



Muse	Search	Journals	This Journal	Contents
------	--------	----------	--------------	----------

Access provided by University of Arizona

Confucianism and Democracy

[Francis Fukuyama](#)

The caning for vandalism last year of American high-school student Michael Fay by the Singaporean authorities underscored the challenge now being put forth by Asian societies to the United States and other Western democracies. The issue was not simply whether Singapore, as a sovereign state, had the right to subject an American expatriate to its laws and legal procedures, but a much more fundamental one. In effect, **the Singaporeans used the case of Michael Fay to argue in favor of their brand of authoritarianism, charging that American democracy, with its rampant social problems and general disorder, could not be regarded as a model for an Asian society.** This claim forms part of a larger argument that Singaporeans, beginning with former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, have been making for some time now to the effect that Western-style democracy is incompatible with Confucianism, and that the latter constitutes a much more coherent ideological basis for a well-ordered Asian society than Western notions of individual liberty.¹ While Singaporeans have been the most outspoken proponents of this view, many people in other Asian societies, from Thailand to Japan, have come to share their beliefs. The standing of the United States in Asia has already been affected: on the issue of using trade policy to pressure China into bettering its human rights record, Washington had few allies in the region, and it was forced to back down on its threat of withdrawing China's most-favored-nation (MFN) status.

Are Confucianism and Western-style democracy fundamentally **[End Page 20]** incompatible? Will Asia formulate a new kind of political-economic order that is different in principle from Western capitalist democracy? The fact is that there are fewer points of incompatibility between Confucianism and democracy than many people in both Asia and the West believe. The essence of postwar "modernization theory" is correct: Economic development tends to be followed by political liberalization.² If the rapid economic development that Asia has experienced in recent years is sustained, the region's democratization will continue as well. In the end, however, the contours of Asian democracy may be very different from those of contemporary American democracy, which has experienced serious problems of its own in reconciling individual rights with the interests of the larger community.

Modernization Theory Confirmed

Although it is no longer considered "politically correct" to advocate modernization theory, it has actually stood the test of time relatively well. In a seminal article published in 1959, Seymour Martin Lipset noted the empirical correlation between a high level of economic development and stable democracy.³ Although the thesis that economic development gives rise to political liberalization has been debated endlessly since then, it was strengthened considerably with the democratic transitions that began in the mid-1970s, and it is more valid today than it was when it was first enunciated.⁴

The correlation between development and democracy is nowhere better illustrated than in Asia. The states of the region have established stable democratic institutions roughly in the same order in which they began to develop economically, beginning with Japan and extending now to South Korea (which held its first completely free elections in 1992) and Taiwan (which is scheduled to hold free legislative elections at the end of this year). There have been a number of failed prodemocracy movements in China, Thailand, and Burma, but even these cases reveal a link between development and democracy. In the Chinese and Thai cases, in particular, the leaders of the prodemocracy movements tended to be relatively well educated, "middle-class," and cosmopolitan citizens--the type of individual that began to emerge during earlier periods of rapid economic growth. The only anomaly in this picture is the Philippines, which, despite having the lowest per-capita income of all the noncommunist states in Southeast Asia, has been a democracy since the election of Corazon Aquino in 1986. Clearly, though, democracy would never have come to the Philippines had it not been for the direct influence of the United States; moreover, democratic practice is not well institutionalized there, and the country retains a semifeudal authority structure in the countryside and features one of Asia's few remaining communist insurgencies. It would not be **[End Page 21]** surprising, in fact, if Philippine democracy were suddenly to collapse, a scenario that is difficult to imagine in South Korea or Japan.

Although modernization theory proposed a correlation between development and democracy, it was hazy on what the causal connections between the two phenomena were. Some proponents, such as Talcott Parsons, argued that democracy was more "functional" than authoritarianism in a modern industrialized society.⁵ I have argued elsewhere that the linkage between the two cannot be understood in economic terms.⁶ That is, the fundamental impulse toward liberal democracy springs from a noneconomic desire for "recognition." The relationship between economic modernization and democracy is therefore indirect: Economic modernization raises living and educational standards and liberates people from a certain kind of fear brought on by life close to the subsistence level. This permits people to pursue a broader range of goals, including those that remained latent

in earlier stages of economic development. Among those latent urges is the desire to be recognized as an adult with a certain basic human dignity--a recognition that is achieved through participation in the political system. Poor peasants in the Philippines or El Salvador can be recruited by landlords to take up arms and form death squads, because they can be manipulated relatively easily on the basis of their immediate needs and are accustomed to obeying traditional sources of authority. It is much more difficult to persuade educated, middle-class professionals to obey the authority of a leader simply because he is wearing a uniform.

The case of Japan seems to provide further confirmation of the proposed link between development and democracy. Japan, of course, has been a formal democracy since General MacArthur imposed a democratic constitution on the country during the U.S. occupation. Nevertheless, many observers both within and outside of Japan have noted that Western-style democracy, with its emphasis on public contestation and individualism, did not seem to sit well with traditional Japanese culture. Some commentators even went so far as to argue that, despite its democratic legal structure, Japan was not a democracy in the Western sense at all, but rather a mildly authoritarian country run by an alliance of bureaucrats, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) officials, and business leaders. ⁷

The political upheaval that has occurred in Japan since the fall of the LDP government in July 1993, however, would seem to bear out some of the premises of modernization theory. The Japanese people deferred to the authority of the bureaucracy-LDP-business triangle for much of the postwar period because that alliance delivered a high rate of economic growth to a nation that had been devastated by the Pacific war. Like many an authoritarian leadership, however, it ultimately failed to hold up its end of the bargain: it presided over the creation and subsequent puncturing of a "bubble economy" in the 1980s, and suffered [End Page 22] from creeping and pervasive corruption. There is no guarantee that such a system will be self-correcting in the absence of popular "feedback loops"; moreover, as the Japanese population grew wealthier and more able to take its prosperity for granted, its willingness to defer to the political leadership and overlook abuses diminished. Although it is very difficult to predict the outcome of Japan's current political struggle, it seems unlikely that the old ruling triangle will carry its power and authority intact into the next generation.

Modernization theory came under heavy attack in the 1960s and 1970s from two principal sources. First, Marxist critics argued that capitalist democracy was not the proper goal of political and economic development, and that modernization theorists were apologists for an unjust global economic order. Another group of critics, who might be labeled "cultural relativists," argued that modernization theory was Eurocentric and did not take account of the diversity of ends dictated by the world's different cultures. While the Marxist critique is less prominent today owing to the collapse of communism, the relativist critique remains very powerful, and has intimidated many people out of arguing for the existence of a universally valid development path whose ultimate outcome is free-market democracy.

Some of the criticisms to which modernization theory was subjected did have a certain amount of validity. Clearly, for the theory to retain its strength, it would have to be modified somewhat in light of subsequent experience. The developmental history of England or the United States cannot be held up as a standard against which subsequent experiences must be measured. It is evident that there is not a single path to modernity: the "late" modernizers have taken a very different route to development (with the state playing a more powerful role) than earlier ones. Indeed, it is difficult to come up with a universally valid rule for the sequencing of political and economic liberalization. Although many states, particularly in Asia, have succeeded in following the "authoritarian" transition to democracy, it would have been absurd to propose that the former communist regimes in Eastern Europe delay democratization until their economies were liberalized. ⁸ Moreover, there is considerable variation in the way that both capitalism and democracy are implemented: Japanese corporations and labor markets are structured very differently from those in the United States, and there is no reason to think that Japanese and American practices will converge any time soon. Finally, the time frame required for economic development to [End Page 23] produce conditions favorable to stable democracy is longer than anyone anticipated 40 years ago: sustained economic growth is difficult to achieve, and democratic institutions are even harder to create.

Nonetheless, a significant connection between development and democracy has been borne out over the past 50 years. Few of the original formulators of modernization theory are still around to defend it and willing to do so. ⁹ But they gave up too easily. If we define democracy and capitalism sufficiently broadly, and are not dogmatic about the means by which either one can be achieved, then the experience of the Asian nations can be seen as proof of the underlying hypothesis.

Asia's Confucian Traditions

Despite the positive relationship that has obtained between development and democracy in the past, many observers today would argue that Asia will not continue to democratize in the future, or that the form democracy takes there will be so specifically rooted in Asian traditions as to be unrecognizable to Westerners.

The most prominent proponent of an Asian alternative to democracy has been former Singaporean prime minister Lee Kuan Yew. Singapore under Lee developed a model of what might be called a "soft" or paternalistic form of authoritarianism, which combined capitalism with an authoritarian political system that suppressed freedom of speech and political dissent while intervening, often intrusively, in its citizens' personal lives. Lee has argued that this model is more appropriate to East Asia's Confucian cultural traditions than is the Western democratic model. In fact, he has said that Western-style democracy would have deleterious effects in a society like that of Singapore, encouraging permissiveness, social instability, and economically irrational decision making.

Many Western authorities on democracy would agree with this assessment of the relationship between Confucianism and democracy. Samuel P. Huntington, for example, has written that "Confucian democracy" is a contradiction in terms:

Almost no scholarly disagreement exists regarding the proposition that traditional Confucianism was either

undemocratic or antidemocratic. . . . Classic Chinese Confucianism and its derivatives in Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan, and (in diluted fashion) Japan emphasized the group over the individual, authority over liberty, and responsibilities over rights. Confucian societies lacked a tradition of rights against the state; to the extent that individual rights did exist, they were created by the state. Harmony and cooperation were preferred over disagreement and competition. The maintenance of order and respect for hierarchy were central values. The conflict of ideas, groups, and parties was viewed as **[End Page 24]** dangerous and illegitimate. Most important, Confucianism merged society and the state and provided no legitimacy for autonomous social institutions at the national level. ¹⁰

According to Huntington, the only Asian countries to experience democracy prior to 1990 were Japan and the Philippines, and democratic transitions there were possible only because both countries were influenced directly by the United States and were less Confucian than other Asian societies.

In my view, **the arguments of both Huntington and Lee greatly overstate the obstacles that Confucianism poses to the spread of a political system that is recognizably democratic in a Western sense. The most striking area of apparent incompatibility between democracy and Confucianism is the latter's lack of support for individualism or a transcendent law that would stand above existing social relationships and provide the ground for individual conscience as the ultimate source of authority. Despite this important difference, it is not clear that a Confucian society is incapable of creating workable democratic institutions that meet democracy's essential requirements.**

Let us begin with the ways in which Confucianism is obviously compatible with democracy. First, **the traditional Confucian examination system was a meritocratic institution with potentially egalitarian implications.** In traditional China, the examination system was not--for various reasons--truly open to all who were qualified (neither, of course, are Harvard and Yale). In their modern form, however, the examination systems implemented in many Confucian societies as gateways into higher-educational systems and bureaucracies are significant paths to upward mobility that reinforce the relatively egalitarian income distributions that prevail throughout much of Asia. The second main **area of compatibility is the Confucian emphasis on education itself.** Although an educated populace is seldom noted as a formal requirement of democracy, in practice a society's general level of education has been an important underpinning of democratic institutions. Without a high level of literacy, people cannot know about and therefore participate in democratic debate; moreover, as indicated above, education tends to make people wealthier and more concerned with noneconomic issues such as recognition and political participation. Finally, like most Asian ethical systems, **Confucianism is relatively tolerant.** In the past, Confucianism has coexisted with other religions, notably Buddhism and Christianity; while Confucianism's record of tolerance is not perfect (witness the periodic persecutions of Buddhists in China), it is arguably better than that of either Islam or Christianity.

The compatibility of Confucianism with modern democracy goes even deeper than this, however, and in ways that are less often recognized. Huntington describes Confucianism as if it were comparable to Islam, **[End Page 25]** being essentially a doctrine that unified the political and social spheres and legitimated the state's authority in all areas of life. **Yet to say that Confucianism merely strengthens the group against the individual and the state against all subordinate organizations or institutions vastly oversimplifies the doctrine's real impact.** The scholar of Confucianism Tu Wei-ming distinguishes between what he calls "political Confucianism," which legitimates a hierarchical political system culminating in the emperor, and what he calls the "Confucian personal ethic," which regulates day-to-day life. ¹¹ In China, political Confucianism was very much tied to the imperial system and its supporting bureaucracy of gentlemen-scholars. This system was abolished with the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911. Despite efforts by the Communists in Beijing and other Sinitic governments overseas (such as that of Singapore) to appropriate the legitimacy of the imperial system, the continuity of political Confucianism has been disrupted in a fundamental sense. Tu argues that in fact **the more important legacy of traditional Confucianism is not its political teaching, but rather the personal ethic that regulates attitudes toward family, work, education, and other elements of daily life that are valued in Chinese society.** It is these attitudes, rather than inherited ideas about political authority, that account for the economic success of the overseas Chinese.

One could go even further and argue that the essence of traditional Chinese Confucianism was never political Confucianism at all, but rather an intense familism that took precedence over all other social relations, including relations with political authorities. That is, Confucianism builds a well-ordered society from the ground up rather than the top down, stressing the moral obligations of family life as the basic building block of society. Beyond the traditional Chinese family, or *jia*, are lineages and larger kinship groups; the state and other political authorities are seen as a kind of family of families that unites all Chinese into a single social entity. But the bonds within the immediate family take precedence over higher sorts of ties, including obligations to the emperor. In classical Chinese Confucianism, one's obligation to one's father is greater than to the police; in a famous story related about Confucius, "The king boasted to Confucius that virtue in his land was such that if a father stole, his son would report the crime and the criminal to the state. Confucius replied that in his state virtue was far greater, for a son would never think of treating his father so." ¹² (The Chinese Communists tried to change this state of affairs, but that is a different story.) Of course, in a perfectly ordered Confucian society, such conflicts between rival obligations should not occur. But occur they do, and while in classical Chinese dramas these conflicting obligations were often portrayed as a source of anguish, the superior authority of the family was made quite clear in the end.

In this respect, Chinese Confucianism is very different from the **[End Page 26]** version that evolved in Japan when neo-Confucianism was imported into the country after the end of the Song dynasty (960-1279 A.D.). The Japanese modified Chinese Confucianism in certain strategic ways to make it compatible with their own imperial system. In China, even the emperor's authority was not absolute; it could be undermined altogether if his own immorality caused him to lose the "mandate of heaven." The succession of Chinese dynasties over the centuries is testimony to the impermanence of Chinese political authority. Japan, by contrast, has been characterized by a single, unbroken dynastic tradition since the mythical founding of the country, and no political equivalent of the loss of the "mandate of heaven" ever emerged by which a Japanese emperor could lose his throne. The Japanese were careful not to allow the political dictates of Confucianism to impinge on the prerogatives of the emperor and the ruling political class. Hence in Japan obligations to the emperor were superior to

obligations to one's father, and a son facing the dilemma of reporting on his father would be required to favor the state over the family. In Chinese Confucianism, the family (or lineage) is a bulwark against the power of the state; in Japan, the family is a much weaker rival to political authority. Hence Huntington's characterization of Confucianism as inevitably supporting state power over subordinate social groups applies much more readily to Japanese than to Chinese Confucianism. Yet it is Japan, rather than China, that has been democratic for the past 45 years.

Granite and Sand

This contrast between Chinese and Japanese Confucianism has given rise to several important differences between the two countries' political cultures--differences that should have implications for the prospects of Western-style democracy. Given the strength of intrafamilial bonds within a traditional Chinese society, ties between people unrelated to each other are relatively weak. In other words, in a Chinese society there is a relatively high degree of distrust between people who are not related. The Chinese may be characterized as family-oriented, but they are not group-oriented, as the Japanese are frequently said to be. The competition between families frequently makes Chinese society appear more individualistic to Western observers than Japanese society, and is the basis for the famous remark that while the Japanese are like a block of granite, the Chinese are like a tray of sand, with each grain representing a single family.

Because of the primacy of the family in China, political authority there has always been weaker than in Japan, and political instability much closer to the surface. Chinese families have traditionally been suspicious of government authority, and many Chinese family businesses--both in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and among [End Page 27] the overseas (or Nanyang) Chinese--go through elaborate machinations to hide their affairs from the tax collector and other officials. Nationalism and national identity have traditionally been much weaker in China than in Japan: there is little sense in China of the "us-against-them" mentality that has at times characterized Japanese nationalism. In business relationships and even political affiliations, loyalties to family, lineage, and region frequently take precedence over the mere fact of being Chinese. It has often been remarked that the level of citizenship is lower in China than it is in many other societies: provided the state leaves them alone, most Chinese do not feel any particular obligations to the larger society in which they live. And there is certainly no generalized moral obligation to do right by strangers simply because they are human beings, as there is in Christian culture. Because they lack the intense feeling of natural unity that the Japanese have, the Chinese find political instability, in a sense, more psychologically threatening.

Paradoxically, the weaker Chinese deference to authority creates a greater need for an authoritarian political system in Chinese societies. Precisely because state authority is less respected in China, the danger of social chaos emerging in the absence of an overt, repressive state structure is greater there than in Japan. The fear of China's fragmenting and becoming dangerously unstable was clearly one of the factors motivating the Chinese Communist leadership in its crackdown on the prodemocracy movement at Tiananmen Square in June 1989. Fear of disintegration is what continues to make China's rulers reluctant to liberalize the political system significantly. One is led to suspect that the emphasis on political authoritarianism in Singapore and other Southeast Asian states is less a reflection of those societies' self-discipline--as they would have outsiders believe--than of their rather low level of spontaneous citizenship and corresponding fear of coming apart in the absence of coercive political authority. In Japan, by contrast, it is not necessary for the state to legislate against failing to flush public toilets or writing on walls, because the society itself has absorbed and internalized such rules.

The relationship between Confucianism and democracy, then, is far more complex than many commentators have indicated. Chinese Confucianism, in particular, does not legitimate deference to the authority of an all-powerful state that leaves no scope for the development of an independent civil society. If civil society is weak in China, that weakness is due not to a statist ideology, but rather to the strong familism that is basic to Chinese culture, and the consequent [End Page 28] reluctance of the Chinese to trust people outside of their kinship groups. The problem that will confront the institutionalization of democracy in China in the future will not be a culturally ingrained deference to state authority, but a sense of citizenship too feeble to generate spontaneous coherence or call forth sacrifices for the sake of national unity. As in other familistic societies in Southern Europe or Latin America, there will be a need to bring the "morality of the street" more in line with the morality of the family.

The experience of communism in the PRC has done nothing to alter these cultural attitudes, despite decades of anti-Confucian indoctrination. Indeed, the importance of family obligations in the PRC has, if anything, deepened over the past few generations. The traditional Chinese family, after all, was essentially a defensive mechanism that served to protect its members against an arbitrary and capricious state: although one could not trust the local authorities, one could trust members of one's own family. Nothing in the chaotic political experience of China in the twentieth century has led the average Chinese to change this evaluation of relative risks. Hence we see even members of the communist elite in China securing educations, foreign bank accounts, and safe havens for their children in the event that the communist political edifice comes crashing down.

The statist, group-oriented attitudes toward authority that Huntington believes to be characteristic of Confucianism per se are more properly characteristic of Japan and Japanese Confucianism, and were indeed manifest in Japan in an extreme form during the 1930s. As a result of the disastrous experience of the Second World War, nationalism and statism have been delegitimized, and replaced by a workable democracy. Traditionally deferential attitudes toward political authority continued to be evident, however, in the long-unchallenged rule of the bureaucracy-LDP-business triangle in the postwar period. As noted earlier, however, it is not clear that these attitudes will continue to pose an insurmountable barrier to a more participatory, Western form of democracy featuring multiparty contestation for power.

The ways in which Confucian culture--both Chinese and Japanese--differs significantly from the Christian and democratic culture of the West have to do with the status of the individual. Although Chinese familism may appear individualistic in some respects, it is not the same as the individualism that undergirds the Western ideal. That is, individuals in China do not have a source of legitimate authority on the basis of which they can revolt against their families and the web of social ties into which

they are born. Christianity provides the concept of a transcendent God whose Word is the highest source of right. God's laws take precedence over all other obligations--remember that God required Abraham to be willing to sacrifice his son--and this transcendent source of morality is what enables an individual in the [End Page 29] West to repudiate all forms of social obligation, from the family all the way up to the state. In modern liberalism, the Christian concept of a universal God is replaced with the concept of an underlying human nature that becomes the universal basis of right. Liberal rights apply to all human beings as such, just as God's law did in Christianity, transcending any particular set of real-world social obligations. While not all of today's American human rights advocates working for organizations like Asia Watch or Amnesty International would describe themselves as believing Christians, they all share their Christian culture's emphasis on universal rights and, consequently, individual conscience as the ultimate source of authority. This, it is safe to say, does not have a counterpart in any Confucian society. It is this difference that is at the root of contemporary disagreements between Americans and Asians over human rights policy.

In evaluating the claim of a fundamental incompatibility between Confucianism and liberal democracy, we should remember that many experts once thought that Confucianism presented insuperable obstacles to capitalist economic modernization as well. While Huntington argues--correctly--that modern liberal democracy grew out of Christian culture, it is clear that democracy emerged only after a long succession of incarnations of Christianity that were inimical to liberal tolerance and democratic contestation. All in all, the obstacles posed by Confucian culture do not seem any greater than those posed by other cultures; indeed, when compared to those of Hinduism or Islam, they appear to be much smaller.

An Attitudinal Shift

The upshot of all this is that **Confucianism by no means mandates an authoritarian political system.** In Singapore, the current political authorities are appealing to Confucian traditions somewhat dishonestly to justify an intrusive and unnecessarily paternalistic political system. Other Confucian societies like Japan and South Korea have been able to accommodate a greater degree of political participation and individual liberty than Singapore without compromising their own fundamental cultural values, and Taiwan is moving rapidly in the same direction. I see no reason why Singapore should not be able to follow this path. If economic modernization does lead to demands for greater recognition, it will be the next generation of Singaporeans who will be voicing the strongest demands for greater political participation and individual freedom--not because these are Western values, but because they meet the needs of a middle-class, well-educated populace.

On the other hand, virtually no one in Asia today believes it likely that Asian societies will ultimately converge with the particular model of liberal democracy represented by the contemporary United States, or, [End Page 30] indeed, that such a state of affairs is remotely desirable. This represents quite a change from the early postwar period, when many people--and not just in Asia--believed that the United States was the exemplar of a modern democracy, to be revered and emulated. This attitudinal shift can be traced to two subsequent developments. The first was East Asia's spectacular economic growth, which many people attributed to the region's Confucian traditions. The second was a perceived decline in the American standard of living, measured not in terms of per-capita GDP, but rather in terms of growing crime, the breakdown of the family, a loss of civility, racial tensions, and illegal immigration--problems that showed no sign of abating. In the view of many Asians, individualism was far too rampant in American society and was leading to social chaos, with potentially devastating economic and political consequences. Thus some began to argue that a "soft" authoritarian system--rooted in Confucian principles and characterized by less individual liberty and more social discipline--not only would result in faster economic growth, but would create a much more satisfying society in terms of overall quality of life.

There is both an element of truth and a great deal of exaggeration in this Asian analysis of what currently ails the United States. It is true that the individualism deeply ingrained in the theoretical principles underlying the U.S. Constitution and legal system has no counterpart in Asian culture. It is thus no accident that American political discourse is framed largely in terms of conflicting individual rights. Yet as Mary Ann Glendon has pointed out, **this "rights talk" is a dialect unique to the United States, with its Lockean and Jeffersonian traditions; in most modern European countries, individual rights are carefully balanced in constitutional law against responsibilities to the community.**¹³ **Moreover, even in the American tradition, the inherent individualism of the constitutional-legal system has always been counterbalanced in practice by strongly communitarian social habits. This high degree of communal participation derived originally from religion (that is, the sectarian form of Protestantism dominant in the United States) and later from the communal habits of America's ethnic groups as well.** Alexis de Tocqueville noted in the 1830s that Americans were very good at associating with one another and subordinating their individualism to voluntary groups of one type or another.

It is only in the past couple of generations that the balance between individualism and communalism in the United States has been tipped decisively in favor of the former. For a variety of historical reasons, communal institutions have grown weaker--or have been deliberately undermined by the state--while the number and scope of basic individual rights to which Americans feel they are entitled have steadily increased. The causes of the problem--and possible solutions to it--are well beyond the scope of the present essay, but the result has been a [End Page 31] diminution of the appeal to Asians of the American model of democracy. Nor are Asians alone in this view; judging from the positive reaction that many Americans exhibited to the caning of Michael Fay in Singapore, this model has become much less appealing to Americans themselves.

Finding a Balance

To many Asians, the social problems currently plaguing the United States are problems of liberal democracy per se. To the extent that this perception continues, the future of democracy in Asia will depend less on the theoretical compatibility or incompatibility of Confucianism with democratic principles than on whether people in Asia feel that they want their society to resemble that of the United States.

Asia is therefore at a very interesting crossroads. It is quite possible that the modernization hypothesis will continue to be

borne out in the future, and that rising per-capita incomes and educational levels in the region will be accompanied by an increasing democratization of political systems. As noted above, this is because there is a universal tendency of human beings to seek recognition of their dignity through a political system that allows them to participate as adult human beings. On the other hand, people's choices are strongly influenced by the alternatives that they see directly at hand, and if East Asia continues to prosper and the United States makes little or no progress in solving its economic and social problems, the Western democratic model will become less and less attractive. Japan's experience will be critical. If Japan emerges from the current recession with its people believing that the country's economic problems were the result of the accumulated inefficiencies of the period of LDP domination, then there will be a sustained impetus for reform of the political system and enhanced prospects for a more genuinely democratic Japan. Yet there is a real possibility that the reform effort itself will become the scapegoat for Japan's economic woes, in which case a sentiment favoring restoration of a more authoritarian kind of political system may take root.

I do not have any particular prediction to make, concerning either Japan or Asia as a whole. What I hope to have shown, however, is that there is no fundamental cultural obstacle to the democratization of contemporary Confucian societies, and there is some reason to believe that these societies will move in the direction of greater political liberalization as they grow wealthier. We should regard assertions that authoritarian political systems are necessarily more Confucian than democratic systems with a certain amount of skepticism. In fact, Confucian values might work quite well in a liberal society (as they clearly do for many Asian immigrants to the United States), where they can serve as a counterbalance to the larger society's atomizing **[End Page 32]** tendencies. On the other hand, the particular form that Asian democracy will ultimately take is unlikely to be identical to the model represented by the United States. If Asia's Confucian traditions allow it to find an appropriate and stable balance between the need for liberty and the need for community, in the end it will be a politically happy place indeed.

[Francis Fukuyama](#) is a senior researcher at the RAND Corporation in Washington, D.C. A former deputy director of the Policy Planning Staff of the U.S. State Department, he is the author of *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). His new book on social capital and the economy will be published in 1995. This essay was presented at a conference sponsored by the Institute for National Policy Research in Taipei, Taiwan, in June 1994.

Notes

1. See, for example, Lee's interview with Fareed Zakaria in *Foreign Affairs* 73 (1994): 109-27.
2. The basic texts outlining early postwar modernization theory include Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1958), and the various works of Talcott Parsons, especially *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937), (with Edward Shils) *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), and *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1951). In this tradition were the nine volumes sponsored by the American Social Science Research Council between 1963 and 1975, beginning with Lucian Pye's *Communications and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) and ending with Raymond Grew's *Crises of Political Development in Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
3. Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 53 (1959): 69-105.
4. For empirical evidence, see Larry Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered," *American Behavioral Scientist* 15 (March-June 1992): 450-99.
5. Talcott Parsons, "Evolutionary Universals in Society," *American Sociological Review* 29 (June 1964): 339-57.
6. See my *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), esp. pt. 2, and "Capitalism and Democracy: The Missing Link," *Journal of Democracy* 3 (July 1992): 100-110.
7. See especially Karel van Wolferen, *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (London: Macmillan, 1989).
8. On this subject see Barbara Geddes, "Challenging the Conventional Wisdom," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (October 1994): 104-18; and Minxin Pei, "The Puzzle of East Asian Exceptionalism," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (October 1994): 90-103.
9. One exception is Lucian Pye. See his "Political Science and the Crisis of Authoritarianism," *American Political Science Review* 84 (March 1990): 3-17.
10. Samuel P. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy* 2 (Spring 1991): 24.
11. Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Ethics Today: The Singapore Challenge* (Singapore: Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore, 1984), 90.
12. Quoted in Marion J. Levy, *The Rise of the Modern Chinese Business Class* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1949), 1.
13. Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

