

## REPRESENTING CAMBODIA: FRENCH CULTURAL POLITICS IN “INDOCHINA”

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Fig. 1 **Cambodian Pavilion at the 1931 Colonial Exposition (Paris)**  
(from L'Illustration, May 23, 1931)

My talk today is about the cultural politics that led to the creation of this ersatz Cambodian building in Paris, a building that was a part of a larger collection of buildings meant to represent “Indochina” in the midst of Paris. These structures were not merely architectural whimsy. They were part of the 1931 colonial exposition, a world’s fair organized by the French government to celebrate its empire.

France’s formal involvement in Cambodia lasted from 1863 to 1953, as part of French Indochina (*l’Indochine Française*), itself a “geographical, cultural, and political construction, grouping different peoples.” I’ll begin with a brief historical overview of France in Indochina, with particular attention to Cambodia. I’ll focus also on the entangled relationship between the *ideology* of France’s “civilizing mission,” and the predominately economic *practices* of French colonialism in the region. I’ll then turn to two case studies of French cultural politics that analyze *representations* of Cambodia and Indochina: (a) travel and tourism and (b) colonial expositions as sites where France’s “civilizing mission” and “economic development” intersected.

### France in Indochina: An Overview

The history of France in Cambodia was bound up with broader French economic interests in Southeast Asia. Intervening in the late 1850s under the pretext of protecting Catholic missionaries, French economic and political interests--the acquisition of trading posts, naval supply stations, a land route to the

rich markets of China, and imperial advance in competition with the British--became the primary motives for conquest. From the early 1860s to the mid-1880s, the French military fought to conquer the region in an effort that was bloody and haphazard. In 1884 France proclaimed the *Union Indochinoise*, or Union of Indochina. This grouped the colony of Cochinchina, and the protectorates of Tonkin, Annam, and Cambodia. The protectorate in Laos dates from 1893. (see Fig. 2, below)

SHAPE \\* MERGEFORMAT  
Fig. 2 **French Indochina**

French policies then concentrated on the consolidation of political authority within the French colonial administration and on the economic exploitation of the region. The power of the monarchies became progressively weaker, as colonial administrations under the responsibility of the Governor-General of Indochina located at Hué, directed the countries. From 1897-1902 Governor-General Paul Doumer rationalized the administrative and financial structures of Indochina, so that general policies guided the regional administrators. A general budget put the resources of Indochina, as well as government monopolies on highly profitable products such as salt and opium, under the governor general's control. The economic exploitation of Indochina began with the conquest of territory, and the primary goal was to return the profits to France. The French imperial state and capitalist enterprises played complementary roles here. For example, the Indochina Bank (*Banque de l'Indochine*) founded in Paris in 1875, was the official note-issuing bank for Indochina's currency (the *piastre*), and the major deposit and investment bank for France's empire in Southeast Asia. In Indochina, the Bank fueled the dramatic growth of highly productive and profitable economic sectors. In general, the colonial economies focused on the production of agricultural products and extraction of primary materials for export, and the return of high profits on

investments. Rice was the agricultural basis of French wealth in Indochina, comprising 2/3 of Indochina's exports through 1920s. Rubber gained in importance after WWI; it was the quintessential colonial product--produced by indigenous workers in harsh conditions on plantations owned by Europeans and destined for metropolitan markets. The French considered Indochina a "model colony": a profitable destination for French investment and exports and a producer of raw materials that did not exist in France but were in demand by French manufacturers and consumers. Taxes and other revenues covered the bill for Indochina's administration and defense.

The French invoked two ideological perspectives as reasons for, and justification of, their activities within the French empire: its "civilizing mission" (*mission civilisatrice*) and its responsibility to promote economic development in colonial territories (*mise en valeur*). The *mission civilisatrice* implied that France bore a moral responsibility to bring its "superior civilization"—western government, rational administration, education, medicine, morals, capitalist economics--to other peoples. This perspective, which tended toward assumptions of inferiority and racism in the colonial context, gave rise to deprecation and stereotypes of non-western cultures, such as the purported weakness, ugliness, and laziness of Indochinese peoples as well as their "exoticism." It also carried within it the implication that "France's colonial subjects were too primitive to rule themselves, but were capable of being uplifted. *Mise en valeur* connoted economic development, and the development of the colonies' natural and human resources. The concept gained momentum after WWI as a policy of government support for infrastructure, such as port facilities, roadways and railways, electrification, better sources of energy, and more schools and hospitals to fully realize Indochina's economic potential.

By the 1920s and 1930s, France considered Indochina to be the "jewel" of Greater France (*la plus grande*

*France*). It was this understanding, along with entrenched economic interests and questions of French national pride, which contributed to France's attempts to hold on to Indochina until its military defeat at Dien Ben Phu in 1954 and subsequent retreat from the region.

### France in Cambodia

While the history of France in Cambodia was bound up with broader French political and economic interests in *L'Indochine Française*, the French initially saw Cambodia primarily as a natural buffer between the French colony in Cochinchina and the British sphere of influence in Thailand. They also hoped that the Mekong would provide an alternative route to Chinese markets. Both of these prospects contributed to the establishment of the French protectorate in Cambodia in 1863. King Norodom gained French protection against Cambodia's powerful neighbors and rival claims to the throne, and the French installed an administration to assure implementation of the protectorate. The French then pursued policies to strengthen their administrative and economic power in Cambodia, which became pronounced after Norodom's death in 1904. Subsequent Cambodian kings Sisowath (r. 1904-1927) and his son Monivong (r. 1927-41) were handpicked by the French. On the eve of WWI the French resident general's powers were close to absolute in matters of law, the police, taxation (which was very high in Cambodia), budgets, and public works. Government was by royal decree, but only with the written consent of the resident general. While the powers of the monarchy diminished under the Protectorate, scholars have emphasized that monarchy as an institution was preserved, an institution that later proved important in the struggle to achieve Cambodian independence.

The French claimed that the protectorate would advance their "civilizing mission" in Cambodia as in other area of Indochina. Assumptions of a French superiority and modernity, and Cambodian "backwardness"

pervaded most of their efforts. Most of the current scholarship, with some exceptions, has negatively evaluated France's civilizing mission in Cambodia, notably in education, health, and medicine. One example of France's civilizing mission that has received a more positive assessment concerns the large city and temple complex, built between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, located at Angkor (now called the Angkor Archaeological Park).

French interest in the ruins of the ancient Khmer city and temples at Angkor accelerated during the Protectorate, and restoration efforts began in 1907, following the return from Thai control of the province containing Angkor to Cambodia. The French Far Eastern School, the *Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, initially directed the efforts by French scholars and Cambodian workers to restore and refurbish the ruins of Angkor and other ancient monuments. The French depicted their restoration efforts as proof of France's generosity and evidence of its technologically sophisticated "restoration" of this artifact of a civilization now in decline. The restoration efforts also aided the project of *mis en valeur* of Cambodia's economic resources since Angkor generated considerable tourist revenues.

The key economic goal of France's presence in Cambodia, as in the rest of Indochina was the drive for profit. For most of the nineteenth century, the French did little to change the agricultural economy that was primarily oriented toward growing of primary products. Rice was the principle crop and staple food of people in Cambodia, as well as a major crop for export (others included corn and livestock). Cambodia's economic importance increased in the 20c. Rice and maize remained Cambodia's biggest export earners, but rubber was in third place and rapidly growing on eve WWII. European planters introduced rubber cultivation during early 20c in eastern Cambodia, and the boom of 20s saw rapid expansion of large scale plantation agriculture in rubber due to increased demand industrial, domestic and military uses. French

concerns, notably the *Compagnie du Cambodge*, owned the largest plantations and made large profits. The human costs were high and brutality common. Even a French resident who viewed one plantation was appalled, as he described thousands of laborers living “as human livestock, terrorized by the overseers” working long hours, and fearful of complaining. Khmer workers were the minority on plantations; many were the poorest Vietnamese peasants brought in as indentured laborers. The Vietnamese were also important in other sectors—as clerical workers, teachers, and within the colonial administration.

The French drive for economic profits in Cambodia meant the development of infrastructures for modern economic and social modernity. The *mise en valeur* of Cambodia involved public works projects to expand transportation networks that would bring products to markets and allow French to move around the country for administrative and other purposes. The governor-general of Indochina initiated plans for major trunk road to link Saigon and Bangkok via Phnom Penh and Battambang and by the early 1920s there were regular car and bus services between Phnom Penh, Battambang and Saigon. By 1925 improved access roads and the inauguration of Cook’s tourism allowed easier access to Angkor and other archeological sites for tourists and restoration work. Railroads were less well developed; the concentrated efforts toward railroad development were mostly in Vietnam, and railroad building slowed as automobiles became the transport of choice for the colonizers. French did build a railroad that extended from Phnom Penh through Battambang to the Thai border in the late 1920s. The Cambodian section of the Trans-Indochina line (intended to connect the border of China with Bangkok) was constructed in 1928-32, although not linked up with Saigon. Steamship and barges were other forms of transport. French ships plied between Saigon and Phnom Penh, and up to Siem Reap and Battambang, the major rice producing areas, then returned down the Mekong to smaller rivers and canals to the port of Saigon. Phnom Penh was accessible to small

oceangoing vessels by means of the Bassac River. Regular air service linked Phnom Penh linked to Saigon by the end of the 1920s, enabling travel to Siem Reap and Angkor by regular seaplane service. Air France opened a regular air service between Saigon and Paris in 1929.

In general, then, while Cambodia was a part of French Indochina, the French considered it to be strategically useful and economically important periphery relative to their “core” holdings in Vietnam. As a site for the production of cultural meanings about identities that referenced the civilizing mission and aspects of economic development, however, it was rich in possibilities.

#### Cultural Politics: Travel and Tourism

I want to turn now to travel and tourism in Cambodia and Indochina. I'll first review the development of “colonial tourism” within Indochina as an aspect of the *mise en valeur* of the region, and then examine two forms of leisure travel: French organized tourism and leisure travel by non-French travelers. I'm interested here in touristic representations of Cambodia and Indochina, and what they reveal about the wider relationship between tourism and particular political and cultural identities. As travelers moved through the “contact zones” between peoples and cultures their identities (social, national, and so forth) could be affirmed or destabilized. In this way, the “cultural” nature of tourism and travel could serve to confirm or complicate dominant ideologies, such as the *mission civilisatrice*, and forms of power. We will track these issues through recurrent themes, ideological motifs, and representations of tourist sites. The tourism industry in France began to focus on the creation of a modern tourist infrastructure in the colonies with reliable transportation, accommodations, and sites that “ought to be seen” in the interwar period. In Indochina, tourist-oriented organizations, businesses, and government officials realized the potential of tourism to help fuel the economic value of the colonies and generate profits. Shipping

companies, private travel agencies, and the *Agence Economique de l'Indochine* in Paris promoted individual and organized travel after WWI. In the 1920s, the hotel industry and the shipping companies formed the *Bureau de Tourisme en Indochine*. With its head office in Saigon (located in the Continental Palace Hotel) and branches in Hanoi, Haiphong, Hué, Touraine, and Phnom Penh, and Singapore, the Tourism Bureau offered aid and information to tourists, and published brochures as well as the tourist-oriented journal *Étrême Asie: Revue Indochinoise illustrée*.

The government-general of Indochina did not decree an official tourism office until 1935, although Governor Varenne worked to promote tourism in the 1920s and the administration at Hanoi maintained the *Office de la Propagande et du Tourisme*. This office had no direct relations with the public, but it fostered tourist development and produced brochures, films, photographs, and other documentation and cooperated with the tourism bureau. Private developers, with loans from the French administration, constructed eighty modern “grand hotels” praised for having “every comfort...and French menus.”

The *Touring Club de France* (French Touring Club, hereinafter TCF), one of the largest and most active private tourist associations in France, formed a special group in 1931 dedicated to colonial tourism. The TCF plumped for the “*belle aventure* of colonial tourism” and initiated a series of highly-publicized group tours to the colonies beginning in 1931 that were intended “to serve the colonial idea.” The TCF sponsored a lengthy and costly Imperial Grand Tour to Indochina in 1932. Lasting for three months, it was led by General Andlauer (the President of the TCF’s colonial tourism committee and the former supreme military commander of French troops in Indochina) and TCF President Edmond Chaix. The itinerary consisted of visits to Tonkin, travel south on the Route Mandarin with stops that included Saigon, and then to Phnom-Penh, and Angkor. The TCF described Indochina as the region “par excellence” of exotic tourism and that

group travel to «our great colony in the Far East» was the only way to understand and appreciate the « Asiatic mentality which...is so different from ours. » Reports of the tour validated French colonialism as seen through « our European eyes, » and praised French technological and modernizing work in Indochina of road building, railroads, urban development, and the well-developed system of hotels and tourist lodgings. Descriptions also praised French efforts to preserve and re-constituent indigenous sites and cultures, notably at the Albert Sarraut Museum in Phnom-Penh and the archeological reconstruction endeavors at Angkor. Regarding the latter, the head of those archeological efforts stated in the *Revue TCF* that while French art and civilization had continued to flourish and progress, the Khmer kingdom had « brutally » declined. Hence, French efforts to salvage the ruins. The phrase « French colonizing genius» appears in a flattering light.

On this imperial grand tour, TCF tourists reiterated their identification with, and support of, empire through meetings with numerous French administrators, colonists, and military officers, including the French Governor-General of Indochina. They also met with King Monivong of Cambodia and praised the magnificent royal palace. TCF tourists represented Indochina as a model colony peopled by quiescent exotic natives, welcoming indigenous rulers, and beneficent French colonizers who generated economic growth, modernized the infrastructures, and generously took up the burden of its civilizing mission to restored the vestiges of past civilizations. The TCF tour affirmed prevailing imperialist ideologies and practices rather than challenging them.

Travel narratives written by individuals provide a more personal sense of how people chose to represent people, sites and local cultures and history in French Indochina. We can also discern whether or not their travels confirmed or complicated their perspectives on French imperial ideologies and practices. Harry

Franck (1881-1962) was a well-known American travel writer. He claims in the preface to his book, *East of Siam: Ramblings in the five divisions of French Indo-China*, that his curiosity about the region was piqued when he observed “these little brown men in the French army as a soldier in France during the “Great War”.” The book narrates his Frank’s two month journey through Indochina. His travels in Cambodia are marked by depictions of the inferiority of Cambodian people and their culture, and decadence of their monarchies. During Franck’s travels through Cambodia he visited Phnom Penh and attended a performance of royal dancers at the Palace. He described the dancing as “posturing” and called King Sisowath a “poor old figurehead” and a “play king” whose kingdom’s “real boss is the *résident supérieur* sent out from France.” Franck represents Cambodians as “a slow and quiet race” with sense of personal dignity” and as “simple, timid souls...manly and infantile at the same time, they are too naïve to be any match for the worlds of today,” and observes that while Annamese “look down on, and even hate the French, they [Cambodians] are regarded by the other races comprising Indochina as the special pets of foreign rulers.”

Franck rehearses the trope of Cambodia as a people in decline, as he observed that “to see current Cambodians lacking “ambition and the ability to build lasting things” and then view “the towers of Angkor Vat... is to refuse to believe that they are the ancestors of those who built that.” Yet, Franck’s own ambivalence is revealed when he adds: “Yet they are the only people in the peninsula who have left enduring works of their intellectual past....their great art...is the certificate of one of the great races of man kind.” Nonetheless, he asserts that “the little Cambodia of today...is the last remnant of this once powerful empire.”

Franck’s travels through French Indochina also caused him to reflect on the relationship between French power and its effects. He credits French improvements in Cambodia’s infrastructure in communications,

transportation, tourist amenities, and urban life, but suggests these changes have not fundamentally altered older Cambodian social and political patterns. He observes the French economic exploitation of Indochina, noting how the profits extracted from the region go back into French pockets: “it is no altruistic ‘white man’s burden’ the French are carrying there.” His travels cause him to confront his own views on the hierarchical, exploitative and racist assumptions of French rule and his own identifications with their attitudes. He writes that “The French conquest of Indo-China...is merely a part of Western covetousness in the Orient, not the individual sin of an individual nation. We can condemn that Western aggression without losing the right to give full praise to the French soldiers who did the dirty work.” But he asks himself: Is it good or bad for white nations to take over weaker peoples who cannot govern themselves....and who are so well worth exploiting? Is it better to be chaotic, ‘backward,’ but independent, or modern and exploited?” Frank admits he isn’t sure what he thinks, and notes: “it is a perpetual struggle between my reflected and my indignant self.”

French and “western” travelers most often represented Cambodia and Indochina in ways that affirmed the ideological assumptions undergirding French imperialism, as they tended to affirm both the *mission civilisatrice* and the modernizing practices associated with the *mise en valeur* of the colonies. While most of these tourists likely reproduced the political culture of empire in their journeys, those journeys could lead to questioning imperial hierarchies and racial categories. As we saw in the narrative of Harry Franck, his journey through selected “contact zones” raised uncomfortable questions about dominant ideologies and practices of French colonialism that he was not willing to confront. In the end, though, he dedicates his book to “The Hospitable French Colonials.”

Representing Indochina and Cambodia : The 1931 Colonial Exposition

While colonial tourism invited and propelled people to travel in “Indochina,” whether through the imagined geographies and cultures depicted in tourist guidebooks or in actual travel within Indochina itself, Colonial Expositions proposed a simulated journey through the Cambodia and Indochina within metropolitan France. As we shall see, the representations proffered at the era’s Colonial Expositions continued to affirm the ideological tenets of France’s civilizing mission and its positive development of colonial economies, infrastructures, and resources.

The 1931 Exposition in Paris was a spectacle of imperialism that concentrated the major themes of interwar colonial rhetoric and ideology. It was an effort by the French State to make the empire visible within the heart of the metropole, showcase the accomplishments of the “civilizing mission,” and demonstrate the colonies’ economic benefits for the metropole. The Exposition consisted mainly of pavilions representing France's economic and technological accomplishments, its own colonies and those of several other imperialist powers, marketplaces of indigenous craftspeople selling their wares for souvenirs, and restaurants serving "authentic" food. It also contained a reconstructed “native villages” where people brought the colonies were displayed. Required to wear their "native costumes" at all times, they could leave the grounds only with special permission. As living ethnological exhibits these and other exoticized displays of people from the French colonies sought to make hierarchies of colonial power visible and orderly.

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**Fig. 3 French Colonial Pavilions, 1931 Colonial Exposition (Paris)**  
(from L’Illustration, May 23, 1931)

Visitors entering the Exposition first encountered the Metropolitan Section, which displayed the technological, commercial and cultural achievements of France, passed the permanent Colonial Museum

that served as a monument to French colonial history and civilizing mission, and then to the Information Center. After these representations of French technological, economic and historical dynamism, the visitor entered the colonial section via the “Avenue of the French Colonies.” This area brought the visitor to the area containing most of the French colonial pavilions. Their architecture and decor proposed a simple, accessible lesson giving the “idea” of each colony. The exteriors presented an idealized image of the colonies; the interiors were largely devoted to didactic elaborations of France's civilizing mission and the modern development of colonial economies and societies. As Patricia Morton observed, “The site plan invoked the imperial trope of a journey back in time, the primary theme of travel accounts...The progression from Paris to the colonial pavilions was terminated by the zoo, the culmination of the visitor’s voyage from civilization (France)” to backward territories “(the colonies).” A miniature train circled the Exposition grounds, enhancing visitors’ sense of being on a simulated journey from the metropolitan section to the colonies and back.

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Fig. 4 **Bird’s EyeView: International Colonial Exposition (Paris)**  
(from L’Illustration, May 23, 1931)

We can see many of these themes in the Indochina section. One of the largest sections of the Exposition, it covered 15 acres and was dominated by the large (square, with 230 feet per side) and imposing partial reconstruction of Angkor Wat, chosen by the French to represent Indochina as a whole. The reconstructed Angkor War was the iconic “jewel” of the exposition. Surrounding the temple were the Annamite pavilion, a Cambodian pagoda whose wood portal was carved by students of the School of Cambodian Arts and Phnom-Penh, a village of Laotian fishermen, and a Tonkin village, with a Mandarin house and market. Angkor Wat represented Indochina through a Franco-centric framing of its history and of the purported

benefits of French imperialism. The region's history was portrayed as one of decline and chaos following the Khmer civilization, and Angkor was recast as the symbol of a new Indochina reborn from its ruins, a rebirth made possible by France--depicted by one eyewitness as "the legitimate inheritors of this ancient Khmer civilization." He added that "by planting the flag of the Republic over the debris of current

Cambodia, we have made a work ...of emancipation."

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Fig. 5 View of Angkor Wat, 1931 Colonial Exposition (Paris)  
(from L'illustration, May 23, 1931)

The exhibits inside the reconstructed temple consisted of statistical tables and displays lauding the economic, cultural, educational, and medical benefits of France's civilizing mission and development. The first floor catalogued the region's vast economic resources; the second depicted the modern technological contributions of France-- industry, growth of transport, airports, etc.; and the third showcased archeological artifacts "saved" by the French. Here again we see the "stereotype of the Khmer as a formerly advanced but presently degenerate society being "protected", civilized, and developed by the French. We also see Angkor Wat standing for the *mission civilisatrice* and the *mise en valeur* of Indochina as a whole.

While the 1931 Exposition was the largest, most comprehensive, and best attended French exposition devoted entirely to colonialism, many of its images and themes--native villages, colonial pavilions, depictions of France's modernity, and so forth--drew upon earlier Colonial and Universal Expositions.

Representations of Angkor Wat were constructed for the 1889 and 1900 Universal Exhibitions, as well as the 1906 and 1922 Colonial Exhibitions held in Marseilles. Expositions were also held in the colonies. The Colonial Exhibition in Hanoi (1902-03), for example, aimed "to communicate the potential wealth offered to France by the colonization of Indochina." The *mission civilisatrice* was represented there by the first congress of Far Eastern Studies, sponsored by the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient.

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**Fig. 6 View of Angkor Wat, 1922 Colonial Exposition (Marseilles)**

(from L'illustration, 21 October 1922)

These representations of the cultures, landscapes, and peoples of the Empire produced a form of colonial knowledge that was meant to be a “real” and “true” depiction of the colonies of Greater France. As such, representations of the colonies at Expositions were powerful instruments of pro-imperial propaganda. They also overtly encouraged colonial tourism. One visitor noted that while he had "already been a tourist" at the Exposition, he now desired to see for himself colonial peoples who "do not resemble us, whose civilization is below ours." Advocates of colonial tourism seized the opportunity to advocate the real thing. The Information Center contained a tourism office that provided materials on colonial destinations and attractions; various organizations and businesses, including the *Office national du tourisme*, the *Agence Economique d'Indochine*, travel agencies, hotels, transport companies, manufactures of *articles du voyages*, and publishers of guidebooks exhibited there as well as within pavilions. The French Touring Club offered an information stand on colonial tourism that included commercial tourist brochures, six touristic dioramas, illuminated boards mapping itineraries of trips to the colonies, and information on transportation. These depictions of colonial tourism sought to underscore accessibility, stimulate the desires of visitors to travel to the colonies, and to highlight the economic benefits, both in France and in the colonies, of colonial tourism.

This and other endorsements of colonial tourism depicted journeys to the colonies, not the other way around. People from the colonies had, of course, traveled across imperial space to participate in processions, live in the “native villages,” demonstrate “native” dances, and vend “native” foods and crafts in this and other Expositions. Notables from Indochina visited French expositions in various official

capacities as well. One of these officials, Son Diêp was a Cambodian high functionary and intellectual in the French and Cambodian administration. He wrote a long poem about his visit to the 1900 Exposition in Paris, calling the pavilions “resplendent.” King Sisowath, accompanied by a large retinue of over 100 people, visited the 1906 Exposition in Marseilles and was reportedly “ecstatic” over the Cambodian pavilion. The Cambodian royal dancers, accompanied by Palace notables, journeyed to the 1931 Exposition, and two of the King’s sons studying in Paris also attended.

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**Fig. 7 Cambodian Dancers, 1922 Colonial Exposition (Marseilles)**

(from L’Illustration, 21 October 1922)

Not all visitors were impressed, however. Pham Quynh, a Vietnamese journalist and intellectual, recounted his experiences as a member of the Indochinese delegation to the 1922 Colonial Exposition at Marseilles. Describing his role as a “walk-on part” intended to add exoticism at conferences and receptions, he noted his disinterest in viewing ersatz colonial reproductions such as the “paper-mâché” version of Angkor Wat. He instead chose to be a tourist, taking a “pleasure trip” around France and visiting World War I battlefields and enjoying the sights and pleasures of Paris. In 1931, he urged compatriots attending the Paris Colonial Exposition as official Indochinese delegates to take the opportunity to be tourists and “observe French life.”

There were other voices at work during the 1930s, ones that provide a preview of the rejection of these and other representations deployed within French cultural politics. The French socialist Léon Blum observed that “Here we have the reconstruction of the marvelous stairway of Angkor and are watching sacred dancers, but in Indochina they are shooting, deporting, and criticizing.” Radical students from Vietnam and other members of the newly formed Indochinese Communist party in Paris and in other French cities

“contested the servile images” of Indochinese peoples at the Exposition, organized protests, distributed leaflets, and in Paris successfully “persuaded the Vietnamese at the exposition not to carry the giant Oriental dragon around the fairgrounds, and the administrators had to ask Africans to do it.”

While the French persisted in their belief in the enlightening and mutually beneficial effects of colonialism and were not yet ready to contemplate any serious alternative to colonial rule, a nationalist consciousness was growing in among Cambodian educated elites during the 1930s, but it was not until 1953-54, with France militarily defeated, and a political climate dominated by escalating violence and cold war ideological divisions, that Cambodia celebrated its independence.

### Conclusion

I'd like to conclude not with a summary, but with an example of ongoing politics of representation, memory, and history in France regarding the former empire. On 23 February 2005 France passed a law that officially takes a controversial view of French colonial history. This law, which claims to speak for “the Nation,” begins by expressing the Nation’s “gratitude to the women and men who participated in France’s accomplishments in the former French departments of Algeria, in Morocco, in Tunisia, and in Indochina, as well as in territories formers under French sovereignty.” It stipulates that researchers and teachers grant the history of France’s presence overseas the “place that it merits” and that “school curricula recognize in particular the positive role of France’s overseas presence.” The law goes on to recognize France’s debt to those who fought on behalf of France in the Algerian war (1954-1962). This law reminds us that by honoring French colonialists and military veterans, and failing to acknowledge any negative aspects or effects of colonialism, the French state retains a particularly selective perspective on its colonial past. The “positive” past it seeks to remember, and to instantiate within the educational system,

involves actively forgetting the negative, and mixed, aspects of the “*mission civilisatrice*” and the “*mis en valeur*” of France’s colonial project. Some historians have been quick to point out the dangers of an “official history” that by emphasizing the “positive role” of colonization mutes or ignores the brutalities and racism that were its “negative” side, and to emphasize that “historians have particular responsibility to promote research and education that promotes...the plurality “of history rather than a one-sided view. Vestiges of cultural politics of the past are, of course, available to those in the present, and therein lay their ongoing power. At the same time, historians and educators can seek to grasp and teach the diversity, complexity, and particularity of human history.

PAGE

PAGE 18

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I use the term “**cultural politics**” here to connote interconnected systems of meaning and practices, and their relationship to sites of power. See: William H. Sewell, Jr., “The Concept of Culture,” in *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, ed. Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (1999: 35-61) and John Armitage, Ryan Bishop and Douglas Kellner, “Introducing Cultural Politics,” *Cultural Politics*, 1/1 (2005): 1-4.

The **1931 Exposition** has been well studied. For works in English, see: Herman Lebovics, *True France*, chapter 2 (1992), Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina*, chapter 1 (1996) and Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (2000). In French: Catherine Hodier and Michel Pierre, *L'Exposition Coloniale* (Brussels, 1991); Sylvie Pala, *Documents: Exposition Coloniale Internationale* (1981); and Sylvie Leprun, *L'Théâtre des colonies* (1986). Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (2001), p. 2. The term comes from the British “Indo-China” which referred to the Asia that lay beyond India. It came to be associated with the French colonial administration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The kingdom of Vietnam had been united since 1802.

Pierre Brocheux, “Un siècle de colonisation » in *Indochine /Vietnam: Colonisation, Guerres et Communisme*, » special edition of *L'Histoire*, No. 23 (avril-juin 2004) :10-19 ; Milton Osborne, *The French Presence in Cochinchina and Cambodia : Rule and Response, 1859-1905* (1969) ; and Virginia

Thompson, *French Indo-China* (1937).

Martin Murray, *The Development of Capitalism in Colonial Indochina, 1870-1940* (1980); Marc Meauleau, *Des pionniers en Extrême-Orient: Histoire de la Banque de l'Indochine, 1875-1975* (1991); John Tully, *France on the Mekong: A History of the Protectorate in Cambodia, 1863-1953* (2002); Stephen Harp, "Hevea and the Hexagon: Rubber Plantations and French Consumerism in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Encountering Modern French History: A Conference Honoring William B. Cohen* (2003), and Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (1996), 188-192.

Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire and West Africa, 1895-1930* (1997), and Aldrich, *Greater France*, 201-01 and 169-179. *Mise en valeur* was associated with Albert Sarraut, former governor general of Indochina, whose book, *La Mise en valeur des colonies Françaises*, was published in 1923

General information below derived from David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (2000); Osborne, *The French Presence*; Alain Forest, *Le Cambodge et la colonization Française* (1980); and *Cambodia: A Country Study* (U. S. Library of Congress) at HYPERLINK

"<http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/1.htm>" <http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/1.htm>. See also the Cambodia sections of Norman G. Owen, *The Emergence of Southeast Asia: a New History* (2005).

Tully, *France on the Mekong*, 143).

French efforts in Cambodia to some extent mirrored those in Indochina more broadly, for example. in policies intended to replace pre-colonial school systems, and in reforms (notably in 1917) whereby French would be the medium of instruction. A later policy (1924) amended earlier ones so that primary education would be in the student's mother tongues (by region) with French as the language of instruction in higher levels of education. French educational policies have been critiques by historians as being either minimal or purposefully ignored, particularly as they favored the use of Vietnamese within the colonial administration. Most scholars of Cambodia have emphasized the pointed neglect of all levels of education, and especially higher education. Others have argued that the French made sincere efforts toward education that were resisted by the Cambodians themselves and that resulted in a compromise position. What is clear is that by the outbreak of WWII, Cambodia's educated elite was small relative to the Vietnamese. For critiques, see: Gail Kelly, "Franco-Vietnamese Schools, 1918-1933" (PhD. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison 1975) and Marie-Paul Ha, "From 'Nos Ancêtres les Gaulois' to 'Leur Culture Ancestrale': Symbolic Violence and the Politics of Colonial Schooling in Indochina," *French Colonial History* 3 (2003): 101-117, and Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power* (2004). For more nuanced perspectives, see Thomas Clayton, "Restriction or Resistance: French Colonial Educational Development in Cambodia," *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 3/9 (December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1995) and Charles Bilodeau, et al, *Compulsory Education in Cambodia, Laos, and Viet-Nam* (1955).

Bruno Dagens « La Découverte d'Angkor, » *Indochine/Vietnam : Colonisation Guerres, et Communisme* [Les Collections de *L'Histoire*] avril/juin 2004, no. 23 : 22-27. The Ecole was initially established in 1900 as a colonial research institute.

Tully, *France on the Mekong*, chapter 16.

By 1924 there were over 1,000 visitors a year to Angkor, including Charlie Chaplin in April 1935. Tully, *France on the Mekong*, 258-60. On railroads in colonial Indochina see David W. Del Testa, "'Paint the Trains Red': Labor, Nationalism, and the Railroads in French Colonial Indochina, 1898-1945" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1999), and Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (2001): 27-30

Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992).

Two French lines, (Messageries Maritimes and Chargeurs Réunis) and several non-French ones offered regularly scheduled voyages by the mid-1930s, although travel remained expensive and lengthy (30 days from Marseilles to Saigon in the early 1930s). Travel to Indochina was somewhat faster when air serves was established via Bangkok in the mid-1930s. *Congrès International du Tourisme, du Thermalisme et du Climatisme, Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques* (Paris, 1937), 7-10; Pierre-Edmund About, *Indochine* [Guides des Colonies Français] (Paris, 1931), 128 and Henry Bontoux, "The Opening of Aerial Tourism in Indochina: From the Saigon River to Angkor Vat on a Straight Wing," *Extrême-Asie: Revue Indochinoise Illustrée*, May 1929.

David W. Del Testa, "'Imperial Corridor': Association, Transportation and Power in French Colonial Indochina," *Science, Technology & Society* 4 (1999), 348, note 32; Samuel Silvestre de Sacy, "Le Tourisme en Indochine," *Revue TCF*, no. 435 (February 1931): 40; "Le Tourisme en Indochine," 41, and The Madrolle Guides, *Indochina* (Paris, 1939), 267 [in English].

Edmond Chaix, "Tourisme d'Outremer," *Revue TCF*, no. 444 (November 1931), 302, 302 "Nos prochains grands voyages coloniaux," *Revue TCF*, no. 530 (January 1939): 28 and "Le tourisme en Indochine," 46. "Impressions d'Indochine," 222.

Marchal, "Une merveille touristique de l'Extrême-Orient Français: Les Temples Khmers d'Angkor," *Revue TCF*, no. 521 (April 1938): 107-112.

"Le Touring Club de France en Extrême-Orient," *Revue TCF*, no. 458 (January 1933), 4; "Impressions de l'Indochine," 222 and Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochine*, 7.

Henry A. Franck, *East of Siam: Ramblings in the five divisions of French Indo-China* (1926), vii, 40, 76-78, 85, 31.

Franck, *East of Siam*, 223-224. Edward Said's statement, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) that "...no one with any power to influence public discussion or policy demurred as to the basic superiority of the white European male, who should always retain the upper hand." (p 151) has been challenged. See: Owen While, "The Decivilizing Mission: Auguste Dupuis-Yakouba and French Timbuktu," *French Historical Studies*, 23/3 (Summer 2004): 540-568.

Exposition Coloniale Internationale de 1931, *Rapport Général présenté par le Gouverneur Général Olivier* (Paris, 1933-34), Tome VI, 586-587.

I have invoked here Saloni Mathur's phrase from her article "'Living Ethnological Exhibits: The Case of 1886," *Cultural Anthropology* 15 (2000): 492-524.

Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, 147 and Lebovics, *True France*, 51-97.

Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, 35-41 and 234-251. The Tonkin village's principle pavilion was the backdrop for regular performances by a native theater troupe performing dragon dances.

Claude Farrère, "Angkor et l'Indochine," *L'Illustration*, n.p. See also Henri Gourdon, « Les Palais et les Pavillons, L'Indochine, » *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, 774-793.

Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina*, 25.

As Yael Simpson Fletcher notes, the 1922 Colonial Exposition in Marseilles was "designed to materialize the cultural heterogeneity of the French Empire" even as the exhibits "drew on the same underling colonialist 'phantasmatics'-- the exotic orient, primitive Africa, and mysterious Islam—as other European expositions." Fletcher, "'Capital of the Colonies': real and imagined boundaries between metropole and empire in 1920s Marseilles," in *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity*, ed. Felix Driver and David Gilbert (Manchester, 1999), 140-141. See also Michael Vann, "All the World's a Stage: Especially in the Colonies: L'Exposition de Hanoi 1902-1903", paper presented at the "Empire and Propaganda Conference" held in September 1997 in London, 5-6.

"L'Exposition Coloniale Internationale: Introduction au tourisme colonial," *La Revue du Touring Club de France*, no. 443 (Oct 1931), 294.

Olivier, *Rapport Général*, VI: 586-599.

*Revue TCF* (31 June and 31 October 1931), 159 and 29.

KHING Hoc Dy, "Le voyage de l'envoyé cambodgien Son Diêp à Paris en 1900," *Récits de voyages asiatiques* (EFEO, 1996), 374 and Tully, *France on the Mekong*, 265. See also Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Visitas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (1988).

Pham Quynh, "Souvenirs d'Exposition coloniale," *Nam Phong* 62 (May 1931): 49-52. Reprinted from *France-Indochine* (15 June 1931).

Blum, "Moins de fêtes et de discours, plus d'intelligence humaine." *Le Populaire* (7 May 1931).

Lebovics, *True France*, 104.

A copy of the law, which contains a petition by historians that protests the law, can be found on: HYPERLINK "http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/UnTexteDeJorf?numjo=DEFX0300218L" <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/UnTexteDeJorf?numjo=DEFX0300218L>