

Good Design: Mekong Design Selection
~Travel to Cambodia~

Ao design

Ms. Akiko Oshima

●Day 1- February 22: Departure to Cambodia

The Cambodian team all met at the departure gate of the Narita International Airport. The flight was on time with a layover to Bangkok, Thailand before landing in the final destination to Phnom Penh. Mr. Savin, the main coordinator of the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) welcomed us on arrival and escorted us to the hotel. The day of travel ended after checking in the hotel and discussing the meet up time for the following day.

●Day 2-February 23: Preliminary Meeting and Presentation

AM

Preliminary meeting at the hotel included the MOC staff, interpreters and the Cambodia team members (AJC staff, JDP staffs, and fellow Japanese designers). We all introduced ourselves and were briefed on the project. During lunch we were also led to the newly opened AEON mall. I was surprised by price of clothing; however the food court was reasonably priced and had a varied menu.

PM

After greeting with and introducing myself to Ms. Norm Bunnak, the owner of Villageworks Songkhem Co., Ltd. and the staff members, I presented my past works and project proposal title “Brand of custom-made uniform & corporate apparel made of organic cotton which accommodates small lot orders,” using my computer. In the end, Ms. Bunnak agreed to go through with the project. Afterward, she showed me around the shop’s showroom and explained the present product lineup.

In the evening, my fellow Cambodia team members gathered at a restaurant to meet with Mr. Kurata, the president of KURATA PEPPER. We were fortunate to get insights and listen to Mr. Kurata’s experience of working vigorously in Cambodia for almost 20 years to successfully build his company. The question, “Where would one go to see Cambodian design?” was raised. Mr. Kurata answered “Firstly to Angkor Wat, of course.” We were able to go on a research trip to Angkor Wat on the fourth day of our trip.

●Day 3-February 24: Villageworks Songkhem Co., Ltd. Research / Welcome Lunch / City Research

AM

The supervisor of Villageworks Songkhem greeted us and gave a little tour of the products

series. I conducted a simple interview:

About the materials- Natural cotton. It is Cambodian organic cotton, however certification system is still not available in Cambodia as of yet.

About the logo- It is in a shape of both of a hand and eye. The hand represents that all items were handcrafted, and the eye means that their sight in the future is bright and hopeful.

About the workshop- It is a 3 hour drive by car from Phnom Penh to the rural village of Kom Pon Ton where the dyed cotton is woven and made into products. The dyes used are all natural.

By lunch time, I was invited to eat lunch with the owner and staff members. They told me that “this is a typical Cambodian lunch.” It consisted of delicious fried fish, vegetable and meat pan fried dish, soup with goya and meat, and pickled vegetables. They were all so very welcoming that it deeply moved me.

PM

I was able to visit the local city market for research. The main goods and products being sold there were traditional crafts and souvenirs. There is a lot of potential for many of the shops at the market. There were many restaurants and cafes nearby which I believe can boost tourism in the area even more.

●Day 4-February 25: One Day Trip to Siem Reap / To the Source of Cambodian Design

AM/ PM

Even though there was only limited time, the organizers arranged for a trip to see Angkor Thom, Bayon, the Terrace of the Leper King, Ta Prohm, and lastly Angkor Wat. I was fascinated by the Khmer culture and to see firsthand the origin of Cambodian design. It was a very memorable experience. I was able to take many photos for future promotional purposes. I believe that my experience in Cambodia will have direct, indirect and sensible influence on my creativity in the future.

During the commute, my fellow designers and I were able to communicate on our progress and exchange advice and information on how we can contribute to further progress in this project.

●Day 5-February 26: Revising Proposal Title / The Last Confirmation of Proposal Contents

The fifth day was important because I was aiming to conclude a contract by the last day. Therefore, we reconfirmed the project details and ended up agreeing to change the proposal theme. The new theme is “Home Wear Brand Made of Natural Cotton”.

The business model aspect of “small lot orders” of the original proposal will be the aim for the future phase. The focus will be on 1. the creation of new items and 2. making it in a brand in the early stages of this project. Since the new theme has a clearer vision of what the immediate goals are, both parties were able to agree on the common goals and steps that we need to take.

For the details of the future brand items, I was able to gather important information of the following things:

- Cost price
- Production site of the cotton
- Dye materials
- Production time
- Weaving technique
- Brand tag production

After our meeting, I was able to visit other awarded companies such as Cambodian Sedge Mats Association, Watthan Artisans Cambodia, SentoSaSilk and Artisans d'Angkor. It is no wonder that they were all awarded the Mekong Design Selection, as they all have very high-quality made products. I enjoyed shopping at their stores as well. I was also able to find new appreciation for handcrafts made by the disabled since many of these companies employ the disabled.

In the evening, the MOC of Cambodia invited us to a lively dinner. The dinner gave me the opportunity to meet with other staff members and interpreters and it was very enjoyable. However, deep inside I was still nervous about the last day and if I was able to conclude a contract or not.

•Day 6-February 27: The Last Day/ Meeting for Contract and Quote / Debriefing with MOC / Return

AM

While Ms. Suzuki of JDP and Ms. Kawaguchi both were present, I was able to explain the drafted estimate and contract. The outline for the project is the following:

June- Second visit to Cambodia

October- The Good Design Exhibition 2015

February- The Tokyo International Gift Show

I felt that the last meeting left a positive outlook on this collaboration project. We were also able to mutually confirm that both parties want to collaborate. However, there was a gap of the value of assets and investments in this project.

In the afternoon, we went back to Mr. Kurata's shop to inform him of our trip to Siem Reap. I hope that Mr. Kurata can continue giving us advice in the future while this project is ongoing.

After we bid farewell to Mr. Kurata, we all gathered for a last meeting to inform MOC of our activities during the trip. I was pleased to be able to have good relations with the owner of Villageworks.

After the debriefing, we all returned to our hotel rooms to pack for our evening flight back to Japan.

Although I was nervous at first about going to Cambodia for the first time and begin my endeavor into my first international project, I was able to have a successful first meeting with the help and support of all organizations involved and from my fellow designers. I look forward to the progress of this collaboration project.

For the original report in Japanese with pictures, please view this link:

http://www.asean.or.jp/ja/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Cambodia-Report_Ao-Design_Ms.-Oshima.compressed.pdf