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Shiping Hua

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Yu-tzung Chang, Yun-han Chu, Mark Weatherall
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Is there still an Asian way?
The changing nature of political culture in East Asia

Yu-tzung Chang, Yun-han Chu, and Mark Weatherall

When interviewed in 1994 for Foreign Affairs, former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew claimed that China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Vietnam share the same Confucian cultural values that have defined their social and cultural identity. Lee identified five values that continue to shape the culture of these societies today: hierarchical collectivism (loyalty to group leaders), paternalistic meritocracy (benevolent rule by a moral elite), interpersonal reciprocity and accommodation (avoiding conflict with others), communal interest and harmony (sacrificing personal interest for the community), and familism (placing family above self) (Zakaria 1994).

However, despite these claims, scholars have lacked the cross-national data to empirically measure the presence of these values. This chapter uses data from the latest wave of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS), applying Tianjian Shi’s (2015) theoretical framework to measure the two core dimensions of Asian values: orientation toward authority (OTA) and definition of self-interest (DSI). We find substantial differences between countries in the region on the OTA dimension, which is found to be strongly influenced by modernization. However, on the DSI dimension, cross-national differences are very small, and we find a consistent emphasis on collectivism across the region that is contrasted to the importance of individual rights in the Western context. Nonetheless, we found that the presence of democratic institutions can strengthen orientations toward individualism. These findings show that it may be too to claim that East Asia does not have its own distinctive system of values that are distinctive from those of the West. However, our data also show that these values are undergoing a gradual process of transition.

The chapter is organized as follows. The first part describes the development of empirical research on political culture, starting from the pioneering work of Gabriel Almond (1956) through to the vigorous development of the field after the 1990s. The second part describes two main research methods in political culture. The analysis in this chapter is primarily built upon the assumptions of the behaviorist school. The third part presents two fundamental questions. First, is there a core value system shared by the majority of citizens in East Asia? Second, do Asian countries have an illiberal value system? The fourth part explains our measurement methods and preliminary analysis. The fifth part presents the model analysis and tests the construct validity of the model, and explores...
factors affecting value change in Asia. The final part is the conclusion. Most past studies have focused a great deal on political philosophy without paying sufficient attention to empirical testing (Nathan 2012; Shin 2012). Finally, in this chapter, we try to move beyond the Asian values debate.

Overview of the study of political culture

The concept of political culture appeared relatively late in social science research, beginning from the pioneering article by Almond (1956) on “Comparative Political Systems” in The Journal of Politics. This is not to say that scholars had ignored political culture in the past. However, Almond was the first to specifically use the term “political culture”; prior to him, researchers used a variety of terms, such as “national spirit,” “Chinese spirit,” or “European spirit,” and people were distinguished by their nationality. For example, the French might be defined by their use of the French language, their culinary preferences, or even their alleged “arrogance” (Lichterman and Cefai 2006). This “national spirit” was also referred to as the “national character.” For instance, “The Chrysanthemum and the Sword” was used to describe the “Japanese national character.” Of course, such ideas are difficult to measure empirically. For example, it is difficult to “prove” that the French are more “romantic” or that the Germans are more “serious.” In short, prior to Almond, the comparative study of political culture focused on abstract concepts and generalizations without the use of modern social science research for empirical validation.

Almond’s concept of political culture started from the tradition of comparative political research. In The Civic Culture, Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) proposed a framework for researching political culture, using four different factors to construct three types of culture: parochial, subject, and participant. Based on these three types of culture, Almond and Verba tried to develop a way to measure culture in different countries. They measured political participation and attitudes toward politics in five countries (the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Italy, and Mexico), discovering significant differences in the development of political culture, even among established democracies (Almond and Verba 1963). This groundbreaking work set the path for subsequent empirical studies on political culture.

However, the emerging study of political culture faced challenges in the 1960s. First, the study of political culture was bound up with modernization theory. This was originally proposed by economists against the backdrop of the reconstruction of Europe in the aftermath of World War II. During the process of Europe’s reconstruction, these scholars found that when a country develops its economy, economic modernization will lead to political and cultural modernization. Through this process, traditional and backward societies would gradually escape poverty and start to modernize, first economically and then culturally and politically, following the same path to development as Western countries had previously undergone. Almond and Verba’s study was based on this assumption. Specifically, they argued that the political culture in the United Kingdom and the United States was more advanced than that in Italy and Mexico, and tried to find whether this implied a single law of development. However, with the rise of the New Left in academia, this research program was criticized for uncritically applying the Western development model to non-Western countries. As a result of these changing trends in academia, following the publication of The Civic Culture in 1963, no cross-national empirical study of political culture appeared until the publication of Ronald Inglehart’s The Silent Revolution in 1977.
So, what happened during this period? In the 1970s, the New Left emerged, along with the cultural hegemony of Antonio Gramsci and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. However, by the 1980s, cultural research, which had been dominated by the New Left, began to undergo some changes. These changes were closely associated with the overall direction of the political science discipline.

In both the East and the West, the 1980s witnessed the emergence of what later became known as the “Third Wave of democratization” (Huntington 1991). This wave of democratization started in Southern Europe, spreading to Latin America, South Africa, and Eastern Europe at an extremely fast rate. Throughout the 1980s, politics around the world moved rapidly toward democracy. In the context of these changes, many new research directions emerged, including the use of survey research in emerging countries. Democratization opened up new opportunities for this type of research while encouraging scholars to collect data that could explain the remarkable transformations in these countries. This wave of research sought to explain political change by looking at changes in citizens’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. When carrying out this research, scholars found that there was much of value in the earlier work of Almond and Verba.

At present, cross-national survey projects can be divided into three main groups. The first is the World Values Survey led by Inglehart. The second group includes a number of regional surveys – the Latinobarómetro, covering countries in Latin America; the New Europe Barometer, covering Eastern Europe and former Soviet states; the Asian Barometer, including countries in East and Southeast Asia; and the Afrobarometer, covering African countries. Given the research interest in the role of citizens’ attitudes in democratization, these surveys are primarily focused on countries that can be classified as emerging democracies. In contrast, the third group under the auspices of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, which covers more than fifty countries around the world, is focused on public opinion in mature democracies.²

Why do these surveys? Behind this question lies the deeper issue of whether democracy is sustainable in these emerging democratic countries. For example, can it be sustained in a country like Egypt? Can democracy survive in a country such as Iraq, where it was imposed from the outside? Cross-national survey projects are interested in measuring citizens’ support for democratic institutions. When research teams started to do this type of cross-national research, their interest in this topic was, of course, different from the system inputs and outputs that were the focus of the work of Almond and Verba. Instead, this new wave of survey research examined issues such as support for democracy, democratic legitimacy, and quality of democracy. In particular, citizens need democratic institutions to deliver certain outputs. Democracy that does not meet the needs of its citizens will not win popular support. However, after more than a decade of survey research, we have found that emerging democracies have been unable to gain a high level of popular support or guarantee a better life for their citizens. In view of this sobering reality, we have started to study the reasons for the gap between the expectations and the reality of democracy. In fact, the greater the level of democratic development, the more serious the gap. This is what Pippa Norris has referred to as the “democratic deficit,” in which people have high expectations for democracy, but governments lack the capacity to meet these expectations (Norris 2011). Therefore, aside from studies of emerging democracies, in recent years, there has also been considerable scholarly interest in the political culture of established Western democracies.

Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk (2016) point out that only 30 percent of Americans born after the 1980s agree that it is “essential” to live in a country that is governed...
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democratically. In European countries, an average of 45 percent of people feel the same. In the United States, nearly 25 percent of people feel that “having a democratic political system” is a “bad” or “very bad” way to “run this country,” while in European countries, an average of 13 percent agree with this. Remarkably, the trend toward openness to nondemocratic alternatives is especially strong among citizens who are both young and rich. Nearly 35 percent of young, wealthy Americans can accept military rule, compared to 17 percent of their European counterparts. In Western countries, rising support for authoritarianism allowed Donald Trump to win the presidency, seemingly challenging the foundations of U.S. democracy. After World War II, Germany had an extreme fear of the far-right, yet in recent years, far-right forces have been on the rise again in the country. In France, the far-right National Front (FN) obtained 25 percent of the vote and 24 seats in the elections to the European Parliament in May 2015, more than did two mainstream parties – the Socialist Party (PS) and the Republicans (LR). Does this mean we are in a reverse wave of democratization? What lies at the root of these troubles? How can we understand the historical trajectory of which our current moment is a part? These recent crises of deconsolidation in Western countries have led to increased scholarly interest concerning the impact of inequality on democracy.

Two competing research approaches

The British political scientist Stephen Welch divides research on political culture into three schools. The first is the political psychology approach, which is also known as behaviorism, and which is currently dominant in research on political culture. The second are non-mainstream approaches, which include anthological approaches and the continental tradition of hermeneutics. The third include critical political philosophy, such as structuralism, postmodernism, and neo-Marxist approaches (Thompson et al. 2006; Welch 2013).

Critical political philosophy is traditionally concerned with political and cultural aspects of modern capitalism, such as cultural industries and racism. Its purpose is to criticize these cultural phenomena. As a result, it is claimed that anthropology and psychology are the only true approaches to the study of political culture. However, there is the problem of the incommensurability between different approaches since meaningful dialogue between them seems to be impossible.

If we adopt an interpretive approach to the study of culture, we need to understand whether the subjects of our research have any special religious rituals or practices, any specific symbols or totems, or any linguistic structures. Furthermore, researchers should try to place themselves in the position of their research subjects in order to understand the meanings behind their behaviors or understand the symbolism behind their rituals. Religious or traditional ceremonies may have different meanings, such as venerating ancestors or exorcism of evil spirits. Researchers need to place themselves within the particular cultural context in order to understand the meanings of these ceremonies. This continental research tradition is not philosophy; in fact, it is an empirical science but one that is distinct from other strands of empirical research.

The work of Clifford Geertz (1973) is typical of the interpretative tradition. For example, imagine two boys are sitting opposite each other, and one of them moves his eyelids. If a third boy comes over and also moves his eyelids, then from a behaviorist perspective, we know that the two boys moved their eyelids, but we are not sure why they are doing so. It is possible that the three boys are passing information to one another through a conspiratorial wink, or alternatively, the movements may just be involuntary twitches.
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Behaviorism has no way of understanding the boys’ actions. It only remembers the action, but it cannot tell us the reason behind it. Perhaps the first boy is transmitting information to the second boy, and when the third boy sees the action, he finds it interesting and mimics the action as a joke. In this specific situation, each of the boys’ actions express a distinct meaning. This example conveys the fundamental question behind research on political culture.

Another assumption in behaviorism and psychology is that subjects are treated as individuals. Behaviorism argues that a holistic understanding comes through looking at individuals first. For example, if we want to know if Group A or Group B is more united, we must look at the actions of the individuals within each group. If Group A and Group B play a soccer match against each other, and Group A has a higher attendance and more support, we can reasonably infer that Group A is more united. Behaviorism does not ignore the group as a whole, but it believes that the characteristics of the group are a product of the characteristics of the individuals that make up the group and can be observed at the individual level. To take another example, the issue of national identity can be measured by whether citizens pay taxes or are willing to step forward when the nation is facing difficulties. Therefore, the characteristics of the group of the whole can be understood through the individuals that make up the group. This means that while the characteristics of the group are still important, they can be understood by observing the individuals that make it up. Therefore, while hermeneutics argues against reductionism, behaviorism believes that group characteristics can be understood at the individual level. Because of the fundamentally different assumptions of the two approaches, meaningful dialogue between them is difficult. As Almond has pointed out, the lack of dialogue between political scientists is unique to the field (Almond 1990).

However, William Mishler and Detlef Pollack (2003) have sought to bring together the two research traditions. Mishler and Pollack use Aaron Wildavsky’s concept of cultural hierarchy to bring together the two traditions, arguing that research on political culture can be essentially divided into three types. The first belongs to the tradition of anthropology and involves the study of thick culture. This approach is based on the fundamental orientations of political culture, and it studies various identity issues, including national identity, religious identity, ethnic identity, party identity, and ideological identity. A different approach from the psychological tradition is thin culture. This approach is based on social and political attitudes, including interpersonal trust, trust in the political system, and evaluation of government performance. The final type is somewhere between the preceding two approaches, and focused on value systems, including collectivism vs. individualism, democratic values vs. authoritarianism, and social order vs. individual freedom. Mishler and Pollack stress that the three traditions lie on a continuous scale, and there is not incommensurability between the three levels. Political culture will be understood in this chapter as a body of value system that set standards of appropriate behavior for countries that distinguish them from other countries.

Proponents of this approach claim that these cultural factors are established over a long period of time and that they continue exerting great influence on political behaviors. For example, in Muslim societies, the Koran provides an overarching source of political legitimacy to traditional as well as modern Islamic polities. In East Asian countries, Confucianism provides the bedrock of the value system that supports various types of regimes, ranging from one-party authoritarian China, to electoral authoritarian Singapore, to liberal democratic Taiwan and South Korea. These cultural factors differ from psychological factors in two aspects. First, they possess certain idiosyncrasies rooted in specific spatial-temporal
domains, such as Confucianism in East Asian societies. Second, those factors are always identified with the societal-level characteristics and are rarely defined by individual behaviors or attitudes. For instance, honoring filial piety is a typical characteristic of Confucianism, but simply having this characteristic does not make a society Confucian-like.

### Beyond the Asian values debate

According to the proponents of “Asian values,” “non-Western” culture and norms influence political, economic, and social behaviors in Asia. Former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir have criticized Western liberalism and democracy based on individual rights, arguing that developing countries do not necessarily need to follow the Western path to development. Instead, East Asia’s unique political and economic development offers an alternative Asian way to development (Dupont 1996: 14–15).

However, it is also necessary to analyze the political motives behind Asian leaders’ support for Asian values. Are there claims, in fact, consistent with the specific historical development of Asian countries? Or are they just a way to rationalize the existing authoritarian regime? Amartya Sen (1999: 15) has argued that democracy is a common value around the world. According to Sen, the arguments of Asian political leaders that “Asian values” or the “Asian development model” make Asian countries unsuitable for democracy are simply a way to obstruct growing demands for democratic reform and rationalize nondemocratic rule. Alan Dupont (1996) also believes that so-called Asian values were designed by politicians for clearly political purposes.

When debating Asian values, scholars from both Asia and the West have to answer two fundamental questions. First, is there a core value system shared by the majority of citizens in East Asia? Second, do Asian countries have an illiberal value system? Donald K. Emmerson (1995) has pointed out that the cultural differences between Asian countries are greater than the commonality between them. In fact, the core values advocated by Asian countries, such as emphasis on family values, the importance of social order and harmony, and respect for the elderly, are also found in Western society. Therefore, “Asian values” should be understood through more specific concepts, such as “Confucian values,” “East Asian values,” “Muslim values,” or “Buddhist values.”

Zakaria (1997: 28) argues that constitutional liberalism can lead to democracy, but democracy cannot bring constitutional liberalism. As a result, East Asian democracies will establish an “illiberal political culture” with strong authoritarian elements, instead of the “liberal political culture” found in the West.³ Daniel A. Bell et al. (1995: 163–7) believes that this will have the following three characteristics. The first is the non-neutral state. The Western liberal tradition respects the sovereignty of the people, with the people determining policy preferences. On the contrary, non-liberal systems rely on leaders to determine what is necessary to improve the living standards of ordinary people, and on this basis allow the state to intervene in the private domain. The second is techno-paternalism, using technocrats to manage developing countries in the same way that a business would be managed. Third, these polities are characterized by managed public space and dependent civil society.⁴

However, past studies have focused a great deal on political philosophy without paying sufficient attention to empirical testing. We cannot rely on just reading classic texts or the observations of individual researchers in order to evaluate the meaning of “Asian values” and their impact on democracy and economic development. Only by asking citizens themselves
can we understand which of these cultural values have been internalized into the worldviews of ordinary people and which values are no longer held by most people. In addition, we are interested in whether these traditions that have survived will act as a barrier to political and economic development.

We also must acknowledge that differences also exist between East Asian countries. Following social, economic, or institutional change, or specific historical events in individual countries, will accelerate the breakdown of cultural homogeneity. Therefore, explaining how cultural values in Asia change and how this value change impacts political institutions has often been ignored by scholars of East Asia.

**Measuring Asian values in East Asia**

In this chapter, we juxtapose the normative propositions stemming from the East tradition against the received views under the Western liberal tradition about what are supposed to be the most important pillars of political culture in the contemporary world. We examine these divergent claims with the latest wave of ABS (2014–2016). In particular, we compare their empirical relevance to a systematic understanding of the sources of political culture in East Asia. We further compare their relative explanatory power between the Confucian societies, namely Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and non-Confucian societies in the region. In so doing, we are in a stronger intellectual position to tackle two related issues. First, we address the puzzle about why the observed level of traditionalism under nondemocratic regimes has been substantially higher than either established or emerging democracies. Second, we can engage the ongoing debate over Asian values in a more focused and rigorous way.

Lucian Pye and Mary Pye (1985) reconceptualize Asian political development as a product of cultural attitudes about power and authority. They contrast the great traditions of Confucian East Asia with the Southeast Asian cultures and the South Asian traditions of Hinduism and Islam, and explores the national differences within these larger civilizations. Based on the work of Weiming Tu, Francis Fukuyama (1995) divides Confucian thoughts into two categories: political Confucianism and Confucian personal ethics. Political Confucianism emphasizes imperial and gentry power, which together define a ruling social hierarchy as the upper structure of society. On the other hand, Confucian personal ethics stress family values and a system of personal ethics; this is the true essence of Confucian culture. The Confucian personal ethic states that it is imperative to obey family elders. It also stresses that the ultimate objective of one’s personal behavior is honoring the ancestors. In order to not humiliate family members, it is necessary to take on the responsibility of “procreation.” In one’s social life, it is also necessary to respect the opinion of the older generation and educated people, and by doing so, a harmonious and well-ordered society is achieved.

Shi (2015: 43–4) identifies four key cultural norms that influence political behavior in East and West, and focuses on two of them for deeper analysis of causal mechanisms by which norms influence behavior. The following common characteristics are idiocentric DSI, reciprocal OTA, acceptance of conflict, and procedural justice. The first two, which are the focus of this study, are discussed in greater detail toward the end of this chapter.

In terms of individual-level pattern, we design six questions corresponding to most, if not all, of the aspects of political culture in the ABS in East Asia. Each of the two perspectives covers three questions. Each question is rated at a four-point scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “somewhat agree,” “somewhat disagree,” or “strongly disagree,” where the former two positive responses are assigned to the value of 0 and the latter two negative
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ones to 1, respectively. “Don’t understand,” “Don’t know,” and “Decline to answer” are pooled in the value of 0 as they neither agree nor disagree. We calculate the mean values of the questions included in each of the two perspectives of political culture. This conversion allows us to construct a composite index that approximated an interval variable designed to tap traditional beliefs at the individual level. The lower the average scores, the more traditionally oriented a respondent is. The higher the average scores, the less traditionally oriented her or she is. In short, the rating is positively related to the degree of traditional values. We will elaborate the wording of questions for each category in the following paragraphs.

First, OTA means that respect is socially conferred by hierarchy under the assumption of experiences. We include three statements to measure this concept: (1) “Even if parents’ demands are unreasonable, children still should do what they ask,” (2) “When a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law come into conflict, even if the mother-in-law is in the wrong, the husband should still persuade his wife to obey his mother,” and (3) “Being a student, one should not question the authority of their teacher.”

Second, DSI refers to the prioritization of group interests over personal interests. We measure respondents’ agreements with three statements. The first statement is “For the sake of the family, the individual should put his personal interests second.” The second statement is “In a group, we should sacrifice our individual interest for the sake of the group’s collective interest.” The final statement is “For the sake of national interest, individual interest could be sacrificed” (Table 14.1).

Table 14.2 displays the frequency of respondents’ answers to these questions in different countries. We want to explore how many people have rejected the traditional Asian norms of hierarchical OTA and allocentric DSI, and why they do so. First, we see very big differences between countries on OTA. In Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, a very high percentage of people do not support traditional authority (patriarchy), whereas China, Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines are found somewhere in the middle, followed by Indonesia, Malaysia, and Myanmar with the lowest levels of rejection of traditional authority.

Table 14.1 Measurement of traditionalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Wording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation toward authority (OTA)</td>
<td>“Even if parents’ demands are unreasonable, children still should do what they ask.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“When a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law come into conflict, even if the mother-in-law is in the wrong, the husband should still persuade his wife to obey his mother.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Being a student, one should not question the authority of their teacher.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of self-interest (DSI)</td>
<td>“For the sake of the family, the individual should put his personal interests second.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“In a group, we should sacrifice our individual interest for the sake of the group’s collective interest.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“For the sake of national interest, individual interest could be sacrificed.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: According to IRT, the ratings are from Strongly Agree and Somewhat Agree, equal to 0, to Somewhat Disagree and Strongly Disagree, equal to 1. Do not understand the question, can’t choose, and decline to answer are categorized as 0.
### Table 14.2 Political culture in East Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>South Korea</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>The Philippines</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
<th>Overall mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OTA</td>
<td>69.77</td>
<td>66.53</td>
<td>54.92</td>
<td>60.76</td>
<td>44.56</td>
<td>69.84</td>
<td>57.67</td>
<td>46.65</td>
<td>55.59</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>22.33</td>
<td>53.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTA1</td>
<td>73.67</td>
<td>68.51</td>
<td>59.92</td>
<td>45.14</td>
<td>49.42</td>
<td>63.34</td>
<td>55.58</td>
<td>14.84</td>
<td>59.72</td>
<td>34.02</td>
<td>17.19</td>
<td>49.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTA2</td>
<td>59.14</td>
<td>63.86</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>41.83</td>
<td>32.08</td>
<td>59.93</td>
<td>53.41</td>
<td>12.39</td>
<td>45.49</td>
<td>32.15</td>
<td>31.85</td>
<td>45.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTA3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSI</td>
<td>15.27</td>
<td>15.34</td>
<td>19.08</td>
<td>10.23</td>
<td>14.61</td>
<td>13.64</td>
<td>10.34</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>14.15</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>12.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSI1</td>
<td>37.19</td>
<td>50.87</td>
<td>45.83</td>
<td>23.23</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>24.65</td>
<td>8.43</td>
<td>18.06</td>
<td>20.97</td>
<td>24.02</td>
<td>15.03</td>
<td>26.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSI2</td>
<td>67.72</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>52.33</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>33.49</td>
<td>50.13</td>
<td>10.17</td>
<td>19.48</td>
<td>33.04</td>
<td>24.94</td>
<td>10.55</td>
<td>34.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSI3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1081</td>
<td>1217</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>4068</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1657</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1550</td>
<td>1039</td>
<td>1207</td>
<td>1620</td>
<td>17039</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Entries are the percentages of respondents giving negative answers to the question.

**Source:** Asian Barometer Survey IV, 2014–2016.
It seems that for OTA, the influence of modernization is greater than that of political institutions or culture.

In addition, we see very big differences between countries on DSI. In particular, we see strong emphasis on family values in East Asian society, with the interests of the family being viewed as more important than the interests of an individual in Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as well as in Indonesia and Myanmar. The type of polity (level of democracy) seems to have more explanatory power, but this needs more in-depth statistical testing.

Creating an index of political culture in East Asia

We use the six questionnaire items to create two multi-item indexes for each of the two norms. First, we conduct a confirmatory factor analysis using data from the Fourth Wave of the ABS. We imposed a two-factor structure on the data and assigned the three items about OTA (OTA1 through OTA3) to the first factor and the three items about DSI (DSI1 through DSI3) to the second factor. The results are presented in Table 14.3. Our findings show that the two-factor model provides a good fit with the data. The first two fit statistics compare the given model with an alternative model. The confirmatory fit index (CFI) is .985, indicating a good model fit. The second fit measure is the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), which also shows a good fit, with a TLI value of .972. A final goodness of fit test, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), also shows a good model fit, with an RMSEA of .038. Second, item response theory (IRT) analysis shows that each of the coefficients in Table 14.3 is statistically significantly correlated with the underlying variable, meaning that they all contribute to the score for each of the factors. Finally, the “difficulty” of each item shows how unlikely it is that a respondent will disagree with the question; a higher difficulty score indicates a higher weighting in the combined scale.

The mean factor score on each of the two dimensions for each country is shown in Figure 14.1. In terms of relative position, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are found to be further from the traditional orientation on the two dimensions, while Singapore, the Philippines, China, and Malaysia are situated somewhere in the middle, and Myanmar and Indonesia retain more traditional orientations. Finally, Thailand seems to be an exception to the overall pattern.

Table 14.3 Confirmatory IRT model for East Asian data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardized coefficient</th>
<th>Difficulty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OTA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTA1</td>
<td>0.576</td>
<td>0.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTA2</td>
<td>0.685</td>
<td>-0.180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTA3</td>
<td>0.537</td>
<td>-0.394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSI1</td>
<td>0.346</td>
<td>-3.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSI2</td>
<td>0.688</td>
<td>-1.741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSI3</td>
<td>0.686</td>
<td>-1.341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CFI = 0.985, TLI = 0.972, RMSEA = 0.038
Covariance of OTA and DSI = 0.421
Chi-square (8) = 204.85, P-value = 0.000

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Findings of the multilevel analysis

There are three main theoretical perspectives of how traditional value system might interact with modernization and democratization; they are discussed separately under the labels of modernization, cultural relativists, and communitarianism.

Modernization theorists believe that the gap between Eastern and Western cultures will eventually disappear through the processes of global modernization and democratization (Chang et al. 2005; Inglehart 1990, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Kim 2013). They also believe that liberal democratic regimes will replace other forms of political regimes and, in turn, become the best and only option. Fukuyama (1995) argues that any changes in political institutions (the upper structure) will not by any means damage the integrated Confucian social order (the lower structure). Confucian culture can be combined with authoritarianism or semi-authoritarianism, for example, Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, or it can be combined with democratic regimes, such as Japan, Taiwan, and South.

People who adhere to cultural relativism argue that the East Asia has vivid paternalistic power and superior-inferior relations, which will never disappear with the modernization of the social economy. In contrast, rapid social economic shifts will result in an individual sense of insecurity, creating a new form of power dependency (Pye and Pye 1985: 381). In addition, Huntington (1996) argues that Confucianism values group interests greater than individual interests, political authority more than individual freedoms, and social responsibility over individual rights. Meanwhile, Confucian society lacks traditions that guard against the consolidation of national power, and thus the concept of individual rights has never existed. Essentially, Confucian thought encourages social harmony and cooperation, avoids conflict, values the attainment of social order, and maintains hierarchical social structures. More importantly, Confucian thought regards society and the country as identical, and thus leaves no space for autonomous social groups. These characteristics of traditional East Asian culture will not assist the development of democracy in the region.

In contrast, institutional theory argues that democratic transition will lead to changes in political behavior, attitude, and culture. Democratization creates new political opportunity

![Figure 14.1: The mean factor score of East Asia.](image)
Is there still an Asian way?

structures and new channels for participation, leading to changes in political values. Therefore, from the perspective of system theory, democratic values will strengthen as democratic participation increases. Longer experiences living under democracy will produce stronger democratic values. In addition, under democratic systems, greater satisfaction with participation in democracy and higher levels of participation are both associated with greater democratic values (Di Palma 1990: 144–52; Przeworski 1986: 50–3; Rustow 1970: 344–5).

Finally, political systems also play an important role. Different institutional designs will affect the effectiveness of democracy, while also influencing the politicization of social cleavages and the development of the party system. These factors directly affect the political participation of citizens, as well as the development of democratic values and legitimacy. Curtis (1998: 222) has noted that in traditional East Asian societies, democratic culture was very weak. Nonetheless, the promotion of democratization in East Asia has produced a stable democratic culture.

Table 14.4 reports the result of the multilevel analysis when we anchor the conception of political culture by OTA and DSI. Among the four major groups of explanatory variables at the individual level, education has significant explanatory power for OTA but no significant influence on DSI. This indicates that higher levels of education can change traditional views on authority but have no effect on group interests vs. individual interests. Age has a significant influence on OTA and DSI, meaning that lower age produces higher OTA and DSI scores, showing lower adherence to traditionalism and supporting modernization theory. However, urban residence had a relatively small effect. In addition, gender differences had a very significant effect. Females had higher OTA and DSI scores, indicating weaker adherence to traditional values. Overall, our microlevel analysis found greater supporting evidence for the modernization theory explanation.

We turn to examine the macro-level coefficients for contextual effects. As shown in the lower section of Table 14.4, among five contextual variables specified in the random coefficient model, two have the significant statistical power to account for the variation of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 14.4 Multilevel analysis result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Covariates</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Individual-level effects</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextual effects</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom House Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buddhism dummy as reference</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam dummy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic dummy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confucian dummy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: t statistics in parentheses. Level of significance: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

country means of political culture. The aggregate level of Freedom House Score is found to be negatively associated with both traditional political cultures, while Confucian (Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore) and Catholic societies (the Philippines) are positively associated with DSI. The two macro predictors, GDP per capita and Islam society on the other hand, show little explanatory power. Moreover, the macro-level result also contradicts the individual-level findings, because institutional factors now have the strongest explanatory power.

Conclusion

Is there an “Asian way”? Pye and Pye (1985) suggest that the “Asian way” is a valid response to people’s needs and will help ensure community solidarity. He predicts that some new version of modern society will emerge from Asia’s accelerating transformation and that it is likely to be a form of democracy that is blended with much that Westerners might regard as authoritarian.

This chapter found significant differences in OTA between East Asian countries, and a strong modernization effect, especially from education and age. From this, we predict that OTA in East Asian countries will gradually converge with the West. However, on the DSI dimension, cross-national differences are very small, and collectivist tendencies are strong across the region, in contrast to the Western emphasis on individual rights. However, democratic reform can increase DSI scores. This chapter has shown that it may be too soon to claim that East Asia does not have values that are distinctive from the West. However, our data also show that these values are undergoing a gradual process of transition. At the individual level, the most important factor is modernization and its effect on OTA. At the macro level, the most important factor is democratization and its effect on DSI. If East Asia continues to modernize and become more democratic, its political culture in the future will be increasingly close to that of the West.

Across the eleven different societies, while traditional values are not immutable to the forces of socioeconomic modernization, they, nevertheless, have demonstrated its staying power despite of rapid pace of modernization and divergent experiences of democratization. The living experiences under different political systems leave marks on people’s value orientation in the domain of personal ethnics, notwithstanding the Cultural Revolution in China. Brian Girvin (1989) once pointed out that when established political culture engages with certain pressure that forces it to change, a specific reaction will occur. The microlevel culture changes first; then the meso-level culture; and, finally, the macro-level culture, which is composed of the values and symbols of collective goals. This latter structure is highly resilient as it is built on the beliefs of the entire society.

Our descriptive analysis lends some support to the claim of modernization theorists that traditionalism and liberal democracy do not go together in East Asia. The macro-level evidence confirms that the value systems of traditionalism and liberal democracy are incompatible across time. In addition, liberal democracy is expected to eclipse traditionalism in the future, given the trend of liberal democracy and traditionalism across generations in East Asia.

Notes

1 Yu-tzung Chang is Professor of Political Science, National Taiwan University; Yun-han Chu is Distinguished Research Fellow, Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica; and Mark
Weatherall is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Center for East Asia Democratic Studies, National Taiwan University.

With regard to developments and trends in cross-national survey research in the 1990s, refer to Heath et al. (2005).

Zakaria even believes that liberal autocracies (such as countries before the 1940s and Hong Kong today) are preferable to “illiberal democracies.”

Huntington (1996: 11–2) quotes Lee Kuan Yew’s argument that East Asians are more interested in “good government” (meaning economic development, political stability, social harmony, efficiency, honesty, and integrity) than in “democratic government.”

In the model, we took Buddhist countries (Thailand and Myanmar) as reference group. Islamic countries include Malaysia and Indonesia.

**Bibliography**

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