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Revisiting the Asian Values Argument used by Asian Political Leaders and its Validity

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INTRODUCTION

THE International Chinese Newsweekly (*Yazhou Zhoukan*) has hailed the Senior Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew as the "new Asian warrior who hits back at the West"[1] and a Japanese academic describes him as "an eloquent spokesman who can talk back to the hoity-toity, self-righteous Westerners".[2] Throughout the 1990s, Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad championed 'Asian values' as being at the root of Asia's remarkable growth over the previous decades. Many Asian nations wish to have it both ways: to be modern and traditional at once, to modernize but not Westernize.[3] Hence, 'Asian values' theory rallies opinion in most Asian countries against Western attempts to teach Asians about democracy and human rights. It is devised for the purpose of challenging "Western-style" civil and political freedoms. It also

serves as a discourse that insists on differentiating between the unified and virtuous "us" from the external "them", in order to form self-identity. However, after the recent Asian economic crisis, the validity of the 'Asian values' argument was seriously questioned. In fact, Asian values are considered to be a source of the crony capitalism at the heart of the crisis.[4] This article attempts to critically examine the cultural arguments and how Asian leaders have used the 'Asian values' argument as political instruments to legitimize authoritarian rule; and how implausible their argument is.

THE 'ASIAN VALUES' CONCEPT

After the end of the Cold War, the United States had enlarged its scope of democracy and the promotion of human rights in its foreign policy. This universalistic claim of human rights was seen by the economically dynamic and increasingly self-assertive

East Asian regimes as an ideological compliment to Western domination.[5] The economic success of Asia has given the region a collective sense of confidence to challenge Western hegemonic thoughts and civilizations.[6] 'Asian values' argument has important implication for many Asians who "harbor deep resentment against the West for its past colonialism and who have an inferiority complex in reg: : to Western civilization."[7]

Huntington describes this Asian assertiveness as the 'Clash of Civilizations', which he portends that future global conflicts will be fought not along ideological fault lines but on cultural differences.[8] Although this thesis has attracted criticisms within the West as well as in Asia, it has "complemented attempts by some Asian political leaders to insulate their regimes" from charges of human rights abuses and to justify authoritarian rule by championing the superiority of 'Asian values'.[9] The prime tactical premise of the 'Asian values' argument is cultural relativism[10]. The argument is only comprehensible in relation to its 'Other'. The 'West' is essentialized and seen as the homogeneous 'Other'. Consensus, harmony, unity and community are values that are commonly proposed as the essence of Asian culture and identity. These are contrasted with the values said to characterize the 'Other', namely, absence of consensus, conflict, disunity, and indiv-

idualism.[11] Lee Kuan Yew is convinced that the economic decline of the West was part of a larger crisis of moral values the root cause of which is an obsession with individual rights.[12] Similarly, Dr. Mahathir asserts that, "Many Western societies ... are morally decadent."[13] Hence, they believe that East Asian societies can provide an alternative development and political model that may supplant those of the faltering West.[14] With the concept of the fundamental differences in culture between the East and the West, 'Asian values' theory was thus constructed.

The 'Asian values' theory, in brief, makes four claims:[15] *First*, human rights are not universal and neither can they be globalized. They emerge differently according to the context of particular social, economic, cultural and political conditions. *Second*, Asian societies are not centered on the individual but on the family. The nation is like a big family. It supposedly comes naturally for Asians to let the combined interests of the family and the nation go before the interests of each individual. *Third*, Asian societies rank social and economic rights over individual's political rights. *Finally*, the right of a nation to self-determination includes a government's domestic jurisdiction over human rights. This implies that other nations should not interfere with the internal affairs of a state, including its human rights policy.

The concept of 'Asian values' has gained political prominence in many Asian countries especially as it is often articulated in government rhetoric and official statements. In asserting these values, leaders from the region find that they have a convenient tool to silence internal criticisms and to fan anti-Western nationalist sentiments.[16] Any domestic opponents can be dismissed as opposing the national interest or simply being un-Asian.[17] 'Western liberalism' seems to be characterized by excessive individualism and a propensity for protestation and open political conflict, thus deemed unsuitable to Asia.[18] Former Indonesian President Wahid was advised by Mahathir not follow this 'Western' model to run his government. Mahathir contends that ASEAN has its own solutions to resolve the economic and political crises of Indonesia, which are different from the West.[19]

The relevance of basic political liberties and civil rights in some Asian countries is often disputed on the ground that they hinder economic and social progress, which can be carried out more effectively "when the government's effort are not frustrated by factional opposition".[20] Both Lee and Mahathir constructed the 'Asian values' argument by contending that the West's attempts to impose universal standards of human rights on developing countries is a

disguised 'cultural imperialism' and an attempt to obstruct their development.[21] Former Chinese Premier Li Peng agreed that each country should be left to define its own concept of human rights and democracy.[22] The Chinese government, in its 1991 White Paper[23], adopted the development-human rights trade off thesis which states, "to eat their fill and dress warmly were the fundamental demands of the Chinese people who had long suffered cold and hunger". Therefore, the government contends that the right to subsistence and economic development is a precondition to the full enjoyment of all other human rights.[24] The White Paper goes on to challenge the international nature of human rights by stating, "the issue of human rights falls by and large within the sovereignty of each state". Thus, to impose any human rights standards to any nation is seen as an interference of its internal affairs.

'ASIAN VALUES' ADVOCATES

In advocating 'Asian values', traditions are being invented in many new Asian nations to support a paternalistic type of authority.[25] 'Asian values' advocates assert that a nation is like a big family, the government is seen as the unchallengeable 'father' who is obliged to exercise both the disciplinarian and custodial roles, and the society is deemed to be the children who ought to obey the father in all cir-

cumstances.[26] These governments introduced traditional patriarchal 'family values' into modern states in order to strengthen their paternalistic rule and to guard against the influence of "Western hedonism".[27] Hence, state fatherhood legitimizes Asian governments to intervene into the daily affairs of individuals and families such as their sexuality,[28] marriage and reproductive rights by implementing fertility control and gender policies in order to achieve national development.[29] This intrusion into civil society is justified by affirming the claim of 'Asian values' that social and economics rights of the nation go before the individual rights.

'Asian values' are also used to justify the governments' restrictions upon the freedom of press and media in China, Malaysia and Singapore.[30] The parent-state argues that it will do whatever it can to protect its ignorant children-subject from the exposure of potentially 'harmful' materials presented by the media.[31] In Malaysia, the government holds that media control is a necessary measure to maintain internal peace and stability given that a proportion of its population is under-educated.[32] Any conflicts with national ideology can be sufficient ground for the government to withdraw a broadcast license. The media are also regarded as having a responsibility to the communitarian interest.[33] Hence, considerable govern-

ment control and censorship are deemed necessary. Lee asserts that "the theory of the press as the Fourth Estate did not fit Singapore, which had to build one nation out of four racial groups".[34] Mahathir also advocates that the greatest media freedom must be consonant with the vital interests of society. He believes that, "while the individuals must have their rights, these must not extend to the point where they deprive the rights of the majority".[35]

Some Asian governments cite the need for political stabilization as an excuse for oppressing minorities and persecution of dissidents. They argue that 'Asian values' render criticism of a government inappropriate and undesirable.[36] China presents itself as a practical example of this. The Chinese government has perpetrated repeated acts of state violence when faced with domestic dissent. The Confucian tradition of parental governance remains the core feature of political interaction in China. Parental governance entails two important principles from Confucian thought. They are filial piety for children-subjects and firm benevolence for parent-officials.[37] Whatever dissent arises must come from "irresponsible malcontents", therefore the state has a moral obligation to remove these deviants from society and restore order.[38]

The 'Asian values' argument faces several serious challenges especially

after the Asian economics crisis. After the crisis, Lee Kuan Yew denied that he had given prominence to 'Asian values'.[39] Lee claimed that he had always advocated 'Confucian' values, demonstrating the importance of Confucian ethics as essential ingredients of East Asia's economic growth.[40] Although Lee argument tended to be felt strongly in sinicized East Asian societies, it was notable that Mahathir had put in a lot of effort in convincing the Malays to adopt these virtues as their own, in order to be differentiated form the West. It seems therefore dubious that if pure 'Asian values' could be devised without having to equate it with 'Confucian values'. If so, Lee's version of 'Asian values' will be especially problematic in Muslim societies such as Malaysia and Indonesia.[41]

Indeed, the proponents of 'Asian values' have been very selective in their approach to suit the argument to benefit their authoritarian positions.[42] Although Confucianism does not incorporate the idea of human rights, its basic tenets are compatible with human rights principles.[43] Lynn Pan noted that, "The danger does not lay in Confucian philosophy itself, but in its politicization".[44] In practice, the central Confucian view of filial piety and loyalty are blurred all too often into unthinking obedience and nepotism.[45] Yet even Confucius, whose teachings are alleged to have instilled devotion to authority among

the Chinese, condemned blind obedience to the state. When asked how one should serve a prince, Confucius replied, "Tell him the truth even if it offends him."[46] However, those who dare speak the truth to authoritarian governments in Asia were often threatened, beaten and jailed, exiled and even executed by offended leaders. Not co-incidentally, Confucius' teachings about paying respect and deference to one's government had been given special highlight by the Singaporean press whereas one that teaches that a vicious, man-eating tiger is less frightful than an oppressive Government had hardly been mentioned.[47]

THE CONVERGING ROOTS OF 'ASIAN VALUES'

It is unjustifiable to depict Asia as Confucian civilization,[48] as opposed to the Judeo-Christian West. Other major traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism have a comparable presence in Asian spiritual practices. Furthermore, Christianity has also penetrated Asia and exerted strong social and political influence, especially in the Philippines and arguably in South Korea.[49] Opponents of 'Asian values' argue that 'Asian values' are a convergence of all these religions and philosophies that teach about humility, tolerance, honesty and social justice.[50] These virtues are to be found also in other civilizations, in fact all over the world.[51] Further-

more, Confucian ethics such as frugality, dedication to work and competitiveness that are claimed to have brought about economic success are not uniquely "Asian" but universal values that can also be found in Western societies.[52] Arguing from an economics point of view, Krugman contends that, "Asian growth is mainly the result of the same things that drive growth everywhere."[53] Hence, critics claim that there is no such thing as a unique and superior set of 'Asian values' that the East has produced.

'Asian values' assumes to embody a concrete distinction in the cultures of East and West. Hill argues that the attribution of a set of cultural values to East and Southeast Asian societies represented a Western project known as 'reverse Orientalism' was originated by Western social scientists to contrast the recent dynamic progress of Asian development with the stagnation and social disorganization of contemporary Western economies and societies.[54] This contrast was subsequently adopted and further advocated by Asian leaders to serve their political legitimacy. In promoting 'Asian values' they assert Asian cultural uniqueness based on the dualism of Asia as the Orient and the West as the Occident, which was ironically a construct of Western imperialist.[55]

Said claims the Orient as a 'European invention' that helps to 'define the West' as its contrasting image[56].

By changing the "evaluative connotation" of Orientalism from negative to positive but keep its "cognitive content" unchanged,[57] 'Asian values' theory is constructed. Like Orientalism, 'Asian values' serve as a discourse that differentiates between the unified and virtuous "East" from the decaying "West", in order to form self-identity.[58] This dualism also enables Asian leaders to reject civil and political rights as being specifically Western and culturally inadequate to the Asian context and make charges of "cultural imperialism" in response to Western interference of their human rights abuses.[59]

It is crucial to understand that 'Asian values' are not embraced by all Asian leaders. Asian leaders such as the Dalai Lama, Lee Teng Hui, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Abdurrahman Wahid have declared their rejection of the illiberal and anti-democratic elements of the "Asian values" argument.[60] Pertierra notes that states with a strong tradition of civil society such as the Philippines articulate different values from authoritarian states such as Singapore, Malaysia and China.[61] Similarly, Ng argues that freedom of speech and media have been essential tools for monitoring government policies and performance in Hong Kong.[62] She contends that, "Government intolerance of opposition is without doubt the one thing the people will refuse to tolerate", a paternalistic

government is less than real possibility for Hong Kong.[63]

One of the reasons that 'Asian values' advocates essentialize the differences between the West and Asia in its social structures and economical development is to deny the need for Asians to have individual rights. They claim that Asian societies were structured around duties, not rights. And a society based on duties is communitarian while a rights-based society is individualistic.[64] This assertion often overstates the 'individualism' of Western society. Ironically, their criticisms of Western society and attacks on liberalism are, in many respects, similar to the critiques of liberalism by Western conservatives.[65]

Ghai contends that even within Western liberalism, "there are strands of analysis which assert the claim of the community".[66] As the common good takes precedence over individual rights, Asian leaders contend that there is no need for governments to respect rights of individuals.[67] Jiang Zemin argues that the "right of survival of China's population is more important that political rights"[68]. However, to reduce human rights to a guarantee of mere survival is a perverse betrayal of any plausible conception of human dignity.[69] A Filipino academic argues that political stability obtained through authoritarian methods is not for the Philippines, he said,

"We're not about to trade our rights for better incomes."[70]

'ASIAN VALUES' AS A MEANS OF POLITICIZING

There has been broad speculation that the paternalistic nature of Asian values lends itself to a lack of transparency within government. This has resulted in more frequent incidences of corruption when the government abuses its rights. Barr contends that it is ironical that in Singapore, Lee claims that 'Asian values' upholds the virtue of clean government, while in Indonesia they have been used implicitly to defend nepotism and crony capitalism.[71] The national ideology of Indonesia, *Pancasila*, has also played a critical role in delegitimizing non-state political organizations.[72] Hence it can be seen that 'Asian values' is not only used to differentiate an Asian value system from the Western one, but also used to enhance authoritarian regime's domestic legitimacy.[73]

'Asian values' discourse of paternalistic governance often provides a convenient means of justification for state oppression of political oppositions, separatists and minorities.[74] Political leaders often cite the need for political stabilization as excuses.[75] However, such an oppressive system does not dissolve but rather suppresses the discontented minorities. The hatred and indignation of the suppressed

will increase the instability of the system in the long run.[76] Many authoritative Asian parent-nations are not benevolent to their children-subjects as they claim. Instead, as an Indonesian academic puts it, they are more like "monsters" than "the defender of common good".[77] Malaysia's former Deputy Premier Anwar Ibrahim has said repeatedly, "it is altogether shameful to cite Asian values as an excuse for autocratic practices and denial of basic rights and civil liberties."[78] He should know, having been removed from office, jailed, beaten by the police, and convicted of sodomy and corruption charges, when his real crime was challenging the Malaysian's Prime Minister.[79] Anwar's case show that basic civil liberties can be disregarded and charges can be trumped up to serve the goals of the national leader. In many Asian countries "any one who dares to challenge the authority is quickly labeled as 'bad' and discredited. Conformity is of a very high order".[80] Thus, consensus is just another meaning of conforming to the wishes of the regime.

'Asia' itself is a difficult enough region to define geographically, let alone to cast in terms of a coherent cultural entity. It is difficult to prove that Chinese values are the same as Malaysian, or Korean values.[81] The fact that these values are often related with diligence and discipline do not represent the sum total of any Asian religion or culture.[82] Hence, this article

rejects the claim of a homogeneous body of 'Asian values' as a civilizational bloc.[83] While recognizing the diversity and differences in values within Asian societies, nevertheless, evidence is found showing that there are some general differences between Asian and Western cultural tendencies and dispositions.[84] However, this does not mean that 'Asian values' as articulated by Asian leaders are any closer to reality. Thus, Noor argues that, "Like the Arabian Phoenix of Mozart's opera, everyone knows about Asian values, but nobody knows where they are."[85] As Asian values are being politicized and conceptualized by authoritarian leaders as an ideological tool for legitimization, "fewer and fewer people seem to believe in them." It is therefore inappropriate to use the term 'Asian values' "to denote a particular set of attitudes, beliefs and institutions which all Asian people share in common", but rather to refer to the diversities which characterize Asian values as such.[86]

CONCLUSION

It can be seen that 'Asian values' argument has been partly motivated by the deep resentment against the West for its past colonialism. Furthermore, Asia's economic success may well have enhanced people's self-confidence to resist the continuing Western hegemony. To deny the existence of cultural and societal differences be-

tween the East and the West is unrealistic. However, to essentialize their cultural differences in stereotypes and dichotomies represents a paradoxical reversal of Orientalism that the 'West' has allegedly contributed. Nonetheless, there should be no friction between Asians retaining their own unique characteristics and believing that all humans should be granted autonomy to exercise their individual rights. To relinquish human rights by any means is inhuman. Sadly, the 'Asian values' argument has opened a convenient door to justify some Asian governments' oppressions of minorities, abuses of human rights and restrictions of freedom on information. Hence, it could be seen that when certain values are politicized, they become instruments subject to the authorities' manipulation.

Given the wide diversity of religion, language and culture in Asia, it is doubtful that a set of common values could be devised. The proponents of the 'Asian values' argument imposed this concept upon the whole of Asia in order to give the West a holistic view of Asia. However, as not all Asian leaders support the argument, 'Asian values' as a concept is not a reality. It is merely a myth created by some Asian leaders as a political tool against challenges from both within and outside the states. Authentic human and social values cannot be imposed by authorities.

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Wong, Siu-lun. "The Applicability of Asian Family Values to Other Sociocultural Settings". In Peter L. Berger and Hsin-Huang Hsiao, eds., *In Search of an East Asian Development Model*. New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988. 134-154.

Yang, Baoyun. "The Relevance of Confucianism Today". In Josiane Cauquelin, Paul Lim and Birgit Mayer-Konig, eds., *Asian Values: Encounter with Diversity*. Surrey: Curzon, 1998, 70-94.

Zakaria, Fareed. "Culture is Destiny - A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew". *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (March/April 1994): 109-126.

ENDNOTES

* Asian values' with 'inverted commas' is used throughout this article to show that this term itself is problematic. This article casts doubt on whether social values in Asia can be homogenized and essentialized as a particular set of attitudes and beliefs that all Asian people share in common, as the advocates of 'Asian values' claim. However, in one or two instances, Asian values is used without the 'inverted commas' to denote (plural/diverse) social values in Asia that can be distinguished from the (singular/homogenous) 'Asian values'.

1 Quoted in Leonard C. Sebastian, 1999, "Values and Governance Issues in the Foreign Policy of Singapore", in Sung-Joo Han, ed. *Changing Values in Asia: Their Impact on Governance and Development* (New York: JCIE, 1999), 225.

2 Cited in Clarence J. Dias, "Culture and Values: Human Rights, Workers, Communities, and their Environment", in Saskatchewan Regina, *1997 National Foreign Conference*. 1997 Available from http://www.ciia.org/dias.htm# values

3 Lynn Pan, "Culture Serves Politics in the Creation of a National Ideology: Playing the Identity Card", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 February 1989, 30. See also, Fareed Zakaria, "Culture is Destiny - A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew", *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1994, 109-126. Economic development has been inevitably accompanied by the emergence of new ideas and demands, such as democracy, human rights, and social justice. However, this is seen as Westernization (distinguished from modernization) and deemed threatening to authoritarian regimes. See Rizal Sukma, "Values, Governance, and Indonesia's Foreign Policy", in Sung-Joo Han, ed, *Changing Values in Asia* (Tokyo: JCIE, 1999), 138. Tatsuo describes the act of criticizing the core values of liberal democracy as "a strategy based on economic modernization without political modernization", see Inoue Tatsuo, "Liberal Democracy and Asian Orientalism", in Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel Bell, eds., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 28. For instance, Mahathir argues that "The notion that a country must Westernize in order to modernize is ludicrous. Asian modernization occurred as an inevitable stage in our own history, not because we were Europeanized or Americanized." See Mahathir Mohamad, and Shintaro Ishihara, *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century*, Trans. by Frank Baldwin (New York: Kodansha International, 1995), 77. However, the difference between modernization and Westernization is not always clear, as Hitchcock puts it,

the most common reaction found in most Asian societies tends to be framed thus: "If we like it, it's Modern; if we don't, it's Western", See Hitchcock, David, I., *Asian Values and the United States: How Much Conflict?* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 1994), 8. Donnelly notes that "The most interesting arguments for an Asian way is a selective adoption of "Western" values and practices to produce an Asian version of modernity." See Jack Donnelly, "Human Rights and Asian Values: A Defensive of 'Western' Universalism" in *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel Bell, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), 80. "As such, the engagement with the negative aspect of modernity has always been framed against the backdrop of the conflict between East and West, Asia and Europe.", Farish A. Noor, "Values in the Dynamics of Malaysia's Internal and External Political Relations", in Sung-Joo Han, ed., *Changing Values in Asia* (Tokyo: JCIE, 1999), 167.

4 Paul Krugman, "Asia's Miracle is Alive and Well?", *Time* 150, no. 13 (29 September 1997)

5 Peter R. Moody Jr., "Asian Values", *Journal of International Affairs* 50, Issue 1 (Summer 1996), 166.

6 Wang Jisi and Zhou Sicheng, "Civilizations: Clash and Fusion", *Beijing Review* 39, no. 3, 15-21 January 1996.

7 Inoue Tatsuo, "Liberal Democracy and Asian Orientalism", in Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel Bell, eds. *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 28.

8 Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1996), 28.

9 Garry Rodan and Kevin Hewison, "A 'Clash of Cultures' or the Convergence of Political Ideology", in Richard Robinson, ed., Pathways to Asia: the Politics of Engagement (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 29.

10 See Michael Barr, "Lee Kuan Yew and the 'Asian Values' Debate", *Asian Studies Review* 24, no. 3 (September 2000): 310.

11 Stephanie Lawson, "Politics and Cultural Myths: Democracy Asian Style versus the West", *The Asia-Pacific Magazine*, June 1996, 40, see also Beng Huat Chua, "Culturalisation of Economy and Politics in Singapore", in R. Robinson, ed., *Pathways to Asia: the Politics of Engagement* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin 1996), 94.

12 Cited in Chandra Muzaffar, "Debate: Asian Values", *The Asia-Pacific Magazine*, June 1996, 51.

13 Mahathir Mohamad and Shintaro Ishihara, *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century*, 20. Mahathir also notes that in the West, "The community has given way to the individual and his desires." The inevitable consequence, he believed, "has been the breakdown of established institutions and diminished respect for marriage, family values and elders, as well as important customs, conventions and traditions." Ibid., p. 80. The similar view of the 'Western decadence' is articulated by Kishore Mahbubani, "The Danger of Decadence", *Foreign Affairs* (Sep/Oct 1993): 10-14.

14 This Asian development model is often explained by cultural factors such as Confucian ethics. See Peter L. Berger, "An East Asian Development Model?" and Hsin-Huang Hsiao, "An East Asian Development Model: Empirical Exploration", in Berger & Hsiao, eds., *In Search of An East Asian Development Model*, Transaction Books (New Brunswick and Oxford, 1988, Chapter 1 and 2. Confucianism is further celebrated as the underlying force driving Asian economic success by authors such as Tu Wei-ming and Richard Madsen. See Tu Wei-ming (ed.), 1996, *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity* (Cambridge: Havard University Press). Madsen, Richard, "After Liberalism: What if Confucianism Becomes the Hegemonic Ethic of the Twenty-first Century", *Japan Policy Research Institute*, Working Paper No. 14, available at: http:

www.jpri.org/jpri/public/wp14.html. These views are also shared by some Chinese scholars. They believe that tradition does not necessarily interfere with modernization and conclude that Asia cannot simply copy the Western model. These scholars claim that, "As it turned out, the Western model is not the only way to modernization." See Wang Jisi & Zhou Sicheng, 1996, "Civilizations: Clash and Fusion", *Beijing Review* 39, no.3 (15-21 January 1996).

15 The Asian values' theory has been presented in many different forms in literatures, press, media and governments' official papers and speeches. Nevertheless this article limits itself to discuss only these four fundamental claims of 'Asian values'. The four 'Asian values' claims presented here are mainly summarized from the views articulated by Asian leaders in Bangkok Governmental Declarations (1993), Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, Singapore 'Shared Values' and China White papers regarding human rights and national sovereignty. This summary is taken from Li, Xiaorong, "'Asian Values' and the Universality of Human Rights", *Report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1996). Available at: http://www.puaf.umd. edu/IPPP/li.htm.

16 Ibid.

17 Richard Robison, "Looking North: Myths and Strategies", in Richard Robinson, ed., *Pathways to Asia: the Politics of Engagement* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 4. When Soeharto was brought to trials, some of the ASEAN political leaders were outraged. Lee Kuan Yew condemned the action as a "big mistake". He believed that the nation's internal stability was far more crucial than a corrupt leader being brought to justice as it was seen as "un-Asian". See Kusnanto Anggoro, "*Bom dan Politik Lintas Batas* [The Bombings and Transboundary Politics]", *Kompas*. Available from: http://www. kompas. com/kcm/kusnan/kus6.htm.

18 Rodan, Garry, "Debate: Asian Values", *The Asia-Pacific Magazine*, June 1996, 51.

19 Kusnanto Anggoro, "*Bom dan Politik Lintas Batas* [The Bombings and Transboundary Politics]", *Kompas*. Available from: http://www.kompas.com/kcm/kusnan/kus6.htm.

20 Amartya Sen, "Human Rights and Economic Achievements", in Joanne, R. Bauer and Daniel Bell, ed., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 90

21 Cited in Inoue Tatsuo, "Liberal Democracy and Asian Orientalism", in Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel Bell, ed., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 30.

22 Michael Barr, "Lee Kuan Yew and the 'Asian Values' Debate", *Asian Studies Review* 24, no. 3 (September 2000): 314

23 Cited in Li Xiaorong, " 'Asian Values' and the Universality of Human Rights", *Report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1996).

24 Errol P. Mendes, "Asian Values and Human Rights: Letting the Tigers Free", available at: http://www.uottawa.ca/ hrrec/publicat/asian_values.html. Tatsuo notes that the implication of Asian leaders is that civil and political rights are "luxuries that only developed countries can afford to enjoy", but they are not applicable to developing countries. See, Inoue Tatsuo, "Liberal Democracy and Asian Orientalism", in Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel Bell, ed., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 34.

25 An invention of traditions to legitimize paternalistic states authority is noted in: Reid, Anthony, 1998, "Political 'Tradition' in Indonesia: the One and the Many", *Asian Studies Review* 22, no. 1 (March 1998): 22-37; Donnelly, 1999, "Human Rights and Asian Values: A Defensive of 'Western' Universalism", p. 87; David, 1998, "Freedom-a Eurasian Mosiac", in David Kelly and Anthony Reid, eds., Asian Freedom: The Idea of Freedom in East and Southeast Asia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9; and Truong, Thanh-Dam,

"'Asian' Values and the Heart of Understanding: A Buddhist View", in Paul Lim, Josiane Cauquelin and Birgit Mayer-Konig, eds., *Asian Values: Encounter with Diversity* (Surrey: Curzon, 1998), 47.

26 Jim Jose and Christine Doran, "Marriage and marginalization in Singaporean politics", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 27, no. 4 (1997): 475-488. Although not ascribing itself to Confucianist values, during the New Order regime, Indonesia introduced a similar concept of 'family principle' (*azas kekeluargaan*), which construes the state as a family with President Soeharto as the ultimate *bapak*, or father figure. See J. I. Suryakusuma, "The State and Sexuality in New Order Indonesia", in L. J. Sears, ed., *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 94.

27 This is done by introducing moral education into the school curriculum. This is evident from the introduction of five Confucian based "Shared Values" in Singapore. See C. Y Kuo, "Confucianism as a Political Discourse in Singapore", in Tu Wei-Ming, ed., *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 294-309. In Indonesia, education was used to promote idealized family and gender models, and at the same time was used as an instrument to instill obedience and submission to the State's patriarchal authority. See Lynette Parker, 1992, 'The Quality of Schooling in a Balinese Village', *Indonesia* 54 (Oct. 1992): 95-116. See also Martha Logsdon, "Gender Roles in Elementary School Texts in Indonesia," in Madaleine J. Goodman, ed., *Women in Asia and the Pacific: Towards an East-West Dialogue* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1985), 243-262.

28 Mahathir has linked homosexuality with "Western hedonism...and the rejections of religious teachings and [Asian] values". See Mahathir Mohamad, and Shintaro Ishihara, 1995, *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century*, 80. This view has generally been used to justify state's repression of homosexuality. Homosexuality is outlawed in Singapore, Malaysia and China.

In China, public homosexual behavior is prosecuted under the laws for hooliganism. See Wah Shan Chou, *Tongzhi: Politics of same-sex eroticism in Chinese societies* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2000). See also, Dennis Altman, "The emergence of gay identities in Southeast Asia" in Peter Drucker, ed., *Different Rainbows* (London: Gay Mens Press, 2000), 137-156.

29 In his August 1983 Singapore's National Day Rally speech, Lee Kuan Yew constructed a 'national crisis' and accused the nation's mothers of endangering the country's future by willfully distorting patterns of biological reproduction. He contended that graduate mothers in Singapore were not producing sufficient numbers of 'genetically superior' babies to secure their self-replacement in the population. He feared that within a few generations, the quality of Singapore's population would measurably decline and Singapore would lose its competitive edge in the world. To produce children was thus seen as a patriotic duty which comes before women's personal and material interests. Hence, women who did not conform (to this discourse of motherhood) were deemed anti-national and state fatherhood was justified in implementing gender policies to cope with this reproductive 'crisis'. See Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan, "State Fatherhood: The Politics of Nationalism, Sexuality, and Race in Singapore", in *Nationalisms and Sexuality*, ed. by A. Parker, et.al. (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), 347-356. In Indonesia, the New Order regime used 'Family principle' as national ideology to encourage fertility control. See Kathryn Robinson, "Choosing Contraception: Cultural Change and the Indonesian Family Planning Programme", in Alexander, P. (ed.), *Creating Indonesian Cultures* (Sydney: Oceania Publications, 1989). See also Lynette Parker, 'Fecundity and the Fertility Decline in Bali', in Margaret Jolly and Kalpana Ram (eds.). *Borders of Being: State Fertility and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 178-202. Chapman also contends that Indonesia's family planning program

has invoked people's patriotic duty to support government initiatives, intimating that to do otherwise would be selfish and unpatriotic. See, Rebecca Jane Chapman, *The Significance of Family Planning for Women in Indonesia*, Working Papers 99, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University. Kim Dae Jung criticised Singapore's regulation of individual's actions such as chewing bubble gum, spitting, smoking and littering as an "Orwellian extreme of social engineering." See Kim, Dae Jung, "Is Culture Destiny", *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 6, (Nov/Dec 1994): 189-194.

30 Nevertheless, it should be noted that in many Asian countries such as Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia (after Soeharto), Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea and India, the press and media do have a substantial amount of freedom. See: Shelton A. Gunaratne, ed., *The Handbook of the Media in Asia* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2000). Available at: http://www.mnstate.edu/gunarat/overview.htm

31 For instance, Singapore Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, in his 1994 National Day Rally speech, referred to a *Sustagen* advertisement on Singapore television which showed a Chinese boy with a clenched fist saying 'Come on, Dad. If you can play golf five times a week, I can have *Sustagen* once a day'. The Prime Minister argued that an advertisement like this was inappropriate for the national values of Singapore because it would encourage children to be insolent to their parents. In condemning such a commercial as not virtuous, the paternalistic Singaporean government implied an expectation of filial piety from its children-subjects. See *The Straits Times*, 26 August 1994.

32 Shelton A. Gunaratne, ed., *The Handbook of the Media in Asia* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2000).

33 See Richard Robison, "Looking North: Myths and Strategies", in Richard Robinson, ed., *Pathways to Asia: the Politics of Engagement* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 6. Lee Kuan Yew argues that Asians have "little doubt that a society with communitarian values where

the interests of the society take precedence over that of the individual suits them better than the individualism of America". Cited in Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel A. Bell, *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.

34 Gunaratne, *The Handbook of the Media* .

35 Mohamed Mahatir, "Nobody Elects the Press", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 April 1994.

36 Martin Lee, "The Myth of Asian Values", in Chee Soon Juan, *To be Free: Stories from Asia's Struggle against Oppression* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1998), ii.

37 L.H.M. Ling, "Rationalizations for State Violence in Chinese Politics: The Hegemony of Parental Governance", *Journal of Peace Research* 31, no. 4 (November 1994), 396.

38 Ibid. The 1989 Tiananmen Massacre and the frequent suppression of the separatist movements in Tibet and Xinjiang were two of the many brutal incidents where the authority of the angry parents was demonstrated towards their disobedient children by violently disciplining them in order to restore stability and to deter any possible future dissents.

39 Lee held that the Western journalists, particularly democracy and human rights activists, were responsible for exaggerating the argument. See: Lee Kuan Yew & Terry McCarthy, "In Defense of 'Asian Values'", *Time* 151, no. 10, 16 March 1998.

40 Michael Barr, "Lee Kuan Yew and the 'Asian Values' Debate", *Asian Studies Review* 24, no. 3 (September 2000), 313.

41 Francis Fukuyama, "Asian Values in the Wake of the Asian Crisis", 1999. Available at: http://www.idep.org.

42 For one such example, see Fareed Zakaria, "Culture is Destiny - A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew" (1994), where Lee interpreted the Confucian maxim *xiushen qi jia zhi guo pingtianxia* as to encourage individual's self-reliance rather than dependence on a welfare state. However, this same aphorism is interpreted by Kim Dae Jung as an emphasis of the "role of government and

stresses the ruling elite's moral obligation to bring about peace under heaven," See Kim Dae Jung, "Is Culture Destiny?", 1994, 189-194.

43 Joseph Chan, "Asian Values and Human Rights: An Alternative View", 1998, 37.

44 Lynn Pan, "Culture Serves Politics in the Creation of a National Ideology: Playing the Identity Card", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 February 1989, 31. This irony is well presented when Confucianism is selectively adopted by Lee Kuan Yew to justify a certain kind of political authoritarianism while Lee Teng-hui has used Confucianism to prove just the opposite - that there are precedents for democracy in Confucian thought. This is noted in Francis Fukuyama, "The Illusion of 'Asian Exceptionalism'", in Plattner Diamond and F. Marc, eds., *Democracy in East Asia* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 226.

45 Yang Baoyun refers this as the "negative influences" of Confucianism. See Yang Baoyun, "The Relevance of Confucianism Today", in Josiane Cauquelin, Paul Lim and Brigit Mayer-Konig, eds., *Asian Values: Encounter with Diversity* (Surrey: Curzon, 1998), 86-88. However, I do not necessarily agree with this attribution of Confucianism as I think the problem does not lie in Confucianism as such, but the willful distortion in the interpretation of Confucianism by the autocratic regimes.

46 Martin Lee, "The Myth of Asian Values", in Chee Soon Juan, *To be Free: Stories from Asia's Struggle against Oppression* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1998), ii.

47 Soon Juan Chee, *Dare To Change: An Alternative Vision for Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Democratic Party, 1994), 119.

48 Lee Kuan Yew states that the Confucian philosophy of *xiushen qijia zhiguo pingtianxia* as the "basic concept of our [Asian] civilization." See Fareed Zakaria, 1994, "Culture is Destiny - A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew". This dualism is also espoused by Huntington (1996). In his book, *The Clash of Civil-*

ization and the Remaking of World Order, he envisions a dichotomy between competing civilizations, the declining 'West' on one hand and an emerging coalition of an Islamic-Confucianist bloc on the other. See pp. 45-48.

49 Inoue Tatsuo, "Liberal Democracy & Asian Orientalism" in *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, 42.

50 Ziauddin Sardar, "Asian values are human values", *New Statesman*, 17 April 1998, 26-27.

51 Jose Ramos-Horta, "Human Rights and Morality Vs Pragmatism and Real Politic: The 'Asian Way'?" Available at: http://www.tmx.com.au/join/articles/hortas.htm.

52 Professor Mendes contends that, "Those who may have been expecting Asian Values to be substantially different from what is valued in Western countries like Canada may be rightfully surprised. Many, if not most of the values described above, are also deeply held by individuals and communities across the political and socio-economic spectrum in Canada, especially among the conservative components of Canadian society. Indeed, even in the United States, the platforms of both the Democratic and Republican Presidential candidates during the 1996 election campaign were attempting to outdo each other in being seen as the champion of many, if not most, of the values ascribed to the core components of Asian Values, especially on the importance of family values and the need for more effective law and order." See Errol P. Mendes, "Asian Values and Human Rights: Letting the Tigers Free", available at: http://www.uottawa.ca/hrrec/publicat/asian_values.html. See also "The Asian Way: Regional Thinkers Put Homegrown Ideas Before the World", *Asiaweek*, 2 March 1994, 23 & 24. Michael Hill also notes that Confucian ethics play a similar role to that of 'Protestant work ethic' or 'Victorian virtues' played in the West in the past. See Michael Hill, *'Asian Values' as Reverse Orientalism: The Case of Singapore*, Working Papers No. 150 (Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 2000), 19.

53 Paul Krugman, "Asia's Miracle is Alive and Well?", *Time* 150, no. 13, 29 September 1997. Francis Fukuyama (1999), in "Asian Values in the Wake of the Asian Crisis", argues that Asian economic success was not brought about by Asian's unique culture, but by its distinctive institutional design and regulatory systems. Similarly, he believes that Asian crisis can be better explained by conventional economics rather than culture. Available at: http://www.idep.org. This view is shared by other scholars who view that culture is simply a device manipulated by political elites to legitimize their hold on power. This school of thought is more interested in examining the role of the state and the relationships between classes. For one of such arguments (that is similar to Fukuyama's above assertion) see Linda Weiss, "Sources of the East Asian advantage: an institutional analysis", in Richard Robison, ed. *Pathways to Asia: the Politics of Engagement* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 171-204.

54 Michael Hill, 'Asian Values' as *Reverse Orientalism: The case of Singapore*, Working Papers No. 150, Dept of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 2000, 6.

55 Tatsuo, "Liberal Democracy and Asian Orientalism" 37.

56 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 2.

57 Tatsuo, "Liberal Democracy and Asian Orientalism", 39 and Hill, 'Asian Values' as Reverse", 1.

58 Mahbubani (cited in Milner, 1999) contends that Asian leaders are putting "an effort to define their own personal, social and national identities that enhances their sense of self-esteem in a world in which their immediate ancestors had subconsciously accepted the fact that they were lesser beings in the Western universe". Milner argues that the 'Asian values debate must be emphasised as an episode in the long-term, post-colonial cultural project of nation's self-identity search. See Milner, Anthony, 1999, "What's Happened to Asian Values?", in *Beyond the Asia Crisis*, David

Goodman & Segal Gerald (eds.), available at: http://www.anu.edu.au/asianstudies/values.html.

59 Tatsuo argues that in rejecting civil and political rights as being specifically Western, "they ascribe the same homogeneous cultural essence to Asia that Orientalists utilize to contrast Asian society with the Western self-portrait of "Civil Society". See Tatsuo, "Liberal Democracy and Asian Orientalism", 39.

60 Noted in Michael Barr, "Lee Kuan Yew and the 'Asian Values' Debate", 315. Amartya Sen asserts that acknowledgement would have to made to the contributions of national leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi or Dr. Sun Yat Sen, who were, "cogently vocal in defense of the widest forms of democracy and civil rights." See, Amartya Sen, "Human Rights and Economic Achievements", in Joanne R. Bauer & Daniel Bell, eds., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 98. According to Aung San Suu Kyi, 'People's participation in social and political transformation is the central issue of our time'. Cited in Garry Rodan, "Debate: Asian Values", *The Asia-Pacific Magazine*, June 1996, 51. Yet she is hardly an unqualified champion of liberal individualism.

61 Raul Pertierra, "'The Market' in Asian Values", in Josiane Cauquelin, Paul Lim, and Brigit Mayer-Konig, eds., *Asian Values: Encounter with Diversity* (Surrey: Curzon, 1998), 135.

62 Margaret Ng, "Why Asia Needs Democracy: A View from Hong Kong", in Plattner Diamond and F. Marc, eds., *Democracy in East Asia* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 15.

63 Ng also argues that, "The "Singapore model" for Hong Kong was a paternalistic government managed by the local elite, focuses on business and on being on good terms with the Chinese authorities. For better or worse, this "model" has never received more than the most fleeting support from the people of Hong Kong, and even that has been expressed only in words rather than action." Ibid, 13 & 15.

64 Yash Ghai, "Rights, Duties and Responsibilities", in Josiane Cauquelin, Paul Lim and Birgit Mayer-Konig, eds., *Asian Values: Encounter with Diversity* (Surrey: Curzon, 1998), 29.

65 Gary Rodan and Kevin Hewison, "A 'Clash of Cultures' or Convergence of Political Ideology?", in *Pathways to Asia: the Politics of Engagement*, Richard Robison (ed.), (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 30.

66 Ibid, 35. See also Amitai Etzioni, ed., *Rights and the Common Good: The Communitarian Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

67 Yanshong Wang, "Chinese Values, Governance, and International Relations: Historical Development and Present Situation", in Sung-Joo Han, ed., *Changing Values in Asia: Their impact on Governance and Development* (Tokyo: JCIE, 1999), 51 & 52.

68 Cited in Jack Donnelly, "Human Rights and Asian Values: A Defensive of 'Western' Universalism", in Joanne R. Bauer, & Daniel Bell, eds., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1 999), 75.

69 Ibid.

70 Cited in "The Asian Way: Regional Thinkers Put Homegrown Ideas Before the World", *Asiaweek*, 2 March 1994, 23 & 24.

71 Barr, "Lee Kuan Yew and the 'Asian Values' Debate", 313. Nepotism resulted from Chinese family values is also evident in Hong Kong. See Siulun Wong, "The Applicability of Asian Family Values to Other Sociocultural Settings", in Pete L. Berger & Hsin-Huang Hsiao, eds., *In Search of an East Asian Development Model* (New Brunswick & Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), 134-154.

72 Niels Mulder, 'The Ideology of Javanese-Indonesian Leadership', in Hans Antlov & Sven Cederoth, eds., *Leadership on Java: Gentle Hints, Authoritarian Rule* (Richmond: Curzon Press, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1994), 57-72.

73 Stephanie Lawson, "Politics and Cultural Myths: Democracy Asian Style versus the West", *The Asia-Pacific*

Magazine, June 1996, 39.

74 This includes homosexual minorities. According to Wang, the "Confucian's political ideal of rulers loving the people and ruling benevolently, and the people obeying the rulers and being grateful for the benefits that the benevolent rule brought to them, proved to be difficult to implement." Very few authoritarian regime shows benevolent rule while despotism is more characteristic. See: Yanshong Wang, "Chinese Values, Governance, and International Relations: Historical Development and Present Situation", in Sung-Joo Han, ed., *Changing Values in Asia: Their impact on Governance and Development* (Tokyo: JCIE, 1999), 24.

75 Tatsuo, "Liberal Democracy & Asian", 44.

76 This was reflected in the East Timorese' fight for independence, and separatist movements in West Papua after several decades of oppressions from the central Indonesian regime.

77 Goenawan Mohamad, *Sidelines: Writings from Tempo, Indonesian Banned Magazine*, trans. by Jennifer Lindsay (Melbourne: Highland House, 1994), 47.

78 Cited in Louis Kraar, "What Pacific Century?", *Fortune* 140, no. 10, 22 November 1999.

79 The attacks on Anwar were a stark reminder that sexual 'misconduct' remains a powerful weapon for government's social and political control. More generally, Asian homosexual minorities fall victim to discrimination and repression not because they have committed anything wrong but because they are made scapegoats by the state in the construction of a unified and virtuous national identity which deems same-sex acts as Western corruption. See: Carl F. Stynchin, *A Nation by Rights* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

80 Chee, *Dare To Change: An Alternative*, 35.

81 Fukuyama, "Asian Values in the Wake of Asian Crisis". David Hitchcock's 1994 survey of the value preferences of officials, business people, scholars and professionals from the United States and eight East Asian societies is not supportive of the 'Asian values' case as it con-

firms that genuine differences in value perspective exist in the region. See David I. Hitchcock, *Asian Values and the United States: How Much Conflict?* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 1994).

82 Chandra Muzaffar, "Debate: Asian Values", *The Asia-Pacific Magazine,* June 1996, 52.

83 An 'Islamic-Confucianist civilization bloc' as oppose to Western civilization was first articulated by Huntington. This dichotomy between East and West was subsequently though implicitly adopted by Asian leaders to argue that there is a homogeneous 'Asian values' that differentiate between the virtuous Asians and the decadence Westerners as shown earlier in this article.

84 Hitchcock reports that a strong majority of Asian respondents favored an 'orderly society' and 'harmony', which were values given little attention by Americans. See David I. Hitchcock, *Asian Values and the United States: How Much Conflict?* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 1994), 38-41.

See, Josiane Cauquelin, Paul Lim, and Birgit Mayer-Konig, "Understanding Asian Values", in Josiane Cauquelin, Paul Lim, and Birgit Mayer-Konig, eds., *Asian Values: Encounter with Diversity*

(Surrey: Curzon, 1998), 1-19. See also, Bilahari Kausikan, "The "Asian Values" Debate: A View from Singapore", in Plattner Diamond and F. Marc, eds., *Democracy in East Asia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 17-27. Joseph Chan, "Asian Values and Human Rights: An Alternative View", in Plattner Diamond and F. Marc, eds., *Democracy in East Asia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 28-41. Sung-Joo Han, "Asian Values: An Asset or a Liability", in Sung-Joo Han, ed., *Changing Values in Asia* (Tokyo: JCIE, 1999), 3-12. Farish A. Noor, "Values in the Dynamics of Malaysia's Internal and External Political Relations", in Sung-Joo Han, ed., *Changing Values in Asia* (Tokyo: JCIE, 1999), 146-176.

85 Farish A Noor, "Values in the Dynamics of Malaysia's Internal and External Political Relations", in Sung-Joo Han, ed., *Changing Values in Asia* (Tokyo: JCIE, 1999), 171-173.

86 Wing Meng Ho, *Asian Values and Modernization - A Critical Interpretation,* Occasional Paper No. 1, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Singapore, 11.

Regional Empowerment and Ethnic Conflict in North Sumatra

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COMPETITION, MOBILIZATION AND CONFLICT

NORTH Sumatra has never been immune to problems of violence before. The nationalist struggle against the Dutch in Sumatra was, at times, very violent as has been described by Michael Langenberg (Langenberg 1976). The political divides between the supporters of President Soekarno and Vice President Hatta in the mid 1950s caused biggest turbulence in the Moluccan Islands and North Sumatra, as well as in some parts of Java.[2] During Soeharto's

period North Sumatra experienced several violent episodes related to land and fishing rights (Shiraishi 1999: 64). In just four months after the fall of Soeharto the number of people arrested in riots in North Sumatra registered by the police was 1,372, which was next only to the capital city, Jakarta (statistics of the Indonesian Police 1998). The levels of criminal violence in Medan and its vicinity are also considered high. North Sumatra is close to Aceh and is in many respects similar to Indonesia's other trouble spots, the Moluccan Islands, West Kalimantan and Papua, where ethnicity also plays a role in creating social and political divides and contributing to violent mobilization. Nevertheless, the question is: Why has North Sumatra not experienced any large-scale ethnic conflict? Will this kind of

[1] The introduction, comparative chapter (What lies ahead) and the conclusions as well as the structure of this article are done by Timo Kivimäki, while most of the material of other chapters are by Budi Agustono. The chapters on SARA and decentralization code have been written together by Agustono and Kivimäki.

[2] Due to the American hand in this incident, the archival papers of a senior adviser on Indonesia to the US government, Guy Pauker, and the American Ambassador Howard P. Jones offer good accounts on this

matter. (See Jones Papers, Subject file, Box 54, Hoover Institute Archives, Stanford University, and Pauker Papers, Box 30, Hoover Institute Archives, Stanford University and Feith 1967.