

ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

UNEASY COEXISTENCE: ISLAMIC DOCTRINE AND THE BELIEF IN ANCESTRAL SPIRITS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Belief in the possibility of various ways of interaction with the spirits of deceased ancestors is part of the religious culture of many Muslim ethnic groups in Southeast Asia. This is somewhat odd, given the obvious difficulties of reconciling such beliefs and practices with certain Islamic dogmas concerning the fate of the human souls after death. The paper first discusses some manifestations of these beliefs in Southeast Asia, with particular emphasis on practices such as ritual offerings, the idea of the reincarnation of ancestors in some of their descendants, and especially rituals of possession by ancestral spirits. The paper then proceeds to analyse the arguments of a number of reformist Muslim authors of the region that have criticised the conceptual underpinnings of such rites. The Muslim scholarly views presented in the paper will range from those of the early 13th/19th-century jurists Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari and Dawud bin Abdallah Patani to those formulated in contemporary Indonesian fatwas.



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