# “Local” vs. “Cosmopolitan” in the Study of Premodern Southeast Asia

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**[ *Abstract* ]**

This paper analyzes the scholarly approaches to the problem of “local” vs. “cosmopolitan” in the context of the cultural transfers between South and Southeast Asia. Taking the “localization” paradigm advanced by Oliver Wolters as its pivot, it reviews the “externalist” and “autonomous” positions, and questions the hermeneutical validity of the fuzzy and self-explanatory category of “local.” Having discussed the geo-environmental metaphors of “Monsoon Asia” and “Maritime Asia” as alternative paradigms to make justice to the complex dynamics of transregional interaction that shaped South and Southeast Asian societies, it briefly presents two case studies highlighting the tensions between the “local” and “cosmopolitan” approaches to the study of Old Javanese literature and Balinese Hinduism.

**Keywords:** Indianization, Indicization, Sanskritization, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Localization, Local, Cosmopolitan, Indigenism, Area Studies

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## Ⅰ. Introduction: Oliver Wolters and the "Indigenistic" Paradigm in Southeast Asian Studies

According to a popular view, Southeast Asia is the definite geographical stage where complex dynamics of cultural layering, which began in remote historical periods and continued into the present, can be discerned. Scholars from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and methodologies have long since tended to analyze the region's rich culture in terms of a "synthesis" or "hybridization" between foreign elements (or "influences") and "local" or "indigenous" elements.[1] This discourse has often been applied to the "region" at both the micro- and macro-level—that is to say, to any circumscribed, specific locality in Southeast Asia, and to Southeast Asia as a whole—in both the premodern period (think, for instance, about "Indianization" and "Islamization") and the modern and contemporary periods (think about "Westernization"). According to this narrative, "foreign" religions, languages, scripts, etc. found in Southeast Asia a fertile ground to flourish along localized lines, becoming embedded in local geographical and socio-cultural contingencies. Thus, Southeast Asia has been perceived as an inherently pluralistic region that would owe its cultural richness to the inclusive attitude of its societies. Furthermore, the foreign or outside elements have often been regarded as intrinsically cosmopolitan, as opposed to intrinsically "local,"—i.e. embedded, place-bound, vernacular, and indigenous—elements.

The above-described model may be defined as "stratigraphic," insofar that it first assumes a distinction between the foreign and the indigenous, and then describes cultures and societies as "layered" structures, presupposing a "core," "base," or "substratum" that would represent the original or authentic (like the *genius loci*), and some superimposed element, not infrequently defined as "uppercrust" or "overlay." Reynolds effectively describes this model in this manner:

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[1] Craig Reynolds (1995: 434) rightly notes that the "sloppy language that often accompanies discussion of Southeast Asian cultural diversity—'mixing', blending', 'syncretism', 'eclecticism'—... makes a complex historical process sound like a fisherman's catch".

> The notion of "layers" of influence, the "inside-outside" dichotomy, and the all-important role of "the local" are as prominent as ever in the early historiography. Even if not named as such, "local genius" has been a regular motif in political, economic, and cultural studies of the early period (Reynolds 1995: 432–433).
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> Underneath layers of subsequent—and foreign?—accretions lies a bedrock of the *echt* Southeast Asia. Moreover, it is this real Southeast Asia that provides the agency in historical processes. (ibid.: 424)

According to this view, elements of Indic/Sanskritic, Sinitic, or Islamicate high culture would have been appropriated by the natives of Southeast Asia and "localized"—that is, adapted to the prevalent place-specific socio-cultural and linguistic coordinates.

The "localization" paradigm (and, indeed, the very term "localized") were popularized through the influential monograph *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (1999, first ed. 1982) by historian Oliver Wolters, who became one of the founding fathers of Southeast Asian Studies within the Area Studies disciplinary framework. Focusing on the premodern and early modern periods, and taking into account both written sources and phenomena going beyond texts and inscriptions, Wolters insisted on Southeast Asian agency and its dynamic processes, that is the different regional localizations and re-configurations of Indic or Sinitic cultural elements—like the Sanskritization and Hinduization of Java and Cambodia, or the Sinicization of Vietnam. Introducing an intra- regional comparative element, for example when contrasting Old Javanese literature with Cambodian Sanskrit inscriptions, Wolters regarded the Southeast Asian region as a "broadly based community of outlook," or a distinctive "mosaic of literary cultures characterized by foreign and local features fitting into various text-like wholes" (ibid.: 65). Localization of foreign materials was perceived as a purposeful process that validated local statements, and was considered one of the distinctive features of the cultural matrix characterizing Southeast Asia as a whole. Wolters (1999: 55) defined localization as follows:

> Indian materials tended to be fractured and restated and therefore drained of their original significance by a process which I shall refer to as "localization". The materials, be they words, sounds of words, books, or artefacts, 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 ambiences.

Southeast Asian societies were able to consciously choose the Indian models, adapting them to the existing pre-conditions of their social and cultural lives. According to Wolters, Hindu religious conceptions brought ancient local beliefs "into sharper focus." This is the case, for instance, of the lasting influence that theistic cults of Śaivism (most notably that of the Pāśupata sect) and Vaiṣṇavism exerted, through the religious model of "Hindu devotionalism," on the development of the notions of political authority in Southeast Asia, most notably in the ancient—and eminently "Southeast Asian" —conception of the King as "man of prowess" endowed with superhuman abilities and worshiped by his entourage in terms of *bhakti* relationships (1999: 22). Furthermore, in defining the features of the Southeast Asian cultural matrix, Wolters introduced the concept of modernity, assuming that "news of developments in India certainly reached Southeast Asia fairly promptly and continuously" (ibid.: 46). In other words, the principle of "hierarchy," just in the same way it was tied to "purity" in India, seems to have been connected to "modernity" in Southeast Asia.

Historiographically, Wolters' model may be seen as the logic outcome of certain factors, namely: a quest for the "local" and the "autochthonous" that became fashionable after the Second World War and decolonization; geopolitical trends that reflected the division of Asia into the geographic macro-regions of South, East, and Southeast Asia, each linked to a corresponding "civilization;" and the compartmentalization of knowledge that became normative under the Area Studies paradigm in global academe. Furthermore, it may also be regarded as a reaction against the India-centric paradigms and academic cultures that were prevalent during the first half of the 20th century, such as the "Greater India" paradigm

elaborated in intellectual and nationalist circles in Kolkata, and other paradigms elaborated in French Indological and colonial circles. Besides rehabilitating Southeast Asian agency, Wolters' influential model has provided a theoretical basis for the perception of Southeast Asian as a well-defined, distinctive region that underlies the modern Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) geopolitical project. In a way, Wolters has contributed to shape the manner in which modern Southeast Asians perceive their identities in the context of a dialectic relationship between post-colonial nation-states and such a supra-national entity as ASEAN.

Clearly, Wolters' insights—and the term "localized"—still remain useful today. Yet, as contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes intra- and trans-regional connections and moves away from both the boundaries of nation-states and of the equally artificial divisions of Asia into geographical "Areas," it is legitimate to revisit—as some scholars have done recently—some of Wolters' basic assumptions, and their reception in Asian studies circles and global knowledge. Taking Wolters' model as the pivot of this essay, I survey the historiography of "Indianization" of premodern Southeast Asia, and present the paradigm that I have advanced in recent publications on the socio-spatial groupings of "Monsoon Asia" and "Maritime Asia." I then proceed to a critique of the long-lasting "localist" viewpoint in Southeast Asian studies, mainly through questioning the fuzzy boundaries of the "local," and then apply my critique to case studies focusing on Old Javanese literature and Balinese Hinduism. My conclusion is that, in order to grasp the complex dynamics that have shaped cultural layering in Southeast Asia over the centuries, it is essential to transcend arbitrary geo-political and disciplinary contingencies, and move towards a wider-ranging, and truly "borderless," connected history.

## Ⅱ. Defining Southeast Asia—Between the "Externalist" and "Autonomous" Viewpoints

Since the beginning of the scholarly study of premodern Southeast

Asia, a tension may be discerned between the opposing views emphasizing either transregional or local dynamics. This situation has been described by Lieberman (2009: 6-15) as displaying a contrapuntal logic that implies a dichotomy, and alternance, between the "externalist" and "autonomous" viewpoint in the historiography of Southeast Asia. The former view, especially at its inception in the early decades of the 20th century, has revolved around the trope of "indigenous incapacity/external benefaction," springing from "the belief that Southeast Asia, unlike India, China, or the Mideast, had never engendered its own civilization" (ibid.: 7); the latter has sought to correct that view proposing a more nuanced historiography and a more sympathetic approach to indigenous agency (ibid.: 9), as well as a greater attention to cultural specificities.

### 2.1. Cosmopolitanism Ante Litteram: From "Inde Transgangétique" to the "Greater India" movement

The scientific and empirical study of the Southeast Asian past began in European—mostly French and Dutch—"empirical orientalism" of colonial institutions, as well as in Indological circles. These circles upheld the wider geographical and cultural idea of *Inde transgangétique*, in contrast to the narrower focus on "Classical" India embodied in the Vedic texts of "Aryan" pedigree characterizing German and British Indology (Kwa 2013: xxi–xxii). The pioneers of this school were Abel Bergaigne, Eugène Burnouf, Sylvain Lévi, Jean Przyluski, Jules Bloch, Paul Mus, and George Coedès. The last scholar, while upholding a "Trans-Gangetic/Farther India" perspective, also elaborated a pioneering unitary vision of Southeast Asia, which would pave the way to subsequent scholarship focusing on the region, including that of Wolters. Indeed, Coedès' *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* (1944) became a fundamental stepping stone for the study of the Indianized societies of premodern Southeast Asia. The important work by Coedès emphasized peaceful cultural influence rather than colonization, initially triggered by commercial contacts and later associated to the development of Indian-inspired kingdoms in Southeast Asia.

To describe the peculiar "hybrid" nature of Southeast Asian civilizations, Coedès (1966: 55) adopted a biological metaphor, regarding

> The early civilizations of Indochina and Indonesia as branches springing directly from the main trunk of Indian civilization . . . that India supplied much more than a graft, . . . that it was the whole plant that was exported, and that according to the nature of the ground where it flourished, the same plant bore fruits of varying flavor.

Elsewhere, Coedès refers to this process as "osmosis" between Indian and local elements. The "nature of the ground" metaphorically refers to the autochthonous substratum that Coedès, following the doctrine of his predecessors Jean Przyluski, Sylvain Lèvi, and Paul Mus, hypothesized as forming the pre-historical culture of the region of Monsoon Asia, extending from India through Southeast Asia to South China (Coedès 1944: 8–9).[2] This ancestral cultural substratum —labeled "Austric" or "Austroasiatic"—was inferred on the basis of evidence from linguistics, mythology, art history, and archaeology. This culture or civilization would have been characterized by the cult of ancestors, the worship of gods on high places, the figure of the "Lord of the Land," similar funerary practices related to megalithic burials, matrilineal dualism, and structural analogies of myths; its technology would have included the use of complex irrigation systems for growing rice, and advanced skills in navigation. In the 1930's, Paul Mus elaborated the idea of "Monsoon Asia" as an area characterized by an underlying cultural unity, which would explain the existence of some shared religious practices across it (1975: 8–9).

Mus' position in the historiography of Southeast Asia is peculiar. He can be counted among those scholars who had a more nuanced grasp of local realities, and combined the social sciences with textual studies. Far from analyzing Southeast Asian phenomena uniquely in the light of Indic prototypes, he interpreted Khmer and

[2] For an elaboration of these ideas, see Coedès (1953) and (1954).

Javanese monuments, like the Angkor temple complex and Borobudur, as tombs for the ancestors that would reflect a local rather than Indic paradigm; yet, at the same time, he championed a translocal approach that extended the geographical and temporal parameters of the "area" to Monsoon Asia in the *longue durée*. Indeed, he had an expertise in the ethnography of contemporary Southeast Asia, and belonged to that exceptional generation of French savants who had an Indological training, but were nonetheless sensitive to non-Indic (and non-Sanskritic, non-Brahminical) elements, such as Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burman languages, and who did not stop within the boundaries of the Subcontinent but extended their research to Sanskrit material from Bali, Cambodia, and Campā.[3] Mus' research constituted, therefore, a gesture towards a "cosmopolitan" paradigm, a pioneering attempt to look at the "big picture" to explain South Asian phenomena in the light of Southeast Asian ones (and not the other way around)—for example, by studying the Austroasiatic influxes into Sanskrit and Indian religions, or individuating shared cultural elements through a comparative methodology.

The transregional model advanced by the French scholars mentioned above became a stepping-stone for the "Greater India" perspective that was becoming popular in intellectual and nationalistic circles of Kolkata. This model stressed the civilizing role of India, and explained the phenomenon of "Indianization" as a predominantly peaceful transfer of linguistic, religious, and cultural elements from India to the rest of Asia. Scholars like S.C. Mukherji and R.C. Majumdar did not refrain from speaking about "Indian colonies" in the "Far East" (that is, Southeast Asia), yet stressed how the colonization, "in contrast to the violence of European colonialism to subjugate the colonised… was peaceful, humane, benign and welcomed by the pre-literate natives" (Kwa 2013: xxix). According to Majumdar, Southeast Asians, like the Cams, "cheerfully

[3] See, for instance, Lévi's pioneering work *Sanskrit texts from Bali*, and Bergaigne's and Coedés' pioneering work on Cambodian and Cam inscriptions. Another (non-French) figure of eclectic scholar was the Dutch Hendrik Kern, whose domains of research included, besides Indian languages and religions, Old Javanese, Old Khmer and Malay languages, Austronesian linguistics, etc.

submitted to their foreign masters and adopted their manners, customs, language and religion" (ibid.: xxx). As noted by Kwa, such views suggest that the Greater India writers introjected and appropriated the colonial metanarrative of fair-skinned Aryan invaders and dark-skinned "savages" natives of India, extending it "to explain and justify an Indian colonization of the Far East" (ibid.). Interestingly, the region that today we call "Southeast Asia" seems to have been perceived either as a sort of "vacuum," at best a crossroads between the "civilizations" of India and Iran in the west and China and Japan in the east. To be sure, Indian scholars knew about the work of Lévi, Przyluski, and Bloch on Austroasiatic and Austronesian cultures of Southeast Asia, yet did not consider them as real "civilizations"; on the contrary, they regarded them as figments of Indian (Vedic) culture.[4]

The Indo-centric focus, cultural chauvinism, and Indological disciplinary bias of the greater India school no doubt reflect the state of production of knowledge of the time, when Southeast Asia had not yet emerged as a separate field of study, let alone as a world-region. It is also apparent that the champions of the Greater Indian model appropriated the views of French Indologists, but put much less emphasis on the process of mutual cultural interaction. Their scholarly endeavors were tinged by current discourses on Indian "internationalism" and various forms of Asianisms, stressing the civilizational achievements of colonized countries as opposed to the crisis of Western ideals at the eve of the colonial status quo. In spite of its gesture towards cosmopolitanism, the Greater India perspective was (mis)appropriated by Indian nationalists, who

[4] For instance, S.K. Chatterjee (1965: 153) refers to "certain remarkable agreements between the cosmogony of the Polynesians and that of the Nāsadīya hymn in the Ṛg Veda (X.129)," and to some astronomical ideas and terminology, e.g. the enumeration of the days by the phases of the moon, the "Austric" names for the two phases of the moon, the creation of the world from an egg, and Nāga-lore (see ibid.: 149–167 for a wider discussion of Austro-Asiatic and Austronesian loan-words and cultural tropes). Some of these views are clearly the product of the nationalistic milieu of the Greater India Society, and have been long since discredited. Majumdar's (1936) speculative reconstruction of an Indian homeland for the Malays was based on the hypothesis of a pre-Aryan and pre-Dravidian link between the Austroasiatic languages of India and the Austronesian languages of island Southeast Asia and Oceania proposed by Lévi and Przyluski, among others.

superimposed the category "India" to the rest of Asia, and especially Southeast Asia. This shows their inability to transcend the paradigm of the nation-state (whether yet-to-be-formed or newly-formed) and even the colonial model (albeit an alternative, "Asian" form of colonialism).

### 2.2. The "Autonomous" Paradigm

As opposed to the externalist or transregional paradigm, we may individuate an "autonomous" or "indigenistic" paradigm, mainly championed by European scholars of the ancient cultures of the colonial possessions of French and British Indochina and the Dutch East Indies. The emphasis on India characterizing the perspective of the exponents of the Greater India Society inevitably led to a counter-reaction by scholars who were starting to detach themselves from the academic field of Indology and promote a separate and highly specialized discipline devoted to the study of Southeast Asia. While many of its exponents had been themselves trained in Sanskrit, they did not emphasize the Indic elements at the expenses of the local, Southeast Asian ones; on the contrary, they analyzed cultural phenomena in the light of the local cultural specificities. Thus, it was deemed desirable to study, for example, ancient Javanese culture on its own terms, without taking into account the Indian influences, which were considered incidental or even capable of preventing a real understanding of the local culture. I may refer to the studies on premodern Javanese architecture by Stutterheim (1956), underlining the fundamental indigenous character of the Javanese Candi, which he regarded as the successor of the previous terraced religious sites widespread in Southeast Asia and Melanesia; and by de Casparis (1950), viewing Borobudur as a monument devoted to a local cult of ancestor-worship and inspired by indigenous ideas of the "sacred mountain." Thus, for Stutterheim and de Casparis, Javanese architecture expressed long-lasting local beliefs and practices about ancestors and deified kings, and displayed an Indic overlay. A textual scholar like Rassers analyzed motifs in local literatures of Indonesia not in the light of Indian prototypes but in terms of indigenous mythologemes (1959); in a similar fashion, Rassers described the peculiar "blend" of Hinduism

and Buddhism in Old Javanese literature and art in terms of local background and ancestral myths of the Malayo-Polynesians, especially as reflected by the popular Balinese tale of Bubhukṣa and Gagaṅ Akiṅ (1926). Another exponent of this school was C.C. Berg, who took great pains in systematically re-interpret the Javanese past in the light of specifically Indonesian tribal dualistic framework (1965, 1969). Berg (1936) openly criticized Himanshu Bhusan Sarkar for having over-stressed the Indian elements in his *Indian Influences on the Literature of Java and Bali*, which the Greater India Society published in 1934.

Another exponent of the "indigenistic" viewpoint was H. Quaritch Wales. Describing the Indian influences on ancient Burma, in his *Making of Greater India,* Quaritch Wales spoke of a multiphase process where indigenous elements (*local genius*) were suppressed by an Indian overlay, only to re-emerge later; this view may be defined as a "principle of cultural resurgence" (1961: 14). According to Quaritch Wales (ibid.: 18), local culture (or local genius) does not represent an immutable essence, but rather a local choice of, and reaction to, aspects of Indic culture; hence his attention to psychological dynamics. He also affirmed that, despite the waves of Indic influence, the cultures of Java and Cambodia were not hybrid, but retained a distinctive character as Indo-Javanese, Cam, or Khmer.

French historian Denys Lombard may be regarded as an epigone of the "localist" movement, and especially of Wolters, for making claims of indigenous primacy with respect to Java, and for his idea concerning the rise of a "Southeast Asian culture" during the first millennium, which could provide the region a solid geohistorical foundation (1990). Even if Lombard allowed a role for translocal phenomena such as Sanskritization, he still stressed that Sanskrit was used in Java to refer to Javanese realities, and should therefore be studied on its own terms.

The idea of "local genius" has continued to live on in Southeast Asian nationalistic historiographies: consider, for instance, the forum on "Local Genius and Indonesian Culture" sponsored by the Republic of Indonesia to promote a clearer definition of national

identity, or the buzzword "local intellect" *(phumpanya)* that has become the rationale for centers of Thai studies; Reynolds' statement that "In Southeast Asia 'local genius' is taken to be something that needs to be both respected and nurtured" (1995: 432) is as true today as it was two or three decades ago.

### 2.3. Towards a Change of Paradigm

The 70's, 80's, and 90's witnessed the emergence of a series of studies that did not only take into account the evidence of the results of Indianization but also how this process unfolded, and also attempted to refine the theoretical parameters of both extremes—the India-centered and Southeast Asia-centered perspectives—adding a new element of complexity. An important state-of-the-art review of the issue of Indianization of Southeast Asia was produced by Ian Mabbett, who published two separate articles focusing, respectively, on the pre-historical (1977a) and historical period (1977b). Firstly, Mabbett individuated two different phases of Indianization—Indianization I and II. The former, taking place around the first centuries CE, was characterized by "the appearance of principalities or city states with Indian culture" (Mabbett 1977a: 13). The latter took place much later, around the last quarter of the first millennium CE, and witnessed "the growth of peasant societies supporting civil, priestly and military elites" (ibid). Furthermore, Mabbett pointed out that the previous theories, either supporting the idea that an actual colonization took place or emphasizing the role of trade and commerce along with peaceful migration, were based on speculation rather than being supported by data. Approving the view of van Leur, Wheatley, and Bosch, he accepted the idea of "native genius" as an indigenous initiative to appropriate Indic elements (Mabbett 1977b: 144). Then, given the lack of a single most convincing theory, he advocated the need for an eclectic explanation taking into account all the possible factors which intervened simultaneously (ibid.: 158). Perhaps Mabbett's most ground-breaking idea, which opened the way to further analysis in this direction, is that the terms "India," "Indianization," etc. are anachronistic and inaccurate, for an homogeneous cultural entity called "India," let alone "Indonesia," never existed in practice.

Further, the idea that "Indianization of Southeast Asia" is a "confusion of categories" suggests that South and Southeast Asia already shared common socio-cultural traits before "Indianization"; therefore, the dichotomy between an autonomous Southeast Asia and a civilizing Indian culture was a false one.

A major contribution to the discussion was published by the Dutch epigraphist de Casparis in 1983. De Casparis, himself an exponent of the Leiden "autonomous" school, argued that the process of cultural exchange called "Indianization" had been hitherto analyzed in too simplistic a way, and advocated a new paradigm envisaging "a complicated network of relations, both between various parts of each of the two great regions and between the two regions themselves" (ibid.: 18–19). He further considered that in analyzing the phenomenon of Indianization, one could hardly avoid focusing on either India or Southeast Asia, implying that one area "gave" and the other "received," whereas the picture is much more complicated by the mosaic of different cultures which characterized both regions (ibid.: 2).

The theoretical implications of de Casparis' analysis were developed by historian of India Hermann Kulke in his study on the changing image of India's role in Southeast Asia (1990). On the basis of the findings of archaeological campaigns carried out during the last decades, showing the high technological level of mainland Southeast Asian civilizations in prehistoric times as well as in the historical period, Kulke suggested that Southeast Asian cultures were already culturally, socially and technologically refined in the early historical period, sufficiently rich to support developed centralized political organizations. These centralized kingdoms were able to undertake gigantic architectural projects unprecedented even in India: as is well-known, monuments such as Borobudur, Prambanan, and Angkor Wat stand unrivaled, surpassing in scale, building-skill, and richness of reliefs everything that has been built in India, and possibly outside India, before and after them. Such ambitious architectural projects were evidently sustained by a class of highly productive peasants who cultivated extensively the fertile volcanic soil of the islands making use of an advanced system of cultivation of rice characterized by a highly developed large-scale

hydraulic engineering. Kulke (1990: 16) went on saying that "we may have to interpret the congenial acceptance of India's influence and the subsequent 'Hinduization' as the final stage or even culmination of South-East Asia's indigenous pre- and protohistory." This process of Hinduization or Indic influence is therefore to be considered in terms of "status raising." Indeed, the presence of Brahmins in local courts contributed to raise the status of the whole community, for they were seen as "extra legitimators of a new and more advanced type of authority" (ibid.: 21). Having made important considerations on the nature of the ancient Southeast Asian "states," the boundaries of which were not clearly defined and which consisted of nuclear areas in the lowlands centering around the figure of the King, he then introduced an important change of paradigm: Indianization did not involve any "act of 'transplantation' but 'a complicated network of relations' between partners of mutual 'process of civilization' which comprised both sides of the Bay of Bengal" (ibid: 28). Citing as an example the almost simultaneous creations of stone-temples in both India and Southeast Asia, Kulke states that "the socio-political development of Eastern India during the first half of the first millennium AD... resembles in many respects the development in parts of Southeast Asia" (1990: 24). The key idea is an (independent) socio-cultural and economic "convergence" between South and Southeast Asia that enabled similar solutions to similar problems of social change. Kulke's model of convergence between South and Southeast Asia, which redefines the process of Indianization as a "misnomer," would seem to imply a shared cultural complex—not confined to Southeast Asia, as Wolters would believe, but spanning South and Southeast Asia, which is remindful of Mus' ideas. In fact, Kulke did not explain whether the cultural affinities and parallel developments on both sides of the Bay of Bengal originated from a shared prehistoric cultural matrix, or were the outcome of independent origination.

The intellectual contributions by Mabbett, de Casparis, and Kulke are significant in that they problematized the false dichotomies elaborated by previous scholarship and re-oriented the field toward a more balanced appreciation of the translocal dynamics involved in the process of exchange of ideas between

South and Southeast Asia. They also remind us of the dangers to reify and essentialize the field of study by too strictly compartmentalizing the regions and academic disciplines.

### 2.4. The "Externalist" Reaction: The Sanskrit Cosmopolis

A recent trend in contemporary scholarship has been the emphasis on cosmopolitan phenomena. Such is the case of the "Sanskrit Cosmopolis" (and the related "Vernacular Millennium") model advanced by Sanskritist Sheldon Pollock (1996, 2006). Starting from the analysis of the use of Sanskrit language by premodern Southeast Asian civilizations, Pollock has hypothesized the existence of a trans-regional system of cultural exchange of great complexity and dynamicity, extending from Afghanistan to Bali. Supposing that the spread of the Indian culture in ancient Southeast Asia was due to the migrations of "traditional intellectuals and religious professionals, often following the train of scattered groups of traders and adventurers, and carrying with them disparate and decidedly uncanonized texts of a wide variety of competing religious orders" (Pollock 1996: 168), he has defined the cultural phenomenon of Sanskrit Cosmopolis or Sanskrit Ecumene as "what may be the most complicated—and as a totality least studied—transregional cultural formation in the pre-modern world" (ibid.: 197). He has noted that the Sanskrit language articulated politics not as material power—the power embodied in languages-of-state for purposes of boundary regulations—but politics as aesthetic power in all the areas belonging to the Sanskrit Cosmopolis, including the Indian Subcontinent itself. Indeed, besides documentary and political purposes, Sanskrit was used in Southeast Asia, as in the Subcontinent, as a learned and literary language of the elite. This means that Sanskrit was thus exclusively the cosmopolitan language of elite self-representation.

Sanskrit was used in the royal inscriptions of Kalimantan (the oldest of which dates back to the 5th–6th century CE), and Java; however, unlike in Cambodia, Sanskrit inscriptions in Java were gradually outnumbered by the first inscriptions in Old Javanese, which were invariably royal edicts. According to Pollock, Sanskrit

seems to have come to an end as a major form of public expression by the mid of the 9th century; concomitantly, we find an extraordinary and sudden efflorescence of belles-lettres in Old Javanese. Moreover, if Sanskrit inscriptions in Cambodia were largely unaffected by Khmer words and syntactical structures, the Javanese records present a bureaucratic jargon using local names and expressions. The above-mentioned features are not evidence of the emergence or resurgence of a "local genius," but rather of vernacularization, which could be regarded as the same shift to the vernacular for representing epic allegories of local political power that happened at around the same time in India.

Pollock has echoed the same concerns advanced by Mabbett and Kulke about the inconsistency of modern terms used for describing homogeneous political and cultural entities—like "India"—which did not exist in the past, noting that the problem of "Indianization" paradoxically applies to India itself. Since civilizations are not closed and self-contained but are often the result of transcultural dynamics, we should speak of an "Indianization" or "Sanskritization" of Java in the same way that we speak of an "Indianization" of South India. Pollock's contribution has been important for analyzing the problem of Indianization from a translocal perspective, showing that Sanskrit linguistic, religious and aesthetic canons were taken as a source of inspiration by the elites in both India and Southeast Asia. This does not amount to an untimely revival of the Greater India perspective or even of the "Indianization" paradigm, for to Pollock, the adoption of Sanskrit by Southeast Asian rulers represents participation in the cosmopolitan culture of Sanskrit; this process was, thus, driven by Southeast Asian agency.

Pollock's ideas go hand in hand with a vehement critique of what he calls the "civilizationalist indigenism" of Wolters and any "defensive indigenist" approaches that see an undeterminable cultural matrix in Southeast Asia. Pollock has criticized Wolters' view of an *echt* "Southeast Asianness" that presupposes an essential and ahistorical cultural substratum, mainly by pointing out that for allegedly Southeast Asian re-elaborations of ideas, such as universalist sovereignty and the ruler's intimate relationship or

identity with a supreme god through *bhakti,* there is "a lot of Indian evidence but… none from non-Indian Southeast Asia" (2006: 531); in spite of the conceptual framework of Wolters' argument, which grants primacy to continuity with "ancient and persisting indigenous beliefs," it is from the Sanskrit evidence that Wolters derives much of his interpretation of Southeast Asian kingship and political systems. Furthermore, he states, "[i]t is very hard, for the Sanskritist at least, to identify the slightest Cambodian inflection in the Sanskrit inscriptions Wolters analyzes beyond the occasional localism with respect to gender relations or sectarian practices" (ibid.). Thus, what Wolters regarded as "local" seems to be not so local (or "Southeast Asian") after all. Besides targeting Wolters, Pollock has also criticized the earlier view—representing an academic consensus and ultimately stemming from Weber's theories—that ascribed to "legitimation" purposes the adoption of Sanskrit in Southeast Asia, defining it as a banal, tautological, and poorly argued model (ibid.: 516–517).

However elegant and revolutionary, Pollock's model has not been exempt from criticism. For instance, Daud Ali, a historian of South Asia with a sound expertise on Southeast Asia, has noted Pollock's lack of reliance on the copious historical and archaeological secondary literature on Southeast Asian state formation, as well as the fact that his theory remains within the boundaries of the fictive realm of literature (2011: 281). Furthermore, on closer scrutiny, India and Southeast Asia do not neatly conform to Pollock's theory of "division of labour" between Sanskrit and vernacular languages—the former being used for political representation, and the latter for administrative and worldly purposes (ibid.: 283). A more nuanced reading of early epigraphic documents from Southeast Asia has shown the deep entanglement of Sanskritized "Cosmopolitan" elements with local use, that is Old Malay language and local ideologies of power, which have highlighted the diversities instead of similarities with their South Asian counterparts, thereby suggesting varieties of local "reactions" and usages instead of a uniform meaning (ibid.: 289, 291).

According to Ali (2009: 16), "the full implications of Pollock's theory have yet to be explored and may still help us

re-conceptualize the nature of linkages between South and Southeast Asia in ways perhaps consonant with Kulke's suggestive remarks." This suggests that Pollock's ideas will have to be tested and complemented by realigning them to social realities rather than keeping the discourse in the realm of literary imagination.[5] To Ali, Pollock's "apparent neglect for the ideological substance, cultural practices, and socio-economic processes which 'underwrote' the Sanskrit Cosmopolis" limits the usefulness of his work for historians (2009: 16).

Besides advocating the need to fine-tune some of the conclusions of Pollock on (the "death" of) Sanskrit in Java,[6] I should like to point out that Pollock's model is limited to Sanskrit and literary history, and therefore biased towards "high cultural," top-down phenomena; the supralocal dynamics shaping bottom-up —and highly productive and resilient—cultural phenomena that do not fit the model, such as e.g. magic, "folk" practices, religion, ritual, and performances, remain to be investigated. Pollock's neglect of the category of "religion" and its foundational textual corpora (such as the Sanskrit-Old Javanese *tutur* and *tattva* texts from Java and Bali, which I will discuss below) is a case in point.

## Ⅲ. The New Wave: An Emphasis on Networks and Synchronisms

Such concepts such as Subhramanyam's "connected histories", favoring flexible and fluid cultural zones rather than "civilizational"

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[5] See Kulke (2014) for a commentary on Pollock's theory, Ali's response, and his own updated reflections on the "convergence" theory. See also Bronkhorst (2011) for a critique of Pollock's dismissal of the "legitimation theory" and of a link between Sanskrit and Brahmins in Southeast Asia.

[6] Wrestling with Pollock's view that "Sanskrit begins to die in Java the moment Old Javanese begins to live" (Pollock 1996: 229), Hunter (2001: 90) argues that the composition, as late as the early 16th century, of the Old Javanese poem on meters *Vṛttasañcaya* by Mpu Tanakuṅ "suggests that for the courts of East Java the dates of the transnational phase of this 'cosmopolis' must be pushed ahead nearly two centuries." Sanskrit-Old Javanese *tutur* and *tattva* texts support Hunter's critique, pushing ahead the "survival" of Sanskrit on Bali to the modern period, as suggested by the Sanskrit verses included in *tutur* texts composed in the early 20th century—like the *Śivāgama* by Pedanda Ida Made Sidemen.

fixed representations,[7] have laid the foundation to a new wave of historical scholarship focusing on complex translocal dynamics and processes. Research produced in the past two decades has increasingly relied on the concept of "networks" to elucidate the dynamics of cultural transfer between South and Southeast Asia on the one hand, and re-oriented the geographical focus towards a maritime, "Indian Ocean" dimension on the other. The idea of networks is not new, as it builds on and develops the idea of proposed by de Casparis as early as 1983. It was revived by Lombard, who, in spite of his "autonomist" perspective and emphasis on the autochthonous elements in Javanese culture, as well as the consideration of Southeast Asia as a culturally well-defined region, was in favor of the study of the history of maritime Southeast Asia in terms of "Chinese," "Muslims," and "Christian" networks, and also introduced the new concept of "synchronism." Lombard lamented that "it is truly not easy to write a 'well integrated' history of Southeast Asia.... The main difficulty is in fact to transcend the heaviness of regional, colonial and then nationalistic histories which have strongly partitioned off the historical space" (Lombard 1995: 10).[8] He also hoped that one day the historical reconstructions made by archaeologists, linguists, geneticists, and scholars of culture "will give way to a true consideration of synchronisms, that is to say to a comparative theory, which will examine parallels between the evolutionary paths of the different 'layers' or 'sectors'" (ibid.: 15).

The concept of "synchronism" may be compared to Lieberman's (2003, 2009) "strange parallels," i.e. synchronous developments between geographically distant regions in Southeast Asia and the wider Eurasian area. Lieberman, emphasizing the early modern

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[7] See Subhramanyam's (2016: 22) critique of the four civilizations existing across the Indian Ocean region, namely "Islam," "Sanskritic India," "South East Asia," and "Chinese," distinguished by Chaudhuri (1991: 49–66).

[8] Lombard, downplaying the fact that "a vast majority of Southeast Asians have no interest in any other cultural area of their region", asks: "How then is it possible to lay the foundations of comparativeness in such (bad) conditions? How is it possible to reach the vision of a Southeast Asian 'Mediterranean Sea', which could escape the notion of 'outside influences' being such a perturbation for the local historians, but without denying it for all that?" (ibid.: 11).

period, and marrying the maritime perspective with the study of overland Eurasian networks and of landlocked mainland Southeast Asian highlands, attempts to link Southeast Asian history to Eurasian and global history. Focusing on "internal" processes of change, and at the same time upholding a comparative perspective taking into account external factors, he describes the dynamics of cultural integration in Southeast Asia from the 15th century onwards (Lieberman 2009: 10). Lieberman asks whether premodern Eurasia can be regarded as part of a coherent, integrated Ecumene connected to Southeast and East Asian appendices and that, through a comparative study, reveals parallel but independent social adaptations, climatic shifts, and commercial links. In doing so, he argues "less for a single lockstep pattern than for a loose constellation of influences whose local contours must be determined empirically and without prejudice" (2003: 45). He positions himself between the "autonomous" and "externalist" positions, insofar that he disaggregates Southeast Asia and refuses to grant automatic priority to maritime factors, yet emphasizes material as well as cultural dynamics, describes linear change, and acknowledges the critical impact of global currents (ibid.). Lieberman contrasts himself to Reid, whose work he sees as representing a "third wave" succeeding the externalist and autonomous paradigm with his idea of "Age of Commerce" historiography. To Lieberman, Reid's famous two-volume *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce* (1988, 1993), being richer and more sophisticated than any externalist work, shifted the balance away from indigenous cultural forces towards external maritime influences "in a move that reversed the 'autonomous' shift that began in the 1960s" (2003: 16).

Following an increasing recognition of the predominant role played by the sea routes (the so-called "Maritime Silk Roads") in shaping premodern intra-Asian connectivity, a dearth of studies analyzing the circulatory dynamics of cultural, religious, diplomatic, and economical transfer among India, Southeast Asia, and China through the maritime routes has appeared in recent years. A critique against the predominant land-based approach in the spread of Buddhism across Asia has been advanced by Tansen Sen (2014: 40), who in an earlier work has unveiled the multi-directional

connections existing between Asian Buddhist centers in the 7th century and their integration in the wider Asian Buddhist world in the 8th century, characterized by overlapping networks of relations that were religious as much as economic, diplomatic, and political in nature (2003). Based on the same premises, Jason Neelis applies a "networks approach" or "networks model" to the study of such a multifaceted, trans-regional phenomenon as the patterns of Buddhist transmission across South, Central, and East Asia. Advocating the need to transcend the oversimplified metaphors of "flows" and "influences" in a single direction along a fixed route, he highlights the multifaceted links between religious, economic, and political nodes along multiple lines of communication that enhance possibilities for cross-cultural contact and transfer (2011: 319).

The continuums extending from the Sanskrit Cosmopolis to the Persianate and Islamicate worlds, which overlapped with, and then replaced, the Indic circuits of cultural exchange have been described in recent scholarship. Consider, for instance, the circulation of Tamil, Arabic, and Malay materials across South India, Sri Lanka, and the Malay-Indonesian world explored by Ronit Ricci (2011), or the movement of an Arabo-Malay diaspora across the Indian Ocean over the past five hundred years studied by Engseng Ho (2006).

## Ⅳ. Redefining the Region: Monsoon Asia and Maritime Asia

Capitalizing on recent scholarship on religious and cultural networks across Asia, and taking inspiration from the exciting possibilities offered by maritime history, I have attempted to re-conceptualize the geopolitical configurations of Asia as framed by the current Area Studies paradigm in two recent edited volumes, the one on Esoteric Buddhism in medieval Maritime Asia (Acri 2016a) and the other on cultural transfer in early Monsoon Asia (Acri, Blench and Landmann 2017). My approach aims to transcend and re-balance the "autonomous" and "externalist" paradigms by extending the geographical and chronological coordinates of the "Region." Thus, by reviving and refining the Monsoon Asia perspective elaborated by

early 20th century French scholarship, I propose to re-frame the field of study through the geo-environmental metaphors of "Monsoon Asia" and "Maritime Asia," conceived as dynamic macro-regions of intersecting discursive fields across which networks of cultural brokers travelled since time immemorial. Influenced by similar environmental and climatic factors, such as the seasonal monsoons, these macro-regions formed an ideal theater for the circulation of people, goods, languages, and ideas. Spreading across the superimposed geopolitical boundaries of modern nation states, and transcending such equally arbitrary and historically constructed geographical entities as South/Southeast/East Asia, Monsoon Asia and Maritime Asia are conceptualized as forming a single interconnected network, and arguably even an integral cultural ecumene with a shared background of human, intellectual, and environmental history. More than mere (and static) geographical expressions, these macro-regions may be conceptualized as socio-spatial groupings or world regions constituted by a pattern of ever-changing relations dominated by basic underlying affinities that may help make sense of circulatory cultural phenomena across Asia.

My main hypothesis is that Monsoon Asia in the proto- and early historical period, and Maritime Asia in the medieval period, constituted integrated systems of littorals where crops, goods, ideas, cosmologies, and ritual practices circulated via sea-routes governed by the seasonal monsoon winds. Thus, by imagining Monsoon Asia and Maritime Asia as geographical arenas with a shared history of human migration, long-distance trade, linguistic contact and dispersal, and cultural transfer, we may capture the highly fluid translocal dynamics transcending the artificial geography of the nation states or world regions, and thus move beyond the artificial divides fragmenting what were in origin shared cultural processes. For instance, we may study the flows and interactions across the Indo-Pacific area, such as the migration and socio-linguistic "layering" of Austroasiatic and Austronesian language-speaking people across South China, Southeast Asia, and South Asia from the proto-historical period to around 1000 AD; the cultural dynamics before (and beyond) "Indianization"; or the circulation of Indic religions across Asia.

My work intends to encourage an "oceanic turn" and a *longue durée* approach to the study of the translocal dynamics which govern historical processes transcending the boundaries of both nation-states and macro-regions as they are commonly framed in the current academe—as if those concepts were actual distinctive entities, with intrinsic, clear-cut and enduring geographical and ethno-linguistic boundaries. Thus, I programmatically advocate a widening of the geo-historical framework through which cultural phenomena, linked by a shared history going back to a remote past, are to be investigated, as well as a disciplinary de-parochialization. It is worth stressing here, once again, that the Area Studies segregation of region-bound separate and self-contained fields of study is a modern construct. It creates imagined boundaries and, as rightly noted by Ali (2009: 11), obscures rather than reveals:

> When speaking about pre-modern cultural interactions… the ways we conceptualize these often has as much to do with the "onward historical developments" which culminated in the formation of modern nationalism as with the cultural, economical and political flows which traversed the pre-colonial world.

We need to constantly remind to ourselves that the current histories and geographies of Southeast Asia are largely the result of colonial and post-colonial national narratives, or of post-Second World War global academe, which has framed the "Area Studies Paradigm" and (arbitrarily) divided Asia into the quadrants of South-, Central-, Southeast-, and East-Asia. I cannot but agree with Farish Noor who, noting the myopic and narrow intent of official histories, argues that

> The people of South and Southeast Asia today… are the descendants of communities and nations that were open to external influences to a far greater degree that we perhaps realise, and this is borne out by the fact that the culture, religions and vocabularies that were used in the ancient past demonstrate an easiness with cosmopolitanism that would embarrass most of us today (2013: 252).
>
> … What took place in Southeast Asia during the pre-Islamic and pre-colonial eras can only be understood in the context of an age

> where geo-political boundaries were fluid, porous and interpenetrating; and local developments took place against a backdrop of transcultural exchange and translocal evolution (ibid.: 254).

In a thought-provoking essay, Andrew Abalahin (2011: 664) attempts to reframe "a series of world-historical developments that bring together histories that have customarily been viewed apart" by connecting—and at the same time dissolving—early Southeast Asia and Inner/North/East Asia into the macro-region called "Sino-Pacifica" on the basis of their shared non-Sinitic, i.e. (proto-) Austronesian identity in the pre- and proto-historic periods. Geoffrey Samuel, noting the "arbitrary nature of regional traditions of intellectual inquiry," tries to redefine the "area" when calling for a change of perspective in trying to look at Tibeto-Burman-speaking societies of Tibet, Ladakh, Nepal, and Sikkim as part of Southeast Asia rather than Central or South Asia—the rationale being that the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family has been biased towards South and Central Asia, yet Eastern India belongs culturally more to Southeast Asia than South Asia (2005: 199–200). A similar argument was advanced by Kunstandter (1967: 205), who included Eastern India in Southeast Asia on account of linguistic and cultural similarities: "Just as the southern boundary of China does not mark a cultural or linguistic division, the eastern border of India does not mark off a cultural or linguistic area." Warning us not to confuse analytic categories with reality, and expressing the need to move beyond restrictive parochial concerns, Samuel (2011: 348) further notes that

> India as we know it today is a very recent entity. It is all too easy to think of the development of "Hinduism" or at least of "Indian religions" as a process that took place within a territory called "India" and which corresponds roughly to present-day India or even to the rather problematic wider region called "South Asia" for purposes of Western academia…. the adoption of Brāhmaṇical religion was an ongoing process and that Cambodia was in much the same position in relation to this process, if at a slightly later date, than Bengal or South India.

Samuel then invokes a "common frame," and a "quite different sort of geography," to make sense of the complex religious and

cross-cultural processes that occurred over an extended period of time throughout a large swathe of continental and maritime Asia. It is relevant for the present discussion to stress that the separation between South and Southeast Asia for studying premodern phenomena is artificial, and that we need to reposition Southeast Asia not as a periphery but as the pivot of the Maritime Asian networks. Indeed, as pointed out in a recent wave of scholarship on Buddhism, Southeast Asia—and large areas of what are now the Malay peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago in particular—were not only crucial in terms of the transfer of maritime technology and crews, but also played an important, Asia-wide role as both a crossroads and terminus of Buddhist cults. Hiram Woodward (2004: 353) has advanced an argument for "treating Indonesia and India as an integral unit well into the ninth century," making "a case for possible influence of Borobudur Buddhism upon subsequent developments in India"; the contribution of Southeast Asian agents to Tibetan and Indian Buddhism is supported by an increasing amount of evidence (Acri 2016b: 11). In a similar way, Skilling (2009: 42) re-evaluates the important participation of premodern Siam in a much wider world of Buddhist cultural interchange than is usually assumed at present, questioning "whether 'India' should always be the 'centre', Siam the periphery—a passive recipient of 'influence.'" Sen (2003: 11) argues that during the Tang period Chinese Buddhist monks ceased to suffer from a "borderland complex": hence, China ceased to be a "frontier" and became a terminus, and center of diffusion, of Buddhism in its own right. These recent works reflect the need of scholarship to move beyond the paradigm envisaging a "diffusionist" spread of Indic religious traditions from a South Asian "heartland" or "motherland" to East and Southeast Asian "peripheries," for cults were transmitted from multiple centers, and by no means followed a mono-directional pattern.

In focusing specifically on religious networks, I have proposed to transcend the artificial spatial demarcation and imagined boundaries of macro-regions and nation-states, as well as to bridge the arbitrary divide between (inherently cosmopolitan) "high" cultures or "civilizations" (e.g. Sanskritic, Sinitic, and Islamicate) and (inherently embedded) "local" or "indigenous" cultures. My

perspective posits the occurrence of circulatory dynamics of globalization and diverse cross-cultural human relations that have configured the trajectories of cultural patterns in the area. These were formed and accommodated in prehistoric and early historical times, and constitute processual continuities that are still being negotiated in the modern period. By focusing on agency, interaction, and multi-directional transfer, this perspective aims at avoiding both essentialism and extreme fragmentation, thereby achieving greater depth in historical analysis.

More evidence of prehistoric contacts between South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia has turned up in recent years. The presence of jar burials, Dongson drums, Sa-Huynh ornaments, and agate and carnelian beads along the Indo-Pacific arc (Theunissen, Grave and Bailey 2000) suggests the possibility of interactions and transfer of religious ideas and practices from East to South Asia, while studies on the distribution of ceramics, cultigens, and nautical terms and devices, have highlighted the regular maritime links between early farming communities in South and Southeast Asia since at least the 1st millennium BCE (Gupta 2005: 22; Hoogervorst 2013: 102). The continuous presence in the Indian Subcontinent of Austroasiatic-speaking people, who most likely shared an early core of socio-cultural features with their "cousins" in Southeast Asia, suggests that these contacts and transfers are not a mere theoretical possibility. On the basis of recent archaeological findings, archaeologist Pierre-Yves Manguin talks about a "millenium-long phase of exchange" (2011: xvi) that predates the beginnings of "Indianization" in the 3rd–5th centuries CE, when "the relationship between Southeast Asian and Indian societies had already come a very long way." Hopefully, these realizations will contribute to rectify such historical aberrations as the modern narrative around *pribumi*s invoked to differentiate the "children of the soils," that is the Austronesian language-speaking Malays from "newcomers," such as Chinese, Indians, etc., in the Malay-Indonesian world. This narrative does not take into account the fact that the Austroasiatic-speaking Orang Asli were, indeed, the earlier inhabitants of the region (yet not "aboriginals" themselves!). This is comparable to the concept of *ādivāsin*s (another Sanskrit neologism) in India, referring to the

Munda-/Austroasiatic-speaking ethnic groups that were not "aboriginals," but the "creolized" heirs of Southeast Asian ancestors who spread into India about 10,000 years ago (Chaubey et al. 2011; Zhang et al. 2015)

In my "Tantrism Seen from the East" (Acri 2017a), I have argued that, as far as the study of the phenomenon of Tantrism in South and Southeast Asia is concerned, the prevalent attitude among contemporary Indologists towards the manifestations of Indic religions and cultural traits in Southeast Asia has not gone beyond the uncritical subscription to a monodirectional "Indicization" paradigm; on the other hand, the majority of Southeast Asianists have tended to stress Southeast Asian agency in the "localization" of Indic ideas and practices. Concomitantly, Indologists have championed an orthogenetic paradigm to explain the emergence of the phenomenon of Tantrism in South Asia from a (late) Vedic matrix. However, as rightly noted by Brighenti (2009: 95), to explain the various stages of the process of tribal-Śākta interactions in the Indian Subcontinent, we "may necessitate moving beyond the ancient limits of Vedic India." In fact, one may even include the Vedic "antecedents" of Tantrism in a wider-ranging analysis that approaches the study of Indic religions "from the East," so to speak, as partaking of a shared cultural matrix out of which parallel developments originated across the Bay of Bengal, in the context of a millenia-long shared history. In particular, the appreciation of the Austroasiatic imports into Sanskrit and both Hindu and Buddhist tantric traditions remains a desideratum. By extending the field of study to the wider macro-region of Monsoon Asia, the synthesis advocated here would regard seemingly "convergent" religious and cultural phenomena as the outcome of multi-directional and circulatory processes rather than separate, self-contained entities, and propose a possible shared ancestry.

To conclude, I believe that the metaphors of Monsoon Asia and Maritime Asia are powerful tools for capturing the dynamics across space and time that connect seemingly disconnected phenomena, actors, geographies, and historical trajectories, so as to form a coherent historical narrative.

## Ⅴ. Revisiting the "Local"

In spite of the appearance in the last two decades of a series of studies emphasizing cosmopolitan dynamics and partially reviving the "externalist" viewpoint, the academic discourse is still dominated by context-specific regional approaches to the study of premodern cultural and religious phenomena across South and Southeast Asia. These approaches focus on regions and/or nation-states, and emphasize local genius and cultural specificity. Whenever supra-local ("cosmopolitan") cultural phenomena are taken into account, they are often described through the lens of the Indic and Sanskritic high culture—as opposed to a (by definition) "local" or indigenous (i.e. *deśi*) culture. With respect to Islamization, Ali (2009: 18) has noted that this concept has obstructed the exploration of the networks because it presents itself, by its very definition, "as the interaction of a set of 'transposable' religious practices and beliefs with a set of 'local', rooted, 'indigenous' ones". Therefore, according to Ali, there is a tendency to perceive Islam as a universal abstract entity superimposed on the "local." The same considerations may be applied to "Hinduization".

Even when the hermeneutical paradigms accord a higher degree of agency and dynamism to the pre-existing civilizations of Southeast Asia, those "civilizational" configurations are too often vaguely defined through such self-explanatory labels as "local" or "indigenous"—without a clear definition of what is to be understood as local or indigenous. For instance, the concept of "local genius" has been popular among Indonesianists, especially art historians, who generally speak of an "indigenous Indonesian spirit" (Holt 1967: 29); yet, it is not entirely clear what exactly this indigenous spirit consists of, and where its "local" boundaries lay. Edi Sedyawati, when referring to premodern Central Javanese dance, rightly notes that "the adjective 'local' and 'indigenous' are ambiguous terms used to denote anything which does not belong to 'standard' classical Hindu (*sic*) dance style" (1982: 69). Similar considerations can be made with respect to the scholarship on Southeast Asian varieties of imported religions and their mixture of Indic (or Sinitic)

elements and pre-existing indigenous (e.g. "shamanic" or "animist") cultural features, which often has invoked such vague notions as "hybrid," "assimilated," or "syncretic," yet hardly ever explained them. No detailed comparative research has unravelled whether there had been or not a common civilizational configuration prior to "Indianization/Indicization," and what the features of such a civilizational configuration might have been. In short, there is a need to realize that features often perceived as "local" or "indigenous" turned out to be the product of circulatory dynamics, whereby local developments took place against the background of translocal exchanges. In other words, the "local" was already, at least in part, "cosmopolitan" (compare Pollock's concept of "Cosmopolitan vernacular"). This is the case, for instance, of the Austronesian and Austroasiatic "cultural packages" that early seafaring voyagers spread as they gradually settled through Southeast Asia, and which were eventually localized. Thus, we are no less entitled to speak of an "Austroasiaticization" and "Austronesianization" of Southeast Asia than of an "Indicization" or "Sanskritization" of Southeast Asia.

The emphasis on the dichotomy "cosmopolitan" and "local" has dominated not only the study of "Indic" phenomena in premodern Southeast Asia, but also the study of "non-Indic" Southeast Asia. For instance, Fox (1996: 1) lamented a "localization" of interests and disciplinary/areal parochialization reflected in the current academic paradigm of Austronesian Studies:

> Thus researchers in Indonesia, in the Philippines, in Melanesia, in Micronesia and the Pacific islands had each developed their own research concerns. Many of these research concerns reflected the interests of previous research that had been based on established traditions of inquiry within each area. Moreover, for a large area such as Indonesia, there was even greater "localization" of interests with specialization tending to foster a focus on specific islands or subregions, with a deep bifurcation between the eastern and western halves of the archipelago.

Going against this trend, Bellwood, Fox, and colleagues, in many publications stemming from the "Comparative Austronesian

Project," have drawn together different disciplinary approaches for the study of the Austronesian-speaking populations in order to elaborate a general framework for the interpretation of the complexities of the Austronesian heritage across Southeast Asia and the Pacific Ocean. They have compared features traceable to a common heritage beyond language despite millennia of interaction and change, namely a "Southern Mongoloid" genetic ancestry for Austronesian- speakers. These include widespread cultural features such as tattooing, use of outriggers on canoes, features of ethnographic and prehistoric art styles, and social norms concerning siblings' rank and a reverence for ancestral kin group founders (Fox 1996: 6). In spite of these common features, however, "there is little which can be characterized as exclusively and uniquely Austronesian held widely today in common among all the Austronesian-speaking regions" (ibid.: 3). This state of affairs suggests that a polythetic approach is needed to evaluate the complex issue of origin, dispersal, and transformation of the so-called "Austronesians" and their "cultural package(s)" through millennia.

The last two decades witnessed the emergence of a focus on a linguistically and archeologically defined Austronesian shared background of the people inhabiting mainland and insular Southeast Asia, as well as Oceania. New findings from genetics and physical anthropology point to a more nuanced model of migration. A combined approach to reconstruct the history and evolution of ideas that integrates (and moves beyond) linguistics, archaeology, and genetics, could produce and connect new insights by delving into the hitherto little explored domains of production and transfer of knowledge, mythologies, ancestral legal systems and religious beliefs, as well as aspects of material culture such as architecture, trade, navigation technology, etc. In the short manifesto "Towards an integrated comparative study of Austronesian Cultures," Edi Sedyawati (2011: 54–5) has noted that by comparing cultures and their respective culture bearers, it would be possible to discern whether they are related, and therefore presumably share the same origin. Blench (2012: 135), discussing the pervasive and highly distinctive set of iconographic elements in figurative art that is widely spread across the Austronesian-speaking areas, argues that

this strongly religion-associated imagery may be "a manifestation of *adat*, the traditional religion of I[sland] S[outh] E[ast] A[sia] prior to the spread of world religions."

Imran bin Tajudeen (2017) has recently elaborated on the interplay between the cosmopolitan and the local in Southeast Asia and the wider Western Malayo-Polynesian/Austronesian worlds, investigating the nature of the interplay between autochthonous and Indian elements in the formation of Southeast Asia's Indic cultures. The author has described the translations of *śāstric* sources into architecture and art forms according to patterns that integrated Indic and Austronesian paradigms; thus, early architectural examples from Central Java, Sumatran sites, and Kedah prompt us to reconsider some current ideas on the processes and phases of "Indianization" resting upon a dichotomous conception of Indian and indigenous elements that assume a separation between them and their juxtaposition as distinct elements accessible to "stratigraphic" scrutiny.

## Ⅵ. The Local vs. Cosmopolitan in Old Javanese and Balinese Studies

As a conclusion, I offer some reflections on the current trends in the study of two closely interconnected domains, namely Old Javanese literature and modern Balinese Hinduism. This will provide us with a useful case study to evaluate some of the historiographical issues discussed in this essay, as well as bring forward some empirical evidence to corroborate my critique of the "localist" paradigm.

The place held by Old Javanese literature in Southeast Asia is outstanding, since no other literature of the region may claim a literary tradition and a number of ancient manuscripts comparable to the Javanese and Balinese. The majority of these manuscripts were written in Old Javanese language, a "cosmopolitan vernacular" so replete with Sanskrit words (more than 40 percent) that it was even considered to be Sanskrit by linguists of the 19th century, until around 1840. W. von Humboldt demonstrated definitively that it was an (Austronesian) language by its own. The adoption of Sanskrit by

the Javanese, as well as other people in Southeast Asia, constitutes one among the most outstanding linguistic and cultural phenomena in the history of mankind. The extent to which the Sanskrit language influenced Old Javanese has been stressed by Zoetmulder (1974:12) in this passage:

> Sanskrit was so much part of the new culture which they wanted to make their own and to which they wanted to adapt themselves, that the inclination to adopt its modes of expression must have come naturally to them, even where their own was already adequate and there was no real need for change.

The adoption of Sanskrit by the Javanese and Balinese did not entail a passive absorption of foreign influence but a conscious activity of re-elaboration. Sanskrit influenced Old Javanese, and the other way around; but the "Javanization" of Sanskrit should not be confused with the "corruption" of Sanskrit, for an almost parallel, hybrid language emerged: a mixture of Sanskrit and Old Javanese called "Archipelago Sanskrit." Dutch Indologist Jan Schoterman (1979: 333) challenged the general opinion claiming that a great part of the Balinese Sanskrit was just "bad Sanskrit": as a scholar of Tantric literature, he argued that the kind of Sanskrit found in Balinese Śaiva texts (*tuturs*) and *stuti*s shares most of the linguistic features and technicalities found in the Indian Tantras, including a series of "regular" irregularities. Thus, the language reflects a situation that is also found in the majority of the Tantric texts from India, which were mostly composed in semi-literate, non-Brahamnical milieux, and which feature a non-Pāṇinian kind of Sanskrit. Thanks to a series of text editions and studies that appeared in the past two decades, "Tantric Sanskrit" is now accepted as a separate idiom, just like the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit described by Edgerton. The Sanskrit featured in Old Javanese *tutur*s, therefore, does not constitute an isolated example of "local" or "quintessentially Javanese/Balinese" Sanskrit, but a Sanskrit that shares many of the mechanisms of change and adaptation that the language underwent in diglossic linguistic milieux in the Indian Subcontinent itself (such as Eastern India, Nepal, and South India), thereby reflecting dynamics shared across the Sanskrit Cosmopolis.

Given the extent of the Sanskritic imports into Old Javanese, it is not surprising that the study of Old Javanese literature has provided an ideal battleground for scholars upholding the "externalist" and "autonomous" perspectives. The earliest generation of scholars like Kern, Lévi, Sarkar and Majumdar received an Indological training, and were eager to study Old Javanese literature through the lenses of Indology. From the 1960's, the indigenistic viewpoint rose to prominence thanks to the so-called "Leiden school", according to which Old Javanese literature deserved to be studied on its own terms. But in the 1990's, Max Nihom, who has produced a series of stimulating and highly critical studies attacking the indigenistic viewpoint, provocatively stated that "the 'Greater India' perspective of pre-war Dutch scholars should be revived" (Nihom 1994: 14), and that "an Indological approach to the 'high culture' of the classical period in the Archipelago is an academic *sine qua non*":

> these [Old javanese] works of literature are so pervaded by Indic culture, both linguistically—through the medium of Sanskrit loan words—and ideologically—in the sense of notions pertaining to religion, governance and the like—that an approach which is not fundamentally Indological runs the risk of being unproductive and misleading (ibid.).

In two of his works, focusing respectively on passages of the Buddhist *kakavin Kuñjarakaṛṇa* (1994) and the Śaiva *kakavin Śiwarātrikalpa* (1997), Nihom described examples illustrating instances of misunderstandings and faulty translations by scholars of Old Javanese, mainly due to their "insufficient familiarity with the primary and secondary Indological literature" (Nihom 1997: 103). A similar critique was lodged against the translators of the *Kuñjarakarṇa* by Indian scholar Lokesh Chandra (1983, 1986).

Having been trained in Indology, I myself have approached Old Javanese Śaiva texts from and Indological perspective, showing them to be highly interesting for a comparative study, and more systematic than previously supposed. Like Nihom, I have come across a lack of engagement of Old Javanese scholars with Sanskrit material that could have been useful to illuminate aspects of

"indigenous" literary and religious texts. The refusal to engage with this issue reflects the tendency of a generation of Old Javanists to treat Old Javanese texts as works to be read exclusively on their own terms and not as part of a wider cosmopolitan phenomenon. While that generation of (mainly Leiden-trained) scholars has rightly sought to rectify the previous Indocentric paradigms and rehabilitate Southeast Asian agency and cultural specificity, this has too often meant turning a blind eye to the complex dynamics of cross-cultural exchange that contributed to shaping Old Javanese literature (and, more generally, Javanese culture). An example of this very peculiar scholarly attitude is the conscious leaving out of the Sanskrit model of the Old Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa kakavin* by two foremost scholars of Old Javanese, Willem van der Molen and Stuart Robson (van der Molen 2015 and Robson 2015). Besides ignoring a source whose heuristic relevance has been demonstrated, several passages in Robson's translation reveal his hesitation to let his work be informed by knowledge of the Indic-derived Śaiva religiosity that permeates the poem.[9]

In our contributions to an edited volume on the *kakavin Rāmāyaṇa* (2011), Arlo Griffiths and myself used a system to Romanize Old Javanese that deviated from the supposedly "standard" system used in text editions published thus far by KITLV in Leiden in order to conform to the internationally established system to transliterate Sanskrit and a variety of Indic languages across Asia. When criticizing our choice, Dick van der Meij (2012) explicitly attacks the "Cosmopolitan" perspective to defend the "localist" viewpoint:[10]

> I see no reasons why students of Indonesian literatures and manuscripts need to turn to India for inspiration for transliteration systems of Indonesian scripts…. More importantly, I fear that these spelling changes herald a return to the deplorable situation where Indonesian cultural phenomena are not considered in their own rights but rather in those of a so-called "Sanskrit Cosmopolis" (quoted in Acri and Griffiths 2014: 366).

[9] See my review essay (Acri 2017b).

[10] A rejoinder replying to van der Meij's arguments is Acri and Griffiths 2014.

The fact that van der Meij regards as "deplorable" the study of Indonesian cultural phenomena (we would rather say: premodern cultural phenomena of maritime Southeast Asia), in the light of the notion of the Sanskrit Cosmopolis elaborated by Pollock, is indicative of how the study of the Southeast Asian past is still fraught with sensitivities. If anything, this shows how many Southeast Asianists are either ignoring Pollock's work or refusing to acknowledge it (in spite of his imperfections) as constituting a fundamental theoretical advancement that greatly furthered our understanding of the cultural dynamics at work in the premodern and early modern cultural spheres of South and Southeast Asia, and which has significantly contributed to rendering obsolete the politically-charged notion of Greater India, and the equally political principle that anything Indonesian should be studied from a purely local perspective. It would seem that this attitude is running into the intellectual walls erected along the boundaries of contemporary nation-states, which stand in the way of recognizing the translocal, connected histories of different parts of South and Southeast Asia.

The same "localist" paradigm has dominated the study of modern Balinese Hinduism and its relationship with the premodern corpus of Old Javanese Śaiva texts of the *tutur* and *tattva* genre in the past four decades. In his influential essay "'Internal Conversion' in Contemporary Bali," anthropologist Clifford Geertz posited that Balinese religion, in contrast to the "rationalized" World Religion that is Indian Hinduism, was thoroughly "traditional," being characterized by "metaphysical nonchalance," its ritual and religious specialists being "more professional magicians than true priests," and traditional Balinese palm-leaf manuscripts being "more magical esoterica than canonical scriptures" (1973: 176–179). Following Geertz, Frederik Barth (1993: 216–217) has argued that Balinese religious texts do not constitute a "literary heritage allowing reference, comparison, and a critical scholarship of establishing a shared authentic knowledge," but rather "separate, independent sources of authority to their priestly possessors, at best read for their unique and place-and-person-specific knowledge." Jean-François Guermonprez (2001), denouncing the Indo-centric approach of previous scholars and orientalists, argued against the existence of a

meaningful link between South Asian Śaiva texts and Balinese texts, and stated that Balinese religion was not Hinduism, but rather a religion of "holy water" (*agama tirtha*). Guermonprez concluded that the "singularity" of Bali consists in an "Indianization without Hinduization (sic)." Having declared that Bali is not Hindu, and that there only occurred a "Balinization" of religious practices borrowed from India, we are left in the dark as to what the religion of Bali actually is, and what was its historical development.

Such views contribute to perpetuate the false perception of a peculiarly Balinese, "unique," almost "exotic" element that is irreducible to analysis and comparison, and that could not be defined besides invoking such vague concepts as "ancestor cults", "holy water religion," and a purely local form of ritual and "folk religiosity". In this connection, it is important to note that many or most scholars of Bali—whether anthropologists, philologists, or historians—have openly advocated the theoretical (and methodological) position stressing the insistence that Balinese religion and its foundational textual materials must be understood exclusively on their own (i.e. Balinese) terms, and that comparisons with South Asia and other areas of the Sanskritic world are bound to remain fruitless, or ill-advised. These scholars have also refrained from embarking on a comparison of features of Balinese religion(s) and ancient South Asian religions and philosophies, which since the first millennium CE have contributed to shaping the religious discourse on Bali. This perspective has favored a "parochialization" of Balinese culture, and denied the translocal, and intellectual, dimension by which it was shaped since its early history. The consequence of this view is that any translocal, intellectual, and "universalizing" elements of the religious discourse has been regarded as going back to the colonial and post-Independence period (via reformed Neo-Hinduism or contact with monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam) rather than to the premodern and early modern past. Thus, by treating Balinese Hinduism as an almost pre-literate religion, i.e., one primarily consisting in embedded village-rituals and ancestral spirit-cults with an uppercrust of newly-imported universalizing beliefs modeled upon Semitic religions and Indian (Neo-)Hinduism, scholars have

tended to impart an ahistorical characterization of it, which has effectively hampered a full understanding of Balinese religion and its foundational texts. Reacting to this paradigm, my research (Acri 2013) has shown that the *tattva* and *tutur* corpus was not an uniquely local, embedded and place-and-person-specific Balinese product, but partook of a complex translocal cultural phenomenon that flourished along the networks of intra-Asian contacts at an intra-regional level (for example, between Java and Bali, as suggested by the circulation of manuscripts of religious texts well into the 16th century) as well as trans-regional level (between India and Java-Bali, as suggested by the Sanskrit material traceable to Śaiva Sanskrit texts from the Subcontinent). *Tattva*s share a similar agenda of "translation" of Sanskrit doctrinal elements into a local linguistic and intellectual framework, displaying a similar degree of faithfulness to the common and prototypical Sanskrit canon—the corpus of South Asian Siddhāntatantras. At least as far as the earliest texts are concerned, *tattva* literature displays remarkably little—if any—localization, apart from very rare references to local geography, flora and fauna, etc. Localization becomes discernible in the texts composed after the 15th–16th century, yet not in the form of a purely Balinese phenomenon but as a wider regional phenomenon that included Java.[11]

## Ⅶ. Conclusion

In this essay I discussed the problem of the "local," especially as framed by Oliver Wolters, in the context of the scholarly dialogue between the "externalist" and "autonomous" positions. In particular, I criticized the hermeneutical validity of the fuzzy term "local," often invoked by scholars as a self-explanatory category whose historico-geographical boundaries are left undefined. I also

[11] It is undeniable that certain texts feature a higher degree of localization, that is the presence of regional re-configurations and distinctively "vernacular" cultural elements, such as the Old Sundanese Śaiva literature that flourished in 15$^{th}$–17$^{th}$ century West Java; however, since a detailed comparative study of this corpus vis-à-vis Sanskrit as well as Javanese and Balinese texts remains a desideratum, it is necessary to postpone our judgment until a more clear picture will emerge.

presented the extended geo-environmental metaphors of "Monsoon Asia" and "Maritime Asia" as alternatives to the previous paradigms, advocating the application of the concept of networks and a maritime approach. My findings suggest the need to move beyond the top-down phenomena described by Pollock into the direction of "convergence" and "cultural affinities" sketched by Kulke, and perhaps extend the "shared cultural matrix" elaborated by Wolters beyond the (constructed) geographical, social, and linguistic borders of Southeast Asia. When applying my critique to the study of Old Javanese literature and Balinese religion, I noted that a fuzzy-edged "localist" approach makes it difficult to do justice to the wider cultural dynamics at stake, and that to further our understanding of the phenomena in question, we need to move beyond the context-specific cultural instances and realize that civilizations cannot be understood solely in terms of internal dynamics but are a result of long-lasting circulatory processes and translocal interactions.

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