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## Crossing Borders in Southeast Asian Archaeology

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### Overview: Dr. Peter D. Sharrock

#### Multi-directional flows of Buddhist art in Southeast Asia

Since the opening centuries of the first millennium the history and culture of the peoples of Southeast Asia have been profoundly influenced by the movement of Buddhist sages and Buddhist ideas across the region. 5<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri Buddhist sage Gunavarman took Buddhism to Java and converted the king before being invited to the Chinese imperial court. At the turn of this century the early (presumably Khmer) trading polity “Funan” was enough of a centre of Mahayanist learning to send two monks to Nanking to translate Sanskrit texts into Chinese.

Texts are rare in this region but we can trace cross-border influences through temples and icons. Pali Buddhism brought fine Buddha images to “Dvaravati” and Zhenla in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Dvaravati icons include large Buddhas seated “royally” with legs pendant which may be linked to similar icons in China. Zhenla Buddhists made early contact with nascent tantric Buddhism when Indian sage Punyodaya spent 15 years gathering their medicinal herbs for the Chinese emperor. But in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century Chinese pilgrim Yijing reported the Khmer Buddhists killed or exiled “by a wicked king”. The Khmer-influenced bronzes, renowned for their beauty and found in the 1960s at Prakhon Chai in Thailand, may be one outcome of this exile.

The rapid spread of tantric Buddhism in the 8<sup>th</sup> century brought the Buddhists to mandarin status in China and Tantric “mantrin” Amoghavajra spent time in Sri Lanka as well as in Java, where a few decades later the Buddha-covered mountain of Borobudur was to rise on the Kedu plain. Current research seeks direct links with Chinese Buddhist art in the completion of Borobudur in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. Towards the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century the region’s second huge Mahayana complex was built at Dong Duong in Champa, with clear links to China, India and Java and with a “royally” seated Buddha like Dvaravati’s. The 9<sup>th</sup> century also saw mushrooming cults of the future Buddha Maitreya in Champa, Dvaravati and Sri Ksetra that share strikingly similar Bodhisattva iconography.

“State Buddhism” reached mainland Southeast Asia only under the Ly Dynasty in 11<sup>th</sup> century Vietnam. This perhaps spurred Khmer king Jayavarman VII to construct a multitude of Buddhist monuments designed to permanently move the Khmers from Saivism to state Buddhism.

The Theravada exchanges among Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand are better known but also subject to research. The movement of the Theravada from Ayuthaya into Angkor in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century appears related but remains obscure. Work continues on how a vast Buddhist Theravadin pilgrimage centre for the whole region was constructed in Angkor in the 16<sup>th</sup> century – contrary to the colonial account of it being lost in the forest.