

The Shoin Cambodia Times

Spring 2018

A world apart

*Kobe Shoin Student Ambassador
Kao Ogino was shocked
and amazed on her visit to
Cambodia last summer*

When I arrived in Cambodia, I was really surprised because the scenery is so different from Japan – the people, buildings, roads and so on. I went to Tonle Sap which is one of my favorite places. There are only two seasons in Cambodia and it was the rainy season at that time. So I could see many houses on the water and people living in the houses. I was impressed when I entered the jungle by boat. It was very silent and beautiful.

Angkor Wat is a very famous place in Cambodia. We know that religion is very important for the people in Cambodia. I felt that not only here in Angkor Wat but also in many other places. There are many rules of behaviour and dress when we enter temples like this which surprised me.

I stayed for two days in Phnom Penh with the family of Muycheng, the winner of last year's speech contest. It was my first time to stay in a foreigner's house so I was nervous at first. However, they are a very friendly and kind family so I enjoyed staying with them. This was a special experience for me as I realized not so many people learn about the culture of Cambodia through home stay.

Cambodia has a sad history because of Pol Pot. I learned about the history by visiting various sites. First, I went to a land mine museum in Siem Reap. This museum was built by Akira who has been active in reducing land mines in Cambodia. A Japanese man on the staff taught us many things. I was proud to see a Japanese man who works very hard in Cambodia for peace.

I also went to S21 and the Killing Fields, places in Phnom Penh actually used for execution under the Pol Pot regime. I was so shocked when I learned about the terrible history of Cambodia. Pol Pot killed a huge number of people just because of his ideas and that is why the population of old people is very low in Cambodia

today. Everyone needs to know this history in order not to allow such terrible events to happen again.

I visited the houses of students who are able to study through scholarships. Each family suffers severe problems which is the reason they receive scholarships. Although I was shocked when I heard of their problems, the children are enjoying studying and look very powerful. I admired their smiles.

I joined the Kobe Shoin Cambodia Speech Contest as a judge. The participants are a similar age to us but I was *really* shocked because their English ability is so high! Moreover, they have their own ideas and I feel that they had prepared very hard for this contest. The winner this year was Chhengheang Lim. She is very smart and friendly. I was happy to see her again when she came to Japan last year.

Cambodia has problems in education. Although 90% of children can enter elementary school, only about 50% can graduate. Moreover, only about 35% of children can enter high school, even though education is compulsory. The percentage of people who can go to university is even lower. There are many reasons but I think Cambodian people need to understand how important education is and we need to help them with money.

Through this trip, I learned many things and I am more interested in Cambodia than before. I want to visit Cambodia again to help the people ●

Warm welcome

*Heang Lim experienced Japan's
famous omotenashi last December*

‘Are you cold?’ or ‘is this warm enough?’ are the first sentences I heard whenever I moved from one host family to another. For someone from a tropical country where it is



Kao Ogino found plenty of smiles among the poverty

always hot and humid, winter in Japan was an entirely alien concept. Despite the goosebumps and the chattering of my teeth, how could I possibly *not* feel warm when I heard such questions?

Every family showed me warmth, compassion, and most importantly, love. We are so different, but ultimately, very similar which actually surprised me the most.

Because my perception of the Japanese was that their English ability is limited, I thought I might have a difficult time communicating. I was shown quite the opposite. For instance, when playing a game in Japanese at Yuri's house, I could not understand anything but Yuri translated everything into English for me. Rino, another host sister, likes a Canadian singer and played English songs in the car. I did not expect that at all. We even went to Karaoke together to sing English songs!

It was not only the people who made my experience like a dream, but technology as well. I stayed on Port Island where the train is automatic. There is no driver! When I took the front seat of the train, I felt as though I was the driver. In addition, everywhere I went, a vending machine could be found. In Cambodia, we have a few machines at school but there are often problems with paying and they offer a limited variety of goods. In Japan, you can get everything from a machine!

Most surprising of all was that the toilets have seven functions! To me, the toilet was a wonder. Japanese even queue for public toilets! In no way would you ever see Cambodians lining up to use a rest room.



Winners reunited: Kao Ogino and Heang Lim at Shoin in December

Moreover, the Japanese made me feel extremely safe. I didn't need to fear pickpockets or incidents at night. The city never sleeps. It was my first time to go out until late at night without adult supervision and it felt like I was in the right places.

For all this, I can never thank Shoin enough. It was an honor to be selected for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and an honor to have everyone, not just my host families, but all the people from Shoin showing me aspects of Japan I had never imagined ●

Cultural contrasts

*Lisa Tabuchi and Mayu Takita
look at life in Cambodia to discover
the differences with Japan*

Every country has a unique culture, with some being deeply tied to climate or religion. To truly get to know a person, understanding her culture is important.

School life for university students in Cambodia consists of going to classes five or sometimes six days a week. There are many national holidays that tend to be connected with religion in Cambodia. As a result, there are also a lot of make-up classes. Heang's university usually starts at 7:30 in the morning every day. Compared to Shoin, it seems extremely early, but it's actually the latest time to start in Cambodia. Although the school starts

early, it finishes at 11 a.m. Afterwards, students normally go home or to a café to spend time with their friends but many are taking a second degree so they begin another course of studies in the afternoon.

Cambodian students also spend some of their free time in a similar way to Japanese students. Both regularly use their phones and check SNS. In Japan, Instagram is the biggest App, but Facebook is the largest in Cambodia. Even the prime minister of Cambodia has a Facebook account.

Heang's daily routine is to take her iPad on which to read books. In Shoin, many students do not have an iPad so they have books to read.

It is normal for a Cambodian family to live with their grandparents, the same as in Japan. In Japan, the eldest son takes care of the parents. However, in Cambodia, it is the eldest daughter who usually takes care of her parents. This is very surprising for Japanese.

Staple food in Cambodia is rice, the same as in Japan. Cambodian rice is sweeter and longer grain than Japan. People produce rice in Cambodia and export it. The usual drinks are water and beer. The local beer is called 'Angkor Beer' and originated from Angkor Wat. Coffee is popular for students because it keeps them awake.

The transportation system is very different from Japan. The main transportation in Cambodia is usually a car or motorbike. According to Heang, citizens usually do not walk since many motorbikes are ridden on the sidewalk, and it is very hot all year round.

We found some similarities and differences between Cambodia and Japan. Cambodian quality of life has been improving little by little. Many Japanese visit Cambodia: if you have an opportunity to go, please don't just see the sights but try also to experience the local atmosphere ●

Social systems

*Chiari Uchida and Kaho Fujikawa
investigate traditions in the
Khmer home*

Japan has an aging society so the population pyramid is an inverted triangle with few young people and many aged people. Meanwhile, it's a triangle in Cambodia. There are lots of children and few elderly people, so most young women have children.

According to Chhengheang Lim ('Heang'), Cambodia has quite a lot of *pregnateens* – teenage girls who get

pregnant. "Getting married young is common. Some families are proud if their daughter marries young, even at 16 years old."

Even though the situation in Japan used to be similar, today it is common sense for young women to get a job, so sexist attitudes are improving. However, according to the Gender Gap Index by WEF (World Economic Forum) in 2016, Japan was ranked 111th out of 144 countries and Cambodia was ranked 112th. There is almost no difference between these two countries, but there is a difference in daily life.

Heang told us, "When I was a child, I was exhausted because my mom forced me to do dishes, wash clothes, clean the room or do other housework just because I'm a girl. On the other hand, my brothers did nothing."

Men are not supposed to do housework since it's considered a woman's job. It's more difficult for women to get jobs outside the home. Women have to do housework while men are working outside. This situation is still usual in Cambodia.

If she can change anything in Cambodia, Heang wants to change people's mindset. She says she lives with such rigid hierarchical relationships. "According to age or maturity level, of course juniors have to respect seniors, but seniors are not right all the time. I don't understand why we must follow them even if they are wrong."

In Japan, the number of young people who don't respect elderly people is increasing. On the other hand there are a lot of young people who have respect for the elderly in Cambodia.

Cultural situations between developing and developed countries are very different, but developing countries will become more comfortable places for women to live in the future. Heang gave us an opportunity to think about how Cambodia will change ●

Gender gap

*Ayaka Matsumoto and
Akari Ishida examine the position
of women in Cambodia*

The population of Cambodia is 15.76 million. There are more girls than boys today. According to Heang, most women do housework or take care of their children and parents. On the other hand, men have a lot of jobs except housework. Agriculture and fishing account for 70% of male jobs.

There is no difference in marriage age between men and women in

Cambodia. Both can marry over the age of 16. It is very common to marry young in Cambodia – the average age is about 20 years. In Japan, the average age is much later – about 30. In Cambodia, marriage at 30 is considered too late.

Cambodian parents decide their children's marriage partners by soothsaying, so the children often do not decide themselves. It is very different from Japanese culture.

In Cambodia, there are a lot more boys than girls in school although the population consists of more girls. Education for boys tends to be given priority because gender-related roles are fixed. These include the ideas that 'men earn an income' and 'women protect the family'. In Japan, the rate of elementary school and junior high school attendance is 100%. However, in Cambodia the rate of school attendance of girls is much lower than that of boys.

The head of the family is normally the father, but in some families the mother has power over the family, the same as in Japan. Men always work for their family. In Cambodia, women play an important role in restoration and development. But women have low social and economic status compared with men, so women have trouble earning a living ●

Family life

Yu Kamatani and Misaki Yurugi
*learn about roles and relationships
in Khmer society*

The form of the Cambodian family has some differences from that of the Japanese family. The usual Japanese family is nuclear, or may sometimes include grandparents. However, in Cambodia it is common for more than six members to live together. Furthermore, a Cambodian family may have as many as sixteen members, or even more, so homes sometimes have two kitchens.

However, there are some similarities with Japan. In Japan, most fathers do not do housework; this is becoming a social problem these days with working mothers. Cambodia has the same situation. The father is the most important person in a family, so women usually quit their jobs and do all housework. After getting married, it is difficult for women to find a new job.

Heang, however, says her family is different: her mother is stronger than her father.

There are some variations in family life. Educated Cambodians usually start working from the age of 22 or 23 when they graduate from university, but children in poor families start working from the age of 12 or 13 when they finish elementary school. They can't go to school, even if they want to. This is one of the reasons they can't get a job or work in a good place.

Nowadays, it is becoming easier for Cambodian women to get a job, but the situation and conditions still need improving. Most Cambodian people have part-time jobs, but some people work in private companies with good salary and conditions and can take a paid holiday. However part-time jobs do not offer a good salary and workers cannot take a paid holiday. Moreover, work places often are not safe.

Most Cambodians value the time they spend with their family more than their job. If they have an important family event, they take a holiday.

Cambodian married couples don't often divorce because divorced women have a very bad image. Most Cambodian women's marriages are arranged by their parents, but some women can choose their partners themselves, as Heang wants to.

Some points of Cambodian life are better than Japan and some points are worse. But we learned there are big differences between rich and poor ●

A floating house is a house built above the water. These houses are very colorful and attractive. Transportation to them is only by boat. The houses are made from about 150 bamboo poles and are raised above the lake in the inundated forest so that they do not flood during the rainy season. At this time the Mekong causes the Tonle Sap River to change direction and flow back into the Lake which expands to six times its size in the dry season. The flooded forest becomes a great fishing ground with small fish living among the trees.

The houses don't have a washroom. Many families keep a dog, but the dogs can only stay in the house. When the water in Tonle Sap lakes recedes in the dry season, families have to move. The elementary school also moves.

In the villages on Tonle Sap Lake we can see police boxes and gas stations from the boat. Children take a boat to school, but teacher shortage is a problem. There is also a karaoke bar and a water wedding ceremony place. Many people live in these villages, so everything that is needed for daily life can be found.

Many of the inhabitants are fishermen. The fish they catch and sell, along with rice, is the staple food.

There are several floating supermarkets selling fruit, vegetables, clothing, mobile phones, DVD players,



Living on the water

***Arisa Takeshima and
Karen Matsuura*** *discover a floating
community on Tonle Sap*

NO one knows when the first Vietnamese settled on Lake Tonle Sap but there are many still living there today because they can't live elsewhere, the poor of Cambodia. They live in floating houses on the water.

cosmetics, wood and other items. Sometimes they sell study notes or writing materials to foreigners because they want money. The sellers say, "These products will help children. Please buy them." Tourists tend to buy the goods.

Life jackets for children are likely to sell well to locals. Children must first learn to swim in order to live on the water. They jump into the lake

wearing a life jacket and gradually learn to swim. Children practice swimming from the age of four. They can't go to elementary school if they can't swim.

From the time they are born, children live above the water so it is normal for them. From our point of view, we can't imagine living in such conditions. But this is the reality of floating houses in Cambodia ●

Minority report

Yuki Kamiya and Misato Moriya introduce Cambodia's poor ethnic relations in Ratanakiri

Ratanakiri Province in northeast Cambodia is home to a great number of minority groups who have lived in these lands for thousands of years. It borders the province of Mondulakiri. Its infrastructure is poor, and the local government is weak.

Ethnic minorities in Cambodia are taken advantage of by other people. Outsiders take their land and force them deeper into the forest. Many have serious health problems, suffering from malnutrition and diseases like malaria and tuberculosis. They sometimes eat purple tubers normally fed to pigs because they can't grow rice. Because they sometimes live so far from water sources, they don't use valuable water for washing.

These people speak a dialect of the Khmer language so they are isolated. They don't have jobs. They can't make money so they can't get an education.

Health indicators in Ratanakiri are extremely poor: men's life expectancy is only 39 years, and women's is 43 years. Malaria, tuberculosis, intestinal parasites, cholera, diarrhoea, and vaccine-preventable diseases are endemic. Ratanakiri has very high rates of maternal and child mortality; in Ratanakiri and neighboring Mondulakiri (whose figures were combined in the most recent survey), over 10% of children die before the age of five.

Education levels are also low, with just under half of the population illiterate. Ratanakiri also has the country's highest rates of severe malnutrition. The causes of Ratanakiri residents' poor health include poverty, remoteness of the villages, poor quality medical services, and language and cultural barriers that prevent them from obtaining medical care.

Ratanakiri was isolated from Western influences until the 20th century. Major cultural shifts have

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occurred in recent years. Clothing and diet are becoming more standard, and traditional music is being displaced by Khmer music. In many villages there is a growing divide between the young and the old. Young people have begun to refuse to abide by traditional rules and have stopped believing in spirits.

Ethnic problems are increasing in this region. At first we have to be aware of them. If we don't know anything, we can't help to change the situation ●

Political problem

Karen Kinoshita says Cambodia has yet to find true democracy

The present prime minister of Cambodia is Hun Sen who took office in 1985. He has been prime minister for more than 30 years.

There are five political parties in Cambodia though in the past there were seven or eight. The ruling party is the Cambodian People's Party. The Diet Building is in the capital, Phnom Penh.

General elections are held every five years and decided by simple majority. Cambodians can vote from the age of 18.

According to a student of politics, "Most students are not interested in the election because they are not interested in politics, except those who study the subject. It is not easy to talk about politics in public places in Cambodia because it is dangerous."

"This is a big difference between Japan and Cambodia. Japanese people can say anything about the Government without fear."

Many Cambodians are afraid of being heard by spies because Hun Sen

is a powerful figure. He and his party are able to control the election which is the reason he could remain prime minister for so long.

Those who try to change the system are arrested or even murdered.

Cambodia is really under a dictatorship. This is the biggest problem in the country today ●

Speaking in tongues

Yumemi Ayabe, Mayuko Matsumoto and Sachiko Kakumoto report on language learning in Phnom Penh

More Cambodians today are learning foreign languages but they are mainly in the city. In the countryside fewer people do. Just as in Japan, the most popular languages are English and Chinese. English is the most common but the number studying Chinese is increasing.

In Japan, there are many foreign teachers but in Cambodia there are no foreign teachers in junior high school or high school.

Cambodian students start to learn a foreign language at junior high school. They can take two sessions a week. If they want a good foreign language education, they need a lot of money. Heang speaks English fluently. However, to reach this English level, her parents spent thousands of dollars on her education. She went to a private school because English teaching at public high school is not good.

She also went to a language school. English is thought to be important so today many children start to learn at a language school when they are five or six years old.

Even if they are poor, many Cambodians think it's important to learn foreign languages. Heang explained that if they study English and Chinese they can get better jobs. French is not a commonly used language in Cambodia anymore but some students need to learn it to become doctors.

This interest in language is evidence that Cambodia is becoming a more international country. Also in Japan, English is the most important foreign language and children are likely to start to learn it early.

Cambodia still has many education problems, for example the many poor people who cannot get sufficient education. However, this interest in education and language is a hopeful sign that the problems will improve and the lives of Cambodians, especially women, will become better ●