

POLS 230 Asian Politics

This course examines economic development and political liberalization in three major East Asian countries – China, Japan, and Korea. Japan was a major belligerent along with Nazi Germany during World War II, and because of extensive bombing campaigns its industrial base was virtually wiped out. But its economy grew by double digits in the 1950s and 60s and became the second largest economy by the 1970s. Before WWII, Japan's per capital GDP was less than that of Argentina, but now Japan's per capita GDP is about 10 times greater than Argentina's.

South Korea and Taiwan were well behind in per capita incomes of British colonies in Africa, such as those that later became Nigeria and Ghana. But by 2010, South Korea's per capita GDP (\$30,000 according to CIA Factbook) and Taiwan's per capita GDP (\$35,000) are more than 10 times greater than Nigeria's (\$2,500) and Ghana's (\$2,500 in 2010). South Korea's and Taiwan's economies grew at around 10-11% annually in the 1970s and 80s. Now Communist China is growing rapidly even in the midst of world recession. Although many European economies are shrinking and the US economy is stagnating, the Chinese economy is expanding rapidly and China overtook Japan as the second largest economy early this year.

How did these East Asian countries leap into the ranks of wealthy industrialize countries in such a relatively short period of time? We'll examine three key factors that are believed to have contributed to their economic success – the developmental state, Confucian culture, and US cold war policy. The developmental state refers a government that intervenes in a market economy actively promotes industrial growth. Governments of the Asian countries played an important role in mobilizing capital, facilitating R&D, protecting the domestic market/home-grown enterprises and expanding overseas markets. We'll examine how East Asian states nurtured their industries and made them worldly competitive. Confucian culture is also touted as a major factor in East Asian industrialization. Their emphasis on education, good work ethic, discipline, and respect for authority are believed to have played a role in their success stories. We also explore how US cold war policy of shoring up East Asian allies in the face of the communist threat helped Japan, South Korea and Taiwan expand their industrial capabilities.

We also discuss if China would follow the footsteps of South Korea and Taiwan in their political evolution. South Korea and Taiwan experienced democratization in the 1980s after their economic expansion produced a vibrant middle and other favorable conditions for a democratic transition. The question is if China develops its economy and has a strong middle class will it go through a democratization process, as did South Korea and Taiwan.