

Book Review

The Failure of Western Technology in Asia

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A review of Doh Joon-Chien, *Eastern Intellectuals and Western Solutions: Follower Syndrome in Asia* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1980).

The rapid material advancement in the industrialized countries of the West has encouraged many countries of Asia to be modernized with Western technology (concepts, models and techniques). But Dr. Doh Joon-Chien, a proud Asian intellectual, sounds a warning to this trend. Analyzing certain case studies of the failure of Western technology to formulate solutions to national problems of Asia, he made a fervent plea to Eastern intellectuals to look for indigenous technology appropriate to Asia's environmental setting. His book entitled, *Eastern Intellectuals and Western Solutions: Follower Syndrome in Asia* is an attempt to define the problem that Asia is facing relative to Western influence. It focuses on three interrelated issues: (1) the malady which has afflicted the Asian intellectual scene, (2) the relevance of the Western-oriented type of development, and (3) the performance of a number of Western technologies and practices in Asian setting.

The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 gives the introduction to the study. In this chapter, the author states that being a Western-educated intellectual, the clash between the Western and Asian in him has propelled him to undertake this study. He sees this "as the efforts of a Western-oriented Asian to discover his identity as an Asian."

In chapter 2, the author describes the nature and orientation of the Eastern intellectuals. Through prolonged contact with Western values and institutions, a large number of educated Asians have unconsciously developed a Western-biased frame of mind. The author refers to this as intellectual colonization.

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They have hardly any genuine emotional integration with the masses. They are knowledgeable about the West but ignorant about Asia. A decade ago, Nobel Prize winning Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal noted in his book the *Asian Drama* that there existed Westernized Asians who are more a "part of the intellectual life of the cosmopolitan world than they are of their indigenous cultures." They may be occupying academic positions in institutions of higher learning, positions of responsibility in international agencies, in government or in the private sector. Such people are designated by the author as the Eastern intellectuals. They have the feeling that what is Western is superior to that which is Asian. With their faith in Western technology and their eagerness to have their countries enjoy the benefits of such technology, the Eastern intellectuals have busied themselves with the borrowing of Western technology either for adoption or for dissemination. As a result, they have neglected or have done very little original thinking in the creation of appropriate technology and practices as an indigenous response to Asian problems.

In chapter 3, the author examines the negative correlation between the economic development and the welfare of the poor. Development, most commonly identified with economic development, is characterized by growth in GNP or increase in per capita income. This value-neutral interpretation of development makes sense in the Western situation where people have capacity to compete equally. But in most of the developing countries, the majority of the people are poor and the gap between the rich and the poor is very wide. Hence, the growth in GNP or per capita income cannot be the ultimate objective of development. To be relevant, development must be meaningful to the poor.

Since there has been positive growth in real GNP and the real per capita income arising from the development efforts, how have the benefits been distributed? Who have been the prime beneficiaries of development? Have the poor been enjoying the share of the fruits of development in proportion to their size and number? To provide an answer to these questions, the author has analyzed the household income survey data of India, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand between 1960 and 1970. In his analysis, the author has shown that there has been tremendous concentration of household income in the hands of the top 20 percent of the households. This ranged from a high 41.5 percent in Pakistan to 56.0 percent in Malaysia! On the other hand, the share of income of the lower 40 percent has spread from a minimum of 11.2 percent in Malaysia to a maximum of 20.6 percent in Pakistan. The study further indicated that the bulk of the gains registered by the top 20 percent of the families was at the expense of the bottom 40 percent of the families. From this, it appears that development has not been meaningful to the poor.

The author says that a large number of Western scholars and intellectuals, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, were conditioned by their own development experiences. They conceptualized development in terms of what was familiar.

They were of the opinion that if the developing and non-industrialized countries of the world wanted development, they would have to pattern themselves after the West. This type of thinking was reflected in technical assistance programs which emphasize the transfer of the "knowhow" of modernization to developing countries. The presence of Eastern intellectuals also facilitated the large-scale transfer and acceptance of Western institutions, structures, techniques and practices. An in-depth analysis of the experiences of such Western technology was made by the author in the Malaysian setting in Chapter 4 and in the Philippine setting in Chapters 5 and 6.

Upon the recommendation of the American scholars (Montgomery-Esman report), the institution building model "Development Administration Unit" (DAU) was introduced after independence in Malaysia as a means of spearheading administrative change and improvement. However, contrary to the expectations of the foreign advisors, the DAU in the Prime Minister's Department failed to withstand the test of time and became organizationally defunct in a matter of few years. The author mentioned three main reasons for its failure: (1) temporal conflict between the advisors and the DAU on the one hand and the Deputy Prime Minister on the other hand; (2) the illusion of power and influence on the part of the foreign advisors and the DAU; and (3) cultural negligence on the part of the National Committee for Development Administration (NCDA) with members whose organizational interests conflicted with the reform efforts of the DAU.

Moreover, the misplaced emphasis on the application of performance budgeting in Malaysia and the Philippines as an end in itself rather than as a means to contribute to the accomplishment of the objectives of development limited the usefulness of the system.

The Commission on Reorganization in the Philippines which tried to apply the alien solution of staff layoff to solve the problem of overstaffing in the civil service, could not be effected due to environmental realities. The Budget Commission of the Philippines also had, to its dismay, discovered that even the American-based timing assumptions for its Operational Cash Budget could not secure the same result as in the United States since the differences between the geographical and technological realities of the two countries were overlooked.

From these examples, the author concludes that "in Asia for solutions to administrative problems to be relevant, they have to be specifically designed to meet the needs of the environment."

Western technology has also been utilized by the governments of developing countries to provide an appearance of change when little or no change is initiated. The case examples of performance budgeting, government reorganization and coordination mechanism in the form of the Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) from the Philippines, explain the role that Western technology has played in the particular Eastern setting.

Finally, in Chapter 7, the author explores alternative approaches which could prove more beneficial to Asian countries and introduces "People Development" and "People Administration" as an indigenous response to specific problems. Since the Western-oriented type of economic development gives rise to great inequality, it must be, according to the author, rejected as irrelevant to the poor. The alternative lies in "People Development" (PD). PD is characterized by a humanistic quality in which primacy is accorded to people. The end of development is directly related to people. Thus, unlike the value-neutral concept of development with its universalistic commitment, PD is not neutral. It has a definite particularistic commitment to the poor. PD starts out with a set of assumptions on the minimum acceptable standard of living (MASOL) for each household. This consists of: (1) nutrition, (2) clothing, (3) accommodation, (4) health services, and (5) education and training opportunities. These are essential for making the people productive and self-reliant.

Since Development Administration is value-neutral and ambivalent towards the welfare of the poor, PD will need "People Administration" (PA) as its administrative arm for its objective to succeed. To be effective, PA needs to emphasize the following: (1) build on the strength of Asian culture, traditions, values and resources; (2) develop knowledge relevant to the needs of Asian countries; (3) maximize utilization of local materials in designing solutions to problems; (4) foster the team spirit essential for the success of PD in students; and (5) integrate the scholars, the practitioners and the general public by tearing down the language barrier between them.

The author also appeals to the Eastern intellectuals to rebel against the intellectual slavery of the West and look at Asia as their major source of inspiration, to develop a new perspective through an understanding and appreciation of Asia, its people and cultural heritage. In exploring the possibilities in Asia, the author does not, however, want them to reject anything Western but to accept Western ideas, technology and practices as catalysts rather than substitutes for indigenous thinking.

However, for the objectives of "People Development" through "People Administration" to be effective, people must be involved in the whole process of decision-making and implementation. This issue of how the people will participate is not specifically addressed to by the author. This is the main deficiency of the "People Development" and "People Administration" approach in this book. Moreover, the author could have cited the success of alternative indigenous technology, instead of confining the discussion to case examples of the failure of Western technology in Asian setting.

Dr. Doh's approach of "People Administration" does not seem anything different from what Vincent Ostrom once called "Democratic Administration." Nevertheless, this remains a thought-provoking book. It points out a new direction of thinking to planners and policy-makers of developing countries in Asia as well as to scholars of politics, economics and administration.