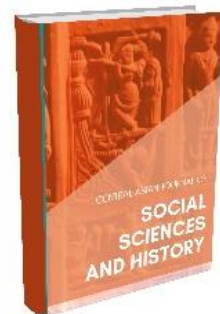




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**CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HISTORY**

Journal homepage: www.http://cajssh.centralasianstudies.org/index.php/CAJSSH



Peculiarities of the Spread of Religions in Southeast Asia

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Abstract:

The article discusses Buddhism and Islam, which are currently main world religions in the region of Southeast Asia, including Malaysia. Among main religions like Hinduism, the spread of these religions also had its own characteristics, in contrast to the processes that took place in other countries, although the Islamization of the region has continued for decades, even centuries, and the region has not seen Arab military action.

The spread of Islam in the region of Southeast Asia, it developed under the influence of the religions that existed there, and over time began the process of syncretization with the customs of other surrounding religions. It is noteworthy that at the time of the penetration of Islam, the population accepted it not as a foreign religion, but as a pre-existing belief.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20-Feb-22

Received in revised form 24-Feb-22

Accepted 11-Mar-22

Available online 18-Apr-2022

Keywords: Islam, Buddhism, missionary, Southeast Asia, Hinduism, tolerance, Malacca.

The Southeast Asian region is divided into 3 regions according to their religious beliefs: the first, the Indo-Chinese states, where more than 90 percent of the population is Buddhist. The second is countries with a predominantly Muslim population, which includes Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and the southern part of the Philippines. The majority of the population of the third region is Catholic, which includes the main part of the Philippines and East Timor [8:16].

In this region, distinctive development was formed in the first centuries AD. According to the scholars currently studying the Southeast Asian region, The development and prosperity of this region was greatly influenced by India and the Hindu and Buddhist religions that existed there, which is why they call this development "Indo-Buddhist" culture. There are specific reasons for this. If it is paid attention to the religious situation of the states in the Southeast Asian region, it can be seen that Buddhism has a

special role in all the existing states in the region.

It is well known that Hinduism is a religion that originated in India and is mainly practiced by Indians. Relying on the religious-philosophical teachings of the ancient Vedas and Brahmanism, this religion began to dominate the entire territory of India in the beginning of AD and spread rapidly in Indo-China and Indonesia. Later it spread to the territory of Malay and other states. While Indian carriers contributed to a certain extent to the spread of the religion in ancient Malaysia, Indian workers who migrated freely to the area in the 19th and 20th centuries tried not only to preserve, but also to develop and elevate their Hindu religious-cultural components. Over time, the Indians who migrated to the Southeast Asian region also brought with them the religions of Brahmanism and Buddhism.

The religion of Hinduism began to be accepted by local state leaders who imitated the luxuries of Indian palaces. Buddhism, on the other hand, came in with the help of Buddhist dervishes (wanderer) living in poverty [10].

Rulers who converted to Hinduism invited Indian Brahmins to deify themselves as gods like Shiva, Vishnu, or Harihar. The new names of the rulers were mentioned along with the names of the gods they equated. Gradually Sanskrit became the sacred language of the palaces. Over time, Indian writing began to be simplified for works of art in local languages. We can see this in the writings that have come down to us in Javanese, Malay, Mon and Khmer.

The "Indian colony" is a peaceful process. Its first distributors were Indian traders who established trade relations with the people of kampong-coast. The Indian merchants who came here married the daughters of the local family, as a result of which the religion of Hinduism and culture began to enter the coastal population. Occasionally, chiefs were appointed from among the Indians, or it was observed that Indian families migrated and settled in the area [9:12].

Initially, traders came to Malaysia sometimes, but by the beginning of the century, not only traders but also Hindu priests began to enter the region due to the abundance of various spices, precious stones and gold found in the Southeast Asian region. These factors were later skillfully used by Buddhist missionaries.

One of the first states on the Malacca Peninsula was Takkola, now located in the territory of Southern Thailand, while Indian sources testify that Kedah was the first state in the territory of Malaysia. Information about this can be found in the "Pattinapalai" of Tamil poetry of the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD [9].

In fact, Indian culture could only contribute to the comprehensive development of Southeast Asia because society itself was ready for such changes. Relations with the Indians, on the other hand, only accelerated the emergence of a class society. Also, later worship and rituals of Hinduism developed along with Buddhism.

Today, Buddhism and Islam, which are considered as the world religions, are among the major religions in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia.

The influx of Buddhism and Islam into this region also has its own characteristics as Hinduism, unlike the processes that have taken place in other countries.

Buddhism was introduced peacefully in the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC by traveling monks and Buddhist merchants. But for the indigenous people, Indian culture was considered a high-level culture. Therefore, the people of this region adopted Buddhism in combination with Hinduism and the

worship of spirits. Only a small segment of the population believed in Buddhism in order to achieve "nirvana" - "higher truth". Many have embraced and believed in a religion that can solve worldly affairs and problems. Buddhism has not been able to displace Hinduism and various other religions that exist in the region, which is why scholars have recognized it as an "Indo-Buddhist" culture.

The Chinese historical source "Tantan" states that all the officials around the king were Brahmins [9:21].

According to the Chinese historical chronicle "Lian Shu", the Buddhist Sanskrit inscriptions found in Kedah are a historical source dating back to the 4th-5th centuries AD. In addition, Buddhist temples and Buddhist statues made under the influence of the Indian school of pottery were found here.

In Panpan, there are 10 special temples where Buddhist priests study the holy books, and it is said that people abstain from wine and eat meat [9:23].

It is noteworthy that from the 5th-6th centuries AD, Buddhist relics were delivered to China from the Malacca Peninsula.

Also in 671, during the visit to India, Chinese Buddhist monk Jing I visited the state of Srividjaya in East Sumatra, as he stated, at that time it was considered as the center of Mahayana Buddhism in Southeast Asia and was named the Srividjaya Buddhist principality in 683-686 [9]. During the reign of Maharaja Vishnu of the Shaylendra dynasty (775-782), the construction of Buddhist temples began, the largest of which is the immortal monument Borobudur.

Islam also spread in the Southeast Asian region and developed under the influence of existing religions there, and over time the process of syncretization with the customs of other surrounding religions began. It should be noted that at the time of the introduction of Islam, the population did not accept it as a foreign religion, but as a pre-existing belief.

Today, Islam is the main religion in the Federation of Malaysia and 90% of the population believes in this religion. But it must also be acknowledged that the Muslims there are different from each other. That is, while Muslims living in the mountainous regions of the region believe in the beliefs and principles of pure Islam, Muslims in the rest of the region believe in Islam, which is influenced by the surrounding religions. It can also be acknowledged that in this region, under the influence of Islam, sanctified places and shrines were built and have been preserved to this day.

Islam came into the region peacefully. Although the Islamization of the region took decades, even centuries, no Arab military action was observed in the region.

Although this area was not invaded by the Arabs during the emergence of the Caliphate, the Arab merchant population had already entered it in the 7th-8th centuries. Such colonies would emerge through sea routes connecting the Far East and South Asia with the Arabian Peninsula. It was precisely these colonies that became the center of Islamization. H. Snook Hurgrone, I. Goldtsier, and other well-known Islamic historians have criticized the hypothesis that the Arabs played a major role in the spread of Islam in the region. They argued that people from India and Iran also contributed to the spread of Islam in the region [5:15]. Many of the trade centers they founded in various parts of the region still exist today, and many of them, as the centers of religious activity, connect local Muslims with the outside Islamic world [3:44].

The introduction of Islam to these lands by non-Arabs also had an impact. Islam in the region differed

from the Islamic view that existed in medieval Arabia. In other words, it mixed with local traditions and the traditions of Indians, Persians and other nations, which played an important role in the penetration of Islam [1:132].

At the end of the 13th century, the preachers of Islam in Southeast Asia caused the majority of the local population to convert to Islam. Marco Polo, who arrived in the port of Perelac in Sumatra in 1292, also noted that the local population had already begun to convert to Islam [11:75].

In the 11th and 13th centuries, Islam was first adopted by the local population in the coastal areas of the Malacca Peninsula and in the northern part of Sumatra [6:140]. As a result, religious merchants from the Malacca Sultanate, which flourished in the 15th century, expanded their activities. In the 15th-17th centuries Java and Brunei, in the 15th-16th centuries West Sumatra, in the second half of the 15th century Patani, in the 14th-15th centuries Sulu and Mindanao, in the 15th-18th centuries Arakana converted to Islam. The new religion was introduced to South Sumatra in the 18th and 19th centuries and to South Kalimantan in the 16th and 17th centuries through the island of Java, as well as to Sulawesi in the 17th century through West Sumatra. The mass adoption of Islam took place in the innermost regions of Sabah and Sarawak [5:16].

Under the influence of West Sumatra, the kingdom of Malacca converted to Islam. In these regions, Islam had already become the leading religion in the 15th century [4:79]. Trade relations with Malacca also had a significant impact on the ports of Java and Brunei. On the island of Kalimantan, they also found adherents who believed in their religion. With the conquest of Malacca by the Portuguese in 1511, the chiefs of the Pryanosta Islands began to follow them [8:16].

The acceptance of Islam by the rulers did not mean that their subordinates also converted to Islam quickly. In fact, the situation observed during the infiltration of Hinduism and Buddhism into this region also occurred with Islam. Islam did not penetrate the domestic and spiritual lives of Muslims in the same way in different places. The appearance of different nations in one region and even Islam in different regions is different. Nations who adhere to the tenets and principles of Islam are the lands where the preachers of Islam used to be productive. In fact, the people of the region, where the Malay culture was formed, embraced some aspects of Islam for hundreds of years, just as they had embraced some aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism in the past. Islam faced with the previous religions - Hinduism and Buddhism - and coexisted with them and took on a unique look.

Social relations are resolved by the previous local "habit" - simple rights. There were no mass demonstrations, no explosions in cultural life either [2:114]. In the first case, Muslims were left out of government view, while in the second case, Muslims were in the spotlight to preserve traditional Islamic laws.

The foreign and domestic policies of this country have less influence on the Islamic world, as Malaysia is seen as the most moderate Muslim country in the world.

It should also be noted that there are now a growing number of Christian missionaries in the region, who carry out their activities mainly by providing social assistance to the poor. As a result, Christianity is on the rise in the region. This, of course, does not mean looking down on members of other religions or discrimination against them.

Studies show that the region is home to several religions at the same time. There is no mutual animosity, hostility or contradiction between them. A representative of one religion sees the representative of another religion not as an enemy, but rather as his brother or a representative of his

own religion, and does not discriminate against each other.

As a conclusion it could be said that, the main reason for the rapid and unresolved spread of Buddhism and Islam in the region is that the indigenous people recognize the ideas and beliefs of the two religions are similar and close to each other. In particular, the ideas of Sufism in the two religions are also considered to be very close to each other. We can learn from the fact that even in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious situation in the region, various conflicts do not arise, and we consider the role of comprehensive study and research of this region in the development of scientific principles of tolerance.

In any country in Southeast Asia, no matter how great the government's efforts were to determine the position of Muslim communities, the attitude of the communities within them was even more important. This depended on their socio-economic development, internal relations, the nature of socio-religious governance, and the extent to which this community had improved its relations with the outside world.

Today, the Southeast Asian region is home to many nationalities and more than a dozen religions. However, it is noteworthy that the region can be recognized as an example in achieving a peaceful settlement of national and religious conflicts.

Addressing the problem of religious extremism and terrorism is one of the most pressing issues in the world today, ensuring religious tolerance and interethnic harmony is a necessary and priority direction for all countries.

Creating religious tolerance and interethnic harmony is not just a task, it must have its own scientific basis. In order to form and strengthen these foundations and principles, it is necessary to conduct special research and make practical recommendations based on them. The number of groups promoting extremist ideas under the guise of religions, especially Islam, is also on the rise. In order to prevent such conflicts and misunderstandings, it is expedient to acquaint our youth not only with religious tolerance and interethnic harmony in our country, but also with the religious situation in different regions, and to set an example of neighboring regions in shaping their worldview.

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