

Even though Canadians have more equal access to health care than Americans, there is still a substantial gap between the health of rich and poor.

to have worse health than wealthier Canadians, say David A. Alter and three of his colleagues from the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences in Ontario.

In their study of 15,000 patients in the province of Ontario from 1996 to 2008, people with low incomes were nearly three times as likely to die during the study. Poorer people also went to see a primary-care doctor far more often than those of greater means, an average of 62 times over the course of the study versus 47. The discrepancy, the authors say, arose not because poorer patients received inferior care or were seeking preventative care, but because of behavioral patterns that increased the likelihood of certain illnesses, such as heart disease. Low-income patients tended to smoke more, get less exercise, and have worse eating habits. They also were more likely to suffer from depression.

Alter and his coauthors believe that their findings “do not argue against universal health care,” but demonstrate that universal care alone does not completely close the gap between rich and poor. More aggressive measures, such as behavioral interventions early in life, are necessary to accomplish that.

OTHER NATIONS

Asia's Religious Renaissance

THE SOURCE: “Religious Resurgence in Contemporary Asia: Southeast Asian Perspectives on Capitalism, the State, and the New Piety” by Robert W. Hefner, in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Nov. 2010.

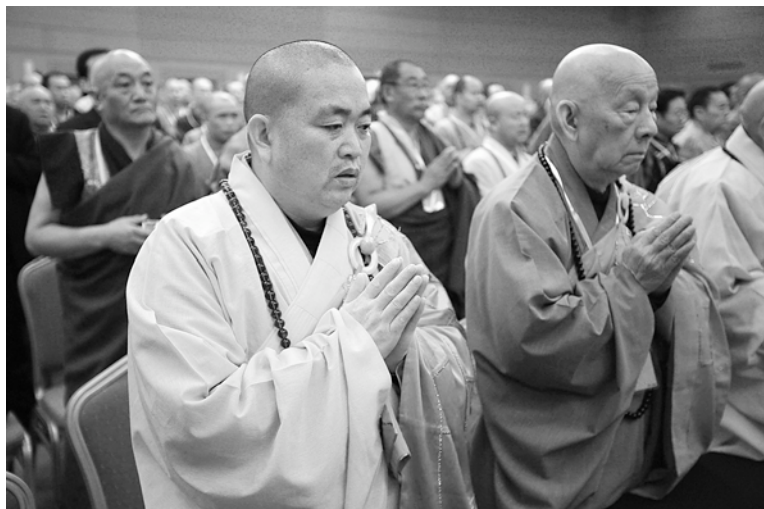
DEFYING A CENTURY OF PREDICTIONS that East and Southeast Asia would become increasingly secular in an age of modernization and globalization, these regions are in the grips of a religious resurgence. Intriguingly, it's not a return to old-time religion but an explosion of religious movements that are distinctly modern in character. They tend to be laity based, to be receptive to leadership by women, and to preach a path to material wealth, observes Robert W. Hefner, director of the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs at Boston University.

One of the most dramatic arrivals is El Shaddai, an officially Cath-

olic but Pentecostal-flavored movement with millions of members in the Philippines. Its typically very poor adherents are promised “wealth in magical exchange for tithing donations to the ‘treasure boxes’ so prominently displayed at El Shaddai’s five-to-10-hour prayer rallies.” Followers chant the slogan “I am rich! I am strong! Something good is going to happen to me!”

In Thailand, the Buddhist Dhammakāya Temple near Bangkok has attracted throngs of middle-class Thais using similar messages and slick advertising. But like many of Asia’s religious innovators, the temple is not concerned only with material well-being. It upends tradition by giving ordinary followers access to the forms of meditation once monopolized by monks. In a world in flux, says Hefner, institutions such as the Dhammakāya Temple offer people “confidence and moral security.”

Of all the religious resurgences, China’s has been the “most startling,” in light of the aggressively sec-



Chinese Buddhists attend a Buddhist Association of China conference in Beijing last year.

ular state there. A generation after the “superstition-smashing calamities” of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, tens of millions of Chinese have become practicing Buddhists, several hundred million observe ancestral and temple rites, and perhaps as many as 60 million consider themselves Christian. Women are disproportionately represented in the leadership of lay Buddhist associations, new Christian groups, and neo-traditionalist temple worshippers.

Even Islam, a religion that has historically shared little common ground with Western capitalism, has in Asia been revived with a market-friendly flavor. In Indonesia, *Islam de marché* (or market Islam) has arrived, borrowing freely from American Protestant evangelicalism. One of its stars is Craig Abdurrohim Owensby, an American convert to Islam who was a Protestant preacher and worked with Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell before he made a fortune in Indonesia selling subscriptions to cell phone messages from the Qur’an.

Instead of destroying religious faith, globalization and modernization have created new needs among those whose lives have been changed, Hefner concludes, and religious entrepreneurs have succeeded by answering their call.

EXCERPT

China’s Foodies

We, the people of Chengdu, love to eat. Food is more important than life itself. . . . My grandpa told me how, in the 1930s, when warlords were battling for control of Chengdu, and artillery fell on the Huangchengba area, deluging streets with debris as houses collapsed, customers in a packed mapo tofu restaurant watched the bedlam creep closer as they waited for their meals, urging the chef to hurry so they might take shelter. The chef maintained his steady pace in the open kitchen, responding, “Mapo tofu cannot be rushed; that would ruin my reputation.”

—LIAO YIWU, a writer in Sichuan Province,
in *Asia Literary Review* (Winter 2010)

OTHER NATIONS

Defying the Democracy Cure

THE SOURCE: “When Democratization Radicalizes: The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Turkey” by Günes Murat Tezcür, in *Journal of Peace Research*, Nov. 2010.

SPURRED BY THE HOPE OF joining the European Union, Turkey embarked on a wave of reform between 1999 and 2004. It abolished its death penalty, liberalized regulation of political parties and the press, and expanded the rights of non-Muslim minorities. Ankara even eased up on treatment of the country’s ethnic Kurds, who are concentrated near the borders with Iraq and Iran, and who have been subjected to a long-standing Turkish policy of repression and

forced assimilation. In 2002, the Grand National Assembly voted to allow radio and television programs to be broadcast in Kurdish (albeit for a limited amount of time each day). In 2004, when possibilities were the brightest they had ever been, the Kurdish insurgent group the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) announced an end to a four-year-old cease-fire and resumed a two-pronged campaign of urban bombings and rural insurgency.

Why did the PKK not seize the moment? The group needed to assert its power or risk fading into irrelevance, argues political scientist Günes Murat Tezcür of Loyola University

Chicago. The conservative ruling party of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), was growing in power in Kurdish Turkey and taking votes from the Democratic Society Party, a Kurdish party. Moreover, without the galvanizing effect of state repression, the PKK would have trouble signing up recruits.

Since 2005 the pace of reform has slowed, and the AKP’s power in the Kurdish region of Turkey has waned. This has led the PKK to modify its behavior, as evidenced by the declaration of a temporary cease-fire in 2009.

Democratization is often thought to be a salve for ethnic conflict, Tezcür observes, but when ethnic insurgencies are unable to translate their power into electoral gains, the medicine may not work.