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Kenneth Christie

The Discourse of Development: Southeast Asia in the 1990's

Some have argued that democracy is somehow unsuited for Asia and that our emphasis on human rights is a mask for Western cultural imperialism. They could not be more wrong. The yearnings for more freedom are not a Western export; they are a human instinct.¹

Western arrogance is breeding many Lee Kuan Yews in Southeast Asia.²

1. Introduction

During the post second world war period, conventional wisdom among elites in developing countries argued that economic development and democracy were essentially competing concerns. Economic growth, order and political stability were viewed as natural pre-requisites to any forms of open, democratic development which might increase the political space in these societies. Consequently, for many underdeveloped nations, economic and social rights were generally prioritized over political and individual rights. Moreover, elites in these regions argued that the latter could hinder the process of economic progress if they were placed first. In this light various rights, freedoms and civil liberties rights could be "traded off". Democratic processes, human rights and political freedoms could and were suspended in response to more pressing needs invariably encouched in material terms.

With the end of the Cold War and the apparent waves of democratization that swept across Eastern Europe and many of the ex-communist states, this thinking was rendered redundant in academic discussions on underdevelopment. However, the debate between democracy and development in the developing world has been revived as an important and crucial aspect of the post cold war discourse of authoritarian regimes in East Asia in the 1990's. This article will look at several aspects of the discourse; a conversation that is the most assertive set of cultural claims from the developing world to emerge in the postcolonial period. It represents a debate aiming at preserving the power structure and avoiding rapid political change that may accompany massive

1 U.S. Secretary of State, Christopher Warren made these remarks at the opening of the ASEAN post-ministerial conference. This was quoted in the Straits Times (Singapore) (27/7/93).

2 This was a senior Indonesian diplomat, cited in Vatikiotis, Michael R. J.: Political Change in Southeast Asia: Trimming the Banyan Tree. Routledge, London 1996, p. 109.

economic growth, such as the development of an independent civil society. In this light the article will analyze the different perspectives, emanating from this dynamic region of the global economy, including Southeast Asian elites views and justifications for development before democracy, and their general views on the process of development. It will then examine the context of the changes taking place at their own societal level, most notably the societal problems being created by the rapid modernization of their societies. Finally I will look at dissenting voices and non-state actors from the region which illustrate a different version of the discourse of development.

2. Defending Authoritarianism

Southeast Asian elites argue their economic success is predicated on a different set of values and concerns to those of Western countries.³ These values are often viewed as broadly illiberal and undemocratic ones and call into question whether development ultimately leads to political liberalisation and a more open civil society. One version of the elite argument emanating from the region is that attempts to promote an illiberal version of democracy are underscored by a dramatic shift in economic power in global terms. In 1960, Japan and East Asia accounted for nearly 4% of the global GNP. Over 30 years later they control at least 25% of that GNP and over half of the World's economic growth has and will take place in Asia in the 1990's.⁴ Asian elites in general and Southeast Asian rulers in particular demonstrate a new political as a result and have bolstered it with the assertion of Asian values and illiberal democracy as a political counterpart to justify and explain their material success. One Western academic noted that "the better their economic performance, the more assertive Asian leaders become in dealing with the West".⁵ In a criticism of a Southeast-Asian country, (regarded as underdeveloped by the standards of the "miracle economies"), perceived as most conforming to the model of Anglo-American democracy, the Philippines, Lee Kuan Yew the most senior spokesman for Asian values and illiberal advocate:

I do not believe that democracy necessarily leads to development. I believe that what a country needs to develop is discipline more than democracy.

3 "Asian" values have been promoted strongly by officials and elites representing different regimes in Southeast Asia. Examples can be found in Mahbubani, K.: "The Dangers of Decadence - What the Rest can teach the West". In: Foreign Affairs, vol. 72, no. 4 (1992); Kausikan, B.: "Asia's Different Standard". In: Foreign Policy, no. 92 (Fall 1993); and Kuan Yew, Lee: "Culture is Destiny". In: Foreign Affairs, vol. 73, no. 2 (1994), among many others. A good selection of these arguments can be found in the article by Dupont, Alan: "Is There An 'Asian Way'?" In: Survival, vol. 38, no. 2 (1996), p. 113.

4 Mahbubani, Kishore: "The Pacific Way". In: Foreign Affairs, vol. 74, no. 1 (1995), pp. 100-101.

5 Van Putten, Claire: "East Asian Governments: Governing the Market, Governing the Media?". In: Gazette 53, no. 12 (1994), p. 1.

*Democracy leads to undisciplined and disorderly conditions which are inimical to development.*⁶

Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's Prime Minister has also been a strong critic of what he sees as a Western, neo-imperialist agenda. He has argued that liberal democracy has been responsible for moral decay, homosexuality and the erosion of traditional family structures amongst other "evils" in the West. He argues: "Let us not be slaves to democracy. If by practising certain aspects of democracy we run the risk of causing chaos in our party and country, we have to choose our party and country above democracy."⁷ Often these arguments are seen as efforts to prop up authoritarian governments whose popular support seems to be declining.⁸

In defence of authoritarian development programmes, elites in the region usually make the case for the superiority of economic/social rights over civil/political rights by juxtaposing immediate survival needs with civil liberties. Which, for example, they ask, is more important to the ordinary citizen of a developing nation: freedom from starvation, or the right of free speech? This question argument could be justifiably rephrased, losing much of its effect, as follows: "Which would developing peoples rather have? A commitment from their governments to sacrifice civil liberties in the hope of increasing the availability of food, or a guarantee that they will not be tortured or extra-legally imprisoned by the state?" Built into this position are the assumptions that economic/social rights are more important than political rights and that the latter may actually hinder development. The example of South Korea under the regime of Park Chung Hee accepted these assumptions. While under investigation by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs for mistreatment of political dissidents, the Seoul government stated,

*[T]he Korean people have been remarkably successful in ... industrialization and economic development. But this much of [sic] success ... would not have been possible without political stability and confidence in the political leadership. ... [The government] has to be bold enough to make difficult demands upon the people and to undertake programs which cannot always be popular with the people. Painful sacrifices are often called for.*⁹

Similarly, the current Chinese government argues that civil liberties must yield to socio-economic imperatives, upon which (they argue) society's very survival is based, and without which political privileges would lose meaning and significance. Therefore Deng Xiaoping could write, "If we only hanker after formal democracy [i.e., a full range of civil liberties], the result will be that democracy

6 "Discipline vs. Democracy". In: Far Eastern Economic Review, 10/12/1992, p. 29.

7 "Mahathir Cautions Against Being Slaves of Democracy". In: Business Times (Singapore), 31/5/1993.

8 Christie, Kenneth: "Regime Security and Human Rights in Southeast Asia". In: Political Studies, vol. 43 (1995), pp. 204-218.

9 See U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs: Human Rights in South Korea: Implications for US Policy. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington 1974, p. 4.

cannot be realized, and neither can the economy achieve development; only a situation of national chaos will emerge." Deng moreover provided a concrete illustration of the consequences of implementing one possible aspect of "formal democracy", the freedom of assembly: "If there is this demonstration today, that one tomorrow, if for 365 days there are demonstrations every day, then economic construction will be out of the question."¹⁰

Moreover the cultural context is stressed by academics and leaders to reinforce the point that they are different and therefore subject to different standards: in East Asia, saving face appears more important than workers dignity:

A labour strike may be considered an exercise of a union's right of collective bargaining in the Western adversarial tradition. But often, especially during a sanitation or transit strike, it may victimize many members of the public. The principle of human rights as wholeness is, in the East Asian consensual tradition considered to have been violated. This is why labour strikes are not popular with the public, even in Japan ... [there is] public aversion to labour strikes as an extreme form of selfishness (because they abridge the rights of a larger number of third parties).¹¹

This theoretical debate (like many others) clearly reflects contemporary historical developments. With the relative decline of once-overwhelming American economic and military strength and the impressive recent growth posted by Japan, China and the East Asian Newly-Industrializing Countries, many Asians have concluded that the West is in decline and their own region will be the next centre of global power. Receding hegemony and growing domestic problems have discredited America's political philosophy as well. The argument for community over individual rights would doubtless lose much of its following in the region if GNPs in the West were growing faster than those in East Asia.

3. Southeast Asian views on Development

Most Southeast Asian states are or have recently been authoritarian rather than democratic, and developing rather than developed. Many regional theorists and politicians therefore argue that their countries should focus on economic progress first, with the expectation that some degree of political liberalization will follow in a future timeframe.

These societies have generally formulated two major views when it comes to development. Firstly, development is a collective activity and is primarily supplied by state agencies and other groups (usually controlled by government) in society. Despite the "rhetoric" of free trade and the free market so often

10 See Deng Xiaoping: "On Upholding the Four cardinal Principles and Combatting Bourgeois Liberalization". In: Beijing Review, July 17-23 (1989), pp. 18-19.

11 See Hsiung, James C.: Human Rights in East Asia: A Cultural Perspective. Paragon House, New York 1985, p. 23.

advanced by the political regimes here, the East Asian "miracle" has primarily been the product of highly interventionist states. Such policies include using subsidies to support what might be otherwise uneconomic exports, centralization in economic planning, foreign exchange and financial controls and a growing public sector.

Secondly, they view development as an economic and social process perhaps requiring in the short term the infraction of classical civil and political rights. In terms of the general population, choice, for instance, might not be so important in employment as in the state directing labour towards certain development projects. The formation of trade unions to protect workers' rights is clearly less important than development goals; until recently Taiwan and South Korea maintained a policy of company unions and in Singapore trade unions are generally synonymous with the ruling political party. There is no guarantee that once economic goals have been reached that civil and political rights will be extended to citizens. No social contract exists between such paternalistic governments and their subjects. In the East Asian perspective the fulfilment of collective rights requires the postponement of individual rights.

Another important line of argument typically used in defending their position is that Western individualistic tendencies which push for democratization are inconsistent (and perhaps even inimical to) with the drive for economic development which is after all their primary goal.¹² Again implicit here is the assumption of a trade-off between basic needs and luxuries, with democracy and civil liberties (in the Western sense) falling into the latter category.¹³ This view evokes psychologist Abraham Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, but writ large. As Maslow's individual being seeks the satisfaction of primary needs such as food and shelter before progressing to more aesthetic concerns like social acceptance and emotional fulfilment, so developing societies must ensure their people's survival before attempting to guarantee a broad range of civil liberties. According to Maslow's formulation, an individual who spent all his time indulging his desire to write poetry might starve to death. Many Asian theorists explicitly acknowledge the tradeoff assumption by arguing that Western-style civil liberties impedes the progress of developing societies, creating chaos, rupture and disharmony.

The preceding views leads us into the controversial issue of whether or not authoritarian government is necessary for successful economic and social development in developing societies. Those who argue this posit that nation-building requires discipline, austerity, and obedience to measures that may be unpopular in the short run but will yield great dividends in the future. In Southeast

12 In 1992, Lee Kuan Yew, the Senior Minister of Singapore stated in a lecture in the Philippines that he did not believe that "democracy necessarily leads to development. I believe that what a country needs to develop is discipline more than democracy. The exuberance of democracy leads to indiscipline and disorderly conduct which are inimical to development." See the Economist, 27/8/1994, p. 15.

13 See Donnelly, J.: "Human rights and development: complementary or competing concerns". In: Shepherd, G. W. Jr., V. P. Nanda (eds.): Human Rights and Third World Development. Greenwood Press, Westport 1985.

Asia, "Asian values" have been invented as the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of the economic miracle in many countries. In times of crisis, effectively a national emergency, governments cannot ensure the successful prosecution of their policies without limiting civil liberties such as the freedoms of speech and of the press, the right of accused criminals to a fair trial, freedom from physical abuse by the police, and so on. As a society becomes wealthier, more orderly and more educated, civil and political privileges will naturally increase. But if the basic goals of development are not achieved, all subsequent aspirations, including political and democratic rights, will fail to materialise. It is therefore unfair for the West whose democratic sensibilities developed within a particular political and historical context to demand that poor, politically unstable underdeveloped countries immediately guarantee as broad a range of individual freedoms as exists in the industrialised world. I argue that the problem with such arguments is the uncertainty of when a society becomes developed enough to embrace human rights and political liberties; at what point on the historical-development continuum does the process of acquiring the material conditions reach a saturation point, so that society can proceed to a new level of political development.

In contrast to sequential approaches to democracy and development, others argue for concurrency. Democratic processes, including respects for civil liberties and political freedoms, do not in this view threaten economic and social development, and therefore can and should be implemented immediately even by developing countries. Such theorists, usually sympathetic to human rights arguments question the logic that civil liberties undermine nation-building. Allowing fair, constructive political debate of major policy issues, protecting citizens from torture by state authorities and from imprisonment without a fair trial, and permitting freedom of worship etc are not incompatible with economic development. In this light, Western-style human rights are seen as a benefit, even a necessity, for the poor, not a luxury of the rich. As empirical support for this argument, one could point out many cases in which restrictions on civil liberties coincided with economic stagnation rather than economic progress – the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos, India during Indira Gandhi's "emergency," and the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe under communist rule. Indeed the Philippines under President Ramos has recently argued strongly against prospects of developmental authoritarianism for their context in response to Singaporean elite's criticism of their policies.

In many cases the language of development, human rights and democracy and their implications have become inseparable for Southeast Asian leaders, but this has been primarily achieved in the area of propaganda. Such an argument implies elitism in the sense that the elites are seen as doing the masses a favour by granting them democracy; the notion that "good government" and discipline are more important than the right of individual's to participate within their society's politics is clearly a prominent campaign for a "subject" political culture. The senior Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew has argued that

Western style democracy has no place in Singapore because the "checks and balances interfere with governing in a developing country where executive action must be swift".¹⁴ Similarly Malaysia, also represents one of the countries that is vociferous and anti-Western in its attacks on liberal democracy. Its leader, Dr. Mohammed Mahathir, regularly condemns Western individualism and democratic norms, claiming that the West is hypocritical and sustains double standards on human rights issues. He argued that Malaysians should not "accept Western-style democracy as it could result in negative effects".¹⁵ Again it might appear that Southeast Asian elites have difficulty distinguishing the effects of capitalism and industrialisation (vis-a-vis the social problems of these countries) from the general principles of democracy, with which they often associate them with. One author, a Malaysian writer has pointed out that the assumption behind "Mahathir's argument is that 'rights' of any sort always means entitlement. Thus he pits his development rights against human rights."¹⁶

Mahathir also accuses the West of manipulating human rights agendas to foster a dependency relationship with underdeveloped nations to reduce threats of competition from the East Asian region. He talks about how the West "create friction and instability so that if we are unstable they can compete with us".¹⁷ The industrialized democracies themselves, the argument continues, did not show much interest in human rights until after they became affluent and politically stable. Only then did they abolish slavery and exploitative child labour, enfranchise more than a small minority of their own citizens, and back away from their imperialist endeavours worldwide. It is therefore unfair for the West to demand that poor, politically unstable Third World countries immediately guarantee as broad a range of individual freedoms as exists in the developed world.

A broad, economic conception of the process of democratization also bolsters East Asian elites demands for economic concessions from the advanced economies. The West's domination of international trade and production, many Third World scholars argue, leaves hundreds of millions impoverished and illiterate, effectively locked out of any hope of relief by a merciless global capitalist economy. Developing countries children die because their governments must direct resources toward meeting debt payments to the North. According to Mahathir, Western efforts to link economic relations with processes of democratization and human rights are really attempts to impose conditionalities and protectionism in another form. The real agenda for Mahathir is to undermine the economic prosperity of the East Asian region.¹⁸ And moreover, the West's control of the media threatens to destroy non-Western cultures. Cold War rivalry and

14 See Simmons, Lewis: "Brave New Singapore: Despite failures Elsewhere in Asia, Authoritarian Capitalism is thriving in Lee Kuan Yew's Tiny Fiefdom". In: *Atlantic*, vol. 268, No. 1 (July 1991).

15 This was reported in "Confucius or Convenience?" in the *Bangkok Post*, 2/3/1993, p. 5.

16 See Boo Tion Kwa, "Righteous talk" in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17/6/1993.

17 See "Mahathir slams Western press for inciting instability in Asia" in the *Business Times* (Singapore), 4/8/1993, p. 3.

18 See *The Straits Times*, 23/7/1991.

proxy wars supported by the developed countries brought massive death and devastation to the South where much of the cold war was actually played out. Scholars such as Malaysia's Chandra Muzaffar chide the West for claiming to be interested in human rights, but defining them in a way that allows the wealthy countries to evade responsibility for the weightiest problems of underdeveloped countries. He argues that "an issue like the crushing impact of Third World debts", he writes, "has not been able to invoke even half as much attention in any European country as, say, the question of torture in some African state or other".¹⁹

In response however, one writer argues this is a problematic contextual argument:

*The East Asian case is based paradoxically on a claim to recognition of both equality and diversity between and among states. Governments which demand an equality of sovereign jurisdiction insist also that each state exhibits economic, social and cultural diversities which should be acknowledged and respected.*²⁰

There is a certain amount of hypocrisy and double standards therefore built into the regions claims. The Philippines is a soft target for soft authoritarian regimes like Singapore who advocate "development before democracy" because it is perceived as the "economic basket case" of the region, despite having the most American style constitution and explicit version of liberal democracy in the region. Lee Kuan Yew has made several hard hitting criticisms of its aspirations and launched thinly-veiled attacks on Western style liberal democracy.

However, the Philippines has shrugged off criticism by these regimes and is pursuing its strategy for a development-friendly democracy with some success. The "sick man of Asia" is gaining support by showing that a "buoyant economy and a vibrant democracy" can go hand in hand.²¹ Its view of democracy has been shaped most importantly by two recent historical experiences; one negative, the disastrous Marcos dictatorship, and one positive, the democratic People Power Revolt of 1986. The trade off logic of authoritarian states is highly questionable in the sense that curtailing civil liberties does not necessarily hasten economic development, nor does protecting them necessarily stifle prosperity.

4. Modernization and Development

The correlation between economic growth and political development has been reformulated recently. New research has reasserted the ideas of modernization

theory that socio-economic development was and is one of the most important factors in democratization. Huntington has argued that with increasing modernization and prosperity a "zone of choice" emerges in which more democratization is required to deal with the new complexity of societal relationships. For example, greater plurality in society is illustrated by more complex interest groups and a greater degree of cosmopolitanism.²² Furthermore, recent literature has stressed the positive correlation between development and democracy when more than GNP and GDP figures were taken into account. Prospects for democracy increased in other words when there were broad improvements in the quality of life for people. Such improvements would include lower infant mortality, increased adult literacy, and increased life expectancy among others.²³

Countries in East Asia (such as Taiwan and South Korea) and Latin America were prompted towards democratization by high levels of economic growth in the 1980's. And this implies that it is in fact the opposite of Southeast Asian claims. Modernization theorists argue that individualism and democracy will not undermine economic growth; on the contrary economic growth will undermine authoritarianism, stimulate democracy and increase levels of respect for political rights and civil liberties.²⁴ Several societies in the region that adopted democratic forms and policies oriented to individual human rights such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and more recently the Philippines have in fact experienced as high rates of economic growth and development as the South-east Asian states which have decried so called Western individualism, such as Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. It would be hard to attribute the reluctance of certain Asian states to embrace more openness to differences of "culture" and "Asian values" given the democratization of other equally Asian societies like Taiwan and South Korea. Authoritarian regimes appear on the defensive with the comparative referent points around the world. Of the thirtyone countries that experienced democratization or became more liberalized between 1974 and 1989, twenty-seven were in the middle income range. Countries that were previously classified as non-democratic, once progressing to middle income status appear to proceed through a "transition" stage in which pressures for democratization, greater pluralism and rights concerns gain more credibility. Once socio-economic development replaces economic development as an indicator, the correlation with democracy strongly increases.²⁵

22 Huntington, Samuel: *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press, London 1991, p. 37.

23 Diamond, Larry, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset: *Democracy in Developing Countries*. 4 vols. Lynne Rienner, Boulder 1989.

24 In fact Samuel Huntington (1991) argues that the change to democracy is most prominent in the middle income countries; "in poor countries democratization is unlikely, in rich countries it has already occurred. Inbetween there is a political transition zone; countries in that particular economic stratum are most likely to transit to democracy and most countries that transit to democracy will be in that stratum." See Huntington, S. P.: *The Third Wave*. University of Oklahoma Press, London 1991, pp. 60-63. This is based on the three classifications of countries into low, middle and high income countries by the World Bank.

19 Muzaffar, Chandra: *Human Rights and the New World Order*. Just World Trust, Penang, Malaysia 1993, pp. 14-15, 20, 29.

20 See Leifer, Michael: "Tigers, tigers spurning rights". In: *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 21/4/1995.

21 This quote was by Michel Camdessus, the managing director of the IMF. See Son, J.: "Philippines: A Model for development friendly democracy?". In: *Interpress news Agency*, 1/11/1994.

Questions concerning the correlation between democracy and economic growth are far from being definitive, but widespread research appears supportive of the view that democracy underpins economic freedoms and in turn promotes growth. Empirically, the worlds richest societies, (Western Europe, the USA and Japan) are liberal democracies and many of the underdeveloped countries are not. Moreover, democracy appears more conducive to long term economic growth than dictatorship. Security of property (important to individuals in the middle classes) goes hand in hand with regard for individual rights. Even benevolent dictatorships cannot provide the same security democracy offers.²⁵ The claim emanating from East Asia that authoritarian government promotes economic growth more efficiently and with greater result is at worst tendentious and at best spurious.

5. Modernization and Societal Disintegration

According to the World Bank, the twenty-three economies of East Asia grew more quickly than any other region between 1965 and 1990. Most of this achievement is reflected in the apparently miraculous growth of eight states (and the subset of Southeast Asia most importantly): Japan; the four "tigers" (Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore) and three Newly Industrialising Economies (NIEs) (Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand).²⁷ However, even the Southeast Asian region is not homogeneous by any measure. Each nation-state here differs widely in terms of economy, society and political system. There are tremendous cleavages and diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity and culture. At least nine types of political system are present in the region including an unconstitutional military dictatorship (Burma), an absolute monarchy without elections or political parties (Brunei), a one party, parliamentary democracy (Singapore), an American style Presidential democracy (the Philippines) and two communist, one party states (Vietnam and Laos) among others. Moreover the economic diversity of the region is underscored by comparing the likes of tiny Singapore with no natural resources, specializing in services to the most diverse country with widescale resources and the fourth most populated country in the world (Indonesia). Per capita GDP's also range from the very wealthy Singapore to the extremely poor Laos. It should be noted that not all states openly espouse illiberal democratic norms but the ones that appear to be highly successful are more prone to this with Singapore sponsoring the illiberal model more vociferously than most. As we can see, clearly, making the economy work has become the main concern of political endeavour in late 20th century East Asia regardless of

25 See United Nations: Human Development Report. Oxford University press, New York 1992, pp. 3, 12-24.

26 See Olson, M.: "Dictatorship, Democracy and Development". In: American Political Science Review, September 1993.

27 The World Bank: The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy. Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, p. 1.

the social costs or consequences; the model of the miracle "tiger" economies is held up with great fervour by themselves and institutions such as the World bank and neo-conservatives. Massive and prolonged economic growth (in double digits, sustained over past 2-3 decades), social transformation, rapid industrialisation and high savings have helped fuel these economies within a framework of strict social order and control.

Despite the great achievements in economic development, there are certain negative aspects of the speed of the change. Again these must be seen in the context of regimes who are defensive and sensitive to the political costs and implications of the rapid transformations. There are costs to the fabric of society and to their development as a whole.

China, which sees Singapore as a role model for its future is experiencing the same disintegrative effects of modernization. The most serious problems it faces were numbered in a recent Asian magazine; these were firstly corruption, followed by prostitution, gambling, drugs, selfishness, unfilial behaviour and public apathy and mistrust.²⁸ These clearly do not fit in with prescribed "Asian values". The fact that Singapore is experiencing rising divorce rates, an increase in drug offenders, more single mothers and increasing alienation as a result of its rapid economic transformation is merely the symptoms of many countries, wherever on the global scale in the process of modernisation and rapid industrialisation. In an 1990 survey, 43.8% of Singaporeans were "politically alienated" in terms of a "difference between perception of citizens' influence on national issues, and perception of how much influence citizens should have on national issues".²⁹ In Malaysia, various social trends accompanying that country's rapid economic transformation also serve to highlight the problems of newly modernizing societies. The present regime is very worried about the increase in teenage promiscuity, alcoholism and drug abuse, and the breakdown of traditional Malay family structures.³⁰ It is not the individualistic tendency, of Western style democratization that undermines traditional, family-oriented societies in Southeast Asia but the processes of industrialization and urbanization, which in turn produces an increasing individualisation of society.³¹ When these are combined with the globalizing effects of democratization which began with the changes in eastern Europe in 1989 (many East Europeans have claimed that the spark for their movements were the televised scenes of China's Spring Democracy movement in action), then there is a fairly strong argument that authoritarians in Southeast Asia are on the defensive.³²

28 Asiaweek, 17/2/1995, p. 25.

29 Chiew Seen Kong and Tan Ern Ser, Singapore Identity and Citizenship, 1990 which was a press release of a survey conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore.

30 Rahim, Samsudin A.: "Disquieting social trends in Malaysia cast a pall on country's progress". In: Straits Times (Singapore), 30/1/1995, p. 16.

31 A useful overview of this can be found in R. E. Howard and J. Donnelly, "Introduction" in: Donnelly, J., R. E. Howard (eds.): International Handbook of Human Rights. Greenwood Press, New York 1987, p. 15.

32 Friedman, Edward (ed.): The Politics of Democratization: Generalizing East Asian Expe-

Some theorists have also questioned the speed with which this transformation has taken place:

*"The Ideology of development", a euphemism for capitalism is embraced with religious fervour. The shrines of economic miracles, like those of religious cults, demand sacrifice and in South Asia, as always, it is the poor and most vulnerable who are offered up to this version of wealth, and its narrow distorted accounting system which understands nothing beyond the balance sheet, yet promotes itself as the profoundest expression of the real world in our time.*³³

The other side of the economic miracle is one that has witnessed widespread income inequalities, social deprivation and environmental degradation. In Malaysia and Thailand for instance where the majority of the population live in rural areas and where they are faced with the urban bias of a fast developing economy, there are serious problems. Low prices combined with enormously destructive mega-projects such as dam building and hydro-electric projects have driven rural people to seek jobs in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur causing in turn social disintegration and family breakdown. Damming and logging projects have laid waste to vast tracts of land, creating homelessness and displacing thousands of rural families.

Workers in the miracle economies work extraordinarily long hours. South Koreans continue to work 10–12 hours a day in a country which has the highest rates of industrial accidents in the world. The Export Processing Zones (EPZ's) of South China, which again reflect the heavy low cost/high export strategy of the tiger economies, have seen large death tolls in the workplace where hundreds of women have been victims. In 1993, almost 2,500 workers were burned to death in Chinese factory fires, invariably because they are forced to live in their place of work, to reduce manufacturing costs.³⁴ In Hong Kong, just one weeks annual leave for industrial workers is common and women bear a large brunt of the downside of the east Asian miracle.

Indonesian state officials like to cite the notion that economic development should precede the luxury of political and civil rights. However, it maintains a fairly weak record in terms of economic rights for many of its citizens. Labour rights and social conditions for its workers reveal widescale deprivation. Here, the minimum legal wage is roughly \$ 1.27 per day, the second lowest in Asia; a survey of 12,000 factories in Tangerang which is part of Jakarta's "industrial" showcase revealed that less than 40% of employers paid the minimum wage. The concern for economic stability to attract investment and corporate activity is also a conventional wisdom in highly developed Southeast Asian countries. The Gross National Product is an obsession in Singapore's version of national security. In 1993, three economists were put on trial under Singapore's Official

riences. Westview Press, Boulder 1994, p. 23.

33 See Seabrook, Jeremy: "Of Human Bondage". In: *New Statesman and Society*, 19/5/1995, pp. 22–23.

34 See "When nimble fingers make a fist". In: *New Internationalist*, January 1995, p. 13.

Secrets Act for revealing the country's growth rate in advance of the Government's official announcement. The environmental costs of booming economies are also proving detrimental to the landscape and the social fabric. In many cities in East Asia, the air quality is so bad that motorcyclists and traffic police are forced to wear surgical masks.

The point I am trying to make is not to argue the case for non-development. These societies will continue to develop regardless because of the inherent dynamics of capitalism; my point is to illustrate how the discourse of development favoured by Southeast Asian elites runs contrary to many of the accompanying social changes brought about by rapid industrialisation. Moreover, increasing social tensions in rapidly modernising economies tend to lead to a point where simple political measures to suppress them ultimately fail. As Sandschneider has argued:

*The increasing dysfunctionality of the status quo system then leads to growing political destabilisation and to the need for political change. The margin between functionality and dysfunctionality of a modernising authoritarian system is very narrow.*³⁵

6. Alternative Voices and Dissent from Elite Discourse

In Southeast Asia, there is however a dissident strain emerging to challenge the conventional wisdom of the authoritarian developmentalist school. Regional NGO's, social movements and political activists are developing alternative positions on the effects of economic growth and the value of democratic norms. The 1993 Bangkok NGO Declaration of Human Rights, endorsed by over 100 regional organizations, asserted that one set of rights cannot be used to bargain for another; according to this view, economic and political rights are equally important. Alex Magno, Director of the Third World Studies Centre at the University of the Philippines, says, "We're not about to trade our rights for better incomes."³⁶ Another Filipino scholar, Hugo E. Gutierrez, argues that "delicate, difficult, and sensitive balancing" between political and economic rights is necessary, since "material advancement alone without [civil/political] rights and freedoms ... would not keep human life truly human".³⁷ Some regional dissidents have accused certain East Asian regimes of using socio-economic rights as an excuse to repress political opposition. Viti Muntarbhorn, law professor at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, argues that many ASEAN governments restrict

35 Sandschneider, Eberhard: "Successful Economic Development and Political Change in Taiwan and South Korea". In: Manor, James (ed.): *Rethinking Third World Politics*. Longman, London and New York 1991, p. 272.

36 See "The Asian Way" in *Asiaweek*, 2/3/1994.

37 See Gutierrez, Hugo E. Jr.: "Human Rights – An Overview". In: Quisumbing, P. V. (ed.): *The New Constitution and Human Rights*. University of the Philippines Law Centre, Quezon City, Philippines 1979, pp. 8–9.

political and civil rights not to promote prosperity, but "to perpetuate the longevity of the regime in power".³⁸

Manuel L. Quezon, the grandson of a former Filipino President has vociferously stated, "the next time you wrinkle your nose in disgust at the sight of our leaders as they sway in the conga-line of democracy, ask yourself: Would you rather be goose-stepping toward progress?"³⁹ Even in highly autocratic Singapore which has no human rights NGO in the city-state, one dissident from the tertiary education sector in Singapore who dared to challenge the one party system, Dr. Chee Soon Juan, stood unsuccessfully for the opposition Social Democratic party against the Prime Minister in a 1992 by-election and soon thereafter lost his job at the University on a charge of misusing a very small sum of money awarded to him for research. Alternative opinions are not respected or sought under soft authoritarian, one party systems. Chee in effect challenged "Lee Kuan Yew's attempts to convince world opinion that there is an Asian model of democracy ... It's in fact a means for staying in power indefinitely" (he argued).⁴⁰ Despite the harsh treatment meted out to people who disagree with the Singaporean authorities, Chee and other activists still try to present their case. Julius Caesar Parrenas, has also argued that the stability of authoritarian governments tends to be temporary. Intangibles also matter in the decision by investors where to place money; Parrenas gave the example of Hong Kong businessmen who might logically prefer Singapore when Hong Kong reverts to China after 1997, but find that the regimented life there is not "conducive to creativity".⁴¹ Jusuf Wanandi, an important Indonesian political commentator, has also argued that globalisation is taking its toll on the notion of a distinctive communal identity in the region: "Our communal approach is definitely changing as a result of the influence of international values. What we need to find now is an appropriate mixture of individualism with continued respect for authority."⁴²

High profile dissidents like Kim Dae Jung, Aung San Suu Kyi and Wei Jingsheng are no less Asian than Lee Kuan Yew, Mahathir Mohammed and Li Peng. "Asia has democratic philosophies as profound as those of the West" writes Kim, and "should lose no time in firmly establishing democracy and strengthening human rights. The biggest obstacle is not its cultural heritage but the resistance of authoritarian rulers and their apologists".⁴³ One cannot help but conclude that the debate between Asian and Western conceptions of human rights is more political than cultural: authoritarians versus (relative) liberals, not

38 See Muntarhorn, Vitit: "Repression and oppression still prevalent in ASEAN". In: *The Nation* (Bangkok), 15/5/1994, p. A4.

39 See Branigan, W.: "Out to show democracy works". In: *International Herald Tribune*, 12-13/11/1994, p. 7.

40 See De Beer, Patrice: "Democracy, Asia's major import from the West". In: *Guardian Weekly*, 25/7/1993.

41 Ibid.

42 Cited in Schwartz, Adam: *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1990's*. Westview Press, Boulder, Co 1994, p. 255.

43 Kim Dae Jung: "Is Culture Destiny? The Myth of Asia's Anti-Democratic Values". In: *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 6 (November/December 1994), pp. 191, 194.

Asians versus Westerners. The most vociferous proponents of an Asian approach to human rights that rejects Western-style civil liberties are authoritarian regimes threatened by demands for political liberalization, while most of the most influential spokespeople for expanded political rights are current or former political prisoners, people who have personally experienced the brutality of unbridled power.

However there are other sides to the discourse. Several Southeast Asian elites themselves have argued for more nuanced positions in the debate. Anwar Ibrahim, the deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia has argued that the proposition that democracy is inimical to political stability and economic growth has been debunked by both Malaysia's and Thailand's experience: "Political liberality is not incompatible with strong economic performance; these countries have sustained growth for more than three decades while practising open and vibrant forms of democracy."⁴⁴ President Ramos of the Philippines has also criticized Southeast Asian developmentalist view (Based on the Philippines experiences under Marcos). Such arguments serve to illustrate that the debate is more nuanced than either/or and more complex than simple categorisation.

7. Conclusion

Western-oriented democratization theorists would question Southeast Asian elite assertions that generous civil liberties inevitably impede economic growth and foster social and political decay. Such assertions they argue, are spurious. But the timing for this counterattack is unfavourable. While the argument is characterized as one over unchanging principles, this theoretical debate (like many others) clearly reflects contemporary developments.

There is a clear appeal in the discourse propagated by officials in the region; it recognises cultural diversity in the first instance. Moreover, the notion that commonly accepted standards in areas of human rights are conditioned by power relationships (which in turn were conditioned by imperial standards at a time when underdeveloped nations had no voice in international relations), reflects the imposition of political hegemony by the West. The latter point appeals to demonstrating the hypocrisy and double standards of Western powers who were guilty of widespread human rights abuses and undemocratic practices when they occupied the position of economic hegemony. Current practices such as the reversal of the decision not to award China most favoured nation Status (MFN) also reflect the contemporary hypocrisy in Western relations with East Asia, while espousing human rights rhetoric. However, as this article has shown the debate has several sides and is more nuanced and complex than appears on the surface. It must also be asked whether the developmentalist, authoritarian version of democracy and human right is ultimately anti-capitalist, and therefore

44 Ibrahim, Anwar: "Asia's New Civility". In: *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6/10/1994, p. 34.

in contradiction with the economic direction nearly all the Southeast Asian states are taking. Capitalism inevitably brings, and implicitly accepts, unequal levels of wealth. This development versus democracy appears as a false dichotomy with the assumption that development can only occur under authoritarian governments.

To the extent that the development-democracy rights debate between East and West is merely a shadow conflict whose moves are determined by differing economic or geopolitical interests, a resolution will remain elusive. The best hope, perhaps, is in the steady trend of democratization that has brought liberalization to some countries in the region and presses heavily upon the others. If, as in other cases, political rights and liberties follow prosperity, and if Southeast Asia and the rest of the region continues to post the highest economic growth rate of any region on earth, even the dubious proposition that such political change cannot be allowed prior to economic development will soon disappear.

Abstracts

Dieser Artikel behandelt die Beziehung zwischen der ökonomischen Entwicklung und dem Demokratisierungsprozeß in Südostasien in der Zeit nach dem Kalten Krieg. Im regionalen Diskurs werden Ansprüche, die sich auf den ökonomischen Erfolg stützen, geltend gemacht, um verschiedene Formen autoritärer Regierung zu rechtfertigen. Diese Ansprüche und regionalen Sichtweisen und die Schwierigkeiten von deren Aufrechterhaltung angesichts der rapiden Modernisierung, Industrialisierung und den damit einhergehenden Erscheinungen von gesellschaftlicher Desintegration werden hier untersucht.

This paper looks at the relationship between economic development and processes of democratization in post cold war Southeast Asia. The regional discourse is one of asserting cultural claims based on economic success in an effort to justify various forms of authoritarian rule. These claims and regional views on development are investigated here along with the difficulties of sustaining them in the face of rapid modernization, industrialization and accompanying forms of societal disintegration.

Kenneth Christie, Department of Comparative Politics,
University of Bergen, Norwegen

Journal für Entwicklungspolitik XIII/4, 1997, S. 445

Komlosy, A., C. Parnreiter, I. Stacher und S. Zimmermann (Hrsg.): Unge-regelt und unterbezahlt. Der informelle Sektor in der Weltwirtschaft (= Historische Sozialkunde 11). Brandes & Apsel/Südwind Verlag, Frankfurt am Main/Wien 1997, 249 Seiten.

Das Ende der „großen Theorie“ in der Entwicklungsdiskussion hatte zur Folge, daß die Konzepte der Marginalität allmählich von der Diskussion um den informellen Sektor ersetzt wurden. Der vorliegende Band bringt Beiträge von mitteleuropäischen und US-amerikanischen Autoren, die sich im Rahmen einer Wiener Ringvorlesung mit dem Thema auseinandersetzten. Sie gehen von den Perspektiven der Soziologie, Raum- und Stadtplanung, Ethnologie, Geographie, Politologie und Afrikanistik aus; mit insgesamt vier Beiträgen ist jedoch der historische Ansatz am stärksten vertreten.

Dabei sind alle Beiträge mehr oder weniger hermeneutisch angelegt und spiegeln das subjektive Verständnis der Autoren wider. Eigene empirische Forschungsergebnisse werden in keinem Beitrag eingebracht, wohl aber eine ganze Reihe von theoretischen Ansätzen, die auf das Phänomen des informellen Sektors bezogen werden. Dabei herrscht weitgehende Einigkeit darüber, daß die Informalität das Ergebnis kapitalistischer Wirtschaftsstrukturen ist und somit weder auf das 20. Jahrhundert noch auf die Dritte Welt beschränkt bleibt. Eine erste Reihe von Beiträgen ist sehr generell gehalten und umfaßt Studien auf säkularer und globaler Maßstabsebene (Delapina, Füllberg-Stolberg, Komlosy, Zimmermann, Holzer). Im zweiten Abschnitt werden regionale Analysen zu Indonesien (Evers), Afrika (Stacher), Lateinamerika (Schubert) und Osteuropa (Hofbauer) vorgestellt, bevor auch das aktuelle Phänomen der Informalisierung westlicher Ökonomien behandelt wird (Parnreiter). Dieser sozioökonomische Umbruch wird in den beiden letzten Beiträgen am Beispiel der Bekleidungsindustrie (Langthaler) und der Weltstadt New York (Sassen) noch näher behandelt.

Der in jeder Beziehung anregende Sammelband kann jedem, der sich mit sozioökonomischen Prozessen der Gegenwart auseinandersetzen will, zur Lektüre und kritischen Auseinandersetzung empfohlen werden. Eine solche Auseinandersetzung provozieren die Autoren schon durch die häufige unkritische Übernahme von bedenklichen Theorien (Weltsystem: Wallerstein), Romantizismen (Subsistenz: Bennholdt-Thomsen) oder geopolitischen Vereinfachungen (Neuer Limes: Ruffin). Aber dies kann eine weitergehende Diskussion nur befruchten, der zu wünschen wäre, daß kulturgenetische und sozialdifferenzierende Gesichtspunkte ebenso einfließen wie die Ergebnisse empirischer Feldstudien.

Axel Borsdorf

Journal für Entwicklungspolitik XIII/4, 1997, S. 446–447

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