
A WORD FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

The influence of religion on national politics in some Southeast Asian countries is diverse. Countries like Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand tolerate their people practicing their religious beliefs. Indonesia, a secular state with nationalist ideologies, has realized that religion is imperative in achieving social transformation. Vietnam, a communist state, has tried to eradicate the influence of religion on politics, but is like getting blood out of a stone, so to speak. Therefore, considering the richness of history and spirituality of the context of Southeast Asia, it is safe to say that the impact of religion on politics is evident. Fittingly, this special issue of the *Politics and Religion Journal* is dedicated to the Southeast Asian Community by a group of scholars using the lens of the *Politology of Religion* to properly understand the nexus of religion and politics. It covers countries of Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam including the religions/belief systems of Islam, Catholicism/Christianity, Buddhism, and a public cult.

Holidin's article examines the current democratization transpiring in Indonesia both from the ideological and existential aspects in connection with the complexity of the relationship between Islam and Pancasila, i.e., the nation's civil religion and formal ideology. This paper seeks to understand the degree to which Pancasila maintains its status quo and how religious groups cooperate with Pancasila in upholding Indonesia's democracy. The author is optimistic that even if the implementation of Pancasila as a national ideology in Indonesia's transitioning democracy may pose a risk of democratic backsliding, Pancasila is still necessary for preventing the danger of democratization simply because it gears toward socio-political change and that may also enhance the integrity of the Indonesian government. Moreover, the weakening of Indonesia's democracy may intensify the obligation of civil society organizations to fulfill their duties in sustaining resilient democracy in their beloved country. Thus, political turmoil that puts Indonesia's democratization at risk instigates the Muslim community/civic organizations to maintain their amicable relationship with the government but not to the extent that they are to be politically manipulated.

Based on Thant's article the Pali word Sasana refers to the set of authoritative teachings attributed to the Lord Buddha Himself. However, there are allegations that Sasana has undergone some modifications due to external factors with the passage of time. Thus, it is difficult to claim that Sasana in Myanmar's Buddhist context remains immaculate in its form. Nevertheless, Thant adds that when Myanmar Buddhism flourished intensely during the 19th century comparable to the Sun and the Moon due to the mandate of the Mandalay Kings, specifically during the reign of King Mindon (1853-1878), Sasana was purified and properly disseminated. King Mindon and his followers were said to have invested significantly in different sorts of charitable and religious works in the belief that the kingdom's political and economic conditions would improve because for them merit results from their good deeds known as positive karma. Every Myanmar king in history acted as the pro-

tector and supporter of religion and Sangha, i.e., the community of monks. Using primary sources, the proponent clearly explains how King Mindon exerted efforts to support and protect Buddhism during his reign, how the people of the Mandalay Period expressed and practiced their faith, and how the Sangha safeguarded and preserved the Sasana.

Sagut asserts that the Principle of the Separation of Church and State stipulated in the Philippine Constitution is constantly referred to in the determination of court resolutions when disputes arise between the two. He adds that this mandate should not be interpreted where expressions of religion and the participation of churches in the public sphere are prohibited and to be mindful of the fact that the primary purpose of this law is to guarantee that religions and belief systems in the Philippines are equally respected and protected. Actions in the public life of religions and churches should not be hindered as long as they are not detrimental to other people and their communities. Moreover, religions and churches are motivated in becoming agents of transformation and missionaries for the people's welfare. Churches themselves, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, should therefore consistently reflect on their pragmatic and pastoral responses when people are desperately clamoring for justice.

Phongphan and Borromeo-Eballo's article describes the practice of Buddhism in Thailand as a way of life. The proponents explore how the Eightfold Path has been incorporated into the lived experience of every Thai in accordance with the "Self-Sufficiency Economy" envisioned by His Royal Majesty King Bhumibol Aduljadej in 1997. That economic model suggests that every family should consider moderation, rationality, immunity, and use of knowledge guided by morality as necessary in surviving crises and achieving sustainability amidst the challenges brought about by global capitalism and consumerism. The proponents posit that the concrete application of the Eightfold Path through the "Self-Sufficiency Economy" may lead to the integral development of the people. The authors also validate their claim by citing some concrete examples of holistic programs and projects that substantiate the effect of the "Self-Sufficiency Economy" paradigm and how it fulfills the teaching of the Eightfold Path among Thais.

Nguyễn and Trần's article is a product of a series of fieldwork and consultations with primary sources to confidently recount how the cult of "108 Chiêu Ứng Anh Liệt" of the Hainan Chinese had come into existence. They claim that the said public worship was first observed in Hainan Island, China but was eventually standardized, formalized, and legitimized in Vietnam after a bloody incident happened in the central seaboard of the country when a company of Hainanese traders was unjustly massacred in 1851. King Tự Đức of Nguyễn, Vietnam ordained the victims in that year as a sort of vindication. Due to the imperial sanction imposed by the King, that veneration was certainly transformed into a sacred ritual, standardized, and recognized as an established faith by the Hainan Chinese communities in Vietnam and some parts of Southeast Asia. The authors also realized that the growth of that cult was

not spontaneous considering the imperial sanction granted by the King Himself. However, the authors maintain that the worship of “108 Chiêu Ứng Anh Liệt” serves as a symbol of a sacred repository of collective consciousness, rhetorical narratives, and shared values of the community like the “going-upstream spirit” or capacity of the members to unite and strengthen their beliefs so that they will gain identity and status as a community. These narratives and symbols deserve to be discussed through cultural and political discourse within the Southeast Asian region. Indeed, ritual space is an ideal place for dialogue.

In a nutshell, religious tolerance has been embraced by some Southeast Asian countries simply because religion is considered as a legitimate institution having a conservative force that tends to unite people through emotional and social interactions and serves as a bastion of human virtues, values, and morals. It can also be gleaned from the featured articles the difficulty of delineating the demarcation line regarding the distinct roles of religion and state simply because both are essential in providing the holistic needs of the people through sustainable programs and good governance (Phongphan and Borromeo-Eballo). Instead, the unity and dialogic relationship between the two institutions are more appreciated and advantageous for the people in realizing political, social, and economic transformation (Holidin). Religion also provides an opportunity to experience a “going-upstream spirit” or opportunity for the members to unite and assert their identity and status as a community. (Nguyễn and Trần). For state leaders, being supportive of religion may increase their credibility as spiritual credit held to be earned by the performance of righteous acts to ensure future benefits or good karma (Thant). And to vividly illustrate the dynamic interface between religion and state in the Southeast Asian context, we can use a ‘bicycle’ as a metaphor. Using a bicycle, one can surely reach his/her destination if the two wheels are consistently going in one direction. The same is true with religion and state as they both aim to reach transformative and sustainable living toward the common good and realize just, peaceful, and humane societies. Thus, the relationship between the two institutions is seen not as a separation but as a kind of critical collaboration (Sagut).

It has been an honor to work with the authors and the Editor-in-Chief of the Politics and Religion Journal, Prof. Miroљjub Jevtić. Congratulations to all!

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