

Asahi: A place for gay people
(January 31, 2012 – Evening p. – p. 2)

"My husband is..." said the person in front of me. He is a man any way you look at him. To be honest, I was confused, wondering whether I had heard him incorrectly, or thought that perhaps my English skills were not sufficient to understand him.

This was the first meeting I had with US Consul General Osaka-Kobe Patrick Linehan, and I talked with him about his family.

I wrote about him in the morning edition's "Hito" column because I was impressed by his way of living as an openly gay person in society and as a diplomat, and because I felt that it is difficult to find such people in the Japanese government.

I was also reminded of the strong presence of gay people in Bangkok and Manila, where I had served as a resident correspondent. Beauty parlors and cosmetics shops there were almost exclusively dominated by such people, and large families have one or two 'Katoey' or 'Bakla' living among them.

I don't think the percentage of gay people in the total population differs much from country to country or from race to race. Whether gay people are conspicuous or not in a particular society depends, perhaps, on how permissive or understanding that society is.

It seems that gay people in Europe and the US have won their current social and legal status through struggle against discrimination. It appears, however, that parts of Southeast Asia have always had a place for gay people. The Asian natural environment is such that rice is harvested twice a year and fish abound in rivers. Perhaps there is no need for such social norms as "a man should behave like a man" where food is readily available.

Japan, however, may be a place where gay people likely find it considerably difficult to live, especially if one works for a company or in government.

*** U.S. Embassy translation ***