Cultural Heritage as Civilizing Mission

From Decay to Recovery

Michael Falser *Editor*

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Proceedings of the 2nd International Workshop
on Cultural Heritage and the Temples of Angkor
(Chair of Global Art History, Heidelberg University,
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Cover illustration: A press photograph depicting Maréchal Lyautey (in white uniform) in his role as the official representative of the 1931 International Colonial Exhibition in Paris, guiding his guests, the future George VI of England and his wife, through the pavilion structures of the event. In the background the entry gate to the ephemeral, 1:1-scaled replica of the 12th-century Cambodian temple of Angkor Wat. Parisienne de Photographie, © Roger-Viollet

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Preface

The research field known as Global Art History is a new one that is being defined by a number of academic institutions worldwide in response to the challenge posed by global connectivity to existing disciplines. In Germany, the *Heidelberg Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context—The Dynamics of Transculturality"* has instituted the first and only Chair in the country for this area of study.[1] Built into the *Karl Jaspers Centre for Advanced Transcultural Studies* (renamed *Heidelberg Centre of Transcultural Studies* in 2014) as the institutional home of the Cluster "Asia and Europe," the *Chair of Global Art History* under Professor Monica Juneja seeks to question the taxonomies and values that have been built into the discipline of art history since its inception and have been thereafter taken as universal. This includes a deconstruction of the disciplinary models within art history that have marginalized experiences and practices of entanglement. With a focus on the role of disciplines like archaeology, architectural conservation/preservation, and art history within larger political ideologies, this book seeks to contribute to the Chair's main interest of investigating formation processes of art and visual practices in transcultural settings.

This book is particularly associated with one of Heidelberg Cluster's four major research areas: "Historicities and Heritage," which engages in a dialogue between modern disciplines like visual and media, anthropology, archaeology, and global art history. It discusses how texts, languages, spaces, objects—in this book, architecture—and concepts—in our context the notion of cultural heritage as part of culturo-political action programs—have been reconfigured over time to create entangled histories and memories as well as artefacts of hybrid materiality.

This book is part of my particular (Habilitation) project within this research area entitled *Heritage as a Transcultural Concept—Angkor Wat from an Object of*

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[1] For more information about Heidelberg Chair of Global Art History, accessed February 4, 2013. http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/research/cluster-professorships/global-art-history.html.

Colonial Archaeology to a Contemporary Global Icon.[2] The project investigates the modern concept of cultural heritage by charting its colonial, postcolonial, nationalist, and global trajectories. It does so through a case study of the twelfth-century temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia and explores how different phases of its history unfolded within the transcultural interstices of European and Asian projects and conceptual definitions: from its "discovery in the jungle" by French colonial archaeology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to its canonization as a symbol of national identity during the struggle for independence and decolonization, under the Vietnamese occupation and the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime, and finally as a global icon of contemporary heritage schemes after Cambodia's national and cultural rebirth under UN assistance after 1990 until today. A study of material traces and architectural forms as well as of literary and visual representations of the structure are undertaken with a view to analyzing the processes of transfer and translation as well as the more recent proliferation of hybrid art forms in the wake of Angkor Wat's transformation into a media icon. In general terms, the project deals with the modern processes of cultural appropriation, exclusion, and ascription that marked the transcultural relationships surrounding the Angkor Wat complex. By questioning the supposedly "universal" concept of "cultural heritage," the project investigates how different regimes between Europe and Asia (France and Cambodia) made one and the same cultural heritage object—in this case the temple of Angkor Wat—an integral part of their different "cultural visions and civilizing missions." Raising this question to a higher, comparative level through a wide range of case studies was the basic point of departure for this book, which was initiated at the *2nd International Workshop "Rebirthing" Angkor? Heritage between Decadence, Decay, Revival, and the Mission to Civilize* and took place at the Heidelberg Chair of Global Art History in May 2011.[3] Not all of the original papers presented at conference have been included in this book and some additional authors were asked to supplement the final result.

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[2] See the homepage of the project "Heritage as a Global Concept," accessed February 4, 2013, http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/research/d-historicities-heritage/d12.html. The overall results of this project will be published in my forthcoming monography *Angkor Wat. From Jungle Find to Global Icon. A Transcultural History of Heritage* (De Gruyter: Berlin).

[3] See the original workshop, accessed March 30, 2013. http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/research/d-historicities-heritage/d12/angkor-workshops/2011.html. These conference proceedings are the second in a series. The first proceedings were published, together with Monica Juneja, in 2013 as *"Archaeologizing" Heritage? Transcultural Entanglements between Local Social Practices and Global Virtual Realities*. They analyzed (a) how built cultural heritage (Angkor was again the central point of investigation) is visualized and negotiated in different media from photography to computational sciences; (b) the kinds of tensions these (often idealized) "representations" hold for the site and its stakeholders; and (c) how new approaches in theoretical research and practical on-site conservation react to these problems. See the original 2010 workshop, accessed March 30, 2013. http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/research/d-historicities-heritage/d12/angkor-workshops/2010.html, and the webpage of the published workshop proceedings: http://www.springer.com/social+sciences/book/978-3-642-35869-2.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to the making of this book—above all, the authors themselves. I would also like to thank the German Research Foundation (DFG) for providing the funding for this publication, Prof. Monica Juneja for her invaluable theoretical input and personal encouragement, as well as the Gerda Henkel Foundation and Prof. Andreas Beyer, the director of the *Centre Allemand d'Histoire de l'Art* in Paris (2009–2014), for the financial and infrastructural support needed to finalize this publication. In addition, sincere thanks are due to Andrea Hacker of the editorial office at the Heidelberg Cluster for her friendly and efficient management of the project from the start, to Angela Roberts for her careful and competent copyediting, to Birgit Muench of Springer, and to Petronela Soltesz and Jennifer Pochodzalla for their technical assistance. Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to the two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript as well as to the series editors for their many constructive suggestions.

Heidelberg   Michael Falser
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Cultural Heritage as Civilizing Mission: Methodological Considerations

Michael Falser

> *The era of decadence [...] ended with the arrival of the French in Indochina. Civilization does not exist anymore in this privileged country where it once strongly flourished, but the soil preserved its incomparable fertility. Since we put our flag into this region, it seems that [this civilization] begins to live and breathe again. [...] is it not up to us to revive the marvelous past of this people, to reconstitute the admirable oeuvres which their genius has created; in a word: to enrich the history of art and the annals of humanity with a new page?[1]*
>
> Louis Delaporte in this 1880 publication Voyage au Cambodge

> *Angkor must be saved! This challenge, in which UNESCO proposes to stand beside the people of Cambodia, extends far beyond a mere restoration of relics of the past. For the saving of Angkor will allow an entire people to regain its pride, its will to live and a renewed vigor with which to rebuilt its country. I therefore appeal to the international community as a whole to put the stamp of universal solidarity on the rebirth of Angkor.*
>
> UNESCO's director general, Federico Mayor's Appeal for the protection, preservation, restoration and presentation of the site of Angkor, *launched on November 30, 1991 in front of the Angkor Wat temple*

Methodological Preliminaries and Structure of the Book

The self-legitimation of political regimes in modern history was and often still is attempted through a twofold strategy: (a) a normative assessment of the ruled country's past and present, and (b) the enactment of a concrete committed action

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[1] All English translations in this introduction are mine.

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programme to guide the nation towards a better future. The interest in this dynamic of a normative *(intro-)vision* on the one hand, and—as a practical consequence—of an applied, action-oriented *mission* on the other, forms the basis of this volume's thematic inquiry. Although this critical assessment of the past and present may encompass a wide variety of aspects (social, financial, moral, intellectual, etc.), our focus here is on the specific field of materialized culture, and in particular on the complex of architectural manifestations that crystallizes over time through a multiform process into a (supposedly) "representative," (i.e. trans-generational and collective) cultural canon of the nation known as *cultural heritage*.

The concept of cultural heritage as it is used here (in French: *patrimoine culturel*; in German: *Kulturerbe*) relates to material structures, institutional complexes and practices, and at the same time carries a powerful emotional charge and a value structure emanating from the idea of belonging and of shared cultural meanings, especially in the context of a young nation. Its origins go back to the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, which was followed by secularizing and nation-building processes. What is essential, however, in the context of this book, is that this concept was carried by concrete agency as a form of colonial modernity to the non-European world, where it worked (often with destructive side-effects within the local context) to create new identities for alien cultural objects, ranging from single sculptures to architectural ensembles such as whole temple sites. Additionally, it situated these monuments and sites within a distinct discourse that was indebted to the modern, Western disciplines of art and architectural history, archaeology, ethnography and anthropology, architectural restoration, conservation, and preservation—disciplines which together underpin the different contributions of this volume.

In order to (a) analyse transfer, translation, exchange, and hybrid innovation processes that are a product of transcultural, often asymmetrical, flows between metropolitan centres in Europe and colonial sites (in our case in Asia and Africa), and to (b) conceptualize this dynamic of normative (intro-)vision and action-based mission in the colonial, but also post-colonial and global arena, the nature of cultural heritage provides a starting point from which to explain our methodological approach. If we differentiate culture into social, mental, and material aspects, the *concept of cultural heritage* participates and is strongly intertwined in all three levels. At the social level it encompasses all the different social practices of (regional to global) identity construction and institution building. The identification, (de-)evaluation, (de-)selection, protection (or negligence, destruction), (re-)presentation and administration of cultural heritage was, and is still today, often regulated by institutionalized authorities and scholarship (e.g. governmental or international conservation agencies, museums, research institutes, NGOs). Driven by concrete culturo-political action programmes, the acting regimes stage themselves as the legal owners of these monuments and sites. As a mental construct, culture comprises values—and the quality label of (national to universal) cultural heritage is a normative projection in the name of authenticity, purity,

and originality that itself dominates preservation and conservation and forms the real physical interventions on the declared heritage sites. Finally, material culture comprises all kinds of artifacts, including architecture, and declared historic monuments (French: *monuments historiques*, German: *Baudenkmale*), which represent a normative selection from the built environment that must be protected by institutionalized authorities. This creates imposed—and therefore in situ concerns "local" stakeholders—practices and techniques of restoration, preservation, and conservation, resulting in unavoidable effects that include ideological exploitation and touristic commodification (in general Lowenthal 1985, Lowenthal 1996).

Making these three entangled levels of cultural heritage operational in the colonial, post-colonial, and global arena, and applying them to the above-mentioned dynamic of normative (intro-)visions and the culturo-political action programmes of ruling regimes, introduces the other core term of our inquiry: *civilizing mission*. The very term "civilizing mission" is directly connected with modern European expansionism towards non-European territories. Certainly, earlier Occidental reflections on culture and civilization—from Greek, Roman, Biblical, and Augustinian roots through the Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation—may have initiated some of these civilizing ideas (Fisch 1992); however, the idea that one could bring one's own imagined superior culture to the world spread during the so-called *Sattelzeit* (after Reinhard Koselleck) between the 1760s and 1830s, which formed a "threshold of global history" (Bayly 1998) when the modern concept of cultural heritage not only matured, but also the civilizing visions and missions entered "the age of practical implementation" (Osterhammel 2006, 13). A bit later, in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century era of imperialism, these were already fully established as "an ever-shifting set of ideas and practices that was now used to justify and legitimize the establishment and continuation of overseas colonies, both to subject peoples and to citizens or subjects in the homeland" (Watt 2011, 1). According to Reinhard Koselleck, colonialism triggered "asymmetrical counter concepts" in "pairs of concepts that are characterized by their claim to cover the whole humanity [or] binary concepts with claims to universality" (Koselleck 2004, 156 and 157). Indeed, his quoted conceptual pairs "Hellene-Barbarian" and "Christian-Heathen" correspond to the "civilized-uncivilized" divide and to the colonizer's self-identification as the torchbearer of civilization acting in the name of humanity for those who are "ignorant of their own past (or having none)." Therefore, civilizing missions— and the component "mission" is associated with a missionary-like religious project of bringing Christian faith to the infidels (cf. White and Daughton 2012)—drew upon a reservoir of ideological topoi or cultural visions that were formulated by the colonizer towards a motivated, committed action. The most prominent of these was certainly the stereotype of the colonized culture that was marked by political crises or cultural decadence and lacked the competence to conserve its heritage from falling into decay (see, for example, our introductory quotes). Adding economic, political, military, and communication to the list of

imperialist styles as "disciplinary regimes" (after Foucault), our enquiry relates to what has been defined as "cultural or scientific imperialism" in the Saidian sense (Said 1993). In this context, the agents from the colonizing centre not only imposed the norms and categories that defined what should be declared cultural heritage at the colonial periphery, but also provided the scientific expertise and leadership for the concrete data collection of research and the concrete physical intervention on-site (Galtung 1978, 55–61).

In a strategy that has been seen as a specifically modern "salvage paradigm, reflecting a desire to rescue something 'authentic' out of the destructive historical changes" (Clifford 1989, 73), architecture played a crucial role in the formation and justification of a civilizing mandate in which the colonial power staged itself as the symbolic custodian, legitimate inheritor, legal owner, institutionalized preserver, and specialized conservator-restorer of the "to-be-salvaged pasts" of the colonized. These salvaged pasts were then compressed in time and space into the colonial strait jacket of what we call a *cultural heritage paradigm.* This colonial strategy most often followed (a) similar (but not identical!) institutionalized practices of collective identity-production and propagandistic exploitation; (b) the use of aesthetic categories to define the physical body of protected monuments; and (c) a comparable set of norms for concrete intervention, like those used in the colonizer's homeland. Once these monuments were declared a "cultural heritage" and within the remit of a colonial empire's overseas possessions, their archaeological rediscovery, preservation, restoration, or full-scale reconstruction in situ—often occurring in parallel to their partial "re-presentation" in typically Western museum spaces and exhibition—became the new owner's self-imposed task. This duty was to be fulfilled by "para-religious" devotion and supposedly altruistic care, financial and human sacrifices, and a purely scientific interest that would ultimately benefit the colonized and all of civilized universal humanity. As Edward Said has noted in a new preface to his groundbreaking 1978 publication *Orientalism,* the issue of violence, directly applied in order to enforce this mission, is rarely addressed or mentioned:

> Every single empire, in its official discourse, has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilise, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires. (Said 2003, xvi)
>
> Edward Said in the 2003 preface to *Orientalism* (1978)

A crucial point of this edited volume, however, is that our enquiry is not embedded in a one-dimensional conceptualization of the imperialist one-way transfer of a Western (social, mental, and material) power structure to the non-West, as implied by Said's Occident–Orient divide (above many other critiques cf. Al-Azm 1981; Clifford 1988; Turner 1994; Macfie 2000). Almost thirty years later, with the end of the world's decolonizing phase (for the French case, cf. Labouret 1962) and with the new globalized dynamics of an exponentially