This book represents a significant intellectual journey for us. It began with the intention to combine our different disciplinary backgrounds (economics and political science) and geographic specialties (East Asia and South Asia) to rethink the standard stereotypes of the political economies of two Asian regions. In particular, neoclassical orthodoxy explained the rapid growth of East Asia and the stagnation of South Asia by the former's embrace of and the latter's disdain for the free market, both externally and internally. We believed that this was far too simplistic a picture and, consequently, might be taken to imply far from efficacious policy prescriptions in certain instances.

The research involved in this project did not change our minds on that score, but it did point the way toward a somewhat different and perhaps more sophisticated line of argument. We argue that not only neoclassical economics, but also the competing developmental state model greatly underestimates the role of societal or private actors in determining how well an economy performs. Thus, the debate over "state versus market" leaves something essential out. In short, there is a need for "bringing society back in" because both strong states and strong societies play a vital role in successful economic development and transformation.

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