

Editors' Introduction: Recognition, Dignity, and Lived Governance in Contemporary Asia

Asep Muhamad Iqbal

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, UIN Bandung, Indonesia

Contemporary Asia is often described through the language of transformation: rapid modernization, expanding cities, shifting legal regimes, intensified identity politics, and changing expectations of justice. Yet transformation is never only a matter of speed, scale, or institutional design. It is also a question of recognition: whose identity is acknowledged, whose tradition is allowed to endure, whose labour is valued, whose suffering is addressed, and whose moral claims become visible within public institutions.

This issue of the *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* approaches contemporary Asia through the connected problems of recognition, dignity, and lived governance. Charles Taylor's argument that identity is partly shaped by recognition, misrecognition, and the social relations through which people are seen remains useful for reading the struggles explored in this volume (Taylor 1994). Nancy Fraser's insistence that justice requires attention to both redistribution and recognition is equally relevant, because the articles gathered here show that cultural dignity, material livelihood, institutional fairness, and legal reform are inseparable in many Asian settings (Fraser 2000).

The timing of this issue is significant. The United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report 2023/2024* warns of uneven development progress, intensifying inequality, and growing polarization, all of which complicate cooperation and public trust (United Nations Development Programme 2024). These broader conditions are visible in the studies assembled here, although each article works from a specific empirical site. Taken together, they show how Asian societies negotiate belonging, continuity, gendered inequality, legal reform, livelihood disruption, and religious governance amid unequal structures and contested forms of authority.

This issue, Vol. 6, No. 2 of JASSR, brings together six studies that move across Bangladesh, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Aceh's

distinctive legal and religious context within Indonesia. The attached editorial draft identifies these articles as engaging ethnic identity contestation, village negotiations with modernity, gender inequality in Islamic higher education, narcotics law reform, rural workers' career transition after resettlement, and public perceptions of Sharia enforcement. What connects them is not a single method or country case, but a shared concern with how people encounter power in everyday life and how they seek dignity within institutions that do not always recognize them fully.

The issue opens with Rajmoni Singha's "Ethnic Identity Construction and Contestation in Bangladesh: The Case of the Manipuri and Bishnupriya Communities." The article examines how ethnic identity claims are constructed, contested, and politically charged among the Manipuri and Bishnupriya communities in Bangladesh. Using qualitative methods, Singha shows that identity is not simply inherited; it is narrated, defended, disputed, and made meaningful through language, history, culture, and collective memory (Singha 2024).

The contribution of this article lies in its careful attention to the politics of naming and belonging. For minority communities, identity is not an abstract category, because it shapes access to recognition, cultural preservation, social status, and the moral authority to speak as a people. Singha's article therefore contributes not only to the study of ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, but also to broader debates on recognition politics in South Asia.

The Manipuri and Bishnupriya case also reminds us that minority identity is rarely stable in contexts where history, migration, language, and community boundaries overlap. Identity claims may become sites of tension when different groups invoke competing historical and cultural narratives. In this sense, the article speaks to a wider Asian problem: how plural societies can protect minority dignity without flattening internal diversity or turning cultural difference into a zero-sum struggle.

The second article, by Didin Nurul Rosidin, Muhamad Ibrahim, Asep Saefullah, and Ihsan Sa'dudin, turns from ethnic identity to cultural continuity in Indonesia. "Negotiating with Modernity: Smooth but Selected Changes in the Benda Kerep Village of Cirebon in 1990–2010" examines how residents of Benda Kerep negotiated modernization while preserving core elements of their traditional

and *pesantren*-based life. The article focuses on a period marked by selective encounters with infrastructure, education, and technology, showing that modernity entered the village through negotiation rather than simple replacement (Rosidin et al. 2024).

The strength of this article lies in its refusal to frame modernity as inevitable rupture. Benda Kerep does not appear as a community frozen outside history, nor as a community absorbed completely by modern change. Instead, the article shows selective adaptation, where residents weigh the practical benefits of new infrastructure, schooling, and technology against the need to preserve moral order, religious authority, and social continuity.

This contribution is important for understanding contemporary Asia because many communities experience modernization as negotiation rather than surrender. Development policies often assume that infrastructure, schooling, and technology will automatically produce social progress, but Benda Kerep shows that local communities interpret change through inherited values and collective memory. The article therefore invites readers to see tradition not as the opposite of modernity, but as one of the languages through which communities decide how much change they can absorb without losing themselves.

Siti Muflichah's "If You're Male, You Get It More': Experiences of Indonesian Female Academics Under New Managerialism" brings the issue into the institutional world of higher education. The article examines the career experiences of female academics in Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions, especially their struggles within promotion systems, leadership pathways, gendered expectations, and new managerial forms of academic evaluation. Drawing on feminist methodology and postcolonial feminist theory, Muflichah highlights how Indonesian Muslim women academics navigate institutional demands that are formally neutral but socially unequal (Muflichah 2024).

This article is especially valuable because it connects gender inequality to institutional reform. New managerialism often presents itself through neutral languages of productivity, performance, ranking, and measurable output. Muflichah's article shows that such systems are not experienced equally, because academic evaluation intersects with gendered expectations around care, family, mobility, leadership, and institutional visibility.

The broader relevance of this article is clear. *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2024* states that the world is still falling short of its commitments to women and girls (UN Women and UN DESA 2024). Muflichah's article gives that global concern a grounded institutional form. It shows how gender inequality is reproduced not only through explicit exclusion, but also through everyday assumptions about who is productive, who is available for leadership, and whose academic labor counts.

The fourth article, Hartato Pakpahan, I Nyoman Nurjaya, Setiawan Nurdayasakti, and Nurini Aprilianda's "Reformulating Indonesia's Narcotics Law on Personal Drug Misuse: A Humanist Approach," moves the issue from academic institutions to the legal system. The article critically examines Indonesia's narcotics law on personal drug misuse and argues for a shift from a predominantly punitive framework toward a more humanist legal approach. Through normative legal research and comparative analysis with policies in the Netherlands and Portugal, the authors call for reforms that prioritize rehabilitation, reintegration, restorative justice, and social equity (Pakpahan et al. 2024).

The article's importance lies in its insistence that drug policy is not only a matter of punishment. It is also a matter of public health, social marginalization, legal imagination, and human dignity. A humanist approach asks whether the law merely disciplines bodies or whether it helps address the conditions that produce addiction, exclusion, and repeated contact with the criminal justice system.

This debate is timely because drug policy remains a major global and regional concern. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's *World Drug Report 2024* identifies continuing concerns around drug markets, drug use, drug-related harms, and policy responses (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2024). Pakpahan and colleagues contribute to this debate by asking what justice should mean when the person before the law is not only an offender, but also a person in need of care, treatment, and reintegration.

Duyên Nguyen Thi's "Career Transition of Rural Workers After Resettlement: A Case Study from Nghi Son Economic Zone, Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam" brings the issue to the socioeconomic consequences of land acquisition, resettlement, industrialization, and urbanization. The study examines how rural workers affected

by land acquisition adjust to new livelihood conditions after resettlement. It sheds light on how development projects reshape employment, expectations, household strategies, and the meaning of economic security (Nguyen Thi 2024).

The significance of this article lies in its focus on transition rather than displacement alone. Land acquisition is often discussed through compensation, relocation, or project implementation, but Nguyen Thi's study asks what happens after people move and after agricultural livelihoods are disrupted. The question is not only whether resettled workers receive formal support, but whether they are able to build sustainable careers, preserve dignity, and participate meaningfully in the new economy created around them.

This article contributes to a wider understanding of development in contemporary Asia. Industrialization and urban expansion often promise national growth, but they may also create uneven burdens for rural communities whose land becomes the foundation of new economic zones. Nguyen Thi's case study reminds readers that inclusive development must be measured not only by infrastructure and investment, but also by the livelihood futures available to those displaced by transformation.

The final article, by Maskur, Irman, and Lukmanul Hakim, turns to the lived enforcement of religious law in Aceh, Indonesia. "The Symbolic-Compliance Gap and Public Perceptions of Sharia Law Enforcement in Aceh, Indonesia: Insights from Becak Drivers" examines the perceptions of *becak* drivers toward Sharia law implementation and enforcement. The article finds a complex mix of support and criticism: many participants see Sharia law as a symbol of discipline and Aceh's religious heritage, while also criticizing superficial compliance, inconsistent enforcement, perceived injustice, and limited moral transformation (Maskur, Irman, and Hakim 2024).

This article makes an important contribution by focusing on public perception from below. Legal and religious systems often present themselves through official language, but their legitimacy is tested in everyday encounters. *Becak* drivers are not elite legal theorists or state officials, yet their experiences reveal how ordinary citizens judge the fairness, consistency, and moral meaning of law.

The article's proposed theory of Symbolic-Compliance Dynamics is especially useful because it distinguishes external

conformity from internal moral commitment. A law may succeed in producing visible obedience while failing to generate deeper ethical transformation. This distinction matters for religious governance in Aceh and beyond, because it suggests that legitimacy depends not only on symbolic authority, but also on fairness, consistency, public trust, and meaningful moral education.

Taken together, the articles in this issue show that contemporary Asia is being shaped by struggles over recognition, dignity, and governance in everyday life. Ethnic minorities negotiate identity and historical belonging. Traditional communities select which forms of modernity they can accept. Women academics confront gendered institutions that claim neutrality. Legal scholars rethink punishment through humanist reform. Rural workers rebuild livelihoods after land acquisition. *Becak* drivers evaluate the moral and practical credibility of religious law.

The issue also demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary social science. The articles draw on qualitative fieldwork, historical analysis, feminist methodology, normative legal research, socioeconomic case study, and public perception analysis. This methodological range is not merely a matter of academic variety. It reflects the complexity of Asian societies, where identity, law, development, religion, gender, and everyday life are deeply entangled.

The broader contribution of this issue is to show that social transformation is never only structural. It is also interpretive, moral, and lived. Policies, laws, modernization projects, and institutional reforms become meaningful only when people encounter them in concrete situations: in minority identity claims, village negotiations with infrastructure, academic promotion systems, courtrooms and rehabilitation debates, resettlement processes, and conversations about Sharia enforcement on the street.

As editors, we are pleased to present this issue as a contribution to the study of Asian societies in transition. We are grateful to the authors for their careful scholarship and to the reviewers for their intellectual generosity and critical engagement. We hope readers will find in these articles not only empirical insight, but also a deeper language for understanding how people across Asia negotiate recognition, dignity, and justice in conditions of uneven change.

References

- Fraser, Nancy. 2000. "Rethinking Recognition." *New Left Review* 3: 107–20.
- Maskur, Irman, and Lukmanul Hakim. 2024. "The Symbolic-Compliance Gap and Public Perceptions of Sharia Law Enforcement in Aceh, Indonesia: Insights from Becak Drivers." *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* 6 (2): 259–84.
- Muflichah, Siti. 2024. "If You're Male, You Get It More': Experiences of Indonesian Female Academics Under New Managerialism." *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* 6 (2): 179–208.
- Nguyen Thi, Duyen. 2024. "Career Transition of Rural Workers After Resettlement: A Case Study from Nghi Son Economic Zone, Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam." *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* 6 (2): 233–58.
- Pakpahan, Hartato, I Nyoman Nurjaya, Setiawan Nurdayasakti, and Nurini Aprilianda. 2024. "Reformulating Indonesia's Narcotics Law on Personal Drug Misuse: A Humanist Approach." *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* 6 (2): 209–32.
- Rosidin, Didin Nurul, Muhamad Ibrahim, Asep Saefullah, and Ihsan Sa'dudin. 2024. "Negotiating with Modernity: Smooth but Selected Changes in the Benda Kerep Village of Cirebon in 1990–2010." *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* 6 (2): 157–78.
- Singha, Rajmoni. 2024. "Ethnic Identity Construction and Contestation in Bangladesh: The Case of the Manipuri and Bishnupriya Communities." *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* 6 (2): 129–56.
- Taylor, Charles. 1994. "The Politics of Recognition." In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann, 25–73. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- UN Women and UN DESA. 2024. *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2024*. New York: UN Women and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

United Nations Development Programme. 2024. *Human Development Report 2023/2024: Breaking the Gridlock: Reimagining Cooperation in a Polarized World*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2024. *World Drug Report 2024*. Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.