

Localizing Mahāyāna Buddhism through Sacred Space and Royal Patronage: Đồng Dương and Borobudur in Ninth-Century Southeast Asia

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Abstract: This article examines how Mahāyāna Buddhism was localized in ninth-century Southeast Asia through the interrelated processes of sacred-space formation and royal patronage. Focusing on Borobudur in Central Java and Đồng Dương in Champa, it argues that these monuments should not be read as derivative reproductions of Indian Buddhist models, but as regionally grounded courtly projects in which transregional doctrines were reworked within distinct dynastic, ritual, and cosmological settings. Drawing on a comparative historical and interpretive reading of inscriptional, archaeological, art-historical, and site-based evidence, the study shows that Borobudur articulated a specifically Javanese mode of Buddhist localization by transforming cosmology into an ordered experience of movement, ascent, and visual instruction under Syailendra patronage. Đồng Dương, by contrast, reveals a different strategy in which Buddhist monumentality was embedded within the political landscape of Indrapura and aligned more directly with royal foundation, ritual access, and dynastic projection. Considered together, the two sites suggest that sacred space in premodern Southeast Asia was not merely a backdrop for devotion, but an active medium through which kingship, merit, and cosmological order were organized and displayed. The article therefore reframes the spread of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Southeast Asia not as a simple process of religious transmission, but as a historically situated practice of localization shaped by court power, regional landscapes, architectural production, and wider maritime circulation..

Keywords: Mahāyāna Buddhism; sacred space; royal patronage; localization; Borobudur; Đồng Dương; Champa; Central Java; Southeast Asia

Introduction

In the religious history of premodern Southeast Asia, Mahāyāna Buddhism did not expand as a uniform doctrinal system simply transmitted from India to local polities. Its regional trajectories were shaped through processes of selection, translation, and institutional embedding, in which rulers, ritual specialists, and monumental landscapes played decisive roles. Among the most revealing cases are Borobudur in Central Java and Đồng Dương in Champa, two ninth-century sites that demonstrate how Buddhist ideas were rearticulated within distinct political and cosmological environments. Although both have long been recognized as major monuments of Buddhist Southeast Asia, they are too.

often approached either as isolated masterpieces or as local reflections of wider Indian models. This article proposes instead that they should be read comparatively as material and political expressions of localization, in which sacred space and royal patronage worked together to make Mahāyāna Buddhism intelligible, authoritative, and locally consequential. By examining their spatial organization, symbolic programs, and dynastic settings, the article argues that Borobudur and Đồng Dương illuminate not merely the regional presence of Buddhism, but the different ways in which Buddhist authority was conceptualized, spatialized, and politically articulated in ninth-century Southeast Asia.,

Recent research on mediaeval Maritime Asia has made it increasingly difficult to sustain older models that treat Southeast Asian Buddhist monuments as secondary derivatives of Indian prototypes. Instead, newer work emphasizes the creative agency of littoral and insular polities in reformulating imported religious ideas within local aesthetic, political, and spatial worlds. This shift is especially relevant to Borobudur and Đồng Dương. Both sites have long been acknowledged as major monuments of Buddhist Southeast Asia, yet they continue to be discussed more often as separate regional cases than as part of a shared problem of localization. As a result, questions of style, iconography, or dynastic chronology have often overshadowed a more fundamental issue: how sacred architecture and royal sponsorship worked together to produce locally authoritative forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

This article addresses that problem by reading Borobudur and Đồng Dương as distinct courtly religious projects in which sacred space, dynastic legitimation, and territorial embedding were mutually constitutive in the localization of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It argues that the localization of Mahāyāna Buddhism in ninth-century Southeast Asia was not a passive effect of cultural diffusion, nor merely a devotional phenomenon, but a historically situated process in which courts selectively organized monuments, landscapes, and ritual forms to make Buddhist authority intelligible within local cosmological and dynastic settings. By foregrounding this process, the article places both sites within a wider conversation about regional creativity, maritime Buddhist circulation, and the political production of sacred space.

Accordingly, this article adopts a comparative historical approach centered on two interrelated questions: how sacred space materialized Mahāyāna cosmology in specific local settings, and how royal patronage transformed such spaces into vehicles of political and religious authority. The comparison does not seek to collapse Borobudur and Đồng Dương into a single regional pattern; rather, it highlights how different courts mobilized Buddhist architecture to negotiate their own cultural and dynastic circumstances. By placing these monuments in dialogue, the article contributes to a broader rethinking of premodern Southeast Asia as a zone of active religious production rather than passive reception. More specifically, it suggests that the localization of Mahāyāna Buddhism was inseparable from the spatial inscription of power, and that Buddhist monumentality served not only devotional purposes but also contributed to the public expression of courtly order and dynastic self-positioning. In doing so, the study offers a comparative framework for understanding how religion became materially rooted, politically charged, and historically differentiated across the Buddhist worlds of Southeast Asia. Beyond juxtaposing two major Buddhist monuments, this article makes a more specific analytical intervention: it argues that localization in ninth-century Southeast Asia operated through the co-constitution of sacred space, dynastic legitimation, and territorial embedding. Rather than treating Buddhist architecture as a passive recipient of transregional doctrine or as a purely symbolic expression of belief, the article shows how courts materially organized monuments, ritual movement, and political landscapes to make Mahāyāna Buddhism locally authoritative. In doing so, it reframes localization not as a secondary cultural adaptation, but as a political-spatial process through which religious authority was produced, anchored, and differentiated across regional settings.

To address this problem, the article places Borobudur and Đồng Dương in comparative dialogue as courtly religious projects. The methodological principles and comparative criteria are outlined in the following section.

Literature review

Recent research on mediaeval Maritime Asia has substantially revised older diffusionist accounts of Buddhist and Hindu monumentality in Southeast Asia. Rather than treating the region as a passive recipient of Indic doctrines, iconographies, and architectural forms, newer studies emphasize the creative agency of Southeast Asian courts and religious communities in reworking transregional materials within local political and spatial settings. As Aciri and Sharrock (2022) argue, Southeast Asian polities were not merely conduits of Indic religions but active agents in transforming rituals, icons, and architecture across the region *“Far from being a mere southern conduit for the maritime circulation of Indic religions, in the period from ca. the 7th to the 14th century those regions transformed across mainland and island polities the rituals, icons, and architecture that embodied these religious insights with a dynamism that often eclipsed the established cultural centres in Northern India, Central Asia, and mainland China”* (Aciri & Sharrock, 2022). This shift is important because it moves the discussion away from questions of simple influence and toward problems of selective appropriation, reformulation, and emplacement. Yet even within this newer body of research, monumentality, rulership, landscape, and circulation are still often examined as adjacent themes rather than as constitutive dimensions of a single process. What remains less clearly theorized is how Mahāyāna Buddhism became locally authoritative through the interaction of sacred architecture, dynastic legitimation, and territorial-political setting. Borobudur has generated a particularly rich body of research, much of it centered on cosmology, monumentality, and ritual movement. Site-based and historical studies continue to confirm its status as one of the most sophisticated Buddhist monuments in island Southeast Asia, while also underscoring its scale, complexity, and dynastic significance (Miksic, 2025; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). More conceptually oriented studies have gone further by reading mandalas, landscape, rulership, and temple architecture as mutually implicated rather than analytically separate domains (Sharrock, 2024; Chemburkar, 2024). This growing body of research makes it increasingly difficult to interpret Borobudur as either a static cosmogram or a derivative reflection of Indian models. At the same time, much of the existing research remains centered on explaining Borobudur’s symbolism, architectural order, or ritual path as features internal to the monument itself. Less attention has been given to the broader analytical question of how those features participated in the localization of Mahāyāna Buddhism through the coordination of sacred space, dynastic ambition, and political topography. Research on Đồng Dương has developed along a different but equally important trajectory. Earlier studies often framed the site primarily as a monastery or as evidence of a Buddhist phase in Champa. More recent research, however, has challenged that reduction by expanding Đồng Dương into a broader political-sacred complex associated with Indrapura, extending beyond the monastery proper to include connections with defensive structures, a citadel, nearby ports, production areas, and funerary sites (Son & Noseworthy, 2021). This revision is significant because it shifts the scale of analysis from isolated monument to territorialized royal foundation. Studies on Cham art and sacred monuments have likewise helped situate Đồng Dương within the political and artistic world of Champa, especially in relation to inscriptions, sculpture, and the reign of Indravarman II (Hubert, 2012). Even so, existing research has tended to treat Đồng Dương either within the internal history of Champa or within the art-historical development of Buddhist Champa. It has less often been used to theorize localization as a process through which Buddhist authority was anchored simultaneously in royal initiative, ritual space, and political geography.

A further line of research has widened the scale of interpretation by highlighting the transregional circulation of Buddhist texts, ritual forms, and protective traditions across South Asia, mainland Southeast Asia, Java and Bali, and southern China (Bianchini, 2024). Such studies are crucial because they prevent Borobudur and Đồng Dương from being read as closed or purely local worlds. Instead, they show that both sites emerged within wider maritime networks of exchange and religious movement. Yet this transregional perspective also sharpens an unresolved problem: circulation alone does not explain why certain Buddhist forms became materially authoritative in particular courts and landscapes. Put differently, the movement of ideas across regions must still be distinguished from the processes by which those ideas were institutionally grounded, spatially organized, and politically charged in specific local settings.

Taken together, these studies have greatly deepened research on Borobudur, Đồng Dương, and the Buddhist worlds of mediaeval Maritime Asia. However, they have more often illuminated cosmology, monumentality, polity, and circulation in partial or parallel ways than explained how these dimensions converged in the making of local Buddhist authority. The unresolved issue, therefore, is not whether Southeast Asia creatively reworked transregional Buddhism; recent research has already made that clear. The more precise question is how localization operated as a political-spatial process through which sacred space, dynastic legitimation, and territorial embedding were brought together. This article addresses that question by reading Borobudur and Đồng Dương not simply as two important Buddhist monuments, but as distinct courtly projects in which Mahāyāna Buddhism was made locally authoritative through different configurations of architecture, patronage, and political emplacement.

Method and comparative approach

This article adopts a comparative historical and interpretive approach grounded in a selective corpus of inscriptional, archaeological, art-historical, and site-based materials. For Borobudur, the study relies on specialist and institutional sources that document the monument's cosmological structure, ritual sequencing, and dynastic framing (Miksic, 2025; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). For Đồng Dương, the analysis draws on research that reinterprets the site as a larger Indrapura complex rather than a self-contained monastery, together with inscription-based and heritage documentation linking Indravarman II's foundation of the site in 875 to the establishment of a Buddhist vihāra and a sanctuary dedicated to Lakṣmindra Lokeśvara (Cục Di sản văn hóa, n.d.; Son & Noseworthy, 2021). These site-specific materials are read alongside broader studies of Maritime Asia, Champa, and Buddhist sacred landscapes in order to place both monuments within wider circuits of Buddhist circulation rather than within a simple model of one-way diffusion (Acri & Sharrock, 2022; Bianchini, 2024).

The comparison proceeds through four criteria: dynastic context, spatial organization, cosmological inscription, and territorial embedding. The first concerns the relationship between monument-building and royal legitimation. The second focuses on enclosure, axiality, ascent, and movement through ritual space. The third considers the extent to which architecture materializes Buddhist ideas in visible and processional form. The fourth examines how monuments were positioned within wider political landscapes, including capitals, associated sites, and regional networks. These criteria make it possible to compare Borobudur and Đồng Dương without forcing them into formal equivalence. The argument is not that the two monuments were architecturally identical, but that each brought architecture, sacred symbolism, and dynastic authority into a locally specific relationship. In the case of Borobudur, UNESCO's description of the monument as both cosmologically structured and dynastically significant supports such a reading (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). UNESCO describes Borobudur as a monument "*built in three tiers around a hill,*" structured in accordance with "*Buddhist cosmology,*" and identifiable as a "*dynastic monument of the Syailendra Dynasty.*" Read together, these features support an interpretation of Borobudur as a site in which architectural form, sacred symbolism, and dynastic authority were brought into a locally specific relationship (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.).

This approach also has clear limitations. The evidentiary base is asymmetrical: Whereas Borobudur remains architecturally legible as a standing monument, Đồng Dương must be reconstructed through inscriptions, archaeological interpretation, and later research; as Son and Noseworthy (2021) argue, current understandings still depend heavily on research that is more than one hundred years old and need to be revised through a broader reading of the Đồng Dương complex (Cục Di sản văn hóa, n.d.; Son & Noseworthy, 2021). For that reason, the article does not claim to reconstruct ritual practice in full detail, nor does it argue for direct institutional contact between the two courts. Instead, it compares two regionally specific strategies through which Mahāyāna Buddhism was localized under royal auspices in the ninth century.

Conceptual framework

This article approaches localization not as dilution, deviation, or secondary adaptation, but as the historically situated reformulation of transregional religious ideas within specific political, spatial, and cultural settings. Such an approach departs from older diffusionist habits of explanation and aligns more closely with recent studies that restore agency to Southeast Asian courts and regional artistic worlds. In this sense, localization refers to the active work through which Buddhist ideas were translated into new forms of authority, visibility, and emplacement in mediaeval Maritime Asia.

A second premise is that sacred space must be treated as a medium of religious production rather than a neutral setting for ritual activity. Recent work on mandalas, temple architecture, and landscape in Buddhist Southeast Asia suggests that monuments were not simply containers of doctrine; they were spatial technologies through which cosmology was ordered, movement was choreographed, and authority was made experientially legible. This is particularly important for a comparison between Borobudur and Đồng Dương, because both sites can be read as monuments in which spatial sequence, sacred topography, and royal intervention were brought together.

Finally, royal patronage is understood here not merely as financial support, but as a constitutive dimension of Buddhist authority. Courts did not simply sponsor religion from the outside; they shaped the conditions under which religious space could become politically consequential. In this framework, sacred space and royal patronage are treated as mutually reinforcing processes. Taken together, these concepts help clarify how Mahāyāna Buddhism in ninth-century Southeast Asia became locally meaningful, dynastically significant, and spatially anchored without ceasing to participate in a wider maritime Buddhist world.

Case study I: Borobudur as a dynastic Buddhist monument and sacred path

Borobudur should be read not simply as a static cosmogram in stone, but as a dynastic Buddhist monument whose architecture organizes a process of ascent. UNESCO describes the monument as a three-tiered structure composed of five concentric square terraces, three circular platforms, and a crowning stupa, and identifies it as an outstanding dynastic monument of the Syailendra realm (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). This arrangement matters because it does more than symbolize Buddhist cosmology in abstract form. It turns cosmology into spatial experience by staging movement from lower to higher realms through an ordered architectural sequence (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.).

The ritual logic of the monument becomes clearer when its relief programme is read together with its circulation routes. As Gordon (2015) notes, “*devotees circumambulate clockwise along walkways that gradually ascend,*” so that movement through the monument becomes part of its religious meaning rather than a merely practical feature. This is reinforced by the narrative programme itself, especially in the upper galleries, where the Gandavyūha contributes to what Gordon (2015) describes as a structure in which “*the concept of ‘path’ is a central theme.*” Read together, these features suggest that Borobudur localized Buddhism not only by representing cosmology, but by turning doctrine into an ordered experience of ascent, movement, and visual instruction. According to Gordon (2015), devotees circumambulate clockwise along ascending open-air passageways, while the monument’s galleries contain extensive narrative relief cycles, including episodes associated with the Gandavyūha. These reliefs do not merely ornament the structure. They guide the pilgrim through a didactic path in which Buddhist teaching is encountered step by step, culminating in the upper terraces and central stupa. In this sense, Borobudur localized Buddhism not only by representing cosmology, but by making the path to enlightenment spatially traversable within a Javanese monumental setting. Read in this way, Borobudur can be understood as a political-sacred project in which dynastic authority, sacred topography, and Buddhist doctrine were materially coordinated. UNESCO’s identification of the monument as a dynastic monument is important because it grounds the argument in more than symbolism alone (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). The monument’s scale, hilltop placement, and carefully sequenced ascent suggest that Syailendra patronage did not merely support a Buddhist sanctuary, but helped materialize a court-backed sacred order in which kingship, merit, and cosmological hierarchy became publicly legible (Miksic, 2025; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.).



Picture 1: Part of the exterior view of Borobudur. Source: Authors

Picture 1 shows the frontal exterior view of Borobudur, emphasizing its monumental stepped form, axial stairway, and highly ordered architectural symmetry. In our reading, the layered structure reinforces the idea of ascent, while the dense arrangement of niches, terraces, and sculptural details suggests that the monument was designed not simply as a building, but as a spatially organized sacred environment.



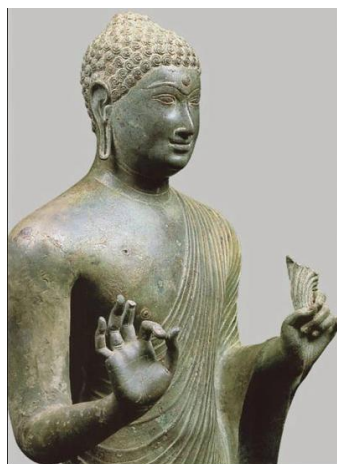
Picture 2: This photograph shows the bell-shaped stupas on the upper level of Borobudur Temple in Central Java, Indonesia. Source: the authors

From our perspective, the bell-shaped perforated stupas evoke a sacred Buddhist space associated with meditation, contemplation, and the journey toward enlightenment. Their repeated circular arrangement conveys a sense of order, harmony, and ritual movement. The gradual rise toward the central upper area may be understood as symbolizing ascent from the ordinary world to a higher spiritual state.

Case study II: Đồng Dương as a Buddhist foundation of Indrapura and a political-sacred complex

Indravarman II established a new Buddhist dynasty at Indrapura and promoted Mahāyāna Buddhism through the construction of the Đồng Dương Buddhist monastery (Võ & Trần, 2016). In this light, Đồng Dương is better understood as a royal Buddhist foundation embedded in the political world of Indrapura than as an isolated monastery. Heritage documentation based on the site's inscriptional record indicates that in 875 Indravarman II established a Buddhist vihāra and a temple dedicated to Lakṣmindra Lokeśvara, while also endowing the foundation with land and resources and linking it to

the wider political formation of Indrapura (Cục Di sản văn hóa, n.d.). These details matter because they anchor the site's Buddhist significance in epigraphic evidence and royal initiative rather than in later stylistic interpretation alone. The reconstructed layout of the complex strengthens this reading. Chau (2023) describes the site as a walled compound with three brick enclosures, including "*a vihāra, a long pillared corridor, and a main shrine*". The corridor appears to have functioned as an intermediate ritual zone rather than as a merely utilitarian passage, suggesting that movement toward the sanctuary was staged through sequence and preparation (Chau, 2023). This pattern is significant because it indicates that Đồng Dương was not simply a place where Buddhist images were housed, but a carefully organized ritual environment in which access, performance, and sanctity were spatially mediated. Recent studies further broaden the scale of interpretation. Son and Noseworthy (2021) argue that Đồng Dương should be reconsidered as part of a larger complex associated with the Indrapura polity, including defensive structures, a citadel, associated sites, and links to nearby ports. On this reading, the Buddhist foundation at Đồng Dương was embedded in a wider territorial and administrative landscape rather than detached from it. A more cautious formulation is preferable here: the available evidence does not justify the claim that Buddhism fully displaced Hindu traditions across Champa, but it does indicate that under Indravarman II Buddhism moved to the foreground as a royally patronized mode of sacred and political expression (Hubert, 2012; Son & Noseworthy, 2021). Taken together, the inscriptional, architectural, and territorial evidence supports a stronger but still defensible claim: Đồng Dương was not merely a Buddhist religious site, but a dynastically charged foundation through which Indravarman II localized Mahāyāna Buddhism in close association with the wider Indrapura polity. What made this localization distinctive was not only doctrinal affiliation, but the integration of inscription, patronage, ritual space, and political geography. For that reason, it is safer and more convincing to describe Đồng Dương as a royal Buddhist center within a plural Cham landscape than to make the stronger claim that it represented a complete Buddhist transformation of the Cham court. Material evidence reinforces this reading. The emergence of a distinctive Đồng Dương sculptural style further indicates that localization operated not only through dynastic patronage and sacred architecture, but also through the formation of a local visual language. Finds associated with Đồng Dương include a large bronze Buddha linked to Amaravati influence and a bronze image often identified as Laksmindra Lokeśvara, both of which suggest that the site was also a center of visual and devotional production rather than a purely architectural foundation. The sculptural record further suggests that Đồng Dương did not simply reproduce Mahāyāna forms from abroad; rather, it reworked Buddhist and Brahmanical elements within a distinctly Cham visual idiom (Võ & Trần, 2016). To illustrate, the Đồng Dương Buddha is a statue of Śākyamuni Buddha discovered by the French archaeologist Henri Parmentier in April 1911 at Đồng Dương, Bình Định Commune, Thăng Bình District, Quảng Nam Province. The Đồng Dương Buddha has often been associated with what researchers have traditionally called the Amaravati style (Giao Hào, 2015).



Picture 3: The statue has often been associated with Amaravati influence, a connection that has been noted in earlier discussions of Buddhist artistic exchange across South and Southeast Asia (Giao Hào, 2015).

The Buddha statue displays balanced and harmonious proportions, while the treatment of the robe is refined and supple, bringing out the solemn majesty of the Buddha. The statue has often been associated with Amaravati influence (as noted in discussions of Buddhist artistic exchange across South and Southeast Asia), named after the ancient city of Amaravati in southern India, an important center of Buddhist art that exerted a strong influence on the artistic cultures of South Asia (Giao Hào, 2015).

Comparative discussion: Mechanisms of localization in Borobudur and Đồng Dương

Borobudur and Đồng Dương show that the localization of Mahāyāna Buddhism in ninth-century Southeast Asia did not occur through doctrinal transmission alone. In both cases, Buddhist authority became locally durable when it was anchored in monumentality, royal initiative, and spatial ordering. Yet the two sites did not localize Buddhism in the same way. What they shared was not a single architectural formula, but a broader courtly logic of religious authority in which rulers helped organize the conditions under which Buddhist ideas could be made visible, traversable, and publicly meaningful within particular courts and landscapes (Acri & Sharrock, 2022; Wolters, 1999). At Borobudur, localization worked through cosmological monumentalization. The monument gave Mahāyāna Buddhism a distinct local form by binding cosmology to movement, topography, and dynastic presence. Its three-tiered arrangement, processional ascent, and narrative relief cycles transformed Buddhist doctrine into a structured experience of pilgrimage and visual instruction (Gordon, 2015; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). In this sense, Borobudur did not merely illustrate Buddhism. It monumentalized the path itself within a royally sponsored sacred landscape. Đồng Dương, by contrast, localized Mahāyāna Buddhism through dynastic installation in a capital-centered ritual complex. The inscriptional and heritage record links the site directly to Indravarman II, to the establishment of a Buddhist foundation, and to the political setting of Indrapura (Cục Di sản văn hóa, n.d.). When this evidence is read together with the reconstructed sequence of enclosures and the expanded interpretation of the site as part of a broader political-sacred complex, the mechanism of localization becomes clearer. Buddhism here was embedded in the spatial and institutional core of a royal center rather than rendered through a totalizing cosmic ascent (Chau, 2023; Son & Noseworthy, 2021). The comparison therefore points to two related but distinct mechanisms of localization. Borobudur produced Buddhist authority through cosmological sequencing and monumental ascent, while Đồng Dương produced it through dynastic foundation, protected cult, and capital-centered ritual visibility. Both were local formations, but neither was isolated. Each emerged within broader maritime circuits through which Buddhist ideas, images, and ritual forms circulated across South Asia, mainland Southeast Asia, island Southeast Asia, and southern China (Bianchini, 2024). What made each site historically distinctive was therefore not its degree of foreign influence, but the specific way in which a local court reorganized Buddhist materials to serve local political and sacred purposes.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Mahāyāna Buddhism in ninth-century Southeast Asia became authoritative within local settings through the intertwined processes of sacred-space formation and royal patronage. By placing Borobudur and Đồng Dương in comparative dialogue, it has shown that Buddhist monumentality was neither a neutral expression of doctrine nor a passive outcome of transregional diffusion. Instead, it emerged through historically specific interactions among courts, landscapes, architectural forms, and ritual priorities that gave Buddhist ideas new local meanings and new political uses. The comparison also makes clear that localization did not follow a single regional pattern. At Borobudur, Mahāyāna Buddhism was anchored through cosmological monumentalization: doctrine was translated into an ordered experience of ascent, movement, and visual instruction within a Syailendra-sponsored sacred landscape. At Đồng Dương, by contrast, Buddhist localization took shape through dynastic foundation within the political world of Indrapura, where monumentality, ritual access, and royal initiative were brought into closer alignment. In this sense, the two sites shared a broader logic of localization while embodying distinct historical strategies for making Buddhist authority visible, durable, and locally consequential. More broadly, the study supports recent research that repositions Southeast Asia not as a peripheral recipient of external religious models, but as a region

of active religious and political creativity. It also suggests that the study of Buddhist monuments must move beyond questions of style, iconography, or influence alone. To understand how Mahāyāna Buddhism became rooted in particular local worlds, greater attention must be paid to the spatial, dynastic, and political conditions through which sacred authority was organized, experienced, and sustained..

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