

AMITAV ACHARYA, *Civilizations in Embrace: The Spread of Ideas and the Transformation of Power. India and Southeast Asia in the Classical Age*. Singapur: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013. 88 pages, 22 color photos, US\$ 32.90. ISBN 978-981-4379-73-1

The title which renowned Southeast Asian scholar and political scientist Amitav Acharya has chosen for his latest book embodies the major thrust and content of his main argument: when two ancient civilizations – the Indian and the Southeast Asian – met, they embraced, and they did not clash.

While much has been written about the spread of Greek and Roman ideas in the Mediterranean, the diffusion of Indian ideas – political and religious – in Southeast Asia has received much less scholarly attention (one of the best known scholars in this field is Hermann Kulke, see e.g. Hermann Kulke / Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India*, 5th ed., London: Routledge 2010, Chapter 3, Part 4). This book manages to fill this gap. In six chapters, Acharya chronicles the transmission and spread of ideas originating from India to Southeast Asia over a period extending from the fourth to the fourteenth century, focusing on the diffusion of Indian religious (Buddhist as well as Hindu) and Indian political (kingship and statecraft) concepts. The study explores how those ideas and concepts were instrumental in the process of increasing the legitimization of Southeast Asian rulers, as well as the general transformation of political institutions and political authority in the region. Acharya's objective here is, as he writes, to "advance the case for considering alternative models of diffusion of ideas and culture in world politics." (p. xii)

In his study, Acharya also discusses and critiques the scholarly debates that revolve around the concepts of colonization and Indianization of Southeast Asia, while his own arguments build upon concepts of convergence and localization which he expands further. Acharya writes that "the Indianization process in Southeast Asia clearly highlights the distinction between voluntary adaption 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." (p. 45) The book clearly makes a case for the positive effects of localization as forwarded by Acharya in his influential book *Whose Ideas Matter? Agency and Power in Asian Regionalism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), and the present study can be read as an historical addendum to his perspectives on localization, focusing here solely on the historiographical side of the argument. As for the motivation of why and how ideas spread, Acharya convincingly shows how aspects of efficiency, empowerment, applicability, legitimation and universalization have all played a determining role in the process of localization. And taking recourse to the idea of "embrace", Acharya argues that there has never been a clash of civilizations between the Indian sources and the Southeast Asian recipients of these ideas. Instead, this ideational transmission was enabled in parts by the initiative of

local actors in Southeast Asia and supported by what he terms “the cultural entrepreneurship of outsiders” (p. 2).

The spread of Indian ideas in Southeast Asia also differed markedly, according to Acharya, from the process of Greek colonization of the Mediterranean from the sixth century BC onwards, which took place by means of coercion and military conflict, as opposed to the transmission of Indian ideas which were in most parts peacefully borrowed and localized. It is especially Acharya’s latter argument of the existence of a clear dichotomy between the west and the southeast which is the major shortcoming of the book, for Acharya uses less than five pages in order to substantiate his argument, even though such a claim certainly necessitates a deeper investigation and a much more elaborate description of the means and ends of Greek expansion, especially in view of the time span of 600 years Acharya has based this thesis on. The few examples used here are not convincing, and it remains unclear why these two civilizations constitute “two paradigms of cultural diffusion”, as the title of chapter 5 postulates.

The last part of the book contains a photo section with 22 color plates that illustrate the diffusion of Indian ideas using concrete examples of temple art. The photos mainly deal with Hindu-Buddhist temples of Southeast Asia and show specific elements of Indian art became localized and merged into Southeast art. This impressive photo section perfectly underlines the theoretical arguments which, despite the less convincing juxtaposition of Greek expansionism with the Southeast Asia one, plausibly demonstrate how normative change has taken place in Southeast Asia through idea transmission, and Acharya is correct when he writes that “the spread of Indian ideas into Southeast Asia offers a powerful classical point of reference for such a synthetic approach to understanding the spread of ideas and norms that modern political scientists and international relations scholars can look to for their own work” (p. 53).

In sum, Acharya has managed to seamlessly connect processes of ideational transmission with concepts of power, agency and identity in a brief and convincing study. The book constitutes an important contribution to the literature on international norm diffusion and transmission of ideas and will not only appeal to scholars and students of Southeast Asia, but to all those interested in question of how ideas travel and are treated and transformed in regional worlds.

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