

In This Issue

This issue begins with an innovative collection of articles discussing the influence of Islamic vernacular writings in the twentieth century. The symposium, organized by JOHN R. BOWEN, demonstrates how the presentation of Islamic teachings in vernacular pamphlets in four separate locations within Asia can be shown to have both spread and deepened Muslim influence.

The symposium is impressive, not only for its findings but also for the variety of interpretative perspectives employed by the authors. With surprising ease the contributors have broken the often artificial boundaries of Asia's regions to provide meaningful comparisons from both South and Southeast Asia. Three of the articles refer to the work of BENEDICT ANDERSON, who has stressed the role of mass-produced vernacular literature in creating the political and social identities on which the postcolonial world is organized. The contributors generally stress that religion—often interpreted as a private matter in the postcolonial world—can increase its influence in the public sphere. In addition, the authors address the question of the differing ways a text can be composed and read, an issue that is arguably central to most current literary criticism and as well the major concern of some social scientists. BARBARA D. METCALF, in particular, stresses that the social uses of these vernacular Islamic texts reveal there is no wholly autonomous subaltern tradition, but rather that alternatives are always shaped by the particular dominant order in which they occur. Finally, the authors all address the gap that lies between universal principles and their particular expressions. The symposium organizer, JOHN BOWEN, suggests that studies of other universal traditions, such as Buddhism and Confucianism, will reveal new understanding of the alternative projects being proposed in their names for the postcolonial world.

JAMES F. EDER's article also invites crossregional comparison within Asia and beyond. Eder asks: How did the family farm fare under the pattern of capitalist development occurring in the Philippines from roughly 1970 to 1990? His data are drawn from a market-gardening community near the capital city of Palawan Province, but the discussion is framed in the larger terms of the process of proletarianization of rural work and the persistence of household farming. Eder concludes that household farms have persisted and even prospered, but that their position within the overall economy of the area has changed markedly. Eder argues against labeling this pattern of change as partial or semiproletarianization. Instead, he believes that we can better understand the processes of capitalist change among small-scale Asian households by focusing on "the persistence of self-employment, traditional household organization, and household-based enterprises" facilitated by the availability of non-farm employment in an increasingly diverse economy.