

# SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS IN DEVELOPMENT: LESSONS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FROM JAPANESE EXPERIENCE\*

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## Introduction

Japanese society has been the focus of many scholars during the last two or three decades as Japan emerged as one of the economic superpowers of the world, even though she does not come within the Western hemisphere. One of the main puzzles encountered by these scholars is to explain how Japan achieved this "miracle" within a very short period of time. On the other hand, Japan's success story attracted many developing countries aspiring to be modernized in order to learn relevant lessons from the Japanese experience.

Until the emergence of Japan as a modern nation, the Western model of development was considered the only authentic model available for developing nations that are clamouring to achieve the goal of modernization. However, the Japanese experience amply demonstrated that alternative paths of development could be found with a proper combination of Western technology and the indigenous culture of each country. Furthermore, the notion that indigenous cultural traditions are a hindrance to modernization also became questionable when it was highlighted that some premodern Japanese cultural traits made positive contributions to the Japanese success. Therefore, the Japanese experience has modified some of the theoretical approaches to modernization based on the Western experience.

As more and more scholars became interested in the Japanese case, many aspects of Japanese economy, society and culture that have been interacting in the process of modernization became the focus of attention. As a result, it paved the way to modify the narrow economic approach which was used to explain the Japanese "miracle" emphasizing on such characteristics as economic efficiency, competitiveness in international markets and protectionism at home as the main factors that contributed to the successful modernization of Japan. It became clear that the modernization process of Japan could not be gauged properly by only looking into economic factors and ignoring social and cultural issues. According to American sociologist Nathan Glazer,

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