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Southeast Asian 'Indianness'

*A Local vs. Trans-regional Perspective*¹

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This article is an attempt to define the concept '(Southeast Asian) Indianness' through a comparative approach based on a *local vs. trans-regional* perspective. We shall analyze the complex relationships that develop between a trans-local, urban and literate Indo-Aryan Great Tradition and a local, rural and oral Little Tradition. At first, we shall tackle the question of whether literacy has any socio-religious relevance and we shall try to identify its relationship to orality. We will subsequently analyze the (re-)indianization process as a socio-political construct and will finally propose some re-readings of 'Indopheresis' applied, we believe wrongly in some cases, to some Southeast Asian Indian-based socio-cultural realities.

Textual and Sociological realities

'Great Tradition' and 'Little Tradition'

The problem of the alleged gap between the textual norm of a religious tradition and the sociological realities of the daily religious experience still animates the academic debate. The very problem is to reach a consensus about the relations between the dynamic of the local interpretations of religion in daily life and the religious textual norms.

In order to render both sides of the religious reality, that is local variants of a religious convention and its textual norm, Robert Redfield (1956) posited two kinds of coexisting traditions and analyzed to what extent both traditions tangled. Redfield posited thereby two traditions, a rural, localized and illiterate one he named *Little Tradition* and another one, urban, translocal and based on a written tradition he named *Great Tradition*. Actually, this classification divided the religious activity into two distinct spheres and seemed to lay the foundations for a hierarchical classification of the religious facts, where the Sacred Text-based approach was overvalued by the very term that was used to designate it 'Great Tradition', while the various local actualizations were undervalued under the name '*Little Tradition*'. Moreover, this compartmentalization of knowledge between both traditions implied that people living in rural areas had little knowledge or interest in the religious textual knowledge (Goody 1968:6-9) even if the local religious *élites*' knowledge was considered as authoritative among the villagers; this compartmentalization

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consequently placed the 'Little Tradition' in dependence vis-à-vis the knowledge from the 'Great Tradition', while the latter did not grant any interest in the various sociological interpretations of the literati practices.

The *Great Tradition-Little Tradition* divide is ultimately a compartmentalization of what belongs to the realm of the textually consecrated *religious doctrine* and what belongs to the domain of the *religious beliefs*. Bridging this divide still leads to controversy; the crucial question being: do the 'Great Tradition' and the 'Little Tradition' cover mutually exclusive domains? Is there a doctrinal Buddhism or a normative Islam independent from their local variants? We shall tackle these questions in the next paragraphs.

'Great Tradition' and 'Little Tradition' as complementary domains

This compartmentalization of the religious sphere into two traditions, one based on *orality* and the other on *literacy* raises the question of the relations between both of them; in other words, has literacy any socio-religious relevance and what would be its relationship to orality?

Robert Hefner's works (1981; 1985) on the Tengger Indic priestly tradition in East Java is quite revealing because they show the religious relevance of semantically opaque priestly rituals and illustrate the place respectively held by *orality* and *literacy* in a unified and coherent religious system, where the first is complementary to the latter. The Tenggers belong to a Javanese ethnic group of some 40,000 souls living in the mountains of East Java, in the Tengger massif. The Tengger population is of great interest as, first of all, they have preserved an early Indicized Javo-Balinese sort of priestly rituals (Hefner 1983:665) since the collapse of the last Majapahit Hindu-Buddhist courts in Java over five centuries ago. Secondly, according to Raffles ([1817] 2010:330), the main duty required to the priests is to preserve the sacred texts through which they alone can speak to the deities²; these sacred texts are written in an archaic language codified in the prayers which remains for the most part unintelligible for, or at least unfamiliar to, nonpriests³. Though unintelligible, these prayers are considered of religious relevance in public comments and the public importance of these priestly rituals are ensured through a system of ritual exchange and festivity (Hefner 1983:673). The semantically opaque ritual prayers written in an archaic Javanese language (called *kawi* 'language for the prayers'⁴) are part of one coherent religious system.

Do the text-based practices from the Great Tradition and ordinary folk religious interpretations from the Little Tradition cover mutually exclusive religious domains? The question is far from being rhetorical, at least in the case of the Tengger Javo-Balinese

² The deities are said to demand that the offerings offered to them should be presented in a special language by a special celebrant (Hefner 1983:669).

³ It is thus a type of *restricted literacy* (Goody 1968:4), i.e. literacy unfamiliar to the majority of the villagers. In that kind of literacy situation, when few are literate, the use of literacy serves as a medium for social or —as far as the Tengger priests are concerned— symbolic domination.

⁴ This language had been written on palm-leaf manuscripts (*kropak*) till the XIXth century.

'Hinduism'⁵, because, though the prayers mention Indic deities (or Indic names for deities), folk accounts and commentaries do not speak of Indic gods but of Tengger local guardian spirits. For example, during the *kasada* festival on the slopes of the Mount Bromo, the priest invokes *síwa* but there is no public reference to such a deity; instead, *síwa* is identified to *dewa kusuma*, the Tengger Founding-Ancestor (*cikal bakal*). Though tainted with a Great Traditional Indic naming *síwa* (or *brama* in the tenth century⁶), a Little Traditional theme of Javanese veneration for an Ancestor (*dewa kusuma*) seems to surface⁷. In other words, a local Little Traditional cult is formally embodied in a Great Traditional liturgy.

Bridging both traditions is not an easy game to play. In the very specific Tengger case, it seems that both traditions do cover the same sociological reality; the affirmation of an ethnic cohesion and particularism through the veneration of a founding ancestor, named differently depending on the perspective: from the perspective of the priests⁸ (the *resi pujangga* or *dukun*) trained in the recitation of prayers in a dialect hardly accessible to the non-initiated and from the popular perspective of laymen considering these semantically opaque prayers as religiously relevant. In the very specific case of the Tengger ritual, we may venture to conclude that literacy is important as a medium for a ritual orthopraxy⁹.

Hefner's studies on the Tengger non-Islamic or Indic priesthood rituals clearly suggest that text-based practices can't be detached from a study on religious traditions and 'beliefs'. The author clearly shows that there can't be any (Javo-Balinese) 'Hinduism' (or whatever it might actually be) that would possibly exist apart from society and that the Great Traditional elements cannot be studied and understood outside the sociological ethos that makes use of and gives signification to them. Stanley Tambiah (1970) reached the same conclusion in his study on the Thai folk religious practices in Northeast Thailand, where the Pāli rituals from the Great Tradition have an equally meaningful position in the religious symbolic world as the one of the Little Traditional spirit cults.

⁵ There are major correspondences and similitudes between Tengger priesthood and Balinese priestly tradition which allow us to postulate a direct Javo-Balinese link between both (Hefner 1983).

⁶ Brandes (1913)

⁷ We are not asserting that the Indic elements have always been the apanage of the Great Tradition; in the Tengger case, elements from the Indic Shivaite tradition were deemphasized in public statements to the benefit of syncretistic Pan-Javanese elements (*kejawen*) in response to the political and religious changes that affected Java. The socio-linguistic implications on the Tengger language of these religious and political changes which affected the neighboring countryside should not be underestimated (Cf. Smith-Hefner 1989).

⁸ The priests can here be considered as 'cultural mediators' between the Great and the Little Tradition.

⁹ The *Tengger* ritual therefore belongs to the Javanese *abangan* and *pijaji* type of tradition (both are complementary according to Geertz 1960:234), in the sense that what matters is the correct ritual performance rather than the doctrine. The same semiotic interpretation applies to the *Balinese religion* (Geertz 1973:77) and to the Balinese political realm (Geertz 1980).

Moreover, this compartmentalization of the religious sphere into two intermixing traditions raises the question of the religious syncretism in Southeast Asia, that is, a Great Traditional world religion (such Buddhism, Hinduism and Islām) that would have overlaid local older religious traditions. We shall discuss the notion of syncretism in the next paragraph.

The notion of *syncretism*

The very notion of *syncretism* implies disequilibrium between the Great and Little Tradition in the sense that the world religions in their great traditional specificities (literacy and translocality) serve as standard for comparison. In other words, it is about identifying the relationships between a translocal world religion and some local indigenous spirit beliefs; are they two different religions (Spiro 1967; 1985) or are they variants in one religion (Tambiah 1970; Geertz 1960)?

The relative lack of specific studies on guardian spirits (*anāk t̄ā*) worship in rural Cambodia, alongside the studies restoring a Khmer Buddhism in its Great Traditional ideality and 'purified' from its animistic alterations pushed aside in a popular superstition is noteworthy because it shows the preponderance of the Pāli canonic texts in the interpretation of the actual religious experience. As noted in Alain Forest (1992:5-6), the *anāk t̄ā* cult is regarded as a sign of cultural backwardness and talking about it discredits the Khmer culture. However, the syncretism between the cult of *anāk t̄ā* and Buddhism both participate in the collective Khmer psyche; studies dealing with the *brāy* 'evil spirits' and their place within popular Buddhism are also extremely rare¹⁰. Whereas a Khmer defines himself as the result of a perfect match between ethnic identity and Buddhist religion ('to be Khmer is to be a Buddhist'), Khmer Buddhism remains a syncretistic form of Theravada Buddhism in which the *brāy* and *anāk t̄ā* cults definitely play a role. This tendency to reject in superstitious animism any deviance to 'pure' textual Buddhism originates in the dogma that Theravada Buddhism is only conceivable through the filter of its written Pāli sources which, though sacred, are ultimately a hodgepodge of various texts.

We must at this point ask ourselves about the place of the spirit cults (whether the Burmese *nat*, the Lao *phī* or Khmer *brāy*) within doctrinal Buddhism. In other words, the question is whether there is an animistic cult distinct from Buddhist cult or a form of syncretistic Buddhism. The syncretistic feature of Buddhism is relevant because there may be a contradiction between the doctrinal concepts theory and animistic agents' role. There is therefore a latent contradiction and tension between, on the one hand, the doctrinal postulate that *karma* (that is ethical causation) justifies daily suffering, of which relief depends on individual effort, and on the other hand, the assumption that supernatural agents can both cause and relieve from this suffering. Melford Spiro (1982:186-7) explains this tension with his 'two religion thesis' (Buddhism distinct from the animistic *nat* cult). This discrepancy may arise whether we assume or not that doctrinal Buddhism is the very essence of the Buddhist reality. Consequently, Melford Spiro's study (1967) on Burmese

¹⁰ The *brāy* belongs to a class of supernatural female beings, especially the souls of women who have died in childbirth; it is also a class of guardian spirits supposed to protect the Buddhist temples and Buddha statues; Ang Chouléan (1986, 1988) should be consulted on this topic.

supernaturalism contrasting the *nat* cult or exorcism rituals with Buddhism is almost exclusively based on the canonical texts doctrine and not on the actual observation of rituals performed by monks, activities within the village Buddhist temple or listening to religious ideas expressed by the Buddhist villagers. Moreover, for Spiro, the conflicting relationship between Buddhism and what he called 'supernaturalism' is a doctrinal one (that is, Buddhism and spirit cults are just incompatible) and are psychologically experienced by the Burmese.

Conversely, Stanley Tambiah (1970:41) prefers regarding the relationships between Buddhism and the spirit cults as a categorical opposition acting within a total field in which complementarities and hierarchies can be expressed between Buddhism and animistic cults¹¹. It is also the position taken by Clifford Geertz (1960) in his influential study on Islâm in Java; for Clifford Geertz, the religious differences (Islâm, spirit cults or supernaturalism, Indic substratum) in Java are just variants in one single religion¹². Many scholars¹³ working on the relationships between animistic cults and doctrinal Buddhism appear to endorse Tambiah's position and seem to consider that spirits cults or animist beliefs are better understood if studied in their relation to Buddhism (Hinduism or Islâm). The spirits cult and Buddhism form a religious system in which every single element is organized and prioritized. We think that this thesis is reinforced by the sacred geography within the Buddhist monastery considered as a totality encompassing an entire religious system. The sacred geography of the monastery ritually marks areas for doctrinal Buddhist allegories as well as areas for animistic agents such as huts for Khmer *anāk tã vatt* (Ang Chouléan 1988), Lao *phī khun wat* (Condominas 1968) or Burmese *nat*. An area is then ritually marked within the Buddhist monastery to house an animistic spirit. In addition, we think this tension can be partially neutralized by the recovery of animistic agents by Buddhism itself, as shown in the case of Khmer maleficent spirits *bray*, which become protector spirits when they are associated to the Buddhist monastery. The analysis of the songs of incantation to the *nat* analyzed by Alexandra de Mersan (2010) is similarly noteworthy in the sense that it focuses on the inclusion of *nat* worship in a Buddhist geography and the subordination of *nat* to *Sikra* (*Indra*) united by a matrimonial tie. Furthermore, it is significant that the song of incantation to the *nat* studied by de Mersan opens and ends with the evocation of *Jambudīpa*, the island of Buddhism *par excellence*. In addition, *Sikra* — devout servant of the Buddha according to Renou & Filliozat (1985:493) — is presented as the husband of the Country Ladies, the mighty *Ramōn* and *Mayu*; the *nat* worship is therefore metaphorically

¹¹ It is what Michael Mendelson named *Messianic Buddhism* (1961; 1975).

¹² We should note, however, that in the case of the religion in Java, the syncretistic conflicts are sociological ones; according to Clifford Geertz (1960), the religious differences are sociologically labeled with the terms *abangan*, *santri* and *priyayi* and even if numerous criticisms have been raised against the Geertzian correlation with religious variants and social status, the Javanese are totally aware of these variants. This hasn't been observed in the case of Buddhist syncretistic conflict where the Burmese or Thai are not concerned about the religious variants.

¹³ Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière (1989 ; 2009) among many others.

placed in a subordinate position through a patriarchal relationship¹⁴. The *nat* worship and Buddhism are *de facto* integrated into a single and hierarchical system of beliefs.

The *Great ~ Little Tradition* divide is not just a mere conceptual or theoretical construct but is also sociological in the sense that this 'dichotomization' surfaces as a subordination of the Little Traditional religious beliefs to the great traditional world religions; however, both are complementary (sometimes conflicting) parts of a unique and coherent religious system. There is no Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam outside their sociological representations. 'Indianness' in Southeast Asia is brought into a sociological position of symbolic superiority, and conflictually combines with a Little Traditional world of religious beliefs, supernaturalism, superstitions, spirit cults, etc. (no matter how you name them). In the field of religious symbolism, therefore, the Indo-Aryan Great Tradition in Southeast Asia could be associated to the phenomenon of 'partial' or 'restricted' literacy, where literacy serves as a sociological medium for symbolic and/or social domination in an Oral Tradition Civilization (i.e. when most people are illiterate).

'Re-indianization' as a socio-political construct

We have just analyzed the complex underpinning relationships between a literate Indo-Aryan Great Tradition and some local oral Little Traditions. We shall now tackle the question of how the sociological realities interact with both of them, laying an emphasis on either the great-traditional facet (what we call the 're-indianization process') or the little-traditional one according to the socio-political purpose to be reached.

Great Tradition as a response to social change: the *Khmer* case¹⁵

EFE0 as an almighty colonial institution? In the case of Indianized Southeast Asia, as noted in Susan Bayly (2000), the French saw themselves as revitalizers of the 'Indochinese' grandeur through great traditional Indianism. It is through the Great Tradition that the French tackled this task: revitalizing and purifying the 'Indochinese' culture from its Little Traditional degeneration through an orientalist interpretation of the Khmer culture; this point of view was widely spread through colonial instruments founded for this purpose: the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFE0, founded 1901) and the *École Supérieure*

¹⁴ It also provides a cosmological legitimacy to the king in the sense he is the husband of the *Country Ladies* and that *Sakra / Indra* gives or takes away the *regalia*. On the role of Indra in Burmese kingship and in the Burmese *nat* worship, Brac de la Perriere (1989, 1996) should be consulted. We should also note this tradition has survived till today; on this, Mersan's article (2009) should be consulted; the author describes therein the symbolic matrimonial tie between a high-ranking Burmese officer and an Arakanese deity to ensure the Burmese officer legitimacy in the territory placed under the protection of the Arakanese deity.

¹⁵ We would like to thank David Chandler for his comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. All remaining errors are our sole responsibility.

de Pāli (ESP, founded 1922), both institutions which were to construct a historical narrative based on an Indic Great Tradition.¹⁶

However, we should be wary of considering the French colonial actions and interests in Indochina as a monolith. Indeed, the French colonial actions and interests were not equally carried out and evaluated in Tonkin, Annam, Cochin China-Cambodia and Laos. It has become fashionable to condemn harshly the EFEO mission in Cambodia and to accuse it of being an omnipotent instrument for colonial control over the Khmer culture (Peycam 2010) and to remove the Khmer intellectual circles of that time from any role in their own history. It is rather the personal works of EFEO scholars such as Louis Finot (1864-1935), George Cœdès (1886-1969) and Suzanne Karpelès (c. 1890-1969), all indologists, which should actually be analyzed and assessed, even if the rhetoric they presented to the *Résident Supérieur* in order to justify some funding from Hanoi, may have sounded colonial¹⁷. It is important to recall that the seat of the EFEO was in Hanoi and that its action in Cambodia remained therefore relatively limited as an instrument of colonial control. As David Chandler (pers. com.) points out, the French based their legitimacy on a series of agreements they had pushed onto the complaisant, if not weak, Cambodian monarchy, rather than on the work of the EFEO or ESP.

'*Intercultural mimesis*'. As we just mentioned above, the individual works of EFEO scholars should be assessed, rather than the role of the EFEO as a monolithic 'institutional colonial machine'. In order to understand the creation of new Khmer Buddhist institutions by the early twentieth century, we must account for these scholars' individual perceptions and intellectual relationships towards Buddhism. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Buddhism, as it was conceived (or constructed) in the West and transposed in the East, was a Great-Traditional Buddhism whose very essence was to be found in 'Textuality'. Moreover, as Almond wrote (1988:33), *Buddhism as it manifested itself in the East could only there be seen through the medium of what was definitively said about it elsewhere [in the West]*. It was within that general dominant Western perspective on Buddhist studies during the early-20th-century that the EFEO scholars' intellectual interests for the Great Traditional Buddhism and the Khmer elites' socio-political interests met in an 'intercultural mimesis', that is *occasions where it seems that aspects of a culture of a*

¹⁶ Like virtually all colonial experience, French colonial rule was imposed on 'French Indochina' through military violence and diplomatic baseness. After the guns had sounded, the French colonial administration had to legitimize its control over its newly acquired colony. The French tried to legitimize their *mainmise* on their Southeast Asian colonies by adopting a culture-based perspective and they wanted to stress, therefore, on an opposition between their 'spiritual' colonial administration, the so-called civilizing 'genius' of France, and the brutal imperialism in the British Empire (Maspero 1929). The administration of the French colonies will be charted in the opposition between France's civilizing 'genius' and British brutal strength, at least theoretically. In this sense, the French intellectual conception of colonization was anchored in the same intellectual ground as the one of the 'Greater India' polemicists, among whom R.C. Majumdar ([1927] 1985:xxii-xxiii), who regarded the Indian colonization of Southeast Asia as benevolent, peaceful and decidedly culture-based.

¹⁷ Hansen (2007:128).

subjectified people influenced the investigator to represent that culture in a certain manner (Hallisey 1995:33).

Autochtonization of Buddhist modernist movements. The founding mandate of the *École Supérieure de Pāli* was to shear the Khmer Buddhism of its supernatural accretions and to come back to the textual Pāli sources. Under the auspices of the ESP headed by the French pālicist Suzanne Karpelès, began what the colonial scholar-authorities called the ‘renovation of Buddhism’ characterized by a return to scriptural purity, to a Buddhism consistent with the European academic circles then dominated by Indologists considering it as *an historical project, derived exclusively from manuscripts* (Lopez 1995:7)¹⁸. This institution was carved out to institutionalize the formation of the *saṅgha*, and to disconnect the religious realm from the State politics; the French, on a strictly Great Traditional basis, created that way a conceptual framework which facilitated the emergence of a new category, that of the *sāsanā jāti* (‘national religion’). Within this renovation process did emerge a reform movement of the *saṅgha* called the *Mahānikāy thmī* (‘Little Mahānikāy’), the future *Dhammakāy*, whose purpose was to bear out or revalorize a Buddhist doctrine on the basis of a scriptural Pāli purity (Edwards 2004:64). The Buddhism, which the reformist wing of the *saṅgha* and the French scholars wanted to reform, was the Little Traditional Theravādin Buddhism, a junction point between of Buddhistic, Hinduistic and animistic practices and beliefs also characterized by a recurrent practice of witchcraft. It is quite revealing that the *Buddhisme* (sic) *au Cambodge* by Adhémard Leclère (1899), a quasi-ethnographic monument of the Khmer Buddhism, was ostracized by the colonial intellectual authorities of the time, as this *opus magnum* clearly aimed to study *la religion et les croyances religieuses du peuple cambodgien, non telles [...] qu'elles devaient être d'après les textes sacrés, mais telles qu'elles sont en réalité aujourd'hui* (1899:xi).

The ‘re-indianization’ or ‘re-great-traditionalization’ of Theravāda Buddhism was part of an attempt to autochtonize a modernist variant of Theravāda Buddhism; the colonial authorities (and consequently the Khmer authorities) then broke away from the foreign influence of the Siamese *Dhammayutism*¹⁹ which the Khmer reform movement largely took as a pattern; besides, it is also symbolically significant that King Sisowath Monivong of Cambodia and King Sisavong Vong of Laos were invited by the French scholar-administrators when the *Institut Indigène d'études Bouddhiques de Petit Véhicule* (later ‘Institut Bouddhique’) was inaugurated in Phnom Penh in 1930. Indeed, the cooperation between the French colonial administration and the Lao and Khmer *saṅgha* was fostered in order to deprive an embarrassing religious (if not political) orientation of the ‘French Indochinese’ *saṅgha* toward Siam and to replace it by a loyalty toward the French colonial authorities and their patronized Khmer authorities.

Buddhistic Response to Social Change. We must first lay stress upon the fact that the French colonials did not construct a Khmer Buddhism but rather joined with an autochthonous reform which consisted in reconsidering the relationship toward Buddhism and toward the response it provided in the rationalization of changing human realities.

¹⁸ Quoted in Edwards (2004:67).

¹⁹ Which also promoted a rigorous study of the Pāli Canon.

Reform movements took hold in the awareness of social and political upheavals that affected Southeast Asia in the late nineteenth century and in the alleged inadequacy of Buddhist responses provided to face these sometimes cataclysmic social changes.

Indeed, the French cultural action in Cambodia was paralleled by autochthonous reformist movements to purify Theravāda Buddhism from its local Little Traditional 'degeneration' such witchcraft, superstition, spirit cults, etc. The reform movements in Cambodia can be associated with the Siamese *Dhammayut* sect (Harris 2005:107) aiming at returning to a rigorous study of the Pāli Canon and at shearing Buddhism of its local, at village-level, accretions.

We have to replace the Khmer reform movement in its historical context of major socio-political turmoil (Chandler 2008:141-165). A return to the canonical sources and to the Theravāda dogma of the immutability of *kammīc* law conducive to a (re-)ordered Cosmos might have been seen as an antidote against these sorrowful times in a devastated Cambodia. The Cambodian people's misfortunes were measured in terms of a distance away from the 'pure' knowledge of the Theravāda Buddhism in its most canonical form and in the ignorance of the language conveying the Buddhist life-saving precepts.

The return to a rigorous study of the Pāli holy texts was in the continuity of a precolonial Khmer performative tradition of textuality (Edwards 2004:67; Taylor 1993:64-5) and a conception of literacy according to which texts are physically potent objects which were considered as sacred as relics; in that kind of devotional aspect of literacy, touching, hearing or seeing holy texts embodying the Buddha connected the devotee to Him (Edwards 2004:83). Collecting texts in the reformist period was synonymous with the notion of 'purifying' Theravāda Buddhism and was to be seen as a symbolic act generating merits. Furthermore, the Khmer reform movement tried to palliate two fundamental flaws; on the one hand a remarkable ignorance of the Pāli language and, on the other hand, the absence of Pāli canonical texts in Cambodia (Hansen 2007:80). Indeed, in the beginning of the twentieth century, knowledge of Pāli was, at best, feeble (Maspero 1915:36) and there are reasons to believe that at the dawn of the nineteenth century the *Tipiṭaka* may not have been known as an entire corpus in Cambodia and rather referred to manuals containing formulas to be learned by rote by the monks without necessarily understanding them or reflecting over them (Bizot 1992:25-7); the concept of 'purification' connected with collecting Buddhist texts and finding the true Canon gradually got intertwined with the interpretation of the *Tipiṭaka* (Hansen 2007:83) in a textual and interpretative process Stanley Tambiah (1976:211) called *scripturalism*.

The reform then consisted in 're-indianizing' the religious practices and beliefs by 're-great-traditionalizing' them—that is, returning to canonical Pāli sources and reflecting over them rather than learning them by rote—in response to the tremendous socio-political changes which affected Cambodia from the beginning of the nineteenth century on.

Purification of Buddhism by a Franco-Khmer elite. In the specific case of French colonialism in Southeast Asia, the colonial authorities adopted a culture-based perspective to legitimize their power. They imposed themselves as 'Revitalizers' and 'Translators' of Ancient Indic Civilizations through the filter of the European academic Indianism. However, we don't assert that the colonial scholar-authorities constructed the Khmer culture and

religiosity on an Orientalist Great Traditional ground but rather that a Franco-Khmer intellectual elite —the colonial scholar-administrators and the reformist wing of the *samgha*— reshaped Khmer Buddhism in order to fulfill their own divergent, if not conflicting, needs.

Great-Tradition as an ethnic construct: the *Balinese* case

The interest of the Balinese case we shall deal with is that, albeit the Dutch colonial administration did not understand much about the socio-cultural complexity of Bali, they tried to model Bali on the idea the scholar-administrators had of it through the filter of Orientalism and Great Traditional, Sacred-texts-based, Hinduism. So much so that, to some extent, the Dutch Orientalist construction would become Balinese realities. Indeed, the Balinese have been deliberately engaging into a (re-)Indianization, or (re-)Great-Traditionalization, process since the incorporation of their island within the Dutch East Indies colonial empire at the turn of the twentieth century.

Orientalism and Great Traditional Hinduism Join in the Dancing. On the top of the Balinese ‘apartness’ came an emphasis on the ‘hinduized’ facet of Balinese culture; it was not about an opposition heathen Bali vs. Islamic Java quite frequent during the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries anymore but rather about a ‘hinduizing’ perception of a Balinese culture that had to be protected from a ‘hinducidal’ Islam. Bali became a living ‘Museum of Hindu Java’. This protectionist vision, this conceptualization of Bali as a museum of Javanese Hinduism was primarily motivated by the need to hold back the rise of Islamic, communist and nationalist movements that prevailed in Java; this protectionist, almost paternalistic, vision spread in academic circles under the impulse of Sir Raffles (1817, volume II) whose interest was to gauge Balinese political significance (Boon 1977:21) and to generate interest in the Balinese ‘Hinduism’ filtered out through his study of the *Kawi* literature. Another architect of an Orientalist perspective on Bali was John Crawfurd for whom *the great body of the Balinese are Hindus of the sect of Siwa [...] (1820:237)* and whose *Brahmins [...] may be considered genuine Hindus (1820:238)*. Shortly after, the studies by Wolter Robert Baron van Hoëvell followed; van Hoëvell’s writings attest a heavily involvement in the defense of the peoples of the Dutch colonies of *Indies*. As Vickers (1989:79) points it, van Hoëvell was highly interested in discovering the Indian origins of Balinese culture and wanted to investigate how religion and culture interacted within Balinese society. For van Hoëvell (1848:152), it was *a fact generally known that on the island of Bálí the Hindu religion subsists undisturbed*; he did actually consider Bali as an India further east.

It is also in this ‘hinduizing’ perspective on the Balinese society that Rudolf Friederich was sent to Bali by van Hoëvell on behalf the *Bataviaasch Genootschap* in 1846 together with the colonial expeditionary forces against Bulèlèng. Friedrich was steeped in the romantic *Orientalismus*, he knew Sanskrit and was a connoisseur of Indian Hinduism. He was consequently the perfect scholar to be sent to Bali in order to deepen the knowledge of Balinese Hinduism, to confirm it as a branch of Indian Hinduism and to study the *Kawi* literature, which was supposed to be a branch of the Sanskrit language²⁰. Friederich’s method

²⁰ Which is actually not the case as *Kawi* is Old-Javanese, a Malayo-Polynesian language.

is indicative of that time imbued with the Great Tradition of Hinduism where the Brahmin was considered as the true bearer of the Hindu Knowledge. Indeed he only lent credibility to the comments uttered by the Balinese Brahmins, whom he idolized; the rest of the Balinese population was of no interest to him and he made no secret of his contempt for them.

During the nineteenth century, it was on the sole basis of the Great Tradition of Hinduism and its culturally enshrined representatives (the Brahmins) that the Balinese cultural facts were apprehended. For example, in his study of the Balinese religious literature, Rudolf Friederich (1959:11) would argue that *the first rank in the Balinese literature, as in that of the Hindus, is occupied by the Vedas*; however, the word *weda* came from India emptied of its genuine semantics and is used in Balinese in its verbal prefixed form *ma-weda* which means a way of officiating in a learned priesthood register (Guermonprez 2001:273-4). The interpretation of the Balinese *weda* through its Great-Traditional Indian counterpart was rather tempting for a Sanskritist such as Rudolf Friederich²¹. The case of Sylvain Lévi's 1928 mission to Bali is equally worthwhile. As any serious Indologist —therefore (self-) proclaimed expert on caste, in the words of Jackie Assayag (1998:168)— Sylvain Lévi (1933: ix) reported seeing Brahmins walking alongside *kṣatriya*, *vaiśyas* and *sūdra* ploughing their way through the shade of a Hindu temple dedicated to *Varuṇa*. However, what was catching the traveler's attention posing trunks in the port of Singaraja was the presence of Muslim Bugis traders and Taoist Chinese hearing the muezzin's call to prayer, rather than Sanskrit stanzas proclaimed by some Brahmin to the glory of the god *Varuṇa*, otherwise totally unknown in Bali²².

The colonial Hindu-based 'baliseering' ('Balization'). It is on this Great Traditional Hinduistic foundation mentioned above that the Dutch colonial administration would embark in the attempt of constructing Bali as a turned-into-a-Hindu-museum culture

²¹ It is quite revealing that observers without any Sanskritist's *a-priori*, and freed from the Great-Traditional Indological yoke from the nineteenth - early twentieth centuries, seem to have observed the Balinese religious universe with more impartiality. This is the case of Miguel Covarrubias, a Mexican painter, cartoonist and anthropologist who lived in Bali and wrote his authoritative *Island of Bali* (1937); he pointed out ([1937] 2008:260): *The conglomerate of religious principles manifests itself in elaborate cults of ancestors and deities of fertility, of fire, water, earth, and sun, of the mountains and the sea, of gods and devils. they are the backbone of the Balinese religion, which is generally referred to as Hinduism, but which is in reality too close to the earth, too animistic, to be taken as the same esoteric religion as that of the Hindus of India.*

²² It should be recalled here that the Balinese are not used to naming the deities they worship; thus, the principal deity revered in the *pura segara* ('sea temple') is not *betara baruna* but *betara segara* ('deity of the Sea'), or more commonly *ratu ngurah segara* ('king ruling over the sea area') (Guermonprez 1985:51). As Hildred Geertz pointed out (1994:124), Balinese consider it irrelevant to name the deities they worship; if they are asked, they will just answer they are bringing offerings *to the betara* (to the deity, to the God). The Balinese religious universe is inherently indigenous and particularistic despite Sanskrit terms and ritual elements rooted out from India.

in the late 1920²³. But, if the colonial officials were attempting to run a society conceptualized by the European academic Orientalism, these same Dutch administrators had first to teach the Balinese how to be authentically (Hindu) Balinese. A 'balization' of the Balinese social tissue consisting of promoting the richness of its cultural heritage based on Hinduism then commenced. The socio-cultural vector of this Hindu legacy would become the Balinese gentry restored in its political and religious authoritative position under the strict supervision of the colonial authorities; this position of religious and political authority was sealed in a 'caste' (*warna*)²⁴ hierarchy which the colonial administrators granted legal status. The Dutch, therefore, ossified a genuinely flexible hierarchical 'caste' system (Howe 1995; 2001). As explained in Michel Picard (2002:111-118), the 'balization' should have long term consequences; indeed, in marking out Bali in its Hindu heritage in opposition to an hegemonic Islam in the archipelago, the colonial administrators designed a novel conceptual framework where religion (*agama*) should dissociate itself from tradition (*adat*), from culture (*budayaan*) and art (*kesenian*) while at the term of the twentieth century *it would have been very difficult to isolate and identify something in Bali called Balinese religion as a separate, distinct and organized sphere of life* (Howe 2005:57). It is in this novel conceptual framework built by Orientalists that the Balinese would from then on discuss their own identity, their *kebalian*.

Construction of the 'kebalian' ('Baliness'). The Balinese intellectuals would take over this Orientalist construct and fictions which would become the conceptual framework in which they were soon to discuss their identity (Picard 2008); through an 'internal conversion' process (Geertz 1964), they reinvented themselves as the Hindu they were already supposed to be (Picard 2004:57). The colonial administrators fractionated artificially the Balinese socio-cultural reality by encouraging (imposing) the emergence of the *agama* and *adat* categories, both cultural 'realities' which beside had not been lexicalized in Balinese till these two concepts entered Balinese lexicon under colonial influence. These two conceptual constructs of *adat* and *agama* were posited as two distinct realities by the colonial administration.

From the late nineteenth century, a Balinese intelligentsia trained in colonial schools turned the connections between the *agama* and *adat* domains over in its mind and wondered about how these should be differentiated²⁵. Then a (unarmed) conflict ensued opposing the

²³ The political aim of such an attempt is equally obvious; indeed, Hindu Bali became the outpost for the colonial struggle to staunch the rise of Islamist, nationalist and communist movements.

²⁴ It should be reminded with Guernonprez (1985) that the Balinese *warna* originate in a theory of social hierarchy inseparable from a civilizing myth according to which Bali would have been 'civilized', 'hinduized', by Hindu Majapahit Javanese in the fourteenth century. The Balinese *warna* do not owe anything to the Indian *varṇa* (except the name). The Balinese *warna* system fits into a differential value of ancestry (*kawitan*) of the distinct descent groups (*soroh*) (Geertz & Geertz 1975). The membership to a particular *warna* is calculated according to a genealogical distance from a deified ancestral nucleus named 'Deity Majapahit' (*Batara Maospait*).

²⁵ It should be mentioned here with Hildred Geertz (personal communication, 2012) that *most of the discourse* [described in this paragraph] *is not theological but political*

jaba ('commoners') representing the forces of modernism to the *triwangsa* ('gentry') representing the reactionary forces. The gentry and commoners differed on how to view the relationship between what belonged to the *agama* domain and what came out of the *adat* sphere. For the *triwangsa*, the Balinese *agama* was based on the *adat* from which it was inseparable; this conception of *adat-agama* relationship was rooted in the very fact that 'tradition' (hence 'religion', as both were indissociable) legitimized their hegemonic position within the Balinese society. On the other hand, *jaba's* conception fell within the scope of a criticism of the traditional social order perceived as unfair; they therefore opted for a clear dissociation between the *adat* (perceived as unfair and vector of the gentry hegemony) and the *agama* which they wanted to reform on the basis of a Hinduistic Great-Tradition. The modernist social movement was therefore based on a 're-Hinduization' or a 're-Great-Traditionalization' of the Balinese 'Hinduism'.

An example of 're-Indianization' or 're-Karmazation' process motivated by social conflict (opposing the *jaba* to the *triwangsa*) is the critique of cremation procedures, which is one of the traditional practices of the Balinese gentry. The cremation practice, described in detail by Clifford Geertz (1980), had an impact on the lower castes in the sense they tried to emulate the magnificence of the ceremonies, even if heavily indebted. These rituals were criticized on economic and religious grounds. Indeed, the protest against the costs of such a ceremony is rooted in an 'indianizing' vision of *karma*, that a good rebirth was not the result of an expensive cremation but of the actions of a person during his lifetime²⁶. This tendency to 're-indianize' a Balinese society is to be the result of social tensions opposing the gentry (the *triwangsa*) to the lower castes (the *jaba*) since the 1920s; it is also symptomatic of an increasingly marked dissociation of the *agama* and *adat* on the one hand and of a tension between the *adat bali* and the *agama hindu* on the other hand. Implicitly a 're-indianizing' conception of Balinese ritual practices was used as a justification for criticisms on social order dating from the Javanese Majapahit invasion.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are characterized by a consciousness (though hazy) on the part of the 'Indianized' Southeast Asian peoples of their specificity. An autochthonous intellectual elite began to think about what is, and how to be, a Khmer, a Balinese or a Burmese. A criticism of the society as it was built or promoted by various colonial administrations joined in the debate on the ethnic specificities as Nation-building. Two tensional —sometimes contradictory— forces conflicted in the (post-)colonial indigenous debate. On the one hand a reformist force rooting in a Great-Traditional, trans-regional, and Sacred Texts-based Buddhism or Hinduism purged of their particularistic accretions; on the other hand, a 'reactionary' force, which, though not denying the authoritative feature of the Great-Tradition, set great store by and insisted on the little-traditional particularisms of the local religions or beliefs, in which the dominant position in the socio-cultural hierarchy anchored. The years 1920-30 are characterized by an open crisis caused by too sharp a separation between a Great-Tradition, a return to the Sacred textual sources regarded as the bedrock of modernism, and a Little-Tradition considered a contemptible refuge for the justification of a social order considered unfair. The last years of

at base; almost all Balinese just go on with their 'religious' activities, not caring what they are called. Only among a tiny fringe of educated people is there any 'theological' thought or speech.

²⁶ Howe (2001:58 *et seq*) should be consulted.

the colonial regimes and the early postcolonial reflection on 'Indianized' Southeast Asian ethnic identity display an image of 'Indianness' politicized on the basis of a Great-Traditional 're-Indianization', venerable pedestal of a socio-cultural modernism supposed to expunge years of degeneration characterizing, from the native point of view, the colonial period.

Little Traditional re-connotation of a Sanskrit Great Tradition

Between 300 and 1000 AD, an array of cultural features, of Sanskritic norms, spread from North India to royal courts in South India, and incidentally to Southeast Asia. One of these features included a focus on Sanskrit as a correlate of social order, which gave this language a powerful sociological appeal (pollock 2006:524). This phenomenon Pollock termed *Sanskrit Cosmopolis* (1998; 2006). But the question remains of how Southeast Asians reshaped the Indic motifs according to their own socio-cultural contingencies.

Sociology-based re-connotation as an introduction

The problem we shall tackle through the subsequent lines is the use of Sanskrit or of Sanskrit terms in 'Indianized' Southeast Asia. We do believe that the local sociology generally re-connotes the borrowed Indian term. For instance, in the Khmer realm, the Sanskrit word *kula* ('race, family, community, tribe; noble family, noble') was obviously re-connoted according to some Khmer sociological contingencies; indeed, the Middle Khmer form *kloe* (from Skt. *kula*) designates 'two friends of the same sex bound by a ritual oath of loyalty and mutual aid' and its Khmer semantics is culturally motivated by the sociological microcosm represented within the world of the *vatt* ('temple') in which the mutual support between two *sāmaṇera* 'novices' subjected to the tough education inculcated by their *upajjhā* 'monk in charge of education of a younger' was nothing but vital to their psychological equilibrium. This connotation is totally absent from the genuine Indo-Aryan semantics. To hang about in the Khmer world, let's also lay an emphasis on the fact Śiva (*braḥ śsūr*) is nothing more than a local '*nak tā*' spirit', and, as in Burma, Indra (*braḥ ind*) and Brahma (*braḥ brahm*) alone have retained their status of 'Sanskrit' deities as guarantors of the *Dhamma* and right-hand deities of the Buddha; the other 'Sanskrit' gods were absorbed into the world of local spirits. Besides, it should be noticed that the very Sanskrit word for 'religion' (*āgama*) lost some of its Indo-Aryan connotation and means 'magic' in Khmer, whereas, in Balinese, this term meant "anything related to 'Indianized' royalty, associated to a more advanced foreign civilization" (Atkinson 1987:175; Gonda 1973:499), although the connotation of the term was 're-Indianized' during the quest for *kebalian* ('Baliness'). We think Oliver W. Wolters (1999:109-10) summarized as usual the problem in the most relevant way: *What is the local re-connotation of Indian terms?*²⁷ We will address this problematic in the following lines.

²⁷ On the Southeast Asian little-traditional re-connotation of the Sanskrit *brāhmaṇa*, (author) can be consulted.

Some re-readings of 'Indopheresis'

We will start from the observation that the interpretation of the Indian relief in 'Indianized' Southeast Asia is often drafted through the filter of Indian great-traditional codes. Our purpose is to suggest alternative interpretations of this relief on the basis of the sociology of various Southeast Asian communities rather than Indian ones. The major difficulty scholars of 'Indianized' Southeast Asian are faced with is to have the ability to see beyond the Indian glaze. We do not claim that we should *systematically* interpret any testimony of an Indian reality through a local reality, but we do think that the various ethnological studies on the modern offspring of these ancient 'Indianized' Southeast Asian cultures might be crucial in the interpretation of the Indian varnish of these Southeast Asian civilizations, past and present. As an illustration we will incorporate some data drawn from anthropology conducive to, we believe, a relevant reinterpretation of Southeast Asian 'Indianness'.

Anthropology and interpretation of ancient Southeast Asian 'Indianness'. We shall analyze the re-connotation of the Sanskrit great-traditional *Brahmā* in the Old Javanese *Brama/Bromo* (that is, the little-traditional Javanese *Dewa Kusuma*) on the basis of *Tengger* and *Balinese* anthropological data.

We shall now come down to modern Balinese ethnographic data on the *Sīwa* ritual performed by some specialized Brahmins (*pedanda sīwa*) and their local little-traditional re-connotation, before attempting to apply it to the reinterpretation of the 'Indianized' glaze of the past. As we have seen above, Balinese Hinduism is primarily an orientalist edifice, an *anthropological romance*²⁸ before being incorporated into the construction of a local *kebalian* ('Baliness') based both on *agama* ('religion') and *adat* ('tradition') in response to the cultural aggression that would represent for them the colonial pressure and the Islām. Accordingly, Rudolf Friederich ([1849-50] 1959:11) was to teach us that the Balinese Brahmins were proficient in the Vedic texts because they named some manuscripts *weda*. However, this word came from India without that specific association because the term in its deverbal form *maweda* 'to do weda' just means a way to officiate in the learned register of priesthood, including during the ritual made for *Sīwa Aditya* by the *pedanda sīwa* priests in their domestic temple.

However, does the Balinese Siwa correspond to the Indian Śīva? In other words, does the Balinese Little Tradition overlap with, or even take hold in, the Indian Great Tradition? If a Śīvaist Indian ritual block was rooted out from India and preserved as such by the Pedanda siwa over the centuries, the identification of Siwa to Śīva is not obvious. As shown by J.-F. Guermontprez (2001), the climax and ultimate purpose of the *pujā* performed by the Pedanda Siwa is the descent of Siwa into the *tirta*, the holy water. The Brahmin honors the *tirta* in an approximate Sanskrit consisting of a juxtaposition of words without any syntactic link. This is a strictly Indonesian cult of holy water²⁹ and it is quite revealing that some manuals guiding the Pedanda Siwa in the practice of the rites are concluded by *telas ing akarya toya* ('end of the preparation of the water'). Also noteworthy is that solely the part of the Hindu *pujā* symbolizing the descent of Siwa into the water has been retained. The *tirta* will

²⁸ See Boon (1977).

²⁹ The Balinese religion is also called *agama tirta* 'Holy water religion' by Brahmin priests.

ultimately be sold not to the followers of Śiva but to the Pedanda's 'clients' who will use the tirta to the completion (*puput*) of household rites, especially the funeral rites, whose stake is the transformation of the dead into an Ancestor (Guermont 2001:287). A Śivaist ritual was taken from India to worship Siwa, a deity with no personality or attributes associated with the world of the mountain, with the Ancestors³⁰. Moreover, the Balinese Brahmins worshipping Siwa, the Pedanda Siwa, do not legitimize their priestly position by revealed texts but by a common descent with their ancestor *dang hyang Dwijendra* (Rubinstein 1991), a Brahmin who came from Java at the end of the Majapahit dynasty in the first half of the sixteenth century. In the case of Bali, as noted by Clifford Geertz (1973:77), what matters is less the deity who is revered than the ritual associated with it; in the words of Fritz Staal (1995:31)³¹, *Balinese ritual is a classic case of ritual without religion*. In Bali, what matter are the rituals rather than religion. The *signifier* is Śiva and the *signified* is a deity associated with the mountain, with the Holy water, with the cult of the Ancestors. In other words *Siwa* is not *Śiva*.

Keeping the Balinese case in mind as well as the anthropological data (and their interpretations) on the non-Islamic Javanese world (Hefner 1983, 1985), the question of the little-traditional re-connotation of the great-traditional Sanskrit *Brahmā* into the Old Javanese *Brama/Bromo* might now consequently be raised. Both, we do believe, shed light on the Old Javanese re-connotated 'Indianized' reliefs, particularly the cult of *sang hyang swayambhuwa*, or *brahmā* in the Mount Bromo mountainous region inhabited by the Tengger who have preserved, as we have seen above, a non-Islamic kind of priesthood.

The oldest known reference to the Mount Bromo region dates from a 851 Śaka (929 AD) edict, which gave the Langgasuntan village some taxation autonomy as a sacred place where a deity was worshiped in an area called *walandit*. In this region, a cult activity associated with the Mount Bromo is attested; one of the charters moreover identifies the beneficiary deity to *sang hyang swayambuwa*, the 'deity' (*hyang*), 'born of itself' (*swayambuwa*), *i.e.* *Brahmā* (Hefner 1985:25; de Casparis 1981:142-43). The Mount Bromo area remained an important spiritual center until at least the dawn of the fifteenth century as a charter dated from 1327 Śaka (1407 AD) identifies *walandit* as a *hila hila* ('taboo') place and its inhabitants as *hulun hyang* ('servants of the deity') of the Mount Bromo (Pigeaud 1962:III:171). In addition *sang hyang brahmā* is also attested in Old Javanese (deCasparis 1991:35). It is tempting to equate these *sang hyang Swayambhuwa* and *hyang Brahmā* with the Indian *Brahmā*. However, anthropological research on the non-Islamic Tengger priestly traditions indicates that this volcano deity, whether named 'sang hyang Swayambhuwa', or 'brama' which gave the volcano its name, makes no reference to any Indian *Brahmā* 'Absolute' but to a deity rooting in the Tengger Ancestrality where the Mount Bromo is considered as the *pundhen* shrine of the first-founding ancestor (*cikal bakal*) of the Tengger ethnic group (Hefner 1985:59). Moreover, prayers that accompany the liturgy of the Tengger priests, the *dukun* (or *resi pujangga*), during the *Kasada* Festival³² reflect a holy water cult (*dang yang*

³⁰ The identification of the mountains with water and fertility (and therefore with the ancestors) is quite common in Old Javanese literature (Pigeaud 1962:IV:45) where *Siwa* was named the 'Lord of the Mountains' (Pigeaud 1962:IV:8).

³¹ Quoted in Michel Picard (2008:182).

³² The analysis of the Tengger myth of *Kasada* by Hefner (1985:55 ff) should be read.

Banyu) which is one of the most resistant cults in the Mount Bromo region even among the Islamic communities in contact with the Tengger. The identification of mountains with water and fertility is rather common in Old Javanese literature (Pigeaud 1962:IV:45). In the Mount Bromo area as well as in Bali, the Tengger *dukun* and Balinese *pedanda* ('priest') become a medium for the product of the mountain deity, the holy water. For the Tengger as for the Balinese, the priest's spiritual possession by the deity, whether *brama* or *Síwa*, is a technique of holy water creation (Hefner 1985; Hooykaas 1973; Guermonprez 2001).

The Javanese *Brama* and the Indian *Brahmā* do not overlap in any way. The Javanese *Brama* is systematically related to the fire; according to a legend recorded in the *Tantu Panggelaran*, a fourteenth century work, the *pande* ('smith') would have received from *Brama* the secret of the art of forging (Pigeaud 1924:58-59; Guermonprez 1987:12) and the exact area where *Brahma* forged iron is on the Bromo volcano (Gonda 1973:219-220). The *sang hyang Brahmā* attested in Old Javanese is also closely related to the fire in the sense that it signifies the fire in the ceremonies inaugurating a *sūma*, a land free of tax and usually attached to a sanctuary (deCasparis 1991:35; Zoetmulder 1982:254). As far as the Indian *Brahmā*, the Absolute (Biardeau 1981:183), is concerned, there is absolutely no connection with any fire, whether holy or not.

The *signifier* is the great-traditional *Brahmā* and the *signified* is Dewa Kusuma, a little-traditional deity associated with the mountain, with the Holy water, with the cult of the Ancestors. In other words the Javanese *Brama* is not the Indian *Brahmā*. The anthropological data collected on the Tengger priestly traditions lead us to cautiously advance this interpretation. It is also important to note with Hildred Geertz (1994:124) and Michele Stephen (2001:148-9) that Balinese find it irrelevant or even impolite to name their Gods, and that would explain why *brama* (Hefner 1985) and *síwa* (Guermonprez 2001) seem to name the same deity for which a ritual for the cult of the ancestors is actually performed. The same applies to the Hindu Cham religious world in Vietnam (author), as they just find it irrelevant to name the God for which a ritual is done; they are performing a ritual for *po yang* 'God, deity' and the same informant, if you really insist, will just name it with a name he thinks you want it to be named: *wisnu* one day and *Síwa* one week after, just as the Tengger named Dewa Kusuma 'Brama' in the tenth century AD (Brandes 1913) before naming it *Síwa* in the twentieth (Hefner 1983:669)

The interpretation of the Indianized reliefs the ancient Southeast Asian civilizations left us still leads scholars to talk past each other. The hypothesis confrontation essentially opposes the advocates of a rigorous application of the Sanskrit Great-Traditional codes and their interpretative transfer to local Southeast Asian 'Indianized' symbols to the adherents of an approach focusing on the socio-cultural indigenous contingencies in the interpretation of the Little Traditional re-connotations. In other words the divide contrasts the defenders of a strict observance of the Sanskrit Great Tradition of and its 'rooting-out' to 'Indianized' Southeast Asia with those who venture to interpret a trans-regional Great Tradition through the filter of a local Little Tradition.

Conclusion

Over these few pages, we have tried to propose a relevant definition of the concept 'Southeast Asian Indianness' through a comparative approach based on a *local vs. trans-regional* perspective, which ultimately analyzes the complex relationships that develop between *Orality* and *Literacy*. Southeast Asian 'Indianness' comes from the encounter (and the tensions inherent in it) between an urban, literate and trans-regional Indo-Aryan Great Tradition and a local, rural and oral Little Tradition. It can be characterized as the result of the conjunction of two cultural movements: on the one hand, a great-traditionalization and trans-regionalization of the upper echelons of society and, on the other hand, a local cultural resistance to this invasive great-traditionalization in the form of a re-localization and re-little-traditionalization of the imported Indo-Aryan Great-Tradition. Or, in Pollocks's formulation (2006:571-2), how Sanskrit turned peripheries into new centers (rather than absorbed these peripheries).

Indo-Aryan 'Great-Traditionalization' of an Oral Tradition society. An oral tradition civilization was gradually covered by a trans-regional Indo-Aryan Great-Tradition, symbol of 'Power' and 'Knowledge' leaving a center (the political and clerical spheres) increasingly great-traditionalized, while the periphery (the rest of the society) would remain attached to its Little-Traditional cultural framework. This first phase wore the germ of an unwholesome socio-cultural divide of the society affected by the input of a supposedly superior Indo-Aryan culture.

Re-little-traditionalization process. To neutralize a pernicious divide within the 'Indianized' Southeast Asian societies, a phenomenon of re-little-traditionalization of the center consequently took place. Indeed, the central authority had to legitimize its power within its periphery and, conversely, the periphery imitated the socio-cultural habits of the center because of the prestigious glaze emanating from it. This re-little-traditionalization process of a prestigious Great-Tradition is characterized by a re-localization of the beliefs through a process of re-connotation of an Indo-Aryan Great-Tradition according to the various local socio-political and cultural contingencies.

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