

Islam and Muslim Societies

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Book Reviews

Islam and Democratization in Asia By (ed.) Shiping Hua, 2009, New York: Cambria Press, Price: \$119.99.

Islam-democracy compatibility, the process of democratization in Muslim societies, and such themes have been hotly debated, discussed, and defined; and from the final decades of 20th century, such themes have gained impetus, or to say have intensified. The debate has become even more intense with the combination of Islamic and Asian values vis-à-vis democratization. Asia contains the most populous Islamic country in the world: Indonesia. Is Islam compatible with democratization in the context of Asian cultures?

To address these important issues, a series of books have been published in the English language (especially from 1990s and from 2000s, it gained an impetus)*. Most of these books deal with the relationship between Islam, Muslims, and democratization with a sub region in Asia, such as Islam and democracy in Central Asia, Islam, and Muslims in South Asia, as well as Islam and democracy in Southeast Asia. Some deal with the same issue with a focus on the future. However, there has yet to be a book that deals with the relationship between Islam, Muslims, and democratization in the context of Asian cultures from the perspectives of theory and empirical country studies in South, Southeast, and Central Asia. This volume seeks to help fill that gap/vacuum.

Brief Outline of Chapters:

On March 13–14, 2008, the Center for Asian Democracy at the University of Louisville hosted a workshop on the “Islam and Democracy in Asia” workshop in Louisville, Kentucky, the United States, designed to explore the relationship between Islam and democratization within the context of Asian cultures and institutions (see Acknowledgements, p. xiii; Introduction, p.2). The ten essays included in this volume were selected from over 120 received from scholars all over the world. The authors of these 10 essays represent a variety of viewpoints: some believe that Islam is compatible with democracy; others have doubts about it. Topics of the papers presented vary: some are about theories that explore the relationship between Islam and democracy; others are empirical studies that deal with the subject matter from the regional perspectives of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia (see Introduction, p.2).

Although most authors in this collection are affiliated with scholarly institutions in North America and Europe, most of them have their ethnic origins in Asia. Authors in this collection include not only scholars but also practitioners, such as diplomats. The voices of this diverse group thus represent a variety of viewpoints, spanning from those who believe that Islam is compatible with democracy to those who have doubts about it. The first three

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chapters by Muqtedar Khan, Moataz A. Fattah, and Laure Paquette discuss the theoretical issues of Islam in the context of Asian cultures. Issues addressed include the relationship between Islamic governance and democracy, the Muslim political culture, and the underdog strategy adopted by some Islamic countries in Asia. These theoretical studies are followed by three chapters by Touqir Hussain, Tariq Karim, and Omar Khalidi, who comment on South Asia. They discuss topics that include the relations between Islam and democracy in the context of Pakistan, the aspiring pluralist democracy and expanding political Islam in Bangladesh, and the Muslim experience of Indian democracy. This is then followed by a section on Southeast Asia where Felix Heiduk discusses the role of political Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia in one chapter and Naveed S. Sheikh comments on the ambiguities of Islamic (ate) politics in Malaysia in another Chapter. The last two chapters are on Central Asia. Brian Glyn Williams provides unprecedented insight about the Taliban and Al Qaeda suicide bombers with an account of his field trip to Afghanistan, and Morris Rossabi discusses Muslim & democracy in the context of China and Central Asia. This volume, comprising the perspectives of scholars and practitioners, will be invaluable to those in political science, sociology, and religious studies.

Descriptive outline

Divided into 4 parts, the book consists of 10 chapters, preceded by List of Figure and Tables (p. xi); Acknowledgments (p. xiii); and 'Introduction' (pp.1-9) by the editor, Shiping Hua – professor of Political science and Director of the Centre for Asian democracy at the University of Louisville - and followed by Bibliography; List of Contributors; and Index.

In the 'Introduction', Shiping Hua makes a descriptive analysis of all the chapters, a brief analysis/review of the literature or in other words, the uniqueness of this book. He also reveals the aim/ goal/purpose/objective of this book. For him, the aim of this book is to cast some much-needed light on the relationship between Islam and democratization within the context of Asian cultures and institutions (see p.9).

Part I, 'Theories of the Relations between Islam and Democratization', consists of 3 chapters by Muqtedar Khan, Moataz A. Fattah. In **chapter 1**, "Islamic Governance and the Democratic Process", Muqtedar Khan articulates what constitutes the modern notion of Islamic governance from an Islamist perspective. Examining Islamic sources for ethical governance guidelines and the notion of an Islamic constitution, he develops a model of Islamic governance arguing that neither of these can be achieved without a systematic democratization of society and the application of democratic processes in the system of governance. For Muqtedar Khan, Islam is not a barrier to but a facilitator of democracy, justice, and tolerance in the Muslim world.

In **chapter 2**, "Islam and Democracy: an Examination of Liberal Muslims' Political Culture," Moataz A. Fattah points out that most literature on democratization suggests that

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the image of democracy has never been more favourable. However, it has been suggested that predominantly Muslim countries are markedly more authoritarian than non-Muslim societies. In other words, while Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and South and East Asia experienced significant gains for democracy and freedom over the last twenty years, the Islamic world experienced an equally significant increase in the number of repressive regimes. To test this thesis, Fattah examines a set of related questions that tackle the issue of Muslim culture and democracy based largely on survey research. Do the attitudes of ordinary Muslims stand as an obstacle toward the adoption of democracy? Why do Muslims not bark for democracy when the evidence suggests that all the world does? Can people who have been fed a steady diet of authoritarian-government-controlled information and ideas maintain democratic attitudes? It is important to note, however, that since these governments rarely permit the conduct of independent survey research regarding politically "sensitive" issues, no one really knows how successfully they indoctrinate their citizens.

In **chapter 3**, "Islam and Democracy in Asia: What Can We Learn from the Underdog Strategy?", Laure Paquette argues that whether Muslims are in the minority in a particular country or are in the majority, elements of extremism can be identified. She analyzes these two types of government & using the model of underdog thinking. This model is new to the study of Islam and democracy in Asia, but has previously been applied to a wide-ranging series of case studies at the state and international level in East Asia. Paquette presents some of the uses of this model for these two types of government, using several examples and a case study. First, she explores the characteristics of underdog thinking and examines examples of Muslim minorities and the Muslim weak state using underdog strategic thinking. Then, she explores how Muslims could be encouraged to participate in democracy.

In addition, the chapter explores how the strategic thinking of the underdog will guide the behavior of the Muslim minority in a period of democratization, either to improve that minority's political effectiveness, or to help the government predict and manage that minority. Finally, it also explores how the underdog's strategic thinking will guide the behavior of the weak or failed state with a Muslim majority when that state is also in a period of democratization, and how this framework may help greater powers understand and manage the behavior of that state.

Part II, 'South Asia', again is divided into three chapters, deals with Islam and democracy in the context of South Asia. In **chapter 4**, "Islam and Pakistan," Ambassador Touqir Hussain argues that Islam has provided a legitimate cause for Islamic activism in Pakistan. Since the birth of the nation had a weak national identity, Pakistanis have historically looked for a surrogate identity, and have often found it in religion. For him, years of authoritarian rule, degraded rule of law, social injustice, and weak institutional architecture had its own consequence: encouraging the public tendency to resort to

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extremist solutions. Many Islamic thinkers are engaged in an intellectual effort to bring Islamic values to the center of the debate in the Islamic world, as a means of renewing their societies that are under siege from Western cultural and political assault. There is thus a new wave of predominantly religion-based revisionism in which religion has become a medium of expression of social discontent, economic dissatisfaction, political activism, and personal unhappiness, and the Islamists are riding this wave.

In **chapter 5**, “Bangladesh: The New Front-Line State in the Struggle between Aspiring Pluralist Democracy and Expanding Political Islam,” Ambassador Tariq Karim remarks that Bangladesh, with its more than 147 million people who are hostage to widespread poverty, presents itself as a most interesting case study: a third-world nation struggling to establish, preserve, and consolidate democracy against the grain of a legacy of deep-rooted political schizophrenia that is apparently embedded in its identity and history.

Bangladesh - considered until recently as a possible role model for developing Muslim nations because of its inherited secular tradition, its democratic aspirations, and inclusive world vision - has a long history of struggle against authoritarianism for democratic rights, and is a democracy in which voting gives each individual a say in electing leaders of their choice and in governance issues. However, the progressive abdication of the pluralist vision of democracy and good governance by successive political parties elected to government, whose indulgence of a zero-sum politics relentlessly undermined and corrupted the core institutions upon which any democratic nation must rely, has been concomitant with creeping inroads made by Islamist extremism.

In **chapter 6**, “Muslim Experience of Indian Democracy,” Omar Khalidi remarks that with Muslims representing 12 percent of India’s population, the Indian Muslim population exceeds most Middle Eastern countries’ Muslim populations, and is rivaled only by Indonesia and Pakistan. India is also the world’s largest democracy. Despite all its shortcomings, Indian democracy is sharply contrasted with its absence in its immediate neighborhoods to the east (Bangladesh, Myanmar) and the west (Pakistan and beyond). India is also officially a secular country, again in contrast to the neighboring countries of the Middle East. For all of the reasons outlined here, a study of the Indian Muslim experience with democracy is critical to any discussion on Islam and democracy in Asia and elsewhere.

Khalidi’s study explores three interrelated themes. First, it considers the Indian Muslim elite’s perception of the British style parliamentary democracy in the 19th century, and why they thought it would be injurious to their interests in a multi religious society in which they are a minority. Instead, the Indian Muslim elite sought and gained an electoral system—Separate Electorates—perceived to be in their interests. Secondly, it examines Indian nationalist (mainly Hindu) critique of the system of Separate Electorates, and its abolition in the 1950 constitution. Thirdly, it examines the implications of Muslims’ poor

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numbers in parliament and state assemblies on power-sharing, as seen through cabinet appointments, allocation of state resources for development, and the protection of lives and property during the riots and pogroms that are part of contemporary Indian life.

Part III, 'Southeast Asia' spans over two chapters that deal with Islam and democracy in the context of Southeast Asia. **Chapter 7**, "Challenging Democracy? The Role of Political Islam in Post-Suharto Indonesia," by Felix Heiduk, shares some insights on the impact Islamists have and the role they play in a Muslim-majority democracy like post-Suharto Indonesia. Indonesia's transition to democracy has been challenged by various problems such as a large-scale economic crisis, the pauperization of large parts of its population, various legacies of the Suharto-era like corruption and nepotism, armed separatism, intra-communal conflicts between Muslims and Christians, and Islamist terrorism, yet the country stayed on its course toward democracy. A majority of the population as well as the country's political elite regard the idea of turning Indonesia into an Islamic state as counterproductive to the democratization process of the country. Thus, if Indonesia's democratization remains stable and working, the country could become a role model for the compatibility of Islam and democracy for the Muslim world. Within this framework, the study seeks to analyze the role Islamists have played and continue to play in the context of Indonesia's democratization process.

In **chapter 8**, "Islam and Democracy in Malaysia: The Ambiguities of Islamic (ate) Politics," Naveed S. Sheikh points out that Islam in Malaysia has been used both as a top-down strategy of legitimization by the state, and a bottom-up strategy of delegitimization by partisans seeking to challenge, and ultimately capture, state power. Islam has also been used horizontally, as social capital, to bind together a racial (in) group vis-à-vis minority (out) groups in the pursuit of distributive privileges. Sheikh argues that Islam is bound to remain a permanent, if contested, feature in the Malaysian political landscape for the foreseeable future. The presence of the Islamic discourse alone also bears no predictable correlation with either preference formation or policy choices. Above all, God remains transcendent in Malaysia.

Part IV (the final part) 'Central Asia' (consisting of two chapters) focuses on Central Asia, Afghanistan and China.

In **chapter 9**, "Taliban and Al Qaeda Suicide Bombers in Afghanistan: Tracing the Emergence of a Terror Tactic," Brian Williams reports on his field research, completed in the spring of 2007, provides a firsthand account of the Taliban's much-touted spring offensive. During this field research, his focus was on the mysterious rise of suicide bombing in the country. His job was to find out who the bombers were, where they were getting their inspiration, and what their overall strategy was.

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The results of his intensive fieldwork—which took him from the dangerous Pashtun tribal areas along the Pakistani border through the Hindu Kush mountains of central Afghanistan to Herat on the Iranian border—are most unexpected and have changed the way we view the war in Afghanistan. Most importantly, they point the finger at Iraq, and show that the uniquely vicious form of terrorism emanating from the Iraqi theater of operations has radicalized the Taliban insurgency. Through interviews with Afghan National Directorate of Security officials, Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, Afghan government, Northern Alliance warlords, off-record U.S. military, and Pashtun tribesmen he collected considerable evidence of Taliban insurgents traveling to the Sunni triangle for terrorism training. Williams also uncovers irrefutable evidence of Iraqis and other Arabs coming from Iraq to Afghanistan to train their Taliban counterparts. Most importantly, his work shows that the Iraqis succeeded in convincing the Pashtun-Taliban, who previously had strong taboos on suicide of any sort, that “martyrdom operations” were sanctioned by Islam.

In **chapter 10**, “China and Central Asia: Developing Relations and Impact on Democracy”, Morris Rossabi argues that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, China has increasingly played a role in the five Central Asian countries, a development that surely will have an influence on both democracy and Islam in the region. Economic relations between China and Central Asia have accelerated over the past decade. Rossabi also explores the political ramifications of these developing economic links for both Central Asia and Xinjiang. Will China’s economic leverage in the region translate into political leverage? How will China’s role in this region affect any attempt to move to more democratic institutions in Central Asia? What will be the impact of China’s role in Central Asia in general?

Islam and Democratization in Asia, on the whole, is a good contribution to the literature on Islam and Democracy theme. This comprehensive study offers a balanced understanding of the debated issue of democracy and Islam in post 9/11 interreligious, intercultural relations, covering both theoretical and practical aspects of Islam, Muslims, Democracy, and democratization in Asian Countries, from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, to Afghanistan, China, Central Asia. It will be suitable and useful for scholars, political commentators, students, and teachers of the field alike.

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