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Abstract

This paper pleas for adopting a differentiated perspective on the current controversy over "Asian Values" and democracy. It presents a comparative analysis of the political systems of Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and depicts these polities as structurally similar co-optative systems which are undemocratic since they keep the given power structure in place by preventing opposition parties from ever being elected. In the light of their particular context, however, a more ambivalent picture emerges. Considering the contingent set of historic, ethnic and socioeconomic circumstances at work in the evolution of these systems, their performance in safeguarding public order and in providing economic prosperity has to be recognized.

While an institutional analysis of the "Asian values" discourse can demonstrate the political character of cultural definition and distinction and can likewise avoid an essentialist interpretation, a tentative discussion of the prospects for democratization with emphasis on the emerging middle-classes draws a pessimistic picture for future democratization.

Contents

1. The Cultural Challenge to Liberal Democracy

The 1990s saw the emergence of new global discourses on the meaning, future paths and targets of social and political development – and, in the course of doing so – the reemergence of such putatively antiquated categories as "civilization" or "culture" replacing the key terms of the cold-war period, "ideology" and "system".[1] Today, for an increasing number of political observers, "culture" is perceived as "the new dividing line in the debate over the question of freedom and the question of human rights."[2]

One discursive arena functioning as a circulator of this new-old idea, now commonly labeled as the "Asian values" debate, was opened up in the early 1990s. The "Asian values" debate principally revolves around the question, whether there exists a particularly Asian culture that justifies the proclamation of a particularly Asian identity, hence of difference from "the West", that is a fundamentally Asian, thus rendering the Western notion of modernity of dubious value for the socio-political modernization of Asian societies.

And indeed, Southeast Asia creates a puzzle for common thinking about democratization. Let us consider "Lipset's law", which since its formulation in 1959 has been at least probabilistically corroborated[3]; according to this law "(t)he more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy"[4]. In this sense Southeast Asia represents an oddity.

In comparing various indices of socioeconomic development – as are measured by per capita GNP, long-term and recent change of per capita GNP, and the UNDP Human Development Index – with levels of freedom – as are measured by the "freedom score" developed by Freedom House – Donald Emmerson found the Southeast Asian region "recalcitrant": that is, not coinciding with Lipset's law.[5] In fact, if the level of freedom is related to economic growth, the Southeast Asian region is conspicuously the most recalcitrant world-wide.

"In this context, the recalcitrance of Southeast Asia lies in the apparent stability (so far) of relatively unfree countries whose economies are nevertheless rapidly growing."[6]

Within the Southeast Asian region, particularly the ASEAN states[7] exhibit this pattern of high growth coupled with authoritarian rule.

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[1] Most prominent: Huntington 1993, 1996
[2] Brzezinski 1997, p. 4
[3] Recently reviewed and confirmed by Diamond (1992)
[4] Lipset 1959, 75.
[5] Emmerson 1995, 232–235.
[6] bid. 234.

So, is culture foiling democracy in Southeast Asia?

While two Southeast-Asian statesmen, Malaysia's Datuk Seri Mohamad Mahatir[8] and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew[9], are initiators and most ardent advocates of this idea, so far there has accumulated a vast body of additional comments, polemics and scholarly contributions from various other sources – Western as well as Asian.[10] Though the center of the discourse lies in Singapore, Malaysia, and, to a lesser extent, in Indonesia[11], affirmative voices are resonating from Thailand, Myanmar, China, Japan, and South Korea.[12]

The discourse has several dimensions. At a regional dimension, it only refers to the Asia-pacific region: hence, the discourse on regional identity concerning the ongoing process of regionalization and integration for the sake of cooperation in economic and security matters.[13] These tend to be related to commonalties and affinities between various Asian societies. On another dimension, it can also remain within national boundaries, in the sense of a moral discourse and a rhetoric of self-confidence in the face of the once superior and now morally and economically declining "West".

But due to its normative implications, the discourse also gained a global dimension. Emphasizing historical contingency and taking a cultural-relativist perspective, the normative heritage of the (Western) enlightenment and its "liberal" conception of human and civil rights moving the individual into its normative focus, becomes a rather arbitrary choice bare of binding quality for non-Western cultures. From this perspective, emulating Western modernity for them means merely to submit to the "imposition of incompatible values", as one phrase frequently uttered since the 1993–UN Vienna conference of Human Rights puts it. Then, for the first time, in an attempt to define a set of human values apt for "regional particularities", an Asian alternative to normative universalism was proposed. This is embedded into a conventional argumentation of developmental pragmatism giving priority to economic over socio-political development, and an increasingly self-confident Third-World anti-imperialism that denounces normative criticism of Western countries for systematic human rights violations and the

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[7] And among the ASEAN, particularly Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia in contrast to Thailand and the Philippines, in which democratization is under way.

[8] e.g. Mahatir Mohamad 1994

[9] e.g. Zakaria 1994

[10] For a recent review, see Heberer 1997; for current contributions, see Ng 1997, Kausikan 1997, Chan 1997, Vatikiotis 1996b

[11] Compare the statements of the Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas in the conference on human rights of the Asia-Pacific countries in Bangkok in 1993 preparing for the Vienna conference on human rights the same year.

[12] Similar debates occasionally bubble up in South Korea when the Western press reports negatively or in Japan when it becomes involved in a trade war, as the Korean journalist Shim Jae Hoon remarked in Freedom Forum 1994. But also in China, the ideological vacuum in the wake of the Dengist reforms and the enormous socio-economic ruptures produced by them bring about the need for a new ideological foundation of one-party rule. Neoconservatism is a plausible option. (see Fewsmith 1995)

[13] See Higgott 1994, Camroux 1994, Jayasuriya 1994.

persistent poor quality of democratic procedures. They see this as motivated by Western self-interest, and their discourse now contains a crucial new element: an essentialist notion of culture.

This Asian distinctiveness has direct implications on the question of democratic development.

On the one hand, it is argued, it is their cultural peculiarity to which some Asian nations owe their outstanding high rates of economic growth. Such traditional virtues as industriousness, thrift, a strong sense for teamwork, and respect for learning are the prerequisites for the rapid rise of post-colonial Third-World economies of scarcity to their new roles as powerful players in the global market.

To this interpretation let us add the view that economic success is a project of the whole national community requiring all its effort. Again, a set of communitarian – typically Asian – values delivers the glue for this community: the readiness to subordinate individual interest to the goals of the family or, at the broader level, the national community; and respect for authority, ranging from filial piety in the sphere of the family to trust in and obedience to public authorities in the public sphere. The Asian thus portrayed also has a preference for a strong state that effectively provides for prosperity and safeguards order; such an individual has a desire for harmony and a dislike of open confrontation.

Finally, Asian political systems and political cultures only reflect these general tendencies in society. Corporatist institutions, hierarchically structured and elitistic, represent the framework for politics. For a semi-democratic regime "Asian style"[14], the fostering of economic development and the maintenance of order takes priority at the expense of human and civil rights. Instead of open debate or public conflict consensus is pursued. A paternalistic government enjoys high legitimacy among the populace.

The implications for democracy are clear. Given that (for cultural reasons) the majority in the society construes the government as the embodiment of the true community interest and prefers to see it molding the state as a leviathan endowed with the mandate to violate individual rights for the sake of public order and economic development, then any normative critique loses its footing.

This is particularly the case if one follows the argumentation of Michael Walzer, that the West lacks the right to force its normative canon and its governmental system upon other states.

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[14] For its basic characteristics – patron-client communitarism, personalism, authority, one dominant political party and strong state – see Neher 1994a.

The people in a country should decide for themselves which governmental system suites their preferences. There is only one universal right, and this is the right to difference.[15]

Or, to exaggerate the point, one could claim that, since their legitimacy is rooted in culture, Asian regimes are the outcome of popular choice; and in this sense, they meet a basic democratic ideal. Asian "semi-democracies" carry the prefix "semi" only because they are the first of all true "democracies", albeit not "liberal democracies".[16]

The argument, of course, implies a contradiction in terms. Thinking of democracies as procedural systems required to make possible public choice, how could a system with profound non-democratic characteristics reflect popular choice?

One could respond that regime legitimacy is not necessarily dependent on public choice. It could, as was outlined above, also derive from "governance that works"[17], that merely meets people's needs without being accountable to them by way of democratic procedures.[18]

Thus, one has to distinguish among different types of regime legitimacy in terms of their sources. A regime can receive confidence for effectively providing security and order, and for proving itself capable of fostering material prosperity. Another source of regime legitimacy, however, is the regime's role as protector of individual rights and as subject to and thus the outcome of public choice. But, for a choice to take place, alternatives must be available. In terms of a political system, this means the existence of a "constitutionally protected political opposition which is capable of providing an alternative government and, to that extent, is one of the strongest enabling factors for the exercise of mass judgment."[19]

2. Asian Semi-Democracies as Co-Optative Systems

The three countries that figure most prominently in the "Asian values" debate – Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia – will now be scrutinized:.

First, it will be demonstrated that this basic requirement for choice is fulfilled only in a very restricted sense in either of the countries discussed. The general pattern is that oppositions are systematically crippled by the ruling elite. It will be shown that, while all three countries possess crucial democratic institutions (e.g. democratic constitutions, regular elections,

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[15] Walzer 1996

[16] See Emmerson 1995b

[17] Kausikan 1997.

[18] Leaving aside the valid counter-argument that a democratic system can hardly be installed as a result of democratic "people's decision", but is in one way or the other the result of non-democratic decisions.

   Lawson 1993, 18.

political parties), they serve principally to reap democratic legitimacy while these institutions are rather formal in character and lack substance.

Singapore

Singapore, to begin with, is a one-party state dominated by the PAP (Peoples Action Party), itself headed by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew from 1959 until 1990, and from then on by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong. Even so Lee – now addressed under the title Senior Prime Minister – still exerts considerable political influence. The sustained economic achievement of Singapore is due to a very high degree to this extraordinarily efficient government and its technocratic administration, which is much less plagued by its neighbors chronic maladies of corruption and excessive patronizing. This may be the main reason for the government's outstandingly high legitimacy among its constituency, in spite of its often harsh policies and deep intrusions into the private spheres of the citizens. Characteristically, "since 1968 PAP has won all but a handful of seats (of hundreds), with its percentage of party votes ranging from 61 to 84."[20]

Nevertheless, the PAP consistently refrained from exposing itself to the risk of being weakened, let alone being removed from office via democratic procedures.

In order to prevent the opposition to gather momentum, the government utilizes several instruments and strategies. It has done so chiefly since the early eighties, when a process of electoral decline set in.

First of all, at the level of structural arrangements, the single-member, plurality method of parliamentary election greatly inflates the dominance of the ruling PAP.

One instrument against the opposition actively applied is the concerted attack on opposition candidates by PAP representatives in political life, as well as outside the political sphere, in order to destroy any focus of opposition. To this end, the legal apparatus is set in motion against the troublemaker, which usually takes the form of charges for defamation in response to criticism or persecution by the revenue authorities. Additionally, the political opponent has to expect chicanery when looking for a job and a life under surveillance – for example, the recent sufferings of Dr. Chee Soon Juan, the leader of the SDP (Singapore Democratic Party).[21] In addition, potential sympathizers and activists from the opposition are intimidated in examinations by the Internal Security Department in order to make them desert.

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[20] Neher 1994b, 147.

[21] Similarly, another Worker's Party leader, Tang Liang Hong, fled the country after the recent elections on January 2. After a verbal confrontation with (afterwards victorious) Go Choc Tong , he became "target of the most wide-ranging legal offensive launched by the ruling People's Action Party since independence." Hiebert 1997

There are some pieces of legislation which give the government virtually unlimited leeway in pursuing its politics of power maintenance. The Internal Security Act (ISA) allows the Minister of Home Affairs to detain any person considered to pose a risk to social order for a two-year period, after which the verdict can be arbitrarily renewed to extend the imprisonment infinitely. A recent amendment of the ISA empowers any police officer to arrest any person without a warrant and to keep that person in custody for one month without charges. The last internationally sensational enactment of the ISA took place in 1987, when some twenty members of various Catholic organizations were imprisoned without trial for allegedly engaging in communist agitation. During their lengthy way of the Cross, a series of grave human rights abuses and a humiliating ritual of coerced "confessions" embarrassed the international public.[22]

Other laws, such as the Societies Act and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, tightly circumscribe civil-society activities. The Societies Act requires any association with more than ten people to register, but the government can refuse without vindication or judicial check. This law already had its effect on the Catholic Church and the Singapore Law Society.[23] The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act empowers the Minister of Home Affairs to prohibit religious congregations. Again, this is mainly a tool for surveillance and for controlling the activities of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is a potential germ for NGOs which, in turn, have proved their capability for political mobilization of large marginalized groups as it has done in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines.[24]

Finally, the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, introduced in 1974 and amended in 1986 to include the foreign press, established a system of licenses to be renewed annually: that is, used for extensive censorship.

Another bulwark against potential opposition was erected with a constitutional change in 1991, which endowed the newly created office of an elected President with crucial veto rights over government spending and senior public-service appointments. To be eligible as elected President, three years as a senior government official or chief executive of a large Singaporean company or government agency and the approval of a Council of Presidential Advisers is required; so nobody outside the PAP establishment can realistically strive for this powerful office.[25]

Thus, even proceeding on the assumption that the government enjoys a high level of legitimacy among its constituency, the present state of affairs cannot be taken as the result of voters

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[22] Following their first release, the detained had complained about inhuman treatment in a press conference. Immediately they were re-arrested together with their lawyers and the printer of their statement by the same police officers who had tortured them the first time. Subsequently, they were forced to publicly announce the falsehood of their statements. Chew 1994, 943.

[23] Ibid., 944.

[24] Rodan 1993, 92.

[25] Ibid. 100–1.

choice. The Opposition has been severely obstructed when it made efforts to present itself as an alternatives to the government and measures have been taken to preclude any change of this condition.

On the other hand, during the past ten years, certain changes in the structure of the polity have been implemented which – at first glance – could be read as a widening of representation. They are reflected by a number of institutional innovations in order to provide more elaborate mechanisms of political expression for groups outside the PAP, but also outside the party system in general. These innovations include the establishment of a Feedback Unit (1985), the introduction of Town Councils (commencing in 1986), the introduction of Government Parliamentary Committees (1987), the creation of the Institute of Policy Studies (1988), and the installation of up to six so-called Nominated Members of the Parliament (1990) nominated by the President on the advice a PAP dominated committee. The four stated objectives of the reforms are "to receive suggestions from the public on national problems; to gather information on existing policies; to facilitate prompt responses by government departments to public complaints; and to instigate public information programs."[26] Thus, the bulk of the arrangements, was not aimed at increasing participation in terms of an actual share in policy decisions, but rather at augmenting policy effectiveness. To give professionals and members of the English-educated middle class the opportunity to voice opinions and reservations, is suited to convey to these potentially dangerous groups a sense of being taken seriously. In this way, it takes the bite out of dissent and dissatisfaction with the PAP and depoliticizes debates. At the same time, the inclusion of professionals and experts taps their expertise in order for policies to come up to the new functional requirements of a highly differentiated society. Generally, participation in these institutions is conditional on behaving in line with a consultative and consensual style and refraining from any open criticism and contention.[27]

Thus, the strategy of silencing critics is completed with a double strategy by appeasing selected groups without surrendering any political control. The expansion of choice opportunities, then, is as a feigned one. Choice still rests exclusively with the government.

Indonesia

Regarding Indonesia, it could be argued that – to put it bluntly – Indonesia already had its choice of whether it finds liberal democracy the apt system for itself – and that the decision was negative. But the collapse of liberal democracy marked by the resignation of the Ali

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[26] Ibid. 87.

[27] This political etiquette suited to include as well as to exclude, was finally put down in a White Paper of the Singaporean government in 1991. It stated five essential values as Singapore's core value set: "placing society above self; upholding the family as the basic building block of society; resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention; stressing racial and religious harmony and tolerance, regard and community support for the individual." Ibid. 90.

cabinet in March 1957, and the subsequent declaration of martial law, was not the consequence of the people's choice. In the words of Ulf Sundhaussen, the failure of liberal democracy

"cannot be blamed on society at large and its reportedly low level of affection for democracy: the masses had little, if any, direct impact on what was substantially politics among a very small elite. It is the actions and attitudes of this elite – and especially those sections of the elite that purportedly stood for democracy – which must be scrutinized.

The explanation for the demise of parliamentary democracy lies in a number of ideological, structural, tactical, and personal errors and shortcomings of the democratic elite, and a lack of concern and farsightedness on the side of the less democratic politicians."[28]

Thus, parties committed to liberal democracy did not succeed in developing a common long-term strategy to protect democratic institutions. Instead, they often pursued obstructive tactics in their own short-term interests. A second main reason is that no federalist order has managed to master the enormous tensions arising from Indonesia's ethnic complexity. Finally, even the democratic parties themselves at times displayed unscrupulous behavior with respect to democratic standards so as to undermine the credibility of democracy in general.

In the aftermath of the awful escalation of events that led to the end of Sukarno's authoritarian Guided Democracy, however, popular support for liberal democracy was virtually nil. Consequently, the power-architecture of Suharto's subsequent New Order, while formally retaining the democratic institutions of the Constitution of 1945 – a bicameral, presidential system in which political parties compete with functional groups to represent the electorate in a parliament and a People's Deliberative Congress – never provided for substantive democratic process. In other words, the manifestation of a political opposition within a fair framework and thus, the development of eligible alternatives to the present government, was methodically blocked.

The sole definite center of power in New Order Indonesia is the President. This condition is stabilized first by the fact that Suharto can rely on the wholehearted loyalty of the army. The army, in turn, is bound to the concept of *dwi fungsi* (two functions): Its agency is not limited to external defense and internal security but also takes on a role as the major sociopolitical force. In concrete terms, this means the concrete form of the military penetrates all branches of the bureaucracy and occupies the top jobs in civil service.

The second source of Suharto's power, apart from army and the bureaucracy, respectively, is an informal network of strategic patronage bonds extending into all important institutional

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[28] 1989, 450.

structures of both state and society. In the economic sphere, this involves control over huge conglomerates in part exercised by members of his family. One important means of gratification for patronage loyalty are the *yayasans* – tax-free social funds that represent large capital accumulations.

Finally, Suharto has command over a number of instruments embodied in law. For instance, the system allows the President to choose his ministers from outside the parliament. But also within both parliament and the People's Deliberative Congress, Suharto secures his influence via the government-party GOLKAR (*Sekber Golongan Karya* Joint Secretariat of Functional Groups). In its very statutes, GOLKAR does not define itself as dedicated to the representation of political interests but rather as "functional", by which is meant functional for ensuring social control and consolidating rule by the state bureaucrats and the president. From the first elections of the New Order in 1971, GOLKAR has held safe majorities of both votes and seats (in the last elections in 1992 it received 288 out of 400 seats). This is to an indeterminate degree due to its (the state's and the president's) legitimacy and, on the other side, due to the advantages the party indisputably enjoys in campaigning, since it can fall back on the organizational resources of the bureaucracy.

As GOLKAR's principal financier (via the *Yayasan Dakab* fund) as head of GOLKAR's control board (*Dewan Pembina*), Suharto controls office-holders and candidates within GOLKAR, and thus the composition of parliament and People's Deliberative Congress as a whole. Thus, if voices emerge within GOLKAR demanding a more political role for the party[29], they can easily be silenced by manipulating the composition of the personnel.

Although opposition parties are allowed to compete with GOLKAR in elections, several structural changes were forced upon them during the New Order. Some parties (e.g. the communist party, PKI, and the socialist party, PSI) active during the period of liberal democracy were banned altogether, while the remaining parties were concentrated in 1973 to form two opposition parties. Five Muslim parties were fused to the Union of Muslim parties, the PPP (Development Unity Party); and seven non-Muslim – both Catholic and secular – parties were merged to the federation of all non-Muslim parties, the PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party). This step already had tactical reasons because it prevented the smaller non-Muslim parties from completely disappearing, thus precluding an imminent confrontation between GOLKAR and the successful Islamic parties.

Ten years later, a decisive blow against the opposition parties was delivered when they were forced to adopt *Pancasila* – the official state ideology – as their common and "sole principle" (*Azas tunggal*). The formulation of the five values constituting *Pancasila*, though, is a very general one and thus subject to interpretation. With the assertion that a certain party platform

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[29] As it is recurrently happening; see Asiaweek 1994 and Robinson 1993, 65–67

contradicts Pancasila, it can swiftly be discredited as unconstitutional. This step, which rendered the opposition parties bereft of their independent profile,

"particularly damaged the Muslim political party, which was prohibited from claiming any special representation of Islam or carriage of Islamic values. Similarly, no potential social-reformist party would be permitted to claim to specially represent the interests of the working class or to have a special concern for social justice. In effect, all political parties were now required to accept Pancasila ideology and platform, permitted only in their claims to be its most effective implementers."[30]

The working principles of the parliament, finally, still adhere to Sukarno´s concepts of *musyawarah* and *mufakat* instead of a majority vote. This decision-making procedure is guided along the principles of deliberation and consensus; apart from being in awe of notions of a public majority mandate and competitive opposition, it also has the effect of negotiations mainly taking place in seclusion, rendering politics and interests completely opaque. It creates conditions conductive to compulsory camouflage by retrospectively presenting decisions as consensual. Again opposition is prevented from gaining a profile of its own but – in losing its contours – is neutralized.

From the above description of the constraints imposed upon the opposition parties, the double strategy of the Indonesian state becomes evident. On the one side, organized social forces that can potentially challenge the state are co-opted in a controlled process that renders them harmless. The state thus prevents open criticism and the formation of any alternative to the existing government. This principle extends far beyond the political sphere to embrace the whole society.[31] Hence, elections must be seen as legitimizing rituals rather than as contests for government office. This is justified by the thorough conviction on the part of President, army, bureaucracy, and GOLKAR that antagonistic politics are a threat to public order.

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[30] Robinson 1993, 44.

[31] One more recent maneuver typical for this strategy that also reveals a lot about power politics within the highest echelons, is the inclusion of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) under Suharto's patronage in 1990. Compared with the other Muslim mass organizations – *Muhammidiya* (25 million members) and *Nahdalatul Ulama* (35 million members in more rural areas, representing a secularized version of Islam) – the ICMI is with only 100,000 members a very small and elitist organization holding a modernist-orthodox notion of Islam. However, with its periodicals *Republika* and *Ummat,* it is capable of competing for influence and leadership among Indonesia's Muslims. Suharto's ulterior motive behind this step probably has been to create a counterbalance to the principal pillow of his power – the army – because, in past years there has been growing criticism from the ranks of the latter – e.g. against his patronage bonds with huge Chinese conglomerates and the enormous social inequalities and resentments arising from their operation. Suharto appointed his powerful Minister of Technology, B.J. Habibie, as ICMI´s Chairman – only to equip him with a formidable orbit of power. Recent reshuffles directed at some of Habibie's henchmen are generally read as a measure to counterbalance that new power center in turn. Habibie is a possible aspirant for the presidency. See Fletcher and Loveard 1995b, 1996.

On the other side, the stability and order thus achieved call for the persecution of those who are not willing to comply and who insist on liberal democratic principles and on their right to speak out. In particular, if certain taboos are broken[32], critics have to fear an arsenal of lawful punitive measures without any hope of protection by an independent judiciary.[33] They are intimidated or publicly stigmatized as "communists"[34] while the media are censored or induced to self-censorship.[35]

The functioning – but also the hazards and possible limits – of the co-optative system can be demonstrated by looking at the events during the run-up to the Indonesian elections in May 1997. In June 1996, Sukarnoputri Megawati, daughter of Indonesia's first president Sukarno and the highly popular leader of the Indonesian democratic Party PDI, predicted to gain significant votes in the imminent election, was expelled as head of the party. At the government's instigation, the more suitable deputy speaker of Parliament, Suryadi, was put in her place. But this case of "political engineering"[36] produced a reverse effect. On June 20, a protest march in Jakarta joined by some 5000 people turned into the first riot of a month replete with violent clashes, which finally culminated in the July 27 police takeover of the PDI headquarters in Jakarta. This one day left five dead, 149 injured and 23 missing.[37] During these days, on the one hand, the PDI almost completely lost its credibility for proving to be state-controlled; on the other hand the banished Megawati became a charismatic pro-democratic symbol rallying groups representing workers, students, women, human-rights activists and journalists.[38] Maybe more importantly, she also enjoyed the sympathy of a considerable portion of the Moslem community due to her friendship with Abdurrahman Wahid, head of the prominent Muslim organization *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU).

In the aftermath of the riots there followed a wave of persecution for participants and riot "organizers". Among them was Budiman Sudjatmitko, head of the People's Democratic Party (PRD), a small, allegedly "communist" group of youth activists blamed by the government for inciting the unrest.[39]

What is characteristic of the co-optative system was a subsequent change in the relationship between Suharto and Abdurrahman Wahid. Wahid had fallen from Suharto's grace in 1993

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[32] Foremost, the family of the President.

[33] See Loveard 1995b.

[34] For instance, in 1995 a group of prominent civic activists fell victim to such an anti-Communist crusade: among them, labor leader Muchtar Pakpahan, academic George Aditjondro and internationally recognized author Pramoedya Ananta Toer. They were accused of being members of an "organization without form" (OTP *organisasi tanpa bentuk*) agitating in order to stir social unrest. See Fletcher and Loveard 1995a, McBeth 1995

[35] A period of thaw beginning in 1992 was brought to an end in 1994 when the respected critical magazine *Tempo* had its license revoked.

[36] McBeth 1996

[37] Cohen 1996b

[38] Cohen 1996a

[39] Berfield & Loveard 1996, Cohen 1996b

when he had refused to endorse his re-election. Though Wahid kept his position in NU and thus his influence among the Moslems, since then both were on cool terms. However, this changed in November 1996 when Suharto offered Wahid the symbolically important handshake. Simultaneously, Suharto ousted Muslim leader Amien Rais from his office in the rival Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals ICMI. With that, Suharto served several of his purposes. Firstly, he continued his disciplinary action against ICMI; secondly, he drove a wedge between the respected Wahid and the charismatic Megawati; thirdly, he sent "a message ahead of the parliamentary elections that all is well between the government and Indonesia's largest Muslim organization."[40] This latter step was in line with the general GOLKAR strategy to woo Muslim support in the elections.

At any rate, the May 1997 elections brought a resounding victory for GOLKAR. Instead of the envisaged 70% (68% in 1992), after official estimates GOLKAR gained 74% in 1997. Conversely the PDI – evidently due to Megawati's appeal for an election boycott – dropped from 15% to 3%, which finally marks the almost complete exclusion of the pro-democracy forces.

However, this result by no means mirrors regime legitimacy unambiguously. The campaign has been the most violent since the inception of the New Order. Riots preceding and accompanying the election took a toll of 300 to 400 dead and, for the first time, balloting had to be repeated on a large scale. These are clear signs for a deep gap between real regime legitimacy and that "measured" by the elections.

Malaysia

Like Indonesia, Malaysia adopted a democratic constitution, when it attained its independence. It was modeled after the Westminster system of its former colonial master. Correspondingly, the British departing in 1957 envisaged a convenient two-party system. However, very soon another constellation emerged reflecting the precarious ethnic composition of the country's population.[41] The first sequence of elections showed "that politics was being mobilized on communal lines."[42] Only parties appealing to the separate ethnic communities proved successful in elections, while non-communal parties failed to mobilize not only votes but also any other support worth mentioning. Hence, a coalition between the main communal parties, – the inter-communal Alliance Party made up of the Malay UMNO (United Malay National Organization), the Chinese (MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association), and the Indian MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress) – crystallized both a winning formula in federal elections and a workable government. Considering the smoldering ethnic tensions and the internal as well as external threats to security, governing was not an easy task, though. It required a number of

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[40] McBeth 1997b

[41] This composition had been fundamentally changed during the colonial period, when large numbers of Chinese and Indians migrated into the country to work in the tin mines and plantations or to engage in small scale trade.

[42] Ahmad 1989, 354.

political arrangements which, taken together, come near to what Arendt Lijphart has termed "consociationalism". Thus, the ethnic communities remained semi-autonomous. They were each represented by a small, legitimate elite negotiating at the highest level with the representatives of the other communities. Decisions were made confidentially within the inner circles of the Alliance. Since its main purpose was to preserve ethnic peace within a fragmented political system, the elites should, on the one hand, have been capable of mobilizing their communal mass support; but on the other hand, they had to refrain from ever actually exploiting this privilege in order to exert pressure on the other negotiating parties. However, even though the main ethnic groups shared power within the Alliance framework, their relative sway was asymmetric, with the Malay UMNO particularly maintaining its political supremacy in the face of the overwhelming Chinese dominance in the economy. Thus, the Alliance allowed Malay political superiority through UMNO, while at the same time accommodating their partners. After carrying out two elections in 1959 and 1964 in due order and bringing resounding victories for the Alliance, the system finally collapsed in the wake of the 1969 elections. Since the Alliance barely missed the margin of the majority mandate – it received only 47.5 per cent of the votes versus 52.2 per cent for the opposition – the result seemed for the first time to jeopardize the existing system of Malay control over the polity. What followed was a series of racial riots concentrating in Kuala Lumpur (possibly triggered by some UMNO leaders who tried to restore Malay support[43]), during which around two hundred people (official version) were killed. Subsequently, a state of emergency was declared and executive power was transferred to a National Operations Council (NOC) which was to take over during the suspension of parliamentary democracy until 1971. During this period, the Malay-dominated NOC designed a new system of government aimed at viable ethnic coexistence, with the main goal of redressing the sources of Malay unease and their distrust of the Chinese, based on the impotence of the former within the economic sphere. Racial harmony was to be restored by means of a bundle of long-term redistributive and affirmative-action measures aimed at alleviating Malay inequality. The object of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the New Education Policy, and the New Cultural Policy was to increase the Malay's share in the modern sector from its rural predominance and to consolidate the influence of Malay culture (particularly the Malay language) on national culture (while retaining cultural rights for other groups). The economic core of the NEP was based on massive state intervention in the economy in such a way as to distribute and redistribute corporate assets in favor of Malays. The policy instruments employed would be preferences quotas, public corporations, and regulations requiring private businesses, both multinational and domestic – Chinese – owned, to make shares available to Malays at discount prices.

It was evident, though, that to sustain these policies the bases of the political system had to be modified, too, since they were bound to produce new ethnic grievances for having favored the *bumiputeras* (meaning "son of the earth" or "native", i.e. primarily Malays) through a unique

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[43] Case 1993, 192. For a comprehensive account of the ethnic rioting in 1969, see Vory 1975.

set of privileges to the disadvantage of all non-*bumiputeras* (Chinese and Indians). This new political system was supposed to ensure that UMNO dominance would never again be so imperiled. Thus, the scheduled construction of racial harmony was just as imbalanced as the decision-making process within the NOC. While there was still room for bargaining among the different ethnic groups, top UMNO leadership had the final say in how fairness and the national interest were to be defined in the coming order.

This order still rests on the implementation of democratic procedures. Elections are regularly held in which opposition parties are allowed to contest and even to win some parliamentary seats - but their assumption of governmental power is systematically ruled out. The governmental coalition in office since 1971 has certain traits in common with the inter-communal Alliance of the preceding consociational period. In contrast, however, the new grand coalition *Barisan Nasional* (National Unit) firstly incorporates a greater number (13 to 15) of parties apart from the central UMNO; and secondly it has shifted from the (sketchily) consociational arrangement of the previous period towards increased UMNO prerogatives, with the UMNO safeguarding the Malay claim for privileged access to the wealth of the nation. The other parties are thus co-opted by being allowed to participate in decision-making and policy formulation in a domesticated way, thereby broadening the legitimization of the *Barisan Nasional*. At the same time, opposition parties and civil society associations outside the co-optative system are methodically suppressed by means of a multiplicity of structures, security regulations and tactics.

The electoral system itself underpins sustained electoral victory for the UMNO by means of a single-member constituency rather than proportional representation, as well as a weighting of constituencies in favor of rural areas populated mainly by Malays. Thus, "while opposition parties usually capture around 40–45% of the popular vote, they receive only 20%–30% of the seats in Parliament."[44] In contrast to this, constant security legislation designed to ensure biased elections – generally vindicated as necessary to prevent the stirring of racial resentments – is employed to function as an authoritarian check if challenges to the regime or to single politicians arise. Emergency provisions of the constitution, for instance, have been used to overthrow opposition-controlled state governments. The *Internal Security Act,* which permits detainment without trial, is applied not only to confront threats from the extreme left (or what is considered as such) or right ("Muslim extremists") but also to remove government critics or even dissidents from within the *Barisan Nasional.* The *Official Secrets Act* and the *Sedition Act* serve to suppress embarrassing information about the government and to curb public debate.

Finally, during election campaigns, the mobilization activities of the opposition are severely handicapped; while the government – above all the UMNO – takes full advantage of its

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[44] Case 1994, 918.

command over state equipment and bureaucratic personnel. It enforces its capacity to establish patronage bonds or to reinforce existing ones, for instance, by apportioning on-the-spot-development grants in the countryside. Since the main newspapers and electronic media are part of government conglomerates, media outlets can also be used in a partisan way.

The resulting overall picture, then, is one of a democracy without any real potential for governmental change. Opposition is either co-opted into the *Barisan Nasional* and thus subordinated under UMNO mastery, or ousted through a variety of formal or informal discriminatory measures. In this way, elections become opportunities either to pocket majorities and solidify legitimacy or, at best, instruments to measure marginal fluctuations in public support in order to receive feedback on policies. However, they never become serious risks for the established government.

3. Constraints on Democracy

So far, it has been shown that the countries whose leadership most prominently figure in the "Asian values" debate, are not liberal democracies. They fail, albeit in different degrees, to fulfill the basic requirement of permitting opposition to develop within a framework of fair competition among parties protected from persecution. Instead, the opposition is quelled by means of a variety of legal and institutional structures and short-term tactics.[45]

In all countries, a double strategy is employed of either selectively excluding or co-opting potential challengers into a system of domination. While basic democratic institutions are retained, they are deficient in substance: elections are enacted as safe victories and thus as announcements of popular legitimization for the present order and government. Fluctuations in voter support are closely observed and received as cues for necessary changes in co-optation-patterns or policies, in order to readapt and stabilize the system.

The general justification for these practices is the maintenance of public order under conditions of rapid social transformation, grave social cleavages, and the cultural peculiarity of value orientations and modes of decision-making.

We could stop at this point; and indeed, some "Western" commentators on the "Asian values" debate do so. But while none of the critical points made above will be recanted in the following,

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[45] Emphasizing the systemic correspondence among the three countries should not mean that there are no serious differences in terms of democratic structure and quality. In the words of Larry Diamond: "Malaysia rather represents a real semi-democracy, with significant opposition parties and coalition politics, while the UMNO is still hegemonic in manipulating the levers of power to ensure its reelection and political dominance. Singapore is more hegemonic and less liberal than Malaysia, but still a civil, multiparty system. Indonesia is the most authoritarian of the three, with military control of the opposition parties. The doctrine of *dwi fungsi* – that is the political representation of the military – does not exist in Malaysia or Singapore." (Larry Diamond, pers. com.)

nevertheless some important qualifications have to be made: without them, the picture of democracies "Asian style" would remain incomplete and severely distorted.

It must not be ignored that the polities taken into account developed under a number of constraints on public order and national security. Given that competitive politics are possible only on a firm foundation of order and security, these constraints have also to be viewed as constraints on democratic development.

Singapore

In Singapore, an interplay of internal and external constraints can be found.[46] Internally, Singapore's multi-ethnic social composition and the initial great appeal of a mass-based, communist-front party in the fifties and early sixties made the popular, participatory politics of a democracy a risky venture, due to the danger of communists and communalists exploiting racial divisions and religious prejudices. Externally, the very smallness of the city-state and its vulnerability to external conditions in the military and economic realm also constrained its path of development. In the sixties, Singapore's international entrepôt trade proved to be far from sufficient in terms of providing full employment; while at the same time, the British garrison – on which nearly a quarter of the working population depended – departed. In addition to this and for political reasons (i.e. the claim for Malay dominance), Singapore, had to leave the Federation of Malaysia in 1965, thus losing access to the pan-Malaysian market. The way out of this mess, as fancied by the PAP, was a concerted political and economic strategy exclusively aimed at achieving the fastest economic growth in the shortest time. Exposed to the vagaries of an international market, this required a government guided by efficiency and effectiveness, one acting and reacting quickly to changing economic circumstances, a government unhindered by the constitutional and structural impediments of a liberal democracy. By means of a technocratic and pragmatic policy, conditions were created that were attractive to foreign investors – at that time mainly US-based multinational corporations in search of cheap labor. In addition to special fiscal measures and subsidies for international companies, this meant the preparation of two crucial conditions: political stability and low wages. Thus, the potential "instability" implied in democracy – where governments can change – had to be warded off, and organized labor had to be kept in a non-militant and compliant state. The large repertoire of legislative provisions directed against civil society activities – especially unions – and the non-democratic structures of Singapore's semi-democracy as they have been presented above, are the consequences.

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[46] Chew 1994, 939–941.

Indonesia

A difference vaster than the one between the tiny city-state Singapore (roughly 2 million inhabitants) and colossal Indonesia (with its 200 million inhabitants the fourth-largest population world-wide) is hard to imagine. Accordingly, the sets of constraints on political development are different in the two countries. In Indonesia, the constraints are rooted above all in the deeply divided character of its society. Three major, partly cross-cutting lines of cleavages can be distinguished – all vested with the potential for violent conflict, ranging from riot to civil war. [47]

The first line of cleavage arises from ethnic tensions. In three ethnically distinct regions – Aceh in Northern Sumatra, Eastern Timur (until 1975 a Portuguese colony, therefore predominantly Catholic) and Irian Jaya – there are active guerrilla movements fighting for independence: thus, the perpetual presence of the army both to control and to repress, respectively. Another ethnic tension exists, for instance, between the dominant Javanese and the ethnic minorities of the outer islands, aggravated by transmigration programs transplanting millions of Javanese and Madurese into the alien environment there.

Another ethnic group attracting widespread resentments exploding in almost regular riots are the Chinese. As an ethnically distinct group dispersed throughout the country over all its urban centers, this 3.5% per cent of the population is said to control 70–80% per cent of the country's capital[48] – a disproportion only worsening with Indonesia's economic advancement and steadily fanning ethnic rancor.

Secondly, there is the hostility between orthodox, devout Muslims (*santri*) and syncretistic, more tolerant, secular Muslims (*abangan*). The former, probably a minority, concentrate in Northern and Western Java, as well as in South Sulawesi and Aceh (Northern Sumatra) where Muslim uprisings and insurrections have taken or are currently taking place. Also, violent conflicts between Christians and Muslims occasionally break out.

The third type of cleavage originates from the division between center and periphery – between the administrative, political and economic center of Jakarta and all the rest of Indonesia, as well as between Java and the rest of the country, particularly the outer islands.

Undeniably, the chaotic potential inherent in these cleavages (and the genocidal realization of this potential in the mass slaughter of half a million "communists" – to an undetermined extent Chinese – in 1965–66) was behind the collapse of liberal democracy in Indonesia, as well as behind the subsequent emergence of Suharto's New Order that turned out capable of keeping the chaos in check. The foundation of the New Order is a "strong state", that controls all

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[47] Compare Sundhaussen 1989, 458–461.
[48] McBerth & Cohen 1997.

aspects of political and economic life and co-opts all potential challengers. While bureaucracy and army amalgamate, the product of the fusion – the state – thus successfully avoids becoming subservient to any other societal force.

Malaysia

Though smaller and less complex than Indonesia, Malaysia's main cleavages run along the same lines. For instance, there are center-periphery tensions – here between Kuala Lumpur and the states, particularly those of Borneo, Sarawak and Sabah. This problem is managed (as well as perpetuated) by Malaysia's federalist constitution, which reserves important privileges for Kuala Lumpur. Likewise, there is the tension between secularism – which generally sets the tone in the UMNO and the *Barisan Nasional* – and an orthodox and intolerant Islam.[49]

The fundamental source of conflict, however, lies in the relationship of two ethnic groups: Malays and Chinese. The Malays, native to Western Malaysia and representing a majority of roughly 60 per cent as opposed to 30 per cent of Chinese, has always insisted on their political prerogatives. Traditionally composed of a small upper class of aristocrats and bureaucrats and masses of peasants, they were driven by the fear of being superseded by the "modern" – i.e. urban, professional, and economically most dynamic – Chinese. Hence, they saw their only chance in asserting their grip on political power. In 1969, the consociational arrangement collapsed that ensured Malay domination while leaving room for bargaining over demands of the other communities; subsequently influential actors interpreted this as a serious threat to Malay political predominance. The ensuing system of extensive preferential treatment for Malays at the expense of all non-Malays and the fortification of Malay political supremacy, may seem neither just nor democratic; but it made for enduring ethnic peace. As can be expected, there is grumbling on the part of the non-Malays; but people do submit to the fixed system of Malay domination, albeit grudgingly, mainly because it also possesses a certain responsiveness not only to minority demands (through the junior partners of the UMNO within *Barisan Nasional*)) but also by not oppressing the cultural identity of the various communities. At the very least, the secular-modernist consensus within the UMNO grants the other communities a certain security against Muslim fundamentalists. Finally, the NEP took place during a period of economic growth averaging 7 per cent annually. Thus, even most non-Malays could improve their material well-being. Indeed, the NEC probably would not have worked without the economic boom, as is indicated by the repercussions on the political system of a rather short economic slowdown during the eighties.

If we consider this context of political development and the resulting sustained performance, the we have to re-evaluate the regimes being studied. While these countries – and each and

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[49] Which is politically organized by the oppositional, pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) that since 1990 has formed the government of the state of Kelantan; apart from other religious-inspired policies, the PAS seeks to introduce the Islamic *hudud* law, which can proscribe the amputation of limbs for criminal offenses. (Mitton 1995b)

every individual therein – pay with their civil liberties and their opportunity for democratic choice, the non-trivial achievements of these regimes are stability and an ascending curve of economic performance. Corporatist institutions, consensual politics, avoiding open conflict, a paternalistic government, decidedly deploying state power: all those can be viewed as historically contingent responses to certain problems rather than as mere attempts to hang on to power. Ambivalence, then, is probably a more apt way of looking at these "democracies Asian style" than is judgmental accusation.

It is also important to notice that Indonesia and Malaysia might particularly have negative associations with their historical experiences with liberal democracy. By any yardstick, recent history has brought them a transition from an unstable to a stable state. Instability is associated with liberal democracy, and stability with the present regime. In *their* memory – at least the authorized memory of the ruling elite – the association of instability with democracy is a causal one. And why should they feel incompetent when they write their own histories?

Indeed, to accept that there have been and still are particular constraints on democratic development, and that the systems can be viewed as adaptations to difficult circumstances non-conducive to liberal democracy has easily become a justification for non-democratic practices. However, accepting the challenge of taking these fundamental reservations into account does not mean accepting the justification.

One helpful way to avoid giving in to this justification is to analytically distinguish between objective and subjective constraints.[50] Keeping this distinction in mind in that it equips the observer alert skepticism and a keen eye for discerning rationalizations. Thus, to take up the position that, in light of the precarious constraining their development, the regimes under consideration have achieved an optimal balance between order and freedom, such an observer could scrutinize this assertion by critically examining the objective quality of these constraints.

What would then be found are, for instance, self-created constraints.

The example of Malaysia is instructive. In this context

"it is not societal pluralism that in itself weakens the viability of democracy, but instead the willingness of the elites to exacerbate and exploit it. Hence, the UMNO (Baru)-led government

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[50] The distinction can only be analytical because to a certain, indeterminate extent, the very significance of a constraint is always in the eye of the beholder. That is, on the one hand constraints are real in that they are no mere chimera and may run counter to the expectations of the actors involved – occasionally with fatal effects. On the other hand, they may be accepted as reality only because they are plotted down on the cognitive maps of the relevant actors. For instance, to perceive a person as an enemy and behaving according to this assumption (a subjective constraint) can have repercussions on the behavior of the other person – probably in its becoming hostile (thus making it an objective constraint). Hence, constraints on political development always have a subjective and an objective dimension.

may be right when it contends that 'multiracial' countries can ill afford full democratic procedures, especially when it is itself sometimes driven by electoral calculations to make strong ethnic appeals. Ironically, the UMNO (Baru) can cite the tensions that result as a reason for continuing to limit electoral competitiveness, claiming that it is uniquely able to guard against recurrences of the 1969 ethnic rioting."[51]

Another argument against the notion of constraints is their transitory nature. Even if the notion of a trade-off between order and democracy is accepted, the claim for more open systems becomes more realistic as the constraints weaken.

Singapore

In Singapore, the constraints have already vanished dramatically.

"Especially now that Singapore's industrial competitiveness derives more from productivity-enhancing and technology-intensive inputs, rather than simply lower labor costs, there is little evidence of any structural and economic imperative underlying authoritarian rule. The more concerted attempt of late to bolster the service sector, notably knowledge-intensive, industries reinforces this point."[52]

Nonetheless, to accuse opposition figures of sparking ethnic resentment still serves as a pretext for their persecution.[53]

Indonesia

In Indonesia, the prospects of the various cleavages disappearing are still rather poor, although during the decades of New Order rule a feeling of belonging to a unified nation has probably been established – as is indicated by the spread of *Bahasa Indonesia* as the common language, which somewhat lessens primordial bonds. However, during the past year, there was a cumulation of severe ethnic and religious clashes with heavy destruction and hundreds of fatalities. The main targets in Java have been ethnic Chinese and Christians[54]; while in Western Kalimantan perhaps 200 people were killed, in the course of ethnic fighting between groups of indigenous Dayak and transmigrant Madurese.[55]

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[51] Case 1993, 201.
[52] Rodan 1993, 103.
[53] As happened to Worker's Party leader Tang Liang Hong who was accused of "Chinese chauvinism." Hiebert 1997
[54] Cohen 1997
[55] McBeth & Cohen 1997

Malaysia

In Malaysia as well, the NEP is finally bearing fruits after 25 years, thus raising hopes for a relief of Malay-Chinese tensions. Hence, a large Malay urban middle class and a small but dynamic group of Malay capitalists has come into being under the protection of the NEP. Better educated and professional Malays have "made it" by entering the modern sectors of a booming economy. On the other hand, however, there is also a number of Malays not yet up to coping with the demands of a competitive economy who still rely on state patronage. Moreover, there are still considerable wealth differentials between the Chinese and non-Chinese. In any case, the initial target of the NEP to increase the Malay share of total economic assets by up to 30 per cent by 1991 has been missed by 10 per cent. Therefore, the UMNO – under pressure from UMNO youth and various organized Malay interests – decided to continue the policy, now under the title of "New Development Policy". To summarize, while there is evidence of improvement, the complete disappearance of constraints on political development in Malaysia – objective as well as subjective – is still not near at hand.[56]

For all three countries, the end of the cold war might bring about another shift in the set of (subjective) constraints. In spite of massive state intervention in the economy, the development course chosen is capitalist – adopted first by Singapore and most recently, in the mid-eighties, by Indonesia – pursuing adaptation to the demands of a global economy. Since capitalist development is usually accompanied by the development of material inequalities (in the case of Indonesia extreme), the social source of the demand for radical redistribution will not be exhausted in the near future; rather it will swell. While communists were eliminated in all three countries during the fifties and sixties, since then all forms of organized labor have also been systematically debilitated. Hence, the potential for conflict arising from extreme inequality remains. Since communists – which is the label often assigned to social democrats as well – will probably not emerge as a mobilizing force, such other groups as anti-Chinese movements (in Indonesia) or radical Muslims (Indonesia and Malaysia) might increasingly play that political role.

Henceforth, however, the legitimacy of authoritarian action as directed against "communists" will possibly lose credibility, even if it is still used at present to denounce critics who seek to build civil society.

4. The Invention of Culture

In the light of the preceding discussion, Asian semi-democracies have been classified as being particularly "successful" or "efficient" though not responding in a "liberal-democratic" way to a

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[56] See also Esman 1994, 67–74.

particular set of difficult circumstances. This brings us back to the question of culture. The cultural argument claims that the Asian political culture is a reflection of the general culture of Asian societies, and that the legitimacy of Asian regimes is culturally rooted.

On the one hand the existence of cultural differences cannot be denied. Culture can be tentatively defined as a certain mode of thinking, moral evaluation, communication, and behavior that shows an indeterminate degree of historical inertia and thus exerts some causal influence on the present.

However, avoiding an essentialist conception of culture, one can point at the existence of discourses, *on* culture. In these discourses certain notions and definitions of culture are propagated by certain actors and institutions pursuing their interests. These discourses are inventive. In fact, the course of culture invention can be reconstructed in all three countries, where those in power prove to be the inventors.

Singapore

Until the mid-eighties, the uninterruptedly and exclusively ruling PAP can be termed (and particularly by its critics has been termed) both anti-ideological and pragmatic. At the helm of the state since 1959, by the end of the seventies the PAP had proved extraordinarily efficient in leading the highly vulnerable (in terms of security and economy) city-state on the track to prosperity. It thereby raised the (justified) expectation that Singapore would become Japan's successor in the history of the East-Asian economic miracles.

Until the end of the seventies, its formula for success had been the subjugation of political principle to economic necessity. The satisfaction of material needs (housing, employment, social services) as the principal goal (and PAP's success in realizing that goal) outshined any other conceivable demand on politics. It also appeased any discontent among the majority of the population, possibly as a result of a practice of extreme state intervention into virtually all domains of society (e.g. by means of family planning, tight circumscription of union rights, suppression of disputes over wages, arbitrary amendments of laws and the exertion of pressure upon critics, etc.).

Thus, it was not a lack of legitimacy that urged the government to fill the ideological vacuum at the end of the seventies. The motivation was of a different nature.[57]

At that time, a sense of discomfort arose among the authorities over what has been called the problem of "exaggerated individualism". The rising job mobility among the employed was taken as a sign of the disappearance of loyalty bonds in economic life. Increasing numbers of single

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[57] The following historical draft orients itself mainly by the work of Beng-Huat Chua. (1992)

persons applying for state-financed housing were construed as symptom of the decay of the family. The increase in household consumption (due to a rising standard of living), occasionally climaxing in resented excesses of conspicuous consumption were diagnosed as an epidemic of hedonism. In this situation, Singapore was also open to the conservative Western discourse manifest in, for instance "orientalist texts", social-science modernization theory and American management theory"[58] lamenting the liberal-individualist revolution of the sixties and discovering Japan and Confucianism as setting a shining counterexample to cultural liberalism. This was to become the intellectual underpinning of a new state launched notion of culture.

Japan seemed to demonstrate that modern systems of production, while successful in a capitalist world economy, do not necessarily have to coincide with cultural modernity – or what has been perceived as such from the Western viewpoint. In particular, Japan seemed to indicate that the virtues of community would not necessarily have to be undermined by the forces of modernity.

Since a plain imitation of the Japanese model did not seem viable for Singapore, Confucianism was found to be the appropriate solution, the more so as the majority of the population is of Chinese origin. But at that time, Confucianism as an elaborated doctrine was virtually unknown in Singapore since the education system deriving from the British colonial period was Western in substance[59]. Nor was it any form of religious education provided in Singapore's schools until the early eighties. At that time, due to the perceived moral deficits, Confucianism was introduced as an obligatory subject in higher grade classes, along with Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

Whereas all of the latter religions were commonly practiced and already firmly institutionalized in Singapore's society a group of eight foreign scholars had to be consulted to establish Confucianism as regular subject. During their stay in Singapore from July through September 1982, they spoke at numerous public lectures, seminars and TV talk-shows to widely disseminate their teachings, thereby triggering a mass campaign of moral renewal.

Subsequently, the government-sponsored Institute for East Asian Philosophies (IEAP) was founded in 1983 with the purpose "to advance the understanding of Confucian philosophy so that it can be reinterpreted and adapted to the needs of the present society."[60] Since then,

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[58]   Jayasuriya 1994, p. 416

[59]   In fact, the PAP faction which had asserted itself against the initially dominant left-wing *Chinese-educated* working-class movement in the early sixties (subsequently virtually eliminating it) was a conservative group of *British-educated* middle-class nationalists led by Lee Kuan Yew. This group exclusively became the dominant force within the PAP and thus within the powerful bureaucracy imbuing public life with Western culture. (Rodan 1993, 80) This context explains why Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew – the most prominent proponent of the "Asian values" philosophy – had been nicknamed (until his thirties and still in private life) "Harry" Lee. (Zakaria 1994, 125) Until his thirties, Lee Kuan Yew could hardly speak Chinese! He acquired the language later in order to communicate to the Chinese-speaking Singaporean populace during election campaigns. (Buruma 1996, 194)

[60]   Tamney 1991, 400, quoted from Lawson 1993, 25)

directed by the two highest-ranking state officials – the first and second Deputy Prime Ministers – it has organized several international conferences, most of them related to Confucianism's relevance to modern societies.

As equally state-driven as the domestic invention of culture, a cultural consciousness of region was propagated. It gained in salience with the close of the Cold War and its ideological schema, hence "beginning to overshadow the earlier dominant 'economic' and security regional discourses"[61] and just at a time when "Singapore's important neighbors, Malaysia and Indonesia, have also begun to be prone to articulating an understanding of the region in culturalist terms."[62] As institutional amplification of the cultural notion of a region serves a number of tightly state-tied policy institutes and "think tanks".

Eventually, in the nineties, the discourse on regionalization was increasingly accompanied by a discourse on political development spearheaded by the retired Lee Kuan Yew. Around him the programmatic "Singapore School"[63] was organized – again, consisting mainly of high-ranking state officials or government-dependent institutions and scholars, respectively.[64]

Indonesia

In Indonesia the history of cultural invention dates back to a much earlier time: the first few years of independence under the rule of its first president, Sukarno.

After the end of the Japanese occupation, the surrender of the returned Dutch four years later, and a short federalist interlude, Indonesia installed a liberal democratic system with the constitution of 1945.

But then there occurred a rapid economic decline, a proliferation of local insurrections and military revolts, and violent ethnic, religious and communist rallying, followed by no less than six cabinet dissolutions between 1950 and 1957. Indeed, the last cabinet of Ali Sastroamidjodjo was assembled on the basis of free elections in 1955 only to be dissolved after the declaration of martial law. It is then not surprising that the notion of a democratic system vesting power primarily in the parliament and cabinet progressively lost credibility among both political elites and the populace.

To blame for all this misery, according to President Sukarno, was Western liberal democracy. Neither would this system protect the interests of such numerous minorities as is the case

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[61]   Jayasuriya 1994, p. 415.
[62]   Ibid.
[63] The term has been coined by Jones (1994)
[64] Important proponents of the "Singapore School" are Chan (1993), Kausikan (1993, 1997), Koh (1993) and – the most prominent – Kishore Mahbubani (1992, 1993, 1994, 1995)

with Indonesia ("fifty plus one are always right"), nor was it in accordance with the cultural peculiarities of the country. Instead, Sukarno argued for a different political system based on Indonesian traditions.

He seized the concept of an "organic state", previously developed by the two Javanese nationalist aristocratic thinkers Supomo and Ki Hadjar Dewantoro. It envisioned a state transcending special vested interests that instead embodied the common good. The idea of the organic state, derived on the one hand, from a type of nationalist cultural relativism contrasting "Eastern" society – characterized by the ideals of harmony and consensus – with an image of "Western" society based on individualism, confrontation and materialism. On the other hand, the doctrine of the organic state was imbued with the traditional ethos of Javanese aristocrat officials who submitted to the principles of order, authority and obligation.[65]

From the Javanese peasant culture, Sukarno drew the concepts of *gotong royong* (cooperation), meaning that no major political grouping (particularly not the communist party PKI, favored by Sukarno but vigorously rejected by major political and societal groups) should be excluded from the decision-making process. This process should not be modeled on the competitive voting procedures practiced in Western democracies but rather by *musyawarah* (deliberation) until *mufakat* (consensus) was reached. If that was not achieved, the decision should be made by the state equivalent of the village elder, i.e. the president, Sukarno himself.[66]

These revived and reinterpreted traditions became the ideological underpinnings for the subsequent institutional restructuring during the authoritarian period of "Guided Democracy" (1957 - 1966). The parliament was subdued to the *gotong royong* principle, which meant the loss of the chance for political representation on the part of political parties. From then on, half of the seats were reserved for so-called "functional groups" recruited on the basis of a presumed special function for society (e.g. their profession). The most prominent group among them was the military, which by this and other means became the second power center after the president, who installed himself as charismatic leader of what can be called an "authoritarian corporatist regime".

Guided Democracy collapsed in an economic and humanitarian disaster, but the ensuing New Order government under President Suharto has kept both, the essential traditional concepts and the corresponding authoritarian corporatist structure functioning until the present day.

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[65] Robinson 1993, 42
[66] Sundhaussen 1989, 435

Malaysia

In Malaysia, the invention of culture and identity was primarily advanced through the initiative and visionary power of Datuk Seri Dr. Mahatir Mohamad. Upon assuming office in 1981, Mahatir brought about a resurgence of national identity and self-esteem. Using arguments from the Western discourse on the East-Asian economic miracle, he demanded cultural reorientation for Malaysia: "Imploring his countrymen to turn away from the West, Dr. Mahatir initiated a 'Look East' policy (to learn the work ethics of Japan and Korea)."[67]

Mahatir was highly sensitive to any attempt on the part of developed nations to exert influence upon Malaysia through diplomatic or economic channels, often with moral lectures on their superior political value system or the necessity of environmental protection. In his firm stance, Mahatir gained profile by furiously rebutting Western vindications:

"Prime Minister Mahatir continues to sound the familiar theme that strong state capacity is necessary for guiding rapid economic growth and preserving ethnic peace, and that his government must produce societal goods rather than particularistic favors. He buttresses this argument by raising nationalistic fervor against Western models of democracy, asserting that indigenous forms of rule by consensus are culturally more appropriate."[68]

In the nineties, Mahatir made efforts to distinguish himself as *the* spokesman for the "Asian values" debate beside Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew. He arranged some international conferences on the theme of "Asian values". In 1992, a Commission for a New Asia was organized to prepare a catalogue with fundamental rights appropriate to the Asian context. In the end, the catalogue comprised 28 rights which can basically be considered compatible with a liberal democracy. But in contrast, political rights ranked last in the list, after economic, cultural and religious rights. Furthermore, a "right to order and freedom from anarchy and chaos" was included, which implies the precedence of state power over the protection of individual rights. In 1994, another international conference on "rethinking human rights" took place in Malaysia that denounced Western hypocrisy on the subject.[69]

The previous institutional analyses of culture discourses has been aimed at demonstrating how and by whom the notion of cultural essence and difference is disseminated, how this dissemination is directed, and how it is steered politically.

This is not an argument against the essential notion of cultural difference but rather an example of how to politically define this difference.

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[67] Ahmad 1989, 368
[68] Case 1993, 202–3
[69] Emmerson 1995, 236

The idea of culture invention, however, implies that culture is not destiny; rather, for certain purposes under certain circumstances by certain interests, fate can be a socially constructed phenomenon. Then, as the examples showed, certain forms of communication are established to determine what to reveal and what to conceal; and certain institutions are designed to stabilize these communications.

To ask how and by whom culture is invented, delivers the most striking critical argument in the "Asian values" debate. It directs one's attention to cultural politics, as outlined above, based on the assumption that the basic driving force behind them is the desire of the ruling elites to preserve their power. The creation of a cultural identity distinct from "the West" is thereby instrumental in that it imposes a certain interpretation on socio-political processes and structures at both the local and global level. It makes sense of these processes and structures by selecting a certain set of meanings at the expense of alternative meanings, particularly those that reveal aspects of power and interest. Its main purpose is to legitimize internal political structures already in place as it de-legitimizes both internal and external critics. Thereby, this purposeful creation of meaning has an internal as well as an external thrust.

Turning to the internal audience, the idea of culture may serve as a means of legitimization to complement the principal tool for garnering legitimacy: providing positive economic performance. Thus, the argument of an albeit normatively undesirable but – for the sake of economic development and to guarantee stability and order – indispensable semi-democratic framework is supplemented by the argument of cultural appropriateness. A consequence of this is that, even after long-term high growth rates have already raised wealth levels to Western standards and the project of development seems to have succeeded, the day of the semi-democratic system is still a long way off. Being deeply rooted in culture, it will survive the completion of its primary task. This argument is of particular importance not only for Singapore, which has already reached the per capita GDP of its former colonial master Great Britain, but also for rapidly developing Malaysia. The group most interested in keeping the system as it is, is the elite. They are determined not to surrender to an emerging middle class possibly demanding the subjugation of state and polity to the civic sphere. This interpretation says much about the invention of tradition in Singapore and Malaysia at a time when high growth rates have started to transform the social pyramid in favor of more wealthy, professional and educated groups.

Internally, the creation of cultural identity may also serve to reconcile society and polity. It can build unity within a society torn apart by the forces of modernization. In the discourse on "Asian values", community boundaries are drawn in a way different than in the course of nationalistic movements both past and present. The national community does not serve as a uniting theme but rather as a civilization, or simply "Asia" as contrasted to "the West". In this function, domestic discourse is not only linked to the discourse on regionalization; it also defines the cultural enemy from the outside already as lurking within. The enemy's wicked

influence comes with its political institutions, namely liberal democracy. The latter, coupled with civil liberties and civil rights, opens up the valves for an epidemic of exaggerated individualism, homosexuality, family decay and crime.

Indeed, rapid transformations in developing societies do have grave consequences. They often raise justified concerns and a pressing demand for an identification of the causes. However, the explanation offered here hardly masters the complexity and ambivalence of the problem. Rather, it is oversimplified and biased, not only in the way in which it analyses the problem, but also in the way it defines the problem. Again, the purposeful character of the explanation is self-evident. In order to create community and produce legitimacy for a government that makes itself the arbiter of the common good – unconstrained by public accountability the "Asian values" rhetoric pits the duality of "good" and "bad" against "East" and "West". By satisfying the need for simple explanations and delivering moral contrasts, it thus draws attention way from the opposites of liberty and oppression.

In part, the officially denounced grievances can easily be traced back to official policies. One example is Singapore's ideology of meritocracy, according to which those who achieve more are considered for top positions, earn more and enjoy higher social status. Singapore's highly competitive education system embodies this ideology and thus contributes considerably to the much-lamented increase in individualism and the undermining of social solidarity.[70]

Another example concerns the increase in delinquency. Indeed, among the Indian minority of Malaysia, such an increase has taken place in recent years. But again, the reasons are not to be found somewhere in "the West" but rather are homemade. The Indians are the ones who gained nothing at all from the New Economic Policy (NEP) launched in the early seventies, aimed at alleviating general poverty and inequality along Malaysia's ethnic lines. Lacking the privileged *bumiputera* status, they did not benefit from the huge redistribution program of the NEP; instead they currently run the risk of degenerating into a permanently deprived racial minority.[71]

Turning to the external audience, the main purpose behind the "Asian values" rhetoric is again the acquisition of legitimacy within the national context of its proponents. Their self-confident display of cultural distinction vis-àvis the former developmental models, and the occasional humiliation of the latter by bluntly exercising new economic interdependencies, nourishes the prestige and authority of leaders like Lee Kuan Yew and Mohamad Mahatir within their

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[70] Beng-Huat Chua. 1992, 258

[71] See e.g. Hiebert 1995a and 1995b, Jayasankaran 1995b, 26; other disruptions associated with the rapid social transformation of Malaysia are the spread of religious groups, the increase in the incidence of AIDS (10,000 estimated HIV cases by September 1994), a growing drug-addiction problem, and a rising incidence of child abuse. (Jawhar bin Hassan 1995, 191) Alarming is the transformation of youth culture in Southeast Asia. A survey in 1995 found that, in Islamic Malaysia among young people between the ages of 13 and 21, 71% smoked, 40% watched pornographic videos, 28% gambled, and 14% took hard drugs. (Vatikiotis 1996a)

countries. If one considers the stratego-theatric aspect of this discourse, its internal and external arenas turn out to be tightly intertwined.

But of course, the communication directly addressed at Western governments can also directly influence their behavior. The systematic and recurrent demonstration of the Asian governments determination not to tolerate any undue interference or tutelage, can achieve its goal. By coming though loud and clear, the message can preclude any future critique or principled measures in the addressees foreign policies. Western governments are thus trained to approach oriental rulers in humble courtesy, if for no other reason than not to lose face. The wide argumentative repertoire of the "Asian values" discourse in turn facilitates their vindicating pragmatic policies before Western constituencies. In fact, it ushers success in. In the EU-ASEAN summit in Bangkok in 1996, questions of human rights and democratization were explicitly excluded from the agenda.[72]

5. Dim Prospects for Democracy: Middle-classes Stabilize the Status Quo

In the preceding passages we have refrained from giving a purely critical evaluation of democracies "Asian style" and argued in favor of an ambivalent perspective. While the cultural arguments advanced by proponents of the "Asian values"-philosophy are rejected, it can hardly be denied that political development is structurally constrained. On the one hand, the systems inspected are designed to preserve the power structure in place; on the other hand, they guarantee order and economic growth within a context of constraints. Nevertheless, even considering the positive achievements of the systems, the notion of constraints can be scrutinized as well. Constraints always have a subjective dimension open to interpretation (and rationalization), and they change with time.

Both reservations imply a potential for change and a capability of improvement on the part of the regimes, as well as the possibility for adjustment to actually changed or just differently perceived circumstances. They also imply the potential for further liberalization and democratization beyond the already-existing, rather formal democratic institutions.

This leads us to ask what the chances are for a realization of this potential. What are the future prospects for democratization?

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[72] It is only due to Portugal's tough stance on East Timur that the EU made efforts to work out a compromise in the meeting of EU and ASEAN foreign ministers in Singapore in February 1997. Human-rights issues remained off the agenda, and the joint declaration for closer economic, trade and cultural cooperation was very general indeed. In more specific questions, negotiations were to be separately held later.

As we said at the beginning, at the macro-level of analysis Southeast Asian political systems behave oddly by taking the positive association of Lipset's law as a yardstick. Strong and sustained economic growth has been joined neither by the regime opening up nor by democratization.

The explanation of why this *has been* so, is immanent in what has already been said. All of these countries have had some experience with a liberal or a comparatively more liberal system that was replaced in the wake of crisis by a more authoritarian form of government. Paradoxically, however, the latter invariably retained formal democratic procedures, albeit somewhat hollowed out and lacking in the capacity to peacefully replace governments (though, as in Malaysia, the Prime Minister). The principal means of legitimization and of providing stability was the new governments capacity to increase material wealth. In Singapore, this has been the explicit goal of the PAP ever since the early sixties – notwithstanding the means employed to that end – which is why it has been termed "pragmatic". Likewise, Indonesia's New Order government grounds its rule on successful economic development. Malaysia's NEP also rests on the essential requirement of continuous economic growth in order to convey a feeling of improved living-standards, even to those, to whom the NEP presents the bill. (mainly the Chinese). In fact, an economic slow-down in the mid-eighties was accompanied by a crisis in the Malaysian regime that eventually led to the split of the UMNO into *Semangat 46* and UMNO-*Baru*. This was interpreted by many observers as a sign for the regime opening up. But after the subsequent economic recovery, the system of domination stabilized anew with UMNO-*Baru* taking the role of the old UMNO. Was this swing-back a short-term reversal of an inescapable trend towards democratization, or was it merely the oscillation of a basically stable system? Similarly in Singapore, during the transition from Lee Kuan Yew's retirement to Goh Chok Tong, a state-engineered liberalization was forced. However, liberalization came to an end after the elections of 1991. Equally, Indonesia experienced a phase of more open public debate stopped by Suharto in 1994.

Are Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia stable semi-democracies? Are these countries more than mere laggards of democratization - perhaps something like long-lasting contradictions to "Lipset's law"?[73]

If one tries to assess the future course of political development, there are many "imponderables" reflecting the causal complexity of such processes.

In all three countries, for instance, a transition of leaders is forthcoming.

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[73] One thing must be emphasized, however: within the broader East- and Southeast-Asian region, the attribute "recalcitrant" only fits to these three countries. South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and the Philippines are all comparable countries in terms of economic development; however their elites join affirmatively the discourse on "Asian values", nor are they reluctant to advance democratization.

When Lee Kuan Yew has passed away, will he live on in an institutional form, as can be hypothesized regarding the constitutional change in 1991[74], or could this mean a radical change in political style for Singapore?

The question of the effects (as well as the very conduct) of leadership transition is also an open one for Indonesia. Now 76 years old, Suharto will do a seventh five-year term of office[75] However, the transition is unavoidable in the longer term: the new president will probably not be able to rely on Suharto's power resources but will be interdependent on a growing variety of other important actors.[76]

In Malaysia, a change of leadership could be imminent[77]. However, the question arises of whether Anwar Ibrahim's different personality will make the crucial difference for Malaysia's political system.

Apart from the category of actors, there is the unpredictability of the global economy on which all of the countries increasingly depend – to mention a second principal determinant of the democratization process.[78]

But since the focus on individual actors or global markets hardly allows us to estimate developments, we will try to make plausible projections by looking at structural factors – especially at those that are candidates for triggering and mediating a regime change from within.

Such a structural factor is the emerging middle class and bourgeoisie. To start with, one would expect a special status for these groups first because rapid economic development is usually accompanied by a parallel growth in their scope. Secondly, since economic growth is the principal source of power for the regimes in place, it could be assumed, that the generators of this growth will gain considerable political leverage. Thirdly, the regimes have developed

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[74] Rodan 1993, 100.

[75] Loveard 1995a.

[76] Actually, there is total uncertainty about what and who comes after the resignation or death of Suharto. It is probable that the military will try to shape the transition in a controlled manner. Whether it succeeds, is open to question. If it does, it is to be expected that it will retain its present status in order to guarantee internal security. See McBeth 1997a.

[77] Mitton 1995a, Jayasankaran 1995a. However, again there is no schedule for 71–year-old Mahatir Mohamad's resignation. (Hiebert 1997).

[78] For a systematic consideration of the effects of globalization on political development in Southeast Asia, see Neher, 1994b. At any rate, a pessimistic clue as to the effects of globalization on democracy is provided by recent legislation in Indonesia. The Manpower Bill "will give the government extensive control over every aspect of industrial relations, with unlimited power to intervene in labor disputes, and direct control over trade unions. (...) The Manpower Bill embodies all of the anti-worker legislation which prompted mass protests and strikes recently in South Korea and Australia. As members of the APEC free-trade regime, the governments of these countries have imposed a neoliberal agenda which combines free trade and freedom for international capital with strong state intervention to repress worker's movements." (Conference act.indonesia)

effective means of demobilizing possible alternative forces "from beneath", such as organized labor or social democratic parties.

But the look at middle class and bourgeoisie, while again revealing structural analogies, does not justify hopes that they could and would become the driving force behind a democratization process.

Singapore

In Singapore, thirty years of rapid economic growth have led to the emergence of a substantive middle-class, as can be measured by a number of indices for income and education levels, home-ownership rates, consumption patterns and rates of overseas travel.[79] The most recent transformation in Singapore's workforce was induced in the mid eighties by an official push for structural diversification of the economy and higher value-added production. It replaced the traditional cheap-labor policy and upgraded Singapore as service center for multi-national corporations. Thus, such professions as law, accounting, management, finance and consulting (in the technical sector) and communications, advertising, transport and distribution, leisure and medical services (in the service sector) have greatly increased.

But despite the official capitalist and efficiency-maximizing development strategy, through its integration into the international division of labor the state is still the most influential economic actor within Singapore's domestic economy. Controlling the real-estate sector and running the main domestic large-scale enterprises the state is the main employer. This includes the middle class employed in civil-service. Thus, it provides the opportunity structure for a major part of Singapore's bourgeoisie – the "public entrepreneurs". In contrast, Singapore's domestic private sector is comparatively minute. Thus, though there is a diversified and professional middle class and a bourgeoisie, both are dependent on the state. On the other hand, by appreciating their crucial economic role, the PAP has not restricted middle-class and bourgeoisie aspirations but rather has supported them as long as they are confined to the economic sphere. Moreover, the ideology of meritocracy promoted and institutionalized by the government, making educational achievement the requirement for social mobility, creates a high social status for the middle-class. As has been shown above, civil society organizations have been neutralized by a system of surveillance and exclusion. Simultaneously, the co-optative system developed in the past fifteen years in response to a worsening of election results, was aimed particularly at middle-class proponents. This can be inferred from the practice of selectively co-opting professionals or experts with middle-class background.

But can we not read the (slight) electoral decline since the early eighties as a sign of growing middle-class dissatisfaction with the present regime? Have not the measures taken by the – in

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[79] Rodan 1996, 20–26, from whom I borrowed the ensuing line of argument.

this respect, extremely sensitive – government served exactly the purpose of recuperating middle-class support? While the response to the second question is probably positive, this might not be the case for the first. Especially the snap elections of 1991 cannot be interpreted as a rejection by middle class voters: with the loss of 4 from a total of 81 seats, the electoral decline hit a new low.

"To generalize, the support for the opposition parties came from satellite towns on the outer rim of the city. They contain a high percentage of constituents with average and below-average incomes involving a range of working-class occupations, including clerical and non-supervisory white-collar categories."[80]

For an explanation of lower-class discontent, two points can be advanced. The basic reason may lie in the perception of rising socio-economic inequalities as are manifested in conspicuous consumption by those who are crowned by success in the context of curbed social mobility. Secondly, the elitist policy of co-optation and promotion by a government having exclusively middle-class interests in view, has additionally irritated the lower classes.

It thus can be concluded that the policy of regaining middle class support was misdirected. In fact, the middle class has emerged rather as a beneficiary from the present system and therefore has no reason to seek political change. The lower classes, on the other hand, have been effectively hindered from organizing politically.

In the elections of January 1997 Goh Chok Tong and the PAP were clearly confirmed in office with an increase of 4%, rising to their old 65% and taking two of the four (from 83) seats from the opposition. Again, it was in an area of factories and low- and middle-income residents, where the opposing Worker's Party scored a relative success with 45% of the popular vote.[81]

Indonesia

Although far more complex, heterogeneous and proportionally much smaller than in Singapore, a middle class and a bourgeoisie also have also emerged in Indonesia.

The bourgeoisie has to be subdivided into two groups. First, there is the Chinese bourgeoisie that emerged in the seventies when the first conglomerates were founded – large, private corporate groups based on state-allocated concessions, licenses, contracts and credit; these groups seized forestry concessions and trade monopolies, for instance. The Chinese bourgeoisie prospered most in the early eighties, when its members gained access to oil-

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[80] Ibid. 34.
[81] Hiebert 1997.

funded industrial projects in their role as contractors and suppliers. Today, it controls the major private-sector industries.

Second, though less efficient and of only minor economic importance, there also developed a *pribumi* (native) bourgeoisie. But likewise, its opportunity structure is framed by state and bureaucracy that allocate shares in the exploitation of natural resources and large-scale production and development schemes. More than the Chinese capitalists, successful *pribumi* entrepreneurs owe their rise to the state, whose officials have to a certain extent pursued explicit nationalist policies to support the development of a native (non-Chinese) private sector. Another more direct source of *pribumi* capitalism are the families of high-ranking officials – starting with the family of the president – who take advantage of their strategically placed offices to set up enterprises on their own.

The *pribumi* segment of the bourgeoisie is organized politically into various business organizations and is one of the few groups relatively free to express criticism or to support opposition parties. Nevertheless, those who built up corporate structures independently of the state are still a small minority (e.g. the media industry). In general, the *pribumi* bourgeoisie is subject to – often native-biased – state patronage and is therefore neither willing nor able to restrain state power.

The Chinese, on the other hand, though much more autonomous economically, are virtually excluded from the public sphere because of the widespread public hatred against them. Their social vulnerability, on the one hand makes them abstain from an open formulation of their common interests; rather, they choose to rely on personal patronage bonds with officials and politicians. On the other hand, this same "exposedness" renders them dependent on state protection from the anti-Chinese mob. So they have a stake in a strong authoritarian state.

If the bourgeoisie, on the whole, does not pose a challenge to the present regime – for it derives essential benefits from it – what about the middle-class?

Though clearly existent and growing, the Indonesian middle class is not easy to survey, for it "consists of a wide range of sub-elements from wealthy, urban managers and professionals to lower-level clerks and teachers in the regions and small towns, often with strong connections to local *ulama*."[82] The upper portion of this complex continuum represents only a tiny island in an ocean of poverty, as is indicated by a professional and managerial middle class of 3.9 per cent concentrated in Java and Jakarta.[83] A considerable part of the upper middle class – high-ranking officials, businessmen, intellectuals – owes its wealth and security to economic growth under the aegis of the New Order and to the authoritarian vigilance of the regime, which it has

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[82] Robinson 1996, 85.
[83] Ibid. 84.

supported from its very beginning. Having nothing to gain and a lot to lose in case of any breakdown of the regime and the ensuing social turmoil, it anxiously adheres to the status quo. At the same time, it is also members of the upper middle class who commit themselves to the principles of civil society: for instance, readers of such critical magazines as *Tempo* or *Kompas* engage in human-rights and environmental organizations and also support such prominent critical organizations as *Forum Demokrasi* or *Petisi Limapuluh*. However, the democratizing potential of Indonesian civil society its contained by the co-optative policy of the government. On the one hand, this offers alternatives and safe outlets for participation and political-bureaucratic careers without risk to the stabilized order. However, on the other hand, it excludes non-accommodating challengers.

"It is little wonder that middle class reformers have made such limited political progress in the past forty years. Internally divided, dependent upon the state and fearful of social and economic chaos, they have been largely immobilized. The general expectation that middle-classes represent sources of social power and wealth independent of the state and are therefore concerned with limiting its power and imposing accountability has not generally applied – at least not yet – in Indonesia."[84]

There is also the quantitatively more prominent lower portion of the middle class – the mass of teachers, clerks and lower-level civil servants mainly situated in the countryside. This group has proved far less committed to liberal and democratic ideals than the upper middle-class; Instead, it is rather inclined to radicalism from the right – ultra-nationalist, fundamentalist and anti-Chinese – and as it once was to the left (the now-destroyed PKI). Thus, the lower middle class represents not so much a force of democratization but rather a precarious destabilizing factor to be kept in check by authoritarian corporatist structures. Indeed, since both upper and lower middle class are to a large extent employed by the state bureaucracy, they are automatically integrated into such corporatist organizations as KORPRI, which monitors their ideological adherence to the New-Order regime.

On the other hand, in Indonesia there is a portion of the middle class that does demand democratization. This group probably coincides with the readership of such critical magazines as *Tempo* or *Kompas*: it sympathizes or supports the lively NGO scene and watches international news broadcasts as CNN. Politically, this group of potential democratizers has been represented by the PDI. However, after the elections of May 1997, the PDI shrunk to insignificant 3%, which means its virtual elimination as political force. Thus, at present, this part of the middle class has to be viewed as excluded from the co-optative system. The same holds true for potential allies as the labor movement.

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[84] Ibid. 87.

In conclusion, we can state that neither the bourgeoisie nor middle class – despite their heterogeneity – takes an antagonistic stance towards the government by demanding drastic change. Rather, each stands in a synergistic relation of dependency and protection. Though impulses for a more liberal system are emitted by upper middle-class actors, they remain marginal and are quickly absorbed and neutralized by co-optative policies.

Malaysia

Consider the following factors: an average GDP growth of 6% over a period of 25 years; a general rise in living standards; the doubling of the volume of the economy during the sixties and its subsequent tripling by the nineties; the ongoing transition from an economy based on the export of tin and rubber to an exporter of such high-tech products as, for instance, semiconductors; the ability to offer a variety of professional services for multi-national corporations. All this entailed a profound restructuring of Malaysian society during the past three decades and has led to the creation of substantive business, middle and working classes at the expense of the rural class. Nevertheless, the expectation cannot be confirmed that these changes would also bring on pressures towards liberalization and democratization. Although the emergence of a number of critical NGOs recruited mainly from the educated middle class undoubtedly indicates the existence of a civil society in Malaysia, several characteristics of the middle class and the bourgeoisie make their role as a democratizing force appear improbable. In the first place, it must be considered that the middle-class, which 1990 amounted to approximately one-third of the population (lower and upper middle-classes), has not grown at same rate in each ethnic segment. Under the aegis of the NEP, the Malay portion has particularly increased dramatically enough to now constitute roughly one-half of the middle-class. Since the Malays owe their facilitated upward social mobility to the NEP – and consequently, to its semi-democratic regime – they have no reason to urge liberalization but important reasons to be supportive of the government. This becomes even more evident if we consider the role not only of the bureaucracy but also of the huge state- and UMNO-owned sector of the economy to act as an elevator promoting upward mobility for Malays.[85] As for the still-small group of new Malay entrepreneurs – also active supporters of the NEP – the supposition that they could manage on their own and compete on the free market without their patronage links remains dubious. As one author puts it:

"Malay business people did not so much constitute a class determined to further its common interests but rather consisted of coteries of clients preoccupied with maintaining individual links with political patrons. Malay business people, therefore, served to strengthen the state rather than acting as a check on its power."[86]

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[85] See Kahn 1996, 61–67.
[86] Crouch 1993, 146.

On the other hand, even Malay middle class support for the government is not unconditional. If Malay expectations for special treatment and upward mobility are frustrated – as happened when patronage flows ebbed away as a result of a general economic downgrade in the eighties – their dissatisfaction and threat to withdraw support can and did cause severe turbulence in UMNO leadership. Thus, the UMNO finds itself forced to be responsive to the demands of its voting population. But that does not mean that middle-class Malays want Malaysian semi-democracy to become more democratic. Their selective responsiveness has so far suited their purposes well.

The non-Malay portions of the middle-class, on the other hand, have good reasons to demand a regime change. However, general economic growth has so far sufficed to raise their living standard as well, though not at the same speed as for the Malays. The Chinese bourgeoisie particularly has even expanded despite the NEP, so that today the largest conglomerates are still in Chinese hands.[87] Politically, the non-Malay middle class and bourgeoisie are either excluded from or incorporated into the system. If they are represented the junior partners of the UMNO within the *Barisan nasional* to which they maintain analogous clientelistic relationships, they thus become neutralized in the political sphere.

Hence, the typical Malaysian from the middle class or bourgeoisie hardly gives the impression of wanting any change in the system. The majority is either content with the limited responsiveness of the regime to its particularistic interests or is divided along communal lines.

As has been said before there are many possible factors influencing the course of political development, and history has produced very different courses for democracy.

However, some strong arguments can be made that – at least in a mid-term perspective – the rapidly growing middle-classes and bourgeoisie will not comply with their historical role. This goes against the assumption that they figure as the most important agents of democratization in the cases of Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia when looking at development paths.

Though capitalist, all three countries have political economies characterized by huge shares of state ownership and massive state intervention. Thus, if not directly bound to the bureaucracies (as in Indonesia and Singapore), most of the middle class and bourgeoisie are dependent on state patronage (be they Singaporean "public entrepreneurs", *bumiputera* capitalists in Malaysia, or *pribumi* capitalists in Indonesia). In Malaysia and Indonesia, the more independent parts of the bourgeoisie – the overseas-Chinese – would appear likely to be interested in a subordination of the state to their class interests, and possibly vested with the accompanying economic leverage. However, as a group the Chinese either are content with the

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[87] Far Eastern Economic Review 1995.

state's protection against a hostile ethnic environment, as in Indonesia, or they are ruled out politically, as in Malaysia.

Also, there are numerous groups within the middle class and bourgeoisie of all three countries, thus making them heterogeneous and splintered, and unlikely to develop any awareness of a common class interest. This is particularly true for Malaysia and Indonesia. Most profound is the split of the bourgeoisie into a native (*pribumi* or *bumiputera*) and a Chinese bourgeoisie, while middle-class groups are either divided along communal lines, as in Malaysia, or along socioeconomic and center-periphery distinctions, as in Indonesia. On the other hand, the wealthy in general are well aware of the vast wealth differentials brought about by fast economic growth; they are also aware that an authoritarian state will satisfy their demand for stability and order.

Different groups undoubtedly exist within the middle class. However, those who display any willingness for political change and who engage in civic activities are excluded from the state's co-optative system.

6. Conclusion

We hope that we have demonstrated the artificiality of the discourse on culture. We hope our argument serves to effectively criticize the globally disseminated thesis that "Asian values" are fixed cultural traits inevitably producing the semi-democratic types of regimes found in the countries whose leaders advance this thesis: Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. In our view the main causes behind the propagation of "Asian values" would be more aptly sought in "identity politics", where leaders creatively tap sources for their legitimacy in the context of rapid socio-economic and cultural transformation and globalization.

The legitimacy of these regimes is derived from their capacity to function as stable frameworks for economic growth, rather than from their cultural appropriateness or their democratic nature. In their political culture, deliberation, consensus, and abstention from public controversy combine to a highly efficient, evolved co-optative system designed to selectively include and exclude potential challengers to conserve the core authoritarian structures. However, to stop at this point would again mean oversimplification. Considering the constraints under which these systems have evolved – the deep ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and regional cleavages of Indonesia and Malaysia, and (to a lesser extent) the particular vulnerability of a city-state like Singapore – their principal achievement of providing a stable framework of law and order accompanied by continuing economic growth is no trivial accomplishment. Hence, we have to recognize the existing constraints on democracy if we try to evaluate these regimes. This can be dangerous, though, since taking into account any context of constrain means running the risk of rationalizing their abuses. First and foremost, we have to bear in mind that constraints

always have a subjective dimension; and secondly, that any context is always in a state of flux.

However, a final examination of dynamic context focusing on groups of the expanding middle-class and bourgeoisie does not give rise to optimistic expectations. These same social groups that in other countries usually play a crucial role in democratization processes, are largely content with the regimes in place since they derive protection and essential benefits from them. Although a number of alternative determinants of democratization are rather disregarded, we are led to the expectation of virtual regime stability or, at best, a very slow and painful process of the regime opening up in the long run but controlled by the powers that be.

However, to repeat my initial argument, the causes of this is not the influence of a specific culture but rather a unique complex constellation of historical and structural conditions.

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