

**The “Indianization of Southeast Asia” Revisited:  
Initiative, Adaptation and Transformation in Classical Civilizations**

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The impact of ideas and norms on world politics has received a good deal of attention in recent scholarship on international relations. Much of this effort was initially directed at engaging rationalist international relations theory on the causal and transformative impact of ideational forces vis-à-vis power and interest. But after gaining ground in this debate, idea scholars have now turned their attention to studying the *process* of contestation and specifying the conditions which facilitate or inhibit the institutionalization of ideas. In this task, they are challenged by a number of questions: why do some new or emerging ideas get institutionalized in a particular locale while others do not? Why do different areas of the world show varying receptivity to the same or similar ideas? The available literature on ideas is yet to offer definitive insights into these questions.

In this paper, I urge international relations scholars looking for answers to these questions to turn to Southeast Asian historiography and revisit what probably counts as the single most extensive case of pacific spread of ideas in the history of civilization: the transmission of Indian religious and political ideas to Southeast Asia during the pre-colonial period. These ideas - not just abstract ideas about the divine authority and legitimacy of the ruler, but also specific rules of governance and inter-state relations - decisively influenced the origins of statehood and the inter-state system in Southeast Asia, yet the process of their transmission was almost entirely peaceful, and was characterized as much by local initiative and adaptation as by the “supply” of ideas through commerce, conquest or cultural entrepreneurship. What was originally viewed to be a passive acceptance by Southeast Asian rulers of foreign, especially Indian, ideas, came to be regarded, thanks to archeological discoveries and scholarly debate, as a matter of proactive and selective borrowing by local rulers seeking to legitimize and empower themselves. Moreover, in the process, Southeast Asian societies adapted and modified a whole range of foreign ideas and rules to suit the local context. This process preserved and in some cases amplified local beliefs and practices while producing significant but evolutionary historical change in the domestic politics and international relations. I use these insights from Southeast Asian historiography to illustrate how active borrowing and localization is fundamental to normative change in world politics and should receive greater attention in constructivist theory.

Southeast Asia constitutes an ideal case for understanding the diffusion of ideas in world civilisation.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to its geographic location between two of the largest and

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<sup>1</sup> By “ideas,” I have used Goldstein and Keohane’s notion of ideas without adopting their rationalist perspective. Goldstein and Keohane, Ideas and Foreign Policy (Cornell, 1993). Their view of the impact of ideas is rationalist: “Ideas affect strategic interactions, helping or hindering joint efforts to attain ‘more efficient’ outcomes” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:12) I use a more constructivist notion of ideas, stressing their constitutive impact. Constructivists (reflexivists) argue that: “interests cannot be conceptualized apart from the ideas that constitute them” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:26). But a purely ideational explanation has been criticized: “Reflexivists who assert that interests cannot be evaluated apart from the ideas that constitute them set aside materialist and rationalistic arguments without subjecting them to serious empirical evaluation.” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:26)

Goldstein and Keohane present a three-fold typology of ideas: as world views, principled beliefs, and causal beliefs (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:8-11) World views “define the universe of possibilities for action” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:9). The world’s religions constitute a major source of such ideas, another

example is the concept of sovereignty. Principled beliefs are “normative ideas that specify criteria for distinguishing right from the wrong and just from unjust.” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:9). Such ideas are presented by the anti-slavery movement, or the more recent anti-land mines movement. Causal beliefs are “beliefs about cause-effect relationships which derive authority from the shared consensus of recognized elites, whether they are village elders or scientists at elite institutions.” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:10). Such beliefs include scientific discoveries about the causes of disease, or the link between shared beliefs and revolutionary political change. One example which is especially relevant here is the time honored idea of “consensus” in dispute settlement mechanisms in rural Indonesia, in which village elders guide a process of consultations that defines the parameters of a settlement. This reflects the causal idea that social order depends on the shared beliefs in the social organization of the village.

How does the above classification of ideas apply to the historiographical debates about the spread of Indian ideas to Southeast Asia? It is important to note that the Indian influence in Southeast Asia was primarily ideational, not material. The debate about Indianization is not about whether it was material or ideational, but how the Indian ideas were transmitted, whether through conquest, commerce or through “clerical” activism initiated at least partly through local initiative. Second, the kind of Indian ideas that found acceptance in Southeast Asia falls into what Goldstein and Keohane would call “world views”, especially since they were directly or indirectly rooted in Hindu and Buddhist religious philosophies and traditions. But as Wolters notes, it is not possible to separate religion from politics in classical Southeast Asia, and that there are clear overlaps between world views and other categories of ideas. As Goldstein and Keohane note: “Causal beliefs imply strategies for the attainment of goals, themselves valued because of shared principled beliefs, and understandable only within the context of broader world views” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:10). Similarly, many doctrines, whether it is sovereignty or cooperative security, or social movements link all three types of ideas: “Doctrines and movements often weave conceptions of possibilities and principled and causal ideas together into what may seem to be a seamless web.” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:11)

The Indian ideas that were transmitted to Southeast Asia included all three types, although most have their basis in religious tradition (Hindu-Buddhist). For example, Indian law texts, such as Manu’s *Manusmṛiti*, (The Code of Manu) the most influential Indian legal text in Southeast Asia, is essentially a collection of normative prescriptions and proscriptions. The doctrine of *Dhamma* of the Indian emperor Ashok, whose conversion to Buddhism served as a springboard for the spread of Buddhism to Southeast Asia, contained specific prohibitions against cruel treatment of animals. These would be examples of principles beliefs. Similarly, the prime example of causal beliefs would be the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, which influenced Southeast Asian statecraft, strategy and diplomacy. This book offered the ruler a wealth of ideas about how to preserve and expand his power. Thus, Indianization can be seen as a broad process that did “weave conceptions of possibilities and principled and causal ideas together into what may seem to be a seamless web.” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993:11)

This paper is inspired by an interest to broaden our understanding of how ideas influence international relations, keeping in mind the statement that “Understanding the impact of world views on general politics or foreign policy would require a broader comparative study of cultures” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1997:9).

oldest civilizations, India and China, and its central place in the classical trade route between China and India extending to the Middle East and Africa, Southeast Asia is one region with significant exposure to foreign ideas, culture and concepts of statecraft, including Indian, Chinese and Western, throughout history. Not surprisingly therefore, Southeast Asia for a long time was regarded by many as a cultural extension and “lesser version” of India and China, a receptacle of cultural and political ideas from the two, mainly India, except China in the case of Vietnam). Paul Wheatley draws attention to the importance of Hindu influence as a case of transmission of culture and ideas: “the process by which the peoples of western Southeast Asia came to think of themselves as part of Bharatavarsa (even though they had no conception of ‘India’ as we know it) represents one of the most impressive instances of large-scale acculturation in the history of the world.” (Wheatley, 1982:27-28). Historical writings about Southeast Asia reflected a preoccupation with the influence of Indian ideas and culture and to a lesser extent, those of others, including Chinese, Islamic and Western. As John Legge put it, “most pre-war studies...of Southeast Asian history” were marked by “a tendency of scholars to see that history as shaped by influences external to the region rather than as the product of an internal dynamic.” (Legge, 1992:6). It was this view which came under attack, especially in the post-World War II period, as a result of new research, archeological discoveries, and an element of nationalist “imagining” by local scholars about the region’s distinctive and autonomous past. In the new context, historians recognized Southeast Asia’s claim to be a “culturally independent region” (Osborne, 1990:5). Not only did they point to Southeast Asia’s distinctive civilizational past pre-dating the advent of Indian and Chinese influences, but also to the resilience of its cultural, social and political features which had survived the coming of foreign influences of all kind. Moreover, the emphasis of the new scholarship was less on how Southeast Asians adopted Indic, or Sinic art, religion, political concepts and practices, and more on how they “adapted these foreign ideas to suit their own needs and values” (Osborne, 1990:5-6). The region’s “symbolic and organizational patterns” which were once regarded as being of Indian origin, were now seen to be “merely redefinitions of indigenous institutions.” (Wheatley, 1982: 27). The argument was that Southeast Asians were not to be “regarded as recipients (or victims) of history, but as makers of it.” (Bentley, 1985:299)<sup>2</sup>

**In developing this theme, new scholarship on Southeast Asia during and after the Second World War, began to move away from the Indo- and Sino-centric prisms and acknowledged the “right of Southeast Asian countries to be culturally independent units” (Osborne, 1979:13). Initiative and adaptation became the dominant themes in a**

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Ideas can influence institutional design. And Institutionalization preserves them. “when institutions intervene, the impact of ideas may be prolonged for decades or even generations” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1997:20).

Once ideas have been institutionalized, they can have “an impact even when no one genuinely believes in them as principled or causal statements.” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1997:20). Through institutionalization, ideas can outlast interests and interest-based cooperation. When ideas have been institutionalized, they continue to influence policies even after interests promoted through such institutions fade. “institutionalized ideas continue to exert an effect” even after “the interests that promoted some statute may fade” and “it is no longer possible to understand policy outcomes on the basis of contemporary configurations of interest and power alone.” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1997:21)

<sup>2</sup> In evaluating the debate over the extent of Indianization of Southeast Asia, it is useful to bear in mind George Coedes’ observation that scholars with specialization in Indian culture (Indologists and Sanskritists), usually stressed the deep civilizing role of Indian culture while those trained in social sciences put more emphasis on indigenous initiative and response. (Coedes, 1968)

new understanding of Southeast Asia history. Post-war history of Southeast Asia, came to move away from considering the region as a cultural extension of India and China in terms of its “art, religion or political theory” and instead came to stress “how Southeast Asians, adapted these foreign ideas to suits their own needs and values.” (Osborne, 1979:13). Scholars pointed to important variations between Indian and Chinese ideas and practices and those found in Southeast Asia. Among the examples of adaptation and localization cited most frequently were: Southeast Asia’s rejection of the Indian caste system, the “own individual character” of temple art of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms of Pagan, Angkor and Java which differed from those of India; and, the nature of Buddha images in Thailand that were created in Thailand and “are quite different from the images to be found in India.” (Osborne, 1979:13). The salience of nuclear family in Southeast Asia, as opposed to the extended family in India, and the important role of women in traditional peasant society of Southeast Asia differs markedly from that in China or India. Historians use a variety of expression to describe the adaptation: how Indian culture and political ideas “absorbed by the local population and joined to their existing cultural patterns” (Osborne, 1979:24). While Southeast Asian rulers used foreign ideas, they modified them to suit the local context. For example, Kings used the Indian caste system to describe themselves, but the caste system did not catch on in society at large. Southeast Asian art, while drawing upon Indian models, developed its own distinctive forms. The use of Sanskrit, widespread in government and religion, slowly waned as Southeast Asians used Indian scripts to develop their own languages. (Osborne, 1979:25). In Sum: “Southeast Asian...borrowed but they also adapted. In some very important cases they did not need to borrow at all.” (Osborne, 1979:25). The historiography of Southeast Asia became a project to demonstrate how the region “adopted the alien cultural traits without in the process losing its identity.” (Sardesai (1994:16)

Out of this body of work emerged a number of key concepts which must be counted as a major contribution to scholarship on the transmission of ideas and culture in international relations, both classical and modern. These include Van Leur’s concept of “local initiative” (Van Leur, 1955), H.G. Quaritch Wales’s notion of “local genius”; and Wolters’ concept of “localization” and “relocalization” (Wolters, 1982 and 1999). It is important to note that while scholars involved in this debate were speaking of the transmission of Indian “cultural ideas”, the latter itself was of a broad range, including religion, art, architecture, statecraft, concepts of power, authority, and legitimacy, ideas about political stratification, territorial organization, political institutionalization, diplomatic practice, and law. Moreover, these aspects were closely interrelated (as Wolters put it, “art, religion and government are inseparable phenomena in earlier Southeast Asia” (Wolters, 1982:43). But it was not just religious ideas such as divine kingship, which dominated the flow, there were also a number of secular Indian legal, political and diplomatic texts which made their way into the ancient Southeast Asian political landscape. These included the *Manusmriti*, “Code of Manu”, the *Dharmashastras* (legal treatises), and above all, the purely secular *Arthashastra*, the most famous Indian classic text on statecraft, all of which were “widely revered” in classical Southeast Asia.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cady, 1964:45. The *Arthashastra*, according to D.G.E. Hall, “for centuries was almost the nature of a prescribed textbook at South-East Asian courts.” The text prescribed ideas and norms for both domestic governance and inter-state relations, covering areas such as the pacification of newly acquired territories; prescriptions regarding maintenance of good customs and abrogation of bad ones; procedures for settling lawsuits; the uses of spies; and principles for the levying and collection of revenues. (Hall 1981:250) Other Indian influences included writing systems in Southeast Asia, which with the exception of those of muslim Malays and the Vietnamese, were based on Indian alphabet, the terminologies for law and administration. “Even where the Indian governmental system was not fully introduced, as among the Bugenese and the eastern Indonesian islanders, Hindu influences were reflected at the higher levels of social stratification.” (Cady, 1964:45)

**To attempt a detailed examination of this vast and complex historiographical debate is beyond the scope of this paper (See: Briggs, 1948, Bekker, 1951, Van Der Kroeff, 1951, Du Bois, 1951, Bosch, 1961, Hall, 1960; Smail, 1961, Benda, 1962, Coedes, 1964, Wolters, 1981, Wheatley, 1982; Legge, 1992, Acharya, 2000a. For excellent and insightful summary of the debate see: Mabbett, 1977a and 1977b).** It will be sufficient to highlight the two closely inter-related questions in this debate, which are especially relevant to our focus on how ideas and norms spread: (1) the process through which Indianization (and to a lesser extent Chinese influence) spread through Southeast Asia, and (2) the extent to which these external influences transformed the cultural and political landscapes of the indigenous states.

The first question itself has two aspects: (1) whether the spread of Indian ideas in Southeast Asia was a matter of “passive acceptance as against active borrowing” (Legge, 1992:8) on the part of Southeast Asians, and (2) the extent to which the borrowed concepts were modified to suit local conditions and need. The passive acceptance thesis was implicit in two schools of thought: (1) the *ksatriya* (Sanskrit for warrior) theory – which saw the transmission of Indian ideas as the result of direct Indian conquest and colonization of large parts of Southeast Asia<sup>4</sup>; and (2) the *vaisya* (merchant) theory – which emphasized the role of Indian traders with their extensive commercial interactions with Southeast Asia, who brought with them not just goods, but also Indian cultural artifacts and political ideas (Mabbett, 1977b:143-44). But these theories were rejected in 1934 by J.C. Van Leur, a Dutch economic historian and colonial official in Indonesia (Van Leur, 1955). He was particularly dismissive of the colonization thesis, which was enjoying greater prominence at that time. A particularly blunt expression of this theory was by Majumdar:

Intercourse in the region first began by way of trade, both by land and sea. But soon it developed into regular colonization, and Indians established political authority in various parts of the vast Asiatic continent that lay to the south of China and to the east and southeast of India. The Hindu colonists brought with them the whole framework of their culture and civilization and this was transplanted in its entirety among the people who had not yet emerged from their primitive barbarism. (Majumdar, 1940:21)<sup>5</sup>

Van Leur dismissed the thesis about a Hindu colonization of Southeast Asia. He found no evidence that the Indian approach to Southeast Asia amounted to conquest; on the contrary, it was through peaceful means. Nor could have the transmission of Indian ideas been the handiwork of Indian traders despite substantial commercial linkages between India

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<sup>4</sup> The popularity of the colonization thesis has been attributed to nationalism among Indian historians, who were among the keenest advocates of the thesis (although Western – Dutch and French - scholars played their part as well). Some of these scholars were behind the formation of the Greater India Society in Calcutta in 1926. Soon afterwards, Majumdar began publishing his work on Indian colonization of Southeast Asia.

<sup>5</sup> While the above may seem to be a bit extreme, a more cautious and tentative statement of this view could be found in another work by Majumdar, co-authored with two other historians. In this work the authors suggested that “To some such Kshatriya enterprise we perhaps owe the foundation of Indian political power in these far off regions.” But the colonization idea was still prominent: “The Indian colonists established great kingdoms, some of which lasted for more than a thousand years and continued to flourish even long after the end of Hindu rule in India”. The authors made some concession to indigenous adaptation of Hindu culture (“Hindu customs and manners were no doubt modified to some extent by coming into contact with these peoples” and there was “a gradual fusion between the two races”), but “still for a thousand years the essential features of Indian civilisation were the dominant characteristics of society in these regions.” (Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta, 1948:215-6).

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and Southeast Asia. The Indian trading class, being mostly peddlers (Southeast Asian trade was mostly of the pre-capitalist, peddling type), could not be expected to have mastered the complexities of Hindu ideas and political organization to appear credible before their Southeast Asian recipients. Since Indian influence was most directly evident in Southeast Asian royal courts, and involved matters of high culture such as “art, literature, ideas of power, sovereignty and kingship” (Legge, 1992:8), it must have been the work of the *brahmins* (the Indian priests) who alone possessed the mastery of “sacral magical power and sacral religion” (Van Leur, 1955:357). The *brahmins* were actively solicited by Southeast Asian rulers who wanted to learn from Indian ideas about political organisation that, thanks to their relatively organized form and their heavy emphasis on magic and mystery, offered an attractive way of enhancing the ruler’s legitimacy and authority. In short, the *brahmins* were the classical equivalent of modern day “norm entrepreneurs” of Indian ideas to Southeast Asian courts. And Indian ideational influence in Southeast Asia was largely a matter of “deliberate Southeast Asian borrowing of ideas, artistic styles and modes of political organization” which helped the emergence, consolidation and enlargement of local polities (Legge, 1992:8). To cite Van Leur:

“The initiative for the coming of Indian civilization [to Southeast Asia] emanated from the Indonesian ruling groups, or was at least an affair of both the Indonesian dynasties and the Indian hierarchy. That cultural influence had nothing to do with trade. The course of events amounted essentially to a summoning to Indonesia of Brahman priests, and perhaps alongside them of Indian *condottieri* and Indian court artificers...Indian priesthood was called eastwards - certainly because of its wide renown - for the magical, sacral legitimation of dynastic interests and the domestication of subjects, and probably for the organization of the ruler’s territory into a state.” (Van Leur, 1955:103-4)

In describing the process of Indianization through local initiative, Van Leur borrowed heavily from Max Weber’s explanation of the spread of Hinduism from a small region of North India to the entire Indian subcontinent. (Kulke: 1993: 240-161; Wertheim, 1954) A key thesis of Weber was “external Hinduization”. This described how the rulers of pre-Aryan tribes of central and south India came under Hindu influence by “calling upon” *Brahmanas* from the north. The process was marked by voluntary initiative, rather than coercion and conquest and it was driven by the desire among the local elite for legitimation. The common point of the arguments of Weber and van Leur was that “neither the pre-Aryan tribes of central and South India nor those in Southeast Asia were subdued by invaders who superimposed their statecraft and culture upon them...”. Instead, “Both in India (according to Weber) and Indonesia (according to van Leur) it was the indigenous rulers who invited or ‘summoned’ (van Leur) the *Brahmanas* to their courts, primarily for the purpose of legitimation of their new social status.” Weber’s theory of legitimation was key to van Leur’s Idea of the Local Initiative that refuted the dominant Khastriya theory of Indianization of Southeast Asia. “The struggle for or against acceptance of Hinduism” Weber had argued, “generally was led by the rulers or ruling strata; in any case the strongest motive for the assimilation of Hinduism was undoubtedly the desire for legitimation.” (Weber, 1920:18). According to Weber, the motive for accepting Hinduization lay in the fact that it “not only endowed the ruling stratum... with a recognized rank in the cultural world of Hinduism, but, through their transformation of castes, secured their superiority over the subject classes with an efficiency unsurpassed by any other religion” (Weber, 1958:16). Van Leur similarly argued that the rulers of Southeast Asia in an “attempt at legitimizing their interest...and organizing and domesticating their states and subjects...called Indian civilization to the east – that is to say, they summoned the Brahman priesthood to their courts.” (van Leur, p.98)

Certain aspects of the *process* of ideational transmission implicit in Van Leur’s “Idea of the Local Initiative” (also known as the *Brahmana* thesis) deserve emphasizing here. The act of “borrowing” was mostly the work of the ruling elite. The general population was relatively unaffected by Hindu ideas. (This was so due to the fact the hierarchy of the Indian

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caste system would have prevented interaction between Brahmins and lower strata of population). More importantly, the borrowing of Indian culture and political concepts was done in a highly selective manner. Quite clearly, the Indonesian rulers found attractive those Indian ideas that helped to legitimize their rule. Van Leur urges the consideration of “the Indonesian ruler on Java as a person who had royal investiture conferred on him” by Hindu concepts of power and authority. Hindu ideas and priests helped to legitimize Indonesian rulers by having “a mythological Indian genealogy assigned to him” (Van Leur, 1995:109).

O.W. Wolters, in a major reinterpretation of Southeast Asian regional political history, provides further evidence and argumentation to illuminate the political motivations behind the Southeast Asian rulers’ borrowing of Indian ideas. Wolters argues that the transmission of Indian ideas is best described as a process of “local construction” by Southeast Asian rulers in search of greater authority and legitimacy. Wolters believed that pre-Indic political and social systems in Southeast Asia were “cognac” in nature, marked by a relative indifference towards lineage descent (as well as recognition of descent through either male or female offspring). In this situation, there existed numerous small territorial units which could only be occasionally centralized through the personal efforts of a “man of prowess” - a “big man” who was thought to possess a lot of “soul stuff” (an abnormal concentration of spiritual power) (Wolters, 1982:4-5). But the rule by such “men of prowess” was limited in scope and would not usually survive his death. In this context, the arrival of Hindu devotional ideas filled an important gap in a ruler’s search for authority and legitimacy. A Southeast Asian ruler could now identify himself with Indian divine figures to augment his innate “soul stuff” and develop a more enduring basis of power. As Wolters puts it, such “construction of Hindu devotionalism...led to heightened self-perceptions among the chieftain class and prepared the ground for overlords’ claims to universal sovereignty, based on Siva’s divine authority (Wolters, 1982:52). Wolters provides evidence of this process in Cambodia, whose kings became God Kings, (*Devaraja*) beginning with Jyavarman II’s inauguration in 802 AD. The *Devaraja* cult “assimilated the king’s spiritual identity to Siva as ‘the king of gods’, a definition of Siva that matched the overlord status that the king had already achieved” (Wolters, 1982:7).

Van Leur’s thesis, though widely accepted as a turning point in Southeast Asian historiography, has been challenged.<sup>6</sup> His “extremism has not been emulated...more recent

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<sup>6</sup> Van Leur’s Local Initiative thesis has been supported by others, such as F.D.K. Bosch in 1946 who based his arguments on the fact that Indian influence was stronger in inland kingdoms than coastal regions (suggesting a minimal role of traders as transmitter of ideas), as well as on the lack of references to Indian conquests in Southeast Asian inscriptions. (Bosch, 1961). Another influential historian, G. Coedes argued that while an initial process of transmission of Indian ideas by traders could have laid the foundation for Southeast Asian polities and prepared them to receive, on their own initiative, Indian concepts of kingship and power. (Coedes, 1968). “The initiative for the Indianizing process in Southeast Asia most certainly came from the region’s ruling classes who invited Brahmins to serve at their courts as priests, astrologers and advisers.” (Sardesai, 1994:17). The challengers include Paul Wheatly, who argues that while local rulers used Indian ideas to enhance their status, this was a dynamic social process in which Indian ideas and culture played a vital role. (Wheatley, 1964, and 1973) Some scholars have argued that there was “an approximately equality between giving and receiving cultures.” (Mabbett, 1977:144; See also: Groslier, p.10). But the general thrust of his thesis has been widely accepted by historians, including those whose own work focuses on not so much on how external influences came about, but the extent to which it led to the transformation of the cultural and political landscape of Southeast Asia. Here two lines of argument can be discerned. The first had to do with the actual sources and dynamics of their

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writers have stressed the interaction between the local and imported cultures.” (Mabbett, 1977b:144). But support for Van Leur’s thesis of deliberate borrowing comes from the fact that Southeast Asians were not indiscriminating in their borrowing of Indian ideas and practices. Only those which conformed to indigenous patterns (as well as need, especially for power and legitimacy, which we have already seen in the case of Van Leur’s thesis concerning local initiative) were acquired or when they were presented before Southeast Asians, accepted. Some were summarily rejected or significantly modified so that they scarcely resembled the original Indian idea. Among the foremost examples of this is the Indian caste system, which found little acceptance in Southeast Asia, despite superficial similarities. Mabbett offers an important example of how Indian ideas were modified when they arrived in Southeast Asia in the Indian caste system, or *varna*, which in Angkor was institutionalized and practiced differently than in India (Mabbett, 1977c). In the latter, caste was a general division of the population, while in Angkor it applied to divisions of elite groups at the royal court. Brahmin status was less important and exalted in Angkor. (Wheatley, 1982:27) The Burmese rejected aspects of Manu’s law concerning marriage. C. Hooykaas has identified several features of Balinese Hinduism which are different from Indian brand. These include the Balinese belief that one is reborn within one’s groups of bold relatives, that gods normally live in mountains and lakes and not in temples, and that cremation should be performed only depending on one’s social position. (Hooykaas, p.25; in Wolters 1982:59)

Furthermore, those ideas which had appeal and those which had some but not total appeal were modified to suit local need and to project indigenous or pre-existing beliefs, practices and institutions. This leads to a second major aspect of the process whereby Indian ideas were transmitted to classical Southeast Asia, and it is this aspect which lies at the heart of the process of adaptation. Wolters shows how the Burmese adjusted the Indian legal text of Manu when it was introduced in Burma, rejecting the latter’s notion of marriage, while in Champa and Cambodia, “local practice” was reflected in similar deviations from Indian legal texts were made with respect to property and land. (Hooker, 1978:35-36). Another example of localization is how Indian law texts were adapted in Indonesia. M.B Hooker provides an important example of how Indian ideas “decorated” Southeast Asian substance. One of the Indian legal practices adopted by the Javanese was that of *Jayapatra*, or “note of victory”. It was a document stating the fact that a case had been settled. It contained a statement by both parties to the litigation, the evidence considered, and the particular text of law, or *smrti*, applied, and the judgement itself, with the seal. (The earliest *Jayapatras* in Java date from AD907.) But some of the *Jayapatras* found in Java do not make reference to Indian law texts. Moreover, while in India the trial was usually conducted by a judge (*pradivaka*), in Java, it was conducted by a judge-arbitrator (*samget*), who was “assisted by a council of notables whose decisions were of a collegiate nature”. The proceedings of the trial in Java “seem to have been in the nature of searching for a compromise, thus negating the need for the citation of *smrti*, a reference to which need not necessarily be basic to a decision”. Thus, the Javanese practice appears to have been an important adaptation of the Indian system,<sup>7</sup> in which the *Jayapatra* served as a “form for recording a decision based upon an Indian model but did not require the application of principles of Indian law.” (Hooker, 1978:35-36).<sup>8</sup>

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modification in the hands of the locals, the second concerns the outcome of the impact.

<sup>7</sup> There are important parallels between the localization of *Jayapatra* and the modern notion of consultations and consensus, an ASEAN Way which is usually traced to Javanese village culture. The consensus process is also characterized by a rejection of strict textual legalism, and formal arbitration and involves a search for compromise through consultations.

<sup>8</sup> Other example of modification and adaptation of Indian ideas by Southeast Asian rulers so as to make them conform to local tradition can be found in the Balinese conceptions of the Hindu gods, Shiva and Visnu. In Indian mythology, Visnu is the Protector who reincarnates periodically to save the



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Many similar examples of adaptation of foreign political and religious beliefs and practices can be found in Southeast Asian history.<sup>9</sup> Examining the evidence, Wolters terms

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word from calamity. In Bali, Visnu is localized to become a “rising prince”, who emerges from the periphery to infuse the community with new spiritual energy and status. This localization of Visnu can be understood in the context of “the Balinese cultural background”, which “is one in which new men appear from time to time from the fringes of extensive and ascendant ancestor-groups, build up networks of alliances by demonstrating their capacity for leadership, and eventually become Ancestors in a particular generation by virtue of their achievements during their lifetime on behalf of their kindred. Localization in Bali means that Visnu’s periodic reappearances fit into a Balinese statement constrained by local mechanisms for social mobilization.” (Wolters, 1982:59).

<sup>9</sup> Other scholars developed similar concepts, stressing adaptation, rather than adoption. One of the main examples of adaptation, pointed out by scholars, can be found in religion. Buddhism came from India, but “developed unique ways in Southeast Asia” (Keyes, 1992:18). This may be why Southeast Asia remains Buddhist while in India, the religion has withered. Islam originated in the Middle East, but Southeast Asian version of Islam is much more moderate than in the Middle East. Adaptation applies not just to Indian ideas, but also Chinese influence, especially in Vietnam. In Vietnam, which had been under Chinese control for a thousand years, a new legal code issued in 1042, though modeled on the Tang code, reflected “the adjustments that would have been made elsewhere in the region to accommodate local social norms.” (Wolters, pp.46-7) The aim was to have a social code “organized and presented so that classes of subject matter would constitute a body of law that was clear and appropriate to the times.” (Wolters, 47). In literature too, one can find examples of indigenous resilience. Vietnamese literature is not to be regarded as a “provincial branch” of Chinese literature, since much of it was not written in Chinese characters, and those which were “was often unique to Vietnam in both style and substance” (Keys, 1992:18). Osborne argues from an examination of Vietnamese cultural and political traditions, that the “strength of non-Chinese cultural life”, especially outside the court “belies any picture of that country as a mere receiver of ideas, unable to offer traditions of its own.” (Osborne, 1979:13-14). In Vietnam, which had been under Chinese control for a thousand years, a new legal code issued in 1042, though modeled on the Tang code, reflected “the adjustments that would have been made elsewhere in the region to accommodate local social norms.” (pp.46-7) The aim was to have a social code “organized and presented so that classes of subject matter would constitute a body of law that was clear and appropriate to the times.” (47) In the Philippines, the Christian Holy Week was adapted and construed in terms of the Tagalog concept of *loob*, implying “an inner self and a force with power to attract followers.” (Wolters, 1982:60) While Christian missionaries did not want their self-purification rites to glorify and amplify the *loob* concept of concentrating the “creative” energy of the universe, but this is exactly what happened. (Wolters, 1982:60).

Another important example of the adaptation of religious ideas could be found in the case of the spread of Islam in Java,

“the penetration of Islam was more assimilative than revolutionary...After an initial period of zealotry, the devout Islamic groups were more or less absorbed into the patrimonial state...after the fifteenth century, the rulers assumed Islamic titles, kept Islamic officials in their entourage, and added Islam to the panoply of their attributes. Yet this overt Islamization of the rulers does not seem to have caused major alterations in their way of life or outlook. The penetration of Islam scarcely changed the composition and the recruitment of the Javanese political elite or affected the basic intellectual framework of traditional political

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the process by which the foreign ideas were modified to suit Southeast Asian local need as “localization” and “re-localization”.<sup>10</sup> He advances this concept to explain how different parts of Southeast Asia reflected different degrees of congruence with Indian law. Cultural adaptation is not just about how non-Southeast Asian ideas were adjusted and altered leading to variations between India and SEA, but also about how different parts of Southeast Asia developed variations of the same outside influence. Differences in the practice of Theravada Buddhism between Thailand and Burma is a case in point: a greater emphasis on metaphysics in Burma than in Thailand, while monastic discipline is more emphasized in Thailand than in Burma. Buddhists in Burma place more emphasis on the institution of the noviciate, while Thais emphasize monkhood. (Wolters, 1982:48). Varying uses of Sanskrit in the region offers another example of relocalization; in Champa, for example, Sanskrit continued till 15<sup>th</sup> century, while in Cambodia it remained dominant till the 14<sup>th</sup> century and in Java, the 10<sup>th</sup> century. (Wolters, 1982:47) Wolters also draws attention to the process through which Indian literary materials were “fractured and restated and therefore drained of their original significance” as an example of localization. “Not only did Indian materials have to be localized everywhere but those which had been originally localized in one part of the region would have to be relocalized before they could belong elsewhere in the same sub-region.” (Wolters, 1982:53-54). “The materials, be they words, sound of words, books, or artifacts, had to be localized in different ways before they could fit into various local complexes of religious, social, and political systems and belong to new cultural ‘wholes’. Only when this had happened would the fragments make sense in their new ambiances, the same ambiances which allowed the rulers and their subjects to believe that their centers were unique.” (Wolters, 1982:52) Thus, to study how foreign ideas impacted on Southeast Asia was to study “processes behind the endless elaboration of new local-foreign cultural ‘wholes’” in which local actors and norms acted as a prism through which foreign ideas were adapted. As Wolters put it, “local beliefs, operating under cultural constraint, were always responsible for the initial form the new ‘wholes’ took.” (Wolters, 1982:53)

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thought. To use Gramsci’s term, at no point did a “hegemonic” Islamic culture develop in Java. (Anderson, 1990:68)

Anderson’s invoking of Gramsci is interesting. Shows that hegemonic ideas, which usually is spread by hegemonic power, do not alter fundamental beliefs and ways of life. Rather, they are adapted. This is not to say that outside norms do not have any impact. Anderson provides an important example of how outside ideas can induce change in local beliefs. Sometimes, external ideas can have a “rationalizing” impact on traditional beliefs. Anderson shows how western ideas associated with advent of Dutch capitalism and technology and rational secularism in late 19<sup>th</sup> century generated reform movements in traditional Javanese Islam. In Java, “almost every component of traditional Islam, except fundamental articles of faith, was subjected to this rationalizing tendency. (Anderson, p.68). These reform movts came into conflict with traditional Islamic elements. This normative contestation was played out within Javanese society between reformist and traditional groups. Shows how external ideas can be adapted by sections of local society. In other words, adaptation can lead to normative change, altering traditional beliefs.

<sup>10</sup> Wolters’ concept of localization is similar to “adaptation”, or “synthesis” or “syncretism”. But he prefers “localization” because the other terms “seem to shirk the crucial question of where and how foreign elements began to fit into a local culture. ‘Adaptation’ and ‘synthesis’ give an impression of the outcome of the process, while ‘syncretism’ does likewise and also begs the question by conveying a dictionary sense of reconciliation of originally contradictory differences. The three terms smother the initiative of the local elements responsible for the process and the end product.” (Wolters, 1982:53).

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The impact of localization, or the adaptation of foreign ideas and beliefs to suit local context and need, also comes through clearly and powerfully in studies of Southeast Asian art history, with distinct parallels to the region's government and politics. H.G. Quaritch Wales in his study of Southeast Asian art history has sought to "demonstrate the part played by local genius in actually guiding the evolution of the Indianized civilization itself." (Wales, 1951:83). Looking at intra-regional differences in art between Java, Champa, and Cambodia, concludes that these differences could be explained by local genius, since the Indian influence was common to all. Wales studied the differences between Cham and Khmer temples and noted that while the former preferred tall sanctuary towers, the latter chose to build their temples in the form of stepped pyramids. While both were influenced by Indian religion, the differences reflected preexisting local beliefs and practices: the Khmer's worshipped the earth, while the Chams worshipped the sky. (Wolters, 1982:47). Wales concluded, "The Indian share was more active in terms of stimulus, but the local contribution certainly showed no less activity in terms of response." (Wales, 1951:195) Wales' study also concluded that when a foreign influence decays, there is a return to indigenous forms and practice. Thus, the art of Majapahit (a Javanese kingdom), may be seen as a degeneration of an Indian form, but "Majapahit art is not the product of a degeneration, but springs from virile resurgence." (Wales, 1951:198) "Local genius gives direction to evolution." (Wales, 1951:198) Just as comparative religion uses the idea of local genius to account for differences in art styles, comparative regionalism should account for local genius to study differences in institutional design.<sup>11</sup> The evidence of local genius and local reconstruction in Southeast Asia art history could be extended to other areas. As Wheatley put it: "It has often been pointed out that, although the great architectural monuments such as the Bayon and the Borobudur - and there is no reason to exclude innumerable minor structures as well - are without analogues in India itself, yet their meaning is intelligible only to the student of Indian culture. What is less often remarked is that in ancient times the same principle held for institutions of government, administration, exchange, and symbolism - or so I believe." (Wheatley, 1982:27).

This leads to the second question posed at the outset of this section: what was the outcome of the process of modification, what sort of change comes out of this process of adaptation? This is an important question. It may seem that localization is a form of resistance to change and preference for status quo. This conforms to the concept of adaptation in foreign policy analysis. But this is not the case, Southeast Asian societies did change when they adapted and localized foreign ideas and materials. Thus, adaptation does not mean adaptive societies remain unchanged. This has implications for IR theory of norms. Adaptation is not

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<sup>11</sup> Examples of local genius can also be found in language, how Sanskrit loan words were used (de Saussure, 1966). Many Sanskrit words religious and cultural meanings were adapted and expressed in peculiarly Javanese manner. (Gonda, 1952:202). Ferdinand de Saussure's work on Sanskrit loan words show how "a loan word no longer counts as such whenever it is studied within a [linguistic] system; it exists only through its relation with, and opposition to, words associated with it..." (de Saussure, 1966:22). Wolters uses the case of some Sanskrit words, to illustrate adaptation and local genius. The first one shows variations with India, the second shows variations between parts of Southeast Asia. *Santosa*, in Sanskrit means "contemplation" or "satisfaction", but it was naturalized by the Javanese "to signify what was important to them", which is "the ideal state of mind of the 'completely unconcerned' man in control of all passions." The adaptation reflected a "Javanese social collectivity" (Wolters, 1982:50). The usage of *Sakti*, the Sanskrit term for "power" is of special interest: In Javanese, *Sakti* means "the creating power of divinities", while in Toba Batak (Sumatra), *Sokti* denotes ability to make a successful prediction, or when "pronouncements or predictions are borne out by the facts or verified", while in Bali, *Sakti* means "ancestral power". (Wolters, 1982:50).

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resistant to change, but it is selective change that conforms to local needs. It's a process that brings about greater synergy between global and regional, foreign and local. Indigenous beliefs do not disappear, but they are made more systematic, accessible. In this process, they are even amplified. The result is progress, but its consistent with local needs.

While most theorists of ideas and norms focus their attention on how outside norms could transform existing beliefs and practices, the experience of Indianization in classical Southeast Asia suggests that normative transmission is also about how it could lead to the *amplification* and *universalization* of local ideas and practices. Van Leur argued that all external influences and foreign ideas (whether Hindu, Buddhist or later Islamic), remained weak and “did not bring about any fundamental changes in any part of Indonesian social and political order.” (Van Leur, 1955:95). Wolters argues that Hindu ideas did not transform Southeast Asian political organization, but merely amplified the authority of the ruler. Hindu ideas and practices “brought ancient and persisting indigenous beliefs into sharper focus.” (Wolters, 1982:9) Even after Hindu ideas amplified their status and authority, indigenous beliefs such as soul stuff and prowess “remained dominant” (Wolters, 1982:102) “The ‘Hinduized’ polities were elaborations or amplifications of the pre-‘Hindu’ ones.” (ibid:103) In the Philippines, the Christian Holy Week was adapted and construed in terms of the Tagalog concept of *loob*, implying “an inner self and a force with power to attract followers.” (Wolters, 1982:60) While Christian missionaries did not want their self-purification rites to glorify and amplify the *loob* concept of concentrating the “creative” energy of the universe, but this is exactly what happened. (Wolters, 1982:60). Adaptation did not lead to disappearance of existing beliefs and practices. Instead, the latter were amplified. Foreign ideas were used to enhance status and legitimacy of local rulers, but they were rarely accepted in their pure form. They were used to express local ideas, amplify them, and to pursue local interests. Southeast Asian rulers constructed Indian notions of devotionism to enhance their legitimacy. The introduction of foreign ideas did not lead to disappearance of existing local beliefs and practices, the latter continues, albeit finding new modes of expression, and were sometimes amplified. Thus, the institution of monarchy was amplified, soul stuff, already denoting innate spiritual energy, was amplified with Indian divine mysticism, and prowess was amplified when SEAsian rulers used Indian deities such as Siva to claim legitimacy. Example of how SEA kings used Hindu concept to amplify their authority: In 7<sup>th</sup> Century Cambodia, King Jayavarman I was said to be a “portion” Siva, while Bhavavarman was said to have used Siva’s *Sakti* or divine energy to “seize the kingship.” (Wolters, 1982:10). Vietnamese ruler Tran Thai-ton in 1258 sought to protect from Mongol invasion by assuming the name of Chinese ruler and sage Yao. He also nominated an heir even when he was still in his prime. This mimicked a similar move by Yao, which had attracted the praise of the Chinese sage Mencius. This way the king could establish a parallel with the Chinese rulers. (Wolters, 1982:64). Example of how SEA rulers used Indian concepts to legitimize themselves, in Cambodia in 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD, it was said that “it was because the grace of Siva was all pervasive that the populace submitted willingly to authority” (Wheatley, 1982: 20).<sup>12</sup> Analyzing Vietnamese poetry, Cambodian inscriptions and Khmer art (bass reliefs in Angkor Wat), Wolters argues that Indian symbols had a “decorative” role, they were used to highlight the power and authority and the exalted position of the king and his golden age of his rule, that they were “signifiers” which “were being employed in this [Cambodian] society to express important local ideas.” (Wolters, 1982:89). Indian art was used to send the message that “the king was the source of creative and life-sustaining authority in Cambodia.” (Wolters, 1982:89)

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<sup>12</sup> Amplification can mean using foreign formats to describe local substance. The Hindu Manual of Laws of Manu identified 18 points of litigation. This was used in Java where some of the laws were modified to accommodate Javanese customary law without altering the number 18. (Wolters, 1982:42). Beginning in 13<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnamese historians used Chinese formats for writing imperial history as a model for writing Vietnamese history. But the important thing is that it was a Chinese format, while the substance was Vietnamese. (Wolters, 1982:42-3).

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In ideational transmission, local reconstruction of foreign ideas goes hand in hand with the universalization of local ones. One example of this type of change has been suggested by Kirsch in his study of Thai religion through the concepts of “parochialization”, “universalization”. Analyzing the interaction between existing animism and the emergent Buddhism in Thailand, Hirsch describes a process how indigenous spirits (animism) were identified with aspects of Buddhist cosmology and beliefs. He calls it the “twin processes of parochialization and universalization”. According to his theory, the advent of Hindu deities led Thais to worship them together with local spirits. This is parochialization, as by identifying local spirits with the cosmological deities of Hinduism.

“A locality spirit might be identified with a more abstract Hindu-Buddhist entity like Mae Thorani, the goddess of the earth. Initially, such identifications of indigenous spirits with more abstract religious entities would involve a degree of parochialization. By conceptually identifying a proximate and familiar spirit with a deity in a complex, abstract, universal cosmology, the deity is made less abstract and more on par with the indigenous system of beliefs. But such identifications simultaneously involve a process of universalization. The familiar spirit, now identified with a more abstract and universal cosmological scheme, is upgraded to an entity more distant than previously.”<sup>13</sup>

The adaptation of Buddhist cosmology served local needs and purpose. The identification of indigenous spirits with Buddhist cosmology meant that the existing conceptions of relationships between indigenous spirits was made more “explicable in terms of abstract concepts such as *karma* or more popular beliefs about merit.” Thus, the result or adaptation was to amplify existing practices and beliefs. At the same time, adaptation was not simply co-habitation of different beliefs that did not lead to change in local practices. Rather Buddhist cosmology created a “more complex and systematic order of relations between indigenous entities and beliefs.” (Kirsch, 1977: 263).

“The parochialization of Buddhist cosmology and belief might make it easier to spread Buddhism in initial contacts. But the attendant universalization of indigenous beliefs could only serve to transform the religious scene, making it more complex and differentiated than it had been previously.” (Hirsch, 1977: 264)

Kirsch describes the change as “upgrading”, a Parsonian phrase that suggests evolutionary transformation of an existing social and political system as a result of contact with a foreign influence. He concludes that “the Thai adoption of Theravada Buddhism set in motion the twin processes of universalization and parochialization, which facilitated the spread of Buddhism among the Thai peoples, and simultaneously transformed their religious and social system.” (Hirsch, 1977:264). Bosch, who supported Van Leur’s “Idea of the Local Initiative”, also suggests that the cultural and ideational interaction between India and Southeast Asia led to progress: “the foreign culture gradually blend with the ancient native one so as to form a novel, harmonious entity, giving both eventually to a higher type of civilization than that of the native community in its original state.” (Bosch, 1961:3)

Kirsch’s framework is notable for it allows for the possibility of outsiders to adjust to indigenous beliefs and practices as much as the local actors to adapt to external ideas. Thus, the impact of foreign ideas on local settings need not be viewed as an one-way street. When a local system is “universalized”, it may lead not only to the spread of the foreign idea that was responsible for the upgrading of the local society, and to a better projection of the indigenous beliefs within the local society. It also opens up the possibility that outside norm entrepreneurs may develop a better understanding of local practices and may even borrow from them. Adaptation could thus become a two-way street involving outside norm

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<sup>13</sup> Kirsch, 1977, p.263.

entrepreneurs and the recipients. To use a familiar constructivist phrase, the two normative structures (foreign and local) are “mutually-constituted”. Universalization thus acquires a broader meaning. As Wolters would put it, the infusion of foreign ideas into a local setting could have an outcome in which both the “local and foreign elements were ‘universalized’ and ‘parochialized’ respectively.” (Wolters, 1982:53). Their adaptation occurs over “long periods of time when both local and foreign elements were changing.” (Wolters, 1982:53) Indian ideas had an universal quality and emphasized universal principles. This can be applied to a broader canvas. The adaptation and localization applied not just to Hindu concepts, but Chinese influence in Vietnam and Christian influence in the Philippines.<sup>14</sup>

### **International Relations Theory Meets Southeast Asian Historiography**

The foregoing discussion of Indianization has two major implications for the study of ideas and norms across civilizations. The following are especially noteworthy.<sup>15</sup>

First, it tells us that ideas that have causal power are not necessarily those of the powerful. The diffusion of ideas does not necessarily depend on conquest or hegemonic socialization. The “idea of the local initiative”, “localization”, “local genius”, and “amplification”, shed much light on the relationship between power and the transmission of ideas. The historical case is one that shows how SEA states interacted with their two larger, culturally more advanced and more powerful neighbours (India and China), borrowing selectively and to suit their own needs. India and China were not just external actors but also much stronger powers. They also played different roles. Indian influence was primarily ideational, while Chinese played a more conventional geopolitical role. Yet, it was Indian ideas which held more prominence. Scholars have tried to explain this puzzle by asserting that power not important and may be even counterproductive. At least power is less important than local need. External power cannot impose ideas unless it coheres with local need. This offers a new way of understanding how norms and ideas spread from core to the periphery, or from region to region, as well as how weak states relate to strong states without losing their identity and sacrificing their interests. The historiographic debate on the Indianization of Southeast Asia clearly highlights the distinction between voluntary adaptation and coerced introduction of foreign ideas into a local setting, capturing a dynamic vastly different from the theory of hegemonic socialization proposed by some scholars of international relations.

The experience of Indianization of Southeast Asia shows clearly that ideas did have causal power. The flow of ideas and culture across the Bay of Bengal was crucial in shaping the political transformation of Southeast Asia. It helped the emergence of stronger states in Southeast Asia, strengthened the rulers’ legitimacy and shaped their conduct of international

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<sup>14</sup> Indeed, some scholars have argued that Southeast Asians gave as much as they learnt from foreign cultures and civilizations. Wilhelm Solheim pictures Southeast Asians as cultural and civilizational pioneers; before the arrival of Indians, many Southeast Asian innovations existed and had been transmitted to parts of China, Japan, and Indian Ocean coastal areas by Southeast Asian traders and sailors (Solheim, 1971). These innovations include rice cultivation, bronze, language, ideograph, outrigger canoe, iron and iron technology, etc. (Mabett, 1977a:5-8). Kulke has offered arguments and evidence of Southeast Asian influence over India, a sort of cultural feedback. This is much more evident in the case of Mediterranean, where Arabic and Persian ideas influenced Greece.

<sup>15</sup> The form of social interaction and ideational adaptation described by Van Leur is by no means unique. He compares the spread of Hindu ideas in Southeast Asia to the “way German civilization of the middle ages extended its influence far beyond the limits of Germanic colonization, in the same way the Graeco-Byzantine hierarchy set its stamp on the civilization of Russia.” (Van Leur, 1955:104). This again was an analogy he had borrowed from Weber, who himself had used it to describe the spread of Hinduism from northern India to the south: “As the Slavic princes of the East called into their lands German priests, knights, merchants, and peasants, so the kings of the East Ganges Plain and of Southern India, upto the Tamils at the southern tip, called upon Brahmans trained in writing and administration.” (Weber: 1958:16 f.).

relations. This important and independent role of ideas should thus be looked at first when explaining the international politics of the Indian Ocean region. Yet, the “Indianization” of Southeast Asia was primarily ideational and that the spread of Indian ideas did require the force of hegemonic material power. In dismissing the Hindu colonization of Southeast Asia thesis, Van Leur and many other historians establish that the Indian ideational penetration of Southeast Asia was done not through the exercise of material power (Indian conquest or colonization of Southeast Asia), nor through material linkages (interdependence and trade), but through cultural intercourse. George Coedès, a major figure in classical Southeast Asian scholarship, underscores this point by contrasting Indian and Chinese influence on Southeast Asia. The fact that China’s cultural influence on Southeast Asia (except in the deltas of Tongking and North Vietnam) was insignificant compared to that of India could be attributed to radically different modes of interaction. “The exchanges of embassies between the two shores of the Bay of Bengal were made on the basis of equality, while the Chinese always demanded that the ‘Southern Barbarians’ acknowledge Chinese suzerainty by the regular sending of tribute.” (Coedès, 1968:34)<sup>16</sup> Bosch also describes Indian influence as being of a “a theoretical and scholastic character, elements which remind us of manuscript, the code of law, the recluse’s cell, the monastery, and which undoubtedly are just as incomparable with an environment of warriors or traders as they are in harmony with an intellectual sphere: with the classes of scribes, scholastics, initiates in the holy scriptures and legal systems” (Bosch, 1961:11). This presents an alternative ontology to contemporary HST theory, which remains wedded to an implicit belief that socialisation is a top-down process in which the hegemon imposes its own norms and ideology on the weak.<sup>17</sup> The India-Southeast Asia case shows that

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<sup>16</sup> “The Chinese proceeded by conquest and annexation; soldiers occupied the country, and officials spread Chinese civilization. Indian penetration or infiltration seems almost always to have been peaceful; nowhere was it accompanied by the destruction that brought dishonor to the Mongol expansion or the Spanish conquest of America. Far from being destroyed by the conquerors, the native peoples of Southeast Asia found in Indian society, transplanted and modified, a framework within which their own society could be integrated and developed.”

The Indians nowhere engaged in military conquest and annexation in the name of a state or mother country. And the Indian kingdoms that were set up in Farther India during the first centuries of the Christian Era had only ties of tradition with the dynasties reigning in India proper; there was no political dependence. (Coedes, 1968:34)

<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, Sardesai has argued that Indian powers proved popular precisely because there was no direct political or strategic ambition on the part of India to dominate Southeast Asia. He too contrasts Indian and Chinese influence. The latter was often in the form of political intervention; but that might be why Chinese political ideas never got accepted in Southeast Asia outside of India; while it is “the relative lack of Indian political ambition in the region”, along with greater commercial linkages and proximity, which produced widespread acceptance of India ideas (Sardesai, 1994:16). This has important implications for IR theory, especially those theories (Gramscian, some variants of hegemonic stability theory) which hold that power is important to transmission of norms. In contemporary Southeast Asia, one finds that institution-building was acceptable and possible because the proposals and ideas for it came not from the major powers, but middle and weaker powers such as Canada, Australia and ASEAN. Chinese officials have since made it clear that they would not have agreed to join the ARF if the proposal had come from the US; it

enduring socialisation (as happened between India and Southeast Asia as well as China and India) with significant conditioning effects on local political organisation and exercise of power can happen on the *initiative* of the local actors who also happen to be physically weaker, rather than being imposed from outside by a stronger power.

To be sure, the experience of Indianization was not a matter of “ideas all the way down”. While ideas and norms can spread as effectively through cultural interaction as through conquest, the existence of competing theories of Indianization suggests that power and interest were not entirely irrelevant. The process whereby norms spread was peaceful and cultural, not material. But it also shows Indian ideas did not spread without some help from material considerations and actions, although hegemonic power was not one of them.<sup>18</sup> The Idea of Local Initiative developed by van Leur, however attractive it might have been, had to be seen against the backdrop of alternative theories, such as trade and conquest. Trade deserves particular notice (the evidence of conquest is too sketchy).<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, ideas defined a major part of the interaction between India and Southeast Asia and they helped to transform the political landscape of Southeast Asia.

A second insight of this essay is that ideas do not enter into a cultural or normative vacuum. The diffusion of ideas depends not just on whether emerging ideas enjoy initial prominence in the idea pool or cohere with existing local beliefs and practices, but also on their local reconstruction or potential and suitability for local reconstruction. External ideas/norms do not extinguish pre-existing local beliefs and practices, but may instead amplify them. On this point, it is worth stressing the point OF most of the revisionist historians that Southeast Asia was not a political or ideational clean slate into which foreign (Indian or Chinese) ideas and culture arrived - “a blank page on which Indians inscribed their alien signatures” (Wheatley, 1982: 27). Instead, much of the revisionist literature assumes an “indigenous substratum” upon which the “superstructure” of Indian and Chinese cultural influences were erected (Sardesai, 1994:13). Wolters’ notion of “soul stuff” offers an example of such pre-existing political pattern. But this substratum was not wholesome and offered no basis for durable political structures. In an elegant summary of the relevant evidence concerning Indianisation, Mabbett points to archeological evidence that has led some scholars to argue that well before the arrival of Indians and Chinese, Southeast Asia already possessed “most of the attributes of civilization” and even “pioneered” many of them. What was missing, however, was “stratified societies and political centralization”(Mabbett, 1977:2). This is precisely where Indian ideas fitted in and made most of their mark. This not only attests to the singular importance of political ideas in the cultural transmission process, it also shows that emerging foreign ideas (in this case political ideas about kingship and authority) seldom enter a normative and ideational vacuum, but are instead filtered through the prism of an existing local framework, and accepted only because they seem to recipient as something that fits or can be made to fit, the existing local political and cultural context.

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was ASEAN’s initiative that made a multilateral approach to regional security acceptable to China.

<sup>18</sup> One must note the material incentive of the norm entrepreneurs, the Brahmins. “At his court one sees many...Brahmins who came from India to profit from his munificence and are much in his favour”: this observation by the sixth century Chinese traveler Ma Tuan-lin of Brahmins in in the royal court of a Malay coastal state captures the mutually beneficial relationship between the recipients and transmitters of Indian culture and political ideas. (Cited in Van Leur, 1955, 357).

<sup>19</sup> Even van Leur himself admits that trade is what brought the Southeast Asian rulers with Indian Brahmins in the first place: “Southern India was the trading region of Indonesia. By means of trade, whether carried on as Indonesian shipping or through the intermediacy of Indian shipping, the Indonesian rulers and aristocratic groups came into contact with India... (van Leur, 98). The primary focus here is still cultural interaction and socialization, but it was linked to communications that had a more material basis, especially trade, At least some importance must also be given to trade and even conquest, as pointed out by those who challenge van Leur’s thesis.



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Third, in order to be acceptable, foreign ideas must not only be suitable to local context, but they should also amplify local beliefs and practices. To be sure, the adoption of foreign ideas depends on local need, especially political need. Indigenous structures, including the organisation of power within the receiving state, determine which foreign ideas are appealing and thus to be adopted and which one are not. Thus, one of the reason why Indian ideas found greater roots in Southeast Asia compared to Chinese ones has to do with “the absorptive, syncretic quality of Indian culture, itself enriched by numerous strands imported by series of invaders of the Indian subcontinent.” (Sardesai, 1994:16), which fitted the cultural diversity of Southeast Asia. The hierarchical nature of classical Indonesia state was suited for the borrowing of those foreign cultural and political ideas (and the Indian ideas were perfect for this purpose) which supported and legitimised that hierarchy. “Indian culture made such an impact on Southeast Asia because it fitted easily with existing cultural patterns and religious beliefs...Just because this was the case, the process of Indianisation should not be seen as simply involving a Southeast Asian acceptance of Indian cultural values. Indian culture was absorbed in much of Southeast Asia, and Indian religions, art forms, and theories of government came to be of the greatest importance.” (Osborne, 1979:24-25). The rulers needed Indian ideas for legitimising their power needs, thus, the example shows that power is constituted by ideas and the exercise of power can only be understood by looking at its inter-subjective basis. A corollary to this is that outside ideas and norms have a better chance of acceptance if they conformed to, or were consistent with, local norms and social practices. Local norms and practices provided the basis for deciding which outside ideas will be accepted or rejected. If an outside norm was inconsistent with local need or culture, it was either rejected or adjusted. This suggests path dependency and conforms to Florini’s evolutionary biology model. Some scholars have argued that emerging norms have a better chance of being accepted if they are congruent with existing norms. The above case supports this thesis. Outside ideas have a greater chance of being accepted if and when they addressed local deficiencies, rather than replace existing forms. Southeast Asia was not devoid of political forms and institutions before Indian influence arrived. The preexisting forms was based on rule by “man of prowess” using personal legitimacy rather than kinship-based ties. The kinship was “cognatic kinship” marked by relative indifference toward lineage descent. The lack of emphasis on lineage descent meant that other concepts and approaches of legitimacy were needed. This is precisely what Indian ideas of devotional legitimacy did. They filled a gap.

Fourth, congruence between foreign and local ideas is to be understood not as a static fit, but as a dynamic condition. Neither is congruence to be seen as a response on the part of the recipients in adjusting indigenous beliefs to emerging ideas, the process could also move in the reverse direction, meaning their emerging norms could be accepted or rejected on the basis of an assessment of their suitability for local reconstruction. Indian ideas enjoyed great prestige in Southeast Asia. They found deeper roots in Southeast Asia compared to Chinese ones partly due to “the absorptive, syncretic quality of Indian culture, itself enriched by numerous strands imported by series of invaders of the Indian subcontinent,” which fitted the cultural diversity of Southeast Asia.<sup>20</sup> But Southeast Asian also rejected many Indian ideas and practices which conflicted with local tradition and which could not be adapted. “Southeast Asians borrowed only those Indian and Chinese cultural traits that complemented and could be adapted to the indigenous system.”<sup>21</sup>

Fifth, external ideas/norms do not necessarily penetrate all levels of the receiving society nor do they extinguish pre-existing local beliefs and practices. Ideational influence is never total or overwhelming; existing and traditional ideas and norms remains resilient. In Van Leur’s work, because of the selective nature of the borrowing of ideas by a small Southeast Asian elite, the traditional pre-existing and “indigenous” Indonesian culture and ideas survived through the process of Indianization. The latter “did not bring about any

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<sup>20</sup> Sardesai, 1994:16. “Indian culture made such an impact on Southeast Asia because it fitted easily with existing cultural patterns and religious belief. Osborne, 1979:24-25.

<sup>21</sup> McCloud, 1995:69.

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fundamental changes in any part of Indonesian social and political order”; indeed Van Leur asserts more generally that: “The sheen of world religions and foreign cultural forms is a thin and flaking glaze; underneath it the whole of the old indigenous forms has continued to exist” (Van Leur, 1955:95).<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the Indianisation process tells us that the act of borrowing of ideas is a highly deliberate, or “rational” process, based on pro-active local initiative and calculations of cost and benefit. Ideas spread through a process of social and cultural interaction. But such cultural interaction and transmission need not be apolitical or non-rational; there is an element of strategic intent on the part of the parties. Out of the social and cultural interaction between India and Southeast Asia, the Brahmanas received material benefits while the kings secured and enhanced their legitimacy. van Leur’s thesis on “local initiative”, as noted earlier, drew heavily from Weberian rationalism; Weber had argued in the Indian context that “the strongest motive for the assimilation of Hinduism was undoubtedly the desire for legitimation” (Weber, 1920:18) and that for its recipients, Hinduization “secured their superiority over the subject classes with an efficiency unsurpassed by any other religion” (Weber, 1958:16). Yet, the process through which Hindu religion and Indian ideas spread was one not through coercion or conquest, but social and cultural interaction. Moreover, the motive was not entirely rational need, or utility maximization. Prestige also played an important role.<sup>23</sup> Thus, this view of normative adaptations falls somewhere in between strategic interaction model favoured by rationalists on the one hand and the social interactionist model proposed by the Constructivists on the other. It supports Finnemore and Sikkink’s idea of “strategic social interaction” model, which they describe as a situation in which “actors are making detailed means-end calculations to maximize their utilities, but the utilities they want to maximize involve changing the other players’ utility function in ways that reflect the normative commitments of norm entrepreneurs” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1999:270). From the work of the historians of Southeast Asia, it is possible to discern various forms of adaptation which may be called “strategic social adaptation”.

In the case of classical Southeast Asia’s relations with India, the “rational” nature of this intercourse is borne out by the fact that Southeast Asians were not “passive recipients, but active borrowers”, of Indian ideas. They sought out ideas which would be beneficial and rejected those which were deemed regressive. The examples of classical and contemporary Southeast Asia clearly establish that transmission of ideas was a matter of adaptation, not imposition or even simple imitation (which figures in some constructivist explanations of how

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<sup>22</sup> “In surveying the Indonesian forms one is constantly struck by the survival and strength of the traditional indigenous organizational forms, by the clear and colourful configurations wherever other forms by might and main (sic) superimposed themselves on the existing ones and under the tension of new adjustments created a new pattern, and by the durability of the forms when transferred outside Indonesia.” (Van Leur, 1955:102)

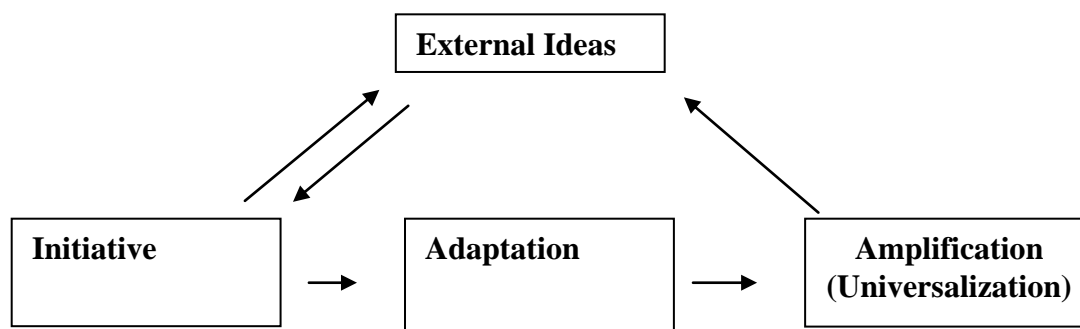
<sup>23</sup> Prestige plays an important role in the transmission of ideas. “Beliefs, fashions and manners may spread from one group to another without much regard to their intrinsic qualities. The group which adopts them may do so not because they satisfy some already existing need, but simply because they come from a group enjoying higher prestige. Stiff collars, long trousers and waistcoats are certainly not worn by inhabitants of the tropics because of any intrinsic merits of this attire. Religions, notions of honour and propriety, even political ideologies are often embraced regardless of their effects upon the structure of the society involved, simply because they come from a source enjoying higher prestige.” Andreski, 1969, 180-81.

The importance of prestige is certainly evident in the transmission of language. J. Gonda shows that linguistic borrowing in Indonesia from Indian Sanskrit was not always based on necessity. Sanskrit words were borrowed by Indonesians even when native expressions of the same ideas were available. This was because Sanskrit words enjoyed a higher prestige, and desire on the part of the natives to “imitate more civilized or prominent people”. For example, the Malay term for wife is *Suami*, (in Sanskrit *Suamin*, meaning master, lord, king, husband), instead of the indigenous term *laki*, which is considered less respectful. Gonda, 1973, p.611)

norms spread). Ideas were borrowed when they suited the local milieu when they advanced the interests of the ruler. The Idea of the Local Initiative, as we have seen, is clearly imbued in Weberian rationalism. Similarly, in contemporary Southeast Asia, norms were borrowed or selected when they suited local context to secure legitimacy and preserve existing order. The process was highly selective (itself a characteristic of “rational”): McCloud speaks of a new understanding of Southeast Asia’s interaction with the outside world in which “Southeast Asians borrowed only those Indian and Chinese cultural traits that complemented and could be adapted to the indigenous system.” (McCloud, 1995:69)<sup>24</sup> Fisher wrote that Southeast Asians have “abundantly demonstrated their capacity to absorb, and more important, to discriminate in what they absorb”. (Fisher, 1964:776). Bad Indian ideas, such as caste system, never flourished in Southeast Asia, as Mabbett shows. If this is true, and van Leur’s thesis, despite an element of exaggeration, has never been seriously challenged<sup>25</sup>, this puts the focus on the role of recipients, and on the demand side, rather than on entrepreneurs and the supply side. And it introduces an significant element of rationalist review and selection to what would otherwise be clearly seen as a social and cultural interactionist universe.

The transmission of ideas in classical and contemporary Southeast Asia was a contested process in which rational borrowing, but in the context of preexisting understandings and moral frameworks, have a decisive role. In this process, the recipients play as much a role as suppliers. From the above discussion, one get a framework for understanding the transmission of ideas as a process consisting of three inter-related steps: (1) “local initiative”, or pro-active borrowing of external ideas; (2) “local genius”, or modification of external ideas to suit local belief and practice; and (3) “amplification and universalisation”, or the process by which external ideas are used to amplify existing ideas and practices and project them as more universal secure and secure greater legitimacy and support for them in the wider cultural milieu than where they were initially prominent.

**Figure 1: How Ideas Spread**



Finally, this paper shows that many cases of clash of ideas are settled through localization, rather than permanent conflict. This challenges Huntington’s clash of civilisations thesis. Moreover, cultural interaction between nations, or the west and the rest,

<sup>24</sup> “Indian culture was absorbed in much of Southeast Asia, and Indian religions, art forms, and theories of government came to be of the greatest importance. But these various cultural gifts from India became Southeast Asian and in doing so changed their character. In some cases, moreover, quite fundamental features of Indian culture and society were not adopted.” Osborne, 1979:24-25.)

<sup>25</sup> Hermann Kulke writes: “...nowadays no research on Southeast Asian history is thinkable on the basis of the status quo ante – before the translation of van Leur’s thesis was published in the year 1955. van Leur’s emphasis on the ‘primacy of indigenous (Southeast Asian) initiative’ has thus to be regarded as a major contribution to modern Southeast Asian studies.” (Kulke, 1993:p.261).

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does not involve a choice between good global (Western) norms and bad (Third World) local norms. Sometimes, regional actors want to persist with local beliefs and ideas about the conduct of social intercourse or international relations which enjoy considerable local legitimacy (not just cultural, but also on utilitarian grounds), but which may come into conflict with norms promoted by non-regional norm entrepreneurs, be they governments or members of a transnational civil society. In some such situations, local norms and practices are normally expected to prevail, and thereby severely restrict the receptivity to outside norms and ideas.<sup>26</sup> But in other cases, local actors may borrow selectively, and even pro-actively, from outside ideas and norms and even then, adapt or modify them to suit the local context and need and by infusing them with locally-derived ideas and practices. Classical Southeast Asia case shows more initiative in, and less contestation of, Indian ideas than the case of contemporary Southeast Asia shows more contestation and localization of foreign ideas and less initiative in seeking them out (one might conjecture here that the ideas of cooperative security and humanitarian intervention were much more openly contested, than Indian ideas of statecraft). But the end result is the same, localization and amplification. Many parts of the world today facing the challenge of normative change can be expected to follow this timeless pattern.

A final question remains: this concerns possible methodological objections to any attempt to employ insights from classical history to a contemporary context. Two possible criticisms of this approach are noteworthy.

First, it might be construed as “historicism”,<sup>27</sup> defined by Karl Popper as “an approach to the social sciences [concerned with]...discovering the ‘rhythms’ or the ‘patterns’, the ‘laws’ or the ‘trends’ that underlie the evolution of history.”<sup>28</sup> Such approaches are criticized for ignoring history’s preference for “temporally-bound rather than universal laws,” and the “nonreplicable” nature of historical phenomena.<sup>29</sup> Historicist approaches have their own usefulness; they have been successfully employed by political scientists and international relations scholars to understand and explain long-term processes and phenomena. As Jack Levy notes in a recent overview of historicist approaches: “Political scientists are more willing than historians to assume a continuity or commensurability in history and to seek transhistorically valid theoretical generalizations.”<sup>30</sup> While aware of the dangers of extreme historicism that Popper derided, I have good reason to use a historical example of ideational localization to understand contemporary regional discourses.<sup>31</sup> This is because considerable evidence of such localization dynamics and processes have emerged

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<sup>26</sup> Katzenstein’s (1996) work on Japanese police and military, and Johnston’s (1995) work of Chinese strategic policy, are two of the best studies attesting to the primacy of local cultural norms within an Asia Pacific context.

<sup>27</sup> Tucker 1998, 414.

<sup>28</sup> Popper 1957.

<sup>29</sup> Levy, 2001,64. For a critical view of historicism in the study of international relations, see Gaddis, 1997, 84.

<sup>30</sup> Levy, 2001, 64. Some of these efforts are qualified, Marxist scholars acknowledge historical laws but limit their application to broad but concrete historical circumstances, while scholars of decision-making such as Alexander George call for middle range theories that rely on “contingent generalizations”. Structural theorists acknowledge recurrent patterns spanning many centuries but within specific historical systems such as the Westphalian system since 1648. Examples of even more long-term transhistorical generalizations include Modelski and Thompson, who study recurrent patterns of global distribution of power and wealth over 10 centuries and even extend some of their generalizations back to 4000 B.C. Levy, 2001, 64-65.

<sup>31</sup> My attempt to use a historical example to underscore contemporary realities is no different from attempts by Realists to use insights from Thucydides’ Peloponnesian War to explain contemporary international relations. See Jervis 1978.

from the study of the contemporary domestic politics of Southeast Asia, evidence which now occupies an important place in the methodological tools of comparative politics scholars studying domestic political institutions. In his study of Indonesian politics, for example, Benedict Anderson mentions the “whole trend to absorb and transform the Western concepts of modern politics within Indonesian-Javanese mental structures”. Describing this dynamics of ideational contestation involving ideas such as democracy and socialism, Anderson writes: “In any such cross-cultural confrontation, the inevitable thrust is to ‘appropriate’ the foreign concept and try to anchor it safely to given or traditional ways of thinking and modes of behaviour. Depending on the conceptions of the elite and its determination, either the imported ideas and modalities or the traditional ones assume general ascendancy: in most large and non-communist societies it is almost invariable that at least in the short run, the traditional modalities tend to prevail.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, looking at modern political institutions in Southeast Asia, McCloud concludes that: “At national and popular levels, Western political and social institutions have been rejected, not out of hand, and categorically, but with the qualification - as old as the region itself - that externally derived concepts and institutions will be blended with the indigenous (much of which was also previously imported) and fitted to local sensibilities and needs.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, “Elements of the traditional system have important explanatory value in regard to contemporary politics...in order to explain much of the current activity at both the national and regional system levels.”<sup>34</sup> These insights from the study of domestic politics are relevant for study of regional institutionalization.<sup>35</sup> There are striking parallels between ideational localization and amplification during the classical period and the contemporary domestic and international politics of Southeast Asia. Hence, the justification for my qualified historicist approach.

A related justification for my approach concerns the usefulness of historiography as a tool of studying international politics. While historicism in the conventional sense is concerned with historical prediction or discovering laws or cycles of history, historiography is “a discourse about, but different from, the past.”<sup>36</sup> As such, debates and rethinking about how history progressed (historiography) could inform us about how to interpret and analyze contemporary events. Historiography in this sense has an important place in Constructivist and critical theorists who have turned to discourse analysis to offer alternative explanations of international change that challenge rationalist and materialist perspectives. The debate about the Indianization of Southeast Asia constitutes an important example of how discourse can reshape our understanding and explanation of political phenomena, (in this case statehood and regional identity in Southeast Asia). Thus, insights from a particular historiography, including the historiography of Southeast Asia, can be used as a general theoretical and methodological tool to enrich the Constructivist tool-kit on ideational change in world politics.

A more difficult question about my approach is the comparability between the historical example of ideational transmission and the contemporary ideational dynamic in Southeast Asia. The kind of ideas being transmitted from India to classical Southeast Asia consisted mostly of world-views associated with Hindu and Buddhist

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<sup>32</sup> Anderson 1966, 113.

<sup>33</sup> McCloud 1995, 338.

<sup>34</sup> McCloud 1995, 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> Lisa Martin and Beth Simmons defend the application of approaches to study domestic politics to analyze the dynamics of international institutionalization. Martin and Simmons 1999, 99.

<sup>36</sup> Munslow 2000, 133.

religion. Others were causal beliefs, such as the legal code of Manu and the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya. On the other hand, the transmission of ideas in contemporary Asia Pacific fall mainly into the category of principled beliefs, more commonly known as norms. It might be argued that external propagation, or norm entrepreneurship, is more important in the case of principled beliefs, while causal beliefs are more amenable to local initiative. This is because the local recipient is empowered by causal beliefs while principled beliefs constrain him/her. Viewed as such, it might be wrong to derive a conceptual framework about ideational dynamics involving world-views from the experience of classical Southeast Asia and apply it to a contemporary context of transmission of principled beliefs.

But comparability can be defended because in both classical and contemporary Southeast Asia, the distinction between causal and principled beliefs was greatly blurred (such blurring is acknowledged by Goldstein and Keohane, as mentioned earlier). In the case of the former, both were subsumed under world-views, rooted in Hindu-Buddhist religious tradition, which typically contain both causal beliefs and principled beliefs. In the case of the emerging principled beliefs in contemporary Southeast Asia, they enabled local rulers to seek new ways of legitimacy and develop new approaches to complex transnational problems such as the fallout of the Asian economic crisis.

Causal and principled ideas share one thing in common: an ability to satisfy a ruler's quest for legitimation. In classical Southeast Asia, borrowing Indian ideas about statecraft simultaneously empowered and constrained indigenous rulers. With the help of Indian ideas, local rulers not only achieved a new status in the eyes of their subjects, but also accepted new obligations towards their subjects and agreed to conduct themselves in accordance with the abundant prescriptive elements of Hindu-Buddhist religious doctrines and political texts. Similarly, in contemporary Southeast Asia, emerging principled ideas both constrained and empowered (legitimised) their recipients. While norms such as cooperative security and human rights might have had an immediate constraining impact on existing governments, in accepting them, the latter could also achieve greater legitimacy in the long term. For example, while ideas about human rights and democracy threaten autocratic rule, reform-minded authoritarian rulers can use them to seek a new legitimacy for themselves (this is an important lesson of democratic transitions in Taiwan and South Korea). Against this backdrop, one could compare the flow of ideas from India to classical Southeast Asia with the impact of emerging norms about cooperative security and humanitarian intervention in contemporary Southeast Asia. Both dynamics were influenced by the legitimacy concerns and needs of the local rulers. In both cases, the recipient rulers were simultaneously empowered and constrained by the emerging ideas and norms.

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