M. Picard (ed.), *The Appropriation of Religion in Southeast Asia and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, ix + 285 pp. ISBN 9783319562292, price: EUR 116.59 (hardback), EUR 91.62 (ebook).

This edited volume of essays on religion in Southeast Asia covers a broad array of cases: essays on regions as diverse as Bali, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Melanesia come together in this collection to discuss two straightforward (and seemingly perennial) questions: 'What does and what does not count as religion in a given context [... and w]ho gets to make this decision [about what counts] and why' (p. 2). Asserting a social constructivist position, the editor discusses in the introduction the various socio-historical developments that have led to the adoption of the notion of 'religion' in the region, including but not limited to the colonial encounter and contemporary political movements to 'sanitize' and institutionalize religion. Unfortunately, this does not break new theoretical or conceptual ground. Such constructivist approaches that take into account issues such as colonial power, local elites, and modernity have long been established in the study of 'Asian' religions (Josephson 2006; Lorenzen 2006). What is more, the idea of the construction of religion in the introduction is explored almost exclusively through the development of vocabularies of religion, such as *dharma* in India (p. 11). This may lead readers to believe that the authors are concerned with terminological rather than performative aspects of religious traditions and their construction. But all contributions do make some use of anecdotes and data from the field, rather than only textual sources. The strength of this volume lies in its individual case contributions and its regional focus: scholars working outside of the region are given the opportunity to explore descriptions of everyday negotiations of what constitutes religion in accessible and engaging ways.

It is clear that the volume was written for a regional studies audience rather than those interested in a specific discipline, as methodologies differ drastically from case to case. It is indeed most valuable for researchers and senior students of Southeast Asian Studies: the unique configurations of religion in the region may open new avenues for discussion and also shed light on understudied subjects, such as Balinese pilgrimages to India (chapter 6). There are also timely contributions that examine recent political history in connection with the development of religion, such as the post-Communist construction of religion in Cambodia, where the author has pointed out how 'religion' becomes entangled with intersections of nation-building and the aftermath of the communist purges (chapter 3). There are points when readers may wish that authors had spent less time reconstructing the historical contexts and

emergence of vocabularies, and had given more space to examinations of contemporary practices that illustrate these constructions. Bénédict Brac de la Perrière's essay on Burmese Buddhist social space (*thathana*) in relation to ritual (chapter 2) could have been strengthened further if there had been more emphasis on the relationship between spirit worship and Buddhist practices today (p. 57). Chapters 7–9 have a markedly more historiographic focus, exploring how 'religion' becomes constructed through various encounters between indigenous groups and colonial powers. Jos D.M. Platenkamp's essay 'Encounters with Christianity in the North Moluccas (Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries)' stands out among these as a detailed, well-presented account (pp. 217–251). These chapters make excellent resources for students and scholars who seek grounding in these historical-religious developments in the region.

Across all essays, the authors emphasize how emic perspectives are complicated, undermined, and even rejected by etic ones. Yet there is not enough emphasis on etic perspectives and ethnographic fieldwork (not to mention issues such as positionality and reflexivity) to make it a truly rigorous anthropological text as a whole. However, there are individual contributions that make outstanding and insightful contributions to the fields of cultural anthropology or anthropology of religion. Anne Yvonne Guillou's contribution on 'The (Re)Configuration of the Buddhist Field in Post-Communist Cambodia' (pp. 67–95) provides an illuminating discussion of three different monks whose own perspectives on what religion constitutes provides a lively illustration of the agency and internal debates and justifications that contemporary religious authorities invest in their constructions of 'religion'. A similarly compelling essay by Annette Hornbacher called 'Return to the Source: A Balinese Pilgrimage to India and the Re-Enchantment of *Agama Hindu* in Global Modernity' (pp. 153–195) takes its readers on pilgrimage to holy sites in India with Balinese devotees. This essay reveals the creativity that lay practitioners exercise when negotiating between their own Balinese traditions, Indian 'consumer' rituals, and the socio-cultural issues of conducting pilgrimage in a geographical context that is often jarring and at times uncomfortable for them.

As a whole, the volume also has the potential to be an interesting historiographic contribution: all authors are writing from within European academic contexts. However, there is very little reflection on positionality in individual essays or in the introduction, so the authors and the editor miss an opportunity to use this volume as their own contribution to a critically reflexive perspective on 'Southeast Asia' from 'Europe'. While they hint at this through their research questions, as they attempt to deconstruct categorizations and dualisms imposed by academic others onto non-European traditions, a more explicit engagement with why and how this is relevant for Southeast Asian

studies, as well as religious studies, would have been welcome, and may have served to further unify the collection.

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