Old Money—The History of Giving in Asia

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In 2010, Warren Buffett and Bill Gates visited China to convince their Chinese millionaire and billionaire counterparts to commit to giving large portions of their wealth to charity. During this time, the Western media's portrayal of the philanthropic landscape in China, such as that by The Associated Press, was that it was "relatively immature." Journals readily noted that while China's GDP has recently come to reach half of America's, the United States philanthropic market was still 21 times larger.¹

Like China, other Asian economies are frequently subject to similar news coverage whenever prominent Western businessmen pay visits to promote philanthropy throughout the region. While it celebrates its Gates, Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller families as generous and selfless champions of philanthropy, it calls for greater action from Asia as a whole.

Admittedly, Asia is outnumbered, outweighed, and outscored by the West on most fronts within the charitable sector. The West in general boasts more philanthropists, more individual donors, and more organizations, not to mention the sheer amount and scope of donations. Nevertheless, contrary to the claims of the media, the clear superiority of the West in these measures does not dictate Asia's capacity for doing good.

To better make sense of this apples-to-oranges comparison between Asian and Western philanthropy, one must first revisit the difference and

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the relationship between charity and philanthropy defined by the first chapter of this book: philanthropy is a formalized and systematic process of doing good, while charity is the act of doing good itself. That is, even though philanthropy in Asia may be “relatively immature” due to the continent’s rather late economic growth and exposure to the concept, history tells us Asians, too, know how to be charitable and generous.

Four key historical experiences are shared by most, if not all, Asian economies. First, Asians emphasize caring for the well-being of fellow community members, from family to locality. Second, religions significantly influence the giving and helping behaviors and patterns of Asian countries and peoples, with many religious institutions even going so far as to deliver social services to the people. Third, modern civil society in most Asian countries flourished as either a challenging force against, or as a direct result of, twentieth-century colonialism. Finally, the public image and personality of modern civil society in Asia has been shaped by past interactions and experiences with powerful central governments. This chapter will explore in greater detail these themes of community, faith, colonialism, and authoritarianism for each of the 11 Asian economies, to demonstrate how Asia’s long history of generosity and charity will help pave way for a philanthropic tomorrow.

INDIA

Socioeconomic incongruities coexist in India. Considered one of the leading developing countries in terms of annual GDP growth, India still suffers from nationwide poverty. One in five Indians is poor, and an estimated 270 million citizens live below the poverty line.² Basic sanitation, health care, education, and other social services are not readily available to much of the local population.

Accompanying some of these alarming challenges are promising trends. India is renowned for its advanced information technology sector, as well as for housing major homegrown multinational corporations across various industries. It boasts more than 100 billionaires, consistently ranking India in the top five with the likes of the United States, China, and Germany.³ And it is the largest democracy in the world.

India’s philanthropy reflects such contrasts. With socioeconomic hardships alongside a dynamic marketplace full of new wealth, the gap for Indian charity and philanthropy to tap into is glaringly apparent.

Preceding this present-day environment favorable for charitable individuals and institutions is a rich track record of giving—both informal and formal—that predated even the pioneers in American philanthropic history.

From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, India for the first time witnessed the establishment of modern foundations by prominent members of the private sector, including the J. N. Tata Endowment Scheme (1892) and the N. M. Wadia Foundation (1909).⁴

India also possesses a deeply ingrained culture of informal giving.⁵ Providing financial and non-financial support to one's immediate family and community (caste, village, or other extended social groups) is common. This culture resonates across the country today: 24 percent of donors reported having given money to their friends, neighbors, and colleagues, while 53 percent of donors indicated that an unreturned loan to a family relative is a donation.⁶ Families also provided various social services to their domestic helpers in addition to their paid salary. Clothing and food were common donations, along with financial contributions to their health care and their children's education.

Finally, donating for religious purposes has historically been a major part of Indian giving. In fact, charitable religious endowments and trusts came before modern philanthropic institutions. Donations frequently went to Islamic endowments specifically for charitable purposes, known as *waqfs*, and to trusts like the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams that managed Hindu temples and provided social services such as schools and hospitals. India's organic institutionalization of philanthropy and long culture of family, community, and religious giving attest to the country's preexisting familiarity with and maturity in doing good.

This homegrown charity and philanthropy reflects India's strong faith-based textual roots to its generous culture. Hinduism—the most widespread religion in India today—Buddhism and Islam all contribute to Indians' inclination to do good. The concepts of *zakat* (almsgiving) and *sadaqaat* (voluntary offerings) in Islam and of *bhiksha* (food given as alms) and avoiding bad *karma* in Buddhism particularly pertain to giving.⁷

In Hinduism, many ancient Sanskrit texts are comprised of extremely detailed stipulations about charity and philanthropy.⁸ That is, beyond simply encouraging benevolent actions, these sources spell out the who, what, when, why, and how of *daana* (giving) and *seva* (service). Kings were also required by the epic of Mahabharata to share their wealth with the people and not use it for their own pleasure. Sanskrit books even imply a hierarchy, as in the Laws of Manu, in which food, required by all beings for their survival, emerges as the best in worth over gold, silver, salt, and so on. A benefactor's attitude had to be genuine and passionate; certain traits were also expected of the beneficiary. In other words, giving merely for the sake of giving is insufficient, necessitating benefactors to check multiple boxes to give, strategically and efficiently.

Still, India has not been immune to external influence on its charitable and philanthropic sector. Industrialization during the British Raj era increased both the size and the scope of philanthropy in India.⁹ With a modernized economy, the overall wealth of businesses exceeded an unprecedented amount, resulting in a bigger surplus for public welfare. At the same time, industrialization helped expand the market coverage of businesses and allowed them to operate beyond the regional confines of their respective headquarter cities, which in turn scaled up the scope of the private sector's philanthropic activities. Many domestic philanthropic foundations reflect India's inherent culture and history of goodwill, but they grew against the backdrop of industrialization that occurred under British colonial rule.

India's government played an important role. As early as 1860, India legally recognized the existence of nonprofit groups via the British Raj Societies Registration Act, granting the status of a "society" to a group of seven or more people in any literary, scientific, or charitable association.¹⁰ Numerous nonprofit organizations and philanthropic foundations arose as a result, and this piece of legislation still applies to NGOs today.¹¹

The legacy of the colonial era also shaped philanthropic thought. As many donors concluded that British dominance grew from advanced science and technology, philanthropists changed their giving priorities, funneling more money into relevant endeavors, as well as into projects of social reform.¹² More money was funneled into secular purposes, such as social reform and cultural revivalism projects. In the end, with Mahatma Gandhi's return to India in 1916, this particular evolution of Indian philanthropy culminated in a mobilized Indian civil society's involvement in the independence movement.

Gandhi's return in 1916 shifted the course of India's development plan to economic self-sufficiency. As part of this quest for self-sufficiency, voluntary action at the local village level became pivotal in the drive to tackle widespread poverty.¹³ As a result, the number of village-oriented community organizations proliferated.¹⁴ Gandhi's theory of trusteeship inspired many wealthy individuals at the time to donate money and resources for the good of the greater community, whether it would be for the independence movement or for the delivery of social services.¹⁵ In so doing, Gandhi utilized many of the Hindu concepts relevant to charity and philanthropy in a way that transcended the terms' original definitions to bring about greater change in line with his goals.¹⁶ He worked to transform the primary motive behind doing good from acquiring merit as a religious

obligation to wholeheartedly wanting to contribute to the general welfare of all, stating, “You should regard yourself as the trustees and servants of the poor. Your commerce must be regulated for the benefit of the toiling millions and you must be satisfied with earning an honest penny.”¹⁷

Gandhi also said, “Earn your crores by all means. But understand that your wealth is not yours; it belongs to the people. Take what you require for your legitimate needs, and use the remainder for society.”¹⁸ The Birla and Bajaj families were notably affected by the principles and theories of Gandhi and donated millions of rupees for causes that he promoted.¹⁹

Post-independence India (1948–1980s) further encouraged philanthropy. The socialist, interventionist government focused on social welfare and economic development, with a heavy dose of central planning.^{20,21} The private sector supported the government’s developmental agenda, and India experienced a dramatic increase in the number of private trusts and foundations.²² The government, in turn, encouraged citizens’ participation in social welfare programs, but some argue that the state’s dominant role actually imposed limitations on the nonprofit sector, so that it was only the confrontational response to inefficient government that led to the burgeoning of the nonprofit sector in India.²³ Be that as it may, the outcome of growth in both philanthropy and charity in India is unquestionable.

Today, the charitable and philanthropic sector of India is one of the most vibrant in the world. Individual giving in India is a global outlier, trumping the rest of the world at its level of GDP per capita.²⁴ More than 2 million NGOs are reported to be active in the country, while the numbers of philanthropists and potential philanthropists in millionaires and billionaires are increasing every year.^{25,26} The Companies Act of 2013 and its 2-percent corporate social responsibility spending requirement has had a huge impact, as will be seen in greater detail in a later chapter of this book. But the socioeconomic shortcomings, discussed in the beginning of this section, persist to plague the country, making the role of charity and philanthropy all the more imperative for the future trajectory of India.

PHILIPPINES

In the Philippines, we see the impact of all four themes: community, faith, colonialism, and authoritarianism. The Filipino lexicon reflects its deep cultural roots in traditions of *pakikipagkapwa*, a sense of shared community and *kapwa*, compassion. To this day, Catholicism plays a crucial role

both in spiritually encouraging charity, as well as in directly providing basic social services to those in need. Two colonial regimes—Spanish and American—helped establish the initial infrastructure needed for its now vibrant civil society and philanthropic community, while the Marcos dictatorship cracked down heavily on advocacy groups, ultimately triggering a fierce counteraction from an extremely well-mobilized nonprofit sector.

In pre-colonial times, informal mechanisms of mutual self-help volunteerism prevailed throughout the country at the village level. Volunteers often helped with construction of public infrastructure projects such as churches, schoolhouses, streets, plazas, and cemeteries.²⁷ In fact, this domestically bred practice of *bayanihan* (assuming another's burdens) was more commonplace than religious associations exported by Catholicism and Spanish colonialism.²⁸ This unique history of alleviating fellow community members' hardships demonstrates the Filipinos' deeply ingrained fondness for community welfare, manifested in both the language and village-level volunteerism.

Under Spanish colonialism, the Philippines began to see for the first time the establishment of formal charitable organizations. Public goods institutions set up by the Roman Catholic Church left behind a significant legacy of introducing institutionalized social delivery organizations (SDOs), alongside individual philanthropic giving to the Church.²⁹ With its funds, the church built hospitals and orphanages, and its *cofradías* (brotherhoods) were instrumental in the provision of welfare services to the poor and needy. Not only did these religious associations fulfill their basic duties of arranging town festivals in honor of saints and ensuring the observance of Christian morals, but they also behaved like charitable groups by providing free labor and money to their immediate communities in times of crisis.^{30,31} In addition to these charitable and social imports, Catholic missionaries appended the Western notion of *kawanggawa* (charity) to the Filipino dictionary of doing good.³²

The American colonial government further facilitated the progression of Philippine civil society in its resemblance to contemporary nonprofit organizations and foundations. Under the Americans, secularism flourished, demarcating boundaries between state and church, as well as between state and non-governmental provision of public goods and services.^{33,34} As a result, the Philippines witnessed the emergence of secular welfare agencies, interest groups, professional associations, and charitable institutions. During this period youth, labor, peasant, and women's organizations flourished, alongside the creation of professional groups such as

the Philippine Medical Association and the Philippine Bar Association.³⁵ More sophisticated, larger organizations with written constitutions—such as the Society of the Poor—also came into being.³⁶ Furthermore, Americans brought over to the Philippines their own non-government organizations like the American Red Cross and the Anti-Tuberculosis Society, which were known to receive philanthropic support from the local elite.^{37,38} The Philippine Corporation Law of 1906 further encouraged nonprofit groups by giving them legal recognition along with proactive government funding (2.2 percent of the government's annual expenditure at the time) for local associations that focused on health services.³⁹

In the 1960s and 1970s, the hopelessly deteriorating economy and increasingly rampant corruption of the Marcos regime triggered the mobilization of numerous social movements across sectors, from students to human rights advocacy.⁴⁰ Eventually, these movements gradually evolved into formal non-governmental organizations, supplementing the lack of government presence in delivering essential social services in certain areas of the country.^{41,42} With these trends, civil society in the Philippines took its unified shape for the first time via protest and calls for reform against the authoritarian Marcos government. Marcos responded in 1972 with martial law, until public protests finally ousted him from power in 1986.

The subsequent Corazon Aquino administration enacted legislation favorable to nonprofits. The 1987 constitution explicitly stipulates the rights of non-governmental organizations, so that the state must respect their participation. With this new legal framework, registered NGOs rose by an astonishing 96 percent in less than a year, from 27,100 in early 1986 to 53,000 by late September.⁴³ And as José Magadia points out, civil society in the Philippines changed its focal orientation from resistant advocacy to a variety of other issues primarily in social services. With this shift in its fundamental identity, the overall sector was able to grow further by incorporating additional functions such as policy research, network building, and so forth.⁴⁴

Income inequality, poverty, corruption, and ineffective public policy still plague the Philippines. In multiple socioeconomic indices and measurements, the country fares poorly, generally situating at the bottom half and lower tier. On the Social Progress Index, which attempts to capture how well countries provide basic social and environmental needs of their citizens, the Philippines ranks 68th out of 133 countries—even below its neighboring Southeast Asian nations of Malaysia and Thailand.⁴⁵ On the latest Corruption Perceptions Index, the Philippines ranks 95th out of

168 countries, scoring behind the likes of China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the fact that the Philippines hosts the largest number of NGOs per capita in Asia, between a quarter and half a million groups in total, reflects centuries of cultured yearning for doing good—and for civic engagement as a positive opportunity for the future.

SOUTH KOREA

Many observers say that modern Korean civil society began 20 years ago, in the aftermath of twentieth-century industrialization and democratization. Industrialization came first (the “Han River Miracle,” after World War II), then, in 1987, the June Democratic Uprising against military governments shaped the state and society that followed.⁴⁷

But the practice of doing good, and its institutionalized forms in civil society, long predated these events in Korea. Many such practices began with Confucianism, which has contributed enormously to present-day Korean culture, perhaps more so than in any other Asian community.⁴⁸ As far back as the sixteenth century, Confucianism in Korea gave birth to private academies that taught ethics. These academies were essentially the equivalent of a modern-day NGO. They grew locally without any involvement and support from the state, instead funded through donations from local elites.⁴⁹ And they demonstrated a high level of management autonomy and independence from the state. For example, the academies faced no interference from the government, neither in regulating their student admission policies nor in their economic plans to rent their lands to tenant farmers for self-funding.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, tight oversight of these academies arrived under King Yeongjo in the eighteenth century, in the name of accomplishing “grand harmony,” ultimately stalling the growth of this premature sector of society.⁵¹

Japanese colonialism had mixed effects on Korean civil society. Indirectly, it encouraged modern development, ending Korea’s feudal society and introducing capitalism.⁵² It was also during this period that Korea had its first private scholarship foundation, Yangyounghoe, established in 1939.⁵³ But Japan’s aim to solidify control over the Korean peninsula involved cracking down on any form of social movements that challenged its colonial rule.^{54,55} Due to the hostile relationship between the colonial ruler and the Korean people, Koreans began to regard the regime more as an illegitimate alien power than as a moral patriarch like their past imperial rulers.⁵⁶ This antagonistic anti-state orientation is constantly echoed throughout

much of Korea's history during the twentieth century and defines the fundamental identity of Korean civil society to this day.

Independence from Japanese colonialism in 1945 enabled the brief growth of previously repressed social movements. Farmers, the poor, and other marginalized groups of society eventually congregated under an umbrella organization named *Chonnong* whose membership reached 3 million people in 1946.⁵⁷ Service-oriented religious groups and charity were also for the first time introduced to the country during this period.⁵⁸ This sudden expansion of civil society in Korea can be attributed to the lack of an official government for three weeks after liberation, which provided room for a high degree of freedom and autonomy that these movements had never experienced during the colonial era.^{59,60} However, this brief period of optimism for the charitable sector was cut short by the arrival of the first authoritarian ruler in modern Korean history, followed by a series of subsequent military dictatorships.

Three extremely powerful rulers dominated the next 40 years of the post-liberation Republic of Korea: Rhee Syngman (1948–1960), Park Chung-hee (1963–1979), and Chun Doo-hwan (1980–1988). Korean civil society's anti-state disposition further intensified under their rule, chafing against the military support that kept the presidents in power.⁶¹ This confrontational relationship meant advocacy groups, serving as the representative voice of the disgruntled citizenry, came to lead the non-profit sector in Korea.^{62,63}

Even so, other kinds of social service organizations managed to flourish amid the tensions. Under President Rhee Syngman, non-political service-oriented organizations backed by foreign aid were relatively free to pursue their welfare activities. After the coup that installed President Park Chung-hee, Korea saw a rise in the standard of living, as Park's regime was both authoritarian and development-oriented. The resulting growth of the middle class enabled the development of such organizations as the *Saemaul* (New Village) Movement. Now regarded as one of the most well-known legacies of the Park regime, the New Village Movement played a huge role in the urbanization and development of Korean local agricultural communities, implementing the central government's policies and plans at a grassroots level.⁶⁴ Completely rehabilitating rural infrastructure from top to bottom, the New Village Movement is now considered a "classic example of community-driven development."⁶⁵

Park's development-driven agenda came to fruition under his successor Chun Doo-hwan, another military dictator, in the 1980s. That decade

brought rapid industrialization, urbanization, and socioeconomic class diversification, which in turn led to popular support for various civil society organizations (from women's groups to environmental advocacy groups). Such organizations played active roles in anti-state efforts to bring down the military dictator, until Chun eventually stepped down in the face of ongoing public demonstrations and protests.⁶⁶

Those 40 years of authoritarianism shaped the advocacy-focused, anti-state nature of Korean civil society. Even today, the most influential and prominent organizations are advocacy groups concerned with issues such as the environment, women's rights, and social justice.⁶⁷ Now there are 7600 such organizations, the majority of which were founded in the 1990s. And, in the words of Bidet, authoritarian governments' "instrumentalization" of non-governmental organizations and civil society groups whose activities and projects were well in line with their policy objectives also laid the foundation for various SDOs and the overall non-profit sector.

That legacy also presents Korea with particular challenges. Donors recognize Korean civil society's heavy sway toward advocacy groups, and that makes some wary; many philanthropists (usually *chaebol*, the Korean term for family dominated conglomerates) are reluctant to donate their money to charity and partner with local NGOs, alternatively seeking to work by themselves via private foundations or to work together with the government.⁶⁸ This distrust is not one-sided. Because Korea's wealthy elite traditionally maintained close ties with military regimes, their lack of civic participation against authoritarianism makes them remnants of authoritarianism. The recent scandal of Korean conglomerates' shady donations to former President Park Geun-hye has reaffirmed this suspicion of Korean society against the wealthy, exacerbating distrust between the people and potential philanthropists.

CHINA

China's development of charity and philanthropy is often misconstrued to be anemic. With its one-party political system and a widespread assumption that civil society is inherently a Western value and concept, this is understandable. Before the current Communist Party rule, the Chinese moved from one imperial regime to another, casting shadow over a rich culture of self-help. But China has a long history of doing good.

Confucianism introduced China to basic concepts of community care, from taking care of the elderly to providing education to the youth. This

provision of welfare predated any formal institutionalization of social welfare and civil society, but it was to be taken up primarily by the government acting as the father figure of the people.⁶⁹ But the officials of the Qin dynasty disagreed. They advocated for a strong state and a weak society, neglecting the state's civic duty to attend to the poor, believing that those in need were at fault for their own poverty. Chinese citizenry stepped forward to fill this gap, creating the country's first systematic private form of charity: family-based kinship organizations. These family self-help groups were both a reaction to the legalist Qin regime that failed to provide social services and a reflection of existing Confucian principles that emphasized community care in terms of family relations.

These lineage organizations provided public goods and services, including care for widows and orphans, distribution of grain, and construction of schools.⁷⁰ Wealthy individuals—most notably, salt moguls—oversaw village social welfare activities.⁷¹ These clan-based groups gradually spread from just southeast coastal China to the rest of the country during the Song (960–1279) and Qing (1644–1912) dynasties. The nature of these groups also changed at the same time, easing their blood-tied membership requirements and focusing more on the delivery of social services.⁷² Family-based groups continued to flourish after the end of imperial dynasties, and other types of civic organizations arose, including professional associations and foundations.⁷³

The smooth uptrend in China's growing civil society halted after the Communist Party came to power. The Communist Party cracked down on all private associations, seeing them as a sign of state failure.⁷⁴ The repression of these organizations, along with late exposure to key concepts pertaining to charity, shaped current misconceptions of Chinese civil society.

Despite this unfriendly environment for the third sector, another term for civil society, during the twentieth century, Deng Xiaoping's open-door economic policies enabled the beginning of contemporary charity and philanthropy. In 1995, an NGO Forum held alongside the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing introduced the general public and the government to the term "NGO" for the first time.⁷⁵ With this occasion, the Communist Party accepted that NGOs were not anti-governmental opposition groups.

NGOs and civil society ended up aligning well with Deng's free-market ideology. The growing popularity of a liberalized Chinese economy crept into the field of social services, applying free-market principles to social welfare and allowing room for the third sector to take up a much more

influential role in delivering public goods and services to the people. Hence, during the second half of the 1990s, China experienced a huge surge in the number of large domestic charity organizations, such as Friends of Nature and Global Villages, as well as the entry of many foreign NGOs.⁷⁶

Under the Hu Jintao government, charities faced a brief period of restrictions, as Beijing became wary of NGOs bringing forth ideologies challenging to the Communist Party.⁷⁷ At this time, government-organized programs, such as the China Red Cross, rose to prominence and became dominant forces within the sector.⁷⁸ The Chinese government also reverted to more involvement in the provision of social goods and services, ending various market initiatives begun in the 1990s.

Amidst this recent experience of government pushback, other challenges to the growth of Chinese philanthropy arose in the form of nationwide scandals and controversial legislations.

Most notable was the 2011 Guo Meimei scandal, in which a young Chinese woman who claimed to be the “commercial general manager” of the “China Red Cross Chamber of Commerce” flaunted her lavish lifestyle of luxury sports cars and branded bags on social media. It caused such public uproar that domestic charitable organizations saw a 90-percent drop in donations.^{79,80} This particular scandal exacerbated the lack of institutionalized trust in China, which heavily relies on *guanxi* (strong personal connections).⁸¹ The World Values Survey, for example, indicates that close to 80 percent of the Chinese respondents do not trust strangers.⁸² The Guo Meimei scandal further reduced the low level of institutionalized trust resulting from the culture of *guanxi* and societal distrust. Such scandals and their ramifications remain one of the biggest obstacles to the success of Chinese civil society.

The 2016 Charity Law put forth by the National People’s Congress may shape the next set of relationships between the government and non-profit organizations. Its impact is not yet clear. Supporters see improvements made in registration, fundraising, and tax incentives, while critics worry about restrictions on overseas NGOs.^{83,84,85,86} The Charity Law, its implications, and potential effects will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter of this book.

China’s long experience with charity and philanthropy brings context to the challenge given at the start of this section: yes, the United States boasts philanthropic giving 21 times larger than in China, with a GDP only twice as large, but that does not mean China is not interested in

giving.⁸⁷ China has a rich history of the wealthy giving back to society in the form of clan-based lineage organizations. Civil society proved resilient to a temporary downturn during the twentieth-century Communist rule and now is developing at a good pace. The following facts suggest an optimistic future:^{88,89,90}

1. China has experienced a 66-percent increase in the total amount of charitable donations during the time span of 2009–2014.
2. Five times as many charitable organizations were in China by 2014, compared with ten years earlier.
3. Per capita charitable giving increased by 20 percent annually through 2013.
4. 2014 saw \$15.51 billion worth of total regular donations, even excluding one-off donations made for natural disasters.

TAIWAN

Modern Taiwan, founded after the Chinese Communist Party took full control of the Mainland in 1949, began as the Chinese Nationalist Party—or the Kuomintang (KMT)—fled to the island of Formosa. Prior to this KMT exodus, and before 50 years of Japanese colonialism, Taiwan was part of the Qing dynasty from 1683 to 1895.⁹¹ Under Qing influence, Taiwan gradually accustomed itself to Chinese cultural traditions, including Confucianism. Taiwan's culture of doing good long resembled that of Mainland China, while its recent state-civil society relations resembled that in South Korea due to the shared experience of having an authoritarian, developmental regime.

Yet Taiwan's culture is unique. It differs from its Mainland counterpart in the more significant role that Buddhism plays in charity and philanthropy. The Buddhist notions of *karma* and accumulating merit in particular galvanize the Taiwanese people to volunteer and donate. In multiple surveys, more than 50 percent of the respondents have directly attributed their motivation behind doing good to avoiding bad *karma* and accumulating merit.^{92,93} In fact, one of the most well-known and largest charitable institutions in Taiwan is a global Buddhist organization known as the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, the largest owner of private land in the country.^{94,95} This mix of Taiwan's Confucian roots and the widespread Buddhist faith and practices encouraging benevolent activities attests to Taiwan's societal capacity for doing good. Many believe that

the Tzu Chi Foundation, whose assets are not publicly disclosed, is the wealthiest foundation in Asia.

Taiwan has also been shaped by military dictatorship for more than 30 years after 1947. This period, marked by rapid economic growth and industrialization, has been dubbed the “Taiwan Miracle.” In the first half of this time, the KMT government solidified its control over the island, supervising and controlling the public arena with military might. Any demands or suggestions coming from society were met with suppression and censorship. Martial law put Taiwan under authoritarian rule for the next 38 years. Civil society became hard to imagine.

From 1963 to 1978, economic policies started to top the list of priorities for the KMT.⁹⁶ Shifting the economy to one based on export-oriented industrialization, the KMT inadvertently gave birth to and bolstered the urban middle and industrial working classes. For the first time, public life saw the influence of other societal interests—market forces—besides the military political party. However, the KMT still exercised its dominance, and many of the economic players displayed political loyalty to the KMT for business opportunities.⁹⁷ Competing views of society were limited to a few intellectuals and social elites.⁹⁸ Civil society remained in limbo.

In the 1980s, numerous social movements began to emerge, not as a unified opposition to the KMT but rather as a reflection of diverse interests and socioeconomic classes resulting from economic growth.⁹⁹ Without this united front, and given the KMT’s self-organized transition from “hard” authoritarianism to “soft” authoritarianism, co-opting the voices of Taiwanese civil society, Taiwan avoided the kind of direct confrontation seen in Korea’s June Democratic Uprising of 1987.^{100,101} While Korea’s military regime violently cracked down on dissident groups, the KMT in Taiwan eased toward democratization.¹⁰² With the co-opting of the third sector, social movements and civil society groups did not feel the necessity of confronting the government, but were instead inclined to engage with the state through formal mechanisms and channels set forth by the government.

This is not to say that there were no protests and public demonstrations against the government. In 1987, up to 1800 street demonstrations were recorded.¹⁰³ As with Korea, authoritarianism amid a growing prosperity shaped civil society in Taiwan, so it began to be, and remains, advocacy-oriented. On the other hand, the KMT’s self-democratization led to a more constructive relationship between the state and the third sector, mutually reinforcing the democratization process and providing a much more favorable environment for the growth of the charitable sector in the country.

This state-civil society cooperation reached its all-time high after the lifting of martial law in 1987. The Taiwanese government started to embrace and collaborate with these social movements, allowing formal establishment of NGOs.¹⁰⁴ The third sector and the private sector began to be included as consultants in the legislation of policies, laws, and regulations. Furthermore, the nonprofit sector in Taiwan has taken an even more active role in its state-society relationship by engaging in foreign policy. In the context of Taiwan's unique cross-strait relations with China, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and civil society have cooperated with participation in international conferences.¹⁰⁵ Nonprofit organizations are in effect acting to promote Taiwan's soft power abroad. With this friendly infrastructure and environment acquired after overcoming many historical obstacles, Taiwan now boasts nearly 60,000¹⁰⁶ registered non-governmental organizations as of 2015, reflecting the growth and vibrancy of the sector.

JAPAN

Japan's civil society is an anomaly in the Asian continent. Japan as a nation is not well known for charity and philanthropy, despite its status as the most developed economy in the region. Frequently cited reasons range from the Japanese population's cultural disposition of deference to the state, and corporations to the developmental regime's tight regulatory and political oversight.^{107,108} These analyses of Japan's underdeveloped sector of doing good touch on material truths. What is missing in this discourse, however, is an acknowledgment of Japan's proven record, from ancient times to today, of helping others in the community.

Japanese philanthropy dates back to at least the seventh and eighth centuries, when members of the affluent noble class and high-ranking monks established charitable projects and institutions under major Buddhist temples such as the Tōdai-ji and Shitennō-ji.¹⁰⁹ Buddhist temples initiated fundraising campaigns, known as *Kanjin*, to finance religious activities and social welfare initiatives.¹¹⁰ Catholicism, which arrived in Japan during the sixteenth century, further exposed the country to the concept of doing good. Catholic missionaries founded mutual aid organizations called *Misericordia* to raise funds for social service projects such as building nursing homes and leprosy hospitals.^{111,112}

Homegrown Japanese philanthropy developed further in the Edo period (1603–1868). First, wealthy Osaka-based merchants established private academies backed by an endowment system, laying the grounds for

Japan's modern-day foundations, *zaidan hojin*.¹¹³ Most notably, in 1829, a purveyor to the feudal lord of Akita offered *Kan-on-kō*—land purchased for agricultural production whose proceeds went to assist local peasants and orphans. This philanthropic gesture, later joined by an additional 191 donors, exists to this day as a social welfare organization.

These cases of religious and institutionalized giving remained relatively isolated, however. Central authorities' long history of monopolizing the provision of public goods and social services left little room for civil society to grow beyond its beginning stage.¹¹⁴ The highly centralized public sector continued through the Meiji Restoration in the late nineteenth century. The Civil Code was established in 1898, legally recognizing and systematizing for the first time the existence of private nonprofit activities (the *koeki hojin* system).¹¹⁵ But the Meiji government's successful import of Western technology and culture into Japanese society provided the foundation of a modernized state. Japan then rose as a major imperial power in Asia, flexing economic and military dominance throughout the region from the 1920s to the 1940s. During this period of military authoritarianism, all private entities were merged into one single national organization under government pressure and supervision.¹¹⁶

After Japan's defeat in World War II, the war-torn island, faced with the challenge to quickly recover the economy, employed heavy central planning executed by its elite bureaucracy. This interventionist developmental state and its influential bureaucracy are key to explaining the current perception of Japanese civil society.

The developmental state imposed legal restrictions and encroaching managerial oversight on the nonprofit sector. The Civil Code covering each *koeki hojin* (public interest corporation) requires that an applying organization have its license granted by a government agency, contradicting the "non-governmental" part of NGOs.¹¹⁷ The application process is difficult and complex, with many facets advancing the government's agenda. For example, NGOs were made accountable to the practice of *amakudari* (translated literally as "descent from heaven"), pressuring NGOs to hire retired bureaucrats.¹¹⁸ Persistent requests for detailed accounts and activity reports and internal meddling of NGOs' day-to-day operations became common.¹¹⁹

What allowed the bureaucracy's dominance over civil society to continue? The government delivered on its promises pertaining to economic development, and in response, the Japanese citizenry regarded the progress made by the developmental state in a positive light. In other words,

public trust in the bureaucracy further empowered its role in managing the Japanese economy and society, leaving the state's overbearing governance of the nonprofit sector to continue without challenge.¹²⁰ Added to this "performance legitimacy" was Japan's long history of deference to the state.¹²¹ Japanese even has a self-deprecating phrase expressing a sense of reverence for the bureaucracy, *kansonminpi* (translated literally as "respectful bureaucracy, despicable common people").¹²² Keiko Hirata cites Confucianism's emphasis on social stability, preference of the larger group over individuals, and hierarchical organization of society as the cultural motive behind the Japanese people's deference to the state. This wariness of dissident opinions against the government reached its peak during the Cold War era, when many anti-government NGOs and individuals were alleged to be communist or radically left-wing. With Japan's winning streak of economic growth, and the preexisting Japanese tendency to follow the bureaucracy, the state's constant intervention in the nonprofit sector remained intact for most of the twentieth century.

Recent socioeconomic circumstances have changed the nature of state-civil society relations in Japan, hinting at the possibility of an unforeseen growth trajectory for the nonprofit sector. The fruits of the developmental state—more middle-class citizens, more wealth, and more educational opportunities—have stimulated the expansion of civil society in Japan.¹²³ Likewise, globalization has also contributed to the inception of Japan's young civil society. The developmental state naturally felt pressure to meet in line with the standards of the developed world and international norms favoring the concept of civil society.¹²⁴

The government's changing attitude toward the charitable sector grew after two major earthquakes in 1995 (Kobe) and 2011 (Tohoku). The Kobe earthquake—with 6500 dead and 75,000 buildings demolished—was especially damaging, and the response telling.¹²⁵ Despite heroic stories of volunteerism, the overall coordination among the state, civil society, and thousands of volunteers was disorganized, failing to respond to the disaster in an efficient manner.¹²⁶ Stringent registration laws for nonprofit organizations prevented the government from seamlessly communicating with small-scale organizations that convened in Kobe.¹²⁷ At the same time, petty internal power struggles within the bureaucracy aggravated the situation at hand.¹²⁸ This administrative disaster, betraying the people's trust in the bureaucracy, served as an impetus for a series of regulatory and policy changes conducive to the growth of civil society. The 1998 NPO (nonprofit organization) Law eased requirements for registration, and in

2002 the government began engaging academics and NGOs on discussing plans to reform the entire legal framework for civil society.¹²⁹

Coupled with this renewed attitude of the government toward the non-profit sector in the aftermath of the Kobe earthquake were changing social circumstances. Most significantly, the issue of Japan's aging society amidst a limited welfare state is creating new opportunities for NGOs, regarded by the government as a cost-effective alternative to provide essential social services to the elderly.¹³⁰

In terms of individual giving, institutionalized philanthropy, and the nonprofit sector, Japan lags behind its regional counterparts in Asia. However, like many other Asian nations, Japan has committed acts of great charity over many centuries. Today, Japan shows that it, too, can be benevolent, and now has a political and social infrastructure evolving to facilitate the growth of the sector.

SINGAPORE

Singapore tops the charts in many socioeconomic measurements. Singaporeans boast a GDP per capita of \$52,888.70, among the highest in the world.¹³¹ They also enjoy a high quality of living, with a life expectancy of 83 and adult literacy rate of 96.8 percent.^{132,133} Quality health care, education, and other social welfare benefits and programs are taken care of by the government. Where, in such a well-managed and tightly controlled landscape, is there room for philanthropic input? Much of the donated money goes abroad, and the aggregate number of donations is relatively low.^{134,135} In fact, one of the few major players in philanthropic giving in Singapore is the Tote Board, a government-backed organization.¹³⁶ What input does come from the nonprofit sector is still heavily influenced by the state. The government's stance is generally adverse to NGOs, especially politically vocal ones.¹³⁷ As the primary caretaker of social services, Singapore's government fundamentally defines the role of doing good in its modern nation-state.

It was not always so. From 1819 to 1963, Singapore was under British colonial rule, with occupation by the Japanese empire from 1942 to 1945.¹³⁸ During this pre-independence era, civil society in Singapore was quite vibrant in the form of ethnic self-help organizations.¹³⁹ As authoritarian as it may have been, the British colonial government did not impede the indigenous growth of these groups and may have in fact indirectly created the room for civil society's growth through subpar provision of

social services.^{140,141} In the 1950s and 1960s, these groups contributed to Singapore's fight for independence.¹⁴² Other types of associations, such as trade unions, student groups, and the women's movement started to flourish during this period as well.¹⁴³ Without the presence of an authoritarian government overtly adversarial to civil society and monopolizing the provision of welfare, pre-independence Singapore was able to experience a hint of nascent civil society.

After independence, the People's Action Party (PAP) led by Lee Kuan Yew reversed what could have been a continued sense of excitement around civil society. Two underlying beliefs framed the government's early contentious attitude toward civil society. First, the PAP believed that the public sphere in Singapore had been excessively politicized during the final few years of the colonial era, with groups and riots on ethnic and ideological lines interrupting social stability.¹⁴⁴ Second, the utmost priority of the government's policy agenda back then was economic development.¹⁴⁵ Successful accomplishment on this front was reflected in the government's efficient provision of public benefits, leaving no space and few opportunities for civil society groups.¹⁴⁶ From the perspective of the PAP, a powerful centralized government, superseding other segments of society, was absolutely crucial to maintaining both the social and the economic well-being of the newborn city-state.

The PAP imposed legal and "extra-legal" limits on civil society.¹⁴⁷ The Internal Security Act and the Societies Act were used to oppress any form of dissident voices and increase oversight of non-governmental entities.^{148,149} More significant were the PAP government's political strategies and institutional barriers used to control and co-opt civil society. The party sought to delineate the public debate surrounding civil society by alternatively naming it as "civic" society, focusing more on the "responsibilities" of the citizenry rather than its "rights."¹⁵⁰ Having begun as a one-party state that unilaterally provided social services, the PAP shrewdly evolved into a "competitive authoritarian"¹⁵¹ regime that still adhered to the principal belief of the government as the core of society, while allowing limited, state-controlled civil outreach.

When Goh Chok Tong became the country's second prime minister in 1990, he instilled a sense of hope among Singaporeans that Singapore may soon become a liberalized society.¹⁵² At that time, Brigadier-General George Yeo, minister for information and the arts, gave a speech incorporating a metaphor apt for the current circumstances surrounding civil society in Singapore. He acknowledged past government policies and attitudes as

resembling a “banyan tree” that gave no room for civil society to grow, calling for a “pruning” of the tree (yet keeping the tree as the core of society).¹⁵³

But after losing four seats to the opposition in the 1991 general election, the PAP realized a more liberalized stance toward civil society did not result in more votes. Going forward, PAP gave less emphasis to its renewed state-civil society relations.¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the small step forward taken by the government tilted the vertical relationship toward an increased presence of civil society in Singapore. Voluntary welfare associations and SDOs were welcomed in a supplementary role; this was known as the “many helping hands” policy.¹⁵⁵ Although the Singaporean government might not be open to the idea of civil society opposed to the state, it is willing to accept a civil society supplementing the “pruned banyan tree” state.

The “pruned banyan tree” vision of state-civil society relations in Singapore applies to present-day affairs in the country. Philanthropic giving and charity organizations are welcomed, if not encouraged. Through the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre, for example, various nationwide giving events are hosted to encourage individual giving, and tax schemes are renewed to incentivize larger scale philanthropic gestures from the private sector.^{156,157} With this continued acceptance by the government of the philanthropic and charitable community, the city-state’s private sector and culture of giving and helping others might be on a more positive track for the future.

HONG KONG

Hong Kong, like Singapore, is an Asian city-state whose history is primarily characterized by British colonialism and rapid economic development. But the story of Hong Kong’s philanthropy and charity differs due to its proximity and unique historical ties to China. Hong Kong also has a less interventionist government, allowing its social delivery sector to take a much more prominent role than its Singaporean counterpart. The history of doing good in Hong Kong has been shaped by these three primary factors: British colonialism, Chinese influence, and a *laissez-faire* state.

In colonizing Hong Kong, the British Empire sought to provide its merchants with a physical port of access to China but not necessarily to spread Christianity nor to “civilize” the local population, as it had done in its other colonies.¹⁵⁸ With this narrower goal in mind, the British colonial government limited its involvement in the day-to-day affairs of Hong

Kong society.¹⁵⁹ Such “positive non-interventionism” profoundly impacted the nonprofit community.¹⁶⁰

The British government neglected to provide education and health care, leaving room for Hong Kong’s first nonprofit groups to emerge.¹⁶¹ These organizations divided into two types, Christian-inspired missionary charities and Chinese clan-based associations.^{162,163} In pursuit of converting the local citizens to Christianity, missionaries ended up providing schools, hospitals, orphanages, and even elderly care facilities. Chinese clan-based associations, known as *kaifong*, mobilized neighborhoods for mutual aid to fill the void left by the “small” British colonial government. They built the Man Mo Temple, launched by a few wealthy members of the Chinese community, and the Tung Wah Hospital.¹⁶⁴

Even under British rule, Hong Kong remained in China’s sphere of influence. Major events experienced by the Mainland—whether for good or for bad—had ramifications for Hong Kong. The aforementioned *kaifong* clan-based associations are one example of China’s influence, and the number of these groups proliferated as Chinese refugees poured into the city in the wake of China’s civil war between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party.¹⁶⁵ The colonial government could not single-handedly tackle all of the social challenges and demands rising from this influx, increasing the need for NGOs’ supplementary assistance. This period also saw the rise of *tung heung wui* (“same-village associations,” in English), formed by people who wanted to help those hailing from the same place of origin in China.¹⁶⁶ It is still quite common for donors from Hong Kong to provide charitable support for projects in their home villages despite having left those places generations ago.¹⁶⁷

It was also during this time that several NGOs and philanthropic organizations now well known in Hong Kong society were established. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, a network of NGOs, was founded in 1947 to help coordinate the activities of these proliferating self-help organizations, and the Hong Kong Jockey Club declared its commitment to donate its annual surpluses for philanthropy.¹⁶⁸ Both organizations are key intermediaries in the industry of doing good in Hong Kong today.

Especially since the 1997 “handover,” China’s influence continues to shape Hong Kong’s civil society. In recent years, the unique political relationship of “one country, two systems” has prompted the formation of more advocacy groups, both in opposition to and in support of the Chinese government.^{169,170}

Both the British and the Chinese influence developed against a backdrop of a *laissez-faire* government. Modern-day Hong Kong is a special administrative region, a city-state commonly known for a vibrant private sector, low tax schemes, and detached government involvement in social services. The government's regulatory framework for NGOs is neutral, not interfering with the formal establishment of such organizations and at the same time, not incentivizing further beyond the provisions of the Inland Revenue Ordinance pertaining to tax exemption.¹⁷¹ Private options for any social needs are readily made available to the Hong Kong population.

Officially, Hong Kong relies on free-market principles when it comes to delivering public welfare, and it certainly does so in comparison to Singapore. That is, the government is clearly not the main provider of social services. Nevertheless, the Hong Kong government now is the single largest source of funding for NGOs, providing 28 percent of their operating budgets.¹⁷² This funding occurs in response to pressure to spend more on public welfare, in the wake of rapid economic development and persistent income inequality.^{173,174} Given its dedication to a non-interventionist free market, yet attending to the demands of its people, the Hong Kong government has contracted out to SDOs the primary role of providing social services. Hong Kong's state-civil society relationship is one of supplementary mutual dependence, where a rise in the state's indirect spending on social welfare increases the size of the voluntary sector as well.¹⁷⁵ Budget cuts have the opposite effect, and with recent financial crises, the Hong Kong government has decreased its funding for SDOs.¹⁷⁶ Competition for government funding within the sector has thus intensified, and fundraising has been identified by numerous organizations to be the most difficult current challenge.¹⁷⁷

THAILAND

Three historical experiences have defined the modern-day landscape of Thailand's charity and philanthropy. First, religious giving—particularly in the context of Buddhism—has been and still is a major part of the nationwide philanthropic culture. Second, Thailand's unique position as the only country in Southeast Asia not colonized by either Europe or Japan has implications for its social sector. Third, Thailand's current domestic challenges, including multiple military coups and regime changes, have contributed to an extreme politicization of its civil society. The cumulative result of

these historical events is a relatively recent emergence of the nonprofit sector and a leaning within the sector toward advocacy-oriented social movements. Only recently have socioeconomic trends, including income equality, begun to encourage development of SDOs and social enterprises.

For centuries, Buddhism has functioned as the philanthropic epicenter of Thailand.¹⁷⁸ Individual giving to both the religious order, Sangha, and to those in need helped acquire merit and to meet the moral standards expected of a Buddhist.¹⁷⁹ Thais have long placed water jars outside their homes for thirsty individuals, and strangers commonly found free housing and food from welcoming village residents.¹⁸⁰ Buddhist temples used donations for providing education, elderly care, and health care to their local communities, and they still play a pivotal role for doing good in Thailand.¹⁸¹

Thailand's civil society has also been shaped by its independence, as the sole Asian kingdom never colonized by foreign empires in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁸² Britain and France agreed to leave the nation as a buffer between their Asian spheres of influence. Two monarchs during this period maneuvered to preserve the balance, engaging with as many foreign delegations as possible via trade treaties. The two kings also opened the country to foreign influences by sending Thai aristocrats abroad to European institutions. By 1940, Thailand boasted a well-developed infrastructure, including roads, canals, railways, shipyards, hospitals, and schools.¹⁸³ This might have partially contributed to the relatively late inception of the nonprofit sector in Thailand during the later years of the twentieth century, which offered an opening for organized civil society organizations only after the democratic transition.¹⁸⁴

A more telling legacy is that of a powerful bureaucratic and military elite in Bangkok. Discouraged by the deteriorating royal class, this new elite staged a coup in 1932, paving the grounds for Thailand's cycle of future military coups.¹⁸⁵ Under control-conscious military rule, there was little room for Thailand's civil society to grow. During and after World War II, the government used the National Culture Act of 1942 and similar laws to control Chinese clan-based philanthropic associations, in the name of fighting communism from China.¹⁸⁶ For much of the twentieth century, the authoritarian military state continued to view with suspicion any organized form of private interests.

Thailand's first major civilian resistance against military dominance occurred in 1973, when 500,000 students came to the streets of Bangkok to protest for democracy, eventually forcing the government leaders to

leave the country.¹⁸⁷ Though military rule returned afterwards, the student protests and the increasing number of NGOs forced the military to believe that it had to work together with civil society for its own survival.¹⁸⁸ As a result, Thailand saw an increase in the expression of social demands and in the number of grassroots organizations during the 1980s.¹⁸⁹ However, under the unstable seesawing back and forth between military regimes and civilian rule, civil society in Thailand became ever more politicized and advocacy-oriented.^{190,191,192}

INDONESIA

Through its sheer size, abundance of natural resources, and rapidly growing population, Indonesia is elevating its macroeconomic status to a point where it is now a part of the four emerging “MINT”¹⁹³ economies, alongside Mexico, Nigeria, and Turkey. Beneath this economic growth, however, are alarming indicators of poverty: more than half of the population still lives on less than two dollars a day, 29 out of every 1000 children die before the age of five, and the maternal death rate remains stubbornly high.¹⁹⁴ Indonesia has long had such disparities of wealth, and its social sector has sought to fill the gap. Charity and philanthropy in Indonesia has encountered much support in the process, along with various roadblocks, in keeping with the country’s unique cultural background.

Religion, particularly Islam and its cultural customs, occupies a prominent place in the Indonesian context of doing good. With more than 85 percent of the country professing Islamic faith,^{195,196} *zakat* (almsgiving), alongside non-obligatory forms of charity, defines the nature of individual philanthropy in Indonesia. Almost all Muslim Indonesians fulfill their *zakat* duties annually, and more than 90 percent of individual giving in Indonesia is accounted by religious giving.^{197,198} Amid this prevalence of Islamic philanthropy, institutionalized collection and administration of *zakat* funds came to the fore, both from the public sector and from the private sector. In 1949, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was founded; it later adopted the role of managing *zakat* funds, and private collecting agencies known as *Lazis* (*Lembaga Amil Zakat*) followed suit.^{199,200,201}

Christianity also plays a role. Though less than ten percent of the population practices Christianity, the religion’s commitment to delivering social services (including emergency disaster relief, education, and health care) make it a notable contributor. So does its follower base of wealthy and/or ethnic Chinese Indonesians.^{202,203}

The religious backdrop does not always promote a positive environment for social services. Under the authoritarian Suharto government, many religious impulses were steered toward containing communism and cracking down on dissident political voices.^{204,205} Also, giving donations to non-religious NGOs—even those for social services—is less commonplace, and donating to non-Islamic organizations is even shunned.²⁰⁶

Religious and nonreligious NGOs developed under Dutch colonial rule.²⁰⁷ The Dutch government intervened little in private matters related to *zakat*, unintentionally allowing for the emergence of Islamic associations.^{208,209,210,211} To the dismay of the Dutch empire, Indonesian civil society grew toward social consciousness and a sector-wide goal of fighting for independence.^{212,213,214} With its clear division of public and private spheres, the Dutch colonial government enabled a freer Islamic philanthropic life that led to the establishment of community organizations.

The charitable sector faced a less tolerant government in the New Order era (1965–1998) under General Suharto. Suharto suppressed any dissent, halting the growth of NGOs and other civil society organizations in the country.^{215,216} He co-opted religious activities for his agenda, as noted above, and limited other functions.^{217,218} Hans Antlöv, Rustam Ibrahim, and Peter van Tuijl aptly summarize the position of civil society in the New Order era:

During more than three decades of authoritarian rule, civil society in Indonesia was seen as a part of the problem, not as the solution. Civil society was there to be controlled, not to be listened to or as a partner to work with.²¹⁹

At best, alongside religious groups, only community development-focused NGOs—locally known as *Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat*, meaning “self-reliant community development institution”—were recognized by the government as in line with its development activities and policies.²²⁰ The legacy of this predatory food chain between the public sector and the social sector resonates across the country to this day, where some Suharto-era laws are still applicable and readily made available should the government deem necessary in its intent to control civil society.²²¹

In the final years of the Suharto regime, and following its fall in 1998, political democratization resulted in an increase in the number of NGOs from thousands to tens of thousands just by the end of 2003.^{222,223,224} However, a wide array of current challenges and obstacles remains for the

charitable and philanthropic sector in Indonesia. Indonesia lacks any major incentive for this sector, in that tax exemptions for NGOs are not provided; nor are tax deductions for individual donors.^{225,226} Charitable organizations rely heavily on foreign funding, given a lack of vibrant domestic philanthropy.²²⁷ And in the wake of the politicized struggles under the Suharto regime, distrust remains high between the private, public, and nonprofit sectors.^{228,229} These areas can be improved with efforts by all relevant stakeholders in Indonesian society, tackling its challenges with the combined efforts of NGOs, the government, and the private sector.

MALAYSIA

The Malaysian experience of philanthropy is history in the making. That is, with its semi-authoritarian regime and stiffly divided multiethnic populace, Malaysia did not see a vibrant third sector until recently.^{230, 231} Several factors inhibited the birth and growth of active charity, while recent changes bring a hint of hope for a slowly developing field.

Malaysia's "semi-authoritarian" label reflects the mismatch between its official status as a democratic nation and its reality as a one-party state.^{232,233} Based on repressive legislative measures, some would argue that Malaysia is simply authoritarian.²³⁴ Civil society has been particularly restrained by the 1960 Internal Security Act and the 1966 Societies Act, which permit detaining without trial and categorizes NGOs as "friendly" or "political."^{235,236} The government has also established its own social organizations, including the National Human Rights Commission and the Federation of Malaysian Consumer Organizations, to absorb the functions of social movements and NGOs.²³⁷

In sharp contrast to the Dutch Indonesian experience of separate private and public spheres of Islam, Malaysia's authoritarian reach influenced religious philanthropic life. The difference stems from a British colonial legacy, one that elevated the status of sultans at the expense of religious institutions.²³⁸ Such a co-optation of religious affairs continued to exist throughout the post-colonial period; even the administration and collection of *zakat* is singlehandedly managed by governmental religious councils.²³⁹ In such an unfavorable environment, it is surprising that some NGOs and civic activities exist at all.

An authoritarian state also complicated relationships among Malaysia's multiethnic populace. Federal discrimination and ensuing ethnic tensions encouraged segregation of philanthropic beneficiary groups and a fractured

civil society.^{240,241} In particular, Elizabeth Cogswell finds in her survey of civil society that in Malaysia, Chinese help Chinese, Malays help Malays, and Indians help Indians. While charitable organizations might state in their charters that they serve without regard to ethnicity, in practice some focused on assisting their ethnic groups in response to the government's discriminatory policies.²⁴² Sometimes, a given ethnic group would even refuse help from another due to historical tensions.²⁴³ Chinese Malaysians, seeing the preferential treatment of Malays, often donated in China to their villages and communities of origin, rather than to other fellow Malaysians in need of assistance.²⁴⁴

Despite these challenges, recent affairs in Malaysia attest to potential. With increased exposure to uncensored social media and the Internet, Malaysians are demanding more in terms of political liberalization.²⁴⁵ Such desire burst forth when the dominant United Malays National Organization party suffered a heavy defeat in the 2008 elections, leading for the first time to a united electoral front within civil society against the government regardless of ethnicity.²⁴⁶ The transition might not come easily, given the lack of political experience among now-elected social leaders.²⁴⁷ Nonetheless, if these new members of the government promote productive reforms, charity and philanthropy in Malaysia may grow faster than ever before.

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