

“Asian Values” and Democracy in Asia

Proceedings of a Conference Held on 28 March 1997 at Hamamatsu,
Shizuoka, Japan, as Part of the First Shizuoka Asia-Pacific Forum:
The Future of the Asia-Pacific Region.



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY



ASIA PACIFIC FORUM
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION



Edited by:

Takashi Inoguchi

Vice Rector

United Nations University

Edward Newman

Director of Studies on Conflict and Security

Peace and Governance Programme

United Nations University

Copyright © 1997 United Nations University. All Rights Reserved.

United Nations University

5-53-70, Jingumae

Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-8925

Japan

Telephone: (03) 3499-2811 / Fax: (03) 3499-2828

E-mail: mbox@hq.unu.edu

<http://www.unu.edu>

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Asian Values: The Debate Revisited | 10 |
| The United States and East Asia: New Commonalities, and Then All Those Differences | 18 |
| A Clash of Values? Human Rights in the Post-Cold War World | 27 |
| Political Culture and Indonesian Democracy | 43 |

Introduction

Takashi Inoguchi and Edward Newman

Cultural determinism argues that cultural values condition modes of social and economic organization, including patterns of political relationships, political participation, citizenship and government. As a corollary of this, societies or regions which embrace a common cultural heritage can be said to have evolved discrete systems of political and social arrangements distinct from - and sometimes in opposition to or in conflict with - the rest of the world. On the basis of this, these culturally embedded arrangements have been argued to explain and underpin such important issues as relative economic performance and social cohesion, and to determine crucial issues of international relations between cultural groups.¹

Cultural approaches in the social sciences are not new, especially in comparative research. Max Weber famously drew conclusions regarding the relative strengths of Protestant and Catholic cultures for economic growth. However, in the wake of the Cold War the cultural backdrop has become particularly popular and contentious. There are two broad arguments. With the decline of global ideological conflict, and with it the polarizing effect this had upon international politics, economic and political regionalism have become more prominent. This has been on the basis of a process of development over a number of decades. In parallel to this, the ideological debate has given way to a cultural one. This has been tied to various political and economic indicators, but it has also been argued to underpin economic and political friction. Famously, Huntington wrote that "the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural... [The] principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics."² Such culturally based arguments reject the homogenizing consequences of globalizing forces. In fact, they highlight the adverse affects of this process; people become more aware of their differences as cultures rub against each other.³ This has been heightened by the resurgence of traditional values resulting from the uncertainties of socio-political change in some societies.

The contrary, more popular view holds that culture is declining as a determinant of domestic and international politics in the context of globalizing pressures. This process is undermining traditional values and institutions and bringing a convergence of cultures through communication, travel and trade: a fledgling homogenizing "world culture" as a consequence of increasing shared experiences. In the words of Havel, an "amalgamation of cultures" in a transcendent global ethos.⁴ The convergence of political and economic practices and the spread of democracy have similarly led to arguments of growing similarities which have implications for cultural differences. Francis Fukuyama argued that the spread of free market economics and democratic politics is a process which "guarantees an increasing homogenization of all human societies, regardless of their historical origins or cultural inheritances".⁵ This is also "undermining traditional social groups like tribes, clans, extended families, religious sects, and so on".⁶ The proliferation of democracy - albeit of various incarnations - in parallel to economic

development appears to support this. However, democracy and economic growth have not been uniform: what role have cultural values played in conditioning their development?

The debate over "Asian values" is at the heart of this controversy. The extraordinary economic growth experienced within East Asian countries - often achieved under different modalities than that of the neo-liberal orthodoxy - has put the political and social arrangements of these countries under the spotlight. The success of these countries, in relation to the downturn of Western economies, and the friction which has arisen over trade protectionism, economic conditionality, democracy and human rights have made the "Asian values" debate more than just an intellectual exercise. In fact it is highly, perhaps irredeemably, politicized. The social problems in the West have compounded the contrast of fortunes and a number of political leaders - both in the East and West - have suggested that the "Asian way" is the way forward. The principal representatives of the "Asian values" thesis in Asia - whilst challenging the universalization of liberal social ideas and reveling in higher growth levels than their former colonial overlords - have been happy to proclaim the ascendancy of "Asian values".

The concept of "Asian values" rests upon a number of presumptions which have serious methodological problems. In fact the phrase "Asian values" implies that the social, economic and political characteristics of certain Asian countries are based upon a shared value system which is identifiable and distinct and which transcends national, religious and ideological differences. East Asia is presented as a value system in the context of an East-West dichotomy. The thesis maintains that cultural values have underpinned the growth rates of East Asian countries and conditioned the orderly social and political characteristics of the region. These ideas raise some pressing questions. Can these assumptions of causality and determinism be upheld methodologically? Do East Asian values transcend ideology, culture, religion and social and economic change? Is there an East Asian model of democracy which defines political relations, the roles and extent of government, notions of citizenship and patterns of political participation? What role have cultural values played in the democratization of East Asian societies and what implications has this had for the maintenance of high economic growth rates? What impact have cultural values had upon the international relations of the region and between East Asia and the West?

The "Asian values" debate is inseparable from the qualitative and quantitative patterns of development and economic growth in the region. From third world levels following the Second World War, and in some cases decolonization, the newly industrializing economies have experienced tremendous export-led growth, exploiting various comparative advantages in manufacturing but also proving adaptable in embracing high technology and skill-intensive exports. Trading and service businesses have also been important, against a backdrop of strong government. Japan, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, and a "second tier" comprising Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, are the most notable examples. The growth rate has been sustained and generally accompanied by diminishing income inequalities. These societies have undergone a process of development - with all the social and political consequences - in a remarkably short period of time. The "East Asian Miracle"⁷ would appear to be a justifiable conclusion, although one must bear in mind the circumstances of this success. Most of these countries practised various forms of state intervention, protectionism and strategic trade guidance in the Cold War context with the support of the United States, which also

provided a major market. During the formative years, and in some cases long after, East Asian states were typically of the authoritarian form, shifting to soft authoritarianism and latterly in most cases becoming democratic. However, in accordance with the patterns of the developmental state, especially during the Cold War, the manifestations of democracy have been characterized by dominant party systems clearly not in the liberal democratic mode.

What Are "Asian Values"?

This question is so politicized, contested and methodologically dubious as to make it illusory. The notion has been manipulated from within and outside Asia and rests upon the crudest of generalizations. The idea of cultural values which are peculiar to East Asia and manifested from the bottom up through these countries' social and political apparatus appears to be easily falsifiable. Nevertheless, one can identify certain cultural traits. Beginning with the primary characteristics of these societies, it is often said that they are based upon group orientation; the interests of the community are felt to come before those of the individual. In fact, this is sometimes argued as a communitarian, perhaps neo-Hegelian, constitution of the "person" by virtue of membership of, and interaction with, larger units. One distinguished observer wrote that the individual "is not an isolated being, but a member of a nuclear and extended family, clan, neighborhood, community, nation and state. East Asians believe that whatever they do or say, they must keep in mind the interests of others ... the individual tries to balance his interests with those of family and society."⁸ The consequence of this, it is argued, is that people are more group conscious than are those in the liberal, atomized West; Asian people work for the good of society, are less selfish and accept that the cohesion and stability of society are more important - and logically prior to - the rights of individuals. Behaviour is said to be motivated primarily not by concerns of individual rights but equally by duties and responsibilities. Indeed, it is only through an orderly society which curtails the excesses of individualism that all members of the community can live safe and fulfilled lives. The government must secure such an environment. An application of this thinking is clear in the rhetoric of the Chinese government concerning the reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty. In response to fears of a curtailment of individual freedoms the government has repeatedly spoken of the need to "strike a balance between civil liberties and social stability". Group orientation is also associated with values such as self-effacement, self-discipline and personal sacrifice to the greater good. This is integral to perceptions of public morality, harmony and social dynamism. Respect for family ties and the elderly, frugality, filial piety, hard work and teamwork are further elements of this matrix. With the right leadership it is a framework for "economic prosperity, progress, harmonious relations between citizens, and law and order".⁹

A number of these values have been seen within the context of the Confucian tradition, despite the difficulties of applying this to East Asia generally. Confucianism, as an amalgamation of religious and philosophical thought, is most closely associated with Chinese societies and so it is erroneous to equate it with "Asian values". Singapore's abandonment of a public policy of state Confucianism was partly due to the sensitivities of non-Chinese Singaporeans, for example. However, a number of analysts have broadened its influences throughout the region¹⁰ and linked it to economic vitality - despite Weber's argument to the contrary - and social cohesion. Moreover, the influence of this tradition upon notions of citizenship and governance has given rise to the concept of "Confucian democracy". Confucianism has no single accepted influence,

but it advocates ethical properties to private and public relationships which appear to suggest an acceptance of hierarchy and the need for social harmony, respect and reverence for family and benevolence in government.¹¹ In political terms this might appear to consolidate the state's authority in the interests of the "common good" and create a submissive population which accepts hierarchy and seniority. The extent to which East Asians are consciously influenced by Confucianism in this way is most questionable. Sceptics regard it as a part of a "top-down" promotion of an East Asian cultural renewal to resist Western criticisms of authoritarianism. Some have argued that it is an "invention of a tradition".¹²

Religion is an integral component of cultural values, although in East Asia its influence is similarly contested. Some East Asian leaders have argued that the aggressive separation of church and state - in effect constraining religion to the private sphere - in the West and the consequent process of secularization have contributed to a moral void in public life and accentuated the negative impulses of individualism. In East Asia, despite the obvious diversity of religions - chiefly Buddhism, Islam and Christianity - and a similar process of secularization, it has been argued that religion still plays a part in everyday life and still contributes to identity and group orientation.

The politicized nature of this debate derives partly from the manner in which "Asian values" are often pitted, usually falsely, against "Western values", another ambiguous concept. Of course, commentators such as Mahathir bin Mohamad usually speak in terms of a renaissance of "Asian values", in parallel to an economic renaissance, in contrast to socially and economically deteriorating Western societies. The resistance to liberal, Christian-derived, cosmopolitan values is a major part of this revival. In particular there is resistance to abstract universal notions of human rights and democracy, especially when these are seen to disguise arrogant, paternalistic and even interventionist Western tendencies. The communitarian conception of the self is at the heart of this argument; universal abstractions are rejected. Institutions and norms only have meaning in the context of the culture, social processes, level of development and values they derive from. However, the defensiveness towards external criticisms and pressures is not only a consequence of a different philosophical heritage. Western attempts to "impose" universal notions of human rights - the prohibition of child labour for example - are seen as a ploy to undermine East Asian competitiveness.

"Asian values" are invariably discussed in the context of an East-West dichotomy. This increases the tendency to exaggerate and generalize, and leads one to conclude that the debate is more political than substantive. When advocates of "Asian values" celebrate the community over individualism, the family as the basis of society, frugality, respect for learning, hard work, public duty, teamwork, they usually demean their argument by contrasting these with the breakdown of the family, decadence, hedonism, excessive individualism, lack of teamwork, fecklessness, and ill discipline in the West. At its most nonsensical, the dynamism and cohesion of East Asia is contrasted with the West's "moral degeneration" and its imminent social collapse, no less.¹³ This suggests an ascendancy of the "Asian way" of strong government, social conservatism and free market economics. The renaissance theme is common. It is interesting that some political leaders in the West have begun to "learn from the East" and use the rhetoric of this agenda in response to the perceived excesses of individualism and social deterioration. Reinvigorating community values and the public spirit is a popular theme.

Democracy and Politics

The "Asian values" thesis maintains that certain patterns of development and politics are reflected throughout the region. Whilst this is to an extent self-evident, demonstrating a connection between these arrangements and cultural values is a formidable task. Nevertheless, some generalizations can be made which reflect a divergence from the liberal democratic model of the West. In fact, the divergence contributes to a process of democratic proliferation which makes it difficult to define the criteria of democratic government. The classical liberal characteristics of democracy require a multiplicity of parties representing competing policy agendas and clear political alternatives, limitations on governmental authority and guaranteed rights of free expression and association. In an adversarial system, there is effectively a government-in-waiting. Citizenship ensures the opportunity to have an input into one's destiny and to participate in a public sphere of debate about all public issues in the context of a constitution and the rule of law. Out of this rigorous political competition comes good governance and accountability. The spirit of US democracy is characterized as guarding against government excesses as much as with endowing the government with the authority to define and enforce the public good. As Samuel Adams wrote, "When the government fears the people, there is liberty. When the people fear the government, there is tyranny."

East Asian democracies differ from this rather romanticized democratic ideal. Most have evolved through hard or soft developmental authoritarianism to some form of democracy, in the sense of having elections, universal suffrage and political parties. Yet in some cases they appear to be based upon a different social premise. Strong government invested with the responsibility of upholding collective needs, an absence of many liberal democratic practices, and longevity of political elites seem to be the norm. Singapore, for example, has been ruled by the People's Action Party since independence, and under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew between 1959 and 1990. Singapore has even been described as a "consencracy".¹⁴ The ruling Golkar party of Indonesia, with the support of the military, has won all elections since the present political system was established in 1975. A similar longevity of power has been experienced by the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, the United Malays National Organization in Malaysia, the elite in Thailand, the alliance of bureaucratic and military forces until recently in South Korea, and the Kuomintang in Taiwan. Can this be attributed to an East Asian preference for harmony, consensus and an adversity to confrontation?

In a number of these countries there has not been complete freedom for opposition parties, freedom of speech, a separation of powers, or civil and political rights as conceived in Western political thought. In societies where the emphasis is upon consensus and harmony, especially when pursuing economic growth, it has proved possible to deem opposition as subversive. Cultural values have been a tool to control dissent. It has been widely argued that free market development precedes democracy and civil rights, as indeed it did in the West. Lee Kuan Yew stated that "I do not believe that democracy necessarily leads to development. I believe that what a country needs to develop is discipline more than democracy."¹⁵ Aung San Suu Kyi's argument that development can and must occur in a democratic "culture of peace" has not moved Myanmar's Asian neighbours beyond the mentality of domestic jurisdiction and non-interference which characterizes the region.¹⁶ In a developmental context it has been possible to argue that

stability and basic welfare are the priorities; strong government and a curtailment of some political rights are thus necessary in the interests of society. The collective goals are clear so the government's responsibility of upholding these should not be unduly hampered by democratic checks and balances.

This ethos continues in some cases, albeit in a diluted form. A strong bureaucracy and an absence of the separation of powers are still characteristics of East Asian states. In fact, there has been practically a fusion of the state, leading party and bureaucracy.¹⁷ Accountability and transparency, the bedrock of liberal democracy in the West, are not the starting point of government. For years the cultural disposition of East Asians was thought to accept this benevolent, paternalistic spirit of government. As the epitome of this, Karel van Wolferen presented a picture of a docile, conformist, submissive Japanese population completely indifferent to the intrusions of the state and bureaucracy and an impenetrable political system.¹⁸ Huntington broadly suggested that Confucian or Confucian-influenced societies are inhospitable to democracy.¹⁹ If the government and bureaucracy are working in the interests of society, why are accountability and transparency necessary? Indeed, these liberal notions can undermine efficiency and stability and cause gridlock between institutions. Efficiency and stability rank higher than transparency and accountability, although this is changing. This appears to conform to the East Asian emphasis on harmony and consensus, which could obstruct the free exchange of ideas and rigorous political debate.

In the context of these conservative values a number of East Asian societies still do not have a free press. According to one observer, "East Asians want their governments to maintain a morally wholesome environment".²⁰ This implies a level of governmental intervention and arbitrariness which is rather alien to the libertarian and minimalist notions of government in many Western societies. A government campaign in Britain to promote morally wholesome values under the theme of "back to basics" was completely abandoned, for example. Could one characterize Asian democracy as government of the people but not necessarily by the people, and the people as subjects rather than citizens? If one were to attempt comparisons with the West it would appear that many East Asian political systems have been built upon different philosophical foundations and certainly reflect different priorities and needs. This is sometimes manifested in rather Orwellian terms of "too much freedom is dangerous".²¹

Competing conceptions of human and civil rights have focused the "Asian values" debate. Invariably this raises the most indignant defensiveness in the region. There is a common generalization which is often presented as a dichotomy. In the West, liberal, cosmopolitan individual freedoms which stress civil and political rights. In the East, communitarian, context-dependent rights and duties commensurate with local needs and conditions which are more likely to stress social and economic rights. To some degree this rough distinction has been reflected in states' attitudes to the principal international human rights instruments - such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the covenants on civil and political, and social and economic, rights of 1966 - and it was manifested at the time of the UN Human Rights Conference in Vienna 1993. The Asian position, elaborated at a Bangkok summit prior to the UN conference, was that they would not accept a declaration which put the rights of the individual above the needs of society and the right to live in an environment of social and political order.²² It is in this sense that the universalization of a liberal vision of rights is resisted; by arousing dissent and demands

for a free press the liberal agenda is also regarded as an attempt to undermine East Asian competitiveness. There is also an element of indignation at a perceived Western cultural and racial superiority.

East Asian leaders claim that different standards are both a reflection of different cultural foundations and different practical needs. Indeed, irrespective of cultural relativism, levels of social and economic development and degrees of state consolidation are key factors in human and political rights. The multi-ethnic nature of many East Asian states and the demands of managing the welfare of developing societies dictate certain priorities and an element of authoritarianism, just as they did in the West when it was undergoing a similar phase. In some cases fragmentation is a more pressing concern than human rights, a fact that some human rights commentators in the West fail to understand. Moreover, unlike the West, the region has experienced tremendous development in just decades. The socio-political impact of this has to be managed in such a way as to safeguard growth and avoid social fracture; democratizing too fast is not wise.²³

The international relations of East Asia appear to reflect this collective reasoning. There is clearly an emphasis on domestic jurisdiction and non-interference. Negotiations concerning Myanmar's membership in the Association of South-East Asian Nations, despite condemnation and sanctions against Myanmar by the outside world, have reflected this tendency. Similarly, the region stands out for having few, if any, legal instruments pertaining to human rights and no human rights commission.

The central problem with the Asian arguments is that, whilst they draw upon the rhetoric of cultural relativism and the developmental state, they are too easily a façade behind which authoritarian leaders deny human rights and opposition. If East Asian societies are so self-disciplined and cohesive, why has it been necessary to maintain authoritarian state structures?

²⁴ "Asian values" can too easily be a tool to resist change and de-legitimize external scrutiny.²⁵ Chinese leaders, for example, often talk defensively about the "feelings of the Chinese people".²⁶ However, the "Asian position" at the Vienna conference on human rights was interpreted by the leaders of those states, from the "top down", and not by their citizens.

The Changing Context

The effects of economic globalization and interdependencies, advances in communications and transnational forces can be twofold. Some have argued that there has been a revival of traditional values as a result of the uncertainties of social change and as cultures rub up against each other. Whilst education, democracy and development may reflect a superficial Westernization, they can lead to a rediscovery of indigenous values, even a "cultural backlash".²⁷ The more popular liberal view is that this process results in a dilution of cultural differences and the breakdown of traditional values and institutions as the volume of shared experiences and behaviour increases. As a generalized consequence of "modernization" - industrialization, urbanization, education, democratization - this is undeniable. East Asian leaders have sought to exploit the opportunities of this environment whilst resisting the globalizing culture which accompanies this process. Yet by openly resisting change - and in the case of Singapore legislating to retain traditional values - they highlight that the force of change exists. Gerald Segal wrote that "modernization in East

Asia is changing social values" and certain characteristic values are fading.²⁸ A deculturalization may thus be at work.

The confidence which has resulted from the economic success of East Asia has been accompanied by an element of anxiety as old institutions and values come into contact with modern forces. One only has to talk with senior members of society to hear complaints of a decline of traditional values and a trend of materialist individualism. And changes in aspirations and perceptions of good governance and feelings of alienation have had implications for politics and social relations. These implications have been quite dramatic in transitional democracies. Democracy groups have been unhappy with the pace of change in some cases and civil activists have been promoting participatory modes of local democracy. The public in Japan is less willing to trust the integrity of the alliance between the bureaucracy, the Liberal Democratic Party and business in working for the interests of Japan behind closed doors; there are significant calls for more transparency and accountability. In Thailand, tourists enjoying a river cruise to the ancient capital of Ayutthaya witness the ramshackle river houses of the poor next to the multimillion dollar hotel and housing developments. The old tour guide script explains that this is not a source of social discontent or instability because generally the mindset of the people is to accept their situation without complaint. Yet at the same time tens of thousands of disadvantaged people, especially from the countryside, conduct demonstrations in the centre of Bangkok against the uneven distribution of income from the booming economy. Thus, feelings of cultural identity - whether declining or in resurgence - coexist with increasing political consciousness in the context of globalizing forces. People are more assertive, overcoming traditional restraint and mobilizing from the bottom up.

In some cases, the established political structures - shored up by traditional values - have not proved adequate for an expression of grievances and aspirations which have resulted from transitional social tensions. This has contributed to civic activism and changing expectations of authority and leadership. The globalizing thesis can be modified to argue that there is not a broad deculturalization or a sweeping away of culture, but rather that certain values win through. There is a process of cultural Darwinism, not between, but within cultures. This is the reality of change in all societies. The fact that change has been accelerated in East Asia has added an element of anxiety to this process.

Asian leaders deny the weakening of cultural values in the context of the internationalization of production, rapid growth and advances in communication. As Mahathir bin Mohamad wrote, "Asian modernization has occurred as an inevitable stage of our history, not because we were Europeanized or Americanized."²⁹ Yet democratization and heightening political awareness have brought a political lexicon to East Asia which is common to - and perhaps emanated from - Western political thought, although this is not to say that democratization is Westernization. Authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states use arguments of cultural relativism and home-grown models of democracy, but there is a universalization of ideas and norms. If not embraced and managed, this is a source of friction for the future. The stability and longevity of some East Asian elites have been at the back of economic successes. What if this success does not continue?

Conclusion

If a case could ever be made for "Asian values", it would not be as a coherent, ahistorical, monolithic bloc. Much of this discussion is a reflection of East Asian politics but not necessarily East Asian values. Every East Asian value exists to some extent in the West and the contest between tendencies - conservative and liberal, authoritarian and democratic - is a struggle within these regions just as much as between them. Arguably it is just at a different stage in East Asia. Even if there is a case for cultural determinism in an abstract sense, there is still great dissent regarding an "East Asian culture". Fukuyama, for example, argues an interconnection of family ties, citizenship and society which is quite different from most generalizations.³⁰ In the West there have been difficulties in defining and upholding the "common good" and reconciling it with the aspirations of individualism and liberty. A similar discourse is in evidence in East Asia. Governments emphasize the need for "an environment of social and political order",³¹ but this conception of the "common good" is always in the interest of particular groups. However, this perennial democratic paradox is complicated and enlivened in East Asia by rapid change and the controversial relationship between economic development and political liberalization. "Asian values" have a role in this debate but it would be wrong to suggest that they are the determining factor in the outcomes.

References

1. Leo Suryadinata, *Military Ascendancy and Political Culture: The Study of Indonesia's Golkar* (reprint, Ohio University Press, 1992), pp. 71-85.
2. Bingham P. Powell, Jr., *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability and Violence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 3-4.
3. Chan Heng Chee, "Democracy: Evolution and Implementation: An Asian Perspective", in Robert Bartley, Chan Heng Chee, Samuel P. Huntington and Shijuro Ogata, eds., *Democracy and Capitalism: Asian and American Perspectives* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993).
4. Samuel P. Huntington, "American Democracy in Relation to Asia", *ibid.*, pp. 27-43.
5. Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York: Free Press, 1959).
6. Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 31-32.
7. J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (New York: New York University Press, 1956). However, Arend Lijphart argues that consociational democracy can achieve state unity without coercion, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
8. Franz Magnis-Suseno, paper published in Syamsuddin Haris and Riza Sihbudhi, eds., *Menelaah Kembali Format Politik Order Baru* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1995).
9. Gatra, 8 March 1997, p. 25.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
11. Richard Robison, "The Middle Class and the Bourgeoisie in Indonesia", in Richard Robison and David S.G. Goodman, eds., *The New Rich in Asia: Mobile Phones, McDonalds and Middle Class Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 84.

Asian Values: The Debate Revisited

C. O. Khong

"You get music and soap operas and prettier girls than here. And you get programmes in our own Minnan dialect. But best of all, you get news. Real news, not the bull they give you on Chinese TV. And I like it when some politician in the Taiwanese parliament can use Minnan dialect to shout down the old Kuomintang fogey. I know that kind of fogey; we've got them on this side, too. I enjoy seeing cabbies like me tie up the whole downtown in a protest 'honk-a-thon'. And I like it when Taiwanese get all worked up about elections. Wish we had free elections here. I'd vote for the opposition." (Xiamen taxi driver Teo Ah-hoon, talking about his satellite TV tuned to Taiwan)¹

"The difficulty that Western minds face in grasping the arrival of East Asia arises from the fact that we are witnessing an unprecedented historical phenomenon: a fusion of Western and East Asian cultures in the Asia-Pacific region. It is this fusion, not a renaissance of ancient Asian glories, that explains the explosive growth of the Pacific and provides the possibility of continued peace and prosperity in the region."²

The tremendous rise to economic prominence of East Asia has brought a new-found self-confidence. We talk today about Asian culture as an explanation for rapid growth, conveniently forgetting that for long, Asian culture was seen as an obstacle to the region's modernization. Asian models of economic and political organization are championed by zealous advocates to challenge the Western political vision, at a time when that Western vision has itself become clouded by alienation and uncertainty in the search for new political avenues. The advocates of "the Asian way", boosted by the success of their economic challenge to the West, argue that "Asia's time in the sun" has now arrived.³

However self-confident Asian advocates may appear, the debate began not as a challenge, but as a defence by Asians against what were perceived to be Western assumptions of universality for their economic models, political ideals and social practices. The Asian defence was that the values underpinning these models are particular, not universal. Asian values are different in kind, not in degree. They are self-reliant, yet somehow communitarian rather than individualistic; built on personal relationships and mutual obligation, rather than the cold letter of the law - even if the law is today called upon to enforce those values; respectful of authority and hierarchy; and state interventionist, even into the private space of individuals. The word that summed up this - in part self-contradictory - spirit was Confucianism. Its validity was seen to lie in the achievement built up in the East Asian region, although presumably the most Confucian part of that region, China itself, was for many years its most enfeebled component.

But the debate has today taken on a subtly different tone. While maintaining that the West must appreciate the social and cultural differences that set Asia apart from it, there is a recognition by East Asians that their region faces a struggle to work out norms of governance and social organization that will be perceived as legitimate by fellow citizens. The conviction holds,

though, that Asians will succeed, because they are aware that their continued prowess is dependent on looking ahead, and on making something new. In looking to tradition, it is not to borrow from a sterile past, but rather to re-interpret traditional values selectively, to make them relevant for the circumstances of today. There is now an acknowledged openness to draw on values and practices from other traditions, including Western ideas. What is being asked for on the Asian side is that this borrowing become a two-way process, a dialogue rather than a haranguing of one by the other.

The current debate needs to take on additional considerations. There is a guarded acknowledgement that Asian societies will have to create room for intellectual enquiry and to address issues of human rights and political liberties. It is no longer adequate to say that the record of modernizing governments justifies their right to rule. Asians today ask awkward questions: from where does this right spring?

Much of the traditional political theory of developing societies focuses on how political life is shaped from the top down. This misses a critical dimension. Whatever Asian political elites or Asian governments may say, there is a lively political discourse at the grass-roots level which, in the long term, is going to determine the shape of Asian governance. The values that feed this debate are not easily characterized, as they come from a variety of sources. Ideas of democratic governance are very much a part of it. Authoritarianism is acknowledged as a component of Asian values - is it not also in Western values? - but (as in the West) it is by no means uncritically accepted. Today, Asian political systems, Asian modes of economic governance and Asian political leaders are very much on trial.

The Politics of Globalizing Societies

How are we to characterize those Asian societies in which this vigorous political debate is taking place? Most obviously, these are societies exposed to the full brunt of globalizing forces, and changing rapidly as a consequence. For individuals, there is a multiplication and intensification of relations and interconnections. Issues transcend national frontiers. But they are issues which arise from interactions between individuals and agencies which are not directly under government control. David Held argues that the politics of globalization strikes at the heart of political legitimacy in all societies. Governments have to justify themselves to people who are increasingly politically aware.

Notably in Taiwan and South Korea, growing prosperity under authoritarian rule gave rise to democratic transition led by an emergent middle class. For South Korea, the process was characterized by mass social mobilization and violent confrontation spearheaded by radical students and labour groups. Yet after the democratic breakthrough, the middle class withdrew support from Kim Dae Jung's opposition - seen as too radical and hence threatening - and became critical of the students and the labour unrest. The political process was opened up, but this led to an immediate concern for stability and government efficiency.

In Taiwan, the process was more low-key and involved bargaining and compromise between key political groups. Once the government committed itself, somewhat cautiously, to political

liberalization and the ruling Kuomintang transformed itself into a party with more native Taiwanese - as opposed to mainland Chinese - characteristics, the middle class began to return its support to the reformed ruling party. The overriding concern again was to restore the stability of the system.

Globalization has had profound and widespread consequences in Asia, ranging beyond the middle class. The improvement in living standards experienced by most people is a consequence of their integration into the global political economy, a fact readily appreciated by them. On the other hand, unequal burdens and social dislocation have also resulted from economic growth. Again, governmental authority is called into question. Globalization has stimulated an intensification of demands for participatory politics at the community level. Exposed to massive changes, people look - not for more political rights, in a Western conceptual sense, but - for a government which is more responsive to local needs and to individual concerns. We should be clear, though, that their demands arise in a situation where incomes are, for the majority, growing rapidly. The politics of local identity is not simply a defensive politics which is fearful of change. People are open to change, but they seek to make change relevant to their personal circumstances by differentiating the homogenizing forces which globalization brings. In doing so, they perceive that only a government which is accountable locally can be responsive locally. In this way local interaction and a thriving grass-roots politics are encouraged.

This politics of identity is sharply focused in Taiwan. Repressed feelings of a distinct Taiwanese identity now find political expression and the independence versus reunification debate reaches even into families with roots in both camps. But a vigorous grass-roots politics can also be seen in supposedly apolitical Singapore. In the Potong Pasir area, for instance, a strong local political movement supports a political leader identified very much with the concerns of a largely working class community. In China itself, direct elections at the village level stem the pervasive influence of the Communist Party, which is increasingly under pressure from populist grass-roots democracy.

The New Asian Politics: Populism through Democracy

It is populism, rather than democratic theory, which explains the nature of the new Asian politics. Above the level of the ordinary citizen, there is indeed a debate going on between political elites. The nature of this debate in authoritarian China is anti-populist, hence disconnected from the concerns of ordinary people. The ruling Communist Party destroyed much traditional culture, reaching its height in the Cultural Revolution with the ravaging of temples and the denouncing of parents by their children. Its intellectual opposition, which was crushed at Tiananmen, equally disparages popular belief, feared to be feudal, backwards and inimical to modern scientific progress. Ever since the May Fourth movement, Chinese intellectuals equated democracy with scientific rationality and believed that individual Western values could be isolated and selectively grafted onto the indigenous political process. It is in precisely those areas of China which are most rapidly developing, the southern coastal provinces, that we find both vital grass-roots political debate as well as a strong resurgence of popular beliefs (whether traditional or, in the case of Christianity, modern). They are symptomatic of each other.

In Taiwan, democratic practice brings the two together. Thus, while it appears that globalization has led to growing demands for more democracy, it is democracy which has led to the growth of traditional practices and folk religion: populism. Politicians, in order to be elected, have to be populist. They campaign by making food offerings to hungry ghosts and taking part in temple festivals, whatever their private views. In South Korea, folk rituals also form part of the popular political vocabulary, and political movements are often characterized in terms of indigenous culture.

In Singapore in the 1960s, contending political factions similarly appealed to popular beliefs. Since the consolidation of a dominant party system, however, politics has taken a different turn as the government has resorted to imposing a "Confucian" national ideology on a populace it viewed as in danger of becoming "deculturalized". What is interesting here is that, as John Clammer noted, Singapore already has a culture which is "an amalgam of many bits of tradition, many utterly transformed by their transformation to Southeast Asia, some more Malayan than Chinese, and very few any longer practised in China, the whole thing held together by a rather vague ideological model of what Chinese culture should be".⁴ Below the official view, the local culture is dynamic and economically vibrant, though not necessarily analogous to the values of the Confucian elite, even if it believes it to be so.

The new Asian politics is more firmly based where it feeds off the wellspring of popular beliefs. The successful democratic transitions in South Korea and Taiwan had widespread social support. Moreover, their success arises not directly from any crusade for democratic principles in opposition to authoritarian rule - important as that may be - but from their association with political cultures which are notably populist. It is their appeal to popular beliefs rather than abstract principle which is the key to understanding their success. What we may in fact be witnessing here is the evolution of an elitist oligarchic tradition into a democratic one; the paradox is that a successful evolution depends on a coming to terms with traditional populist culture, rather than its rejection through cleaving to traditional elitism.

The New Asian Values: Confucianism as Cultural Explanation

The idea of an "Asian tradition" is very new. National traditions have been strong and rooted in peoples' perceptions. But the sense of a regional identity and shared heritage is a notion of today, the result of the burgeoning rapid modernization taking place through the region and the pride which people feel for this modernization.

The Japanese playwright Masakazu Yamazaki talks about the drive to modernize as the common denominator of all Asian national civilizations, bringing about a sense of Asian identity. But civilization is not culture. Culture is not universalistic. So under the broad umbrella of Asian modernization, we see the revival and new flourishing of a range of traditional Asian cultures. As they are newly revived, so new elements of universality are being mixed in from the contemporary environment. But each of them still retains a component of its original identity.⁵ We should therefore be concerned with the living tradition: how the past lives on and mixes with ideas from the present. But there is little, apart from polemic, critical examination of what is so distinctive in the Asian heritage that is making an impact in an increasingly

modernized Asian world. Such a consideration is vital in assessing past achievements and in predicting prospects for Asia.

The regional heritage from the past that is being discovered - or in some ways constructed - is Confucianism. This is a broad reference to a general set of values and precepts regarding how people should behave that spread originally from China and its dominance as a source of ideas. This can be linked to Confucius's teachings, although it is intermixed with Buddhist, Taoist and other doctrines with all kinds of contradictory implications. While there is now an increasing awareness through the region of the influence of China upon many countries' traditions and of the Confucian core in this Chinese teaching, the way these implications play out is different in each country. The resulting behaviour patterns cannot all be readily identified as Confucian. The cultural distinctiveness of Asian models of governance is nowadays fashionably attributed to Confucian doctrine. Asian politics has all to do with the Asian spirit, defined as a belief in authoritarian control, respect for bureaucracy and emphasis on the group at the expense of the individual. There is the inescapable suspicion that for many Asian governments Confucian values provide a handy imprimatur to practise the authoritarian politics which their people supposedly desire. They claim to be evolving their own distinctively Asian model of politics, which in some dangerously simplistic interpretations is inimical to democracy and liberalism. The former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew is often characterized as advancing this view, but a close reading of his public pronouncements shows a rather more sophisticated appreciation, which in no way attempts to defend authoritarian practices at the expense of concerns over legitimacy. Lee also disclaims that an "Asian model" exists, accepts that value systems do change, and criticizes Western society, interestingly enough, for a perceived erosion of individual responsibility and for an over-reliance on government to solve social problems.⁶

Clearly, culture is an explanatory feature of the workings of different societies. The prevailing cultural context must be expected to have a fundamental impact on people's attitudes and motivations. The difficulty lies, however, in elucidating the particular nature of their thought processes. Certainly in East Asia both the rights of individuals and their view of government can be seen in a particular light. But to make a crude dichotomy between exaggerated and mutually exclusive notions of conformist "Asian" - as opposed to individualistic "Western" - values is simply misleading.

The Confucian political tradition is, like many other schools of thought, far too broad and rich to be neatly categorized. For instance, Confucian teaching allots, indeed requires, a role for criticism of political authority. Every Chinese schoolboy learns the famous story of the irascible scholar, Hai Rui, who, before addressing his criticisms to the emperor, took the precaution of buying his own coffin. (Fortunately he lived on for another 20-odd years.) The moral of the story, as it is taught, is not that you should never criticize the ruler. Rather, the moral is that the educated gentleman is duty-bound to criticize the ruler and to redress his wrongs, whatever the consequences might be. Scholar and emperor are bound together in a bond of filial piety. Criticism of wrong by the former is a very strict duty, to ensure the good behaviour of the latter.

This story, however, is not one which readily equates with a Western individualistic liberal political tradition. Criticism of the ruler is not a democratic right. Rather, it is an elitist prerogative incumbent on those very people who uphold the structure of government and whose

criticisms are directed at maintaining it. Today, these people would be roughly equivalent to the bureaucracy; though the original definition was one of education. Thus, an action which fits readily into democratic liberal practice, as it is understood in the West, is actually seen in a qualitatively different light in Confucian culture.

How does Confucianism operate in practice at the populist level, in shaping the social and political choices which ordinary people make? Here the pontificating of Asian elites becomes irrelevant; we can discard all those abstract concepts of high Confucianism such as loyalty and filial piety. The common person does not read the Analects nor even some simple primer of Confucian doctrine. It is how Confucian values shape practice at the lower levels that is the more important.

Popular Confucianism, as it affects the man or woman in the street, is far removed from high Confucian theory. It is perhaps no more than a vague amalgam of residual ethical beliefs and a bias towards particular practices not amenable to rational analysis but nevertheless prompting certain attitudes towards the family, education, social responsibility and views of government. The family is the focus of attention and close affections, education is respected, public service honoured, but government viewed with a measure of suspicion. There is a concern to keep some distance between one's family and the state, whose intentions cannot, in the last resort, be fully trusted. Such attitudes are neither obviously democratic nor readily authoritarian. They do, however, appear to lend themselves to the kind of participatory community politics which these globalizing societies appear to spawn.

Similarly, in the dynamic business practices of the overseas Chinese, what we see is not the high Confucianism of the intellectual elite - which is extremely stifling towards entrepreneurial initiative and innovative ideas - but the vulgar Confucianism of ordinary people, far removed from the centre of traditional culture. A merchant father - as vulgar Confucianist - can send his sons out to secure their own fortunes and the sons can be extremely daring in their business dealings, knowing that should they fail, they have the security of the extended family to fall back on. They can therefore assume risks which they might otherwise not consider. The high Confucian mandarin, on the other hand, would not dream of allowing his sons to engage in business ventures, as even the smallest risk of failure carries the possibility of dishonouring the family.⁷

Tradition and Modernity

In looking at how cultural heritage shapes Asian behaviour today, we are concerned about how people think that they relate to the world around them - to their families, their social acquaintances, their governments - and how this shapes their behaviour. Some of this behaviour may have pre-echoes in Confucian doctrine of correct forms of behaviour, but the connection should not be drawn too tight. There is something in the popular stereotype - the idea of responsibility to the group, of individuals seeing themselves in terms of their relationships to others - but too much should not be made of it.

The key tension for the future will be between loyalty towards the family prescribed by tradition, and the loyalty demanded by the state. The state may well stress preserving family structures, yet

in Japan, the pressures of modern life increasingly mean that these structures are eroding, even if there are still tremendous pressures to conform. In China, after June 1989, the gap between reality and those values proclaimed by the state will (in the absence of movement by the state) mean that ordinary people will be reluctant to move beyond personalized ties and family-centred aspirations. But individual self-interest will be tempered by notions of family solidarity, harmony within the group and the desire for consensus. Questions will continue to be raised over which "Confucian" tradition to pursue: the idea of supporting the existing social order because of fear of chaos and instability, or the humanistic strand stressing the idea of people having their fate in their own hands and being able to work to improve their own individual futures.

The coming decades will see the emergence of a new Asian politics, shaped more by popular practice than by elitist concerns. This cannot be a process which is planted in the popular mind from above. Rather, it will rise from below, as the institutional expression of a lively political debate articulating the concerns of people caught up in rapidly changing globalizing societies. They will seek to institutionalize governmental authority, precisely in order to eliminate the arbitrary nature of "strong man" politics. Yet these institutions will equally be sensitive to the cultural nuances of the political contexts in which they are located.

Will this political institutionalization be democratic? Certainly it will be informed by democratic practice. But the precise mechanism is less relevant than the voice which political institutions give people in the decisions which shape their lives. In Asian societies it is simply not the case that individualism is not recognized. However, the individual cannot regard himself, or herself, as autonomous from his, or her, relations with other people. To describe this situation as group-orientated is overly simplistic. The point is that order is maintained through the individual having to act in a manner which takes account of the existing set of relations, or the "network" in which the person finds herself or himself. This network may not be - indeed, is not - impartial. But even though organized hierarchically, its functioning requires both parties to each relationship to conscientiously fulfil their responsibilities towards the other. Failure to do so disrupts harmony; and if one side falls short, the other is released from its corresponding obligations.

These understandings do not in themselves result in authoritarianism, as it is understood in the Western sense. East Asian Confucian-influenced society has in fact a deeply refractory attitude towards the emergence of divisive class-consciousness, which disrupts the harmony of the social network. Its authority is paternalistic, and paternalism requires participation in a spirit of mutual dependency. Superiors have to ensure the welfare of subordinates, because their power derives from the compliance of the latter. This is a situation which could in fact lend itself to democratic practice (with strong notions of individual obligations to society). However, institutionalization needs to formalize notions of accountability and of access to power, and the base of political legitimacy needs to be broadened beyond that of performance.

Political change in Asia will have to address these challenges. In doing so the debate will be conducted in terms of what Asian societies and peoples want, possibly even with a self-perception that Asia is somehow a culturally "Confucian" region. The forms of governance that result, however, will not be easy to characterize. They will reflect, though not replicate, the values of Western democracy. And they will be shaped by individual attitudes and social conventions borne of an intellectual tradition which defies stereotyping.

References

1. Lincoln Kaye, "Southern Cooking", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 May 1995, p. 22.
2. Kishore Mahbubani, Permanent Secretary of Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Pacific Way", *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 1 (1995), p. 102.
3. Ibid.
4. John Clammer, *Singapore: Ideology, Society and Culture* (Singapore: Chopman, 1983), p. 112.
5. Masakazu Yamazaki, "Asia, a Civilization in the Making", *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (1996).
6. Fareed Zakaria, "Culture Is Destiny: A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew", *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (1994).
7. Conversation with Professor Wang Gungwu, Institute for East Asian Political Economy, National University of Singapore, 21 February 1997.

The United States and East Asia: New Commonalities, and Then All Those Differences

David I. Hitchcock

Background

This paper is based upon research conducted in a number of East Asian countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, China, Korea and Japan. In 1994 and 1996 I conducted some very informal, unscientific polling of approximately one hundred people throughout Asia and repeated the exercise with Americans. The results of the 1994 polling on "Asian values" have taken on a life of their own because there existed little similar field research.

New Common Ground

We are all familiar with various reports and media stories about the "East Asian Miracle". Rapid economic growth of the region has indeed brought new prosperity to millions and significantly lowered the number living in poverty. Along with unusually high annual growth rates, democratic institutions have also been developing in many of these countries.

Since I was attempting in my research to probe underlying factors in these seven countries that may be affecting the formation of attitudes towards the United States and towards other countries, I began by asking what my respondents believed were the most important issues or problems their country faced today. The result - somewhat surprisingly - was a rather different picture of the region from the "miracle" image held by many Americans, at least. To varying degrees and with some exceptions, the problems described were remarkably similar, from country to country.

There was considerable concern or frustration over the quality and character of political governance. In some countries, the desire for greater public participation in the political process is quite strong; some noted a desire to see further relaxation of central authority. Yet even in the democratic countries, respondents described considerable cynicism or disillusionment towards the political process and the administration of government. This feeling was compounded in most countries by corruption within government and between government, business and bureaucracy. There also remains anxiety about ethnicity in some of the countries studied, and about the need to maintain social stability as essential to orderly economic development. There are historical memories of colonialism and past conflicts in the region - though these appear to be fading - that can play on national feelings. In China and Korea they are close enough to the surface to spring out when stimulated by contemporary events.

Respondents noted economic anxieties of varying degrees in each of the seven countries. Freer trade may threaten local industries; higher wages could result in factories leaving the country for cheaper labour elsewhere; too much foreign investment may corrupt local cultures; and new money is leading to more materialistic societies and wider income gaps between the poor and the top twenty per cent, though less so in Japan. In some cases, the economic boom also highlighted the gap between rural and urban populations.

One result of the rapid modernization and globalization of much of East Asia is a growing concern amongst citizens for the spiritual, moral and ethical shape of their society. The institutions one might expect to deal with these concerns were, they thought, largely found wanting. Although religion was attracting larger numbers of people, monks, priests and other religious leaders were not used to coping with the social and psychological effects of societies in the midst of rapid change. Some referred to a spiritual vacancy, to the loss of a moral compass, to the diminishing influence of traditional values and guidelines. As for other traditionally influential institutions - the family and schools - both were generally considered less effective than in the past. Modern, urban life has reduced the number of members living under the same roof, and they spend less time at home together. Divorce rates and general family tensions are on the increase practically everywhere. While health and welfare were traditionally provided by the family much more so than in the West this, too, seemed less reliable. Respondents in some countries, especially in North-East Asia, are worried about the future cost of medical care and public welfare. Schools too, it was said, are often failing to provide education that would help children to learn to think for themselves, to be creative. The basic skills were taught well; but it was felt that the changing times called for reforms in curriculum, including civic or moral education.

This, of course, was only one side of developments in each of these countries - the vast improvement in the lives of many millions was taken as a given. But it was because of this rapid improvement that the concerns had become quite widespread. Nowhere did I gain the impression that these problems would necessarily overwhelm these countries. But they are a part of the story Americans rarely hear about.

I was struck by how uncannily similar the concerns I was hearing about in seven East Asian countries resembled issues troubling many Americans about their own society. Trust in American government is down. There is what Francis Fukuyama has warned about, a diminishing of America's "social capital" which could be hard to replace.¹ Corruption, or "sleaze", in political campaigns is up (though it has always been there to some degree). The income gap in the United States between the lowest and highest twenty per cent is at a new high; not as wide as in some of the seven East Asian countries, but wider than in most. The economy is perhaps the world's strong-est and most productive, but at a cost of considerable distress from "downsizing".

American public education, still highly regarded at the university level, requires many reforms in public schools, where literacy and knowledge of mathematics and history are far too low. While respondents in East Asia reported a desire to have more from education than the basic, rote skills, Americans complain that their schools are not effectively teaching the core subjects - thus presenting an interesting phenomenon in which countries on opposite shores of the Pacific seem to be shuffling backwards, towards each other.

Books about family values in America have become best-sellers and important planks in American political party platforms. Membership in churches, synagogues, temples, shrines and mosques is up - more widespread religious activity than in almost all of East Asia - yet "spiritual loss" and inner stress, especially from peer and parental pressure on youth, have increased substantially. Teenagers are more independent in the United States, too, and the results - more drugs and teenage pregnancies - are the subject of a daily stream of radio, TV and press comment.

Images of the United States: Good and Bad

A cluster of questions about positive and negative aspects of the United States revealed a rather contradictory picture. The negative images mentioned by respondents in each country - crime, bombings, private militia, drugs, violence, sex, racial conflict, the homeless - were almost the same. Yet the "land of opportunity" and liberty, of friendly and generous people, of volunteerism, a country on the cutting edge of innovation and creativity in the arts, sciences and commerce was also part of the picture. Many I spoke with, however, believe the negative is now overshadowing the positive, especially among the general public, who learn about the country mostly through television.

Yet while the "dark" side of America may not be far "off-screen" in many Asian homes, respondents reported that there is still a deep admiration, especially among the better read and travelled, for American ideals and openness; and a sense that despite its serious problems, the United States remains enormously resourceful, resilient and wealthy, still at the pinnacle of both "hard" and "soft" power in the world. To summarize East Asian views of the United States, many respondents expressed that, despite its serious problems, some of which are exported to East Asia along with trade, investment and popular culture, the country is still a fascinating one. Despite signs of social decay, the United States is still powerful, wealthy, technologically inventive and creative. US society may ignore its homeless, but it presses for equality for its citizens and promotes freedom and openness more than most countries do.

However, another perception is that the United States, despite its own problems, zealously pursues East Asia with its own agenda, too often reflecting its Cold War superpower status. The United States appears to them to be demanding change even faster, ignoring the avalanche of economic and social change that is already turning their societies upside down. While they may even take some comfort in US domestic disarray, the respondents knew at heart that it is still powerful, resourceful and wealthy.

The United States and much of East Asia turn out to have a vast expanse of common ground where similar - but not necessarily the same - problems must be faced. But, at least on the US side, there has been very little effort to reach out to exchange ideas and experience. Thus, the opportunity for a much greater two-way flow of ideas and experience in dealing with the numerous problems presents itself. Most respondents were careful to stress that such exchanges should be among professionals, should be largely private, and usually should take place bilaterally. They warned against packaged American solutions and emphasized the importance of real equality and mutual respect in such an endeavour. These caveats, and indeed many of the

responses I received, suggested one basic and apparently still frequent and irritating aspect of America's contact with much of East Asia. There is still the perception that the United States is too domineering, self-righteous, insensitive, threatening and superior.

When I asked respondents how the United States should react to Asian criticism in its approach to the region, the replies were almost uniform: there is a need for more consultation, sensitivity, accommodation and humility. When queried about characteristics of their own culture that they felt the United States could use more of, the replies were also similar, and can be summed up in one word: tolerance.

Questionnaires on Values and Practices of Governance

In 1994, for a report on "Asian Values and the United States: How Much Conflict?", I asked 100 East Asian specialists and opinion leaders to indicate the most "critically important" personal and societal values and qualities listed in random order. My respondents were asked to indicate these values for people in their country, not for themselves. Americans also participated in the exercise. Two of the top five personal values identified were common to both East Asians and Americans: hard work and self-reliance. Honesty was sixth on the American list and third for East Asian respondents. Two of the top six societal values/qualities were also common to both East Asians and Americans: freedom of expression and official accountability.

The largest gap between Americans and East Asians in the personal values/qualities list was in how each group scored "respect for learning" and "obedience to parents" (although the latter was not high with either group). The largest gap between East Asian and American replies on the list of societal values/practices was over the importance each attributed to an "orderly society" (71 per cent of the East Asians versus 11 per cent of the Americans); "personal freedom" (82 per cent of the Americans versus 32 per cent of the East Asians); and "individual rights" (78 per cent of the Americans versus 29 per cent of the East Asians). The percentage of East Asians indicating as "critically important" "decision by majority" or "decision by consensus" was, however, approximately the same as in the United States. And the percentage supporting "resolve conflicting political views through open debate" or "through private consultation" was identical - an interestingly high total for "majority" and "open decisions".

In the 1996 study, I asked one hundred experts and opinion leaders - some of the same persons - to study a list of certain practices governing society, twelve practices in all, and identify those which were in their judgement "most important" and "least important" to people in their country. The closest scoring by both Americans and East Asians was on the importance of "a speedy trial"; "humane working conditions"; and "to be paid a fair wage". The widest gap between East Asian and American respondents was over the importance of "can say and write what you think" and "can refuse to testify against oneself". But generally, there was considerable convergence between East Asian and American replies on the relative importance of practices governing society. The highest scores of "most important" practices by the East Asian respondents were "to be paid a fair wage", then "open elections" and "humane working conditions". The highest "most important" scores for Americans were "can say and write what you think"; "open elections" and "cannot be discriminated against because of race, religion, gender, age or physical handicap" (also high among East Asians).

Of course these figures are only based on the judgement of a sophisticated group of people in seven countries, attempting to guess the views of others in their country. Such results can at best only give us a hint. But they may still be helpful. There were large gaps; but also some quite similar evaluations. The 1994 study showed a large difference in the relative importance North-East Asians and South-East Asians give to "follow religious teachings" (higher in South-East Asia) and to "inner self-fulfillment" and "self-reliance" (higher in North-East Asia). On the societal values list, "personal freedom" and "individual rights" were more important in North-East Asia than in South-East Asia. On the other personal and societal values, however, North-East Asian and South-East Asian scores were similar.

Global Chasm or Signs of Convergence?

We are all familiar with those in East Asia and the United States who have warned of deepening cultural "fault lines", cultural "chasms" and "civilizational clashes" between the "West and the rest". Samuel Huntington, despite the tough criticism his 1993 Foreign Affairs article received, repeats his theories in a new book and also proposes that Americans "renew and preserve" their civilization "against challenges from non-Western societies". He then turns around and urges that peoples in all civilizations "should search for and attempt to expand the values, institutions and practices they have in common".

On the basis of my research there is reason to consider if the differences I have described may be gradually narrowing while the similarities and common interests and concerns increase. In addition, there are scholars who point out that although the cultural origins may have been very different, the concepts espoused at one time had some important similarities. The dean of American Confucius scholars, William Theodore deBary, suggests that the contrast between a greater emphasis on individual autonomy in modern Western conceptions of human rights and a greater emphasis on social and communitarian values in Confucianism, " ... is often overdrawn at the expense of shared concerns and understandings". DeBary points out that " ... social and communitarian values have by no means been lacking in the West, while respect for the dignity of the self and person have been central to Confucianism from its inception". He further states that over time, there was an increasing consciousness in Confucianist thinking of the "need for law in a constitutional sense and in the sense of due process". He notes that " ... at the same time, some Westerners concerned with social and communitarian values have been ready to find in Confucianism a remedy to what they see as an excessive individualism and libertarianism in the West".²

These points were also made at a Bangkok conference where, according to Don Emmerson, some Asian scholars and writers suggested that within their own cultures and religions, there were concepts and traditions - in Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam - that could be "construed to favor, if not universal and intrinsic rights per se, then at least the just outcomes sought by Western advocates".³

A number of East Asian experts have concurred with Jakarta's Dewi Fortuna Anwar that "despite the rhetoric about 'Asian values' which set Asian societies irrevocably apart from the West ... there is no denying that there is an increasing convergence between the two".⁴ Timothy Ong of

Brunei and Anwar Ibrahim of Malaysia emphasize the importance of learning from one another, stressing what we have in common rather than what separates us.⁵ Japanese diplomat Akio Kawato argues that "rather than clinging to traditional values ... [which] would only create opposition among the new middle class and youth ... Asians should grope for that which guides social change. ... What is needed is a search for new ideals. In the throes of economic expansion, a society that has lost its traditional values and has no ideals of its own would be concerned only with making money - one great casino."⁶

In my interviews, a number of respected experts and officials spoke warmly about the importance of US ideals of freedom, opportunity and dignity of the individual. Some wished their own people would be more conscientious about morality, rather than the United States becoming less so. Perhaps what disturbs people in East Asia most about the United States is not so much what Americans "stand for" but how Americans go about preaching and pushing their ideas and policy positions on others. Kim Byung-Kook has a wonderful explanation of cultural differences between Western concepts of abstract, universal truths on the one hand, and East Asian particularism or situationalism on the other. He suggests that the acceptance of liberal democracy and capitalism in Korea after the war was more for pragmatic reasons than as a matter of principle. Indeed, he argues that for Korea (and I would add perhaps Japan), it was a matter of national survival.⁷ In much of the region, it has been particular experience and the situation at hand, rather than universal propositions that Americans tend to believe in, which have tended to govern decisions and policies.

There are also traditional Asian behavioural patterns that tend to contribute to attitudinal differences with the United States. The avoidance of conflict in interpersonal relations is one of them. Moreover, a different attitude towards time, a tendency to round off the corners of differences slowly, finding what works rather than what is "right" or "wrong".

A New Direction for US-East Asian Relations

This differing emphasis in behaviour makes it essential that the United States give more thought to how Americans may be approaching East Asia in negotiations and other business. Various instances of US diplomatic actions that went wrong are given as examples. The United States should avoid pressure tactics and threats of sanctions against friends and allies; Americans must avoid measures that hark back to the Cold War. There is a remarkably wide area of potentially fertile common ground that could be much more actively nurtured by both sides of the Pacific. I refer to the challenge before us all to tackle the serious social problems that trouble all our societies.

There is much Americans can learn from East Asian experience and much that Americans can share, as they go about trying to overcome their social problems. What is called for is an entirely new level of largely private cooperation and exchanges, among civic education and language teachers, environmental education experts, local government administrators, drug programme specialists, jurists, criminologists, family and student counsellors, family court members, and religious leaders. NGOs and foundations can play an even larger role in these exchanges than at present.

These new discussions would be important in and of themselves, as they lead to new initiatives to alleviate problems of common concern. In addition, they could gradually also lead to a much broader area of commonality and to a new spirit of Pacific community, as the atmosphere improves. This in turn could make it somewhat easier to overcome more narrow bilateral diplomatic differences between the United States and East Asian countries.

Do "Asian Values" and "Asian Democracy" Exist?

Replies to my probing on "Asian values" did not support the concept of an "Asian way". One Malaysian scholar preferred "universal values, human values". Another Malaysian expert observed that the countries that talk the most about "Asian values" are Singapore and Malaysia, whose "... own cultures are not so deep, so they identify the issue most keenly". A well-known Indonesian former journalist noted "we are part of Asia - we all eat the same rice, but there is no Asian way of thinking, no real Asian way of thought". An Indonesian scholar said "we feel we are a part of Asia because of geography; we feel our culture is part of Asian culture; but the feeling of Asian may be diminishing because of globalization. It's strongest when dealing with outside powers". A Thai businessman noted that "we have all been at the same economic stage, and have more commonalities than the West, but it's not kinship".

Some respondents in South-East Asia set Japan aside from their vague sense of Asianness. Masakazu Yamazaki asserts that "the only thing Asian countries share together is modernity. ... Confucianism is one of many shared influences, but so many others are in conflict - despite the influence of Chinese civilization". Most Japanese I interviewed took the point of view that Japan is part of Asia in one sense, but is also apart from Asia. One scholar suggested that for economic and foreign policy reasons, "we are more pro-Asian now; there is not an increasing sense of Asianness in Japan, but our mutual interests are increasing ... the public is more pro-Asian than pro-American".

What all this suggests is that before we even arrive at the question of "Asian values" and "Asian democracy", we find considerable scepticism in the region about the degree to which the word "Asia" itself has much meaning beyond the geographical one. The diversity of the region - racial, cultural, religious, historical - makes it one of the richest, most fascinating areas of the world, but also seriously complicates the task of defining a discrete "Asian" form of democracy or "Asian" set of values. Perhaps it would help us in exploring these questions to see if one can separate human rights from democracy. Democracy, that is rule by the people, can - and has - trampled on the rights of some citizens in history. And some rather authoritarian leaders have been successful at advancing important economic human rights. The informal polling I carried out in 1994 and 1996 certainly suggested that in some important areas, the priority of certain values East Asians and Americans appear to hold may be quite different, at least for the time being. Nevertheless their long-term goals are not substantively different. The issue, as reflected in these polls, seems to come down largely to the proper balance between the role of the individual and the role of the community, between the power of the people, and the power of authority, between a peaceful conflict of ideas through debate, and the maintenance of order and stability.

Rulers, however they may be chosen, believe they are promoting the common good. But who defines that common good? Can it be accurately established if it is not decided by the people themselves, through open debate? If government leaders, no matter how capable, acting as "wise

and virtuous guardians", are left to define the common good, they may not always reflect the wishes of the people, but the wishes of powerful elites.⁸ In more open societies, there will always be debate over what the common good is. In less open societies, this debate may be restricted; leaders make this decision on behalf of everyone.

In the 1994 values poll, "accountability of public officials" scored high as a critically important value for both American and East Asian respondents. "Freedom of expression" also was important for both East Asians and Americans. In the 1996 poll, "choosing leaders through open elections" was second from the top among East Asian respondents on the list of "most important" practices of governance. This would suggest considerable acceptance of some important tenets of democracy.

Yet in the 1994 poll, there were sharp differences between East Asians and American respondents over the importance of "an orderly society", "rights of the individual", "personal freedom" and "preservation of harmony for the group". In particular, in Singapore, Indonesia, China and Malaysia, many stressed how crucial it was in the thinking of their governments to maintain public order and stability. Many people I interviewed in China emphasized that without strong, central control, there would be chaos. Memories of race riots in Malaysia, the ethnic mixture of Singapore, and Indonesia's and China's diverse subcultures, suggest that these countries have in common a strong determination to maintain order - if necessary at the expense of some individual liberties.

Interviews in both 1994 and 1996 suggest one other, rather deeply ingrained cultural characteristic that may contribute to the high emphasis on orderly society in much of East Asia: a traditional aversion to conflict in interpersonal relations, the instinct to try to settle differences gradually, using intermediaries in some countries, even putting off a final decision if there is still strong minority opposition. A closely related characteristic is the instinct to avoid public embarrassment. Such a behavioural characteristic would certainly tend to buttress the importance of orderly and harmonious societies in which the preservation of personal relationships is more important than confronting issues or people more directly.

In sum: Differences certainly exist between East Asian countries and the United States over the importance of some social values which have implications for politics and democracy, but these differences may be diminishing through globalization and modernization. Debate regarding the relationship between individual autonomy and the needs of the larger community, about order versus rights, goes on in the West every day; it is not really a geographic issue of Asia versus the West, or the "West versus the rest". Societies undergoing extremely rapid change face a mountain of social and economic problems which lead them to keep a fairly tight control over the political process while they focus on overcoming other more urgent problems. The priority of political liberalization tends to be a lesser one. But priorities can change. Western democracies certainly are not identical in their interpretation of human rights and liberties. So in East Asia, too, there is considerable variety. But for each Lee Kuan Yew, Suharto or Jiang Zemin, there is an Aung San Suu Kyi, Kim Young Sam, Fidel Ramos and Lee Teng Hui. This makes it very difficult to define Asian democracy.

Even in the long run, we will find differing approaches to governance and to the balance between the rights of the individual and the rights of the community, between order and freedom. But is this ongoing dynamic likely to be defined by region, or by culture and increasingly by open, competitive market economies?

Conclusion

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and other UN instruments provide a basic core that most countries subscribe to but do not always follow. As East Asian countries make progress economically and politically, we can hope - perhaps even expect - to find wider adherence to these core principles and standards. In the meantime, the West should show understanding and patience. The pace of change in East Asia is breathtaking and sometimes also quite upsetting. It is taking place in decades rather than in the century or two it took in the West. Nations will inevitably try to be true to their own ideals, and in the older democracies, this can be noisy and irritating to others. The more we can unite around a common core of recognized, international principles, the better. No single country can be the judge, though free countries will express their opinion even when it is not asked for. But if we strive together, respecting our differences while seeking fundamentally similar goals, and if we energetically cultivate the common ground between us, then we are likely to realize that our ideals for a truly "civil society" are remarkably similar.

References

1. Francis Fukuyama, Trust: *The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 321.
2. William Theodore deBary, in his introduction to deBary, ed., *Confucianism and Human Rights* (forthcoming).
3. Donald K. Emmerson, "Can East Meet West on Human Rights?", *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 1996, B5.
4. Dewi Fortuna Anwar, "The Impact of Social-Cultural Changes on US-East Asian Relations", paper presented at a conference on Cultural Factors in US-East Asian Relations, Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, 29-31 July 1996.
5. Timothy Ong, "All This Talk about Asian Values Sends an Unhelpful Message", *International Herald Tribune*, Opinion Section, 20 May 1996; Anwar Ibrahim, "Asia's Moral Imperative", *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 13 May 1996.
6. Akio Kawato, "Is a Clash of Cultures Inevitable?", *Chuo Koron*, December 1995.
7. Kim Byung-Kook, "A Journey without a Vision: Politics of Democratic Consolidation in Korea", paper presented at a conference on Democracy in East Asia, sponsored by the International Forum for Democratic Studies, National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, D.C., 14-15 March 1996, pp. 15-18.
8. Michael Freeman, "Human Rights, Democracy and "Asian Values"", *The Pacific Review* 9, no. 3 (1996), pp. 352-66.

A Clash of Values? Human Rights in the Post-Cold War World

James T. H. Tang

Human rights issues have come to international prominence in the post-Cold War world.¹ As Western governments trumpeted ideological victory in the aftermath of the Cold War, East Asian states mounted a challenge to Western beliefs on human rights. The human rights positions of East Asian states have generated tensions with the West and given rise to far-reaching regional and global implications. This paper addresses the post-Cold War East Asian challenge to the contemporary "Western" understanding of human rights and its implications for regional international relations. It also explores the prospects for a regional approach to resolving human rights differences and better human rights protection.

In December 1990, when the United Nations decided to convene a World Conference on Human Rights, the international environment seemed to offer a historical opportunity for the creation of a new world order in which human rights would occupy a central place.² The euphoria, however, was misplaced. Instead of focusing on further developments of the global human rights protection system on the basis of the liberal tradition, Member States became logged in debates about fundamental and competing conceptual issues. Several Asian states questioned the applicability of universal human rights in different cultural, economic and social settings. The Asian regional preparatory meeting which took place in Bangkok between 29 March and 2 April 1993 provided an opportunity for Asian governments to put forward their definition of human rights on the global agenda. The Bangkok Declaration, signed by over forty Asian governments, did not reject universal human rights. But the declaration suggested that universality should be considered "in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds".³ The Asian states also sought to link development issues with human rights questions and emphasize the importance of non-interference.

In the event, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in June 1993 did not turn into a battleground between Asian and Western governments. Nonetheless, their division was clear: Western governments criticized the human rights conditions in the Asian region and maintained that universal standards in human rights should be observed; East Asian states accused the West of using human rights to interfere with the domestic affairs of other countries, and ignoring the different economic, social and cultural conditions in the developing world.⁴ This East Asian challenge, however, is not only based upon culture.⁵ The confrontation must also be understood in the context of the spectacular economic development in the Asia-Pacific region.

The economic rise of the Pacific region has led to intense discussion about whether a fundamental shift in world politics has taken place.⁶ As the debate about the meaning and theoretical implications of the Pacific phenomenon among international relations scholars becomes fashionable, some East Asian commentators seem to have drawn the conclusion that the

East Asian mode of development has proved to be more successful than that of the West. They assert that their political systems and economic policies are enjoying ascendancy and that they can offer "an alternative vision of the values needed for a better world".⁷ Western values appear to be set on a collision course with Asian traditions and economic priorities in the form of a "clash of civilizations".⁸ To what extent can different interpretations of human rights exist in the contemporary world? Have human rights differences between the industrialized North and the developing South replaced the East-West ideological confrontation as the major source of international conflict? Can the differences over human rights between East Asian countries and the West be resolved?

Human Rights in World Politics

Human rights questions have been on and off the agenda of world politics since the end of the Second World War. The holocaust in Europe and Japanese atrocities in Asia generated political momentum in the immediate post-war years for the establishment of an international human rights protection system. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 was a testimony to the international commitment to human rights protection.

International human rights protection, however, has proved to be a rather uneven process in different parts of the world over the past half-century. The European system, which has been characterized as an enforcement regime, is the most developed, with comprehensive coverage, a highly developed set of mechanisms and procedures and a high degree of national compliance. Elsewhere regional arrangements for human rights have been established, with the exception of the Asian region, where no region-wide human rights protection system exists. Human rights were usually accorded low priority by Asian states, which devoted their energy to efforts in developing their economies, and creating national identities. Cold War confrontation and the struggle for independence have therefore shaped the agenda of human rights in Asia for more than forty years.

Another dimension to human rights is a changing domestic human rights agenda in many East Asian states. The renewed international attention to human rights co-incided with a more vocal domestic articulation of human rights concerns in the region brought about by social, economic and political changes which have come about in the post-decolonization era. Regional and local non-government groups have become far more aggressive in championing the protection of human rights.

In a region which has been dominated by authoritarian regimes, political structures in countries like South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines have undergone significant changes in the past ten years. These newly liberalizing states have sought to accommodate a more pluralistic polity and become more responsive to a widening domestic human rights agenda. In some other East Asian states, however, economic success has not led to political liberalization. Countries such as China have undergone dramatic changes since the late 1970s, but the state's response to the changing economic and social conditions has been greater assertiveness.

International pressure on East Asian states over human rights has been interpreted as an attempt to undermine their political position and therefore a threat to regime survival. The Beijing

government's uncompromising stance towards political dissidents during the visit of the US Secretary of State Warren Christopher in early 1994 is probably also a response to the perceived threat to the leadership's authority. Human rights differences between the Western world and East Asian countries can therefore be a major source of friction, creating problems for the Asia-Pacific region's search for a post-Cold War regional security structure and better regional economic co-operation.

The East Asian Challenge

The post-Cold War international debates on human rights have been referred to as a clash between the post-colonial approach and the neo-colonial approach. The post-colonial approach, developing from the liberal tradition, emphasizes the interdependence of states and the triumph of the liberal democracies over authoritarianism. The neo-colonial approach sees a continuation from the colonial era to the present, rather than the creation of a new world order, with Western industrialized countries continuing their exploitation of the developing world with new allies in the form of the ruling classes in the developing world or major multinational corporations.⁹ The Western approach to human rights, which places more importance on civil and political rights and the universality of human rights on the basis of the liberal tradition, is usually associated with the post-colonial approach. The Asian position on human rights, which stresses the importance of economic and social rights, as well as cultural differences, has been identified with the neo-colonial approach. While these two approaches provide useful analytic frameworks in understanding the differences between the Western and Asian positions on human rights, they do not address the East Asian challenge which has been built on the economic success of the region.

The remarkable economic success of a number of East Asian countries since the mid-1960s has often been linked to state policies. The relationship between government policy and the spectacular record of high growth of economies in the region - Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and China - has been the subject of a World Bank policy research report.¹⁰

These economies consistently outperformed most of the rest of the world beginning in the 1960s. They grew more than twice as fast as the rest of East Asia, three times as fast as Latin America, and five times faster than sub-Saharan Africa. Even the oil-rich Middle Eastern economies and industrialized OECD group were easily outperformed. Their success is clearly not an accident. As the World Bank put it, "if growth were randomly distributed, there is roughly one chance in ten thousand that success would have been so regionally-focused".¹¹ While there are a number of fundamental economic factors behind the phenomenal East Asian success story, researchers from the World Bank also concluded that systematic government intervention in fostering development can be observed.

The critical role of the state in "guiding" the economy to the right direction in most of the successful East Asian economies has challenged the liberal economic assumption that the state should be a neutral incentives regime. This has given rise to the statist perspective that government policy is the key in understanding the success of East Asian economies. While the statist perspective has been challenged, and competing perspectives have been articulated, the

critical role of the state in the East Asian economies has been widely acknowledged. Indeed, interest in the "state" among social scientists has been revived.¹²

The academic debate on the role of the state, however, may seem irrelevant to political elites in the region, who believe that the formula of success has been found. They suggest that a politically stable environment, brought about by a strong and dominating but competent government committed to a developmentalist strategy, is the best way to go ahead. East Asian states have become more assertive in defending their political power and presenting a different approach to human rights problems.¹³

The East Asian challenge can be seen in cultural, economic and political terms. Culturally, they assert that the Western approach ignores the specific cultural traditions and historical circumstances of Asian societies, whose interpretations of human rights are different from the Western tradition. Economically, they maintain that the priority of developing Asian societies has to be the eradication of poverty: the right to survival must come first. Therefore, political stability under the capable leadership of good government is essential. They also question the motives of the West by accusing the Western countries of having double standards and using human rights merely as an instrument for advancing Western economic or security interests. In some ways the East Asian reaction to Western pressure on the human rights question can be characterized as a realist response: Western human rights policy has been seen as "power politics in disguise" - an instrument for advancing Western political and economic interests.¹⁴

But if both the post-colonial and neo-colonial approaches cannot adequately describe the nature of the East Asian challenge to human rights problems in the Asia-Pacific, the realist interpretation clearly has its limitations too. The growing pressure on the East Asia stance on human rights comes not only from Western governments and citizen groups (both international and regional). The rising importance of international institutions, and increasing demands for better human rights protection within the East Asian region are all relevant features in the evolution of the contemporary understanding of human rights protection. Describing the current debate over human rights as the East Asia region versus the democratic West oversimplifies the growing complexity of contemporary international relations.

An Alternative Regional Approach?

As human rights issues return to the international agenda, the record of East Asian countries has been subjected to critical scrutiny by the international community. While there may be some scope for interpreting human rights differently and perhaps even assigning different priorities to specific human rights according to the region's special circumstances, East Asian states are on the defensive.

In mounting an intellectual challenge and political offensive to the "Western version" of international human rights protection, East Asian states have sought to identify some of the inconsistencies of Western human rights policies, and highlighted some of the self-contradictory tendencies in an area which is diverse and contentious. The acceptance of universality clearly does not necessarily mean that the reality of cultural diversity can be rejected. Moreover, given the range of human rights which are being advanced in the contemporary world, it is by no

means surprising that some of these rights are in conflict, and the priorities of different societies over human rights demands are not always the same.

The importance of economic and social developments in measuring human rights conditions is widely accepted throughout the human rights community. A study commissioned by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights identified poverty as a key obstacle to the advancement of human rights. As the report suggests, worldwide poverty and increasing disparity between the North and the South "is endangering the ethical foundation of our Planet".¹⁵ The economic dimension of human rights protection can be highly complicated, involving difficult social and political questions. The report concludes that poverty is a human rights violation and "an economic problem linked to national and international development policies, and a social and political issue that has to do with entitlements of liberties and freedoms, popular participation, and above all democracy".¹⁶ Asian governments are clearly not alone in claiming that economic rights are important.

East Asian states, however, have not emerged victorious in the current debates. While Asian governments' emphasis on development needs and cultural differences are not entirely groundless, they have failed to justify their policies in the suppression of human rights or in claiming that they are the only representatives of their societies and thereby the only adjudicators of human rights standards. As many human rights activists have observed, while development is a legitimate human rights concern in the developing world, all too often state development policies in such countries become a source of human rights violations when people are forced to leave their homes for development projects or are deprived of their means of livelihood.

Despite the economic success of many East Asian countries, the power relationship between the state and the people is overwhelmingly in favour of the state. Many East Asian governments therefore cannot avoid confronting the responsibility of widespread human rights abuses in their countries. The human rights conditions in many East Asian countries have consistently been rated as poor by international human rights monitoring groups. The Humana human rights country rating, for example, has ranked most East Asian countries as below average. Several Asian countries are in fact at the bottom of the scale.

The Humana ranking is somewhat problematic, however, reflecting a Western bias towards individualist civil and political rights. Nonetheless, as an independent and respectable source of human rights monitoring, its assessment is a useful yardstick in measuring human rights conditions.¹⁷ In fact most reports by independent human rights organizations have been highly critical of the situation in East Asia. Governments in the region are not only notorious for their poor human rights record, they also have a poor record in making commitments to internationally recognized norms.

Indeed, in spite of the growing importance of human rights issues in world politics, Asian states prefer to deal with human rights within their own domestic jurisdiction, resisting international monitoring. They are reluctant to sign major instruments of international human rights protection. Countries such as China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are not signatories to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

International opinion and the influence of external pressure on human rights development in Asia have proved to be rather mixed for a variety of reasons. The record of the United States in influencing human rights conditions overseas, for example, has been exaggerated. In fact during the Cold War US security objectives often took precedence over human rights concerns. American support for right-wing military regimes has long been a bitter issue for human rights advocates from Latin America. When the news that the Joint Planning Committee of the NGO forum in Vienna had invited former US president Jimmy Carter as a speaker for the closing session of the forum was reported, Latin American NGO delegates denounced him as "the ex-president of a state that is principally responsible for the major violations of human rights and of international law around the world".¹⁸

In Asia, China's human rights conditions were accorded low priority in the agenda of US-China relations during the 1970s when a tacit strategic alliance against the Soviet Union was formed between the two countries. US human rights policy seen from Asia appeared to apply only to the communist states and was therefore perceived as hypocritical.

Since the end of the Cold War many East Asian states have continued to adopt an uncompromising attitude towards human rights differences with the West, and deny human rights NGO activities at home. They are often ruthless in dealing with political dissidents, considering them as a threat to regime stability. The Chinese position was unyielding when US Secretary of State Warren Christopher visited Beijing in March 1994 and talked to Chinese leaders about human rights conditions in China, which had been linked to the Clinton administration's renewal of the Most-Favoured Tariff treatment for China. Foreign Minister Qian Qichen bluntly stated that "China is under no obligation to implement the executive order of the US President".¹⁹

But external pressure has clearly played a part in shaping government policies and the human rights agenda in the region. The Japanese government, for example, clearly found it necessary to adopt a tougher posture towards China after the Tiananmen tragedy in 1989 as a result of Western pressure, despite its intuitive tendency for a friendly political relationship with its giant neighbour. Even hardline states like China find it difficult to ignore human rights issues, making a significant policy shift in encouraging scholarly research on human rights. The state sponsorship of scholarly human rights study in the PRC was largely a direct response to Western condemnation of the human rights conditions in China following the Tiananmen incident in 1989. The diversification of international contacts by human rights activists in the Philippines gradually made a significant impact on international public opinion towards the Marcos regime, which was highly dependent on foreign economic aid.

Moreover, political liberalization in several East Asian states since the 1980s, such as the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, has forced governments to be more accountable. They are more ready to confront their own human rights problems, thus creating a more encouraging environment for regional cooperation over human rights protection. In the Philippines "people's power" removed the Marcos regime from power. In South Korea the election of Roh Tae Woo was the first proper presidential election for years. Roh's successor, Kim Young Sam, a former opposition leader, is the first civilian president since the 1960s. The ruling party in Taiwan, the Kuomintang, has relaxed its political grip on Taiwanese society and

accepted open competitive elections as an integral part of the island's political process. Political liberalization has clearly led to a more positive attitude towards human rights protection in these countries. Political liberalization or democratization, however, do not necessarily lead to human rights improvements. The disintegration of the former Soviet Union and dramatic political changes in Eastern Europe have generated new issues in the human rights debate, and violent forms of human rights abuses.

Contradictory tendencies can be observed. First, the intensification of international tensions over human rights issues is taking place as the transformation in world politics provides new opportunities for establishing a new and peaceful regional order for the Asia-Pacific. The economic success of many East Asian states has also facilitated strong international links both across the Pacific and within East Asia, providing the basis for other forms of security arrangements and economic cooperation, including multilateral frameworks involving Western and Asian countries.²⁰ Second, the improvement in economic conditions in East Asian states and the political liberalization of the region are taking place, yet blatant human rights abuses have continued. Even in "newly liberalizing states" human rights violations obviously have not disappeared. Traditional practices die hard, and widespread human rights violations can still be observed. Moreover the sweeping economic changes in the region have been driven primarily by economic policies which are market focused. While this can weaken state power, it has created new social and economic problems with human rights implications.

The role of international intervention in human rights problems is controversial. The international community clearly has a role to play in assisting countries which suffer in conditions of natural disasters or war when individual rights are transgressed by warring groups or governments. The need for humanitarian assistance clearly supports the argument that a more flexible view of sovereignty should be accepted. In fact states which respect human rights and promote human welfare are more likely to be stable members of the international community.

East Asian states are reluctant to tolerate international involvement in human rights protection in the region, rejecting it as a Western attempt to impose a set of standards which are not consistent with Asian traditions and realities. Yet they have not produced a convincing alternative approach. International relations in the Asia-Pacific region are not as institutionalized as in Europe, and region-wide fora for discussing human rights issues are therefore limited. However, the rapid pace of economic development in the region has made an institutionalized framework of economic co-operation possible both at the non-governmental and inter-governmental levels, such as PECC and APEC. But the prospect that such organizations would provide the basis for the development of a human rights dialogue does not look promising at present. While some of them may provide a useful forum for keeping human rights issues on the agenda, the outlook remains uncertain.

What are the prospects for developing a regional institutional approach to human rights protection in East Asia in the light of international and domestic changes in the Asia-Pacific region?

Regional Human Rights Arrangements

Contemporary human rights protection was initially defined in universal terms. Regionalism was not supported at the United Nations following the Second World War because it was regarded by some as "a breakaway movement, calling the universality of human rights into question".²¹ Since the 1960s, however, regional conventions on human rights have been adopted in Europe, the Americas and Africa. The European arrangement is the most institutionalized and can be regarded as a successful example of regional cooperation over human rights protection by politically like-minded states which share a common cultural tradition.²²

If many Asian states have resisted committing themselves to international human rights regimes they have displayed even less interest in the establishment of a regional human rights system. They have rejected proposals for human rights mechanisms even at the subregional level, not to say region-wide arrangements.²³ The idea of a regional approach to human rights in Asia has been dismissed as impractical simply because of geography, history and culture. Asia covers a huge area, with a large population whose cultural traditions are diverse and share little in common in terms of political and economic development. It has been suggested that "an approach which considers the whole of Asia as one region for the purpose of international human rights is unrealistic".²⁴ With the exception of some South Pacific islands, Australia and New Zealand - countries on the margin of Asia - most governments in the region are not enthusiastic even about a subregional approach.

Jack Donnelly classified human rights regimes into four types of activity: declaratory, promotional, implementation, and enforcement regimes. All regimes, by definition, have standard norms, or at least guidelines, but their capacities to monitor and/or enforce the observation of norms vary. Declaratory regimes involve international norms but no international decision-making. Promotional regimes involve an exchange of information and efforts to promote the national implementation of norms. Implementation regimes involve monitoring procedures and policy coordination which are weak and under national control. Enforcement regimes involve binding international decision-making and strong forms of international monitoring of national compliance.²⁵

Using his framework Donnelly attempted a brief review of the evolution of human rights regimes since the end of the Second World War. In 1945 no international regimes on human rights existed. Ten years later a declaratory global regime had been established. With another ten years the global regime became a strong declaratory regime, and it developed into a promotional regime by 1975, and a strong promotional regime by 1985. Among regional regimes, Europe's was the only enforcement regime by 1985. The Inter-American regime, which was only a declaratory regime in 1965, however, had become a strong promotional/enforcement regime by 1985. The declaratory African regime only came into existence in the early 1980s. The absence of a human rights regime even of the declaratory kind in Asia, one of the world's largest and economically most dynamic region, is conspicuous.

The vast size of Asia and the complex cultural differences of the region defy a regional approach. Proposals for a human rights system have been consistently rejected by Asian governments. As early as 1964 a UN seminar in Kabul on human rights in developing countries discussed the

drafting of an Asian convention on human rights. The idea received further support in 1965 at the Southeast Asia and Pacific Conference of Jurists in Bangkok. The Philippines proposed to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1967 that regional commissions should be set up in regions where there were no such institutions. While regional arrangements were established in other parts of the world, the idea has not enjoyed wide support in Asia.

Again, during the 1982 Colombo seminar representatives from Asian governments did not favour the establishment of an Asian human rights commission. Those who favoured a global approach also feared that a regional or subregional framework in a region where many authoritarian regimes are in power might actually pose a threat to the cause of human rights because regional arrangements would run the risk of being overwhelmed by the representatives of such regimes.²⁶ Thus a combination of geography, historical circumstances, cultural diversity and political opposition has made the establishment of a regional human rights commission in Asia extremely difficult.

But countries in Asia exhibit similarities in the form of vast populations and highly complex social organizations that were in existence long before the reception of Western laws and legal concepts.²⁷ Communities in East Asia share a long history of economic, social and political interaction, even if some such interactions have not always been cordial. In the contemporary era most of them also experienced Western colonialism in one form or the other. The end of the Cold War should facilitate better political cooperation among them. Moreover East Asian states which have embarked on a similar export-oriented economic strategy share common interests in the face of Western protectionism.

The increasing importance of human rights in the post-Cold War international agenda may force East Asian states to rethink their approach to human rights problems. ASEAN states, for example, have attempted to develop an alternative approach to human rights management. In July 1992 an ASEAN think-tank submitted a note on human rights to the ministers meeting in Manila. This put forward a set of guiding principles for dealing with human rights issues, incorporating the ASEAN arguments on situational uniqueness. The submission expressed support for an impartial international monitoring body with comprehensive values and proposed that ASEAN should examine the feasibility of establishing a Commission on Human Rights. The establishment of such a commission, argued the think-tank, would enable ASEAN to develop and formulate human rights policies in accordance with its specific historic, economic and political circumstances. The Commission would also be the "embryo or catalyst" of a region-wide commission for the Asia-Pacific or even Asia as a whole.²⁸

Other proposals for international institutions in the region include the establishment of a US-China human rights commission. According to the proposal, the bilateral US-China human rights commission would consist of governmental and non-governmental members. The commission would provide a forum for discussing systemic human rights issues such as political crime and religious freedom, and act as a channel for regular exchange of human rights information.²⁹ Such institutions, if they are to be established, may help to ease international tensions in the region, but they are still on the drawing board, and many NGOs are suspicious that they may become an instrument of human rights management rather than human rights protection.

If there is an absence of governmental support for establishing region-wide human rights protection systems in the Asia-Pacific, the same definitely cannot be said of the non-governmental groups. In fact most initiatives for regional human rights protection have been made by NGOs. Since the 1970s Asian NGOs have been more and more active in promoting human rights protection in the region. Today's Asian NGOs, as an observer remarked, "are more numerous, better organized and more outspoken than ever before".³⁰ Most of them are national organizations, but some are organizations with wider regional concerns. These NGOs include Lawasia, the law association for Asia and the Pacific, the Asian Coalition of Human Rights Organizations, which was established in Bangkok, the ASEAN-based Regional Council on Human Rights in Asia, and the Asian Human Rights Commission and the Asian Legal Resource Centre, which were set up in Hong Kong in 1983.³¹ These are not the only human rights NGOs with a regional focus. The Asian Center for the Progress of Peoples and the Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives, for example, have been actively involved with human rights promotion in the region. The considerable number of regional organizations which attended the Bangkok NGO conference in 1993 is also indicative of the interests in human rights issues at the regional level. Many of these groups, however, may have different agendas, and a subregional focus. The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, and the Asian Students Association have a specific focus. In terms of resources and activities they may also have significant differences, but they have all been involved in the promotion of human rights with a regional focus.³²

The many initiatives for developing human rights arrangements by Asian NGOs can be classified into three major categories. The ideal model is characterized by a comprehensive and highly institutionalized human rights system with a human rights convention, a set of monitoring and investigative machinery as well as an enforcement mechanism. The second category is more action-oriented, involving coordinating human rights campaigns and organizing regional human rights promotion activities. A third category involves proposals for establishing human rights institutions for research and information exchange purposes with varying degrees of institutionalization.

Among the numerous Asian NGOs, Lawasia has been particularly active in putting forward concrete proposals on regional human rights institutions. Lawasia has drafted ten basic principles on human rights, and also produced a model Pacific Charter of Human Rights. In 1988 the organization recommended the establishment of a regional human rights research institute which would conduct research on human rights, offer human rights study courses, monitor human rights abuses and serve as an information clearing house for the region. One of the most recent proposals was put forward in a 1993 Lawasia meeting in Sri Lanka. The proposal envisages the establishment of an Asian convention on human rights, to be supported by an Asian human rights commission and a court of human rights.³³

The action-oriented category initiatives have been brought about by necessity because human rights advocates found it useful to coordinate their efforts in the promotion of human rights and in promoting Asian concerns in major international forums. The setting up of the regional NGO coordinating group in early 1994 greatly enhanced the efforts of Asian NGOs involved in the Bangkok regional human rights meeting and the subsequent Vienna meeting in June 1993. During the Vienna conference Asian NGOs were regarded as the best organized group and with

270 representatives, constituted the second-largest group in the NGO forum after Western Europe.³⁴ As a follow-up to the Vienna World Conference many Asian NGOs have put forward ideas for strengthening their links and coordinating their activities. In early 1994 a new regional NGO facilitating group was created during a meeting in Bangkok which was attended by 70 human rights advocates from 58 organizations based in 15 different countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The group intends to facilitate human rights campaigns and activities by enhancing information exchange and access to data about human rights issues and events of common interest, and the effectiveness of human rights protection actions and appeals.

The category of information and research-oriented organizations is closely related to the ideal model and action-oriented categories of regional NGO initiatives. Information exchange and obtaining access to information about human rights violations in the region are clearly critical for developing a legal protection framework or an action-oriented region-wide campaign. Several organizations have begun work in building up information networks on human rights issues. Another initiative on human rights information networking was made in September 1993, when an Asian regional meeting on human rights information exchange and networking took place in Hong Kong. The meeting, co-hosted by the Human Rights Database project at the University of Hong Kong and the Human Rights Information and Documentation System International, was attended by representatives of nine human rights documentation centres from eight countries.

Human Rights Monitoring and Information Networking

Measuring human rights violations is clearly no easy task. No comprehensive human rights data with reference to the particularities of human rights violations in the region are available. At present comprehensive and regular reports on human rights situations in the world are published either by government agencies such as the US State Department and international advocate NGOs such as Asia Watch, Amnesty International and Freedom House. Many of these reports cover the general human rights situation in the Asian region and specific human rights problems in Asian countries. Asia Watch, for example, released a report on human rights in the APEC region during the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation conference in Seattle in November 1993.³⁵ But such reports suffered from various limitations and none of them addresses the economic and social context of such problems.

Apart from technical problems, which have been discussed in a number of works,³⁶ existing reports also have been criticized on political grounds. Reports produced by individual governments are very often linked to specific policy objectives. Many independent observers, for example, have found the State Department reports useful, but as governmental reports their neutrality is questionable because their findings would have implications for US foreign policy.³⁷ International NGO reports on human rights have provided useful information on human rights and their findings have been cited often by human rights advocates. But the emphasis of some of these international NGOs may not be the same as their Asian counterparts. Compared to some Asian NGOs, Amnesty International, for example, may be more preoccupied with prisoners of conscience rather than broader concerns about political and social structures. The Freedom House annual report, "Freedom in the World", is another example. While the report is a conscious attempt in using standard data, the measures are vague, and more emphasis is placed on political and civil liberties, with scant reference to the social and economic dimensions of

human rights. Similarly, Asia Watch seldom ventures into the economic and social dimensions of human rights in its annual documentation of human rights violations in Asia.³⁸

Clearly a system of human rights protection should involve more efforts to examine the conceptual dimension of human rights protection in Asia. In a UN sponsored seminar in preparation for the Vienna World Conference, the problems of measuring the economic, social and cultural dimensions of human rights and developing indicators were discussed at length.³⁹ The major problem in developing indicators for measuring human rights is the subjective and qualitative nature of human rights. The interdependence and sometimes conflicting nature of certain economic, social and political and civil rights have further complicated attempts in developing a set of reliable and consistent indicators. While universal standards have been widely accepted in contemporary human rights debates, the North-South divide in the world does have implications for measuring achievements and understanding the source of human rights violations.

The development of an Asian approach to human rights protection requires the refinement of conceptual understanding of human rights in the Asian context, and greater expertise in measuring human rights standards as well as formulating better indicators. While many people in Asia would accept that political and civil rights, and economic and social rights, are indivisible, there has not been any comprehensive review of how such concepts can be applied in the East Asian context. Conceptualizing human rights in a regional and cultural-specific context remains highly problematic. The establishment of region-wide human rights protection mechanisms remains difficult. But efforts in developing information centres/networks, better data collection capacities and the promotion of region-wide information exchange have facilitated the emergence of what could be called "principled issue-networks on human rights".⁴⁰ Such an issue-network, characterized by its transnational nature, will help to facilitate greater human rights protection in the region.

Conclusions

There is no quick fix for resolving the human rights tensions between Western industrialized countries and states in the Asia-Pacific region. These tensions are not based entirely on different interpretations of human rights standards and international politics; they are also conflicts arising from different state-society power relationships and political arrangements. Unless dramatic political changes are to take place in the Asia-Pacific region, different interpretations and emphasis of human rights standards and values will remain an important source of international conflict and tension.

Important political, economic and social changes are forcing East Asian states to re-examine their positions towards human rights issues. A more general improvement of human rights in East Asia requires, among other things, greater social awareness, sustained economic development and more fundamental political changes. Efforts to develop a greater sense of common purpose on human rights protection, to further political liberalization, to develop further channels of institutionalized regional co-operation and the promotion of greater awareness will certainly go some way to the reduction of international tensions over human rights and create a better climate for human rights protection. But a regional alternative will only emerge when there

is an awareness of different regional conditions and a genuine commitment to human rights protection, backed up by appropriate institutions and processes at the national level.

Some years ago R. J. Vincent identified the inescapable tension between human rights and foreign policy by pointing out that "the society of humankind stands opposed to the club of states, and one of the primary rules of the latter was to deny membership to the former".⁴¹ Growing economic prosperity in the East Asian region is creating greater pressure for human rights improvement in the region, leading to the possibility of domestic political friction within Asian states with implications for regional stability. Governments in the region ignore human rights at their own peril.

References

1. This paper is developed from the introductory and concluding chapters of the author's edited book, *Human Rights and International Relations in the Asia-Pacific Region* (London: Pinter, 1995).
2. General Assembly resolution 45/155.
3. Declaration adopted by the ministers and representatives of Asian states in Bangkok, 2 April 1993, in preparation for the World Conference on Human Rights. Japan and Cyprus signed but expressed reservations on the statement.
4. A detailed account of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna and the parallel non-governmental organization activities can be found in *Terra Viva*, an independent daily published by the Inter-Press Service between 11 and 25 June 1993.
5. See for example James C. Hsiung, ed., *Human Rights in East Asia: A Cultural Perspective* (New York: Paragon House, 1985).
6. See for example Peter A. Gurevitch, "The Pacific Rim: Current Debates", *The Annals*, special issue on the Pacific Region: Challenges to Policy and Theory, vol. 505 (September 1989).
7. Tommy Koh, "The 10 Values That Undergird East Asian Strength and Success", *International Herald Tribune*, 11-12 December 1993, p. 6. See also interview with Lee Kuan Yew, *Time*, 14 June 1993, pp. 20-21.
8. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3, pp. 22-49.
9. Christopher Tremewan, "Human Rights in Asia", *The Pacific Review* 6, no. 1 (1993), pp. 17-30. My summary is a very simplified version of Tremewan's arguments.
10. *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
12. A general discussion of the role of the state is in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For discussions about the East Asian situation see Frederick Deyo, ed., *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); see also Jeffrey Henderson and Richard P. Appelbaum, "Situating the State in the East Asian Development Process", in Richard P. Appelbaum and Jeffrey Henderson, eds., *State and Development in the Asian Pacific Rim* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), pp. 1-26.

13. See for example Lee Kuan Yew, "Democracy and Human Rights for the World", speech delivered at the Create 21 Asahi Forum, Tokyo, 20 November 1992, as released by the Singapore Government.
14. See Jack Donnelly's "Twentieth-Century Realism", in Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel, eds., *Traditions of International Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 85-111.
15. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro with the collaboration of Malak El-Chichini and Tulio Khan, "Poverty, Marginalization, Violence and the Realization of Human Rights", a study commissioned by the Centre for Human Rights pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 45/155 of 18 December 1990 and 46/116 of 17 December 1991. Paper submitted to the Fourth Session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Conference on Human Rights. A/CONF.157/PC/60/Add.3, 1 April 1993, p. 29.
16. See for example Clarence J. Dias, "Relationship between Human Rights, Development and Democracy: South/North NGO Solidarity in Fostering Popular Participation", discussion paper for a workshop on the relationship between development democracy and human rights, NGO forum held in conjunction with the World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 10-12 June 1993.
17. For a discussion of the report's methodology and a defence of its limitations see the introduction in Charles Humana, *World Human Rights Guide*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 3-10.
18. *Terra Viva*, 12 June 1993, p. 11. Carter's speech was drowned by the booing from Latin American and Caribbean delegates. See also *Terra Viva*, 14 June 1993, pp. 1, 6.
19. *South China Morning Post*, 17 March 1994.
20. A useful source on international security issues in the Asia-Pacific region is the working papers produced by the research programme of the North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue organized by the Centre for International and Strategic Studies and the Joint Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies, York University.
21. Karel Vasak, "Introduction: Regional Institutions for the Protection of Human Rights", in Karel Vasak, ed., *The International Dimension of Human Rights*, revised and edited for the English version by Philip Alston, vol. 2 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1982), p. 451.
22. A solid discussion of the European arrangements can be found in Karel Vasak, "The Council of Europe", in Karel Vasak, ed., *The International Dimension of Human Rights*. A more up-to-date and straightforward account of the Council's work can be found in *The Council of Europe and Human Rights*, a report prepared by the Council of Europe for the World Conference on Human Rights, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 1993.
23. The term international regimes is used with reference to the existing literature on regime theory. See Stephen Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983). A discussion of international human rights protection and regimes theory is in Jack Donnelly, "International Human Rights: A Regime Analysis", *International Organization*, no. 40 (1986), pp. 599-642.
24. Virginia A. Leary, "The Asian Region and the International Human Rights Movement", in Claude E. Welch, Jr., and Virginia A. Leary, eds., *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), p. 16.
25. Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 206.

26. Seminar on national, local and regional arrangements for the promotion of human rights in the Asian region, Colombo, 21 June-2 July 1982. See Virginia A. Leary, "The Asian Region and the International Human Rights Movement", in Claude E. Welch, Jr., and Virginia A. Leary, eds., *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights*, pp. 16-18.
27. Hiroko Yamane, "Asia and Human Rights", in Karel Vassak, ed., *The International Dimension of Human Rights*, p. 653.
28. See a detailed discussion of the ASEAN-ISIS proposal in Jusuf Wanandi, "Human Rights and Democracy in the ASEAN Nations: The Next 25 Years", *The Indonesian Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (First Quarter, 1993), pp. 14-24.
29. For a discussion of the commission see John Kamm's opening address to the International Colloquium on Human Rights and Foreign Policy, 11 March 1993, University of Hong Kong. John Kamm, a former president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, has been a key supporter of the US-China Commission on Human Rights.
30. Sidney Jones, "The Organic Growth: Asian NGOs Have Come into Their Own", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17 June 1993, p. 23.
31. Virginia A. Leary, "The Asian Region and the International Human Rights Movement", in Claude E. Welch, Jr., and Virginia A. Leary, eds., *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights*.
32. A full list of NGOs which attended the Bangkok NGO conference on human rights in March 1993 can be found in "Our Voice: Report of the Asia Pacific NGO Conference on Human Rights", and NGOs' statements to the Asia Regional Meeting, Bangkok, Asian Cultural Forum on Development, 1993, pp. 263-86.
33. For discussions on the regional charter and human rights commission see Nihal Jayawickrama, "An Asian Convention on Human Rights", paper presented at Lawasia 1993, Sri Lanka, 13 and 16 September 1993; and Tony Deklin, "Current Initiatives in the Pacific for the Development of a Regional Human Rights Organization", paper presented at a seminar on human rights organizations in Asia and the Pacific, Taipei, October 1990; and also Yougindra Khushalani, "Human Rights in Asia and Africa", *Human Rights Law Journal* 4, part 4 (1983), pp. 403-42.
34. The breakdown of organizations by region by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, which was the coordinating organization for the forum, is as follows: Africa: 202; North America: 178; Latin America: 236; Asia: 270; Australia/Oceania: 38; Western Europe: 426; Eastern and Central Europe: 179. *NGO Newsletter*, no. 4 (July 1993).
35. Asia Watch, *Human Rights in the APEC Region* (New York: Asia Watch, November 1993).
36. See, for example, Michael Stohl, David Carleton, George Lopez and Stephen Samuels, "State Violations of Human Rights: Issues and Problems of Measurement", *Human Rights Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (November 1986), and also Harry Scoble and Laurie S. Wiseberg, "Problems of Comparative Research in Human Rights" and John F. McCamant, "A Critique of Present Measures of Human Rights Development and an Alternative", in Ved. P. Nanda, James R. Scarritt, and George W. Shepherd, Jr., eds., *Global Human Rights: Public Policies, Comparative Measures and NGO Strategies* (Boulder: Westview, 1981).
37. Analysis of the State Department reports can be found in John F. McCamant, op. cit.
38. See for example Asia Watch's contribution to "Human Rights Watch World Report, 1993", New York, Human Rights Watch 7, 1992, pp. 147-93.
39. Report of the Seminar on Appropriate Indicators to Measure Achievements in the Progressive Realization of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Geneva, 25-29 January 1993, A/CONF.157/PC/73, 20 April 1993.

40. Kathryn Sikkink, "Human Rights, Principled Issue-Network, and Sovereignty in Latin America", *International Organization* 47, no. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 411-41.
41. R. J. Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 129.

Political Culture and Indonesian Democracy

Leo Suryadinata

Liberal Democracy (1949-58)

Upon independence from the Dutch, Indonesia immediately introduced a form of liberal parliamentary democracy. In this system, political parties were the major actors and a free and fair general election was conducted in 1955. Nevertheless, parliamentary democracy did not last. In the following few years, the democratic system continued to be challenged. Extra-parliamentary forces - President Sukarno and the army - grew in strength and influence, and the regional rebellions and their subsequent defeat officially ended the parliamentary democracy period. There are many interpretations of the collapse of parliamentary democracy in Indonesia. Some maintain that the Indonesian people were not ready for "Western democracy" as there was no democratic tradition in Indonesian culture.

However, some argue that parliamentary democracy was doomed from the start as Sukarno and the military did not play a significant role in the democratic system. These two major actors were bound to "sabotage" the system. Religious, ethnic and economic conflicts accompanied by regional rebellions provided opportunities for these two actors, together with the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), to increase their political power and influence. Parliamentary democracy was eventually destroyed.

Guided Democracy

Success in crushing the rebellions gave rise to a more powerful army and bolstered the position of President Sukarno. They effectively replaced parties as the principal political actors. Supported by the army, Sukarno re-adopted the presidential system of the 1945 constitution and under this "democracy by leadership" the elected parliament was dissolved and replaced with an appointed assembly.

"Guided Democracy" was a form of authoritarian rule by Sukarno. Whilst political parties were not banned (except the Masyumi and the PSI, which were involved in the regional rebellions), their strength and political freedom were drastically reduced. The rights of assembly and organization were curtailed but the state managed to form a large organization to keep the political activities of the people under control; the national front was to be the outlet for people's aspirations. Sukarno, supported by the army, was the decision maker. Parliament was a rubber stamp and "Indonesian socialism" was the only acceptable political ideology as the country moved further to the Left.

This period was characterized by economic decline and competition between the PKI and the army. Sukarno was able to strike a balance between the two, but in 1965 his declining health triggered an abortive coup. The PKI, which was implicated in the coup, was eventually banned and destroyed, while Sukarno was also forced to step down. The army became the victor in this

power struggle, giving rise to General Suharto and "Pancasila Democracy" in 1966. This system has continued since.

Pancasila Democracy

Under Pancasila Democracy parliament was retained, although in form rather than substance. The new government - the "New Order" - sought legitimacy through constitutional rather than extra-parliamentary means. Soon after the assumption of power the military decided to utilize the parliament and organized an election. The electoral law, the composition of parliament and the People's Consultative Assembly were adjusted to give an advantage to the government and military over other parties. The military also occupied important administrative positions at both the national and sub-national levels. The military domination of the country had begun.

Before the elections, the obscure military-dominated organization Sekber Golkar was transformed into an effective electoral vehicle. The existing political parties, except the PKI and the left-wing parties, were not allowed to participate. After the 1971 elections, political parties were further weakened and subject to government control.¹ Aside from the three existing parties, no new political organizations were allowed to compete and all election candidates had to be screened by the government. General elections have been held periodically but the political scene has not changed. The Indonesian military and the bureaucracy continue to play a crucial role in politics through Golkar, under the firm control of President Suharto. Many observers describe the Indonesian system as closer to authoritarianism than democracy.

Liberal Democracy, "Asian Democracy" and Indonesia

Can Indonesia return to the parliamentary democracy of the 1950s? Was the demise of liberal democracy and the subsequent prevalence of authoritarianism a reflection of Indonesian traditional values and political culture? Before examining factors which may promote or hinder democracy it is important to examine democracy and its many meanings. According to one study,² "representative democracy" has certain key characteristics:

1. The legitimacy of the government rests on its claim to represent the desires of its citizens.
2. The organized arrangement that regulates the bargains of legitimacy is the competitive political election. Leaders are elected in regular intervals, and voters can choose among alternative candidates. In practice, at least two viable political parties that have a chance of winning are needed to make such choices meaningful.
3. Most adults can participate in the electoral process, both as voters and as candidates for important political office.
4. Voting is secret and not coerced.
5. Citizens and leaders enjoy basic freedom of speech, press, assembly and organization. Established parties and new ones can work to gain new members and voters.

A political system must meet all of these criteria in order to qualify as a democracy. The typical "Western" conception of democracy is that it is both an end and a means to an end. Any country which does not fit into this model is called undemocratic or authoritarian. However, in recent years some Asian scholars and politicians have argued that there are many types of democracy,

of which the Western liberal model is only one. "Asian democracy" is an equally valid system in the context of particular needs and cultural values. One of the advocates of this thesis, Chan Heng Chee,³ observes a number of characteristics. There is a communitarian ethos which teaches that the individual is important as part of the group or society rather than the centre piece of democracy and society. There tends to be a greater acceptance of and respect for authority and hierarchy. The dominant party can remain in power for two or three decades or more. Nearly all Asian democracies have a centralized bureaucracy and a strong state. Finally, Asian democracies tend to be interventionist states with a large public sector. The state plays an important role as an engine of economic development.

This definition of democracy is not without its problems. These characteristics reflect both representative democracy and authoritarianism. There is no indication of the weight of democracy in its relationship with authoritarianism. In addition, it is unclear whether Asian democracy will guarantee political stability. Huntington maintains that this kind of democracy is suitable when the economic performance of the country is good.⁴ Any economic crisis which leads to demands for a change of government will not be accommodated by this type of democracy as there is usually no other viable party capable of governing. As a result, "Asian democracy" can lead to political upheaval rather than stability. Moreover, it is not clear whether or not this democracy is "transitional" or "final". Will "Asian democracy" remain distinct from the Western model or will it eventually be transformed to liberal/representative democracy?

Aside from this debate, it is questionable whether Indonesian democracy is a form of "Asian democracy" as defined by Chan Heng Chee. Before 1957 Indonesian democracy was closer to the liberal type. However, Guided Democracy did not even embrace the basic tenets of democracy: there were no general elections nor elected members of parliament, and political parties were severely constrained. In the context of the New Order, regular elections are held but political participation is still screened and restricted. The military still retains a central role in the political process; in fact, it essentially sets the agenda.

Indonesian politics under Suharto reflects some of the characteristics of "Asian democracy". However, it is debatable whether or not this is "Indonesian democracy". Indonesia is a multi-ethnic state, and many ethnic groups have different concepts of democracy. The present system is a Javanese and abangan dominated political system, with strong military support. There are abangan (nominal Muslims) and santri (orthodox Muslims) cultures among the Javanese.⁵ The existence of these subcultures or sub-communities was a result of uneven penetration of Islam in Java. Coastal communities are more Islamic than those in the interior. No one knows the strength of each community, but in the recent past the abangan tended to belong to these interior communities.

Herbert Feith also observes two streams of political culture in Indonesia, roughly in accordance with *abangan* and *santri*.⁶ He identifies the Javanese--aristocratic culture and the Islamic-entrepreneurial political culture. The aristocratic political culture tended towards nativism, while Islamic entrepreneurialism was more inclined to accept and incorporate modernizing influences from the outside. One could argue that these traditions have conditioned political arrangements. Javanese-aristocratic culture has tended to be more authoritarian, while the Islamic-

entrepreneurial culture has tended to be more conducive to democracy. Some "culturalists" thus argue that the "Indonesian political culture" is one which inevitably results in authoritarianism.

Such a culturally deterministic argument is dubious. The nature of political culture is problematic, and it is particularly difficult to argue that culture remains static. Nevertheless, many observers have noted that among the Javanese there has been a prevailing attitude of deference to authority, which is certainly relevant to the current political scene. Yet there are clearly other factors which may effect, if not determine, the political system.

Factors Which Promote and Hinder Democracy in Indonesia

The multi-ethnic nature of Indonesia has been a major factor in a tendency towards "Asian" rather than liberal democracy. It has been argued that the ethnic and religious diversity and divisiveness require authoritarian leadership to prevent disorder, fragmentation and violence.⁷ The military remains engaged in both security and non-security affairs, including economics and politics, and its dual function was eventually recognized in law. In recent years there have been discussions concerning the role of the military and whether it is time to return to the barracks. Opinion is largely divided along civilian and military lines, and a particular point of contention has been the military's role in social affairs. Magnis-Suseno discusses the significance of international communication in demands for democratization and human rights in Indonesia.⁸ While admitting the positive impact of the external environment, he also recognizes the role of the military in the process. He observes that the military will continue to play a dual role but this should be modified in such a way as to support the democratization process. Within the military there is also division regarding the extent that the dual role is still necessary, although a majority of officers believe that their social role is important and will continue for some time. Indonesia will not be ready for civilian rule until well into the next century, according to Major-General (retired) Z.A. Maulini.⁹ Even Dr. B. J. Habibie, a civilian, expressed his support for the dual function of the military during "this era of development".¹⁰ Given the military's domination of the bureaucracy and politics it is unlikely that it will withdraw from its prominent role in society.

A further factor which appears to bolster authoritarian rule is the absence of a middle class in the Western sense. The proportion of the Indonesian population classified as professional and technical is only 3.9 per cent.¹¹ The concept of the middle class is further complicated by ethnicity. The Indonesian middle class is strongly non-indigenous - ethnic Chinese - and it is unlikely to demand rapid political change which might prove harmful to its economic interests. The indigenous component of the middle class is smaller and also depends upon government officials. It is thus difficult to identify the middle class in Indonesia, and this becomes more problematic when the concept is linked to democratization. The Western concept of a middle class spearheading political change is not applicable.

"Democratization" in Suharto's Indonesia

Some observers have recently argued that there is a democratization process in Indonesia and point to the weakening role of the Indonesian military in the political process. They maintain that Suharto has appointed fewer military personnel in his 1993 cabinet and succeeded in reducing

the number of military representatives in parliament. The rise of Dr. Habibie and the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals appears to substantiate this trend. There has also been a higher frequency of protest movements by students and trade unions in recent years and the government has permitted a number of quasi-opposition groups, including the Association of the Intellectuals for Pancasila Development. Has a democratization process begun?

There is no doubt that there is a loosening of Suharto's grip in certain areas, but he has been taking the initiative and calling the shots. Opposition to the regime has grown but Suharto is still in control and there is no sign of the military withdrawing from public life. The government still only allows three political parties to exist. The "demilitarization" of Golkar does not make the organization more democratic; Suharto still appoints its leader. In fact, Suharto has been able to tightly control political activity and is not likely to let democratic forces - which are still very weak - get out of control.

Political culture is difficult to define, and the nature in which it determines or conditions political systems is even more problematic. Political culture is not an adequate explanation for the presence or absence of democracy. A multi-factor approach is essential to understanding Indonesian politics.

References

1. Leo Suryadinata, *Military Ascendancy and Political Culture: The Study of Indonesia's Golkar* (reprint, Ohio University Press, 1992), pp. 71-85.
2. Bingham P. Powell, Jr., *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability and Violence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 3-4.
3. Chan Heng Chee, "Democracy: Evolution and Implementation: An Asian Perspective", in Robert Bartley, Chan Heng Chee, Samuel P. Huntington and Shijuro Ogata, eds., *Democracy and Capitalism: Asian and American Perspectives* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993).
4. Samuel P. Huntington, "American Democracy in Relation to Asia", *ibid.*, pp. 27-43.
5. Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York: Free Press, 1959).
6. Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 31-32.
7. J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (New York: New York University Press, 1956). However, Arend Lijphart argues that consociational democracy can achieve state unity without coercion, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
8. Franz Magnis-Suseno, paper published in Syamsuddin Haris and Riza Sihbudhi, eds., *Menelaah Kembali Format Politik Order Baru* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1995).
9. Gatra, 8 March 1997, p. 25.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
11. Richard Robison, "The Middle Class and the Bourgeoisie in Indonesia", in Richard Robison and David S.G. Goodman, eds., *The New Rich in Asia: Mobile Phones, McDonalds and Middle Class Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 84.