INTRODUCTION

Religion, Business and Contestation in Malaysia and Singapore

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ABSTRACT

The articles in this special issue examine the interactions of religious, economic and political power by exploring the impact on multi-ethnic societies in Malaysia and Singapore of prominent non-mainstream Christian and Muslim groups whose significant business activities relate to their religious faith. A study of the enterprises developed by these groups provides insights into the importance of religion to their leaders and the groups they represent when initiating and operating these businesses. Because these enterprises are engaged in sustained contact with different publics, the question is raised whether they are implicated in proselytization and if this leads to social conflict resulting in fragmentation and polarization, or whether they can be a force for positive change in society by contributing to the resolution of social and economic problems. Moreover, state authorities concerned about rival centres of power find it difficult to ignore potent combinations of economic and religious influence, but both the development of these combinations and the political response to their existence owe much to the globalization of religious ideas, current economic orthodoxies and the Southeast Asian context.

KEYWORDS: religion, business, Islam, Christianity, southeast asia, Malaysia, Singapore

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