

OTHER NATIONS

## Asia's Individualists

"Two Funerals and a Wedding? The Ups and Downs of Regionalism in East Asia and Asia-Pacific after the Asian Crisis" by Douglas Webber, in *The Pacific Review* (No. 3, 2001), Routledge Journals, Taylor & Francis, Inc., 325 Chestnut St., 8th fl., Philadelphia, Pa. 19106.

Everywhere in the world, the trend seems to be toward regional integration—except in Asia. The region does have three potential counterparts to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Union (EU), but two have fallen on hard times and the third seems unlikely to succeed.

According to Webber, a political scientist at INSEAD (the European Institute of Business Administration), these three Asian attempts at regionalism share a number of problems.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a Cold War relic built on a foundation of anticommunism. It showed signs of life when it helped persuade Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia in the early 1990s and planned a regional free-trade area. A much larger assemblage, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Group (APEC), held a summit meeting in Bogor, Indonesia, in 1994, and this organization also showed great promise, reaching what prominent U.S. economist C. Fred Bergsten called "potentially the most far-reaching trade agreement in history." (APEC embraces the major Pacific Rim countries, including the United States and Russia.) Then came the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98, which exposed the underlying weaknesses of these organizations and spoiled their grand plans.

Out of the crisis came a new, albeit more informal, organization: ASEAN Plus Three (APT). Encompassing Japan, China, and South Korea as well as the ASEAN countries, it spoke of launching an East Asian free-trade

zone, moving toward monetary cooperation and possibly a single currency, and other measures. Webber is skeptical that much will come of these ideas.

The big problem is leadership. Experience shows that regional groups must be led either by a benign power (e.g., the United States in NAFTA) or a duo (e.g., France and Germany in the EU). But Japan and China, the APT's big powers, aren't likely either to cede power to each other or to cooperate very closely. Indeed, leadership woes helped cripple Asia's other regional organizations. ASEAN stumbled in part because it was led by Indonesia, which went into crisis after the fall of President Suharto in 1998; APEC failed to implement its ambitious trade liberalization plans because of a clash between its leading duo, Japan and the United States.

The APT enjoys the advantage of a high level of trade among its members—higher than that among the three NAFTA countries. But it shares a handicap with its regional counterparts: It encompasses many diverse countries and even civilizations—Chinese, Japanese, Islamic, and Buddhist. (ASEAN stumbled when it admitted formerly communist countries in the 1990s.) They could be driven together if the United States takes a hostile posture toward Asian regional efforts, but that wouldn't provide lasting glue, Webber thinks.

He speculates that Asia's future may lie not in grand schemes of union but in a more modest network of bilateral free-trade agreements between compatible countries, such as Singapore and Australia.

## Turkey's Choice

"Dreaming in Turkish" by Stephen Kinzer, in *World Policy Journal* (Fall 2001), Q Corp., 49 Sheridan Ave., Albany, N.Y. 12210.

Two words define Turkey today, writes Kinzer, former Istanbul bureau chief for the *New York Times*. The first is *istiklal* (inde-

pendence), which represents for him the country's long struggle to "break away from its autocratic heritage, from its position out-

side the world's political mainstream, and from its fears." But opposing *istiklal* is another word, *devlet*; the "dictionary says it means 'state,' but it also means something much uglier." To Kinzer, *devlet* represents every element of Turkish society that opposes freedom, that keeps it from fulfilling the "glorious historic mission" envisioned by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923 when he "transformed a shattered and bewildered nation into one obsessed with progress." *Devlet* means "saying no to dissent, no to iconoclasm, no to new ideas, no to the kind of boldness and daring that propelled Atatürk to greatness."

Ever since Atatürk created the modern Turkish state out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, Westerners have hoped that Turkey could provide a model in the struggle to reconcile Islam and modernization. Turkey is the key to stability in the Middle East because of its location: Situated at the juncture of Europe and Asia, it is the "gateway to Russia and the Slavic world," and shares borders with Syria, Iraq, and Iran. But though Turkey has a constitution, no one would mistake it for a democracy. Only in 1950 did the military commanders—the de facto ruling class since Atatürk's death in 1938—allow free multiparty elections, and

three times since then they "have staged coups to depose elected governments." After the last coup, in 1980, a new constitution gave the military veto power over government policies.

Violence has strengthened the military's hand. In the 1990s, a series of Kurdish revolts were brutally suppressed. Dissent is nonexistent, and newspapers print nothing without the approval of the military. Foreign powers have limited influence. The United States maintains a strong military relationship with Turkey (home to important U.S. air bases) "while seeking gently to promote the values of tolerance and free choice." The Europeans have denounced Turkey's human rights abuses while dangling the carrot of eventual European Union membership—"a huge prize that will guarantee generations of freedom and fulfillment." But Turkey would first have to become a true Western-style democracy.

What stands in the way? According to Kinzer, the military's efforts to control dissent have effectively eliminated the possibility of open politics. Although there are many educated people in the country, the "military schools are far superior to those most civilians attend," and while Turkey



*Shoppers throng Istanbul's Istiklal Street beneath the ever-present gaze of Kemal Atatürk.*

has talented “writers, thinkers, university professors, and business executives,” its political system excludes them from positions of power. In Kinzer’s view, “in no country is the gap between the quality of the educated elite and the quality of the political class as great as it is in Turkey.”

Many Turks seem resigned. While some younger folk resent the lack of freedom, they also see the military as Atatürk’s inheritor and the most competent institution in Turkish society. Young men must perform military service, and hence Turks “do not fear

their army or consider it oppressive, the way terrified Africans and Latin Americans did when cruel military dictatorships dominated their societies.” On the contrary, many view the military as a bulwark against extreme Islam, the Kurds’ periodic revolts, and the turmoil in neighboring Iran and Iraq.

More than 75 years after the revolution that overthrew the Ottomans, Kinzer says, the country must once again “break free of its shackles and complete its march toward the democracy that was Atatürk’s dream.”

## *China’s Persecuted Catholics*

“A Tale of Two Bishops” by M. A. Thiessen, in *Crisis* (Feb. 2002),  
1814 1/2 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

In a dingy Shanghai apartment, an 83-year-old man in “a moth-eaten sweater and worn slippers” greets the first Westerner he has met in many years. The old man is Joseph Zhongliang Fan, the Roman Catholic bishop of Shanghai. He lives under virtual house arrest, having spent the years from 1955 to 1985 as a prisoner in the Chinese *Laogai*, or gulag.

Fan has been relatively fortunate, writes Thiessen, a Washington writer who was Fan’s visitor that day. “The persecution of underground Catholics in China is systematic, ongoing, and brutal. Bishops, nuns, priest and laity are arrested, beaten—sometimes killed.” Some 1,200 churches have been torn down during the past three years in one province. In 1999, Rev. Yan Weiping was found dead after being arrested while saying mass. He had been beaten and thrown from a window.

No such dangers face Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian, of the 45-year-old officially sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, which rejects the pope’s authority. Fan and Jin were both protégés of Fan’s predecessor, and both went to jail with him in 1955. Like Fan, Jin spent many years in prison, but he eventually broke. In 1985, he agreed to be consecrated as the Patriotic Church’s bishop in Shanghai, usurping his mentor, and was excommunicated by Rome. Thiessen visited him too. “He looks like the

stereotypical sweet, elderly priest. But his words are bitter—full of disdain for his suffering brothers and sisters who remained loyal to Rome.”

Why does Beijing fear its tiny Catholic minority? China, says Thiessen, “is spiritual dry brush—a small spark could set off a giant spiritual brushfire.” That’s why it has also suppressed the Falun Gong movement.

There are signs of dissension within the Patriotic Church. When the church moved to consecrate 12 new bishops in January 2000—on the same day Pope John Paul II was to elevate 12 bishops in Rome—nine of the men balked and 130 seminarians refused to attend the ceremony.

For all that, Beijing and Rome have been engaged in a delicate dance of reconciliation for several years: John Paul II has acknowledged the church’s errors in China during the colonial period; Beijing apparently sought his prior approval of a new Patriotic bishop. The Vatican “desperately wants to prevent” a permanent breach like the one that led to a separate Church of England centuries ago. Beijing is intrigued, says Thiessen, by a deal that would require the Vatican to sever official relations with Taiwan. Last year, Bishop Fan and Bishop Jin met to discuss the choice of a successor in Shanghai. However, they couldn’t agree on a candidate.