ASIAN POWER AND POLITICS

The Cultural Dimensions of Authority

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Designed by Gwen Frankfeldt

Contents

Preface

THROUGHOUT ASIA TODAY the drama of politics is being played out by leaders and followers whose roles are largely prescribed by culturally determined concepts about the nature of power. From India and Southeast Asia to China and Japan, government officials—whether they are civil servants, politicians, or men in uniform—are all experiencing tensions between inherited ideals of authority and imported ideas of what political power can accomplish. The East is thus in the process of extensive change, but it is also pursuing paths different from those the West followed in achieving modernization. Largely because Asian cultures have spawned quite different concepts about what the nature and limits of political power should be, the story of their transformation is unique in the contemporary world.

Briefly put, my thesis is that political power is extraordinarily sensitive to cultural nuances, and that, therefore, cultural variations are decisive in determining the course of political development. More particularly, Asian cultures have historically had a rich variety of concepts of power. They share, however, the common denominator of idealizing benevolent, paternalistic leadership and of legitimizing dependency. Thus, although Europe did succeed in imposing on Asia its legalistic concept of the nation-state, the Asian response has been a new, and powerful, form of nationalism based on paternalistic authority.

Because these paternalistic forms of power answer deep psychological cravings for the security of dependency, peculiarly close ties between leaders and followers have tended to develop and become the critical element in the creation

of political power. This process contrasts with political development in the West, where the growth of individual autonomy has taken precedence over the perpetuation of dependency. Thus in the West it seemed natural and inevitable to have persistent conflicts in the political realm between demands for greater popular participation and assertions of sovereign authority. In Asia the masses of the people are more respectful of authority. Their leaders are concerned about questions of dignity, the need to uphold national pride, and other highly symbolic matters. Those in power want above all to be seen as protecting the prestige of the collectivity, which they are inclined to place above the goal of efficiency or of advancing specific interests in concrete ways.

By focusing on the role of power in the political development of Asia, I have sought to return to the fundamentals of modern political science—but with one very important difference. Whereas modern political theorists, from Charles Merriam and Harold Lasswell through Robert Dahl and Samuel P. Huntington, have conceived of power as a universal phenomenon—operating under the same laws whether in ancient Greece or in the contemporary international system of states, in parliaments or in city halls—and moreover have sought to identify its properties scientifically, I have treated power as something that differs profoundly from culture to culture. My argument is that in different times and places people have thought of power in very different ways, and it is precisely these differences that are the governing factors in determining the diverse paths of political development. In my view theories which seek to specify general propositions about power miss the point entirely. Of all social phenomena power is one of the most sensitive to cultural nuances; its potentialities and its limitations are always constrained by time and place.

It is safe to assume that societies have reasonably coherent views about such fundamental political concepts as authority and power, for these are matters that always bulk large in the collective experiences of political cultures and in the personal lives of individuals. Out of the long years of infancy and childhood people develop profound emotional sentiments, and extraordinary fantasies, about how power operates, and in the process they learn ways of managing and manipulating the games basic to superior-subordinate relationships. These early socialization patterns are reinforced by the ways in which religious beliefs about divine powers instruct people in understanding what is involved in a culture's rules about the relationships between guardian leaders and loyal followers.

Given the richness of human ingenuity in playing the roles of superiors and subordinates it might seem that there should be an infinite variety of styles and techniques when it comes to the operations of power. Fortunately for the political scientist, societies tend to cluster the acceptable

uses of power into quite limited, but culturally distinctive, patterns. Proof that such nuances of political cultures are important is easily available. Note, for example, that probably no other skill is as sensitive to the parochialism of culture as that of the politician. Politicians simply do not travel well; it is usually a safe bet that the hero in one constituency would have trouble getting elected in another. Could a Boston "pol" make it in Charleston, South Carolina, to say nothing of Tokyo? And is there any American congressional district in which the typical French or Italian prime minister could easily win election? Intellectuals can readily cross national boundaries and win acclaim, but the successful transplanted politician is rare indeed.

In addition to highlighting the subtle cultural differences that shape the modernization of the various Asian countries, it is necessary to trace historical changes in Asian views about power. In ancient times power was generaly associated with beliefs about the role of authority in upholding the cosmic order. Later, with the advance of more secular ideas, power was usually identified with social status. Not until modern times, and so far only to a limited extent in any Asian country, has power been seen as primarily utilitarian, useful for tasks more precise than just sustaining the social order.

It is therefore important in comparing Asia and the West to explore the consequences of treating power as status—with all the accompanying demands for dignity and deference—rather than as decision-making, as setting agendas and determining courses of action. What a society expects of power determines in large degree what it gets from its political system. Should power be used to give a people pride and self-respect, or should it be used to solve detailed practical problems involving competing interests and trade-offs between them?

In comparing the approaches to modernization that result from different cultural ways of defining power and authority I shall not try to rank countries according to their relative "success" in achieving modernization. Athough I shall note how certain approaches to power have created problems while others have facilitated advances, my basic assumption is that all the countries of Asia are undergoing change. If at any one time some may seem to have raced ahead, this does not mean that some other country may not in time "catch up" and go "ahead." My interest in comparison is only to isolate the factors which may help to explain different patterns of development.

From earliest childhood I had to confront the mysteries of cultural differences, but it was only with my first intensive fieldwork experience in Malaya that I gained scientific insights into such differences. In the early 1950s I spent nearly a year interviewing Malayan Chinese who had

gone into the jungle to fight under the banner of Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought. As I worked on this companion study to Gabriel A. Almond's *Appeals of Communism,* which was based on interviews with former Communists in four Western countries, I was struck by how different my Chinese interviewees were from his American, British, French, and Italian respondents. Whereas the Westerners either demonstrated, or at least rationalized, a craving for autonomy and individual identity, and wanted to be masters of their own fate, my Malayan Chinese wanted above all to achieve a sense of belonging, to be able to submerge their individualism in some larger group and to believe that no matter who led them, he would be in contact with almost magical sources of power.

My eyes were further opened to the value Asians set on dependency when my researches took me to Burma to interview politicians and administrators who were grappling with the problems of nation-building. Again I was to learn that self-evident concepts of Western politics were not applicable because the Burmese had quite different ideas about the nature and the uses of power. Later, fieldwork in Hong Kong and several countries in Southeast Asia and visits to India reinforced my awareness that different cultures emphasize very different views as to what authority should be like or should actually do.

Yet, out of all these experiences I found a common underlying theme. This was that for most Asians the acceptance of authority is not inherently bad but rather is an acceptable key to finding personal security. For most Asians the happiest times in their lives are inevitably their childhood years, when they are the most dependent, whereas autonomy and self-identity usually bring loneliness and the sadness of independence. In addition, the stern demands of filial piety and the imperative to express awe of parental authority generally work to repress oedipal reactions and thus to heighten the earlier implanted narcissistic cravings. I could not escape the conclusion that the search for autonomy and for individual identity has been a distinctly Western quest. For Asians the search for identity means finding a group to belong to—that is, locating an appropriate paternalistic form of authority.

In selecting my plane of analysis I rejected the increasingly narrow, but highly sophisticated, focus of the separate social science disciplines and have sought instead an approach which will exploit the best of several different academic fields. I have done this because of a conviction that political analysis without historical perspective is as flat and as lacking in human vividness as is sociological theorizing without the benefits of the insights of depth psychology. By focusing on political culture one becomes, in fact, obligated to explore all aspects of behavior, making use of whatever advantages are offered by all the relevant disciplines.

In this study "Asia" does not include Soviet Asia, Mongolia, or Southwest Asia, which is really more a part of the Middle East. The focus is instead on the major Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic cultures (excluding Sri Lanka because that violence-torn society raises themes not dealt with here). Although the fashion of the day in scholarship is specialization to the point of producing only single-country studies, I make no apology for dealing with so many of the countries of Asia. My reasoning is that it is conventional in the study of political development and modernization to deal with all of the Third World, the developing world, in general terms; hence to limit the focus to Asia is as much an act of modesty as one of hubris. At the same time I feel humbled by, and respectful of, the outstanding scholarship being practiced by specialists on the various countries of Asia. I regret not being better able to integrate all their findings into this book.

The study will start with a brief justification for even theorizing about political modernization, for this endeavor went out of favor in the academic turmoil of the late sixties. It will then proceed in ever narrowing concentric circles as it moves from a general overview of the historic patterns of changing concepts of power in most of Asia to, first, variations between broad cultural areas—the Confucian East Asian societies, the Southeast Asian cultures, and the Hindu (and also Muslim) patterns of South Asia—and then to differences within these cultural areas. This is important because the differences among, say, the main Confucian societies are just as important as the differences between the Confucian cultures and the South and Southeast Asian cultures. Moreover, I need to accentuate these cultural differences by identifying what is common in most Asian cultures in order to legitimize my conclusion. Only then is it possible to grasp the true dimensions of paternalistic authority and the ways in which Asians have mastered dependency and turned it into a psychologically liberating force that manifests its true qualities in the deepest meanings of loyalty. Asian forms of nationalism, racial identity, and company loyalty constitute new forms of authoritarianism. They are new in the sense that they are built out of the complex personal bonding ties of superiors and subordinates, of patrons and clients—ties in which it is often obscure who is manipulating whom, and for what purpose.

Over the last three decades I have, in addition to doing fieldwork in Asia, had many occasions to visit Asian countries; but a sabbatical leave and a most appreciated grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund gave me an opportunity to travel through most of the countries of Asia, staying long enough in each one to get a sense of the conditions there, and eventually to arrive at a feeling for where they all stand at a common

point in history. While this experience provided the baseline for this work, it would not have been possible to undertake such a broad comparative study had not excellent monographic research been produced on each of the Asian countries. I am, therefore, heavily indebted to several generations of scholars who have worked the various vineyards of Asian studies.

It is easy to explain why power and culture are the two central concepts of this book. At the time I began my formal training in political science there was optimism that the discipline was about to make giant strides in becoming an accumulative science because of the discovery that power was the essence of politics. At the same time American intellectuals were excited by the promise of new revelations from the theories of culture and personality that were being enthusiastically propagated by the anthropologists Clyde Kluckhohn, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict. My thinking about political psychology was later stimulated and expanded by the experience of jointly preparing and teaching seminars at M.I.T. with both Nathan Leites and Harold Lasswell, and by working with Erik Erikson in an M.I.T. faculty group when he was codifying the theories that came out of his Luther study and beginning his study of Gandhi. It goes without saying that my understanding of the theories of political development owes much to participating in the work of the Committee on Comparative Politics of the Social Science Research Council, but I welcome this opportunity to acknowledge again my great intellectual and personal indebtedness to Gabriel Almond.

Over the years at M.I.T. I have been extremely fortunate in having had a number of outstanding students whose researches on Asian political cultures have turned out to be learning experiences for me. Thus, while formally I was the mentor and they the students, in fact my understanding of Asia was broadened by their research and fieldwork. It is with pleasure that I acknowledge now my debt to the following scholars. On Japan, there were Richard Samuels, Lewis Austin, Takashi Inoguchi; on China, Richard Solomon, Susan Shirk, Alan P. L. Liu, Dorothy Grouse Fontana, Paul Hiniker, Talbott Huey, John Frankenstein, and Sophia Lu-tao Wang; on the Philippines, Jean Grossholtz, Aprodicia Laquian, and Loretta Sicat. On Vietnam, there were Samuel Popkin, Jane Pratt, and Paul Berman; on Indonesia, Karl Jackson, David Denoon, and Yahya Muhaimin; on Singapore and Malaysia, William Parker, Vincent Lowe, Russell Betts, Colin MacAndrews, and Zakaria Haji Ahmed; on Thailand, Herbert Rubin and Charles Murray; on India and Pakistan, Stanley Heginbotham, Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, Albert Cantril, and Ahmed Rehman. Thomas Berger provided helpful research assistance for this book.

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1 | Asia and Theories of Development

O N THE FACE OF IT, the mere idea of treating Asia as a single entity is absurd. Knowledgeable people realize that "Asia" is only a geographical expression, that the continent abounds in diversities, and that the peoples there should never be confused with one another. Only relics of the nineteenth century and the hopelessly uninformed would lump Asians together and speak of "Orientals," or of "Eastern thought." Asia certainly is as rich in its differences as is Europe.

Yet, we do speak of Europe as though, hidden behind its diversity, there lies some common, shared quality which justifies our thinking of Europe as a single entity. We agree that to say that something is "European" has meaning. But a similar generalization in regard to Asia is quickly ruled out as unjustifiable. Few will question that there is a European civilization; and although the French, English, Germans, Italians, and the rest may speak their separate tongues, they do share the legacies of Greece and Rome, of a common Christendom, and all that makes up the Judeo-Christian tradition. Behind the manifest variations of Asia, however, lies not one civilization but different root civilizations, the Sinic and the Hindu, and also the Muslim and the Buddhist traditions. Asia has a more varied past than Europe and therefore has not the same sense of a common descent.

Conventional wisdom, holding that at times it is appropriate to minimize Europe's diversities and concentrate on its common heritage, judges Asia's differences to be unmanageable. Comparisons within Europe are thus consid-

ered justifiable, while attempts to compare Asian countries are like "comparing apples and oranges."

Yet, with all this acknowledged, the pull of comparison in Asia persists. People do want to know how India and China are doing compared with each other. We find it natural to ask whether the "Japanese model," and now more recently the "South Korean–Singapore model," will be relevant for other parts of Asia. The "Chinese revolution" and then the successes of Hanoi led some people to talk of a general pattern of "Asian peasant rebellions." Others have found significance, and barely suppressed satisfaction, in contrasting the "hard" cultures of Confucian East Asia with the "soft" cultures of Hindu India and Buddhist Southeast Asia.

If we reflect on those comparisons within Asia which come most naturally, it soon becomes apparent that they share one quality: it is not that they are variations on a common past, as with the countries of Europe, but rather that they share similar hopes for the future. The common element in Asia is that it is a continent in pursuit of economic growth, national power, and all that can be lumped together under the general label of modernization. The unity of Europe lies in its history; the unity of Asia is in the more subtle, but no less real, shared consciousness of the desirability of change and of making a future different from the past.

Furthermore, in varying degrees, Asia's desire for change, largely a concern of the elite, came from a single source—Western technological civilization. Although the West came to Asia in a number of guises, creating different colonial traditions and different perceptions of danger and opportunity, the extraordinary historical fact is that, in spite of the trauma of that interlude of variegated Western challenges, enlightened Asians have been able to penetrate the Western masquerade of diversity and grasp at some of the most unifying features of Western secular civilization. In the process Asians have moved beyond the phase of seeking to become Westernized and have come to the stage of striving for modernization. Japan, as the pacesetter, in its "low posture" style, has slipped past the stage of self-conscious concern about becoming Westernized and has quietly joined the ranks of the most modernized, so much a part of the West that it has become conventional to dispense with the phrase "the West and Japan" and to speak instead of the "advanced industrial societies," by which everyone understands that Japan is to be classed with Europe and North America. Other rapidly changing Asian countries are not far behind Japan, and consequently the very idea of becoming Westernized will lose meaning as we think of the more generalized concept of a world culture.[1]

In Defense of Development Theory

The objection may be raised that in identifying the unity of Asia by its common pursuit of modernization we have done little more than to say that Asia's diversity is encompassed by the larger category of societies variously called the "Third World," the "developing" or "emerging" nations, or simply the "LDCs," which presumably share this same concern for achieving modernization. After all, if the criterion is "modernization," how does Asia differ from Africa and Latin America? Moreover, isn't the concept of modernization, which was popular in the 1950s and 1960s, now somewhat tarnished, if not discredited, and hardly worthy of being the central concept of a serious study?

These are two valid questions which call for sober answers, particularly since both questions are in a sense awkwardly related. It is true that the development or modernization theories created in the 1950s and 1960s did lump together Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Yet it is also true that an important reason for dissatisfaction with those theories was precisely the fact that they were stretched too thin by being applied to all three continents. From the vantage point of the 1980s it is evident that in essence the earlier modernization theories had a close empirical fit with the experiences of Asia but not with those of either Africa or Latin America. It is apparent now that the postcolonial African political systems generally lacked the blend of nationalism and earnest commitment to modernization that was characteristic of Asia. As for Latin America, it is an inappropriate stretching of the imagination to classify that continent's well-established countries as "newly emerging" states, as though they were just breaking away from colonial rule. South and Central American countries have had long histories of independence and have, over time, molded their own distinctive political and social systems. They are not at all comparable to those Asian states whose terminal phases of colonialism pointed them in the direction of elite-guided social and economic change which was intensified by the drive of newfound nationalism.[2] Nor are they comparable to China or Japan, which from the moment they were exposed to the dangers of Western colonial domination sought to gain national strength and economic security by adopting modernizing technologies.[3]

Indeed, reflection on the problems raised by Latin America helps to clarify some of the inappropriate criticisms of modernization theories, at least as applied to Asia. First of all, Latin America was subsumed under general discussions of development partly in response to policy concerns rather than intellectual ones. Specifically, the Kennedy administration's decision to oppose the spread of Castroism by initiating the Alliance for