Bill Su

Professor Boccuyannis

Reading Writeup Culture and Democracy

I am going to focus my write up on talking about Asian culture and democracy because it is a topic that is most relevant to me. Before starting digging deep into the issue, I am going to first explain different levels of cultural theorist proposed by Przeworski et al. The I am going to examine Lee Kuang Yao’s argument and argue that his interview does not offer a conviencing argument that democracy is impossible in Chinese societies.

Przewoski et al explained in detail several different culturalist arguments, among with the non-culturist argument. In general, first presented different aspects of the culture that may matter (182). They argued that culture may be different interms of people’s value to democracy, people’s ability to agree upon previously agreed principles, temperamental characteristic of people, and whether they are able to reach consensus (182-183). They then proceed to present several culturist views. The first view believes that culture cause both development and democracy, coined as strong culturist view. The second view believes that both development and culture are needed to promote democracy, which is also a strong culturist view. Then they presented a view that says that economic development generates culture which promotes democracy, a weak culturist view. They then presented a view that culture emerges as an effect of democratic institutions once they are in place, another weak culturist view. And finally the non culturalist view that democracy emerges independently of culture (184). With detailed data analysis of economic development and outcomes, the authors concluded that culture does not matter in promoting democracy, development does (184).

Arguments by Prezewoski are against that proposed by Lee Kuang Yao in his interview. Lee’s primary argument is that a completely free society is not imaginable through Asian values due to its chaotic nature (111). He argued that gun, drug and violence in European and American society is abhorred according to the Asian value, which is more familial and stability based (112). In order to maintain order, a strong hand must be in place to maintain the stability of the country, and that will involve in infringement of people’s liberty (112). He even quoted a Chinese proverb saying that in Chinese value starts with the bottom, and aims to make sure each individuals in the society is well-behaved (114). With those beliefs, he argued for a paternalistic authoritarian society like that of Singapore.

But from reading Lee’s argument, I don’t think he necessarily argued that democracy is impossible in Asian value, but just the American style of democracy. What Lee argued for is a more controlled style of democracy in which educated, rational people are at the driver seat of the government, producing a true republic that is democratic.