
The interactions of the Chola empire in the Chao Phraya delta

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Abstract: *The Chola Empire of South India (9th to 12th C.AD) was in a position to establish strong contracts with the delta of Chao Phraya River of Thailand in the medieval period. They have very well established this contract by Diplomatic trade and religious means. The impact of this South Indian Empire caused a considerable effect in the Customs, Manners, Religious practices, Place names art forms and Architecture etc of the Thais for Example the former name of Bangkok, Krungthep is nothing but Kuranguthope of Tamil means the "Monkey's forest". In the close proximity, at Bujung valley of Malaysia, there was establishment of Cholas in this period, which is very well connected with this delta and gives "Siva, Vishnu, Thirupavai, Mulaipali, etc., and enhances the intrinsic culture and art forms of Thailand. This paper will deal with all these facets and gives substantial conclusions on the history of Thai arts and Religion.*

1 Introduction

The Chola country of South India and the Siam (Thailand) of Indochina are located in the same latitude. The Chola country, the east cost part in the Peninsular India is facing the Chao-Phraya Delta of Siam through Bay of Bengal. Almost similar landscape, climate, flora and fauna are seen on either sides in the Chao-Phraya Delta and of the Kavery Delta. Although differed in physiological forms as Dravidian and Mongoloid, the behavioural pattern of both the Tamils and Thais are identical . Their food stuffs, preparations, manners and customs, ceremonies and rituals, culture and psychology are analogous.

A cultural unity is visible amidst the linguistic and physiological diversity between these two different distant parts of Asia and ethnic groups.

How this similarities or cultural unity happened between South India and Siam?

A thorough probing reveals enormous facts and explores hundreds of evidences in the Chao Phraya Delta.

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2 Early contacts

Accordingly one may assume the trade contact of these two countries even in the Pre-Christian era along with the ptolemy and periplus references, sea trade was flourishing in that early period in the ancient port cities of the Chola's Kaveripumpattinam, Nagappattinam & Puducherry, with both east & west.

The commercial trade contacts between South India and Siam were very well established from Pallava period of 6th A.D.

Before 12th C.A.D. the present day Thailand was longitudinally divided in two halves and ruled by Combodian khmers and Mons of Burma. The Combodia, Burma, Malay Peninsula like south east Asian countries were all well influenced by the South Indian culture and trade in these periods. The close proximity of South Indian port cities like Mahabalipuram, Puducheri, Kaverippumpattinam, Nagappattinam etc. with Malaya, Kedah, Combodia promoted not only the trade but also the culture of these Mon-Khmers, who are with no doubt the forefathers of the Thais. Hence the Thais of Swarnabhumi were not reluctant in accepting the culture of their forefathers, Mon-Khmers, who were very much Indian Brahmanical.

Since these Mons and Khmers were able to cover the lower and middle parts of the Siam, this cultural diffusion reached only in these two parts which received many changes in the course of time, rather than the northern part which received this influence after a long time.

3 Cultural similarities

Inscriptions

The earliest inscriptions numbering more than 200, of all south east Asian countries are all of Sanskrit language written in Grantha script, a common script between Sanskrit and Tamil, which originated in the Pallava period in the Chola country by the Brahmins. No other scripts has been discovered so far. This professes the impact of the Chola country on South east Asian countries in the early period (Chabra 1965; 72-76)

Three Grantha inscriptions of 5th C.A.D. and two of 6th C.A.D. at Kuanlukput, one 7th C.A.D. inscriptions and one of 8th C.A.D. at Nakhon si Thammarad were discovered so far which are all in the southern part of Siam only that is in the Chao-Phraya Delta.

A 5th C.A.D. Sanskrit inscription discovered from «Sithep» of Siam is displayed at Bangkok Museum. Such inscriptions seen at wat Maheyang and Sonkai valley, explains the impact of South Indian Sanscrit in Siam. Since the early scripts used in these countries are all «Grantha». Almost all the scripts of these countries of Indo-China are formulated in an analogous form with Grantha and «Thai» is the typical example for that. The flowing and cursive nature of these scripts proves it.

TAKUA-PA TAMIL INSCRIPTIONS

Above all an important Tamil inscription was found at the Wat Naramiang temple of Takua-pa which confirms the permanent settlements of the Tamils in Chao-Phraya Delta. This inscription reads as follows:

«...(5) Varman Ku (na) ... Manthan

Naankuurula Yaa(n) Thotta Kulam per Siri Avani Naranam Manikkramatharkkum Sena Muhatarkum Patharkum Adaikalam».

Tamil merchant named...Manthan dug one tank (for the Domestic purpose of) by the name of Shri.Avani Naranam (which was) handed over for custody (for it's protection) to the people of the concerned settlement Manik Kramam, Senamuham and Devotees. (Kongknew Veeraprajek :1986 : 7-20).

TAMIL SETTLEMENTS IN SIAM

The inference from this inscription gives a clear and vivid account of the influence of the Chola country in Chao-Phraya Delta. They were not only well settled with all domestic comforts but also with religious provisions in this distant place.

This researcher consider that digging that tank happened in a later period in that Tamil merchant settlement called Avani Narana Manikkramam which was a vaishnavite above where there was a temple for Vishnu was already existing. Since the inhabitants of this settlement are all very rich traders living with invaluable riches, the entire settlement was well protected by the armed forces called Senamugam. These residents were all staunch Vaishnavites and devotees. Therefore the new comer ... Manthan from Naankur in the Chola country, which was also a Chola's port town near to «Puhar», who earned well after having connection with this «Avani Naranam», decided to dig this temple tank in gratitude.

PEY WORSHIP

The worship of Karaikal Ammaiyar or Peyar is a typical identical and unique religious practice of the trader community of Chola country. This Peyar was a pious lady of this trader community connected with Siva worship celebrated for her chastity depicted in the form of a skeleton along with the image of dancing Siva. Such a Siva panel along with Karaikal Ammaiyar is found at Pimay, and in the triangular pediment of the eastern façade of the Phnam Rung Siva temple of North east Siam. The image of teaching Siva-Dakshinamurthy is also found in this temple.

SAIVISM

The great number of Sivalinga discovered so far in Siam tells the influence of Siavism in Siam in 5th C. and after. The findings of «Muha lingas» proves that there was a great impact of Saivism in Siam in Pallava period. An image of Siva with five heads and Ten hands is displayed at the Museum of Ayutthaya. Dancing Siva with ornaments is seen at Kut Suen

Teng temple. Three Brahmin temples were discovered at Negara Se Thamma Raja. They are of Brick structures dating to 11th C. AD (Stanley O'Connor : 19 : 1-22). In the eastern façade of the Pimay Buddhist temple an image of Rishaba Vahana Siva is seen. Images of Siva, Uma and Yama were discovered at Woa Daeng cave and Prasat Hin – Nong Hong of North East Siam. They belong to 11th C.A.D. and of Chola in style. It is being confirmed by the Siva of Viengsra.

The practice of Thiruppavai and Thiruvempavai in Siam is another evidence of the interaction of the Cholas. The Thais are in general familiar with Pranava and Panchatchara that is Om and Namasivaya.

IMPACT OF AGAMAS

Cholas were following the Agama tradition in their temple rituals and chanting the Thevaram, Thiruvagasam, Thiruvempavai and Thiruppavai and Nalayera Thivya Prabantham in temples. Similar practices are found in Siam, should have been by the interactions of the Cholas.

VAISHNAVISM

In 1902 W.Walter Bourke has found out the sculptures of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva on the banks of river Takua Pah at Koupra Narai and declared about the influence of south India over Siam. Vishnu images were found out from Nakhon Sithammarat, Pimay, Bangkok, Cayya, Takua Pah, OCEO, Phetburi etc. According to Pier Dewpond the Takua Pah Vishnu is belongs to Chola style. Almost all the Iconographic details of the available Vishnu images at Siam implies the influence of the Pallava style. This researcher has studied some of the Buddhist images of Sukkhotai and Ayutthaya collection and came to the conclusion that:

- a) Some of them were moulded by the Chola sculptors at Siam in Tanjorian style.
- b) Some of them were costed at Thanjavur, Nagappattinam and brought to Siam either to their own settlements or to the Thai public or royalty. Prince Chand Chirayu Rajani, in his book entitled «Thai imageries of Swarnabhumi Art» mentioned about my view points. The area of 'Sitep' should have been a strong hold of Vaishnavism and of Indian settlement in Pallava and Chola period. Stanley O'Connor considers that the ancient architectural and archaeological findings of Thailand dating from 5th to 9th C.A.D. are all Brahmanical and of South India. They are of either late Pallava or early Chola in style. The reclining image of Vishnu, Govarthana lila are also identified at a dilapidated temple in the eastern part of Thailand. One Bairava sculpture of Viang Sira confirms the Indian or Brahmin towns formed in Siam in those period.

TAMIL BUDDHISM – THAI BUDDHISM

This iconographical, religious and cultural influence of the Cholas over Thailand was reflected in Thai Buddhism also. Experts used to classify the Thai Buddhist Bronzes mainly into two categories. They are

- 1) Pallavanised and
- 2) Cholified ones.

In *cholification* the «Nagappattinam bronze casting» technique (Tanjorian) was highly appreciated and adopted by the Thais.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The South Indian philosophy of Hinduism and Buddhism which were prevailing in the Chola period were also being adopted by the Siamese which are clearly referred by Pre Rup Stele Inscription and Prasat Kok Po inscriptions. The South Indian Buddhist Monks like Vinita Ruci and Vajrabodhi spreaded Buddhism of Chola country in Siam, Vietnam and Laos.

RAMAYANA

Another strong proof of Cholas interaction in Siam is Ramayana. The Ramakian practised by the Thais are analogous to Cholas Kamba Ramayanam only and the Mayil Ravana story is also of South India (Mayirab Story).

There are 21 similarities found between Kamba Ramayanan and Ramakian. For example the love at first sight between Phra Ram and Nangsidha.

The Ramayana sculptures of Lobpuri temple wall and of Pimay Buddha temple depicting the epic with flying Hanuman with Sanjeevi hill, the fainted Lakhsmana, Building the Sethu bridge by the Monkeys, nose cut of Surpanaka, defeat of Vali etc.

The word «Ramakien» is only a corrupt form of «Rama Kirthi».

THIRUPPAVAI - THIRUVEMPAVAI

Chanting of Thiruppavai and Thiruvempavai by the Thai Brahmins were also introduced into Thailand by the Cholas only. Some of the Thevaram like «Mattitta Punnayang Kanal» etc. and Thivya Prapandham like. 'Thiru Valuthi Natenum', «Uyarvara Uyarnalam Udaiyavan» etc are also being mixed in their chanting. They are quite familiar with Thiruchitrabalam, Narayaname and Namasivaya. This author was able to see same Tamil leaf also in the Grantha Palm leaf manuscripts kept by the Thai Brahmins, which reveals that Tamil was familiar with the Thai Brahmins in Chola period. They were well versed in Grantha also. But nowadays without knowing the script and the meaning, the phonemes were written in Thai script in a corrupt form and they are chanted.

Hindu customs and rituals were followed by Thai royalty even in their coronation ceremony.

GARUDA

The image of Garudantika the flying Kite man carrying Vishnu on his shoulder is familiar with Thailand. (Bangkok Emerald Buddha temple, Pimay Buddha temple, etc.)

VISHNU AND RAJA

The reclaiming Vishnu is identical with Chola country is found in Siam. Vishnu with two consorts is a Chola's production which is being seen in Siam. They are Lakshmi and Pudevi. Pudevi is considered or treated as Maheswari by the Siamese.

The Hari-hara (Half Vishnu – Half Siva) is flourished among South Indian smartha Brahmins. The very same practice was in existence at Siam even in 7th C.A.D. when Esana Varman was ruling Siam. There is a great saying among the Cholas as follows. «Seeing the king is seeing the Vishnu» The same concept is seen at Siam. King Ramathipaty who established the Ayutthaya kingdom calling himself as Narayana – Nara, and ordered for a full fledged annual ceremony in the Nagara Sri Thammarat.

THE BRAHMAN TEMPLES

In the Thai Brahman temple complex of Bangkok a Ganesh temple, Siva temple and a Vishnu temple are Seen. This Vishnu is being named as Sugothaya Perumal, typical Tamil name, Sugothayam is the former name of the Thailand. This name consists of two syllables Suga + Uthayam that is the «Pleasant dawn». Like Korea the land of morning calm, Thailand was treated by the Cholas as a land of «Pleasant dawn».

SWINGS

The 'Great Swings' seen in Thai Brahmin temples and the Swing festivals (Login wor) are all of South Indian tradition only.

PAVAAI

The «Paavai Nonbu» (December and January) was familiar with the Thais until 1940. Nowadays it has been reduced to a temple ritual.

RAIN FESTIVAL

The rain festival and the Mantra Chanting that time are all of Tamil in tradition. It affirms the loyalty of the people to the king as «We serve you not only today; but for forth coming 7 births also.

DEEPAWALI & KARTHIKAI

Deepavali and Karthikai festivals were also introduced by the Cholas in Siam. The Karthikai festival is being celebrated as «Malai» (Thiruvannamalai fire festival) by the Thais. The float festivals of Thais are also similar with the Tamil Cholas.

THE THAI CHOLAS

«The kings of Ayutthaya were proud to call themselves as Cholas» (Paul Pelliot – 'Encore A Propos Des Voyages De Tcheng Howo' Toungpao 1936). The story of the Manu neethi

Chola was familiar among Sugothays and king Ramakongheng had installed a bell for the public call for justice. (David K.Wyatt 1984 : 54)

TAMILS AND TAMIL IN THAILAND

The Tamil people migrated to Siam in the Chola period, slowly lost their language and culture and mingled with the Thais. But one can see the Physiological features of this Chola Thais from the Mongoloid Thai natives.

The mixing of these Tamils with the Thais long ago also resulted in influence to the Thai Vocabulary. For Example:

Tamil	Thai	English
Thangam	Thongam	Gold
Kappal	Kamban	Ship
Malai	Male	Garland
Krambu	Klambu	Kurry
Kenty	Kently	Small vessel
Appa	Pa	Father
Thatha	Tha	Grandfather
Amma	Me	Mother
Guru	Gru	Teacher
Asan	Asan	Teacher
Puttan	Puttan	Great Grandfather
Puthran	Puthru	Son

And so many others.

In addition the days and months names are similar with the Tamil ones.

CONCLUSION

Hence the interactions of the Cholas in the Chao-Phraya Delta which was named by the Cholas as Meenam treated equally with the Kaveri river Delta, preferred to settled and considerably influenced the Thais in all ways of life which excelled even the original Chola culture by its sobere nature.

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