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## Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier and Tim Winter (Eds.) Expressions of Cambodia: The Politics of tradition, identity and change. New York: Routledge, 2012.

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**Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier and Tim Winter (Eds.) *Expressions of Cambodia: The Politics of tradition, identity and change.* New York: Routledge, 2012.**

Ollier and Winter's edited volume is an engaging assembly of thirteen chapters organized along four major themes that focus on some aspect of Cambodian culture. As the editors note in their introduction, the notion of culture within present day Cambodia is caught between two opposing narratives. While one narrative revolves around the destruction of culture following the genocidal reign of the Khmer Rouge, the other chooses to highlight the restoration and regeneration of that culture. The editors' aim with this eclectic volume is to situate culture at the forefront of a scholarly analysis that allows us to comprehend the totality of post-conflict Cambodian society as it navigates the socio-cultural spaces in between these competing narratives. The editors note that the inspiration for this volume grew out of a discussion over how best to "judge" the Cambodian Cultural Village (CCV)—a national identity theme park that resembles a Disney-like experience on the outskirts of Siem Reap. Rather than dismiss the CVV as an incongruous monument, the editors believe that this type of oddity can actually foster one of the three major goals of this volume, which is to "open up new spaces of analysis, identify fresh topics of study, and offer rich theoretical perspectives that treat phenomena such as the CVV as important and worthy of inquiry" (p. 6). The two remaining goals of this work are to unify current scholarship on Cambodia "under a single thematic umbrella" and to fill a void in the growing body of literature on Southeast Asia that tends to ignore Cambodia. In pursuit of their goals, Ollier and Winter adopt a process-oriented cultural framework that centers on the question of what "expressions" the CVV permits us to make about quintessential dichotomous relationships such as "tradition and modernity, diaspora and home, memory and identity, and the citizen and the state" (p. 6). While each of the chapters in this volume succeeds in highlighting some element of a cultural framework from the prism of multiple perspectives, the chapters fall short of the work's ultimate aim in that the authors of individual chapters fail to link the focus of their respective chapters to the stated goals of the book. Beyond the introductory chapter, none of the chapters address the CVV and its role in cultural reconstruction, preservation, or even identity. What each chapter offers, however, is an almost unintentional reference to the purpose of the volume in connection to the duality and contradictions that define identity in and out of Cambodia today. It is this dichotomous awareness and focus unique to each chapter that holds the volume together.

In part one, *Re-scripting Angkor*, the only link among the chapters is their shared reference to Angkor Wat (a temple built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the largest religious monument in the world, a prime attraction for visitors of Cambodia). Edwards' chapter illustrates the universality of "graffiti" and the range of culturally defined "graffiti practices," examining the shifting meaning from more spirituality-based inscriptions to those that stress the longing to be known. Winter's focus is less on culture and more on the role of tourism and the contrast between Cambodia's "glorious" past and its "tragic" recent history, which both seem to keep tourists confined to the "well trodden paths." Norindr emphasizes the emblematic significance of Angkor Wat on multiple levels including its worth for non-Cambodians. For notions of identity and culture, Norindr frames his analysis through a discussion of Rithy Panh's 2003 film, "The People of Angkor," and contrasts the invisibility of the local population with foreigners against the backdrop of Angkor Wat. For Norindr, reclaiming Cambodian culture needs to center on the "invisible, the marginal, and the subaltern" (p. 68).

In part two, *Identity and the liminal space*, the authors take us to the spatial frontiers of Khmer identity beyond Cambodia's borders to the realms of the diaspora and show the linkage between exile and home and the authenticity of identity, as well as memory and longing. While the chapters are informative, their theoretical foundations are not readily apparent. Poethig's essay draws our attention to the debate over dual citizenship and the political manipulation over the genuineness of one's national identity. Chau-Pech Ollier's chapter explores the world of Khmer Rap through the lyrics and music of PraCH Ly, whose work allows us to understand the identity markers of what it means to be a Cambodian in America (as opposed to a Cambodian-American). In contrast, Um's essay navigates the various layers of memory and homeland among exiles and returnees.

In part three, *Performing Tradition*, Dahles and ter Horst examine the differing discourses on the fluidity of ethnicity among Sino-Khmers in the context of their relationship to the silk industry and what it means for an ethnic identity to be "authentic" versus "forged." As part of an ethnographic study, this chapter would have been a better fit in part two since its only apparent relationship to the performing arts is its peripheral mention of fabrics worn by performance artists. Turnbull discusses the dismal state of affairs of Cambodia's performing arts, while Amratisha exposes us briefly to the distinct worlds of women writers both in Cambodia and abroad, highlighting both common and dissimilar themes.

In part four of this volume, *Engaging modernity*, the element of duality is at the forefront as the editors bring us the insights of Ian Harris, who examines the re-emergence of Buddhism in post-Pol Pot Cambodia and the tensions over tradition and modernism through an entrepreneurial versus charismatic conceptual framework. Wood's chapter is the only contribution that incorporates the volume's introduction into his theoretical framework, which analyzes tourism caught between market driven incentives and the politicization of historical memory. Lastly, Derks' ethnographic study of Khmer women and their migration experiences from the village to urban areas provides us with a gendered approach to notions of identity and the struggle to find balance between the traditional and the modern.

Overall, each chapter makes an important contribution to our understanding of Cambodian culture, identity, tradition, and change, particularly in the context of post-conflict nation building. And on a positive note, this volume does add Cambodia to the body of scholarship on the region. However, the work falls short of unifying these essays into a coherent whole. For the most part, the chapters themselves seem distant from the introduction. From this reviewer's point of view, what could have made the volume stronger as an edited text would have been the inclusion of a concluding chapter by the editors that attempted to link the chapters together to the stated goals of the volume. As such, the chapters in this volume should be read for their individual commentary, insight, and analysis and not for their contribution to a greater theme or as a part of a logical whole.

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