

The Prospects for Democratization in Pacific Asia: Findings and Perspectives

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At the early twenty-first, democratization dominates the political agenda of many countries in the world and also in Asia. In the course of three decades of „Third Wave of Democratization“, the democracies in this part of the world tripled in number. This impressive figure, however, conceals the ambivalence of the actual political development in this region. On the one hand, one must indeed confirm the trend towards more democracy. On the other hand, the trend towards democracy is more precarious in this region than in other parts of the world. From the vantage point of research in comparative democracy, the dominating impression is one of a high level of heterogeneity in trends underlying democratic development. This article will attempt, in a systematic, comparative way, to analyze trends towards and prospects for democratization in Asia in five steps. Firstly, the conception of democracy informing this investigation will be explained. This will be followed by an outline for an empirical topography of political regimes. Third, we are going to analyze two main trends in the democratic development in Asia: Firstly, most young democracies in Asia are more successful in the institutionalization of political rights of participation than in the guaranteeing of law and order and civil liberties. The trend towards democracy turns out to be a trend towards „defective“ or diminished forms of democracy. Secondly, Asia drifts apart with respect to “democratic quality”. Or, more specifically: a dividing line runs separating the basically positive developments in the direction of liberal democracy in Northeast Asia from the stagnating or regressive developments in South and Southeast Asia. In a fourth step, theoretical considerations and empirical findings will be presented to explain the diverging developments of democracy in the region. The analysis then closes with an outlook over the future prospects of democratic transformation in the region.

I. The Concept of Democracy

Democracy analysis ultimately depends on the concept of democracy informing it. Probably the most influential definition of democracy is Robert Dahl's concept of polyarchy (DAHL 1971). According to Dahl, polyarchy – as a realistic variation of democracy – is defined by the two interactive dimensions of political participation and contestation. Dahl's definition is succinct and elegant. At the same time, however, it is insufficient for the understanding of a phenomenon which has increasingly occupied research in comparative democracy in recent years: the appearance of political regimes which, strictly definable neither as “functioning” polyarchies nor as open autocracies, are to be situated in the “grey area between democracy and dictatorship” (BENDEL/CROISSANT/RÜB 2002).

A look at several relevant democracy measurements highlights the relevance of the problem. According to the U.S.-based *Freedom House*-institute, the proportion of “electoral democracies” to all countries in the world has grown in the last 30 years from a 25 to today more than 60 percent. In the year 2001, 120 of the total 192 world states had a democratically elected government (FREEDOM HOUSE 2002). So, without any doubt, the world today is more democratic than ever; political alternatives to democracy have lost much of their relevance, both ideological and factual. But *Freedom House* deliberately chooses the term “electoral” and not “liberal democracies”. Both the annual monitoring carried out by *Freedom House* and several comparative studies or case studies show that, in many systems undergoing political change, although *de jure* political rights, civil liberties, and the institutions of constitutionalism and the rule of law are found, a whole battery of *de facto* restrictions, usually informal ones, curb the effective working of the formal rules and significantly distort their value.

One theoretical concept, which allows the systematic division of such new regimes from liberal democracies, a typological understanding of their internal differences, the revelation of the causes for their existence and their demise, as well as a causal explanation of the dynamics specific to their development, is the concept of “defective democracy” (MERKEL/CROISSANT 2000; MERKEL ET AL. 2003). It itself makes use of a multidimensional conception of democracy, complementing DAHL's concept of polyarchy by adding the two dimensions of effective power to govern and the rule of

law. These dimensions form the conceptual coordinates, with which one may distinguish between different forms of democracy.

These dimensions are:

- 1) the dimension of vertical legitimation and control (Dahl's polyarchy dimension),
- 2) the dimension of the effective power to govern,
- 3) the dimension of the rule of law and horizontal accountability.

ad. 1) In liberal democracies, the access to political power is guaranteed by the universal right to vote and the conduct of fair elections. If a relevant segment of the adult citizenry becomes excluded on the basis of its race, ethnic background, sex, religion, property, education, or political conviction, the democracy is thereby “defective”.

ad. 2) In liberal democracies, the effective ruling power lies exclusively in the hands of representatives, who have been elected generally and fairly. If “veto powers” - e.g. the military, a guerrilla force, or a militia - withhold certain political domains from the grasp of these democratic representatives, the democracy is thereby “defective”.

ad. 3) In liberal democracies, democratic power is linked to arrangements stemming from the constitution and the rule of law. Especially relevant to this context are the reciprocal control of the powers of state and the guarantee of fundamental civil rights and liberties. If the representatives, empowered via free and general elections, compromise these fundamental rights, if the reciprocal control of power becomes suspended through circumvention of the parliament or of justice, or if the integrity of the rule of law falls under deliberate and chronic attack, the democracy is thereby “defective”.

These considerations require, however, complementary explanations related to the complexity of multidimensional concepts. First of all, even defective democracies must display an extensive structural basis for a democratic ruling system in order for them not merely to represent a facade for authoritarian patterns of government. This *democratic substance* must exist even when partial limitations on one of the three dimensions of democracy are at work. It remains guaranteed if the channels both of the effective contestation of central power positions and of the control of power cannot be closed off unilaterally, whereby an autocratic regime would again arise.

The second explanation concerns in particular the vertical dimension of legitimation and control. The prerequisite for the control and legitimation of democratic rule is, first and foremost, free and fair elections. It is characteristic of real electoral alternatives exist, and thus also the danger of the loss of power as a result of the general electoral will. Elections only bear

democratic significance if one can principally designate the position of power as being vacant. These considerations may be summarized by a typology of defective democracies. Depending upon the dimension of democracy, we strike upon four subtypes of defective democracy:

Table 1: Types of defective Democracy

Damaged Dimension	Type
1) Dimension of vertical limitation and control	Exclusive democracy
2) Dimension of the rule of law and horizontal control	Illiberal democracy Delegative democracy
3) Effective ruling power	Enclave democracy

Source: MERKEL et al. (2003).

II. A Topography of Democratization in Asia

Comparative research on democratization in the 20th Century comes to a clear result. The Third Wave of Democratization left its weakest traces at the coast of the Asian continent. As measured by the annual evaluations of political rights and civil liberties made by the already-mentioned Freedom House institute, the continent being in the last place in terms of the realization of these basic conditions of democracy. Of course the term “continent” is, for the purposes of political science, a far too wide-meshed one to function as a meaningful taxonomic principle. Even if one compares the three subregions commonly used by comparative Asian studies, i.e. South, Southeast, and Northeast Asia, the result would immediately have to be relativized: According to the data from Freedom House for the years between 1974 and 2002, the proportion of „electoral“ democracies among states in the region grew from 6 to almost 41 percent. One can distinguish between four groups of countries.

Although the number of democracies has risen significantly in the last 20 years, the regional wave of democratization remains fragile and limited. More than half of Asian countries are governed autocratically. Even where democratization has occurred and where democracy has survived, the way to consolidated liberal democracy is a long one. On the contrary, most young democracies remain unconsolidated. Most of them display significant defects in the area of the rule of law and democratic constitutionalism, in the civilian control over the military, in the struggle against corruption,

in the development of stable political institutions, or in the peaceful resolution of social conflicts.

Table 2: Political Regimes in Pacific Asia (2003)

	South Asia	Southeast Asia	Northeast Asia
Electoral democracies (“Second Wave”)	Sri Lanka India	--	Japan
Electoral democracies (“Third Wave”)	Bangladesh	Indonesia Philippines Thailand	South Korea Taiwan
Failed democracies	Nepal (Democracy suspended in October 2002) Pakistan (Coup d’état, October 1999)	Cambodia (Putsch, July 1997)	--
Autocracies without democratization	Bhutan Maldives	Brunei Laos Malaysia Myanmar Singapore Vietnam	China North Korea

Source: Classification by the author based on information by Freedom House (2002).

III. Trends in Democratization

Though, in „defective democracies“, the formal procedures of electoral democracy are in place, they are combined with autocratic elements. We must distinguish, however, between regimes with fully-developed and relatively stable defects on the one hand and “defective democracies“, which have undergone a more or less continuous development towards liberal democracies in the last few years on the other, although most of such regimes have not overcome all their defects.

In South Asia, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have gone through a transition to democracy between 1988 and 1990. For the Nepali government, the foundational elections in the year 1991 saw the birth of a genuine anti-authoritarian rulership, the Nepali Congress. However, a successful elite settlement between the old authoritarian ruling elite and groups of the political left, which could have stabilized the young democracy, did not occur. Maoist guerilla fighters rather fight a revolutionary war in large areas of the country against the central government in Kathmandu. They find

support among the poor, the intelligentsia, ethnic minorities, and the rural population. The massacre of the royal family in June 2001 further aggravated the crisis of democracy. Finally, in October 2002, King GYANENDRA took over direct governmental power by decree, dissolved parliament, and appointed a governmental cabinet personally answerable to him. Thus the constant erosion of democracy in Nepal ended in a barely disguised power takeover on behalf of the monarch.

In Bangladesh too, the democratic process is characterized by strong polarization and a high level of political violence. The various segments of the political elite exploit their democratically gained power to the same degree as ever, either to secure their own economic interests (or those of their families) or simply to get revenge on their political opponents. Technically, the judiciary is politically independent. *De facto*, however, the lower courts are hardly functional and enjoy for that reason very little prestige and trust on behalf of the population. Because of the poor functionality of the courts and the lack of acceptance of the constitutional principles, the rule of law is in a precarious condition and, in rural areas, actually hardly present any longer. In recent years, cases of politically motivated interference in the independence of the judiciary, particularly of the High Judicial Court, resulted in a widespread breach of confidence in the judiciary (ISLAM 2002), and the fight against corruption is being used increasingly as a political weapon. With regard to their civil rights, most citizens live under the thin protection of a „low intensity citizenship“ (O'DONNELL 1994).

Democracy in Pakistan already collapsed in 1999. Granted, it had already been clear in preceding years that democracy was hardly capable of getting the serious social and economic problems besetting the country in order. Although a multiparty system and an elected government existed, the principles of a loyal opposition and of tamed politics remained unknown. After 1988, even democratically elected prime ministers governed by decree, marginalized the parliament, and stood in conflict with other constitutional organs, such as the presidency and the high judiciary court. While Islamic movements gained in power, large numbers of the population had lost their trust in democratic institutions and in the political elite. In rural areas, big landowners and armed clans took over the state's monopoly on the use of force. The governmental practices of Prime Minister SHARIF increasingly destabilized the fragile balance between governmental institutions, civil politics and militia, and the politically dominant familial clans. The desta-

bilization of the democratic institutions and attempts to remove commanders disagreeable to the government from the highest positions in the armed forces finally provoked, in October 1999, the military putsch.

Democratization in South East Asia was achieved, between 1986 and 1999, in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and in Thailand. In Cambodia, the Paris Peace Accord in 1991 paved the way for the first free and fair national elections in the country's history in May 1993. With the strong support of the West and of Japan, an interim government of the United Nations was put together, which was responsible for the pacifying and democratization of the country. The elections led to the victory of the oppositional FUNCINPEC over the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), which had governed the civil-war torn country since 1979. The CPP refused, however, to accept the result. The crisis was solved temporarily, when both parties formed a coalition government lead by Prime minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh (FUNCINPEC) and co-Prime minister HUN SEN (CPP). In spite of their defeat, the CPP continued to dominate the state apparatus. Continuous conflicts between the coalition partners escalated in July 1997 to armed fights between both parties, interpreted by most observers as a putsch on the part of the CPP against FUNCINPEC. Since then, the CPP has extended and secured its power (PEOU 2000). The parliamentary elections of 1998 and 2003, in the wake of both of which new coalition governments under Hen Sen were formed, were „clean“, at least technically speaking; in reality, pressure and threats during election run-ups allowed the CPP to assert itself as a hegemonic force.

Also for Indonesia, the prospects for successful democratic transition remain uncertain. Built upon the ruins of the „New Order“ regime of president SUHARTO, Indonesia's democracy finds itself in a virulent crisis of stateness. Conflicts between the central government and ethnic minorities are signs of a failed nation building. One of the most urgent problems for stabilizing young democracies is the development of a stable and efficient relationship between presidency and parliament. Favored through the electoral system, the election of 1999 produced a highly fragmented multiparty system and, consequently, a legislature in which no single party achieved majority status. Finally, ABDURAHMAN WAHID was elected as a compromise candidate, whose own party occupied less than 10 percent of the seats in parliament. After the inauguration of President WAHID, his grand coalition cabinet supported by the six largest parties proved as unstable and inca-

pable of using its nominal majority in parliament for putting policies through effectively. The conflict between the president and the increasingly hostile parliament reached its peak in impeachment proceedings against Wahid in July 2001.

Reforming civil-military relations is another core challenge to Indonesian democracy. Given the powerful position of the armed forces during the authoritarian regime, it is hardly surprising that civilian control is weak. Democratization forced the armed forces to concessions to the new democratic authorities (HEINZ 2001: 124). However, the armed forces continue to operate in problem regions like Aceh or West Papua according to old methods. Even after the regime change, “the activities of the officers are intertwined with the local level in many ways – economic, social, and political – and political control is hardly possible under these conditions” (OP CIT.: 122). In sum, the transition process in Indonesia has led to a fragile and formal democracy, settled somewhere in the gray zone between democracy and autocracy, whose short-term stability rests essentially upon the co-option of previously excluded actors and the informal balance of power within the fragmented ruling coalition, which however, for this very reason, is unable to catch up on lasting authoritarian legacies or to deepen the minimal democratic standards it realized.

Democratic defects are also to be recognized in the Philippines. Elections are of low quality and political violence remains highly prevalent. The military has been largely subordinated to the political control of democratically-legitimated authorities. Until the onset of the 90s, however, veto powers and reserved domains have been grave defects, considerably weakening the functioning of democracy, the elected representatives’ power to govern, and the impetus behind political reform (CROISSANT 2002). Since the Philippine Congress hitherto acts primarily as an institution of vested interests, the functioning horizontal accountability comes, paradoxically, to be a disadvantage to the the political system’s ability to reform. Both administrative and tax reforms, which could have contributed to the increased ability of the weak state to act, failed because of the resistance of the Congress. Social and economic reforms, which, on a middle-term basis, contribute to the weakening of the strongly asymmetrical distribution of societal power resources, have failed up till now as a result of the resistance of this veto player. Political, economic, and societal reforms necessary for the removal of defects and their causes hardly have a chance to be realized in

the functioning system of checks and balances between the president and the congress (CROISSANT 2003). The weak protection of civil liberties, the inefficiency of the courts, the endemic corruption of the judiciary, the administration, and the police, the brutality of the armed forces in insurgent regions, the insufficiency of the state’s power in parts of its own territory, and grave socio-economic inequality lead to a situation in the Philippines, such that, there too, much of the population can be merely said to enjoy a „low-intensity citizenship”.

In Thailand, the improvement of various democratic standards – above all the introduction of a directly-elected senate, the improved protection of the political rights of Thai citizens, and the cutting back of the political influence of the military – contrasts with the intensification of other defects. The greatest successes in the removal of democratic defects were achieved since democratization in 1992, effected by the neutralization of veto powers via the subordination of reserved public domains under the power of democratically-legitimized authorities. This applies above all to the role of the armed forces. The Thai military transformed itself in the 90s from an undeniable veto-power to an influential interest group in Thai politics (CROISSANT 2002). However, weak rule of law represents a grave hindrance to the effective functioning of the Thai state of rule of law. The binding power of constitutional norms on the executive, the bureaucracy and the legislature is weak, and the relation between state and citizens marked by the frequent non-observance of civil rights of protection – this indeed more and more in recent years, as indicated by massive human rights violations by the police and the army in the fight against drug-related criminality and separatist insurgence in the Moslem-dominated Southern provinces.

Compared to Southeast Asia, the young democracies in Northeast Asia seem to be on the path from defective to liberal democracy. With some reservations, this statement is to be applied, firstly, to South Korea. After almost forty years of authoritarian rule, the countrywide protest for democracy in June 1987 marked the breakthrough for democratic transition. In free and fair elections, ROH TAE-WOO, the candidate of the government party, was elected to the presidency in December of the same year. Headed by an ex-general, the government was quickly able to integrate the military into a democratic system. This helped, during the first years of democratic rule, to bridge a consensus among the population and the political elite. This became clear in 1993, when KIM YOUNG-SAM took over the office of

the presidency, the first civilian to do so after over 30 years of military-dominated politics. Finally, the election of former dissident KIM DAE-JUNG as president in 1997 proved that electoral competition, including the possibility of power shifts among parties, had become the only game in town.

However, this cannot be conflated with the consolidation of Korean democracy. Thus, for example, SAXER (2002: 222f.) correctly points out the difficult legacies of the national security and developmental state, that hinder democratic consolidation. The defects of Korean democracy have culminated at present, above all, in the area of horizontal accountability. Since its democratization in 1987/88, the Korean governmental system has oscillated between the two extreme poles of “delegative democracy” and chronic institutional gridlock, depending on whether the president’s party had a majority in the National Assembly. Whenever the executive had a majority in parliament at its disposal, the relation between the president and the national assembly became characterized by an “imperial” president, who largely shifted the material production of policy from the legislative arena to that of his own decisions and who rid himself of annoying checks on the part of the parliament (“delegative democracy”). However, as soon as the president saw himself confronted with an oppositional majority in parliament, reciprocal blockades became the rule, even to the point of the complete paralysis of the political system, as most recently in early 2004. In both cases, this was detrimental to the consolidation of democracy.

Of the nine cases of democratization in the Third Wave in Asia, the only country in which transition led to a democratic regime without significant defects is Taiwan. Surely, there remains a need for reforms for the elimination of continuing legacies left behind from more than four decades of authoritarian rule, for the fight against “money politics” or “mafia politics” (ALAGAPPA 2001), and for the strengthening of the rule of law. Still, human rights, political rights, elections, and institutions of the rule of law have been realized effectively. This does not mean that the process of democratic consolidation in Taiwan has been completed, as the last few years have shown. Similar to the situation in South Korea three years prior, the first-ever election victory of an oppositional candidate for the presidency (CHEN CHUI-BIAN) in March 2000 was a milestone in the democratic development of Taiwan. Nevertheless, the peaceful take-over of power brought a series of new problems for democratic consolidation. As at least to some extent a result of the semi-presidential system and competing majorities in

the executive and the legislative, the first two years of the new government were marked by permanent gridlock, which led to serious problems regarding the political stability and the institutional inefficiency of the democratic system (CHU 2001). It is debatable whether this deficits of governance should be seen as acceptable forms of political dispute issuing forth from the interplay of an unfavorable semi-presidential system on the one side and, on the other, political parties yet inexperienced in their respective roles, or whether or not they indicate deeper problems besetting democratic transformation. At least one fact not to be ignored is that the process of the consolidation of Taiwanese democracy has by no means been successfully completed. The political turbulence in the wake of the extremely narrowly re-election of CHEN in March 2004 probably also supports this interpretation. Without intending to overstress its democracy-threatening potential – to what extent it will lead to a weakening or even to a strengthening of democratic consolidation is a question the future will answer -, it seems to support the thesis of an unconsolidated democracy.

This short overview reflects the differences in the dynamics and the profiles of democratic transition. By way of a summary, Table 3 assigns the young democracies to different subtypes of democracy:

Table 3: Political Outcomes of Democratization

Autocracy	Defective democracy			Liberal democracy
	Exclusive	Illiberal	Enclave democracy	
Cambodia		Bangladesh	Indonesia	Korea (1992-1998; 1999-00) Taiwan
Nepal (since 2002)		Philippines		
		Thailand		
Pakistan				

Source: MERKEL ET AL (2003: 174).

IV. Primary Causes of Defective Democracies

What accounts for why and how defective democracies originate? Some years ago, SAMUEL HUNTINGTON (1996: 9) asserted that the challenge for new democracies was not “overthrow but erosion: the intermitted or grad-

ual weakening of democracy by those elected to lead it". JUAN LINZ (2000: XL-XLI), on the other hand, points out that political elites are not always responsible for the deficiencies of the democratic system. Anti-democratic rebels, separatists unwilling to seek compromise, disloyal soldiers, or unfavorable socioeconomic conditions may constitute problems of democratic governance which, although they foster defects of democracy, can hardly be traced back solely to the power-seeking strategies of elected officials.

These opposing views essentially reflect the age-old debate in social sciences on the importance of structure or political action in affecting political development. They function as an initial indication of the difficulties in identifying the primary causes of defective democracy. Given the sheer diversity of the defects of democracy, there is probably no one primary cause which leads to illiberal, enclave, or delegative democracies, but rather a set of causes. For lack of space and setting aside the influence of international factors as an explanatory variable, we focus on four categories of potential causes accounting for defects of democracy: 1) socio-economic variables, (2) cultural and historical factors, (3) stateness and nation building, and (4) political institutions (CROISSANT 2002; MERKEL ET AL. 2003).

1. Socio-economic Determinants of Democratic Development in Asia

The effect of a country's level of socioeconomic modernization on the democratic character of its political institutions is one of the most widely discussed questions in social sciences. Quantitative research has confirmed that a comparatively high level of socioeconomic modernization, the broad dispersion of 'power resources' and a low ethnic, linguistic, or religious fragmentation positively correlate in the effectiveness of political rights and civil liberties (CLAGUE ET AL. 2001; VANHANEN 1997). Comparing political and civil freedom ratings in Asia thus provides an opportunity to investigate whether defects of democracy are linked to key socioeconomic determinants.

Table 4 clearly suggests a strong positive relationship between political and civil rights and different levels of economic prosperity, the distribution of economic or social power resources and economic inequality. The Pearson's correlation coefficient r for GDP per capita and political rights is -0.55, respectively -0.637 for civil liberties. For political rights and IPR it is -0.564 (civil rights -0.542) and for GINI coefficient it is between -0.584 (political rights) and -0.435 (civil liberties) (lower numbers indicate higher

freedom in the Freedom House rating system). While the correlation of political and civil freedom with economic development is far from perfect, as some outliers from the regional trend suggest (most notably Singapore and Brunei), the analysis suggests that these variables partially account for different degrees of political and civil rights in Asia. In intra-regional comparison, the status of political and civil rights is better the higher the GDP per capita, and the more equally power resources are dispersed and income is distributed in society.

Table 4: Social and economic determinants in the development of Asian democracies

	Political rights ^a	Civil rights ^a	BIP p.c. ^b	IPR ^c	GINI Coefficient ^d	Ethnic fractionalization ^e
Bangladesh	3	4	1.602	2.5	0.33	n.a.
Bhutan	7	6	1.412	0.6	n.a.	n.a.
Brunei	7	5	16.779	3.9	n.a.	n.a.
Cambodia	6	5	1.446	0.4	0.40	0.30
India	2	3	2.358	5.4	0.38	0.89
Indonesia	3	4	3.043	10.1	0.31	0.74
Japan	1	2	27.755	37.4	0.25	0.01
Laos	7	6	1.575	2.6	0.30	0.60
Malaysia	5	5	9.068	10.4	0.49	0.72
Maldives	6	5	4.485	9.7	n.a.	n.a.
Myanmar	7	7	1.027	7.7	n.a.	0.47
Nepal	3	4	1.327	0.9	0.36	0.70
North Korea	7	7	n.a.	1.1	n.a.	0.00
Pakistan	6	5	1.928	3.5	0.31	0.64
Philippines	2	3	3.917	15.1	0.46	0.74
PR China	7	6	3.976	3.5	0.40	0.13
Singapore	5	5	23.356	21.6	0.39	0.42
South Korea	2	2	17.380	38.8	0.31	0.00
Sri Lanka	3	4	3.530	10.5	0.48	0.47
Taiwan	1	2	17.200	31.1	0.32	n.a.
Thailand	2	3	6.402	12.9	0.41	0.66
Vietnam	7	6	1.996	2.7	0.35	0.26

a FREEDOM HOUSE for the year 2001/02.

b BIP per capita PPP US\$, 2000, partially estimated.

c Index of Power Resources, 1993.

d 1990-2000, different years.

e Index of ethno-linguistic fractionalization, developed by TAYLOR and HUDSON according to data from *Atlas Narodov Mira*. The higher the value, the greater the fractionalization.

Source: Freedom House (2002); UNDP (2002:149-52); DGBAS (2002a); ESCAP (2002); DGBAS (2002b); VANHANEN (1997: 88f.); TAYLOR/HUDSON (1975: 271-274).

Generally, one may conclude that the probability of greater political and civil freedom in Asia is strongly affected by the characteristics of economic wealth, income inequality, and distribution of power resources exhibited by a given country. If the Freedom House ratings are used as indicators of democratic quality, the prospects for democracy are the better the higher the level of economic development, the broader the dispersion of economic and cultural power resources, and the more equal the income distribution in society. Where cultural resources and economic wealth are dispersed so broadly that no single group within a society can suppress other groups economically by monopolizing cognitive resources or by centralizing economic power in their own hands, the more likely is a cardinal consensus on democracy, and thus arise prospects for the effective use of political and civil rights granted by the constitution. Thus socioeconomic obstacles seem to be an important cause for the deficits of the state of rule of law and ‘low intensity citizenship’ in South and Southeast Asian societies. Semi-modern development paths and cumulative inequalities of status, income, property, and cognitive power resources make the emergence of a pluralistic society difficult. This does not mean that a high GDP per capita leads necessarily to liberal democracy; societies with low socioeconomic modernization are not doomed to autocratic rule or democratic instability. Among the recently democratized countries in Asia, there were more low or middle-income economies than upper-middle or high-income economies. But countries where democracy survived against all odds (Bangladesh) or those in which democracy did not emerge despite high socioeconomic modernization (Singapore) are exceptions. As a rule, expectations of sustainable institutions of liberal democracy in Asia are much higher in more developed societies with a moderate to low degree of socioeconomic inequality than in less developed, more unequal ones.

2. Political Culture and Colonial History

The capacity of civil societies and political parties to force autocratic regimes towards democratization or to pressure a democratic government to adhere to the principles of democracy and the rule of law depends significantly on the society’s political culture and its legacies of political history. Colonial history, for example, has been claimed “to be a significant determinant of democracy in the Third World” (WEINER 1987: 19). Colonialism may affect a country’s prospects for democracy in different ways. Colonial rule may alter the evolution of a country’s political culture and civil soci-

ety; it may accelerate the diffusion of political ideologies and new religious beliefs; former colonial powers often provide an institutional blueprint for post-colonial polities. Most notably, British colonialism has been claimed to be conducive to democratic stability due to its legacy of military professionalism, a well-trained civil service, an independent judiciary, and the pro-democratic disposition of the new countries’ leadership in former colonies. This is potentially of importance for Asia, particularly since its traditional political culture and social values are said to be relatively incompatible with democracy (ZAKARIA 1994).

Table 5: Cultural background, colonial experience, democracy in Asia

	Political regime	Dominant cultural background	Colonial experience
Bangladesh	Democracy	Islam	British
Bhutan	Autocracy	Buddhism	British
Brunei	Autocracy	Islam	British
Cambodia	Autocracy	Buddhism	French
India	Democracy	Hinduism	British
Indonesia	Democracy	Islam	Dutch
Japan	Democracy	Shintoism/ Confucianism	--
Laos	Autocracy	Buddhism	French
Malaysia	Autocracy	Islam	British
Maldives	Autocracy	Islam	British
Myanmar	Autocracy	Buddhism	British
Nepal	Autocracy	Hinduism	--
North Korea	Autocracy	Confucianism	Japan
Pakistan	Autocracy	Islam	British
Philippines	Democracy	Catholicism	Spanish/American
PR China	Autocracy	Confucianism	--
Singapore	Autocracy	Confucianism	British
South Korea	Democracy	Confucianism	Japan
Sri Lanka	Democracy	Buddhism	British
Taiwan	Democracy	Confucianism	Japan
Thailand	Democracy	Buddhism	--
Vietnam	Autocracy	Buddhism	French

Source: Table 1 and Wint (1965).

As illustrated in Table 5, “Asian culture” or colonial experience makes only a weak case for democracy in Asia. There is no positive relationship between British colonialism and (liberal) democracy. Only three out of ten former British colonies have established democracy. Compared to the rest of Asia, there is no significant ‘over-democratic’ achievement in former

British colonies, neither in political nor in civil freedom. Contrary to the “Asian values” thesis, countries with a strong Confucian heritage do quite well in terms of liberal democracy. Three out of six ‘Confucian countries’ (including Japan) have established democracy. Measured by their average scores in political rights and civil liberties, they do far better in terms of freedom than the rest of Asia; Confucian democracy also fare better, on average, than Asia’s democracies in general. There is a strong correlation between Islam and a lack of democracy and freedom. Only two out of six (predominantly) Muslim societies are under democratic rule. The average score of political rights and civil liberties in Islamic countries is lower than the regional average. Buddhism, however, appears to be the most non-democratic culture in Asia. Only two out of seven Buddhist countries have established democracy; the average scores of political rights and civil liberties for Buddhist countries lie far below the regional average.

Apparently, neither cultural background nor colonial experience accounts for democratization and defective democracy in Asia, i.e. at least not in the expected way. There seems to be a negative relationship between British colonialism, Islam, Buddhism and democracy on the one hand and a positive relationship between Confucianism and liberal democracy on the other hand. Yet, the case samples are small. Additionally, profound cultural differences exist within each country. There are large Christian communities in Korea and Vietnam; Japanese culture is a mixture of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shintoism; there are Muslim minorities in Thailand, the Philippines, Myanmar, and India; and Chinese (‘Confucian’) communities exist in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Apparently, cultural and colonial background offers, as an explanatory variable, a rather limited account for democratic development in Asia.

3. Stateness and Nation Building

The relationship between stateness, nation building, and democratization has gained considerable attention in transition studies. Especially JUAN LINZ and ALFRED STEPAN explored this relationship. Their conclusion was, that “(d)emocracy, as a form of governance, presupposes a state. A nation cannot have a democratically elected representation, if this representation is not recognized and institutionalized by a state” (1996: 16). In order for democracy to function, the state monopoly of power must be secured institutionally and the Hobbesian problem of the lack of centralized legitimate use of force be solved. Strong ‘stateness’ requires that the state’s authority *de*

facto covers the entire territory, that a sufficient bureaucratic capacity exists to implement regulations, and that a fundamental agreement is reached that the people under its rule are citizens of the state. The last requirement has also been labeled as that of ‘national unity’, which implies “that the vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political community they belong to” (RUSTOW 1970: 351).

With a view to Asia, one must ascertain that weak stateness and the lack of national identity poses a fundamental problem for liberal democracy in the region. Most states in the region arose in the wake of de-colonization between the late 1940s and the early 1960s. Problems associated with stateness and nation building are not specifically those of the transformation phase, but rather extend back to this de-colonization period. In the past, they had already burdened the political system’s ability to gain stability, although they were then further aggravated by the process of transformation (e.g. Indonesia), among other things.

Problems of stateness and nation-building may be fundamental causes for the emergence of defective democracy. Both concepts are multifarious and difficult to operationalize. KAUFMAN ET AL. (2002) have recently constructed six aggregate governance indicators, two of which may be used to compare at least some facets of the stateness-problem. The first indicator is ‘Political Stability’. It combines several indicators, all of which measure perceptions concerning the likelihood that the government in power will be destabilized or overthrown by possibly unconstitutional or violent means. The second indicator, that of ‘Government Effectiveness’, combines, among other things, assessments of the quality of public service provisions, the quality of the bureaucracy, and the competence of civil servants (IBID.). Their combined results suggest a relationship between the level of political stability, government effectiveness, and democracy. By and large, the indicator values of autocracies are worse than those of ‘electoral democracies’. Although there are exceptions, such as Singapore and Malaysia, both of which rate highly in both of these aspects, it may nonetheless be concluded that the more impaired the political stability, the effectiveness of government, and thus the stateness as a whole of a particular country, the greater the damage is to political rights and civil freedoms and, therefore, the more defective is the democracy.

On the other hand, states with a liberal democratic political regime (Taiwan, Japan) receive better values than defective democracies. Northeast Asia's democracies have a better record than democracies in South and Southeast Asia. The ratings of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia are particularly bad, as are those of the failed democracies in Pakistan, Cambodia, and Nepal. In these countries, the disruption of the state's monopoly of legitimate use of violence in parts of the country prevents public authorities and the courts in particular from protecting the rights of its citizens. Violations of the rule of law and human rights caused either by terrorism on behalf of political extremists or by the state's military and police forces form a daily part of political life. Widespread development problems, corruption, and patronage render the state in South Asia and in some parts of Southeast Asia inefficient.

A look at the degree of ethnic and linguistic fractionalization (see Table 4) gives some indication of the relative challenges faced by nation-building. As Table 4 illustrates, Asia is remarkably diverse in terms of ethno-linguistic fractionalization; there are societies virtually without any minorities (North and South Korea) and heterogeneous societies like Indonesia and the Philippines. A correlation analysis suggests, however, that the probability of improved political and civil rights is not affected by ethnic diversity; that is, that there is no positive relationship between ethnic diversity and the Freedom House ratings. The Pearson's correlation coefficient r for ethnic diversity and political rights is -0.240 , respectively -0.134 for civil liberties, which is statistically insignificant. Thus, different degrees of ethno-linguistic heterogeneity in Asia cannot explain regional differences in the status of political and civil rights, even though differences in ethnicity and religion are a major cause of political conflict and human rights violations in some countries, e.g. the Philippines and Indonesia. This suggests that although ethnic diversity may have a negative effect on democracy, its overall impact on Asia is weak. Moreover, there are clear examples of ethnically diverse countries in the region which enjoy persistent and more-highly-than-average rated political and civil freedoms (India, Thailand). Rather, contemporary inter-ethnic violence is generated by ethnic nationalists, who either reject the citizen-status in the states in which they are members and demand statehood for themselves or who are reluctant to accept the universal right of citizenship for minority groups in their country. Current research on ethnic heterogeneity on the one hand and political vio-

lence and the state of political and civil rights supports this assumption, no matter, what measurements of ethnic heterogeneity are employed (FEARON/LAITIN 2000; FISH/BROOKS 2004). Thus, ethnic nationalism and violence are, to some extent, the outcome of both the political strategies of a country's elite and their constitutional engineering rather than a direct result of ethnic diversity itself.

4. Political Institutions and Political Parties

Socioeconomic determinants, cultural heritage, historical experiences, the stateness variable and ethnicity are all important contextual factors for democratic development, although they do not determine the result of processes of democratization. Research on democratic consolidation suggest that the survival and consolidation of liberal democracy depend not only on structural conditions, but also on the design of political institutions and the calculations, perceptions, preferences, and strategies of political actors. Which type of democracy, which governmental and electoral system is most conducive for a working liberal democracy? Obviously there is no institutional master design constituting, the ideal solution for institutional engineering in young democracy. However, for example, presidentialism has been claimed to be detrimental for the consolidation of liberal democratic constitutionalism, conducive rather to political instability and delegative democracy. In particular, JUAN LINZ (1994) argues that presidential governments in young democracies tend to provoke conflicts between parliament and the (presidential) executive, constitutional breakdown, and a vicious circle of crisis in governance. This is especially so when the constitution gives the head of state considerable legislative powers the president can use, in times of an economic or political crisis, against the spirit of the constitution. Presidents are given the opportunity, at least in some instances, to circumvent challenges to and the control of powers by way of decree. In these ill-defined 'emergency cases', the executive, by way of its own decisions, bestows on itself important legislative authority. Executive usurpation of legislation increasingly debases the parliament "to a forum of demagogic posturing, while the president makes the tough decisions unilateral without the political parties in congress" (ACKERMANN 2000: 647).

Table 6 shows, however, that it is hardly possible to find any general relationship between institutional structures and the success of the consolidation of liberal democracy.

Table 6: Institutional Structural Conditions for Young Democracies in Asia

Country	Governmental system	Type of democracy	Mandate shares of the party of the state or government head during elections in the timespan under observation (first or only parliamentary chamber)			
			Share of mandate in %	Election year	Person	Time in office
Failed democracies						
Cambodia	Parliamentary	n.a.	-	-	-	-
Nepal	Parliamentary	Characterized by majority democracy	40.5	1994	Koirala	1998-1999
			40.5	1994	Bhattarai	1999-2000
			54.1	1999	Koirala	2000-2002
Pakistan	Parliamentary	n.a.	-	-	-	-
Electoral democracies						
Bangladesh	Parliamentary	Characterized by majority democracy	48.7	1996	Hasina	1996-2001
			64.0	2001	Zia	since 2001
Indonesia	Presidential	n.a.	65.0	1997	Habibie	1998-1999
			10.2	1999	Wahid	1999-2001
			30.2	1999	Sukarnoputri	since 2001
Philippines	Presidential	Characterized by consensuality	27.0	1998	Estrada	1998-2001
			35.6	2001	Arroyo	since 2001
South Korea	Presidential	Characterized by majority democracy	49.8	1992	Kim YS	1992-1998
			46.5	1996		
Taiwan	Semi-presidential	Characterized by consensuality	26.4	1996	Kim DY	1998-2003
			42.1	2000		
			52.4	1995	Lee	1992-2000
			54.5	1998		
Thailand		Characterized by consensuality	29.5	1998	Chen	since 2000
			39.6	2001		
			25.6	1996	Chuan Thaksin	1997-2001
			49.6	2001		since 2001

Source: CROISSANT (forthcoming).

The only delegative democracy in Asia, South Korea, has a presidential government and the two liberal democracies in the region have either a cabinet system (Japan) or a semi-presidential government (Taiwan). On the

one hand, this seems to support the largely negative opinion about presidentialism as an obstacle to the development of liberal democratic constitutionalism. On the other hand, the three failed democracies are all parliamentary systems. Contrary to the Linzean nightmare of constitutional breakdown, presidentialism in both the Philippines and Indonesia is characterized by a weak, sometimes even paralyzed presidency and by a very strong system of parliamentary control of executive power.

The threat of illiberal or delegative democracy is neither limited nor inherent to presidentialism. Far from it: In parliamentary systems, especially in Westminster-type systems, the balance among the branches of power is particularly threatened, as ANDRÁS SAJÓ (1999: 160) explains: “One of the main risks of Westminster-type systems is that the cabinet makes parliament the source of its own unrestricted and hidden legislative power, in violation of checks and balances. Here general authorization laws play the role of the rotten fig leaf, hence the importance of parliament’s real power to determine substantively the legislative processes”. Westminster-style parliamentarianism or ‘majoritarian democracy’ is particularly vulnerable to the majoritarian tyranny and to democratic illiberalism. Due to majoritarian democracy’s inherent tendency to the political exclusion of minorities, its institutional structures tend to become a serious threat to democracy, particularly in plural societies, whereas consensual democratic institutions potentially offer a necessary precondition for democratic consolidation (see also LIJPHART 1999: 301-302). As we argue elsewhere (CROISSANT 2003), it is not inherently presidentialism but the broader institutional framework – the strength and types of the president’s legislative powers and the configuration of institutional and partisan veto players – which is favorable for the evolution of delegative democracy in South Korea. Strong, proactive legislative powers of the president and weak veto players permitted presidents to establish a delegative democracy in South Korea, whereas presidents’ weak, reactive legislative powers and strong veto players hampered executive usurpation in the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Indonesia.

V. Prospects

With regard to the long-term prospects for the stability of (defective) democracies in Asia, there seem to be grounds for optimism. With the global demise of communism and socialist revolutions, a lethal threat to democ-

racy in Southeast and East Asia since the 1950s has vanished. In the 1970s and 1980s, political and military elites who strived towards establishing an authoritarian regime could rely on support, depending on which side of the iron curtain they stood, from either the West or the East, as long as they were willing to serve as bulwark against communism or imperialism. Today, however, authoritarian elites in most developing countries cannot hope to be supported externally. In view of the experiences most countries have made with the economic and political failure of their past authoritarian regimes, only a low support among the citizenry exists for a repetition of the authoritarian experiment by former authoritarian elites and the military.

In some young democracies, at least, there is a rather broad acceptance of (defective) democracy, as can be seen in the results of recent public opinion surveys such as the East Asia Barometer and the World Value Survey. They suggest for the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Bangladesh, and South Korea, that support for democracy-in-principle is generally higher than in other regions, for example in post-Communist countries. Asians in these countries are more ardent in supporting democracy than the post-Communist Europeans from a normative perspective (Lee/Shin 2003); again a blow to the 'Asian values' thesis. While the extent to which citizens of new Asian democracies support the actual performance of the democratic regime, their confidence in democratic institutions, and their trust in political parties is quite low, it is still higher in Asia than, for example in Latin America (ibid.).

Concerning the prospects for democratic persistence, one might interpret these findings optimistically, since it is a trivial but crucial precondition for the overthrow of democracy that its enemies find significant social support for the autocratic regime they want to create. Considering the available survey data for Asia, one can hardly expect the albeit more or less pervasive dissatisfaction with the workings of present democratic institutions to lead to any potential support for an undemocratic regime.

What are the prospects for the development of liberal democracy? The optimistic assessment of the prospects for the stability of the status quo does not justify the conclusion that existing defective democracies will turn more or less automatically into liberal democracies. If one accepts the argument that economic prosperity, distribution of wealth and social power resources, and stateness-problems affect the prospects of liberal democratic development, then it will be much more difficult to develop a 'working' lib-

eral democracy in South and Southeast Asia than in wealthy and developed countries like Taiwan and South Korea. Most of Asia's democracies probably have to go a long way before they will develop into a consolidated, liberal democracy. It is rather unlikely that the young democracies of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Bangladesh will be able to improve the socioeconomic and stateness conditions of democratic rule in the near future. Thus, for most Asian democracies, the future of defective democracy may be 'stagnation'.

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About the author

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Abstract

This article undertakes a systematic inquiry of democratic development in Asia. It draws on the concept of defective democracy, presented in the first section of the paper. Based on this concept, the article is mapping the development of democracy in three Asian sub-regions: South, South East and Northeast Asia. It makes two major trends of democratization in these areas visible. Firstly, in most democracies the institutionalization of political rights comes along with stagnation or decline of the rule of law and civil liberties. Secondly, the quality of democracy in Asia grows apart. While new democracies in Northeast Asia are on the track to democratic consolidation, democracy in South Asia is on the edge or did already fall victim to authoritarian renewal. In Southeast Asia, democratic consolidation is stagnating. The article also provides for a systematic analysis of what accounts for why and how defective democracies originate. While "Asian values", type of colonial rule and ethnic heterogeneity make only weak cases for democracy in Asia, socioeconomic development, political institutions, stateness and political party systems are more important. In the last section, the paper provides an outlook to the prospects for further liberal democratic development in Asia, arguing that for the majority of countries and young democracies in the region, remaining a defective democracy is the likeliest perspective of democratic development in the near future.