Chapter 12

Non-Western and Indigenous Theories of Change

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Introduction

Explanations of change in political science have tended to be born in and defined by the West. These approaches originated with a foundation in Greek political philosophy, were refined in the European Enlightenment Era, and then realized in the post–Industrial Revolution rise of the middle class. However in the 1970s, non-Western and indigenous models of development caught on as it became clear that the imported Western models, Marxian and non-Marxian, were not working well in most developing countries; hence the idea for a homegrown or an indigenous route to development.

After Vietnam and Watergate, the United States appeared to “lose its way for a time” as it was unable to articulate a clear purpose as a nation; as a result it failed for a time to push very hard for its own development model. The Cold War standoff allowed Third World leaders to play the United States and the Soviet Union off against one another while advancing their own indigenous or nationalistic models. In the 1990s, there were two events that changed the global situation, ripening the discussion of other, non-Western models. First and foremost, the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in local, ethnic, and nationalistic groups that were no longer wedged between bipolar forces and were now encouraged, and almost required, to assert their own sovereignty, manifested through their unique
customs, identities, characteristics, and manner by which they chose to modernize and change. Serving as almost a counter influence to this assertion, new technological advances and the emerging hegemonic superpower, the United States, found their way into every household, bringing Coca Cola and cable (“globalization”) to even the remotest villages. As Western influences interacted with a growing indigenous cultural awakening, the issue of universality versus particularity became more and more pressing.

This chapter addresses the non-Western or indigenous theoretical models of change. First, we will explore competing frameworks for analyzing the non-Western theories of change as they interact with the models of change that are familiarly Western. Then, we will explore the components of particular non-Western theories, addressing briefly five main regions. Finally, we will explore the potential universalities present in these regional models, searching for a more encompassing “grand” model of change.

**Frameworks for Non-Western Theories**

This section will concentrate on explaining non-Western theories of change as well as the ways in which these non-Western models interact with Western ones. This section includes varying perspectives, from Frances Fukuyama’s view that all models of change are attempting the same goal of democratization to Howard Wiarda’s assertion that states fall along a continuum of change, with some adopting more components of Western democratization than others.

**Liberal Democracy as Global Phenomenon**

Frances Fukuyama states that liberal democracy, though borne from the Western framework, is globally compelling. He shows that the end of the twentieth century turned out differently than expected, with democracy as the ideology of choice around the world. He notes that in 1790 there were three democracies, and today there are sixty-two. This process has not been linear, with instability, uncertain commitments to liberal values, and even complete lapses back into authoritarian rule being prevalent. Fukuyama suggests, however, that “these regions will eventually mature into a more tolerant and democratic direction.”¹ Nationalistic and other struggles are therefore precursors to the emergence of stable democracy, just as in Western Europe in the nineteenth century. Thus, Fukuyama posits that all states will trend toward a model of change that ends in liberal democracy.