

Development and Spread of Buddhist Art and Traditions in South East Asia

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Over the last several decades, Buddhist studies have grown into a complex field, with historical, philosophical, linguistic and socio-cultural aspects which are being studied independently as well as in comparative light. New materials came to light in the last century which has created the need for sustained research in this important chapter of human history and civilization. Buddhism from its inception is a religion that has captured the enthusiasm of the rich and the poor alike. It was a religion that preached a way out of suffering in a simple and direct manner which could be understood by the common man. Unlike Brahmanism that had become too recondite and scholarly for the masses to understand, Buddhism fulfilled the spiritual needs of the people. Every person could work their way towards the enlightenment. Its notions of social equality earned it much success. The establishment of the Sangha gave it strength. As it was a proselytizing religion, it spread quickly and flourished for centuries. By the beginning of the first millennium, Buddhism had been firmly established in the areas of Thailand, Burma, Java and Cambodia. Buddhism develops art and architecture as visual aids for propagation of religious ideas in South East Asia. Buddhist stylistic arts have created a great impact on the religious and secular life of the people in those related areas for more than two millennia and thus Buddhism has created a great current of art in South East Asia. Under this artistic trend, many valuable art works were created and they gave rise to a special social phenomenon. Thus, the present paper focuses on the historicity of Buddhist arts tradition in South East Asia, influence and impact of Indian Buddhist art on Southeast Asian art and the dimensions of Buddhist art in South East Asian culture. This paper also compares the Buddhist art in the homeland of Buddhism with those in other Buddhist countries in South East Asia and examines the dissemination of Buddhism through art and Architecture.

Key Words: Buddhism, Buddhist art, Buddhist architecture, South East Asia

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