

**Book review: Kusaka Wataru, Iga Tsukasa, Aoyama Kaoru, Tamura Keiko (eds), #####LGBT#### — #
[Southeast Asia and "LGBT"
Politics: What is Contested on Sexual Minority?]**

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cluded the group of Indonesians married to Arabs. The fondness of Indonesians toward Arabs in terms of naming – combining Indonesian and Arabic names – could be also elaborated as a reflection of the social mobility of many Indonesians toward the status of middle-class Muslims. Finally, this volume should provide greater insight into the uniqueness of Indonesian Muslims and stimulate further studies on this fascinating population.

Muhammad Wildan

KUSAKA WATARU / IGA TSUKASA / AOYAMA KAORU / TAMURA KEIKO (EDS), 東南アジアと「LGBT」の政治 — 性的少数者をめぐって何が争われているか [*Southeast Asia and “LGBT” Politics: What is Contested on Sexual Minority?*]. Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2021. 388 pages, ¥5,400. ISBN 978-4-7503-5164-3

In March 2020, 34-year-old Hendrika Mayora Victoria Kelan was elected as the chairperson of the Village Consultative Body (Badan Permusyawaratan Desa, BPD) in Habi, a small coffee- and cacao-producing village in East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia. Under Indonesia’s decentralisation policy, such elections are not unusual, and Hendrika’s election would have not been anything particular, except for the fact that Hendrika is a transgender person. This makes her the first transgender person to successfully become a public official in Indonesia – a landmark event after more than two decades of Reformasi. However, numerous surveys indicate that many Indonesians do not accept LGBT individuals as equal.

Four years earlier, in 2016, Geraldine Batista Roman was elected as Representative of Bataan’s 1st district, making her the first transgender person elected to the Congress of the Philippines. She took up the seat that was previously held by her mother, a common pattern in many political families in the country. Her election was celebrated as a breakthrough for LGBT rights, as the Ladlad LGBT party had failed to win a seat in two previous elections (in 2010 and 2013). However, to date there is no openly gay politician in the Philippines.

These two events may seem unrelated (Hendrika and Roman do not know each other), but they illustrate the contemporary conditions of and challenges faced by transgender people (and the LGBT community in general) in Southeast Asia, a region that has long been known for its sexual and gender diversity. Since the early 2000s, all countries in the region, except Brunei, have established legislation that prohibits any form of discrimination based on sex (and sexual orientation). Nonetheless, LGBT people still find it difficult to have safe spaces. This book takes up these issues in a fresh way with interdis-

ciplinary approaches that make it valuable reading for students of Southeast Asian Studies.

The book opens with a preface by two of the editors, Kusaka Wataru and Iga Tsukasa, on the contested spheres of sexual citizenship and the hegemony of religion and family ideology of the nation state, all areas that LGBT individuals have to negotiate and identify with. The advancement of LGBT rights in the region depends much on how their country's political actors tolerate the LGBT community. On this basis, the subsequent chapters of the book are grouped into six parts that reflect the socio-political conditions of the LGBT community in each country in the region (except Brunei): exclusion, conditional inclusion and social acceptance.

The first part provides an overview of how LGBT individuals are perceived under the dominant cultural values. It consists of two chapters: on the naming and vocabularies (old and new) that express sexual diversity in the region, by Imamura Masao; and on the LGBT representations in Southeast Asian films (produced after 2010), by Sakagawa Naoya.

Part two, on "Nation, Religion- and Family-based Exclusion", consists of three chapters. Okamoto Masaaki discusses the controversial debate on the classification of LGBT as a mental illness in Indonesia (2016–2017); Iga Tsukasa describes the failed LGBT inclusion under the Pakatan Harapan, the ruling coalition in Malaysia (May 2018–February 2020); and Miyawaki Satoshi examines the conservative position of the Philippines' Catholic Church on LGBT, despite social acceptance since the early 2000s.

The book continues with a discussion on how governments (either local or national) develop LGBT-inclusion policies under the logic of capitalism. Here, the development of Pattaya's entertainment district (Thailand) as a welcoming space for LGBT during the Cold War is explored by Hinata Shinsuke. Tamura Keiko presents a paper on Singapore's civil society movement for LGBT rights as human rights (since the early 2000s).

Part four, "Family- and Citizenship-based Conditional Inclusion," written by Oda Nara, focuses on the development of policy and social norms in Vietnam on same-sex marriage and gender change (2015–2020). A column on the burgeoning discussion on LGBT issues in Laos – led by the American Embassy in 2012 – is added by Omura Yusuke.

How government's official policy creates contradictions and exclusion in society is the core question of the next part of the book. The three chapters depict the development of the LGBT rights advocacy movement in Myanmar since the early 2000s (Kojima Takahiro), the social conditions of *bakla* individuals with reference to the LGBT movement in Cebu city (Kusaka Wataru) and the process of institutionalising the same-sex partnership certification system in Osaka, Japan, since 2018 (Shingae Akitomo).

Finally, the sixth part is entitled “Another ‘Liberation’ in Everyday Politics”. Its first article, by Hatsukano Naomi, reflects on the influences of international actors and local human rights NGOs in fostering LGBT acceptance in Cambodia (since the early 2000s); the second, by Kitamura Yumi, focuses mainly on the struggle of LGBT acceptance in Indonesia’s Christian churches (since 2016). The book ends with a chapter by Aoyama Kaoru on the complex relations between the market, religion, human rights ideals and the politics of the nation-state in the progress (and regression) of LGBT rights in the region.

This book is the result of a collaborative research project under the support of the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), led by Kusaka Wataru from April 2016 to March 2019. For this project Kusaka Wataru has successfully assembled Southeast Asia specialists from different universities across Japan. As a result, each chapter of the book is written with a deep understanding of each country’s social context and with rich references to local/vernacular literatures. Each chapter makes its own contributions to the discussion on specific LGBT questions in a particular Southeast Asian country. In that way, readers can read any chapter according to their own interest or familiarity; they can engage with the thick description and strong empirical analysis. However, this approach limits our reading to the boundaries of each nation-state – an issue of overreliance on specific country-studies that haunts Southeast Asian Studies. It seems there is an underlying presumption that each LGBT question stays isolated and may not necessarily relate or be compared to other countries in the region.

The chapter on the same-sex partnership system in Osaka appears somewhat out of the book’s area of focus, especially as the editors do not show its relevance or argue that the Japanese system may provide an alternative model for Southeast Asia beyond the constitutional path that Taiwan has achieved in securing same-sex marriage since 2019. The book also does not discuss the possibility on how ASEAN might offer a supra-national institutional framework for the inclusion of LGBT rights in domestic laws and policies, as the ASEAN SOGIE caucus, the only regional network of human rights activists, has tried to implement since 2011.

The book uses the term “sexual minority” to refer to the LGBT communities in the region. It is a specific term that was first adopted by the Japanese LGBT activists to advance their cause in Japan. It later gained acceptance as the politically correct term, along with the introduction of the same-sex partnership certification system by local governments (since 2015). The book does not discuss whether or how this particular term is suitable to describe or capture the diverse LGBT communities in Southeast Asia and their specific issues as analysed in each chapter. These concerns aside, this book is an important addition to the general discussion of LGBT rights in contemporary Southeast Asia.

Although the book is currently only available in Japanese, students of Southeast Asia Studies who do not read Japanese can benefit from the bibliography as a guide to local references. Furthermore, it can serve as a platform for future collaboration with Japanese scholars.

Jafar Suryomengolo

CHERIAN GEORGE / GAYATHRY VENKITESWARAN, *Media and Power in Southeast Asia*. (Cambridge Elements: Politics and Society in Southeast Asia). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 71 pages, €15.00. ISBN 978-1-1084-6788-9

In the 2021 World Press Freedom Index (WPFI), which ranks 180 countries, 10 out of the 11 countries in Southeast Asia can be found on the bottom half of the list. Certainly, this has something to do with Southeast Asia's long history of authoritarianism, with censorship policies and threats to journalists that limit media practices. However, classifying the region into free/non-free categories oversimplifies the issue because it negates the positive changes that have occurred in each country.

Even if the media is considered “not free”, Cherian George and Gayathry Venkiteswaran argue in *Media and Power in Southeast Asia* that countries in Southeast Asia are “unfree in markedly different ways” (p. 3). The book tries to capture the nuances of these differences within the context of the relationships between the media, government, civil society and the private sector, where structural changes and democratisation processes might or might not be impacted by the changes in relations between them.

The book's main thesis centres on four issues – media freedom, independence, pluralism and safety – whose developments have been challenged by “trends towards commercialisation, digital platforms and identity-based politics” (p. 2). The first chapter criticises the current scientific frameworks on the comparison of media systems, which tend to be Eurocentric; it simultaneously debunks stereotyped concepts such as “Asian values/culture” and “development journalism” (p. 8). Such concepts are often applied uncritically to Asian societies to evaluate their political and media systems using the lens of Western liberal democracy. The current models are not transferable to the colourful Southeast Asian context, which makes modelling the Southeast Asian media system a challenging undertaking. The authors do not attempt to build a model but rather capture these nuances through five analytical themes that structure the book.

Using Malaysia, Myanmar and Indonesia as case studies, the second chapter deals with the question of political change and its effect on media practices