

# Critical heritage studies: IIAS summer school revisited

From 5-8 June 2012, over 500 renowned scholars, researchers, students, and heritage professionals from all over the globe gathered in Gothenburg, Sweden, to participate in the inaugural conference of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies (ACHS). The organizers wanted to launch the ACHS and, in cooperation with the International Journal of Heritage Studies, establish an extensive network of scholars across the globe in order to debate and discuss cutting edge research in the field of heritage studies.

Sadih Boonstra

CRITICAL HERITAGE STUDIES is based on a developing interdisciplinary synthesis. This synthesis is leading to a deconstruction of what until now is referred to as museum and heritage studies as insights from memory studies, public history, tourism research, anthropology, sociology, geography and cultural studies are combined in all sorts of new ways. New forms of conceptualizing heritage – for which old definitions based on traditional material culture are abandoned – that describe heritage as a cultural process of meaning-making are of crucial importance to understand the cultural, social and political context in which heritage is at play. The aim of the conference was to re-theorize the field of heritage and to develop current theoretical debates to make sense of the nature and meaning of heritage.

#### IIAS summer school

The inaugural conference seemed to be the perfect opportunity to present and develop the insights of the first IIAS summer school 'Heritage Conserved and Contested: Asian and European Perspectives', which took place last year in Leiden, the Netherlands. A working group of alumni, Eva Ambos (University of Heidelberg), Non Arkaraprasertkul (Harvard University), Sadih Boonstra (VU University), Adèle

*We should first and foremost focus on the analysis of the context in which the idea of heritage is created, used and defined.*

Esposito (Parisian Institute of Research Architecture Urbanism and Society) and Shu-Li Wang (University College London), teamed up and put a panel together entitled 'Conflicting values, negotiating heritage. The politics of heritage in Asia'.

The panel of the 2011 IIAS summer school focused on the contrastive analysis of Asian and European approaches and sought an alternative understanding of heritage that demanded a more contextualized, flexible and inclusive approach capable of reflecting specifically local social and cultural dynamics. Drawing on historical, anthropological, architectural, and ethnographic material, speakers discussed the instrumentality of cultural performance in interethnic conflict in Sri Lanka; the meaning of current wayang performances informed by contrasted colonial and postcolonial pasts in Indonesia; the relation between local archaeological sites and large state projects in China; and the construction of a past at Angkor that ignores the present-day values and past composition of Cambodian society. Dr Philippe Peycam (director of IIAS) and Professor Michael Herzfeld (Harvard University) who directed the 2011 summer school, contributed to the panel as discussants. Dr Peycam also opened the session outlining the context of the panel and its objectives.

#### The summer school panel

Eva Ambos started with her presentation on 'The Politics of Heritage in Sri Lanka'. She argued that purity is the main value around which heritage politics in Sri Lanka are centered and further discussed a shift in heritage politics from a multicultural to a transcultural approach. From her extensive fieldwork in Sri Lanka she used the *kohombā kankāriya* village healing ritual as an example to demonstrate that purity is localized as it embraces notions of a revitalized national Buddhism that excludes pre-Buddhist aspects, and elements of Tamil Hindu culture. She turned to the low caste performers to look beyond the official, national readings of *kohombā kankāriya*, and found that because of their marginal position they are able to escape the purity of nationalism to a certain extent. Although the low caste performers use the code of purity, they subvert it by essentializing a pure and authentic lineage, instead of national heritage.

'Destroying or innovating tradition? The politics of authenticity in the Indonesian wayang puppet theatre', by Sadih Boonstra, demonstrated how standards of authentic, linked to boundaries of heritage, are fluid and constantly negotiated. Sadih discussed how the innovations of one particular *dalang* (wayang puppeteer), Ki [The Honourable] Enthus Susmono (b. 1966), led to condemnation by many who applied a standard containing an invisible essence of wayang. Innovation produces 'discomfort' for these viewers and leads them to claim that Enthus Susmono crosses the line; but the instant success of Enthus Susmono's newest creation *Wayang Santri* demonstrates that boundaries are interpreted differently by various audiences and that they are fluid and constantly negotiated.

Adele Esposito's paper, 'The construction of heritage values in contemporary Cambodia: the case of Siem Reap', dealt with archeological forms, such as dwellings, and commercial buildings. Since the listing of Angkor as a World Heritage Site in 1992, foreign experts working in Cambodia produced representations of these forms of heritage and designed conservation projects and management tools. Although the way of operating perpetuated foreign interference in heritage matters – also typical of the French regime – their projects had little impact on local spatial transformations. Measures

## The construction of heritage values in contemporary Cambodia: the case of Siem Reap

Adele Esposito



SINCE THE COLONIAL TIME, heritage construction in Cambodia has been dominated by the celebration of the outstanding value of Angkor. I focus on forms that are in the shadow of the archaeological site: dwellings, commercial buildings, public facilities and urban shapes, which are part of the contemporary landscape of Cambodian towns. In the years following the listing of Angkor as a World Heritage Site (1992), foreign experts working in Cambodia, in the context of bilateral cooperation agreements, have produced representations of these forms of heritage and have designed conservation projects and

management tools. Not only were these representations influenced by the cultural inheritance disseminated during the colonial domination, but their way of operating perpetuated the foreign interference in heritage matters that was typical of the French regimes. However, their projects had little impact on spatial transformations.

I challenge this operational inconsistency because it has questioned the position of Cambodian national and local authorities as interlocutors of the foreign experts. How do

they receive and react to these imported materials? Does the failure of heritage planning mean that the Cambodian authorities lack power? My analysis focuses on the case of Siem Reap province where the archaeological site of Angkor is located, but I also mention programs and projects designed for other Cambodian cities, such as Battambang, Phnom Penh and Kèp.

I argue that the measures aiming at conserving inherited buildings through inventory, listing and urban regulations have never been implemented in Cambodian towns. In contrast, the production of knowledge concerning wooden houses and villages, to which both foreign experts and Cambodian agents contribute, has stronger consequences. This knowledge describes architectural models and spatial organizations and shows the technical and cultural reasons of these shapes. It does not aim to justify the conservation of existing villages, but to serve as a source of inspiration for creating new architecture and neighbourhoods. Heritage is conceived as a permanent model that can be represented and redeployed into new creations. It also nourishes an idea of the cultural identity of the Khmer people based on the purity of its rural origins.

While architectural magazines base the design of new types of houses on these models, national authorities used this knowledge for planning the relocation of a part of the population living in the protected park of Angkor on the site of Run Ta Ek. Unlike previously unsuccessful attempts in the field of urban heritage and management, Cambodian authorities were able to implement this relocation project. So, they displayed their power to act, while they had been deaf to the solicitations by the experts who had proposed conservation models.

This evidence challenges the actual power of exogenous concepts and tools as well as the pretended dependence of Cambodian agents on colonial paradigms; the conception of heritage as a model, more than as a collection of material remains, seems to be more familiar to the local culture according to which the destruction and replacement of inherited buildings is not a source of guilt. In this way, Cambodian authorities show their capacity to receive and reject external contributions according to their own interests.

**Adele Esposito, Institut Parisien de Recherche Architecture Urbanistique Société (IPRAUS).**

**Above:**  
The main gate  
of Wat Bo pagoda  
in Siem Reap;  
photo taken by  
author in 2005.

aiming at conserving inherited buildings through inventory, listing, and urban regulations were never implemented in Cambodian towns. In contrast, the production of knowledge concerning wooden houses and villages has had a stronger impact, and serves as a source of inspiration for creating new architecture and neighborhoods. In this way, Cambodian authorities receive and reject external contributions according to their own interests.

Shu-Li Wang presented three national archaeological parks in China. As the heritage industry has expanded alongside the rise of cultural tourism, the Chinese state nominated twelve archaeological parks. These sites face dilemmas regarding the conservation of heritage and the presentation of the past, such as how to visualize archaeological knowledge. Studies of nationalism in China generally take Chinese nationalism and cultural uniformity as monolithic, and China is often portrayed as a nation with a majority voice. Shu-Li argues against this assumption, and suggests that what constitutes 'Han' is in a constant state of flux. By analyzing the staging of three national parks, she demonstrates how pasts are utilized as resources in various settings in response to the state's project. Based on her fieldwork Shu-Li argues there is need to re-think Han Chinese as a set of diversified, uneven and heterogeneous entities.

**Analyzing the social cultural context**

After the presentations of individual papers, Michael Herzfeld pointed out four recurring themes: the complexities of motives and effects; the tension between desire for display and engagement of critical self-knowledge; social poetics of heritage production; and heritage boundaries and the defining of purities. The idea of representing the entirety of e.g., the Han Chinese patrimony is variegated and contested and shows a tension among the local, regional, national and international level. But to understand changes in the meaning of heritage over time, or between places, we should pay attention to the social poetical context. According to Herzfeld, a critical study of heritage always means an analysis of the social cultural context. We should first and foremost focus on the analysis of the context in which the idea of heritage is created, used and defined.

One dimension of this dynamic is the postcolonial condition. As the western colonial powers defined and spread a set of social values around the world and tried to reify those as the ultimate good, much at work we see today represent attempts by various countries to live up to standards thereby created. Although not all of those standards were created in the West, the fact remains that western values have dominated this discourse, sometimes in the hands of Asian or non-European actors, because they were postcolonial and had learned the arts of self-definition from their colonial masters and perpetuated some of these models. In the case of Siem Reap a conflict takes place, among different levels, which is animated by reified assumptions that were generated by colonial discourses and reinforced by the continuing involvement of the erstwhile colonial powers in the management of the postcolonial situation. Even in countries that were not technically colonized we see the same kinds of effect.

With his second point about cultural intimacy Herzfeld argues that heritage discourse as a contested space is always about the tension between that which is presented to the world (self-display), and what is happening on the inside; dirty jokes, and a nasty sense of humor in the case of Enthus Susmono. With the social poetics of heritage production Herzfeld refers to the notion that when producing heritage, one is playing games with existing categories. Etymologically speaking, the word 'invention' comes from the Latin root for 'to discover'. To Herzfeld, invention is a mastery of conventional form such that you are able to get away with breaking out of it, and by getting away with breaking out of it, you start to change the rules of the game, as illustrated by the case of Enthus Susmono. Social poetics is revealed in stretching innovation, but not crossing the lines.

Discussions about convention involves the concept of purity, such as in the case of the healing ritual *kohombā kankāriya*. Herzfeld points out that behind the creation of a 'pure' tradition, 'pure' national heritage etc., lies a battle, a contest, a desire to specify boundaries. By the same token, the definition of heritage also has boundaries – with the recognition and rejection of heritage – that are constantly negotiated. A temporal process is shown in Siem Reap where various versions of the postcolonial regime of truth succeeded one another, all designed to, as Johannes Fabian put it, keep the population in a 'state of anachronism', to make sure it did not become part of the modern world. Heritage, as is tolerance, is a form of keeping people in a manageable situation; people are allowed to have traditions, temples, that can be framed.

**Critical heritage studies are essential**

Herzfeld concludes by instructing the audience to have a critical eye for all claims of benign ideology, to always ask the crucial questions by who these ideas of heritage are performed, under what conditions, and for whom. In this respect, Herzfeld is of the opinion that critical heritage studies are absolutely essential. Governments may become increasingly uneasy, and perhaps obstruct research that argues against monolithic forms of rules.

We should not let governments or any other institutional form tell us what heritage is. We might end up by saying more about what heritage isn't or what it shouldn't be or what it is in danger of becoming. We should analyze what has already happened in discourses of heritage in various degrees of totalitarian control, ranging from a relatively open and democratic system in Indonesia, to various forms of ethnic closure in Sri Lanka and China, and a very strong Khmer political dimension. Herzfeld closed with the appeal to keep complexity in full view and celebrate it. If we talk about how heritage happens, Herzfeld hopes that heritage studies might have the kind of political weight in the world it can and should have.

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## Destroying or innovating tradition? The politics of authenticity in the Indonesian wayang puppet theatre.

Sadiah Boonstra



Left: Ki Enthus Susmono and his puppet image. Photo by Sadiah Boonstra

THE WAYANG PUPPET THEATRE OF INDONESIA was proclaimed as UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity on 7 November 2003. The UNESCO Proclamation confirms implicit standards for the wayang tradition, referred to as the 'normative expectation' by Richard Schechner in 2010, by describing it and framing it in the international heritage discourse. Such standards are informed by ideas of authenticity and urge critics to condemn *dalang* (wayang puppeteers), who do not meet these standards. However, audience appreciation of these *dalang* shows that these standards are fluid. To examine how standards of wayang are negotiated I focus on the *dalang*, Ki [The Honourable] Enthus Susmono (b. 1966), who is widely regarded by both friend and foe as a radical innovator. He is a particularly interesting case as wayang standards have prompted critics to refer to Enthus Susmono as *Perusak* (Destroyer) of wayang, but cause his fans to fondly refer to him as *Crazy Dalang*. By 'othering' Enthus Susmono's innovations to an implicit standard of wayang, the standard is actually reinforced and emphasized.



Drawing on 13 months of fieldwork in Indonesia, I will describe how Enthus Susmono innovates in the field of his puppet creations, the musical compositions he uses, his performance style, the language he uses, his person or personality, the incorporation of Islamic elements in his work, and spectacular attractions (*atraksi*). These manifestations of innovation reflect Enthus Susmono's overall approach of wayang. He told me several times that he is always searching for ways to *buka pasar* – open up new markets – as he calls it, and to reach new audiences. His newest creation is the genre of *Wayang Santri*, which became wildly popular straight after the first performance in August 2010. Enthus Susmono explained that the stories in his new repertoire are locally situated and deal with Muslim daily life and are not derived from the wayang repertoire. In an obvious Islamic context he alternates Islamic chants with crude jokes, and a drunk puppet. Despite my own initial reservations when watching *Wayang Santri* for the first time, nobody in the audience seemed insulted. On the contrary, the crowd screamed with laughter, took pictures and recorded the actions on their mobile phones. Of course, not everyone approves of this new form of wayang. Some in this camp are actively involved in the preservation of wayang, including policy makers in the field of heritage management. Other people think that Islam should not be incorporated in wayang at all, but as far as the general audience is concerned, wayang and Islam are inextricably linked.

The case of Enthus Susmono demonstrates that performers and viewers inevitably identify the standard – and thus authenticity – differently, resulting in contrasting uses. Cultural policy makers and wayang aficionados in Jakarta identify a standard containing an invisible essence of wayang. Innovation produces 'discomfort' for these viewers. They expect something from the performer that appeals to their idea of wayang. The spectator's expectations must be catered to, leading to an inbuilt conservatism as to how the performers can and should present themselves. Enthus Susmono, with almost unrestrained creativity, is not afraid to stretch his innovation to the limit and searches for the boundaries of this conservatism. In this, he is as creatively adventurous as economically minded. Critics claim he crosses the line, but the instant success of Enthus Susmono's *Wayang Santri* demonstrates that the boundaries are interpreted differently by various audiences and that the boundaries of wayang are fluid and constantly negotiated.

Left: Wayang kulit puppet representing George Bush, by Ki Enthus Susmono. Courtesy of Tropenmuseum inv. nr. 6330-22.

Critical heritage studies *continued*



## From multiculturalism to transculturality: the politics of heritage in Sri Lanka

Eva Ambos

AFTER THE OFFICIAL END OF THE CIVIL WAR between the separatist LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and government security forces in May 2009, a number of heritagized rituals took place in Sri Lanka. I discuss these heritage politics in Sri Lanka by drawing on my fieldwork with performer lineages. Through the analysis of a ritual to mark the 2nd term presidency of Mahinda Rajapakse, I argue that purity is the main value around which heritage politics in Sri Lanka are centred. I further discuss a shift in heritage politics, from a multicultural to a transcultural approach in scrutinizing the independence day celebrations in February 2010.

With my first example, I show that purity as a value is localized through the performance of heritagized culture in a village healing ritual, carried out by low caste ritual practitioners. A ritual from the region around the hill town Kandy – a *kohombā kankāriya* – was chosen to honour a president who originates from the low country, the coastal area of the South and West with its distinctive ritual traditions, and who never tires of underlining this, because Kandyan culture in general is associated with authentic culture and purity, with the latter serving as an axiomatic value and being part of a code, which conveys a dominant interpretation and masks alternative readings. It embraces in the case of the *kohombā kankāriya* notions of a revitalized national Buddhism, that excludes pre-Buddhist aspects and elements of Tamil Hindu culture, which are characteristic for Sinhalese Buddhism as a localized, syncretistic adaption of Theravada Buddhism. The related

emergence of an idealized image of ‘Buddhism proper’, informed by middle class values, requires the purging from ‘non-Buddhist’ elements, which eventually leads also to a rejection of rural practices, often characterized by syncretism.

To step beyond the official, nationalist readings of the *kohombā kankāriya* under discussion, I turn to the performers who due to their seemingly marginal position ‘at the edge’ of this Sinhalese Buddhist nation owing to their low caste and their rural background, are able to escape – at least partly – this tight corset out of tradition, purity and nationalism. Purity as an axiomatic value linked to the *kohombā kankāriya*, imbued with elitist notions, appears to push the low caste and rural performers to the margins of society. But they use the code of purity in an alternative way, which subverts its dominant usage. While they embrace purity as a value as well, they essentialize a pure and authentic lineage *tradition*, instead of national *heritage*.

Looking at purity as a value in relation to interethnic and interreligious boundaries, I argue that the 2010 independence day celebrations reveal a shift in heritage politics from a multicultural to a transcultural paradigm, whereas both embrace purity as a value. Transculturality here should be thought of in a double sense: Firstly, as transcending culture, whereby an official image of a religious and ethnic neutral nation state is developed; and secondly, as an appropriation of the Other. While the multicultural paradigm consists of ideologies which exclude everything that is interpreted as ‘Other’ as invading and corrupting Sinhalese-Buddhist culture to keep it pure, the transcultural one is to absorb the ‘Other’, to incorporate it into a hegemonic Buddhist-Sinhalese framework and to redefine it in relying on purity as a value.

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## Politics of displaying landscape: staging China’s three national archaeological parks

WANG Shu-Li

I PRESENT THE STAGING of three Bronze Age archaeological sites in China, as a point of departure in exploring how archaeological materials are re-interpreted in constructing local identities, and incorporated into the state’s grand narrative in post-Mao China. In China, the heritage industry has expanded alongside the rise of cultural tourism, resulting in the Chinese state’s nomination in 2010 of twelve National Archaeological Parks. In the Yinxu archaeological site (ca. 1400-1046 BC) there has been a debate over issues regarding conservation of heritage and the presentation of the past, such as how to visualize archaeological knowledge; notions of authenticity (should a site be more like a museum or a theme park?); national history (Han vs. non-Han Chinese culture); and archaeological interpretation. Two other sites, Shaxingdui (ca. 2800-1000 BC.) and Jinsha (ca. 1200-900 BC.) in Sichuan province are facing similar dilemmas.

Studies of nationalism in China generally take Chinese nationalism and cultural uniformity as monolithic; China is often portrayed as a nation with a majority voice (Gladney 2004). I suggest that what constitutes ‘Han’ is in a constant state of flux. There is need to rethink Han Chinese as a set of diversified, uneven and heterogeneous entities. I would like to de-territorialize the boundary of Chinese empires and deconstruct the identity of Chinese-ness in terms of the oppositions between the national vs. local and central vs. marginal perspectives. What is the contemporary narration of these urban spaces with the country’s rich archaeological heritage unearthed in terms of global vs. local and central vs. marginal perspectives? I take exception to ideas of Han Chinese as singular, unified, and heterogeneous entities in terms of place-making. I explore how place-based identity developed and how the identities of multiple locales have been formulated. Drawing on one year’s worth of ethnographical research, I examine the staging of China’s three national archaeological parks, focusing on how ancient pasts are utilized as resources in various local settings in response to the state’s project, and how the presentation of the sites is a possible means of achieving urban development.

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