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**Theoretical Issues and Oppositional Politics in
East and Southeast Asia**

Working Paper No. 60

December 1995

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ISBN: 0-86905-460-0

ISSN: 1037-4612



INTRODUCTION

Two decades ago political opposition in various parts of East and Southeast Asia was primarily characterised by peasant insurgencies and radical student movements questioning the very basis of the capitalist path to development. Their campaigns were often conducted outside constitutional processes. In the last decade, however, capitalism and industrialisation has firmly taken root in the region and capitalism's ascendancy is not in question. As a consequence, the nature of political opposition, the forms through which it is conducted, and the actors involved have undergone a transformation. Extra-constitutional challenges are limited and the predominant agendas of political oppositions in the region have decidedly narrowed to more reformist goals. The new reformers are drawn from new social forces generated by the very processes of rapid capitalist industrialisation, including elements from across a range of classes: bourgeois, middle and working classes. To differing extents and by varying means, they are shaping the contests over power in the region's dynamic societies.

Also in the last decade, the demise of various dictatorships or military regimes and the establishment or resurrection of elections in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia have prompted a spate of works questioning the long-term viability of authoritarian rule in general. A host of writers began enthusiastically documenting and analysing what was generally characterised as 'democratisation'. A significant component of this literature involves reconsideration of the relationship between economic development and political change. This has been fuelled to no small degree by recent political transformations in the newly-industrialising countries (NICs), notably those of the comparatively mature industrial economies of South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Would these winds of change soon be repeated in authoritarian societies elsewhere undergoing rapid industrialisation?

This question was answered with an enthusiastic affirmative by modernisation theorists whose credibility had taken a battering. Earlier they had depicted market economies and liberal democratic polities as mutually-reinforcing, but the development experience of the late industrialising countries of Asia and Latin America had been at odds with this proposition. The sudden political upheavals provided an opportunity for these theorists to salvage something from the debate. To be sure, contemporary modernisation accounts of the causal link between capitalist development and political change are more sophisticated and qualified than previous attempts. They came in the wake of the influential thesis on transitions from authoritarian rule by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) and O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986), which

rejected any general theory of social or economic determination of political outcomes in favour of voluntarist approaches which emphasised the importance of agency and processes of negotiation and strategy-building. Variables such as culture, institutions and political leadership, for example, are seen in the revised modernisation literature to complicate the forward march of 'democracy' and mediate the political effects of economic development (Pye 1985; Huntington 1991; Lipset 1993, 1990; Marks 1992; Diamond 1989, 1993; Case 1994).¹ The emphases vary somewhat within this framework, but economic development is nevertheless understood to generate fundamental changes in social structure, including the creation of an extensive and diverse middle class, that exert pressures for political pluralism. At the very least, authoritarian regimes will become increasingly difficult to reproduce according to these analysts.

Modernisation theorists have not been alone in prophesising problems for authoritarian regimes experiencing the advent of accelerated economic development. Literature on 'developmental authoritarianism' argues that late industrialising countries require a stage of authoritarian rule to kick-off industrial growth, but after the initial phase this political regime constrains capitalism. Marxists have also argued that authoritarian regimes are ill-suited to the task of resolving frictions between competing fractions of capital in more advanced phases of capital accumulation (Harris 1986). They too point to changing centres of economic and social power including a strategically-important middle class of professionals and technicians who have economic independence from the state (Robison 1986). The attainment of bourgeois hegemony in the social and economic spheres lessens the need for coercive political structures.

Debates about the continued feasibility of authoritarian rule in late industrialising countries have been influenced by broader events and intellectual trends. With the dramatic collapse of various Eastern European socialist regimes, presiding over economic decay rather than economic buoyancy, the Cold War was suddenly defunct. For some, the momentous turn of events culminated in the unquestionable triumph of liberalism, a veritable end of history (Fukuyama 1992a). In this context, state-centred analyses came under fire for deflecting attention from important social phenomena which lay behind the unpredicted speed and extent of transformation in Eastern Europe. A related resurgence of analytical interest in the concept of civil society amongst liberal theorists has been joined by Marxists and other critical theorists looking beyond the state. The decline of state socialism brought with it disclosures about the extent of repression and abuse of office which embarrassed many socialist scholars. In political terms, this has led to a new emphasis on decentralisation and non-state forms of organisation. In

analytical terms, it has steered theorists towards usages of the concept of civil society that differ significantly from Marx himself.

Against the above background, two very powerful themes are discernible in this vast body of literature on political change in late industrialising countries of East and Southeast Asia. The first of these is a propensity to equate the challenge to, or demise of, authoritarian rule with the advance of 'democracy'. This concept is generally employed unproblematically, but implicitly endorses a liberal democratic or formalistic definition of the term. For some writers, the existence of elections appears to be the benchmark of 'democracy', for others a more detailed conception of competitive party politics is articulated. But extra-parliamentary activity not servicing formal political institutions is under-theorised. At a time when popular participation and interest in political parties appears to have waned in established liberal democracies whilst social movements and interest associations disengaged from the formal political process gather momentum (see Schmitter and Karl 1991: 80), we should surely remain circumspect about oppositional forms elsewhere. Much of this literature is consistent with a linear conception of history, sitting comfortably with Fukuyama's notion of liberalism's imminent global triumph.

This does not mean writers, including Fukuyama himself, have entirely dismissed the possibility that political change in late industrialising countries of Asia or elsewhere might deviate from the liberal democratic model. But liberal democracy remains the point of reference for these analyses, deviations from it explained in terms of obstacles to this seemingly natural and irrepressible historical force. Of these 'obstacles', culture features thematically in the literature and forms the basis of the prevailing attempts to conceptualise alternatives to liberal democracy. Ironically, such attempts resonate with the message of authoritarian leaders about 'Asian values'. This emphasises the 'differentness' of Asians and is employed to dismiss domestic political challenges as 'un-Asian' (Rodan 1995).

A second theme to the literature is a not unrelated romanticisation of civil society which is depicted as the natural domain of personal and group freedoms, implicitly contrasted with the state as a set of naturally coercive power relationships. There is often an unstated assumption attached to this that the rise of civil society is fundamentally a middle-class phenomenon. Civil society is championed not just for its supposed intrinsic merit as the locus of free-minded and mutually-co-operative groups and individuals beyond the state's purvey, but more particularly as an essential pre-condition for political parties to be genuinely competitive and meaningful conduits of the popular will. This tendency in the literature downplays the significance of gross

inequalities of power and resources that are to be found within civil society. It is the nature of civil society as much as the fact of it that matters to the prospect and direction of political change. Certainly not all opposition to authoritarian regimes in East and Southeast Asia is imbued with liberal democratic values or aspirations.

Moreover, the analytical and normative insistence on a state-civil society separation diverts attention from the critically important point that civil societies cannot exist as alternatives to states - only in relation to them. Civil society presupposes the state. The state provides the legal framework underwriting the independent political space of civil society. But attempts to reinforce or challenge the inequalities of civil society also involve the state in different ways - whether to enhance, consolidate or diminish the power of particular social groups. The state-society divide is always a difficult one to clearly make, but different historical conditions have resulted in pervasive states in much of East and Southeast Asia which make these boundaries even more problematic than in Europe and North America. The prevailing assumption is that 'strong states', by definition, are associated with 'weak societies'. This is informed by the notion that civil societies, independent of the state, are the legitimate expression of society. But societal forces are to differing extents incorporated into the state and, especially in the East and Southeast Asian context, cannot be dismissed as political entities. Rather, here co-option is a real alternative to representation and civil society which may in many cases prove the most significant political accommodation to social diversity.

Neither of these two dominant theoretical themes to the literature encourage a detailed examination of the nature of political change occurring in industrialising East and Southeast Asia. The contest between authoritarianism and liberal democracy is part of the political struggle unfolding in the region, but it is certainly not the entirety of it. Some of these struggles do involve attempts to expand the space of civil society, though not always from 'democratic' forces. They can include religious organisations, professional bodies, trade unions, or any of a host of non-government organisations. But they can also involve attempts to establish space for political contestation in arenas other than civil society. Organised contests over particular exercises of official power can come from within state-sponsored organisations, even if this form of opposition is not oriented towards a change of government. Co-opting social forces is not unproblematic, even in one-party states, since this often targets groups precisely for fear of their potential as political opponents.

Moreover, there is a conceptual limbo in the prevailing literature between civil society and state which conceals a wide variety of organised groups of differing political significance.

The danger is that new forms of political organisation and reconstitutions of state-society relations which do not correspond with the liberal democratic model will escape adequate identification and analysis.

The emphasis on extra-parliamentary political activities suggests several types of 'opposition'. At one extreme, there is political opposition intended to fundamentally change the state and society, such as Communist or Islamic fundamentalist parties or movements. Another type of opposition seeks to change the government but not the state or society in any fundamental sense. Here we would include most oppositions identified by liberal pluralist theorists. Typically, this includes the attempt to replace one political party in government with another. Finally, there are oppositions which pursue an agenda of reform or reaction within the state and the existing government. This can be conducted by factions within the bureaucracy, the military, or various social and cultural organisations brought under the umbrella of a corporatist state. It can also be conducted by various non-government organisations outside the state but not part of the formal political protest. This includes non-revolutionary trade unions, social and cultural organisations, for example, which pursue policy agendas without seeking to advance the cause of a particular political party or alternate government. The importance of the respective types of opposition is related to both the capacity of the state to foreclose or foster particular avenues for opposition, and the degree to which contending groups accept the state or government as legitimate.

For historical reasons, the state-society relationship in East and Southeast Asia contrasts in certain respects from the European experience and this has important implications for political opposition. In much of East and Southeast Asia, the state serves as the midwife of industrial capitalism which involves a different relationship between it and the bourgeoisie and civil society than in situations where an absolutist or feudal state attempts to obstruct capitalism. Since the state in East and Southeast Asia has embraced capitalism, structures emerge that incorporate the new social forces. Hence, political activities involving these social forces are often channelled into state sanctioned institutions. The environment for potential oppositions is quite different.

The principal question under scrutiny here is not whether 'democratisation' is occurring or likely to occur as economic change and social transformations take place in these societies. Instead, the question is what do these transformations mean for the nature of political opposition. The research objective is to specify the way in which challenges — real or in prospect — to or within authoritarian rule have resulted from the massive social changes

accompanying industrialisation. Of particular interest are the direct and indirect roles of emerging social forces — ‘New Rich’ comprising the bourgeoisie together with the middle class, and the working class - in the process of political opposition.

There is extensive literature focusing specifically on the question of the middle class and its significance for political development. Much of this has been inspired by the unproductive hypothesis that the middle class is intrinsically hostile to authoritarian rule. However, historically the middle class has adopted a range of political positions, sometimes siding with fascist and authoritarian regimes - as in Italy and Chile. A new economic system that gives rise to new sources of wealth and class interest also produces new fracture lines in social and political interest and new policy issues. For example, the new middle class has organised around such issues as the quality of public utilities and services, the environment, public accountability and transparency. Their interests translate into new demands and constituencies that necessarily shape oppositional politics. But the notion that these interests are necessarily tied up with a push for political liberalism is certainly open to question as the political impact of new classes is contingent upon their relative location in the structures of social and economic power. For example, where its interests are threatened by powerful radical working class movements, or where it fears social chaos, the middle class is prepared to support authoritarian regimes. Similarly, working class political movements, the product of industrial capitalism, may take several forms, depending on the prevailing configurations of social power and political structure. They may be revolutionary oppositions, loyal oppositions, or elements of a large corporatist enterprise.

The content, site and *modus operandi* of political opposition can therefore vary considerably, and these differences warrant careful attention. For some oppositionists, the agenda is of greater public accountability and transparency in government who seek to eradicate official corruption and other obstacles to a modern, efficient capitalist economy. But the reform agendas of such oppositionists from the business and middle classes do not necessarily extend to more general demands for human rights or other political reforms that would open the state up to broader social forces. Rather, assorted human rights, social justice and welfare claims are often advanced by other oppositionists. Similarly, political parties are in some cases the principal, even if limited, articulator of political opposition — such as in Singapore — but to differing extents elsewhere in East and Southeast Asia we find social movements, NGOs, interest groups such as professional organisations, as well as individual dissidents employing various extra-parliamentary organisational and strategic means to oppose

government policy. In some cases, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forms appear to be developing simultaneously — even if they remain essentially disconnected avenues. In other cases, the extra-parliamentary forms are the only ones to have significantly evolved in recent times. Finally, public demonstrations and labour strikes, whilst conspicuously absent in Singapore, are not uncommon in South Korea, for instance, and are increasingly common in Indonesia. Yet less visible challenges to government policy are common — especially where corporatist structures are either firmly established or even in the process of being extended.

The position taken in this paper is that political opposition, whatever its form, involves the existence of political space to contest the exercise of power through government or regime. This space may be established within representative political institutions, but it is no less likely to exist outside them, and even within authoritarian regimes. Equally, it may involve the existence of civil society, but not necessarily. Accordingly, whilst political parties are obviously of interest, other forms of political contestation - regardless of whether or not these forms facilitate competitive party systems are of no less interest.

In the discussion below, which selectively examines the theoretical literature relevant to the question of social transformations in industrialising Asia and their significance for political opposition, the following substantive points will be underlined: (i) dramatic transformations in social structures accompanying industrialisation are generally resulting in changes in state-society relations, but this takes a variety of forms within East and Southeast Asia; (ii) this is a process best understood as the opening up of political space rather than the struggle between state and civil society; (iii) economic change throws up a variety of challenges, not just those produced by new forms of wealth and social power attempting to shape politics, but by those marginalised by the new forms of development who want to resist or reverse these changes and return to idealised traditional situations.

Let us begin by examining the prevailing attempts in the literature to conceptualise political opposition and the particular challenges posed by authoritarian systems in this exercise.

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AS THE POINT OF REFERENCE

In the classic academic works on political opposition undertaken by Dahl (1966a; 1971; 1973), the greater focus is on industrialised, liberal democratic societies and the place of legally-protected political parties therein. However, at the outset of the first of these works, Dahl (1966b: xi) observes that the right to such an opposition is a particularly modern phenomenon,

especially in the context of electoral systems based on universal franchise. To be sure, Dahl was in no doubt about the importance of the context within which parties operate. As he stated: 'A country with universal suffrage and a completely repressive government would provide fewer opportunities for oppositions, surely, than a country with a narrow suffrage but a highly tolerant government' (Dahl 1971: 5). Furthermore, he recognised that: 'To the extent that an opposition concentrate on elections and parliamentary action, it may be powerful in unimportant encounters and feeble or even absent when key decisions are made' (Dahl 1966b: 395). Nevertheless, the questions he was fundamentally concerned with related to the factors that facilitate or obstruct this form of opposition, and the variety in the character of political oppositions taking this particular form.

In Dahl's schema, the two extremes of political regimes are polyarchic and hegemonic systems. The former he describes as 'highly inclusive and open to public contestation' (Dahl 1971: 8), which manifests in the greatest number and variety of interests represented in policy making (Dahl 1973: 9). By contrast, the latter prohibits any form of organised dissent or opposition in a highly exclusive decision-making regime. No distinction is drawn between loyal and disloyal opposition. Rather, by definition opposition is regarded as disloyal and must be repressed (Dahl 1973: 13).² One of Dahl's central observations is that the tolerance by authorities of opposition is linked to calculations by governments about the political costs of otherwise attempting to coerce or obstruct opponents (Dahl 1966b: xii; 1971: 15).

The tolerance or lack of tolerance towards a 'loyal' opposition is obviously a basic yardstick within this framework. The concept has its roots in eighteenth century Britain, used to describe the party out of power as 'His (Her) Majesty's Loyal Opposition'. Such an opposition was understood to be loyal to the Crown, even if it was office-seeking (see Safire 1972). Most importantly, loyal opposition attempts to gain office through constitutional rather than revolutionary means. In a broad sense, this commitment materially affects the content of opposition in so far as this involves a loyalty to the institutions of the state and the associated rules and regulations for their alteration; and hence a readiness 'at any moment to come into office without a shock to the political traditions of the nation' (Lowell as quoted in Punnett 1973: 13).

Yet within these limits, loyal oppositions obviously can vary in their objectives and strategies. Dahl's distinction between structural and non-structural oppositions remains an influential one in attempting to specify this. Structural oppositions attempt to fundamentally alter the distribution of economic and social power through constitutional means. This may

require some modification to the constitution, but to remain loyal such structural opposition must do this according to the rules of the constitution itself. The difficulties this can pose have been a source of frustration and division amongst reformers in socialist and social democratic parties in particular. As Punnett (1973: 14) points out, however, it is not just the advocates of structural change who can be tempted to reject constitutional processes. In seeking to consolidate the basic social and economic order, the constitution can be a target of extreme right-wing groups who see liberal democracy as a threat to that order.

Whilst there are important distinctions to be made between the different characters of political parties seeking to replace the government and the margins of tolerance for their challenge, opposition to government policies in liberal democratic systems comes from various sources and takes numerous forms, including interest groups and social movements. This has long been recognised in liberal political theory and systems theory, in which political parties are understood to either straddle civil society and formal institutions or act as conduits for societal demands conveyed through civil society (see Bobbio 1989: 25). Even so, much of the interest in opposition of this sort has been in its role complementing or supporting competitive party systems rather than as opposition in its own right.

However, not all the literature so acutely privileges party politics. Definitions of democracy which extend themselves beyond mere formalism or electoralism acknowledge the importance of extra-parliamentary activities somewhat differently. Schmitter and Karl (1991: 78), for example, contend that: 'Modern democracy, in other words, offers a variety of competitive processes and channels for the expression of interests and values - associational as well as partisan, functional as well as territorial, collective as well as individual. All are integral to its practice'. Much earlier, Bertrand de Jouvenel (1966: 157) argued that 'The means of opposition are the infrastructure of political liberty: the party of opposition is simply an element of superstructure'. He emphasised the difference between seeking to be involved in government, at any level, and seeking political representation and warned that the biggest threat to representation was its absorption into the system of government through co-option (de Jouvenel 1966: 168). At the time, he had trade unions in mind as a clear example of the prescribed duality. Both these approaches come closer to acknowledging the plurality of oppositional forms in liberal democracies alongside, rather than in the service of, electoral politics. But, they are also premised on the existence of liberal democracy.

Barker (1971: 4–6) emphasises that, in addition to the concept of 'loyal opposition' with which many liberal theorists were preoccupied, 'opposition' can also be understood as: outright

resistance to the state; resistance to the power of the state when that power is exerted oppressively; resistance to the group, faction or dynasty controlling the state; a system of constitutional checks and balances guarding against power abuse; and methods employed by citizens or groups to modify the actions of government without openly challenging that government. Like Dahl, Barker (1971) emphasises how contemporary a phenomenon, and indeed an idea, institutionalised loyal opposition is. As he argues, such an opposition is by no means synonymous with liberalism, at least not in its earlier variants expressed through such people as John Stuart Mill. Certainly Mill believed government benefited from the debate of diverse opinion in parliament, but guided by reasoned, disinterested argument. Rather than the formalisation of dissent through a loyal opposition and party politics, Mill placed emphasis on the critical role of a free press in scrutinising government (Barker 1971: 13–15). According to Barker (1971: 17), ‘It was not the existence of an organised Opposition that liberals valued, but the freedom to oppose and criticise, a freedom which could not be properly exercised in formal organised parties’.

Barker (1971: 25–6) criticised Dahl for his overly-prescriptive attachment to liberal democracy which he believed lead to insufficient differentiation of the forms and contents of oppositions in favour of a celebration of the existence of opposition per se.³ A similar criticism was made of Ionescu and de Madariaga (1968) and at least the initial editions of the journal Government and Opposition under de Madariaga’s editorship. These authors contended that: ‘the presence or absence of institutionalised political opposition can become the criterion for the classification of any political society in one of two categories: liberal or dictatorial, democratic or authoritarian, pluralistic-constitutional or monolithic’ (as quoted in Barker 1971: 26).

Subsequent to Barker’s criticisms, an edited collection by Dahl included the work of Juan Linz and others attempting to address some of these concerns. In contrast with liberal democracies in which the major distinction to make was between loyal and disloyal opposition, Linz (1973) emphasised that in authoritarian regimes the major distinction was between opponents inside and outside the system; and that this was not simply a distinction between legal and illegal opposition. The concept of ‘semi-opposition’ was advanced by Linz in drawing this out. According to Linz (1973: 191), semi-opposition ‘consists of those groups that are not dominant or represented in the governing group but that are willing to participate in power without fundamentally challenging the regime’. Such opposition is not institutionalised, as in the case of political parties, and may take seemingly apolitical forms - a religious association or an educational institution, for example. These social groups do not enjoy legal protection for

their political activities and thus have a precarious existence.⁴ However, the chief difference between semi-oppositions in authoritarian regimes and oppositions in a liberal democracy, according to Linz (1973: 193), lies in the absence of any accountability to some form of 'constituency'. Semi-opposition thus signifies a selective opening up of the inner circle, rather than a legitimising of interest group politics.⁵

This concept has its problems, especially in deciphering at what point groups or individuals could be said to be 'participating in power' (Aspinall 1995: 3), or in specifying the qualitative difference between the limits on semi-oppositions on the one hand, and loyal oppositions on the other, in fostering genuinely alternative programmes. Nevertheless, Linz directs attention to the fact of limited political pluralism, and he puts the question of political co-optation into a different context. Attempts by groups and individuals to exploit contradictions within the state for pragmatic ends are rendered more visible. Recently, Stepan (1993: 64) identified five key opposition functions of democratic opposition in authoritarian regimes: resisting integration into the regime; guarding zones of autonomy against it; disputing its legitimacy; raising the costs of authoritarian rule; creating a credible democratic alternative. Whilst opposition in East and Southeast Asia may quite often fall short on such criteria, it nevertheless may be the ascendant form in most societies and the one with best prospects of extension. Co-optation is a thematic question confronting analysts of political change in East and Southeast Asia.

Although Linz and others attempted some time ago to steer attention to the particularities of political oppositions other than formal, constitutional, loyal oppositions, much of the recent interest in the prospects of political change in industrialising East and Southeast Asia remains indifferent to the conceptual challenge Linz took up. In Lawson's recent work on political opposition in Asia, for example, she contends that: 'where there is no possibility of alternation in power between governing elements and oppositional elements through a peaceful process of fair and open elections, there is no constitutional opposition, and therefore no genuine democracy' (Lawson 1993a: 194; see also Lawson 1993b). Certainly there can be no liberal democracy without constitutional opposition, but this does not necessarily mean opposition itself is entirely absent. This privileging of a particular oppositional form is understandable if we are only interested in whether liberal democracy exists, but it is not helpful if we are trying to identify the extent and nature of political oppositions per se. More than a decade earlier, Justus van der Kroef (1978a: 621) observed that 'the more effective and, from an international point of view, the more visible form of political opposition has tended to be organised and

expressed outside parliament and the electoral system'. He referred to students and segments of the intellectual community, the military, religious and ethnic groups, and communist organisations (van der Kroef 1978a: 622). There have certainly been changes in the character, contexts and relative importance of such opposition since then, but these changes escape attention in frameworks that search only for loyal oppositions operating through parliamentary processes.

However, with regard to the political systems in East and Southeast Asian societies, there have been recent attempts to characterise them which break from such heavy reliance upon the dominant liberal framework. The problem is that these attempts are heavily reliant upon culturalist perspectives that conceal rather than reveal the complex dynamics in these societies.

CONCEPTUALISING ALTERNATIVES IN ASIA

Amongst conservative and liberal writers, cultural factors have long been an important component of political analysis (Almond and Verba 1965). Of late, though, there has been a noticeable revival of interest in political culture, at various levels of abstraction, as much of the literature addresses the question of what factors are needed to sustain 'democratisation' in those countries to have recently broken from authoritarian rule (see Huntington 1991; Dahl 1994).⁶ Not all theorists share the conviction that culture is so important to the establishment of liberal democracy. Schmitter and Karl (1991: 82) argue 'that contingent consent and bounded uncertainty can emerge from the interaction between antagonistic and mutually suspicious actors and that the far more benevolent and ingrained norms of a civic culture are better thought of as a product and not a producer of democracy'.⁷

Nevertheless, the concept of culture has been widely employed in a fundamental way to generalise the patterns of political development. In Pye's (1985) influential thesis on Asian political culture, for instance, he clearly recognised that the liberal path of North America and Europe may not be feasible in late industrialising countries of Asia. However, he did not see this so much as the consequence of different historical and socio-political factors generating power relations hostile to, or unreliable on, liberalism. Rather, he emphasised the durability of anti-liberal Asian political culture. Subsequently, Moody (1988) sought to demonstrate how personalism and moralism, points Pye attributed to Chinese culture, posed obstacles to liberal democracy in East Asia. Moody (1988: 12) observed: 'In East Asia there is an intellectual heritage critical of unrestrained power but no heritage of institutional limitations on power.'

Both the social ethos and the institutional heritage contributed to politics organised around personal groups and defined in moral terms’.

More recently, a number of authors have adopted the concept of culture ostensibly as a way around the problem of measuring political development solely against the yardstick of liberal democracy. Fukuyama (1992b: 109) himself now contends ‘there are grounds for thinking that Asian political development could turn away from democracy and take its own unique path in spite of the region’s record of economic growth’. According to him, this possible ‘Asian alternative’ is linked to pervasive group hierarchies emanating from traditional social structures in culturally-Confucian societies. Whilst the end of history may have meant ideological and institutional convergence around the globe, cultural diversity not only remains but, according to Fukuyama, underlies divergences in economic success and social cohesion (see Fukuyama 1995a, 1995b). Similarly, Huntington (1993a: 17) contends that: ‘The interaction of economic progress and Asian culture appears to have generated a distinctly East Asian variety of democratic institutions’. The dominant-party systems prevalent in the region, he points out, have the formal trappings of liberal democracy, but political participation is effectively reserved for one party: ‘This type of political system offers democracy without turnover. It represents an adaptation of Western democratic practices to serve not Western values of competition and change, but Asian values of consensus and stability’ (Huntington 1993a: 18).⁸

But whilst Fukuyama and Huntington acknowledge the hostility of deep-seated traditional Asian cultures to liberalism, in contrast to Pye they maintain that Asian cultures also contain some ‘democratic’ elements. This is an important departure from Pye’s (1985) generalisation which tends to obscure divisions within and between the various Asian societies. Fukuyama (1995a), for instance, maintains that there are at least three respects in which Confucianism is compatible with ‘democracy’: the traditional Confucian examination system was meritocratic and thus egalitarian in its implications; the importance attached to education; and the tolerant nature of Confucianism, given that it has co-existed with Buddhism and Christianity.⁹ Similarly, based on the premise that cultures are dynamic rather than immutable and static, Huntington also holds out the prospect that, over time, democratic cultural elements could prevail in Asia. According to Huntington (1993a: 21): ‘Confucian democracy may be a contradiction in terms, but democracy in a Confucian society need not be’. Huntington does not actually specify the ‘democratic elements’ he has in mind, but it is implicit that they are compatible with liberal democracy since no other possibility is raised. This assumption is also apparent in the criteria

Fukuyama cites as indicative of democratic cultural heritages. But what is most noteworthy about the propositions by both Huntington and Fukuyama is the idea that culture either lies at the core of political differences between 'Asia' and the liberal 'West', and is therefore central to the prospects of bridging this gap, or fundamentally shapes any possible democratic political trajectory in East Asia. The effect of this is to divert attention from the question of alternatives to liberal democracy in Asia in favour of the idea of 'Asian' alternatives.

This analytical importance attached to culture allows observations about the 'differentness of Asians' to be appropriated for political and ideological purposes, and even legitimates such exercises. Huntington's (1993b) not unrelated thesis about a 'clash of civilizations' supplanting the previous ideological disputes characterising the Cold War has added impetus to broad, monolithic conceptions of 'Asian culture'.¹⁰ Select authoritarian leaders in Asia have vigorously promoted the idea of 'Asian values' to deflect pressure over human rights and employment conditions and launch an offensive against liberalism. Whilst this may be designed to insulate authoritarian regimes from external criticism, it also attempts to depict domestic political opponents and dissenters, who do not share these values, as 'un-Asian' and dismissible on that basis. Significantly, this rhetoric about cultural homogeneity surfaces precisely at a point when social and economic transformations in various Asian societies produce diverse interests and identities requiring some sort of political accommodation. Obviously authoritarian leaders prefer an accommodation that least threatens their positions. The recurring theme by self-appointed spokespersons on 'Asian values' about a cultural predisposition to consensus rather than contention is an especially useful rationale for this.

Whilst the 'Asian values' perspective is principally enunciated by a handful of authoritarian elites in Asia, this has not diminished its impact on policy makers and analysts outside the region. Many appear to take these arguments at face value in their attempts to comprehend these societies. The appeal of cultural relativism ranges across the political spectrum, providing both a basis for condemnation of 'Western imperialism' as well as rationalising inaction over behaviour that elsewhere would be protested as human rights abuses (Robison 1993). Some cynically adopt the rhetoric about 'Asian values' to advance neo-liberal and conservative political agendas within established liberal democracies outside the region (Rodan 1995). As would be expected, a critical public reaction within the region to the proclamations of Lee Kuan Yew et al. on 'Asian values' has given some expression to the fallacy of harmony and consensus amongst 'Asians', including from the recently-established

Forum of Democratic Leaders in the Asia-Pacific (Sydney Morning Herald 27 June 1995: 8). Most of these voices are, however, from relatively high-profile figures who might also be categorised as the elite: political leaders, prominent lawyers and academics. Other divergent perspectives from within the non-government and grassroots communities of course have less access to the media to challenge the 'Asian values' line, and pursue agendas such as welfare, human rights and social justice issues as well as, in the case of some developmental NGOs, the establishment of greater participatory democracy and a shift in social power.

The pre-occupation with liberal democratic political forms thus combines with cultural arguments about a supposed 'Asian' aversion to political contestation in favour of consensus and group harmony to limit inquiry into political oppositions. The additional tendency in the literature to emphasise the strategic importance of political leadership in effecting and sustaining 'democratic' transitions serves to further devalue the analytical currency of political opposition in East and Southeast Asia. Most of this attention has centred on ruling elites and their tolerance or otherwise of political contestation (see Higley and Burton 1989; Case 1994; Marks 1992; Huntington 1991; Diamond and Plattner 1993; Scalapino 1993). The pivotal role of elites is described by Case (1994: 438) thus: 'In sum, class structures, civil society, and social structures may cut in a variety of ways. To see which way, one must investigate elites, in particular the attitudes they hold and the relations they forge with societal audiences'. The choice of the term 'audience' rather than 'forces', for example, seems to infer a passivity that emphasises an unambiguous causal relationship from the elite down. It also assumes that elites are free to make a range of choices. Huntington (1991: 108) similarly attributes exceptional strategic significance to elite leadership in contending that: 'If he had wanted to, a political leader far less skilled than Lee Kuan Yew could have produced democracy in Singapore'.

Having argued a case for broadening the framework beyond liberal pluralism, and having found culturalist arguments unsatisfactory to this task, let us examine other theoretical material that might be more helpful.

BEYOND POLITICAL PARTIES: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

It must be acknowledged that the preoccupation with political parties and the formal political system at the expense of other broader processes of contestation is most acute amongst liberal theorists writing on 'democratisation' in Asia. The extensive literature from this framework on the functioning of democracy in Western Europe and the United States, by contrast, has paid greater attention to the links between political parties and their many and varied social bases

and the institutions through which these bases are mediated. Parties are of course not distinct from society. They respond to interests and pressures emanating from constituencies within society, constituencies with differential capacities and means to exert an influence over parties. However, whilst some groups attempt to exert this consciously and explicitly, others are less directly or explicitly connected to the formal political process. It is this latter category to which far greater attention has now turned, as cynicism towards, and alienation with, the formal political process in established liberal democracies appears to have gathered momentum in recent decades and manifested in a variety of new organisational structures. Accompanying this is the emergence of a body of literature focussing on 'new social movements' (NSMs). The assumption in this literature is that NSMs are new phenomena affecting the form, locus and nature of political opposition. Whilst this claim may be overstated, and ultimately effectiveness depends upon their impact on formal political processes, this literature is nevertheless helping to broaden our conception of politics and political opposition. Let us, then, briefly survey and evaluate some of its main features.

Social movements, either as an analytical category or as social phenomena, are not new. As Shaw (1994: 651) reminds us, the study of social movements was 'the stock in trade of social historians of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'. Indeed, in the broad historical sense, social movements are a fundamentally modern rather than post-modern phenomenon, dating from the peasant revolts and the workers' movements studied by these scholars, to the late twentieth century variety (Shaw 1994: 651). Scott defines a social movement as:

a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests and, at least for some significant part of their social existence, a common identity. Such movements are distinguished from other collective actors, such as political parties and pressure groups, in that they have mass mobilisation, or the threat of mobilisation, as their prime source of social sanction, and hence of power. They are further distinguished by other collectivities, such as voluntary associations or clubs, in being chiefly concerned to defend or change society (Scott 1990: 6).

This definition concedes the possibility of considerable diversity in the sorts of political objectives, organisational structures, ideological commitments, social bases, and extent of movements. What then are the distinctive characteristics of 'new' social movements?

A number of generalisations and themes can be discerned from the extensive and theoretically-diverse literature. NSMs are commonly depicted as: international in character; subscribing to values that fundamentally challenge the existing social and economic order; consciously operating outside the established political structures linked to the state, especially

political parties; employing mass mobilisation, or the threat thereof, as the principal political weapon; having decentralised, informal and often transient organisational structures; and lacking an easily-identifiable social base, being instead issue- and value-based movements of disparate and fluid composition (see Crook, Pakulski and Waters 1993; Scott 1990).

These generalisations portray an ideal type category, since each of these characteristics can only more or less apply to the respective heterogeneous organisations under this banner. Included here are environmentalist, feminist, peace, anti-racist and other movements. There is a strong emphasis on NSMs as extra-parliamentary forms of opposition and protest based on values and attitudes, as distinct from the more traditional disputes over the distribution of resources.¹¹ State structures in general are viewed by NSM members to be easily corrupted to instrumental rather than value-based decisions. This critique supposedly informs the loose, anti-bureaucratic organisational forms attributed to NSMs.¹² Some of these NSMs are understood as potentially liberating, such as feminist movements, but many more are viewed by Habermas (1987: 392–3) as defensive, attempting to stem the incursions of the ‘economic-administrative complex’ on the ‘lifeworld’.¹³ Generally, though, they are portrayed in positive terms, a tendency which downplays movements like the Aum Supreme Truth in Japan, and the Michigan Militia and Branch Davidians in the USA.

In a sense, any mobilisation of social forces is a political act that will inevitably involve some engagement with the state. The most conspicuous cases involve formal political engagement by NSMs and the establishment of ‘alternative’ political parties, such as the German Greens and other ecology-oriented movement parties (see Kaelberer 1993). But it can take more subtle forms, such as the incorporation of feminist and anti-racist perspectives into school syllabuses via state representative and consultative committees and advisory boards. The dilemma these movements face is that, however distasteful the established structures may be to them, these have to be influenced to affect any change on the specific issues of concern. The price of success in forcing policy makers to take notice of them is an increased risk of co-option. Not all forms of co-option result in the same sorts of compromises to autonomy and principle, but they almost certainly generate internal disputations amongst movement members.

But the broader and more important theoretical point is that social movements are not completely separate social phenomena requiring a distinct analytical framework. Rather, they exist in relation to other elements of civil society and traditional institutions. To understand their impact as political oppositions these relational dimensions are crucial (Shaw 1994). But neither the fact of co-option nor the importance of the institutions alongside social movements

negate the significance of NSMs for political opposition.¹⁴ In particular, the extra-parliamentary nature of these movements politicises social and cultural spheres and potentially exposes the exercise of power to broader contestation. Moreover, whilst the concerns expressed, such as environmentalism, cannot easily be separated from the material development of global capitalism and the class structures underlying it (Wilde 1990), these movements represent a challenge to the strategies of leftist activists which must take them as a given, not a diversion.

Alvarez and Escobar (1992) maintain that during the 1970s and 1980s various forms of social movements emerged in Latin America to assert an important influence over political life. These movements have, they argue, 'placed previously suppressed or marginalised demands on to the political agenda - claiming rights to better urban services and land, as well as to increased population and more meaningful democratic participation' (Alvarez and Escobar 1992: 326). Hellman (1992) sees this forcing some reassessment by political parties in an endeavour to capitalise on the mobilisational capacities of these movements. But within East and Southeast Asia where industrialisation has in some parts matured considerably, and where working-class-based organisations like trade unions are still subjected to the repressive apparatus of the state, there is increasing evidence of non-government organisational activity.

Significant variations in the range and strength of social movements in the respective East and Southeast Asian societies, and the relationships between social movements and political parties, represent a major force behind the differential political trajectories unfolding in the region. These different trajectories, of course, will further expose the fallacy of the 'Asian values' emphasis on cultural commonality supposedly steering politics in the same general direction.

So the theoretical opening-up of work on political oppositions in liberal democracies has the potential to feed into more imaginative approaches to the study of oppositions under authoritarian rule. For the fruits of this to be fully realised, though, it is necessary to dispense with the influential notion that extra-parliamentary political contestation is best understood in terms of the conflicting objectives of state and civil society.

BEYOND THE 'STATE VERSUS CIVIL SOCIETY' DICHOTOMY

The concept of civil society has a long history, throughout which it has assumed a variety of meanings (see Shils 1991; Keane 1988; Bobbio 1989; Kumar 1993; Bryant 1993; Reitzes 1994; Tester 1992; Gellner 1994). This reflects in the diverse usages of the concept's current revival. As Kumar (1993: 383) observes: 'So, today, civil society has been found in the

economy and the polity; in the area between the family and the state, or the individual and the state; in the non-state institutions which organise and educate citizens for political participation; even as an expression of the whole civilising mission of modern society'. Despite these problems, the concept can be usefully employed; this is certainly not a call for the concept's shelving. To be sure, civil society is the form of political space that affords the most substantive oppositional capacity and potential, within which social forces can both resist and co-operate with the state in their own interests. In qualitatively differentiating the different sorts of political space this concept is indispensable. Nevertheless, civil society is one form of political space within which oppositions can operate - not the only space.

It is not the point here to survey the various traditions represented in the literature on civil society, but rather to focus primarily on the major intellectual influences shaping the concept's usage in analysing political change and opposition. In particular, the juxtaposition of civil society against state, with a clear normative preference for the former, is a powerful contemporary theme. This has a variety of analytical consequences, including inadequate specification of the content of oppositional positions within civil society and the concealment of political oppositions operating outside this realm.

Among liberal theorists, definitions of civil society approvingly emphasise themes of independence, liberty, plurality and voluntary action. Diamond (1994: 5), for example, defines civil society as 'the realm of organised social life that is voluntary, self-regulating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules'. He also contends that: 'To the extent that an organisation...seeks to monopolise a functional or political space in society, claiming that it represents the only legitimate path, it contradicts the pluralistic market-oriented nature of civil society' (Diamond 1994: 7). Similarly, Mirsky (1993: 572) describes civil society as 'a social sphere in which no single locus of authority predominates and in which men and women interact with each other in a series of overlapping relationships and associations - communal, civic, religious, economic, social, and cultural'. The understanding of civil society in residual terms vis-a-vis the state - the realm of social relations not encompassed by the state - often carries with it powerful normative assumptions about this separation. As Parekh (1993: 160) points out, for liberal theorists, quite unlike civil society, the state is a coercive and compulsory institution: 'coercive because it enjoys the power of life and death over its members, compulsory because its citizens are its members by birth and may not leave it, and outsiders may not enter it, without its approval'. In this view, the role of government is to maximise the liberties of self-determining agents and to facilitate their goals,

not to impose grand goals separate from these. The normative attachment to civil society is at times quite explicit in the literature. Kukathas and Lovell (1991: 35–6), for instance, assert that : ‘The ideological and political collapse of communism suggests that we should redirect our attention to the target of its attack: to reassert the functions of the traditions and institutions of civil society, and to ask what is necessary if its development or regeneration is to be made possible’ (Kukathas and Lovell 1991: 35–6). They add that ‘civil society is important because of its contributions to the constitution of human identity and the fulfilment of individual aspirations’. Others emphasise the ‘civility’ of this particular social realm, which is sometimes depicted as protecting liberal democracy from the inherent dangers of extremism (see Shils 1991: 14).

The celebration of civil society and political pluralism associated with it is also a feature of the post-structuralist and post-modernist literature on new social movements. Here the juxtaposition of repressive state against liberal civil society is arrived at via a somewhat different route, but the effect is fundamentally the same. According to Cohen and Arato (1992: 71), ‘Post-Marxists not only register, as did Gramsci, the durability of civil society under capitalist democracies and the consequent implausibility of revolution, but maintain the normative desirability of the preservation of civil society’. They further observe that: ‘All of our relevant sources view liberal democracy as a necessary condition for bringing the modern state under control’ (Cohen and Arato 1992: 80). Again, the premise is the notion that the state is inherently predisposed to oppression, whereas civil society is the natural domain of liberty.

The emphasis on civil society as the dichotomous opposite of the state, and the fashionable identification by scholars with the former, brings with it a number of problems: the idealisation of civil society; the fostering of a zero-sum conception of the relationship between state and civil society; the obscuring of attempts to gain state power to shape relationships in civil society; and the conceptual concealment of those ambiguous but significant relationships between state and society.

First, civil society is in fact the locus of a range of inequalities based on class, gender, ethnicity, race, and sexual preference, for example, that are symptomatic of specific economic, social and political systems of power (Wood 1990; Kumar 1994; Reitzes 1994). The ‘tendency to demonise the state and deify civil society’, as Reitzes (1994: 105) puts it, plays down this darker side, and ignores the fact that the internal structures and practices of autonomous organisations can be both undemocratic and uncivil — a point amply demonstrated in the organisations currently surfacing in Eastern Europe as well as those that emerged in South

Africa during the 1980s (see Reintges 1990; Shubane 1992; Howe 1991; Salecl 1992). Obviously the political implications of the various elements of civil society differ according to their respective objectives and practices.

In rapidly-industrialising East and Southeast Asia, regime opponents include reactionary elements. Economic change throws up a variety of challenges, not just those by new sources of power and wealth seeking more open and accountable public decision making. Rather, marginalised groups resistant to certain forms of change, such as the recently-banned Muslim fundamentalist non-government organisation (NGO) Al Arqam in Malaysia, are motivated by concern about the erosion of traditional religious values. Moreover, a range of elitist and hierarchical structures and ideologies characterise the various organisations resurfacing and emerging in the region. Amongst new sources of power and wealth, the aspirations for political liberalisation can also be somewhat exclusive.

Second, the notion that state and civil society are essentially locked in some sort of zero-sum game is especially limiting. Stepan's (1985: 318) specification of four logical possibilities in the unfolding of power relations between state and civil society is worth reiterating: state power can be extended in zero-sum fashion to the detriment of civil society; power in both realms can be simultaneously expanded in a positive-sum game; power can simultaneously decline in both realms, in a negative-sum fashion; and, finally, the power of civil society sectors can expand while those of the state decline. The arguments of various chapters in this volume underline this range in state-society possibilities as industrialisation and social transformations advance, including the expansion of the state itself rather than civil society, as in Singapore.

Third, the connection between civil society and the state is stronger than the latter providing the legal framework for the former to exist. The process of political contestation - whether it be over the control of formal political institutions of the state or the attempt to influence these through interest groups or social movements - often centres around competing efforts to redress or consolidate relationships in civil society. This relationship has to some extent received attention from Held (1987, 1989, 1993) and Keane (Keane 1988), who have argued the case for the mutual 'democratisation' of state and civil society.

Fourth, there is a real danger that too sharp a delineation of state and society — and the related delineation of state and civil society — conceals important and interesting aspects of state-society relationships not easily handled within this dichotomous, zero-sum framework. In particular, the way in which societal forces have been incorporated or co-opted into some sort of relationship with state structures, though not always unproblematically for policy makers and

officials of the state, demands careful analysis. Gorz's (1980) observation that the state in advanced liberal democratic societies has increasingly usurped the social self-regulatory capacity of civil society at the expense of reciprocity and voluntarism partly recognises the limitations of the dominant conceptual dichotomy. Certainly it challenges the neat association of liberal democracy with an expansive civil society. Similarly, the extensive literature on corporatism in liberal democracies variously suggests that the social forces in civil society are being subverted or selectively bolstered, through functional representations. The significance of these political forms could withstand considerable elaboration, however.

Schmitter (1992: 427) has possibly come closest to grasping the implications of state-society relations with his emphasis on the varied and discrete arenas and processes of political contestation associated with the modern state:

First, what if a modern democracy were conceptualised, not as 'a regime', but as a composite of 'partial regimes', each of which was institutionalised around distinctive sites for the representation of social groups and the resolution of their ensuing conflicts? Parties, associations, movements, localities and various clientele would compete and coalesce through these different channels in efforts to capture office and influence policy. Authorities with different functions and at different levels of aggregation would interact with these representatives and could legitimately claim accountability to different citizen interests (and passions).

His concept of 'partial regimes' is explicitly intended to transcend the limitations of the traditional liberal notion that political parties are the most important and influential expression of political representation vis-a-vis the state. Thus he steers attention to the organisational representations of class, sectoral and professional interests which 'might intrude on the putative monopoly of political parties in the representation of social groups' (Schmitter 1992: 431). Most importantly, his notion that liberal democracies comprise assorted forms of political representation encompassing a range of institutional sites encourages a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of the political intersection of state and society. This includes development of the analysis of organisational links to the formal political process as some writers have attempted, for example, by applying the concept of partial regimes to regulatory structures.

Whilst Schmitter's idea of 'partial regimes' is intended to assist in defining 'democracy' by subjecting more institutional sites to scrutiny,¹⁵ the attempt to broaden the focus of political analysis has wider implications. A fifth point, then, is that the boundaries between state and civil society are greatly complicated by the existence of a host of institutional forums that attempt to incorporate social forces - regardless of whether these forms of representation are democratic. But if these boundaries are at times obscure in established liberal democracies,

they are no less problematic elsewhere where different historical contexts have resulted in a pronounced ideological assertiveness for pervasive state structures.¹⁶ The predominant acknowledgment of this feature of so many post-colonial societies is to contrast extensive states with under-developed social organisations: strong state, weak society (see Blaney and Pasha 1993). It is often the ability of regimes, especially but not only authoritarian regimes, to incorporate organised social forces that renders them so effective in political terms. But this effectiveness does not simply derive from the negation of an organisation's independence from the state or the obstruction of other organisations in society, important as both are. Rather, it lies also in the very fact of social organisation. The point is that societal groups may be highly organised, even if not residing in civil society. Rigger's chapter on Taiwan gives this special attention.

Moreover, a sharp state-society dichotomy is not sufficiently sensitive to changes within polities where a pervasive state has incorporated societal forces. Ding (1994: 298) appears to be addressing this problem in his adoption of the concept of 'institutional amphibiousness'. It has the following features:

First, the boundaries between institutional structures are ambiguous. Institutional structures are so closely interwoven with each other in their actual operation that the formal demarcation of the scope of each other's activities or powers becomes insignificant. Secondly, the nature of individual institutions is indeterminate. An institution can be used for purposes contrary to those it is supposed to fulfil, and the same institution can simultaneously serve conflicting purposes.

This, he contends, not a civil society offensive, was the most crucial dynamic in the dramatic political changes in Eastern Europe and important in the build up of dissident and oppositional forces in China leading to the 1989 Democracy Movement. For Ding, societal forces incorporated into the one-party state via 'pseudo-social organisations' can, in certain circumstances, 'convert these organisations from state agencies into instruments for the expression of ideals, or mobilisation and co-ordination of interests against the party-state' (Ding 1994: 298–9). The attraction of Ding's concept lies in its recognition of the possibility of contradictions and tensions internal to the corporatist state, as well as its recognition that the absence of a civil society does not automatically equate with a lack of social organisation. It is particularly instructive for analyses of one-party states where political oppositions may be more likely to manifest themselves outside the formal political institutions.¹⁷

Some authors have attempted to take this point further, in effect questioning whether there is another realm that has so far escaped adequate conceptualisation: a realm which constitutes the intersection of state and society. Habermas (1989) took this up, in a fashion,

when he explored the changing nature of the ‘public sphere’ in advanced capitalist societies. He understood the public sphere as an intermediate space between state and society, in which both participated, that could take a variety of forms: liberal, plebeian or regimented, for example. As he saw it, the liberal bourgeois public sphere, formed in opposition to the state, was transformed with the advent of the welfare state and the parallel development of mass society and advertising. In this process: ‘[S]tate intervention in the sphere of society found its counterpart in the transfer of public functions to private corporate bodies. Likewise, the opposite process of a substitution of public authority by the power of society was connected to the extension of public authority over sectors of the private realm’ (Habermas as quoted in Huang 1993: 218). This, he described as the ‘societalisation’ of the state and the ‘statification’ of society, a process that undermines the intermediate space previously constituted by a particular public sphere. But Huang (1993: 219) observes that Habermas’s notion of private individuals coming together to form a public sphere in opposition to the regulatory regime of public authorities means that: ‘The public sphere becomes merely an extension of (civil) society in its democratic development against the absolutist state’.

To get around this reversion to a binary opposition of state and society, Huang (1993) developed the concept of a ‘third realm’ as conceptually distinct from state and society. It was intended as a value-neutral category with broader application than the historically-specific ‘bourgeois public sphere’. Huang rejects the idea of multiple public spheres as too vague and instead looks for something that can be applied to a range of historico-social contests. The concept of ‘third realm’ was employed by Huang to analyse changes in state-society relations in post-revolutionary China:

Beyond the boundaries of the expanded formal state apparatus, moreover, the party-state sought to extend its influence further by completely institutionalising much of the remaining third realm. Instead of relying on ad hoc collaboration between state and society, the party-state created institutional frameworks within which such collaboration was to take place. The purpose was to ensure the state’s influence in those spaces it acknowledged to be intermediate between state and society (Huang 1993: 232).

This process involved both the penetration of existing institutions, such as the justice system, as well as new institutions such as rural collectives which were neither part of the bureaucratic state nor civil society (Huang 1993: 233). It is this conceptualisation that informs Huang’s (1993: 237) caution against expectations that a society long dominated by the party-state can rapidly develop societal organisations ‘genuinely separate and independent from the state’. Rather, the unfolding tensions in the third realm are the most likely dynamics to shape China’s political direction for the foreseeable future. Though Ding did not adopt the same sort of trinary

conception, his treatment of the ambiguous dimensions of state-society relations is not inconsistent with Huang's 'third realm'.

Useful as this concept may potentially be in steering enquiry towards empirical studies of the intersection between state and society, we should be careful to scrutinise the concept more carefully before any wholehearted endorsement of it. In particular, to attribute to it the same analytical or political significance as the concept civil society would overstate the case. Even if one were persuaded by the notion that such an ambiguous realm exists and has general application, it does not necessarily follow that it carries equal weight in its implications for political opposition or the analysis thereof.¹⁸

The idea that a modern, industrialised society can exist without a civil society, and indeed flourish economically, is a further point taken up briefly by Gellner (1994). He notes a frustration by conservatives in the established, industrialised liberal democracies who lament the absence of a holistic, moral community. According to Gellner, the inherently pluralistic nature of civil society simply cannot deliver what these conservatives demand. However, there are contemporary alternatives to civil society that are capable of offering the shared vision absent in civil society, in combination with industrialisation and economic development. He sees Islam in this light, addressing the spiritual and practical needs of a disoriented urban population experiencing development-related upheaval. But China, Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia are also singled out as a group. As Gellner understands it, the problem of capitalist anomie is ameliorated in these societies via the discipline of authoritarian order from above and family networks from below which condition the individual's experience of the market. Whilst the depiction of these societies as ones tightly-bonded by kinship may be somewhat idealised and culturalist, Gellner does at least recognise the possibility of sustainable political alternatives to civil society in conjunction with capitalist industrialisation.

To reiterate, none of the above argument infers a normative indifference to the existence of civil society or advocates its downgrading in analytical terms.¹⁹ It simply suggests the state versus civil society dichotomy should not be rigidly enforced if we are trying to conceptualise the full range of political contestations in any society, least of all one-party states or 'dominant party systems' which characterise much of East and Southeast Asia. Other political spaces are important because their existence conditions the character of opposition. The nature and significance of the co-option of societal forces through modifications to state institutions is thus an important area of investigation. To differing extents, this co-option introduces important

dynamics to the political process, including forms of contestation, that can affect the content of public policy.

However, civil society, as a concept, must be preserved for specifying a particular form of political space. It cannot include all, independent, voluntary social organisations. Instead, a distinction must be drawn between civic and civil society, the latter involving regular attempts to advance the interests of members through overt political action. As Bernhard (1993: 308) emphasises, civil society requires ‘the existence of an independent public space from the exercise of state power, and then the ability of organisations within it to influence the exercise of state power’. Seen in this way, civil society is an inherently political sphere, of no less significance than formal political parties. For example the ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) in Singapore is acutely aware of the inherently political nature of civil society, hence its adoption of legislation and a legal discourse intended to constrain the political activities of social and cultural organisations.

A final observation about the concept of civil society concerns its extra-national dimensions. The theorisation of state-civil society relations has been overwhelmingly premised on the assumption that civil society, like state, is a fundamentally national phenomenon. Yet there are both international governmental organisations (IGOs) and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) which complicate the matter. International relations theory literature has for some time been interested in the former, but the latter have only recently attracted serious academic interest on any scale.²⁰ The emphasis in new social movements on the international character of feminist, environmentalist, human rights and other movements, has contributed to greater awareness of INGOs. Moreover, the recent accelerated growth of INGOs, now estimated at 23,000, simply compels more analytical attention (Alger 1990: 159). Many of these outside the established centres of capitalist production involve developmental organisations of a grassroots nature. important debates have surfaced over the politicisation of the development process through some of these organisations. But there is also evidence of growing regional linkages between human rights, environmental and other activists in Asia (see Vatikiotis 1994). The extent to which political opposition is able to draw on the international support of like-minded communities - whether they be political parties or social movements - is obviously an important empirical question. But at what point do these links qualify as part of a ‘globalised’ or ‘international’ civil society?

According to Lipschutz (1992: 398–9), we are witnessing the emergence of new political spaces as transnational networks of economic, social and cultural relations are formed for

specific social and political purposes by people united by common norms. This, he stresses, is qualitatively more than accelerated international social contact brought about by new technologies. Rather: 'It is new forms of social organisation and social practice, and not hardware alone, that have global political effects' (Lipschutz 1992: 413). These forms of organisation are diminishing the state's political importance, and quite deliberately as Lipschutz (1992: 398–9) sees it: 'This civil society is "global" not only because of those connections that cross national boundaries and operate within the "global, nonterritorial region", but also as a result of a growing element of global consciousness in the way the members of global civil society act'.

Whilst the state is by no means in its death throes, avenues for political contestation over the exercise of power are being opened up by the processes focused on by Lipschutz. The question is how significant are they and what are the preconditions for utilising them? In chapter eight, He Baogang embarks on a dedicated study of exiled Chinese oppositionists. In this case, international organisations and movements are mounted from abroad. He finds, however, that whilst they are effective in shaping international opinion and influencing host governments, the impact of these groups is ultimately restrained by severance from domestically-based movements and organisations.

CONCLUSION

Given the enormity of the social transformations in East and Southeast Asia resulting from rapid capitalist industrialisation, it is indeed reasonable to anticipate political changes. However, if we are to ascertain and specify those changes, it is necessary to adopt a theoretical framework that does not lock out of consideration possibilities that may differ from the historical experiences of earlier industrialising capitalist societies, and our own normative preferences. The triumph of liberal democracy is but one possibility for these societies, and not necessarily the most likely. Political oppositions consistent with this model are thus not the only oppositions emerging in the dynamic, late-industrialising societies in East and Southeast Asia.

As we have seen above, there are some common themes to oppositions, and the circumstances shaping them, in the industrialising countries of East and Southeast Asia. In particular, economic and social transformations associated with rapid industrialisation have precipitated political accommodations involving changes in state-society relations throughout the region. However, what is striking is the diversification in the forms of these accommodations. There is a differential mix, importance and complexion of political parties,

social movements, NGOs, and co-opted social organisations unfolding that is giving definition to political oppositions in the respective societies in the region. We should expect the contrasting mixes in the forms and substances of oppositions in each society to produce even more divergent political trajectories as capitalist industrialisation consolidates.

The relative importance and character of civil society is an important part of this differentiation. However, oppositions eeking out a measure of independent political space need not be bearers of liberal democratic values or architects of political liberalism. Indeed, their attempts to affect political change are often premised on the retention of elitist and hierarchical structures. But rather than diminishing their significance as political oppositions, this may afford greater latitude to openly contest the exercise of state power. Similarly, authorities are able to shape the direction of civil society to encourage elements that do not challenge the fundamental social and political order. Indeed, if the prospects of civil society are in some cases brighter now in parts of East and Southeast Asia than two decades ago, it has much to do with the moderating influence of new social forces limiting their criticisms to the detail rather than the essence of the economic and social system. It is precisely because this time opposition is less fundamental, particularly where it involves an expanded civil society, that it is more likely to be sustainable over the longer term.

NOTES

- * I am grateful to Kevin Hewison, Richard Robison, Chua Beng Huat and two anonymous referees for their constructive criticisms on an earlier draft of this work. Thanks also to Amanda Miller for her copy editing.
- 1 Increasingly, with the focus on leadership in particular, voluntarism is emphasised in the accounts of whether or not the preconditions for change are actually realised. Diamond (1989: 3), in an acknowledgement of the transitions volumes, states that ‘the choices, decisions, values, and actions of political and institutional leaders have figured prominently - and in many cases, quite clearly decisively - in the decline or fall of democracy’. He contends that, in the democratic prospects of Asian countries, ‘effective and democratically-committed leadership’ is of crucial importance (Diamond 1989, p. 49).
- 2 There are of course variants within these two extremes, referred to by Dahl as mixed regimes and competitive oligarchies. Mixed regimes afford a measure of space for select public contestation, including ‘loyal oppositions’, but barriers nevertheless exist to the full expression of political preferences. Competitive oligarchies are even more selective about the tolerance of opposition, excluding the bulk of the population which is unorganised and unrepresented but allowing some contestation amongst elites (Dahl 1973, pp. 14--5).
- 3 Barker (1971, p. 26) draws on the following quote from Dahl to illustrate the problem: ‘Today one is inclined to regard the existence of an opposition party as very nearly the most distinctive characteristic of democracy itself; and we take the absence of an opposition party as evidence, if not always conclusive proof, for the absence of democracy’.
- 4 Linz distinguishes between legal semi-opposition and alegal and illegal opponents who operate outside the system. Alegal opposition ‘refers to opponents whose activities, without being strictly illegal, have no legal sanction and run counter to the spirit if not the text of the Constitution and laws of the regime. They are outside the law: alegal’ (Linz 1973, p 191).
- 5 Linz maintains that semi-opposition is largely interest-based rather than structural. Despite occasional pretensions to the contrary, this opposition does not question the basic assumptions of the regime (Linz 1973, p. 191). As such, it is limited in the ability to foster genuinely alternative programmes.
- 6 In Huntington’s book *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (1991), he not only identifies a new global surge in the direction of liberal democracy since the mid-1970s, he also warns that previous waves of ‘democratisation’ have been followed by a wave of reversions to authoritarian rule. On this point, Dahl (1994: 18) clearly sees culture as strategic in resisting any undemocratic or anti-democratic impulses: ‘Whenever a country develops an advanced market oriented society its people will be provided with many structures, incentives, skills, and opportunities that are favourable to democratic ideas and processes. But such a development does not by any means insure that they will possess a democratic culture and common identity that are strong enough to avoid severe crises or conflict, or maintain democracy when they occur.’
- 7 According to Schmitter and Karl (1991: 82), the challenge in trying to establish liberal democracy ‘is not so much to find a set of goals that command widespread consensus as to find a set of rules that embody contingent consent’. For them, all liberal democracies involve a measure of political uncertainty owing to institutionalised competition. But the rules of competition limit the bounds of that uncertainty.
- 8 On the basis of her observations on different regimes in the region, Chan (1993, pp. 21--24) also posits the notion of an ‘Asian democracy’. This involves free elections but characteristically has the following distinguishing features: a communitarian sense which locates the individual within the group; a greater acceptance of and respect for authority and hierarchy; a dominant-party

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- system rather than a competitive party system; and a centralised bureaucracy and strong state. According to Chan (1993: 25), ‘indigenous cultures and folkways are impossible to erase, which is why we should not expect transplanted political institutions to look exactly like their antecedents and to function in a similar way. Hence Asian democracy’.
- 9 This latest position by Fukuyama comes in the wake of Kim Dae Jung’s (1994) rebuttal of Lee Kuan Yew’s widely-publicised insistence on the irreconcilability of liberal democracy and Confucianism. Kim effectively turned the cultural obstacle argument on its head, arguing that ‘almost two thousand years before Locke, Chinese philosopher Meng-tzu preached similar ideas’ (Kim 1994, p. 191). According to Kim (1994, p. 192), whilst the basic ideas and traditions requisite for ‘democracy’ first emerged in Asia, it was the Europeans who first ‘formalized comprehensive and effective electoral democracy’.
 - 10 This is not to overlook the fact that the finer detail of his thesis has aroused considerable controversy. See, for example, *Foreign Affairs*, 72: 4 and *Asian Studies Review*, 18: 1, both of which contain various critical responses to Huntington’s thesis.
 - 11 Habermas (1984: 392), for example, argues that: ‘these new conflicts arise in domains of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialisation’ and ‘The new problems have to do with quality of life, equal rights, individual self-realization, participation, and human rights’. Moreover, Crook et al. (1993, p. 151) underline that the values per se of NSMs are not as significant as the insistence that they serve as the uncompromising measure of all institutional and political behaviour, both in civil society and formal state institutions. Young (1994, p. 84) argues that this emphasis on values makes NSMs difficult to reconcile with the liberal pluralist model of rational, self-interested individuals or collectives. Rather, ideas and principles that cannot be deduced from socio-economic position or material self-interest play a major role.
 - 12 NSM organisations are depicted as: small, locally-based groups; organised around specific issues; having wild fluctuations in the levels of activity; often with fluid hierarchies and lacking –clear systems of authority. These characteristics lead Scott (1990, p. 30) to suggest it might be more appropriate to use the term ‘social networks’ rather than organisations when describing NSMs. Importantly, the disparate nature of social movements militates against their mobilisation as a coherent oppositional force with a programmatic alternative. Some NSM theorists have looked to the ecology movement as possibly having the potential to transcend this. Here it is the rejection of technocracy and its support institutions and values, rather than capitalism, which is seen as the motivation for radical change (see Scott 1990, p. 30).
 - 13 According to Habermas (1987, pp. 358-9), ‘The lifeworld is the unspecified reservoir from which the subsystems of the economy and state extract what they need for their reproduction: performance at work and obedience’.
 - 14 Crook et al. (1993, pp. 163-4), acknowledge the dilution effect of the above processes on NSMs, but nevertheless insist that NSMs represent an irreversible change for the politics of industrialised societies in favour of increased diversity of political processes: more open organisational structures, more diverse elites, more fluid and fragmented alliances and loyalties, and more complex networks of communication.
 - 15 Schmitter (1992, p. 428) notes that competing theories and models of democracy emphasise particular institutional sites in advancing their cases, but argues that all are potentially democratic so long as ‘they respect the overarching principle of citizenship and the procedural minima of civil rights, fair elections ‘free associability etc.’.
 - 16 This is not to insist that we can simply differentiate the actual extent of state structures in Europe and North America from East and Southeast Asia. Arguably the biggest differences in state-society relations from one case to another centres around the form or nature of the relationship rather than the extent of it. States are at all times extensively related to societies.

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- 17 Stepan (1985, p. 340) makes the complementary point that the evolution of political opposition to the state within society is shaped by the way in which the state defines its project and by the contradictions and conflicts that emerge inside the state apparatus itself.
- 18 This point was forcefully and convincingly made by Chua Beng Huat in reaction to an earlier draft.
- 19 Some theorists, such as Tester (1992) and Kumar (1993), do see cases for abandoning the concept. Tester –argues against the use of the concept civil society on the grounds that it is essentially a construct of modernity and thus carries with it questionable assumptions about an objective, external reality: ‘The modern imaginations of civil society are based on a series of problems and possibilities which means that they are largely inadequate for the tasks of interpreting and creating maps of post-modernity. Civil society will only continue to be accepted as a satisfactory imagination to the extent that it can continue to provide easy and comforting answers to easy and irrelevant questions’ (as quoted in Reitzes 1994, p. 103). Kumar believes too much wasted energy has accompanied the renewed interest and faith in the concept of civil society. For him, ‘The establishment of a democratic polity and a public sphere of political debate and political activity are the primary conditions for a thriving civil society of independent associations and an active civil life’ (Kumar 1993, p. 391). This suggests that it is to the institutions of the state and the reconstitution of the functioning political society that attention should be focused. This position is not inconsistent with the ‘new institutionalism’.
- 20 Ironically, as Ghils (1992, p. 417) points out, transnational phenomena such as religious movements pre-date the institution of the state itself.

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