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Introduction

Today, the legacy of Cambodia’s colonial past can still be seen in the country’s ‘cultural heritage.’ Indeed, commonly held prescriptions of an ‘authentic’ Khmer or Cambodian culture, forged during a period of French colonialism, have been re-invigorated through the cultural logics of a post-conflict international tourism and heritage industry overwhelmingly oriented around the World Heritage Site of Angkor.

Closer examination of tourism in Cambodia today, however, suggests important shifts are now occurring. During the 1990s, North America and Europe dominated Cambodia’s arrival statistics. More recently, Northeast Asia and ASEAN countries have become the country’s key source markets. Today, over 70 percent of all tourists traveling to Cambodia are from within Asia. This shift in markets holds important consequences for Cambodia’s material culture, where a Eurocentric discourse of what is considered as ‘traditional’ Khmer or Cambodian is now being overlaid, transcended and reconstituted by the aesthetics of a tourism industry linked to Taiwan, Korea and China. Characterized by a multitude of economic and cultural flows, this shift in tourism holds major implications for a country still very much engaged in a task of socio-cultural rehabilitation and identity reconstruction.

An exploration of the recent changes in Cambodia reveals a number of issues and questions that have yet to be adequately addressed in the literature on material culture and tourism. It will be seen that debates in this field have primarily revolved around critiques of commodification, tradition versus modernity, the local versus global, or the paradoxes of staged authenticity. Implicit to these studies has been a monolithic and undifferentiated reading of the tourist as subject. Indeed, as with much of the literature on tourism, the prototypical encounter has been between Westerners — silently gendered as male and ethnically as white — and their host destinations. As a result, less attention has been given to differentiating between tourist audiences and practices, and understanding the consumption of material culture in variegated, culturally divergent terms. In response, this chapter argues the situation in Cambodia demonstrates why more nuanced, less universalist,
understandings of aesthetics and taste, and a willingness to rethink how places are being re-scripted and re-packaged for new forms of consumption are urgently required. In offering such an account, the chapter seeks to discuss the aesthetics of material culture in less judgmental terms, and move beyond ideas of high/low culture and quality/mass tourism, by highlighting the cultural positions from which such pronouncements are made.

Approaching material culture

The study of souvenirs within tourism studies stretches back more than two decades. Most broadly, attention has principally focused on the production of handicrafts, craftpieces and indigenous or ethnic arts: the 'primitive arts' of traditional societies. Relatively little attention has been given to mass manufactured plastic or metal items, or what is often referred to as 'kitsch' items on sale in places like New York, Milan, Shanghai or London. The analysis of souvenirs, as forms of material culture, therefore reveals much about the field of tourism studies generally, and the epistemological foundations it rests upon. One of the first scholars to treat souvenirs as a serious field of enquiry back in the mid-1970s was Nelson Graburn. Not surprisingly, the framework for interpreting tourism-related material culture at that time was heavily oriented around the concept of authenticity, an idea that gained a wide following through the writing of Dean MacCannell (1976). As we know, understanding tourism as a quest for the authentic rests upon a structuralist reading of societies, peoples, and cultures conceived as the 'other' of an alienated Western subject. In laying out the foundations for such debates in the context of ethnic and tourist arts, Graburn (1976) simultaneously recognized the problems and limitations of conceiving the authentic in relation to ethnicity, tradition, or culturally relative definitions of quality.

Despite such early words of caution, numerous studies conducted subsequently have seen authenticity in more absolutist, positivist terms in order to question processes of commodification and the introduction of mass manufacturing in 'traditional' contexts. Indeed, 24 years after Graburn's observations, a number of authors in the excellent volume Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism (Hitchcock and Teague 2000) were at pains to remind readers of the contingent and highly subjective nature of authenticity. As Hitchcock (2000), Dougoud (2000), Mars and Mars (2000), and Wilkinson (2000) show in the volume, souvenirs become prescribed as authentic through their symbolic value as markers of place, as expressions of difference, or as signs of good taste.

Debates concerning processes of commodification, tradition versus modernity, and the paradoxes of staged authenticity have endured over a number of decades largely due to the geographies of research, with a prevailing discourse of 'locally crafted' invariably referring to non-Western, pre-industrial settings. Feest's (1992) typology of tribal art, ethnic art, pan-Indian art and Indian mainstream art, for example, has remained influential for a number
of subsequent studies (see Evans 1994a, 2000). McNaughton (2006) considers host–guest relations in India as a factor of handicraft production, while Teague (2000) examines handcrafted metalwares in Nepalese villages to ask questions about tourism’s impact on tradition and a localized cultural integrity. In their respective studies, Evans (2000) and Graburn (1982, 1987) pursue similar themes, but from a perspective that contemplates the arrival of tourism as an engine of revival. Discussing the case studies of Mexico and Lombok, Evans suggests ‘whilst the demise of “tribal” art may be regretted . . . the development of a tourist art and craft market has effectively revitalized indigenous art, and local economies, albeit in Western terms and tastes’ (2000: 132).

Clearly, for Evans, a sense of ambivalence arises from the way tourism shapes the very aesthetics of a revival. Such sentiments have been a recurring theme within the literature. Important studies in Cohen’s special issue on tourist arts (1993) have illustrated how the lack of tourist knowledge about a place leads producers to change their design, at once both reverting to more archaic styles and simultaneously drawing on Western designs for inspiration. Similarly, Causey (2003) provides us with a richly detailed account of how the ‘style’ of handicrafts in North Sumatra emerges through an interweaving of tourist perceptions and evolving designs and production techniques. Causey reads the production of handicrafts in terms of market interaction. Likewise, Evans (1994a, 1994b), McNaughton (2006), Sinclair and Tsegaye (1990) and Stanley (2000) all look towards market intermediaries as a pivotal factor in the evolution of styles and designs.

With the vast majority of studies on souvenirs dedicated to non-Western, pre-modern socio-cultural contexts, today’s academic gaze continues to revisit and rework many of the themes explored by early anthropologists interested in the ‘primitive arts’ of traditional societies. Situating this recent scholarship in its nineteenth- and early twentieth-century roots also draws us into the arenas of European colonialism, early approaches to museumology and the travel of objects from colonial territories to metropolitan centers. Europe’s fascination with primitive arts at the beginning of the twentieth century would segment and codify masks, carvings, and ‘mysterious’ sculptures according to Western typologies of art and design, and the exotic and ethnologic.

While authors like Teague and Stanley point towards a need for greater reflexivity concerning the cultural positioning of scholarship on tourism today, ideas like authenticity, tradition and localized cultures remain highly territorialized debates: conversations typically located in the traditional, pre-modern ‘third world.’ The endurance of these themes has also relied upon a simple distinction between inward and outward audiences, whereby tourists are regarded as external, non-indigenous subjects. It is a binary distinction, however, that presents the tourist in undifferentiated terms, and as a monolithic subject. The Western (authentic-seeking) tourist has come to speak for all tourists, regardless of their ethnicity, location, religion or color. As a consequence, little attention has been given to differentiating between tourist
audiences and understanding consumption in variegated, culturally divergent
terms. This chapter attempts to address this by examining recent develop­
ments in Cambodia.

**History repeats itself: revival and restoration**

As the 1990s unfolded, Cambodia embarked upon a number of rapid and pro­
found social transformations; from civil war to peace, from a socialist-style
authoritarianism to multi-party democracy, and from geographic isolation
to a free-market economy. The country would also be recovering from an era
of history defined by civil war, genocide and a decade of foreign occupation.
A key focal point for these interweaving transitions would be a heritage tour­
ism industry oriented around Angkor. The conservation of Angkor’s temples
promised the restoration of identity, history, cultural sovereignty and
national pride. International tourism promised much-needed socio-economic
development. As I have detailed at length elsewhere, Angkorean heritage
tourism would thus be pivotal in shaping a broader nationalized discourse
of ‘revival’ (Winter 2007a, 2007b). To fully understand the socio-political
dynamics of this language, however, it is helpful to return briefly to the early
decades of the century.

The date ‘1860’ stands in Cambodian history as the moment the French
botanist, Henri Mouhot, ‘discovered’ the ruins of Angkor. His diaries, post­
humously published across Europe, would inspire numerous travelers and
explorers over the coming decades to set off in search of the mysterious,
labyrinthine remnants of a lost civilization. Until the turn of the century,
such trips from Europe were narrated and written up as voyages of explora­
tion, rather than merely tourism. By 1907, the visitors log for Angkor recorded
around 200 names for that year. As the early decades of the century pro­
gressed, the Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO) – a research and
conservation body established at the turn of the century – made significant
advances in clearing and restoring a number of the temple sites (Edwards
2006). Angkor thus became the focal point of a colonial cultural, political dyad,
enabling the French to claim sovereignty over Cambodia’s vestigial glories
and present themselves as gatekeepers to the arts and crafts of a magnificent,
but lost ancient culture.

A nascent tourism industry would also deliver an international audience
for a burgeoning arts and crafts industry in Cambodia. Deeply concerned
about the impact of imported goods from Europe, and the resultant cultural
modernization, the historian, artist and archaeologist George Groslier had
been working towards a national arts program since the early 1910s. Argu­
ing that Cambodia’s traditional arts were in ‘crisis’ and threatened with
‘contamination’ from foreign imports, Groslier embarked upon a mission of
‘rescuing’ the country’s culture. In her detailed examination of his diaries
and daily records, Muan (2001) traces his description of an artistic essence;
one that was fixed in tradition and the ‘climate, flora and fauna’ of where
the Cambodian people lived (cited in 2001: 20). She argues that, for Groslier, the crisis did not involve the end of aesthetic production, but rather a shift towards Westernized art forms that 'did not match the ethno-national portrait of "Cambodian art"' he envisaged.

Some years later, Phnom Penh would see the opening of a new Department of Fine Arts. Under the guidance of Groslier, the Department focused its attention on creating a cultural industry which linked arts training with the city's Musée Khmer, an ancient temple heritage and a steadily growing tourism industry. The School of Cambodian Arts he helped establish would also train teams of craftsmen to work in the ancient traditions, reproducing the intricate carvings and sculptures found in the temples. In stark contrast to the rise of modernism and its various movements in Europe, art in Cambodia was returning to its classical roots. The Angkorean civilization had given this young nation a magnificent cultural heritage, a moment of unsurpassable artistic achievement.

In Groslier's eyes, mimicry and replication were thus natural and honorable aspirations for Cambodians to hold. Cambodian art would be handcrafted, classical designs reproduced on a mass scale. The school helped shape a colonial ideology which transposed a concern for the high art of classical antiquity on to the colonial subject. Tourists from Europe and America would reaffirm this aesthetic régime by giving it an economic validity. Temple paintings or replicas of bas reliefs and Angkorean statuary made ideal souvenirs: supposedly authentically Cambodian and 'tasteful' enough to be proudly displayed in a middle-class European home. In essence, then, Groslier's efforts, along with the work of EFEO and the growing popularity of Angkor as a tourist site elevated the temples into the definitive, and omnipresent, point of reference for a cultural tourism and heritage industry oriented around the notions of revival and restoration.

After more than two decades of violent conflict and civil war, this language of revival would return in the early 1990s. The combination of a multi-billion dollar United Nations assistance program and an economic reorientation towards a Western donor community ensured a discourse of reconstruction was in large part conceived around, and driven by, Western understandings of what constitutes Cambodian culture. The return of EFEO as a key player in a World Heritage framework for Angkor would also mean that conservation and architectural restoration would dominate the country's heritage industry. In effect, the need to protect the temples from a turbulent social environment and re-establish a program of restoration re-solidified a former colonial narrative that firmly prioritized and reified the country's classical antiquities. The reintroduction of a Eurocentric reading of Cambodian culture also meant those cultural forms, both tangible and intangible, indisputably linked to the Angkorean period – and thus indisputably Khmer in heritage – received the bulk of aid and nourishment. One of the most successful organizations in this area was the Siem Reap-based Chantiers-Ecoles.
Founded in 1992, the training school was co-funded by the French Foreign Ministry (Ministère Français des Affaires Etrangères) and the European Union. Over the coming years training schools for silk, carving, and lacquering and gilding would open. In 1998, *Artisans d’Angkor* was created with the aim of making the operation entirely self-financed. A year later, the first *Artisans d’Angkor* boutique opened in Siem Reap. Among the principal product lines were wood and stone reproductions of statues, busts and the temple bas-reliefs. Carved in stone, the single most popular tourist souvenir marking a trip to Angkor has been the bust of the famed leader of the Angkorean period, Jayavarman VII. Recalling Meethan’s (2001) arguments concerning the need for provenance in the transaction of touristic objects, workshop tours vividly demonstrate to clients that production techniques have ‘changed little’ since the Angkorean period. As the display for the *Artisan d’Angkor* airport shop presented in Figure 4.1 suggests, Jayavarman VII has been carved tens of thousands of times by those learning and working in their workshops.

In their production of silks, while a range of bags, cushions, and scarves have been designed to suit ‘modern’ tastes, the organization has made great efforts to research and reclaim traditional production techniques and ‘classical’ designs. A continual focus on such hand-woven silks, along with wood, lacquer-ware and hand-carved stone reflects the underlying philosophy of the organization. Strongly reminiscent of Groslier’s language of restoration, their mission statement declares:

*Artisans d’Angkor* has renewed interest in the authenticity and value of the strong Khmer cultural identity and stands for upmarket workmanship creativity, a showcase for traditional Cambodian savoir-faire... Its activity is centered around the social, economic and professional

*Figure 4.1 Artisan d’Angkor* airport shop display, Phnom Penh (2005) (Photo by author)
advancement of the artisans, and around promoting quality handicrafts with a strong Khmer identity.

(Artisans d’Angkor 2006)

Not surprisingly, this link between community development and the reclamation of a cultural identity has been a recurring theme for a number of other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the country. The town of Siem Reap, for example, is home to the retail outlets of Rehab Craft Cambodia, Joom Noon (Gifts of Hope), Rajana (Design), Tabitha, and Hagar among others.¹ As part of a post-conflict civil society imported from countries like Sweden, the UK, France, Canada, or Belgium, these shops offer a range of handicrafts made from wood, stone, silk, lacquer, cotton, as well as handmade cards, photo albums, wall hangings, paintings and other decorative ornaments. Invariably, such items bear the hallmark of ‘Made in Cambodia.’ Handed to every tourist that enters the shop, the promotional brochure of the Stung Treng Women’s Development Center (SWDC), an organization specializing in the production of ‘Mekong Blue’ silk, states:

Through a program of teaching sewing and weaving skills, women learn about the traditional art of Khmer silk, lost after decades of civil war . . . We aim to empower vulnerable women and their children. The weavers learn all stages of the traditional art of Khmer silk weaving from dying the raw silk through spinning and eventually weaving the silk into its finished product. Thus the art of Khmer silk weaving, once common to this province, is kept alive.

(Anonymous 2004: 4)

In the absence of a substantive domestic market for premium products like hand-made silk, the arrival of high spending tourists from abroad presented a vital, and steadily growing, stream of revenue for such organizations. From annual arrival figures of tens of thousands in the early 1990s, tourism would rapidly grow with sustained political stability. Throughout the 1990s, the demographics of Cambodia’s tourism industry were dominated by European and North American countries. In 2000, visitors from the USA topped the list of country-by-country statistics, accounting for 14 percent of the 265,000 arrivals. However, while France, the UK and Australia also featured in the top ten, a shift in the geography of source markets was now beginning to occur. As the twenty-first century dawned, it was clear that future growth in Cambodia’s tourism industry would come from countries in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and Northeast Asian regions.

The arrival of Asian tourism

Initially led by Japan, this growth in intra-regional tourism has continued to gain momentum with ever increasing arrivals from Taiwan, Korea and
China (Ministry of Tourism 2000, 2003). By 2003, nearly 60 percent of the 701,000 tourists entering Cambodia originated from Asia, with around two-thirds of that figure accounted for by countries located in the northeast of the region (Ministry of Tourism 2003). According to the Ministry of Tourism, the fastest growth from the previous year, 2002, came from Korea (141 percent), Malaysia (46 percent) and Thailand (37 percent). The less spectacular, but still notable, increases from China (17 percent) and Taiwan (16 percent) ensured Cambodia and Angkor in particular were entering a new era of tourism (Ministry of Tourism 2003).

Since the late 1990s, the town has witnessed an extremely rapid expansion in the number of businesses catering to the Asian tourist and in particular the Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Taiwanese markets (Winter 2007a). By the end of the decade, a high level of integration had evolved between numerous travel agents, restaurants, souvenir shops and hotels, all targeting markets from Northeast Asia. Rather than aiming at the high-end luxury sector, virtually all the hotels and restaurants have been constructed with the 'mid-range' package tour market in mind. Much of the investment for this infrastructure has come from outside Cambodia. Since the late 1990s, Siem Reap has witnessed a rapid growth in Korean, Japanese and Chinese expatriates operating in its tourism industry. As the second major economic hub of the country, the town is now home to a significant proportion of the estimated 30,000 mainland Chinese living in Cambodia today (Beech 2005). In many cases the investments made by these communities also intersect with Cambodia's well-established, and often wealthy, ethnic Chinese population. By establishing various partnerships, entrepreneurs have been able to secure stakes in a variety of tourism-related products, including hotel rooms, nightlife entertainment, catering and even imported alcoholic spirits.

One of the most important industries in terms of revenue generation for this sector has been the sale of souvenirs. Since the late 1990s, a number of large shops targeting the Asian tourist have opened. In response to the rapidly increasing number of tourist arrivals from around the region, these outlets have become larger and larger, with some now employing as many as 60 sales assistants across two or three floors. Nestled in between restaurants, hotels and massage parlors, the shops typically occupy prime retail locations along the two roads connecting the town with the airport and the Angkor Park. For the majority of the year their car parks are full during late afternoon or the minutes either side of sunset with taxis and tour buses making a 'souvenir stop' before returning guests to their hotel. In part, success in the industry has been driven by a system of commissions. Bus, taxi and motorbike drivers, along with tour guides and tour operators, are all given monetary incentives to bring their clients to particular stores. With substantial percentage commissions on sales, buses carrying up to 50 passengers have become lucrative sources of income for the guides and their drivers; an economic system that has contributed significantly to the average length of stay in the country hovering around the two-day level. For guides, tour operators
and shop owners alike, securing a souvenir stop every 48 hours has proved far more profitable than having guests visiting a shop once during a four- or five-day stay.

Not surprisingly, tourists entering these shops are immediately faced with an array of Angkorean themed items. However, in both design and materiality, the products offered differ significantly from those at Artisans d’Angkor and the other NGO outlets in the region. Jayavarman VII appears once again, but instead of being exclusively carved in stone or wood, he comes in a choice of glass, metal or gold-painted plaster of Paris. While sandstone replicas provide Artisans’ customers with a tangible connection between the very materiality of Angkor’s temples and their future memories, glass reproductions speak of another cultural aesthetic. In place of an ‘authenticity’ of material, etched and polished glass promises the precision of mass manufacturing, a souvenir that sparkles and looks very ‘modern.’ Glass is also the material of choice for a range of molded blocks, inside of which sit three-dimensional miniature ‘etchings’ of Apsara dancers, the central complex of Angkor Wat, the four-faced towers of the Bayon temple, or the words ‘Angkor of Cambodia’ (or indeed, in some cases, Angkop of Cambodia). Once fitted with three AA batteries, a switch at the back turns on the unit’s upward-facing Light Emitting Diodes. Best viewed in a darkened room, Jayavarman VII, or the gently leaning Apsara dancers, now flash on and off in vibrant red, green and blue. Similarly, matching Angkorean key chains made from cubes of Perspex flash from the power of watch batteries.

For those customers wondering where such items have been manufactured, the stamp ‘Made in China’ on the bottom of the plastic pedestals provides the answer. The origins of textile products such as scarves, shoes and skirts, however, are less clear. Casual enquiries to sales staff are met with a default ‘Made in Cambodia.’ On further probing, they reluctantly admit all the items have been imported, ‘mostly from China or Taiwan.’ Indeed, in contrast to the subdued, primary colors found elsewhere, these shops offer their clients a choice of 20 to 30 different scarves, many with elaborate designs and multicolored patterns. Among these are designs that are also commonly found in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

This blurring of ethno-cultural and national boundaries also appears in the ‘reproductions’ of the sculptures and bas reliefs found in Angkor’s temples. Plaster casts of Apsara dancers are recomposed and modified to feature musical instruments not depicted anywhere in the actual temples themselves (Figure 4.2). Similarly, a desktop-sized model of a wooden folding screen, perhaps of ‘Chinese style,’ features figures taken from the Ramayana depicted on scroll paintings of a style commonly found in Thailand. On the panels either side of these images is a brief description of the history of Angkor Wat and a map of Cambodia (Figure 4.3). With their metal hinges, high gloss machine-sculpted wooden panels and raised plastic frontispieces, these items conveniently fold up for travel. But in their design these objects speak little of a Cambodian or Khmer heritage.
Figure 4.2  Plaster reproduction of temple bas-relief (Photo by author)

Figure 4.3  Folding wooden screen (Photo by author)
With an ever growing market of tourists traveling from Northeast Asia, these shops have continued to diversify their range of products. The temples now provide the inspiration for hologram pictures, clocks, bath towels, cutlery, cigarette trays, and even desktop-sized three-dimensional ‘watercolors’ cast in plaster, complete with model easel (Figure 4.4).

Typically, these Angkorean themed items occupy the front, most prominent, sections of floor-space. Further into the shops, the product lines diverge and appear to have little connection with Cambodia. Tea sets, gold jewelry, jade amulets and belts made from sting-ray ‘leather’ have been sourced and imported from a variety of countries. The jug and cups set presented in Figure 4.5 are among numerous items that have traveled overland from Bangkok.

More recently, however, one of the town’s largest outlets, the Royal Angkor Shopping Mall, located in the very prominent ‘royal square’ in between the Grand Hotel d’Angkor and the King’s private residence, has turned its ground floor over entirely to precious stones and gems. Sapphire, moonstone, kunzite, amethyst and garnet stones, imported from Thailand, are displayed in rows of glass display cases. Owned by a Taiwanese businessman, the large two-storied shop also stocks an extensive range of metal and glass temple replicas, alcoholic spirits, ‘ethnic’ clothing and other home decorations. Typical of many of these ‘malls’ located on the roads to the airport and Angkor park,
the target audience for this business is primarily tourists from China, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and the secondary markets of Malaysia and Singapore. Clearly, in aiming at these sectors of the global tourist public, these businesses have brought into play a set of very different aesthetics and cultural logics than those employed by the shops and stalls more reliant upon clientele from Europe and North America. The final section of the chapter situates this shift within the broader context of Cambodia’s socio-cultural recovery, and considers how the rise of the Asian tourist poses new challenges and questions concerning the relationship between tourism and material culture.

**Implications: rethinking material culture**

As countless studies have shown, tourism does not merely sit detached and external from its social context. Indeed, as tourism is performed for an outside world, its definitions and prescriptions of tradition, ethnic identity, or national culture become part of the fabric of the host society. This chapter has considered such issues during a highly charged and emotive moment in a country’s history. The recovery of Cambodia’s cultural landscape after an
era of genocide and prolonged conflict has in part been driven by a rapidly expanding international tourism industry. An analysis of souvenirs reveals how a rapid rise in Asian tourism is bringing new cultural logics and new aesthetics to this recovery process.

By considering how a language of the ‘traditional’ has historically emerged, Cambodia’s culture has been read in socio-political and discursive terms. Rather than pointing towards any notions of ‘authenticity’ and associated critical assertions concerning loss or commodification, the chapter has examined material culture as evolving and dynamic, and contingent upon particular economic and social relations. Accordingly, parallels between a French colonial period and a post-war era have been cited; historical moments of anxiety and uncertainty within which discourses of reconstruction and restoration have been driven by Eurocentric ascriptions of the country’s culture. A brief look at some examples of the material culture imported for a Northeast Asian market, however, suggests that the parameters and contours of Cambodia’s post-war revival are now being shaped by a very different set of aesthetic and cultural criteria.

We have seen that, when funded by foundations, governments and NGOs, the production of culture for tourism has been oriented towards a provenance of place and an ‘authenticity’ derived from the use of locally sourced materials and hand-made manufacturing. In contrast, an entrepreneurial business sector from Northeast Asia applies very different logics to this process in response to the aesthetics of the Asian consumer. In this respect, it can be seen that Asian tourism is opening up the parameters and discourses of a Cambodian cultural ‘recovery.’ It encourages the absorption of ‘modern’ techniques and materials, and the integration of eclectic designs and technologies. Seen in a positive light, a more fluid, open and less xenophobic notion of recovery can perhaps emerge from culturally vibrant trans-national connectivities. Asian tourism is also encouraging the ‘traditional’ to be reconstituted and represented in different ways. Equally, however, it can be validly argued that these current trajectories of tourism pose very real threats to already fragile socio-cultural, ethnic identities and weakened claims of sovereignty. Perhaps most importantly, this brief study suggests the need for further research over the coming years investigating the degree to which such cultural flows are welcomed, absorbed or rejected by Cambodians themselves. Clearly, the shifting nature of tourism in Cambodia poses unfamiliar questions and issues that negate critiques oriented around inside versus outside audiences.

At a broader level, this study suggests Asian tourism demands more critical responses to the aesthetic and cultural shifts accompanying the growth of regionalized economies and consumer audiences. Cheap manufacturing, for example, combined with trans-national business networks reaching across Southeast Asia is reconfiguring, even severing, ties between place and culture. Clearly, the souvenir industry for Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese markets does not rely upon ideas of local provenance. Instead, it appears the most
popular souvenirs for such markets only take up temporary residence in Cambodia: imports that in many cases return home to their country of manufacture. In that they speak little of their locality, and that their value does not stem from being ‘Made in Cambodia,’ these items pose important analytical challenges. As a conceptual category, the ‘local’ rests upon the idea of a globalized network of locales, where distinction and difference within the network provide the criteria for judgment. Invariably, such difference has been simplistically ascribed along the political and geographical fault lines of the modern nation-state, whereby Cambodian culture, for instance, stands in relation to Thai or Laotian cultural expressions.

The examples cited above suggest the need for a re-conceptualization of the relationship between culture and place in terms of fluidity and cross-border mobility, and a move towards the cultural and social flows within networks over ‘local’ culture as a static, nodal category. Too often scholarship on material culture privileges an aesthetic truth which is supposedly integral to, and thus retrievable from, the object of attention. The movement of objects promotes fusions of influence. Industrialized manufacturing offers both standardization and modification. To read such aesthetics requires an understanding of traces, of ghosts and of hybridity. I would therefore suggest that cultural artifacts that do not exclaim their provenance should not be dismissed as less valuable or ‘authentic’ than those that do.

The souvenir industry in Cambodia also poses the challenge of how to develop critiques that retain a sensitivity towards different aesthetic regimes, yet simultaneously recognize gradations of quality. To talk of glass or plastic items made in China as ‘kitsch’ or ‘tacky’ demands an understanding of the cultural and subjective bias from which such pronouncements are made. It appears that Asian tourism in Cambodia opens up questions about significance which have yet to be addressed within the literature. What, for example, do the etched glass blocks cited above signify when they contain images of Kuala Lumpur’s Petronas Towers, Singapore’s Merlion or Shanghai’s Oriental Pearl Tower? Does the desire to travel, collect and display such items back home tell us about new or emerging forms of cosmopolitanism or class distinction in Asia? Given the limits of space, I have not pursued an analysis of taste and aesthetics along lines of class or gender here. Clearly, such approaches would provide further clarification and help answer some of these intriguing questions which are posed by a fast-growing Asian tourism industry.

In an attempt to open up such dialogues, this chapter has considered the production and consumption of souvenirs in relation to certain market and economic relations. However, rather than critiquing these relations in terms of their impact on local practices and traditions, or why tourism per se introduces new technologies and methods of manufacturing, the chapter has sought to understand how a rise of a non-Western consumer market brings with it new social and institutional contexts within which souvenirs are manufactured, circulated and exchanged. As Gell reminds us in the Introduction to
his challenging text, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory, 'the project of “indigenous aesthetics” is essentially geared . . . to providing a cultural context within which non-Western art objects can be assimilated to categories of Western aesthetic art-appreciation’ (1998: 4). He thus concludes that a theory of art production and circulation ‘cannot be the study of the aesthetic principles of this or that culture, but of the mobilization of aesthetic principles (or something like them) in the course of social interaction’ (ibid.: 4). Accordingly, by focusing on Asian tourism, it has been argued here that new modes of analysis are required, ones that critically engage with new forms of consumption in countries like Cambodia and the socio-economic relations they depend upon.

The challenging and precarious situation in Cambodia has also illustrated why ideas of taste, quality and other aesthetic sensibilities need to be read in relation to their political, even ideological, underpinnings. Accordingly, to what degree do the foundations and developmental aid agencies operating in such countries import Eurocentric notions of culture? Does authenticity remain an orientalist language? Indeed, and as I have shown elsewhere, these same questions are equally applicable to heritage policies put in place for managing more static, larger forms of material culture such as architectural structures (Winter 2007b). As we have seen for Cambodia, the consumption of Asia by Asian tourists is bringing different representations of place, culture and history to the fore. In presenting such arguments, this chapter has attempted to illustrate why Asian tourism challenges us to move beyond analyses predicated on global/local, traditional/modern and foreign/indigenous dichotomies, and instead develop a greater sensitivity towards multiple gazes, cultures of difference and the ways in which emergent economic and social networks are rescripting and repackaging places for consumption.

Note

1 Information about each of the organizations listed here is available at (listed in order):

www.camnet.com.kh/rehabcraft/aboutus.html;
www.rajanacrafts.org/about_Rajana.html;
www.tabithauk.com/About%20Tabitha%20Cambodia.htm; and

For further information about the Artisans Association of Cambodia, an umbrella organization for craft-related non-governmental bodies operating in Cambodia, see www.aac.org.kh