



The Myth of Kauṇḍinya in Southeast Asia

An Archaeological Analysis

WILLIAM SOUTHWORTH
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

ABSTRACT The myth of Kauṇḍinya has had a profound impact on the writing of Southeast Asian history, being used by historians in the early twentieth century to explain how the earliest kingdoms in the region were formed. However, the myth as we know it today has been constructed from fragments of information found in Sanskrit epigraphy and Chinese textual sources from three distinct time periods. Using a form of textual analysis first described by Michel Foucault under the heading of ‘archaeology’, this article attempts to isolate and examine the nature of the myth within each time period, as if uncovering distinct layers of an archaeological excavation. I have tried to show how each version of the myth is indelibly a product of its own time, drawing its significance from the religious, social and literary context in which it was recorded. In particular, while revealing elements of continuity and discontinuity in the transition of the myth, it also highlights important events in the transmission and reception of religious ideas and practice that may be connected to the wider themes of dynamics and stability in religious studies.

KEYWORDS Kauṇḍinya, Śaivism, Mahābhārata, Sarvāstivāda, Buddhism, Funan

Introduction¹

The enunciative domain is identical with its own surface. Each statement occupies in it a place that belongs to it alone. The description of a statement does not consist therefore in rediscovering the unsaid whose place it occupies; nor how one can reduce it to a silent, common text; but on the contrary in discovering what special place it occupies, what ramifications of the system of formations make it possible

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1 This article is respectfully dedicated to the memory of Karl-Heinz Golzio (1947–2023), who shared and unflinchingly supported my interest in this topic.

to map its localization, how it is isolated in the general dispersion of statements.²
(Foucault 1972, 119)

One of the most enduring and persistent myths of early Southeast Asian history is the story of the Indian brahmin Kauṇḍinya. According to traditional western scholarship, he is said to have travelled from India to the Mekong Delta (in what is now southern Vietnam and Cambodia), where he founded a kingdom called Funan; one of the earliest kingdoms known in the region. A wider implication of this narrative was the theory that the earliest kingdoms or polities in Southeast Asia had been established by Indian religious or aristocratic elites who had migrated to Southeast Asia in the early first millennium CE. Elements of this story were included by Francis Garnier in his *Voyage d'exploration en Indo-Chine* of 1873, while references to it in Chinese sources were first collected by Paul Pelliot for his article, "Le Fou-nan" of 1903. The historical validity of Kauṇḍinya was promoted above all by the historian George Coédès, who identified not one, but three Kauṇḍinyas, each one associated with a new influx of Indian culture into the region. This cultural process was termed 'hindouisation' in French or 'Indianization' in its English form,³ with Kauṇḍinya and the foundation of Funan presented as a model of how similar states elsewhere in the region had been created (see *Les États hindouisés du Sud-Est Asie*, 1964; translated as *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, 1968). This historical model has since been vigorously opposed by more recent historians, not least by Michael Vickery, who robustly declared that "no real 'Kauṇḍinya' ever went from India, or from anywhere else, to Funan at any time" (2004, 114). Nevertheless, the story persists in the academic literature, reinforced by a complex and sometimes bewildering network of epigraphic and Chinese textual references of varying date. [2]

In order to gain some clarity and focus on this complex debate, I have chosen to use a methodology devised by the French social historian and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984). This methodology was first developed during the author's research on social attitudes towards mental illness and its treatment (*Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique - Folie et déraison* 1961, trans. *Madness and Civilization* 1965) and on the emergence of modern clinical medicine (*Naissance de la clinique: une archéologie du regard médical* 1963, trans. *The Birth of the Clinic* 1973). In both cases, Foucault had sought to escape from the evolutionary approach of many cultural historians, whose understanding of early medical literature had focused on how specific terms, treatments or procedures foreshadowed later developments, blending all periods into an apparently seamless developmental narrative. In contrast, Foucault wanted to reveal the inherent discontinuities in this history, showing how the impact of the European Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the academic expansion of clinical medicine in the nineteenth century had dramatically altered society's perception of madness and physical ailment, turning the intellectual focus from the treatment of the individual patient to the study of the disease. [3]

Foucault later attempted to describe his methodology on an abstract level in *L'archéologie du savoir* 1969 (trans. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 1972), but this remains a dense and highly [4]

2 "Le domaine énonciatif est tout entier à sa propre surface. Chaque énoncé y occupe une place qui n'appartient qu'à lui. La description ne consiste donc pas à propos d'un énoncé à retrouver de quel non-dit il occupe la place; ni comment on peut le réduire à un texte silencieux et commun; mais au contraire quel emplacement singulier il occupe, quels embranchements dans le système des formations permettent de repérer sa localisation, comment il s'isole dans la dispersion générale des énoncés" (Foucault 1969, 157).

3 The French noun 'hindou' was used from the eighteenth century to designate both a Hindu by religion and an Indian by race or nationality. The choice of 'Indianization' as the English translation for Coédès' original 'hindouisation,' in preference to 'Hinduization,' is a recognition of the importance of Buddhism in this historical process.

theoretical text. Although Foucault's use of the term 'archéologie' is essentially metaphorical, describing a purely textual form of analysis, one surprising aspect of his work is the extent to which it is recognisable as archaeology in the normal sense. As the quotation at the beginning of this article makes clear, Foucault has attempted to localise each statement (*énoncé*) within an enunciative field (*domaine énonciatif*), much as an archaeologist would trace the position of each artefact within a stratigraphic layer or feature. Most importantly, Foucault insists that each statement can only be understood in regard to the immediate context in which it is found, or in other words, that the precise meaning of a statement is determined by its context. This archaeological insistence on context will be employed in the following discussion, in which I have tried to analyse each variation of the Kauṇḍinya myth in close relation to the literary or epigraphic text in which it is found. Each of the three main variations of the myth come from three distinct periods or cultural layers, beginning with the most recent in the seventh century and progressing backwards in time to the fifth and third centuries CE.

Upper Layer (c. 600–675 CE)

Although the names of Kauṇḍinya and his wife Somā are listed as ancestral figures in inscriptions from Cambodia from the seventh century onwards, the story of their union is derived from a single epigraphic source. This was curiously not found in Cambodia, nor in the former territory of Funan in southern Vietnam, but at the archaeological site of Mỹ Sơn on the central Vietnamese coastline. This site lies secluded in a circle of hills some 20 km west of the historic port town of Hội An and was the principal religious center of the Campā culture from the fifth to early thirteenth centuries CE. The site as a whole was dedicated to the Hindu god Śiva and the reference to Kauṇḍinya occurs within a Śivaite inscription classified under the number C. 96 (C = Campā). The text is written in a mixture of Sanskrit prose and verse and covers two sides (A & B) of a stone stela erected near a sacred enclosure classified by archaeologists as the E Group (see fig. 1). The inscription records the consecration of a Śiva *linga* (the phallic symbol of the deity) under the name Śrī Prabhāseśvara and was ordered by a king named Prakāśadharma Vikrāntavarman (Finot 1904, 918–25; Majumdar 1927, III:16–26; see also Jacques 1995, 100–110; Golzio 2004, 13–21). This event has been dated precisely in the text to the equivalent of Sunday, February 18, 658 CE (see Golzio 2004, 13). [5]

In addition, the king Prakāśadharman has recounted in the inscription details of his royal genealogy (see fig. 2), which connects him via his father to the ruling lineage of Campā and via his mother, Śrī Śarvāṇī, to the ruling house of Cambodia.⁴ It is said that his father Jaggaddharman had travelled to the city of Bhavapura in Cambodia, where he had married Śrī Śarvāṇī, the daughter of the Khmer king Īśānavarman I. This city is then used as the setting for the following verses (XVI–XVIII) engraved on face A, lines 24 to 26 of the stela (Golzio 2004, 15–16): [6]

XVI. (24) (tat)ra sthāpitavāñ chūlaṃ kauṇḍinyas tadvijarṣabhaḥ
aśvatthāmno dvijaśreṣṭhād droṇaputrād avāpya tam

XVII. (25) – kulāsīd bhujagendrakanyā someti sā vanśakarī pṛthivyām
āśritya bhāve tivīṣeṣavastu yā mānusāvāsam uvāsa

XVIII. (26) kauṇḍinyanāmnā dvijapuṅgavena kāryārthapatnītvam anāyī yāpi
bhaviṣyato rthasya nimittabhāve vidher acintyaṃ khalu ceṣṭitaṃ hi [7]

4 This genealogy has been revised from earlier versions based on a re-transliteration and re-reading of inscription C. 137 from Trà Kiệu (see Goodall and Griffiths 2013, 429n18, 434).



Figure 1 Stela inscription of Prakāśadharmā Vikrāntavarman (C. 96), *in situ* at M̃y S̃on.

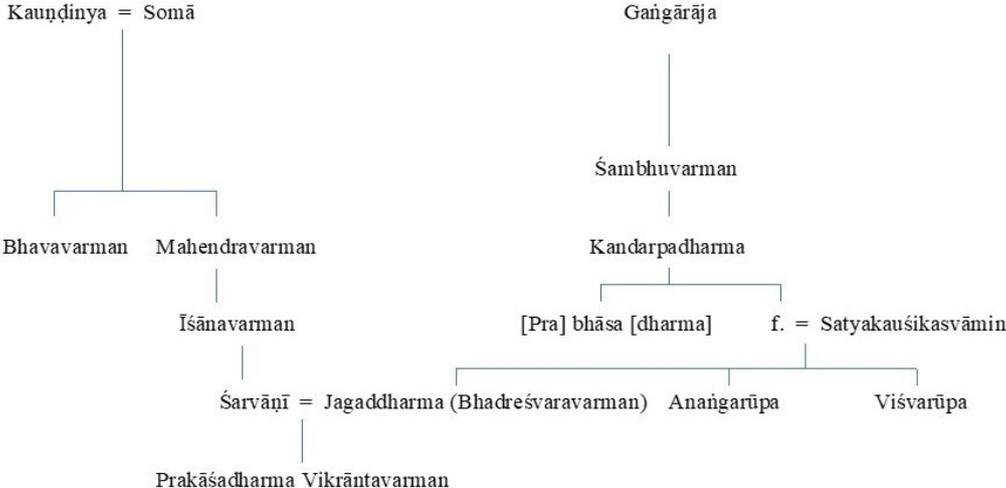


Figure 2 Lineage of Prakāśadharmā Vikrāntavarman, based on details given in inscription C. 96 from M̃y S̃on.

These verses were translated by R.C. Majumdar (1927, III:23) as follows:

[8]

XVI. (24) It was there [at Bhavapura] that Kauṇḍinya, the foremost among Brāhmaṇas, planted the spear which he had obtained from Droṇa's son Asvatthāman, the best of Brāhmaṇas.

[9]

XVII (25) There was a daughter of the king of serpents, called Somā, who founded a family in this world. Having attained, through love, to a radically different element, in the habitations of man.

XVIII (26) She was taken as wife by the excellent Brāhmaṇa Kauṇḍinya for the sake of [accomplishing] certain work. Verily, incomprehensible is the way of God in providing conditions leading to future events.

It is clear from this extract that emphasis has been placed on Kauṇḍinya's status as a brahmin or brāhmaṇa (referred to in the text using variations of the epithet 'dvija' meaning 'twice-born') and on his connection to the brahmin Droṇa and his son Aśvatthāman. Both Droṇa and Aśvatthāman are leading figures in the great Indian epic poem, the *Mahābhārata*, and although presented in a truncated form, the Kauṇḍinya story appears to relate to this text. The name Droṇa literally means 'bucket' or 'trough' and he was so named from his having been generated by his father, Bharadvāja, in a bucket. He married Kṛpī Śāradvatī, a half-sister of Bhīṣma, and by her became the father of Aśvatthāman. Bhīṣma appointed him *āchārya*, or a teacher of the military arts, to the Kaurava and Pāṇḍava princes, including Arjuna, who became his favourite pupil (*Mahābhārata* 1(7)121–123; Buitenen 1973, 267; Monier-Williams 1899, 503).

[10]

Despite his attachment to Arjuna, Droṇa fought with the Kauravas in the war against their cousins the Pāṇḍavas, and after the death of Bhīṣma he became their commander-in-chief. Droṇa possessed a celestial weapon, the Brahmāstra or 'Brahmā's missile,' which dealt infallible destruction (Monier-Williams 1899, 740). However, in the seventh book or 'Droṇaparva' of the *Mahābhārata*, it is told how in the midst of combat, Droṇa was falsely told that his son Aśvatthāman was dead. Laying down his weapons in grief, he was then decapitated by Dhṛṣṭadyumna. However, this crime of killing a brahmin and *āchārya* was revenged in the tenth book or 'Sauptikaparva'. Aśvatthāman, together with a small group of companions, is said to have entered the Pāṇḍava camp at night while their enemies were asleep and to have killed Dhṛṣṭadyumna and the five young sons of the Pāṇḍavas (Dowson 1988, 29, 97–98, 191). Although not clearly stated in the inscription, it seems probable that the 'spear' (*śūla*) obtained by Kauṇḍinya from Aśvatthāman son of Droṇa was meant to be identified with the mythical weapon Brahmāstra or one of its variants. It could also be inferred that this weapon was then brought to Bhavapura by Kauṇḍinya and planted in the earth as a means of laying claim to the country. However, it should be noted that this text makes no mention of any journey from the Indian subcontinent to Cambodia. Rather, these references to persons and events in the *Mahābhārata*, although originally based in India, appear to have been already localized or indigenized into a shared mythological past.

[11]

The brahmins Droṇa and Aśvatthāman are sometimes mentioned as ancestral figures in royal genealogies in India, notably in inscriptions of the Pallava dynasty of modern Tamil Nadu. However, these are not the only figures from Indian mythology that are featured in inscription C. 96 from Mý Søn. The paternal lineage of Prakāśadharmā Vikrāntavarman is said to be connected to "kings beginning with Dilīpa and Māndhātṛi" (C. 96, A, II). Dilīpa is famous for having insulting Surabhi, the 'cow of fortune,' and was cursed to have no more children

[12]

until he had looked after Surabhi's daughter, Nandinī. However, after doing this obediently, the curse was lifted and his wife Sudakṣiṇā conceived their son Raghu, the ancestor of Rāma. This story is told in a famous Sanskrit verse play, the *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa. Similarly, Māndhātṛi is known as a king of the race of Ikṣvāku and is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* as a son of Yuvanāśva and Gaurī. According to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, he is said to have engendered fifty daughters, all of whom married the old sage Saubhari, who from them gained one hundred and fifty sons (Dowson 1988, 92–93, 197–98). Moreover, Prakāśadharman's paternal grandparents are compared to Atri and Anasūyā (C. 96, A, XII). Atri, like Bharadvāja the father of Droṇa, is the name of one of the Seven Seers, and is identified in the *Mahābhārata* with the moon (*Mahābhārata* 1(7)114.40–45; Buitenen 1973, 257). He married Anasūyā, daughter of Dakṣa, and in the *Rāmāyaṇa* they were visited by Rāma and Sītā at their hermitage south of Chitrakūṭa. In the later *Purāṇas*, they were also identified as the parents of Soma, the moon, and are often placed at the head of the genealogy of both the Kauravas and Paṇḍavas in the *Mahābhārata* (Dowson 1988, 190, 192; Buitenen 1973, opposite 12).

It is clear from these references that the main literary purpose of Kauṇḍinya in inscription C. 96 is to establish a connection between the historical genealogy of Prakāśadharma Vikrāntavarman and the mythical genealogies presented in the Sanskrit epics, notably in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. The name Kauṇḍinya is indeed mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*, although only in passing (Golzio 2009, 160–61). The recorded appearance, from the third century CE onwards, of variations of the name Kauṇḍinya as a clan name (*gotra*) in inscriptions of several South Indian dynasties, including the Sātavāhanas, Pallavas and Kadambas (Nilakanta Sastri 1961; Golzio 2011, 32), merely adds an extended historical dimension to the mythological use of the name in C. 96. Much of the later commentaries on the text, however, focus on the marriage between Kauṇḍinya and Somā, who is explicitly referred to in C. 96 as the daughter of the 'king of serpents' (*bhujagendra*). This recalls not only the accounts of similar unions in South Indian genealogies (Coedès 1911), in particular the Pallava claims of descent from Aśvatthāman and a *nāga* princess (Golzio 2023, 124), but also later Cambodian legends referring to an exiled prince, Prea Thong, and his marriage to Nang Nakh, the daughter of the king of the serpents (Garnier 1873, 99–100). Indeed, Somā is often referred to in the secondary literature as the Nāgī Somā, although none of the surviving Cambodian inscriptions actually refer to Somā as the daughter of a serpent or *nāga*. [13]

Currently, the only reference to Somā as the daughter of a serpent king is in the Campā inscription C. 96 from Mỹ Sơn already cited. It is also apparent that while sculptured figures of *nāgarāja* are a common feature of early Indian art, being depicted in human form with a multiple cobra hood extending behind their head,⁵ this iconographic form is entirely absent from the pre-Angkorian art of Cambodia and its affiliated territory in southern Vietnam. However, figures of *nāgarāja* have been found in the early art of Campā (Boisselier 1995), noticeably at the site of Mỹ Sơn itself and at the temple of Po Nagar at Nha Trang (see fig. 3). The inscription of Đông Yên Châu (see fig. 4), located roughly 1 km west of the Campā citadel site of Trà Kiệu and some 8 km east of Mỹ Sơn, may also refer to the cult of a *nāgarāja* or serpent king (Marrison 1975, 53–54).⁶ Although undated, both the statues and inscription [14]

5 For example, the famous relief at the entrance of Cave 19 at Ajanta (Huntington 1985, 246–47, and figure 12.5).

6 The text of the inscription is written in Old Cham and constitutes the earliest known inscription in any Austronesian language. It begins with the words "Siddham! Ni yang nāga punya putauv," and these have been translated as: "Fortune! This is the divine serpent of the king" (Marrison 1975, 53–54). Although grammatically correct in its use of the possessive particle 'punya,' the reverse order is also possible, thus:



Figure 3 Seated figure of a nāgarāja found at Po Nagar at Nha Trang (now in the Museum of Khánh Hòa province, Vietnam, no. 97. KHCP: 17). The statue measures c. 56 cm and can be dated from the sixth to seventh centuries CE.

can be attributed to the period between 550 and 650 CE, thus immediately pre-dating the inscriptions of Prakāśadharman. It is therefore possible that the identification of Somā as the daughter of the king of the serpents in C. 96 was an innovation originating in Campā, where the inscription was found.

The derivation of the name Somā is also significant. In Vedic literature, the word ‘Soma’ is used to denote both a plant and a sacrificial drink—the ‘elixir of the gods’—derived from it. In later Purāṇic literature however, Soma was principally employed as the name of the moon or moon god. The name Somā, as used for the wife of Kaunḍinya in C. 96 and in contemporary Khmer genealogies, can thus be translated grammatically as ‘from Soma’ or ‘from the moon.’ It is remarkable that the only Cambodian inscription that mentions the origins of Somā (K. 1142) indeed refers to her as the daughter of Soma (Jacques 2007, 53n1).

The appearance of the myth of Kaunḍinya within a Śivaite context during the early seventh

“This is the divine king of the serpents.” The reason for this unusual formulation would then be a desire to follow the word order of the Sanskrit terms ‘nāgaraja’ or ‘bhujagendra.’

[15]

[16]



Figure 4 Rubbing of the rock inscription of Đông Yên Châu (Quảng Nam province, Vietnam), c. sixth century CE. The text ‘ni yāng nāga puñ putauv’ occurs in the first line (from [Coedès 1939](#), opposite 48).

century CE was no doubt aided by the influential commentary on the *Pāśupata Sūtras* by a Śaivite teacher of the same name ([Banerjea 1985, 451](#)).⁷ It has been argued that the Pāśupata sect played a significant role in the early expansion of Śaivism in Cambodia, where it is first explicitly named in an inscription of Īśānavarman from Sambor Prei Kuk (K. 604) containing the date of 549 in the śaka era or 627 CE ([Finot 1928](#); [K. Bhattacharya 1955](#); [Kamaleswar Bhattacharya 1961, 43](#)). In Campā it has also been associated, among other sources, with scenes of Śaivite ascetics on the stone pedestal of temple My Sơn E.1 ([Chemburkar and Kapoor 2018, 45–56](#)). This pedestal would have originally enclosed the Śiva *linga* of Prabhāseśvara, whose foundation is recorded in inscription C. 96.

Finally, although widely heralded as the foundation myth of the kingdom of Funan, it is abundantly clear that the historical names of the kings Bhavavarman, Mahendravarman and Īśānavarman mentioned in inscription C. 96 (and in inscriptions from Cambodia such as K. 151 from the site of Robang Romeas near Sambor Prei Kuk) can be identified in Chinese sources not with Funan (扶南), but with the kingdom of Zhenla (真臘) that succeeded it ([Golzio 2011, 37–38](#)). The myth of Kaundinya described in C. 96 is therefore not the foundation myth of Funan, but that of the court of Īśānavarman in Cambodia as retold in the epigraphy of his grandson Prakāśadharman at Mý Sơn. [17]

Middle Layer (c. 450–550 CE)

The second layer of the myth of Kaundinya is based on a radically different source of information; namely, the Chinese dynastic histories. The most important quotation is taken from the *Liang shu* (梁書) or ‘History of the Liang.’ Although the Liang dynasty ruled the southern regions of China from 502 to 557 CE, the *Liang shu* itself only began to be compiled during [18]

7 I am grateful to Andrea Aciri for making this important observation during the workshop itself.

the following Chen dynasty and was completed by Yao Silian (姚思廉) during the early Tang (618–907 CE). The following passage is taken from the account of Funan (扶南) in *juan* (卷) 54 of this work:

Kauṇḍinya (Qiaochenru) was originally a brahmin from India. There was a supernatural voice that said to him: ‘You will be king of Funan’. Kauṇḍinya was pleased in his heart. He arrived at Panpan in the south. The people of Funan heard of it. The whole kingdom received him with joy, went before him and proclaimed him king. He changed all the laws according to the ways of India. (*Liang shu* 54, 789; see [Pelliot 1903, 269](#))⁸ [19]

At first glance, this story appears remarkably clear and unambiguous and there is no textual uncertainty as to Kauṇḍinya’s Indian origin or status as a brahmin. The name for India used in this extract is Tianzhu (天竺); the standard name for the Indian subcontinent in this period. The word for ‘brahmin’ is similarly ‘Poluomen’ (婆羅門), a term still used today in its Sino-Vietnamese transcription (Bà La Môn) to refer to the Brahmanical Cham communities of south-central Vietnam. Perhaps surprisingly, the identification of ‘Qiaochenru’ (僑陳如) as a transliteration of Kauṇḍinya is also not in doubt. This is because it remains the standard transcription of the name Kauṇḍinya in Chinese Buddhist texts and the same Chinese characters are used, for example, to transcribe the name Kauṇḍinya in the *Da Tang xiyu ji* (大唐西域記) or ‘Great Tang Records on the Western regions’ by the Buddhist monk Xuanzang (玄奘) at the beginning of the seventh century CE. [20]

It is noticeable, however, that while the text provides a detailed description of Kauṇḍinya’s journey to Funan, it makes no mention of any weapon or female counterpart, but rather places emphasis on his revision of the law. The transcription of his name also begs a second question: Who is Kauṇḍinya in the *Da Tang xiyu ji* and in other Chinese Buddhist texts, that his name can be so easily identified from the Chinese characters of ‘Qiaochenru’? The answer of course is that Kauṇḍinya (in Sanskrit) or Kondañña (in Pali) is the name of the first disciple of the Buddha. By tradition, he is said to have been a brahmin and one of five ascetics who accompanied the prince Siddhārtha Gautama in his austerities in the forest. After his subsequent enlightenment, they were also the first disciples to be converted after hearing the first sermon of the Buddha in the Deer Park at Sarnath near Benares ([Oldenberg 1906, 128, 147–52](#)). Because of the pictographic origins of Chinese script and the fact that the characters employed for Buddhist names were carefully chosen according to meaning as much as for sound, there is no doubt that this text would have been read by Chinese Buddhists as a direct reference to the first disciple of the Buddha. [21]

In many Buddhist traditions, the figure of Kauṇḍinya is more or less subsumed among the legend of the first five disciples or ‘Group of five’ (*pañcavargika*), traditionally comprising Kauṇḍinya, Vāṣpa, Bhadrīka, Mahānāman and Aśvajit ([Lamotte 1958, 18](#)). However, it is clear that in one tradition in particular, Kauṇḍinya was given a far greater significance. This sect was known to its adherents as the Āryamūlasarvāstivādanikāya or the ‘Noble Fundamental School that affirms the Existence of All Things.’ According to this school, the ‘turning of the Wheel of the Law’—symbolizing the start of the sacred cycle of Buddhist teaching—is closely linked to the conversion of Kauṇḍinya. This doctrine is explained in the *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣāsāstra* or ‘Great Commentary on the Abhidharma,’ a text believed to have been written by the Vaibhāṣikas—a sub-school of the Sarvāstivāda in Kāśmīra—and dated to around the second [22]

8 The page numbers of the *Liang shu* refer to *Liang Shu* (1973).

century CE (Dessein 2007, 23–24). It was translated into Chinese by a team under Xuanzang between 656 to 659 CE (T.1545) and includes the following passage:

Question: “When the Buddha proclaimed the doctrine, all five *bhikṣus* saw the doctrine. Why then is only Kauṇḍinya mentioned?” Answer: “Because Kauṇḍinya was the first to see the doctrine. It is so that Kauṇḍinya had already entered the path of vision, and that the four other [monks] were still in the stage of the aids to penetration (*nirvedhabhāgīya*)”.

In quoting and translating this passage from the *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣāśāstra*, Bart Dessein has commented: “It is clear that the idea here is that it is only when Kauṇḍinya obtained enlightenment as a result of the sermon in the Deer Park in Vārāṇasī, that one can rightly claim that the wheel of the doctrine was set in motion” (2007, 34, 36). This gave the person of Kauṇḍinya a privileged place within Sarvāstivādin teaching.

The school of the Sarvāstivādins is first attested at Mathurā in inscriptions from the reign of Kaniṣka (c. 128–151 CE; Lamotte 1958, 578). In the account of Xuanzang, at the beginning of the seventh century CE, it is included in a list of four main Buddhist schools, comprising the Sthavira, Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivādin and Saṃmatīya (1958, 596–601). The Sarvāstivādins are particularly associated with the composition of Buddhist scriptures in Sanskrit, but they were not a Mahāyānist school, being considered a direct offshoot of the Sthavira tradition ancestral to modern Theravāda Buddhism. Our knowledge of the relative distribution of the Buddhist schools (*nikāya*) in Southeast Asia is based essentially on the *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* (南海寄歸內法傳) or ‘An Account of the Inner Law sent home from the Southern Sea’ by the Chinese monk Yijing (義淨). His description is based on his own journey to India via Southeast Asia from 671 to 695 CE and records the situation at that time. Yijing was himself a Sarvāstivādin and the Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya is duly mentioned in the introduction to his work as marking the beginning of the present Buddhist cycle (I-tsing 1896, 4). He gives the same enumeration of four main schools listed by Xuanzang, with all four sub-divided into eighteen minor schools (1896, 7–8). According to Yijing, the Sarvāstivādanikāya was the dominant school in northern India at that time and was also present in southern China, in the provinces south of the Yangzi (1896, 13). Most importantly, it was also considered universal, and for a long time almost exclusive, in Maritime Southeast Asia, including at Malayu (Sumatra), Holing (Java) and Poli (1896, 10–11).

Although the story of Kauṇḍinya’s journey to Funan is undated, it appears in the text of the *Liang shu* immediately before the reign of a king of Funan bearing the family name Qiaochenru (僑陳如) and the regnal name Sheyebamo (闍耶跋摩); both names corresponding to Kauṇḍinya Jayavarman. According to the *Nan Qi shu* (南齊書) or ‘Book of the Southern Qi,’ this king was already reigning at the end of the Song dynasty (420–478 CE) and was actively sending merchants to Guangzhou to trade on his behalf. In the year 484 CE, he sent a major embassy and petition to the court of the Southern Qi (479–502 CE), which was led by Buddhist monk named Nagaxian (那伽仙). This name has been read by Pelliot as Nāgasena (1903, 257). It is interesting to note that this monk is referred to as a ‘Tianzhu Daoren’ (天竺道人); translated by Pelliot above as a “bonze hindou.” Tianzhu (天竺) obviously refers to India, but the term ‘Daoren’ (道人) means literally a ‘person of the way’ and refers to the Dao (道) or ‘path’ of Daoism. This apparent confusion was explained by the great nineteenth century French sinologist Stanislas Julien:

In the Chinese Buddhist texts, the Indian word *Bôdhi* (Intelligence), the principal

attribute of the *Bouddha* [*Buddha*], is equated with *Tao* [*Dao*], 道, which has a specific significance among the *Tao-sse* [*Daoists*], and from this came, from the *Tsin* [*Jin*] dynasty to that of the Song (265–420 AD), the practice of giving to the Buddhist clergy the name of *Tao-jin* [*Daoren*] 道人, ‘men of Intelligence’, or ‘aspiring to Intelligence’, which is considered to be the highest degree of perfection.⁹

This use of Dao within a Buddhist context is perhaps not surprising at this period, when many of the Chinese administrators would themselves have been Daoist and Buddhism remained at a formative stage of acceptance in China. The spread of Buddhism in southern China during the fifth century CE clearly encouraged Southeast Asian rulers to add Buddhist artifacts to their normal range of diplomatic gifts in order to emphasize their Buddhist credentials at the Chinese courts. The first known embassy of Jayavarman to the court of the Southern Qi dynasty in 484 included “gold and sandalwood statues, ivory stupas, and glass vessels, all of which had some religious significance” (Wang Gungwu 1958, 53n32). These items were increased with the accession of the emperor Liang Wudi, who was famed for his Buddhist piety. Jayavarman is reported to have sent him a coral Buddha image in 503, before sending further embassies in 511 and 514, the year of his death (Pelliot 1903, 270). The statement that Qiaochenru originally came to Funan via Panpan on the Malay Peninsula is significant, as the southern Chinese court also regularly received items of Buddhist worship from this country, which was closely allied to Funan. In 529, Panpan sent ‘ivory images and stupas, gharu woods, sandalwood and many other kinds of incense,’ supplemented in 534 by ‘Buddha’s tooth and painted stupas’ (Wang Gungwu 1958, 54). This Buddhist emphasis continued during the following decades, when a king Rudravarman of Funan reported the presence of a hair of the Buddha at Funan in 539: [28]

That Buddhism was flourishing in Funan at this time is clear from a passage in the *History of the Liang* which states that a Chinese embassy was sent to Funan between 535 and 545 to ask the king of this country to collect Buddhist texts and to invite him to send Buddhist teachers to China. The king of Funan chose the Indian Paramārtha or Guṇaratna of Ujjayinī, who was then living in Funan, for this mission. He arrived in China in 546, bringing 240 bundles of texts with him. (Cœdès 1968, 60; cf. Pelliot 1903, 271) [29]

It is clear from these historical accounts that Buddhist monks from India and other western countries were active in Southeast Asia and southern China during the second half of the fifth and early sixth centuries CE. Material evidence for these Buddhist contacts can also be found in the stone sculpture of Angkor Borei in southern Cambodia and an extraordinary series of wooden Buddha statues (see fig. 5) discovered at water-logged sites in southern Vietnam (see Tingley 2009, 126–27, cat. no. 27). Although this tradition undoubtedly extended into the seventh century, its beginnings can almost certainly be dated back into the fifth and sixth centuries CE. Perhaps most remarkable, however, are two Chinese bronze statues of the Buddha found at locations near the site of Oc Eo in southern Vietnam. The first is characteristic of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534 CE; see Khoo 2003, 10) but is more probably a product [30]

9 “Dans les livres bouddhiques des Chinois, le mot indien *Bôdhi* (Intelligence), le principal attribut du *Bouddha*, a pour équivalent *Tao* [*Dao*], 道, qui a une signification particulière chez les *Tao-sse*, et de là est venu, depuis la dynastie des *Tsin* [*Jin*] jusqu’à celle des *Song* (265–420 après J.C.), l’usage de donner aux religieux bouddhistes le nom de *Tao-jin* [*Daoren*] 道人 ‘les hommes de l’Intelligence’, ou ‘prétendant à l’Intelligence’, qui est considérée comme le plus haut degré de la perfection” (Julien 1853, x–xi:n2).

or diplomatic gift of the Southern Qi (479–502 CE). The second shows a clear iconographic influence from the post-Gupta Buddha images of northern India and can probably be attributed to the southern Liang dynasty (502–557 CE; see [Tingley 2009, 124–25](#), cat. No. 26).¹⁰

This religious and political context is also apparent from epigraphy. A king Rudravarman, son of Jayavarman, is mentioned in a Buddhist inscription from southern Cambodia that lists the ‘three jewels’ of Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha (K. 40, stanza VI, line 11; [Cœdès 1931, 8–11](#)).¹¹ In addition, a king named Guṇavarman, perhaps also a son of Jayavarman, is mentioned in a large stela inscription from the plain of Tháp Mùrì in southern Vietnam (see fig. 6). Here he is described as: ‘kauṇḍi[n]ya[vaṅ]śaśaśina’ or ‘Moon of the lineage of Kauṇḍinya’ (K. 5, stanza VII, line 12; [Cœdès 1931, 1–8](#)). It should be remarked however that this inscription is not Buddhist, but concerns the consecration of footprints of Viṣṇu (Bhagavata) within a shrine named Cakratīrthasvāmin. A third inscription from the Ta Keo province of southern Cambodia (K. 875) mentions a queen of Jayavarman named Kulaprabhāvati, and this too is dedicated to Viṣṇu Golzio (2011). These inscriptions are all dated palaeographically to the early sixth century CE and are part of a separate network of Viṣṇu inscriptions and iconography linking Cambodia and southern Vietnam at this period to Sumatra and the northwest coast of Java ([Dalsheimer and Manguin 1998](#)).

Inscription K. 5 clearly demonstrates that the name Kauṇḍinya, and his status as a brahmin, were equally applicable to a Hindu context and suggests that the royal family of Funan were supportive of both Buddhist and Vishnuite foundations. Nevertheless, from the Buddhist transcription of Qiaochenru (僑陳如) and the importance of Kauṇḍinya to Sarvāstivādin ideas on the first reception of Buddhist doctrine, it seems very likely that the story presented in the *Liang shu* was intended to claim, or at least to give the impression, that the first disciple of the Buddha came to Funan and changed the laws of the country in accordance with *dharma*. This would correspond well with other Buddhist legends from early Southeast Asia that seem only to be the “écho de l’histoire de Bouddha et de ses principaux disciples, défigurée au gré des convenances locales” ([Garnier 1873, I:120](#)).

From other historical references of the fifth to sixth centuries, we know that at least some Buddhist monks and Hindu brahmins did indeed make the sea journey from India or Sri Lanka to Southeast Asia, many no doubt in the hope of an equally honorable reception as that accorded to Kauṇḍinya in the story. To what extent these hopes were realized can now only be conjectured, although in some cases at least their names have been recorded in later inscriptions and in Chinese historical texts. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that any real brahmin Kauṇḍinya ever sailed from India to become King of Funan. Such interpretations not only ignore the socio-economic basis of political power in Southeast Asia itself, but also the essentially religious nature of the persons involved.¹² The myth of Kauṇḍinya recorded in the *Liang shu* is more likely a retrospective justification for the appropriation of Kauṇḍinya as a family name by Kauṇḍinya Jayavarman. This appropriation would have been a conscious political act, laying claim not only to the legacy of the first disciple of the Buddha, but also to the status of a brahmin within the Hindu social hierarchy. Although Yijing does not give any information regarding the Buddhist schools formerly present in Funan, it is interesting to note that Kauṇḍinya was also adopted as a family name in the early sixth century by the

10 I am grateful to Bernadette Bröskamp for sharing her expertise on early Buddhist imagery in China with me during a reappraisal of the attribution of these statues.

11 K = Khmer, although the language used could be Sanskrit, Khmer or both.

12 However, for an alternative view based on the evidence from seventh-century Khmer epigraphy, please see the recent article by Golzio (2023).

[31]

[32]

[33]



Figure 5 Two wooden statues of the Buddha from the Mekong Delta (now in the Museum of Vietnamese History, Hồ Chí Minh City). The statue in the foreground measures 133 cm in height and is dated to the sixth century CE. It was found at Bình Hòa village in Long An province (BTLs 1618).

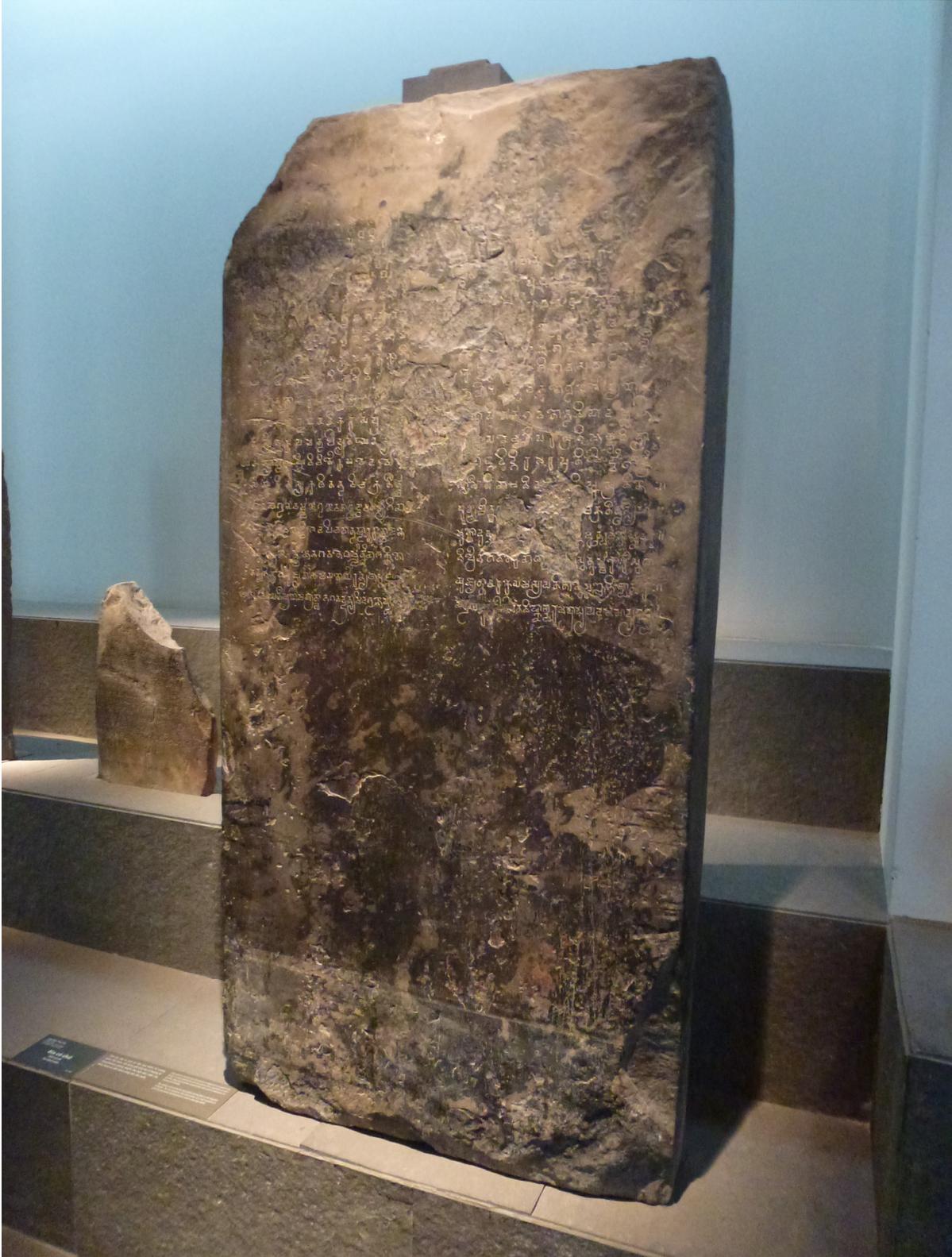


Figure 6 Doorjamb inscription from Prasat Pram Loveng (K.5), now in the Museum of Vietnamese History, Hồ Chí Minh City.

kings of Poli, a kingdom in island Southeast Asia that is specifically referred to as an area of Sarvāstivādin influence (I-tsing 1896, 12; Coedès 1968, 53).¹³

Although the long essay on Funan in the *Liang shu* was included by the French sinologist Paul Pelliot in his early, seminal article on ‘Le Founan’ (1903, 262–71), just under half the original text was left untranslated. This is because the second part does not refer explicitly to Funan, but rather to the restoration by Liang Wudi of monasteries in China dedicated to the Indian Emperor Aśoka (阿育王); to the use of reliquaries in the form of the Aśoka stūpa; to miracles attribute to Liang Wudi; and to his acquisition of a portrait of Aśoka (*Liang Shu* 1973, 54:790–793).¹⁴ This interest in Aśoka on the part of the Liang emperor Wudi was inspired at least in part by the Aśokāvadāna or ‘Legend of King Aśoka’ (Strong 2016). This Sanskrit text was first translated into Chinese in c. 300 CE as the *Ayu wang zhuan* (阿育王傳) and again in c. 512 CE, early in the reign of Liang Wudi, as the *Ayu wang jing* (阿育王經). The Aśokāvadāna itself formed part of the Divyāvadāna or ‘Divine Narrative,’ the earliest traces of which can be found in the *vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins. Although not strictly relevant to the history of Funan, this passage nevertheless underlines the significance of Funan to the Liang dynasty in China—namely as an important link to the Buddhist traditions of India and the royal patronage of Aśoka. In my opinion, it is predominantly in this Buddhist context that the Kaunḍinya legend of the early sixth century should be viewed. [34]

Lower Layer (c. 225–250 CE)

The earliest or lowest layer of the myth consists of scattered, fragmented references from what in archaeology would be described as a ‘disturbed context.’ This is the *Wushi waiguo zhuan* (吳時外國傳),¹⁵ a lost account of Funan by two Chinese envoys named Kang Tai (康泰) and Zhu Ying (朱應). These envoys were sent to Funan during the southern Wu (吳) dynasty, which ruled from 222 to 280 CE. While the exact date of their mission is disputed, it must have taken place between 225 and 250 CE. Their report contained a story regarding the founding of Funan, which was subsequently quoted in later historical literature. In his early work on Funan in 1903, Paul Pelliot collected three variations of this story from the early Chinese dynastic histories, and these have been analyzed and compared in detail by Sumio Fukami.¹⁶ These are: [35]

A. The *Jin shu* (晉書) or ‘Book of the Jin.’ Although the Jin dynasty reigned from 318 to 420 CE, this history was only commissioned during the Tang dynasty in 646 and was completed by a committee of scholars led by Fang Xuanling (房玄齡). The story occurs in the Funan section of *juan* (卷) 97 (see Pelliot 1903, 254; Fukami 2009, 200); [36]

B. The *Nan Qi shu* (南齊書) or ‘Book of the Southern Qi.’ The Southern Qi reigned from 479 to 502 CE. The book was begun by the scholar Xiao Zixian (蕭子顯) [37]

13 It is indeed tempting to relate this ancestral Kaunḍinya to the Kuṇḍunga mentioned as the grandfather of Mūlavarman in the Kutei inscriptions of eastern Borneo (see Coedès 1968, 52).

14 I am grateful to my colleague Ching-ling Wang for summarizing the contents of this section for me.

15 Yoshiaki Ishizawa (1995, 26, Appendix B) has listed eleven variations of this title in historical references up to the Northern Song dynasty (960–1126 CE), as well as four variants of a possibly apocryphal work, entitled the *Funanyiwuzhi*, attributed to Zhu Ying (1995, 27, Appendix C).

16 I am particularly grateful to Sumio Fukami for presenting me with a copy of his article during a visit to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

before his death in 537 and completed by his son. The story is quoted in the Funan paragraph of *juan* 58 (see [Pelliot 1903, 256](#); [Fukami 2009, 199](#)).

C. The *Liang shu* (梁書) or ‘Book of the Liang.’ The Liang reigned from 502–557 CE. The book was begun during the southern Chen dynasty (557–589 CE), but was completed by the scholar Yao Silian (姚思廉) during the early Tang dynasty (618–907). The story occurs in the Funan section of *juan* 54 (see [Pelliot 1903, 265](#); [Fukami 2009, 199–200](#)). [38]

Despite the recurrence of the story in these three histories, each claiming to be a direct quotation from the now lost *Wushi waiguo zhuan*, Pelliot nevertheless considered all three to be derived from a corrupt edition of the text. They are also by no means identical, showing not only differences in length and detail, but also in narrative style. This is partly due to the process of manuscript copying in China before the advent of printing. Although some texts were directly copied by hand from a pre-existing manuscript and checked visually, others were not so much copied as dictated; the manuscript was read, while two or three scholars wrote down what they heard, the resultant copy being a synthesis of these various dictations. As a result, names were often misspelt according to similarities of sound rather than of written character, and long passages of text were often necessarily summarized, providing a reduced précis of the original. Some of the variations in the surviving versions of the foundation of Funan are the result of these processes and will be discussed below. [39]

However, in 1925, Pelliot reported the discovery of a fourth version of the myth that appeared to give a more faithful account of the original text than those he had translated in 1903; or that at least represented an independent tradition ([Pelliot 1925, 244](#)). This version was found in *juan* 347 of the *Taiping yulan* (太平御覽), a Tang compendium published in 983 CE. The Chinese text was translated into French by Pelliot ([1925, 245–46](#)) and into English by Sumio Fukami ([2009, 189](#)). The quotation below is based on both translations, with the intent of staying as close as possible to the original Chinese text: [40]

The *Wushi waiguo zhuan* says: ‘In origin, the ruler of Funan was a woman named Liuye. There was once a man named Huntian of the country of Mofu who loved to worship a spirit, his heart never wavering in its service. The spirit was moved by his devotion. At night he [Huntian] dreamt that a man gave him a sacred bow and ordered him to board a merchant ship and go to sea. In the morning, Huntian got up, entered the shrine and found a bow at the foot of the spirit’s tree. He then boarded a large merchant ship and went to sea. The spirit directed the wind in such a way that it [the ship] arrived at Funan. Liuye desired to plunder and capture it. Huntian raised the sacred bow and fired. [The arrow] pierced [her] ship from end to end. Liuye was frightened and surrendered, and thus Huntian became king of Funan.’ [41]

The substance of this story is the same in all four versions of the text, with minor variations. Although there are interesting points of comparison with later versions of the myth, it should at once be remarked that in none of these versions is it claimed that Huntian was Indian or came from India. The *Jin shu* states only that Huntian was a stranger, while the *Nan Qi shu* says that he came from an otherwise unknown country named ‘Ji’ (激), meaning ‘spray’ or ‘breakers’ (*Nan Qi shu* 58: 1014).¹⁷ This is probably a scribal error for the ‘Jiao’ (徼) of the [42]

17 Page numbers of the *Nan Qi shu* refer to *Nan Qi Shu* (1972).

Liang shu, which should probably be translated not as the country (國) of Jiao, but rather as a ‘jiao guo’ (徼國); a ‘frontier’ or ‘neighbouring country’ (*Liang shu* 54: 788). Where the *Liang shu* is more definite, however, is in stating that Huntian came not from the West, but from the South. In his ‘Le Founan’ of 1903, Pelliot argued that this might refer only to the second part of a staged journey, Huntian originally sailing East through the Straits of Malacca and only then turning north to Funan. It is clearly stated in the *Taiping yulan*, however, that Huntian was from a country called Mofu (摸跌國). This country is otherwise unknown, but Pelliot noticed the close affinity of the Chinese characters for this name to the kingdom of Hengdie (橫跌國). This similar name occurs in *juan* 787 of the same *Taiping yulan* and is also ascribed to the work of Kang Tai, although now under the title of *Funan tusu* (扶南土俗) or ‘Customs of Funan.’ Pelliot argued that both were graphic variants of the same name and referred to the same location. As both these names are quoted from and in the same texts, it was not possible to determine whether the original name was meant to be read as Mofu, Hengdie or a third possibility (Modie) comprising elements of both (Pelliot 1925, 248).

The second reference to Hengdie nevertheless specifies that this country was located to the Southeast of a kingdom named Youbo (優鉞), which itself lay 5,000 *li* (里) to the Southeast of Tianzhu (天竺). As we have seen, Tianzhu was the standard name for India at this period. Moreover, the distance of 5,000 *li* between Tianzhu and Youbo—although clearly a rounded figure—suggested a distance of approximately 2,000 km. It is clear from this account that Hengdie/Mofu could not have been located in India. Indeed, the geography strongly suggests an itinerary from the Malay Peninsula up the western coast of Thailand and Burma (Myanmar) to the Ganges delta. Although Pelliot was reluctant to definitively exclude an Indian origin for Huntian, he was nevertheless forced to admit that:

If T’ien-tchou [Tianzhu] refers here to India as a whole, [the distance of] 5,000 *li* to the Southeast of T’ien-tchou would lead us to transgangetic India [Burma] for [the location of] Yeou-po [Youbo]; and the Heng-tie [Hengdie] (Mo-tie?) [Modie?] from where Kauṇḍinya departed, itself situated to the Southeast of Yeou-po, must be looked for on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula.¹⁸

Strictly speaking, if Hengdie/Mofu was a point of departure for both India and Funan, it should most probably have encompassed both coasts of the Malay Peninsula. However, this location would at best be Southwest of Funan. If Huntian indeed arrived in Funan from the South, as the *Liang shu* suggests, then Hengdie/Mofu could equally be located at the southern tip of the Straits of Malacca or even on the east coast of Sumatra. The itinerary also recalls a further extract from the work of Kang Tai quoted in *juan* 54 of the *Liang shu* (Pelliot 1903, 271) and in *juan* 1 of the *Shuijing zhu* (水經注), a sixth-century geographical commentary (Fukami 2009, 194–95). According to this account, the king of Funan, Fan Zhan (范旃), had heard of Tianzhu from a foreign merchant named Jiaxiangli (家翔梨) and decided to send Suwu (蘇物), a close member of his family, on a mission there. He is said to have sailed across a large bay in a north-westerly direction, calling at several countries on the way, before arriving after more than a year at a port named Danzhi. He then continued upriver until finally arriving at the capital of Tianzhu:

The king of Tianzhu was highly surprised to receive a visit from a country so far

18 “Si le T’ien-tchou désigne ici l’Inde entière, 5,000 *li* au Sud-Est du T’ien-tchou devraient mener en Inde transgangétique pour le Yeou-po; et le Heng-tie (Mo-tie?) d’où est parti Kauṇḍinya, situé lui-même au Sud-Est du Yeou-po, serait à chercher sur la côte orientale de la péninsule malaise” (Pelliot 1925, 248).

away beyond the sea. After showing Suwu the sites of his country, he presented him with four Yuezhi horses as a gift to King Fanzhan, and dispatched two emissaries, named Chen and Song, to accompany him home in order to transmit his respects to the king Since Kang Tai was at that time in Funan, he was able to receive a detailed report about Tianzhu from the emissaries Chen and Song. (Fukami 2009, 194–95)

It is implicit in this story that the king of Funan had little prior knowledge of India and was largely dependent on foreign merchants for information. There is not the slightest indication that the king himself or any of his immediate predecessors had originally come from India. Indeed, the diplomatic exchange with Tianzhu is depicted as being entirely the initiative of Fan Zhan, the king of Funan, who also sent the first known embassy from Southeast Asia to the Wu court in China in 243 CE (Pelliot 1903, 303). Danzhi may represent the ancient port of Tamralipti at the mouth of the Ganges. The actual location of the capital of Tianzhu visited by Suwu is uncertain, but the term Yuezhi (月氏) used for the horses is the general Chinese name for the Kushan, and the capital may have been Mathurā, where Kushan kings were still reigning during the mid-third century CE. It is also probable that the descriptions of the countries of Hengdie and Youbo were originally derived from the account of this journey. [47]

Pelliot argued strongly that the Chinese name ‘Huntian’ was a phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit name Kauṇḍinya, and his arguments have influenced later phonetic research into the historical pronunciation of the Chinese characters concerned. However, it is notable that the name of the protagonist is written with different Chinese characters in three of the surviving versions of the text (Golzio 2023, 123). It is also important to bear in mind that phonetic reconstructions are necessarily approximate and hypothetical, especially in regard to the transliteration of names where the original language is unknown. In particular, there is no indication in the text that the name ‘Huntian’ was Sanskrit in origin. At present, the earliest unequivocal evidence we have for the adoption of Sanskrit names by Southeast Asian rulers is from the early fifth century CE. All that can be said with any degree of certainty is that the Chinese characters used for Huntian must have sounded phonetically close to Kauṇḍinya and may well have suggested a later association with this name. [48]

Although Huntian is praised for his devotion in the story, there is no indication that he was a brahmin or a priest of any kind. In addition, while interesting parallels can be made with other religious or mythological traditions, there are also no clear indications of Buddhism or any specific Hindu cult. The term translated here as ‘spirit’ was rendered by Pelliot as ‘génie’ (1925, 245–46), although the alternative translation of ‘dieu’ was not excluded (1925, 245n5). Fukami is less inhibited in using the term ‘god’ (2009, 189) and the ‘shrine’ can equally be interpreted on a grander scale, and more conventionally, as a ‘temple’—the word used both by Pelliot (1925, 246) and Fukami (2009, 189). It is tempting to interpret these terms in regard to the later worship of Hindu deities in Southeast Asia, but this vocabulary should be understood within the intellectual context of Chinese Daoism, with which the author of the *Wushi waiguo zhuan* would have been familiar. Despite the appearance of a spirit or deity, a sacred tree, and some form of sacred enclosure, there is little to indicate any specific religious belief or cult system. The general religious context evokes a wide range of popular folk beliefs in supernatural entities attached to natural phenomena both in Cambodia itself (Ang Choulean 1986) and more generally within Southeast Asia as a whole. [49]

The name Liuye (柳葉), used for the wife of Huntian and original ruler of Funan, has the literal meaning of ‘willow leaf’ and is a conventional Chinese allegory for a beautiful woman. [50]

Somewhat less conventional, however, is her appearance in the story as a pirate queen intent on capturing and looting Huntian's ship. Female pirates are indeed known from later periods in the South China Sea, but this feature may rather be an indication of the historically high and active position of women in Southeast Asian societies. The merchant ship itself is of interest, evoking the great merchant vessels referred to in classical Roman literature, such as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and the *Geography* of Ptolemy. Ptolemy, writing in Alexandria in the mid-second century CE, was indeed aware of the Malay Peninsula under the name of the Aurea Chersonessus and lists the names of several ports there. This maritime trade is also attested in the Chinese dynastic histories as well as archaeologically through finds of South Asian and occasionally Mediterranean artefacts in Southeast Asia.

Despite the fragmentary nature of the evidence, the over-riding impression of this layer is of an indigenous Southeast Asian religious and social context. Many of the elements described in the story, such as a belief in nature spirits that reside in trees and other natural features; the premonition of future events in a dream; the acquisition of a weapon with magical powers; the long sea journey guided by supernatural forces; the female ruler or pirate queen; and the test of strength and confrontation by boat are all typical of narrative traditions within the region. Indeed, as one commentator has observed,¹⁹ it is difficult to imagine a more Southeast Asian myth. [51]

Conclusion

This rarity of statements, the incomplete, fragmented form of the enunciative field, the fact that few things, in all, can be said, explain that statements are not, like the air we breathe, an infinite transparency; but things that are transmitted and preserved, that have value, and which one tries to appropriate; that are repeated, reproduced, and transformed; to which pre-established networks are adapted, and to which a status is given in the institution; things that are duplicated not only by copy or translation, but by exegesis, commentary, and the internal proliferation of meaning. Because statements are rare, they are collected in unifying totalities, and the meanings to be found in them are multiplied.²⁰ (Foucault 1972, 120) [52]

The scattered references to the myth of Kauṇḍinya collected in this essay, derived from Sanskrit epigraphy or early Chinese sources, correspond very well to the complex process of transmission and appropriation described by Foucault in *L'archéologie du savoir*. These fragmented accounts do not lend themselves easily to any natural, evolutionary scheme. However, in regard to the traditional concept of 'Indianization' popularised by George Coédès (1964, 1968), it is apparent that what is primarily being 'Indianized' here is the myth itself, which in turn reflects the religious, social or literary context of each specific period. By examining the three main versions of the myth in sequential layers or 'domaines énonciatifs,' I have tried to show how [53]

19 Marion Frenger, pers. com. 2020.

20 "Cette rareté des énoncés, la forme lacunaire et déchetée du champ énonciatif, le fait que peu de choses, au total, peuvent être dites, expliquent que les énoncés ne soient pas, comme l'air qu'on respire, une transparence infinie; mais des choses qui se transmettent et se conservent, qui ont une valeur, et qu'on cherche à s'approprier; qu'on répète, qu'on reproduit, et qu'on transforme; auxquelles on ménage des circuits préétablis et auxquelles on donne statut dans l'institution; des choses qu'on dédouble non seulement par la copie ou traduction, mais par l'exégèse, le commentaire et la prolifération interne du sens. Parce que les énoncés sont rares, on les recueille dans des totalités qui les unifient, et on multiplie les sens qui habitent chacun d'eux" (Foucault 1969, 157).

each version forms part of a distinct literary and religious context that determines not only the outward appearance of the story, but also its inherent meaning and relevance.

In the lowest layer, I have followed Pelliot and Fukami in trying to bring together the scattered mythological references from the now lost *Wushi waiguo zhuan* of Kang Tai and to demonstrate how this version of the myth is inextricably connected to early Chinese views of Southeast Asia and the maritime character of Funan in the mid-third century CE. The myth of the lowest layer is in many ways an archetypal Southeast Asian story in which all specifically 'Indian' elements are missing. The details within it, however, provide an intriguing glimpse of Southeast Asian supernatural beliefs, although described within the vocabulary and intellectual outlook of Chinese Daoism. [54]

The only obvious connection between the lower and middle layers of the myth is the name Kauṇḍinya itself, which appears in the lowest layer only as a phonetic cognate of probable Southeast Asian origin. In the middle layer of the fifth to sixth centuries CE, I have tried to evaluate the myth of this period within the historical context of the *Liang shu* and the religious vocabulary of Chinese Buddhism. I have also sought to show the specific religious influence of the Buddhist school of the Sarvāstivādins in promoting Kauṇḍinya as the first disciple of the Buddha and examined the nascent role of Brahmanism in the Vishnuite epigraphy of the early sixth century. [55]

Finally, in the upper layer, I have examined the myth within the specific seventh-century context of inscription C. 96 at M̃y S̃on and attempted to clarify its appearance within Campā epigraphy, its literary relations to Sanskrit epic literature, in particular the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, and its possible religious connections to the Śaivite Pāśupata sect. This reworking and adaptation of mythological elements over time continued long after the seventh century, with the hero Kambu appearing in inscriptions of the tenth century as the mythical ancestor of the Kambuja, from which the modern name of Cambodia is derived. [56]

What I hope to have demonstrated, however, following the theoretical example of Foucault, is that each form of the myth cannot be separated from its immediate intellectual context. By arbitrarily combining the different versions of the myth and interpreting the earliest Chinese records from the mid-third century CE as merely a linguistic distortion of the Sanskrit version of the mid-seventh century (Coedès 1968, 37), scholars have created a historical anachronism that continues to inhibit our understanding of the political and religious development of early Southeast Asia. Rather, by strictly examining each version of the myth within its immediate literary context, it is possible to trace not only continuities and discontinuities in the transmission of the myth itself, but also the dynamics inherent in the religious life of each period. [57]

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