

References

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Angkor Wat: A Transcultural History of Heritage, Volume 1 Angkor in France. From Plaster Casts to Exhibition Pavilions
Angkor Wat: A Transcultural History of Heritage, Volume 2 Angkor in Cambodia. From Jungle Find to Global Icon

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The Angkor ruins in Cambodia were inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1992, and today they have become a national icon of Cambodia as well as a symbolic image of world cultural heritage. As is well known, the ruins of Angkor were “rediscovered” by Westerners in the mid-nineteenth century. This was followed by archaeological research conducted by the French, the results of which were disseminated throughout the world. During the colonial period, the ruins of Angkor were used to tout the success of France's colonial endeavor. Michael Falser's two-volume study describes “the 150-year transcultural heritage trajectory” of the Angkor monuments.

Four years after its publication, the work has already received numerous reviews and is highly appreciated. Readers will be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the volumes, which contain 1,000 pages of text, more than 1,200 illustrations, and a lavish 80-page appendix of photographs and illustrations. This is an unprecedented “reception history” of the Angkor Remains rich with literary documents and visual materials. It is also a result of the dramatic increase in digital material databases since the 2010s.

Falser's achievement is more than just a collection of documents, however. The greatest feature of the work is its constructive structure and underlying concept. The author divides the modern history of the Angkor monuments into the two “topos” of Europe and Cambodia, and discusses reception of the monuments in each cultural and political context. Volume I describes the process by which the colonized Angkor monuments were incorporated into the complex framework of the colonizers' cultural heritage in Europe, while Volume II reveals the process by which they became the new national cultural heritage of post-colonial Cambodia. The author then interprets the two histories as a single contiguous and transcultural one. Although reception in France and in Cambodia have been studied separately, this work is the first attempt to synthesize the receptions as one continuous history, rather than opposing, or distinct, phenomena. In this respect,

it can be highly evaluated as an original study.

This transcultural historiography is supported not only by a vast body of material, but also the application of contemporary cultural research theory. It employs postcolonial theories such as the concept of Foucault's "heterotopia" (p. 46), comparative analysis of "transfer" and "translation," analysis of "the contact zone as a space of intercolonial encounter," and so on. The work can thus also be described as a theoretical postcolonial study of the representations of the Angkor Remains.

The first volume tells the history of the reception of the Angkor monuments in Europe and the United States from the 1850s to about 1950. From the writings of Henri Mouhot, who "rediscovered" the site, and the pre-modern nineteenth century museography in which replicas of the site and original statues are intermingled, to the colonial representations at the 1937 International Exposition in Paris, this volume is an elaborate analysis of historical events without omission. The examples taken up are exhaustive: there is A. Lenoir's French Monuments Museum, the Industrial and Ethnographic Pavilions at the Expositions Universelles, a replica and cast made as the "ideal" reconstruction by Louis Delaporte, the Comparative Sculpture Museum of Viollet-le-Duc, Pavilions at the 1922 Colonial Exposition in Marseilles, and the representation of "the most beautiful aesthetic conquest of colonialism" at the 1931 International Colonial Exposition in Paris, to name only some. The volume also notably surveys and deeply analyzes even smaller national expositions in France, such as those in Lyon (1894), Bordeaux (1895), and Rouen (1896), which have not been explored in previous studies (p. 226). Through these specific examples, the book describes the transcultural process by which the Angkor Remains, and Angkor Wat in particular, became iconic international heritage in Europe.

In addition to being a rich historiography, the work also provides the perspective of an architectural expert, specifically in its examination of the questions surrounding "complete restoration" by anastylosis and analysis of unpublished documents detailing the plans for the construction of the pavilion at the 1931 International Colonial Exposition (p. 299).

Yet the heart of the work remains in its historical interrogation. Falser criticizes previous studies that have considered the history of Angkor representations exclusively as a history of French colonialism, and proposes a more international, universally comparative history of Angkor's representation. He explores comparisons that have not been highlighted before, such as British exhibitions of Indian art, the influential relationship between Delaporte and Fargasson (p. 144), replicas in the Ethnomuseum in Copenhagen (p. 100), Berlin (p. 176), and the South Kensington Museum in England (p. 247), to rethink the process by which Angkor was represented in Europe within the context of academic competition among Britain, Germany, and France. Falser both critiques former studies that have been confined to France alone and opens the study of Angkor representations to a global perspective.

Despite this depth, however, the work does lack comparative study in Asia. For example,

Angkor Wat became a symbol of Japan's "Greater East Asia Co-prosperity" ideology during the Pacific War (1941–45), especially after Japan marched into French Indochina. This is something I explore in my own book on Angkor, *オリエンタリストの憂鬱 (Orientalisuto no yuutsu)* [Orientalist melancholy], in Japanese, (2008). Such representations made by the Japanese, and those across Asia, are also important case studies to consider. It should also be noted that there are some rather cumbersome considerations and analyses scattered throughout both volumes. For example, while it is true that the museographic analysis of museum and exposition representations made with a Michel Foucault-like nineteenth century epistemology is interesting, ten pages of museology and exposition history with no direct connection to Cambodian monuments seems excessive (pages 135–143 for comparative museums, 189–200 for the 1889 World's Fair).

In Volume II, the analysis shifts from European museums and expositions to the Parc archéologique d'Angkor of Cambodia, where the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) has been conducting archaeological research and restoration since 1900. The author reinterprets the local archaeological site as a combination of cultural, social, and political products, and analyzes the complex history of its formation. Here, the practices of archaeology and conservation/restoration are read as "elements of (post)colonial intellectual history."

Even in the post-colonial period after Cambodia's independence, the Parc archéologique d'Angkor continued to be maintained by the French. According to the author, "The Francophile king, Norodom Sihanouk, (became) the perfect intermediary or 'cultural broker'" [for the French] and "prolonged the French monopolistic grasp over Angkor." The author considers that "this French regime even survived the first Republican years until the early 1970s" (Vol. 2, pp. 1–4).

The discussion begins with the process of "mapping" the Angkor Remains during the colonial period, followed by an analysis of the archaeological practices by the Conservateurs d'Angkor of EFEO to make the ruins a "picture-perfect site." The archaeological method of anastylosis, which they subsequently practiced to achieve "complete restoration," is reinterpreted as an inevitable consequence of this process. Falser emphasizes that the adoption of anastylosis in the 1930s led to a paradigm shift in the EFEO's thought and activity, from "conservation to reconstitution," and he analyzes the political, historical, and cultural significance of this shift. Although Falser mentions the Banteay Srei temple, which was first restored using the anastylosis method, oddly enough, he does not discuss the famous case of André Malraux, who attempted to steal the reliefs at this temple. In my opinion, the Malraux case is an important one that prompted the paradigm shift from "conservation to reconstitution," and it should be revisited from this perspective.

To my knowledge, there has been little academic research of the influence and significance of the Angkor monuments on the buildings constructed in Cambodia after independence. The study of Cambodian architecture in Falser's work will guide future research. The author analyzes the Independence Monument erected in Phnom Penh in 1962 (p. 195), the construction of the National Sports Complex in 1964 (p. 198), and the sound and light show during the visit of French

President De Gaulle to Angkor in 1966 (p. 126). He brilliantly interprets these as examples of “back-translation to the real spots,” calling them “déjà-vu” of the spectacle of the 1931 International Colonial Exposition held in Paris.

According to the author, Sihanouk, who became the head of state in 1960, appropriated the salvage paradigm used by the French during the colonial period into postcolonial national ideals: he inherited the discourses of “Khmer Revival” and “Cambodian Renaissance,” as embodied in Angkor Wat, and read them into the notion of the “continuity of the actual dynasty within the historic tradition of Angkor’s ancient kings.” The ideal of French colonialism, he argues, was transposed directly into the “Khmer national conscience” and thus, a transcultural and hybrid representation of Angkor was formed between independent Cambodia and postcolonial France.

The author also notes that the historical research by French researchers at the EFEO on the Angkor dynasty’s “mastering of water” and the image they formed of King Jayavarman VII greatly influenced Sihanouk’s “Buddhist socialist” political philosophy, helping to justify state intervention in agriculture and flood control projects. I am not competent to evaluate the validity of the author’s perspective and analysis in finding “continuity” in Cambodian political thought from the colonial period to post-independence. Historically speaking, however, continuity between the colonial and independence eras may have been mediated by the Japanese ideal of Asianism during the Pacific War. Here we see a lost opportunity in the work: to examine the significance of Angkor Wat as a symbol of Asianism prior to becoming a symbol of Cambodian nationalism after independence.

The meaning and significance of historical monuments not only change in response to changes in political and cultural regimes of domination, but also accumulate in layers as they are repeatedly passed on and/or broken off. The Angkor monuments are not only the memory of the colonial and postcolonial periods, but also the Khmer Rouge period and the post-1990s international protection regime that continues to this day. Today, the Angkor monuments have been granted the status of a heritage icon for all humanity, beyond a common heritage for France and Cambodia.

Since the turn of this century, the transcultural image of Angkor Wat that was formed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seems to be undergoing a further, significant transformation. Poor replicas of Angkor Wat and the Bayon temple continue to be built in tourist hotels in Siem Reap, and fantastic replicas of Angkor ruins are being constructed in entertainment parks around the world (in Spain, China, Vietnam, and so on). Tokyo Disneyland has created a Jungle Cruise modeled after the representation of the Angkor ruins in the American movie *Apocalypse Now*. These appear to be nothing more than empty playground equipment that do not reflect Cambodia’s history. But we will need to continue to think about these Angkorian imaginaries today and in the future, based on the rich historical knowledge and interpretive theories that this book provides.

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