Review of The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution, by Francis Fukuyama. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011.

著者	Lee Yu-Ting
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I

In *The Origins of Political Order*, Francis Fukuyama provides a lucid historical account of the development of political order in human societies, from a strongly synthetic perspective. The bulk of nearly 600 pages represents only a half of his project. A second volume will deal with the period from the nineteenth century, in which, Fukuyama claims, conditions for the formation of human political institutions have undergone fundamental changes. As indicated repeatedly, this book was inspired by Samuel Huntington's 1968 work *Political Order in Changing Societies*, which Fukuyama believes must be supplemented with a historical investigation of how the modern polity developed. (Huntington's analysis of the problems faced by contemporary developing countries in modernizing their political systems, according to Fukuyama, takes for granted the existence and exemplary role of such institutions as the state and political parties.) By this investigation, Fukuyama expects to reveal the historical contingencies of state formation in different societies and to examine in a historical light the causes of diverse failed attempts to build a modern state.

At this point Fukuyama's philosophy of political development becomes apparent. He lays particular emphasis on the idea of contingency, mainly to ward off accusations of historical teleology concerning the emergence of, or global convergence toward, the modern Western political establishment. However, he also argues that once the three key institutions—the state, the rule of law, and government accountability—took shape, fortuitously combined together, and stood the test of time, they became imitable and indeed desirable for non-Western nations, although the degree of success in transplanting institutions is, again, historically conditioned. Thus, in this ambitious work, history assumes a strategic character. To wit, resorting to historical circumstances endows the narrative of the development of the political order with complexity. Nonetheless, replacing a linear view of history with a circumstantial, contingent one does not assume historical relativity. Theoretically, Fukuyama regards a well-balanced combination of these three institutional factors to be the key to sustainable political success, as well as a guarantee of both state power and social welfare. Indeed, at the end of this volume, Fukuyama attributes the chronic dysfunction of democracy in the United States, the European Union, Japan, and India to different degrees of mutual alienation among the state, the rule of law, and accountable govern-

ment. According to Fukuyama, this historical investigation serves to reconfirm the superiority of these institutions emerging out of contingencies, even though their necessity and rationality in an even larger historical perspective is not obviously in question. Little wonder that this standpoint, ahistorical to a certain degree, reminds some reviewers of Fukuyama's Western-centric, end-of-history conceit, revealed in his previous works. The author's erudition and organizing power warrant a thorough reading of this thought-provoking book, yet its historical argument needs a critical review from the stance of historical studies in general and historical thinking in particular.

II

"The purpose of this book is less to present a history of political development than to analyze some of the factors that led to the emergence of certain key political institutions" (p. 22). "What I am aiming for in this book is a middle-range theory that avoids the pitfalls both of excessive abstraction (the vice of economists) and excessive particularism (the problem of many historians and anthropologists). I am hoping to recover something of the lost tradition of nineteenth-century historical sociology or comparative anthropology" (p. 24). These statements well specify the purpose and methodology of the project, in which Fukuyama takes on a nineteenth-century style of grand narrative that does not shy away from extensive comparisons and generalizations.

To begin with, Fukuyama supports the inevitability of the development of the human political order on biological grounds. Part 1 of the book, "Before the State," expounds on the necessity of politics and the formation of early human political organizations. After a broad survey of works on biology, psychology, and anthropology, Fukuyama comes to the conclusion that group orientation, construction of a mental model of causality, rule following driven more by emotion than by reason, and the desire for recognition constitute natural building blocks for us to construct a theory of political development. On this basis he sets out to delineate the four successive stages of political development: "For bands and tribes, social organization is based on kinship, and these societies are relatively egalitarian. Chiefdoms and states, by contrast, are organized hierarchically and exert authority on a territorial rather than a kinship basis" (p. 53). Evidence shows that the four types of human society can coexist, but the direction of evolution is unmistakable. Kinship organizations are an outgrowth of human nature, Fukuyama argues, since one of its biological building blocks, group orientation, promotes kin selection and reciprocal altruism. Though tribes are complex in nature, their decentralized structure and lack of clear rules of succession impose limitations on the solidification and expansion of tribal societies. Fukuyama does

not really discuss the structure of chiefdoms, but the crucial step out of the tribal stage is the effort of political agents to detach themselves from kinship influence and favor functionality. Here we enter the domain of impersonal political mechanisms that seek to maximize efficacy in the group's dealings—an achievement that heralds the birth of the first key institution of the modern political order, the state.

Fukuyama challenges the notion of Western centrism not only by arguing that modern political institutions arose from historical contingencies without foreshadowing the inevitable rise of the West, but also by claiming that China had the first organized state. Following Max Weber's definition of the state as "an organization deploying a legitimate monopoly of violence over a defined territory" and Weber's criteria for modern states as "subject to a rational division of labor, based on technical specialization and expertise, and impersonal both with regard to recruitment and their authority over citizens," Fukuyama finds the first appearance of mature state apparatuses in ancient China when independent states under the nominal dominance of the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–256 BCE) strove to annex each other and usurp the authority of the Zhou kings. With the unification of China under the Qin dynasty in 221 BCE and critical revisions of the imperial system carried out by the succeeding Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), China came to be "the first civilization to invent the modern state" (p. 78). (Intellectually uneasy about this claim, I will return to it in the third section.) Yet as the formation the Chinese state was driven solely by war, other key institutions and societal forces were not in place to check sovereign power. Hence, imperial China was cyclically plagued by bad emperors who abused their centralized power or failed to exert it at all, personally contributing to political decay.

In part 2 of the book, "State Building," Fukuyama discusses India and the Islamic world along with China. Indian history presents a sharp contrast to Chinese political development. On the one hand, the frequency of warfare characterizing pre-Qin China found no counterpart in ancient India, which accordingly was not incentivized to make a strong, centralized state. On the other hand, Hinduism provided Indian society with a sense of providence, a sense that laws are more elevated than secular decrees, which thus formed a rudimentary framework for the rule of law. However, Hindu's introduction of the rigid caste systems of *varna* and *jati* virtually frustrated any attempts to bring the whole subcontinent under a powerful regime, with the result that India suffered repeated external invasions and rule by foreign powers. Even to the present day, Indian democracy still lacks a state with the ability to exert authoritarian power.

The Islamic world constitutes another major reference for comparison with the West. As faith was the binding force for political cohesion in the

Islamic world, the rule of law was not absent, at least theoretically, in the Islamic political tradition. To prevent kinship influence in states, there emerged in successive Islamic regimes a system of cultivating slave civilian and military staff, who were cut from their families and native cultures and educated in an elitist style to furnish states with outstanding bureaucrats and soldiers. The system, called Mamluk, was strictly nonhereditary at the beginning, but the biological nature of human beings made such rule unsustainable, and there were no effective social forces to hold the increasingly entrenched upper classes of such states accountable. Hence, the decline of this peculiar recruitment system led to the decline of Islamic empires. From China to the Islamic world, Fukuyama accumulates sufficient examples to argue for the importance of the coexistence of the three institutions—the state, the rule of law, and accountable government—which Western Europe came to possess in the course of modern history.

Parts 3 and 4 of the book, “The Rule of Law” and “Accountable Government,” are dedicated mainly to the rise of these two key institutions and their coming together in the West. The Catholic Church played a significant role in preserving a social space exempt from excessive state intervention. With its hierarchical structure and well-defined clerical and lay functions, the Catholic Church also provided a model of the rule of law for emerging European states to emulate. In contrast, the Orthodox Church of the Byzantine Empire never evolved out of a caesaropapist type of authoritarianism in which the law was invariably subjugated to the state. Further comparison reveals that while traditional China never saw the emergence of a rule of law, with such moral notions as the Heavenly Mandate being the sole check on imperial power, Indian rule of law existed only in primitive forms, and the rule of law in the Islamic world was more symbolic than real.

In presenting the formation of accountable government, Fukuyama breaks the topic into the British, French/Spanish, Hungarian, and Russian cases, explaining how the different configurations of political actors decided governmental accountability and thus stability of individual political systems. “The amount of resistance to state centralization depended on the degree to which the three groups outside the state—nobility, gentry, and Third Estate [consisting of tradesmen, merchants, free serfs, and other town and city dwellers]—were able to work together to resist royal power. It also depended on the internal cohesion that each one demonstrated. And finally, it depended on the cohesion and sense of purpose of the state itself” (p. 333). In addition, despite their great number, peasants were historically too scattered to form any durable political bodies to claim self-interests. While it is impossible to wade into the historical details of the aforementioned cases, only in England did the balance of power help the country to thrive, and the superiority of its

institutions became all the more conspicuous after the Industrial Revolution. In France, political forces other than the state were too fragmented to resist being co-opted by the latter. This political collusion placed an unbearable burden on the peasantry—a predicament eradicated only through the French Revolution. In Hungary, nobility and gentry formed a strong coalition that paralyzed the state and accelerated its demise. In Russia, all political forces were rigorously subjugated to the state in a perfect absolutism.

III

Fukuyama deals with so many Western countries to avoid the pitfall of Whig history, which entertains the progressive view that the Western political tradition arose in Greek and Roman times, was codified in the Magna Carta, then was firmly established by the Glorious Revolution, and with the expansion of the British Empire, was spread to the rest of the world. Instead of this view, Fukuyama insists that British political success arose contingently. None of its liberal tradition, concentration of social forces through feudalism, or widespread practice of customary laws was predestined. Nevertheless, it can easily be observed that Fukuyama's theory of political order is approaching an end not unlike that of the Whig view: the British political system at its prime speaks for its own legitimacy; it hardly needs further justification. For Fukuyama, the well-balanced political mechanism that happened to mature in the West, especially in England—that is, the interdependent yet mutually autonomous institutions of the state, the rule of law, and accountable government—guarantees a sustainable political order. Indeed, in part 5 of the book, "Toward a Theory of Political Development," different combinations of the three institutions are examined to explain the success or failure of various regimes worldwide.

Obviously, Fukuyama's account is deeply rooted in international anarchy—the notion that the state is not only the unit of political action but also the end of political development. Of course, Fukuyama's realist theory construction is admirable, whose state-centric perspective relies heavily on reference to biology, which tells us that the tendency toward violence and competition is no less embedded in human nature than the tendency toward cooperation. Nonetheless, his deliberate detachment from Western centrism cannot be fully successful if modern Western institutions—rather young in human history without having sufficiently stood the test of time—are enthroned as the ultimate form of human political organization. (Fukuyama does not make this claim, of course, but his theory, while allowing reconfiguration, allows for no improvement of the key institutions.) Furthermore, resort to biology also obliges Fukuyama to compare biological and political evolution (pp. 446–449)—a project that would benefit from greater nuance and

more historical insights.

Thus, in a sense, this book is more typological than historical. It can be claimed to be historical in its delineation of the political development of each selected tradition. Yet throughout the book that historical account is spun around crystallized notions of the state, the rule of law, and accountable government, and shortcomings of their development in different regions are indicated with purposeful comparison with their later maturation and even consummation in the West. More important, Fukuyama deals with each tradition mainly in isolation, although he is aware that intensive interaction and mutual influence occurred between civilizations. In his rather fragmentary treatment, however, he frequently and freely draws analogies between situations in different contexts, a method that calls for extreme caution in historical studies, and he often directs such analogies at the differences between Western and non-Western political developments.

Under this circumstance, the claim that China had the first organized state hardly amounts to anything more than a slogan that, paradoxically, betrays the difficulty of departing from Western centrism. Fukuyama claims, "China was the first civilization to invent the *modern state*" (my italics). This obviously achronological statement can only be understood in a typological rather than historical sense. That is, the modern state can find a prototype in ancient China (not an origin in a strict sense, as a historical relationship has not been established). Likewise, India and the Islamic world are drawn into the narrative with the same typological logic: the historical intricacies of these civilizations being largely omitted in favor of the modern West as the centerpiece of comparative political development. Besides, some historical actualities presented in the book need reconsideration. For example, Fukuyama oversimplifies in portraying Empress Wu (Wu Zetian, 623–705) of China as purely evil, and he is not precise in describing modern China (prior to World War II) as a colony.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Fukuyama classifies civilizations—China, India, the Islamic world, Russia as approaching the West, and Latin America as derived from the West—in a style similar to that of Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations*. While such classification is not intrinsically wrong, this treatment is problematic in at least two aspects. First, minor traditions are simply invisible in this picture. Second, the diversity only of the West receives Fukuyama's attention, with the inner variations of other civilizations being ignored. Indeed, any comparative work of such a vast temporal and spatial scope will bog down if too many historical details are required, but a more balanced treatment of civilizations is certainly desirable.

Fukuyama makes an interesting observation: "One of dynastic China's great legacies, then, is high-quality authoritarian government. It is no accident

that virtually all of the world's successful authoritarian modernizers, including South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and modern China itself, are East Asian countries sharing a common Chinese cultural heritage" (p. 313). Following this clue, one may be prompted to ask, given that the state, the rule of law, and accountable government are cornerstone institutions, can countries with different traditions achieve a good political order with different proportions of these institutions, or is there a golden ratio that they have to approximate, as exemplified by certain Western paradigm countries?

Finally, it is reasonable to ask whether the state, the rule of law, and accountable government furnish all that is necessary for a good political order. Based on human biology, which features both reciprocal cooperation and violent competition, Fukuyama's ideal political world is characterized by a balance of institutional powers. Ideas are extremely important in making political systems, as he fully admits. How can cultural, ideological, psychological, and moral factors help to define, refine, or even transcend this mechanism of mutual checks? This is an issue worthy of more in-depth study.

Yu-Ting LEE

Doctoral Candidate in Cultural Interaction Studies,
Kansai University, Japan

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The historiography of Asian connections through the study of pre-colonial and early modern maritime trade is longstanding, but academic interest in Asian connections of the modern period is recent. In Prasenjit Duara's words, this new interest is "unable to grasp the continuities and discontinuities that form the present."¹

1 Prasenjit Duara, "Asia Redux: Conceptualizing a Region for Our Times," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, 4 (2010): 963.