

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Colin Campbell, *The Easternization of the West: A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the Modern Era*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007, 416 pp. \$US 42.95 paper (978-1-59451-224-7), \$US 92.00 hardcover (978-1-59451-223-0)

During the 1990s the concept of “Asian Values” was energetically promoted by the governments and ideologues of a number of countries in Southeast Asia. Among other issues, the proponents of so-called “Asian Values” claimed that due to the allegedly communitarian orientation of Asians, authoritarianism rather than democracy was better suited their societies. In contemporary India, not known for its authoritarianism except for a brief period during the 1970s, a number of vigilante groups attempt to purge what they perceive to be “Western” cultural influences. Women wearing jeans, shops selling Valentine’s Day merchandise, couples holding hands, as well as bars and pubs are occasionally subject to their violent expressions of disapproval. Concern and apprehension over “Western” influences is of course by no means a new phenomenon, stretching back to the colonial era. However the possibility that the “the West” might itself be subject to a process of “Easternization” has not been a topic of scholarly discussion. In his most recent book, Colin Campbell takes on precisely this daunting counterintuitive task.

Going against the current sociological trend of viewing culture largely as a set of “social practices,” Campbell deploys Weber’s conception of it as comprising peoples’ ideas and beliefs, especially as manifested in their worldviews. Building upon Weber’s observation that humans have an “inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and to take up a position towards it” (p. 11), Campbell conceives of culture as an overarching system of a comprehensive worldview rather than discrete and differentiated packets of meaning and practices. Using this understanding of culture in tandem with Weber’s sociology of religion, Campbell constructs two ideal typical modes of religious and cultural orientations. The “Western” mode represented by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam postulates a personal god who transcends the world he created and who ultimately intends to resolve all discrepancy by eventually establishing a “Kingdom of God on Earth.” The “Eastern” religious orientation revolves around the postulation of an immanent divine prin-

ciple, which works itself out through a moral mechanism involving the transmigration of souls and eventually aims to achieve closure once all life has progressed to the highest level of unity with the eternal divine principle. These two religious and cultural orientations also have quite distinctively different takes on the problem of theodicy. In anticipation of objections to his delineation of such clear-cut differences in orientation, Campbell is quick to point out that this typology, although not entirely without empirical support, is logically, not empirically derived. Thus, although for Campbell there were always elements of “East in the West” as well as the “West in the East,” these are ideal-typical religious orientations in the Weberian sense such that “no one religion and certainly no one civilization can be directly equated with either” (p. 175).

Deploying these ideal-typical constructs, the “East” and the “West,” Campbell examines the transformations that ushered in the counterculture in the West during the 1960s and their consequences for cultural change. The rise of the Civil Rights movement, the reaction to the Vietnam War, and the proliferation of a variety of sub-cultures as well as the counterculture in Europe and North America are analyzed in rich detail. Campbell’s focus is primarily on the role of this era of cultural ferment in creating institutional and ideological spaces for the eventual incorporation of a variety of beliefs, practices and cosmologies such as Yoga, Zen Buddhism, New Age, etc. into the “West.” Campbell further argues that the larger process of rationalization of religion in the “West” eventually contributed to a chasm between God and the world he created. This process of “disenchantment” also led to the weeding out of magic in the name of an ethical rational monotheism. The same process supported the development of a secular culture together with the emergence of modern capitalism, a separate economic realm and modern science that was independent of the religious framework that initially gave rise to it. For Campbell, the resultant secular culture eventually undermined whatever influence the religious culture had. This was, as he puts it, a “double secularization,” such that religion secularized itself directly as in the Protestant Reformation’s attack on magic, and indirectly, by creating an independent secular force or science that undermined its literal and historical claims. Elements of magic that were never entirely absent in the “West” were driven even further underground. Given these institutional and ideological transformations, Campbell’s main argument is that a totally secular, disenchanted, scientific worldview contributes to the West turning to the “East,” “mainly because there is nowhere else to go.”

Given the decidedly counterintuitive nature of Campbell’s argument, there will be no shortage of objections to his main claims. Indeed Campbell anticipates these objections and pre-emptively responds to them in a

chapter titled “Some Objections Reconsidered”! Those who might object to the dichotomous concepts “the East” and “the West” are treated to very thoughtful discussions in chapters titled “What is the West?” and “The East in the West.” While there is no doubt that readers will raise many other objections that Campbell could not have anticipated, he has nevertheless succeeded in penning a remarkably thoughtful, provocative and scholarly work of historical sociology in the “big picture” mode that unfortunately is not much in vogue these days. Each chapter is rich in acute sociological observations and Campbell’s elegant writing style makes this book an absolute pleasure to read.

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