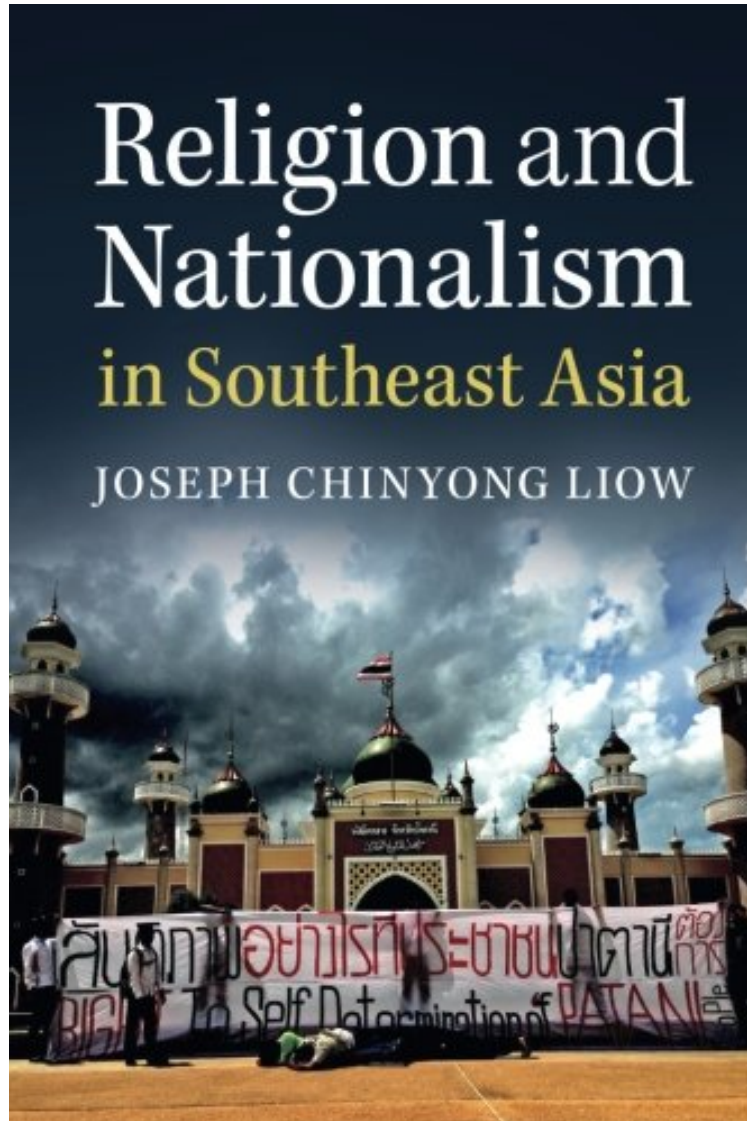


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Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia

Joseph Chinyong Liow

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Joseph Chinyong Liow : Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The nationalist project at its best, explained by the best By C P Slayton The Guardian online (Nov 2016) argued that Indonesia will be and should be the country to watch. It would make sense considering the expansive and populous archipelago, dominant religious themes, projects in diversity, development, and strategic placement. That same author, Elizabeth Pisani, admitted on her own blog and twitter feed

that despite the reality, Indonesia will seldom make the front page (unless a meme goes viral: "om telolet om"). Indonesia, however, taken together with the Philippines, Malaysia and Southern Thailand make for a crucial study in social movements and national identity formation. I am constantly amazed at the unique differences in Southeast Asian cultural and religious dynamics as compared to other world regions with similar challenges. Joseph Liow is perfectly equipped with an interest that is equally contagious to the reader to discuss the theories behind nations, identity formation and the religious influence. The author compares the Philippine "Bangsamoro" and Southern Thailand Malay minority Muslim movements with the nationalist projects of majority Muslim Indonesia and Malaysia. In a fine twist of analysis, he includes co-religionist perceptions of each development to argue why one movement would garner support and another indifference. If religion were the key factor in violence and stubborn conflict, why the diverse identity formation within Islam and the varied adoption of symbols, language and myth? Politics and modernism is not the "progressive" solution beyond religion. Religion itself is one of many enablers of the political and modern solution, as the book argues. One aspect that all the movements in Liow's research have in common is a claim to Malay history and in part, language. Malay as the official culture and language of Islam in South East Asia has been argued before by this author and many others. Malay terminology is not only adopted to frame the nationalist cause but the selective history and language vocabulary itself is offered up at one time or another to be the sole possession of Muslims. Nationalist language, primed by grievance, instrumentalized by politics and aided through religious identity have developed a particular claim to legitimacy over land and law. In the case of the latter, Shari'a is often a de facto if not de jure reality by pressure of the ulama and influential conservative groups across these aforementioned areas. Joseph Liow mentions specifically the resistance to non-Muslim leadership in the Malay peninsula, his book having gone to press before he could add, undoubtedly, the largest mass protest Indonesia has seen in recent history against the non-Muslim leadership of Jakarta Governor, running still for re-election Feb 2017. While the specific ingredients of the region's national and religious projects may be specific to Southeast Asia, it could be said that the majority of the world's states, regardless of religious influence has argued at one time or another for outright discrimination in the name of "national security". What is easier, diversity or a unified religiously tied ethnic identity? Indonesia's Pancasila ideology is still a test case, barely 85 years old. The mandate to Shari'a and ensured Muslim-only leadership as stated in the additional Piagam Jakarta was never formally legalized. But gentlemen's agreements have a way of evolving... or devolving. It is indeed a curious defense that Muslims, non-Muslims and Secular governments alike at one time or another both condemn the other for discrimination on grounds of "national security" but resort to it themselves. Any argument one group has for the right to land and self-rule could easily be used by another, half-way across the globe or right next door. One fascinating factor in Liow's case studies is that each Muslim group claims religious right to land, via cultural and linguistic identity, but not by Arab descent nor even by Arabic as the language of Islam. What Middle East Islam might claim as the esteemed language, land and lineage is utterly transformed in Southeast Asia's nationalist projects. It is not just identities that are created but the twisted facts that form the foundation of national right and heritage create a pattern of pre-conceived notions. What one hopes to be true or what one expects in their competitor becomes the only interpretation of the facts, regardless of contrary data. Such was the case, as the book details, between Christians and Muslims in Sulawesi, Ambon and the Maluku islands of Indonesia. In addition, the colonial relationship, one of many historical grievances, is both essential and regretful. Indonesia's current boundary is mostly defined by colonial occupation. The Dutch colonial system was also the common enemy that enabled Indonesia's national cause. On the other hand, Malaysia's gradual release from British colonialism was often seen as a compromise in the eyes of Indonesia's nationalist agents. Even though Thailand is proud to have resisted colonialism altogether, the southern-most Patani Muslims level similar colonial accusations against the Buddhist nationalist cause. In the case of the "Bangsamoro" their account of colonial resistance runs uninterrupted from Spain to America to present day Philippine government. The earlier Dutch and Portuguese colonialists were said to have supported the nominal Muslim cause in order to suppress the extremist and more conservative movements. This "middle ground" approach was at once congenial towards many Muslims but also strategic in advancing the colonial agenda. The late Kenyan Professor, Ali Mazrui, argued that the British and French powers in Africa, also purposely endorsed more timid Muslims with similar contemporary outcomes. In both regions, the marginalized extremists not only accused their fellow Muslims of tacit subservience but expanded the extremist cause by force. See, even colonialism requires a careful framing to augment the specific religious and nationalist cause. The diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing steps apply equally well to other factors in Liow's case studies beyond colonialism. One additional gain in this research is that the author is keen to correct the misperception of religion as the source of conflict while also reframing the shallow "Clash of Civilizations" analysis. Liow's case study revolves around the extremist Islamist elements in each country. Extremist elements appear to be the action arm of broader sentiment. (Shadi Hamid comes to a similar conclusion in the case of Middle East Islam). While the extremists are denigrated by their co-religionists, the truth is that the best jihadists know where and how to find common cause. But were it not for the extremists and the conservatives, what would become of the nationalist movements? In any matter of religious influence it is a common error to divorce completely the extremist ideology from the popular sources of discontent and belief. Another impressive mark of Joseph Liow's style is his political and religious balance

bolstered by a clear presentation of the theories of social movements. Unlike so many others, Liow avoids the sensational reports and instead finds common ground and general accountability for peace between all political, religious and social actors. The balance however, still leaves absent what any religious adherent in Southeast Asia would tacitly confirm every day; that there is a correct and an incorrect practice of faith which may or may not be tied to who lives on the land, who makes the law, who governs the people and whose ancestors and language define the living space. In short, is it only the extremists or is there a general, but still less zealous acceptance of how religion defines Land, Law, Lineage, Language and Legitimacy? What would South East Asia look like without the extremist influence? What comes first, the religion that provides the answer to nationalism's project or the desire to nationalism that then instigates the motive to religion? For Joseph Liow, religion is just one of many necessary factors, albeit a strong one, that pulses through the Southeast Asian political and social economy.

Religion and nationalism are two of the most potent and enduring forces that have shaped the modern world. Yet, there has been little systematic study of how these two forces have interacted to provide powerful impetus for mobilization in Southeast Asia, a region where religious identities are as strong as nationalist impulses. At the heart of many religious conflicts in Southeast Asia lies competing conceptions of nation and nationhood, identity and belonging, and loyalty and legitimacy. In this accessible and timely study, Joseph Liow examines the ways in which religious identity nourishes collective consciousness of a people who see themselves as a nation, perhaps even as a constituent part of a nation, but anchored in shared faith. Drawing on case studies from across the region, Liow argues that this serves both as a vital element of identity and a means through which issues of rights and legitimacy are understood.

"Joseph Liow is an influential observer of religion and nationalism across Muslim Southeast Asia. His new book presents a rich and insightful analysis that will guide a new generation of scholars and students." Edward Aspinall, Australian National University, Canberra "Joseph Liow has brought together a wealth of information on the extent to which religion has come to infuse contested conceptions of nationhood and conflicts over political supremacy. This is an incisive exploration of the ways in which faith has been put into the service of projects of domination." Donald L. Horowitz, Duke University, North Carolina About the Author Joseph Liow is Dean and Professor of Comparative and International Politics at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. He is also the inaugural holder of the Lee Kuan Yew Chair in Southeast Asia Studies and Senior Fellow in the Foreign Policy Program at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC. Liow's research focusses on comparative politics, Islamic studies, international relations, and political sociology. He has a particular interest in Muslim politics and social movements in Southeast Asia, and has published books on the topics of Muslim politics in Malaysia and Islamic education in Thailand.