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Edited by Caroline Starkey and Emma Tomalin

THE ROUTLEDGE
HANDBOOK OF RELIGION,
GENDER AND SOCIETY

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MASCULINITIES AND RELIGION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Teguh Wijaya Mulya and Joseph N. Goh

Introduction

Epistemological formulations of masculinity and institutional and popular religion bear on each other in fascinatingly diverse ways around the world. In Abrahamic faiths, for instance, prevalent notions of a male masculine God secures an 'Abrahamic masculinity [which] pervades Judaism, Christianity, and Islam . . . in culturally specific ways that are historically conditioned' (Neal, 2011, p. 562). The Christian feminist scholar Mary Daly's (1985, p. 19) now classic dictum that 'if God is male, then the male is God' continues to resonate strongly with the work of contemporary scholars, such as Adriaan van Klinken's research on African Christian masculinities (2012). Such notions often lend themselves favourably and incontestably to male patriarchal privilege in religion, which we understand in this chapter to mean diverse discourses on religion, spirituality, theology and transcendence.

Studies suggest that stronger masculine imageries of the divine are commensurate with more conservative and traditional ideologies of gender (Whitehead, 2012). Masculine-centric understandings of Christianity and Sikhism, for instance, perpetuate patriarchal performances of faith (Gelfer, 2009, 2011; Gill, 2014; Poling, 2000), including in familial and paternal systems (Hoegaerts, 2009; Pembroke, 2008). Nevertheless, efforts have been made to challenge and recuperate masculine traits in religion. A revisioning and recasting of the norms of masculinity, rather than relinquishing them altogether, may prove useful in dismantling Christian patriarchal notions of God and challenge existing power relations in ecclesiastical systems (Collins, 2010). Additionally, some Islamic studies suggest that hegemonic male masculine power is an expression of idolatry that usurps the ultimate authority of God in human lives (De Soudy, 2011).

Religious masculinity is often conscripted as a convenient imagery for complex negotiations of nationalism and citizenship. Sarah Imhoff's (2017) location of the role of masculinity in early twentieth-century American Judaism and Maddy Carey's (2017) exploration of the impact of the Holocaust on the gender identities of Jewish men in Europe are two sterling examples. Historians note that the former colonisation of India has been portrayed and decried by Indian activists of the past as its feminisation. By succumbing to the imperial forces, India was seen as weak, fragile and even emasculated. These activists thus highlighted a sense of urgency among these activists to restore the nation to its original Hindu masculine glory (Gupta, 2011; Roy & Hammers, 2014). Along similar lines, hypermasculine religiosity is seen

as the perfect framework to promote global militia efforts. James W. Messerschmidt and Achim Rohde argue that Osama Bin Laden propagated a heroic 'jihadist global hegemonic masculinity' (2018, p. 664) that sought to rescue a battered global Muslim community from the tyranny of American Judaism and Christianity, and irresponsible global Muslim leaders.

Scholars highlight the crucial need for the abandonment of abuse and violence as archetypal performances of hegemonic masculinity, which they see as a spiritual and sacred process (Ellison, 1994). An appreciation for 'gentler' masculine traits that complement more 'severe' characteristics can contribute to the shaping of more holistic spiritualities among men (Arat & Hasan, 2018; Nelson, 1994; Van Osselaer, 2009). Studies on masculinities and spiritualities in Australia suggest that male teenagers are becoming more inclined towards 'personal integrity and relationship values than . . . success-oriented or physical/personality values, a construction that at once challenges the hegemonic ideal of masculinity' (Engebretson, 2006, p. 107) in the doings of spirituality. In the Western world, there is also an increasing number of men who are embracing Buddhist tenets of meaningful living and mindfulness to improve their psychological well-being in the face of overwhelming masculine anxieties in contemporary Western societies (Barker, 2008).

Issues of men who embody gender and sexual diversities also figure extensively in religion, such as gay, bisexual and transgender men. While Buddhism generally maintains an ostensibly neutral stance on such matters (Cabezón, 1998), mainstream forms of Christianity and Islam continue to subject such men to various degrees of condemnation (Boisvert, 2013; Jamal, 2001). Nevertheless, more liberal-minded individuals have created shared spaces within which to safeguard the multiplicity of their gender, sexual and religious identities and expressions (Minwalla, Rosser, Feldman, & Varga, 2005; Yip, 1997, 1999). Progressive Christian outlooks are particularly helpful in unpacking this idea of shared spaces. Experts suggest that both Christian gay and transgender men rely heavily on religious artefacts and imageries such as white evangelical gospel music (Harrison, 2009), spiritual autobiographies (White & White, Jr, 2004), religious art (Sabia-Tanis, 2020), mystical experiences (Kelly, 2019), the born-again rhetoric (van Klinken, 2017), associations with the image of the suffering Christ (Cheng, 2011) and discourses of ongoing collaboration with the divine creator in matters of gender (Hero, 2012; Sabia-Tanis, 2003) to corroborate the nexus of masculinity, sexuality and faith. Moreover, gay male religiosity is seen as undermining stereotypically masculinist and patriarchal configurations of spirituality (Gelfer, 2009).

This chapter participates in the augmentation of this vast corpus of scholarly work on masculinities and religion by showcasing selected realities and perspectives from Southeast Asia, specifically Brunei Darussalam, Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.¹ Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia are Muslim-majority countries. The Philippines is a mostly Christian country, while Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism are popular belief systems in Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. This chapter first pays attention to the socio-cultural productions of what it means to be a man in Asia by foregrounding the daily expressions of masculinity in relation to religion. Then, it explores the diverse and often competing ways in which religions valorise and excoriate specific articulations of masculinity. While one religious tradition may laud docility and submissiveness, another may extol aggression, and yet another, knowledge. The diverse embodiments of masculinity as conduits of divinity and holiness, specifically the transgression of masculine norms, are then examined before the chapter segues to interlacing issues of religion, masculinity and the construction of nationalism. Thereafter, a section is devoted to intersecting issues of religion, masculinity, sexuality and violence. The chapter closes with a brief overview of the role which religion and masculinity play in the areas of health, education and sports.

Religion and everyday performances of masculinity

Masculinities in everyday life are performed in innumerable ways, from how an individual walks, talks, thinks, feels and does things to institutionalised cultural rituals that symbolise a man's manhood. Such performances of masculinity do not exist in a vacuum but are constituted through various contextual socio-cultural discourses, including religion. In Southeast Asia, religious teachings, symbols and rituals—enmeshed in ethnic traditions and contemporary (gender) politics—have been found to function as both sources and mechanisms to reproduce certain versions of masculinity.

Among Buddhist-majority countries like Myanmar and Thailand, for example, some religiously related rituals serve as a masculinising mechanism during the initiation from boyhood to manhood, such as the *shinpyu* initiation ceremony in Myanmar or temple boys' practices in Thailand. Generally taking the form of short participations in the Buddhist monastic life, these religio-cultural practices become a significant rite of passage to cross the social and spiritual threshold which distinguish boyhood from manhood (Janssen, 2007). Another example of a Buddhist-related symbol related to the performance of masculinity is the amulet. As demonstrated by Craig Reynolds (2011) in his study in mid-south Thailand, the possession of an amulet is often considered as a sign of male masculinity. Conversely, women who own amulets generally receive them from their father, brothers or uncles as gifts. While the Buddha is not usually portrayed as a macho figure in sculptures and paintings, his supranormal power throughout the history of Buddhism has endowed him with an 'archaic sense of might, strength, and command' (Reynolds, 2011, p. 56). In mid-south Thailand, this power constitutes the religious aspect of Thai machismo, as Buddhist amulets have become a source of such power, and thus, a symbol of masculinity—comparable to tattoos, alcohol, participation in cockfights or gambling, and brothel visits. These amulets' specific power and economic valuations are often discussed in male homosocial settings.

In a country with a dominant Muslim population like Malaysia, everyday practices of kinship among Malay-Muslim Malaysians evince complex representations of masculinity that reflect socio-cultural, ethnic and religious influences. Based on his research in the Malaysian state of Negeri Sembilan, Michael G. Peletz (1995) discovers that in contrast to women, men are considered as ruled by reason yet demonstrate a lesser sense of responsibility in domestic affairs. Women, unlike men, are purportedly susceptible to compulsive passions but show greater reliability in familial duties. These perceptions stem from an uncontested Malaysian Malay-Muslim ontology that emphasises a divinely ordained prescription of gender roles for men and women. Islam is also an important determinant in contemporary Malaysian laws governing family life. Maznah Mohamad (2010) highlights the prevalence of *Syariah* or Islamic laws that uphold a conservative and patriarchal society by privileging Malay-Muslim men in matters of marriage, divorce, property and custody of children. Such men reap the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005, p. 79) from entitlement rather than meritocracy through an 'imagined unified collectivity' (Mohamad, 2010, p. 373) which sustains the artificiality of unwavering unity and shared ideology for an ethno-religious group that is relentless in its preservation of dominance in a pluralistic society.

Religion and competing versions of masculinity

Scholars document how masculinities are articulated in both similar and different ways across contemporary Southeast Asian contexts. Constituted through shifting local, global, cultural and religious discourses, these versions of masculinity coexist and compete to gain wider currency

in Southeast Asian societies. The availability of these versions provides a range of masculine subject positions to be taken up in the constitution of an individual's gendered subjectivity.

In Cambodia, for example, Courtney Work (2014) mentions two competing versions of manhood: A Buddhist-inspired compassionate, kind and hardworking man who is content with his place and a heterosexual, breadwinning and aggressive man who conquers women, earns money and spoils for a fight. In Thailand, Pattana Kitiarsa (2013) argues that competing versions of masculinity are exemplified by Buddhist monks who are ascetic, are spiritual and renounce the world, on the one hand, and Muay Thai fighters who are physical, violent, competitive and worldly on the other. While seemingly oppositional, both versions of masculinity are comparable, as both have been institutionalised as male-oriented, hierarchical and offering social mobility for Thailand's countryside male youths. Pattana Kitiarsa (2013) further argues that both versions of masculinity have been deployed as an apparatus of nation-building endeavours. Boxing and Buddhism are continuously and discursively reproduced as Thai masculine ideals. Both have become the avenues for boys and men from different social classes to achieve cultural status as national heroes, which in turn fuels a patriarchal nationalist ideology by producing and sustaining versions of masculinity as a privileged cultural system, and marginalising—although not entirely excluding—women from organised venues of monastic life and boxing championship.

Some religious communities in Southeast Asia exhibit specific versions of masculinity whose qualities are defined in religious terms. Rachmad Hidayat (2011), for instance, discusses a version of masculinity which is performed within the Indonesian Muslim communities. He explores various qualities of a *santri* (a student in an Islamic boarding school or *pesantren*), a *kyai* (a Javanese term for a highly respected male elder, often associated with—but not necessarily—a Muslim leader or a *pesantren* leader) and an *ustad* (a Muslim preacher, commonly associated with the modern/younger preachers) that are considered masculine and endowed with power. Hidayat discovers that their authority and masculine status came from the depth of their Islamic knowledge, the strength of their religious morality and the scope of influence in the network of Islamic communities. A *kyai*, for example, is not commonly questioned or challenged by his students. Instead, respect and submission are socially expected from anyone interacting with him.

The depth of religious knowledge and the strength of religious morality have also characterised the ways some older Buddhist men acquired authority among (predominantly female) pagoda communities in Vietnam (Soucy, 2009). Understanding of sutras and Buddhist scholarship, in contrast with devotional recital and supplication, are continuously positioned as masculine, authoritative and more important for religious enlightenment. A similar situation in Myanmar has also been documented by Ward Keeler (2017), in which male Buddhist monks reside in the uppermost echelons of Buddhist society and cosmology.

Masculinity and cultural intermediaries of the sacred

One pattern of contemporary gender norm disruption widespread across Southeast Asia is the existence of gender-diverse intermediaries in sacred rituals, in which men who were assigned male at birth take the gender ambiguous or feminine role of the intermediary between humans and spirits. These practices date back to the time before major organised religions arrived in Southeast Asia, but their persistence in the contemporary world and tensions with dominant religions differ significantly across Southeast Asian countries. In Indonesia, for example, scholars identify how such rituals were widely practised in pre-Islamic Indonesia by shamans (Blackwood, 2005; Graham, 1987; Ichwan, 2014) such as the *bissu* (a male transvestite shaman in Bugis tribe) in Sulawesi, *manang bali* (a man who has gone through a gender transformation ritual to be a

shaman) in Kalimantan or Borneo, and *warok* (a male medium and an actor in *Reog* performance who maintains his spiritual power by avoiding sex with women and lives with a young boy) in Ponorogo, East Java. One of the common features was their gender-ambiguous performance in sacred rituals as they interceded with spiritual beings on behalf of human beings. Transcending gender binaries was rendered as a spiritual quality for them, surpassing common categories of human beings. However, the arrival of Islam and Christianity in Indonesia contributed to the decline of these shamanistic practices as both religions cosmologically conceptualise the Divine not as androgynous and manifested in dual-gendered deities but as a masculinised, heteropatriarchal God who created man and woman. In the development of these monotheistic religions in Indonesia, gender is generally understood as fixed and God-given. These rituals involving gender-diverse intermediaries currently only exist in localised and limited contexts.

In contrast with Indonesia, the gender-nonconformist spirit mediums in Myanmar, *nat kadaws*, have been formally integrated into the dominant religion (Coleman, Allen, & Ford, 2018). Realising that he could not eliminate spirit worship from Myanmar's daily lives, the Buddhist King Anawarahta of Bagan in the eleventh century enshrined *nats* or the spirits as official guardians of Buddhism. Consequently, the practice of animistic spirit worship has not only survived but has even been revitalised in the contemporary context of economically developing Myanmar, as people continue to seek good fortune and financial success through spirit worship (Peletz, 2009). In the past, *nat kadaws* were mostly women, but since the second half of the twentieth century, they have generally been feminine-acting men (*apwint*) who are attracted to and have sex with other men (*achout*). While contemporary Myanmar is still largely homophobic and transphobic, the special status of *nat kadaw* has been documented as mitigating the stigma and discrimination against their non-normative gender and sexual identities (Coleman, Allen, & Ford, 2018).

Male shamans who were considered as effeminate gay men, cross-dressers or genderqueer in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Philippines were also perceived as intermediaries between the spiritual and physical realms. Carolyn Brewer (1999) posits that the spiritual salience of such shamans, known as *bayog* or *asog*, lay in their personal decision to live more feminine or womanly lifestyles, as women were the normative spiritual leaders in animistic cultures. In contemporary Philippines, gender-diverse individuals such as the *bakla* ally themselves with popular religious icons such as the *Santo Niño* or Holy Child Jesus. The gender ambiguity of the Divine Infant—inferred from his androgynous robes and his mischievous demeanour and imagined through an anthropomorphisation of God as a human child—enable the *bakla* to transgress male masculine norms by cross-dressing and performing popular piety in full view of official clerics. This spiritual defiance of gender-rigid norms as dictated by Roman Catholicism occurs during the annual Ati-atihan festival held in honour of the *Santo Niño* (Alcedo, 2007). Masculinity also commands attention in contemporary official Philippine Roman Catholicism. Religious anxieties due to gender relations are escalating due to the increasing visibility and preponderance of gender theories such as gender fluidity. These theories challenge the male-dominated clerical authoritarianism in Philippine Catholic hierarchy that continues to foreclose the possibility of admitting women to the ministerial priesthood based on a shaky theological premise of the male masculinity of Christ (Cartagenas, 2014).

Religion, masculinity and the nation-state

In the domain of nation-state politics, studies in Southeast Asian countries reveal how both masculinity and religion play crucial roles in each state's ideological and political praxes, such as nation-building efforts or nationalistic responses to majority-minority conflicts. Existing

research in this field also demonstrates how masculinity and religion are important aspects of identity politics in the contexts of cross-nation exchange, particularly in understanding and undermining 'foreign' forms of masculinity.

Strengthening a sense of nationalism through discourses of masculinity and religion can be seen in the rhetoric surrounding the violence against Rohingya Muslims in the Buddhist-majority Myanmar. Studies on this case identify how Muslim men have been scapegoated by discursively positioning them as sexually aggressive, rapacious and actively attempting to convert Buddhist women to Islam (Drollinger-Smith, 2014; McCarthy & Menager, 2017). The unconfirmed rumour of the rape of a female Buddhist employee by two wealthy Muslim employers in Mandalay in 2014, for example, immediately and effectively mobilised a rioting mass. The rumour was believable because it rests on the long-established, widely circulated associations of Muslim men with sexual assault and wealth, such as in the popular narrative of the forced conversion of a poor Buddhist woman marrying a wealthy Muslim man to relieve her family's debts. Here, gender and religion have become the focal points in the discourse of Myanmar nationalism, resulting in the majority support for virtuous defence of women and Buddhism and the ensuing unjustifiable violence against Rohingya Muslims.

Majority-minority tensions involving both religious and masculine identities have also been documented in another Southeast Asian country, Singapore. In a country with a Chinese majority population, Singaporean Malay-Muslims face minoritisation on various levels, not least being due to their Islamic faith. Malay-Muslim youth gain acceptance in Chinese-dominated gangs or secret societies and assert their masculinities through the doings of 'Chineseness'. This entails taking part in traditional Chinese religio-cultural practices, sporting tattoos with Chinese designs and forsaking Islamic dietary restrictions such as avoiding the consumption of pork (Ganapathy & Balachandran, 2019).

In the contexts of cross-nation exchanges involving men moving between countries, encounters with a 'foreign' form of masculinity and religiosity are often inevitable. These encounters may require a reworking of one's sense of being masculine, mainly with an aim to maintain a sense of religious and masculine superiority. For instance, Michael Hawkins (2013) detects the construction of a chivalrous and civilised American masculinity during American military rule in Muslim south Philippines which was pitted against the supposed patriarchal barbarism, diminished virility, ill-treatment of women and other inordinate practices of indigenous Muslim Moro men. Similarly, a study on Indonesian Muslim men in Australia reveal how they understand and enhance their version of masculinity when they migrate to Australia by positioning Australian men (perceived as global hypermasculinity) in opposition to their moral code as Muslim men. Australian men's screaming and yelling while watching sports, for example, is seen as overly competitive, unrefined and even animalistic, when contrasted with the ideals of self-regulation, politeness and cultural refinement embodied by Indonesian Muslim men (Nilan, Donaldson, & Howson, 2007).

However, migration may also result in the marginalisation and feminisation of migrant men's masculinities. Ester Gallo (2018) notes that Catholic Philippine and Indian migrant labourers and clerics in Italy construct religiously based communities and engage in evangelisation activities away from their lands of origin. Exposed to new and different experiences and expressions of faith, they find their understanding and practice of religion challenged and transformed when they interrogate differences in Christian practice between their homelands and their host countries, and the impact of these differences on their masculinities. A 'Catholic Asian masculinity' (Gallo, 2018, p. 185) accords a degree of acceptability and respectability to these men while contributing to their feminisation due to both the popular perception of Asian migrant workers as conscientious labourers and their adherence to religious practice. This situation is exacerbated

by their continuing membership in ethnic churches which continues to marginalise them from what they consider as a more mainstream version of Christianity in their host country. Consequently, any evangelisation attempts on their part directed at 'secular' Italians are considered as inferior. These men rework and redefine their identities that straddle their masculinity, migrant status and Asian Christianity by remaining in ethnic churches, joining Italian parishes or participating in 'new global Catholic reformist movements like The NeoCatechumenal Way' (Gallo, 2018, p. 195).

Religion, masculinity, sexuality and violence

The interconnected discourses of masculinity and religion in Southeast Asia have given rise to unequal power relations between cisgender heterosexual men and women, transgender women and transgender men, and gay men to the extent that violence is justified in both private and public contexts. Conservative interpretations of sacred texts are employed in this justification, although counter-discourses from feminist and other affirming readings are also gaining traction.

In Vietnam, some researchers note how Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist legacies have provided a discursive backdrop for the binary positioning of men and women. The yin/yang dichotomy, for example, has not only been embedded in Vietnamese cultural history, but has also been reproduced among contemporary cults through the complementarity of male and female deities (Phuong & Eipper, 2009). Some researchers note how this binary does not always position men and women as equal and complementary, but that men are often rendered as superior to women to the extent that men's violence and aggressiveness towards women are considered natural (Bui & Morash, 2008; Horton & Rydstrom, 2011).

Correspondingly, Elli Hayati, Maria Emmelin, and Malin Eriksson (2014) explore the ways in which Indonesian Muslim men understand masculinity, Islam and intimate partner violence. The findings show that those who hold the 'traditional' (p. 6) position (considering violence as undesirable but occasionally necessary to discipline women) back up their views using Quranic verses, while the 'egalitarians' (p. 8) (rejecting violence because men and women are equal) do not really draw on religious discourses to explain their views. In contrast with Hayati et al.'s participants who tend to use the Quran in conservative ways vis-à-vis gender-based violence, Lily Zakiah Munir (2005) demonstrates that the Quran actually provides resources to oppose violence against women and support gender equality in Indonesia, such as the basic Islamic principles of justice, equality and *maslahat* (benefit, well-being).

Regarding gender and sexual diversity, Tom Boellstorff (2004) argues that the emergence of political homophobia in post-1998 Indonesia was closely linked with the discourse of masculine nationalism. In the times of political and economic uncertainty after the fall of Suharto, violent attacks on previously tolerated LGBT public events by hard-line Muslim groups increased significantly. In the absence of a strong leader like Suharto as the *Bapak* (Father) who maintained Indonesian social, economic and political stability, there was a sense that the nation was losing its very manhood. Consequently, as Boellstorff points out, sexual- and gender-diverse men were violently attacked because they were seen as a threat to normative masculinity and therefore to the nation itself (2004).

In Malaysia, notions of masculinity are mainly determined by conservative Islamic laws and socio-cultural norms, and to a lesser extent, Christian doctrine (J. N. Goh, 2011, 2014b). Islamically charged ideals of masculinity also play important roles in establishing 'valid' ethnic and nationalistic discourses (J. N. Goh, 2015). Little wonder therefore that 'the imagined and

idealised Malaysian Malay-Muslim person is portrayed as decidedly male, heteropatriarchal and heterosexual in his ascendancy and dominance in political, economic, matrimonial and familial arenas, his piety, and his ethical impeccability in accordance with institutional Islam' (J. N. Goh, 2014a, p. 606). Nevertheless, rather than abandoning their faith systems altogether, some gay, bisexual and transgender Muslim and Christian men deploy personalised and experience-based gender- and sexuality-affirming religious and theological discourses to undermine oppressive rhetoric in relation to their gender and sexual identities and expressions. These discourses include an emphasis on the inclusive and compassionate nature of Islam and Christianity, and the purposeful creation of non-normative men by an omniscient God (J. N. Goh, 2018, 2019; Shah, 2018). In other words, these non-normative men do not perceive themselves as wilfully defying divine dictates in terms of gender and sexuality. They see themselves as displaying the dazzling diversity with which God creates human life. They insist on a more holistic interpretation of passages in their scriptures that uphold the dignity and security of the downtrodden and marginalised.

Religion and masculinity in the fields of health, education and sports

Muslim men in Brunei index good health as an Islamic imperative and a condition for taking care of their families and maintaining robust sexual relations with their wives (Idris, Forrest, & Brown, 2019). Such care also extends to their parents and is motivated by a sense of gratitude for parental upbringing, the imperative to acquire '*pahala*' (p. 9) (merit), and the threat of *Syariah* penalties for the wilful abandonment of parents. The concept of '*ikhtiar*' (p. 14), which can be loosely translated as personal resolution or 'self-reliance' (p. 8), is another socio-cultural concept adopted by Bruneian Muslim men in relation to good health. *Ikhtiar* furnishes these men with the opportunity to exercise hegemonic masculinity in the form of independent self-care during bouts of illness instead of relying on the assistance of others. This show of strength is also reflected in Malaysian societies where religion shapes ideas of masculinity in relation to health and lifestyle. Young men in their twenties and thirties from various ethnic groups trace the significance of masculine traits such as male leadership, financial independence, familial care, fatherhood and child raising to their religious and cultural beliefs (Khalaf, Low, Ghorbani, & Khoei, 2013).

In the field of education and schooling, scholars demonstrate how certain versions of masculinity are reproduced through the education system and educational practices and are closely linked with religious values, texts and traditions. In Brunei, an amalgamation of Islamic and socio-cultural values plays a significant part in the preservation of stereotypical and essentialised gender roles among pre-service teachers (Burns, 1998). In nineteenth-century Singapore, elite schools were sites for the production of a cosmopolitan masculinity that reflected and maintained Victorian Christian conservatism. This elite masculinity, as Daniel P. S. Goh points out, served 'to educate and civilize the boys of local Chinese elites' (2015, p. 138) towards Singaporean masculinity. Colonisation had effeminised local men but also elevated their ethnic and cultural status as Anglicised and Christianised individuals.

Syed Imad Alatas (2018) discovers that masculinity in such settings is neither necessarily dictated by academic performance nor absolutely determined by religious ideals. Rather, the main aim of education is self-enhancement that may or may not hold particular Christian significance. By the twentieth century, the Singaporean government sought to promote a type of Confucian masculinity in 'moral and religious knowledge education to combat individualism and westernization in the use of English language and mass consumption of western popular culture' (D. P. S. Goh, 2015, p. 147).

In sports, postcolonial Singaporean athletic masculinity is influenced by what is often referred to as the Chinese cultural religion or a combination of Buddhism and Confucianism (Brook, 2017). Fuelled by such belief systems, young Singaporean men of Chinese descent aspire towards the imagery of the 'fighting scholar or martial artist' (Brooke, 2017, p. 1300) and its attendant masculine traits of '*functionality over esthetics; a power within; drive, determination and morality; and control, discipline and humility*' (p. 1307; emphasis original).

In Laos, Creak (2011) coins the term 'muscular Buddhism' (p. 1) in his analysis of physical education teachers' manuals, the contents of which are comparable to the character- and state-building logic of European muscular Christianity. Creak demonstrates how a militarised version of physical culture which was applied to students was constituted through Buddhist teachings and practices. For instance, militaristic physical education regimes that demand discipline and training were paralleled with monastic ascetic disciplining of the body. Both forms of bodily devotion are rendered as a meritorious act and beneficial to one's spiritual life.

Conclusion

This chapter has exhibited an array of investigations on the interplay between religion and masculinity in Southeast Asian contexts. The six themes discussed—everyday performances of masculinity, competing versions of masculinity, sacred intermediaries, nation-state, and sexuality and violence—demonstrate the complex and multiple ways religious discourses have been drawn upon in both disrupting and, more predominantly, perpetuating the traditional hegemonic masculinity. It is evident in these discussions that the interplays between religion and masculinity in Southeast Asia are enmeshed in various historical and cultural specificities, contexts of global/cross-nation exchange, and local and national dynamics of identity politics.

Not intended to be exhaustive, this chapter seeks to highlight existing knowledge and encourage further examination. A method that might still be underused in this regard is comparative analysis, as most existing studies focus on one country. Comparing and contrasting insights from a country with another might generate a better understanding and exchange of ideas. One gap that might also still need to be explored further is minority religions in each country. Most researchers examine the dominant religion in the country studied. Finally, analyses of how masculinity and religious studies in Southeast Asia may question, rework or complicate the established Western-originated theorisations of masculinity are still largely under-explored.

Note

- 1 Due to the scarcity of relevant extant resources, Timor-Leste is not included in this chapter.

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