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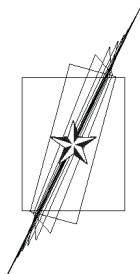
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From the Editor

In much of the Asia Pacific, we mostly focus on the economic development of our respective countries. We continually seek for increases in, among others, our production of goods and services, the size of our target markets and consumers, and the number of our economically-productive citizens. As well, we aim for increases in our national investments and savings and in our national allocation and expenditure for infrastructure development. We hope that all these closely-directed economic-based expansions would impact on our people's quality of life, which we commonly equate to mean that our people have a house, money, food, and education. Quality of life is not only about these basic needs but also about being free from appalling social conditions, such as oppression, discrimination, vice, and disease. Freedom is a basic and an inherent human right. Unfortunately, many of us in the region are not free in multiple ways. We unravel in this edition of the Asia Pacific Social Science Review (Scopus) several unfortunate, albeit surmountable, conditions that have effectively clamped our freedom.

Siwach Sripokangkul discusses the historical influence of the military institution in Thailand that has stifled the Thai people's democratic freedom. In his article, "On the Path to Democracy in Thailand: Military Reform is the First Step," Siwach intricately describes the influential role of the Royal Thai Army in the politics of Thailand and underscores, in particular, the unchecked nature of the Army's power. When the military power is unbridled, which is also often the case in other countries in the region, civilians are controlled and prevented from exercising their freedom—for example, their freedom to dissent and to report rampant military abuses. Once the military control of civilians is institutionalized, the control of the military deepens even more. Over time, the military establishment reigns supreme over and deprives civilians of their democratic freedom. This is evident in Thailand where the streets, the mass media, and even small group talks are "cleared" and "cleansed." The military commonly touts the absence of civilian assemblies and expressions as a sign of national harmony and discipline. But, what good would a military-backed pristine order do to our quality of life if we are deprived of our inherent right to speak our minds? We should accept discourses and movements—even if chaotic—because these are our ways of expressing our inalienable freedom. Siwach is cognizant that the Royal Thai Army would guard against the unfolding of any substantive democratic processes in Thailand. He calls the Royal Thai Army as "the main barrier to democratization"; rightfully, he calls its reform as the first step towards democracy in his native land.

In most times, the social condition suppressing our freedom is the making not of the military but of the public. Sadly, the public includes in this case our families, relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, and teachers, not to mention our favorite television networks and newspapers. More sadly, the public are highly prejudiced against non-heterosexual identities. Eric Julian Manalastas and colleagues—in their article, "Homonegativity in South East Asia: Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men..."—provide evidence of how widespread the homonegativity among our publics throughout the region is. Based on the authors' analysis of the World Values Survey datasets, between 28% and 66% of our people, in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore,

Vietnam, and the Philippines, were homonegative. We are simply surrounded by masses of people who are intolerant of our non-heterosexual identities, albeit their numbers, given the rising levels of modernization across the region, could have already gone down over time. We may think of the public's homonegativity as innocuous, because it is expressed normatively in our everyday life by some very familiar sectors. On the contrary, homonegativity is very harmful to our freedom and happiness. When our very own public think, say, and do something against our homosexual identities, they effectively put us in a bad light, make us feel different, and limit our freedom to express ourselves of who we are. If we are to eradicate homonegativity, we need to start instituting reforms in key sectors (e.g., schools, mass media).

In addition to our sexual identities, our social condition, once we become refugees, deprives us of our freedom too. When we leave our mother-country as refugees, we lose our freedom to remain in the care of our country of birth. When the countries that host us as refugees—either permanently or otherwise—perpetuate the discrimination and violence committed against us, we lose our freedom to live in peace; in this context, we fear for our lives each day. This is precisely the social condition that has befallen the Rohingya refugees found in several countries in the Asia Pacific. Not only that they have been treated inhumanely but many of them have been annihilated as well. Yet, we have not made any concerted region-wide action against their inhumane treatment. In effect, we are condoning the rampant discrimination of the refugees. Mohamad Rosyidin, via his article “Why Collective Identity Matters: Constructivism and the Absence of ASEAN's Role in the Rohingya Crisis,” calls for a collective identity building that, he says, is needed for the formation of institutional commitments and arrangements on the refugee crisis. We hope that his conceptual tool, and other emerging efforts out there, go places to later make a dent on the crisis.

In some other instances, we lose certain freedoms in part due to our own choices. For example, we abandon our freedom of health and of life once we smoke-drink and commit suicide. Tens of millions of our people in the Asia Pacific are smokers (e.g., in China and India), alcohol drinkers (e.g., in Thailand and the Philippines), and suicidal (e.g., in Japan and South Korea) (globally, there is one suicide every 40 seconds says the World Health Organization). With powerful social forces impinging on our personal agency, more of us could follow suit. Unfortunately, we have a dearth of risk-reduction interventions for these problems even if we know that these are grave occurrences in our region. With their vivid descriptions and explanations, the data of the two articles in this edition—Rito Baring et al.'s “Exploring the Characteristics of Filipino University Students...” and Supachet Chansarn's “Economic Development, Economic Problems, and Suicide in Thailand...”—should be useful as we further press our demand for interventions.

We could also glean from the remaining featured articles the other social conditions that could thwart our freedoms. For instance, our government decisions on critical matters, such as our environment (see article of Bing Baltazar C. Brillo), welfare (see article of Vikas Dixit) and fuel subsidy (see article of Teguh Dartanto), could make us suffer in the absence of any well-thought out policies. Even a set of ethical prescriptions on sexual expression (see article of Dalmacio A. Cordero, Jr.) could impact on our freedom, especially in relation to preventing teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections among minors. And even when we vote (see Book Review of Brendan Howe) or when we wrongly vote could be devastating to our freedoms. We must do something about our freedoms, because without them we would be constrained from having authentic happiness and self-actualization. Although our freedoms are contingent on the constraints that various institutions impose upon us, some of our freedoms (e.g., vis-à-vis vices) are very much dependent on our personal agency (i.e., our capability to direct ourselves towards achieving our goal). Our interventions—apart from seeking institutional reforms—should help empower our people. Let us seek greater freedom and better quality of life for our people in the Asia Pacific.

Romeo B. Lee

Editor

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