



INDIA'S HISTORICAL IMPACT ON SOUTHEAST ASIA

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ABSTRACT:

India's historical impact on Southeast Asia forms an important component of world history. In this age of globalization, relations between two significant regions are important. The Look East and Act East policies have become the catch word of Indian foreign relations since the 1990s, where Indian policymakers desired close cooperation with Southeast Asian countries. This is nothing new from an Indian perspective, but an enactment of déjà vu. What we know of today as Indian and Southeast Asian relations began in prehistoric times and continued until Western colonial hegemony was established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the essay that follows, "India" is defined as the Indian subcontinent up to the end of colonial rule. The contemporary nations of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste (East Timor), the Philippines and Việt Nam historically encompass a region profoundly impacted by Indian, Chinese, Islamic and then European civilizations. Southeast Asia has its indigenous particularities and nuances that make the region distinctive, too.

INTRODUCTION:

Indianization is the term generally used for Indian cultural influence upon Southeast Asia and Indian cultural penetration was generally peaceful and non-political. Southeast Asians voluntarily accepted the Indian cultural elements they liked. There was only one instance of Indian invasion: the naval expedition of Rajendra Chola in 1025 CE against the Srivijaya kingdom. The best way for readers to get more specific examples of early IndianSoutheast Asian interactions is to systematically consider examples of concrete contact

between Indians and the peoples who inhabited what are today prominent Southeast Asian countries. As will be seen especially in the case of Islam, intercultural contact between Indians and Southeast Asians was not a one-way process.

PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS:

Geographically close to India, Myanmar was a vital link between India and Southeast Asia. Therefore, the region was impacted by Northeast India and Southeast Asia the most and in turn developed a close rapport with Northeast India. This part of Southeast

Asia borders India and a land route, utilized by both Indian and Southeast Asians, through the rugged Arakan Mountains has existed since prehistoric times. The Bay of Bengal, which connects the now-modern nations of India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, also facilitated intercultural contact. Existing local traditions are evidence of Indian immigrants establishing some political authority in Myanmar. The still-existent Mon ethnic group from lower Myanmar to the east of Salween River in Thailand were the earliest people to come in to contact with Indians. The prevalence of Sanskritized names and commercial relations point to this close link. Cultural intercourse between the two regions grew through traders and Buddhist missionaries who reached lower Myanmar and consequently, Indianized kingdoms were established.

METHOD:

People living in what is today Thailand were already producing relatively sophisticated products and artifacts when they came into contact with external influences from Cambodia, China, India, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. India's contact with Thailand could be dated from fourth century BCE as evident from materials like rouletted

ware, knobbed vessels, glass beads, semi-precious stones, ivory and others from both regions. There is also a view that contact was made in the sixth century BCE, when Indian merchants came to Thailand by sea routes. When Buddhism came to Thailand, preexisting religious traditions underwent a process of adoption leading to an indigenous form of Buddhism, which was different from both the form and content of Indian Buddhism. For example, Thai Buddhism appropriated indigenous beliefs of animism with ancestor worship. The belief in spirits (phi) is still pervasive in contemporary Thai society. The combination of phi, an indigenous concept, along with deity (thewada) from Hindu-Buddhist cosmology means that the process of merger between different religious traditions had begun. Along with animistic practices, Buddhism also intertwined with other Hindu cultural patterns that had been introduced. Consequently, a single, distinct tradition emerged in Thailand out of animistic beliefs, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Thai society absorbed Indian elements into its cultural patterns and Thai culture has shown a tremendous capacity to harmonize different traditions and yet retain its distinctive nature.



Avalokiteśvara holding a lotus flower. Bihar, 9th century, CE. The Pyu followed a mix of religious traditions

DISCUSSION IN THIS STUDY:

Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos
The Indo-Chinese region (contemporary Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) comprised the former French possessions of Cochin-China, Annam, Tonking, Cambodia, and Laos. Here, powerful Indianized kingdoms such as Campa, Funan, Chenla, Angkor, and Lan Xang flourished. The people of Campa known as Chams are ethno-linguistically Malay inhabiting the eastern coast of central and southern Việt Nam. They

were greatly influenced by the BuddhistHindu culture of India as a result of commercial relations between Việt Nam and India. Indian traders crossed the Gulf of Siam to reach the port of Oc Eo in South Việt Nam near the Cambodian border. Oc Eo was a vital port city for trade from the second to sixth centuries CE. Excavations of Oc Eo have yielded beads, seals with Sanskrit inscriptions, gold medallions, and rare pieces of statuary.



Angkor Wat.

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