Centrale, was part of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina established by the French colonial government.

Today, NLC is under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and employs 30 staff. It is divided into seven sections:

- Technical
- Reading
- Research and Reference
- Conservation and Bookbinding
- Lending
- Manuscript
- Administration

Collection :

The collection of the NLC is estimated at around 29,592 volumes, including a collection of “Cambodiana” (ie:. material of Cambodian cultural significance).

The National Library maintains the country’s most comprehensive collection of Cambodiana including books, reports, newspapers, serials and non print items, published in Cambodia, about Cambodia, or by Cambodians, mainly in Khmer, English or French. There is a computer catalogue of the post-1970 collection and a printed classified list that includes over 5000 records. The Library compiled a separate Cambodiana Catalogue in late 2006.

The French collection at the NLC dates from the founding of the library in 1924 and contains over 20,000 volumes. It contains laws and administrative documents for Cambodia and Indochina as well as books about art, travel and history of Cambodia. In addition the collection contains many French

novels from the 19th and 20th centuries and recreational reading typical of a French public library. The entire collection has been restored and kept as a special collection, which reflects the anthropological, historical and social thinking of the time. It is valuable to the understanding of both the French community in Cambodia and Cambodian history. A bibliography of this collection is currently in preparation.

The National Library is also the home of an important set of palm leaf manuscripts. Other palm leaf manuscript collections exist at the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient, the Royal Palace, the National Museum and individual Buddhist temples.

Services:

The directory *Repertoire des bibliotheques et centres de documentation* for the Phnom Penh area was published in French and Khmer in December 2003 and is set to be updated soon to cover all of Cambodia. A glossary of library terminology is in preparation, as is a manual/handbook for librarians. The report by Helen Jarvis and Peter Arfanis *Publishing in Cambodia*, first produced in 2002, is now being updated for formal publication. The Cambodian Librarians and Documentalists Association also produces a regular newsletter.

The ISBN Agency at the NLC is working with the Federation of the Development of the Books Sector in Cambodia to produce a Books in Print publication that will be distributed across Cambodia as a service to publishers, booksellers, libraries and researchers.

The NLC launched its lending collection to the public and the use of the collection continues to grow; there are now almost 600 registered borrowers in the system. Further efforts were made to establish ISSN and Legal Deposit and it is expected that further progress will be made on establishing these norms in 2007. The NLC also is working to produce a Reader Services brochure and is preparing to introduce reader services training for clients, now that the WINISIS database has been made available to the public on-site at the NLC. It is expected that internet access will be made available at the library in 2007.

A variety of institutions are involved in reading promotion, including the Department of Books and Reading in the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts. The Department administers the National Library of Cambodia and, among many activities, maintains a mobile book service to rural areas in Kandal Province. The Federation for the Development of the Book Sector in

Cambodia (FDBC) is active in supporting access to books throughout the country, while NGOs such as Room to Read and SIPAR, have focused on help to school libraries, particularly in the villages. The Buddhist Institute Library has also set up branch libraries in the provinces.

Information literacy programs are conducted by UNESCO, UNICEF and some NGOs such as Buddhism for Development. The French Embassy is supporting the Writing Improvement Project VALEASE (Projet du Fonds de Solidarite prioritaire de Valorisation de l'Écrit en Asie du Sud-Est) which includes training in children's literature. The VALEASE project also supported several other activities in 2006 including the *Lire en Fete* in November where an exhibition of new books was held at the National Library of Cambodia.

Digital library services are relatively undeveloped outside the university and special libraries of Phnom Penh, although all eighty-five libraries listed in the *Repertoire des bibliotheques et centres de documentation* indicate some automation of their catalogues and promotion of online information services. The privately-run Centre for Khmer Studies has an online catalogue of its Cambodiana Collections and other libraries such as the government's Senate Library do have websites which at the very least list the collections of the library.

There are currently no formal inter-library loan services, although informal exchange arrangements do exist among some cooperating libraries.

Various special services are provided by the WINISIS working group, the working group of the FDBC and various NGOs.

Projects:

The National Library of Cambodia has requested donations from international agencies to improve the building and its environment. This will hopefully overcome our pest control problem and make the conservation of books and newspapers easy to control.

The Library has an application to UNESCO for funding for conservation materials to alleviate some of the more pressing issues. This same application also seeks funding for a security system to help address the issue of theft from collections. Thus this application seeks to alleviate, to

some extent, both the environmental problems and human impact problems that affect the ability of the Library to carry out its mandate of collecting and preserving Cambodia's documentary heritage.

The Library welcomes any support that Workshop participants can provide in furthering its work in this area.

The Library hosted the Cambodia Librarians and Documentalists Association (CLDA) Cataloguing training course from November 13 to December 1, 2006. 24 people from many libraries and institutions attended this course. The Library also provided training on Dewey classification for 14 people over January 29-31.

The Library, in association with the Federation for the Development of the Book Sector in Cambodia, has recently compiled a National Books in Print volume, covering the period 2005-06. This publication will be freely available in print form and on CD from early April 2007.

Library at the National Level:

The Cambodian Librarians and Document lists Association (CLDA) was founded in 1995 and now has over 100 members.

A Federation for the Development of the Book Sector in Cambodia (FDBC) was established in 2003 and continues to develop its activities. In 2005-2007 the Federation received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation to promote reading and publishing in Cambodia and to produce a Books in Print in collaboration with the National Library, with the first volume published in April 2006.

The National Library of Cambodia (NLC) is continuing to develop its research services and Cambodiana collections as well as its Lending Collection which is the only such public lending service in Cambodia. A visit from a New Zealand library consultant in late 2005 led to the review and redevelopment of the NLC's Development Plan and Collection Development Policy and the recommendations of these reviews are currently being implemented at the Library. Particular areas of focus are the development of the Reader Services, the improvement of the WINISIS catalogue and the integration, conservation and promotion of the Cambodiana Collection.

There are some 13 academic libraries in Cambodia. A few have recently incorporated internet access. In addition, there are 28 libraries in various government institutions, including the National Assembly, the Senate, the

Buddhist Institute and various ministries. In the provinces, there are now 22 Community Information Centers with Internet access. In addition, there are over 1000 school libraries.

There are over 50 medium or small-sized specialist or private libraries and at least 23 non-government organisations that have their own libraries, as do at least 5 UN agencies.

Probably the busiest library in Cambodia is the Hun Sen Library at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, which receives on average 600 visitors per day. The National Library receives 50 to 75 visitors per day. Smaller libraries throughout Cambodia tend to receive 10 to 15 visitors per day.

Library buildings in Cambodia are generally of an acceptable standard. Many buildings are quite old and do not have the appropriate infrastructure for the establishment of network connections and so forth. However some of the major libraries such as the National Library are seeking funding for capital works and library building expansion at this time and the government's Senate Library has recently moved to new premises.

Infrastructure:

There are currently no dedicated library networks in the country although the Royal University of Phnom Penh is currently establishing a library network for its campuses. All major libraries in Phnom Penh are currently exploring the transition to Unicode for Khmer script, and while some progress has been made, no single solution has yet been adopted.

Basic Internet connectivity is provided for Library staff to assist in their work, but is not available for public use, mainly due to insufficient bandwidth and lack of public computers.

Preservation:

The safeguarding of the National written heritage is one of the main challenges of the National Library of Cambodia. In 1995 a French government assisted project established a special section for the French Colonial collection acquired before Cambodian independence in 1954. The old west wing of the Library was renovated to house a collection of some 25,000 volumes of largely 19th century French literature and historical guides on Cambodia. A separate database of this material is already developed.

The section also includes a valuable collection of colonial prints. Moreover, the French government assisted in the establishment of a preservation and

bookbinding section. The equipment provided is essential to improving the binding and conservation methods used and fully supporting the training aid that had been given by the French Conservator Mr Marc Vergne in the National library in 1995. The basic restoration facilities were donated by the French government.

With the help of the French government, a few selected conservators from the National library of Cambodia were sent for training in France, Malaysia and Thailand. The Library's conservation program covers activities such as paper repairing, rebinding, encapsulation, and boxing.

Concern has been expressed for the quality of the material used in repair, especially for old and rare collections. The best method of paper repair is using Japanese tissue. The method is very expensive and time consuming. Therefore, it is used only for repairing very important materials.

The conservation program's main job is to repair rare books and preserve important books, newspaper and maps. The other important part of the national cultural heritage is palm leaf manuscripts with mainly religious texts which were originally held in the library. They are also rare materials and they have traditionally been stored in decorated boxes.

A concern of the National Library of Cambodia is that the newspaper collection is deteriorating rapidly and has yet to be fully transferred onto microfilm to protect and preserve the quality of the newspapers. Some newspapers date back to the 1950's and are an extremely important part of Cambodia's history.

The biggest concern is that at present, the National Library of Cambodia is not able to fully play the role of a national library in terms of safeguarding the nation's written heritage. It does not receive any budget from the government except salaries. The equipment of the NLC is not sufficient and is inadequate to achieve anything substantial in preservation terms.

Digitization:

Digitalization is a new tool in the preservation and conservation of rare and valuable old books. The National Library of Cambodia has received a Minolta Digitization Machine from the National Library Board of Singapore in early 2004 with the ASEAN (COCI) project of scanning of old rare books and we have converted early French books about Cambodia into electronic versions. Most of the titles are old and fragile, dating back to the colonial period. Some books are in a state of decay and need to be scanned to preserve

them. The books are scanned and the electronic versions are stored in CD-ROMs.

Disaster Planning:

There is no current disaster plan for the library and its documentary heritage. National Library and the National Archives staff have received training in conservation and preservation but unfortunately a disaster plan is heavily reliant on funding from the ministries and international agencies.

Education and training:

Cambodia has just four fully trained professional librarians. There are no library training schools in Cambodia. Some on –the job training is provided trained librarians, including international volunteers from Australia and New Zealand. The only training regularly available is a three month basic introductory course run by the Asia Foundation and most of the staff has already completed this. A few staff has also done short attachments of a few weeks or months in libraries overseas in France, Malaysia and Thailand.

There are four major training initiatives: the National library WINISIS group, an annual basic training course, the Royal University of Phnom Penh training program, and a training program funded by the France Cultural Centre in Phnom Penh.

Copyright and library act:

Cambodia passed copyright legislation, the *Law on Copyright and Related Rights, NS/RKM/0303/008*, in 2003. However, there are not yet any copyright/intellectual property rights watchdog organisations or associations.

Libraries in Cambodia continue to develop and an increasing number of Cambodians, especially younger members of the population, are visiting libraries to access reading and research materials. Although libraries in Cambodia are still under-funded they are certainly not under-utilised and their services are appreciated by users; this bodes very well for the country's development for the expansion and enhancement of libraries in Cambodia.