

CHAPTER SEVEN: ANGKOR IN FRANCE, THE EXPOSITIONS

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the international exposition became a nexus of entertainment, commerce, and self-promotion on a scale that ranged from the personal to the national. The exposition as a large scale, international event was initiated when England held its Great Exhibition in 1851, best remembered for the construction of an enormous glass and metal framed structure christened the Crystal Palace. France was among the countries that hosted some of the earliest large scale, international exhibitions, four of which were held in Paris in 1855, 1867, 1878, and 1889. The hosting of exhibitions quickly grew into a competition on an international scale, including expositions held in England, France, and Belgium, among others. Not to be outdone, the United States hosted its own international exhibition in Chicago in 1893, constructing an enormous wheel—the first Ferris Wheel—in answer to the Eiffel Tower, which had been erected for the 1889 exposition in Paris. These events soon grew into an important forum for delineating and describing European colonies in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere, and form an important component for the evolution of the Western, and particularly France's, understanding of Cambodia.

Exposing Angkor: Cambodia at the Expositions

The expositions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were vastly popular, consistently drawing enormous crowds. These events also fulfilled

numerous functions beyond simple entertainment. The grounds of the expositions were filled with exhibits that displayed everything from samples of agricultural equipment; to performances by musicians and actors; to the best selections from the art salons of Paris and London; to product samples from factories and farms. As international expositions, neighboring nations often erected exhibition halls in which they showcased their own historical and natural highlights. And, most importantly for this examination, the exposition was also used as a forum for exhibiting colonial possessions.

The exhibition of colonial possessions was a way of displaying the reach of the empire to the vast crowds attending these expositions. In part, these displays were aimed at attendees not connected to these colonies, particularly in the case of nations erecting exhibition halls to display their colonial possessions at an exposition taking place in a neighboring country. These halls—such as the exhibition hall dedicated to the Dutch East Indies that was erected in the Dutch section of the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris—served to display their empire before their international competitors. However, the majority of the displays were exhibits connected to the host country and its colonies, and the majority of the attendees were nationals of the country where the events were held. Thus, the expositions were primarily aimed at entertaining and, above all, informing the host country's population about the nation, including territories beyond the *métropole*.

In addition to the three nineteenth century expositions held in Paris, France hosted several, much larger expositions in the first four decades of the twentieth century, including the Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1900, which inaugurated the new century. The official titles of these expositions continued to indicate their broad scope; the words “international” or “universal” appear in many of the official titles. However, the colonial possessions of exhibition participants, and of France in particular, played an increasingly important role in these displays. Three of these

large-scale events, including the most extravagant French exhibition of the twentieth century, were focused primarily upon the display of empire. These events were the 1906 and 1922 *Expositions coloniales*, both of which were held in Marseille, and the immense 1931 *Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris*.

The display of empire had been an important aspect of the international exposition since its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century. Among the displays that excited particular interest at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London were those which brought audiences in contact with Britain's overseas empire, particularly India, the jewel in the British crown. The India section of the Great Exhibition was the first interaction with the colonies that many European citizens experienced.¹ This section also brought English artists and designers into contact with the art and design of the Subcontinent, an interaction that would greatly affect the direction of English design.²

The earliest exhibitions in Paris also contained sections displaying aspects of France's empire, particularly the products of Caribbean possessions such as Martinique and Guadeloupe, as well as information about the oldest North African possessions, Algeria and Tunisia. This display of colonial possessions evolved and expanded from small displays, often embedded within larger exhibits, to increasingly larger, more comprehensive and more expensive spectacles.

¹ Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters, a History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 235. While the vast majority of the visitors to the India section would have been British, Mitter does note that the French writer Gustave Flaubert visited the section, and was enchanted by what he saw. Furthermore, postcards, drawings and photographs of the exposition, and of the India section, were also conveyed to the remaining territories of Great Britain, and to the Continent.

² *Ibid*, p. 234.

The first French exhibition to utilize aspects of “native” architecture in its presentation of the overseas colonies was the 1867 *Exposition Universelle de Paris*.³ The example instituted by the 1867 exposition was repeated and enlarged upon by organizers of the *Exposition Universelle de Paris* of 1878, who presented



Figure 28 “Rue des Nations”

³ This display included a “palace of the Bey” surrounded by a number of tents making up the Tunisian pavilion. Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid modernities : architecture and representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition Paris* (Boston: MIT Press, 2000) p. 229.

France, other nations participating in the event, and the colonies in a string of connected façades dubbed the “*Rue des Nations*.” (Figure 28)⁴ Each “address” along this “*rue*,” which were often hardly wider than the entryway, offered an example of “typical” architecture of the cultures they were meant to represent. Cochinchina, which had become a colony in 1862, was represented by an archway decorated with faux ceramic roof tiles resembling Buddhist temple architecture

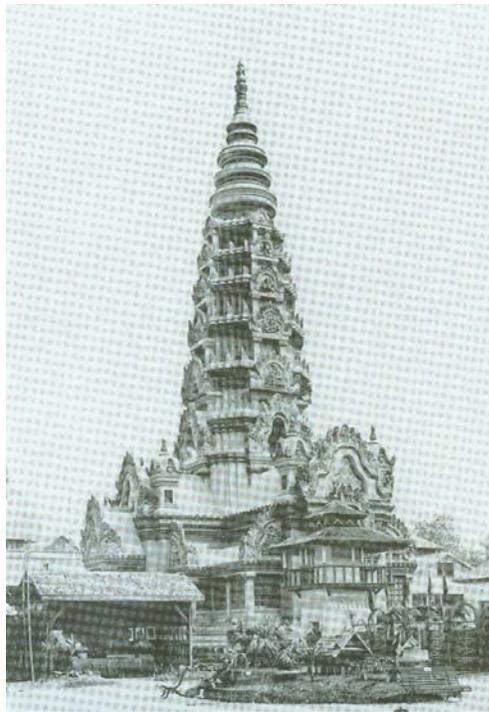


Figure 29 Cambodia pagoda, 1889 Exposition

from southern Vietnam; the Cambodian protectorate was portrayed in a narrow tower squeezed between similarly sized towers representing France’s North African possessions, and was crowned with a stepped belfry decorated with finials shaped to

⁴ Ibid, p. 202.

echo flames. As with the Cochinchina structure, the Cambodia doorway was designed to evoke the country's Buddhist temples.

In these early events, however, colonial exhibits were among the more minor elements of the expositions. The importance of these exhibits grew with and through each subsequent exposition. The starting point for the expansion of the colonial sections is the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*. (Figure 29)⁵ The exposition that was the impetus for the erection of the Eiffel tower also dedicated space for colonial exhibits that included a Senegalese village; a number of structures representing the architecture of the Sudan; and an Angkorian-style "pagoda." In addition to each of these architectural representations, the 1889 Exposition represented the first event at which large numbers of colonial subjects were brought to France to populate the structures, streets, and villages constructed to represent colonial possessions.⁶ The peopling of the "native" exhibitions with "native" peoples that was inaugurated in the 1889 Exposition became *de rigueur* for the colonial exhibits by the following event in 1900.

The expositions were widely viewed as entertainment: the exposition space included troupes presenting live music, dance, and theater performances; numerous food stalls; anchor attractions, such as the Eiffel Tower in 1889, or Chicago's Ferris Wheel in 1893, which provided incomparable spectacles; and a nearly endless supply of exhibits displaying an vast array of items, from the quotidian to the exotic. However, their function went beyond simple entertainment. Lists of exhibits and vendors from the exhibitions indicate that numerous concessions were rented to companies and retailers only tangentially, or not at all, connected to the colonies. The expositions were utilized by commercial interests as a form of advertising that

⁵ Ibid, p. 241.

⁶ Morton notes that for the 1889 Exposition more than 400 Indochinese, Senegalese and Tahitians were brought to Paris for the colonial exhibits. This event most likely marked the first interaction with subjects of *la plus grande France* for most of the exposition's visitors. Ibid, p. 117.

allowed companies to introduce their product to an enormous audience, or to reinforce the information that audience had about the company or product. However, while there was a strong and important commercial aspect to these expositions, it is important to note that they were planned, organized and funded predominantly by the municipal, national, and colonial governments. The exposition was an advertising boon for commercial vendors; however, the most important “vendor” at these expositions was the state, and the “product” they were advertising was the nation, including both *métropole* and colony.

The exposition was also seen as an opportunity to draw crowds—and commerce—to the cities. Visitors who came to see the exposition would bring their business to area hotels, restaurants, transport companies, department stores, galleries, museums, and markets. They would also depart with the name of the city on their lips, bringing more attention, and, it was hoped, future visits, to the city. The expositions were successful enough that cities in France other than Paris and Marseille began, near the end of the nineteenth century, to stage smaller expositions in the hopes of drawing visitors and vendors to their gates, and to expose their municipality as a promising location for commerce and investment.⁷ Thus, the expositions were as much an advertisement for their municipal location—Paris, Marseilles, Rouen—as they were promotional events for the nation.

The promotion of a cohesive sense of nation, and by extension of empire, was, however, an important component and motivation for the repeated investment in these tremendous spectacles. There were displays for all the regions of France, filled with examples of local flora, agricultural and manufactured products, and other items that typified the area. Through visiting these exhibits attendees were able to “see” parts of their own country they had never had the opportunity to visit,

⁷ Colonial expositions or fairs were held in Rouen in 1896, Bordeaux in 1907 and Roubaix in 1911, in addition to the larger scale events in Marseille in 1906 and 1922. Ibid, p. 71.

and to get a deeper sense of all the regions that contributed to the French nation. The colonial sections of these expositions played a similar role, bringing the colonies to the *métropole* so that metropolitan audiences could experience the colonies without having to take long, dangerous journeys, or having to brave disease, or even death. Bringing exotic Asia or Africa to the *Champ du Mars* did provide entertainment to the audiences who visited these sites, however, they were also erected to both inform the public about these additions to the nation, and to promote the idea of the colonial expansion of France's territories. These displays were a form of "*propagande coloniale*" meant to combat the oft-lamented ignorance many French citizens had about their colonial possessions.⁸

⁸ For example, in his 1923 collection of answers to "*questions coloniales*," under the heading of a chapter entitled "*propagande coloniale*," Charles Régismanset rails against public ignorance on colonial matters: "Once more, I find it necessary to speak briefly about the issue of organizing active and effective colonial propaganda... (and our) interest in having, at this time, the French people know their colonies. Our sufferings in these times... will be exposed tomorrow as the sufferings born of a blow to our treasury resulting in our foreign purchases." He blames these actions on ignorance of the colonies who could provide the materials, etc., that would release France from these dependencies. Charles Régismanset, *Questions Coloniales (1912-1919)* (Paris: Émile Larose, 1923), p. 187.

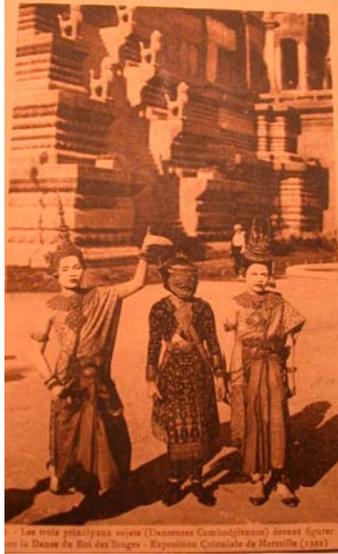


Figure 30 Dancers at 1906 Exposition

In her study of the 1931 Exposition in Paris, Patricia A. Morton sees the colonial displays in the international and colonial expositions as “prime devices for disseminating... images (of the colonies) to the *Métropole*...”⁹ The images that were conveyed included the pavilions erected in “native” style architecture to represent individual colonies; exhibits of “native culture,” which included items as diverse as farm implements, monumental sculpture, and items of local dress; and performances staged by the colonial subjects brought to the expositions for this purpose. These performances, which Morton refers to as “human displays,”¹⁰ and others have called “human zoos,”¹¹ included not only the scheduled performances, such as those staged by the Cambodian royal ballet (Figure 30)¹² and troupes of Sudanese and Kanak dancers, but also the continual performance of “nativeness” by the tens, and eventually hundreds, of Africans, Caribbean Islanders, and

⁹ Morton, 2000, p. 202.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Herman Lebovics, "Les Zoos De L'exposition Coloniale Internationale De Paris En 1931," in *Zoos Humains Xixe Et Xxe Siècles*, ed. Bancel et al (Paris: Éditions le Découverte, 2002).

¹² Postcard produced for the colonial exposition.

“Indochinese”¹³ who had been brought to France for the expositions. In this category of performance are included the sellers positioned in the North African “*souks*” that represented the Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan sections; the “villagers” who inhabited the huts erected to represent the West African territories; the Cambodians continually praying in the Buddhist “temple” that filled the interior of the 1931 Indochinese section’s Cambodia pavilion;



Figure 31 Cambodian “temple” interior, 1931 Exposition

(Figure 31)¹⁴ and the Vietnamese who transported visitors from one section to the next in *pousse-pousse* (rickshaws) imported from Southeast Asia. (Figure 32)¹⁵ The importance of the presence of a “native” population in creating the appropriate atmosphere for the expositions is exemplified by the complaints of too thin a colonial population at the *Exposition universelle de Paris* of 1900.¹⁶ As Morton

¹³ A catch-all term for Vietnamese, Laos, and Cambodians commonly used in France during the colonial era.

¹⁴ *L'exposition Coloniale de Paris* (Paris: Librairie des Arts Décoratifs, 1931).

¹⁵ Postcard produced for the 1906 colonial exposition in Marseille.

¹⁶ Morton, 2000, p. 117.

highlights, the efficacy of the colonial sections depended on their “appear(ing) to teem with *natives*, just as the colonies were imagined to swarm with natives in “real life.”¹⁷

Each of these elements lent a sense of authenticity to these colonial displays. It was not that audiences lost sight of the contrived quality presented by the exhibition space: as a 1906 cartoon from the *Marseillaise* newspaper succinctly displays, visitors were all too aware of the unreal quality created by having colonies separated by thousands of kilometers on the globe separated by mere meters at the exposition. (Figure 33)¹⁸ However, the displays, taken each in their own circumscribed space, gave a sense of reality that was impossible to

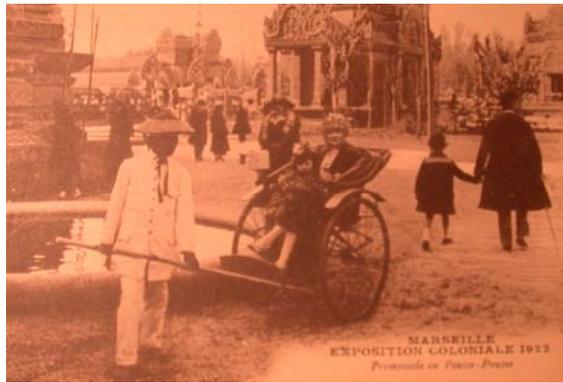


Figure 32 “Pousse-pousse” (Rickshaw) at the 1906 Exposition

recreate in the sanitized space of the museum. While few would have doubted the authenticity of the *objects* in museum collections, object and audience were remote from one another, which made the *interaction* between viewer and object obviously inauthentic. While the interaction between viewers and objects—often the same objects as were displayed in French museums such as the *Musée Guimet* or the

¹⁷ Ibid, italics original.

¹⁸ *Petite Marseillaise*, 17 September 1922.

Trocadéro—may not have been fundamentally changed by the exposition space (objects were still displayed in cases, and out of their original contexts) the *sense* of the experience changed when the objects were housed in “authentic” structures, and when one was conveyed to the structure by a member of the culture thought to hail from whence the object came. That the “natives” and the objects may or may not have genuinely come from the same culture, that “real” examples of indigenous architecture would have exhibited vastly different interiors (and often exteriors), and that all of this did, in fact, take place only a



Figure 33 Cartoon about 1906 Exposition

few meters from the supposedly “authentic” display of another culture, did little to mitigate the feeling of heightened authenticity lent to the experience for many of the expositions’ visitors. That feeling was the culmination of key elements provided within the exposition space: the bringing together of the people, the places (in the form of architectural structures) and the objects which were all at once alien and representative.

Thus, the expositions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were an important venue for creating the product-narrative of the various colonies for audiences in the *métropole*, and for appearing to confirm for those audiences, however inaccurately, their concept of an authentic colonial world taken from the travelogues, novels, and postcards discussed in earlier chapters. This was particularly true for the Cambodian protectorate, which was one of France's oldest possessions in Asia, and which, with the return of Angkor in 1907, became the cultural jewel in the French crown.

The earliest rendering of the Cambodian protectorate at the expositions appears at the 1878 exposition in Paris, where the territory is represented by a Buddhist temple-influenced tower. By the following exposition eleven years later, the Cambodian pavilion had evolved into an Angkor-influenced tower. While the tower, called a "pagoda" in the information provided by Exposition organizers, shows a definitive turn toward the ruins, the structure is also clearly the hybrid progeny of several sources, which include not only Angkor, but also Oudong and Sukhothai.

As each of the colonial sections of the expositions grew, the Cambodian pavilions were also enlarged, and with each passing event, the pavilions' reference to the temples became more and more specific. In addition, with the retrocession of the temples the Cambodian pavilions both escalated in scale and reflected the improvement in the materials delineating the prototypes that informed their design. Rather than simply referencing the temples at Angkor, the constructions of 1922 and 1931 attempted, to a large extent, to recreate the originals on French soil.

The difference between the Cambodian pavilion of the first colonial exposition in Marseille, held the year before retrocession, and that of the second, held in 1922, is striking. The 1906 structure offers a reference to the Bayon temple in the form of the monumental, smiling faces that adorn all four sides of the central tower. (Figure 34)¹⁹ The resemblance to the Bayon ends with these images, and like its 1889 predecessor, it presents a hybrid design, with references to Angkor Wat and other structures. Although the original temples which this



Figure 34 Cambodia pavilion, 1906 Exposition

structure echoes are legible in its form, it bears a more direct connection with the drawings of the temples, completed in the 1860s by Louis Delaporte. (Figure 35)²⁰ While clearly produced as a representation of Cambodia, the building takes a step away from the original structures from which its design elements are taken through its construction and painting, presenting a smooth, white surface that

¹⁹ Morton, 2000, p. 242.

²⁰ Delaporte, 1999, p. 157.

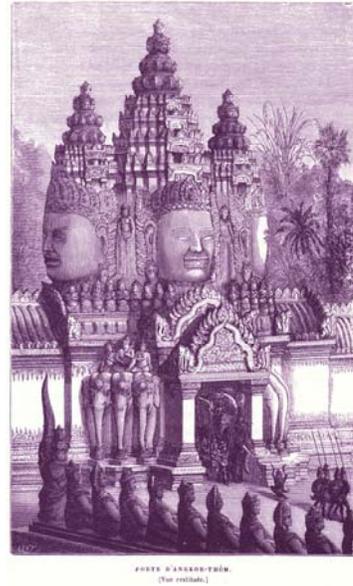


Figure 35 Delaporte engraving of the Bayon

bears little resemblance to the porous laterite and sandstone blocks that make up both the Bayon and Angkor Wat.

By contrast, the Cambodian pavilion constructed for the 1922 colonial exposition in Marseille presents an embodiment of the protectorate in a structure clearly meant to closely mimic a specific temple: Angkor Wat. (Figure 36)²¹ Situated next to a reflecting pool, which echoed the reflecting pools that lie in front of the original structure, the 1922 Cambodia pavilion was a scaled down reconstruction of the original. The architects of the Indochinese section concentrated upon the central structure, building only the upper levels topped by the easily recognizable quincunx towers. However, there is no doubt which temple had been rebuilt in Marseilles. Furthermore, the walls of the edifice have been rendered in a hue that, while not mimicking the original structures, makes a more natural match with the ancient sandstone and laterite temples of Angkor than did the 1906 structure. The Cambodian pavilion was among the largest and most impressive

²¹ Morton, 2000, p. 244.

pavilions erected for the 1922 exposition, and was discussed extensively in the press.

As much of an impression upon the public the Cambodian pavilion erected in Marseille may have made, the Indochinese pavilion erected at Vincennes for the 1931 *Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris* far outstripped this and all previous constructions. (Figure 37)²² The nexus of the Indochinese section was again a reconstruction of the interior structures of Angkor Wat that, while not



Figure 36 Cambodia pavilion, 1922 Exposition

including the moat or the exterior galleries that line the perimeter of the temple grounds, was built at a scale nearing that of the original. Not only did architects in Paris attempt to recreate the true silhouette of the original, but the exterior walls of the structure were decorated with bas-reliefs made from plaster molds of the sculpture that adorns the original Cambodian temple.

²² *L'exposition Coloniale de Paris* (Paris: Librairie des Arts Décoratifs, 1931).

The 1931 reconstruction of Angkor was unique among exposition pavilions not only in terms of scale and fidelity to its model, but also because, unlike previous expositions where the temple had appeared, it was no longer solely representative of Cambodia. Instead, each of the five components of the Indochinese Federation, including Cambodia, was represented by its own structure. The Cambodia pavilion, which was designed by George Groslier, the Director of the School of Cambodian Art, bore a striking resemblance to Phnom



Figure 37 Indochina pavilion, 1931 Exposition

Penh's *Musée Albert Sarraut*. (Figures 38 and 39)²³ Both the pavilion and the museum, which was also designed by Groslier, were described by its creator as “traditional” structures. They clearly reference Cambodia's Buddhist temples, particularly in the style of the roof ornamentation, if not in the floor plan and color scheme.

²³ Figure 39: *L'exposition Coloniale de Paris* (Paris: Librairie des Arts Décoratifs, 1931); Figure 40: photograph by author.



Figure 38 Cambodia pavilion, 1931 Exposition

The Angkor temple at Vincennes housed thematic exhibits which covered the entire geographic area of the Indochinese Federation. In the previous decades the temple had become inexorably linked with Cambodia, and this connection continued to be confirmed at the exposition. However, by 1931 the temple was the best-known of Indochina's monuments. While the architectural styles of Vietnam, and to a lesser extent non-Angkorian Cambodia and Laos, weren't unknown, Angkor was one of the few specifically recognizable structures in Southeast Asia for Western audiences. This is evidenced by the structures erected to represent the administrative divisions of Vietnam, Laos, and, in 1931, Cambodia. (Figure 40)²⁴ Each of these buildings was erected in the "style" of Annam, Tonkin, Cochinchina, or Laos, however, they were not replications of specific structures. The one exception was the Cambodia pavilion, which clearly references an original—the *Musée Albert Sarraut*—that is a manifestation of the French interpretation of local style. The structure that was designed to be a

²⁴ Morton, 2000, p. 42.



Figure 39 National Museum in Phnom Penh (formerly the Musée Albert Sarraut)

reconstruction of a known, true original, and to be the most “authentic” architectural experience in the Indochinese section, was erected both to reference Cambodia, and also to represent the entirety of Indochina. By 1931, Angkor was not only the symbol for Cambodia, it was becoming a symbol that partially encompassed Vietnam and Laos as well.

The symbolic evolution of the temples is legible in the evolution of representations of Cambodia, and eventually Indochina, at the expositions. It is possible within this trajectory of architectural design to see the developing process of public information and instruction on Cambodia being joined with the gradual embodiment of Cambodia within a codified set of symbols, of which Angkor was the most important. This evolution represents both the recession of Cambodia within the metropolitan imaginary to the boundaries of the Angkor Historical Park, as well as the aestheticizing of Cambodia within these redrawn mental boundaries.



Figure 40 Cochinchina pavilion, 1931 Exposition

It is no coincidence that the edifices of the Cambodian pavilions grew more elaborate, and more accurate as reconstructions, over the decades. At the time of the first expositions, Angkor was still in the possession of Siam. The temples have, however, from the earliest European interactions with them, been categorized as “Khmer,” without regard for where the contemporary boundary marking Cambodia and Siam might lie. As the years passed, however, French colonial officials began to look more often to these Khmer ruins as territory which rightfully belonged within the boundaries of contemporary Cambodia. The presence of identifiable vestiges of Khmer civilization was one of the justifications for the return of the provinces of Angkor, Sisophon, and Battambang. Thus, with attention being turned in the *métropole* to the return of these provinces and their structures, which represented ancient Cambodian cultural patrimony, the references to these vestiges grew in number and in size, as is clearly delineated in the structures erected for the expositions.

The temples at Angkor were, from their so-called discovery by Henri Mouhot in 1861, referred to as marvels and as wonders. However, like diamonds in the rough, these structures were seen as jewels whose beauty was hidden beneath the cover of the jungle. They were, up to 1907, not within the boundaries of French

empire, and thus continued to be referred to most often as a “mystery.” Specific temples were not replicated in the Cambodian pavilions that pre-date retrocession, with the exception of the 1906 exposition in Marseilles, but were hinted at. The reference in this structure, however, was not one of replication, but of generalization: the faces planted on the sides of the pavilion draw greater parallels with the writings of Mouhot and the drawings of Delaporte than with the prototype, the Bayon. The issue presented by the lost provinces, and the temples within them, was by the time of the 1906 exposition an important point of discussion. The timeliness of the attention to Angkor just a year before the temple was returned is evidenced by King Sisowath during his visit to France and the exposition when he publicly demanded that France retrieve his Alsace-Lorraine, comparing Angkor and Battambang to the two French provinces which had been lost during the Franco-German war of 1871.²⁵

Significantly, the size of the Angkor-inspired pavilions more than doubled between the 1906 exposition, and those that took place in 1922 and 1931. In part, this can be attributed to the growing interest, attention, and attendance the expositions had excited. However, the shift can also in no small part be attributed to the temples’ having been delivered into French hands in the intervening years. French architects designing the buildings had more, and better, information on the original structures, which contributed to their design and implementation. However, the lavish expansions presented by the later structures can also be attributed to the change in the temples’ status: they gained importance in the French imaginary because their ownership had changed hands. Rather than simply being erected as a representation of the former glories of a civilization over whose remnants France held dominion, by 1922 these were glories belonging to the French empire. The

²⁵ Tully, 1996, p. 10.

1922 and 1931 structures carried with them a new mandate: to inform the public about the possessions held in the expanded territories in Southeast Asia, and to highlight the marvel that had become the jewel of the French imperial crown. By 1931 it had become such a recognizable feature of the colonies in Southeast Asia that exposition architects decided it was possible, and desirable, to embody the entire Indochinese Federation within the towers of Angkor Wat.

Despite the tremendous efforts made by architects and exposition organizers to bring a level of heightened authenticity to the exposition at Vincennes, the Indochinese pavilion was, like each of the Cambodian pavilions before it, a simulacrum; it is both easily recognizable, and a referent without an original. The structures are both so far removed from their original context and purpose as to have lost any meaningful connection to the originals, and they have been re-inscribed with a completely new and different meaning and purpose.



Figure 41 Interior of the Indochina pavilion, 1931 Exposition

This re-inscription appeared in a number of forms, the most obvious of which is found in the interior space of the pavilion. (Figure 41)²⁶ The colonial era identity inscribed upon the temple was already the result of a shift in meaning:

²⁶ Morton, 2000, p. 196.

constructed originally as a Hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu, by the time of French arrival the structure had become a Buddhist holy site. A large monastery was situated to one side of the structure, and the monks who resided within sight of the temple walls were the self-assigned caretakers of the building and grounds.²⁷ However, the structures erected at the expositions contained within them clear citations of neither Buddhism nor Hinduism. Instead, legible references to religion were suppressed in the interiors of the structures in their various incarnations in Paris and Marseille. Rather than the dark inner galleries and sanctuaries of Angkor Wat, the 1931 pavilion included a roof made partially of glass bricks that allowed natural light to shine into the interior and onto the colonial displays of the Indochinese products. In Paris and Marseille, the inner sanctum was not the domain of either Vishnu or Buddha, but was filled with exhibits showcasing France's colonies in Asia, from farming implements to rice varieties.

The exhibits that filled these edifices covered a wide range of topics and a broad variety of subjects. Items included on lists of objects that were sent from Cambodia as exhibition examples included agricultural products, such as seeds, rice, and rubber; forest products ranging from harvested woods, to cardamom gathered in the Cardamom Mountain range; ritual objects, such as bowls and bells carved in precious metals; farm implements, including yokes for oxen, plows, and even entire carts; examples of ancient sculpture selected for display by the *EFEO*; displays explaining silk production, including mulberry leaves, silkworms, looms, and a variety of finished products; examples of "traditional crafts"; and hundreds of photographs exemplifying life in the colonies. While the display of items such as rubber and rice served dual purposes—one of which was to encourage investment

²⁷ Since the colonial era, what was then a series of simple, semi-permanent structures has grown into a permanent temple and monastery to the northwest of the temple.

and trade—the main focus of these demonstrations was didactic. The exhibits were there to educate exposition audiences about all the corners of the French empire.

Through this process of education, audiences were also the recipients of a promotional message. Colonial expansion was not always widely supported by the French populous. The cost, in resources both financial and human, was often weighed in public debates against the benefits, real and imagined. The colonial pavilions were erected at great cost and with much fanfare, with important



Figure 42 French Prime Minister visiting the Exposition

political visitors making appearances. (Figure 42)²⁸ These investments were made both to instruct audiences about the colonies, and to promote the idea of them by embodying the countries within structures designed to evoke wonder and delight. The expositions worked to great effect, as evidenced by a story told to me by a Franco-American woman living in Paris. She mentioned having taken her elderly mother to Cambodia in recent years. I was surprised at this, as she had already mentioned her mother's age (over seventy) and health (fragile) and Cambodia is a

²⁸ *Album de l'exposition coloniale de Paris 1931* (Paris, 1931).

difficult place for an elderly woman in questionable health to visit. She then told me that visiting Cambodia had been her mother's life's dream, which further surprised me. When I asked where her mother's fixation on Cambodia had come from, she said the 1931 exposition in Paris. As a young child, her mother's parents had taken her to the exposition, and the Indochinese pavilion had made such an impression upon her that she not only remembered the visit, but had spent the rest of her life dreaming of visiting "the real Angkor Wat."²⁹

The pavilions were, thus, constructed in the space located between contradictory notions: That of the authentic and that of the fantastic. The fusing of the imagined and the real is exemplified by the bas-reliefs that decorated the 1931 Indochinese pavilion. The plaster decorations which covered the exterior of the structure began as molds taken from the bas-reliefs decorating the walls of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. This portion of the production of the temple constitutes the "authentic." These molds were used as the basis for the ornamentation that appeared on the walls of the Indochinese pavilion, but only after they had been cleansed of all damage. The final plaster sculptures, like the fully reconstituted towers that topped the structure, were thus representative of the temple in what was imagined to be its perfect, original state.³⁰ The final structure is thus also a representation of the fantastical: of a state of perfection that may or may not have ever existed, and of which the exposition architects can only imagine. The pavilion thus represents the tangible manifestation of an imagined physical and temporal past, which was then mapped onto the "original," as represented by the sculptures from which the molds were taken. Furthermore, the Angkor constructed at Vincennes, cleansed of the ravages of time, embodies the *EFEO*' work in Cambodia as it is represented by Angkor's conservators in their guidebooks. It was not an attempt at reconstructing

²⁹ Personal communication with Nina Leventhal, Paris, November, 2002.

³⁰ Morton, 2000, p. 247.

Angkor itself, but of creating something like the “restored view” of the temple that appeared in Delaporte’s drawings and in the “after” photographs of the colonial guidebooks.

While the pavilion façades presented the intersection of the authentic and the fantastic, they also symbolized the boundaries of the colonies themselves. The interior spaces of the pavilions were presented as miniature representations of the space found within the country’s boundaries. These spaces contained displays which gathered catalogued samples of all the disparate parts which made up each of the colonies, from agriculture to religion, and from art to commerce. By collecting and cataloguing objects which supplied the symbolic presence of all categories of life—home, family, work, clothing, tools, land, food, art, etc.—and encapsulating them within the walls of the pavilion, it created a sense of the containment of the country and its essence. The containment of the essential Cambodia behind the recognizably famous façade of Angkor demonstrates the process by which architectural edifices became legible symbols for entire countries. Just as the Angkor-shaped Cambodian pavilion at the 1922 exposition contained miniaturized representations of the facets of life in Cambodia in the form of “samples” of Cambodian products, tools, and plants; so the original Angkor became the location which, like the expositions, literally and figuratively contained the country.

The expositions were by no means the only avenue by which metropolitan audiences learned about France’s overseas possessions, however, they played an important role in conveying information about these territories. Equally important was the role that exposition architects and organizers played in shaping and confirming the choice of objects, including architectural objects, that would come to represent these territories. Furthermore, by embodying the colonies within select architectural representations, particularly in the case of Cambodia, the process by

which colonies became objectified and aestheticized was demonstrated and solidified.

Significantly, the context and meaning of the objects and the architecture that were proffered as the symbolic location of the colonies was erased and effaced in their display at the colonial expositions. By doing so, the meaning and the power of the object as a symbol was also effaced. Relieved of their religious and historical meaning, these objects and buildings could only be approached at the expositions as aesthetic objects.³¹ By superimposing a meaning based solely in aesthetics, the exposition pavilions served not only to illustrate the structures specific to the exposition as aesthetic objects, but, by extension, to inscribe the same neutralized meaning to their inspiration.

As high as the attendance rates were for each of the colonial and international expositions, the number of French citizens who did not attend the expositions is far greater than the number who did. However, the expositions reached beyond the audience who interacted with the monumental exhibits first hand, as the events were discussed widely in newspapers and periodicals; were the subject of postcards sent far and wide; and were discussed and described by those who did attend. Furthermore, while the international and colonial expositions were not the sole method by which the aestheticizing of Angkor took place, they did play a far-reaching and important role, particularly in combination with other means and media, such as literature, tourism, and scholarship.

³¹ This process parallels the anthropologist George Stockings' description of the aestheticization of material culture, in which non-Western "objects of "material culture" – which in traditional contexts had spiritual value (were) respiritualized as aesthetic objects..."George W. Stocking, *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, vol. 3, *History of Anthropology* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).