



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Malay Muslims: The History and Challenge of Resurgent Islam in Southeast Asia by Robert Day McAmis

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regime and some (not all) insurgent forces, it seems unlikely that they will come into existence unless there are also major domestic political reforms.

This is an important study, and it raises other related issues concerning regional security and stability, which, however, are not explored. Burma is quite evidently a state in name and not in fact, since it does not possess complete sovereignty and territoriality as attested by relatively autonomous insurgent groups which control the territory. To the extent that the influx of refugees due to protracted conflict and civil war has been securitized by Thailand as a host country, the internal conflict in Burma constitutes a security dilemma in bilateral relations. Yet, it makes no sense to talk of bilateral relations in *state-to-state* terms if Burma is not properly a state. Nevertheless, Burma was admitted to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on the grounds that constructive engagement would lead to reform and would presumably contribute to regional stability. This, however, has produced a glaring security paradox in ASEAN: a member "state," by its very lack of adequate "stateness," is a major source of insecurity to another in the regional grouping.

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Malay Muslims: The History and Challenge of Resurgent Islam in Southeast Asia.
By ROBERT DAY MCAMIS. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans
Publishing, 2002. 173 pp. \$20.00 (paper).

How would a slim volume written by an academic theologian look? A retired American Lutheran missionary who has lived in the Philippines for twenty-five years and has studied Islam and Southeast Asia in Western universities, Robert Day McAmis attempts not only to survey a long history of the largest ethnic group in the Muslim world but also, perhaps more importantly, to call for mutual understanding and dialogue particularly between Malay Muslims and Christians. *Malay Muslims: The History and Challenge of Resurgent Islam in Southeast Asia* does not discuss in detail various aspects of the coming of Islam in Southeast Asia. Instead, this book seeks to assert that Muslims were and are diverse. Therefore, McAmis argues, any attempts to essentialize Muslims are unacceptable. Like Christians, Muslims run the range from fundamental, conservative, and moderate, to liberal. Not only are they theologically, culturally, and politically diverse, but they also change according to local, national, and global circumstances.

McAmis's major concern is, unsurprisingly, the Islamic resurgence which has bothered contemporary Western scholarship and media. Although "Islamic resurgence" is defined as a return to original Islamic practices, the main feature is clearly discerned from Arabic terms such as *jihad* (struggle for the faith), *ummah* (Islamic community), and *da'wah* (mission). However, McAmis is perhaps too quick to associate the goal of Islamic resurgence with establishing an Islamic state (p. 79). In fact, Islamic resurgence or revival has different goals, agendas, and forms. Most Islamic resurgence movements in Southeast Asia do not have political agendas per se but simply want to forge what they perceive as an Islamic order or society, especially given the fact that most Muslims have undoubtedly adopted the modern nation-state. Despite the diversity, moderate Muslims still make up the majority in Southeast Asia, and all attempts to establish an Islamic state in which Islamic law becomes national

law have failed due to lack of support. Consequently, most Islamic projects have tended and continue to be society oriented rather than state oriented. Thus, most contemporary Islamic parties appear to be as nationalist as secular ones.

Although unable to escape the East-West divide, the author promotes intercivilizational dialogue rather than conflict. Given the pluralistic history of Southeast Asian states (e.g., the largest Christian church in Asia is in the Philippines, and the largest Protestant church in Asia exists in Sumatra, Indonesia), an understanding of the diversity of Muslims as well as Christians is indispensable for such peaceful coexistence. Thus, contemporary Southeast Asian Islam should be seen as a result of multiple external and indigenous influences. Continuous Middle Eastern influences are of undeniable importance, but the nation-state and its administrative system, including civil law, have achieved widespread acceptance. The idea of an Islamic universal caliphate has never succeeded in Southeast Asia. Instead, political liberalism has been more attractive to Southeast Asia than theocracy. Culturally speaking, religious dress, mosques, and other ritual symbols in the region have been different from those in the Middle East, South Asia, or elsewhere. Linguistically, many Indo-Malaysian words are derived not only from Arabic but also from English, Sanskrit, Portuguese, Dutch, and hundreds of local languages. Economically, an open-market system has been adopted almost completely, although a handful of Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia have begun to develop their Islamic economic system (i.e., a noninterest system). Religiosity has had various and changing forms, but the mainstream was the one with compromise and accommodation. The emphasis on spiritualism (with historical links to Sufism) rather than legalism has contributed to the tolerant, accommodating, and open-minded religiosity.

Being particularly concerned with Muslim-Christian relations, McAmis shows how the Crusades have left a traumatic memory on both sides. In Southeast Asia, European imperialism was and is associated with support for Christian missions and discrimination against Muslims. McAmis therefore invites Malays to improve understanding and collaboration with Christians, aptly quoting a Koranic verse: "You will find your best friends among those who call themselves Christians" (p. 101). He is apparently optimistic about the prospect of Christian-Muslim peaceful coexistence because both share a common enemy: secularism which does not recognize the place of God. Christian and Islamic missions have become the areas of conflict, but if both sides show mutual understanding, the history of peace will replace the history of conflict. He believes that Muslim and Christian religious leaders and communities can contribute their answers to the problems of religion through dialogue. The intention needs support, but McAmis has very little to say about the history of national and local efforts at dialogue and cooperation in Southeast Asia. A thick description of how Muslims as well as Christians have actually acted as peacemakers would be equally, if not far more, useful. A common weakness of theologians inviting interreligious dialogue is a lack of historical models and examples of peaceful coexistence.

The author's use of sources is instructive, particularly in combining prominent Western and indigenous authors, but a critical reading of these sources would be helpful especially when he addresses an academic audience. McAmis uncritically adopts Clifford Geertz's concepts of *santri* and *abangan* without referring to Geertz's Western and local critics. The reality is more complex than this dichotomy. There are some characteristics of Geertz's *santri* that are found in his *abangan* and vice versa. Whether or not most Muslims in Java identify themselves as *santri* or *abangan* is still unclear. It is therefore imperative to study further how Muslims perceive themselves

in their own terms. In addition, McAmis's suggestion that in Malay culture the most important means of disseminating culture are oral (p. 63) is misleading. Legal codes and historical texts are but two genres of Malay literature.

In the midst of rare literature on Southeast Asian Islam and generally biased media, *Malay Muslims* provides a fresh, sympathetic, and balanced description about Islam and Muslims. McAmis's efforts to describe the variety as well as the general characteristics of Muslims in Southeast Asia to a popular audience are well appreciated.

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Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony. By RUDOLF MRÁZEK. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. xvii, 311 pp. \$70.00 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

Rudolf Mrázek's *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* is a wonderfully moody book. Moody, because it aims at capturing the aura of the Dutch East Indies in the last seventy-five years of colonial rule almost as much as it attempts to tell a critical, historical story. Wonderful, because it succeeds at this project better than any other book that I have read about this particular time and place. One feels as if time travel has been accomplished by the time that the last page is reached. This is no mean feat—Mrázek writes about pharmacies and fingerprints in this book and often uses very dry, technical journals as his sources. The fact that we can smell the odor of chemicals being mixed by the apothecary and feel the sensations of the Javanese laborers as their fingers are pressed to the acid blotter is a tribute to Mrázek's powers over language. It is appropriately enough through the use of language—language reproduced from a broad variety of actors and their surviving documents—that Mrázek accomplishes his goal. We do not so much analyze the world of this Dutch colony from the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century as we live in it for three hundred pages. Not many books can evoke so serious a sense of time and place, and Mrázek's work should be read if nothing else for this fact.

There are many other good reasons, however, to read this volume. Mrázek's primary fascination is the transformations of modernity in the Indies during this time, and he sees the adoption and morphogenesis of certain kinds of technology as an apt window to study these changes. He tells us that it took up to five months to transport a load of sugar from the interior of Java to the coasts in the mid-nineteenth century; later, it took a fraction of this time to do so. Roads hastened commerce, therefore, but they also caused an increase in traffic accidents, with "natives" usually being on the losing end of fast new pieces of machinery. A Javanese princess, Raden Ajeng Kartini, whose writings became famous after her premature death at twenty-five, mused about the appearance of railroads and tram cars on Java: "In the train, . . . I pressed my hand on my heart. . . . Now, we fly with a storm over the iron road. . . . I prayed that the ride would never end" (p. 8). One can sense the possibilities of freedom that the train presented to a young Muslim woman such as Kartini: speed, distance, and an escape from the cloisters of convention. When she dreamed about the possibility of airplanes in the Indies, just after the turn of the century and right before her death, she thought sadly that "I should indeed have been born a boy" (p. 8).