Democratization, Civil Society, and Illiberal Middle Class Culture in Pacific Asia

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A prevailing understanding in the study of political and economic development holds that economic modernization creates an irresistible pressure for liberal democratic political change. Authoritarian rule may offer the initial stability necessary for economic growth, but, as fully developed modernity approaches, it becomes increasingly redundant and reluctantly withers away. Depending on one's theoretical preference, the overt or covert hand promoting this change is an articulate, urban, and self-confident middle class.[1] In the argot of development studies, the presence of this new socioeconomic phenomenon intimates both liberalization and democratization.

After thirty years of sustained economic growth, we would expect to find the high performing Asian economies of South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Taiwan metamorphosing into polyarchic democracies with Asian characteristics.[2] Indeed, a growing literature traces the inexorable rise of bourgeois democracy and civil society in Pacific Asia. After 1987 South Korea, we are told, spawned an increasingly self-confident middle class that terminated an "authoritarian cycle" of rule.[3] In Taiwan the middle class has become so "politicized and powerful"[4] it has forged the "first Chinese democracy."[5] Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia growing democratic "revolt" in Malaysia stems from "a type of middle class politics."[6] In Singapore the burgeoning confidence of an educated middle class constitutes an "extremely important precondition for political liberalization,"[7] while in Indonesia a "middle class has grown larger and is demanding more public information."[8] From this perspective it would seem that "the middle class transforms society. Some elements of that class . . . start to demand those effete and nonmaterial things which are associated . . . with western lifestyles and philosophies. The items include political participation, multi-party politics, an end to corruption, a freer press, environmental clean up. Already these things and others can be seen emerging on the East Asian scene."[9]

Observers of this phenomenon in East Asia concede, nevertheless, that the role played by the new middle class is curious. In South Korea Dong Won Mo finds the middle class highly sensitive "to a stable social order."[10] In Taiwan the middle class between 1960 and 1990 was either "intolerant" or largely "apolitical."[11] Meanwhile, in less developed and therefore more authoritarian Southeast Asia Harold Crouch considers the middle class to have "ambiguous political consequences," operating both as democratizing agents and supporters of continuing

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authoritarian rule.[12] In Indonesia Robison analogously finds that the emerging middle class contradictorily both threatens "the pact of domination" that maintained the Suharto regime[13] and supports the Indonesian equivalent of a "Bonapartist state."[14] Even more curious and generally unremarked is the fact that the only political entity to generate the type of autonomous civic activity consistent with the middle class model is Hong Kong, a notably dynamic economy that has flourished under a liberal but problematically colonial administration.[15]

Moreover, not only is the political conduct of this emerging middle class ambivalent, but its explanatory utility also becomes increasingly redundant. For, if the middle class is both central to the continuity of an illiberal politics and the agent of liberal democratization, it is conceptually incoherent. This inconsistency in both the behavior of the class and the application of the term emanates from the prevailing understanding of the relationship between political and economic development.

Broadly, we can identify two not necessarily incompatible schools of thought. The first, associated with Seymour Martin Lipset's pioneering work in political sociology, presents the emergence of an educated and self-assured middle class as an important precondition of the transition to democracy.[16] The second more circumspectly views the middle class as playing a progressive role after an authoritarian regime initiates the democratization process. This process assumes that a ruling elite liberalizes in order to decompress social tension, thereby opening civil society to autonomous organization. As the infant civil society strengthens, the associative life of the middle class facilitates the transition to full democracy.[17]

Yet neither the precondition nor process model adequately accounts for the seemingly incoherent behavior of the new middle class in Pacific Asia. It is clearly inadequate for a discipline that infers causal connections between otherwise discrete social, economic, and political phenomenon in contingently situated units of rule to consider such regionally incoherent behavior "aberrant"[18] or to explain it away by some neo-Marxist sophistry concerning the structure of class coalitions.[19] What, we might ask, is the actual character of this new middle class, and how does it affect its political role? How do the incumbent ruling arrangements in newly industrialized Pacific Asia respond to or manage this emerging social phenomenon? Finally, what light, if any, does the pattern of political change in Pacific Asia shed upon the process of democratization?

The Dependency Culture in Contemporary Pacific Asia

Reporting the East Asian miracle, the World Bank found that the high performing Asian economies "are unique in that they combine rapid, sustained growth with highly equal income distributions."[20] The most significant social phenomenon produced by this growth is a materialistic, urbanized middle class. While economic

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growth, according to Kuznets, classically entails increasing income disparities between rich and poor and town and country, a distinctive feature of the economies of Pacific Asia has been their ability both to distribute increasing wealth equitably and to telescope the historical time taken to modernize.[21] The Gini coefficient covering the period 1965–1990 shows "rapid growth and declining inequality have been shared virtues" among the high performing Asian economies.[22] As a consequence, the Pacific Asian states of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and, to a lesser extent, Indonesia have become middle class polities.

Commentators concur that this economic transformation owes nothing to constitutional democracy and little to neoclassical economic policy. In fact, successful government-planned, export-led growth ultimately legitimated the autocratic generals of "quasi-Leninist political parties that governed postcolonial Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia.[23] Their model is one of planned development where no aspect of social, economic, and political life is left to chance.[24]

Between 1960 and 1995 these economies achieved growth rates in excess of 7 percent per annum. To secure the political stability integral to planned development, the technocratic elites increasingly entrusted with industrial policy selectively reinvented Asian traditions of deference, bureaucracy, and consensus.[25] In fact, a growing band of Asian commentators now contends that Asian values of legalistic bureaucracy and Confucian deference in emerging South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore and traditional practices of cooperation and consensus building in Indonesia and Malaysia explain both Pacific Asian economic dynamism and the capacity to industrialize without incurring undue social dislocation.[26]

In other words, planned development informed by traditional values shaped the modernization process in Pacific Asia. This conclusion should not seem particularly surprising if modernizing cultures necessarily adapt customs to the demands of modernization.[27] Indeed, when Pan-Asian nationalists like Kishore Mahbubani and Mahathir Mohamad assert the superiority of local customary practice over the liberal individualist alternative,[28] they appear merely to polemicize what Lucian Pye identified, more dispassionately, as distinctive psychological and cultural traits that impinge critically upon contemporary Pacific Asian social and political practice.[29]

It is important to emphasize, however, that the customary values that modified development in Pacific Asia have been largely reinvented for the ideological purpose of channeling popular energy to collectively achievable economic targets. Significantly, the first generation leaders who assumed power in the unstable world of postcolonial Pacific Asia viewed the recovery of lost tradition, whether of Confucian, Buddhist, Hindic, or Islamic provenance or in a variety of syncretic amalgamations, with considerable skepticism. Committed to building new nations, they believed traditional hierarchical practice had failed either to prevent the indignity of colonization or to promote the capacity to modernize. Custom appeared incidental to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) in attempting to

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revive the waning nationalist cause in Taiwan after 1949, to Syngman Rhee in confronting internecine strife in Korea in the 1950s, and to those in Southeast Asia riding the tiger of political and economic instability in the early 1960s. In fact, a continuing theme of East Asian political discourse between 1950 and 1965 concerns the extent to which tradition impeded a "positive creed" and "active belief" in building new national communities[30] from otherwise problematic "tray[s] of loose sand."[31]

The activist character of postcolonial self-determination in Pacific Asia, therefore, initially deterred the revival of traditional practice.[32] Nevertheless, the emerging postcolonial identity, while nominally democratic and populist, remained suspicious of liberalism, a doctrine associated both with deracinating individualism and European colonial exploitation. Consequently, in Malaysia the emerging postcolonial identity necessitated a new political vocabulary to cover concepts like "state," "nation," and "politics."[33] In Indonesia liberation and the creation of *Indonesia Raya* required both an imaginative leap as well as a new language,[34] while in Singapore, expelled from the Malaysian Federation and surrounded by "a sea of Malay peoples," the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) sought pragmatically to forge a multicultural amalgam of East and West.[35] Meanwhile, in Northeast Asia the Kuomintang's blend of Sun Yat-sen's "scientific reinterpretation of Confucianism"[36] and ideas derived from Chiang Kai-shek's German National Socialist advisers in the 1930s demanded the suppression of indigenous Taiwanese culture.[37] Ironically, the postwar Communist threat further sustained authoritarian personalities like Chiang and Syngman Rhee. Constituting Communism as an external "other" offered the matrix for a new identity and unity.[38]

Only during the period of sustained growth and rapid urbanization after 1960 did traditional understandings come to play an integral role in the nation-building process. As a number of commentators observed at the time, swift modernization in these late developing economies generated identity confusion at both a personal and a national level.[39] In 1965 Soedjatmoko contended that the "dynamics of . . . developmental values [might] only come to life in a wider structure of meaning" and wondered whether "the progressive breakdown of traditional social structures with their established customs and the difficulty of relating to emerging new ones" created growing "uncertainty and anxiety leading in some case to a genuine crisis of identity." Indeed, such a "brooding preoccupation with the national self" was widely considered an "unavoidable phase in a nation's adjustment."[40] To resolve the seemingly unpatterned desperation generated by the shock of the new and the deracinating transition from an agrarian to an urban order, governments turned increasingly to traditional understandings of relationship and order, now centrally disseminated through the media of television, school, and press, to reconstitute in the burgeoning modern Asia city the values fast disappearing from the rural hinterland.

Consequently, after 1965 and the bloody instauration of Suharto's New Order Indonesian commentators observed a renewed emphasis upon paternalistic guidance

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and *musyawarah* (deliberation) leading to *mufakat* (consensus) in a spirit of non-conflictual cooperation.[41] In Singapore the transmission of shared Asian values became a matter of educational and political urgency only in the 1980s,[42] while in the same decade the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) in Malaysia sought to revitalize and purify traditions drawn from the golden era of the Malacca sultanate, but amended to support an "untraditionalistic leader" devoted to building "Malaysia Incorporated."[43] In South Korea, somewhat differently, the claim to have inherited a Confucian legacy dating from the end of the Yi dynasty substantiated the Republic of Korea's claim to be the legitimate vehicle of the Korean nation. Yet only during General Park Chung Hee's era of state-managed industrialization (1961–1979) did official ideology come to emphasize a nation ruled not by laws but by superior men. In this context, the *Samil Dongnip Undong* movement inculcated "a national spirit . . . more fundamental than the national spirit of modern nationalism."[44] It "hit responsive chords" among both government bureaucrats and the rural peasantry.[45] In Taiwan, more problematically, scientific Confucian education after 1988 had to pay increasing attention to indigenous cultural practice.[46] Nevertheless, official education policy still remains officially committed to mandarinization and, as Yun Han-chu observes, the KMT has been peculiarly successful "through its exclusive control over the socialization agents, the schools, and mass media" in constructing an "ideologically underestimated popular coalition where all members of society believe the KMT embodies the interest of all classes."[47]

Significantly, the World Bank maintains that the efficient provision of primary and secondary education was a crucial factor in creating the disciplined work force necessary to sustain economic growth in the high performing Asian economies.[48] Its report, however, neglects to mention the values actually promoted by state education. Yet since the 1970s the educational bureaucracies of these countries have sedulously attended to the role of public schooling in creating loyal and efficient citizens. The more confucianized polities of Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea require state schools to inculcate nation-building values like filial piety and conformity, while in Indonesia an awareness of *Pancasila* ideology and in Malaysia of *Rukun Negara* became significant features of the school curriculum.[49] This schooling, moreover, occurs in an educational context of intensely competitive public examination, rote learning, and mechanical obedience. Officially controlled or state-licensed newspapers and television, often contractually obligated to promote national development, reinforce the school's socialization message.[50]

As these states educated and trained their populations, culture, which "once resembled the air men breathed and of which they were seldom properly aware," became visible.[51] The literate, mobile, urban, and formally equal lifestyle of the East Asian miracle contrasts radically with the stable, immobile, and discontinuous cultural practices of the relatively recent past. Yet in the process of this transformation a national culture, officially promulgated through centrally supervised, specialized

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educational agencies, came to constitute the admission card to employability and citizenship. "The Age of Nationalism," as Gellner explains, "arrives."[52] Modernizing elites rediscover in tradition a resource against the anxiety sublimated at the collective and individual level by very rapid industrialization. Indeed, reinvented Confucian and modified Islamic practice teaches habits that facilitate collective mobilization toward developmental targets and provide technocratic planners with an invaluable resource. But this national culture is no longer invariant custom. Instead, tradition, centrally disseminated, metamorphoses into a set of ritual practices, inculcating "certain values and norms of behavior by repetition."[53] These norms, moreover, no longer seek to revive a past golden age but instead, as one Singapore National Day song expresses it, guide the building of a "better tomorrow."

Not without political significance the middle classes are both the material beneficiaries of the East Asian miracle and the class most exposed to national values. The reinvented values, inculcated through state education and mass media campaigns, emphasize community rather than autonomy and moral certainty rather than tolerance. The middle class product of the state educational system subsequently enjoys state employment and patronage and is expected to respond positively to official calls for greater unity.

In Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea the middle class consists mainly of professionals, civil servants, and businessmen with bureaucratic connections. In Singapore the "work force accounted for by administrators, executive and managers, as well as professionals and technicians," rose from 7 percent in 1956 to almost 25 percent by 1990.[54] In Taiwan Hung Mao-tien claims the middle class forms "one-third of the total adult population." It includes "owners of small and medium sized enterprises, managers in public and private banks and corporations. KMT and government bureaucrats, elected representatives, teachers, and professionals."[55] In South Korea scholars generally distinguish between a "new middle class" of white collar workers in both private and public institutions" and an "old" middle class of small owner-managers. Hagen Koo, on the basis of available survey data, maintains that by 1980 the new middle class comprised about 17.7 percent of the entire middle class which constituted a third of the population. Koo further identifies a "mainstream middle class" with an economic interest in a stable capitalist order from a peripheral middle class consisting primarily of "highly politicized" university lecturers.[56]

The graduates produced in growing numbers by the tertiary education sector in Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore, moreover, continue to find employment in the expanding public or semipublic sectors.[57] State education followed by bureaucratic training inculcates a respect for expert knowledge and a lack of interest in wider political issues. Specialization, defense, and a professional code of status group conformity facilitate social practices that have significantly illiberal political implica-

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tions. In Singapore these factors favor a middle class identity founded on political indifference mixed with high anxiety. Its most significant manifestation is the local cultural practice of *kiasuism. Kiasu* behavior is premised on the belief that if "you are not one up you are one down" and condones otherwise antisocial activity provided the progenitor succeeds in achieving collectively desired but scarce social goods while maintaining conformist anonymity.[58] The selfishness central to *kiasu* behavior emanates from an all-pervasive fear of failure in a competitive and highly regulated society.

The government-controlled media are notably ambivalent in their response to displays of Singaporean *kiasuism.* Significantly, *The Straits Times* considers it "synonymous with Singapore's famous competitiveness," while the newspaper's editor interprets it as "a duty to care."[59] In fact, the middle class anxiety that *kiasuism* reflects responds positively to the ruling People's Action Party's claim to technical, rational, and managerial guidance. Incontrovertible rationalistic certainty provided by state experts consoles the neurotic parvenu who recoils at the prospect of free choice. This lack of confidence, therefore, welcomes the activist and interventionist PAP style of rule.

In Taiwan the ruling KMT in its various guises as government employer, political machine, and entrepreneur remains the major source of middle class employment.[60] Prior to 1986 its stable, tutelary rule encouraged the *guanxi* (connections) through which the middle classes attained the socioeconomic security that their Confucian education in moral certitude required. Significantly, like their Singaporean counterparts, *arriviste* Taiwanese are "not always able to express themselves adequately."[61] Inadequacy, allied with deference, found assurance in a political "culture of intolerance."[62] Thus, "whatever its size, the middle class has yet to find a single political voice. It does, however, have certain traits in common with middle classes in other [Asian] countries; it is politically pragmatic with an overriding interest in preserving the status quo."[63]

Consequently, the continuing erosion of the KMT's capacity to wield paternalistic authority after 1987 has important ramifications for middle class political behavior. Growing political uncertainty has actually amplified middle class political and social insecurity. The rise of autonomous social movements, the growth of the opposition Democratic People's Party (DPP), and the articulation of dissent within the KMT therefore constitute growing sources of anxiety for a middle class that is largely unimpressed by the polymorphous joys of pluralism. Although some commentators argue that political liberalization has fostered the emergence of a more tolerant, open, yet still Confucian civic culture,[64] others note a growing dependence upon factional connections in both local and national politics.[65] In fact, attachment to a faction offers a way of avoiding the unwanted consequences of political liberalization. Consequently, a middle class worried by the uncertainty of democratic change continues to seek reassurance in the technocratic guidance of the KMT.[66]

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Like its counterpart in Singapore and Taiwan, the South Korean middle class also finds solace in an intolerant social conformity. The military-backed authoritarian regimes of Generals Park, Chun, and Roh actively promoted the virtue of conformity. Combined with a Confucian allegiance to moral rule, it has engendered in the Korean middle class a respect for *ch'ijo*, or an inflexible stand on matters of principle.[67] The practice of clientelism intensified this respect for intolerant commitment. In particular, President Park's regime strategically cultivated regional bonds of kinship, training, and personal contact *(inmaek)* in order to maintain political dominance.[68] Since 1987 regional factions have formed the basis of the constitutionally tolerated political parties. Consequently, "political parties especially are notable for their factional strife, for parties in truth are collectivities of individuals who have banded together to enable a leader to attain and maintain power."[69] In a society that exhibits such regard for group loyalty premised upon intolerant commitment, the open discussion of different views and the possibility of political compromise offers little persuasive appeal.

If the blandishments of pluralistic civil society seem ill-suited to the insecure, inarticulate *arrivistes* of Seoul, Taipei, and Singapore, how are they received in moderately Islamized Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur?

Once again, a pattern of middle class dependence asserts itself. This pattern is most evident in multiethnic Malaysia. Here, the *bumiputera,* or indigenous Malay, middle class is the direct creation of post-1971 government intervention in the economy. In the aftermath of ethnic riots in 1969 the UMNO-dominated *Barisan Nasional* (BN) coalition government introduced a new economic policy designed to promote the indigenous Malay interest. In the course of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's premiership since 1981, UMNO has attempted both to manage communal difference and to forge a new Malay national consciousness through an assertively *bumiputera* affirmative action policy. UMNO policy successfully expanded not only the size of the middle class, but also the *bumiputera* element within it.[70] The Malay middle class, as former UMNO representative Tawfik Tun Ismail explains, is largely "a creation of the government." By 1988 the middle class comprised 36 percent of the total population, while *bumiputera* ownership of corporate equity rose from 2.3 percent in 1970 to 20.3 percent in 1990.[71] While Chinese entrepreneurs have been politically neutralized, the *bumiputera* middle class has either actively supported Mahathir Mohamad's attempt to create a centralized one party state or remained politically apathetic. Its political position is hardly surprising, as the state bureaucracy and businesses with UMNO links constitute the primary source of Malay middle class employment. UMNO, in other words, offers them a political and economic "crutch."[72]

Consequently, the Malaysian *nouveaux riches* "do not have the same reasons for contributing to politics or speaking out because they would rather not change the system so long as they are the beneficiaries."[73] It is "snob appeal that motivates the

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middle class" and reinforces a traditional Malaysian pattern of deference, hierarchy, and consensus.[74] Traditionally, bonds were to feudal rulers; now they are to the party and its new men of prowess. State largesse facilitates UMNO's rule, and patron-client relations within UMNO and the wider business community negate the possibility of open disagreement or public debate. UMNO's press control, patronage, judicious manipulation of the constitution, and "money politics" have consequently augmented the state management of politics, business, and *a fortiori* the middle class.[75]

In Indonesia the middle class grew together with the state bureaucracy after the traumatic transition to President Suharto's New Order in 1965. The middle class, moreover, most obviously benefits from the bureaucratic "management of the nation's affairs. It has a stake in the economic and social progress that has been achieved, it has a stake in the status quo, in continuity."[76] Significantly, the New Order has vastly increased the size of the civil service, which after 1967 grew faster than the population as a whole.[77] Together with a regular salary, the bureaucracy provides its four million middle class employees "with rice, housing, transport to and from work, and comprehensive medical care."[78] In return, the government expects loyal conformity.

This arrangement fortuitously corresponds to traditional Javanese understandings of "self-control and lack of initiative seeking."[79] The corporate management of New Order society characteristically cultivates dependency through reinvented tradition. A syncretic blend of technocratic development and traditional deference has made New Order rule increasingly exclusionary rather than participatory. This development, nevertheless, suits a docile, pessimistic, and dependent middle class. Indeed, a survey for the recently banned *Editor* magazine found in 1990 that the "better off the middle class were, the more reluctant they were to go onto the political stage."[80] This result reinforces the view that the new class is politically "barren."[81]

Thus, as the major economic and social beneficiaries of thirty years of economic growth the new middle class in Pacific Asia is highly dependent upon state patronage. Its defining characteristic is the deracinated anxiety of the parvenu and the consequent search for ties that guarantee stability and certainty. In return for reassurance, ruling elites expect their middle class dependents to demonstrate commitment toward the latest government-sponsored "nation-building" initiative. Mere acquiescence is insufficient. Traditional high culture, whether Islamic, Javanese, or Confucian, centrally promulgated for mass consumption, reinforces the view that the only alternative to a bureaucratically determined consensus is unwanted conflict between right and wrong. From this perspective, political pluralism appears disturbingly anarchic.

The managerial techniques of contemporary corporate capitalism further reinforce this illiberal political culture. Pacific Asian technocracy postulates an economic rationalism in which management, entrepreneurialism, and administration develop

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the population as a resource. Instead of an urban bourgeoisie that forges an autonomous sphere of civil activity out of an otiose authoritarianism, the middle class produced by the developmental state is effectively in its thrall. What are the implications of this culture for political change?

State Strategy and the Middle Class

The evolving relationship between the ruling elites and the middle classes in the high performing Asian economies does not evince the conflict that theories of democratization lead us to expect. Instead, we discover a ruling elite often ideologically, economically, and ethnically homogeneous with the middle class. Consequently, political change, to the extent that it occurs, represents a technocratic strategy to manage proactively either the anticipated aspirations of the middle class or the anticipated problem of political succession.

This pattern is most evident in Malaysia and Indonesia. Here, the middle class is noticeably state-dependent and quiescent. Political debate, to the extent that it is officially tolerated, reflects an oligarchic concern with pursuing the most effective strategy to maintain the stability that attracts economic investment and to avoid the errors committed in the West by "fanatical" liberal democrats.[82] This proactive management of the future nevertheless can generate both factional and generational tension. Factionalism within UMNO constitutes the harbinger of political change, and division has become increasingly marked during Mahathir Mohamad's abrasive prime ministership. A ripening conflict between the dynamic, technocratic deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim and the aging Mahathir increasingly threatens noncontentious consensus building. In part, this tension illustrates the problem of managing leadership transition in Southeast Asia, which continues to value the "man of prowess," but it also reflects disagreement within UMNO over Mahathir's "Vision 2020" for a fully developed Malaysia and the role of the new Malaysian middle class in this plan.[83]

Mahathir, paradoxically, has become the victim of his own success in destroying feudal attachments and forging both an increasingly centralized Malaysian state and an anxious new Malay identity. The effectiveness of his modernization strategy has created choices that provide grounds for elite dissensus. As Professor A. B. Shamsul observes, tension exists within UMNO between the probusiness team led by Anwar and the UMNO traditionalists whose support is "rooted in the Malay villages."[84] Moreover, although modernizers like Anwar and Mahathir both agree that "the Asian traditions themselves need to be revitalized and purified . . . from the excesses of an oppressive, autocratic and feudalistic past,"[85] the Malay middle class does not necessarily share their reformatory zeal. Nor do they want greater autonomy. Instead, the anxious, urbanized Malays, favored by affirmative action, increasingly seek consolation either in the myth of an idealized *kampung* lifestyle or alternatively

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in the chiliastic certainties of a purified and fundamentalist Islam.[86] The fact that young, middle class Malays found the messianic doctrine of the *Al Arqam* sect attractive prompted the government to invoke the draconian provisions of the Internal Security Act to suppress this Sufi sect and intern its leadership in July 1995. Ironically, the young, privileged Malays attracted to *Al Arqam* frequently found their faith during state-sponsored studies at British and North American universities. While UMNO leaders officially worried at the exposure of Malay youth to decadent western liberalism, those educated in the West discovered there an Islamic authenticity that denies the market friendly version of Islam carefully nurtured by UMNO. In Malaysia, therefore, political change reflects both intergenerational tension and a conflict over identity created by rapid modernization. The vast majority of the middle class, whether Chinese, Indian, or Malay, has either become politically apathetic or actively supports UMNO's growing control of social and economic life. In the April 1995 elections the political opposition was reduced to insignificance; the UMNO-led BN coalition won an impressive 64 percent of the popular vote. As one government critic observed, the Malay middle class "doesn't care" about political liberalization; "as long as they live comfortably, people are satisfied."[87] Moreover, the small minority of young middle class Malays who oppose UMNO demonstrates its dissent in a fundamentalism utterly opposed to the secular diversity offered by the intermediate associations of civil society.

A related, but more uncertain, pattern of change appears in contemporary Indonesia. President Suharto's New Order has extended state power to all corners of society. Yet the success of cooperative, *gotong royong* capitalism and public welfare since 1965 poses new difficulties. By the late 1980s the evolution of the New Order increased the number, variety, and complexity of private groups. The problem of managing the succession to Suharto further exacerbates the difficulty of managing this evolving complexity. These unwanted dilemmas and the absence of constitutional mechanisms to contain them have increased political unease. Burgeoning uncertainty, in turn, casts doubt on both the continuing legitimacy of the armed forces' dual function, as guardian of the revolution and the republic, and the New Order's technocratic capacity to absorb growing labor unrest and widespread financial irregularities in the recently deregulated banking sector.

This uncertainty briefly made possible a new political "openness" between 1992 and 1994. For proponents of democratization, this opening obviously constituted a response to middle class aspirations. Thus, John McBeth considered the new policy "a calculated effort by President Suharto to provide an increasingly dynamic society and its growing middle class with more avenues of expression."[88] Analogously, *The Economist* maintained that the new policy reflected Suharto's conversion to the "proposition that economic growth should be accompanied by political liberalization."[89]

However, what contemporary liberal determinism considers progressive looked

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rather different to a New Order elite accustomed to corporately managed consensus. Openness, in fact, signified an ill-defined arena where previously depoliticized voices were hesitantly invited to articulate their views in order, somewhat optimistically, to refresh the national consensus. Unfortunately, the technocracy, the army, and the previously depoliticized Islamic organization *Nahdlatul Ulama* expressed different approaches to future development. In Indonesian terms, such difference connotes a loss of direction, not the reluctant embrace of a newly discovered pluralism. The loss of purpose was illustrated by student demonstrations against the national lottery in December 1993 and confirmed by subsequent student claims that "we have been cool for fifteen to twenty years but now we're thinking of democracy."[90] Yet the demonstrators manifested no latent commitment to pluralism and the rule of law, but rather showed an enthusiastic commitment to a purified Islamic *umma.*[91]

Moreover, it soon became clear that the middle class in general and the armed forces in particular considered "openness" a threat rather than the "refreshing" reinvigoration of "national stability" that Suharto sought when he launched the new policy in 1992. There is no Indonesian tradition of public debate or loyal opposition. Accustomed to the deference carefully cultivated by the New Order, Indonesian officials find both public criticism and the potential consequences of a free vote rebarbative. As Amir Santoso explains, "victory and defeat are more transparent in the voting process (*mufakat lonjong* or elongated agreement) while our culture considers it demeaning to the highest degree for a person to be made to lose face in public."[92] The inability to tolerate the free speech that openness initially permitted ineluctably fueled demands for the reimposition of censorship. The subsequent closure of critical political journals like *Tempo* in 1994, the continuing centrality of the armed forces in the maintenance of public order, and the growing politicization of Islam indicate that the succession to Suharto lacks institutional safeguards, and the prospect of liberalization remains uncertain. Indeed, to the extent that the middle class is active at all in Malaysia and Indonesia, it seeks to resolve its continuing search for security in a purified Islam. An Islamic solution might very well be democratic, but it certainly will not be liberal or market friendly.

In contrast to these Southeast Asian states, some constitutional democratic change has occurred in the more Confucian and economically developed polities. South Korea, in particular, offers a classic example of middle class pressure promoting constitutional democracy. Postwar Korean politics oscillated between autocratic centralization and brief, often violent moments of intransigent resistance and constitutional reform. This pattern resembled Yi dynasty (1392–1910) practice, in which government constituted a great vortex, "summoning men rapidly into it, placing them briefly near the summit of ambition and then sweeping them out, often ruthlessly."[93] Violence marked every leadership transition from Syngman Rhee in 1961 to Roh Tae Woo in 1987. In April 1987 incumbent president Chun Doo Hwan

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reneged on an earlier promise to grant a new constitution. Instead, he arbitrarily appointed General Roh Tae Woo to succeed him. This act brought the urban middle classes into the streets. Faced with massive unrest, General Roh acceded to constitutional demands, and direct presidential elections were held for the first time in December 1987.

Most commentators maintain that this bourgeois resistance began a new historical cycle of constitutional democracy. Their prediction was apparently confirmed by the presidential elections of December 1992, which resulted in both an uncharacteristically peaceful leadership transition and the first civilian president of South Korea. Moreover, the new president Kim Young Sam, embarked upon a series of bureaucratic and judicial reforms that promised greater political accountability. "A new political era has dawned," Daryl Plunk avers, characterized by "an unprecedented opening up of the government's decision making process."[94]

Yet this view of South Korea as a liberal democracy with a vibrant and autonomous civil society is misleading. Freedoms of both the press and political organization remain severely curtailed. All periodicals must register with the government and specify their editorial objectives. Moreover, when the press fails to practice self-censorship, the Agency for National Security Planning is on hand to offer Confucian guidance, a practice that the professor of journalism at Korea University notes "is possibly contrary to the idea of a free press."[95] More worrisome, a national security law introduced in the 1950s continues to impose severe penalties on those who commit an "ideological crime" like commemorating the death of the "great leader" of North Korea. As a recent study of Korean democratization reluctantly concluded, "formal and informal restrictions on the basic rights of citizens to a free press and free association" remain in force.[96]

The constituting feature of the South Korean middle class is its search for order, certainty, and security, and this disposition is reflected in the continuing fragility of South Korean politics. It casts doubt upon the view that middle class resistance to Chun Doo Hwan in 1987 announced the arrival of a self-confident, bourgeois liberal democracy. In the mid 1980s the middle class was politically timid.[97] Indeed, prior to 1987 the "role played by the entrepreneurial-management sector as far as the process of political democratization has occurred [was] . . . passive if not negative."[98] Yet in 1987 this conformist, timid bourgeoisie suddenly became politically assertive and actively demanded political reform.

This newly articulate bourgeoisie executed a notable *volte face* when it voted for its erstwhile oppressor, General Roh Tae Woo, as president. A number of Korean writers noticed this curious conduct and termed it "sentimental." However, they made little comment on its implications for Korea's nascent democracy.

It is at least plausible to argue that such behavior indicated, not a demand for autonomy, but a plea for reassurance. This possibility is seemingly confirmed by the fact that during the events of June 1987 the Korean middle class somewhat surreally

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took to the streets chanting the decidedly unrevolutionary slogan "order."[99] As it became increasingly obvious that the military autocracy no longer guaranteed political certainty, middle class demonstrators demanded democracy to allay continuing uncertainty concerning orderly leadership transition. As Dong Won Mo observed, the Korean middle class "appears to be more concerned about issues of . . . constitutional order . . . than with issues of distributive justice."[100] Indeed, the shift from political passivity to radical action reflects a Confucian legacy of moral absolutism rather than a newfound interest in civil liberties. From this perspective, arbitrary rule builds up resentment, or *han,* that erupts in moral indignation and is conducted in terms of *ch'ijo* moral absolutes and *inmaek* clientelism. Thus, although constitutional change has taken place in South Korea, as the paradoxical consequence of a middle class desire for order, the prevalence of intolerant regionalism tied to group conformity restricts liberal democratic practice. Instead Korea has a form of patrimonial democracy in which political parties are amalgams of regional groups, disagreement takes the form of confrontation rather than debate, and participation occurs through the manipulation of factions and slush funds rather than self-chosen activity. Local elections held in July 1995 further entrenched an increasingly irreconcilable regionalism oiled by the judicious application of financial inducements.[101]

Ironically, while the military elite and its technocratic advisers premised constitutional reform upon the presumption of a middle class demand for autonomy, middle class values remain distinctly conformist. This conformism is seemingly confirmed by a recent "univariate analysis" of "democratic orientations" among the Korean public that found that "83.2 percent of the population" believed democratization "would enhance the quality of their lives," while only 3 percent of the survey group had actually experienced any benefit from the apparent "transition from authoritarian rule to democracy."[102] Such data suggest not only a triumph of hope over experience, but also the extent to which democracy offers the seductive prospect of a new organically binding certainty. This certainty gives Korea's nascent civic culture a strangely unified character which, as one of its more excited proponents unwittingly admits, "gradually filtered from the upper to the lower classes until there are no particular cultural differences among classes, age groups, or resident types."[103] Korean democracy, it would seem, represents the uncertain outcome of the pursuit of moral certainty and as such offers no obvious prospect of an autonomous civil society that guarantees the rule of law. Indeed, reform, as Hyun Chin Lim and Byung Kook Kim maintain, may sustain only a new "*dicta blanda* dexterously hiding its authoritarian nature behind the façade of formal electoral competition."[104]

An equally ambivalent search for a way to maintain stability in the face of an unwanted dilemma also explains political change in Taiwan. The lifting of martial law in 1987 and the subsequent erosion of KMT autocracy clearly facilitated more open political debate, the emergence of a political opposition, and reform of both the

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national legislature and the local government. Despite its abandonment of patern-alism, however, the KMT remains the dominant party, and there is little evidence to suggest that the opposition has either the desire or the capacity to mount a serious political challenge. Moreover, the massive financial resources commanded by the KMT, "the richest ruling party in the noncommunist world," together with its con-tinuing penetration of social and economic life, cast doubt on the widely promul-gated view that Taiwan now functions as a constitutional democracy.[105] In fact, the KMT elite proactively managed the change from autocracy to accountability after 1987 both to guarantee a smooth transition from Chiang Ching-kuo to the current indigenous Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui and to address the incoherence sur-rounding Taiwan's political identity.

By the late 1980s external political factors, primarily Taiwan's troubled relation-ship with the People's Republic of China, rendered the ruling party's legacy of patri-archal tutelage, inherited from Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek, unsustainable. Unfortunately for this otherwise appealingly paternalistic doctrine, the KMT could not decide whether it constituted the de jure rulers of the Chinese mainland or the de facto rulers of an independent island state. Moreover, the loss of United Nations' membership in 1979, followed by an increasingly difficult Pacific economic trading environment after 1989, acutely exposed this dilemma. In the course of the presi-dency of Chiang Ching-kuo (1977–88) and more significantly during the current presidency of Lee Teng-hui (since 1988), growing elite uncertainty about Taiwan's identity compelled the KMT leadership to permit open debate and constitutional reform. Under Lee Teng-hui's technocratic guidance, the KMT strategically pro-moted reform in order to ensure its continuing guidance of Taiwanese affairs. Moreover, by coopting some of the more popular issues advanced by the main oppo-sition, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the KMT has actually enhanced its capacity to rule.

The inchoate nature of opposition politics and the evident uncertainty of middle class voters further diminish the potential for an electoral challenge to KMT domi-nance. Thus, Yun-han Chu finds that the DPP has no mass basis or extensive organ-izational links with "the mobilized sectors of civil society" and observes that 40 per-cent of the voters who articulated a preference for the DPP in 1989 actually voted for the KMT.[106] Moreover, the KMT's developing capacity to mobilize local and national factional machines, its extensive mechanisms of patronage and vote buying, its access to the national security bureau and the extensive network of popular surveillance, and its continuing control of Taiwan's three main television channels effectively counter the notion that Taiwan has successfully evolved an autonomous sphere of civil activity.[107] Moreover, the support of the mainstream KMT for "Taiwanization, technocratization or youthification" by no means implies "that the ruling party is disposed to alienate its control over political outcomes."[108]

The problem for the KMT arises not from any middle class pressure for autono-

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my and political pluralism, but from its own uncertainty about how to proceed in the emerging new world disorder. This uncertainty is ill suited to Taiwan's anxious and factionalized middle class. Indeed, after almost a decade of democratization the largely apolitical middle class takes an increasingly captious view of new constitu-tional arrangements, considering "aggressive queries and the farce in the National Assembly and the legislative yuan, as well as the clashes in the streets and con-frontations in the campuses," distastefully un-Confucian. Such disorder, Yun-han Chu observes, worries many businessmen and ordinary citizens, and "the turmoil and confusion are often attributed to the unruly and ungovernable nature of democ-racy."[109] Indeed, alienation from "proper democratic norms" has led more conserva-tive Taiwanese to compare their experience of liberalization unfavorably with the apolitical, one party rule of Singapore. As Diane Ying contends, the anxious Taiwanese middle class perhaps does not want "greater freedom and democracy." They certainly admire Singapore, "run like a corporation with a common vision, a sense of mission and visible strategies."[110]

Remarkably, in view of the prevailing democratization orthodoxy it would seem that the continuing ability of the PAP to dominate both Singaporean politics and socioeconomic development is peculiarly suited to the anxiously apolitical new middle classes of Pacific Asia. In the course of its thirty year domination of govern-ment, judiciary, bureaucracy, and economy, the PAP has syncretically blended an apparent commitment to a liberal market economic policy with a reinvented concern for Asian values of hierarchy and deference in order to build what the ministry of information and the arts considers a "tropical paradise." Singapore's party-led bureaucracy attempts to manage the city-state like a multinational corporation. In the political philosophy of the PAP the ruling party executive forms the board of direc-tors of Singapore Incorporated, and citizenship represents a form of share ownership with attached voting rights. Centrally enforced national savings schemes and gov-ernment subsidized housing imbricate the citizen in a web of social security.[111] From this perspective, regularly held elections test the rationality of the ruled, who neces-sarily endorse rational and efficient rule rather than pass judgment on the compe-tence of the technocratic elite. The Singapore polity constitutes an enterprise associ-ation mobilized toward a collective goal of excellence. Central to its success has been its ability to mold a multicultural population into "one people, one nation, one Singapore" through a developing control of all aspects of public discourse. Indeed, the party-state's relatively uncorrupt but absolute power to direct environmental, economic, and social policy offers a model and practice of apolitical development and public administration for developing Asia and Africa.

Political reform and constitutional innovation in contemporary Pacific Asia, then, neither constitute an inevitable authoritarian response to middle class pressure nor reflect wider social demand for a modular civil society and a communicatory democ-racy. Instead, political development is the sometimes contradictory but always

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proactive attempt by a technocratic elite to maintain harmony, order, and economic growth in an uncertain world. In this context, the selective promotion of specific customary practices disseminated through agencies of central government appeals to the psychological needs of a deracinated middle class and in turn clarifies its political behavior. In other words, traditional reconstructions of power in Asia and their implications for self-enactment and self-disclosure crucially affect the process of political change. Consequently, we may have to abandon the structural constraints of the developmental model and reconsider the success of the high performing Asian economies. While Protestant individualism and its contingent democratic politics initially succored the modernized industrial order, once this order "has come into being, and its advantages are clear to all, it can be better run in a Confucian collectivist spirit."[112]

Conclusion: Democratization and Its Discontents

Democratization, conventionally understood, connotes the state's recognition of the premonitory snufflings of civil society, "the devolution of power from a group of people to a set of rules," and the "appearance of uncertainty."[113] However, the evolving political practices of East and Southeast Asia confound this understanding. In Northeast Asia political reform continues to favor single party rule, while in Southeast Asia the prospect of even moderate "decompression" seems improbable. Indeed, the selective cultivation of traditional high cultural values of passivity and group conformity and their subsequent promulgation through universal education programs militate against individualism, the rule of law, and critical public debate. Yet the dominant paradigm, in both process and preconditions, requires evolution in the direction of bourgeois liberalization. The consequent lack of fit between political science and political practice in Pacific Asia promotes incoherence. Such incoherence springs in part from what Ernest Gellner has shown to be the circularity in the use of the term "democratization," which combines and confuses a type of rule with an ethical value. Given such "misleading associations," Gellner prefers the term civil society to describe an arrangement based "on the separation of the polity from economic and social life" that maintains economic growth "by requiring cognitive growth" and makes ideological monopoly impossible." Such an individualist, modular society seems to have been the successful but historically contingent product of Anglo-American political and economic development. As such, it may prove ultimately to be both transitory and unappealing to modernized societies formed by different histories and influenced by different ethics.[114]

Modular civil society is not, then, emerging in Pacific Asia. Instead, political change reflects a conservative, managerial strategy to amplify political control by forging a new relationship with an *arriviste* middle class. Central to an understand-

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ing of this evolving relationship, not only do the state managers require a leadership principle, but the middle class, too, desires the certainty that technopaternalism provides. This anxious pursuit of hierarchically coded relationships is daily manifested in the personalized factionalism of the ostensibly communitarian politics practiced in East and Southeast Asia. Consequently, liberal, communicatory democracy exercises little appeal and, when it appears, represents a comminatory intrusion upon the conservative pursuit of harmony and consensus.

A reinvented Asian understanding of power as the capacity to harmonize, balance, and, particularly in the case of Confucianism, transmit an ethical understanding further facilitates this project. Power is personal, and subjects, particularly middle class ones, actively seek the assurance that relationships of dependence provide. Therefore, any alteration in the distribution of power should not automatically be considered as progress from rule by good men to rule by law and the institutionalization of constitutional procedures. Indeed, Asian constitutions represent an often temporary and certainly mutable by-product of generational transition and are transitory arrangements that eventuate from the search for new "men of prowess" adjusted to the current requirements of an apolitical technocracy and an insecure middle class.

Nevertheless, we may identify the lineaments of an Asian model. Given the understanding of leadership as the power to absorb difference and establish balance and harmony, the style of authoritarianism in the 1970s became increasingly cumbersome. The actual and potential conflicts it generated intimated imminent dissolution in East Asian political thought. Consequently, in the course of the 1980s East and Southeast Asian states devised a number of managerial strategies to reestablish the desired equilibrium. The variation in political practice among them reflects their success in achieving this balance. Political technique is reflected through a paradoxically conservative weave of tradition and national development that explains political differences in Pacific Asia rather than the autonomy of their *Ersatz* civil societies.

NOTES

Some of the ideas essayed here owe an intellectual debt to David Brown of Murdoch University, who helped formulate them over innumerable cups of tea in the Artscanteen of the National University of Singapore between 1990 and 1995. The errors are, of course, all my own.

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5. Linda Chao and Ramon Myers, "The First Chinese Democracy," *Asian Survey,* 34 (March 1994), 213.

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16. Seymour M. Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (New York: Anchor, 1963).

17. See particularly Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), ch. 2.

18. See Donald K. Emmerson, "Region and Recalcitrance: Rethinking Democracy in Southeast Asia," *The Pacific Review,* 8 (1995), 223–48.

19. Hewison, Robison, and Rodan, eds., p. 6.

20. The World Bank, p. 8.

21. See Shirley W. Y. Kuo, "Urbanization and Income Distribution: The Case of Taiwan 1966–80," in M. Syrquin, L. Taylor, and L. Westphal, *Economic Structure and Performance: Essays in Honor of Hollis B. Chenery* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984), p. 218.

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Young Man," *Washington Quarterly* (Spring 1994), 5–22; and Kishore Mahbubani, "The Pacific Way," *Foreign Affairs*, 74 (January-February 1995), 100–11.

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71.   Ibid.

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107. Bosco, "Taiwan Factions," ch. 4; *The Economist,* Sept. 18, 1993, p. 31.

108. Constance S. Meaney, "Liberalization, Democratization and the Role of the KMT," in Cheng and Haggard, eds., p. 103.

109. Chu, p. 173.

110. *Commonwealth* (Taipei) (June 1994).

111. See Christopher Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore* (London: Macmillan, 1994), ch. 3.

112. Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 160.

113. Przeworski, pp. 14, 50.

114. Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), pp. 185, 211, 212.

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