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# Neoconservatives and Neo-Confucians: East Asian Growth and the Celebration of Tradition

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*This article explores the influence of East Asia's economic growth on the evolution of American neoconservative thought in the 1970s and 1980s. It traces how prominent neoconservative thinkers—Nathan Glazer, Peter L. Berger, Herman Kahn, Michael Novak, and Lawrence E. Harrison—developed the claim that the region's prosperity stemmed from its alleged Confucian tradition. Drawing in part from East Asian leaders and scholars, they argued that the region's growth demonstrated that tradition had facilitated, rather than hampered, the development of a distinct East Asian capitalist modernity. The article argues that this Confucian thesis helped American neoconservatives articulate their conviction that “natural” social hierarchies, religious commitment, and traditional families were necessary for healthy and free capitalist societies. It then charts how neoconservatives mobilized this interpretation of Confucian East Asia against postcolonial critiques of capitalism, especially dependency theory. East Asia, they claimed, demonstrated that poverty and wealth were determined not by patterns of welfare, structural exploitation, or foreign assistance, but values and culture. The concept of Confucian capitalism, the article shows, was central to neoconservatives' broad ideological agenda of protecting political, economic, and racial inequality under the guise of values, culture, and tradition.*

In a February 1980 issue of *The Economist*, Roderick MacFarquhar, governor of London's School of African and Oriental Studies, reflected on the massive economic transformations reshaping the world. In particular, he highlighted East Asia; Japan had become the globe's second-largest economy, while South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong were achieving high growth rates, forming a major new capitalist nexus. Conflating these countries, MacFarquhar claimed that the region's success was not due to new technologies, favorable trade relations, or government policies. Rather, it stemmed from cultural legacies, specifically the region's Confucian heritage. Confucianism, he proclaimed, “still provides an inner compass to most East Asians,” and was the crucial factor behind “East Asian hyper-growth.” Indeed, Confucian societies were better positioned than their Western competitors to thrive in a changing global economy. “[I]f western individualism was appropriate for the pioneering period of industrialization,” he claimed, “perhaps post-Confucian ‘collectivism’ is better suited to the age of mass industrialization.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Roderick MacFarquhar, “The Post-Confucian Challenge,” *The Economist*, 9 Feb. 1980, 67–72, at 68, 71.

In making such claims, MacFarquhar was hardly alone. In the 1970s and 1980s, a range of commentators sought to explain why East Asian growth rates soared, while the United States and European economies stagnated and a host of countries from the global South—including many postcolonial states—struggled to achieve robust growth. One common explanation for East Asia's economic success in both academic and public writing emphasized the region's Confucian heritage. All of these countries, so this argument went, shared a Confucian culture that instilled social cohesion, discipline, familial values, and communalism. Despite this theory's selective interpretation of Confucianism and its many limitations—its crude conflation of diverse Asian countries; its failure to explain why “ancient” Confucianism led to widespread growth only in the 1970s; its inability to fully account for mainland China, the home of Confucius—it proved surprisingly popular. It circulated in newspapers, magazines, and books and fed numerous academic meetings and conferences across the Pacific. A chorus of journalists, politicians, and scholars even declared that the Confucian origins of East Asian growth called for a substantial rethinking of long-held theories about the origins of capitalism. East Asia showed that Max Weber was wrong in his famous claim that capitalism's ideology of self-denial, hard work, and enterprising innovation stemmed solely from Euro-American Protestantism.<sup>2</sup> Belief systems such as Confucianism did not foster passivity, but the dynamic tensions and mentalities necessary to capitalist growth. As MacFarquhar stated, Confucianism was “as important” to East Asian growth “as the conjunction of Protestantism and the rise of capitalism in the West.”<sup>3</sup> Such writing updated and recast orientalist tropes to elevate “tradition” as a source of social strength and economic vitality, rather than the cause of inertia and stagnancy.

This argument had many advocates, but among its most prominent promoters were American neoconservatives, such as sociologist Nathan Glazer, nuclear theorist and futurologist Herman Kahn, sociologist Peter L. Berger, Catholic theologian Michael Novak, and former aid worker Lawrence E. Harrison. Immersed in the intellectual world of neoconservatism, these men published a bevy of books, articles, and essays that celebrated the role of “culture” in economic growth, equating “culture” with “tradition” in their promotion of the “Confucian thesis.” Focusing much of their attention on Japan due to its earlier economic success, they asserted that East Asia's recent experiences showed the limits of modernization theory, which had dominated postwar American economic and social thought with its claim that societies traveled on a universal path from tradition to modernity.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, they posited that capitalist development was a more culturally

<sup>2</sup>Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit of Capitalism” and Other Writings*, trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York, 2002; first published 1905); Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (Glencoe, IL, 1951; first published 1915).

<sup>3</sup>MacFarquhar, “The Post-Confucian Challenge,” 68. See also Sophie Pettuzzo, “Confucianism and Capitalist Development: From Max Weber and Orientalism to Lee Kuan Yew and New Confucianism,” *Asian Studies Review* 43/2 (2019), 224–38, at 228; Jack Barbalet, “Confucian Values and East Asian Capitalism: A Variable Weberian Trajectory,” in Bryan S. Turner and Oscar Salamink, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia* (New York, 2015), 315–28, at 318–19.

<sup>4</sup>See Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2007).

specific and culturally exclusive process, one that could only take place in certain areas of the world where local cultures and religious traditions were especially conducive to it.

Tracing the evolution of the “Confucian thesis” within these figures’ intellectual production enriches not only our understanding of neoconservatism, but also broader changes in American thinking about poverty and capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s. Historians have explored the genesis of neoconservatism in the crucible of the 1960s, charting how influential thinkers such as Irving Kristol responded to the intertwined rise of the welfare state, the campus free-speech movement, the antiwar movement, and the black power movement by stressing the need for “civic virtue” and “moderation.”<sup>5</sup> Scholars have also examined the later influence of neoconservatives in foreign policy, in particularly their faith in American exceptionalism and their advocacy of unparalleled American hegemony through aggressive military intervention overseas.<sup>6</sup> Just as important, however, neoconservatives also developed their moral, economic, and political visions by reflecting on the shifting international economy, including the economic rise of East Asia. Like European neoliberal thinkers, American neoconservatives believed that modern capitalism was a system of global dimensions.<sup>7</sup> Its development in one part of the world was crucial for understanding its challenges and promises across the globe. This article therefore argues that East Asian growth, both real and imagined, served as a generative space for American thinking about capitalism. In particular, it charts how it helped neoconservatives articulate their arguments about the importance of traditional values, family, and religion in facilitating economic growth and social cohesion, and in preventing moral and cultural decline; such ideas did not just develop in response to domestic debates over poverty and welfare, but also by reflecting on the transformation of the global economy.<sup>8</sup>

At first glance, this neoconservative emphasis on East Asia’s Confucian heritage seems puzzling: why would this group of Americans, who had minimal expertise on East Asia, claim that the most visible example of recent capitalist success emerged from Asian religious and intellectual traditions? As this article demonstrates, neoconservative’s selective interest in East Asia stemmed from two key factors. First, all of these writers asserted that East Asia’s example could address a growing fear that capitalism sowed the seeds of its own destruction. In the 1970s, influential writers like Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell repeatedly cautioned that the immediate gratification offered by capitalist success would destroy modern society through

<sup>5</sup>Justin Vaisse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 7. See also Gary J. Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology* (Philadelphia, 1993); Murray Friedman, *The Neoconservative Revolution: Jewish Intellectuals and the Shaping of Public Policy* (Cambridge, 2005); Mark Gerson, *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham, 1996); Andrew Hartmann, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago, 2015).

<sup>6</sup>John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs* (New Haven, 1995); Muhammad Idrees Ahmad, *The Road to Iraq: The Making of a Neoconservative War* (Edinburgh, 2004).

<sup>7</sup>Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Great Depression* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2018).

<sup>8</sup>On the welfare state see Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York, 2017), 49–61.

hedonism and nihilism and undermine the discipline and work ethic necessary to continued economic growth. Yet in contrast to the fear that many Americans felt as Japanese growth skyrocketed, neoconservatives declared that East Asia offered the tantalizing prospect that this destructive dynamic was not inherent to capitalism.<sup>9</sup> Drawing in part from the racially and culturally essentialist writings of Japanese scholars like Nakane Chie and Doi Takeo, neoconservatives claimed that East Asia demonstrated market economies' ability to preserve the traditions, especially religion, family, and community, that gave life meaning. Indeed, the purpose and discipline provided by these "natural" hierarchies—rather than economic redistribution or egalitarianism—would produce a brighter economic future. East Asian regimes, both democratic and undemocratic, thus offered an appealing template for the United States' own renewal. If the United States suffered from stagnation and, in the words of Samuel P. Huntington, an "excess of democracy," its salvation would be achieved by a "return" to its own traditions, specifically the white Protestant ethic, which neoconservatives never tired of celebrating as the source of American success.<sup>10</sup>

Second, and equally important, neoconservatives like Berger and Novak proclaimed that their Confucian theory refuted postcolonial criticisms of global capitalism, which proliferated in the aftermath of decolonization. In particular, they directed their ire at Latin American leaders and thinkers, who were central to the development of dependency theory and the set of economic proposals known as the New International Economic Order (NIEO). East Asia, neoconservatives loudly declared, demonstrated the necessity of proper values rather than structural change. Ongoing poverty in places like Latin America was not due to the legacies of imperialism or foreign economic extraction; these societies simply lacked a culture conducive to growth. This logic was a global expansion of the domestic "culture-of-poverty" discourse, which neoconservatives had played a central role in developing. This discourse attributed African American poverty not to oppression or racialized capitalism, but to psychology, culture, and flawed family structures.<sup>11</sup> Applied to the international stage, it explained global economic inequalities as a "personal or cultural problem rather than a byproduct of the capitalist economy."<sup>12</sup> Neoconservatives repeatedly used their cherry-picked narrative of East Asian growth as "evidence" to point out Latin American flaws. This interpretation of East Asia therefore linked culture-of-poverty discourse, criticisms of dependency theory, and critiques of welfare with those of foreign aid. Some writers further used this argument about the inferiority of Latin American culture as compared to "Confucian" East Asia to advocate against immigration. If Latin Americans, Harrison proclaimed, were mired in an antigrowth "culture" of passivity, their arrival in the United States would dilute American culture and undermine capitalism itself. The Confucian

<sup>9</sup>On American reactions to Japanese growth see Andrew C. McKeivitt, *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America* (Chapel Hill, 2017).

<sup>10</sup>Michael J. Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York, 1975), 113.

<sup>11</sup>On culture-of-poverty discourse see Robin Marie Averbeck, *Liberalism Is Not Enough: Race and Poverty in Postwar Political Thought* (Chapel Hill, 2018), 55–68, 86–97.

<sup>12</sup>Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, "Other Americas: Transnationalism, Scholarship, and the Culture of Poverty in Mexico and the United States," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 89/4 (2009), 603–41, at 638.

thesis, then, conveniently tied together neoconservatives' thinking about the domestic and the international. They used East Asia to articulate hierarchical and racist claims in the language of culture and values to defend long-standing inequalities in the United States and beyond.

### The genesis of "Confucian capitalism"

The belief that East Asia was a product of its "Confucian heritage" was not new in the 1970s and 1980s. Drawing on older arguments, mid-century scholars of East Asian studies generally agreed that Confucian teachings were key to understanding centuries of East Asian life.<sup>13</sup> UC Berkeley historian Joseph R. Levenson, for example, asserted that Confucian teachings, such as respect for precedent, "permeated intellectual life" in "pre-modern China." Confucianism, he proclaimed in his three-volume *Confucian China and its Modern Fate* (1958–65), remained influential for "twenty-five hundred years."<sup>14</sup> In their widely used textbook, *East Asia: The Great Tradition* (1960), Harvard historians Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbank—the most prominent Asian studies scholars in the United States—described Confucius as "the founder of a great ethical tradition" and attributed "the East Asian pattern of compromise, of always seeking the middle path," to the region's Confucian culture.<sup>15</sup> These scholars did recognize that Confucianism was not a monolithic tradition, but one open to reinterpretation over the centuries. It was more accurate, Levenson noted, to talk of "Confucianisms—plural, changing" schools of thought, marked by debates over the role of individualism, self-cultivation, and filial piety.<sup>16</sup> Still, Confucianism helped scholars to sweepingly synthesize East Asia's diverse histories into a unified story. As Reischauer declared in *Foreign Affairs*, the region was "shaped over the millennia by Confucian ethical concepts and the tradition of a centralized empire."<sup>17</sup>

Alongside this homogenization, Confucianism served to distinguish between East Asia's "premodern and "modern" eras. According to Levenson, for example, the eclipse of the monarchy in Republican and Communist China led the Confucian tradition to suffer "its modern fate," becoming "a vestigial idea ... a thing of the past."<sup>18</sup> Reischauer and Fairbank similarly described the Confucian tradition as part of premodern East Asia, where "the major traditional forms of thought and action, once established, had an inertial momentum, a tendency to continue in accepted ways."<sup>19</sup> Demonstrating the influence of modernization

<sup>13</sup>Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 10, 23–4, 121–9.

<sup>14</sup>Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*, vol. 1, *The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (Berkeley, 1968), xxx; Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*, vol. 2, *The Problem of Monarchical Decay* (Berkeley, 1968), vii.

<sup>15</sup>Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbank, *East Asia: The Great Tradition* (Boston, 1960), 70–72.

<sup>16</sup>Levenson, *The Problem of Monarchical Decay*, vii. See also William Theodore de Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson, comps., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York, 1960), 102–28.

<sup>17</sup>Edwin O. Reischauer, "The Sinic World in Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* 52/2 (1974), 341–8, at 341.

<sup>18</sup>Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*, vol. 3, *The Problem of Historical Significance* (Berkeley, 1968), 3.

<sup>19</sup>John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: The Modern Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 5.

theory's separation between tradition and modernity, these scholars claimed that this stagnant tradition was only overcome through the nineteenth-century arrival of "modern" Euro-American peoples, ideas, and technologies. Only then, Reischauer and Fairbank claimed in their second textbook, *East Asia: The Modern Transformation* (1965), could a "new phase in the history of East Asian civilization" begin; Confucianism itself was unable to generate a real, transformative modernity.<sup>20</sup> Even scholars who claimed that Confucianism continued to shape modern East Asia, such as historian Karl Wittfogel, argued that it resulted in a perverse and oppressive modernity. His *Oriental Despotism* (1957), for example, declared that Confucian values like filial piety fostered the blind obedience that enabled China's Communist dictatorship.<sup>21</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, however, a new interpretation of Confucianism began to emerge. As East Asian countries experienced high rates of growth, politicians and thinkers began to argue that the Confucian tradition, often selectively defined as a hierarchical emphasis on family and filial piety, education, hard work, and community, was not a premodern relic, but the motor behind the region's modern prosperity. The most prominent figure to make this claim was Singapore prime minister Lee Kuan Yew. "Singapore," he wrote in his memoir, "depends on the strength and influence of the family to keep society orderly and maintain a culture of thrift, hard work, [and] filial piety." These values were central to "Confucian societies" and "made for a productive people and help economic growth"; Lee even developed a Confucian curriculum for Singapore's schools in the early 1980s.<sup>22</sup> Other governments followed suit, as officials in Taiwan, South Korea, and the People's Republic of China (then going through market liberalization) all heralded Confucianism as central to both economic and cultural practice. For democratic and nondemocratic regimes, this invocation of tradition legitimized political authority and projects of state-led modernization, cultural nationalism, and integration into the global capitalist economy.<sup>23</sup>

As Japan was the earliest East Asian state to achieve economic takeoff, Japanese writers were especially active in linking prosperity to "tradition." The country's commitment to ancient values, so the logic went, was the true force behind its stratospheric growth. This claim was common in an emerging body of literature

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 4. On modernization theory's influence in the historiography of China see Paul A. Cohen, *China Unbound: Evolving Perspectives on the Chinese Past* (London, 2003), 48–50. For a searing critique of modernization theory in Japan studies see John W. Dower, "E. H. Norman, Japan, and the Uses of History," in *Origins of the Modern Japanese State: Selected Writings of E. H. Norman*, ed. John W. Dower (New York, 1975), 3–102.

<sup>21</sup>Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, 1957), 151–2.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Justin William Moyer, "How Lee Kuan Yew Made Singapore Strong: Family Values," *Washington Post*, 23 March 2015, at [www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/03/23/how-lee-kuan-yew-made-singapore-strong-family-values](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/03/23/how-lee-kuan-yew-made-singapore-strong-family-values).

<sup>23</sup>Chua Beng-Huat, "'Asian-Values' Discourse and the Resurrection of the Social," *positions* 7/2 (Fall 1999), 573–92, at 574–6; Harriet Zurndorfer, "Confusing Capitalism with Confucianism: Culture as Impediment and/or Stimulus to Chinese Economic Development," at [www.researchgate.net/publication/325270473\\_Confusing\\_Capitalism\\_with\\_Confucianism\\_Culture\\_as\\_Impediment\\_AndOr\\_Stimulus\\_to\\_Chinese\\_Economic\\_Development](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/325270473_Confusing_Capitalism_with_Confucianism_Culture_as_Impediment_AndOr_Stimulus_to_Chinese_Economic_Development) (May 2018), 1–20, at 3; Barbalet, "Confucian Values and East Asian Capitalism," 324; Arif Dirlik, "Confucius in the Borderlands: Global Capitalism and the Reinvention of Confucianism," *boundary 2* 22/3 (1995), 229–73, at 230.

called *nihonjinron* (essentially “theories of the Japanese race”), which broadly sought to rehabilitate Japanese nationalism from its recent history of imperialism and brutal war. The Japanese people, *nihonjinron* writers claimed, were blessed with inherent “racial and character traits” that distinguished Japan from other states, peoples, and cultures.<sup>24</sup> This unique racial and cultural homogeneity, which stemmed from Japan’s geographic isolation and a commitment to “traditions” of harmony, groupism, and consensus that dated to premodern times, had enabled its economic fortunes.<sup>25</sup> Anthropologist Nakane Chie, one of the most widely read *nihonjinron* writers in and outside Japan, described Japan as a society organized around vertical hierarchy with a strong “group consciousness” rooted in the “principles that governed traditional rural communit[ies],” especially the concept of the household (*ie*) as the central unit of society. These ideas, she argued in her highly influential *Tate shakai no ningen kankei* (1967), translated as *Japanese Society* (1970), continued to shape modern Japanese life, fostering social and political harmony, and driving Japan’s economic dynamism.<sup>26</sup> While Nakane only briefly mentioned Confucianism, other *nihonjinron* writers elevated it as central to the country’s cultural matrix. Yamamoto Shichihei, for example, declared in *Nihon shihon shugi no seishin* (1979), translated as *The Spirit of Japanese Capitalism* (1992), that Buddhism and Confucianism instilled the belief that one’s labor had “religious significance,” and thus fostered the “strict, self-denying ethics of capital.”<sup>27</sup> These essentialist, conservative, and xenophobic narratives gained formal state approval. A 1980 report for the Japanese government by a committee chaired by Yamamoto heralded Japanese tradition for its emphasis on “harmonious human relations” in contrast to the “self-centered individualism of the West.”<sup>28</sup>

As East Asian growth soared—Japan’s prosperity in particular became a source of both fear and fascination—a broader range of scholars began to reevaluate the Confucian tradition, linking it to East Asia’s economic transformation.<sup>29</sup> Robert N. Bellah’s *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-industrial Japan* (1957) was an important precursor; Bellah argued that during the Tokugawa era (1603–1868), Confucian “diligence and frugality” became “the ethic of an entire people” and paved the way for “economic rationalization.”<sup>30</sup> Bellah’s book was republished by the Free Press in 1985, with a preface and a new subtitle—*The Cultural Roots of*

<sup>24</sup>Nick Kapur, “The Empire Strikes Back? The 1968 Meiji Centennial Celebrations and the Revival of Japanese Nationalism,” *Japanese Studies* 38/3 (2018), 305–28, at 326; Harumi Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron* (Melbourne, 2001), 4.

<sup>25</sup>Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity*, 16–43.

<sup>26</sup>Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society* (Berkeley, 1970), 5–6, 23, 148.

<sup>27</sup>Yamamoto Shichihei, *The Spirit of Japanese Capitalism and Other Selected Essays*, trans. Lynne E. Riggs and Takechi Manabu (Lanham, 1992), 112, 143. See also Michio Morishima, *Why Has Japan Succeeded? Western Technology and the Japanese Ethos* (New York, 1982).

<sup>28</sup>Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity*, 81.

<sup>29</sup>See, for example, Ezra F. Vogel’s best-selling *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (Cambridge, MA, 1979); and Marvin J. Wolf, *The Japanese Conspiracy: The Plot to Dominate Industry Worldwide—and How to Deal with It* (New York, 1983).

<sup>30</sup>Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York, 1985), 183, 194, 196. See also Amy Borovoy, “Robert Bellah’s Search for Community and Ethical Modernity in Japan Studies,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 75/2 (2016), 467–94, at 470–73.

*Modern Japan*—that reflected widespread emphases on cultural explanations of political and economic systems. Similarly, in *British Factory, Japanese Factory: The Origins of National Diversity in Industrial Relations* (1973), British sociologist Ronald P. Dore argued that the two countries' work practices could "only be ascribed to different cultural traditions." Japan "is a Confucian country," whose emphasis on hard work, education and honor among workers facilitated "profits, efficiency, and growth," values that were in short supply in "a more philistine culture such as Britain's."<sup>31</sup> The People's Republic of China's burgeoning economic transformation, along with Taiwan's economic success, facilitated similar developments in the field of Chinese studies. Most significant was Tu Weiming, a prominent scholar of Chinese history at Harvard, who published an avalanche of works such as *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action* (1976) and *Confucian Ethics Today* (1984). Confucianism's "emphasis on the collectivity against selfish desire," Tu argued, served as a "philosophical explanation for the characteristics of East Asian capitalism."<sup>32</sup>

Strikingly, this reassessment of East Asian tradition was not limited to political leaders or scholars of Asia. Drawing from both Asian and Euro-American scholars and texts, North American neoconservatives became vocal proponents of the claim that tradition had facilitated, rather than hampered, the development of a distinct East Asian capitalism and modernity. An indicative example of this neoconservative fascination with East Asia was the writing of Harvard University sociologist Nathan Glazer, a prominent public intellectual and coeditor of *Public Interest* with Irving Kristol. In the early 1960s, Glazer had decided to "become an expert on Japan" and received funding from the Ford Foundation to spend twelve months in Tokyo.<sup>33</sup> After a seemingly unproductive year—he spoke no Japanese—Glazer returned to the United States, where he collaborated with Daniel Patrick Moynihan to write *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (1963). Glazer and Moynihan attributed each group's economic and social position to "ethnic culture"; in their racialized vision, wealth and poverty resulted not from discriminatory economic and political structures, but from collective psychologies, family practices, and cultural values.<sup>34</sup> As such, the book was an important articulation of the concept of a culture of poverty. Though *Beyond the Melting Pot* did not specifically examine Asian Americans, Glazer admired the alleged persistence of cultural traditions among Asian migrants in contrast to other ethnic groups, particularly African Americans and Puerto Ricans. When discussing Puerto Rican families, for example, he contrasted them with the "more tightly knit and better integrated family systems of, say, Chinese,

<sup>31</sup>Ronald P. Dore, *British Factory, Japanese Factory: The Origins of National Diversity in Industrial Relations* (Berkeley, 1973), 12, 295, 402.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Dirlik, "Confucius in the Borderlands," 255, 256. See also Thomas A. Metzger, *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture* (New York, 1977); William Theodore De Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy and the Learning of the Mind-and-Heart* (New York, 1981).

<sup>33</sup>Peter Skerry, "Nathan Glazer: Merit before Meritocracy," *American Spectator*, 3 April 2019, at [www.the-american-interest.com/2019/04/03/nathan-glazer-merit-before-meritocracy](http://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/04/03/nathan-glazer-merit-before-meritocracy).

<sup>34</sup>Averbeck, *Liberalism Is Not Enough*, 25.



and Japanese peasants.”<sup>35</sup> This interpretation echoed mid-century social-science research on Nisei, the children of Japanese migrants, that attributed their upward movement to a “Confucian upbringing” emphasizing “respect for authority and parental wishes, duty to community, [and] diligence.”<sup>36</sup> Such claims celebrated Asian Americans as a “model minority” that was culturally “compatible” with the self-evidently superior values of “middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestants,” while blaming other racial and ethnic minorities—especially black Americans—for their own socioeconomic marginalization.<sup>37</sup>

A decade later, Glazer resurrected this emphasis on the persistence of tradition as he sought to explain Japan’s economic prosperity. In a 1976 Brookings Institution publication on Japan’s economy, he contributed a lengthy article examining the “social and cultural factors” behind Japanese growth. Glazer posited that Japan posed a “paradox” for socioeconomic theory because its stratospheric growth seemed to confound previous explanations of how societies achieved modernity. Rather than cultivating the disenchanting and rational mindset that Weber claimed distinguished the modern era, “the Japanese insist on the significance of feeling in all social relations,” including political and economic life. Moreover, Japanese culture did not celebrate the individual, another one of modernity’s trademarks for both Weber and sociologists like Talcott Parsons. Japanese society rather “ends up on the side of collectivity orientation, a position that also tends to be regarded as traditional and therefore unfavorable to economic growth.” This orientation was a legacy of its alleged ethnic, racial, and cultural homogeneity and a socially distinctive culture drawn from “the agricultural household, the *ie*, and the culture developed by the hereditary military and bureaucratic class of the samurai”—claims that Glazer drew in part from *nihonjinron* theorist Nakane Chie and Ronald Dore. This unique cultural unity—“characteristics that seem to follow logically from the long historical experience of an isolated and homogeneous nation on a distant group of islands” (claims that also formed staple tropes of *nihonjinron*)—meant that Japan had only a small underclass prone to developing a “culture of poverty.”<sup>38</sup>

Unsurprisingly, given his reliance on culture-of-poverty discourse, Glazer emphasized the importance of education and the family in transmitting values, positing that the Japanese family unit showed a “remarkable stability” that “underlies the stability of the value pattern.” Rather than fostering passivity—as was to be expected in this allegedly premodern emphasis on family ties—Glazer cited *nihonjinron* theorist Doi Takeo while proclaiming that Japan’s “emphasis on interdependency, yearning for nurturance and security within a group, may be as substantial a basis for achievement as Western emphases on personal autonomy

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 27. Charles Petersen, “Meritocracy in America, 1932–1978,” 18 (I am grateful to Petersen for sharing this unpublished paper with me); Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton, 2013), 243–4.

<sup>36</sup>Wu, *The Color of Success*, 155.

<sup>37</sup>Ellen D. Wu, “The Invention of the Model Minority,” in Cindy I-Fen Cheng, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Asian American Studies* (New York, 2017), 285–301, at 286. On the anti-black nature of model-minority discourse see Wu, *The Color of Success*, 145–241.

<sup>38</sup>Nathan Glazer, “Social and Cultural Factors in Japanese Economic Growth,” in Hugh Patrick and Henry Rosovsky, eds., *Asia’s New Giant: How the Japanese Economy Works* (Washington, DC, 1976), 813–96, at 816, 820, 839, 842, 890.

and early independence.” Japan therefore demonstrated that “modern” principles and economic growth were not dependent on each other. In fact, Glazer speculated, the introduction of allegedly modern concepts like individualism and rationalism to Japan would likely *slow* growth, since they would undermine its traditionalist and communal ethos; Japan had shown the limitations of the belief that “some dissolution of traditionalism was necessary for economic growth to be sustained over long periods of time.” Japan therefore demonstrated that there was not one universal form of modernity, but rather multiple modernities produced by different cultures and traditions.<sup>39</sup>

While Glazer spoke broadly about “tradition” and communal values, other neo-conservative writers specifically invoked Japan’s Confucian heritage to make similar claims. Prominent among these was Herman Kahn, who is often absent from scholarship on neoconservatism but whose prolific writings engaged regularly with neo-conservative thought. Kahn made his name as a nuclear strategist at the RAND Corporation in the 1950s (his thinking about nuclear war may have inspired the character of Dr Strangelove). In the early 1960s, he left RAND and founded his own think tank, the Hudson Institute.<sup>40</sup> At Hudson, Kahn drew from his work developing scenarios at RAND to project various futures for the international economy; in the 1970s, Hudson offered a series of corporate education and consulting programs through which Kahn shared his views. Though he lacked professional expertise on Japan, Kahn became fascinated with the country, its culture, and its economy. In the 1960s, he utilized projections made by the Department of Defense to “forecast” the economic rise of Japan, publishing *The Emerging Japanese Superstate* (1970).<sup>41</sup> Through Hudson, which opened a Tokyo office in the 1970s, Kahn and his collaborators developed close relationships within Japan’s defense, corporate, and conservative circles.<sup>42</sup> Most notable was Kahn’s friendship with well-known Japanese commentator Kase Hideaki. Kase is now chairman of the deceptively named Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact and a leading figure in the historically revisionist effort to commemorate the alleged benevolence of Japanese empire, absolve Japan from World War II-era war crimes, and celebrate the “glory of the nation.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 818, 853, 861, 889–93. See also Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence* (Tokyo and New York, 1973); and George A. De Vos, *Socialization for Achievement: Essays on the Cultural Psychology of the Japanese* (Berkeley, 1973).

<sup>40</sup>Neoconservative intellectuals and writers, including Daniel Bell, Raymond Aron, and William Kristol, were members of Hudson and/or its board of trustees. See Neil Pickett, *A History of the Hudson Institute* (Indianapolis, 1992), 7; and B. Bruce-Briggs, *Supergenius: The Mega Worlds of Herman Kahn* (New York, 2000), 308.

<sup>41</sup>Pickett, *A History of the Hudson Institute*, 8. See Herman Kahn, *The Emerging Japanese Superstate: Challenge and Response* (Englewood Cliffs, 1970); Herman Kahn and Thomas Pepper, *The Japanese Challenge: The Successes and Failures of Economic Success* (New York, 1979).

<sup>42</sup>These relationships continue today; in 2013 Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzō was the first non-American to receive Hudson’s Herman Kahn Award. See Mitsuru Obe, “Abe First American to Win Conservative Hudson Institute Award,” *Wall Street Journal*, 23 Sept. 2013, at <http://on.wsj.com/1b5SgF8>.

<sup>43</sup>Kase is quoted in Edward Luttwak, “Friendly Relations,” *London Review of Books* 41/7 (2019), at [www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n07/edward-luttwak/friendly-relations](http://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n07/edward-luttwak/friendly-relations).

Drawing from scholarship like Nakane's *Japanese Society*, Kahn claimed that the essence of Japanese culture was its emphasis on vertical hierarchy and "group consciousness." *The Emerging Japanese Superstate* opened with a long chapter on the "Japanese mind," parroting *nihonjinron* to describe Japan as insular and admirably culturally homogeneous. "So highly developed is the sense of national solidarity," Kahn asserted, "that the people have at times acted like one huge family with the emperor at its head." This gave Japan an "unsurpassed capacity for purposive, dedicated, communal action and for choosing explicit national goals" that was "unmatched in any other culture." These qualities, which Kahn claimed partially stemmed from the "responsible, paternalistic Confucian master," were the source of the country's economic prowess; the "meticulous regard for ritual, codes, obligations, [and] rules" was "presumably one of the reasons the Japanese factory works so well."<sup>44</sup> Kahn also relied heavily on anthropologist Ruth Benedict's influential *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), a wartime study of Japan's "national character" that attributed Japan's wartime aggression to a nonindividualistic "shame culture."<sup>45</sup> Through this emphasis on a unified and static Japanese "culture," the cultural values once blamed as the source of a horrific war were now heralded as the source of Japan's economic success.

As the 1970s unfolded, Kahn expanded on these earlier claims to make similar arguments about South Korea and Taiwan. Such thinking was prominent in *World Economic Development: 1979 and Beyond* (1979), written for the 1978 meeting of the International Chamber of Commerce (where Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew gave a special lecture entitled "Extrapolating from the Singapore Experience").<sup>46</sup> In this book, Kahn situated economic development in a four-hundred-year trajectory and claimed that it was no longer solely a product of the West. Thanks to their heritage, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan were "superbly designed to create and foster loyalty, dedication, responsibility, and commitment and to intensify identification with the organization and one's role in the organization," values that would "result in all the neo-Confucian cultures having at least potentially higher growth rates than other cultures."<sup>47</sup>

For Kahn, this genealogy was not merely a historical curiosity, but also had important contemporary implications. It was in part designed to rebuff environmental critiques of industrialization, especially the Club of Rome's report *Limits to Growth* (1972), which warned that development would falter in regions that could not sustain its environmental toll. Kahn claimed that the principal role that culture played in facilitating economic growth meant that the main barriers to growth lay not in the environment but in the realm of ideology and values. These East Asian "heroes of development" showed it was possible for growth to expand across the globe: "Two hundred years ago almost everywhere human beings were comparatively few, poor and at the mercy of the forces of nature, and 200 years from now, we expect, almost everywhere they will be numerous, rich, and in control

<sup>44</sup>Kahn, *The Emerging Japanese Superstate*, 8, 19, 20–21, 24, 38.

<sup>45</sup>Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946).

<sup>46</sup>Kahn urged interested readers to obtain a copy of Lee's "excellent speech." Herman Kahn, *World Economic Development: 1979 and Beyond* (Boulder, 1979), 4.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 122.

of the forces of nature.”<sup>48</sup> Unsurprisingly, *World Economic Development* was funded by conservative foundations such as Olin and Scaife (now active in climate-change denialism), along with money from South Korean and Taiwanese government fronts passed through Kase Hideaki in Japan; Kahn had originally intended to coauthor the book with Kase.<sup>49</sup>

In celebrating Confucianism’s contributions to economic growth, Kahn was joined by sociologist Peter L. Berger, an important figure in academic and public discussions of economic development. Berger’s earlier work explored how American and European societies transmitted customs and values between generations, but his focus shifted in the 1970s when Berger became interested in the so-called Third World.<sup>50</sup> After visiting Mexico in 1969, where he was shaken by the country’s persistent poverty, Berger refocused his career on questions of economic growth, modernization, and capitalism.<sup>51</sup> Like Kahn, Berger’s interest in this topic drew him to Japan and East Asia, and the region’s economic transformation came to play a central intellectual role in his thinking. Accounting for the success of East Asia, Berger declared in 1984, was “crucial for any responsible theory of development.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, such thinking pushed Berger in a very decidedly pro-capitalist direction: “East Asia confirms the superior productive power of industrial capitalism” and “the superior capacity of industrial capitalism in raising the material standard of living of large masses of people.”<sup>53</sup> In the early 1980s, Berger served as a representative to a United Nations working group on development, and founded the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture at Boston University. He hosted and participated in a range of academic discussions on economics, development, and culture and regularly published in neoconservative magazines like *Commentary* and under the auspices of the American Enterprise Institute, a major free-market think tank.

Building on his earlier work about the transmission of values, Berger paralleled Glazer and Kahn’s elevation of culture, including Confucianism, as an important motor behind East Asian economic growth. He asserted in 1988 that East Asia offered a unique “second case” of capitalist modernity (in contrast to the Euro-American first case); its distinctive social and cultural features included a strong, achievement-oriented work ethic, a highly developed sense of collective solidarity, heavy emphasis on education, and brutally severe meritocratic norms that selected elites at an early age.<sup>54</sup> Invoking scholars such as Nakane and Bellah, Berger claimed that this “non-individualistic capitalist modernity” likely

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 329, 2.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., xix–xx; and Bruce-Briggs, *Supergenius*, 358.

<sup>50</sup>Gary J. Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology* (Philadelphia, 1993), 274–5.

<sup>51</sup>Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind*, 282. See also Peter L. Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change* (New York, 1974).

<sup>52</sup>Peter L. Berger, “Underdevelopment Revisited,” *Commentary*, 1 July 1984, 41–5, at 44.

<sup>53</sup>Peter L. Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions about Prosperity, Liberty, and Equality* (New York, 1986), 82–4, 12, 153.

<sup>54</sup>Peter L. Berger, “An East Asian Development Model?” in Peter L. Berger and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, eds., *In Search of an East Asian Development Model* (New Brunswick, 1988), 3–11, at 5–6.

demonstrated the continued relevance of Confucian-derived values.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, in *The Capitalist Revolution* (1986), Berger offered a series of hypotheses that sought to theorize the relationship between capitalism and society by developing the concept of “economic culture” to explore the “social, political, and cultural matrix in which these specific economic processes operate.”<sup>56</sup> Berger asserted that a highly developed sense of pragmatism; an active rather than contemplative orientation to life; a positive valuation of wealth; and a great capacity for delayed gratification and discipline, especially on behalf of family, were values common to all national cultures “in the orbit of Sinitic civilization.” In facilitating this, Confucianism played a “very important role,” giving East Asian societies “a comparative advantage in the modernization process.”<sup>57</sup>

Neoconservatives such as Glazer, Kahn, and Berger thus all joined the chorus that theorized about the significance of “traditional” culture and values in the development of a distinct East Asian modernity. For Kahn and Berger, Confucianism became a useful concept to capture this idea, and it offered a cultural common heritage for the four Northeast Asian states (Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong) that seemed to be looking to a bright capitalist future. In this thinking, the People’s Republic of China was the exception that proved the larger rule; Berger, for example, proclaimed that the “dismal reality” of China’s Maoist experiment demonstrated that “development strategies that defy tradition at all points run into great peril.”<sup>58</sup> In part, this neoconservative emphasis on tradition reflected both mid-century and contemporary academic scholarship on East Asia and East Asian states’ self-presentation, especially *nihonjinron*: as the second-largest economy in the world, Japanese growth had first drawn their attention to this subject. Moreover, robust institutional support furthered the spread of these arguments. Governments and universities on both sides of the Pacific and organizations like UNESCO, the Carnegie Foundation, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences all funded conferences and publications linking East Asia’s Confucian tradition and its economic takeoff.<sup>59</sup> For neoconservatives, however, the Confucian thesis served a larger intellectual goal than simply explaining Asia’s economic fate. Rather, it was a crucial site for a more ambitious agenda of recalibrating conservative ideologies to new domestic and global contexts.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>56</sup>Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution*, 8.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 163, 166.

<sup>58</sup>Peter Berger, “Speaking to the Third World,” *Commentary*, 1 Oct. 1981, 29–36, at 35–6.

<sup>59</sup>Examples include Chung-Hua Institute for Economic Research, *Conference on Confucianism and Economic Development in East Asia, May 29–31, 1989* (Taipei, 1989); Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, *Cultural Identity and Modernization in Asian Countries: Proceedings of Kokugakuin University Centennial Symposium* (Tokyo, 1983); Tu Weiming, ed., *The Triadic Chord: Confucian Ethics, Industrial East Asia, and Max Weber* (Singapore, 1991); Tu Weiming, Milan Hejtmanek, and Alan Wachman, *The Confucian World Observed: A Contemporary Discussion of Confucian Humanism in East Asia* (Honolulu, 1992).

### Neoconservatives and the paradox of capitalism

For these neoconservative writers, “uncovering” the link between Confucianism and capitalism—and the larger argument that economic growth was the product of culture, values, and tradition—was appealing for what it allowed them to claim about problems they saw plaguing the United States. In particular, their interest in the Confucian thesis stemmed from their hope that East Asia might provide an answer to growing anxieties about the inner tensions of capitalism, anxieties most forcefully articulated by two leading figures of the neoconservative world, journalist and editor Irving Kristol and sociologist Daniel Bell. In the 1970s, both Kristol and Bell increasingly feared that the hedonistic success of consumer capitalism undermined the discipline, work ethic, and social purpose necessary to both meaningful life and continued economic growth. Linking East Asian growth to the Confucian tradition seemed to offer a solution to this alarming paradox. If capitalism flourished from, rather than destroyed, traditional culture and values—particularly religion and the family—in twentieth-century East Asia, then perhaps such outcomes were possible elsewhere, including the so-called “West.”

Irving Kristol, perhaps the best-known neoconservative thinker, repeatedly articulated these anxieties about capitalism and the decline of American virtue. In his *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (1978), Kristol celebrated capitalism’s ability to improve people’s lives. Capitalism delivered prosperity and unprecedented individual freedom to its beneficiaries through “prudence, diligence, trustworthiness, and an ambition largely channeled toward ‘bettering one’s condition’.”<sup>60</sup> Yet alarmingly, capitalism also challenged and weakened those very values. “Paradoxically,” Kristol bemoaned, “such success breeds its own kind of frustration. The better the system works, the more affluent and freer the society, the more marked is the tendency to impose an even greater psychic burden on the individual. He has to cope with his ‘existential’ human needs—with the life of the mind, the psyche, and the spirit—on his own.” The boring “domestic virtues” of the bourgeois economic order, Kristol feared, were unsatisfying to many people, creating a spiritual alienation that threatened the stability and legitimacy of American society. “The inner spiritual chaos of the times, so powerfully created by the dynamics of capitalism itself, is such to make nihilism an easy temptation.”<sup>61</sup>

Bell similarly examined this puzzle in his deeply influential book *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976). Like Kristol (whom he often cited), Bell ruminated that the mid-1970s United States was trapped in deeper “cultural crises which beset bourgeois societies.” Advanced capitalist societies were lost in an ideological confusion which could “devalue a country, confuse the motivations of individuals, instill a sense of *carpe diem*, and undercut its civic will.”<sup>62</sup> The source of this confusion, Bell claimed, was the ideological exhaustion of the Protestant ethic, the backbone of capitalism. Once “the Protestant ethic was sundered from bourgeois society, only hedonism remained, and the capitalist system lost its transcendental ethic”; the “unrestrained economic impulses” of capitalism were no longer held in check by Puritan restraint or the “Protestant sanctification of

<sup>60</sup>Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York, 1978), x, 65–6.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, ix, xi, 268, 262.

<sup>62</sup>Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York, 1976), 28.

work.”<sup>63</sup> For Bell, this capitalist paradox became especially pronounced in the 1970s as capitalism entered a new era, with dramatic changes in the nature of work. Reiterating an argument developed in *The Coming of Post-industrial Society* (1973), Bell asserted that work was shifting away from the manufacturing of goods to the production of ideas and services, and becoming increasingly reliant on “theoretical knowledge in economic innovation and policy.”<sup>64</sup>

These neoconservative anxieties were clearly embodied in the concept of the “New Class,” a staple trope of the 1970s through which neoconservatives explained and justified their own sense of marginalization.<sup>65</sup> The New Class was an “array of knowledge and symbolic workers,” including scientists, teachers, journalists, social workers, and communication workers whose skills, in the words of Kristol, “proliferate in a ‘post-industrial society.’”<sup>66</sup> Neoconservatives bemoaned that even as members of the New Class were poised to succeed in the postindustrial society’s demand for knowledge, they instead discarded capitalist frugality and discipline in favor of decadence and support for state-led welfare. This desire to expand the welfare state was not due to a true interest in justice, egalitarianism, or economic opportunity, but instead a selfish quest to redistribute power from “the free market ... to government, where *they* will then have a major say in how it is exercise[d].” For Kristol and others, the New Class fundamentally threatened the future of capitalism. Through its support for secularism, feminism, and black liberation, it scoffed at the traditional institutions like church and family that instilled the discipline, commitment, and community necessary to social cohesion, political order, and capitalist growth; the New Class were “spoiled children” who were “contemptuous of bourgeois family life and secular in tastes and values.”<sup>67</sup> Because the New Class allegedly controlled the mechanisms of education and cultural production, it was in an advantageous position to popularize its selfishly anticapitalist bent. As Kristol lamented, “Members of the new class do not ‘control’ the media, they *are* the media—just as they *are* our educational system.” This disproportionate influence would allow them to expand welfare and form “some version of state capitalism in which the citizen’s individual liberty would be rendered even more insecure.”<sup>68</sup>

Neoconservatives thus identified family and religion as key to restoring American purpose and virtue as part of resolving these capitalist contradictions and confronting the threat of the New Class. Bell’s work declared that, above all, societies needed a unified system of values and purpose to avoid a fate of nihilism and despair. Those were located first and foremost in the traditional family unit, which resisted hedonistic selfishness, and in religious commitments, which provided anchorage and a renewed system of meaning by “restor[ing] ... the continuity of generations, returning us to the existential predicaments

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 21–2, 55, 84.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 14. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York, 1973).

<sup>65</sup>Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 87.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 83; Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 28.

<sup>67</sup>Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, 78. See also Robert B. Horwitz, *America’s Right: Anti-establishment Conservatism from Goldwater to the Tea Party* (Cambridge, 2013), 116–24.

<sup>68</sup>Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 28–30.

which are the ground of humility and care for others.”<sup>69</sup> This call for the return of hierarchical and paternalistic gender relations, certainly a response to the feminist movement, proved popular with many neoconservative writers, including those who were fascinated with Asia’s economic prosperity. In *World Economic Development*, Kahn mourned the ways that the values of the “modern family” destroyed parental authority. Affluent capitalist countries allowed children to grow up “with an almost total lack of meaning and purpose for living conventional lives”; this could be corrected, he argued, by “ideological or religious revival or renewal.”<sup>70</sup> Bellah, read by many neoconservatives, called for “civil religion,” an “ideal of a deeply felt identification with culture and nation that itself could fill the role of ‘God,’ providing a secular set of guiding moral ideals.” Only such ideals could arrest the United States’ moral slide towards “radical theoretical individualism.”<sup>71</sup>

The “collective” societies of East Asia, particularly Japan, thus seemed to offer a useful corrective to American ills, especially excessive egalitarianism. By rooting economic growth in the region’s alleged adherence to a selective and static set of communal traditions, neoconservatives sought to “prove” that capitalist success did not inevitably facilitate the triumph of individualist nihilism. Instead, continued economic growth could operate hand in hand with tradition to rebuild social purpose and discipline the redistributionist demands of welfare recipients and the New Class. Reflecting on Bell and Kristol’s anxieties about capitalism’s self-destruction, for example, Glazer concluded that despite the enormous changes of the postwar era, Japan was able to “retain some of its traditional ‘Japanese’ character.” Japan’s successful industrialization stemmed from the fact that “traditional values supporting work and commitment to community were passed on and remained active.” Only by retaining such values, Glazer implied, could Japan forestall the crisis of capitalist legitimacy that threatened all “highly developed capitalist societies.”<sup>72</sup>

Even more forceful was Kahn, who referenced Bell, Kristol, and Glazer to excoriate the New Class for holding values that threatened “to slow or even stop economic growth.” This group’s “loss of nerve, will, optimism, confidence and morale about ‘progress’” and “de-emphasis of many traditional values,” he acidly wrote, fostered nothing but hedonism and narcissism; it would “destroy the authority of parents, teachers, and others who should be respected,” and bring ruin to the West.<sup>73</sup> Yet Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan showed that it was possible “to assimilate the old with the new.”<sup>74</sup> In contrast to the New Class’s obsession with “individual (selfish) interests,” a “properly trained member of a Confucian culture will be hard-working, responsible, skillful, and ambitious and creative in helping the group

<sup>69</sup>Stefan Eich, “Daniel Bell’s Dilemma: Financialization, Family Values, and Their Discontents,” *Capitalism: A Journal of History and Economics* 1/1 (2019), 241–58, at 252; Bell, *The Cultural Contradiction of Capitalism*, 29–30.

<sup>70</sup>Kahn, *World Economic Development*, 170, 31–2.

<sup>71</sup>Borovoy, “Robert Bellah’s Search,” 470, 477. See also Robert B. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96/1 (1967), 1–21.

<sup>72</sup>Glazer, “Social and Cultural Factors in Japanese Economic Growth,” 896, 891, 894.

<sup>73</sup>Kahn, *World Economic Development*, 161, 165–6, 170; Bruce-Briggs, *Supergenius*, 350–51.

<sup>74</sup>Kahn, *World Economic Development*, 177, 339.



(extended family, community, or company).<sup>75</sup> In a clear response to feminism, which Kahn attributed to selfish individualism, Kahn particularly emphasized the family. Hierarchical Confucian societies, he claimed, valued “cooperation among complimentary elements,” such as the unique and proper roles assigned to husband and wife; this emphasis on the “synergism” within the “institutional context” gave one a clear understanding of one’s responsibilities to society at large.<sup>76</sup> For Kahn, then, the “success” of Confucian values served the cause of strengthening gendered hierarchy both inside and outside the home.

Berger was similarly intrigued by East Asia’s alleged demonstration of the importance of family and community. While Berger celebrated both democracy and capitalism as the source of human rights, liberty, and individual freedom, he also warned that such individualism must be “contained” within traditional institutions.<sup>77</sup> Especially important was the “bourgeois family” and religion, which could “balance the anonymous aspects of individual autonomy with communal solidarity” and counter the forces of “creative destruction” innate to capitalist development.<sup>78</sup> Such claims drew from Berger’s emphasis on the importance of “mediating structures,” a concept that he developed with Richard Neuhaus that emphasized the role of church, community, family, and neighborhood in giving life meaning and purpose, particularly by interfacing between people’s private lives and large public institutions.<sup>79</sup> In Berger’s telling, capitalism, particularly the capitalism developed in East Asia, had a unique ability to sustain these “mediating institutions.” Japan, in particular, had modernized while “leaving traditional values and institutions intact ... Similarly successful ‘creative schizophrenia’ seems to be a factor in the development of Asian societies with a strong foundation in Confucian or neo-Confucian morality.”<sup>80</sup> East Asia therefore demonstrated the alluring possibility of a different path for capitalism in the United States and across the globe. Indeed, in *The Capitalist Revolution*, Berger cautiously posited, “The societies of East Asia have succeeded for a long time in modernization under capitalist conditions without undergoing individuation along Western lines.” East Asia thus showed that a more “communal capitalism” was possible.<sup>81</sup>

Neoconservatives’ enchantment with East Asian growth was also generative in their quest to elevate social, cultural, and racial homogeneity as the source of economic prosperity. The most forceful to articulate this link was Catholic theorist Michael Novak, who in a series of writings stressed the moral superiority of capitalism and sought to reconcile it with Catholic teachings. In his widely read *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (1982), Novak declared, “Democratic capitalism

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 121–2. For a more extreme take on “Confucian monogamy” see William Tucker, “All in the Family,” *National Review*, 6 March 1995, 36–44, 76, at 37.

<sup>77</sup>Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution*, 71–85.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 112–13.

<sup>79</sup>Cooper, *Family Values*, 287. The concept of mediating structures played a central role in neoconservative visions of welfare reform. See Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, DC, 1977).

<sup>80</sup>Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution*, 71–108; Berger, “Speaking to the Third World,” 36.

<sup>81</sup>Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution*, 169.

is not a 'free enterprise system' alone. It cannot thrive apart from a moral culture that nourishes the virtues and values upon which its existence depends." In emphasizing the central role of "virtues and values," Novak called attention to the "social cohesion" of societies like Japan—the only nonwhite society that he cited as successfully democratic capitalist—and Germany, which he asserted was necessary to making democratic capitalism work. "[O]nly those cultures which nurture in their people's inner social disciplines," he mused, "are capable of democratic politics and capitalist economies. Cultures in which individuals are not taught how to cooperate, compromise, and discipline themselves to practical communal tasks can make neither democratic politics nor market economies work."<sup>82</sup>

Kahn similarly emphasized the importance of racial and cultural homogeneity to call attention to the alleged dangers of multiculturalism and the importance of hierarchy. Reiterating *nihonjinron* by heralding Confucian Asia's adherence to "smoothly fitting, harmonious human relations," he bemoaned the United States' excessive accommodation of diversity in the form of unions, women's groups, and student groups. Kahn based this complaint on Nakane's claim that the Western emphasis on building such groups led people to only work with those like themselves, which pitted groups against each other.<sup>83</sup> "Confucian hierarchic society," Kahn declared, showed that societies operate best when "there is enough hierarchy, discipline, control or motivation to restrain excessive tendencies to egalitarianism, anarchy, [and] self-indulgence."<sup>84</sup> Neoconservatives thus invoked the East Asian model to bolster their belief in tradition as a source of moral authority and state control against the dangerous prospect of egalitarianism (which Kahn equated with disunity) and economic redistribution; Kahn, for example, bemoaned how egalitarianism led to demands for "excessive compensation."<sup>85</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, Kahn did not believe that democracy was necessary or even desirable for successful economic development. "We prefer democracy," he declared, "but we are not too rigid on this point."<sup>86</sup>

Neoconservative usage of East Asia as the model of a capitalism that privileged and celebrated tradition was, of course, often fantastical. In keeping with their attack on state-facilitated economic redistribution at home, their emphasis on culture as the source of East Asian growth diminished the role of state policy and governance. Indeed, their analysis stood in stark contrast to the many observers who attributed East Asian growth to government planning, particularly industrial policy. Prominent political scientist Chalmers Johnson criticized cultural and religious explanations of East Asian growth, arguing that Japan was best described as a "capitalist developmental state" where "both the public and private sectors have perfected means to make the market work for developmental goals."<sup>87</sup> Economist Robert Reich further argued that Japan's success demonstrated the need for the

<sup>82</sup>Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York, 1982), 56, 134.

<sup>83</sup>Kahn, *World Economic Development*, 121.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>87</sup>Chalmers Johnson, *Japan: Who Governs? The Rise of the Developmental State* (New York, 1995), 8, 38–41; Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925–1975* (Stanford, 1982), viii.

United States to actively develop its own industrial policy.<sup>88</sup> Those who offered less admiring takes also attributed Asian growth, especially Japan, to state action, while simultaneously reviving long-standing “yellow-peril” stereotypes that described these states’ conduct as uniquely nefarious. Well-known writers such as Pulitzer Prize-winner Theodore H. White and conservative politicians such as Reagan administration Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldrige lambasted Japan for “cheating” the global economic system and the alleged free market through public–private economic collusion.<sup>89</sup> Neoconservatives’ more admiring take on “Confucian capitalism” thus allowed them to “otherize” certain aspects of the East Asian experience—especially the role of government planning—while also extracting specific lessons that shaped and advanced their larger intellectual agenda.

With its myopic and self-serving emphasis on culture, the Confucian thesis bolstered neoconservatives’ interconnected goals of defending an imagined “tradition,” rejecting welfare, and reviving the superiority and morality of capitalism. East Asia demonstrated that capitalism did not have to destroy tradition but instead could stem from it; religion, family, community, and hierarchy simultaneously provided moral purpose and capitalist drive. What is more, the region showed that the “culture” and “values” that allegedly undergirded capitalism could be located in multiple religious and cultural settings. As Kristol asserted in *The Public Interest*, capitalist diligence, self-denial, and discipline had different roots in different cultures and societies. “[A]s a Jew,” he wrote, “I was raised to think this was an ancient ‘Hebrew Ethic,’ and some Chinese scholars I have spoken to feel that it could appropriately be called ‘The Confucian ethic.’”<sup>90</sup> But this acknowledgment of the significance of other cultural traditions ran on a circular logic that ultimately stemmed from and returned to the Euro-American “West.” As Berger bluntly asserted, “the East Asian experience supports the hypothesis that certain components of Western bourgeois culture—notably activism, rational innovativeness, and self-discipline—are necessary for successful capitalist development.”<sup>91</sup> Celebrating the cultural specificity of East Asia’s path to prosperity, then, was not simply an acknowledgment of this new global center of capitalist production. Just as important, elevating Confucianism as the East Asian parallel to Weber’s Protestant ethic served to confirm the alleged superiority, vitality, and necessity of the white bourgeois tradition.

### Confucian capitalism on the global stage

For all these prescriptions for American society, the neoconservative embrace of arguments about the cultural roots of economic growth also had a crucial global

<sup>88</sup>See, for example, Robert B. Reich, “Why the United States Needs an Industrial Policy,” *Harvard Business Review*, Jan. 1982, at <https://hbr.org/1982/01/why-the-us-needs-an-industrial-policy>; Reich, “An Industrial Policy of the Right,” *Public Interest*, Fall 1983, 3–17.

<sup>89</sup>Theodore H. White, “The Danger from Japan,” *New York Times Magazine*, 28 July 1985, at [www.nytimes.com/1985/07/28/magazine/the-danger-from-japan.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/1985/07/28/magazine/the-danger-from-japan.html?pagewanted=all); Jennifer M. Miller, “Adam Smith’s Arthritis: Japan and Fears of American Decline,” in Jonathan Hunt and Simon Miles, eds., *Reagan’s World: The Cold War and Beyond* (Ithaca, forthcoming).

<sup>90</sup>Irving Kristol, “On Corporate Capitalism in America,” *Public Interest*, Fall 1975, 124–41, at 137.

<sup>91</sup>Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution*, 166.

dimension. In particular, writers like Berger, Novak, and others utilized the Confucian thesis as ammunition against postcolonial demands for economic justice embodied in the New International Economic Order and dependency theory. Their ire was especially directed at Latin American intellectuals such as Argentinian economist Raúl Prebisch, whose mid-century innovations in structuralist economics undergirded dependency theory's systematic analysis that a core of wealthy states consistently extracted wealth from a poorer periphery. Though campaigns like the NIEO, a wide array of leaders, economists, and intellectuals in the 1970s led a global charge that poverty persisted in the global South because of the exploitative nature of transnational capitalism and the legacies of colonial domination.<sup>92</sup> Neoconservatives routinely invoked East Asian growth as "evidence" to discipline and contain these critiques by deflecting such claims. Like Latin America, they argued, East Asia had suffered from colonial dominance; this demonstrated that Latin American culture simply did not encourage or emphasize the values conducive to growth. Combining an internationalized conceptualization of the culture of poverty with a long-standing racialized discourse that deemed "Hispanic lethargy and lassitude as a basic drag on modernization," these writers utilized the Confucian thesis as part of their quest to preserve existing economic hierarchies by exonerating capitalism—and the United States—from charges of imperialism.<sup>93</sup> Some even took their claims one step further, arguing against Latin American migration to the United States. Drawing from model-minority discourse, they declared that in contrast to "hardworking" Asian Americans and even some Asian migrants—whose numbers were expanding due to the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and as a consequence of the war in Vietnam—migrants from Mexico and Latin America would undermine the US with a static, negative, and anticapitalist culture.

As historians have shown, neoconservatives actively mobilized against international critiques of capitalism in the 1970s.<sup>94</sup> One of their main targets was the New International Economic Order, a set of proposals put forth by countries of the global South that called for radical transformations to the global economy to counter the legacies of imperial dominance by redistributing wealth and the benefits of economic growth and development.<sup>95</sup> Warning against any capitulation to the NIEO's demands, Kristol declared that the NIEO posed not merely an economic threat, but was "much more a question of one's attitude towards ... liberal civilization in general."<sup>96</sup> Indeed, if the United States acted out of guilt and accepted the claim that "their poverty is the fault of our capitalism," Kristol warned, it would empower "communist, socialist [and] neo-fascist" forces that "are opposed to

<sup>92</sup>Jeremy Adelman, "International Finance and Political Legitimacy: A Latin American View of the Global Shock," in Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel J. Sargent, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 113–27, at 119, 124.

<sup>93</sup>Adelman, "International Finance and Political Legitimacy," 125.

<sup>94</sup>Michael Franczak, "Losing the Battle, Winning the War: Neoconservatives versus the New International Economic Order, 1974–1982," *Diplomatic History* 43/5 (2019), 867–89.

<sup>95</sup>Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 89–118; Vanessa Ogle, "State Rights against Private Capital: The 'New International Economic Order' and the Struggle over Aid, Trade, and Foreign Investment, 1962–1980," *Humanity* 5/2 (2014), 211–34.

<sup>96</sup>Quoted in Franczak, "Losing the Battle, Winning the War," 2.

liberal capitalism on principle,” while also allowing progressive forces in the United States to “launch a [domestic] reform movement through the back door.”<sup>97</sup> Berger similarly extended his opposition to domestic welfare to the global stage; writing against the NIEO in 1981, he asserted, “Whatever development may mean, it should not mean the establishment of an international welfare system.”<sup>98</sup> Placating the NIEO’s architects, in this frenzied worldview, would not be a gesture of goodwill, nor would it serve to bolster the global economy. Rather, it would destroy capitalism and freedom within the United States and across the globe.

To mobilize their audience against postcolonial critiques, neoconservatives and their allies selectively invoked the historical record to claim that imperialism had little to do with workings of global capitalism.<sup>99</sup> Particularly influential was the work of P. T. Bauer, a developmental economist at the London School of Economics who became a close adviser to Margaret Thatcher. Bauer published a series of articles in *Commentary* in the late 1970s railing against Western guilt and the NIEO. Contrary to claims that the West had “caused the poverty of the Third World,” Bauer scoffed, contact with the West was “the principle agent of material progress there.” It was the West, after all, that brought all the “foundations and ingredients of modern social and economic life” to places like “black Africa,” most importantly the concepts of progress and mastery over the environment.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, it was the countries with the least contact with the West that grew the most slowly. “The extreme backwardness of the aborigines, pygmies, nomads or African tribesfolk,” Bauer wrote while invoking racist colonial discourses of civilizational hierarchies, “can hardly be due to exploitation in international transactions as these groups have few or no contacts with the rest of the world.”<sup>101</sup> The different levels of developmental success among different peoples and countries, he argued, demonstrated that economic success or failure was not determined by global economic, financial, and power structures, but by cultural norms. As Bauer put it, “In all cases ... the principal determinants of economic achievement and performance have been human aptitudes, motivations, aspirations, mores, modes of thought ... It is these which have either fostered or hindered the willingness to work, save, take risks, and pursue economic opportunities.”<sup>102</sup> States that did not grow therefore had deviant or pathological cultural values.<sup>103</sup>

Bauer’s arguments about the roots of global poverty proved useful for neoconservatives like Berger, both for his attacks on the NIEO and for his polemical defenses of capitalism. Writing in *Commentary* in 1981, Berger referenced Bauer’s work to declare that it was obvious that the United States could not accept the NIEO’s claims, particularly that the “causes of Third World poverty must be

<sup>97</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>98</sup>Berger, “Speaking to the Third World,” 33.

<sup>99</sup>Jessica Whyte, *The Morals of the Market: Human Rights and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (New York, 2019), 119.

<sup>100</sup>P. T. Bauer, “Western Guilt and Third World Poverty,” *Commentary*, 1 Jan. 1976, 31–8, at 32.

<sup>101</sup>P. T. Bauer and B. S. Yamey, “Against the New Economic Order,” *Commentary*, 1 April 1977, 25–31, at 28.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 28–9.

<sup>103</sup>Whyte, *The Morals of the Market*, 32.

sought outside the Third World itself.”<sup>104</sup> Prebisch and others’ emphasis on imperialism and colonialism, he bemoaned, was a “litany [of] mostly malicious nonsense”; the most frequent obstacles were internal, including “indigenous social patterns and cultural values that are not conducive to economic activity.”<sup>105</sup> In critiquing this “fixation on external factors,” Berger turned his attention to East Asia, noting that there had recently been “phenomenal success” in places such as South Korea and Taiwan; development, he reminded his reader, was the result of “effort, hard work and ingenuity.”<sup>106</sup> Such efforts could not and should not come from the state but from “enterprising individuals, families, clans, *compadre* groupings, and other traditional units,” alongside “more modern associations such as cooperatives or credit unions.”<sup>107</sup> Berger’s emphasis on culture thus sought to invalidate both postcolonial critiques of capitalism and state-led developmental models.

As Berger became increasingly focused on countering dependency theory in the 1980s, East Asia became even more important to his intellectual and moral case for capitalism. From Japan to Hong Kong, he argued in *The Capitalist Revolution*, many East Asian states had extensive experience with imperial and neocolonial dominance, yet had now entered a period of “dramatic development” that was “inexplicable in terms of dependency theory.”<sup>108</sup> If dependency theory did not hold for all major regions of the world, he triumphantly declared, then its central claim—that imperialism was inherent to capitalism—was false. Based on this claim, Berger asserted that capitalism was actually the best path forward for the global South; East Asia had shown that capitalism was not extractive, but the most favorable spur to development.<sup>109</sup> In contrast to other states, the “Asian prosperity crescent” had “completely wiped out Third-World-type misery within [its] borders,” combining “high growth with highly egalitarian income distribution.”<sup>110</sup> East Asian development therefore showed that capitalism did not inherently lead to inequality and exploitation; rather capitalism, when married to traditional values, could organically produce equal opportunities, without the need for regulation or economic redress. East Asia, then, was the shining rebuttal to dependency theory’s critique of capitalism. As Berger flatly put it, “the development of capitalist societies in East Asia is the most important empirical falsification of dependency theory.”<sup>111</sup>

Equally determined to invalidate Latin American critiques of capitalism was Novak, who lambasted the NIEO and its supporters in American Enterprise Institute-published works such as *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism, Speaking to the Third World* (coedited with Berger in 1985), and *This Hemisphere of Liberty* (1990).<sup>112</sup> Like Berger, Novak invoked East Asia to firmly separate

<sup>104</sup>Berger, “Speaking to the Third World,” 31.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>108</sup>Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution*, 128–9.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>110</sup>Berger, “Underdevelopment Revisited,” 45.

<sup>111</sup>Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution*, 128.

<sup>112</sup>Peter L. Berger and Michael Novak, *Speaking to the Third World: Essays on Democracy and Development* (Washington, DC, 1985).

imperialism and capitalism, and to dismiss any links between global economic inequality and colonial legacies. After all, some of Asia's most "developed" nations (likely a reference to South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and especially Hong Kong, then still a British protectorate) had been or still remained colonies. East Asia therefore showed that imperialism had positive benefits, and that economic development stemmed from cultural values. As he put it while citing P.T. Bauer, "the moral-cultural system is the chief dynamic force behind the rise of both a democratic political system and a liberal economic system."<sup>113</sup>

In contrast to East Asia, Novak lamented that Catholic-majority countries lacked the necessary "moral-cultural system" to develop capitalism. Throughout Latin America, he declared, a "spirit of patrimonialism and mercantilism" from the Spanish and Portuguese empires inhibited hard work and free competition.<sup>114</sup> These Catholic-majority countries lacked the "self-control," "emotional constraints," and proper "patterns of liberty and authority," leading them "to oscillate between 'anarchy and hierarchy,' with less moderation and order than is typical of Northern European cultures."<sup>115</sup> Novak even engaged with the age-old racialized notion of a relationship between climate, economic activity, and intellectual capabilities. "The Japanese," he noted, "have almost no natural resources: their wealth springs from hardiness and creativity of spirit."<sup>116</sup> Yet countries in Latin America, "blessed with climates that make subsistence relatively easy, can languish without significant development for generations. Theories of wealth which try to ignore cultural factors miss the central point."<sup>117</sup> Novak thus used East Asia to critique Latin America for its failure to develop pro-capitalist culture and values. East Asian states, he wrote in *Forbes* in 1990, "reward creativity, enterprise, invention, and effective social organization. The Latin system rewards cozy favoritism by the state for privileged business."<sup>118</sup> Because Latin Americans remained enamored of fanciful explanations such as dependency theory and refused to embrace capitalist mindsets, they could only blame themselves for being "about two centuries behind several nations of East Asia" in developing capitalist institutions.<sup>119</sup> Much as the domestic discourse of the culture of poverty worked to blame black Americans for their own economic fate, the international discourse of East Asia's "culture" of growth declared that global poverty was cultural and psychological, rather the product of capitalist exploitation.

The neoconservative usage of culture to attack dependency theory did not only seek to redeem capitalism and absolve the United States. Locating Latin America's economic woes in flawed cultures and values also helped articulate arguments against immigration. Perhaps the most vociferous to link the two was Lawrence E. Harrison, an associate at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs. After concluding a twenty-year career with the US Agency for International

<sup>113</sup>Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 185.

<sup>114</sup>Michael Novak, *This Hemisphere of Liberty: A Philosophy for the Americas* (Washington, DC, 1990), 57.

<sup>115</sup>Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 299.

<sup>116</sup>Novak, *This Hemisphere of Liberty*, 57.

<sup>117</sup>Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 289, 285.

<sup>118</sup>Michael Novak, "A Malthusian Vision," *Forbes*, 14 May 1990, 80.

<sup>119</sup>Novak, *This Hemisphere of Liberty*, 57; Novak, "A Malthusian Vision," 80.

Development in Latin America, Harrison published the heavy-handedly titled *Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind: The Latin American Case* (1985) and *Who Prospers? How Cultural Values Shape Economic and Political Success* (1992). These works argued that “it is culture that principally explains, in most cases, why some countries develop more rapidly and equitably than others.”<sup>120</sup> The prime examples for this argument were Latin America and East Asia. While Latin America’s “Ibero-Catholic” values were “anti-democratic, anti-social, anti-progress, anti-entrepreneurial, and, at least among the elite, anti-work,” Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan’s “essentially Confucian patterns” attached high value “to work, saving, education, thrift and merit.”<sup>121</sup>

The racialized nature of Harrison’s assessment is clear. Along with Reischauer, Fairbank, Berger, Novak, and *nihonjinron* theorist Doi Takeo, Harrison cited Jared Taylor, who authored a 1983 book on Japan before becoming a leading member of the white nationalist movement in the 1990s.<sup>122</sup> Harrison also relied heavily on the work of economist Thomas Sowell, whose widely read *Ethnic America: A History* (1981) laid out similarities and differences in categories like fertility, income, crime, IQ, and business ownership in different ethnic groups to downplay the impact of race and racial discrimination while emphasizing the importance of culture, family, and values. One of Sowell’s primary examples was the economic success of “orientals,” especially Japanese Americans, who flourished despite experiencing virulent racial discrimination.<sup>123</sup> Sowell thus parroted existing model-minority discourses by proclaiming that Asian Americans “proved” that values emphasizing hard work and discipline facilitated economic success within the United States. Harrison further utilized Sowell to deflect claims of racism, arguing that Sowell’s claims—and thus Harrison’s own arguments—could not be construed as racist because Sowell was black.<sup>124</sup>

More than his neoconservative counterparts, Harrison put this cultural framework in the service of anti-immigration arguments. His writings used the racialized cultural essentialism embodied in the argument about Confucian capitalism to denigrate not only Latin American states, but also Latin American migrants, arguing that cultural heritage shaped the value and potential of ethnic groups within the United States. If Asian and Latin American migrants differed from each other in income, crime rates, and education levels, this was not due to discrimination, racialized capitalism, or the allocation of resources, but to their adherence to different values. Conflating Chinese, Japanese, and Korean migrants as “Confucian-Americans,” he proclaimed that their success in the United States

<sup>120</sup>Lawrence E. Harrison, *Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind: The Latin American Case* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), xvi.

<sup>121</sup>Lawrence E. Harrison, *Who Prospers? How Cultural Values Shape Economic and Political Success* (New York, 1992), 115, 142; Harrison, *Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind*, 165.

<sup>122</sup>Jared Taylor, *Shadows of the Rising Sun: A Critical View of the “Japanese Miracle”* (New York, 1983). On Taylor, who was born in Japan to missionary parents, see [www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/jared-taylor](http://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/jared-taylor).

<sup>123</sup>Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York, 1981), 6. On the widespread nature of such discourses in the 1970s and 1980s see Wu, *The Color of Success*, 248–52.

<sup>124</sup>Harrison, *Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind*, 165–7; Harrison, *Who Prospers?*, 192. Novak utilized Sowell’s work to make similar points. See Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 161, 219–20.



“parallels the experience in their homelands ... many of these Asian-Americans have imparted pro-work, pro-education, pro-merit values to the melting pot at a time when those values are much in need of revival.”<sup>125</sup> Like “Confucian” Asians, then, Asian American success demonstrated the necessity and superiority of white bourgeois Protestant values. In contrast, Harrison asserted, Mexican Americans had experienced less discrimination than Asian Americans, yet “traditional Iberian values and attitudes continue, generation after generation, substantially unmodified by large numbers of Mexican-Americans.” If they did not achieve similar levels of education or income, this was “the consequences of traditional Mexican/Hispanic culture”; their presence thus challenged American traditions of hard work and contributed to American “disunity.”<sup>126</sup>

To be sure, not all anti-immigration advocates so willingly distinguished between Latin American and Asian migrants. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the growth of Asian migration combined with Japanese prosperity and its perceived threat to the United States to fuel virulently anti-Asian sentiments. This was tragically evidenced by the 1982 murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin by two Michigan autoworkers, who assumed Chin was Japanese and assaulted him with a baseball bat while shouting racial slurs and blaming him for the decline of the American auto industry. But Harrison’s typology found echoes elsewhere. A 1986 article in *The Economist*, for example, contrasted Filipino Town in “seedy downtown Los Angeles” with the “throbbing ethnic cities-within-a-city of Little Tokyo, Chinatown and Koreatown” to claim that the Filipino population’s lower earning rates were because Filipinos were not really Asian. “Some Filipinos argue that to measure them against other Asians is a mistake: that 300 years of Spanish rule followed by 50 years of American tutelage make Filipinos more akin to Hispanics than to Confucian Asians.”<sup>127</sup>

Even vociferous advocates of immigration restrictions flirted with—and feared—the claim that Asian migrants had more value than those from Latin America because of their cultural heritage. Writing in *National Review* in 1992, *Forbes* senior editor Peter Brimelow, who later created the racist and white-supremacist anti-immigration group VDARE, published a lengthy treatise against immigration. Citing Kristol, Sowell, Novak, and Glazer and Moynihan, among many others, Brimelow criticized “Hispanics” as an unassimilated and “strange anti-nation inside the U.S.,” symbolic of the “American Anti-Idea” represented by “ethnically fueled multiculturalism.”<sup>128</sup> In contrast, Brimelow singled out Japan as an anti-immigration model and a “great nation, the only non-European society to have achieved a modernization that is not essentially derivative.”<sup>129</sup> With this modernization spreading through the “Orient,” Brimelow worried that East Asian migrants “are [now] often viewed (perhaps naïvely) as the most, well, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ of the current wave.”<sup>130</sup> With discussions about immigration, then, the emphasis on

<sup>125</sup>Harrison, *Who Prospers?*, 149.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, 149, 153–5, 187, 214.

<sup>127</sup>“American Survey: The Million Who Are There, but Have Not Quite Arrived,” *The Economist*, 25 Jan. 1986, 31.

<sup>128</sup>Peter Brimelow, “Time to Rethink Immigration?” *National Review*, 22 June 1992, 30–46, at 45.

<sup>129</sup>Peter Brimelow, “Mysteries of the Orient,” *National Review*, 18 Aug. 1989, 43–4, at 44.

<sup>130</sup>Brimelow, “Time to Rethink Immigration?,” 36, 39.

Confucian “culture” exhibited its most explicitly racial meanings. What was always implicit in its hierarchical critique of dependency theory now became its center.

## Conclusion

In the 1990s, as the economies of Southeast Asia inaugurated a new phase of East Asian growth, the rhetoric of Confucianism was often overshadowed by the broader terminology of “Asian values.”<sup>131</sup> Like Confucianism, Asian leaders like Lee and Malaysian prime minister Mahathir bin Mohamad utilized the rhetoric of “Asian values” as a tool of legitimacy. They juxtaposed and celebrated the benefits of Asian familism, consensus, harmony, and collectivism—placing the well-being of society above selfish individual interests—against Western individualism and human rights.<sup>132</sup> Yet for some observers, “Asian values” was simply new language for old arguments. Writing in the *National Interest* in the fall of 1999, Glazer celebrated East Asia’s cultural heritage: “it is in East Asia that we find together the fullest developed version of a cultural or civilizational ethos that successfully nurtures economic growth.”<sup>133</sup> Glazer cited many familiar names; Bell, Bellah, Berger, Kahn, and MacFarquhar were all given their due, while the title—“Two Cheers for ‘Asian Values’”—was a clear reference to Kristol’s 1978 book *Two Cheers for Capitalism*. Indeed, despite the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, Glazer concluded by proclaiming that East Asia demonstrated the advantages and persistence of “tradition ... in the face of many aspects of globalization,” a more straightforward version of his conclusions about Japan in the 1970s.

Other observers saw far more negative possibilities in this cultural heritage. In developing his influential theory of the clash of civilizations, political scientist Samuel P. Huntington—a close collaborator of Lawrence E. Harrison—described much of East Asia as a “Confucian” and Sinic civilization (Huntington categorized Japan as its own civilization).<sup>134</sup> Citing MacFarquhar, Huntington declared that China’s approach to the world “was a reflection of the Confucian visions of a carefully articulated hierarchical society.”<sup>135</sup> Since modernization, he noted, no longer meant Westernization, economic growth had only exacerbated cultural distinctiveness across the globe, evidenced by the fact that “East Asian economic success has its source in East Asian culture.”<sup>136</sup> Unlike Kahn, Berger, and Glazer, however, Huntington did not believe that a modern, Confucian Asia offered lessons for the United States. Rather, the profound cultural differences between East Asia and “Western civilization” meant they were destined for conflict. Still,

<sup>131</sup>Pettuzzo, “Confucianism and Capitalist Development,” 224–5, 229–35.

<sup>132</sup>Chua, “Asian-Values’ Discourse and the Resurrection of the Social,” 575–7; and Leigh Jenco, “Revisiting Asian Values,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74/2 (2013), 237–58, at 237.

<sup>133</sup>Nathan Glazer, “Two Cheers for ‘Asian Values,’” *National Interest*, Fall 1999, 27–34, at 27.

<sup>134</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?,” *Foreign Affairs* 71/3 (1993), 22–49. See also Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, 1991), 72–6, 299–307; Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel Huntington, eds., *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (New York, 2001).

<sup>135</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996), 234.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 20, 29.

Huntington's reliance on his predecessors was apparent. Adapted from capitalism to world politics, the Confucian thesis continued to undergird influential theories of global order.

For members of the neoconservative intellectual world, including Glazer, Kahn, Berger, Novak, and Harrison, the claim that East Asian growth stemmed from "tradition," particularly the "Confucian" values of discipline, filial piety, social cohesion, and respect for hierarchy, did important intellectual work. The theory, with its ahistorical and culturally essentialist premise, broadened and globalized neoconservative arguments about the central importance of virtue and culture in determining poverty, social meaning, and the broader fate of humanity. If people or countries were poor, it was because they lacked the proper values and ethics necessary to capitalist growth; structural fixes, whether in the form of the welfare state or the NIEO, were thus unnecessary and even harmful because they were incapable of addressing the "real" problem. Such arguments also offered a handy explanation and corrective to the United States' own domestic struggles; "Confucian" East Asia proved the importance, necessity, and continued relevance of "reinvented tradition," especially bourgeois values rooted in religion and the family.<sup>137</sup> Neoconservatives further utilized this interpretation of the East Asian experience to claim that capitalism was a moral system. East Asian countries, with their high growth rates and "increasingly egalitarian income distribution," "proved" that capitalism could deliver a superior outcome for all.<sup>138</sup> Ultimately, their selective and self-serving concept of Confucian capitalism organized and justified a larger ideological agenda that validated political, economic, and racial inequality under the guise of values, culture, and tradition.

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<sup>137</sup>Cooper, *Family Values*, 313.

<sup>138</sup>Kahn, *World Economic Development*, 329; Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution*, 149–53.

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