

Eastern Province and the Sinhalese Influence on South East Asia

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Between the 11th and 15th centuries, a major influence from the Sinhalese transformed the cultures of South-East Asia from Myanmar through the regions of present-day Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and southern Vietnam. That transformation resulted in these countries accepting the Sinhalese form of Theravada Buddhism and the emergence of the "Sihala sangha" lineage in the region. There were also major transformations in architecture, painting and sculpture, and literature. In this makeover of South Eastern Asian culture, there were links to the Eastern Province. A major monk with considerable impact in the 14th century on what is today, Myanmar, northern Thailand and Laos was Udumbara Maha Sami from Udumbaragiri (present day Dimbulagala). He was the fountainhead of the cultural transformation of the northern part of the Southeast Asian region. Again in the 14th century, another key figure in the interactions between the Eastern Province and present day Thailand was Sri Sraddha, a Thai prince monk who stayed for 10 years in Sri Lanka, and among other acts, repaired the Mahiyangana stupa. On his return, he reconstructed the then capital city Sukothai of the first Thai kingdom on forms based on the then Sinhalese architecture. The present paper traces from Burmese and Thai sources, the activities of these two figures, both in Sri Lanka and in South East Asia and discusses them as key elements in the civilisational transformation of Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Eastern Province, South East Asia, Sinhalese influence, Udumbara Sami, Sri Sraddha

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RASSL 3rd Research Conference March 27th & 28th 2009