

## CONFERENCE SUMMARY

### "Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia"

DORISEA Mid-term Conference, June 26-29, 2013, Göttingen

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*To be published in Archipel 86 (2013, in press)*

The DORISEA project is a "competence network" funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and coordinated by the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology (Institut für Ethnologie) at the University of Göttingen. It involves scholars from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, history, religious and linguistic studies from five northern German universities, Hamburg, Heidelberg, Humboldt University in Berlin, Münster and Göttingen, who study the role of religion in the changing, "modernizing" societies of Southeast Asia. Given the dispersed nature of Southeast Asian Studies in Germany, this kind of cooperation is both innovative and welcome.

In this conference DORISEA commemorated the mid-point of its initial four-year funding not by presenting initial research results from the participants but rather by a broad discussion of the link between "religion" and "modernity" involving both established and younger researchers from *outside* the project. Four "keynote" speakers (Peter Jackson, Australian National University, Janet Hoskins, University of Southern California, Anthony Reid, also ANU, and Justin McDaniel, University of Pennsylvania) introduced concepts such as the paradoxes of modernity, the role of syncretism and diaspora, puritanism and patriarchy, and Buddhist ecumenism. These and the seventeen other papers which were geographically widely dispersed and involved all major religions in Southeast Asia, and included new sects, syncretism and unorthodoxies. "Religious practices, the politicization of religion and the clashes of moral systems" are the three main aspects of the project's research.

Few parts of Southeast Asia were not included in the program—Burma appeared with two presentations, and Laos, although not the subject of a presentation, is the focus of some of its projects. For those interested in island Southeast Asia, from the Philippines, Rito Baring of De La Salle University presented Catholic churches in malls as a new kind of religious space, Patrick Campos of the University of the Philippines discussed the elevation of the "face of Rizal" to a nationalist and religious icon, and Giovanni Maltese of Heidelberg showed how Christian Pentecostals in Negros interact with Muslim rebels. For Malaysia, Andrew Willford, Cornell University, pointed out how Tamils in Malaysia feel betrayed by development policies favoring Malays that intrude upon their spaces. Justin Mc Daniel presented, in his discussion of "Buddhist ecumenism" and "Buddhist leisure" as one example a Singaporean temple-museum-park that aims to do justice to all varieties of Buddhism.

Indonesia was the focus of four papers: Nao-Cosme Rémon (Aix-Marseille University) concentrated on Catholic-Muslim relations in Riung, Flores, conversions and intermarriage. Kari Telle (Chr. Michelsen Institute) looked at tensions aroused by the plans of Hindu Balinese on Lombok to build a large temple, while Muslim Sasaks mobilized opposition to the plan (recalling similar tensions involving the building of Christian churches elsewhere). In the only paper to deal with Islam internally, Monika Arnez (University of Hamburg) presented the organization Forum Lingkar Pena, which aims to encourage modern Muslim writers, as well as one of its "products", the novel *Ayat-ayat Cinta*. The paper by Tsuda Koji on "Chinese religion" looked at attempts to systematize and codify a Tridharma religion (Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism) by ethnic Chinese in Indonesia in the post-Suharto era.

In his keynote, Anthony Reid offered some early but thought-provoking ideas about the relationship between religion and modernity by comparing early industrialization in Southeast Asia with that in Europe, particularly Britain. His thoughts touched on the

"maleness of modernity" and on the relations between puritanism, in Britain's case Methodism, urban growth and the rise of a new middle class striving for respectability, drawing parallels with late 20th century Southeast Asia's paternalism and new religious trends.

The organizers chose a format between "conference" and "workshop", on the one hand offering a diversity of papers, on the other leaving plenty of time for questions and discussions. There were no parallel sessions, assuring each presentation of an interested and competent audience, with exchanges spilling over into the coffee breaks. The advantages of such a format will benefit the researchers themselves, who presented their projects briefly on the final morning, but they will also provide intellectual food for thought for all of the several dozen persons who attended, and perhaps, later, for readers of one or more publications.