

Globalization and Democratization in Asia: The Construction of Identity

Book Reviews

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Globalization and Democratization in Asia: The Construction of Identity. Edited by Catarina Kinnvall and Kristina Jonsson. New York: Routledge, 2002. 276 pp.

This collection of essays focuses on the effect of globalization on political processes and identity formation in Asian countries. The increasing transnational interaction has been a fait accompli in the world. What has this new phenomenon brought to Asian states? The contributors to this collection provide important answers by exploring the linkage between globalization and changes in political structure and identity in Asian societies. Their overarching theme is summed as follows: globalization has brought intimidating challenges to preestablished dominant groups that have controlled official or subsidiary state apparatuses, while bringing opportunities to underrepresented or suppressed groups to be politicized and mobilized.

There are several strengths in this collection that make the seemingly commonplace theme fascinating. First, the contributors conceptualize globalization as a long-term process and compare the effect of globalization upon Asian societies among several timelines. They emphasize that the extent of transnational interaction and its increasing speed make the current trend of globalization unprecedented, even though the transnational interactions existed in the ancient era (e.g., the Silk Road, the Steppe Road, and trade winds). More important, the authors in the book explore why and how Asian societies respond differently to globalization among different timelines. For example, the increasing international interactions served as a favorable opportunity for the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) in the 1960s, while the expanded economic integrations were blamed for the Asian financial crisis in 1997. The temporal comparison within each case study is helpful for understanding the differences between past and present. While treating globalization as a long-term process rather than a new phenomenon, the authors provide a theoretical stepping stone to describe and explain changes in Asian countries.

Second, the contributors show that the effect of globalization upon political processes and identity formation is not unidirectional. The same external inputs of globalization have led to heterogeneous outputs among Asian societies. For example, the Asian financial crisis has severely affected the Republic of Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia, while having relatively little impact on Malaysia and Taiwan. Authors identify the context as an intervening variable to explain the different

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