

Fall 2024 Arts of Asia Lecture Series
Sponsored by the *Society for Asian Art*

Bridging the Indian Ocean: Comparisons and Contrasts

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For more than a thousand years, up till about 1300, Southeast Asian ruling classes adopted and adapted many aspects of Indian elite culture. Sanskrit was used in Southeast Asia as a high-prestige written language just as it was in India. Various forms of Buddhism and Hinduism spread, together with their sacred stories and their vocabulary of symbols. In parts of Southeast Asia these religions are still followed today, and their imagery and symbols are still understood and made use of.

Art objects in the Asian Art Museum's collection show some of the important similarities and differences between Indian and Southeast Asian classical traditions.

To be discussed:

Hindu and Buddhist deities

Door guardians (Sanskrit *dvarapala*)

Mythical serpents (nagas) and mythical crocodile-like creatures (*makara*)

Flying celestials

"Face of glory" (Sanskrit *kirtimukha*; in Indonesia often known as *kala* [time or death]), a monster face over an entranceway or above a sacred image, serving as a sort of guardian

Honorific parasols

Symbols of radiance: head or body halos, flames, gold

South Asia and Southeast Asia--Some factors in Common

- Shiva- and Vishnu-centered schools of Hinduism (though these largely disappeared from Southeast Asia in the 1300s and 1400s)
- Various schools of Buddhism (though Buddhism largely disappeared from India by the 1300s)
- Some Hindu mythology, epics, and imagery, though sometimes interpreted differently
- Some Buddhist mythology and imagery
- From about 300 to 1300 writing in Sanskrit for high-prestige purposes
- Theories of kingship, governance, and royal ceremonial

Resources

Nearly all of the museum's South and Southeast Asian objects can be found in the online database known as eMuseum at <https://searchcollection.asianart.org/collections>. There are images, up-to-date information, and label texts. Many of the museum's South and Southeast Asian sculptures on view have been rephotographed recently, and you will often find back views and multiple closeups as well as overall front views.

Also:

Asian Art Museum of San Francisco: Collection Highlights. 2018.

McGill, Forrest, et al. *Emerald Cities: Arts of Siam and Burma, 1775-1950*. Asian Art Museum, Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2009. (Everything here is from the museum's collection.)

Dalrymple, William. *The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World*. London: Bloomsbury, 2024. (American edition will appear in early 2025.)