



Topic: East Asian Economic Development in Historical Perspective: A Debate on Colonial Legacy and Policy Diffusion

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Chalmers Johnson's preeminent research about Japan's post-war economic miracle pioneered the theory of developmental state, which has been widely recognized in explaining the rapid industrialization of emerging economies in East Asia. However, the institutional basis of East Asian emerging economies doesn't come from nowhere, and the origin of developmental state is still in fierce debate. Whereas the majority of East Asian emerging economies shared a common history of colonial rule, some scholars introduce the concept of colonial legacy to analyze the source of developmental state. As for South Korea and Taiwan, Japan's colonial legacy is regarded as an indispensable factor in realizing rapid industrialization since 1960s. Students who oppose this idea argue that there is no direct link between colonialism and post-colonial development. This article argues that although the concept of colonial legacy can provide a more comprehensive analysis of the origin of developmental state in East Asia, it is necessary to distinguish the direct impact of Japanese colonialism as an exogenous factor on colonies' development, and the impact of Japanese post-war economic development model on other East Asian economies through policy diffusion as endogenous factor. Through the mechanism of policy diffusion, other East Asian economies could actively learn and imitate Japan's economic development model during their early stage of economic take-off. Without differentiating the impact of Japanese factors on East Asia's economic development through two mechanisms of colonial legacy and policy diffusion effect, the influence of colonial rule on South Korea and Taiwan's economic development will be exaggerated.