

HELMUT ASCHE: *Industrialisierte Dritte Welt? - Ein Vergleich von Gesellschaftsstrukturen in Taiwan, Hongkong und Südkorea.* Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 1984. 379 pages, DM 38.-

The title and the approach of this study are very promising. Although there are quite a number of recent works dealing with the economic performance of the so-called "Gang of Four" (Singapore, Hongkong, Taiwan and South Korea), attempts to look behind the patterns of 'instant' industrialization are hard to come by. However, a comprehensive analysis of the development of the social formation in those NIC's (newly industrializing countries) is an indispensable variable for the assessment of their all-over development process.

Asche tries to fill this gap with a comparative analysis of the social structure in Taiwan, Hongkong and South Korea which he later compares with other data from Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. The author who has done his own (limited) field research has collected a great amount of data and local sources which makes his work sometimes more of a reader than a concise thesis to support or to reject mainstream propositions. Consequently, it takes the reader quite a while to arrive at the crucial point where the author offers his findings and conclusions. The purpose of his study (p.376) is "to investigate within the East Asian context, (1.) if there is economically successful development in the Third World under the auspices of the capitalist world market, and (2.) what are the implications (of such a development) for the social structure and livelihood of the people"? Moreover, was there an increasing internal economic integration rather than 'structural heterogeneity' as the members of the dependency school have claimed for a long time? All this is studied with the scholarly ambition of casting new light on the old debate whether "real" development is blocked in countries dominated by dependent capitalist accumulation or whether countries like the "Gang of Four" (other writers call them the "Four Little Dragons", assuming that by means of 'modernization' China will soon be the Big Dragon!) have broken the vicious circle of underdevelopment and thus constitute feasible models for the rest of the Third World?

To answer this important question satisfactorily, we would need enough reliable data on income distribution and the different social groups' share in productivity and GNP. Again, such data are hard to get, especially data on real wages etc. Consequently, the author had to rely on a great amount of secondary data collected by very different institutions and with very different objectives in mind. Though the author deserves praise for his critical treatment of these data which often show inconsistencies for which he cannot be held responsible, it would probably need a bigger project with more manpower and funds to come up with the empirical in-depth findings required for the construction of a comprehensive theory on transitional societies.

Nevertheless, on the basis of his three case studies Asche is able to differentiate among the NIC's. According to his findings Taiwan appears to be

the most advanced case of self-sustained development with a reasonable balance between agricultural and industrial changes and without excessive unemployment and marginalization. Hongkong is a 'developed' capitalist metropolis by nearly every standard (p.377), whereas South Korea is more backward in terms of its class structure and hence more 'transitional' than the other examples. But, as Asche observes critically, "there is an essential restriction (in the case of South Korea): the newly produced contradictions jeopardize the completion of transition" (p.378). The reader would have appreciated some more elaboration on this point because it raises the question why the same should not hold true for the other NIC's as well.

Asche's conclusion is that "contrary to what some(!) 'dependencia' theorists believe, the new export-led growth in East Asia has generated new capitalist societies ('gesellschaftliche Gesamtkapitale'). This proves to be true at least in the case of Taiwan - and Hongkong, insofar as the special conditions of a city-state allow" (p.378). Asche concludes that the term 'model' should be abandoned due to the very specific conditions (Singapore is a city-state, too) and thus he confirms the point which A.G. Frank, this reviewer and others have made earlier in the debate.

To my mind, this study raises a number of valuable and interesting points in its detailed analysis. However, it suffers from a general weakness: it lacks a (1) theoretical and critical definition of the phenomenon of NIC's within the framework of world system analysis (and its ideological implication as "world bank models") and (2) the conventional tool of 'social structure' often gets mixed up with the more powerful Marxist tool of class analysis to the disadvantage of the latter. If class analysis were to be applied more rigorously as the author probably had in mind, we would need some hints on forms of class struggle along the development path of the NIC's and their rival competitors. Or, would the author assume that such manifest demonstrations of antagonistic contradictions could be successfully contained (or even be absent?) in "transitional societies" because the system provides a sufficient amount of goods and services to the majority of the people? Certainly, some Third World countries have quite rapidly industrialized and 'modernized' their economic structure with the help of huge foreign loans and costly imported know-how. The recent growth-rate crisis in Singapore shows, however, that such a big leap forward can also mean a leap into a cobbled one-way street which may finally prove to be a development trap for the majority of the population.

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