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Fairness, Globalization, and Public Institutions

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Published by University of Hawai'i Press

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Fairness, Globalization, and Public Institutions: East Asia and Beyond.

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006.

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Finally, even though we focus on political institutions in East Asia, broadly defined, we also include discussions of the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world from time to time when their experiences seem especially relevant to our discussion.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

The Need for Global Dialogue

Walt Anderson

IF THERE IS to be a strong and lasting global civilization, it will come about not merely from wise leadership or high levels of public participation, but because many people have learned to practice the simple (yet somehow elusive) art of dialogue. Dialogue is not debate, negotiation, or decision making (all of which are necessary to politics and governance), but the deeper human interaction that precedes them and makes them possible, as people begin to understand the frames of reference of others and develop shared visions and common language. Dialogue is not just about policy, but also about morality, worldviews, and emotions.

The frames of reference that shape personal convictions about public issues are largely implicit, are rarely examined or deliberately revised, and play a large part in triggering emotional responses. In smaller and more homogenous societies, people's frames of reference may be quite similar and dialogue over differences relatively easy to achieve. This is certainly not the case in pluralistic, multicultural societies. Indeed, there are some indications that advanced industrial societies may be becoming less, rather than more, capable of serious, informed deliberation around major issues. Increasing mobility and access to communications make it easy for people to seek out and join subcultures of like-minded others rather than engage in dialogue with those who think differently. This makes it easy to demonize those who are on the other side of issues concerning such matters as globalization, free trade, environmental protection, and the ethics of biotechnology. We may be getting better at generating controversy and confrontation than at encouraging civil conversation aimed at achieving understanding and consensus.

James Rosenau has argued eloquently in various writings that more and more people all over the world are taking part in a "skill revolution" as they learn how to mobilize, form coalitions, use information/communications technologies, and influence public opinion. There is much evidence to support this, and it is one of the most hopeful developments of our time. But it is urgently necessary that the skill of engaging in dialogue across cultural, political, and worldview boundaries be a part of this revolution.

Notes

1. www.fairglobe.hawaii.edu.
2. The conference was originally scheduled for the week of September 20, 2001, but was postponed because of the September 11 attacks.
3. Dao Minh Chau, "Administrative Concepts in Confucianism and Their Influence on Development in Confucian Countries," *Asian Journal of Public Administration* 18.1 (June 1996): 46.
4. *Ibid.*, 58.
5. The rise of China as an economic and political power has been paid much attention lately. The debate has centered on whether a rising China would be a threat or an opportunity both for the region and for the world. In any case, this controversial debate is proving that China is rapidly emerging as a world power and is obtaining its past reputation as the central country in the region.
6. Gilbert Rozman, ed., *The East Asian Region: Confucian Heritage and Its Modern Adaptation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 6.
7. Su-Hoon Lee, "The Rise of East Asia and East Asian Social Science's Quest for Self-Identity," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 6.3 (Fall/Winter 2000): 768–783.
8. *Ibid.*
9. See Wei-ming Tu, ed., *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).