

9 SINITIC TRANSFERS INTO CHAM ART

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This paper weighs the impact of Han Chinese culture on the early formation stages of Cham civilization, then studies the variegated Sinitic transfers when Mahāyāna Buddhism briefly held sway as the Cham political class constructed the Đồng Dương temple complex in the late 9th century. The ancient Champa polities along the east coast of the mainland Southeast Asia were midway between India and China. This geographical position provided growth opportunities through trade and also facilitated artistic transfers in both directions. Champa has long been studied as an 'Indianized' polity but the influence of its northern neighbour has been less examined. This paper presents some material evidence for arguing for the existence of direct and indirect Sinitic influence on Cham art.

Sa Huỳnh culture, Gò Cẩm and Trà Kiệu: prehistorical and proto-Cham interactions with China

Evidence of early trade with China from archaeological excavations reflects a prelude to the historical Chinese political expansion into the Red River delta. During the Sa Huỳnh cultural period on the south-central coast from 500 BCE to 100 CE, indications of trade with China include discoveries of a Chinese sword with possible silk traces at Phú Hòa, east of what is now Hồ Chí Minh City; Chinese coins from the reign of Wang Mang (9-23 CE) at Hậu Xá, west of Hội An in Quảng Nam; and also two Western Han (206 BCE-9 CE) bronze mirrors of the 1st century BCE at Sa Huỳnh cultural sites.¹

Recent archaeological finds from the early centuries CE in Gò Cẩm² and Trà Kiệu³ in the Quảng Nam province further prove that Linyi,⁴ founded at the time of the expansion of the ancient Chinese empire, was established in Quảng Nam on the base of the extant Sa Huỳnh culture.⁵ Some Han style artifacts usually found in Han tombs were excavated from Gò Cẩm, including daily utensils and personal ornaments such as Han style stamped wares, fragments of Han style glazed wares, roof tiles, one red shard bearing a Chinese 'Wuzhu' coin stamp design,

earrings called *erdang*, bronze arrowheads and a sword guard. The most unusual find is a broken *fengni*, a piece of clay sealing a document or container commonly used in China during the Qin and Han dynasties. It is imprinted with four Chinese characters that have been deciphered as *Huang (shen) shizhe zhang* 黃(神)使者章 ('seal of the envoy of the Yellow God'). This is the first Han sealing to have been found in Vietnam, and indicates that Cham people were familiar with Chinese beliefs.⁶

Trà Kiệu has been identified as Dianchong (典冲, Viet. Diễn Trung), the capital of Linyi during the 2nd to 3rd centuries CE, the period before what is usually referred to as Indianization. Yamagata Mariko has pointed out that the Han style stamped pottery wares and roof tiles found at Trà Kiệu, though locally made, were manufactured with a technique, form and style borrowed from China.⁷ Furthermore, the structural technique used in the foundations of the buildings there, which had tiled roofs supported by wooden pillars (*banzhu*), might also have been influenced by Chinese construction techniques.⁸

Eave tiles with human face decorations unearthed from the upper layer of Trà Kiệu stratigraphy at the Hoàn Châu site provide the most significant and direct Chinese influence on proto-Cham art. Artifacts with striking similarities have been found in the palace area of the former capital of the Six Dynasties in Nanjing, and were used in China during the Wu (229-80 CE) and Western Jin (265-316 CE) periods.⁹ Trà Kiệu likely adopted this new design of Chinese tiles for their own important buildings, and the design further flourished and diversified even after such tiles were no longer in use in Nanjing.¹⁰ Such material culture transfers may have resulted from the frequent political tribute activities. According to Chinese historical records, Linyi sent envoys to Wu and then later to Western Jin respectively in ~230, 268 and 284 CE.¹¹