

REVISITING ASIAN VALUES IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN'S CYBERDEMOCRACY DISCOURSE

Mansur Juned

Hubungan Internasional, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional
Veteran Jakarta, Jl. RS Fatmawati No.1 Pondok Labu Jakarta Selatan
E-mail: mansurjuned@upnvj.ac.id

ABSTRACT. The question of democracy and cyberdemocracy within the expanding population of internet users in Southeast Asia is a prevalent and debatable concern in the region. The phenomenon is perceived as sign of better democratization while also concerned for its political destabilization effects. Recent instances of cyber sovereignty, cybersecurity, and cyberdemocracy in contrasting practical applications indicate the imperative need for an alternate paradigm to comprehend the underlying issue comprehensively. This study employs a regionalism framework to comprehensively understand the issue by investigating overarching indicators of cyberdemocracy and cases of cyberdemocracy in Southeast Asian countries through case study in qualitative method framework. This article uses library research and limited content analysis of academic literature, regional agreements, and material from news media as data sources. Limited content analysis and data triangulation are used to ensure data validity and to acknowledge the data sources' bias before the findings are analyzed and concluded. The results indicate that Asian values significantly influence the configuration of cyber sovereignty, which integrates the Chinese concept of regulated cyber sovereignty with the Western notion of freedom in the digital realm, resulting in a cyberdemocracy driven by state governments in the region. The research findings also indicate that this state is influenced by preexisting Asian values and the region's prevalent challenge of digital transformation.

Keywords: Southeast Asia; ASEAN; Cyberdemocracy; cyber sovereignty; Asian Values

TINJAUAN NILAI-NILAI ASIA DALAM DISKURSUS DEMOKRASI SIBER DI ASIA TENGGARA

ABSTRAK. Pertanyaan terkait demokrasi dan demokrasi siber di tengah pertumbuhan pesat jumlah pengguna internet di Asia Tenggara merupakan sebuah hal yang memicu perdebatan di kawasan tersebut. Fenomena tersebut dipandang sebagai tanda kemajuan demokratisasi di kawasan namun juga dikhawatirkan memicu ketidakstabilan politik. Perkembangan terbaru terkait aplikasi kedaulatan siber, keamanan siber, dan, demokrasi siber mengindikasikan adanya kebutuhan untuk mengeksplorasi perspektif baru terkait hal tersebut guna memahami isu tersebut. Riset ini mengeksplorasi elemen-elemen utama dalam demokrasi siber dan mengkaji aplikasinya di negara-negara Asia Tenggara dengan menggunakan konsep regionalisme untuk memahami hal tersebut melalui penelitian studi kasus dalam pendekatan metode kualitatif. Riset ini menggunakan studi pustaka terkait berbagai literatur ilmiah, kesepakatan regional, dan berbagai materi lainnya di berbagai media sebagai sumber data. Konten analisis terbatas dan triangulasi data dilakukan guna menjamin validitas data dan memahami kecenderungan bias sumber data sebelum hasilnya dianalisis dan disimpulkan. Hasil penelusuran menunjukkan bahwa Nilai Asia memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk pemahaman dan aplikasi dari kedaulatan siber di kawasan yang mengkombinasikan konsep kedaulatan siber terkontrol Tiongkok dengan pandangan demokrasi siber Barat yang bertumpu pada kebebasan dalam *cyberspace* dalam bentuk demokrasi siber yang dikontrol oleh pemerintah. Riset ini juga menemukan bahwa kondisi ini juga dipengaruhi oleh faktor-faktor sosial yang ada serta berbagai hambatan yang dihadapi dalam upaya transformasi digital di Asia Tenggara.

Kata kunci: Asia Tenggara; ASEAN; Demokrasi siber; Kedaulatan siber; Nilai-nilai Asia

INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital technology brings hope for a better future in many aspects, including open, more inclusive interaction for better democracy in Southeast Asia (Barendregt & Schneider, 2020). However, such a techno-optimistic sentiment often fails to grasp the complexity, especially in a region with a different cultural background than the Northern Hemisphere where the claim was initiated. Such paradox can be seen in Southeast Asia as a region with fruitful hope that a robust rate of digitalization will generate better democratization in the form of cyberdemocracy only to be involved in the debate between freedom in cyberspace and cyber-sovereignty.

Southeast Asia is one of the fastest growing regions in internet penetration, with 80% or 460 million of its population having internet access and growing 6% annually (Chiang, 2023; & Kearney, 2023). However, there is also a significant gap between the region's countries in internet access that is concentrated in the big six countries: Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the rest of the region by number of internet users, internet penetration, and value of digital economy as the indicators (Chiang, 2023). Furthermore, most Southeast Asian populations are active in social media as an early indicator of political engagement in cyberspace required for cyberdemocracy (Barendregt & Schneider, 2020; & Kearney, 2023).

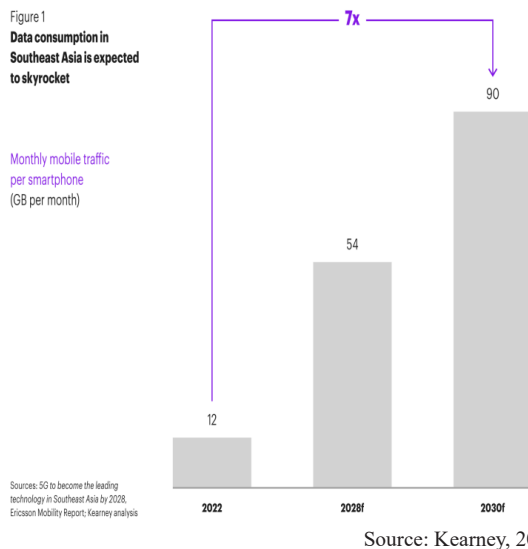


Figure 1. Expected trend of Southeast Asia data consumption

The promising digital trend in Southeast Asia generates hope for a better climate of democracy in the region as most of the region's countries are flawed democracies, according to Democratic Index 2022 (Economist Intelligence, 2022). However, Tamalayan (2020), Sinpeng (2017), and Paladino (2018) findings regarding repressive policies, censorship, and social media-based disinformation in the region suggest that the Democratic Index of Southeast Asian countries in 2022 is the result of more complex underlying causes. In this regard, cyber repression as the exertion of cyber sovereignty should not be perceived as a product of an authoritarian government but as a response regarding the existing cyber interaction among the people.

In this regard, most Southeast Asian countries perceive sovereignty in cyberspace differently from the Western conception of infrastructure and data sovereignty in the efforts to keep the harmony and stability of the digital space (Lee, 2021). This tendency is visible in instances of ITE Law in Indonesia, Indonesia's internet shut down case in Papua, Thailand internet shut down in numerous coup attempts, and Philippines shut down internet access in uncontrollable situations. At the same time, the data protection policies and applications remain insignificant (Tamalayan, 2020). While it can be interpreted as inconsistency in building an adequate climate for cyberdemocracy, the existing condition in cyberspace-based interaction between the people in Southeast Asia, which is characterized by low digital literacy, disinformation, and polarization, cannot leave the discourse as Barendregt & Schneider (2020) and Azwar et al. (2022) argue regarding dilemmatic cyberdemocracy's condition in this region.

Taking these two contrasting conditions in the region of Southeast Asia, the perspective of regionalism based on the exploration of the unique characteristics of a region might offer an alternative

insight into understanding. The rationale behind this is that a region's different shared cultural background influences the interaction and policy characteristics, which also affects the formulation of regional agreement in a more contemporary issue such as cyberdemocracy (Acharya, 2004). Therefore, the inquiry using this perspective will help us to understand how contrasting situations occur by acknowledging the unique political culture background of the region.

In this regard, democratization in Southeast Asia takes different routes than the process in Western countries such as United Kingdom or United States. The process in Southeast Asia, similar to its northern counterparts in Northeast Asia based on more collective values known as 'Asian Values' rather than focusing on individual values (Acharya, 2010). This trait is represented in the diverse forms traced back a hundred years from the government forms, regional interaction, and the power relations between rulers and people. As Mahatir Mohammad once suggested, the cultural values in Southeast Asia nations are more similar to Confucian values in Northeast Asia (Acharya, 2010).

Asian value was a center of debates behind the Asian Economic Miracle that happened in different political foundations to its Western counterparts (Boll, 2001; & Jenco, 2013). Regardless of diverse interpretations, Asian values roots of in communitarian values, authoritative government, and harmony within the society in contrast to more freedom and individual values in Western societies (Kim, 2011; & Thompson, 2001). Even though its relevance is questioned by Sinpeng (2017) in the recent development in the region, I argue that the presence still exists in the societal interaction and governments' policies, including diverse cyber domain regulations and ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025.

Therefore, this article explores the idea of how Asian values contribute to the unique characteristics of the region, particularly in the context of cyberdemocracy, through the perspective of regionalism. It explores how cyber restriction policies in Southeast Asian countries have become common in the region, which also promotes digital technology to improve the democratization process and regional cohesion. Understanding the cultural background of the region will help us to acknowledge essential points in the regional perspective of Southeast Asian countries regarding the use of cyberspace to promote democracy, their conception regarding cyber sovereignty, people interaction, and potential threats.

Acharya (2017) argues that in Asian Values very close connection with the Southeast Asian in several ways. First the value of 'community

over self' and 'respect to the authority' have been transformed into several regional and domestic regulations such as the UU ITE in Indonesia, Section 112 of Thai Criminal Code that prohibit defame, insult, or threaten the Thai Royal Family as well as the non-interference principle adopted by the ASEAN. Second the author also argues that the presence of Asian Values also manifested Myanmar's human right cases in which the ASEAN countries opted to respect the sovereignty of Myanmar in solving the conflict regardless external pressure which demand direct intervention.

This article uses regionalism to investigate cyberdemocracy in Southeast Asian countries. It acknowledges regional characteristics as essential points in perceiving multi-stakeholders regional interactions and integration in contrast to a more universalist perspective (Buranelli & Tskhay, 2019). Regionalism, an area of study within the discipline of international relations, is dynamic studies that shift from a more Eurocentric perspective into a more inclusive perspective that highlights the uniqueness of a region, including the normative values of a region (Buranelli & Tskhay, 2019). in this context, it allows wider and deeper exploration of cyberdemocracy and cyber sovereignty in practice, which differs from the Western experiences and conception. Therefore, the different perspectives and practices in perceiving particular issues, such as cyberdemocracy and cyber sovereignty in other regions, will enrich the discussion regarding the problems and regionalism.

Cyberdemocracy can be understood as the use of digital media in practicing democracy not only limited to procedural processes and digital forms of government but also in more diverse forms of civil involvement such as cyberactivism and online petitions (Kaczmarczyk, 2010). The forms and tendencies of cyberdemocracy are dynamics due to the increasing complexity of asymmetric relations in cyberspace, where cyberdemocracy takes place (Choucri, 2018; & Gerbaudo, 2012). This condition, however, attracts vulnerabilities that generate diverse threats to the stakeholders in the conception of cybersecurity. It is limited to types of cyberattacks and their socio-political implication. To contain the existing cyber threats, governments exercise their sovereignty in cyberspace by implementing diverse forms of regulations, particularly in data security (Bimantara). However, several countries with strong roots of communitarian or authoritarian values extend the use of cyber sovereignty from limited to data sovereignty to socio-political security to contain not only the impact of cyber threats but also the impact of information flow towards its people in the sense of societal and/or political security.

The theme of cyberdemocracy which has diverse similar names such as digital democracy and online democracy, has been a growing issue in recent years with various locations, including Asia. Lee (2021) highlights the refugees and minorities as forgotten people in the cyberdemocracy in Asia due to their perceptively minor in society. Sinpeng (2017) highlights different aspects of cyberdemocracy in Asia of how elites are perceived to employ restrictive and/or manipulative policies to direct digital political interactions. Tamalayan (2020) provides deeper insights by contemplating the use of manipulative and restrictive digital policies in Thailand and the Philippines to find that the measure to control the citizens by the governments is also adaptive to digital technology advancement. While those previous articles highlight the government's restrictive and manipulative policies, Barendregt & Schneider (2020) argue about the banality of cyberactivism in Asia, which is more focused on gaining popularity themselves rather than advocating existing issues similar to the concept of 'technopopulism' by Bickerton and Accetti (2021) and plebiscite democracy based on reactive democracy from Gerbaudo (2022).

The theme of democracy, security, and regionalism in East Asia and Southeast Asia is also discussed previously by Emmerson (2009) and Lynch (2010). They both highlight the complexity of the condition of Asia and Southeast Asia in the formulation and application of Asian and ASEAN ways of democracy. However, the discussion regarding similar topics in the same region in the cyber dimension has yet to be deeply explored. Therefore, this article intends to explore the topic of cyberdemocracy in Southeast Asia by using a regionalism perspective limited to how Asian values contribute to shaping the region's perspective towards democracy in cyberspace and its paradoxical relationship with security and sovereignty.

METHOD

this article uses a qualitative research method, particularly case study to investigate cyberdemocracy in Southeast Asia. Case study approach according Creswell & Creswell (2022) is in-depth exploration of a bounded system. this article acknowledge the different traits, characteristics, and experiences of Southeast Asia nations in their political values, democratization as well as digital penetration require in-depth and in-context exploration provided by the use of case study approach in qualitative method in general.

Furthermore, this article uses mostly secondary data regarding the application of cyberdemocracy in Southeast Asia in general, Asian Values, and cyber

regulations in the region from diverse literature. Data regarding cyberdemocracy, its related factors and phenomenon are collected through journals, books, reports, news, and opinion articles. Those data represent the indicators of cyberdemocracy, circumstances in Southeast Asian countries, and also represents concerns from the pro-cyberactivism. Data regarding Asian values are collected from the academic journals and textbooks as direct references that mentions the definitions, applications, and discourses regarding the Asian values. Furthermore, the document of regional and domestic regulations and frameworks are collected through the official websites of both regional organization and Southeast Asian countries' government.

The data collected from those resources are categorized accordingly to the previously mentioned data category. Furthermore, qualitative data validity was done by content and sources analysis to acknowledge bias representing sources' author reflexivity and data triangulation process in which those data are compared and analyzed by considering data bias reflected by types of data sources. The findings are analyzed in-depth according to the context of Southeast Asian countries to be concluded in causal explanation

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Long Road of Democracy in Southeast Asia

Snyder (2000) argues that democratization is a long process in which success or failure depends on the type of existing nationalism. The democratization process in Southeast Asia has been through a long journey from the end of the Cold War into the recent digital. However, it has never been categorized as 'democratized' in the sense of Snyder (2000). Democratic Index 2022 by Economist Intelligence (2022) suggests most Southeast Asian countries (6) are flawed democracies while four countries are categorized as authoritarian regimes. However, the more important question lies in how the existing condition of democracy in Southeast Asia developed over time, especially in significant events such as the end of the Cold War, the Asian financial crises of 1997-1998, and digital transformation nowadays. (figure 2)

Emmerson (2009) and Lynch (2010) suggest that democratization in the region is far from straightforward; many interrelated socio-economic-political conditions in the regions have shaped democratization in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the region also has different political values and history compared to Europe or North America. Acharya (1999) argues that democracy in the sense of liberal democracy is not a familiar value in the region, which

only began to spread in the early 1990s after the end of the Cold War. Most of the countries in the region used more autocratic political systems to repress potential turmoil after their independence during the early period of post-World War II (Acharya, 1999). Furthermore, an autocratic system was also generated by ethnonationalism, patriotism, and strong collective values (Acharya, 1999; Emmerson, 2009; & Lynch, 2010). There was a significant tendency for the people of Southeast Asia to accept such a system as they were more comfortable with harmony and stability in the domestic sphere regardless of the political system.



Source:Malaysia Now, 2022

Figure 2. EIU Democracy Index 2022

The same assumption also became a rationale behind the foundation of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, a regional organization intended to contain the spread of communism in the region, which significantly came from the victorious Vietnam (Acharya, 1999). However, the regional organization did not act similarly to regional integration in Europe, as regional cohesion was only a normative value in the declaration document. Furthermore, ASEAN from its early establishment in 1967 until now, ASEAN has adopted the non-intervention principle to limit the degree of intervention between countries to maintain stability in the region. The same principle also prevents the regional organization from achieving consensus on issues regarding human rights, such as the military junta in Myanmar, Rohingya, and so forth (Emmerson, 2009).

Furthermore, the stability of the autocratic system in Southeast Asia resulted from the Asian economic miracle in which strength gained from the

autocratic system was used to promote economic growth in the region. The strategy was successful as wealthy democratic countries in North America and Europe supported the Southeast Asian countries to contain the spread of communism in the region. Acharya (1999) argues that economic growth did not necessarily promote democracy in the region as growth did not equally distribute, and there was a perception at an elite level that democracy was a dangerous idea for national stability as a foundation for economic growth.

The collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War was a game-changer in the region. As the communism threat became less relevant, Western countries started to withdraw their support towards autocratic governments in Southeast Asia in economic and political aspects. The pressure to adopt a more democratic system from the Western countries and the Asian financial crisis of 1997 weakened the autocratic governments in the region, notably in Indonesia and the Philippines. However, it was not enough completely transform the region into a democratic region from the perspective of liberal democracy as Barber (n.d) suggests that the existence of collective values that respects authority and harmony, as well as the influence of ex-Eastern Block countries such as Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

Cyberspace in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is one of the fastest-growing regions in terms of internet penetration. By 2022, 80% of Southeast Asian populations will be active in cyberspace, and the annual growth number reach 6%. (Chiang 2023; & Kearney 2023). Since its early introduction to the public in the region in the 1990s, the internet has become pivotal technology in many aspects of Southeast Asia, including the economy, culture, and politics (Goggin et al., 2021). Furthermore, the internet also becomes the technology that allows significant changes in the interaction among the people of Southeast Asia. It flourished in digital culture, became media for resistance, and even increased the economic level of the region (Goggin et al., 2021; Lim, 2006; Davies, 2021)

Extensive library research academic journals and reports from various organizations (Chiang, 2023; Kearney, 2023; Goggin et al., 2021; Putra & Aminuddin, 2020; Talamayan, 2020) suggest that there are two major concerns regarding cyberspace in Southeast Asia: digital economic and cyberdemocracy particularly regarding the activism in cyberspace. Cyberspace in Southeast Asia is one of the fastest-growing regions in terms of digital economy (Davies, 2021). Meanwhile, the expanding cyberspace is not

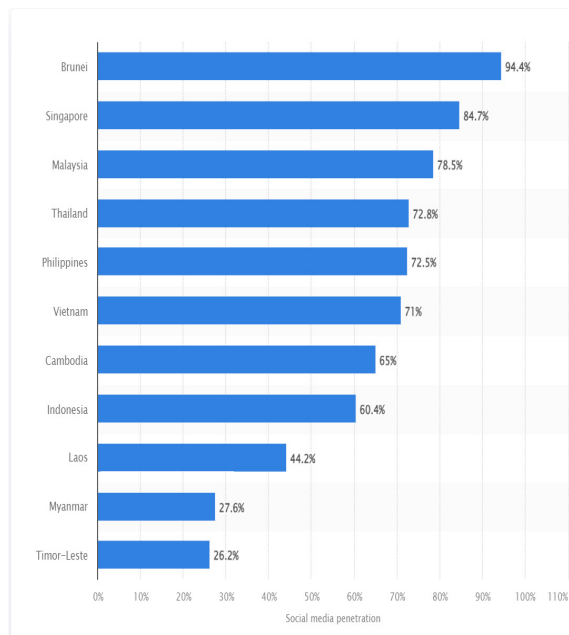
able to positively impact democratization in the region, which is represented in the repressive policies and polarization among the citizen of Southeast Asia (Lee, 2021; Barendregt & Schneider, 2020; and Talamayan, 2020).

The number of internet users in Southeast Asia by 2022 rose to 460 million, indicating that more people are connected to cyberspace, creating one of the most dynamic regions in the digital economy (Chiang, 2023). Davies (2021) estimates to reach 1 trillion USD by 2030, which indicates that the continuously growing internet users and development of digital technology in the region will increase the value of digital technology essential to support the region's economic growth. Furthermore, Davies (2021) argues that one of the main generators for this robust growth in digital economic valuation and internet users, in general, is that the pandemic forces people to use digital technology in many aspects, which also increases digital transactions.

Furthermore, the growing interaction in cyberspace among populations of Southeast Asian countries is also supported by the extensive use of social media. Data from Oberlo (2023) suggests that more than 506 million social media users and predicted to grow further. A more specific report from Statista Research Department (2023) displays that most Southeast Asian countries have more than 50% social media penetration in their populations, with only Laos, Myanmar, and Timor Leste having less than 50% penetration. this article argues that social media penetration is one of the vital measurement indicators of digital engagement and degree of quantity in interaction within cyberspace as social media directly amplifies cyberspace impacts towards real-life aspects (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021). Theoretically, it will strengthen cyberdemocracy as it allows sharing of more concerns and opinions regarding existing issues and helps promote more economic transactions in cyberspace. (figure 3)

However, similar reports from Chiang (2023) and Kearney (2023) also mention the fragile foundation of cyberspace in Southeast Asia. First, there are diverse gaps and disparities regarding internet access as the essential aspect in cyberspace between Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines to other less connected countries such as Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, or Timor Leste (Chiang, 2023). Second, there is a wide demographic digital gap between urban and rural populations, the digital natives and digital migrants, and so forth, in accessing the internet as well as digital literacy. Third, Southeast Asia needs to improve its digital infrastructure, making internet access unevenly distributed in the region. Fourth, there needs to be more adequate

policies to support growth and empower the use of digital technology in diverse aspects at the domestic and regional levels.



Source: Statista Research Department, 2023

Figure 3. Social media penetration

In the aspect of cyberactivism as the foundation of cyberdemocracy, the fragility of Southeast Asian digital engagement becomes more apparent, not only the weaknesses mentioned above as the main obstacles. The unwillingness of the Southeast Asian governments to provide adequate policies to support and cultivate civic engagement in the political dimension of cyberspace left many ambiguous policies with multiple interpretations, which are perceived as tools for manipulations to solely protect the authorities’ interests such as the UU ITE in Indonesia which is notorious for its ambiguity in perceiving critics towards the government in cyberspace, the case of Vietnam blogger Nguyen Huu Vinh under article 258 of the Penal Code, the *Prachatai* case of Thai article 112, and so forth (OHCHR, 2016; Sinpeng, 2017; & Tamalayan 2020). Furthermore, some Southeast Asian governments, particularly those with low democracy index, according to EIU, took different paths in perceiving cyberactivism by ultimately minimizing political criticism in cyberspace by implementing heavily restricted policies (Economist Intelligence, 2022; Talamayan, 2020; Sinpeng, 2017; & Paladino, 2018).

The problems with the use of cyberspace and the development of digital engagement in the region had not gone unnoticed by officials as the agreement for ASEAN Digital Masterplan was done in 2021 as the regional framework for digitalization in line with global regulation of International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Group of Governmental

Experts on Information Security. The framework tries to tackle the significant issues in the building of the ASEAN digital community, from the digital infrastructure aspect to promoting an inclusive digital community for the people of Southeast Asia (ASEAN, 2021). However, the effectiveness of the masterplan remains to be determined as the disparity between the big six and other countries is significant. At the same time, the framework needs to provide clear and binding power for the stakeholders to comply as the nature of the regional organization adopts the non-intervention principle (Achmad et al., 2021). Furthermore, ADM 2025 also focuses more on building the region’s digital infrastructure rather than maturing the interaction within cyberspace to provide clear insight on building a digitally inclusive community, which leaves the task of empowering the potential of the digital community left to the respective governments.

Asian Value on Cyberdemocracy in Southeast Asia

The paradox of cyberspace in Southeast Asia represents a similar perspective from the region during the Asian economic boom. At that time, despite adopting a capitalist market-based system, the implementation was modified to meet the value of socio-political harmony by using a hybrid democratic system. A similar notion also appears in China, which strongly connects to the region using a hybrid system initiated by Deng Xiaoping in a more authoritarian style (Teoh, 2018). Regardless of the tension with China in the case of the South China Sea, both Southeast Asian and Chinese governments share similarities in focusing on using cyberspace as leverage for economic reasons. At the same time, they also put a degree of restriction on the digital space in the name of security (Sinpeng, 2017).

However, the rising number of internet users is also symmetrical with the growth of social media users, which in become one of the most common media for cyber activism. Even though cyber interaction poses a particular threat to societal and political security, the governments of Southeast Asian countries mostly applied a limited degree of restriction in contrast to Chinese policy regarding cyberspace. The restriction on Cyberspace in Southeast Asia mainly contains limitations on how people can spread false information on the internet, especially on social media, without specifically forbidding forms of critics and opposition toward the authority (Sinpeng, 2017; Talamayan, 2020; & Barendregt & Schneider, 2020).

this article re-investigating the claim from Sinpeng (2017) regarding cyber restriction regulations in Southeast Asian countries and found several

examples of regulations that become the legal basis for restricting cyberactivism, such as the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act Singapore (Freedom et al.), UU ITE Indonesia (Wahyuni, n.d.), Telecom Law Myanmar (Jonesday, 2023), Article 88 of the Penal Code Vietnam (OHCHR, 2016), and Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code (ILaw, 2016). The brief elaboration of those regulations suggests different degrees of restriction in Southeast Asian countries. Not all those regulations are specifically meant to regulate cyberspace, such as Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code prohibiting criticizing the royal family in any media.

Furthermore, the elaboration suggests a common tendency among Southeast Asian countries to protect domestic harmony and stability from cyberspace's free flow of information such as Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam. More specifically, it is translated into a prohibition to freely criticize the authority, which is diverse from one Southeast Asian country to another. Another interesting fact is that the regulations are not the only weapon from the government to repress activism in cyberspace, as happened in the Philippines when military-sponsored Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks targeted the media opposing the authority (Bulatlat, n.d.). Such an attack also occurred in Indonesia on an anti-corruption activist, even though the government was not proven (yet) behind the attack even though it is directly against UU ITE. (Alfons, n.d.). Even though most of Southeast Asian countries has already legal framework against doxing and other type of cybercrime, however, the implementation is put into question if its done towards opposing group. Most of the regulations perceived as cyber-censorship are intended to protect the cybersecurity of the nations (Barendregt & Schneider, 2020; & Lee, 2021). This argument is relevant to how interaction in cyberspace can become a societal and political threat of its asymmetrical anarchistic nature by imposing severe polarization in cyberspace and physical space (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021; & Juned et al., 2022). However, those regulations also remain controversial as it not only intends to restrict freedom in cyberspace but also the lack of regulations from the Southeast Asian countries to protect the data of internet users, which is considered more important (Chiang, 2023). This article perceives that this finding suggests the tendency of Southeast Asian countries to prioritize stability and harmony in society rather than protect personal data, which can lead to more significant cyber activism.

The priority to protect the political and societal stability in the Southeast Asian countries indicates that the regional value of Southeast Asia is based on more communitarian values rather than individual values.

This argument is in line with Jenco (2013) and Kim (2010), that supported the claim of Acharya (1999) regarding the existence of communitarian values in Asian countries that are perceived as more essential than individual values. In further exploration, the presence of sub-state actors in Southeast Asia who support the authorities in regulating cyberspace from free flow information is also generated by the same values. Furthermore, the ADM 2025 as the regional digital framework also reflects this belief by putting the government as the leading actor in the digital transformation process, similar to their role during the surge of Asian economics (Kim, 2010).

The similar values adopted by the people of Southeast Asia generated similarity in the government's actions. They increased the relevancy and effectiveness of regulations formulated with Asian values at the core. Therefore, regional government-driven agreements are more favorable than community or individual-driven movements. This perception becomes more relevant in response to the polarized internet users in Southeast Asian countries, as Barendregt & Schneider (2020) argue, which presents a more anarchic structure rather than powerful and regulated civic power. The cyber interaction in the polarized society due to the nature of cyberspace and the late democratization in the region made the authority position more favorable to implement restrictive cyber regulations as it also indirectly symbolizes the ideal role of governments in the perspective of Asian values.

This paper does not in a position to neglect the changing perspective and actions among Southeast Asian people toward Asian Values. However, as Acharya (2004) suggests, the change is gradual as it is a product of the hybridization of foreign and local values. The drastic changes in Southeast Asian perspective regarding cyberdemocracy also become less likely due to geopolitical factors in which the region is a contestation area between China and the United States in the regime of cyberspace, particularly between government-based cyber sovereignty and freedom in cyberspace manifested in data sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

Southeast Asia has a significant presence of Asian values manifested in its distinctive regionalism. The Asian value, even though its existence and relevance are continuously contested, still provides significant cultural normative background in formulating and implementing diverse policies within the region. This unique pattern is also reflected in cyberspace development in Southeast Asia; despite the rapidly growing number of internet users, the severe disparity

between countries still exists due to limited regional cross-boundaries actions to be taken to improve the condition due to the non-interference principle. The policies taken to empower digital transformation also is government-based and more focused on infrastructure development to promote the economy rather than civic interaction in cyberspace. Furthermore, the strong communitarianism in Asian values is also reflected in the government's reluctance to empower cyberdemocracy fully and, in contrast, promoting restrictive policies to protect the security of its political and societal aspects from perceived chaotic cyberspace. These conditions lead into hybrid form of cyberspace regulation in many Southeast Asian countries which put limited individual freedom in context of cyberdemocracy on cyberspace while keep protecting the domestic political stability and authority as a practical solution towards existing global trend in cyberdemocracy, absence of general consensus regarding cyberspace, and existing domestic condition and values.

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