

Professional Development Grant Final Report

Hindu and Buddhist Influences on Cambodian Art at Angkor Wat and the Evil of S-21

2009-10

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Completed Project Activities

The Cambodia Project for which I received a Professional Development Grant in 2009-10 proposed that I travel to Cambodia to visit the key historical and cultural sites. I was already in Thailand to give a paper at a conference in Bangkok, and so the plan was to take the opportunity to work on Southeast Asian civilization of Angkor, which is crucial to studies in comparative civilization. The plan was to infuse the material into my Eastern Religion and Comparative Religion courses and to incorporate the material into my research on Comparative Civilization. I accomplished those goals and then some. I am still using the material in my academic career, and this is four years later. Here is a list:

1. My fall *Comparative Religions* class is based on the organization provided by the Indian Ocean culture, of which Cambodian culture is key hub.
2. My work at Angkor Wat and subsequent study of Indian Hindu and Buddhist influences on Southeast Asia, particularly on the bas reliefs of Indian stories from the Ramayana in the corner pavilions as well as the bas relief of the Churning of the Ocean Milk in the East gallery, led me to the more general project of characterizing Southeast Asian (Mekong River) Civilization as I put together the cultural influences present in Thailand, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Laos, Burma and Indonesia. I then connected the cultural influences with the Indian Ocean monsoon-based trade routes and came up with the idea of “Monsoon Meta-Civilization,” which encompasses the trade routes from Zanzibar up the east coast of Africa to Oman in the Middle East, and then on to Persian, Indian, Southeast Asian and finally Indonesian port cities. (This is comparable to Braudel’s “Mediterranean Civilization, which draws attention to another area of deep connectivity—that between Italy, Greece, the Levant and Egypt) In the context of Monsoon culture, the civilization of Angkor is the most important Indic culture outside of India and a key hub in Monsoon Culture, which is characterized by Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.
3. As with my Comparative Religion course, I improved my Eastern Religion courses based on what I learned about religion in Southeast Asia. (For example, I now emphasize the crucial borrowing that occurred between Southeast Asia and India and Southeast Asia and China and the interaction of the two influences. But there are many, many changes I’ve made in my teaching of religion as a result of the Cambodia trip.)
4. I gave a Humanities Colloquium presentation on the Indic (Hindu/Buddhist) and Confucian influences on the culture of the civilization of Angkor.
5. I helped organize and gave the keynote speech for the 2011-12 **Beyond the Silk Road** event that drew on my work in Cambodia.

6. I gave a talk on the Silk Road, again making reference to the Monsoon Meta-Civilization at Northwestern Michigan College on May 18, 2013. (So just this week I engaged in an activity made possible by my 2009-10 Cambodia Professional Development Grant.)
7. I gave a 2011 paper at the *Asian Cultural Studies Association Conference, 2011*, Bangkok, Thailand based on my Cambodia research. I discussed the evolution of sculptural depictions of the Buddha in two directions, north and east out of India and on to the Silk Road into China, and southeast out of India into Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia.

Plans for Future Activities using what I learned from my Cambodia Project

1. My Cambodia research will play a significant role in my upcoming book on Comparative Civilization.
2. I am giving a paper on the Angkor Civilization of Cambodia at the conference of the Society for the Study of Comparative Civilizations this summer (June 12-16, 2013) in Mt. Palomar, CA.
3. My teaching load continues to be primarily in the area of religion, and the Cambodia project comes into play each time I teach my Eastern or Comparative Religion courses.
4. Although I am not currently working in the area, I have an on-going interest in the history and concept of evil. My visit to Tuol Sleng, also known as S-20, the notorious torture center of the Khmer Rouge in the days of the Cambodia Killing Fields was incredibly powerful. I have a long term plan to visit several of these "horror sites" and then write a book about evil in history. I have also visited Hiroshima, Tianamen Square, Beijing and the Vietnamese War Museum in Ho Chi Minh City as part of this academic interest. However, I still have too many more to visit before starting the project in earnest.