

By G. COEDES

*The Making of Greater India:
A Study in South-East Asian Culture Change*

BY H. G. QUARITCH WALES

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For fifteen years Dr. H. G. Quaritch Wales has devoted himself to the study of the expansion of Indian civilisation in the Indochinese peninsula. His excavations in Malaya and in Siam, as well as his publications, have had as their object the investigation of the character and routes of this expansion. In his new book he sets forth his present ideas on the moulding of the arts in the Indianised countries of South-East Asia.

It would be vain to look in Dr. Quaritch Wales' book for an analytical study of the problems raised by the making of Greater India. It is a synthesis, or more precisely a thesis, whose method draws its inspiration from the recent works of Kroeber (*Anthropology*, 1948) and Kardiner (*The psychological*

frontiers of society, 1945). Already in his first work on the traditional Siamese feasts the author had displayed his partiality for the sociological method, and he remains faithful to the same line.

The arts and the civilisations in general of the Indianised countries of South-East Asia have long been considered as a mixture of Indian and local elements, and if the present tendency is to attribute more and more importance to the autochthonous component to explain the differences of the civilisations among themselves, Indian art and civilisation are nevertheless regarded as the predominant factor.

Dr. Quaritch in his book puts forward a new point of view. For him, the problem is a problem of 'change of

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culture' and concerns, if I follow him, the evolution, not so much of Indian civilisation under foreign influence, as that of the autochthonous civilisation under the influence of India. The change of culture—the Indianisation of the Khmers and the emergence of their art, for instance—is the result of the more or less conscious reaction of a cultural group to the action of a contact with a foreign culture. The essential factor of this reaction is not racial; it is the fundamental character of the group, the sum of its specific cultural characters, which constitutes the 'local genius', local here being equivalent to pre-Indian.

Within the group of countries which have come under the cultural influence of India, Dr. Quaritch Wales distinguishes two zones. In the western zone, comprising Ceylon, Burma, central Siam, the Malay peninsula, and Sumatra, an extreme acculturation destroyed the local genius. In the eastern zone, comprising Java, Champa, and Cambodia, the differentiation of the Indo-Javanese, Cham, and Khmer cultures was due to the reaction of the local genius whose constant features were rooted in the pre-Indian civilisation peculiar to each area. Returning to one of his previous theories on the successive waves of Indian expansion, he distinguishes four of them corresponding to the four periods characteristic of the development of Indian art: Amaravati (second and third centuries), Gupta (fourth to sixth centuries), Pallava (530–750), Pala (750–900).

Such is, in its broad lines, the thesis put forward in the introductory chapter. The next chapter is devoted to the western zone 'which experienced the

colonising ardour of India in all its force and where acculturation was extreme'. In this zone the archaeological remains are of pure Indian type, the effects of each of the Gupta, Pallava, and Pala waves were felt everywhere, the last being, however, less noticeable in Burma and Siam; Buddhism and Vishnuism flourished to a greater extent than in the eastern zone, where the Sivaist cult of the lingam found a field favourable to its development; and finally there is no sign of any evolution, the cessation of Indian influence leading to an immediate decadence.

Examination of the archaeological documents of the western zone which, apart from the Pagan monuments, include very few architectural remains, on the whole bears out Dr. Quaritch's theory of the extreme acculturation of the area.

The third chapter is devoted to the prehistory and the primitive religions of the people's inhabiting the oriental zone. This chapter is of quite special importance in the scheme of the book, since it leads up to the working hypothesis framed to solve the problem stated at its outset. This problem, whose statement Dr. Quaritch does me the honour to borrow from one of my works is: 'How has Indian aesthetics, transplanted to Cambodia, Java, and other countries given birth to Khmer art, Javanese art, and the other Hindu arts of the Far East?'

According to him, eastern Indochina and Java, before coming under the influence of India had shared in two types of megalithic culture, of which certain still surviving ethnic groups are the belated representatives and to whose

existence in the last millennium B.C. certain archaeological remains bear witness.

Dealing with the first and older megalithic civilisation, the author founds his enumeration of its material features on the work of R. Heine-Geldern. His description of its religious characteristics is based on that of Paul Mus. This civilisation still persists in Assam, in the island of Nias, and among certain peoples of the Assam mountains and the Malay archipelago.

The second and more recent, or Đôngsonian, megalithic civilisation, which would appear to have been introduced into Indochina in the fourth and third centuries B.C., was a bronze civilisation. Its remains in Southern China, Tonkin, and Indonesia and also on the former territory of the kingdom of Champa are well known. Their almost entire absence in Cambodia would go to show the persistence in that country of the older megalithic culture.

Alongside these two types of megalithic culture, Dr. Quaritch Wales concedes a certain importance in the moulding of the eastern zone's pre-Indian civilisation to two other elements. First, he admits a 'possible' Egyptian influence, which is suggested to have manifested itself in Java by certain solar emblems studied by Stutterheim; he considers, with Braddell, the possibility that this Egyptian element may have had as vector the Arab seafarers, particularly the Sabaeans in the first half of the first millennium B.C. Second, he admits a Chinese influence of the Han period, evidenced by many finds of pottery, which would explain certain naturalistic features of the arts of Champa and of Java.

The author uses the various mixtures of these four elements to characterise the pre-Indian civilisations of the eastern zone, whose local genius reshaped the Indian contribution. In Java, he says, the components were old megalithic, Egyptian (?), Đôngsonian and Han, in Champa they were Đôngsonian and Han, while in Cambodia only the old megalithic component need be taken into account.

It was the reaction to Indian influence of the local geniuses thus constituted which resulted respectively in the Indo-Javanese, Indo-Cham and Indo-Khmer cultural evolutions. Such is the working hypothesis put forward by Dr. Quaritch Wales to explain that evolution.

The available space does not allow me to follow the author step by step in the study he undertakes of the arts of Java, Champa and Cambodia in the light of this hypothesis. Its substantiation, based on a thorough knowledge of the archaeological material, drawn from the best sources, is generally convincing and always interesting. A reproach he is certain to meet with from some critics is that of trying to explain everything by a single principle of interpretation. It is indeed the danger inherent in any work of this kind that it tends to clap a complex and shifting reality into the strait jacket of a thesis to be proved. Dr. Quaritch Wales doubtless felt that the importance of his working hypothesis for the study of artistic evolution in Java, Champa, and Cambodia justified his running the risk of being criticised and contradicted. Remembering the good grace with which he has in the past taken criticisms and contradictions into consideration,

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I feel sure the reactions his book will certainly arouse among certain historians of art will lead him to relax and revise on some points the occasionally somewhat rigid application of a theory in which there is certainly a great deal of truth.

My personal feeling is that the very unequal development of archaeological research in the countries considered dictates great caution, and that it is perhaps a little premature to want to explain everything by a single principle. But I do not in the least contest Dr. Quaritch Wales' right to put forward what he modestly calls a 'working hypothesis'. Indeed, I congratulate him and thank him for having done so, for I think that in the present state of our knowledge it has the merit of attracting our attention to a somewhat unappreciated fact: the continuance in each of the Indianised countries of the eastern zone of a pre-Indian tradition which, even when the action of India reached its greatest intensity, was always present beneath the surface and ready to react. There was too much of a tendency formerly to talk of Indian civilisation and art being imposed on peoples of whose reaction nothing was known. The author deserves indulgence if he sometimes falls into the contrary excess and sees in the action of India no more than a 'stimulus' having provoked the reaction of what I had called the 'autochthonous substratum' and which he prefers to call the 'local genius'. Without saying so in so many words, he seems to look on the pre-Indian civilisations of South-East Asia as venerable trees deriving from varied cross-fertilisations in which the Indian

graft had provoked the flowering of the Javanese, Khmer, and other civilisations. If that had been the case, one should have found, it seems to me, much greater differences between the arts of these countries, specific differences as marked as those which separated the ancient pre-Indian civilisations themselves. The fact is that, however great the individuality of each of the arts considered, they none the less display a close relationship, and I shall never tire of repeating that monuments as different in their design, architecture, and decoration as Borodur and Angkor Vat, can still be entirely explained by Indian ideas and Sanskrit texts. It seems to me, on the contrary, exceedingly difficult to see in them the response of a Javanese or Khmer local genius to a simple Indian stimulus, for their Indian character goes far too deep.

My impression, but it is only an impression, is that the ancient pre-Indian civilisations of Indochina and Indonesia, whatever the label one cares to put on them, have provided the more or less rich, more or less complex soil in which the same plant of foreign stock has grown, and that whatever country one looks at, the plant is the same and displays only such differences as are due to the difference of soil. And if I may be permitted to go back to an expression which I have already used once in reviewing Dr. Quaritch Wales', *Towards Angkor*, I should conclude by applying to the whole group of Indianised arts of Indochina and Indonesia the formula I then applied to Khmer art: 'a vigorous trunk which, springing from an Indian seed, has deep roots in the Cambodian soil'.