



Political Theologies and Development in Asia

21 February 2017

Asia Research Institute, NUS

Image was from an article on MailOnline© EPA (European Pressphoto Agency):
Thai well-wishers hold Thai Baht banknotes with pictures of the King Bhumibol Adulyadej as they wait for the procession to move the body of the King outside of the Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok.

Over the past decades, scholarship on political theology has become a major analytical tool for understanding the state of contemporary politics, authority and governance. Drawing on seminal early work of Carl Schmitt and others, this literature deconstructs the modern Western dividing line between “religion” and the “secular” in order to open new and exciting conversations for understanding relationships between religion and politics. Scholarship on political theology might specifically offer analytical tools to productively think on how the “problem-space” (Agrama, 2012) of secularism – the question of where to draw the line between religion and politics and attached stakes – has been historically and culturally variably addressed.

Research into political theology is used in a number of distinct, if also interrelated, ways: genealogical, functional, and cosmological. Genealogical studies focus on questions of historical continuity and disjunction between modern secular formations and prior religious roots (e.g. Agamben 2011; Fassin 2011; Wydra, 2015). Functional research emphasizes the ways in which the sacralisation of political authority operates through similar mechanisms to religious rituals, mythologies and symbolism (e.g. Gentile 2006). Some cosmological approaches conceive political theology as rearticulating a specifically theopolitical vision (e.g. Cavanaugh 2003). Other cosmological approaches seek to critique the sacralisation of secular entities (e.g. Burleigh 2007; Goodchild 2009) or, conversely, to buttress their critical political projects through engagement with theology (e.g. Badiou 2003; Taubes 2003; Žižek 2003)

The Singapore workshop will draw upon each of these strands of scholarship but will also move the research agenda forward in a number of distinct directions.

First, while scholarship on political theology is dominated by discussions centered in Europe, we will examine these dynamics in the context of ‘Asia’. Western discourses and practices remain influential in this region, but they have never been adopted without translation and/or significant reconfiguration. Moreover, Asian religious conceptualizations of power respond to non-Christian historical dynamics, traditions, and ethno-cultural peculiarities, and these too deserve critical analysis. The workshop will critically examine to what extent discussions of political theology are illuminating for Asian contexts.

Second, the workshop will explore dynamics of interaction between locally established and transnational visions of political theology around conceptions of and debates over development, broadly defined. This focus is driven by the understanding that development, in its varied and contested meanings, remains a crucial site for the analysis of Asian politics. The ‘developmentalist state’, international organizations, and NGOs represent important loci for the elaboration of political theologies across modern Asia. Moreover, these same organisations represent important vectors of interaction between Western and Asian contexts (Fountain, Bush and Feener, 2015). Recent work by Didier Fassin (2011), Stephen Hopgood (2006 & 2013), and Harald Wydra (2015) have illustrated the analytical possibilities of engaging conversations on political theology, development, global governance, human rights, and humanitarianism. This workshop will build upon and expand these emerging debates.

Papers prepared for this workshop will examine specific case studies of these negotiations within Asia across diverse religious traditions. Our goal is to bring together a small group of anthropologists, historians, sociologists, political scientists, and theologians working on religion and politics in the region for a focused conversation around this theme. Through historical and/or ethnographical research, presenters will examine detailed case studies of political theologies and those groups and institutions affected by them by engage in the following sorts of questions:

- What are the religious genealogies of Asian states, political structures and models of authority?
- How have Western political theologies been introjected, reformulated, and-or rejected, in the constitution and ongoing development of Asian political theologies?
- What is the role of development aid initiatives, humanitarianism, and (religious) NGOs in shaping political theologies in Asian contexts?
- How have political and economic processes been sacralised to govern, develop, and-or modernize Asia?
- What are the changing Asian theological-political dynamics under capitalist-neoliberal contemporary order?
- How are theological concepts such as victimhood, sacrifice, dharma, charity and telos mobilized within Asian economic and-or political processes?

21 FEBRUARY 2017 (TUESDAY)	
09:45 – 10:00	REGISTRATION
10:00 – 10:45	WELCOME REMARKS & INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
	Jonathan Rigg National University of Singapore
	Giuseppe Bolotta National University of Singapore Philip Fountain Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
10:45 – 11:15	TEA BREAK
11:15 – 12:20	PANEL 1
<i>11:15</i>	<i>Chairperson</i> Amelia Fauzia National University of Singapore
	“Aren’t You Happy?”: Healing and “Spiritualized Nationalism” in Korean Media Culture Sam Han Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
<i>11:20</i>	The Ambiguous Soteriology of Jazz: Manufacturing and Embodying the ‘Theos’ of Developmental Kingship after the Death of Thailand’s King Bhumibol Edoardo Siani University of London, UK
<i>11:25</i>	<i>Discussant</i> Gustav Brown National University of Singapore
<i>12:35</i>	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
12:20 – 13:30	LUNCH

13:30 – 15:15	PANEL 2
	<i>Chairperson</i> Teresita Cruz-Del Rosario National University of Singapore
13:30	Spirit Possession and the Amorality of Capital: Alternative Claims to Cosmological Power in Singapore Kenneth Dean National University of Singapore
13:35	Heterogeneous Rationalities of Reclamation: Syrian Christian Church and the Agricultural Migrations in South India V.J. Varghese University of Hyderabad, India
13:40	A Nation of Bodhisattvas: Buddhism in Liang Qichao’s Political Thought Lei Kuan Rongdao Lai National University of Singapore
13:45	<i>Discussant</i> Bernardo Brown National University of Singapore
13:55	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
14:40 – 15:00	TEA BREAK
15:00 – 16:05	PANEL 3
	<i>Chairperson</i> Mok Mei Feng National University of Singapore
15:00	The Theopolitics of Art and the Public Sphere: Some Episodes from Muslim Southeast Asia Kenneth M. George Australian National University
15:05	From Blood, Cast in Concrete: Materializing Political Theology in Thailand Eli Elinoff Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
15:10	<i>Discussant</i> Peter A. Jackson Australian National University
15:20	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
16:05 – 16:15	BREAK

16:15 – 17:20	PANEL 4
16:15	<p><i>Chairperson</i> May Ngo National University of Singapore</p> <p>The Yogic Ethic and the Spirit of Development Sunila S. Kale University of Washington, USA Christian Lee Novetzke University of Washington, USA</p>
16:20	<p>To Go as Far as China: Shia Humanitarianism between Pakistan, England and Iraq Till Mostowlansky University of Hong Kong</p>
16:25	<p><i>Discussant</i> Catherine Scheer National University of Singapore</p>
16:35	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
17:20 – 17:50	CONCLUDING DISCUSSION
	Michael Feener University of Oxford, UK
17:50	END OF WORKSHOP
18:00	BUS TRANSFERS TO DINNER VENUE
18:30 – 20:30	WORKSHOP DINNER (For Speakers, Chairpersons & Invited Guests)

**“Aren’t You Happy?”:
Healing and “Spiritualized Nationalism”
in Korean Media Culture**

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In this paper, I investigate the notion of “healing” in contemporary Korean media culture as a technique of “spiritualized nationalism” founded on a (political) theology of “han”—a Korean term denoting a feeling close to resentment. I present the argument that the preponderance of television programs discussing and giving tips on “healing”—meant as self-recovery and self-care in everyday life—normalize the condition of precarity that is increasingly endemic in contemporary South Korea under conditions of “compressed modernity.” Analyzing television talk shows, specifically *Healing Camp: Aren’t You Happy?* (SBS) and *Talk to You: Don’t You Worry* (JTBC), this paper argues that the vocabulary of healing is “religious.” Drawing on Simon Critchley’s recent forays into political theology, especially his discussion of Rousseau, I contribute to recent debates surrounding political theology by making more explicit a register that Philip Rieff once described as “therapeutic.”

The Ambiguous Soteriology of Jazz: Manufacturing and Embodying the ‘*Theos*’ of Developmental Kingship after the Death of Thailand’s King Bhumibol

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With this paper, I investigate the problem of sovereignty in Thailand during the ongoing period of interregnum by offering an ethnography of the mourning activities organized at a Bangkok shopping mall shortly following the death of King Bhumibol. The passing of the monarch in October 2016 leaves the question of who should enjoy the ultimate right to rule in Thailand highly contested, with a military junta that has installed itself to power following a *coup d’état*, a new king who is often deemed unsuitable to rule, and a society that is split among supporters of democracy and supporters of authoritarianism, and which additionally contains anti-monarchic elements. At this crucial turning point in Thailand’s history, I argue that the mourning activities organized at the partly royally-owned EM District shopping mall address precisely the problem of rule by conveying the crucial role of the junta in bringing the project of development initiated by King Bhumibol in his young age to fruition. Such a message, I propose, is delivered by means of the creation of a ‘*theos*’ for the deceased king, which immortalizes him in his youth as development-dedicated monarch, and by further suggesting that the ruling junta is the perfect embodiment of such *theos*. The mourning activities at the mall, I finally argue, additionally reveal the presence of an remarked if concealed *theos* of People, which in turn suggests the existence of emerging and potentially disruptive discourses of popular sovereignty.

Spirit Possession and the Amorality of Capital: Alternative Claims to Cosmological Power in Singapore

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In the context of modern day Singapore, the flourishing of spirit medium culture in hundreds of temples and apartment based spirit medium altars seems strikingly at odds with the state sponsored technologically driven march towards a Smart City. This paper explores the ways in which spirit possession negotiates the forces of modernity, including the powers of the state and flows of capitalism. Spirit mediums in Singapore adapt modern technology such as the simulcasting of ritual performances, internet circulation of spectacular imagery, and the invention of virtual rituals to attract new followers and stake ontological claims. In the recent spread and rise of amoral underworld deity cults, spirit possession circles in Singapore are folding in and reworking forces of statist drives for moral citizenship as well as re-routing capital through massive banquets, temple auctions, god-given lottery tickets, and flows of ritual artifacts. This paper explores the alternative claims to cosmological power that arise within a secular state system that bases its legitimacy on economic progress, social order and secular modernity.

A Nation of Bodhisattvas: Buddhism in Liang Qichao's Political Thought

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This paper is a study of the role of Buddhism in Liang Qichao's (1873-1929) political philosophy, focusing on the period when he lived in exile in Japan between 1898 and 1912. The first section examines the Japanese context and influences in the reformulation of Liang's views on religion, especially its relation to politics. Part two explores Liang's fascination with Buddhism in his political imagination of building a strong China. His introduction of the neologism *zongjiao* 宗教 quickly became a popular category to define and classify religious practices in China. In opposing Kang Youwei's advocacy of Confucianism as the state religion for China, he argued that Buddhism could provide the moral and religious motivation for people to participate in nation-building. Yet he did not adopt Buddhism without re-orientating it. The "modern" Buddhism promoted by Liang was a rational, this-worldly religion that preached the selfless Bodhisattva path, stressed equality, and relied on self-power in achieving the common good. Therefore, Liang's "secular" Buddhism has less to do with the separation between religion and state than the incorporation of Buddhist ideals into a social ethics for the new citizenry. As one of the most important public intellectuals in modern China who communicated political ideas through journalism, many of Liang's ideas have driven public discourse and policies on religion, and shaped self-representations of Buddhism in twentieth-century China. Lastly, this paper evaluates the impact of Buddhist ideals in Liang's transformation from an advocate for constitutional monarchy to a fervent supporter of republicanism in China.

**Heterogeneous Rationalities of Reclamation:
Syrian Christian Church and the Agricultural Migrations
in South India**

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My proposed paper will be an attempt to complicate the spiritual/material divide implicated in the discourses of modernity at large on the one hand and disentangle how the notion of reclamation was made to serve the purpose of converting the physical geography and salvaging a religious geography on the other, by examining the involvement of the Syrian Christian church in the peasant migrations from the cultivated plains of rural Travancore to the sparsely inhabited mountain-forest terrains of Malabar, in South India. I would argue that the apparent conflict in the mission of colonizing virgin landscapes in order to transform them into fruitful sites of production and an imagined repossession of a lost and defiled geography (by its Christian other) to its original congregation conforms each other in significant ways. While the conversion of verdant landscape for progress and development was sought to be boundless, the boundaries within the Christian/Catholic universe was intransigent due to discordant histories/claims of ancestry and locality, wherein plurality and preservation became convincing rationales for expansion and development. The Syrian Christian narratives straddled the theological, nationalist, economic, ethical and humanitarian rationalities with ease and careful calibration, and maneuvered a joint front with even its political other, the Communists, and constructed a devoted Syrian Christian subject yielding to the divine will and the nation against all odds in building their Canaan, but also with a silent denominational calling. What one could see here is a complex intertwining of secular and religious – religious buttressing the secular and the secular in turn expanding the religious, in its larger and smaller variations, mutually constituting each other.

The Theopolitics of Art and the Public Sphere: Some Episodes from Muslim Southeast Asia

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This paper explores the theopolitics of material and visual culture in Muslim Southeast Asia (principally Indonesia and Malaysia). It begins by taking cue from Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel's pursuit of an *object-oriented politics* and public sphere. In this conception of "the political," material things and images lead to animated disputes and accords. They gather assemblies of actors for whom the object and images are matters of concern, and thereby conjure a thing-centered public. Recruiting insights from Jacques Rancière's work on aesthetics and the distribution of the sensible; from Sara Ahmed and Miguel Tamen on communities of object-oriented affect and interpretation; and from Heideggerian ideas about disclosedness and ethics, the paper suggests avenues for ethnographic or historical inquiry into thing-centered politics. Consonant with the material turn in religious studies exemplified in the work of David Morgan, Birgit Meyer, and others, this paper also explores gestures of *object-oriented religiosity*. The aim, then, will be to understand political formations of the secular and the sacred through their material and visual *matters of concern*. Using the theoretical and analytic approach sketched above, this paper will offer some ethnographic case studies of object-oriented politico-theological negotiations in Indonesia and Malaysia, where Islam has played a pronounced role in state and society.

From Blood, Cast in Concrete: Materializing Political Theology in Thailand

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What binds the nation? Thailand's cycle of coups, elections, protests, and state violence have raised important questions about the legitimacy of the nation in its current form and its future viability after the passing of the reigning monarch, Rama IX. Elsewhere, I have argued that this turmoil has centered around contested answers to questions surrounding the boundaries of legitimate political subjectivity and the composition of the political itself. In this paper, I consider how this struggle over the political hinges on disputes surrounding the theological basis of the nation. I argue that such disputes are as material as they are historical and legal. I examine two recent political demonstrations at the Thai government house—a blood ceremony in 2010 by pro-democracy Red Shirt activists and an effort to cast the gate in concrete by anti-democratic activists in 2014—to better understand the ways in which nationhood and its discontents materialize in a moment of tremendous uncertainty. Rather than provide an in situ analysis of these events as they took place, I argue that the materials at the center of the protests—blood and concrete—reveal distinct lines of thinking surrounding the forces that bind citizens to each other and to broader cosmologies of politics. Blood references both alternative sensibilities surrounding the basis of citizenship and a common substance of political commensurability. Concrete reasserts the royal genealogy of Thailand's developmental telos and the hierarchical basis of both economic and political developmentalisms rooted in the moral legitimacy the well-born. While blood seeks to level hierarchy via democracy, concrete solidifies pre-cast inequalities via the restoration of the moral hierarchy. By thinking through political theological things, I argue that the forces that once held the nation together are quickly becoming the lines upon which it might come apart.

The Yogic Ethic and the Spirit of Development

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Yoga has always been political, from the ancient past to the present day. India's best known political figure of the twentieth century, M. K. Gandhi, employed yoga in his public politics. Gandhi's yoga was a political-intellectual concept drawn from Indic classical philosophy joined to the needs of an anti-colonial effort. His political idea of yoga offered a contrapuntal response to Western-style development, which in his view would lead to the degradation of not only the soul but also the economy, society, and the environment. For Gandhi, yoga was a way to express his idea that political action always emerged from solving the puzzle of the individual actor. Almost a century later, India's current prime minister, Narendra Modi, has again offered yoga as a solution to the problems of India and the world. But in this case Modi has coupled yoga with that Western-style development and economic expansion that Gandhi had rejected; for Modi, yoga cures the negative externalities of development, its wastefulness and excess. But it also provides an opportunity to mobilize a soft-power symbol of his political imagination of India itself. Our paper considers the political yoga advanced by Gandhi, and concludes with reflections on Modi's use of yoga, all filtered through the lens of a modern yogic ethic of development. Our paper offers some speculations on the political theology of yoga that might be apparent not only in development ideologies, but in other ideological, intellectual, and political contexts, in India and abroad. This paper is an effort to understand how political ideas of yoga in modern India influence and form political theologies of development.

To Go as Far as China
Shia Humanitarianism between Pakistan, England and Iraq

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In this paper, I explore the complex genealogies of contemporary Twelver Shia humanitarianism. Based on ethnographic fieldwork amongst charitable trusts in Pakistan and England I examine these genealogies against the backdrop of literature in the field of political theology. Moving away from the notion of linear genealogical connections between specific theologies and contemporary humanitarian practices I argue that the political theology underlying contemporary Shia humanitarianism is informed by the entanglement of diverse genealogical strands. These include reformulations of the Muslim liberal, the concept of “meritocracy” deriving from managerial discourse and the battle of Karbala as an inherently political-theological event. In sum, I purport that – to do justice to the complexity of Shia humanitarianism – it is useful to move away from the notion of an *apriori* theological foundation which underlies contemporary humanitarian work and instead think through multi-polar and multi-directional interactions.

ABOUT THE CONVENORS, CHAIRPERSONS & DISCUSSANTS

Amelia FAUZIA is a Senior Research Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Dr Fauzia received her PhD from the University of Melbourne (2009), looking at contestation between state and Muslim civil society in the practice of Islamic philanthropy. Her dissertation was published by EJ Brill entitled *Faith and the State, A History of Islamic Philanthropy in Indonesia* (2013). She holds a Master in Islamic Studies from the University of Leiden (1998) on Islam and Javanese messianic movements of the 19th-20th century Java. She has taught and conducted research related to Islamic history of Indonesia, contemporary issues of Islam in Indonesia, and Islamic philanthropy. Dr Fauzia works on Islam, NGOs, and humanitarianism through the networks of Islamic philanthropy in Southeast Asia.

Bernardo BROWN is a Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, affiliated with the Religion and Globalization and the Asian Migrations clusters. His work on Sri Lankan Catholic return migration has recently appeared in *Contemporary South Asia* (2014), *Ethnography* (2015) and *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* (2015). His current Research projects focus on Catholic seminaries and priestly vocations in South and Southeast Asia. He received an MA from the New School for Social Research and a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Cornell University. Before joining ARI, he held a post-doctoral fellowship at the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden.

Catherine SCHEER is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She received her PhD and MA in Anthropology from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris. Her previous work focused on Cambodia's "indigenous minorities", specifically the Bunong, and their interactions with Protestant development actors. In her doctoral thesis on the dynamics of Christianisation in a highland commune, she examined the links between local worldviews and ritual practices and missionary teachings that have changed over time, affecting the Bunong's claimed identity and moral logic. She thereby attempts to contribute to the anthropology of Christianity in continental Southeast Asia. Her current research – in the context of the Religion and NGOs in Asia project- concerns the production of knowledge about languages in education by Southeast Asia-based international organisations, including Christian NGOs.

Christian Lee NOVETZKE is a professor in the South Asia Program, the Comparative Religion Program, and the International Studies Program in the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington, where he holds a College of Arts and Sciences Endowed Professorship. He also serves as the Associate Director of the Jackson School and the Director of the Center for Global Studies. He teaches and writes about religion, history, and culture in South Asia, as well as theoretical issues in the study of religion in general and its intersection with historiography. He works with Marathi and Hindi materials, including textual, ethnographic, and visual/filmic sources. His books include *Religion and Public Memory* (2008); *Amar Akbar Anthony*, with William Elison and Andy Rotman (2016); and *The Quotidian Revolution* (2016).

Edoardo SIANI is a PhD candidate in social anthropology at SOAS, University of London. His doctoral thesis, which has received financial support from the University of Cambridge, SOAS, École Française d'Extrême-Orient and Chulalongkorn University, investigates the relationship between Buddhist cosmology, politics and economy in contemporary Thailand by focusing ethnographically on divination practitioners in Bangkok. Based in Thailand since 2002, Edoardo previously worked in the local language education sector, conducted due diligence investigations, cooperated with the Bangkok police as an interpreter, and wrote political analyses regarding Southeast Asia for Italian newspapers.

Eli ELINOFF is a lecturer in Cultural Anthropology at Victoria University of Wellington. His research addresses questions related to political and environmental transformation in Thailand. He has published work in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, *Cultural Anthropology Online*, *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* the *Journal of Urban History*, and *South East Asia Research*. Prior to assuming his current role in New Zealand, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the Asia Research Institute and the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore. He received his PhD in Anthropology from the University of California, San Diego in 2013.

Kenneth DEAN is Professor and Head of the Chinese Studies Department, National University of Singapore, and Professor Emeritus, McGill University. He directed *Bored in Heaven: A Film about Ritual Sensation* (2010), an 80 minute documentary film on ritual celebrations around Chinese New Years in Putian, Fujian, China. Dean is the author of several books on Daoism and Chinese popular religion, including *Ritual Alliances of the Putian Plains: Vol. 1: Historical Introduction to the Return of the Gods*, Vol. 2: *A Survey of Village Temples and Ritual Activities*, Leiden: Brill, 2010 (with Zheng Zhenman); *Epigraphical Materials on the History of Religion in Fujian: The Quanzhou*

region, 3 vols., Fuzhou: 2004 (with Zheng Zhenman); *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China*, Princeton: 1998; *Epigraphical Materials on the History of Religion in Fujian: The Xinghua Region*; Fuzhou 1995 (with Zheng Zhenman); *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China*, Princeton 1993; and *First and Last Emperors: The Absolute State and the Body of the Despot* (with Brian Massumi), Autonomedia, New York. 1992. His current project is the construction of an interactive, multi-media database linked to a historical GIS map of the religious sites and networks of Singapore.

Giuseppe BOLOTTA is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He is a psychologist and socio-cultural anthropologist. He earned his PhD in Anthropology from University Bicocca of Milan, and his Master's in Psychology from University San Raffaele of Milan. In 2013, while on a PhD exchange program in Bangkok, he also undertook political science training at Chulalongkorn University. His doctoral research is a multi-situated ethnography of religious, humanitarian and state institutional policies for poor children living in the slums of Bangkok (Thailand). He is currently working on a monograph with the working title "Slum Children: Cultural Politics of Marginal Childhood in Bangkok". He co-founded the scholarly network "Sciences de l'Enfance, Enfants des Sciences" (SEES, <http://sciences-enfances.org>) and has worked with Psychologists without Frontiers (PSF).

Gustav BROWN is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalization cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Dr Brown holds a PhD and MA in Sociology from the University of California, Los Angeles, as well as an MA in International Studies from the University of Washington. His doctoral research examines the intersection of democratization, decentralization and Islamisation in Indonesia—at the level of the state, in regional politics and in everyday life. Dr Brown is currently working on examining the partnerships, policies and practices that enable non-proselytizing Christian INGOs like World Vision to build trust and manage conflicts while operating within majority Muslim communities in Indonesia.

Jonathan RIGG is Director of the Asia Research Institute and Professor in the Department of Geography at the National University of Singapore. Prior to that, he was Head of the Geography Department at Durham University in the UK. He was also based at the School of Oriental & African Studies, London University where he was a Lecturer, British Academy Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, and PhD student. He is a development geographer interested in illuminating and explaining patterns and processes of social, economic and environmental change in the Asian region and the

impacts of such changes on ordinary people and everyday life. In his work, he has tried to give a “face” to the individuals buffeted by modernisation and ascribe to them an agency which is sometimes absent in higher level interpretations of change. He has been concerned to treat ordinary people as special and the geographical contexts in which they live—and which they help to shape—as distinctive. He is currently working on three projects: an international, interdisciplinary study of resilience to earthquake risk in the continental interior of Asia; a study of the role of land in agrarian change in Thailand; and a project on the survival of the smallholder in East and Southeast Asia. His latest book *Challenging Southeast Asian Development: The Shadows of Success* was published in August 2015.

Kenneth M. GEORGE is Professor of Anthropology at the Australian National University, and former Director of the School of Culture, History and Language in the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, having served previously at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Harvard University, and as Editor of the *Journal of Asian Studies* (2005-2008). His ethnographic research in Southeast Asia has been supported by fellowships from the Social Science Research Council, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. His books include *Showing Signs of Violence: The Cultural Politics of a Twentieth Century Headhunting Ritual* (1996); *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia* (2005, co-edited with Andrew Willford); and *Picturing Islam: Art and Ethics in a Muslim Lifeworld* (2010). His current research (with Kirin Narayan) explores the intermingling of religion and infrastructure in South and Southeast Asia.

Lei Kuan Rongdao LAI is a postdoctoral fellow at Asia Research Institute and Assistant Professor of Religion at the University of Southern California. She received her PhD in Religious Studies from McGill University in 2013. She specializes in modern Chinese Religions, focusing especially on the changing landscape in modern Chinese Buddhism and identity production. She is currently working on a book manuscript, based on her doctoral dissertation, on modern Buddhist education and citizenship in China. Her other on-going project focuses on the networks and transnational movements of Chinese Buddhists in the twentieth century.

May NGO is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalization cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She earned her PhD in Anthropology at Swinburne University of Technology, Australia. Her doctoral research examined the role of religious actors in the humanitarian field, focusing on a case study of a Christian faith-based organization in Morocco working with Sub-Saharan African irregular migrants. Her research interests include how constructions of both the 'sacred' and the 'secular' are negotiated within the humanitarian and development field, and how an examination of these processes render into question values that are assumed as universal and neutral. During her time at ARI, she will complete a book manuscript based on her doctoral dissertation. She will also be working on a new project examining the politics of migration, religion and development in Cambodia, with a focus on Catholic organizations.

MOK Mei Feng is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Asia Research Institute. She received her PhD in History from the University of Washington in 2016. Her research is on the Chinese diaspora in modern Vietnamese history during the Cold War. She focuses on Chinese diasporic communities negotiating nation-building and transnationalism in everyday life.

Philip FOUNTAIN is a Teaching Fellow in Religious Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. Prior to this he was a Senior Research Fellow in the Religion Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He received his doctorate in anthropology from the Australian National University. He has published extensively on religion and development, religion and disaster relief, the anthropology of Christianity and anthropological theologies. With Robin Bush and R. Michael Feener he edited *Religion and the Politics of Development* (Palgrave, 2015).

Peter A. JACKSON is Emeritus Professor of Thai history and cultural studies in the Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific. Over the past 30 years, he has written extensively on modern Thai cultural history, with special interests in religion, sexuality and critical approaches to Asian histories and cultures. Peter Jackson was editor-in-chief of *Asian Studies Review*, flagship journal of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, from 2009 to 2012 and he is a member of the editorial collective of Hong Kong University Press's *Queer Asia* monograph series. His most recent book, "First Queer Voices from Thailand: Uncle Go's Advice Columns for Gays, Lesbians and Kathoey", was published by HKUP in April 2016. He is collaborating with Prof. Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière (Centre Asie du Sud-Est, CNRS-EHESS Paris) to establish a network of scholars interested in the resurgence of spirit possession rituals across the Buddhist societies of mainland Southeast Asia. He is currently a Senior

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R. Michael FEENER is the Sultan of Oman Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, and a member of the History Faculty at the University of Oxford. Previously, he was Research Leader of the Religion and Globalization Research Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, and Associate Professor in the Department of History at the National University of Singapore. He has also taught at Reed College and the University of California, Riverside, and held visiting professor positions and research fellowships at Harvard, Kyoto University, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris), the University of Copenhagen, The Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art (Honolulu), and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands. He has published extensively in the fields of Islamic studies and Southeast Asian history, as well as on post-disaster reconstruction, religion and development.

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