Book Review



Title : Art in Peninsular Thailand Prior to the Fourteenth Century A.D.
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1. Introduction

This book seeks to go beyond stylistic identification. It attempts to place the works of an discovered in their own cultural context and to relate them to the art history in Thailand as a whole. It proposes that similar to the arts discovered in the central and northeastern regions of the country, those found in the south on peninsular Thailand be classified also into four periods corresponding to the four principle stylistic changes that took place within the span of time. In chronological sequence these prevailing cultural influences before that of the Thai were as follows : The Indianized period, 3rd to 5th century A.D. The non and Peninsular States period, 5th to 8th century A.D. The Indo-Javanese period, 8th to 10th century A.D. The Kmer period, 10th to 13th century A.D.

2. Art in Peninsular Thailand Prior to the Fourteenth Century A.D.

2.1 Geographical location

Geographically speaking, Southern or Peninsular Thailand begins at the head of the Gulf of Thailand between Ratchaburi and Petchaburi Provinces and ends at the border of the west of Malaysia. However, the historical and cultural distinctions between south and central Thailand begin southward from the boundary of Prachuap KiriKhan and Chumphon Provinces, just north of the Isthmus which comprises a stretch of the Malay Peninsular between the latitudes of 13° 20’ and 5° 30’ N. The region is separated from the Federation of Malaysia by the Kalakiri Mountain which run from the east to west across the Peninsular. The geographical layout of Peninsular naturally favours the east coast for human settlement, particularly in areas where broad alluvial plains cultivation of paddy fields. Considering the coastline as it might have been in ancient time, two types of settlement patterns can be distinguished, inland and coastal settlements.

2.2 The States

Judging from official Chinese dynastic records, the east coast states mentioned above seem to have flourished till the end of the seventh century A.D. When one by one oblivion overcome them. In their places there appeared in the

trade phase the state of Srivijaya, known in Chinese transliteration as Fo Shi or Shi Li Fo Shi. Srivijaya, sent its first Embassy to China in A.D. 670-673. The location of this state remains controversial the orthodox view holds that it was at Chaiya on the Isthmus. An approximate location in Srivijaya was indicated by the Chinese pilgrim Yi Jing. Srivijaya - Chaiya was known to Arab writers as Sribuza which was in the country of Sabaj which could only have been on the Isthmus since Sumatra is recorded to have been south of it. Sribuza Kalah (Chaiya-Takua Pa) can be considered to have been the two principle city-states in the country of Zabaj, Which according to a mid eleventh century A.D. Arab writer, was called "Suvarnadvipa" by the Indians Zabaj was also the Arabic pronunciation of Javaka, from where a king named Chandrabanu made two unsuccessful attempts to raid Sri Lanka in A.D. 1247 and around 1270 this Chandra banu was probably the same person as the one described in the inscription of A.D. 1230, found at Nakhon Si Thammarat, as Lord of Tambralinga. Thus Zabaj, Javaka and Suvarnadvipa represent a general name for the people of Malay Peninsular, and not the name of any particular states.

2.3 Periodizations

On account of their distinctive stylistic differences, the art of the Peninsula from the third to the thirteenth century A.D. can be divided into four phases based on the cultures whose influences determined their particular characteristics. They are as follows: the Indianized period, third to fifth century A.D.; the Mon and the Peninsular states period, fifth to eighth century A.D. ; the Indo-Javanese period, eighth to eleventh century A.D.; and the Khmer period, eleventh to thirteenth century A.D. Within these broad chronological divisions, there are stylistic variations between local schools that give Peninsular art its richness and diversity.

2.3.1 The Indianized period: third to fifth century A.D.

Prior to the spread of Indian civilization, the indigenous people of the Peninsula had attained a relatively high degree of material culture, as attested by the Dongsonian type of bronze drums found in Chawang District and at Tha Rua, in Muang District, of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, as well as at Phunphin and Chaiya in Surat Thani Province. The presence of these drums in Surat Thani and Nakhon Si Thammarat Provinces indicates that these two regions were populated before the advent of Indianized cultures. It was in this area too that the earliest artistic remains in the Indian manner were found.

The earliest Indianized sculpture found in the Peninsula is reported to have been found at Wat Sala Thung at Chaiya, this image has its stylistic predecessors among

the earliest Indian Visnu figures from the Kuṣāṇa period at Mathurā (A.D. 78-200), those with the anterior left hand holding the śaṅkha, the anterior right hand in the abhayamudrā, the posterior right hand grasping a gadā and the posterior left hand holding a wheel or disk (cakra).

To date no image of the Buddha that can be confidently assigned to a date before the fifth century A.D. has been discovered in Peninsular Thailand. The earliest examples fall within the second half of the fifth century A.D. One is the image in beige-coloured sandstone discovered at Wiang Sa. The other is a clay votive tablet found in the cave at Khao Khanab Nam, Muang District, Krabi Province. Both of these examples ultimately have their prototypes in late fifth century A.D. Indian art of the Sārnāth school in northeastern India.

2.3.2 The Mon and the Peninsular states period : fifth to eighth century A.D.

The period from the fifth to the eighth centuries A.D., which roughly corresponded to the second phase of the Chinese trade, saw the transference of trade from the hands of the Indian merchants to those of the local entrepreneurs. This change was instrumental in the decline of Indian influences and the rise of the native states bordering the Gulf of Thailand. The proliferation of the coastal states encouraged the growth of the native culture and the creation of an art that shows strong local traits. On this account the art of the period is here designated the Mon and the Peninsular states period.

The artistic remains of the Mon and the Peninsular states period, from the fifth to the eighth century A.D., can be summed up as consisting primarily of Hindu and Buddhist devotional images made of stone and clay. Sivaism and Buddhism seem to have coexisted in the major east coast sites such as Chaiya, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Yarang, as indicated by the discovery of both linga and the Buddha images. Vaisnava appears to have been localized to the Isthmian region from Takua Pa in the west to Phunphin and Tha Sala in the east, since at neither of these places have major Buddhist works of art been found. Chaiya was the principal Buddhist centre in the Peninsula where Mahāyāna Buddhism flourished from the sixth century A.D. onward. Two distinctive phases of Buddhist sculptures can be discerned at Chaiya. The earlier 'First Chaiya style' sculptures of the sixth and early seventh centuries A.D. show stylistic affinities with their Indian prototypes. The 'Second Chaiya style' of the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. exhibit similarities with art in the Mon states.

2.3.3 The Indo-Javanese period: eighth to eleventh century A.D.

The beginning of the Indo-Javanese period may be marked by the history inscribed on a stele dating from the third quarter of the eighth century A.D., once thought to have come from Wat Sema Muang, Nakhon Si Thammarat, but now believed to have been found at Wat Wiang, Chaiya'. Face A of this two-sided inscription records the founding of three brick temples dedicated to the Buddha and two Bodhisattvas, Padmapāṇi and Vajrapāṇi, by Dharmasetu, king of Srivijaya, in A.D. 775. Face B bears an unfinished inscription which is dated slightly later and mentions a king named Srīmahāraja, a descendant of the Sailendra. He may have been the same person as Samaratunga, king of Yavadvipa, who reigned in Central Java from A.D. 792 to 833. Srimahārāja, alias Samaratunga, was a grandson of Dharmasetu whose works are recorded on the earlier inscription; Srimahārāja's mother Tārā was the daughter of Dharmasetu, and was married to the Sailendra king Sangramadhananjaya of Central Java (r. A.D. 784-792)". This marriage between the Sailendra of Central Java and the ruling house of Srīvijaya or Chaiya would have assured close cultural ties between the two countries during the last quarter of the eighth century A.D. Indeed, on account of the stylistic proximity between Peninsular art of this period with the art of Java, it has been suggested that the former should be termed "Sailendra style"

Chaiya continued to be the leading centre for artistic activities concomitantly with its role as the political hub of the Srivijaya empire, which controlled of both sides of the Peninsula. The school of Chaiya produced two distinctive art styles: one combining Pala and Central Javanese influences with its own innovations, for purposes of this discussion dubbed here the 'Third Chaiya style', and another bearing Cham influence and constituting the 'Fourth Chaiya style'. So well-known was Chaiya as a centre of Buddhist culture during the end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century A.D., that the fame of its Avalokiteśvara image spread as far as Nepal.

Second to Chaiya was Sathing Phra where a quantity of bronze Mahāyāna Buddhist sculptures have been found. Since the finds there are of a portable size and eclectic in style, Sathing Phra's role appears to have been restricted to that of an entrepôt port on the east coast, which, judging from the styles of the finds, seems to have flourished between the ninth and eleventh century A.D. This agrees with a local legend that confirms Sathing Phra as a thriving state in the tenth century A.D., with Phatthalung as its tributary.

2.3.4 The Khmer period: eleventh to thirteenth century A.D.

Srivijaya's relationship with the Khmers may have begun as early as the end of the eighth century A.D., when, according to the Arab writer Abū Zayd Hasan', the Mahārāja of Zabaj, the current ruler of the people of the Malay Peninsula, sailed up the river to the capital of the Khmers, seized its king and beheaded him. A new Khmer king was installed in his place, but he was subservient to the Mahāraja. This incident may have set the stage for the historical return from "Java," which in all likelihood refers to the Malay Peninsula', of Jayavarman II, who declared Kampuchea independent of Java around A.D. 802.

In A.D. 1230 the name Dharmarāja Chandrabhānu of the "family of the lotus (padmavamsa)" appears on an inscription from Wat Sema Muang in Nakhon Si Thammarat", mentioning him as Lord of Tāmbralingal. He appears to have been the same Chandrabhānu, leader of the Jāvaka who "under the treacherous pretext that they also were followers of the Buddha...laid waste raging in their fury, all Lanka"). This Chandrabhānu made two raids on Sri Lankā, in A.D. 1247 and around 1270, the second specifically in quest of the "Tooth Relic" and the "Bowl Relic" of the Buddha', but in both cases he was defeated. "Chandrabhānu," however, was not a personal name, but a title for the heir apparent of the ruler of Nakhon Si Thammarat.

The Khmer period, wich spans the eleventh through thirteenth century A.D., saw the decline of Srivijayan power at Chaiya and the rise of Tāmbralinga, or Nakhon Si Thammarat, which for the first time evolved its own art style. Until the second half of the thirteenth century A.D. the principle stylistic influence on sculpture in the Peninsula derived from the Mahāyāna Buddhist art in the area bordering the head of the Gulf of Thailand, in particular from the region of the Tha Chin River basin. Although this area lied within the Khmer cultural sphere of influence, politically, it may have been a dependency of Srivijaya. At about the same time Theravadin Buddhism from Sri Lankā became the predominant religious faith in the Peninsula.

3. Commentary Notes

Owing to the specialization of Buddhist arts as well as contemporary other art objects accredited by the Fine Arts Department, Dr. Piriya Kraisiksh had contributed this work to implement subsidiary information for the exhibition "Arts in Peninsular Thailand Prior to the Fourteenth Century A.D." The exhibition was based on a study of the Arts in Peninsular Thailand aiming to trace the development of the arts as cultural expression of the people, reflecting the changes in their material and spiritual values,

rather than as purely aesthetic expression. As the data had been provided for the exhibition, focusing on the art objects to be exhibited, logical knowledge to the topic seems to be incomplete. This is one point of weekness in the subject content. Nevertheless, the strong point is that this book has been written in chronology, that gives clear expression to the content. For further study, two books recommended to read are (1) Analytical History of Buddhist Followers and Arts : Buddhist Statues in Asia, by Somkiat Lophetcharat[1], and (2) The Revitalization of U Thong: Bead Traces and Buddhism Introduction to Maeklong-Thachin River Bariars, by Bhuthorn Bhumathon and Dr. Banchar Pongpanich[2]. These books in Thai provide also more information of the geographical areas, settlements, and objects discovered through ages of archeology.

It is to be noticed here that all the books relating to Buddhist arts in Thailand have been influenced by M.C. Subhadradis Diskul, the late dean and rector of Silpakorn University, especially the idea and frameworks. Most of the books in this field have been contributed by old students of Silpakorn University with majority working in this University and Fine Arts Department. The text presented by M.C. Subhadradis Diskul, one of the most influent is "Arts of Thailand"[3]. The work brought to comment be improved in such way that analytical study be made with comparative connections from many sources would be appreciated.

4. Conclusion

The study of Arts in Peninsular Thailand before the Thai period tended to emphasize on the attribution of works of art whose stylistic similarities relate them to known corpus of works which has been loosely classified into five groups, namely: Early Objects discovered in Thailand; Dvaravati Style (6th or 7th- 11th century A.D.); ancient Hindu Image (7th-9th century A.D.) Srīvijaya style (8th-13th century A.D.) and Lopburi Style (7thcentury A.D.). While such categorization serves the purpose of identification, it does not take into account the complex cultural and historical frameworks within which these works were created. This work was written

[1] Somkiat Lophetcharat, **Analytical History of Buddhist Followers and Arts: Buddhist Statues in Asia**, (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and publishing Co., B.E. 2546 (in Thai)).

[2] Bhuthorn Bhumathon and Dr. Banchar Pongpanich, **The Revitalization of U Thong: Bead Traces and Buddhism Introduction to Maeklong-Thachin River Bariars**, (Bangkok: Buddhadasa Indapañño Archives Foundation, B.E. 2558 (in Thai)).

[3] M.C. Subhadradis Diskul, **Arts of Thailand**, (Bangkok: Amarin Press, B.E. 2508).

chronological events in the line of Buddhism spreaded. Though, yet, it is valuable for provisional knowledge on the Arts of Peninsular Thailand.

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