



Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority

Lucian W. Pye

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In a major new book, Lucian Pye reconceptualizes Asian political development as a product of cultural attitudes about power and authority. He contrasts the great traditions of Confucian East Asia with the Southeast Asian cultures and the South Asian traditions of Hinduism and Islam, and explores the national differences within these larger civilizations.

Breaking with modern political theory, Pye believes that power differs profoundly from one culture to another. In Asia the masses of the people are group-oriented and respectful of authority, while their leaders are more concerned with dignity and upholding collective pride than with problem-solving. As culture decides the course of political development, Pye shows how Asian societies, confronted with the task of setting up modern nation-states, respond by fashioning paternalistic forms of power that satisfy their deep psychological craving for security. This new paternalism may appear essentially authoritarian to Western eyes, but Pye maintains that it is a valid response to the people's needs and will ensure community solidarity and strong group loyalties. He predicts that we are certain to see emerging from Asia's accelerating transformation some new version of modern society that may avoid many of the forms of tension common to Western civilization but may also produce a whole new set of problems.

This book revitalizes Asian political studies on a plane that comprehends the large differences between Asia and the West and at the same time is sensitive to the subtle variations among the many Asian cultures. Its comparative perspective will provide indispensable insights to anyone who wishes to think more deeply about the modern Asian states.

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