

East Asian Exceptionalism - Rejoinder

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East Asian Exceptionalism – Rejoinder

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For Peer Review

Abstract

This short note calls for a more careful examination of value patterns in East Asia, focusing on the applicability for that region of the Self-expression Index constructed by Welzel (2005). We show that in East Asia, acceptance of homosexuality, a core component of the index, has a correlation with the other components, that is opposite to what we observe in the rest of the world. Further analysis indicates that conservative attitudes towards homosexuality in East Asia have no negative influence on undermining people's aspirations for democracy. Such an anomaly provides strong empirical evidence that the Self-expression Index has limited cross-cultural validity.

For Peer Review

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3 In the rich West, but also in Latin America, responses from the World Values Survey (WVS)
4 show that people who are more religious and less tolerant of homosexuality than the average in their
5 country tend to be less trusting and less keen on democracy. Inglehart and Welzel have used these
6 correlations as one of the building blocks for their index of self-expression values. Combining this
7 index with another index for traditional-rational values, they were able to draw a very nice cultural
8 map of the world where poor and less-developed countries are in the South-West corner and rich,
9 tolerant and fully democratic nations occupy the North-East quadrant with the best scores on both
10 indices.
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17 Our Comment in this issue of the JCCP addressed an anomaly in the cultural map: the location
18 of the East Asian countries with a very high score on the traditional-rational index but below-average
19 scores on the self-expression index. We explained the exception for East Asia by showing that Japan,
20 Korea, Taiwan and the other countries in the region exhibit a pattern in their values that differs from
21 the average for the rest of the world: East Asian citizens who are above average in their keenness on
22 democracy and in their positive answers on the trust question in the WVS are also more traditional in
23 their dislike of homosexuality. Because the patterns are very strong, we cautioned against applying
24 the Inglehart-Welzel index of self-expression – where the question about homosexuality is an
25 important component – in analyses of the prospect for democracy in East Asia. That might suggest
26 that these countries are not yet ready to deepen their experience of democracy, because the level of
27 social tolerance is lower than in comparable Western countries.
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36 In his table 1 Welzel now shows weak positive correlations between the variables in the WVS
37 that measure tolerance and three other clusters of responses in the Surveys, related to questions
38 about female emancipation, freedom of speech, and imagination and independence as preferred
39 goals of bringing up children. Precisely because his correlations are so weak, he leaves open the
40 possibility that in the East Asian region female emancipation, free speech and tolerant parenting do
41 go together with a stronger democratic culture, without explicitly negating our finding that little
42 tolerance for homosexuals does not appear to be a problem for gaining or deepening democracy.
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49 Our paper focussed on the East Asia region, but here are two pieces of evidence bearing
50 explicitly on the contrast between East Asia (including Japan) and all other countries, using the 2005-
51 6 Wave of the WVS:
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55 1. In a 2-level linear modelling of the desire for democracy (question E235 in the WVS), with the
56 individual responses to the question about homosexuality as the independent variable in
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3 combination with a random factor at the national level, the coefficient on the homosexuality
4 question has a t-value of -8 for East Asia (greater tolerance of homosexuality goes with lower
5 importance of democracy), but a t-value of +9 for the rest of the world where greater
6 tolerance goes with higher importance of democracy to the respondent.
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13 2. We obtain the same difference between East Asia and the rest of the World using maximum-
14 likelihood cluster models. These models have the advantage of classifying the data with no
15 need for the distributional assumptions that underlie least squares, factor analysis or
16 traditional cluster analysis. Even if relations are non-linear or non-uniform, the ML cluster
17 analysis will indicate whether significant associations exist. In our case, membership of the
18 cluster with respondents who are above average in their desire for democracy and their
19 general level of trust is strongly predicted by their *dislike* of homosexuality in East Asia (p-
20 value 6×10^{-11}) but by their *tolerance* of homosexuality in the rest of the world (p-value 3×10^{-57}).
21 The even larger significance levels for the cluster models suggest that the two
22 opposite relationships are not linear and perhaps not even uniform – and no known theory
23 suggests that they must be. But the significance of the differences between East Asia and the
24 rest of the world cannot be in doubt.
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34 We do take issue with Welzel's dismissive comments about the democratic culture in Korea
35 and Taiwan. When Inglehart and Welzel wrote their 2005 book, they started the chapter on
36 measuring democracy praising (and working with) the indices of democracy developed by Polity and
37 Freedom House. We copied that and also looked at the more recent index published by the
38 Economist magazine. On all three counts, Korea and Taiwan are on par with established Western
39 democracies. Now, in order to deprecate the level of democracy in Korea and Taiwan, these indices
40 are dismissed and replaced by an own construct. Why this substitution? Welzel's newly calculated
41 index of democracy has a stronger correlation with the author's own measurement of emancipative
42 values. That is circular reasoning.
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49 We know from post-war Western history that little or no systematic connection was present
50 between a healthy democracy and voters who were tolerant about homosexuality, abortion, divorce
51 or euthanasia. Think of the UK in the early post-war period: a mature democracy, but still driving
52 homosexuals to suicide. Or of Italy, democratic in its frequent changes of government coalitions, but
53 until recently with a *divorzio all'italiano* that was a lot funnier in the movie than in reality. In the
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3 history of these two countries political tolerance and respect for the rights of losers in national
4 elections were not obviously connected to tolerance in private sexual and family matters. We caution
5 that what was true historically in Europe is still true today in East Asia. All East Asian nations have
6 subscribed to the universal values in the Charter of the United Nations, but it does not follow that
7 they have to abandon their cultural heritage or assimilate all aspects of today's dominant Western
8 culture. Japan is a modern example of a mature democracy that has well preserved many traditional
9 aspects of its culture, an important part of its own national identity. Cross-cultural researchers
10 should be aware of specific local cultural contexts and not apply Western formulas for data reduction
11 to East Asia without testing whether that is appropriate.
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