



“In Southeast Asia Hinduism has always been and still is the culture of the upper classes but never become complete that of masses...” discuss this statement of W.F. Stutterheim based on the development of Hinduism in Southeast Asia from 1st to 13th century.

Introduction

“The Indianization process witnessed the adoption of concepts and ideologies by the indigenous elite in sustaining and expanding their power over lands and peoples.”

- Ooi Keat Gin

Stutterheim’s statement actually referred to the contemporary Bali, but it is often argued that, Hinduism practiced in Southeast Asia during its Indianized period was more often restricted to the ruling class, the nobility and the elites, while the lower class, especially the peasants were less affected by the ideals and thinking of the Hindu world.

To understand the religious situation of both the upper class and the masses, one needs to consult local epigraphic and archeological evidence, as well as foreign (especially Chinese) records.

Defining Hinduism



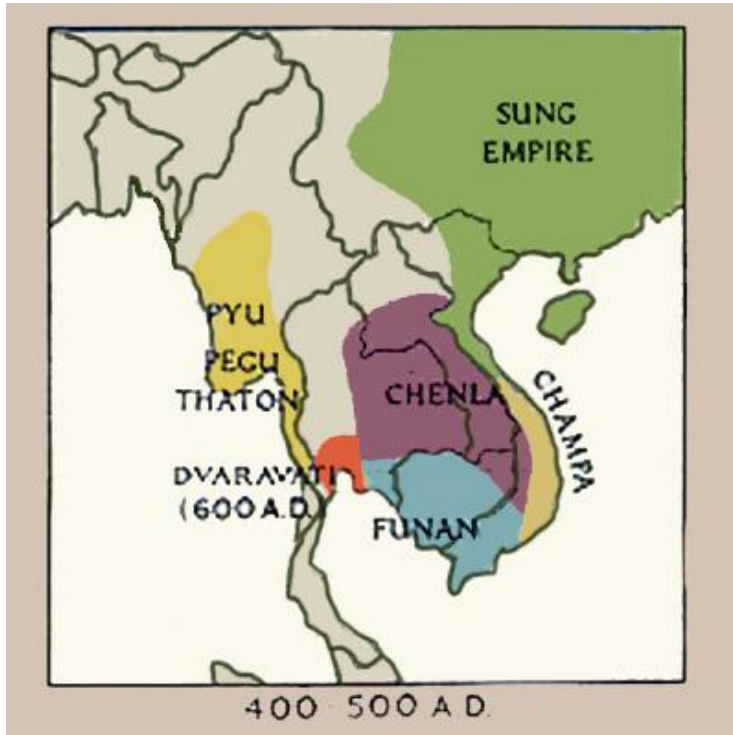
- The term 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' are relatively modern inventions, there is no such word as 'Hindu' in the entire Vedic literature.
- The modern word 'Hinduism' includes a numbers of different beliefs.
- For the sake of convenience, the term 'Hinduism' will be defined as 'traditions (especially Saiva and Vaisnava), myths, religio-political institutions, rituals and ideas originated in Indian soil, minus those of Jainism and Buddhism'.

Indianization of Southeast Asia

- Earlier scholars like R.C. Majumdar proposed Indian colonization of Southeast Asia, where Indians, either Brahmin or Ksatriya were chief elements of the spreading Indian religions on the local population. This theory is now not accepted by most of the scholars.
- Paul Michel Munoz summarized the two main possibilities for the diffusions of Indian culture in Southeast Asia:
 - i) Austronesian sailors and traders had been in contact with India since mid-1st millenium B.C.E, these merchants brought back both Indian products and religions.
 - ii) Indian traders, monks and Brahmins migrated individually or in small groups to Southeast Asia until 7th century C.E., some intermarried with the locals, further spreading Indian religions in the region.
- It is likely that the local chiefs of Southeast Asia, or Men of Prowess as called by Wolters, adopted Indian customs and religions

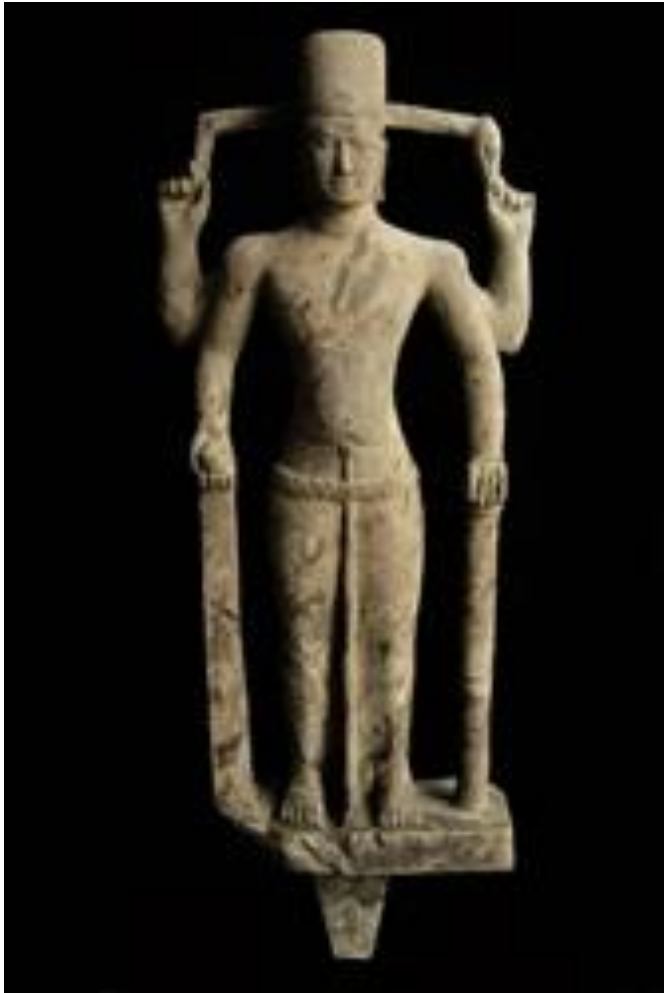
Funan

- Funan was an Indianized kingdom existed between the 3rd to 7th centuries C.E., centered on the lower Mekong delta.



According to Chinese records, a foreigner by the name of Huntian, usually identified as the Sanskrit name Kaundinya who defeated the Funanese queen Liu Ye, and was supposedly responsible for spreading Hinduism in Funan.

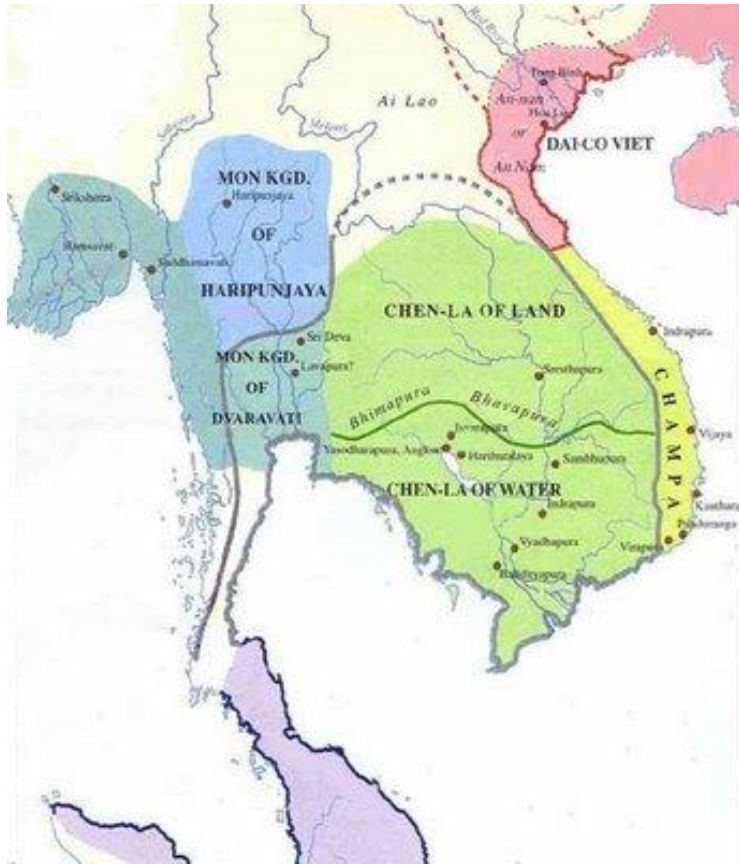
However, recently Michael Vickery disputed this and suspected Huntian might not be a transcription of the Sanskrit name Kaundinya, but of an unknown Austronesian name. In another word, Huntian might come from Malay peninsular as suggested by Coèdès.



- Chinese records mentioned that in the 5th century there was a king, who was originally an Indian Brahmin named Kaundinya Jayavarman, imposed Indian laws for the first time. The Funanese diplomat, a Buddhist monk named Nagasena, told the Chinese that the main deity of Funan was Mahesvara, proving that at least the royal household was Saivite, with strong Mahayana Buddhist influence. In fact, Mandra, a Funanese Buddhist monk, translated Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit to Chinese.
- However, Chinese text also mentioned that “It is their custom to worship the heavenly gods. The statues of the gods are made from bronze, with two faces and four arms, or four faces and eight arms. Each hand is holding something - a child, or a bird or beast, or a sun or moon (俗事天神，天神以銅為像，二面者四手，四面者八手，手各有所持。或小兒，或鳥獸，或日月)”. The statues here were mostly those of Siva, Visnu or Harihara. The Chinese word 俗 means something that is customary and common, this might indicate that while the royalty and the nobility patronized Sivaite cult or Mahayana Buddhism, the masses might be involved in the worship of the Hindu gods as well.

Zhenla (Chenla)

- Zhenla state of Cambodia was first mentioned in the Book of Sui as an Indianized kingdom, in the 6th century where the kings patronized Saivite cult and worshipped Bhadresvara (an aspect of Siva) in a mountain called Lingaparvata and practiced human sacrifice. This seems to indicate the pre-angkorian Cambodia royalty already practiced a form of Tantric Saivism. O.W. Walter noted that by the 7th century, based on inscriptions found, Saivite devotionism was wide spread among the élites. Lingas and Saivite statues were erected., and asceticism was valued. This devotionism was greatly tied with politics, where the ruler's soul (atman) was seen as having the closest relationship with Siva.





- The inscriptions from pre-Angkorian Cambodia show that while many royalties and élites had elaborate Sanskrit names, thus possible stronger influences, the names of the slaves usually were in Khmer and had rather pejorative meanings, like the name of a female slave was “she-who-eats-penis”. The non-Sanskritic names might imply lesser degree of Hindu influence among the lower classes.
- However, the Book of Sui implied there was still certain degree of Hinduism on the people of Zhenla. They honoured both Buddhist monks, and ‘priests’, presumably Saivite priests. It is also mentioned that the people chanted mantras and prayers while cleaning their teeth. It was also recorded that in a funeral, both Buddhists monks and ‘priests’ were presence. In a temple, one could see both statues of the Buddha and the Hindu gods.

Angkorian Cambodia

- The kingdom of Angkor was founded by Jayavarman II, who according to the Sdok Kak Thom inscription, came from Java to the city of Indrapura in Cambodia.



Jayavarman II was a Sivaite, and initiated the devaraja cult, the worship of a Sivaite image, which gave him the legitimacy to be independent of Java and rule as a Cakravartin, the Universal Lord. The Sdok Kak Thom inscriptions mentioned several Sivagamastras, hinted that the devaraja cult was Tantric in nature.

The spread of Saivism in Cambodia might be closely related to that of the Hindu currents in India. For instance, Shankara, the great 8th century Advaita philosopher, was mentioned in an inscription found in Cambodia. Hermann Kulke suspects that the activities of the Vaisnavite reformer Ramanuja might be directly or indirectly influenced the decline of Saivism in Cambodia during the 12th centuries, where Suryavarman II adopted Vaisnavism as the official religion, and later Jayavarman VII became a Mahayana Buddhist.

- Hinduism practiced in Angkorian Cambodia was closely tied with politics. It is true that Hinduism had a very strong influence in upper classes, but little is known about the religion of the masses.



Reports of the 13th century Chinese diplomat Zhou Daguan mentioned that among the religious clerics, there were Pandita, Chao Kru (Thai title for Buddhist monk) and the Tapasvin who worshipped the lingas. Zhou noted that Pandita belonged to the upper classes, while the Buddhism seemed to be very common among the masses. Zhou also mentioned that the Sivaite Tapasvins were much lesser in numbers, and their temples were smaller than the Buddhist ones, this possibly reflecting stronger Hindu influence on the élites, while under Thai influence the commoners adopted Theravada Buddhism, as well as the decline of Saivism in 13th century Cambodia.

Linyi



- Chinese sources mentioned that Linyi, a precursor of Champa neighboring to Funan already used Indic writing system in the 3rd century, indicating the presence of Indianization. Later Chinese annals mentioned that the kings of Linyi ordered statues of gold and silver to be crafted, perhaps statues of Hindu gods. Brahmins were highly regarded in Linyi, and every marriage in Linyi was conducted by a Brahmin.
- Chinese records mentioned that the people of Linyi worshipped the Buddha, but it is unclear if the people were really Buddhists, or the Chinese mistook the statues of Hindu gods as the statues of Buddha.

Champa

- The name 'Champa' appeared in the 7th century in Cham and Khmer inscriptions. Champa reached its peak from 7th to 10th centuries.



Various inscriptions show that the main religion of the kings of Champa was Saivism, where Mahesvara Bhadresvara was worshipped. Some surviving Sanskrit inscriptions, contain some brief descriptions of Hindu theology, for instance the My Son Stelae Inscription of Vikrantavarman mentioned the bhakti devotion to Siva, and Glai Lamov Stelae inscription of Indravarman I describes the deeds of the god Sankara-Narayana. Esoteric Buddhism was also adopted by some kings of Champa, as indicated in the An Thai Stelae Inscription. The Po-Nagar Inscription of Indravarman III stated that Indravarman III was familiar with “six systems of philosophy”, including Mimamsa and Buddhist philosophy and Sanskrit grammar. All these inscriptions show that the people responsible of the inscriptions, i.e. the kings, were indeed heavily influence by Hinduism.

- But did Hinduism only influenced the upper classes and not the lower classes? Chinese sources mentioned very little about religions in Champa. Sanskrit and Cham inscriptions rarely mentioned the religion of the lower classes. In the 15th century, Fei Xin, a Muslim Chinese translator of Zheng He (Cheng Ho). mentioned that Chams in Panduranga practiced animal sacrifice in temples to prevent being harassed by evil spirits, but did not mention the presence of any Hindu elements. It is likely that Hinduism was in decline even before the fall of Vijaya in 1471. Throughout the history of Champa Hinduism had strong influence in the upper classes, but much less influence in the lower classes.



Hinduism is only remembered very vaguely after the fall of Vijaya. The story of Ramayana survives in a tale known as Pram Dit Pram Lak, and the Brahmanical Indra is remembered as Yan In, but these stories different vastly from the original India forms. The goddess Po Nagar is still worshipped, but the legends of her Indianized counterpart Bhagavati has long been forgotten.

Java



- Java was mentioned in Ramayana as Yavadvipa, “the Island of Yava”, proving a very early contact between Java and India. It is likely that Hinduism was adopted by the local chiefs as a way to legitimize their rule. Kingdoms adopting Hinduism in the Indonesian archipelago started from the kingdom of Kutei in Kalimantan in the 4th century. From the 4th to 7th centuries, the Kingdom of Tarumanagara was established, in Java where Saivism was adopted. From the 9th century, the Hindu Mataram Kingdom based in Central Java became a dominant power in the archipelago. Other Hindu kingdoms like Kediri and Singhasari existed from 11th to 13th centuries. From the 13th to 16th centuries, the kingdom Majapahit became dominant, building the largest empire in Southeast Asia.

Throughout the history of the island of Java, the Saivite form of Hinduism was patronized by kings, but at times certain kings or dynasties might adopted other religions, like esoteric Buddhism (by the Sailendra) and Vaisnavism (by King Airlangga in the 11th century) . Hindu arts and literatures flourished throughout the Indianized period of Java, monuments like the temples in the Dieng Plateau and the Prambanan temple complex were built, and literary works in Javanese like Arjunawiwaha were produced.



- The worship of Siva and associated deities show few deviations from the Indian traditions. However, Stutterheim believes that the deceased kings were worshipped as Hindu-Buddhist gods in the candis (temples), connecting Hindu-Buddhist cults with ancestral worship. Elements of Austronesian beliefs persisted in the Hindu-Buddhist periods, for instance the worship of crocodiles, mountains and rivers. Sometimes the deities of the indigenous gods might be Sanskritized, like the god Haricandana.
- Little is known about the religion of the masses, but since Hinduism was strongly associated with kingship in ancient Java, we can safely assume that although the masses might be familiar with certain Hindu aspects, but their religion would probably be indigenous beliefs with Hindu elements. Scheltema stated that, "The Sivaite rites play an important part in the religious ceremony of the upper classes. The common people have adopted a sort of pantheism which makes them sacrifice in the family circle to benevolent and malevolent spirits of land and water, domiciled in the sea, rivers, hills, valleys, cemeteries, etc."

Bali

- Bali might be Indianized in the 8th century. Mahayana Buddhism and Saivism were established in the island. Some of the kings adopted Vaisnava, like Airlangga who became the ruler of both Java and Bali. The current form of Hinduism in Bali was greatly influenced by the Saivism practiced in Majapahit from the 14th to the 16th centuries.



The situation of Hinduism practiced in Bali must be similar with that in Java stated previously, where the upper classes practiced a form of Saivism, and the lower classes were (and still are) more involved in natural spirits worship. However, Hinduism had been fused with this spirits worship, where major Hindu deities are associated with natural forces, for instance, Brahma is seen as the god of fire, Wisnu as the god of water, and Dewi Sri as the goddess of rice.



“The courts and the literati accepted a great deal of ‘Indianization’, but probably no more than they understood or believed likely to be to their own advantage. ‘Indianization’ set them apart from the bulk of the population, and increased their prestige and authority. “

- Charnvit Kaset Siri

It cannot be deny the possibility that some of the upper classes adopted Hinduism for the sake of legitimacy, while others might genuinely seek for spiritual salvation and liberation.



For the masses, other than lack of necessity to adopt Hinduism like the upper classes, but hindered by illiteracy and lack of the mean of communication, received less influences of Hinduism. However, Hinduism did left some impacts on the masses in the folk beliefs, arts and literature, which are still visible today.

Conclusion

- Most evidences like architecture and epigraphic remains were left by the élites, who knew how to read and write. This provides us a bias look at the history of classical Southeast Asia, for the common people were mostly illiterate and did not leave us much evidence of their religions.
- However, we can safely assume that Stutterheim's statement is correct, and could be applied to the religious situation of Southeast Asia from the 1st to the 13th centuries, based on little evidences that we have, as well as comparing the situations of surviving Hindu cultures in today's Chams and Balinese communities.