# Democratization and Identity

## Regimes and Ethnicity in East and Southeast Asia

### Edited by
### Susan J. Henders

# Democratization and Identity

## Regimes and Ethnicity in East and Southeast Asia

Edited by
Susan J. Henders

# Democratization
# and Identity

**GLOBAL ENCOUNTERS: STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORY**
Series Editor: Fred Dallmayr, University of Notre Dame

This series seeks to inaugurate a new field of inquiry and intellectual concern: that of comparative political theory as an inquiry proceeding not from the citadel of a global hegemony but through cross-cultural dialogue and critical interaction. By opening the discourse of political theory—today largely dominated by American and European intellectuals—to voices from across the global spectrum, we hope to contribute to a richer, multifaceted mode of theorizing as well as to a deeper, cross-cultural awareness of the requirements of global justice.

*Border Crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*, edited by Fred Dallmayr
*Beyond Nationalism? Sovereignty and Citizenship*, edited by Fred Dallmayr and José M. Rosales
*Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule*, edited by Anthony J. Parel
*Race and Reconciliatiation in South Africa: A Multicultural Dialogue in Comparative Perspective*, edited by William E. Van Vugt and G. Daan Cloete
*Comparative Political Culture in the Age of Globalization: An Introductory Anthology*, edited by Hwa Yol Jung
*Conversations and Transformations: Toward a New Ethics of Self and Society*, by Ananta Kumar Giri
*Hinterlands and Horizons: Excursions in Search of Amity*, by Margaret Chatterjee
*New Approaches to Comparative Politics: Insights from Political Theory*, edited by Jennifer S. Holmes
*Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies under the Upas Tree*, edited by Anthony J. Parel and Ronald C. Keith
*Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity*, edited by Ramin Jahanbegloo
*Democratization and Identity: Regimes and Ethnicity in East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Susan J. Henders
*The Politics of Affective Relations: East Asia and Beyond*, edited by Daniel Bell and Hahm Chaihark
*From the Margins of Globalization: Critical Perspectives on Human Rights*, edited by Neve Gordon
*Imagining Brazil*, edited by Jessé Souza and Valter Sinder
*Islamic Democratic Discourse: Theory, Debates, and Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by M. A. Muqtedar Khan

# Acknowledgments

# Contents

# 1

## Political Regimes and Ethnic Identities in East and Southeast Asia: Beyond the "Asian Values" Debate

*Susan J. Henders*

The "great experiment in reconciling democratic governance and cultural pluralism" (Young 1993: 19) has seldom seemed so tenuous. This is not a new concern (see Horowitz 1986; Brass 1985; Young 1976; Enloe 1973). However, the ethnicized conflict that marked the end of the Cold War and, more recently, the events surrounding the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center have shaken the faith that liberal democracy, human rights, and economic liberalization—the supposed touchstones of the post–Cold War order—are mutually compatible in a world seemingly fractured on religious and other ethnic lines (see Snyder 2000; Linz and Stepan 1996; Diamond and Plattner 1994). The questioning even reached the pages of the World Bank *Human Development Report 2000*, which devoted much of a chapter to the difficulties of democratizing societies deeply trenched by ethnic differences.

The experiences of East and Southeast Asia have figured relatively little in the renewed debate about democratizing ethnically plural societies.[1] Three reasons stand out. For one, many states, especially in East Asia, are assumed to be highly ethnically homogenous and, therefore, undisturbed by the costly tensions plaguing other societies. The nondemocratic or less than fully democratic character of many governments in the region also suggests that these countries have little to teach us about the impact of democratization on interethnic relations. The "Asian values" debate of the 1990s has probably also stifled discussion. Renewing earlier plural society arguments, former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and others have claimed that ethnically divided societies cannot afford to democratize or expand liberal rights if they want to remain peaceful (see Bell 2000: 201–13). In the context of these claims, some scholars may be reluctant to explore the relationship

1

between democratization and ethnicized tensions, fearing that their work might be used to legitimate continuing authoritarian rule.

The present book shows that, despite these issues, and even because of them, East and Southeast Asian experiences can add much to our understanding of democratization in ethnically diverse societies. The book's regional coverage is not comprehensive—and even includes a brief comparative discussion of South Asian contexts in the chapter by Katharine Rankin and Kanishka Goonewardena. Nor are the book's regional specialist contributors primarily engaged in the standard political science literature on transitions from authoritarian rule. Rather, from their bases in various disciplines they offer provocative reconceptualizations of democratization and collective identities—and of the links between political regimes, collective identities, and ethnicized exclusion and conflict. In this way, the book's primary contribution is theoretical and conceptual, raising questions about conventional ways of thinking about democratization in ethnically diverse societies and identifying generalized hypotheses about what contributes to ethnically inclusive democracy. The chapters that are mainly theoretically and conceptually driven, though based on empirical examples from the region, are grouped together in Part I, while Parts II and III draw together theoretically and conceptually provocative case studies concerning East and Southeast Asia respectively.

Taken together, the contributions here challenge formal, procedural understandings of democratization as a linear process centered only on formal constitutional change and leading to a neat meshing of liberal and democratic institutions. The contributors also question whether democratizing and democratic regimes are entirely distinct from authoritarian rule and always beneficial to interethnic accommodation. Which is not to say that the book's contributors agree with Lee Kuan Yew that authoritarian government can be necessary for interethnic peace, of which I say more below. Rather, they reveal how political regimes and ethnic identities are co-constitutive. That is, the process of (re)producing political power—whether authoritarian, democratizing, or democratic—is simultaneously a process of (re)producing collective identities, including those of an ethnic nature, and vice versa. The book also identifies patrimonial, economic production, and colonial processes as additional factors shaping the co-constitution of collective ethnic identities and political regimes, elements easily left out when democratization is understood only in formal procedural terms. Finally, several chapters demonstrate that, because regimes and collective identities are co-constitutive, the ways in which ethnic identities are produced under authoritarian rule fundamentally affect how they are constituted later under democratizing or democratic regimes.

With these general findings in mind, the present chapter has two aims. Its first three sections offer elements of a conceptual framework for analyzing

democratization in ethnically diverse societies, premised on the co-constitutive relationship between political regimes and ethnic identities, as well as on the interconnectedness of authoritarian and democratizing processes. Although the framework is drawn in large part from the insights of the contributors to this book, not all of them adopt, nor necessarily accept, all of its elements. The final section of the present chapter sets out the contributors' findings concerning the specific conditions that help explain the nature of interethnic relations during democratization processes.

## DO AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES DO IT BETTER? RETHINKING THE QUESTION

This book began as an exploration, in the East and Southeast Asian context, of the argument that ethnically divided societies cannot afford to democratize if they want interethnic peace. It is intended to examine the contentions that authoritarian regimes manage ethnic pluralism better than democracies and that the process of democratization is itself destructive of interethnic accommodation. While associated with Asian leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew, shades of these arguments are not exclusive to their side of the "Asian values" debate. The plural society approach argues that deeply divided multiethnic societies can only remain stable through the use of force, wielded by a colonial or other authoritarian government, or a dominating ethnic group (Ryan 1990).[2] Similarly, Rustow (1970) has argued that democratization can only work if the great majority of citizens accept the boundaries of the political community as legitimate (see also Dahl 1989). Where "stateness" itself is at issue, democracy cannot itself resolve contestation over the identity or borders of the *polis* or *demos* (Linz and Stepan 1996), as David Wurfel points out with respect to Mindanao in the Philippines and Jacques Bertrand with respect to Aceh and West Papua (Irian Jaya) in Indonesia.

Daniel Bell's chapter explores these themes, serving as a foil for most of the other contributors. He makes the relatively moderate assertion that East and Southeast Asia offer some of the strongest evidence that nondemocratic governments have some advantages over democratizing and democratic ones in dealing with ethnic differences in ways that avert ethnicized conflict. Bell contends that the governments of "less-than-democratic" states like Singapore, Indonesia under Suharto's *Pancasila*, Malaysia, and China have had some success protecting the legitimate interests of minority ethnic groups. In the absence of electoral competition, he says, they are less likely than their democratic or democratizing counterparts to resort to nation-building around the nationalist symbols, institutions, and discourses of a majority ethnic group. To Bell, the achievements of these countries, despite their failures and the costs of authoritarianism, should prompt questions about the assumed

correlation between both democracy and democratization and minority rights. Thus, he is cautious about advocating democratization in multiethnic states, in at least some circumstances.

Other contributors question even Bell's moderate claims. They assert that, despite their freedom from electoral pressures, the governments of China, Indonesia in the Suharto era, the Philippines under Marcos, Malaysia, and Taiwan under authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT) rule, *have* engaged in ethnic majority nation-building at great cost to vulnerable ethnic groups and with potentially negative long-term consequences for ethnically inclusive, non-hierarchical democratization. For instance, Chang Maukuei notes that the KMT in its authoritarian phase did not resist using majority Han Chinese nationalism to legitimate its rule in Taiwan and its claims to mainland China. The failure of this policy in Taiwan helped foster a prodemocracy opposition movement centered on "Taiwaneseness," sometimes understood in ethnic terms. By the 1980s in Taiwan, "fighting for democracy was also fighting for equal participation and representation of 'our kind.'" This was because the KMT's exclusive Han nationalism could not encompass the transformative experiences of Taiwan people under the previous fifty years of Japanese colonial authoritarian rule, modernization, and industrialization. These unique experiences had fostered a sense of local identity and demands for autonomy and social justice that clashed with the KMT vision of a unified Chinese state. Thus, while it is tempting to see the relatively ethnically harmonious nature of Taiwan's democratization as overdetermined by the shared Chinese identity of native Taiwanese and those Taiwan people of more recent mainland descent, Chang suggests that this outcome was far from inevitable (see also André Laliberté, chapter 8 in this book).

Also challenging Bell, several authors suggest that, even where authoritarian governments do foster pan- or multiethnic identities, the needs of vulnerable minority communities are not always protected. David Brown, Rankin and Goonewardena, Judith Nagata, and Bertrand ask who benefits from the techniques used by less-than-democratic governments to (re)produce pan- and multiethnic identities. In Suharto's Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia, corporatist or patrimonial institutions, based on co-opted ethnic elites and a centrally enforced unitary identity, hold together the governments' multiethnic vision of the nation. In these situations, the government, in conjunction with selected ethnic elites, set the narrow parameters of acceptable minority group identities and entitlements, excluding alternative visions of group identity and multiethnicity more compatible with democratic values.

Dru Gladney paints a paradoxical picture of the potential and limits of the Chinese government's attempts to consolidate an ethnically inclusive nation and protect vulnerable minorities. Consistent with Bell, he grants limited success to China's multiethnic policies, especially in the post-Mao period.

Ethnic minorities have generally welcomed concessions such as exclusion from the one-child policy, ethnic quotas for education and political representation, and limited administrative and decision-making autonomy in designated territories, despite the restricted and non–liberal democratic nature of these policies. Yet, these measures have neither satisfied all groups nor averted violent ethnicized conflict, especially in Tibet and borderland Muslim areas. This is partly because the Chinese government still resorts to Han Chinese ethnonationalism to legitimize its rule, especially in the face of rising ethnicized economic inequalities amongst the Han since the post-Mao economic reforms. Gladney suggests that, in this way, the reproduction of authoritarian rule and ethnic identities as China liberalizes economically shapes future possibilities for both interethnic accommodation and democratization.

Despite their disagreements, the findings of Bell and the other contributors converge in an important way. They suggest that the key question is not *which type of regime*—democratizing, democratic, or authoritarian—best fosters interethnic accommodation. Rather, it is *under what conditions* authoritarian, democratizing, or democratic regimes are associated with ethnicized conflict and exclusive, hierarchical ethnic identities—and why. Some of their hypotheses are set out later in this chapter. Meanwhile, note that recasting the question in this way makes particular sense in a region where polities do not always neatly fit the authoritarian, democratizing, or democratic ideal types (Bell, Brown, Jayasuriya, and Jones 1995). Moreover, the new question also suggests a need to rethink two problematic assumptions generally made by both sides of the "Asian values" debate: the assumption that authoritarian, democratizing, and democratic polities are entirely distinct and that collectivities such as ethnic groups are ontologically prior to political regimes. A critical examination of these assumptions in the next section destabilizes the simplistic dyads of "East" and "West" and "democratic" (or "democratizing") and "authoritarian," opening the way for rethinking both democratization and ethnic identities—and the relationship between them.

## POLITICAL REGIMES AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES

Ethnic groups can be understood as collectivities centered on contested, shifting claims to a shared cultural identity, broadly defined, whether based on language, religion or other beliefs and customs, lineage, history, territory, or way of life.[4] Most of the contributors understand ethnic groups to be socially constructed, rather than primordial.[5] Their work suggests that both ethnic groups and nations are not fixed solidarities, but ongoing constitutive processes. Understood this way, the boundaries between ethnic groups are fluid and porous, their "content" is heterogeneous and internally and externally contested (see

Barth 1969). Their political salience also varies. As Brown notes, the identity markers of "nation" and "ethnicity" sustain differing interpretations with the same "facts." The unexplained problem is the existence of the collectivity itself and under what historical and social conditions ethnic identities and nations are constructed in ways that contribute either to ethnicized conflict or to the exclusion of vulnerable groups and individuals from meaningful political and economic participation in the life of the country.[6] The contributors by and large find that these undesirable outcomes are more likely when ethnic identities are constituted as exclusive, hegemonic, and/or hierarchical. This reduces the possibilities for inclusive and nonhierarchical pan- or multiethnic identities that can "buffer" exclusive ethnic or ethnonationalist appeals (to borrow Brown's term). It is in the human capacity to maintain multiple and overlapping collective identities—what Saul Newman calls "political schizophrenia" (1996: 20)—that we locate the potential for ethnically inclusive and nonhierarchical democratization and democracy in ethnically diverse societies.[7]

Underlying the sometimes problematic attributes of democracy and democratization in multiethnic societies—though often unacknowledged and undertheorized—is the co-constitutive relationship between political regimes and collective (including ethnic) identities. By co-constitutive I mean that the content, boundaries, and political salience of collective identities such as ethnicity are in significant ways reproduced by processes of creating, maintaining, and transforming political regimes, and vice versa.[8] We can in part trace the conceptualization of ethnicity as a political process to Max Weber (1968: 389), who wrote that "it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity."[9] The constitution of collective identities is necessary for regime legitimacy and for the mobilization of populations for collective action. In this light Chang criticizes Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner for failing fully to address the politics of regime reproduction and change in their theories of the origins and transformation of "nation": "Whether we agree with Anderson that nation is conceived in the mode of consciousness of the ordinary people, or with Gellner that nation is a useful cultural construct for both the state and the elite to pursue industrialization and other objectives, then the 'uses' of nation in real politics and regime transformation processes must be normal and prevalent." The constitution of collective identities is also a condition of a regime's very possibility.

This book's contributors understand the co-constitutive nature of regimes and identities in multiple ways: in terms of the instrumental acts of political and/or ethnic actors who evoke ethnic identities for political purposes, as the more or less unconscious effects of discourse, and as a consequence of broad structures and processes, such as imperial or colonial expansion and governance, decolonization, industrialization, modernization, and global

laissez-faire capitalism.[10] In each case, collective identities are created, maintained, and transformed partly through processes of making, maintaining, and transforming political regimes. These identities, in turn, partly constitute those same regimes.

The literature has identified some institutional features of democratization as potentially problematic in light of the political bases of ethnic and other identities. Linz and Stepan (1996) note that ethnic identities can become politically salient during democratization because the very processes that determine the symbols and norms to be entrenched in new democratic constitutions and laws also constitute identities, which not all citizens necessarily share. The negotiation of laws establishing electoral systems; representative institutions; and the boundaries, rights, and duties of citizens, for instance, require decisions about the boundaries, membership, and values of the *polis* and *demos*. These have important effects on the constitution of ethnically inclusive identities (see also Snyder 2000). Gladney (1998) points out that the maintenance of democratic political power also requires the making and reproduction of majorities for such purposes as (re)creating electoral coalitions, redistricting electoral boundaries, and (re)producing interest groups. If these collectivities are defined on narrow ethnic grounds, ethnic identities may become a focus of political mobilization both for the "majority" and those excluded from it.

As several chapters in this volume remind us, the economic processes associated with political regimes also have implications for the inclusiveness of the collective identities that sustain and are sustained by political power. Partly echoing Gellner, John Lie and Chang note that industrialization was central to forging collective identities in late Imperial Japan and in Taiwan under Japanese imperial rule. Drawing from socialist and feminist approaches, Rankin and Goonewardena assert that the neoliberal economic practices and ideologies associated with post–Cold War democratization imply a notion of individual identity and marketized social relations that challenges preexisting collective identities. Some ethnic minorities are disproportionately disadvantaged as a consequence.[11] They note that the civic norms of citizenship equality and individual rights associated with liberal democracy increase the potential for ethnicized conflict and oppression: given the primacy it grants to the autonomy of the individual as equal citizen, unfettered liberal democracy ignores or suppresses the rootedness of individual identities in intersubjective processes within communities, rendering difficult the institutional recognition of these identities (see also Kymlicka 1990, 1989; Taylor 1993). However, as Gladney's chapter makes clear, neoliberal economic processes in nondemocratic contexts such as contemporary China can also increase the ethnicization of identities and inequalities. To Rankin and Goonewardena, in both formally democratic and nondemocratic contexts, it is the reduced inability of governments enmeshed in neoliberal

economic regimes to claim legitimacy on social grounds that encourages them to mobilize ethnonationalist identities. Meanwhile citizens under late capitalism resort to ethnic identities because they cannot rely on the formal political system for their socioeconomic well-being.

Thus, reconceptualizing political (including economic) regimes and ethnic identities as co-constitutive processes departs from the dominant academic and political discourses about the region in several ways, especially with respect to East Asia. For one, these discourses constitute states in the region, such as Korea, Japan, and even China, as highly ethnically homogeneous.[12] Elsewhere, Gladney has attributed this to "uncritically accepted ideas of purity, numerical superiority, and social consensus" (1998: 1), which naturalize ethnic identities and nations as fixed, easily discernible, and uncontested entities *predating* and, therefore, *unrelated* to, processes of constituting political regimes. By contrast, scholarship on the region influenced by constructivist and post-structuralist perspectives asserts that "nations," including the supposedly homogeneous Han Chinese and the Japanese, are recently "imagined" or "constructed" collectivities inherent in processes of constituting political regimes (see Lie, Gladney, and Chang in this volume; see also Brook and Schmid 2000; Gladney 1998; Anderson 1991; Fujitani, White, and Yoneyama 2001).

The constructed nature of ethnic identities—and the centrality of their political constitution—does not necessarily negate the findings that suggest that minorities are better off in democratic polities. However, casting regimes and ethnic identities as co-constitutive, especially if we also problematize what is meant by democracy (a point addressed later), raises questions about what is assumed and what is left out when a correlation between democracy and ethnic peace is asserted. For instance, Gurr (1993: 184–5) argues that communal rebellion occurs more often in nondemocratic polities than in democratic ones. He also says that, for those societies that consolidated democracy in the 1990s, minority rights improved and ethnicized conflicts seldom happened (Gurr 2000). However, Gurr narrowly defines democracy, conflict, and the meaningful inclusion of minorities. He assumes that minority rights improve under democratic rule because fewer overt protests or conflicts occur. However, as Rankin and Goonewardena's chapter suggests, this approach ignores structural violence, such as ethnicized economic inequalities. Moreover, Gurr's approach appears to naturalize ethnic identities and assume their ontological priorness to political regimes. When ethnic identities and regimes are understood instead as co-constitutive, a different picture emerges.

Lie's analysis of ethnic identity and regime change in Japan is illustrative. Lie argues that postwar democratization constituted the country as a mono-ethnic nation. Okinawans, *Burakumin*, *Ainu*, and Korean Japanese could become part of the nation as individuals, but only through losing or hiding their ethnic identities. Thus, these groups were neglected, discriminated

against, and silenced. However, from the late 1960s, they began openly resisting their exclusion. Notably, this resistance does not appear on Gurr's statistical radar screen prior to the 1990s (Gurr 1990: 74). Even then, the assumption seems to be that that relatively low levels of ethnic protest indicate meaningful inclusion, when it could as easily indicate particularly effective silencing under democratic institutions and monoethnic ideology. This brings us to the next pillar of the book's conceptual contribution—the reconceptualization of democratization itself.

## RECONCEPTUALIZING DEMOCRATIZATION

I have already argued that the process of democratization includes, but is much more than simply establishing free and fair competitive elections resulting in a government with binding authority. It also involves the constitution and reproduction of collective, including ethnic, identities. The contributors make several other significant conceptual departures from formal, procedural approaches to democratization, which I outline here.

Firstly, definitions of democratization that assume a linear process from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy mean that most of East and Southeast Asia should be excluded from the analysis of the impact of democratization on ethnic relations.[13] Such an analysis could not include "illiberal" weak democracies such as Malaysia and Singapore (some would argue Japan), weakly liberal nondemocracies such as Hong Kong and Macau, or enduring authoritarian but economically liberalizing regimes such as China. However, reconceptualizing democratization in broader, less linear terms allows us to explore the impact on ethnic identities of the democratic and liberal features of these states, however imperfect they might be. Here it is useful to employ Nagata's reconceptualization of democratization as "a process of continual adjustments over rights and relationships in a political system, rather than an essentialized state of being (a 'democracy')." This definition encompasses the particularistic historical trajectories of democratic institutions and processes across the region and recognizes that key concepts from global human rights discourse, such as democracy, take on new meanings and resonate differently in diverse political cultures. As Nagata notes, this discourse can be used to claim ethnic and other privileges even while simultaneously serving as a justification for challenging such claims. Thus, she suggests that, if democratization in multiethnic polities is to be ethnically inclusive, it must involve *continuous processes of creating and maintaining* a pluralist citizenship coexistent with a common civic identity. While broadly consistent with elements of liberal democratic theory, Nagata's conceptualization challenges as simplistic the analytical distinction amongst authoritarian, democratizing, and democratic politics made in much of the transitions literature.[14]