Universalizing International Relations through the Genealogy of International Systems: The Historical Problem in IR Systems Thinking, the English School Solution and Southeast Asian History

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Abstract: Contemporary scholars of International Relations (IR) have decried the discipline’s Eurocentric parochialism and propensity to impose Westphalian notions on the past. The study of the genealogy of international systems is one of the solutions forwarded in order to transform IR into a truly universal discipline that is more inclusive of non-Western experiences and conscious of historical diversity. However, IR has a problematic approach in using history. This has plagued the development of systems theories in the field. Nevertheless the English School of IR, being more conscious of the “historical problem” presents a way out through Buzan and Little’s more nuanced conception of International Systems. Furthermore bringing non-Western historical experience could also draw from studies on regions often marginalized by IR. One such region is Southeast Asia. Studies on Southeast Asian history made by political scientist and historians reveal latent systems thinking. Therefore the utilization of the English School’s International Systems framework and the incorporation of Southeast Asian historical studies would help universalize IR as a discipline and hopefully sustain its relevance in providing analysis and solutions to present and future international issues.