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[Review of the book *The Four Little Dragons: The Spread of Industrialization in East Asia*]

Abstract

[Excerpt] This slim and eminently readable volume presents the 1990 Edwin O. Reischauer lectures delivered by Ezra Vogel, the Henry Ford II Professor of Social Sciences at Harvard University and a leading scholar on Asia. In the first chapter Vogel establishes the context for the experiences of the "late late industrializes". Japan and "the Four Little Dragons" (Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan). The next three chapters are devoted to the experiences of Taiwan, Korea, and Hong Kong and Singapore, respectively. The last chapter offers an explanation for the dragons' successes.

Keywords

economic growth, industrialization, East Asia

Disciplines

Business | International and Comparative Labor Relations | Labor Relations

Comments

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The Four Little Dragons: The Spread of Industrialization in East Asia. By Ezra F. Vogel. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991. 138 pp. ISBN 0-674-31525-1. \$16.95.

This slim and eminently readable volume presents the 1990 Edwin O. Reischauer lectures delivered by Ezra Vogel, the Henry Ford II Professor of Social Sciences at Harvard University and a leading scholar on Asia. In the first chapter Vogel establishes the context for the experiences of the "late late industrializes". Japan and "the Four Little Dragons" (Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan). The next three chapters are devoted to the experiences of Taiwan, Korea, and Hong Kong and Singapore, respectively. The last chapter offers an explanation for the dragons' successes

The explanation is multifaceted. It invokes five situational factors, four cultural factors, and three "other" factors. The situational factors are the receipt of massive aid from the United States and from international organizations; the destruction of the old order and its replacement by a "strong state" relatively insulated from local elites; a sense of political and economic urgency for development on the part of leaders and the public; a labor force that was not only plentiful but eager to work; and familiarity with the Japanese model of success. The cultural factors (nicely termed "habits of the heart") include the development of a respected meritocratically selected elite; an entrance exam system that rewards learning and disciplined work habits; the importance of the group; and the drive for self-improvement. The three "other" factors are the passionate drive to acquire new goods ("consumerism"), the commitment to increasing exports and meeting global competition; and the pressures on workers to advance their companies'

interests, and hence their own. This conjunction of forces

helped East Asia make use of their special situational advantages and new worldwide opportunities. The adaptation of these basic institutions to take advantage of their societies' opportune situations ignited the greatest burst of sustained economic growth the world has yet seen (pp 101-2)

The specificity of these conditions to East Asia and their general absence elsewhere is striking. Thus, one must wonder whether the dragons' successes can be replicated in places where the bureaucracy is less meritocratic and service-oriented, workers are less company-oriented and future-oriented, and development is not as urgent an imperative—and in an environment where outside aid is deplorably scarce.

One also wonders how long the dragons will be able to continue to grow so rapidly. Vogel adduces four factors—the end of cheap labor, the accumulation of sizable financial assets, the growth of finance and other services, and a more vocal public—that lead him to think that "the end of an era" is at hand.

Finally, readers of this *Review* who are particularly concerned about the labor situation will want to keep in mind this observation:

The winds of democracy have also been felt on the factory floor, as labor has begun to demand more rights. The changes have been most dramatic in South Korea but workers in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore have also begun to lose their docility (p 108)

New industrial relations systems and practices and labor market institutions will be needed to cope with the new conditions. Interesting times lie ahead

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