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Post-conflict Heritage and Tourism in Cambodia: The Burden of Angkor

Tim Winter

*The World Heritage Site of Angkor is enduring one of the most crucial, turbulent periods in its 1200-year history. Since the early 1990s over 20 countries have contributed millions of dollars to help safeguard and restore its temples. As one of Southeast Asia's premier destinations, Angkor has also seen a 10,000% growth in international tourist arrivals in just over a decade. The challenges arising from the intense convergence of these two paradoxical and unstable agendas—heritage conservation and tourism development—are greatly compounded by Cambodia's need to recover from war and turmoil. This paper explores the critical trends that have surfaced at Angkor and why the challenges posed by surging tourism have been inadequately addressed. It argues Angkor's dominant role within Cambodia's post-conflict heritage and tourism industries requires closer, more critical attention given recent events in the country. This article is the summary of Winter's book *Post-conflict Heritage, Post-colonial Tourism* (Routledge 2007).*

Keywords: Angkor; Cambodia; Conflict; Development; Poverty; Tourism

Introduction

As the 1990s unfolded Cambodia would undergo a series of rapid and profound social transformations; from civil war to peace, from socialist-style authoritarianism to multi-party democracy, and from geographic isolation to a free-market economy. After more than two decades of violent conflict and social turmoil, the country needed at once to restore its cultural, economic and political infrastructures. The speed at which Cambodia embraced modernity and globalisation during this period grossly exaggerated the paradoxes inherent to these two transformative processes. A real energy to develop, to move forward, modernise and depart from the revolutionary, socialist politics of the recent past, was partnered by an intense desire to look back, to reclaim, and to retrieve what was lost.

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It was widely recognised that a key focal point for these interweaving agendas would be the World Heritage Site of Angkor in the north-west of the country (Figure 1). It was a recognition, however, that looked beyond the actual temples themselves, and towards Angkor's role in the emergence of two key industries: heritage and tourism. The development of a 'cultural heritage' industry promised the restoration of identity, history, cultural sovereignty and national pride. International tourism promised much needed socio-economic development. As one of Southeast Asia's most important cultural heritage landscapes, there was little doubt Angkor would stand in the foreground of both these industries in the coming years. This paper examines this situation, tracing the ways in which the site has been conceptually framed and managed over the last 15 years. It also situates Angkor within the wider social, political and economic contexts of a post-conflict, postcolonial Cambodia. It will be argued that, given Cambodia's recent past, more critical attention needs to be paid to the powerful role Angkor plays in the country's heritage and tourism industries.



Figure 1 Traffic congestion at South Gate of Angkor Thom. *Source:* T. Winter.

A Brief Guide to Angkor

Covering an area of just over 400 square kilometres, the World Heritage Site of Angkor is comprised of four main elements: tropical forest, areas of cultivated land, a number of rural communities, and some of the largest and most elaborate architectural structures ever created. Recent NASA satellite imagery and research by the University of Sydney has revealed, however, that the Angkor region stretched far beyond the boundaries of the area designated as a World Heritage space, covering an area in the order of 1,000 square kilometres.¹ Held up by some scholars as the largest pre-modern urban space on the planet, the greater Angkor region thus fully absorbs its modern and ever expanding neighbour: the nearby town of Siem Reap, which today acts as the gateway for temple bound tourists.

The dozens of elaborately carved temples dotted across the landscape are testimony to what is historically Southeast Asia's most powerful and expansive kingdom—a territory which, at its height, stretched from central Laos in the north to central Thailand in the south, and from the Mekong delta in the west to the borders of Pagan in the east. It is commonly accepted today that the Angkorean period spanned from 802 to 1431 CE.² As each new king took the throne, the temple complexes they built became more ambitious, time consuming and dependent upon ever-greater amounts of labour. In Angkor Wat, the Angkorean period has also given us the largest religious building on the planet. Unlike the Egyptian pyramids, Khmer architecture combined immense scale with intricate ornamental detail. It was an architectural programme that would culminate in the highly extravagant Angkor Thom city complex; the ruins of which dominate the landscape today. Not surprisingly, the demands of such extensive construction schedules have been cited by historians as a major contributory factor to Angkor's eventual decline.³

Sacked by the Siamese c.1431, and with regional power shifting towards Siam, Angkor's much reduced population distilled into a collection of rural villages focused around Theravada Buddhist monastic communities. No longer the seat of Southeast Asia's greatest military power, Angkor's architectural landscape steadily succumbed to the tropical climate and surrounding forest.⁴ The cumulative effect of intense heat, rain and pernicious vegetation over a number of centuries not only attacked Angkor's stone temples but also destroyed any wooden structures not maintained by the few villages living nearby. Although a number of Spanish, Portuguese and Asian travellers visited the region after Angkor's demise, the late nineteenth-century travel diaries of French botanist Henri Mouhot became pivotal in awakening interest in Europe.⁵ Encountering a labyrinth of monumental structures entangled with tree roots and lichen in 1860, Mouhot's account was read as if Angkor had been 'discovered' as a 'lost', even dead, civilisation.⁶ Despite the presence of numerous local villages, a powerful mythology surrounding loss and rediscovery was reinforced by the very aesthetics of Angkor's seemingly abandoned, wild and ruinous landscape.⁷ A mythology that endures today.

A language of rediscovery and restitution would come to play a crucial role in legitimising the subsequent political and cultural construction of the French administrative territory of *Indochine*. The restoration of Angkor by the French would serve as

a powerful metaphor for their assistance in restoring a once glorious, but now 'languid' Khmer culture and civilisation.⁸ The scholarly pursuits of the *Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient* (EFEO) would be instrumental in defining Angkor's monumental landscape as a once glorious, but now lost, cultural and national heritage.⁹ As a consequence, during an era of colonialism spanning just over 90 years the temples emerged as the keystone to a Cambodian national, cultural and ethnic identity.¹⁰ Crucially, once independence from the French was secured in 1954, Angkor remained an immensely important symbolic site for this young, forward-looking nation.¹¹ However, as Cambodia became embroiled in the Vietnam–America war, efforts to conserve and restore Angkor ceased and tourism dwindled. Indeed under the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia would effectively isolate itself from the world with devastating consequences. Although never explicitly targeted for destruction throughout a conflict lasting more than two decades, the temples would suffer from neglect and damage.

In 1991, bolstered by the momentum created by the Paris Peace Accords, the country would begin its turbulent transition towards political stability and a free-market economy after a period of history defined by genocide, civil war and a decade long occupation by Vietnam.¹² As we shall see shortly, the formidable task of reconstructing its cultural, social and economic foundations would be heavily shaped by an extraordinary growth in tourism. However, with many of its social and physical infrastructures destroyed, the country's heritage and tourism industries would be characterised by distinct geographic and historical imbalances.

Cultures of Heritage

The addition of Angkor to the World Heritage list in 1992 stemmed from a need to protect, restore and help develop one of Southeast Asia's most important cultural landscapes. In the nomination process however, the discourse of 'value' centred on the site's monumental and archaeological remains.¹³ Damage, looting and deterioration had to be urgently addressed and reversed wherever possible. The reconstruction of Angkor's temples was understandably regarded as the most potent symbol and demonstration of a country in recovery. The ties between monumental restoration and socio-political reconstruction—a cultural, political dyad first forged during the colonial period, as noted above—were now about to reappear. However, the traumatic events of recent decades combined with a vision of Angkor as a unifying marker of modern cultural, national and ethnic identity to greatly intensify the expectation that cultural heritage would give momentum to a wider socio-cultural recovery.

Previous events had left Cambodia with wholly inadequate governmental, administrative and legal structures. The country also lacked expertise in monumental conservation, archaeology, community development, tourism, urban planning or forestry. In recognition of these challenges UNESCO created an administrative body, the International Coordinating Committee for the Safeguarding and Development of Angkor (ICC).¹⁴ The organisation would focus specifically on the newly listed World Heritage Site and its environs, including the nearby town of Siem Reap. Further protection would come from a Zoning and Environmental Management Plan (ZEMP).¹⁵

Enforced by Royal Decree, ZEMP would prove an effective mechanism for insulating the region from its challenging social context. To complement these initiatives, the World Heritage Committee also called for the establishment of a Cambodian-run management body. To this end the Authority for the Protection and Safeguarding of the Angkor Region (APSARA), was created in 1994. In the short term APSARA would act as an organisational bridge between the attendant international community and the domestic government. Although the ICC was generally expected to remain in attendance for in excess of a decade, it was hoped that APSARA, as a self-funded, independent and autonomous Cambodian management authority, would fill the void left by the eventual withdraw of international partners.

Angkor's immense historical importance, along with its global prestige, led to an unprecedented influx of international assistance. Since the early 1990s more than 20 countries—including France, Japan, China, India, America, Germany, Italy and Australia—have together donated millions of dollars to help safeguard the temples.¹⁶ Working under the umbrella of the ICC, teams have been guided by various internationally ratified charters, including the 1954 Hague Convention and the 1972 World Heritage Convention. Guidance has also come from the former experiences of EFEO. The immense institutional knowledge EFEO built up during 70 years of research presented the ICC with a uniquely valuable archive of reports, scholarly publications, fieldwork diaries and thousands of photographs, maps and drawings. Although it was recognised mistakes had been made, and that strategies had evolved over decades of research, EFEO's expertise was crucial to steering the various teams now involved, many of which had little, or no, prior experience of Khmer architecture. EFEO's vast body of knowledge in epigraphy, architectural conservation, art history and to a lesser degree archaeology represented an invaluable resource for modern scholars. On the flip side however, the pre-eminence of EFEO meant that a representation of Angkor—one that neglected vernacular, social histories in favour of the material heritage of a 'high', regal culture—would be re-invoked and re-authenticated through a late twentieth-century framework of world heritage.

Lying at the heart of this process would be an understanding of culture grounded in rational science. The international nature of the ICC demanded a language capable of being shared across the table, universally applied and unequivocally valued by all. Rational science would provide the solution; a unifying medium through which a Khmer temple previously restored by French conservators could be rebuilt by a Japanese team supported by experts from Italy, Germany and the UK. The foundations for this approach can be traced back to the 1972 Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage Convention, which, as Hitchcock points out, was conceived at a time when policies were geared towards the scientific management of tangible heritage.¹⁷ As the 1990s progressed annual conferences and symposiums held in Siem Reap would be dedicated to the engineering technicalities of structural foundations, the mineral composition of sandstone carvings, or the load-bearing capacities of arches and precariously tilting columns. Similarly, annual reports and publications rarely departed from discussing cultural heritage as a language of technology and scientific enquiry.¹⁸ While the dilapidated state of Angkor's ruins undoubtedly demanded such efforts, a heritage

discourse rooted in a 'logical positivism', to use Laura Jane Smith's term, raises important questions that warrant closer attention.¹⁹ The critique offered by Smith of such cultural heritage frameworks centres around their application of 'technical procedures and science to conflicts over material culture [which] de-politicize issues through the employment of its expertise'.²⁰ In essence, the ICC's orientation towards architectural restoration and archaeology 'stress[ed] objectivity and technical rigor' to define its authoritative position as the arbitrator of Angkorean history.²¹ In essence, science would provide the ontological foundations for a universally shared definition of 'authenticity'.

This scientific orientation towards cultural heritage has meant the extensive attention paid to the evolution of construction styles and the reappropriation of buildings by later kings has significantly contrasted with a lack of interest in histories of ancestral spirit cults, oral traditions or contemporary temple ritual practices.²² With few projects guided by anthropologists, historians or sociologists there has been little to counter the positivist, and universalising, language of rational science. In an environment characterised by a quest for objectivity and ontological 'truths' ideas such as historical relativism, plurality or multi-vocality have remained firmly on the margins. Beyond the temples themselves, this situation has had important implications for the park's villages and monastic communities (Figure 2). Some of Cambodia's oldest and most important Buddhist monasteries are situated within the Angkor area. And yet research within the ICC on Angkor as a living heritage, a place of vernacular, religious practices has been limited to the modestly budgeted efforts of a small APSARA team of young anthropologists. Although UNESCO successfully intervened to overturn plans to relocate a number of these monasteries outside the park in 2001, the ICC has otherwise engaged little with the revival of the Buddhist or animist traditions of local residents. Recent publications by Ang and Harris remind us of the importance of these shortcomings.²³ Together, these authors show how Cambodia's Buddhism operates as a socially and politically engaged religion and that the rejuvenation of Cambodia's monastic community (*sangha*) is essential to a broader cultural and societal revivalism. As we have seen, however, such areas have often been overlooked within a vision of architectural splendour and pristine glory that essentially rests upon the cultural binaries of regal/vernacular, classical/non-classical and modern/traditional first introduced in the late nineteenth century.

Cambodia's Post-conflict National Heritage

The lack of historians, social anthropologists or even more phenomenologically inclined archaeologists within the ICC has also contributed to Angkor's emergence as an atomised island of research, demarcated as a rural museum of art and architectural glories. In the face of weak legislative, executive and judicial branches of Cambodia's transitional government, it was critical that UNESCO protected the Angkor–Siem Reap region with strong legal and spatial boundaries. While such policies have been largely successful, the isolation of Angkor combined with the influx of international assistance to the region has ensured the site remains a 'phantasmagoria' of Cambodian

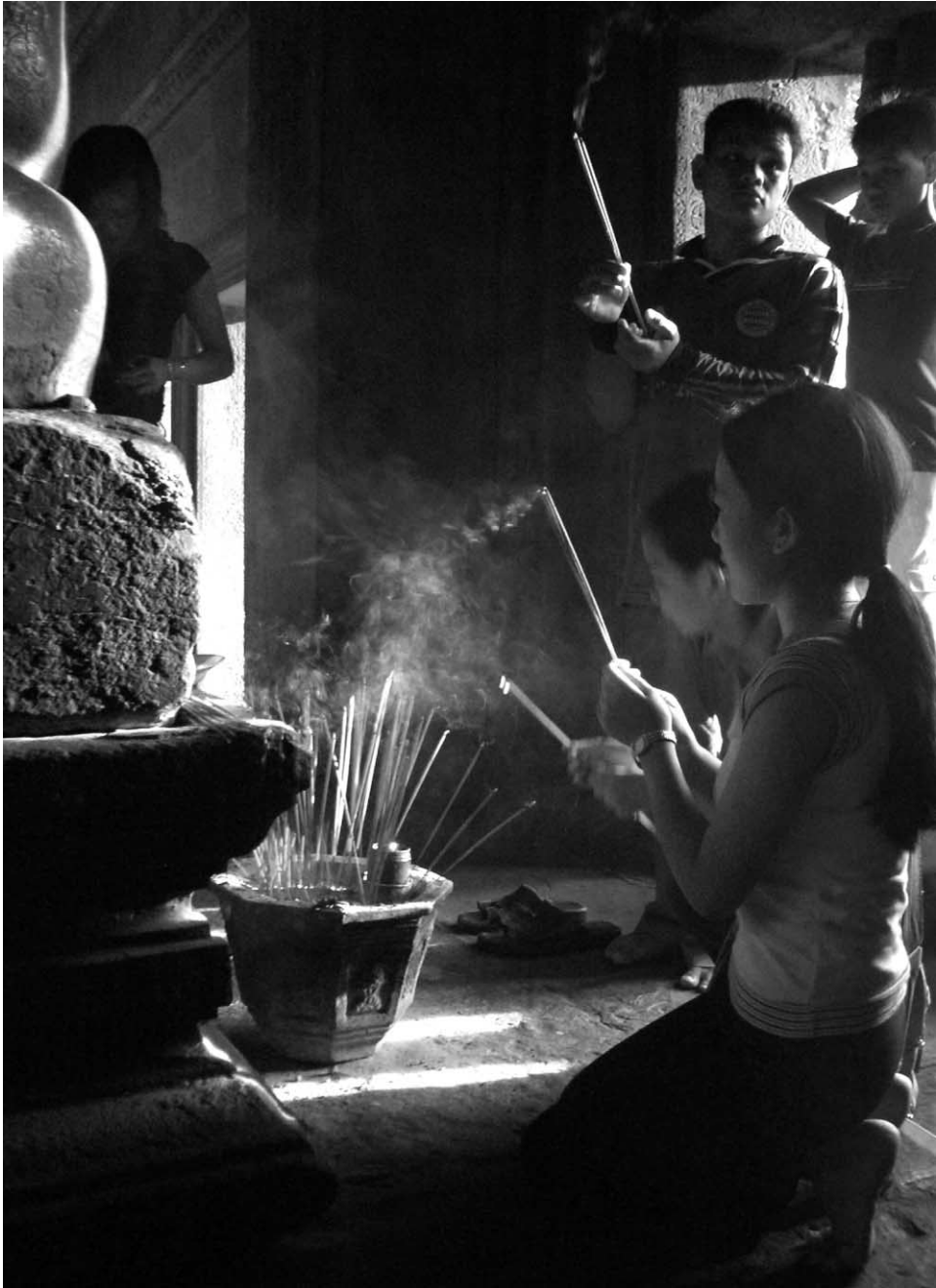


Figure 2 Cambodians Lighting Incense inside Angkor Wat. *Source:* T. Winter.

history, to use Norindr's term, and the apogee of a tri-focal historical narrative which devalues the less illustrious 'pre' and 'post' Angkorean periods.²⁴ With Angkor's temples securing a large share of the funds that enter the country to help protect and

'rebuild' Cambodia's cultural heritage we have to look further afield to fully appreciate the implications of this situation.

As part of an analysis of twentieth-century Cambodian performance art, Turnbull argues that cultural heritage grants since the early 1990s have principally been directed towards 'the country's architectural and archaeological patrimony rather than its equally fragile intangible legacy'.²⁵ Looking back to 1960 he reminds us Phnom Penh was home to 30 performance art theatres, and that Cambodians enjoyed performances from around 50 theatre companies. Today there are only two commercially run theatres for the entire country. Destroyed by fire in 1994, the ruinous Suramarit theatre in Phnom Penh—once the icon of a vibrant culture of independence—symbolises the political, economic inertia surrounding this sector of the country's cultural heritage.²⁶ While Turnbull welcomes recent efforts by UNESCO, various non-governmental organisations and the Royal University of Fine Arts to restore shadow puppetry and classical and non-classical dance forms, he concludes 'while Cambodians appear to cling determinedly to the fundamentals Khmer of identity... their connection to the nation's intangible culture has been more tenuous'.²⁷ Turnbull's account of a neglected modern heritage is relevant here because it reveals the priorities of the state's cultural enterprise, and its desire to source cultural markers such as classical dance which have a seemingly indisputable provenance.

This quest for a homogeneous ethno-national identity has been further demonstrated by Dahles and ter Horst in their analysis of Cambodia's silk industry. The revival of silk production and designs 'celebrates ethnic Khmer dominance' in part through a genealogical link with the courts of Angkor.²⁸ International tourism has played a crucial role here. As they state, by connecting 'the weaving of traditional silk garments for royal and religious ceremonies... [with Angkor]... these garments cannot be anything but traditionally and authentically Khmer'.²⁹ In a similar way, and as I have shown elsewhere, the 'Apsara dance' has sought its provenance in the royal courts of the Angkorean period in order to become the obligatory 'cultural experience' for foreign tourists.³⁰

Finally here, the 'Angkor National Museum', which opened in Siem Reap in December 2007, vividly illustrates the ongoing centrality of monumental architecture to the construction of a national history. The museum houses eight galleries dedicated entirely to the display of artefacts and statues from the pre-, post- and Angkor periods. As the exhibition unfolds, this Angkorean history is once again conflated with the story of a Khmer 'national' identity.³¹ Despite being called a National Museum, no space is given to the country's ethnic and religious minorities, vernacular cultural forms or the country's transition from colonialism to independence. As a reflection of the omnipotence of carved sandstone in the socio-cultural landscape of Cambodia's heritage industry, the museum reinforces the idea that the country has few personalities, engineering triumphs or distinctive cultural industries to complement its achievements in stone.

Seen together, the examples of silks, performing arts and the new Angkor National Museum begin to illustrate what role, direct and indirect, Angkor plays in the restoration of Cambodia's cultural heritage. They also point towards the impact of tourism on

such processes. Given that recent history has severely weakened the country's public sphere, debates and critiques about the relationships between identity and culture, tradition and modernity remain limited. An episode of profound turmoil has understandably given rise to a deep-seated anxiety over what constitutes Khmer and Cambodian identity. As the country has reopened its borders such concerns have also been driven by a desire for difference within a highly connected region. A classical, culturally and historically pure Angkor represents an important resource for a fragile identity. It is suggested, however, that an idealised Angkor undergoing reconstruction has once again become the basis of a state nationalism rooted in a static, if not timeless, vision of a glorious past. Angkorean centric heritage and tourism industries are simultaneously advancing and restraining the parameters of the country's social and cultural revival. Dominated by architectural glories, these two industries significantly increase the risk of the country trapping itself in a mono-cultural, mono-ethnic national identity.³² When considered alongside events in recent Cambodian history, most notably the xenophobic nationalism of the Khmer Rouge, this situation becomes a cause for considerable concern.

Poverty, Inequalities and Development

In 1994, around 8,000 foreign tourists visited Angkor. Just over a decade later, in 2005, over 830,000 international tourists visited the site, an increase of 10,000% in just over a decade.³³ While this growth curve appears staggering in both real and relative terms, it was widely anticipated given Angkor's global prestige and its central location within Southeast Asia's highly interconnected regional tourism industry. When the Angkor–Siem Reap region was added to the World Heritage list in 1992, conservation and socio-economic development were identified as two halves of a long-term sustainable management plan. Understandably, the ICC viewed the impending arrival of an international tourism industry as a force that would threaten Angkor's long-term survival. Fearful of rampant and uncontrolled development, UNESCO stated in 1996 that tourism 'threatens to damage this Khmer cultural legacy far more swiftly and decisively than did any ancient invaders, or even the clandestine raiders of today'.³⁴ Such warnings and caution were wholly understandable. However, as the 1990s progressed the issue of development would be largely overlooked in a programme principally oriented towards archaeology and the protection and restoration of the site's temple architecture. Within this conservation paradigm, development, tourism and the generation of capital were all perceived as threats, impending dangers and issues to be resisted. Rather than embracing the complexities of this new era, the international community overseeing Angkor rarely engaged with the issue of tourism and the consequences it would hold.

Like the rest of Cambodia, the Angkor–Siem Reap region was suffering from major 'deficiencies in infrastructure and human resources'.³⁵ Yet within an ICC managerial framework principally composed of experts in architecture, archaeology, engineering and stone conservation such challenges rarely received the attention they deserved. In the committee's annual reports for the crucial five-year period after the region's listing as a World Heritage Site less than 10 pages out of 400 were dedicated to tourism.³⁶

With international efforts firmly centred on architectural conservation, responsibility for urban development and tourism would lie with the Cambodian-run APSARA Authority. To this end the organisation was founded with three principal departments: *Culture and Monuments*, *Urban Development and Tourism Development*. APSARA's struggle towards operational stability, along with its severe lack of resources, meant that efforts were directed towards maintaining a supportive relationship with the international community.³⁷ It was a situation that resulted in resources being largely directed towards the Department of Culture and Monuments. In addition to successfully operating as a coordinating hub for numerous international projects, the department undertook the task of building a Cambodian pool of expertise. Real successes were achieved in training young Cambodian scholars in the areas of temple conservation, archaeology, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and temple management.

By implication however, the other two sides of APSARA's organisational triangle—the departments of Urban Development and Tourism—received less support and finance. Even as the 1990s came to a close, the directors of two these departments could each only call upon the support of less than five trained staff. As part of their report into the Angkor–Siem Reap region, the New Zealand consultants, Miskell and Thomas, concluded that for both departments 'resources and budget provisions are inadequate for the tasks required'.³⁸ While there is little doubt that Angkor's fragile temples warranted urgent and sustained attention, the neglect of tourism (Figure 3), and its social, economic consequences, would have deleterious consequences.

Equally surprisingly, tourism was also overlooked by a foreign aid industry assisting with Cambodia's socio-economic development. Throughout the 1990s multilateral banks such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB), along with governments from Australia, France, Japan and the US, were influential in mapping the parameters of Cambodia's socio-economic recovery and plan for national reconstruction. The implementation of a three-year structural adjustment programme, lasting between 1993 and 1996, would principally focus on the more 'traditional' industries of agriculture and manufacturing, and the export of natural resources like timber and rubber.³⁹ Within such a framework, the role of culture, and associated tertiary industries like tourism, were only given a passing acknowledgement. Similarly, only a broad recognition of tourism's 'future potential' would appear in the Royal Government's *First Socioeconomic Development Plan* produced in 1996. Despite identifying tourism as one of the country's 'main opportunities for rebuilding its economy', the document's account of reform and economic progress offered few details of how this potential would be realised.⁴⁰

In essence, with tourism lying at the margins of both the cultural heritage and developmental sectors, an institutional and intellectual void concerning the relationship between culture, tourism and development emerged within, and across, the various bodies involved in Cambodia's reconstruction. By the beginning of the 2000s rapid tourism growth had become an important reality. The town of Siem Reap was witnessing a construction boom, not only in the hotel and restaurant sectors, but also in a housing industry catering to the ever-growing numbers of Cambodians now migrating to the area. The election victory of the Cambodian People's Party as the sole ruling



Figure 3 Tourists at Angkor Wat During Khmer New Year Festival. *Source:* T. Winter.

party in 1998 also proved an important turning point in Angkor's development. For a number of government officials Angkorean tourism now offered significant economic benefits. The country's precarious political and economic climate also meant initiatives towards development were invariably short term in their outlook. In a few short years Angkor had become one of the state's most important economic assets.

In response to this new era, the APSARA authority and UNESCO jointly hosted a number of workshops and conferences on 'Cultural Tourism' in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. Driven by a concern for steering Angkor's development away from the more destructive forms of 'mass tourism', these initiatives focused on site protection and the provision of 'high quality' tourist facilities. In terms of site protection, it was becoming evident that hundreds of thousands of domestic and international visitors each year were eroding and damaging the temples. With many travel agents operating copycat itineraries the site's most iconic temples were suffering from extreme peaks and tourist surges on a daily basis. For UNESCO and the ICC tourism was rapidly becoming unsustainable. Although these workshops highlighted a numbers of common goals, the discussion revealed that the international heritage community and

the Royal Government were on different paths and held contrasting visions concerning Angkor's future. In an attempt to accommodate these rapidly diverging agendas, the ICC moved towards a language of 'sustainable development'. Accordingly, the 2003 Paris Declaration on Angkor noted that 'sustainable ethical tourism in the Siem Reap/Angkor region [should be used] as a tool in the fight against poverty'.⁴¹ Recognising the previous lack of attention given to this area, it was recommended that 'development projects in the province of Siem Reap/Angkor be discussed in all their aspects, particularly economic, social and environment, within the framework of the periodic meetings of the ICC'.⁴² This declaration has ensured that issues such as sewerage, water management, forestry and urban planning have received far greater attention within workshops, consultancy reports and government initiatives. Better communication channels have also opened up between the ICC, the Royal Government and the various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working on community development programmes in the region.

However, the speed of tourism growth in the Angkor–Siem Reap region continues to outpace these policy responses. Ensuring tourism can be better channelled to overcome the major economic and social inequalities that have emerged both within, and around, the town of Siem Reap in the last decade remains a major challenge. For those with language and service industry skills, tourism has proved a lucrative industry to work in. After tips, commissions and bonuses, the monthly income for head chefs, tour guides and hotel management staff often exceeds 1,000 US dollars. The personal income of entrepreneurial business owners has been many times more. While a number of NGOs have worked successfully to bolster rural employment and grassroots development through tourism related initiatives, the industry has created major imbalances in the region's economy. Indeed, beyond the pockets of wealth created by tourism, the salaries of school teachers, manual labourers, nurses, or market traders remains in the region of 30 to 40 US dollars per month. Although such inequalities are a common feature to places undergoing rapid tourism development, it is suggested here that in the case of Siem Reap, such problems have been exacerbated by a combination of policy frameworks of cultural tourism and sustainability primarily concerned with limiting tourism's detrimental impact on the Angkor archaeological park, coupled with the government's desires to draw the region into its top-down, state-centric model of development. The ongoing, long-term growth of tourism suggests the need for more community-oriented policies capable of improving the equitable distribution of tourism related capital across the region.⁴³ In a country that now has the highest levels of extreme poverty in Southeast Asia, Siem Reap province continues to languish as the country's third poorest.⁴⁴

In looking to the future, Ministry of Tourism efforts to promote coastal destinations, along with eco-tourism in the northeast of the country and around the great lake Tonle Sap will undoubtedly help these regions to emerge as tourist destinations. The Khmer Rouge, remembered at places like Anlong Veng, Pol Pot's final resting place, will continue to draw visitors. Casino and sex tourism will also grow, with Phnom Penh and the border town of Poipet acting as the main centres of commerce. It is highly likely, however, that these regionalised developments will continue to be outpaced by the

ongoing expansion of tourism at Angkor. With the annual number of foreign tourists visiting Angkor expected to exceed the three million mark by 2010, tourism will further exacerbate regional imbalances and major wealth inequalities both within and across communities, and across the country as a whole.

In this respect, Cambodia exemplifies Aihwa Ong's description of economic globalisation whereby places of hyper-growth like Angkor become surrounded by zones of abandonment.⁴⁵ Historically unprecedented levels of tourism have transformed the site's temples into an immensely important resource for capital accumulation. There is little doubt that an annual income of millions of dollars has been instrumental in steadying Cambodia's GDP growth, and that the industry has been the driving force for investments in both social and physical infrastructures. Equally however, the flows and distribution of wealth have been hugely disproportionate. It is thus argued here that the degree to which a tourism industry dominated by Angkor has contributed to nationwide economic and political stability remains open to question.

Conclusion

The situation surrounding Angkor today is a stark example of a phenomenon common to many countries attempting to recover after periods of conflict or political turmoil. Reconciliation, cultural rejuvenation and economic rehabilitation are urgent and simultaneous demands. Heritage and cultural tourism are widely regarded as effective tools for protecting past histories, that can simultaneously provide the economic fuel for societal modernisation. In essence, heritage tourism looks in both directions: restoring and promoting the past while promising future prosperity. Almost inevitably however, the convergence of these agendas spawns contestation and various unexpected and paradoxical outcomes. Post-conflict Cambodia epitomises this situation. There is little doubt that heritage and tourism are contributing to, and providing substantial momentum for, the reconstruction of the country's cultural, social and physical infrastructures. As the keystone to this fragile recovery, Angkor stands as a beacon of strength, historical power and aesthetic grandeur. International tourism is also proving to be an abundant and seemingly ever expanding source of income. But as the number of conservation projects and annual visitor totals continue to grow, this highly symbolic site finds itself caught in an increasingly intense web of competing agendas.

There is little doubting that the protection and conservation of Angkor's architectural structures and the archaeological research conducted since the early 1990s have been worthy and important enterprises. It has been argued here, however, that such efforts have created a world heritage framework that re-solidifies the problematic binaries of regal/vernacular, classical/non-classical and modern/traditional first introduced in the late nineteenth century. This has meant the ways in which Cambodians value Angkor as a lived space, a landscape in constant flux and a shared heritage of everyday, inter-generational traditions have been marginalised within a discourse of monumental grandeur and classical antiquity. In a context where ideas of a national identity and Khmer culture are being welded onto a vision of lost, timeless glories the Cambodian heritage industry has emerged as a rigid framework which defines the 'authentic' or

'traditional' in narrow, absolutist ways. Heritage and tourism risk Cambodia once again trapping itself in a mono-cultural, mono-ethnic, nationalism.

The re-emergence of international tourism in Cambodia has also transformed the town of Siem Reap into an enclave of imbalanced wealth and development, and a micro-economy beyond which lies sustained rural poverty. Angkorean tourism is thus fuelling the country's ever increasing concentrations in wealth and sub-national inequalities. As Calavan et al. warn us, these economic imbalances, by implication, drastically reduce the chances of much needed social and political reforms being achieved.⁴⁶ As the case of Angkor shows, heritage and tourism can have far reaching social consequences in the developing world. This brief paper has argued that if we are to better understand and critically challenge these consequences, sustained and rigorous attention needs to be given to the broader political, economic and socio-cultural processes that shape heritage and tourism in countries like Cambodia today.

Notes

- [1] See, for example, Pottier, 'Carte Archéologique de la Région d'Angkor. Zone Sud' and University of Sydney, *Greater Angkor Project*, <http://acl.arts.usyd.edu.au/projects/externalprojects/urbanangkor.html> [accessed 1 May 2007].
- [2] Jacques and Freeman, *Angkor: cities and temples*
- [3] See for example Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor*.
- [4] Ibid.
- [5] See Dagens *Angkor: heart of an Asian empire*.
- [6] See Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina*.
- [7] Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage, Postcolonial Tourism*.
- [8] Edwards, *Cambodge: the cultivation of a nation 1860–1945*
- [9] As a product of late nineteenth-century European historiography, the vision of a Cambodian nation was largely moulded around French colonial agendas. For a detailed account of the politicised relationship between race, nation and culture within the French construction of Cambodge, see Ibid.
- [10] See Winter, op. cit.
- [11] See Edwards, op. cit.
- [12] See Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*.
- [13] Wager, *Developing a Strategy for the Angkor World Heritage Site*, 515–23.
- [14] For further details see UNESCO, *Safeguarding and Development of Angkor*.
- [15] Wager, op. cit., 515–23
- [16] Winter, op. cit.
- [17] Hitchcock, *Afterword*, 181–86.
- [18] Winter, op. cit.
- [19] Smith, *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage*.
- [20] Ibid., 37
- [21] Ibid., 10
- [22] This neglect of traditions and temple usage by the international heritage community forms part of Miura's PhD thesis, which focuses on the impact world heritage enlistment has had on one particular village within the park. See Miura, 'Contested Heritage: People of Angkor'.
- [23] Ang, 'The place of animism within popular Buddhism in Cambodia', and Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism*.
- [24] Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina*.
- [25] Turnbull, 'A burned out Theater', 139.

- [26] According to Turnbull 'Of the three million dollars on average that the government spends annually on performance culture—a mere 0.25 per cent of Cambodia's national budget—much of it is allocated to a bloated network of around 3,000 administrators.' *Ibid.*, 139.
- [27] *Ibid.*, 140.
- [28] Dahles and Ter Horst, 'Weaving into Cambodia', 124.
- [29] *Ibid.*, 130.
- [30] Winter, 'When Ancient "Glory" Meets Modern "Tragedy"', 37–53.
- [31] For further details, see <http://www.angkornationalmuseum.com> [accessed 10 February 2008].
- [32] Partly in response to such concerns, UNESCO assisted with the production of an *Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Cambodia*. Published in 2004, this inventory provides an important foundation for the cultivation of cultural policies that seek to create more pluralistic and vernacular connections between the past and the present.
- [33] Ministry of Tourism/UNDP/WTO, *National Tourism Development Plan For Cambodia*. These figures do not include domestic tourists.
- [34] UNESCO/APSARA, *Angkor: Past, Present and Future*, 166–67.
- [35] Ministry of Planning, *First Socioeconomic Development Plan 1996–2000*, 157.
- [36] Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage, Postcolonial Tourism*, 74.
- [37] For more details, see UNESCO/APSARA, *Angkor: Past, Present and Future*.
- [38] Miskell and Thomas, *Angkor Forest Rehabilitation and Landscape Enhancement Project, 2/36*.
- [39] Winter, *Post-Conflict Heritage, Postcolonial Tourism*, 68.
- [40] Ministry of Planning, *First Socioeconomic Development Plan 1996–2000*, 156.
- [41] UNESCO, *Paris Declaration*, 4.
- [42] *Ibid.*
- [43] See, for example, Ball, 'Tourism No Help to Siem Reap's Poorest', 1.
- [44] Asian Development Bank, *Key Indicators 2004*, 40.
- [45] Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*.
- [46] Calavan et al., *Cambodian Corruption Assessment*.

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