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## Comparing East Asian and Southeast Asian Buddhism: Looking at Traditional China from the Margins

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### **Abstract**

Based on extensive geographic and ecological similarities, albeit of quite different scale, I compare the Buddhist traditions of East Asia and continental Southeast Asia during the first and second millenia of the common era. I show that East Asian Buddhism is older and far better documented than its Southeast Asian counterpart, and that the enterprise of translation meant that it evolved over time in East Asia in an organic fashion. Buddhism was certainly present in Southeast Asia during the first millenium, but the nature and extent of its presence there is difficult to gauge. In addition, during the second millenium Buddhism in continental Southeast Asia came to emphasize the Pāli canon as the standard by which religious authenticity was to be judged, based on shared conceptions of religious purity and orthodoxy. Based on this analysis I speculate that there is a parallel between the East Asian emphasis on a discovery model of spiritual training and its organic historical development, and a similar parallel in Southeast Asian Buddhism between a purification model of individual perfection that resembles what occurs there in the demands for orthodoxy in social movements. Finally, I suggest that the analysis of publically chartered religious foundations in the formation of Southeast Asian fiduciary institutions may suggest new avenues for the study of East Asian Buddhism, where negative Confucian models of the economic dimensions of religion have dominated scholarship to date.

### **Keywords:**

East Asian Buddhism, Southeast Asian Buddhism, Indigenization, Sinification, Sanskritization

## 東亞與東南亞佛教之比較— 從邊緣看傳統中國

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### 摘要

東亞與東南亞大陸地區的佛教傳承在廣大的地理與生態相似的基礎上，卻具有相當不同的規模，我將比較兩者在第一千禧與第二千禧年的發展。東亞佛教比起東南亞佛教來得久遠且更能提供較完整的資料，同時東亞佛教的翻譯事業是以相互連貫性的方式逐步形成。佛教在第一千禧年確實存在於東南亞，但它的範圍及性質卻很難判斷；同時，在第二千禧年，東南亞佛教以共有的宗教純淨正統觀念，強調巴利經典為宗教可受評判的信賴標準。在此分析基礎上，我推測在東亞佛教中，對於精神修練型態的發現與其相互連貫性的歷史發展上有類似之處；同時在東南亞佛教中，行者完美的淨化形態類似於社會運動中產生對正統的要求。最後，對於東南亞可受信賴之機構所成立的公認宗教準則之分析提出建議，畢竟宗教經濟面向的負面儒家模式已支配學術研究至今，而此建議也許可以啓發東亞佛教研究的新路徑。

關鍵字: 東亞佛教、東南亞佛教、本土化、中國化、梵語化

## Introduction

Why and how should we compare East Asian and Southeast Asian Buddhism? First, continental Southeast Asia constitutes the far southern zone of East Asia. This geo-ecological zone to the far south of the Chinese heartland is not an amorphous borderland of remote mountains and infectious swamps, as Chinese texts sometimes stereotypically portrayed it, and it will do us well to look with a more critical gaze at the dynamics and distinctions of Buddhism within the region. Second, there are illuminating parallels and contrasts between the ecological zones of continental Southeast Asia and those of East Asia. That is, the zones of both regions are defined by river systems divided by relatively porous mountainous boundaries, leading to similar patterns of agricultural development and human settlement. However, the smaller scale of the Southeast Asian zones and the lack of a single dominating cultural/ethnic group, such as the Hàn Chinese in East Asia, has made for much more diverse patterns of governance and religion. Third, the issues of “indianization”, the use of Sanskrit and Pāli, and the role of Buddhism in Southeast Asia also demonstrate intriguing parallels and contrasts with “sinicization” (and similar secondary patterns), the use of literary Chinese, and the role of the religion in East Asia. Fourth, Mahāyāna Buddhism flourished for a time both on the eastern part of the Southeast Asian continent and in the islands of Sumatra and elsewhere, and although the history of Mahāyāna in Southeast Asia is still largely undocumented there were demonstrable connections between it and Buddhism in China and Japan.

The basic question here is, what was the relationship between transcendence and power in the Buddhism of early imperial (i.e., from the Hàn through the Five Dynasties, or the “long first millenium”) and late imperial (from the Sòng through the Qīng, or the “long second millenium”) East Asia? That is, the theoretical and practical systems of Buddhism present the religion’s highest goal as one of total liberation from the realm of *saṃsāra*, or complete transcendence of the mundane world. Given this profound orientation toward escaping the shackles that inevitably accompany ordinary life, how is it that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas could also represent the highest forms of power within that mundane world? In other words, how is it possible that the famously otherworldly religion of Buddhism could provide a rhetoric for the systematic understanding of the power relationships of ordinary life, or at the very least provide a set of deities thought (at least by some people) to occupy the highest rungs of the pantheon of power within East Asian societies?

Unraveling the relationship between transcendence and power in East Asian Buddhism is no simple matter, and as it happens the best way to begin is to look outside East Asian Buddhism for comparative insight. Indeed, it is only by comparing the Buddhisms of East Asia and continental Southeast Asia that we will be able to address — and provide a tentative answer to — the fundamental question posed above regarding the integral relationship between transcendence and power manifested throughout East Asian Buddhist history. There is no particular logical imperative as to why the Buddhism of Southeast Asia should provide us with the comparative insight that we need for this task, but as we shall see there is a certain

serendipity involving the intellectual agenda of the present paper and the data available. To see how this works out, we will begin with the ecological framework and then move on to issues of religious history. By doing so, we will make possible new insights not limited to the issue of power and transcendence alone, but widely relevant to the understanding of Buddhism in world historical context.

## The Zones of Continental Southeast Asia: Three River Systems and a Coastline

Southeast Asia is usually discussed in terms of two components: its continental portion, divided among the modern states of Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, and its many islands, which now host the administrations of Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and other smaller regimes. Our focus here will be on continental Southeast Asia, with only occasional references to the insular portion of this region. Although Vietnam also functioned as part of the East Asian cultural sphere, here we will note only how the early states within its modern borders operated within the context of Southeast Asia. In addition, although Mahāyāna Buddhism flourished from the fifth through at least the eighth or ninth century in what is now Cambodia and the islands of Sumatra and Java, we lack the archaeological evidence to say very much about how it functioned in those widely separated locations. Indeed, often the locations of events described in written texts cannot be pinpointed authoritatively, and clear references to Mahāyāna Buddhism in Southeast Asia are quite limited. For these reasons, I will not discuss insular Southeast Asian Buddhism here.

Just as the heart of East Asia consists of two massive river systems, the Yellow and Yángzǐ River zones, so is the heart of continental Southeast Asia defined by rivers: the Irrawaddy/Salween, the Chao Phraya, and the Mekong. Whereas the Yellow and Yángzǐ flow predominately from west to east through ecologically quite different terrains, the major rivers of Southeast Asia flow, also in roughly parallel fashion, from similar mountainous headwaters through a succession of increasingly large plains toward the ocean to the south. The distinctive features of the Southeast Asian river systems are the result of the breadth of their catchment areas and the navigability of the rivers themselves. That is, the Irrawaddy and Salween Rivers drain a relatively narrow area relative to that of the Chao Phraya and Mekong, while traffic along the middle reaches of the Mekong are hampered by two sets of rapids. Therefore, the relatively smaller scale of the Irrawaddy/Salween zone (for convenience, below I will refer to these neighboring river systems simply as the Irrawaddy zone) limited the agricultural base from which the second-millennium Burmese state could draw, while difficulties in transport between upland areas and the ocean restricted the economic growth of the second-millennium Cambodian state. For all three river systems, the dry upland areas were more amenable to agricultural development in the first millenium, and the extension of irrigation systems to the

marshes and swamps of the deltas only occurred with concerted effort in the second millennium, especially from the fifteenth century onward.

If the three river systems of continental Southeast Asia define north-south zones that roughly parallel the east-west zones of East Asia, then the mountainous headwaters to the north and the coastal zone of modern Vietnam to the east correspond very roughly to the far northern and far southern zones. The comparison is inexact, but it is a useful metaphor here. Like the far northern zone of East Asia, the mountainous region dividing East and Southeast Asia was the source of both militarily and culturally dominant ethnic incursions toward the south. That is, from about the ninth century Burman tribes began moving into the Irrawaddy zone, overwhelming the area's current residents and establishing the cultural foundations of the later Burmese state, while Tai peoples began to move west and south from their original homeland between modern Vietnam and China, bringing with them superior patterns of rice agriculture that helped them gain control of the entire Chao Phraya zone and eventually much of the Mekong zone as well. (Here I use the label "Tai" to refer to a number of ethnic groups defined by similar language and culture, and "Thai" to refer to the specific group that eventually achieved dominance in the Chao Phraya zone.)

The eastern boundary of the Mekong zone (not including the massive swamplands of the southern delta, which were not developed for agriculture until centuries later) was marked by competition with the coastal zone, which came to be controlled by states whose cultural and political identities developed in contact and competition with the Chinese to the north. Indeed, the fact that so little Chinese influence is apparent in mainland Southeast Asia up until the late eighteenth century — the absence of Chinese elements in the archaeological remains is quite striking — must have been due in part to the preoccupation of successive Chinese governments with the tantalizing riches of the coastal zone. There was considerable overland trade — as well as warfare — between people in the three major river systems and the Nánzhào and later kingdoms of Yúnnán, of course, but adopting Chinese culture never seems to have been viewed as a serious option for Southeast Asian rulers and their governments. Indeed, in this paper we will encounter one case in which a policy of "indianization" appears to have been adopted, at least in part, in order to avoid Chinese domination (see the discussion of Línyì a few paragraphs below).

## Buddhism in Continental Southeast Asia

Traditional accounts of the history of Buddhism in continental Southeast Asia inevitably begin with Emperor Aśoka of India, who is depicted as a great patron of Buddhism in Buddhist legends. Aśoka is supposed to have sent two monks, Soṇa and Uttara, to a place known as Suvarṇabhūmi (or Suvaṇṇabhūmi in Pāli), the "golden land", and Southeast Asian kingdoms of the second millennium frequently claimed this label as referring to their own realms. The term is used in Indian sources, however, only as a general term for a region vaguely located

in the east, and there is no basis for identifying Suvarṇabhūmi with any particular Southeast Asian locale. In addition, even if the two monks — or any number of missionaries — had in fact been sent by Aśoka, or even by rulers of subsequent centuries invoking his memory, there is no evidence of their activities or impact in Southeast Asia. And, as we shall see, it would be doubly invalid to take their mission as the initial establishment of what became known many centuries later as “Theravāda Buddhism”.

### A. The First Millenium: A Smattering of Evidence

There is a paucity of information about Buddhism in Southeast Asia in the first millenium, and what little we do know paints a picture very different from that for Buddhism in East Asia. First, in contrast to the truly vast quantities of textual, art historical, and archaeological evidence available about East Asian Buddhism, for Buddhism in Southeast Asia in the first millenium we have only (a) a number of statues and sculpted images, plus building foundations and other archaeological finds; (b) a substantial number of inscriptions in Sanskrit, Pāli, and indigenous languages, some quoting Buddhist texts and some describing donations to early monastic estates; and (c) references to Southeast Asian kingdoms and events in roughly contemporaneous Chinese and Japanese sources. The inscriptions and sculptures date from the fifth century CE and after; Buddhist materials are found throughout the region, but evidence of the Mahāyāna is almost entirely limited to the Mekong system and to insular Southeast Asia.

Artistic and archaeological finds indicate a Buddhist presence in various locations throughout the subcontinent beginning as early as the first to second centuries CE. This exceptionally early date (the radiocarbon dating is ambiguous) is for an ivory comb decorated with a goose, two horses, and Buddhist symbols found at Chansen in the lower Chao Phraya region. No other archaeological evidence for Buddhism can be reliably dated to such an early period, and most Buddhist remains belonging to the so-called Dvāravatī style (found at sites scattered throughout the lower Chao Phraya area) date from the fifth century or later. By this time there are numerous stone images of Buddhas (and stylistically identical images of Viṣṇu), dharmacakras or “wheels of the Dharma”, and stone foundations of Buddhist buildings and other structures — the remains of circular stūpas, square caityas, and the bases of vihāras or meeting halls (to use the later Southeast Asian meaning of this word). The largest Dvāravatī settlement, at Nakhon Pathom, had a rectangular plan of about 3,700 by 2000 meters, with Buddhist structures both inside and outside the city walls and the surrounding moat. It is clear that Buddhism had been adopted by the centralized political authority and elite society in this and other such cities, although there is no evidence for any state-level administration unifying the various Dvāravatī sites.

Inscriptions do reveal a distinction in the type of Buddhism adopted in eastern vs. western Southeast Asia. Although there are Sanskrit and Pāli inscriptions throughout the region — and even where Pāli was used for scriptural purposes in Sri Lanka, some inscriptions there were written in Sanskrit — both Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna Buddhist inscriptions appear in the coastal and Mekong zones (and also in Sumatra and other parts of insular Southeast Asia),

while only traces of the Mahāyāna can be found in the Chao Phraya and Irrawaddy zones. And, while some of the inscriptions at Angkor refer to Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrines such as *śūnyatā*, “emptiness”, there is only a single known inscription that actually quotes a Mahāyāna text in continental Southeast Asia.

Inscriptions show that by the end of the first millennium CE a range of texts from various sections of the Pāli canon had been transmitted to continental Southeast Asia. One inscription tentatively dated to the ninth century quotes a brief text composed in Sri Lanka, thus documenting communication between Saṅgha members in that island kingdom and the continent. The style of script used most frequently in Southeast Asian inscriptions is usually said to be a variant of that used in eastern India, but recently a connection has been established with western India as well. Judging from these divergent details, there were multiple sources for early Buddhism in continental Southeast Asia.

When considering the initial transmission of Buddhism to Southeast Asia, it is important to remember that Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and other forms of Indian religion were also prevalent in the region, and that the use of Sanskrit for political administration in the region had much in common with that in the Indian subcontinent. In fact, regimes throughout southern South Asia and Southeast Asia adopted Sanskrit for public political expression beginning around 300 CE (about a century later in Southeast Asia) and ending around 1300. The choice of the classical language for political purposes was totally unprecedented in Indian history, and it occurred virtually simultaneously throughout the entire region. If we focus solely on the Southeast Asian use of Sanskrit — for inscriptions on temples and other public buildings and monuments — one seeming contradiction is evident. The inscriptions there were composed in grammatically correct and artistically elegant Sanskrit, but no other non-political uses of the language (e.g., love poetry, drama, essays, or grammars) have been discovered there. From this and other evidence it is clear that professional communities of Sanskrit scholars (often referred to as Brahmans, although they may have been local families descended from Indian ancestors) served at Southeast Asian courts, providing rulers with both literary and administrative expertise.

In earlier scholarship this participation of Southeast Asian states in what has been called the “Sanskrit cosmopolis” would have been interpreted as an example of “indianization”, a term derived from the colonial experience of modern times and implying that cultural influence flowed into Southeast Asia from the superior civilization of the South Asian subcontinent. Instead of adopting this postcolonial prejudice regarding the supposedly “higher” civilization of ancient India, it is more useful to appreciate how local rulers and ruling elites throughout the diverse cultures of the two areas — the geographical difference between the two being irrelevant in this regard, given that the populations of both southern South Asia and Southeast Asia were speakers of non-Indo-Aryan languages — might have benefitted from participating in a broader community of discourse based on adoption of the Sanskrit language and Indic governmental strategies. That local regimes and their rulers were the active agents in making the selection of Sanskrit linguistic usage and Indic administrative technologies may be inferred

from the facts that (a) such a limited cross-section of the Indian religious repertoire was available in Southeast Asia, and that (b) combinations of deities and cults (the best example being a synthesis of Śiva and Viṣṇu) which would have been unthinkable for South Asia in this period occurred so commonly in Southeast Asia.

The earliest decision to adopt Sanskrit terminology seems to have occurred in the state of Linyi along the southeastern coast. The regime was founded by a local family in 270, and in 284 the second ruler sent its first official embassy to the Chinese court in Jiānkāng (i.e., modern Nánjīng) — that is, to the capital itself, not just to the Chinese outpost in Jiāozhǐ. When this second ruler died, his Chinese advisor took the helm, but when he communicated with the Chinese court he did so in a “barbarian” script, presumably using Sanskrit. Two generations later the former advisor’s grandson adopted Sanskrit names for the state’s important cities (hence along the coast can be found the cities Indrapura, Amaravati, Vijaya, Kauthara, and Panduanga!) and formally adopted the Hindu religion. The rulers of this emergent kingdom were sensitive to the ebb-and-flow of dynastic power in China, but they chose to identify themselves as “foreign” to its cultural realm. Staving off pressure from China to the north was not merely a cultural nicety, since Linyi and other coastal states became wealthy by preying on ships trading with China and its regional outposts, much as the nomads of the far northern zone preyed on Silk Road trading caravans and sedentary Chinese agricultural populations.

There may have been other issues involved in the decision to adopt Sanskrit titles, and of course Sanskritization might have been initiated prior to the inheritance of power by rulers of Chinese ethnic background. Nevertheless, for students of East Asian Buddhism it is striking that members of a Chinese lineage — or more specifically the descendants of a Chinese ruler, many of whose maternal relatives were no doubt of local origin — used Sanskritization to establish a local identity.

For our purposes the most useful data concerning Buddhism in first-millennium Southeast Asia comes from Chinese sources. These tell of diplomatic relations between the Fúnán confederation of chiefdoms of the lower Mekong region (which the Chinese texts present as a single state) and the Southern Qí and Liáng regimes (479–502 and 502–51, respectively) with their capital at Jiānkāng. In 484 an Indian monk named Nāgasena, who had earlier traveled from Guǎngzhōu to Fúnán with news of a Chinese sage-emperor ruling to the north, was sent from Fúnán to the Southern Qí court in an (apparently unsuccessful) attempt to enlist military support. He took with him a gold-inlaid image of a dragon-king, a sandalwood Buddha image, and two small ivory stūpas. Nāgasena reported that the Fúnán royal court was devoted to Śiva, but that it allowed Buddhism to flourish as well. (The history of the Southern Qí includes a poetical description of religion in Fúnán provided by this monk.) In 503 Fúnán sent additional Buddhist icons to the newly established Liáng court, and about the same time a monk from Fúnán named Mantrasena (sometimes referred to in Chinese simply as “Mantra”) brought a large number of Indic texts to Jiānkāng. Mantrasena was considered by the Chinese to have been a less-than-proficient translator, but another monk from Fúnán named Saṅghapāla (460–524) was better thought of and revised some of the other monk’s work.

Originally a student of Abhidharma and Vinaya and gifted in many languages, while in China Saṅghapāla became a student of the Indian monk Guṇabhadra, under whom he studied Mahāyāna Buddhism. Beginning in 506, Saṅghapāla spent the remaining 17 years of his life working in a chapel in the palace and four other imperially supported locations, producing eleven translations totalling 48 fascicles. The most important of these were the *Sūtra on King Aśoka* and the *Treatise on the Path to Emancipation (Vimuttimagga)*, the latter of which is one of only two works in the Chinese Buddhist canon thought to have been translated from Pāli. For the beginning of both these translation projects, Emperor Wǔ himself attended and “held the brush” to note down the initial rendering, and afterward he assigned the monks Bǎochāng, Huìzhāo, Sēngzhì, and Fǎyún, as well as the layman Yuǎn Tányǔn, to assist in the translation work.

In 539 Liáng Emperor Wǔ sent the monk Bǎoyún to Fúnán after a lock of the Buddha’s hair said to be there — a potent relic, no doubt, given that it was supposedly twelve feet long! Emperor Wǔ also sent a request that Fúnán send another translator, in response to which the Fúnán authorities dispatched Paramārtha (499–569), who was to become one of the most important translators in East Asian Buddhist history. Paramārtha arrived at the Liáng court in 548, less than a year before Emperor Wǔ was assassinated and the regime sent into turmoil. Paramārtha’s biography also mentions another monk from Fúnán, Subhūti (d.u.), who did translation work in the Liáng capital. Incidentally, a Fúnán monk known in Japanese as Buttetsu is said to have traveled first to India and then to Japan, in company with an Indian monk named Nāgasena (not the same as the fifth-century monk mentioned just above, of course!), where in 752 the latter presided over the eye-opening ceremony of the Great Buddha established by Emperor Shōmu in Nara.

Of all the texts these monks translated, some were certainly brought from Southeast Asia — but sadly there is no way to tell which ones! Although caution is thus necessary, their overall output accords with our other knowledge of Southeast Asian Buddhism at the time, implying interest in Mahāyāna and proto-esoteric topics. In addition to the two texts mentioned above, Mantrasena and Saṅghapāla produced texts devoted to Mañjuśrī and other subjects, one of which teaches that by reciting the names of eight Buddhas women can cease being reborn as women. There are dhāraṇī texts associated with the Peacock King and, curiously, with Śāriputra. Perhaps the most important text translated by these Fúnán monks, though, was the *Precious Rain Sūtra (Bǎoyún jīng)*, of which they produced two different versions.

## B. The Second Millenium: From Estate-based to Community-Oriented Buddhism

The most important theme of Southeast Asian Buddhism during the second millenium is the progressive ascendancy of a particular form of the Buddhist tradition, based on a deliberately conservative reading of the Pāli canon and disseminated through collaboration between the rulers and Saṅghas of Burmese, Thai, Cambodian, and Lao states, with considerable input from Sri Lankan monks. During this period there was no single name for this form of Buddhism,

which emerged out of contestation between different monastic centers and saṅgha groups; as we will see below, it is only in the twentieth century that it comes to be labelled “Theravāda”, a name that itself has explicit programmatic implications. Long before this label became current we can detect two substantially different models of Buddhist monastic activity, one based on the management of royally approved estates as ongoing religious and economic foundations, and the other based on the propagation of Buddhist religious values and ritual practices to communities of lay followers. In order to appreciate the differences between these two models, we need to consider the political environment within which these monks found themselves.

Over the course of the first two millennia CE continental Southeast Asia underwent a great transition in political organization, but it was only in the second millennium that Buddhism began to play any significant role in this process. Prior to this, the earliest forms of political organization were tribal chieftaincies, whose authority came from charismatic “men of prowess”. Such individual or at most family-based rulers exercised military power in part by their control of wealth and trade, which allowed them to win loyalty by the distribution of gifts and the delegation of local authority. The petty kings of the Fúnán regime introduced above might be taken as an example of this style of rule, but their adoption of Chinese forms of administration meant they were able to establish a lineage that lasted for several generations — the next step beyond simple tribal chieftaincy. Subsequent centuries witnessed the rise and fall of numerous ruling lineages in various locations throughout continental Southeast Asia, the details of which need not detain us here. In the ninth century, however, a distinctly new stage of governance emerged with the formation of two powerful “charter states”, referred to in this way because they established memorable precedents that were often appealed to in later centuries. These were the kingdoms of Pagan (c. 849–1287) and Angkor in Burma and Cambodia, respectively. Pagan and Angkor were both established in the ninth century, both entered their greatest phases of institutional brilliance in the eleventh century, both underwent crises in the fourteenth century, and both collapsed in the mid-fifteenth century.

The Pagan and Angkor kingdoms are both known for their enthusiastic construction of religious monuments, with the former erecting up to ten thousand Buddhist pagodas, monasteries, and temples, and the latter creating massive temples and waterworks including Angkor Wat, said to be the largest religious building in world history. Why this colossal outpouring of religious construction? One of the features of Angkor political life was the description of its kings as having special access to divine beings. That is, many of Angkor’s rulers strove to construct physical edifices greater than that of any of their predecessors, and to rule from that physical center as the human representative of the highest religious power of the universe. (The Indian loan word *devarāja*, “king of the gods”, was used at Angkor to refer to the deity, almost always Viṣṇu, with whom the king was associated.) The Angkor kings demonstrated their power by mobilizing the population to create these monuments, which thus became the cosmic centers from which they wielded their divinely mandated power. One of the Angkorian kings professed Mahāyāna Buddhism, and although it is intriguing to read of distinctive doctrines such as *sūnyatā* in local inscriptions, there is no indication that the

change in religious ideology implied any change in administrative style. It is not clear from the historical evidence why the Angkorian state eventually foundered, although one reason seems to be the lack of any effective restriction on the kings' desires for ever greater monuments to their own individual authority. When Nikāya Buddhism arrived in Cambodia in later centuries, well after the decline of Angkor, one of its selling points was the ideal of the cakravartin ruler, whose actions were limited by the moral injunctions of the Dharma. We will come back to this point shortly below.

The Buddhist monuments of Pagan were clearly motivated in part by the desire of the donors — kings, royal kin, and elite families — to create merit for themselves and their deceased relatives. Presumably something like the royal cults of Angkor also prevailed at Pagan, with the construction of religious monuments serving simultaneously to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Pagan state and to provide ritual centers for the expression of its rule. The situation is not clear, however; there is no evidence by which to reconstruct the early administrative style of Pagan, and the stories of the role of Buddhism at Pagan in the twelfth century (involving the King Anuwratha) have been shown to be later legends. What we can say is that, when the ruling authorities adopted Nikāya Buddhism they used widely accepted notions of human lineage connections to help unite as many families and cult groups as possible under their rule. Not only was the king's permission necessary for religious institutions to function and survive, but he became the religion's chief donor, leading his people in the meritorious construction of temples and stūpas.

The Buddhist sites of Pagan and the largely Hindu monuments of Angkor both utilized publically chartered religious foundations to fund and organize monumental religious construction and agricultural development. That is, abundant inscriptional evidence from both sites reveals that kings, ruling families, and elites donated resources to Buddhist or Hindu foundations, establishing those foundations as permanent institutions with ongoing sources of income and special tax treatment. A typical inscription would describe the land, domestic animals, and bonded workers donated to the foundation in question, making it responsible for the maintenance of ritual services at the given temple or monastery, and declaring that the bequest of resources to the foundation had the force of law for all time. In the early centuries of the Pagan and Angkor states these religious foundations served as vehicles for the concentration of wealth in ongoing social institutions, which thus prevented the dispersal of said wealth over multiple generations. That is, such religious foundations provided a religious aura for investment and avoided the division of assets among offspring, as would have been the case for ordinary families. In addition, these foundations created economies of scale for the opening of new lands to agricultural production, even as they generated additional economic activity through the creation of new markets for local artisans and craftsmen.

In their early centuries, and especially from the eleventh century on, the Pagan and Angkor states actively sponsored such religious foundations. At this point both states benefitted from the foundations' role in generating economic growth and helping to extend central political control. From the thirteenth century or so, however, both governments and their successor

states increasingly worked to limit the power of the foundations, whose combined wealth represented a challenge to the ruling power of the central state. Thus kings revoked institutional charters that had been promulgated “improperly” in the past, and the Pagan rulers attempted to pit austere Sri Lankan clergy against estate-based local saṅghas. Since religious foundations controlled between one-third and two-thirds of Upper Burma’s arable land by the end of the thirteenth century, the Pagan government’s need to limit their economic power played a significant role in the transformation of Southeast Asian Buddhism in the second millennium.

One policy adopted by the Pagan rulers in order to oppose the growing power of religious foundations was to support the conservative form of Sinhala-oriented Buddhism mentioned above. In part, this conservatism was energized by dedicated monks from Sri Lanka, as well as Burmese monks who had studied there, who believed that estate-based Buddhism represented a degenerate form of the religion. In other words, rather than operating estates, monks should live by begging. Although there is reliable documentation of friendly collaboration between members of the Sīhala (i.e., Sinhala-oriented) and Ari saṅghas, in polemical sources the Ari are accused of various heretical practices, some of which may derive from local religious traditions and some of which might have involved Mahāyāna or even tantric practices. Although the Ari thus seem to embody a diverse range of religious practices, for our purposes it is not necessary to determine exactly what type of religious brotherhood the Ari were — only that they were criticized by the conservative Saṅgha as practicing an “impure” Dharma and were hounded out of existence. Their greatest weakness, in addition to their very diversity, may simply have been their dependence on monastic estates rather than relying directly on the local populace through begging and community donations.

We do not know very much about when the rulers of Pagan adopted Buddhism as their state ideology, or even if they ever did so formally. Buddhism supposedly received a great boost in 1057, when the king Anawratha (Aniruddha: r. 1044–77) requested a copy of the Pāli canon from the Mon ruler Manuha of Thatôn, in Pegu in the far south of the Irrawaddy zone. Manuha rudely refused, so Anawratha invaded and took him prisoner, then returned to Pagan with both prisoner and Pāli canon in hand. But this story, which would have us believe that scripturally-based Buddhism was adopted by the Pagan Burmese from the Mon, was actually constructed out of three much later components. Its earliest building block was the claim made in 1479 by the Burmese king Dhammazedi, that the area around his capital at Pegu, referred to in Pāli as Rāmaññadesa or “land of the Rāmans” (and interpreted locally as “land of the Mon”), was actually the Suvarṇabhūmi to which the missionaries Soṇa and Uttara had been sent by Emperor Aśoka. About two and a half centuries later, sometime during the years 1712–20, a Burmese writer became the first to record the story of Anawratha’s conquest on behalf of the Pāli canon. Finally, in the nineteenth century colonial scholars added the inference that the lofty Buddhist culture of the Mons had had a civilizing impact on Pagan, much as ancient Greek culture had civilized the Roman empire that conquered it.

Actually, there is ample evidence of interaction between Burmese and Sri Lankan saṅghas from around Anawratha’s time, but the earliest known case actually involved Burma sending

monks to Sri Lanka to assist it in re-establishing Buddhism there. In the Chao Phraya zone as well, interaction between the Thai and Sri Lankan saṅghas was certainly widespread by the end of the thirteenth century, since it is assumed in the inscription written by King Ramkhamhaeng in 1292. Although the authenticity of this inscription is a topic of debate, it depicts Ramkhamhaeng as leading the royalty and nobility of the city of Sukhothai in reverencing the Buddha, observing Buddhist precepts, and attending religious services. The city is supposed to have been filled with temples and images, while west of the city was a monastery built by the king for the Saṅgharāja, or chief of the monks. King Ramkhamhaeng is described as riding a white elephant to a monastery to pay homage to the Saṅgharāja, who on occasion would ascend the throne to teach the Dharma to the king. Ramkhamhaeng is also described as having Buddhist relics excavated and led the people in their worship (rather like Aśoka).

The political history of Buddhism in second-millennium Southeast Asia is well described elsewhere, and here we need only list the various ways in which Buddhism was used for political purposes by second-millennium Southeast Asian states. First, states or minor polities sometimes identified specific Buddhist images, stūpas, or temples as palladia thought to offer protection for their domains, and military campaigns therefore involved the capture or destruction of the opponents' religious symbols and architecture. Second, military campaigns by the Burmese and Thais against each other sometimes involved depicting the opponents as heterodox Buddhists, requiring purification by the forces of a righteous Buddhist king. Third, both during and after their quests for power rulers depicted themselves as Buddhist "universal rulers", a term that came to be used with increasing frequency even by very minor princes, sometimes even as a personal name. Fourth, different Southeast Asian regimes identified their capitals as the site of Suvarṇabhūmi, or even claimed that the Buddha himself had flown from India to establish the Dharma there in during his own lifetime.

### C. The Modern Era: The Creation of the Thai Buddhist State

For reasons of space, we will skip to the modern era and consider only a single example: that of Thailand (known until 1939 as "Siam"). With the establishment of the Chakri dynasty at the end of the eighteenth century Buddhism became fully incorporated into the Thai state, with its kings identified as universal rulers and its Saṅgha enlisted for the performance of state rituals. Rāma I (1737–1809; r. 1782–1809), the founding king of this very successful dynasty, came to power after the brief reign of Taksin (1734–82; r. 1767–82), who had developed a sort of religious megalomania regarding his own Buddhist attainments even as he abused members of the Saṅgha. Rāma I was very careful to provide support for the Buddhist establishment, while at the same time imposing substantial restrictions on it, adopting the position that strict regulation by the state assisted the Saṅgha in maintaining the requisite standards of disciplinary

and ethical purity. In this sense his policies resemble those of Emperor Wǔ of the Liáng and other pro-Buddhist East Asian rulers.

The fourth ruler of the Chakri dynasty, King Mongkut (Rama IV; 1804–68; r. 1851–68), had been a monk for 27 years prior to ascending the throne. As a monk he had distinguished himself by energetically engaging with the Buddhist tradition, becoming widely knowledgeable in Pāli scholarship, and developing a vigorous critique of traditional Thai Buddhism. In order to recreate what he considered to be the Buddha's original style of practice, he founded the Dhammayut order of monks, which has enjoyed very strong support from the throne and aristocracy up to the present, in spite of the small number of monasteries it controls. (The predominant order of Thai Buddhist monks is called the Mahanikai [Mahānikāya].) Mongkut had a strong rationalist streak, and he longed to rid the religion of what he felt were its supernaturalistic excesses — an attitude that was only reinforced by his subsequent contacts with Christian missionaries and diplomats. Nevertheless, he also drew deeply on the historical connection between Thailand and Buddhism. It was he who discovered the famous inscription attributed to Ramkhamhaeng, which is at least as important in the modern consciousness as the first example of Thai writing as it is for the history of Buddhism and the Thai state. In addition, Mongkut identified a specific location just west of modern Bangkok as the actual location where Aśoka's missionaries Soṇa and Uttara taught, and after he became king he had the stūpa there remodelled and renamed as Phra Pathom Chedi (P: *paṭhama cetiya*), the Holy First Reliquary. Mongkut avoided any controversial moves after he became king, but his son Chulalongkorn (Rama V; 1853–1910; r. 1868–1910) was eventually able to contribute greatly to the institutionalization of Buddhism as Thailand's state religion.

## Concluding Inferences

Even the brief discussion given above should be enough to remind us of the overwhelming volume of data we have for Buddhism in East Asia, no doubt thousands of times as much as that for Southeast Asian Buddhism. The East Asian data is also exceptional for beginning at the beginning, so to speak, providing us with so many resources concerning East Asian Buddhism during the early centuries of the common era. We have copious written materials beginning only a century or so after the initial arrival of Buddhism in the Chinese cultural realm, and they include an impressive array of literary genres of both secular and religious literature. The latter category includes dynastic histories, poetic anthologies, gazetteers, and popular fiction, each of which depicts a different facet of the Buddhist tradition. There are archaeological finds indicating the presence of Buddhism from the second century of the common era onward in China, wooden temple buildings from the seventh century still preserved in Japan, and

paintings on silk and paper from the same time or only slightly later preserved in the cave at Dūnhuáng, to mention only a few of the most prominent examples.

In contrast, for the first millenium of Southeast Asian Buddhism we have only a few inscriptions on stone and metal, a variety of archaeological remains and art historical artifacts, and scattered references in Chinese texts. We can do little more than infer the existence of imported Buddhist texts for this early period, and there is no indication of how Buddhism was interpreted in Southeast Asia, nor any hint of the production of local compositions. Not only is direct evidence for Buddhism in the first millenium extremely limited, neither is it backed up by the kinds of secular sources that are available for East Asia. And to make matters even worse, the Southeast Asian sources are distributed quite unevenly, with yawning gaps between both the types of material available and the sites from which they derive. The underlying reason for this paucity of information is that none of the cultures of continental Southeast Asia had its own writing system and literary tradition prior to the arrival of Buddhism.

There is far more data for Southeast Asian Buddhism during the second millenium, of course, and there was considerable literary productivity in Pagan and the later Burmese regimes, in northern and central Thailand, and in Cambodia and Laos. Unfortunately, only a very small percentage of this locally produced literature has been introduced (let alone translated) in western-language sources. And, although there is growing evidence from both religious and secular sources for Southeast Asian Buddhism with the passage of time, the same is also true for Buddhism in East Asia. Indeed, given the explosion of woodblock printing in second-millenium East Asia, the volume of data for Buddhism there during that period may exceed that for Southeast Asian Buddhism by an even greater ratio than before.

And it is not just the differential of available data: Buddhism in East Asia is in a certain way *earlier* than that in Southeast Asia. This is an intentionally contentious way of putting it, to be sure — since most writers would describe the Theravāda Buddhism of Southeast Asia as being earlier than the Mahāyāna Buddhism of East Asia, following *a priori* assumptions about the evolution of Indian Buddhist schools. My point is that — to use a biological metaphor — Buddhism matured earlier in East Asia than it did in Southeast Asia. For East Asia we know of active missionary work from the second century, the emergence of different theories of emptiness by the late fourth century, and the formation of distinctive schools of thought from the early fifth century. By about this time Chinese translations of Buddhist texts achieved such levels of quantity and variety that a firm foundation was provided for the dissemination of the tradition throughout East Asia, and, as a result of this and the political uses of Buddhism by kings and governments, it was from the fourth to seventh centuries that we can observe the efflorescence of Buddhism in the Three Kingdoms of Korea and in the Yamato realm of early Japan.

In contrast, for Southeast Asia we can say only that Buddhism reached there in the early centuries of the common era, that it achieved some currency in political centers from the fifth century on, and that a growing inventory of Pāli and Sanskrit texts were present from about the same time. We can also note that both Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna texts were attested in

the sixth century, with the former limited to the eastern side of the the subcontinent, i.e., the Mekong River and coastal zones. We have noted that a single text composed in ninth-century Sri Lanka was quoted in Southeast Asian inscriptions, as well as that quotations from a wide spectrum of Pāli canonical sources were available by the end of the first millenium. However, the Pāli and Sanskrit terminology of the inscriptions, whether Mahāyāna or not, is limited to the conventional use of widely known rubrics, slogans, and key terms, and it is difficult to infer from them anything more than a general awareness of the most basic Buddhist doctrines.

In addition to this textual data, there is an assortment of Buddhist images from early Southeast Asia, although none are definitively dated to earlier than the fifth century CE. From about this same time we have archaeological remains of buildings suggesting the existence of functioning Buddhist saṅghas, plus stūpas suggesting veneration for departed worthies. Finally, and most important, we have ample evidence of what I have called estate-based Buddhism, in which local saṅghas were made caretakers of substantial financial resources in exchange for undertaking land reclamation projects and managing agriculturally based estates. Given the inscriptional data it is certain that royal and elite families were provided with ritual services and presumably religious instruction, but there is no evidence whatsoever of any efforts to disseminate Buddhism among other social classes.

For dyed-in-the-wool traditionalists and apologists for monastic lineages and their lay adherents who identify themselves using the label “Theravāda”, these may constitute adequate grounds for justifying a continuous story line. But these scattered reference points only provide a shadowy impression at best, a murky outline with virtually no indication of specific color or content. Southeast Asian Buddhism may indeed represent the best possible modern recreation of ancient Buddhist traditions, but it is nevertheless a *modern* recreation, and certainly not equivalent to ancient Indian Buddhism itself. East Asian saṅghas have similarly venerable ordination lineages, and their modern representatives work to recreate the Buddhist tradition in ways less straightforward than the approach of their Southeast Asian brethren, which I characterize as “cleaving to the canon”.

In addition to its relatively late maturation, the manner in which Southeast Asian Buddhism developed in the second millenium was profoundly different from that in East Asia. Various efforts at the revitalization or purification of Southeast Asian Buddhism during this period led to a shared sense of orthodoxy, beginning with the opposition to the Ari monks of Pagan, whose combination of local and Buddhist religious practices was supposedly decried as heterodox and licentious by conservative saṅgha members. The saṅghas of Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand actively reinforced one other, and even in Cambodia the earlier prevalence of the Mahāyāna gave way to the shared orthodoxy. Buddhists in Southeast Asia manifested an ever-increasing tendency to hold up the Pāli canon as the universal standard for religious behavior, and this model of cleaving to the canon as the ultimate standard for defining what proper Buddhist belief and practice should be — the near-fundamentalist position that the Pāli canon represented the text of the Buddha’s teachings, not only verbatim but complete, given the rejection of Mahāyāna sūtras as inauthentic — became the standard by which all

Buddhism in Southeast Asia would be judged. As an outgrowth of these developments, modern Southeast Asian Buddhist authorities and organizations make the religious claim — perfectly legitimate as a religious position but even so amenable to our critique — that they represent the “original” form of Buddhism, labelled “Theravāda” from the early twentieth century to render this religious posture more believable. However, like any human religion this is a constructed tradition.

In sharp contrast to the second-millennium model of cleaving to the canon in Southeast Asian Buddhism, the pattern by which Buddhism was disseminated to and throughout East Asia is best described by metaphors of biological metabolism. That is, East Asia ingested the input from India and Central Asia via the translation enterprise, which was supported through a combination of state projects and broadly based support from communities of devotees. Over the course of time successive waves of texts from the “western region” were consumed by translation, an act of cultural digestion that converted the Indic and Central Asian source material into nutrients that could be disseminated throughout the East Asian cultural body. With each new infusion of Buddhist texts, different types of religious sustenance spread throughout the region, leading to the growth of new doctrinal interpretations and new ritual approaches. Effectively, translation represented a powerful source of regenerative energy for East Asian Buddhism, allowing it to incorporate new religious developments into its very being. During the second millennium the translation enterprise lost its pivotal position, but by this time East Asian Buddhism had achieved sufficient energy to continue the processes of creative interpretation, which included the composition of apocryphal scriptures, Chán dialogues and *gōng’àn* (J: *kōan*) precedent anthologies, and many other genres of religious literature.

There is a corollary to this comparison that seems useful, although at this point it is still speculative. That is, I have described the Southeast Asian pattern of cleaving to the canon as a historical process of religious development that involved multiple neighboring cultures, but this process resembles a very different type of cultural pattern, the Buddhist understanding of individual spiritual cultivation. Just as Southeast Asian saṅghas strove to reach communal perfection by suppressing practices of other religious communities they considered impure, so did individual Buddhist practitioners there seek spiritual liberation by the progressive elimination of defilements. What is implied here is a homology existing in the given societies between conceptions of the individual human body/person and the broader social body/community.

There is a striking parallel to this homology in the East Asian domain. I have described the model by which East Asian Buddhism developed by the metaphor of biological metabolism, and what this means is that the individual participants, as well as loosely organized groups and other types of communities, interacted with Buddhist sources in a characteristic fashion. The cornucopia of Buddhist scriptures was so vast, and so variegated, that each individual and group effectively engaged in a hermeneutic quest, seeking to find the fundamental principles by which the treasures of Buddhism could be understood and put into practice. Perhaps the cultural legacy of the Chinese philosophical tradition played a role here, in implying that the

appropriate goal for each practitioner and group was one of understanding. In any case, there are countless stories of monks who read through the canon until they chanced upon a text, or even a line, that somehow opened up the entire storehouse of Buddhist treasures for them. We may also remember monks such as Tīāntái Zhiyǐ or Hōnen, who used specific scriptures as their guides to the entire Buddhist tradition. The Chán/Sōn/Zen/Thiền tradition, of course, transmits anecdotes of monks who tried to find the key to Buddhist wisdom in this way, only to give up the reading of scriptures and turn to the pursuit of meditation practice. Even here, though, the goal was to understand one's own existential situation as a human being cycling through saṃsāra, and the introspective examination of the "critical phrases" of *gōng'àns* or *kōans* amounted to a different form of the same hermeneutic quest. Chán spiritual cultivation was most commonly interpreted as a process of finding the Buddha within oneself, or — to use the school's own rhetoric — as a process of recognizing that one already is Buddha and therefore has no "self-perfecting" work to do. What was going on in all these very different cases is that East Asian Buddhists were working to plumb the very depths of the Buddhist religion, each striving to achieve realization of the most profound teachings.

As with the Southeast Asian case described just above, the East Asian homology is between individual spiritual cultivation and the shared policies of religious groups. Individuals and groups sought within the scriptures, and within themselves, for the fundamental keys of Buddhism. Similarly, relations between individual and groups in East Asian Buddhism were most often cast in terms of the profundity or shallowness of each other's understandings. To be sure, there are numerous cases in which East Asian Buddhist groups were criticized for failing to uphold proper standards of morality, but it was far more common for depth of understanding to be the primary topic of dispute. As Mahāyāna Buddhists, East Asian practitioners and groups wanted to achieve the most profound realization of Śākyamuni — but it never occurred to them that they should recreate exactly the style of social practice that obtained at the time of the Buddha himself. In East Asia one could invoke the idealized age of the ancient sages, but never attempt to recreate it in the historical present.

To put things in the simplest terms, the characteristic style of Southeast Asian Buddhism was a process of purification, while that of East Asian Buddhism was one of discovery. On the individual level we may associate the former style with ascetic self-control and the attainment of nirvāṇa as a state beyond defilements, and on the communal level with campaigns for orthodoxy and the elimination of heterodox practices. Similarly, on the individual level we may associate the latter style with introspective analysis and the attainment of insight into the fundamental emptiness of the world and all its distinctions, and on the communal level with competitive campaigns for hegemonic recognition of doctrinal supremacy. This set of distinctions clearly resonates with the gradual/sudden polarity so often discussed with regard to Chinese Chán, and even though it would be unwise to reduce the nuances involved to this one format it still seems to me that the sudden/insight/wisdom complex is much more fundamentally represented in East Asian Buddhism than the gradual/concentration/liberation complex.

Incidentally, we can also note how misplaced were the efforts of earlier scholarship to evaluate the degree of fidelity to Indian Buddhist models displayed in East Asian Buddhist texts and traditions. In my understanding the greatest historical value of the East Asian material lies in showing the interaction between the South and East Asian cultural and religious systems from an early date. In other words, the most valuable aspects of East Asian Buddhist materials are not the overlaps and equivalences with Indian precedents, but the disjunctions and differences. The lack of similar data for Southeast Asian Buddhism should remind us of how precious the East Asian materials are — exactly the sort of realization we could not have achieved without temporarily “defamiliarizing” ourselves with our subject matter!

In an entirely different vein, there are two ways in which the preceding discussion of Southeast Asian Buddhism can contribute to the study of East Asian Buddhism. These concern the cultural role of monastic estates and the political dimensions of the religion.

The aspect of Southeast Asian Buddhism that is most clearly manifested in the available inscriptions is the role of religious foundations. These involved the permanent dedication of agricultural lands, domestic animals, and human laborers to particular monastic institutions, the *saṅghas* of which were thus identified as the proprietors of the resulting estate-supported monastery. Now, the estate-based monastery is well known throughout East Asia, and indeed throughout the Buddhist world, but nowhere is its role within society described so well as in recent scholarship on Southeast Asia. That is, in Pagan and Angkor, and perhaps also in Champa and Dai Viet, such institutions had a number of important social functions. They operated as agencies of land reclamation and development, opening up new areas to agriculture, and implementing, improving, and extending irrigation systems. They served as landlords and project overseers, supervising labor and ensuring that rents and other proceeds devolved to the monastery. In one sense the foundation’s activities were undertaken in lieu of the state, and monastic control limited or undercut direct control by the state itself. This was of course a trade-off for both sides, for in another sense such monastic activities were undertaken on behalf of the state, for whom the monks provided ritual services. Indeed, even as the *saṅgha* provided managerial oversight for its estates, the foundation was designed for the ongoing financial support of ritual protection of the king and his state, as well as healing services for the king and his royal family. In this stage of institutional development — that is, no longer petty kings with unstable lineages but early states with at least basic bureaucracies — the ruler was still indispensable to the system. The king was not only military leader and chief of the state’s administrative hierarchy, who controlled both religious and secular patronage throughout his realm. Significantly for our purposes, he also occupied the position of ritual intermediary between kingdom and cosmos.

There has long been an awareness that Buddhist monastic estates played a role in East Asian economic development, especially in first-millennium China. However, as far as I am aware no scholar has considered the positive contribution of monastic estates in such an integrated fashion as has been done for Southeast Asian Buddhism. Donations to monastic institutions in China are invariably depicted as having economically negative impact and as a waste of the

society's precious resources. At best, Chinese monastic estates have been considered as abortive stepping-stones to capitalism, an issue that is inappropriate to the historical period involved. In addition, although Japanese Buddhist monasteries and saṅgha groups are recognized as having had certain functions involving agricultural development and land management, these are frequently discussed in terms of the supposed degeneration of Buddhism, once a purely spiritual religious community, into a worldly shell devoted to profit and personal advantage. And, to the extent that early monastic institutions were controlled by aristocratic families, they are said to have already departed from the ideal of the Buddha's time when the saṅgha lived apart from society.

The Southeast Asian data suggests that estate-based Buddhism involved something far more significant than religious degeneration and the venal pursuit of personal profit. Rather, in societies that were only developing their basic modes of governance and the distribution of economic and political authority, the religious sanction offered by a sacred institution such as the Buddhist saṅgha would have been extremely important. Instead of having agricultural and other productive assets controlled by rulers or elite individuals, or even by ruling-house or elite-family lineages, there must have been a widely recognized value in assigning such assets to religious collectivities. This would have removed the assets from direct ruler or elite control, but it would also have made them less susceptible to the personalistic and family-driven conflicts that always accompanied claims for political power. Recall that we are considering pre-monetary societies, for whom the transmission of assets from one generation to the next was still in the process of being subjected to orderly conventions. In other words, just as religious charisma helped cement the bonds of political unification, so religious authority was vitally important for the productive control of agricultural assets at a certain stage of social development.

What this implies, for example, is that the control of monasteries by aristocratic families in Asuka Japan was not merely a form of conspicuous display, a means for the families involved to demonstrate their wealth and authority. Nor did the monasteries serve only as ritual sites, providing funerary and memorial services for family members in lieu of the grandiose tumuli (*kofun* 古墳) that the government had just prohibited — as important as these functions were at the time. If the Southeast Asian model can be applied to East Asia, then these *uji-dera* 氏寺 served as important fiduciary institutions that allowed for the concentration of resources with a degree of religious protection from interference from the state or competing families. The importance of this fiduciary role may not be readily apparent in the early twenty-first century, with all our banks, savings cooperatives, and other financial institutions handling these matters, but it would have been distinctly important at a certain point in the development of all premodern societies. One economic historian even refers to the estate-based form of the religion at Pagan from the eleventh century on as “redistributional Buddhism”, based on the role it played in centralized economic and social control. The king effectively acted as chief donor, unifying his subjects' religious, political, and economic pursuits by example, moral suasion, and coercion. Thus the contribution of Buddhism was to provide both an ideological

justification and an institutional framework for the consolidation of financial assets. Seen from this perspective, any amounts spent by the Saṅgha on religious services and teaching activities etc., could be written off (to describe the issue only in bookkeeping terms) as a type of administrative overhead. And, since those religious services and teaching activities would also have served to domesticate the recipient social groups into state citizens, there were other advantages as well.

The second aspect of Southeast Asian Buddhism to consider here is its role in providing a language of discourse about power, both political and cosmological. Through multiple collaborations between saṅghas who worked to convert local populations to Buddhist morality and governing regimes that identified themselves as religious states led by cakravartin rulers, a conservative tradition of textually based Buddhism came to dominate Southeast Asian Buddhism. We can readily detect partnerships between rulers and saṅghas, in which a complex calculus of mutual advantages emerged. Rulers presented themselves as cakravartin kings in order to claim the grandeur that image implied — but also to announce to local elites and the populations they governed that they would accept the constraints of Buddhist morality for their own actions as well, rather than operating with the willful disregard shown by the self-indulgent and virtually unrestrained rulers of Angkor, for example. At the same time, Buddhist saṅghas increasingly turned their attention to propagating Buddhism among local populations, a process that led eventually to the creation of village temples and temple schools throughout the region by the end of the eighteenth century. Of course, part of the reason Buddhist saṅghas were turning to local proselytization was that governments were restricting their support through monastic estates and permanent religious foundations of the sort described above. Whatever the causes of these new developments, the overall result at the end of the second millennium was the existence of several states — Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos — whose governments and dominant population groups identified themselves as Buddhist.

The role that Buddhism played in Southeast Asian political life is very instructive for students of Buddhism in East Asia. In neither region does Buddhism ever become the source of administrative structure, or even bureaucratic expertise, as Confucianism did for East Asia and Brahmanic culture for Southeast Asia. Of course, in East Asia the Chinese imperial administrative structure was Legalist in origin, but it came to be staffed by Confucians and has come to be thought of as part of the Confucian legacy. In Southeast Asia administrative strategies seem to have been either adopted from Brahmanical advisors or developed locally — the evidence of the specific Indian contribution is frequently lacking, but in any case Buddhist ideas, methods, or personnel never became integral to the nuts-and-bolts of governance. In addition, the Southeast Asian evidence is clear that, where Buddhism was adopted as state ideology, this only occurred after the initial establishment of governmental control and administrative systems. To be sure, in some cases there was a strongly religious dimension to propaganda strategies, as when Burmese or Thai states each strove to generate enthusiasm for attacks on the other by claims of Buddhist purity for their own side and the allegation of heterodoxy on that of their opponents. As with the nominally universalist religion Christianity

in early modern Europe, the fact that Buddhist doctrine seems to provide no support for interstate warfare or inter-ethnic rivalry did not prevent the religion from being used in exactly this way.

The Southeast Asian example also provides insight into an aspect of East Asian religious history that has been misinterpreted, or which has not been documented well enough, in studies to date. There are numerous East Asian regimes, ruling lineages, and individual monarchs who used Buddhism to construct unifying religious cosmologies for themselves and their states' citizenry. Numerically speaking, this probably happened more often — or at least was maintained more successfully — in the satellite cultures of East Asia and not in the Chinese heartland areas of the Yellow and Yángzǐ River zones. The greatest general difference between the Chinese and Southeast Asian cases, and between the Chinese and the satellite culture cases as well, was the distinction made between the religious and secular realms in the former, and the comparative lack of any such distinction in the latter. Recall that, from the time of Huiyuǎn in the early fifth century the Saṅgha was thought to have been not of this world, and thus beyond the proper grasp of kings and civilian authorities. To be sure, from that point onward Chinese governments asserted greater and greater control over the Buddhist clergy and their activities, and as we have noted above some of the most pro-Buddhist rulers in both East and Southeast Asia regulated the Saṅgha most heavily. In Chinese thought, however, there was an endemic pattern of dualistic assumptions — whether between worldly and transcendent, defiled and pure, substance and function — that eventually crystallized in the xenophobic native/foreign dichotomy of second-millennium times. In contrast, the sharp divisions of Southeast Asian culture were between Burmese and Thai, or Thai and Vietnamese, but never between local and Buddhist, and certainly never between cakravartin and Buddha.

This last absence of any sharp dichotomy between transcendence and power in Southeast Asian Buddhism is most instructive. To be sure, modern scholars of Southeast Asian Buddhism have debated whether or not the cakravartin and the Buddha derive from the same ultimate cosmological source, but my argument here is not dependent on there being no distinction whatsoever between the two. Obviously, no king is the Buddha, and no Buddha functions as king. In a very profound sense the Buddha is far more important than any short-term ruler of this world — but the rulers are much more commonly encountered, and their powers to attack, reward, and punish have a much more immediate impact. The point is that, just as the rulers of Angkor seem to have identified themselves as closely as possible with Hindu deities, some Southeast Asian rulers attempted to identify themselves as closely as possible as devout cakravartins leading both the ordained and lay components of their states in the Buddhist path.

## Bibliographical Annotations

Southeast Asian studies is a relatively new field, having begun in the encounters that took place between colonial administrators, European scholars, and local authorities in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Given the fractured political map and tortuous military history of the region, the field has matured in fits and starts, and many of the most widely cited secondary works repeat theories that emerged out of romantic misinformation and sectarian hagiography. Since time is required for new interpretations to be formulated, evaluated, and revised for adoption across the field, and since there are yawning gaps in the primary data, it is impossible to find lucid and up-to-date explanations of all of the most important facets of the story. As a specialist in East Asian rather than Southeast Asian Buddhism, the following are the readings that I have found most useful for a critical historical understanding.

The multi-volume *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* (Tarling, 1999) is probably the best starting point for any reading on most subjects involving the region, including religion. For the archaeology of prehistorical and early historical Southeast Asia, Higham 2002 is an authoritative and readable guide for all parts of the subcontinent except Burma. For example, Higham (2002, 255) introduces the comb mentioned here (see p. 7); it is a chapter in the *Cambridge History*, de Casparis and Mabbett (1999, 294), which suggests that the radiocarbon dating is ambiguous. Also, the inference regarding the adoption of “Buddhism and centralised political authority” and the scale of the Nakhon Pathom settlement are drawn from Higham (2002, 255 and 257).

Since Higham (2002) is oddly silent on the archaeology of Burma, for that region see the concise summary in Gutman and Hudson (2004) and the exhaustively documented analysis in Hudson (2004). For one of the most exciting publications in recent Southeast Asian studies, see Aung-Thwin (2005), which shows that the commonly encountered description of the Pagan King Anuwartha’s 1057 conquest of a Mon polity at Thaton (Aung-Thwin uses the Pāli forms Aniruddha and Thatôn), as well as the existence of any significant Mon polity anywhere in Lower Burma around the end of the first millenium, is based on a modern misreading of late legendary accounts. Aung-Thwin’s rejection of what he calls the “Mon paradigm” is too new to have made much impact on the study of Thai history, but the judicious reader may use it to evaluate the very sensible and quite readable account found in Wyatt (1982), still the best survey of Thai history available. Similarly, I also strongly recommend Chandler 2000 for Cambodian history and Taylor (1983) for Vietnamese history. (However, Taylor’s traditionalistic understanding of Vietnamese Buddhism needs to be modified by the authoritative analysis in Nguyen 1997.) Higham (2001) is a concise and useful guide to the ancient Cambodian civilization of Angkor. The dates used here for Pagan, c. 849–1287, are taken from Day (1996, 389).

The most comprehensive guide to the political and cultural development of continental Southeast Asia is without question Lieberman (2003), which presents exhaustive analyses of

the processes of state formation in what is now Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Lieberman's ultimate goal, to demonstrate chronological synchronicities between cycles of political consolidation in continental Southeast Asia, Japan, Russia, and France, will not be achieved until the publication of his somewhat delayed second volume, but even this one volume is both brilliant and comprehensive. I have drawn heavily from Lieberman, borrowing the terminology of "charter states" and adopting his perspective on state formation throughout the region. Specifically, the observation that agricultural expansion to the deltas only occurred in the second millennium, especially the fifteenth century (see p. 5), is based on Lieberman's suggestion (49–52) that the periods of most rapid growth were 1450–1560 and 1720–1820. In addition, the remarks about the revocation of improperly promulgated charters and the proportion of land held by religious foundations (p. 11) are from Lieberman, 120. Incidentally, in a personal e-mail communication (September 3, 2007) Lieberman has pointed out that in Southeast Asia Buddhism became the official state cult with no literate rival, whereas in East Asia Buddhism was marginalized/rivalled by differing combinations of Confucianism and Shintō. As he suggests, this is a major distinction that begs for analysis.

Although I generally agree with Lieberman's perspective on state formation, for different perspectives on the terminologies of state and polity in Southeast Asian studies also see the measured review of previous scholarship in Bentley (1986). For consideration of the complexities of kinship relationships in state formation, see Day (1996). Although the inference that, for Linyi, Sanskritization was a method by which to avoid Chinese pressure is mine (p. 8), I draw on Higham (who seems to rely on Maspero, 274) for the basic information about Linyi. On the regime's history of plundering Chinese wealth, see Taylor (Tarling 1999, 1:154). On Nāgasena 那伽仙, one of the monks from Southeast Asia active in southern China, see Harris (2005) and Mochizuki (5:4490b-c).

Since Southeast Asian studies is still working to throw off the dual yokes of colonial imagination and sectarian hagiography, it is difficult to find secondary works on Buddhism there that do not simply repeat legendary accounts. One of the best treatments of Buddhism in any Southeast Asian national tradition is that on its Cambodian iteration, Harris (2005), and it is unfortunate that similar resources do not exist yet for Burma and Thailand. My starting point for the Thai tradition, and indeed for the history of Southeast Asian Buddhism in general, has been Prapod (1990). This Ph.D. dissertation, only now being prepared for publication, examines the inscriptional evidence for Buddhism in Southeast Asia and then charts the evolution of Buddhism in the Thai states up to the present. For example, the observation on p. 8 that Sanskrit inscriptions were used in Sri Lanka even when the language of Buddhist canonical sources was Pāli, and the reference to the Mahāyāna quotation inscription from Kedah, Malaysia, are from Prapod (1990, 104 and 116-17), respectively. Just below, on p. 8, the Sri Lankan text represented in Southeast Asian inscriptions is the Telakaṭāhagāthā, which was edited for publication in the *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* (Goonaratne, 1884). See Prapod (1990, 119-21) and see the web site [http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene\\_1/findolo/gretil/2\\_pali/7\\_poe/telaka\\_u.htm](http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/findolo/gretil/2_pali/7_poe/telaka_u.htm) for an electronic version of this text.

Prapod's work decisively undercuts older accounts of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, such as those offered in Ray (1936 and 1946). For its time, Ray's scholarship was excellent, and his works contain a great deal of useful information, but using them requires working against the grain of his apologetic goal. Readers will note that my attention to the *cakravartin* ideal overlaps in many ways with Tambiah (1976), who provides an excellent summary of relevant Buddhist canonical sources and the Aśokan inscriptions. However, Tambiah provides very little new information for Buddhism in Southeast Asia prior to the Bangkok period, and he seems to be unaware of the significant differences between the image of Aśoka in the inscriptions (which were effectively unknown from shortly after Aśoka's death until modern times) and in Buddhist hagiography. See the very measured and insightful comments on Tambiah's work in Keyes (1978). For King Mongkut and modern Thai Buddhism I have used Keyes (1989), with reference to Wyatt (1982).

On the political use of Sanskrit in Southeast Asia and the "Sanskrit cosmopolis" (see p. 9) I have followed the scintillating thesis of Sheldon Pollock (1996, 1998, 2000, and 2006, of which see in particular 1996, 217-230), which holds great promise for rethinking the shop-worn paradigm of indianization. Although Pollock suggests that this use of Sanskrit in Southeast Asia postdated that of southern South Asia by perhaps a century, see the evidence introduced here for Linyi. More substantively, see Pollock's comment (1996, 234-235) that "indianization" in Southeast Asia would have been no different from that in the Indian subcontinent, as well as his comments on the common provenance and problems of indianization, romanization, and sinicization, etc. (1998, 32-33). Pollock has an inexplicable aversion to the term legitimation (1996, 236-237), and Johannes Bronkhorst (forthcoming) has shown that Sanskrit usage in Southeast Asia was almost certainly maintained by Brahmin specialists, presumably localized lineages with only distant connections to the Indian subcontinent. Even with these minor corrections, though, Pollock's work has implications beyond South and Southeast Asia (he sometimes uses "Southern Asia" to encompass these two regions), in that he suggests a process of vernacularization beginning around 1000 CE by which early modern culture was created, not simply as the collision between global and local cultures but in complex processes of inter-relationships and contention. Incidentally, the observation that western Indian scripts are used in some Southeast Asian inscriptions (p. 8) is from Pollock (1996, 218-219); indeed, his comments on paleographic issues must be taken account into any future treatment of Southeast Asian inscriptions, Buddhist or otherwise.

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