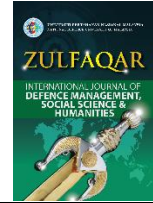




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### Asian Values from the Political Perspective

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#### ABSTRACT

*This paper attempts to make a generalization on the values of Asian societies, though with examples of only from some selected Asian societies. By recognizing each society differs in details with one another, we shall argue that there is a general pattern and some similarities in terms of what we called Asian values among them. Most obvious to us is that religion and belief systems seem to form the core values of almost all Asian societies whether it is Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism and others, past and present. Secondly, in most societies too, religion seems to become an integral part of their political systems in the past and the present time. The transformative impact of modernization from the West does not seem to erode these traditional characteristics of most Asian societies*

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#### Introduction

Only at a very high level of generalization and abstraction, I believe that one can speak of a singular Asian value system. At a more concrete and empirical levels, it will be more appropriate to consider Asian societies as having several value systems, each having its own peculiarities and uniqueness as well as similarities with others.

A comparative study on the similarities and differences between these value systems will be an interesting exercise, albeit this is outside the main concern of this paper. One such exercise has taken place between the 12th and 14th March 1995 at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, organized by the Centre for Civilizational Dialogue where twelve papers were presented by prominent scholars and writers; the keynote address being given by Anwar Ibrahim, the then Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia who was also the key figure in initiating such an interesting and important dialogue (Bakar & Cheng, 1997). The dialogue was between two civilizations or value systems, that is Islam and Confucianism.

Generally, it is often acceptable to draw a line of difference or a dichotomy between the East and the West; the East being Asian and the West being European and North America combined. For some reasons, the African continent does not seem to belong to neither of the two. However, due to the ongoing process of contact and cultural dissemination and diffusion since the discovery of the trade route to the East in the late 15th Century, much borrowings had taken place particularly the East receiving from the West in the form of what is termed as 'modernization.' Asian societies which have a powerful absorbing capacity have accepted and absorbed many of the cultural traits from the West so much so that at face value, most of the Asian societies seem to have been Westernized. At a deeper level of analysis, however, most Asian societies which have undergone change and modifications have succeeded in retaining many of their traditional cultural elements which form the core of their value system and cultural traditions. This seems to be a paradox which some Westerners find it difficult to understand. For example, Japan as a model of an industrialized Asian nation has all the characteristics of an industrial nation comparable to that of Western European or North American countries especially in the development of science and technology. But at the same time, certain aspects of its economic, social and especially cultural life have retained their traditional elements which form the basis of its core values.

### **Salient Characteristics of the Asian Societies**

It is a well known fact that countries of Asia are the birthplace of major religions of the world, and sages that provided the teachings and ethical philosophies which have followers in many parts of the world, both East and West. If we include the Arabian Peninsular, Israel and the Palestine as part of Asia (i.e. West Asia), then all major world religions were born in Asia. Even the recent movement for the unification of churches led by Reverend Sun Myung Moon which found some followings in the West has its birthplace in the East, i.e. the Republic of Korea.

Among these major religions and ethical philosophies like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucius, Taoism, and Shintoism, only Christianity and Judaism seem to be considered as the religion of the Westerners, not denying the fact that Christianity also finds its place in the Eastern countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. But other religions and philosophies like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucius and Taoism are regarded as the religions of the East.

Before the advent of Islam into the Malay world of Southeast Asia in the 13th - 14th Century, Hinduism and Buddhism were the major religions of this region. The religions were peculiarly fused with Animism which had been the indigenous belief system of the population. Buddhism also spread into Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and has remained as the dominant faith of the population of those countries until the present time. Ironically, it is Hinduism and not Buddhism whose birthplace was in Northern India that became the major religion of the Indian continent while Buddhism finds the island of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and some Southeast Asian countries as its stronghold.

In China, Confucius has been the religion of the state for more than a thousand years, since the first century A.D. Likewise, Confucius's influence was also widespread in other parts of East Asian countries like Japan and Korea. But like Buddhism and Hinduism, it finds no following in the West.

Islam which came to the East in the 12th Century found a ready acceptance by the majority of the population in the Malay world of Southeast Asia. It replaced both Hinduism and Buddhism which were the dominant religions then. Christianity which came last together with Portuguese and Spanish colonialism finds its place and has been well established on the Philippines Islands. In countries like Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, and others, Christianity is the religions of the minority who are numerically insignificant as compared with other religions and belief systems like Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism or Confucianism.

What is the relevance of these descriptions on the importance of religion as the salient characteristic of the Asian people with the subject of politics or political system which is the main concern of this paper?

The purpose of this introductory description is to show the importance of religion and belief systems in the everyday life of the people of Asia and that religion forms an important dimension of their cultural system and world view, both in the past and the present time. It will be shown elsewhere below

that religion and the belief systems and other cultural traditions not only form an important aspect of the Asian value system but also that it forms a part of and is almost inseparable from the Asian political systems. Modernization and development have brought about many changes to the everyday life of the Asian people and including the establishment of new economic, administrative, political, and cultural systems. But, these modern systems are inseparable, and are blended and uncultured with the traditional institutions and belief systems which I believe are not easily eroded by the impact of westernization through colonization and the current process of globalization, this forms the main argument of this paper.

### **Traditional Political Systems and Values**

At this juncture, it is appropriate for us to try to answer the question whether there are sectorally valid Asian values or otherwise. As a student of anthropology, I am socialized to accept the theoretical framework that one of the acceptable approaches to understanding the social system or social structure of traditional societies is to study its parts or social institutions which are related to one another to form a single social system. Thus, to the anthropologists, traditional societies in contrast with the modern societies where a single social institution like the economy, politics, or religion can be studied individually or in isolation without relating it to the other institutions or sub-systems. A holistic approach is considered as a prerequisite to the better understanding of any traditional society, though this is not so insofar as modern society is concerned.

Likewise, each social institution like politics should be studied not in isolation from other social institutions like the economy, religion and belief system, customs, education and the like. But it is still possible to analyze an aspect of the total social system like politics, or political system to determine if its traditional institution has undergone change due to the ongoing process of modernization.

At the risk of over simplification, we can classify the traditional pre-colonial political system of Asia into three basic types, namely the stateless system of the tribal nomadic people, the feudal-type of decentralized governmental structure and the pyramidal monarchical structure or what is sometimes referred to as the Oriental Despotism or the tribute-paying Asiatic social formation (neo-Marxist). Without going into details on each of these political structures, the purpose of the forthcoming discussion is to highlight those aspects which are related to the political culture and values which may be considered as common among the Asian societies. This shall be followed by a discussion on the transformation of these traditional political systems into what it is today as found in many of the countries of Asia, especially those that have adopted the modern democratic system and process which are regarded as a viable political system and value orientation.

As we have mentioned above, anthropologists have suggested that a social system consists of many parts or institutions which are interconnected with one another. A study of one institution must take into consideration its relationships with the other institutions that make up the whole. Studies on the traditional political institutions of the Asian societies like the Chinese, Japanese, Indian and the Malays have confirmed the assumption made by anthropologists that the political institutions of these societies are interconnected with other institutions such as the economy, education, and especially religion and belief system.

Traditionally, and until the middle of this century, Asian societies were basically agrarian societies that were dependent on the production of agriculture and fishery mainly for the direct consumption of the producers. A small surplus went into the households of the ruling aristocracy. In addition to the above, there were other products produced to meet the demand from the far distance countries including Europe such as silk and gun powder from China and spices from the Malay world, The number of the export products as well as the volume increased over time. Historical records and especially Chinese sources have documented that the activity of the long distance trade among the Asian societies between China, India, the Middle-East and with Southeast Asia had taken place since the beginning of the first century A-D. It started with the overseas trade but later expanded into overland which resulted in the opening of the famous silk route that linked China with the European and the Central Asian worlds.

Along with the trading activities went hand-in-hand other cultural and religious activities which left a significant mark on the recipient communities. A classic case in point is the spread of Islam from The Arab world and India by the Arab and Gujerati merchants to Southeast Asia beginning from the 12th Century AD. which started in Aceh but later reached the height of its grandeur in the 15th Century

Malacca. From then onwards, through both trade and missionary activities, Islam spread throughout the Malay Peninsular and Malay Archipelago and emerged to be the dominant religion of the people except for the Island of Bali which succeeded in preserving Hinduism and the Northern Island of the Philippines which were converted to Christianity through the Spanish conquest.

There were several factors which accounted for the success of the spread of Islam in the Malay world (Hashim, 1989). The most important factor being the royal patronage it received from the Malay rulers and members of the ruling aristocracy. As in some other parts of Asia, trading activities had been largely controlled by the ruling class or merchants who were closely affiliated with the ruling aristocracy. Members of the merchant class were highly respected and accorded with high status and prestige approximating that of the ruling aristocracy. Similarly, when the Arab and Indian merchants landed on the shores of the Malay Peninsular and archipelago, they were cordially welcomed at the Malay courts both as merchants as well as missionaries who had brought a new faith which was considered as simpler and easier to practice.

The values of the day included respect the knowledgeable, sages or 'guru' who were religiously learned. The court of the ruling dynasty for more than a thousand years had been patronizing religions of the great traditions which arrived from a distant land like Hinduism and Buddhism from India. Now Islam too was accepted and had its share of being patronized by the rulers and members of the ruling aristocracy. The ulama or tuan guru, the religiously learned were accepted as important court officials whose advice were always sought after. Being the guardian of this new religion which was then well accepted by the subjects, the ruling class increased its prestige and found new elements that strengthened its legitimacy. What is clear to us is that in so far as the political system of pre-modern era is concerned, religion and the belief systems are very much intertwined and closely connected with those who held the power to govern. Here, we have a situation where there was no clear separation between the mosque and the state. In the 15th Century Malacca, Islam was regarded as a state religion, the legal tenets were based on the Islamic or shariah law derived from the Quran and the Hadiths (examples from the Prophet). Islam, which to the Muslims was not just a religion but also a philosophy and a way of life, became the dominant or core values of the Malays.

The situation had been similar during the pre-Islamic era of Southeast Asia. Chinese sources had recorded that between the 7th and 13th century A.D., the region had been dominated by the Kingdom of Sri Wijaya which had its centre on the east-coast of Sumatra (Wolters, 1970). Since Sri Wijaya was located at the centre of the maritime trade between the East and the West, it rose to become a powerful kingdom rich with resources, active in trading activities as well as having the most powerful naval power in the region. Other smaller states and kingdoms were subdued as the principalities of Sri Wijaya; the former become satellites of the latter.

As with the Malay-Islamic Kingdom of Malacca in the 15th Century, the grandeur of Sri Wijaya which lasted for approximately 600 years was not merely because of the flourishing trading activities which came under its control, that is the material base, and the naval strength which made it the most powerful sea-power in the Malay world, but more importantly the capital of Sri Wijaya at Palembang had been the centre of learning for Buddhism second only to India. The famous traveller and Buddhist monk of the Tang Dynasty in the 7th Century, I-Tsing or Yi Jing, on his way to study Buddhism in India had stayed for more than ten years in Sri Wijaya to study Buddhist scriptures and Sanskrit which was the language of learning at that time, and the Malay language or Kun-lun which was the language of trade used by the common people. According to I-Tsing's description of Sri Wijaya, its capital had been the centre of learning on Buddhism in the Far East where there were more than a thousand monks studying Buddhist scriptures in Sanskrit (Liang, 1996). Learning Buddhist scriptures was considered a manifestation of the people's love for knowledge. This was encouraged by the ruler who became the patron of religion where Buddhism and the rituals associated with it formed an important part of the court culture at that time. Likewise, the ruler who was the main figure in the political system used Buddhism to legitimize and strengthen his position.

Moving northwards to China and Japan, we found the situation was similar with that in Southeast Asia. Confucianism since its birth had always being accepted as the cultural ideology of the ruling elite, the sage, the village teacher and the literate merchants. Since the first century B.C., symbiotic relationships had already developed between Confucian scholars and the Han imperial government (Bakar & Cheng, 1997). Confucian scholars — the Mandarins — were accepted as court officials while members of the ruling families were converted to Confucianism. Sometimes, there were some challenges

from the Taoists and Buddhists against the domination of Confucianism, especially during the transitional period between the Han and the Tang dynasties. But the situation stabilized when followers of Confucianism proved that they were willing and able to share power with both the Taoists and Buddhists at court (Bakar & Cheng, 1997). The Confucians then regained influence largely because they provided loyal service to the imperial government and never at odds with the latter.

Similarly in the later period during the Tang, Song, Ming and Qing dynasties which brought China into the 20th Century. There was a cordial relationship between Confucianism and its rival, Taoism and Buddhism. But it was Confucianism that was dominating and determined how the empire was to be governed. After the invention of printing which made Confucian classics became accessible to the wider audience, the number of people who studied Confucianism were greatly increased and the examination system was greatly extended. Confucianism itself became a dynamic intellectual philosophy borrowing and integrating concepts from Buddhism and Taoism. Likewise, with the wide use of printing materials, the Confucian values were able to penetrate all levels of society through the greater demand for education and the building of schools and academies. Among the common people, there was a process of syncretism between the religious practices of the Buddhist, Taoists and the Confucian philosophy. At the governmental level, Confucianism formed as an important part of the state ideology where there was a fusion between moral and political issues. Until the middle of this century when the new revolutionary ideology of communism was able to challenge and defeat its arch rival – the nationalists, and when the old orthodoxy was considered out-of-date and not in congruence with the new and modernizing influence, Confucianism and other religious teachings and moral ethics played the important function of supporting the dynastic regimes. For more than a thousand years, Confucianism emerged as the state supported social and political philosophy i.e China and Japan.

The Japanese experience was almost similar to that of the Chinese. In Japan, the three major spiritual and moral cultures that had a great influence on the ruling dynasty were Shintoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. It has been said that when times were bad and the government was in need of philosophical or religious justification, the ruling class may turn to either Shintoism, Confucianism or Buddhism (Bakar & Cheng, 1997). Also during the process of modernization and transition from feudalism to capitalism during the Meiji restoration, certain fragments of Confucianism had been picked up and employed to sustain a stable and harmonious society so as not to cause a major disruption to the community (Bakar & Cheng, 1997). There were times when the Confucianists were challenged by Shinto scholars who regarded Confucianism as a foreign teaching which was corrupting the Japanese nation. But like the case of China, Confucianism had remained entrenched among the ruling class and at times had served to mobilize a wider support for the state and to legitimize the ruling dynasty; it was too strong to be defeated and soon Shinto and Confucianism found harmony in syncretism (Bakar & Cheng, 1997).

### **Tradition and the Transformation of Culture**

Nobody could deny the lasting impact of imperialism and colonialism on the traditional societies of Asia. Colonialism that brought with it modernizing influences resulted in the structural change of the pre-modern societies where economic, political, legal, educational and the bureaucratic institutions of the West were introduced. This was followed by the transformation of cultural values associated with these institutions. Simple societies became more complex with the introduction of monetary economy, new technology, the importance of capital and modern markets, and new ideology and cultural values that challenged the old, established order. There was a process of modification and adjustment where new choices and alternatives were available to the formerly static traditional societies. In other words, modernization is the process of differentiation and increased complexities.

But it is our argument that the transformation of cultural values was only partial and not total. While change was rather obvious in the realm of the economy, technology, education, political, legal and administrative, there were elements of traditional cultural values that were being-retained, and that there was always a cultural heritage and tradition which were not discarded. In all societies, there was always a group of people who belong to the elite class who would strive to preserve some of the traditional cultural elements that served to give identity to each of the societies.

In all parts of Asia, colonialism and modernization had given rise to a new political consciousness and new values where the struggle for independence and the establishment of an independent and democratic state became a goal to be achieved. Ironically, these new, values and ideas on nationalism,

independence, liberty, democracy, progress, and the like were learned from the West or being introduced by the West through modern education and political socialization. The emergence of the modernizing elites had been a single most important factor that brought about change and transformation to the underdeveloped pre-capitalist societies.

We have mentioned earlier that in the pre-modern Southeast Asia, the political system was a pyramidal monarchical government adopted from the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of India and later during the Muslim period, adopted from the Moghul governmental system. At the apex of the political hierarchy was the King or Raja, and during the Muslim period the Sultan, who succeeded to the throne based on heredity or ascribed status rather than achieved status.

The ruler was a symbol of sovereignty whose power to make decision and to punish was absolute after advice was sought from the court officials. The dominant political culture or core values which formed as an ideology of the ruling class was loyalty (*setia*) which was expected not only of the subjects but also from the court officials and other members of the aristocracy. This must be reciprocated by the ruler who was to rule based on the principle of justice (*adil*). Any subject class who rebelled or committed treason was sentenced to death.

The third core values that defined the relationships between the ruler and the ruled was mutual help reciprocity (*kerjasama, tolong menolong*). These symbiotic relationships ensured the society's equilibrium and stability. Disequilibrium or instability often occurs when a rebellious individual or a group of them challenged the established authority. This too was quite a recurring phenomenon.

Malay literary works based on oral traditions depicted many cases of rebel and treason by the subject class who wanted to uphold justice. But they were all punished by death. In addition, there was also a supernatural punishment against the subject class who rebelled such as his house was stricken by lightning and the like. Traditional literature based on oral tradition became a powerful medium that disseminated the cultural ideology of the ruling class. In this way, political stability was maintained.

Another factor that brought together the subject class with the ruling class was religion. As we have mentioned earlier, the Malay ruler became the patronage as well as the guardian of Hinduism and Buddhism during the pre-Islamic period and Islam during the Islamic period. In this way, the position of the ruler was enhanced and strengthened. Therefore, religion and the belief systems together with local customs and traditions which were strongly upheld and became a powerful force as a cultural ideology that legitimized the power of the ruling dynasty.

The coming of the colonial masters and the British to India and Malaysia, the Dutch to Indonesia, the French to Indo-China, and the Spaniards to The Philippines brought with them political culture and ideology that were in congruence with the changing economic structure that was undergoing transformation. Capitalist development and commercialization on a global scale that expanded beyond national boundaries required the traditional political institutions to be replaced by modern ones based on the western model. In most countries of Asia, modernization became a global phenomenon of the 20th century which promised a better future in all aspects of the everyday life of the people: economic, political, educational, legal, social and cultural. In some parts, there was resistance to it by a certain group who considered modernization a Western ideology that would do more damage than good. This radical or left-wing intelligentsia, some of whom were educated from the West would offer an alternative model for development, based upon the Socialist-Marxist principles. Countries of Asia, like Europe, became divided based on differences of political ideology.

As for those countries that had accepted the Western model of development, the democratic system and ideals became a new culture that was accepted and considered a better institution than the old established order. In order to give power to the people, change was radical and revolutionary such as that experienced by Indonesia. In Malaysia, Thailand, India and Sri Lanka, the transition to democratic political system was a smooth one without much disruption. This was because the colonial masters had prepared a small group of elites that came from the traditional ruling class who had received education from the West to propel for a smooth transition to the democratic political system.

Political party system was introduced that enhanced political consciousness at both the local and national levels. These foreign ideas and institutions were adopted and gradually adjusted to suit the local social and cultural environment and needs. In the Federal and State constitutions, Islam is a state religion

though it does not form a part of the ideology of the state. The heads of government often emphasised that Malaysia always remained as a secular state although it is also an accepted policy that the universal aspect of Islamic values were incorporated into the administrative structure and process.

In Malaysia, the Malay elites, with the cooperation of leaders from the Chinese and Indian communities adopted the system of Constitutional Monarchy of the Westminster type. Malay rulers of the nine Malay states were maintained as heads of states although without any real power. A supreme ruler was appointed among them to be in office for a period of five years, based on rotation. General election to elect the peoples' representatives in the House of Parliament was held once in every five years. Through the process of trial and error and especially after undergoing the traumatic experience of racial riots in 1969, Malaysia designed a unique system of power, sharing among its multi-ethnic communities. Most political parties were ethnic-based representing the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Kadazans, Ibans, and others. From a humble beginning of three political parties, the UMNO representing the Malays, MCA representing the Chinese and MIC representing the Indians who together formed the ALLIANCE or Perikatan, later developed into a coalition of fourteen political parties which was then (in 1974) re-named as the National Front or Barisan Nasional. This political formula of inter-ethnic cooperation, which was formed in 1955 some two years before independence, had been a viable strategy that was able to maintain stability and racial harmony. Possibly, the Malaysian Barisan Nasional is a unique system and one of its kind; but is considered as the best formula for this multi-ethnic societies, par excellence.

Here, we have a case of adapting and utilizing the traditional values of 'working together', (kerjasama), mutual help (tolong-menolong) and 'cooperation' (gotong royong) into the modern political system and political process. Since achieving independence from the British in 1957, Malaysia had never failed to have the general election, which was scheduled once in every five years. But, underlying these two concepts or core values is the concept of 'loyalty' which is at work. By this, we do not mean loyalty to the nation, which is accepted as universal ethical values. As a political ideology, loyalty is expected to operate at three levels of relationships. First is between the followers and their political masters within a single party. Second is loyalty to the party of which one is a member. Finally, loyalty is expected from each political party to the concept of Barisan Nasional or the National Front. In this regard and at different levels, the chairman of the Barisan Nasional and the President of the dominant political party, the UMNO, as well as the President of an individual political party are the most influential and powerful figures in the political structure of Malaysia.

Indonesia had a relatively longer experience than Malaysia in her experiment with democracy. But the revolutionary zeal of her nationalist leaders like Soekarno, Hatta, Subanrio and others who were influenced by socialistic ideology had caused Indonesia to depart radically from Malaysia in terms of the political model she adopted which was a republic rather than a constitutional monarchy.

For sometime the brand of democracy practised by Indonesia was guided-democracy, not based on western model but rather a combination of both the democratic principles of the West and socialistic ideology of the Russian type. The political ideology adopted during Soekarno's era was NASAKOM which is a combination of three ideas, that is Nationalism (Nasionalisme), Religion (Agama) and Communism (Komunisme). These ideologies were at odds with one another but they were able to be held together by the charismatic leader Soekarno until it broke asunder in 1965 in an attempted coup d'etat by the communists which failed miserably. It was then followed by a purge and mass massacre of the communist leaders and followers nationwide. The political power was handed to the Armed Forces which became a dominant power in the political culture of Indonesia until the present time.

In many aspects, the Indonesian brand of democracy is different especially in its operation and values with that of Malaysia. Similarly, if we are to compare Malaysia with countries like Thailand, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the differentiation in its operation and values is rather obvious. Space does not permit us to make comparisons between these countries. But, what is important to be noted in all the above cases is the general acceptance of a democratic system of government and the social and cultural values associated with it. No doubt this modern institution is of a foreign origin and an imported one. It was then adopted to suit the local, social and cultural milieu by integrating with it some of the indigenous cultural values.

Similar is the case of Japan whose economy was modernized and industrialized earlier than other Asian countries. In the political dimension, the feudal system of the Shogun had to give way to the pyramidal imperial system of the Meiji with a king or emperor at the apex of the system. Through an

aggressive policy of learning from the West and adopting whatever was considered as good and beneficial to the country from the West, the political system too went through a process of transformation. The democratic principles and democratic system of government were adopted. Together with this modernization package came the modern beauracratc structure of the West which could ensure the smooth function of the government.

With the retention of the Emperor as a symbol of identity, a source of unity and a focus of loyalty, some of the traditional values associated with the three major belief systems and philosophy namely Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism were integrated into the modem political legal system. This led many researchers on Japanese society to conclude that Japanese is, in many aspects, a modern society which is able to retain many of its traditional cultural values and practices.

The situation in China in the pre-Revolutionary era of 1949 was not much different from Japan and many other countries of Asia. But communism as an ideology does not compromise with the super-structural elements like religion, traditional belief systems and customs which are considered as outmoded and a hindrance to progress.

The Cultural Revolution of the sixties had wiped out most cultural remnants of the past. China then became an exemplary alternative model of development for other countries like North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to follow.

But with the downfall of the Soviet Union as a socialist state followed by the new policy of liberalisation or prestorika and the opening of the Chinese economy to foreign investors, we believe that those formerly socialist countries are slowly changing towards adopting western democratic principles and institution and the values related with them.

## Conclusion

We like to summarise our argument that for most Asian countries, approximately more than a hundred years of transformation has brought them closer to the Western industrialized societies in many respects including the political system, political culture and the values associated with them. The democratic principles and values have been widely accepted as an ethical system that can be shared by both Asian and Western societies. This in my opinion, is one of the fundamental ethical systems which Asia and the West have held in common.

But, as Asian societies are rich in their cultural heritage, some of which deserve to be maintained and preserved, these cultural elements would be integrated with modern institutions including the democratic system and process. Thus, we find the situation whereby there are similarities in the basic democratic principles and values but not in their operations as practiced by individual countries.

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