



# Islam & Civil Society

*in Southeast Asia*

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# Introduction

Nakamura Mitsuo

## BACKGROUND

It seems appropriate here to state what is meant by “civil society” in this volume. Although the various chapter writers have not jointly attempted to define the term explicitly, they seem to be more or less in agreement in using the term to refer to the public sphere between the state and the individual, which is really the widest common understanding of civil society in recent literature. Likewise, the writers are also concerned with either or both of the two aspects implied by the term, namely: (a) voluntary associational life on the one hand, and (b) civility, or civic virtues on the other. In the former usage, the term is used as a comprehensive category to refer to a wide range of voluntary organizations, including traditional volitional institutions as well as contemporary civic institutions and associations including NGOs (non-government organizations), POs (people’s organizations), NPOs (non-profit organizations), and philanthropic organizations. In the latter case, values or normative principles constituting the foundation of society and regulating social relationships — most importantly state–society relationship — become the focus of concern.

The pairing of “Islam” and “civil society” in this book underlines an awareness that the relevance of Islam for civic values as well as the significance of associational life among Muslims for the civility of the entire society should become the subject of serious intellectual inquiry. More urgently, it is assumed that these two aspects of Islamic civil society should be approached from the viewpoint of exploring their roles in the dynamic processes of democratization and the empowerment of people in contemporary Southeast Asia. This volume presents the results of this exploration based upon recent Muslim experiences.