Civilizations in Embrace

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Civilizations in Embrace

The Spread of Ideas and the Transformation of Power

India and Southeast Asia in the Classical Age

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FOREWORD

The name Amitav Acharya needs little introduction to those who are involved with the study of contemporary international relations in Asia. His work on Asian regionalism and particularly that which engages with Southeast Asia and ASEAN brought him initial fame, while his research on international institutions and security arrangements has seen him become even better-known. His long-time penchant for the study of non-Western modes of international relations has, however, always assumed a high prominence in his work, and this has, in recent years, been manifested in various studies including a book of the Bandung Conference and its significance for illuminating international relations in Cold War Asia.[1] While engaging with Aaron Friedberg's thesis which held that Asia is "ripe for rivalry,"[2] he has also been questioning why there is an absence of

[1] Tan See Seng and Amitav Acharya (eds.). *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2008).

[2] For which, see Aaron L. Friedberg. "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia". *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 5–33.

non-Western international relations theory.[3] Debates with scholars such as David Kang on the nature of Asian international relation through time,[4] have seen Acharya, among others, exploring how we might portray the interstate and inter-cultural relations of Asia, past and present.[5] These and other conversations led to a 2011 conference at the University of Southern California, to investigate "Was there an historical East Asian international system? Impact, meaning, and conceptualization." This brought together historians and international relations specialists to interrogate possible Asian sources for alternate international relations theory, and to examine whether indeed premodern forms of inter-state relations were different in Asia.

The volume before you is, in some ways, a continuance of the ideas explored in these earlier works by Amitav. Its title "Civilizations in Embrace" conveys the overall theme of the volume — that Asian cultures and civilisations engage with each other in ways which are communicative rather than combatative. Amitav aims through this volume to "advance the case for considering alternative models of diffusion of ideas and culture in world politics," through "one of the most extensive examples of the spread of ideas in the history of civilization; the diffusion of Indian religious and political ideas to Southeast Asia before the advent of Islam and European colonialism."

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[3] Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan. "Why is there no non-Western international relations theory? An introduction". *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2007), pp. 287–312; and Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (eds.). *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and Beyond Asia*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

[4] David Kang, "Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations". *International Security*, vol. 28, issue 3, pp. 165–80.

[5] Amitav Acharya, "Will Asia's Past be its Future?". *International Security*, vol. 28, no. 3 (Winter 2003/04), pp. 149–64.

Depicting the spread of Indic ideas and systems to Southeast Asia over a period extending from the fourth to fourteenth century to have been "largely peaceful," the study suggests that there was no clash of civilization between the sources and the recipients of the ideas which were transmitted, and that "the transmission was driven as much by the initiative of local actors as by the cultural entrepreneurship of outsiders." In sum, Amitav concludes that this example of cultural change through time highlights a "powerful historical precedent for inter-civilizational convergence that upholds the agency of local actors and debunks the notion that the diffusion of ideas can only occur through the mechanisms of power politics." At the end of the study, the example of Greek expansion in the Mediterranean — the Hellenization of that region — from the sixth century BCE to the beginning of the Common Era, is presented both as a counter-example to Indianization and as the archetype of later European expansions involving invasion and coercive transformation of other peoples.

* * *

If a thesis is to be accepted, it must be able to withstand critiques. Let us thus take a closer look at this process of diffusion of Indic cultural elements that was allegedly "not accompanied by imperialism, political hegemony or 'colonization' as conventionally understood." That Indic influences permeated Southeast Asia over the period claimed is certainly a truth universally acknowledged.[6] That these influences extended far earlier than the fourth century CE, and perhaps even 800 years before that, is suggested in a recent

[6] These are detailed in works such as R.C. Majumdar. *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*, Vol. 1: *Champa*. Lahore, 1927 and Vol. 2: *Suvarnadvipa*. Calcutta, 1937, 1938; G. Coedes. *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*. (trans. S.B. Cowing) Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1968.

volume which brings together new scholarship in this field.[7] The mechanisms by which Indic influences — administrative systems, religions, languages and scripts — came to influence Southeast Asia, however, remain elusive. This is partly due to the paucity of sources which we have for this period and, in particular, the dearth of sources relating directly to the modes of interaction between South Asia and Southeast Asia at that time. Ian Mabbett has examined the sources that exist for the "Indianization" of Southeast Asia,[8] and reveals several sources which are suggestive, but somewhat opaque, about the processes by which Indic influences moved into Southeast Asia.

Amitav chooses to dismiss the "occasional mythology about Indian sojourners founding kingdoms in Southeast Asia" (p. 66), preferring to believe that the states established in Southeast Asia were by, for and of "the Southeast Asians." Such dismissal is, of course, congruent with his claims, expressed later in this book that Indic influence in Southeast Asia differed from Greek colonization of the Mediterranean which was "for the Greeks, by the Greeks

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[7] Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani and Geoff Wade (eds.). *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cultural Change*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010.

[8] Ian Mabbett, "The Indianization of Southeast Asia: Reflections on the Historical Sources". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1977), pp. 143–61. Mabbett highlights two key issues: How did Indian influence spread through Southeast Asia? And how far did Indian influence dominate Southeast Asia? He concludes (p. 145): "The original implantation of Hindu-Buddhist culture may be considered, then, as the initiative of warriors and settlers, traders or local rulers, or some combination of these," and that (p. 161) "In a sense, then, the phrase 'the Indianization of Southeast Asia' enshrines a confusion of categories, for culturally Southeast Asia became nearly as 'Indian' as parts of India, while politically there was no such thing as India." The question, of course, still remains what processes gave rise to this cultural change.

and of the Greeks" (p. 65). The spread of Indian ideas in Southeast Asia also differed, according to this thesis, from Greek colonization by that fact that the latter involved "military conflict" while the former did not. That is to say, unlike the Greeks who established *poleis* for themselves in the process of Hellenization, Indic influence in Southeast Asia was drawn on in an essentially pacific way by Southeast Asians, rather than being imposed.

However, such characterization and dichotomy might be challenged by a closer examination of the sources that we do have for early Southeast Asia. One of the obvious examples of military engagement with Southeast Asia by Indian forces is the attack (or attacks) on Kadaram and other ports on the region by Chola naval ships in the eleventh century.[9] These were, according to an inscription, massive military expeditions across maritime Southeast Asia, and replayed similar military expeditions launched earlier by the Chola rulers against the Rashtrakuta country, Sri Lanka, Bengal and Bihar.[10] However, if perchance, this single inscription by Rājēndra Chola at Thanjavur had been lost to us, we would know nothing of this particular invasion. How then are we to assess that relations in earlier centuries had been pacific, particularly when we read of

[9] For which, see Tansen Sen. *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003, pp. 221–27; and Tansen Sen. "The Military Campaigns of Rajendra Chola and the Chola-Srivijaya-China Triangle". In *Natapattinam to Suvarnadwipa: Reflections on the Chola Naval Expeditions to Southeast Asia*, edited by Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany, and Vijay Sakhuja. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010, pp. 61–75.

[10] For further details, see K.A. Nilakanta Sastri. *The Cōlas*. Madras: University of Madras, 1955, pp. 194–228. It is ironic in the current context that in this volume, Nilakanta Sastri (p. 183) equates Rājēndra with Alexander the Great, one of the great agents of Hellenization.

the "armed guards, swordsmen and mercenaries" who accompanied the traders of Tamil guilds on their travels,[11] and we see suggestive accounts of Funan myths in Classical Chinese texts whereby Funan had been ruled by a *nāgī* princess named Liuye 柳葉, who initially opposed but subsequently submitted and eventually married a seafaring "foreigner" named Huntian 混塡 (Kauṇḍinya?) because she was unable to defend against his magical bow.[12] How are we to understand the allegory of the bow and eventual submission in this account? And how might we construe the Chinese account of Funan in the fourth century, where the ruler Jiao-chen-ru is noted as having originally been an Indian Brahman who received a divine fiat to reign over the polity?[13] Other enigmatic accounts from Sumatra suggest early Tamil military engagement with the island. Edwards McKinnon, in writing on the upland Karo of Sumatra, notes "Among the Sembiring Sinyombak one finds sub-clan or sept names with Dravidian associations such as Colia, i.e., Cōla; Meliala, Malāya, Muham, Pandia etc.; and several others. This is yet another coincidence — during medieval times, it was apparently common for Tamil military units to be named after the titles or epithets of Cōla royalty (Pathmanathan 1976, 122), so possibly the naming of these Karo groups follows a contemporary tradition. The Karo origin stories admit to descent from a mysterious Indian ancestor."[14]

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[11] For details of whom, see Meera Abraham. *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1988, p. 78.

[12] See Paul Pelliot. "Le Fou-Nan". *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, vol. 3 (1903), pp. 248–303, 254; and Michael Vickery, "Funan Reviewed: Deconstructing the Ancients". *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, pp. 90–91 (2003), pp. 101–43. See especially p. 102.

[13] Mabbett, I.W. "The Indianization of Southeast Asia," p. 147.

[14] E. Edwards McKinnon. "Continuity and Change in South Indian Involvement in Northern Sumatra: the Inferences of Archaeological

How then should we explain Tamil military unit titles among the clan names of upland peoples of Sumatra?

The idea of Indic influence on Southeast Asia through time having been essentially pacific is not new. Neither is the desire to perceive a softer, more humane form of polity and cultural interaction in Asia new. The sentiment grew during the period of European high imperialism, reaching a climax during and following World War I. Rabindranath Tagore and other pan-Asianists in their quest for common ideals and common heritage in Asia saw a region whose components interacted with each other essentially differently from the West with its "shameless inhumanity."[15]

The scholars associated with the Greater India Society followed with similar ideas. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar was clear in contrasting the violence of European colonialism to subjugate

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Evidence from Kota Cina and Lamreh". In *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cultural Change*, edited by Pierre-Yves Manguin, et al., pp. 137–60. See p. 143.

[15] This ideology is clearly outlined in the opening paragraph of *Ideals of the East* by Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913), a prominent pan-Asianist: "Asia is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilizations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal, which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce all the great religions of the world, and distinguishing them from those maritime peoples of the Mediterranean and the Baltic, who love to dwell on the Particular, and to search out the means, not the end, of life." *The ideals of the East; with special reference to the art of Japan* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Classics/Tokyo: IBC Publishing, 2007 reprint). This is cited in the "Introduction" to Kwa Chong Guan (ed.). *Early Southeast Asia as Viewed from India; An Anthology from the Journal of the Greater India Society* (New Delhi: Manohar, forthcoming).

the colonised, vis-à-vis Indian colonization of the Far East, which he considered peaceful, humane, benign and welcomed by the pre-literate natives. Kwa Chong Guan, in his study of the Greater India Society, notes that Majumdar declared in his first major work published by the society:

> [The] … regeneration of the Cham power in the second century A.D. was due to the introduction of a new element in her politics, viz, the Indian colonists. From this time forward … [the Chams] … cheerfully submitted to their foreign masters and adopted their manners, customs, language and religion. They were politically merged in the Indian elements and there was a complete cultural fusion between the two races.[16]

More recently, Sugata Bose of Harvard University and others have pursued this path, stressing the aspirations to Asian universalism by Tagore and others as the feature distinguishing Asian interactions from those which marked the actions and aspirations of western colonial powers.[17] In various ways, although approaching the topic from the domain of international relations theory, Amitav is following in this tradition, with his claims that the modes of Asian expansion — by which Indic ideologies, rituals, religions, statecraft, languages and scripts were imbibed in Southeast Asia — were entirely different from those of the earlier Greek expansions and the later European expansions.[18]

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[16] From R.C. Majumdar. *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*, Vol 1: *Champa* [f.n. 9] p. 21. Cited in "Introduction" to Kwa (ed.). *Early Southeast Asia as Viewed from India*.

[17] For example, Sugata Bose. *A Hundred Horizons: the Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

[18] It should be affirmed, however, that Amitav's thesis assigns Southeast Asians far more agency in Southeast Asian state formation and cultural borrowing than does Majumdar.

However, here is not the place to discuss in detail all the arguments presented in this book. I offer the above thoughts and questions simply to initiate some debate on the issues presented within. The aim of the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre Research Series is to make available to the public new and stimulating ideas worthy of debate and it is thus eminently appropriate that this work by Amitav is published in this series. The ideas within these covers will, we hope, induce comment and stimulate argument for years to come.

Geoff Wade
18 October 2012
Singapore

PREFACE

This study revisits one of the most extensive examples of the spread of ideas in the history of civilization: the diffusion of Indian religious and political ideas to Southeast Asia before the advent of Islam and European colonialism. Hindu and Buddhist concepts and symbols of kingship and statecraft helped to legitimize Southeast Asian rulers, and transform the political institutions and authority of Southeast Asia. But the process of this diffusion was not accompanied by imperialism, political hegemony, or "colonization" as conventionally understood. This book investigates different explanations of the spread of Indian ideas offered by scholars, including why and how it occurred and what were its key political and institutional outcomes. My purpose is not to offer an exhaustive account of Indian cultural impact on Southeast Asia, but to draw specific insights from this diffusion to challenge the view that strategic competition is a recurring phenomenon when civilizations encounter each other. It is also to advance the case for considering alternative models of diffusion of ideas and culture in world politics. In essence, I highlight a powerful historical precedent for inter-civilizational convergence that upholds the agency of the local actors and debunks the notion that the diffusion of ideas can only occur through the mechanisms of power politics.

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Amitav Acharya
February 2012

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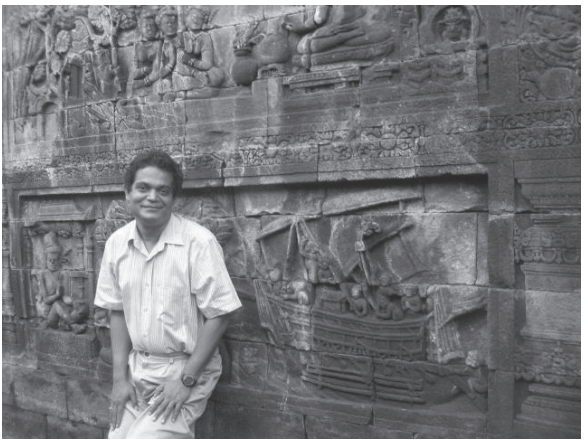

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