
Civil Society and Political Change in Asia

*Civil Society and
Political Change
in Asia*

Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space

Edited by

Muthiah Alagappa

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Preface

Beginning in the 1980s, civil society gained worldwide prominence as a political force in the context of fundamental global geopolitical and economic changes, and in the wake of numerous transitions to democracy all over the world. Political leaders and scholars, especially in the West, credit civil society with having played a crucial role in the collapse of communism and authoritarianism and in the accompanying democratic transitions. Perceived as a normative ideal, civil society is deemed as having the potential to liberate citizens from the oppressive state and to confer full economic and political freedom on them. Some present civil society as a program and an alternative to the domineering state. Viewing it as a positive force for the development of democracy, Western international aid agencies and foundations, along with advocates of democracy in the academic community, target the development of robust civil societies in new democracies and seek to sow the subversive seed of civil society in nondemocratic states. Along with the rule of law, enhancement of legislative capacity, growth of political parties, and development of the capitalist economy, promotion of civil society in developing countries has become a key goal of Western governments and, to a lesser degree, of the Japanese government.

The growing political prominence of civil society stimulated a great deal of thought about the concept in the scholarly community as well. Civil society has been used as a lens to understand politics and deployed as a key variable to explain democratic political change, especially in developing countries. Democratic change in South Korea, Taiwan, Chile, Poland, Czechoslovakia, South Africa, Nigeria, and Benin, among other countries, it is argued, cannot be comprehended without reference to civil society. Others have asserted that studying civil society provides a clearer understanding of the interface between society and government, and that it holds the key to the political legitimation of governments. Furthermore, it is posited that the absence of a vigorous civil society hinders sustained political reform, improved governance, and viable state-society-economy relations in developing

countries. In his 1998 book *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions*, John Keane goes so far as to claim that its emergence is a sign of “the end of a long century of political thinking dominated by statist ideology” and the move of civil society, reborn on grand scale, to “occupy the center-ground of contemporary political thought.” Some scholars contend that civil society is relevant to understanding political development not only in developing countries but also in the postindustrialized countries in which the concept originated. A reconceived theory of civil society, it is argued, can make important contributions to ongoing debates in the developed states on elite versus participatory democracy, rights-oriented liberalism versus communitarianism, and the free market versus the welfare state. Others connect the erosion of social capital and decline of civil society to disarray and disaffection with democracy in advanced industrialized countries.

Many of the best works on civil society are grounded in the experience of the southern, central, and eastern European countries. Experience in Latin American countries also informs some of the major works on democratic transitions and consolidation and, indirectly, civil society. Asia has been much less central in this literature. In part this neglect is due to the persistence of communist and other authoritarian regimes in the region and the belief in several quarters that Asian values are distinct, and that their nondemocratic features are immune to the general worldwide trend. A substantial segment of the Asian political and scholarly community argued in the 1980s and early 1990s that liberal democracy is not suited for Asia, and that the Western concept of civil society is alien and inapplicable to Asian situations. The “Asian values” argument and the presence of multiple political systems have not prevented scholarly work on civil society. Such works, however, have been limited in number, mostly empirical, and country-specific. There are very few Asia-wide studies, and almost none of them are conceptual in orientation or comparative in nature.

This book seeks to contribute to filling the gap in the literature. It is a comparative inquiry into the nature of civil society and the role of organizations in this realm in advancing (or retarding) change in twelve Asian countries in the direction of open, participatory, and accountable politics. It advances four sets of findings: on the nature and development of Asian civil societies; the connection between civil society and democracy; the implications of the rise of civil society for the state and for state-civil society relations; and the relationship between civil and political societies. On the nature and development of civil societies in Asia, the study presents six propositions. First, contrary to the claim that the idea of civil society is alien, civil society organizations not only exist in Asia but have experienced dramatic growth since the mid-1980s; in some cases civil societies have relatively long histories. Second, development of civil society is social-reality specific; multiple factors have fueled the development of civil societies in Asia. Anticolonial mobilization, weaknesses of states, resistance to repressive rule, government sponsorship of orga-

nizations, increase in democratic space, economic growth, the information and communications revolutions, change in the international normative structure, and growing international support have all stimulated the development of civil societies. Their salience has varied with circumstance and over time. Third, civil societies in Asian countries are highly diverse in composition, resource endowment, and goals; they are arenas of power, struggle, and cooperation. Fourth, the composition and dynamics of civil societies have altered dramatically over time in several countries, and more change is in prospect. The spread of open political systems, market economies, and globalization is likely to fuel further change in Asian civil societies, including their transnational and global dimensions. Fifth, contemporary Asian civil societies display features of both the neo-Tocquevillean and neo-Gramscian frameworks. As the state and its political institutions become more legitimate, the neo-Tocquevillean framework tends to dominate. Sixth, the dramatic growth in the number of civil society organizations has not, however, been accompanied by institutionalization of the nonstate public sphere. The full measure of rights and rules necessary to construct and protect the autonomy of this realm is still not in place in several countries, including democratic ones. Civil society in Asia is viewed largely in instrumental terms to bring about or prevent political change in the state and its institutions; it is less commonly viewed as an autonomous arena for self-governance.

On the connection between civil society and democracy, the study advances four propositions. First, there is no necessary connection between civil society and democratic change. Civil society organizations have both expanded and contracted democratic space. Some groups have been in the forefront in preparing the ground for and even taking the lead in advocating political liberalization, political reform, and democratic transition; others, especially those with totalizing missions and that employ violence to achieve political ends segment society and undermine democracy. Second, civil society supports democracy when its dominant discourse is rooted in democratic ideals and prodemocratic organizations acquire critical mass. Third, the specific democratic role of civil society is contingent upon a number of factors: the political opportunity and constraints, stage of political development, and the strength, orientation, and role of the state and political society in a country. Fourth, civil society is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democratic development. On its own, civil society has a limited effect; in fact, it faces an uphill battle in promoting and consolidating democratic change.

The next set of findings relates to the implications of the rise of civil society for the state and for state-civil society relations. Here we advance four propositions. First, the rise of civil society has limited the power and reach of the state, although the latter continues to be the most powerful institution in Asia. Second, the state has had a strong impact on the nature and development of civil society. Third, state-civil society interaction in Asia is not necessarily confrontational. The rela-

tionship varies widely across countries and has undergone transformation in several of them. Fourth, present civil society-state relations in Asia span a broad spectrum. A wide range of organizations covering a broad range of issues now populate the realm of civil society; their interaction with the state ranges from co-optation through mutual respect and interaction on the basis of accepted norms to outright confrontation. The final set of findings centers on the relationship between civil and political societies. Here we advance two propositions. First, there is much overlap between civil and political societies; the boundary separating them is porous. Second, the development of civil society is not necessarily detrimental to the development of political society. There is much synergy between them. In establishing the above propositions, this study as a whole draws on, refines, and in certain cases refutes the arguments advanced in the literature on civil society and political change, demonstrating the contribution that can be made by studies of Asian civil societies.

In line with my goal over the past decade to promote a new generation of scholars on Asia, I invited mostly younger scholars to contribute chapters, while inviting senior scholars and nonregional specialists to discuss and review these contributions. In addition to concentrating some of the best minds on the project, this approach has helped create new networks. The authors and senior scholars met in two stimulating and productive workshops, in Honolulu (March 16–19, 2002) and Phnom Penh, Cambodia (October 24–28, 2002). Covering twelve countries (fourteen were originally included, but for various reasons, Thailand and Bangladesh had to be omitted), involving fourteen contributors, twenty-eight senior scholars, and twenty-three readers, and spanning three years, the study has been a major undertaking. Many people have helped in bringing it to a successful conclusion.

I would like to thank the contributors to the book. Their knowledge—not only of the country of their specialization but also of other countries in the region—is remarkable, and their willingness to ground their inquiry in a common definition of civil society and conceptual framework and to rework their contributions several times is admirable. Our readings of one another's chapters at various stages and regular interaction during and after the two workshops have contributed to the book's coherence. I greatly value the opportunity I have had to work with them. The senior scholars gave generously of their time and expertise. Participating in both workshops, Michael Foley, Niraja Gopal Jayal, Susan Pharr, and Geoffrey Robinson read and reread several chapters; some of them commented on the penultimate drafts. Charles Armstrong, Richard Baker, Vannath Cheah, Chua Beng Huat, Harold Crouch, Larry Diamond, Gerard Finin, Steven Fish, Shiaw-Chian Fong, Peter Hershock, Ben Kerkvliet, Choong Nam Kim, Sankaran Krishna, Christopher McNally, Charles Morrison, Norani Othman, Minxin Pei, Sheila Smith, Ok Serei Sopheak, Arun Swamy, Yutaka Tsujinaka, Guobin Yang, and Xue-Liang Ding participated in one of the two workshops and commented on one or more chapters.

Patricio N. Abinales, Terrell Carver, Neera Chandhoke, Tun-Jen Cheng, Bruce Dickson, William W. Grimes, Ayesha Jalal, James Jesudason, Ku-Hyun Jung, Sudipta Kaviraj, Hagen Koo, William Liddle, Patricia Martinez, Katherine H. Moon, Andrew Nathan, Mochtar Pabotinggi, Morton B. Pederson, Kevin Quigley, Garry Rodan, Frank Schwartz, David I. Steinberg, Nira Wickramasinghe, and Thongchai Winachakul read one or more of the penultimate drafts. Byron Bocar, Saturnino Borrás Jr., Steven Drakeley, Greg Fealy, Anton Lucas, Angus McIntyre, Michelle Miller, Manuel Quiambo, Ben Read, and Olle Tornquist commented on individual chapters. Ben Kerkvliet read the entire manuscript. To all these scholars I would like to express my deep appreciation and thanks. They made an enormous contribution to the project; it has been my privilege—professionally and on a personal basis—to interact with them. Although not a direct participant in the project, Carolyn Fleisher provided strong support for it.

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Muthiah Alagappa

Selected Acronyms and Abbreviations

AARP	American Association of Retired Persons
ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement)
ABSDF	All-Burma Students' Democratic Front
ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
AMP	Association of Malay Muslim Professionals (Singapore)
APLA	All Peasant Leader Assembly (Philippines)
APWA	All-Pakistan Women's Association
AWARE	Association of Women for Action and Research (Singapore)
BAYAN	Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (New Patriotic Alliance) (Philippines)
BCP	Burma Communist Party
BD	Bajrang Dal (India)
BEPRPA	Blue East Port River Protection Association (Taiwan)
BJP	Bharitya Janata Party (India)
BSPP	Burma Socialist Program Party
BTI	Barisan Tani Indonesia (Indonesian Peasants' Front)
CARP	Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (Philippines)
CCEJ	Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (South Korea)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPAR	Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform (Philippines)
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
CSE	Center for Science and Environment (India)
CSGE	Citizens' Solidarity for General Elections (South Korea)

CSMNAIGO	Citizens' Solidarity for Monitoring the National Assembly Inspection of Government Offices (South Korea)
CYDF	Chinese Youth Development Foundation
CYL	Communist Youth League (China)
DAR	Department of Agrarian Reform (Philippines)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party (Taiwan)
DVA	Domestic Violence Act (Malaysia)
FBC	Free Burma Coalition
FCRA	Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (India)
FFF	Formosans for a Free Formosa (Taiwan)
FOSSO	Field Operations and Support Services Office (Philippines)
FP	Federal Party (Sri Lanka)
GHF	Garden of Hope Foundation (Taiwan)
GNP	Grand National Party (South Korea)
GONGO	government-organized NGO
HKTI	Himpunan Kerukunan Tani Indonesia (Indonesian Peasant's Harmony Association)
HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
INGI	International NGO Forum on Indonesia
INPACT	Initiative for Political and Conflict Transformation (Sri Lanka)
ISA	Internal Security Act (Malaysia, Singapore)
ISI	Interservices Intelligence (Pakistan)
JAG	Joint Action Group Against Violence Against Women (Malaysia)
JSS	Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya (National Worker's Union) (Sri Lanka)
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front) (Sri Lanka)
JYC	Jaffna Youth Congress (Sri Lanka)
KFEM	Korean Federation of Environmental Movements
KMT	Kuomintang (Taiwan)
KMP	Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Peasant Movement of the Philippines)
KOMPIL	Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino (Congress of Filipino Citizens)
KPA	Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (Consortium for Agrarian Reform) (Indonesia)
LBH	Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (Legal Aid Institute) (Indonesia)

LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Sri Lanka)
MKSS	Majdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (Organization for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants) (India)
MMA	Muttahida Majlis Amal (United Action Forum) (Pakistan)
MRD	Movement for Restoration of Democracy (Pakistan)
MTBIA	Mandalay Traders, Brokers, and Industrialists Association (Burma)
MWF	Modern Women's Foundation (Taiwan)
NAPCU	National Association for the Promotion of Community University
NCWO	National Council of Women's Organizations (Malaysia)
NDF	National Democratic Front (Philippines)
NFTSR	National Front for Tribal Self-Rule (India)
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NGORC	NGO Resource Center (Pakistan)
NHA	neighborhood association (Japan)
NKDP	New Korea Democratic Party
NPA	New People's Army (Philippines)
NPC	National Peace Council (Sri Lanka)
NPO	nonprofit organization
NRSP	National Rural Support Program (Pakistan)
NSS	Nature Society Singapore
NSS	National Sample Survey (India)
NU	Nahdlatul Ulama (Awakening of the Islamic Scholars) (Indonesia)
OPP	Orangi Pilot Project (Pakistan)
PA	People's Alliance (Sri Lanka)
PAN	Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party) (Indonesia)
PAP	People's Action Party (Singapore)
PARRDS	Partnership for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Services (Philippines)
PAS	Parti Islam seMalaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party)
PBU	professional business unit (China)
PDF	Pattan Development Foundation (Pakistan)
PEACE	Philippine Ecumenical Action for Community Empowerment Foundation
PECCO	Philippine Ecumenical Council for Community Organizing
PERGAS	Persatuan Guru-Guru Agama Islam Singapura (Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association)

PILER	Pakistan Institute for Labor Education and Research
PIP	public-interest legal person (Japan)
PKB	Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (National Awakening Party) (Indonesia)
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party) (Indonesia)
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz
PML-Q	Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-e-Azam
PNA	Pakistan National Alliance
PNF	Pakistan NGO Forum
PNI	Partai Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Party)
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PPP	Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (United Development Party) (Indonesia)
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRD	Partai Rakyat Demokratik (People's Democratic Party) (Indonesia)
PRIA	Society for Participatory Research in Asia (India)
PRRM	Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement
PSPD	People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (South Korea)
PUCL	People's Union for Civil Liberties (India)
PUDR	People's Union for Democratic Rights (India)
RIT	Rangoon Institute of Technology (Burma)
RSC	Remaking Singapore Committee
RSS	Rashtriya Swamsewak Sangh (National Volunteer Corps) (India)
SCAP	Supreme Commander Allied Powers (Japan)
SDF	SUNGI Development Foundation (Pakistan)
SDPI	Sustainable Development Policy Institute (Pakistan)
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association (India)
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council (Burma)
SMO	social movement organization
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council (Burma)
SPDC	Social Policy Development Center (Pakistan)
SSP	Sipah Sahaba Pakistan (Army of the Prophet's Companions)
SWRC	Social Work and Research Center (India)

TWC	The Working Committee Network (Singapore)
TWRF	Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation (Taiwan)
UBCCI	Union of Burma Chamber of Commerce and Industry
UCCM	United Coordinating Council of Muslims (Sri Lanka)
ULD	United Liberal Democrats (South Korea)
UMCCI	Union of Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
UNF	United National Front (Sri Lanka)
UNORKA	Pambansang Ugnayan ng Nagsasariling mga Lokal na Samahang Mamamayan sa Kanayunan (National Coordination of Autonomous Local Rural People's Organizations (Philippines))
UNP	United National Party (Sri Lanka)
UPFA	United People's Freedom Alliance (Sri Lanka)
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association (Burma)
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) (India)
VWO	voluntary welfare organization (Singapore)
WADECOR	Worldwide Agricultural Development Corporation
WLAW	Warm Life Association for Women (Taiwan)
WUFI	World United Formosans for Independence (Taiwan)
YMHA	Young Men's Hindu Association (Sri Lanka)

Contributors

MUTHIAH ALAGAPPA is director of the East-West Center Washington. He received a Ph.D. in international affairs from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. His research interests include international relations theory, international politics in the Asia Pacific region, and comparative politics in Asia.

EDWARD ASPINALL is lecturer in the Department of Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies and Department of History, University of Sydney. He received a Ph.D. in political science from the Australian National University. His research interests include Indonesian politics, especially democratization, civil society, and social movements, as well as Indonesian nationalism and the secessionist movement in Aceh.

AMITABH BEHAR is program officer of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, New Delhi. He received an M.Phil. in political science from the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His research interests are governance and civil society, especially decentralized rural self-governance and social movements in central India.

NEIL DEVOTTA is assistant professor of political science at Hartwick College. He received a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Texas at Austin. His research interests include civil society and democracy, ethnicity and nationalism, ethnic conflict resolution, globalization and Third World development, and South Asian politics and security.

YUN FAN is assistant fellow at the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica. She received a Ph.D. in sociology from Yale University. Her research interests include social movements, civil society, and collective action.

JENNIFER C. FRANCO is an independent researcher in the Philippines and in the Netherlands. She received a Ph.D. in politics from Brandeis University. Her

main research interests are peasant movements, land reform, and rural democratization.

MARY E. GALLAGHER is assistant professor of political science at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She received a Ph.D. in politics from Princeton University. Her research interests include legal mobilization, state-society relations, and the politics of economic reform in developing and transitional states.

SUZAINA KADIR is assistant professor in the Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore. She received her Ph.D. in political science from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her research interests include religion and politics, state-society relations, as well as political change and development in Southeast Asia.

SUNHYUK KIM is associate professor in the Department of Public Administration at Korea University. He received a Ph.D. in political science from Stanford University. His research interests include comparative democratization, comparative policy analysis, international institutions, and regional integration.

KYAW YIN HLAING is assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the National University of Singapore. He received a Ph.D. in government from Cornell University. His research interests include state-society relations, social movements, political culture, democratization, and conflict resolution.

ROBERT PEKKANEN is Luce Junior Fellow in Asian Studies and assistant professor of political science at Middlebury College. He received his Ph.D. in political science from Harvard University. His research interests include Japanese civil society, the transformation of indigenous conglomerates in Southeast Asia after the financial crisis of 1997–98, and the effects of electoral system change on political parties and legislative institutions.

ASEEM PRAKASH is a fellow at the Institute for Human Development, New Delhi. He received an M.Phil. in political science from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His research interests include the political economy of development, caste and communal politics, governance and decentralization, and environmental politics.

AQIL SHAH is a visiting scholar at the International Forum for Democratic Studies in Washington, D.C. Beginning fall 2004, he will be a doctoral candidate in political science at Columbia University.

MEREDITH L. WEISS is assistant professor of international studies at DePaul University. She received her Ph.D. in political science from Yale University. Her research interests include social movements and protest in Malaysia and Singapore, Malaysian electoral politics, and the changing nature of ethnicity and communalism in Malaysia.

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