

Module: Critical Analysis and Representations of Angkor

Course: Contested Histories of Colonial Indochina, Brown University Fall 2019

Instructor: Dr. Cindy Nguyen, cindy_nguyen@brown.edu

Time Required: 40 minutes (for classroom size of 7 students)

Contextual Note to Instructor:

This is a teaching module created for a 20th century colonial Indochina history course taught by Professor Cindy Nguyen at Brown University, Fall 2019. Given the limited time frame of 40 minutes, the students were not expected to have read any additional readings related to 13th century Angkor. Their background perspective prior to this module was grounded in 19th and 20th century colonial Cambodia—the colonial constructs of ‘Angkor’ as a lost civilization and the centering of Angkor within national and ethnic heritage. This module was taught on November 22, thus by this point the students had read most of Penny Edwards’ Cambodia book and finished most of the course. The module followed a separate seminar discussion on religion during the colonial period in Indochina.

To ground the discussion, we referenced the following previously discussed texts:

- Penny Edwards, “The Temple Complex: Angkor and the Archaeology of Colonial Fantasy, 1860-1906,” in *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945*. (University of Hawaii Press, 2007).
 - Travelogue *A Pilgrimage to Angkor* by Pierre Loti (1921)
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Module: Analyzing Representations of Angkor

Activity Goals: In this classroom activity, students will learn to critically analyze different multimedia representations of Angkor. They will learn how to identify important key visual aspects (clothing, colors, architecture, space, sounds, etc) and interpret their historical and cultural significance. They will compare their own experience of a simulated virtual reality simulation with two textual first-person historical travel narratives. After this session, students will develop a strong grasp of visual analysis of different media and apply this technique for their final research project.

PREPARATION

Recall the previously read and discussed texts:

- Penny Edwards, "The Temple Complex: Angkor and the Archaeology of Colonial Fantasy, 1860-1906," in *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945*. (University of Hawaii Press, 2007).
- *Travelogue A Pilgrimage to Angkor* by Pierre Loti (1921)

CLASS SESSION PART 1: REVISITING ANGKOR AND CLOSE READING OF TEXT

[10 minutes]

- **Primary Textual Source:**

- o "Chapter 6 The People" from *Travelogue A Record of Cambodia: The Land and Its People* by Zhou Daguan (1296-1297)

The instructor will guide the students to recall previous weeks' discussion on Angkor from 19th-20th century colonial sources. The students will then read a short excerpt of Zhou Daguan's 13th century travelogue independently and then answer the following questions in pairs:

1. What was your experience of Angkor through reading the travel text? (Reflect on the words, tone, and word choice. What surprised you? What was confusing or curious? What did you want to know more about?)

The instructor will then facilitate a shared discussion on the above questions and provide historical context for the source from Peter Harris' introduction and David Chandler's forward for the text.

CLASS SESSION PART 2: GUIDED VR EXPERIENCE AND VISUAL THINKING EXERCISE

[21 minutes]

- **Visual Media:**

- o **Virtual Angkor:** <https://www.virtualangkor.com> Virtual Angkor project (SensiLab, University of Texas, Monash University, Flinders University) is an immersive virtual reality and 3D simulation of 13th century Angkor metropolis. (ongoing)

Students will take turns using the VR headset (3 minutes each) to explore separate visual media scenes in Virtual Angkor. During each scene, the instructor will ask guiding questions to the group drawing

from the Visual Thinking Exercise questions. Order of scenes: 1) Road 2) Marketplace 3) Sculpture Workshop 4) Village 5) Wat Gate 6) Map 7) Wat Residencies

Visual Thinking Exercise

Step 1: See and Describe (without Interpretation)

- What is going on?
- What do you see that makes you say that? (Specific details which support your observation. Observe shapes, colors, textures, mood. Note the position of people and objects in relationship to each other.)
- What more can you find?

Step 2: Interpret and Make-Meaning

- How is Angkor represented?
- Who is the subject matter (architecture, humans, nature, objects, etc)? Why is this important?
- What is *not* represented?

Step 3: Further Investigation and Visual Evidence

- What is the historical, political, and economic context of the source?
- Who produced this source?
- Why was this source created?
- Who is the primary intended audience?
- What was the historical context in which this was produced? (Consider historical events, global politics, economic concerns)
- What does this visual source reveal that is different than textual sources?
- How does this visual source differ from other visual sources (VR and photographs)?

CLASS SESSION PART 3: CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO REPRESENTATION & ANALYSIS [9 minutes]

After the VR experience we will regroup to discuss the following Critical Analysis Questions.

1. VR Experience:

- a. What was your experience of 13th century Angkor through VR?
- b. Reflect on the feelings of embodiment, the sounds, the sights, the depth. Think through the thoughts that came up. What surprised you? What was confusing or curious? What did you want to know more about?

2. Comparative Media: Text and VR

- a. How does reading Zhou Daguan's travelogue text differ in experience than VR embodiment?
- b. How does VR world and the experience of embodiment transform your understanding of 13th century Angkor?

3. Critical Thinking:

- a. What is absent in the virtual world of Angkor? What is not represented in the Zhou Daguan and Pierre Loti travelogues?
- b. How does your own first-person experience of Angkor compare with Pierre Loti's and Zhou Daguan's first person travelogue account of Angkor?
- c. What does each source reveal about history of Angkor, colonial Cambodia, and colonialism?

Supplemental Primary Sources:

- Travelogue *A Record of Cambodia: The Land and Its People* by Zhou Daguan (1296-1297)
- Southeast Asia in the Ming Shi-Lu (Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644) <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/>
- Photographs from *Angkor: An Introduction* by George Coedès (1931)

Supplemental Reading:

- Roland Fletcher, Damian Evans, Christophe Pottier and Chhay Rachna, 'Angkor Wat: An Introduction,' *Antiquity* 89, no. 348 (2015): 1388-1401.
- Tom Chandler and Martin Polkinghorne, 'Through the Visualisation Lens: Temple Models and Simulated Context in a Virtual Angkor,' in *Old Myths and New Approaches: Interpreting Religious Sites in Southeast Asia*, ed. Alexandra Haendel (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2012).
- Google Arts & Culture "Visualising Angkor: Part 1 – Envisioning a Living City" <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/DAKCaZFzDpVCKw>
- Google Arts & Culture "Visualising Angkor: Part 2 – A New Reconstruction of Angkor Wat" <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/UwKSRNSRibIZKg>