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THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH EAST ASIAN ARTS

By the word 'South East Asia', we would like to limit ourselves only to those countries that had received strong Indian cultural influence in the past, namely: Champa in the present day Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia and Indonesia.

South East Asia lies between India and China and her civilisation received the impetus from these two large countries. The mainland of South East Asia or the peninsula of Indochina extends from China down to the south. Though there are mountain chains which are difficult to cross, the large rivers on the peninsula have always been used as the means of communication: the Red River, the Mekong, the Menam Chao Phya River, the Salween and the Irrawaddy. Indonesia was probably connected in former times with Indochina.

Prehistoric study has been more or less reasonably advanced in South East Asia. Palaeolithic or early Mesolithic tools and paintings have been found in Anyathia (Burma), Kota Tampan (North Perak), Hoa-binh (Tonkin), Khwae Noi (mistakenly called Fing Noi in Thailand) and Laso at Celebes (Indonesia). The people who produced these artifacts are supposed to be Proto-Melanesians who are now living on scattered islands in the Pacific Ocean as well as the aborigines in Australia. Then comes the Hoabinian culture, a Proto-Neolithic form, which was found on the Hoabinh sites in Vietnam, in Laos and in Malaya. It is considered to have co-existed with the appearance of a crude basket pottery. Again in the most recent levels of the Hoabinian figures an independent Proto-Neolithic called Bacsonian in Tonkin. Here the pottery improves and there appear burials by inhumation with an elaborate ritual. This last stage may be dated to the beginning of the 3rd millennium B. C.

Later on, the Neolithic culture (about 2500 B.C.) spread all over South East Asia but it seems to co-exist also with a knowledge of metal which probably derived from China. Here one should mention the new theory on the origin of the use of metal and the practice of agriculture in South East Asia. According to the recent excavations of Professor William G. Sollheim 2nd at

Khonkaen in north-eastern Thailand between 1965-1966 and of Dr. Chester S. Gorman at Mae Hong Son in north-western Thailand in 1966, metal usage and plant domestication might have first begun in Thailand about 4275 ± 200 B.P. (before the present time) and 7000 B.C. respectively (the result obtained through the Carbon 14 test method). They then spread throughout South East Asia. This hypothesis is however waiting for more supports from further excavations.

In general two main Neolithic implement types are distinguished in South East Asia: one in inland Indochina and the other along the coasts. The latter type also prevails in Indonesia. It has generally been believed that this culture was brought down from China by the Indonesians. Apart from the two main Neolithic implement types above-mentioned, there also figure shouldered axes. These Neolithic stone tools are characteristic of the inland area or the island. They have been believed to belong to the Mon-khmer race who followed the Indonesians down into Indochina. As time goes on, however, the presence of bronze is increasingly attested to on all these Neolithic sites. The three sites which best illustrate the end of this development are Sa-huynh in Annam, Samrong Sen in Cambodia, and Gua Cha in Malaysia. Both the Neolithic and Bronze cultures co-existed side by side for a long period.

The use of metal, both bronze and iron, became dominant in South East Asia in the five or six centuries before the Christian era. And here again we can define two large independent systems. Down the valley of the Mekong; scattered in pockets in Burma, in western Malaysia, and as far afield as Sumatra we can recognise a megalithic civilisation, especially huge jars which are mostly found in central Laos. Almost simultaneously we find along the coastline of Indochina and as far away as Malaysia and Indonesia, a splendid bronze-using civilisation which is called the Dongsonian after Dong-son, the richest excavation site in the Thanh-hoa area in Tonkin. The people who produced this latter culture were farmers, fishermen, seafarers and excellent craftsmen in bronze, as is shown by the wealth of material discovered, especially the famous bronze drums. These drums have also been found in Cambodia, Thailand, on the Sunda Islands and Bali. The Dongsonian culture might have flourished in Tonkin about three centuries before the beginning of the Christian era.

This probably was the condition in South East Asia when the first Indian settlers arrived. From the evidence of archaeology so far discovered, the influence of Indian culture probably came into South East Asia about the beginning of the Christian era but it has also been surmised that the people of South East Asia might have already got in touch with the Pre-Aryan Indians

as there were many common features among them: the culture of irrigated rice, the domestication of ox and buffalo, the rudimentary knowledge of metal, the navigation ability, the importance of women and the descendance on maternal line, animism, the cult of ancestors and the god of the soil, the installation of cult altar on the mountains, the burial of the dead in jars or dolmens, the opposition between the mountain and the sea, bird and fish, those who live on the plateau and those who live along the coast, the language of isolated words but with the use of prefix, suffix and infix. Anyhow when the Indian merchants arrived about the beginning of the Christian era they probably encountered the following inhabitants in South East Asia: in the present day Vietnam the Cham of the Indonesian linguistic group; in the present day Cambodia the Khmers; in the valley of the Menam Chao Phya and southern Burma, the Mons who spoke the same language group with the Khmers; in Burma the Pyus; and in Indonesia the Indonesians.

The Indians came as merchants to seek gold and spice. The monsoon wind compelled them to set up trade posts in South East Asia and at least to stay there one season before they could collect exotic goods. This led to the spread of Indian culture through trade connection and intermarriage. The Indians probably came from both the north and south of their country but the impact of the southern cultural influence seems to be strongest in South East Asia especially from Amravati in south-eastern India.

Soon independent kingdoms were established in South East Asia: the kingdom of Funan on mainland Indochina and other smaller kingdoms on the Malay peninsula about the beginning of the Christian era; the country of Champa at the end of the second century A. D., and countries in Indonesia from about the 4th century. The establishment of these kingdoms can be divided into two methods: founded by the Indians who either married the daughter of a local chief or carved out the kingdoms for themselves; or by a local chief who adapted himself into the Indian orbit through the help of an Indian brahmin.

From about the 5th to the 7th century A. D., through the spread of the Indian Gupta and Post-Gupta cultural influences, the historic arts of South East Asia became firmly established. Their general trend seems to be the same in every country. At first they more or less copied the art of their cultural masters but then the native influences slowly crept in until these arts became independent from their prototypes and varied according to each country, each having its own characteristics. They resemble a tree with the same roots and trunk but which spreads out into many branches.

Now through the research of foreign and native scholars, one can have a rather clear picture of these arts though one must say that further research, especially archaeological excavations, should be carried on in every country in South East Asia.

One can say now for instance that the Cham art can be divided into 6 successive styles: those of the ancient period (about 8th century A. D.), of Hoai-lai (9th century), of Dong-duong (9th-10th century), of Mi-son A-1 (10th-11th century), of Binh-dinh (13th-14th century) and of the late period (14th-18th century).

The Khmer art can be even more precisely dated because of the many stone inscriptions and can be classified into 16 different styles namely the Pre-Angkorian period which includes the Phnom Da style (only for sculpture, ca. 540-600 A.D.), Sambor Prei Kuk (ca. 600-650), Prei Kmeng (ca. 635-700), Kompong Prah (ca. 706-800). Then comes the transitional period of Kulen (ca. 825-875) and the Angkorian period which is formed by Prah Ko style (ca. 875-893), Bakheng (ca. 893-925), Koh Ker (ca. 921-945), Pre Rup (transitional, ca. 947-965), Banteay Srei (ca. 967-1000), Khleang (ca. 965-1010), Baphuon (ca. 1010-1080), Angkor Vat (ca. 1100-1175) and Bayon (ca. 1177-1230). Then follow the late Khmer art (Post-Bayon style) and the present-day Cambodian artistic expression.

In Thailand one can divide her arts into two main periods: before the Thai political domination of the country and after that epoch. The first one is again sub-divided into at least three styles: those of Dvāravatī (7th-11th century A.D.), Śrīvijaya (8th-13th century) and Lopburi (11th-13th century). The second period which is of Thai workmanship is sub-divided into the arts of Chiengsaen (11th-18th century), Sukhothai (13th-14th century), U-tong (12th-15th century), Ayudhya (14th-18th century) and Bangkok (from the late 18th century).

The art of Burma can be divided into 3 large periods: that of the Pyus (6th-8th century), the Pagan period (9th-13th century) and the late period (from the 14th century onwards).

Indonesian art can also be divided into Central Javanese period (7th or 8th to 10th century A.D.), Eastern Javanese period (10th-16th century) and the Muslim period (from the 15th century onwards). One can also include the separate art of Bali.

These South East Asian arts not only gain their common impetus from the Indian culture but also have certain interchanges among themselves. Here only some examples would be cited, for instance: the influence of the

Cham Dong-duong art during that of the Khmer Kulen; the Khmer Angkor Vat style on that of Binh-dinh of late Champa; the strong Khmer influence on the Lopburi art in Thailand and the return of the Thai Ayudhya and Bangkok styles on the present Cambodian art; the influence of the Indian Pāla art through Pagan in Burma to the northern Thai art school or that of Chiengsaen; the influence of the Thai late Chiengsaen art on that of Laos; the Dvāravatī influence from Thailand on some Khmer and Indonesian Buddha images; the Central Javanese art influence on the Cham art of Mi-son A-1, the Khmer styles of Kulen, Prah Ko and Banteay Srei as well as on Malaysia, on the middle Dvāravatī period, the Śrīvijaya art in Thailand and the Burmese Pagan period.

The knowledge on the development and interchanges of these arts in South East Asia can be further improved through the proper archaeological excavation in each country and the study of the evolution of motifs recommended by Professor Philippe Stern, the former Chief Curator of the Musée Guimet in Paris, and his school in dating various aspects of the Khmer and Cham arts. One can cite for example here the evolution of a motif which is composed of round and rectangular beads, first conceived in India in the Gupta and Post-Gupta styles and then transported to Cambodia, began to evolve into the Khmer Kampong Prah style (Mireille Bénisti, "La bande à chatons", in *Arts Asiatiques*, Tome XX, 1969). This already evolved motif was also discovered recently by the author at Caṇḍi Plaosan in central Java.

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