

Manfred Hutter (ed.): *Religionsinterne Kritik und religiöser Pluralismus im gegenwärtigen Südostasien*

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Intra-religious Criticism and Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Southeast Asia is a promising title for this collection of essays edited by Manfred Hutter. The starting point for this book was a panel on Southeast Asia at the yearly conference of the Deutsche Vereinigung für Religionswissenschaft in 2005, which was later expanded by several additional papers. The book consists of articles on Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, all written in German. A very brief preface of two pages introduces this collection. The book also includes an index – again far too short to be useful. Several of the papers were originally written in English and later translated into German.

Altogether, this book is rather disappointing as it lacks stringent and careful editing. The far too short introductory preface to an important theme, as indicated in the title, has already been mentioned. Furthermore, several of the papers put together in this volume demonstrate questionable interpretations and amazing factual faults. Also astonishing is the rather broad notion of “contemporariness” used in the conception of this book. The volume thus includes papers on Burmese Buddhism during the Mandalay period 1852–1885, by Mo Mo Thant, and on the Burmese nationalist leader Aung San, who was killed in 1947, by Hans-Bernd Zöllner. Although both articles are worth reading one might ask why they are included in a book on contemporary Southeast Asia. The same reservations apply to the papers by Bo Ma, again on Burma/ Myanmar, and by Nguyen Quang Hung, on intra-religious criticism in the Catholic Church of Vietnam, the analysis of which ends at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. These two papers again present historical outlines which should rather introduce articles on contemporary religious pluralism and intra-religious criticism. Considering recent incidents in Myanmar, it would have been highly interesting to obtain further information on current religious developments rather than including three historical papers on Burma.

Bo Ma’s ethnographic information on the Hindu-Tamil minority in Myanmar is based on the statements of a very limited number of informants, often only one [!] (p. 103ff.). In addition, this contribution is a mere listing of Hindu ethnic groups, with some minor additional ethnographic details (e.g. (in German) “Traditionell tragen Tاملen ein weißes Hemd und einen weißen Sarong” (p. 104)) and short historical introductions. This demonstrates an approach to ethnography which was overcome in social and cultural anthropology at least 40 years, or more, ago.

In Bärbel Beinbauer-Köhler's paper on the small Malaysian NGO Sisters in Islam we learn that Malaysia "is determined by Islam to 60%, without Islam being the state religion" (p. 163). While the first part of this assumption is untenable – one cannot but wonder whether the author would make a similar statement, like "Berlin is determined by Islam to 10%" – the second part is simply not correct. This could easily have been determined by a look at Malaysia's constitution. The author's decision to analyse Sisters in Islam as a Malaysian protest movement (p. 170) is questionable as this small organisation receives substantial financial backing from the German Friedrich Naumann Foundation and is also supported by the daughter of current Malaysian prime minister Abdullah Badawi.

M. Nur Kholis Setiawan's contribution on the role of the Nahdlatul Ulama organisation in the religious life of Indonesia is weakened by several either erroneous or ambiguous translations of Indonesian sources. For instance, the citation "Nahdlatul Ulama sepenuhnya menyadari kenyataan tentang kemajemukan (pluralitas) masyarakat Indonesia dan meyakini sebagai sunnatullah" would be better translated as "The Nahdlatul Ulama is fully aware of the fact of the plurality of the Indonesian society and accepts this as God's way of life" than as (in German) "Die NU behauptet die Pluralität der Bevölkerung Indonesiens"; the second part of the original sentence was fully omitted (p. 200). Other examples of erroneous translations can easily be found in this essay.

Manfred Hutter's essay presents an analysis of "clear intra-Hindu pluralism" in Indonesia (p. 129). He states that this pluralism developed under New Order rule through the inclusion of the traditional religions of the Toraja, Karo-Batak and Ngaju-Dayak under the label of "Hinduism" in the official national religious statistics. Ignoring the lack of usefulness of the government's categorisations, Hutter accepts that there has been an "entirely new plurality in Indonesia's Hinduism" since the 1980s which also includes "new Hindus" who "on the one hand wanted to keep their non-Hindu background, on the other hand stress their Javanese [sic!] adat" (p. 131). But how many Toraja, Karo-Batak and Ngaju-Dayak who really stick to their Javanese customs can be found in Indonesia? Furthermore, Hutter claims that these three ethnic groups have switched from their traditional religions towards Hinduism since the 1960s (p. 135). To analyse the traditional religions of these groups as "intra-Hindu pluralism" shows a lack of understanding of the religious situation in Indonesia. This is strange as the book contains a well-written chapter on the Toraja by Edith Franke and Katrin Gotterbarm.

It is a pity that parts of this book are a bit of a hodgepodge and others are of quite doubtful quality, as this means that the few strong papers might be overlooked. Peter Bräunlein presents a well-written essay on local calvary

Catholicism in the Philippines based on his extensive fieldwork experiences. Alexander Horstmann delivers an excellent and highly readable case study on the transnational *dakwah* movement Jema'at Tabligh in South Thailand; it provides many new, important details on this region. Vineeta Sinha's article deconstructs national religious labels, exemplified by the notion of "Singaporean Hinduism", and provides deep insights into the theory and living praxis of this religion in Singapore. Katja Triplett's essay on Buddhism and intra-religious criticism in contemporary Vietnam after 1975 is a good overview written in a clear and sober style.

Finally it should be noted that especially many of the German authors made no use of sources written in national languages of Southeast Asia. Although this can not be mentioned as a marker of poor research quality per se, the use of original language materials could have enhanced and enlightened some points made in this book and could have helped to avoid several erroneous statements.

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