

SECULARITY: WEST AND EAST

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There now exists a body of thought in the historical and social sciences that has, quite accurately, been called secularization theory. This theory, of course, has not been without its critics, but even for them it has served as a useful foil for various explorations of the fate of religion in the contemporary world. Most broadly, secularization theory proposes a positive relationship between modernity and secularity, in the sense that modernization has brought about a decline in the importance of religion both on the level of institutions and on the level of individual consciousness. In other words, secularization theory proposes a certain view of the way in which modernity has acted upon religion. It is important to point out, however, that there is another aspect of secularization theory, which deals not with the effects but with the roots of modernity. This version of secularization theory proposes that modern secularity, however inimical it might now be toward religion, has religious roots itself. In other words, it is here proposed that religion has served as a causal factor in the genesis of modernity. This proposition (which, incidentally, has had an interesting career within recent Christian theology) refers specifically to the allegedly secularizing consequences of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is paradoxical, even ironic view of western history, the alleged secularizing consequences, of course, are deemed to have been unintended and unanticipated. In any case, these two aspects of the problem of modern secularity, though distinct, are very much related, indeed intertwined. This interrelation of the two aspects becomes particularly clear as one moves from West to East in one's thinking, as I will try to show in what follows.

Secularization theory, of course, originated in the context of Western scholarship, and this provenance has inevitably affected the way in which the theory has been applied to Eastern cultures. This is not at all to attribute ethnocentrism or cultural arrogance to the Western scholars in question; in most instances such a suggestion would be grossly unfair. Also, no agreement is implied here with the currently widespread notion that cultures can only be properly studied by insiders; on the contrary, the outsider often

perceives things that the insider overlooked. All the same, one must ask whether the application of secularization theory to Eastern cultures has not resulted in distorted or misleading perceptions because these cultures, and the religious traditions pertaining to them, were observed through, as it were, Western eyeglasses.

These considerations apply to the view of Western historians and social scientists of any number of non-Western cultures (thus there has been a vigorous controversy in recent years concerning the view of the Islamic world in Western scholarship). It seems to me that a particularly important issue in this connection is the view of the relation of modernity and religion in the cultures of Eastern Asia. The reason for saying this is simple but far-reaching: Eastern Asia, I believe, is the only region in the non-Western world in which a new, fully developed and distinctive modernity is taking shape. Putting it concisely: Until very recently, when one tried to understand modernity, there was only one case to deal with -- the West and its effects on the rest of the world. Or, if one prefers: Modernization and Westernization were virtually identical processes. This is no longer so. One now has, at any rate, *two* cases to deal with -- Western (and Western-style) modernity on the one hand, and the new modernity of Eastern Asia on the other. Science thrives on comparison. In this as in other areas of analysis, therefore, testing Western-derived theories against the realities of Eastern Asia is likely to be a productive undertaking.

The undertaking should be of interest to many people who are not very much concerned with religious issues *per se*. Eastern Asia is a region of rapidly increasing importance in the contemporary world. The main reason for this, of course, is what can aptly be called the East-Asian economic miracle. Its hub is Japan, which remains to date the only non-Western country to have joined the ranks of advanced industrial societies (and which, quite possibly, may soon lead those ranks economically and technologically). But Japan is no longer alone in the region's economic dynamism. There are the booming societies of South Korea, Taiwan, Hongkong and Singapore, together constituting the most dramatic success stories (at least economically speaking) in the Third World. There are indications that the same dynamism is at work in several Southeast Asian societies beyond Singapore, though, for a number of reasons, it is as yet somewhat premature to speak of success stories. There remains the vast question of the future relation of the

People's Republic of China to the economic dynamism on its doorsteps. In any case, even if one limits oneself to Japan and the aforementioned four societies, the question of the distinctive features of their economic development is of very great importance. The question must necessarily touch on cultural factors, and among these religion and religiously derived morality. The present topic, then, is not just for specialists in the field of religion.

Needless to say, the topic is highly complex. It is necessary to say that I can claim no expertise on the cultures and religious traditions of Eastern Asia. I do feel qualified, however, to raise questions in this area, even if I must leave it to others to suggest answers.

Anyone dealing with the problem of the religious roots of modernity soon finds himself in the giant shadow of Max Weber. Incomplete though the Weberian opus may be (Karl Jaspers used the phrase "gigantic ruins" in describing it -- hardly a pejorative description, since no individual scholar, however brilliant, could complete the task Weber had set himself), it is impossible to deal with these matters without taking Weber's views into account. Let me, then, state briefly my own understanding of this. I have been persuaded for a long time that Weber was correct, at any rate in broad outline, in his contention that Western modernity, including its component of secularity, has some deep roots in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Not only do I accept, again in broad outline, Weber's germinal insights into the relation between modern capitalism and certain unintended consequences of the Protestant Reformation, but I also accept Weber's view of the rootage of all of modern rationality (not just in its economic aspects) in distinctive features of the religious revolution of ancient Israel. There is, in other words, a direct historical line between the worldview first expressed in the Hebrew Bible and the "rationalization" (in Weber's sense of the word) that lies at the heart of the modernization process. The irony here, of course, is that modern secularity too can be traced back to embryonic beginnings in the rupture between the faith of Israel and the magical-mystical world of the ancient Near East (that rupture called a "leap in being" by Eric Voegelin) -- modern this-worldliness then coming to be seen as the paradoxical offspring of the Israelite "disenchantment of the world." More generally, I also believe that Weber makes credible the proposition that what is today called economic development requires and

ethic of discipline and self-denial -- precisely the sort of ethic that Weber called "inner-worldly asceticism."

Where Weber is much less persuasive is in his understanding of the relation of Asian religions to "rationalization," though even here Weber's ideas serve as a very useful starting point. It is fair to say, I think, that with the exception of his understanding of Confucianism (of which more in a moment), Weber had a too undifferentiated view of what he designated as the "enchanted garden of Asian religiosity." To be sure, nowhere in Asia do we find "rationalization" of the Western type, nor can it be denied that modernity was imported into Asia from the West. But the subsumption of the entire Hindu-Buddhist universe of religious discourse under the category of "enchantment," and thus its perception as anti-rationalizing in its socio-economic consequences, was rather clearly an oversimplification. Specially, it is Weber's understanding of Buddhism that must be criticized (his approach to Hinduism need not concern us here). A close reading of his writing on this subject discloses a bias in favor of Theravada, as the allegedly more authentic form of Buddhism, which bias necessarily distorted Weber's perception of eastern Asia. This bias, to be sure, was not originated by Weber, but was taken over by him from the Western Buddhologists on whom he necessarily relied. This bias led him to perceive Mahayana as, in the main, a great compromise with magical-mystical folk religion -- a very one-sided perception indeed, which precluded insight into the "rationalizing" potential of Mahayana in Eastern Asia. Also, Weber had very little to say about Shinto, despite the fact that the meteoric rise of Japan to the status of a regional power took place under the aegis of a renascent Shintoism in his own lifetime.

Weber's essay on the Chinese literary bureaucrats and their ethos continues to be a masterpiece of socio-historical analysis. I, for one, think that Weber was quite right in arguing that this type of Confucianism, despite its intense this-worldliness (secularity, if you will), was much too conservative to engender a "rationalizing" development. But Weber was talking about Confucianism as the ideology of the imperial Chinese state. He was *not* talking (and, to be fair, could not possibly have been talking) about Confucianism as an everyday ethic of ordinary people far removed from the reach of imperial authority. In other words, Weber's argument about the socio-economic effects of Confucianism pertain to magistrates in imperial Peking -- *not* to entrepreneurs in Taipei

or Singapore (or, for that matter, in Manila or Bangkok). Put differently again: Weber was very probably right about the counter-modernizing role of Confucianism as a state ideology; he could not foresee the modernizing role of Confucianism as a work ethic for people liberated from the conservative weight of the Chinese state. In this perspective, paradoxically, it is Maoism that that represents that conservative weight today, with a new class of mandarins impeding economic dynamism and legitimating their political power with another economically counter-productive ideology. The old mandarins painted classical texts on silk; the new ones chant incantations at public ceremonies; both may be seen as crucial obstacles to the productive genius of Chinese culture.

The foregoing considerations now allow one to formulate a basic question: Is there a distinctive East-Asian form of secularity, long antedating the advent of modernity, but, given certain favorable conditions (such as the removal of political constraints), providing a receptive cultural context for modernization once that process is introduced from the outside? In Weberian terms, one would then further ask to what extent this secularity is allied to an economic ethic of "inner-worldly asceticism" and, more generally, to a "rationalizing" attitude toward the empirical world. Finally, of course, one would want to assess the relative importance of these cultural factors in the economic development of Eastern Asia.

It will be amply clear that, in the present state of knowledge, no definitive answers to this basic question and its corollary questions are likely. The best one can hope for is intuitions, fertile hypotheses and partial answers serving as building blocks for a comprehensive interpretation to be undertaken in the future (perhaps by Max Weber *redividus* teaching at the National University of Singapore). But even before the attempt is made here to spell out the question a little more, a word of methodological caution is in order. In the current literature on Eastern Asia one may distinguish between two overall tendencies -- one "institutionalist," emphasizing specific economic and political arrangements within the societies at issue -- the other "culturalist," emphasizing the sort of factors discussed in this paper. The former tendency is particularly favored by economists (who often mention in a footnote that cultural factors ought to be taken into account, presumably by someone else, but who then go on to discuss economies as if there existed in a Platonic heaven of rational motives sovereignly independent of such

messy realities as religion, morality or the patterns of family life); the tendency may also be found in the writings of non-economists (for example, Ezra Vogel, whose enormously insightful work on Japan suggests that the basic institutions of that society could be detached from the cultural context to a considerable degree). The "culturalist" tendency, by contrast, is to suggest that only in a particular cultural context can be institutions and policies in question be successful; historians, anthropologists and other area specialists are prone to this approach (if only because of their professional interest in arguing that no one else can possibly understand "their" area of expertise; one may mention here the writings of some Sinologists, who seem to think of the Chinese as a mutation of the species *homo sapiens*, utterly different from other human beings and totally incomprehensible -- except, of course, as interpreted by Sinologists.)

I should think that it is reasonable to look on "institutionalist" and "culturalist" interpretations as complementary rather than contradictory. I, for one, would take it for granted that culture, social institutions and specific policies are interacting variables, with none having the status of invariant determination. I would stress, therefore, that no one-sidedly "culturalist" theory is implied in this paper. The question is *not* whether everything that happens in Eastern Asia can be explained in terms of East-Asian culture. Rather, the question is, more moderately, to what extent cultural factors must be taken into account in the assessment of East-Asian development. More narrowly here, it is to what extent a specifically East-Asian secularity could be such a factor.

What phenomena are relevant to an exploration of this problem? I will suggest six: the distinctive religious pluralism of Eastern Asia; the distinctive character of East-Asian Buddhism; the "naturalism" Shinto and of Japanese religious consciousness in general; the role of the Confucian ethic; the pragmatism of East-Asia folk religion; and finally, at least in some of the countries of the region, the role of Christianity.

The traditional pluralism of Eastern Asia has often been remarked upon (and, indeed, often contrasted favorably with the absolutist character of Western monotheism). All over the region, different worldviews, religious traditions and even schools of moral thought have existed side by side quite amicably, and individuals have often utilized different traditions, simultaneously or at different stages of life, in a manner that seems illogical or irreverent to a Western observer. I will only refer to the work of Hajime

Nakamura, who interpreted this pluralism as a central component of the Asian philosophical mind. This kind of pluralism, to be sure, is not unique to Eastern Asia. Very similar attitudes are found in traditional India and, for that matter, in the classical Mediterranean world; to cite a well-known passage by Edward Gibbon: "The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosophers as equally false; and by the magistrates as equally useful. And thus toleration produced not only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord." Be this as it may, Western modernity did not arise in such a milieu of metaphysical tolerance, but out of (seen through Asian eyes) the monomaniac and absolutist culture of Christendom.

This is important for at least one reason: One of the great shocks of modernization to Western religion has been that of relativity. In other words, modernity, both on the level of social praxis and of theoretical reflection, challenged the absolutist claims of Christianity. Modern society pluralizes the social worlds of individuals, forcing them to rub elbows with the adherents of all sorts of cognitively dissonant world views; this social pluralism, inevitably, leads to cognitive relativization (I, for one, have argued for many years that pluralism and secularization have been twin phenomena in the modern history of Western civilization). This constitutes the great challenge of relativity, with which Western thought in general and Christian theology in particular have struggled for the last two hundred years or so. Now, it can be argued that this is one particular shock, at any rate, which the East-Asian mind is spared in its encounter with modernity -- precisely because pluralism and relativity are already well-established in the religious and moral culture of East-Asian civilization. If so, then the pre-modern pluralism of Chinese, Japanese and Korean cultures could then be seen as a facilitation factor in the process of modernization. And if so, the sharpest contrast in the contemporary Third World would be provided by its Muslim areas.

Nakamura emphasizes both the relativistic and the immanentist character of Asian worldviews -- the latter adjective referring to the conception of the sacred or the supernatural as dwelling within the empirical universe rather than as confronting it from a transcendent beyond. The point is particularly relevant to the question of the distinctive character of Buddhism in Eastern Asia. When Max Weber stressed the radical other-

worldliness of Buddhism and the concomitant depreciation of all worldly activity (including, of course, economic activity), his aforementioned Theravada bias was very much in play. I would incline to the view that the phrase "radical other-worldiness" is correctly applied both to what can reasonably be reconstructed as the original message of the Buddha (those committed to Mahayana will, of course, deny this) and also the mainstream of the Theravada tradition. I'm persuaded that the phrase does *not* apply to most of Mahayana Buddhism, as that tradition has been shaped in Eastern Asia.

Put simply, it can be argued that it was the genius of the Chinese mind that transformed the world-denying message of Indian Buddhism into an essentially world-affirming doctrine, and that it did so by developing a number of themes already implicit in Indian Mahayana. It was, of course, this Sinified Buddhism that penetrated Korea and Japan. East-Asian Mahayana can then be seen as having engendered a very distinctive form of secularity, blending in with with-worldly attitudes and patterns to thought already indigenous to the cultures of Eastern Asia. Mahayana themes relevant to this secularity are the central ideal of the Bodhisattva (an "incarnationist" theme, giving religious dignity to the world), the frequently recurring notion that *nirvana* and *samsara* are ultimately one and the same (thus making the "beyond" accessible in this life and within the empirical world), and the idea of the "Buddha nature" lying dormant within each man. This last idea is particularly interesting in connection with Weber's view that Buddhism has been unable to generate lay religiosity (the only fully qualified Buddhist having to be a monk or a nun) -- a view that, possibly, applies to Theravada, but manifestly fails to account for the vigorous lay movements in Mahayana (a particularly important phenomenon in Japan). The development of Zen in China and Japan is especially interesting in terms of the "secularizing" themes of the oneness of reality and the "Buddha nature" of all men, while the Pure Land schools illustrate the secular importance of the Bodhisattva ideal. (On the former development let me only refer to the work of Daisetsu Suzuki and Heinrich Dumoulin, on the latter to the work of Joseph Kitagawa).

The Benedictine motto of "*orare et laborare*" expressed an ideal of unity between religious meditation and worldly labor in the Western monastic tradition. Weber believed that the ascetic and potentially world-transforming energy of this ideal, long contained within monasteries and convents, burst forth with cataclysmic force when the Reformation broke down the walls of these institutions. Could it be that a similar energy was "stored up" within the walls of Mahayana monasticism -- and that, first in Japan and

now in other parts of Eastern Asia, this released energy (ascetic *and* this-worldly) has been at least one of the motivating forces in modernization? At least in Japan, the historical relations between Zen Buddhism and the classes serving as the "carriers" of modernization suggest that the question is not too far-fetched.

Reference has already been made to the blending between the this-worldly themes within Mahayana Buddhism and similar themes already present in East-Asian cultures before the coming of Buddhism. In the case of China, such an affinity has been argued as between Buddhism and Taoism. In view of the importance of Shinto in the modernization of Japan, it would seem that an exploration of the "secularizing" potential of various themes in that religious tradition would be particularly fruitful. I must, regretfully, confess to much greater ignorance with regard to Shinto than with regard to Buddhism. Yet it seems to me that the most plausible Shinto element to explore is that of "naturalism" -- that is, the immanentist orientation implied in the Shinto attitude toward nature, and possibly the "inner-worldly" ethical consequences of this orientation. Speaking of early Shinto, Kitagawa asserts that "the early Japanese did not draw a line of demarcation between the sacred and the profane dimensions of life, or between *matsuri* (religious rituals) and *matsuri-goto* (political administration), both of which were ultimately under the authority of the Emperor who himself was directed by the divine will" (in his *Religion in Japanese History*). The key Shinto category, denoting this divine unity of being, of course is that of *kami*. To be sure, Shinto Japan is not alone in such a view of continuity between mankind, nature and the gods; on the contrary, it is typical of what Eric Voegelin has called "cosmological civilizations." I can only raise the question here whether there may not be distinctive features of Shinto "naturalism," which, especially in conjunction with Buddhist themes, may have fostered a receptive attitude toward modernity.

One is on firmer ground when one looks at the so-called New Religions of contemporary Japan. There constitute a number of fascinating syntheses of Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity and folk religion. Yet, as several analysts have pointed out, one of their most notable characteristics is their pragmatic, at times even technical, this-worldliness. For example, to quote from a work on Soka Gakkai by James Dator: "The Soka Gakkai, while based on the Nichiren Shoshu tradition of Japanese Buddhism, interprets its scriptures rather loosely and allegorically. Its teachings are a syncretic blending of traditional dogma and modern science... Its organization and meetings... are businesslike

and rational... It...encourages its members to succeed within current Japanese society. Hence, it is wholly this-worldly, virtually lacking any form of eschatology." Apart from the issue of eschatology, very much the same has been said of the other New Religions. These movements, of course, did not antedate modernization but must be seen as a response to it. Yet it is reasonable to ask whether these highly rational and practical syntheses do not presuppose such themes in the pre-modern culture of Japan.

Of all the phenomena of East-Asian culture that may be relevant to modernization, the one that has attracted most attention of late is Confucianism -- or, more specifically, the Confucian ethic. This ethical tradition has been given much credit for the productivity of East-Asian societies in writings emanating from the Hudson Institute and the British magazine *The Economist*. One not insignificant individual who, apparently, has been successfully persuaded of this is Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, where his government has launched a program to inculcate Confucian morality through the public schools. As indicated above, the Confucianism intended here is not, of course, that of the literary scholars and imperial bureaucrats discussed by Max Weber. Rather it is a "vulgar Confucianism," a set of beliefs and values motivating the man-in-the-street. Foremost among these are a deep sense of hierarchy, a quasi-total commitment to one's family (on behalf of which the individual must work hard and save), and overall norms of discipline, frugality and benevolence to one's own. These beliefs and values form a common heritage of East-Asian cultured (Confucianism, of course, greatly influenced Korea and Japan -- and, not so incidentally, Vietnam -- over and beyond its immense impact on Chinese civilization); they are supposed to have resulted in a work ethic of very high productivity. Also, it has been maintained that the Confucian norms of solidarity have been successfully transposed from traditional institutions (such as the family and the hierarchical state) to modern institutions (such as the corporation or the factory). These matters have been extensively discussed in connection with Japanese management methods, but they are equally relevant to Chinese and Korean entrepreneurship throughout the region.

Again, I must plead incompetence when one must come down on one or the other side of the debate over this. It is very hard for me to believe that Confucianism, with its immense impact on these societies, should not have influenced their economic ethos. On the other hand, it is quite possible that Confucianism has been credited too much and that the norms at issue are much more widely diffused, indeed that Confucianism is really a

secondary and theoretical reflection of these norms (this is suggested by Roy Hofheinz and Kent Calder in their recent *The Eastasia Edge*). Be this as it may, scholars have always emphasized the cool rationality, the pragmatism and the secularity of Confucianism. If there is a special East-Asian secularity, then Confucian morality, whether as causal agent or as theoretical legitimator, must be considered an important part of it.

The objection of Hofheinz and Calder to the "Confucian ethic thesis" draws one's attention to the phenomenon of folk religion. My knowledge of this is very limited, but I feel sure that it cannot be dismissed as nothing but a magical substratum beneath the "great traditions" and, as such, relevant to modernization only in negative terms -- as superstition, irrationality and what Western scholars used to call "resistances to development." Rather, I suspect that here too there are themes of pragmatism, rationality and, indeed, secularity, which may be relevant in a positive way to the modernization of Eastern Asia.

I cannot resist the temptation of a personal anecdote here. A few months ago I was discussing the "Confucian ethic thesis" with an anthropologist at the Academia Sinica in Taipei. He expressed great skepticism about the thesis, suggesting that one should look instead at the work ethic implicit in Chinese folk religion. I was vividly reminded of this conversation a few weeks later, when I visited a Chinese spirit temple (actually, a little shrine set up in the living room of a medium) in Singapore. The medium, a very matter-of-fact young man, was explaining the shrine, which consisted of some thirty statuettes of gods, spirits and demons set up on several levels of a wooden bookcase. The most important figure in this mini-pantheon (also, evidently, a do-it-yourself pantheon) was Kuan-yin, the goddess of mercy -- the largest statuette of all, set up in the middle of the top shelf. Her position, it seemed, was unassailable. Much of the medium's explanations, though, had to do with recent promotions and demotions of the lesser characters: This spirit had delivered very good results and, therefore, had just been moved up from level three to level two; but this fellow had done very poorly, had just been moved to the lowest shelf and, if he did not shape up, would soon find himself thrown out of the shrine altogether; and so on. There can be no question about the *religious* character of this particular worldview; it was, as it were, reeking with supernaturalism (after his explanations of the shrine the medium took us out into the little garden behind his house and told us hair-raising stories about a Malay-speaking demon who lived in a tree there).

But what light-years removed is this religiosity from the *mysterium tremendum* of the monotheistic traditions! In its pragmatism, its "naturalism" -- and, yes, its secularity!

I can only mention, finally, the question of the role of Christianity. It is not equally important in all countries of the region, probably it is most important in Korea (and, significantly, it is Protestantism, not Catholicism, which has had most influence there). Christianity, of course, was at best a minor factor in the pre-modern history of Eastern Asia. One must ask, however, whether important influences did not come from Christian sources in its modern history and whether some of the unintended consequences may not have been secularizing in character. In this connection I will also mention the recent upsurge of conversions to Christianity among ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, a phenomenon very likely related to the social and political pressures of modernization.

Is there a religiously rooted "spirit of Asian capitalism"? I don't know; I do know that the question is important and ought to be explored further (and I have shown my filial piety to Max Weber by using this phrase as the name of a seminar I'm currently organizing for the Council on Religion and International Affairs). Is there a distinctively East-Asian form of modernity in the making? I'm quite sure there is, although its contours are only beginning to come into clear view. In any case, the preceding considerations should have revealed a different angle on the other problems mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the problem of the effects of modernity on religion (if you will, the problem of secularization proper). This problem can now be reformulated: Could it be that Eastern Asia has been undergoing a different type of secularization, because of a pre-modern secularity not known in the West?

If so, then the (admittedly uneven and conflicting) data on religious beliefs and practices in the region may not mean what similar data would mean in Western countries. The largest body of data, as one would expect, comes from Japan. At first glance, it seems contradictory -- high participation in religious activities, and high expression of religious unbelief. Thus, for example, in a large survey of religious attitudes in Japan made in the 1960's by F. M. Basabe, 82% of the respondents claimed to have no religious beliefs at all, and even higher percentages denied belief in God or in life after death. Other surveys have come up with similar results. This would put Japan right in with the Scandinavian countries as being in the vanguard of secularization. But how is one to

reconcile this data with the high participation of Japanese in religious rituals and their propensity to join religious movements of every description? The possible explanation, of course, would be that this participation is superficial, merely external, and it not motivated by religious sentiments at all -- like atheists celebrating Christmas or (if they are politicians) supporting a movement to have prayer in public schools. There is also, though, another explanation, which is that Japanese mean something quite different from Swedes when they disclaim belief in God.

The societies of Eastern Asia under consideration here impress one with their immense energy, their driven quality (the slogan of Datsun commercials could will be written in the sky over the entire region), their "materialism" -- precisely, if you will, their security. It is possible that this impression is accurate. A distinguished British economist, who is also a devout Christian, said the other day that what impressed him most about contemporary Japan was its "spiritual emptiness" and that, therefore, he found it difficult to believe in the durability of its economic success. It seems that Lee Kuan Yew is haunted by similar doubts about the future of the "Singapore miracle." If so, the problem could be put once again in Weberian terms: A society thus deprived of religious values will run into increasing problem of legitimation, because it will lack a "theodicy" that can give meaning to sacrifice, self-denial and inequalities of fortune. But it is also possible that economists and even prime ministers are not the best judges of these matters. It could be that, underneath the "materialistic" hustle of these societies, quite different forces of spirituality continue to be in play and that, consequently, seeing them as undergoing secularization in the Western mode is a highly distortive perception.

Needless to say, all of this points to a research agenda of daunting scope, one clearly beyond the capacity of any individual, and one that cannot be expected to reach conclusive results in the near future. One will find such an agenda inviting to the extent that one finds these problems intellectually compelling. It should also be stressed, however, that this is more than only an intellectual or scholarly agenda.

It is very likely indeed that Eastern Asia will continue to be a crucially important part of the world. Its economic, social and cultural dynamics will then be of increasing importance world-wide. And if its economic development continues on its present course, the question of its "inner secrets" will become ever more urgent. Put simply: How

exportable this model of development? It is not only in American and European business circles that such questions are being asked. Political leaders in Southeast Asia have urged their peoples to emulate Japan. Government agencies in the Arab Middle East have sent missions to South Korea to find out its economic success formulas. And not long ago, a Western journalist reported seeing a wall poster in Shanghai (presumably put up by local authorities) with the text "Learn from Taiwan!" What is there to learn? If the "institutionalists" are right, the model is highly exportable; in other words, there are specific institutions and policies to be learned from, perhaps to be copied outright. If, on the other hand, the "culturalists" are closer to the truth, then one might be sanguine about Shanghai adopting the model, but hardly sanguine about Saudi Arabia (not to mention troubled American corporations).

How secular is Eastern Asia? If it is, then it stands out glaringly from the general picture of the non-Western world today -- in stark contrast to the seething religious turbulence of Islam, of South Asia and of Africa (and, if one wants to group that continent with the Third World rather than the West, in contrast to Latin America as well). If it is not, then secularization, in the usual sense, remains a Western phenomenon and, perhaps, a distinctive Western weakness. The question is not just an intellectual one; it has far-reaching practical and political implications.

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