

stimulating reconsideration of our own understandings of the political orders of democratic Southeast Asia.

MICHAEL J. MONTESANO  
*Southeast Asian Studies Programme*  
*National University of Singapore*

***Democracy in Malaysia: Discourses and Practices.* Edited by Francis Loh Kok Wah and Khoo Boo Teik.** Richmond, Surrey, U.K: Curzon Press, 2002. 274pp.

This edited volume of essays examines democracy in Malaysia in the 1990s. It is both a timely and a welcome addition to the growing body of works that have sought to examine the political, social, and economic processes associated with democracy in Malaysia, particularly during the 1990s. The strength of this volume lies in the broad scope of issues that it brings to bear on the study of democracy in Malaysia. The innovative approaches used by the contributors in pursuing the questions posed in each chapter provide the reader with an insight into a set of issues, actors, and processes associated with the study of democracy in Malaysia seldom found in works of a similar nature. Many of the issues and topics raised in these essays are also relevant for comparative political analysis with other cases in Southeast Asia.

The introductory chapter (Chapter 1), written by the editors Khoo Boo Teik and Francis Loh Kok Wah, provides a concise literature review of democracy in Malaysia since independence. It also lays out the wider scope of this volume of essays, which is to provide “an updated examination of Malaysia’s political system, civil society, public institutions and dominant discourses”, as well as to offer a comparative “understanding of ‘discourses and practices of democracy’ in Southeast Asia”.

The rest of the essays in the volume is divided into two parts. The first part, titled “Discourses of Democracy”, comprises essays on developmentalism and democracy, the Asian values debate, and the role of Islam in the democratic politics of Malaysia. This part is comparatively more theoretical in its orientation, particularly in terms of linking some of the political developments in the Malaysian case to the normative and theoretical assumptions found in the literature on democracy. The second part, titled “The Practice of Democracy”, is more empirical in nature, and includes examinations of the media,

public administration, “political NGOs”, and the role of women’s movements in democratization.

In “Developmentalism and the Limits of Democratic Discourse” (Chapter 2), Francis Loh describes the rise of a consumerist/materialist culture among the emerging or new middle classes, which manifests itself politically in individuals seeking to achieve liberties and freedoms in the private sphere, rather than pursuing political equality and justice in the public sphere, much less the institutionalization of these freedoms in the political system. In this sense, Loh writes that the “politics of ethnicism” has largely been replaced by the “discourse of developmentalism”, the suggestion here being that this is a change in political culture across racial/ethnic lines. Loh argues that the “discourse of developmentalism” explains to some extent the pragmatic approach adopted by the new middle classes in Malaysia towards political change, particularly with regard to the issue of greater democratization. By explaining the ways in which political and economic forces have shaped the pragmatic political culture among the rising middle classes, this essay has interesting implications for our understanding of the role of these political/social actors as agents of political change, not just within the Malaysian context but also for the region as a whole.

Khoo Boo Teik’s “Nationalism, Capitalism and ‘Asian Values’” (Chapter 3) provides an interesting interpretation of the Asian values position — one that views it through the prism of the world-view held by one of its most prominent advocates, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. The question remains whether contextualizing the Asian values position in this way has the effect of strengthening or weakening the arguments attributed to it. After all, to the extent that elements of these various representations of Mahathir’s world-view continue to resonate among some political leaders, intellectuals, and even the general public in Malaysia (and in the region), the Asian values debate would remain relevant to the study of democracy here, at least as a “counter-discourse” to liberal democratic governance.

In “Muslim Politics and the Discourse on Democracy” (Chapter 4), Syed Ahmad Hussein not only situates Muslim politics in Malaysia within the wider context of the development of political Islam in other regions of the world, but also juxtaposes the discourse of Muslim politics in Malaysia with that of democracy. By interweaving these two areas of study, Syed Ahmad’s essay argues that the Islamic Party of Malaysia is most effective politically when it is able to successfully incorporate democratic themes within an “Islamic paradigm”, while at the same time exploiting some of the areas of weakness in the governing coalition.

Part Two of this volume begins with two essays on the media in Malaysia, by Zaharom Nain and Mustafa K. Anuar respectively. Zaharom's essay, "The Structure of the Media Industry: Implications for Democracy" (Chapter 5), describes the ways in which the institutional constraints on the (mainstream) media combined with the political-economic background of its ownership structures severely constrains the media's capacity to play the role of an active agent in liberalizing the flow of information between the government and the governed. In "Defining Democratic Discourses" (Chapter 6), Mustafa traces the historical legacy behind the restricted role of the media, and links it to the state's successful consolidation of its control over the function of the media through the post-independence years, up to the 1990s. One of the effects of this, according to Mustafa, is the lack of credibility, in the eyes of the general population, of the mainstream media as purveyors of accurate information, particularly when such information is unfavourable to the government. This, in turn, has resulted in the emergence and rapid growth of an alternative media in Malaysia, which provides "democratic space" that is lacking in the mainstream media.

In "Public Administration: The Effects of Executive Dominance" (Chapter 7), Lim Hong Hai examines an area which has not been written on much, and that is "external controls" on public administration in Malaysia. Lim argues that accountability and democratic control of public administration in Malaysia are threatened by weak or ineffective control over the "political executive". Furthermore, the prospects of accountability structures emerging that are autonomous of executive control are diminished by the level of dominance exerted by the ruling party in the political system.

In "Political Non-Governmental Organizations: Ideals and Realities" (Chapter 8), Saliha Hassan provides a descriptive account of "politically engaged NGOs" and their relationship with the state, as well as the different "political discourses" used by both the "political NGOs" and the state. She argues that "political NGOs" desire a greater participatory role in the political process, as part of civil society in Malaysia. Yet, even as these "political NGOs" attempt to consolidate their role in the democratic process, they are constantly negotiating with the state over the parameters of their political role. Saliha raises questions about the dominant role of the state in delineating the spheres of political activity between the state and civil society, even as she paradoxically recognizes the importance of a strong state. Herein lies the challenge for the "political NGOs" — carving out a significant role for themselves in a political environment that is dominated by a strong state.

In "At the Center and the Periphery: The Contributions of Women's Movements to Democratization" (Chapter 9), Maznah Mohamad

delineates women's movements in Malaysia into two categories: mainstream women's groups, and "marginal" groups. Interestingly, according to Maznah, it is the latter that have played a more significant role in advancing women's issues and interests in the political sphere. This is because mainstream groups are often "entrenched in formal politics" and tend to view their role as one that complements the ruling structures rather than one that challenges them.

Individually, the essays provide rich background information. They are also theoretically informed and well written. As a collection, this volume is successful in its explicit aim of demonstrating that "the Malaysian political system in the 1990s was undergoing important changes". More significantly, these essays enrich our understanding of Malaysian politics by explaining the ways in which these changes did not result in the political system as a whole becoming more liberal democratic. This volume makes a contribution to the scholarship on democracy in Malaysia by offering a sophisticated set of essays that are geared towards advanced students of Malaysian politics and of Southeast Asia in general.

SURAIN SUBRAMANIAM  
*Department of Political Science*  
*University of North Carolina — Asheville*  
*North Carolina, United States*

***East Asia Imperilled: Transnational Challenges to Security.* By Alan Dupont.** Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 335pp.

One of the by-products of the global "war on terror" following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States has been a renewed interest in transnational security threats, including terrorism, transnational crime, transboundary pollution, human smuggling, and disease. Alan Dupont has written a cogent and useful book detailing why these threats are growing in the Asia-Pacific region and, more importantly, why policy-makers should take them seriously.

Once viewed as the "stepchild" of security studies, transnational security issues are emerging as critical challenges to states in the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, these "complex, inter-connected and multi-dimensional" threats, as Dupont describes them, cannot be analysed or understood with the traditional tools of realism, which places the state as the most important actor in international affairs. Dupont asserts that