

Asian Values Revisited after 20 Years: Value Shift in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan

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1 Introduction

This paper focuses on the value shift occurring in four East Asian societies resulting from socioeconomic modernization and political democratization. Proposed in the first half of the 1990s, the notion of “Asian values” describes the socio-cultural characteristics of East Asia (i.e., conformity, hierarchy, harmony, and the priority of collective interests). In reexamining Asian values in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan against the background of overwhelming social transformation in this region, this paper addresses two issues: (1) the differences of Asian values in the public and private spheres in four East Asian societies and (2) whether citizens in these four societies detach from the Asian traditional culture and thus Asian values.

2 Methods

This study divided Asian values into traditional family values and traditional social values in the private sphere, and authoritarian political values in the public sphere. By comparing China with the remaining three liberal democracies, Asian values in four East Asian societies were investigated. The theoretical discussion includes an examination of the empirical evidence provided by the Asian Barometer Survey. Three waves of surveys administered over the past 10 years in four East Asian societies have offered an abundance of information to test the value shift in this region.

3 Results

Revisiting Asian values 20 years after its initial proposal has revealed two major findings. First, no remarkable gap exists between the Chinese and other East Asian societies’ citizens in terms of Asian values in the private sphere. Second, although citizens in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have abandoned authoritarian political values, this value shift has not been observed in China.

4 Conclusion

The value shift is more significant in the public/political sector in East Asia. Even though Asian values in the private sphere are popular in all four East Asian societies, modernization and political democratization have facilitated declining Asian values in the public sphere in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Not only do the Chinese cherish traditional family and social values, as do the citizens in other East Asian societies, but they also uphold authoritarian political values.

References

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