

AFC7 Roundtable Discussion

< Program >

Asian Cultural Dialogues

“The Limits and Possibilities of Freedom”

Organizer: Atsumi International Foundation Sekiguchi Global Research Association (SGRA)

Day1: August 10th (Saturday) 2024, 9 : 00 - 12 : 30

Day2: August 11th (Sunday) 2024, 9 : 00 - 10 : 30

Language: English

Venue: Chulalongkorn University [401-5&7] room

Abstract/Overview

“Freedom” is often touted as the core of a democratic society – a social ideal that all citizens and individuals have a right to. Freedom is also something that is said to be under threat in the current day and age, and said to be so by leaders of opposing political factions, by people who themselves restrain the freedom of others, and by those who impinge upon the freedom of others by exerting their own. Clearly, freedom means different things to different people and social institutions. In this roundtable session, we seek to get a deeper understanding of how the concept of freedom is understood and functions in Asian cultures and societies, and how it can be used to silence as well as liberate people.

【Day 1】 Session 1: Thailand and Freedom

MC: **Sonja PF Dale** Program Director of the Asian Cultural Dialogues

9 : 00 **Opening remarks**

Sonja PF Dale

Program Director of the Asian Cultural Dialogues

9 : 05 **Speech 1**

Yingcheep Atchanont

Director of iLaw

“Freedom in Thailand – Experiences as the Director of iLaw”

Yingcheep Atchanont, Director of iLaw, has been working on monitoring and documenting freedom of expression violation cases in Thailand for the past 12 years. In this presentation he will share some of the current issues in Thailand regarding freedom of speech and the Lese Majeste laws, as well as how many people continue to be persecuted for speaking out in Thailand today. Why is freedom of expression an issue, and why are people being punished for it? What are the challenges that he experiences as a lawyer defending political prisoners? Yingcheep will speak about these issues and more in his talk.

9 : 50 **Discussion/Q&A**

Discussants:

Jose Jowel Canuday Associate professor, Ateneo de Manila University

Carine Jaquet Independent researcher

Lifu Guo Assistant Professor, University of Tsukuba

10 : 30 – 11:00 **Coffee Break**

【Day 1】 Session 2: Freedom of Speech

11 : 00 **Presentation 1**

Miki Dezaki

Independent documentary filmmaker

“Navigating Threats to Freedom of Expression in Japan:

Insights from Personal Experiences and Case Studies”

In 2017, David Kaye, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, submitted a report outlining “significant worrying signals” for

Japan's freedom of expression. This presentation will cover the challenges posed to freedom of expression in Japan, drawing from the presenter's firsthand experiences with right-wing nationalists seeking to silence his documentary film on the contentious issue of "comfort women" and his YouTube video addressing racism in Japan. Through personal anecdotes and case studies, the presentation reveals the tactics employed by right-wing nationalists supported by the Japanese government to intimidate, harass, and undermine voices they deem to be anti-Japanese. Furthermore, the presentation delves into the broader socio-cultural and institutional factors, such as legal constraints, societal norms, and media self-censorship, that contribute to the suppression of freedom of expression in Japan.

11 : 30 **Presentation 2**

Bonnibel Rambatan

Editorial Manager, New Naratif

**"To Fight Alongside Objects:
Resisting Technologies of Oppression in Asia"**

Many movements for freedom call for concrete changes in the law: for certain actions to be decriminalised, bills and amendments to be revoked, statuses to be recognised, and so on. While these struggles are highly important, three other technologies of unfreedom often get overlooked: value systems that moralise docility (e.g. family hierarchy) and demonise difference (e.g. racism, queerphobia); material infrastructures that perpetuate inequality (from inequitable development to occupation); and the radicalising effect of social media algorithms normalising far-right views and peddling fake news, expected only to worsen with the advancement of generative AI. Influenced by Actor-Network Theory (Latour), documentality (Ferraris), and posthumanity (Hayles), among others, this paper argues for an object-oriented reframing of the concept of freedom that takes into account the interplay of documents, values, access, and algorithms. Analyses primarily focus on Asia (specifically Southeast Asia) by examining various research, journalistic investigations, and first-hand accounts of contributors to the democracy-focused media and community organisation New Naratif. This approach aims to achieve two things. First, it enables us to better map out systemic interdependencies of various factors, pull back into a bird's eye view in our delineations of threats and challenges, as well as predict and mitigate potential backlash in our struggles for freedom. Second—and perhaps more importantly—it widens the scope of our discussions of what it actually means to fight for liberation in Asia and beyond.

12 : 00 **Discussion/Q&A**

Discussants:

Jose Jowel Canuday Associate professor, Ateneo de Manila University

Mya Dwi Rostika Lecturer, Daito Bunka University

[Day 2] Session 3: Freedom to Exist

MC: **Sonja PF Dale** Program Director of the Asian Cultural Dialogues

9 : 00 **Presentation 1**

Nyi Nyi Kyaw

International Development Research Centre (Canada)'s Research Chair

“Freedom to Exist? Political Crisis, Survival and Displacement in Southeast Asia”

Freedom to exist can be defined simply as the freedom to survive and, ideally, to thrive. However, for millions of people who are displaced and uprooted from their geographic, social and community roots, surviving, let alone thriving, is a distant dream. There are various types and causes of displacement, including, but not limited to, conflict, human rights violations, slow-onset climate change, rapid-onset natural disasters, and land confiscation by state and private actors and entities, usually under the pretext of development and conservation. Displacement caused by rapid-onset natural, man-made, or partly natural and partly man-made disasters, such as storms and floods, can often be larger in terms of the number of people displaced. But protracted displacement, with little or no hope of resettlement and return to homes or places of habitual residence, is usually caused by conflict, be it political, communal or a mix of the two. When people are displaced or potentially displaced, they face the most serious life-or-death decision: where to flee to in order to survive. There are generally two options: internal displacement and cross-border displacement. In this talk, I will use examples of displacement in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on Myanmar after the 2021 coup.

9 : 30 **Presentation 2**

Thilaga Sulathireh, Justice for Sisters

Community organizer and researcher

“The power of freedom and solidarity”

Justice for Sisters (JFS) is an LGBT human rights group based in Malaysia. Through strategic litigation, evidence building and coalition building, JFS has been advancing the rights of LGBTQ people in an increasingly restrictive environment. Using a queer feminist framework, this presentation will analyze the intersection of power and freedoms, the resistance faced by LGBTIQ people among other marginalized groups in accessing freedoms in today's world, the role of solidarity building in advancing rights, and efforts by JFS in equalizing power and seeking freedoms.

9 : 50 **Discussion/Q&A**

Discussants:

Kyoko Takeuchi Assistant Professor, Kwansei Gakuin University

Carine Jaquet Independent researcher

Speakers

[Speakers]



Yingcheep Atchanont is currently working as a director of iLaw, a Thai local NGO which focuses on people's participation to promote freedom of expression, constitutional reform and free and fair elections. iLaw is developing an online database to collect information of legal prosecutions against people who expressed their views and face harassment. iLaw has led campaigns to amend Thai lèse majesté law and Computer Crimes Act and also a petition for the People's Amnesty Bill in 2024. Yingcheep is also a lawyer who represents lèse majesté cases and recently worked as an expert witness in political cases. Yingcheep is also a victims under 10 cases for joining protest and a plaintiff who launched the cases against government agencies to seek more accountability.



Miki Dezaki is an independent documentary filmmaker best known for his 2019 film "Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue," which has been screened in theaters and universities around the world. A graduate of the Graduate Program in Global Studies at Sophia University in Tokyo, he taught English in Japan for five years before a year-long stint as a Buddhist monk in Thailand. He is also known as "Medamasensei" on YouTube, where he made comedy videos and videos on social issues in Japan. Currently, he is working on his second documentary film on another contentious issue in Japan.



Bonnibel Rambatan is a transfeminine nonbinary writer, artist, and critical theorist working in the intersections of gender justice and political economic philosophy. They currently serve as Editorial Manager for New Naratif, a movement for democracy in Southeast Asia. An independent scholar and artist, Bonni is passionate about finding new possibilities for solidarity and liberation. Their most recent book *Event Horizon: Sexuality, Politics, Online Culture, and the Limits of Capitalism* (co-written with Jacob Johanssen, published by Zer0 Books in 2022) asks the question: "When our desires become the product of tech giants, what ways are there left for us to dream?"



Dr Nyi Nyi Kyaw is the International Development Research Centre (Canada)'s Research Chair on Forced Displacement in Southeast Asia based at Chiang Mai University in Thailand. He is also an honorary fellow at the Peter McMullen Centre on Statelessness at Melbourne Law School, and sits on the Advisory Board at Academy in Exile based at Technische Universität Dortmund in Germany. His thematic research interests include but are not limited to democratization, contentious politics, authoritarianism, identity, forced migration, and humanitarianism. His country of specialization is Myanmar, but he also closely follows what happens in Southeast Asia in relation to his thematic areas of interest.



Thilaga Sulathireh (Sisters for Justice) is a community organizer and researcher. Their, her (or other pronouns) work focuses on gender, LGBTIQ+-related issues, and human rights. They are a founding member of Justice for Sisters, Queer Lapis, among other LGBTIQ+ human rights initiatives.

[Discussants]



Jose Jowel Canuday is associate professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines. He also serves as chief editor of Social Transformation Journal of the Global South and director of the Tagpuan Center for Dialogue, Research, and Collaboration at the Ateneo. His research areas deal with the interplay of power and agency in forced migration situations, conflicts and dialogues, and grounded forms of cosmopolitanism, and the implication of questions of rights and freedom. He has a doctorate in Social and Cultural Anthropology, which he earned from the University of Oxford.



Lifu Guo is an Assistant Professor in the Bureau of Human Empowerment, the University of Tsukuba. They graduated from the Department of Area Studies, the University of Tokyo. Their research focuses on feminism and queer studies, especially gender and sexual politics in modern mainland China. Their recent publication is “Medals and Conspiracies: Chinese and Japanese Online Trans-Exclusionary Discourses during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games,” Kazuyoshi Kawasaka & Stephan Würrer (Eds.) *Beyond Diversity: Queer Politics, Activism and Representation in Contemporary Japan*, Düsseldorf University Press, pp.117-135, 2024.



Carine Jaquet has been engaged in humanitarian aid, peace and democratization efforts, research and activism in and on Myanmar/Burma for two decades. Her research examines peace and conflict, civil society and humanitarian space, ethnic identity and narratives. She has authored books and peer-reviewed publications on humanitarian and political issues, with a focus on Myanmar and Nepal. She worked in Asian and Southeast Asian countries for the UN Political Missions, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and NGOs aiming at supporting local organisations. She also served as a technical advisor for Myanmar government institutions during the ‘transition’ period, including the Union Election Commission. She is a former associated researcher affiliated with the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC). She holds master’s degrees in Asian studies and Intercultural Communication from the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilization (INALCO), as well as a master’s in Political Sciences from Paris 1-La Sorbonne. She graduated with a major in Myanmar language and civilization from Yangon University of Foreign Languages (YUFL).



Mya Dwi Rostika is a lecturer at the Faculty of International Relations of Daito Bunka University Tokyo from 2019. She graduated with a Doctor of Political Science from the Graduate School of Political Science Kokushikan University Tokyo, and majored in Asia Area Studies. She is a researcher of Kartini, Indonesian heroine of women’s emancipation, and also conducts collaborative research on Indonesian politics.



Kyoko Takeuchi is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, Kwansei Gakuin University. Ph.D. (Sociology). They specialize in gender and sexuality studies, and conduct research on the history of the use of gender identity categories and everyday interactions, focusing on non-binary gender identities in Japan. In recent years, they have also been interested in the discourse surrounding transgender/nonbinary people in the media and the formation of (digital) transgender/nonbinary archives. Major publications include “A Plastic Category for Positioning the Self: Focusing on the Narratives of X-jendā” (Japanese Sociological Review, 2022, in Japanese).

[MC]



Sonja Pei-Fen Dale is the current Program Director of the Asian Cultural Dialogues, and an independent researcher with a PhD in Global Studies from Sophia University (Japan). Sonja’s research is multidisciplinary and examines the social structures of inclusion and exclusion as well as identity, with a special focus on LGBTQ issues and non-binary identity in Japan. Recent interests include creating safe and accessible spaces for minority groups as well as utilizing media to create diverse stories.