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Local *versus* Trans-Regional Perspectives on Southeast Asian 'Indianness'

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ABSTRACT: This article is an attempt to define the concept '(Southeast Asian) Indianness' through a comparative approach based on a local vs. trans-regional perspective. I shall analyse the complex relationships that develop between a trans-local, urban and literate Indo-Aryan Great Tradition and a local, rural and oral Little Tradition. First, I shall tackle the question of whether literacy has any socio-religious relevance and endeavour to identify its relationship to orality. I will subsequently analyse the (re-)Indianisation process as a socio-political construct and will finally propose some re-readings of 'Aryapheresis' (i.e. 'Indian [Ārya] Transplant' [phérein]), which I believe has been applied wrongly in some cases, to some Southeast Asian Indian-based socio-cultural realities.

Keywords: *Great Tradition; Little Tradition; Indianisation; Southeast Asia; Hinduism; Buddhism; Colonialism.*

1. Textual and Sociological Realities¹

1.1. '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 academic debate. The very problem is to reach a consensus about the relations between the dynamic of the local interpretations and practices of religion in daily life and 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 co-existing traditions and analysed to what extent both traditions were entangled. Redfield posited two traditions, a rural, localised and largely illiterate one he named the 'Little Tradition' and another one, urban, translocal and based on a written tradition he named the 'Great Tradition'. Actually, this classification divided religious activity into two distinct spheres and seemed to lay the foundations for a hierarchical classification of religious phenomena, where the Sacred Text-based approach was overvalued by the very term that was used to designate it, 'Great Tradition', while the various local actualisations were undervalued under the name 'Little Tradition'. Moreover, this compartmentalisation of knowledge between both traditions implied that people living in rural areas had little knowledge or interest in religious textual knowledge (Goody 1968, 6-9) even if the local religious elites' knowledge was considered as authoritative among the villagers; this compartmentalisation consequently placed the 'Little Tradition' in a relationship of dependence vis-à-vis the knowledge from the 'Great Tradition'. In addition, the latter term did not accommodate any interest in the various sociological interpretations of the practices of the literati. Redfield and his followers posited processes moving between the two traditions, i.e. 'universalisation' and 'parochialisation'. The former was realised as 'Sanskritisation' in the Indian context.

The 'Great Tradition-Little Tradition' divide is ultimately a compartmentalisation of what belongs to the realm of textually consecrated religious doctrine and what belongs to the domain of local religious beliefs. Bridging this divide still leads to controversy, as a number of crucial questions remain: Do the 'Great Tradition' and the 'Little Tradition' cover mutually exclusive domains? Is there a doctrinal Buddhism or a normative Islam independent of its local variants? I shall tackle these questions in the next paragraphs.

1.2. 'Great Tradition' and 'Little Tradition' as Complementary Domains

This compartmentalisation of the religious sphere into two traditions, one based on literacy and the other on orality (Ong 2002, 73-74), 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?

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Robert Hefner's works (1981; 1985) on the Tengger Indic priestly tradition in East Java are 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 former is complementary to the latter. The Tengger are an ethnic group of some 40,000 souls living in the Tengger massif, located in the mountains of East Java. The Tengger population is of great interest, as, first of all, they have preserved an early Indicised Javano-Balinese type 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 (2010 [1817], 330), the main duty required of 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 is 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 Javano-Balinese 'Hinduism'⁵ of Tengger, 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 Mount Bromo, the priest invokes *Siwa*, but there is no public reference to such a deity; instead, *Siwa* is identified as *dewa kusuma*, the Tengger founding ancestor (*cikal bakal*). Though tainted with a Great Tradition Indic naming as *Siwa* or *Brama* in the tenth century (Brandes 1913), a Little Tradition theme of Javanese veneration for an Ancestor (*dewa kusuma*) seems to surface⁶. In other words, a local Little Tradition cult is formally embodied in a Great Tradition liturgy.

Bridging both traditions is not an easy game to play. In the very 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

² The deities are said to demand that the offerings 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 such a literacy situation, when few are literate (in priestly or symbolic registers), 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 until the nineteenth century.

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

⁶ I am not asserting that the Indic elements have always been peculiar to the Great Tradition; in the Tengger case, elements from the Indic Shivaite tradition were de-emphasised in public statements in favour of syncretistic pan-Javanese elements (*kejawen*) in response to the political and religious changes that affected Java. The socio-linguistic implications for the Tengger language of these religious and political changes that affected the neighbouring countryside should not be underestimated (*cf.* Smith-Hefner 1989).

depending on the perspective: from the perspective of the priests⁷ (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, I may venture to conclude that literacy is important as a medium for a ritual orthopraxy⁸.

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

Moreover, this compartmentalisation of the religious sphere into two intermixing traditions raises the question of religious syncretism in Southeast Asia, that is, a Great Tradition world religion (such as Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam) that would have overlaid local older religious traditions. I shall discuss the notion of syncretism in the next paragraph.

1.3. *The Notion of Syncretism*

The very notion of 'syncretism'⁹ implies disequilibrium between the Great and Little Tradition in the sense that the world religions, as regards their Great Tradition characteristics of literacy and translocality, serve as a standard for comparison. In other words, it is about identifying the relationships between a translocal world religion and some local indigenous spirit beliefs: should these relationships be analysed in terms of two different religions (Spiro 1967; 1985) or as variants within one religion (Tambiah 1970; Geertz 1960)?

The relative lack of specific studies on guardian spirits (*anāk tā*) worship in rural Cambodia, alongside the studies restoring Khmer Buddhism in its Great Tradition ideal form and 'purified' from its animistic alterations, is noteworthy because it shows the preponderance of the Pāli canonic texts in the interpretation of the actual religious experience. Studies dealing with the *brāy* 'evil spirits' and their place within popular

⁷ The priests can here be considered as 'cultural mediators' between the Great and the Little Tradition.

⁸ The *Tengger* ritual therefore accords with the Javanese *abangan* and *priyayi* 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).

⁹ In its broadest accepted usage, 'syncretism' is a theological and historical phenomenon. As a theological phenomenon, 'syncretism' is the result of a merger of conflicting ideas and practices in one system of beliefs whose systemic harmony is produced by the modification and autochthonisation of the conflicting elements in the course of time. On this topic Stewart & Shaw (1994), Stewart & Strathern (2007) and Leopold & Jensen (2005), among many others, should be consulted.

Buddhism are extremely rare¹⁰. As noted by Alain Forest (1992, 5-6), the *anāk tā* cult is regarded as a sign of cultural backwardness, and discussing it discredits the Khmer culture. However, the cult of *anāk tā* and Buddhism both participate syncretically in the Khmer religious collectivity; 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 tā* cults definitely play a role. This tendency to reject as superstitious animism any deviance from '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 *phi* or Khmer *brāy*) within doctrinal Buddhism. In other words, the question is whether there is an animistic cult distinct from a Buddhist cult or a form of syncretistic Buddhism. The syncretistic tendency of Buddhism is relevant because there may be a contradiction between the doctrinal concepts of 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, whose relief depends on individual effort, and, on the other hand, the assumption that supernatural agents can both cause and relieve this suffering. Melford Spiro (1982, 186-7) explains this tension with his 'two religions thesis', distinguishing Buddhism 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 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 is psychologically experienced by the Burmese.

Conversely, Stanley Tambiah (1970, 41) prefers to regard 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 cults. Clifford Geertz (1960) also takes this position in his influential study of Islam in Java; for Clifford Geertz, the religious differences (Islam, spirit cults or supernaturalism, Indic substratum) in Java are just variants within one single religion¹¹. Many scholars (*e.g.* Brac de

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

¹¹ We should note, however, that in the case of religion in Java, the conflicts among variants are sociological ones; according to Clifford Geertz (1960), the religious differences are sociologically labeled with the terms *abangan*, *santri* and *priyayi*. Even if numerous criticisms have been raised against the Geertzian correlation of religious variants and social status, the Javanese are totally aware of these variants; Beatty (1999) and Ricklefs (2007) should also be consulted on this topic. This has not been observed to be the case in regard to Buddhist syncretistic variants where the Burmese or Thai are not concerned about these religious variants.

la Perrière 1989, 2009) 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 (or Hinduism or Islam). The spirits cult and Buddhism form a religious system in which every single element is organised and prioritised. I 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 tā vatt* (Chouléan 1988), Lao *phi khun wat* (Condominas 1968) or Burmese *nat*. An area is thus ritually marked within the Buddhist monastery to house an animistic spirit. In addition, I think this tension can be partially neutralised 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 with the Buddhist monastery. The analysis of the songs of incantation to the *nat* 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 *Ramon* and *Mayu*; *nat* worship is therefore metaphorically placed in a subordinate position in the relationship.¹² *Nat* worship and Buddhism are *de facto* integrated into a single and hierarchical system of beliefs.

The Great Tradition - Little Tradition divide is not just a mere conceptual or theoretical construct, but is also sociological in the sense that this 'dichotomisation' surfaces as a social subordination of the Little Tradition religious beliefs to the Great Tradition world religions. However, both are complementary (sometimes conflicting) parts of a unique and coherent religious system. There is no lived Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam outside their sociological representations. 'Indianness' in Southeast Asia is brought into a social position of symbolic superiority, and conflictually combines with a Little Tradition 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 with the phenomenon of 'partial' or 'restricted' literacy, where literacy serves as a sociological medium for symbolic and/or social domination in an Oral Tradition civilisation¹³ (i.e. where most people are illiterate).

¹² It also provides a cosmological legitimacy to the king in the sense that he is the husband of the 'Country Ladies' and that *Sikra* / *Indra* gives or takes away the regalia. On the role of *Indra* in Burmese kingship and in the Burmese *nat* worship, Brac de la Perrière (1989, 1996) should be consulted. We should also note this tradition has survived up to today; Mersan's (2009) article describes 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.

¹³ It should be noted that those people are often literate in the vernacular language, though not conversant with the priestly language or registers.

2. 'Re-Indianisation' as a Socio-political Construct

I have just analysed the complex underpinning relationships between a literate Indo-Aryan Great Tradition and some local oral Little Traditions in Southeast Asia. I shall now tackle the question of how the sociological realities interact with both of them, laying an emphasis on either the Great Tradition facet (what I call the 'Re-Indianisation process') or the Little Tradition one according to the socio-political purpose in question.

2.1. *Great Tradition as a Response to Social change: The Khmer Case*

EFEO as an almighty colonial institution? In the case of Indianised Southeast Asia, as noted by Susan Bayly (2000), the French saw themselves as revitalisers of a past 'Indochinese' grandeur through the medirum of a Great Tradition Indianism. It was through the Great Tradition that the French tackled this task: revitalising and purifying the 'Indochinese' culture from its Little Tradition degeneration through an Orientalist interpretation of the Khmer culture. This point of view was widespread through colonial instruments founded for this purpose: the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO, founded in 1901) and the *École Supérieure de Pāli* (ESP, founded in 1922). Both institutions were to construct a historical narrative based on an Indic Great Tradition.¹⁴

However, we should be wary of considering the French colonial actions and interests in Indochina as monolithic. Indeed, the French colonial actions and interests were not carried out and evaluated in the same ways in Tonkin, Annam, Cochin China-Cambodia and Laos. It has become fashionable to condemn harshly the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (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 analysed and assessed, even if the rhetoric they presented to the Résident Supérieur in order to justify some funding from Hanoi may have sounded colonial (Hansen 2007, 128). 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

¹⁴ As in virtually any colonial encounter, French colonial rule was imposed upon 'French Indochina' through military violence and diplomatic baseness. After the guns had sounded, the French colonial administration had to legitimise its control over its newly acquired colony. The French tried to legitimise their *mainmise* on their Southeast Asian colonies by adopting a culture-based perspective. In charting the administration of their colonies, the French wanted to stress, therefore, an opposition between their 'spiritual' colonial administration, the so-called civilising 'genius' of France, and the brutal imperialism in the British Empire (Maspero 1929). In this sense, the French intellectual conception of colonisation was anchored in the same intellectual ground as that of the 'Greater India' polemicists, among whom was R.C. Majumdar (1985 [1927], xxii-xxiii), who regarded the Indian colonisation of Southeast Asia as benevolent, peaceful and decidedly culture-based.

weak, Cambodian monarchy, rather than on the work of the EFEO or *École Supérieure de Pāli* (ESP).

‘Intercultural mimesis’. As I 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 to 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-Tradition 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 in Great Tradition 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 subjectified people influenced the investigator to represent that culture in a certain manner’ (Hallisey 1995, 33) and conversely.

Autochthonisation of Buddhist modernist movements. The founding mandate of the *École Supérieure de Pāli* was to shear Khmer Buddhism of its supernatural accretions and to return 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’, characterised by a return to scriptural purity. This return to a Buddhism consistent with the views of the European academic circles then dominated by Indologists was considered as *an historical project, derived exclusively from manuscripts* (Lopez 1995, 7, as cited by Edwards 2004, 67). This project was carved out to institutionalise the formation of the *saṅgha* and to disconnect the religious realm from State politics; the French, on a strictly Great Tradition 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 emerged a reform movement of the *saṅgha* called the *Mahānikāy thmī* (‘Little Mahānikāy’), the future *Dhammakāy*, whose purpose was to bear out or revalourise a Buddhist doctrine on the basis of scriptural Pāli purity (Edwards 2004, 64). The Buddhism that the reformist wing of the *saṅgha* and the French scholars wanted to reform was the Little Tradition Theravādin Buddhism, a junction point among Buddhistic, Hinduistic and animistic practices and beliefs that was also characterised by a recurrent practice of witchcraft. It is quite revealing that *Buddhisme [sic] au Cambodge* by Adhémard Leclère (1899), a quasi-ethnographic monument of Khmer Buddhism, was ostracised by the colonial intellectual authorities of the time, as this *magnum opus* 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’¹⁵ (Leclère 1899, xi).

¹⁵ In English: ‘to study the religion and the religious beliefs of the Cambodian people, not as they should be according to the Sacred Texts, but as they actually are’.

The ‘re-Indianisation’ or ‘re-Great-Traditionalisation’ of Theravāda Buddhism was part of an attempt to autochthonise 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*, which the Khmer reform movement largely adopted as a pattern. In addition, it is 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 *samgha* was fostered in order to replace an embarrassing religious (if not political) orientation of the ‘French Indochinese’ *samgha* toward Siam with a loyalty toward the French colonial authorities and Khmer authorities whom they patronised.

Buddhistic Response to Social Change. I must first lay stress upon the fact that the French colonials did not construct on their own a Khmer Buddhism, but rather joined with an autochthonous reform that was involved in reconsidering the relationship toward Buddhism and toward the response it provided in the rationalisation of changing human realities; it is thus movements in both directions that constitute ‘intercultural mimesis’. 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 that had been 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 Tradition ‘degeneration’, including witchcraft, superstition, spirit cults, and other traits. The reform movements in Cambodia can be paralleled by, if not 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, village-level accretions.

We have to place 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 *kammic* 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 Theravāda Buddhism in its most canonical form and in terms of the ignorance of the language conveying the Buddhist life-saving precepts.

The return to a rigorous study of the Pāli holy texts was continuous with 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 that 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 seen as a symbolic act generating merit. Furthermore, the

Khmer reform movement tried to palliate two fundamental problems: on the one hand, a remarkable ignorance of the Pāli language on the part of the *saṅgha* 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 was instead only referred to in 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 became intertwined with the interpretation of the *Tipiṭaka* (Hansen 2007, 83) in a textual and interpretative process that Stanley Tambiah (1976, 211) has called ‘scripturalism’.

The reform then consisted in ‘re-Indianizing’ the religious practices and beliefs by ‘re-Great-Traditionalising’ 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 that affected Cambodia from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards. In the specific case of French colonialism in Southeast Asia, the colonial authorities adopted a culture-based perspective to legitimise their power. They imposed themselves as ‘Revitalisers’ and ‘Translators’ of Ancient Indic Civilisations through the filter of the European academic Indianism. However, I am not asserting that the colonial scholar-authorities constructed the Khmer culture and religiosity on an Orientalist Great Tradition ground, but rather that a French-Khmer intellectual elite—the colonial scholar-administrators and the reformist wing of the *saṅgha*—reshaped Khmer Buddhism in order to fulfil their own divergent, if not conflicting, needs.

2.2. *Great-Tradition as an Ethnic Construct: The Balinese Case*

The interest of the Balinese case I shall deal with is that, despite the Dutch colonial administration’s partial lack of understanding of the socio-cultural complexity of Bali, some well-informed administrators tried to model Bali on the idea the scholar-administrators¹⁶ had of it through the filter of Orientalism and Great Tradition Hinduism based on sacred texts. To some extent, the Dutch Orientalist construction would become Balinese realities. Indeed, the Balinese have been deliberately engaging in a (re-)Indianisation, or (re-)Great-Traditionalisation, process since the incorporation of their island within the Dutch East Indies colonial empire at the turn of the twentieth century.

Orientalism and Great Tradition Hinduism Join in the Dancing. On the top of Balinese ‘apartness’ colonial administrators and Balinese reformers emphasised the ‘Hinduised’ facet of Balinese culture; it was no longer about an opposition of heathen Bali vs. Islamic Java, which was quite frequent during the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, but rather about a ‘Hinduising’ perception of a Balinese culture that had to be protected from a ‘Hinducidal’ Islam. Bali became a living ‘Museum of Hindu Java’. Even earlier, a protectionist, almost

¹⁶ Some of the scholar-administrators did show a great understanding of Balinese culture.

paternalistic, vision spread in academic circles under the impulse of Sir Stamford Raffles (1817, volume II) whose interest was to gauge the political significance of Bali (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 thereafter, the studies by Wolter Robert Baron van Hoëvell followed. Some of van Hoëvell’s (e.g. 1848; 1849; 1850) writings attest to a heavy involvement in the defence of the peoples of the Dutch colonial ‘Indies’¹⁷. As Vickers (1989, 79) points out, 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 [sic] the Hindu religion subsists undisturbed’; he did actually consider Bali as an India further east.

It is also in this ‘Hinduising’ perspective on Balinese society that Rudolf Friederich was sent to Bali by van Hoëvell on behalf of the *Bataviaasch Genootschap* in 1846 together with the colonial expeditionary forces against Buleleng. Friederich 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, as *Kawi* was supposed to be a branch of the Sanskrit language¹⁸. Friederich’s method is indicative of that time, imbued as it was with the Great Tradition of Hinduism. The Brahmin was considered as the true bearer of Hindu Knowledge. Indeed, he only accorded credibility to the comments uttered by the Balinese Brahmins, whom he idolised; 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 mainly¹⁹ on the basis of the Great Tradition of Hinduism and its culturally enshrined representatives (the Brahmins) that Balinese cultural ‘facts’ were apprehended. For example, in his study of Balinese religious literature, Rudolf Friederich (1959, 11) argued 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 was 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 Tradition Indian counterpart was rather tempting for a Sanskritist such as Friederich²⁰. The case of Sylvain Lévi’s 1928 mission to

¹⁷ Baron van Hoëvell was also heavily involved in the “1848 Batavian Revolution” (Stoler 2010, 76).

¹⁸ This is actually not the case, as *Kawi* is Old-Javanese, a Malayo-Polynesian language, though with many roots adopted from Sanskrit.

¹⁹ However, there were exceptions. For example, the administrator F.A. Lieftrinck’s work focused on the ‘village-republics’ rather than on the ‘Hinduised’ rituals (anonymous referee’s comment).

²⁰ It is quite revealing that observers without any Sanskritist’s *a-priori* conceptions, and freed from the Great-Tradition Indological yoke from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, seem to have observed the Balinese religious universe with more impartiality. This is exemplified by Miguel Covarrubias, a Mexican painter, cartoonist and anthropologist who lived in Bali and wrote his authoritative *Island of Bali* (2008 [1937]);

Bali is equally worthy of attention. As a serious Indologist—therefore a ‘(self-)proclaimed expert on caste’, in the words of Jackie Assayag (1998, 168)—Sylvain Levi (1933, ix) reported seeing Brahmins walking alongside *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra* ploughing their way through the shade of a Hindu temple dedicated to Varuṇa. However, travelers berthing in the port of Singaraja would have noted 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 Varuṇa²¹.

The colonial Hindu-based ‘Baliseering’ (‘Balinisation’). It is on this Great Tradition Hinduistic foundation mentioned above that the Dutch colonial administration would embark upon the attempt to construct Bali as a turned-into-a-Hindu-museum culture in the late 1920s. However, if the colonial officials were attempting to run a society conceptualised by European academic Orientalism, these same Dutch administrators had first to teach the Balinese how to be authentically (Hindu) Balinese. A ‘Balinisation’ 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 to 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*)²² hierarchy, which the colonial administrators granted legal status. The Dutch, therefore, ossified a genuinely flexible hierarchical ‘caste’ system (Howe 1995, 2001). As explained by Michel Picard (2002, 111-118), this ‘Balinisation’ would 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—following the first generation of Balinese educated in colonial schools—designed a novel conceptual framework where religion (*agama*) should dissociate itself from tradition (*adat*), from culture (*kebudayaan*) and art (*kesenian*), whereas at the turn 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 organised sphere of life’ (Howe 2005, 57). It is in this novel conceptual

he pointed out (2008, 260) that ‘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’.

²¹ 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 from India.

²² Guermonprez (1985) reminds us that the Balinese *warna* originate in a theory of social hierarchy inseparable from a civilising myth according to which Bali was ‘civilised’, ‘Hinduised’, 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 of a particular *warna* is calculated according to a genealogical distance from a deified ancestral nucleus named ‘Deity Majapahit’ (*Batara Maospait*).

framework built by Orientalists (and by Balinese educated in a European way) that the Balinese would from then on discuss their own identity, their *kebalian*.²³

Construction of 'kebalian' ('Balineseness'). The Balinese intellectuals would take over this Orientalist construct and fiction, 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 Hindus 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*' categories²⁴, both cultural 'realities' which had not been lexicalised in Balinese. These two concepts only entered the 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 1910s, a Balinese intelligentsia trained in colonial schools pondered the connections between the '*agama*' and '*adat*' domains and wondered how these should be differentiated²⁵. Then an (unarmed) conflict ensued, opposing the *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 '*adat*', from which it was inseparable; their conception of the '*adat-agama*' relationship was rooted in the very fact that 'tradition' (hence 'religion', as both were indissociable) legitimised their hegemonic position within Balinese society. On the other hand, the *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 '*adat*', perceived as unfair and vector of gentry hegemony, and '*agama*', which they wanted to reform on the basis of a Hinduistic Great Tradition. The modernist social movement was therefore based on a 're-Hinduisation' or a 're-Great-Traditionalisation' of Balinese 'Hinduism'.

An example of 're-Indianisation' or 're-Karmasation' 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 that they tried to emulate the magnificence of the ceremonies, even if causing them to become heavily indebted. These rituals were criticised on economic and religious grounds. Indeed, the protest

²³ As an anonymous referee noted, the first generation of Balinese educated in colonial schools took a major part in designing this framework —first in terms of *agama* and *adat* in the 1910s-1920s and then by adding on *budaya* and *seni* in the 1930s— in order to delineate their *kebalian*.

²⁴ Although the Dutch had the legislative and administrative power to encourage it, this emergence of the *agama* and *adat* categories is an instance of dialogical discursive construction, or another case of 'intercultural mimesis'.

²⁵ Hildred Geertz (personal communication) has noted that 'most of the discourse [described in this paragraph] is not theological but political 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'.

against the costs of such a ceremony is rooted in an ‘Indianising’ vision of ‘karma’, that a good rebirth was not the result of an expensive cremation, but of the actions of a person during her or his lifetime (Howe 2001, 58ff.). The tendency to ‘re-Indianise’ Balinese society has been the result of social tensions opposing the gentry (*triwangsa*) to the commoners (*jaba*) since the 1920s; it is also symptomatic of an increasingly marked dissociation of ‘*agama*’ and ‘*adat*’, on the one hand, and of a tension between ‘Adat Bali’ and ‘Agama Hindu’, on the other hand. A ‘re-Indianising’ conception of Balinese ritual practices was used as a justification for criticisms of the social order dating from the Javanese Majapahit invasion.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been characterised by a consciousness (though hazy) on the part of the ‘Indianised’ 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. Two tensional—sometimes contradictory—forces conflicted in the (post-)colonial indigenous debates. On the one hand, there was a reformist force rooting in a Great-Tradition, trans-regional, and Sacred Texts-based Buddhism or Hinduism purged of its particularistic accretions; on the other hand, a ‘reactionary’ force, though not denying the authoritative feature of the Great-Tradition, set great store by and insisted on the Little Tradition particularisms of the local religions or beliefs, in which their own dominant position in the socio-cultural hierarchy was anchored. The nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties are characterised 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 the colonial regimes and the early postcolonial reflection on ‘Indianised’ Southeast Asian ethnic identity display an image of ‘Indianness’ politicised on the basis of a Great-Tradition ‘re-Indianisation’, a venerable pedestal of a socio-cultural modernism supposed to expunge years of degeneration characterising, from the native point of view, the colonial period.

3. Little Tradition Re-notations 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 on 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 the ‘Sanskrit Cosmopolis’ (1998, 2006). But the question remains of how Southeast Asians reshaped the Indic motifs according to their own socio-cultural contingencies.

3.1. Socio-cultural Re-notation: An Introduction

The problem I shall tackle through the subsequent lines is the use of Sanskrit or of Sanskrit terms in ‘Indianised’ Southeast Asia. I believe that local socio-cultural circumstances generally re-connote borrowed Indian terms. 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 social contingencies; indeed, the Middle Khmer form *kloe* (from Sanskrit. *kula*) designates 'two friends of the same sex bound by a ritual oath of loyalty and mutual aid'. Its Khmer semantics is culturally motivated by the social microcosm represented within the world of the *vatt* ('temple'), in which the mutual support between two *sāmaṇer* 'novices' subjected to the tough education imposed by their *upajjhā*, 'monk in charge of education of a younger', was vital to their psychological equilibrium. This connotation is totally absent from the original Sanskrit semantics. Also in the Khmer world, Śiva (*braḥ īsūr*) 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 as 'Sanskrit' deities, guarantors of the *Dhamma* and right-hand deities of the Buddha; the other 'Sanskrit' gods were absorbed into the world of local spirits. In addition, the very Sanskrit word for 'religion' (*āgama*) lost some of its Indo-Aryan connotation and came to mean 'magic' in Khmer, whereas in Balinese this term meant 'anything related to "Indianised" royalty, associated to a more advanced foreign civilisation' (Atkinson 1987, 175; Gonda 1973, 499), although the connotation of the term was 're-Indianised' during the quest for *kebalian* ('Balineseness')²⁶. Oliver W. Wolters (1999, 109-10) summarised as usual the problem in the most relevant way: 'What is the local re-connotation of Indian terms?' I will address this problematic in the following sections.

3.2. Some Re-readings of 'Aryapheresis'

Through the term 'Aryapheresis', I mean a 'transplant' (Greek *pherein* 'to bring') of Indo-Aryan (*Ārya*) socio-cultural and linguistic (mostly Sanskrit and Pāli) features in the Southeast Asian realm. As in any transplant, the transplanted features will be modeled according to the receiver's original contingencies. I will start from the observation that the Indian features in 'Indianised' Southeast Asia are interpreted through the filter of Indian Great Tradition codes. Our purpose is to suggest alternative interpretations of these Indian (or Indo-Aryan) features on the basis of the sociology of various Southeast Asian communities rather than Indian ones. The major difficulty with which scholars of 'Indianised' Southeast Asian are faced is to have the ability to see beyond the Indian *trompe-l'œil*. I do not claim that we should systematically interpret any testimony of an Indian reality through a local reality, but I do think that the various ethnological studies on the modern offspring of these ancient 'Indianised' Southeast Asian cultures might be crucial in the interpretation of the Indian varnish of these Southeast Asian civilisations, past and present. As an illustration I will incorporate some data drawn from anthropology conducive to, I believe, a relevant reinterpretation of Southeast Asian 'Indianness'.

Anthropology and interpretation of ancient Southeast Asian 'Indianness'. I shall analyse the re-connotation of the Great Tradition Sanskrit *Brahmā* in the Old Javanese *Brama/Bromo* (that is, the Little-Tradition Javanese *Dewa Kusuma*) on the basis of *Tengger* and *Balinese*

²⁶ *Agama* was also used to refer to some texts dealing with moral, religious and legal sanctions and practices, mainly drawn from the Sanskrit *Manava Dharmaśāstra* (Referee's comment).

anthropological data. As a first step, I shall focus upon modern Balinese ethnographic data on the *Siwa* ritual performed by some specialised Brahmins (*pedanda siwa*) and their local Little Tradition re-notation, before attempting to apply it to the reinterpretation of the ‘Indianised’ varnish of the past. As we have seen above, Balinese Hinduism has been primarily an Orientalist edifice, an ‘Anthropological Romance’ (Boon 1977) before being incorporated into the construction of a local *kebalian* (‘Balineseness’) based both on *agama* (‘religion’) and *adat* (‘tradition’) in response to the cultural aggression represented by colonial pressure and Islam for Balinese. Does the Balinese *Siwa* correspond to the Indian Śiva? In other words, does the Balinese Little Tradition overlap with, or even take hold in, the Indian Great Tradition? If a Śivaist Indian ritual complex was diffused from India and preserved as such by the *pedanda siwa* over the centuries, the identification of *Siwa* with Śiva is not obvious. As shown by Guernonprez (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 honours the *tirta* in an approximate Sanskrit consisting of a juxtaposition of words without any syntactic link. This is a strictly Indonesian cult of holy water²⁷, and it is quite revealing that some manuals guiding the *pedanda siwa* in the practice of the rites conclude with *telas ing akarya toya* (‘end of the preparation of the water’). Also noteworthy is that only the part of the Hindu *pujā* symbolising the descent of *Siwa* into the water has been retained. The *tirta* will ultimately be sold not to the followers of Śiva, but to the *pedanda*’s ‘clients’, who will use the *tirta* for the completion (*puput*) of household rites, especially funeral rites, whose purpose is the transformation of the dead into an ancestor (Guernonprez 2001, 287). A Śivaist ritual was taken from India where it was used to worship Śiva, and was reoriented to worship *Siwa*, a deity with no personality or attributes who is associated with the world of the mountain and with the ancestors²⁸. Moreover, the Balinese Brahmins worshipping *Siwa*, the *pedanda siwa*, do not legitimise their priestly position by revealed texts, but by a common descent with their ancestor *Dang Hyang Dwijendra* (Rubinstein 1991), a Brahmin who is said to have come from Java at the end of the Majapahit dynasty in the first half of the sixteenth century. In the case of Bali, as pointed out 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, quoted in Picard 2008, 182), ‘Balinese ritual is a classic case of ritual without religion’. In Bali what matters is ‘orthopraxis’, that is, rituals rather than religion. The ‘signifier’ is Śiva/*Siwa* and the ‘signified’ is a deity associated with the mountain, with the holy water, and 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 Tradition re-notation of the Great Tradition Sanskrit *Brahmā* into the Old Javanese *Brama/Bromo* might now be raised. Both, I believe, shed light on the Old Javanese re-notation, ‘Indianised’ varnish, particularly the cult of *Sang Hyang Swayambhuwa*, or

²⁷ The Balinese religion is also called *agama tirta*, ‘holy water religion’, by Brahmin priests.

²⁸ 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).

Brama 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 929 AD edict, which gave the Langgasuntan village some taxation autonomy as a sacred place where a deity was worshipped in an area called Walandit. In this region, a cult activity associated with Mount Bromo is attested; one of the charters, moreover, identifies the beneficiary deity as *Sang Hyang Swayambuwa*, the ‘deity’ (*Sang Hyang*), ‘born of itself’ (*Swayambuwa*), i.e. Brahmā (Hefner 1985, 25; de Casparis 1981, 142-43). The Mount Bromo area remained an important spiritual centre 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 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 *Sang 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, ‘the Absolute’, but to a deity rooted in Tengger ancestrality. 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* Festival²⁹, reflect a holy water cult (*Danyang Banyu*), which is one of the most resilient 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 and in Bali, the Tengger *dukun* and Balinese *pedanda* (‘priest’) respectively have 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 *Siwa*, 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 associated with fire; according to a legend recorded in the *Tantu Panggelaran*, a fourteenth-century work, the *pande* (‘smith’) received from *Brama* the secret of the art of forging (Pigeaud 1924, 58-59; Guermonprez 1987, 12) and the exact area where *Brama* forged iron is on the Bromo volcano (Gonda 1973, 219-220). The *Sang Hyang Brama* attested in Old Javanese is also closely related to fire in the sense that it signifies the fire in the ceremonies inaugurating a *sīma*, 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 Tradition Brahmā and the *signified* is Dewa Kusuma, a Little Tradition deity associated with the mountain, with the holy water, and with the cult of the

²⁹ The analysis of the Tengger myth of Kasada by Hefner (1985, 55ff.) should be read.

ancestors. In other words, with regard to the signified, the Javanese *Brama* is not the Indian *Brahmā*. The anthropological data collected on the Tengger priestly traditions lead us cautiously to 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 *Siwa* (Guermontprez 2001) seem to name the same deity for which a ritual belonging to the cult of the ancestors is actually performed. The same applies to the Hindu Cham religious world in Vietnam, as the Cham 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 by which he thinks you want it to be named: *Wisnu* one day and *Siwa* one week after, just as the Tengger named *Dewa Kusuma* as *Brama* in the tenth century AD (Brandes 1913) before naming it *Siwa* in the twentieth (Hefner 1983, 669).

4. Conclusion

The interpretation of the ‘Indianised’ features in the ancient Southeast Asian civilisations that remain still leads scholars to talk past each other. This confrontation essentially opposes the advocates of a rigorous application of the Sanskrit Great Tradition codes and their interpretative transfer to local Southeast Asian ‘Indianised’ symbols to the adherents of an approach focusing on the socio-cultural indigenous contingencies in the interpretation of the Little Tradition re-notations. In other words, the divide contrasts the defenders of a strict observance of the Sanskrit Great Tradition and its diffusion to ‘Indianised’ Southeast Asia with those who venture to interpret the appearance of a trans-regional Great Tradition through the filter of a local Little Tradition.

In the course of this essay, I have tried to propose a relevant definition of the concept ‘Southeast Asian Indianness’ through a comparative approach based on local vs. trans-regional perspectives. Southeast Asian ‘Indianness’ comes from the encounter (and the tensions inherent in it) between an urban, literate and trans-regional Indo-Aryan Great Tradition constructed by European Indologists and anthropologists (as well as by reform-minded Southeast Asians trained in European schools) and a local, rural and oral Little Tradition. It can be characterised as the result of the conjunction of two cultural movements. On the one hand, there is a re-reading of ‘Aryapheresis’, i.e. a ‘localization’ (or ‘autochthonisation’) and ‘Little-Traditionalisation’ of the borrowed Indian Great Tradition features. On the other hand, there is a ‘re-Indianisation’ phenomenon (or a ‘re-Great-Traditionalisation’ process) ‘sponsored’ by the colonial administration and scholarship, which reinterpreted local beliefs and practices in terms of the Great Tradition and suggested their reinterpretation to local elites, who used it in order to strengthen their own socially and politically engaged reforms at the end of the colonial period.

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