

reGenerating Champa: Transitioning Identity from Past to Future

BY JULIE THI UNDERHILL



Rohany Karya (legal intern at the Khmer Rouge War Crimes Tribunal), Khaleelah PoRome (representing the Cham at the UN and in Washington, D.C.), and Yasmeen Cham Thanh (founder and president, Moonlight Humanity Foundation). Muhamedarifeine Manhsour (University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity), Ariya Chau (University of California-Davis medical student), Asiroh Cham (filmmaker and UCLA academic adviser), and Rohimah Moly (California Department of Business Oversight) comprised the final panel, which highlighted career/education opportunities.

In his keynote speech, Dharma spoke on *The Kingdom of Champa: Geography, Population, History*, Pierre-Bernard Font's book (trans. Jay Scarborough; prefaced by Dharma). He explains: "G. Maspero is the first author who published in 1928 a

AFTER SURVIVING WAR AND genocide, Cham refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia began arriving in the U.S. during the late 1970s. However, they rarely meet each other at Cham conferences, and the younger English-speaking generations have never taken center stage.

On May 24, a conference for Cham American youth from the 1.5 and 2nd generations brought together Cham scholars, activists, community members, and artists to the University of California-Davis. I and my fellow co-directors Azizah Ahmad, Asma Men, and Amina Sen-Matthews, organized panelists and performers from both home countries and from the Muslim and Hindu communities. In the first panel, Po Dharma, associate professor at the Paris-based French Research School of the Far East, presented an overview of the vanished kingdom of Champa's history; Marimas Hosan Mottiller analyzed Cham communities in the U.S.; and Farina So contextualized Muslim Cambodian Cham repression under the Khmer Rouge.

The second panel featured Cham American activists involved in struggles

for social justice, including the author (representing the Cham at the UN),

A New CMMC Partner: The Zakat Foundation of America

THE ZAKAT FOUNDATION OF AMERICA (ZFA) PARTNERED WITH THE CAMBODIAN Muslim Media Center (CMMC) to distribute Ramadan food packages to 150 Cham Muslim fishing and farming families in Kampong Chhnang and Pursat provinces.

Math Yousos, 50, chief of Chrolong Kaisna village, thanked the donors, adding, "This is the first big food packages that the villagers in my village have received in Ramadan." Mai Sit from Tbeng Bongkeap village reported that "this year there was not enough rain for farming. Today we received a sack of rice and many other food items. May Allah bless you all."

During the distribution ceremonies, CMMC president Sles Nazy expressed thanks to the donors, especially the ZFA, which he hoped will continue to work with the center.

Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, and Turkish NGOs have been working in Cambodia for years. He hopes that more Muslim American NGOs will follow the ZFA's example.

THE CMMC'S ACTIVITIES

Founded by a group young Cham Muslim intellectuals to uplift the community through multimedia programs, this



book on the history of Champa. But this book deals only with the ancient history of Champa from [its] origin to the 15th century. To complement these shortcomings, Prof. P-B. Lafont ... developed the history of this country.” He continues: “It is a scientific work which gives an overall view of the Kingdom of Champa, not only about its history and its geography, but also its origins, its languages, its demographics, its Indianisation, its social organization, beliefs, culture, political organization, its economy, and its arts.”

The genocidal repression of the Muslim Cham during the Khmer Rouge era was also highlighted in the films by Anida Yoeu Ali, myself, Cham, and Amath, as well as Hati’s poetic performance.

The program featured traditional dances by several troupes – Ladies of Champa (San Jose/Los Angeles), Champamerica Generation/Angels, and Khmer dancers Ryan Boun with Erica Seu. The session closed with a contemporary forms showcase, including performers Ali, Hati, and Kidflomatic, software engineer Rofek Sos, and filmmakers Cham, Inra Jaya, Amath, and myself. These films and performances helped fill a void in contemporary Cham cultural production by imagining innovative ways to investigate history and to express their identities and concerns.



IFTAR IN CAMBODIA

SOME 4,000 MUSLIMS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES GREETED PRIME MINISTER Hun Sen, who hosted them on June 26 for iftar in Phnom Penh, reported Mon Kriya, personal assistant to Othsmann Hassan. Behind him are Chairman of the Highest Council for Islamic Religious Affairs in Cambodia Sos Komry (with turban, right of Hun Sen) and Othsmann Hassan (with glasses, left of Sos Komry). Hassan (president, Muslims Development Foundation) works closely with the prime minister. On July 8, Hun Sen attended another iftar at Alserkal Mosque. ■

nationally recognized NGO seeks to disseminate both Islamic and secular knowledge so that the youth can secure jobs and to provide the Buddhist mainstream with accurate information about Muslims and Islam.

The CMMC has been cooperating with a government-supported Radio Sapcham (Voice of the Cham), which produces the Cham-language Muslim Community News TV Online, develops social media products, and publicizes and participates in humanitarian projects. Currently, the center is seeking funds and development partners to implement another important and long-awaited online TV da’wah program.

The center is now managed by a group of young Muslim intellectuals and chaired by Nazy, who has also served as the secretary general of the Cambodian Muslim Community Development (CMCD) since 2003 as well as Radio Sapcham’s broadcasting director since its inception. In this capacity, he oversees all program content, including broadcast production, story writing, and news presentation.

This young Cham dynamo has a certificate of journalism from the Independent Journalism Foundation (2005), broadcast journalism training, and an M.A. in development. He is also a member of the board directors of the Islamic Council for Development (ICD) and vice chairman of Islamic Council for Development of Cambodia (ICDD).

For more information, visit www.camm-media.org or contact cammcenter@gmail.com.

(from Sem Raty, CMMC reporter)



By emphasizing *reGeneration*, the conference centered the ideas and artworks of the “next generations” of Cham in order to revitalize what is remembered about Champa while simultaneously looking to the future’s exciting possibilities. This event was sponsored by Southeast Asians Furthering Education, the Asian American Studies and Native American Studies departments at UC Davis, the International Office of Champa, and the Council for the Social-Cultural Development of Champa.

After more than a century of non-Cham scholars primarily speaking on their behalf, assembling over forty-five Cham panelists, artists, and performers was a groundbreaking achievement. Many attendees agreed that it was an unforgettable program. It was a step to ensure their cultural survival by fostering understanding between the various Cham communities, despite the differences. ■

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