

## **Asian Perspectives on the European Experience**

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### Summary

The impact of “Europe” on “Asia” is self-evident. It is manifest in the construction of sovereign states, and of a system of such states, across the Asian region, despite the discrete cultures that pre-date European imperialism there. It is also manifest in the regional spread of market economies, and of European conceptions of civil society.

The impact of Europe on Asia was - and continues to be - mediated by Asian cultures, however. These provide Asian peoples with experiences often at odds with European ones, and with different perspectives upon that experience. The result is rejection, embrace, or hybridity, as well as the impact of Asian cultures back upon European experiences in turn. In this last case, we find Asian experiences competing with and even prevailing over European ones.

It is this counter-colonisation process that is briefly explored in this paper, firstly in terms of the idea of Asian values, and secondly, in terms of particular Asian ideas about the concept of heritage, and the concept of steady-state economics.

What is meant by the “European experience”? What set of shared events could qualify as being sufficiently significant and pervasive to be called an “experience” for most or all of those concerned? What, in turn, is meant by “Asian perspectives”? Who are these putative “Asians”, and what does it mean to say that they have “perspectives” on the European experience?

### *The European experience*

Over the last five hundred years or so, a significant number of those who inhabit the global subcontinent geographically labeled Europe, as well as their imperial offshoots, like the European peoples who forcibly colonized the Americas, have undergone a revolution in how they think and behave. This revolution is variously known as the Enlightenment, the modernist project, or the rationalist project. It began as an elite phenomenon, for analytic reasons which remain in dispute, and which include such utterly contingent factors as the bubonic plague that decimated the entire European population in the fourteenth century. Regardless of where this revolution came from, however, it was always clear where it was going to, in that it would be made a global one.

In politico-geographic terms “Europe” has northern, southern, western and eastern components. Here it is the western component that is of primary concern, since western Europe includes those countries that were most active in fostering the rationalist revolution. This includes those countries, and parts of countries, currently called France, Germany, northern Italy, the Netherlands, and the English and Scottish parts of Great Britain.

The success of Europe’s most dynamic New World offshoot, the United States, does prompt analysts to talk of the European experience as a Euro-American one. The continuing distinctiveness of the European experience, however, and of the western European experience in particular, are sufficient reason to see the latter as still standing alone.

The revolution referred to above had many facets. It also occurred on more than one level, with applied and particular dimensions nested inside the more general and contextual ones. The Cartesian idea of specialization with regard to rationalist research, and the intellectual division of labor that this specialization encouraged, was manifest in due course as separate disciplines like politics, economics and sociology. (Descartes, 1912 [1637]; Milbank, 1990) Each of these disciplines was articulated in analytical languages, the particular character of which depended upon the assumptions analysts continued to make regardless of their meta-commitment to the unalloyed use of detached reason.

At its most fundamental, this revolution was one in how European peoples thought about the sacral dimension to how they lived. This resulted in radical changes in how they behaved with regard to the original power that makes all life possible, changes that were the result of a revolution in how European peoples thought *per se*. It remains a

matter of some debate whether these changes were materially determined or whether they occurred for reasons of a more mentalist kind, but regardless of the cause, the outcome was one where particular Europeans began to privilege reason as an end in itself, initially as an elite phenomenon, and subsequently *en masse*. They began to place a high priority, that is, upon the use of the human faculty for reason, a faculty they then turned upon their own sense of the sacral, thereby engendering a secularist revolution that continues to spread. They also turned this faculty upon their understanding of the natural universe, and upon their own behavior and that of other human beings. The result was a scientific, and subsequently, a technological and industrial revolution, that continues around and through us to this day. In due course they even turned this faculty back upon itself, engendering thereby a post-modernist revolution that remains a key feature of the diverse critiques of the whole project.

One result of the revolution in how they thought and behaved was the priority Europeans placed upon a particular way of ordering political affairs both within and between European peoples, namely, modernist state-making. When the European empires fell apart, after two huge wars that originated in their own sub-continental heartland, the statist way of organizing diplomatic and military relations remained behind as the basis upon which they and their one-time colonial subjects built their politico-strategic affairs. What was a European experience was made in this way into a global one.

Another consequence of this rationalist revolution was the priority Europeans placed upon a particular way of ordering the economic affairs within and between European peoples, namely, modernist market-making. When the empires fell apart that scientific technology had made possible, it was the capitalist way of organizing production, work, investment, and trade relations that was left behind as the basis upon which they and their one-time colonial subjects were obliged to build their politico-economic affairs. What was a European experience was made this way into a global one, too.

A third consequence of this rationalist revolution was the priority Europeans placed upon a particular way of ordering the societal affairs within and between European peoples, namely, modernist self-making. When the empires fell apart that scientific technology had made possible, it was the individualist way of organizing civil relations that was left behind as the basis upon which they and their one-time colonial subjects were obliged to build their politico-social affairs. What was a European experience was made into a global one this way as well.

Cutting across the construction of these three dimensions to world affairs was the class-forming capacity of capitalism as a historical and material mode of production. The difference between those who owned and managed the capitalist mode of production, and those who sold their labor for wages, became a prominent feature of the world's political economy, though people's consciousness of this difference remained rudimentary. It still is. Like state-, market- and self-making practices, modernist class construction became a key feature of the European experience nonetheless. In due course, it became a key feature of the global experience with capitalism as well.

Also cutting across the three dimensions to world affairs was an enhanced use of ideas as a means to craft these affairs. The main form these ideas took was noted above. Here we need only note the capacity of the values and norms these ideas represented to construct the kind of world highlighted here, as well as the self-fulfilling way in which such values and beliefs, when sufficiently widely held, became the European experience, and subsequently, the experience of peoples world-wide.

A less evident consequence of the rationalist revolution that Europeans first experienced, and then caused to become the global experience, was the way it marginalized large numbers of people for not being rationalistic enough. These margins included women, indigenous peoples, environmentalists, post-colonials, and the poor. That the main margins should be identifiable as such should come as no surprise, since those who instituted this revolution were European, male, white, eco-indifferent, and well-off. It not only created distinctive peripheries to the rationalist project, however, but highly critical peripheries, too. Those decreed inferior in these ways used their own rationalist capacities to contest their secondary status, and to critique those who, in the main, continued to dominate the whole project.

The least evident consequence of the rationalist revolution was the way that, carried far enough, rationalism revealed its own shortcomings, however, and the need to compensate critically for these shortcomings so that rationalists did not get their understanding of the world radically wrong. This generated a range of auto-reassessments. These are variously known as hyper-rationalism, post-modernism, post-structuralism, psycho-analysis, romanticism, phenomenology, and post-pre-modernism. The difference here depends upon the aspect of the modernist self the critic chooses to highlight. These critiques are now integral parts of the European experience, and to the extent that this experience is universal, they have become part of the global experience, too.

For example, the rationalist way of knowing is an objectifying one. Objectifying requires in turn a particular way of being, namely, an individuated and autonomous one. It requires, that is, a de-communalised, de-sacralised sense of the self.

This does not present any immediate problem with regard to knowing about the natural universe, but it does present a problem with regard to knowing about other human beings, since so much of what we need to know if we are to describe and explain their behavior reliably, and to prescribe policies effectively, cannot be gleaned from an individually autonomous and objectifying vantage point. It can only be gleaned by becoming socially embedded and subjectifying. This means ceasing to be rationalistic and becoming a romanticist instead, for example, by engaging our emotions and feelings instead of our reason. It also means ceasing to be rationalistic, and becoming a phenomenologist instead, for example, by making use of a socially re-embedded form of intuition or “gut-thinking”. The loss of detachment that this entails results in turn in the call (particularly by rationalists) to return to an objectifying perspective once more, in order to appraise what is gleaned by subjectifying means. This is to reintroduce

rationalism's basic shortcomings, however, hence a second call (by romanticists and phenomenologists) for a second return to non-rationalist non-detachment. The result is two cycles of knowing. As these cycles carry the analyst further, two spirals of knowing begin to emerge. These spirals are either romanticist or phenomenological depending upon whether the retreat from the priority placed upon reasoning is of one or the other kind. Since rationalism is still more characteristic of the European rather than the global experience, these spirals are most evident as part of the European experience. As rationalism becomes a basic part of the global experience, however, its limits and distortions become part of that experience too, and the attempt to compensate for these shortcomings - in both romanticist and phenomenological ways - also becomes global.

### *Asian perspectives on the European experience*

Asian perspectives upon the above are part of the globalization of the European experience. This experience Europeans now call "globalization", even though imperialism for the nineteenth century, and neo-imperialism for the twentieth, are more accurate labels.

Globalization (or imperialism) took place in waves. It was not something that began with the invention of jumbo jets, the internet, or the end of the Cold War.

Regardless of what wave we analyze, globalization (or imperialism) means making the parochial experience of a particular part of Europe into the dominant ordering, wealth-making, self-aggrandizing practices of the rest of the world. These practices are seen by Europeans, and their representatives and acolytes, as modernizing and civilizing ones. To non-Europeans, however, they represent cultural impositions of a much less inviting kind.

By the end of the twentieth century, the great land-based European empires were gone. In their stead were the internationalist and transnationalist practices, the economically mercantilist and neo-colonising practices, and the individualist and collectivist practices, that accompanied the statist, liberalist, nationalist ones that nineteenth century European imperialism had bequeathed to the rest of the world. By this time there were global environmentalist, feminist and indigenous peoples movements, too. There was also a much stronger sense that the rationalist project that frames world affairs as a politico-cultural whole was in crisis, and that the shortcomings to this project were not ones we could merely compensate for, rather, we had to transform them into something more enduring and more humane.

One result of the global experience of the European experience was to prompt peripheralised societies to try and define what their own identity might be in relation to the totalizing practices Europeans promoted. Asian societies were part of this global response. They, too, were obliged to come to terms with European practices, and to reflect upon what it was that made their own practices distinctive, and to them at least,

desirable. These deliberations worked back upon Europeans in turn, helping create new ways of thinking in the global centres that European expansionism had created. With rare exception, “Asia” was globalized in the same way everywhere else was, and to the same reciprocal effect. Morris-Suzuki describes, for example, how the European experience not only impinged upon Asia in the forceful fashion described above, but also how Asian perspectives came to impinge upon the European experience. European imperialism did not work only one way. European societies were exposed to an “immense influx of new knowledge”, she says. “As colonization extended ... European explorers and scholars were confronted by a previously unimagined array of biological, geological, linguistic, social and artistic variety. Their reactions to this global diversity were often coloured by fear or disdain, but sometimes by a sense of delighted wonder ...”. Indeed, it was this “overwhelming vision of global diversity and complexity” that “inspired”, she argues, the development of “European scientific knowledge”.(Morris-Suzuki,1996,2)

The point being that the scientific industrialism that provided Europe with its imperial power was not only the product of European innovation, but also a product of civilisational borrowing. This borrowing was made from Asian societies as well as societies elsewhere in the world. The scientific and industrial revolutions at the heart of the European experience, therefore, would not have been possible without Asian cultural traditions, that is, without what these societies had found out for themselves, and without what they taught the Europeans. The Asian societies concerned not only felt the brunt of European imperialism, therefore. They also helped facilitate the intellectual breakthroughs that resulted in the modernist project itself, and in due course, that very imperialism. Thus we get Needham describing the influence on European science of Chinese science.(Needham,1969) And Dallmayr highlighting in more general terms the significance of inter-civilisational dialogue as the story of the world.(Dallmayr,2002)

What do we mean when we talk about “Asia”? Like Europe itself, “Asia” is a highly diverse politico-geographic region. Like Europe, too, “Asia” is a European concept, though one that regional elites now promote as one that applies to themselves. Originally conceived as a kind of Europe in reverse, Asia was constructed by European orientalist as a realm of radical difference, imbued with radically different values, that Europeanised elites in Asia were able to use to sublimate and repress local cultural practices in their bid to create European-style states, markets and civil societies. The concept of values of a modernist European kind was part of this sublimation/repression process. It was used, for example, to deal with the internal conflicts that arose because of the unique cultural practices that being “Asian” had come to represent.

Before the imposition of the European experience, few “Asians” would have thought in terms that extended much beyond their village. By now, however, it is used to designate central, eastern, southeastern, southern and Pacific terms, and a mosaic of societies and cultures, religions and civilizations. Some of these are historically related. Many have had little to do with each other historically.

All Asians experienced European territorial imperialism, though, and the aftermath of that imperialism, and experience that made of “Asia” one more domain of

European-style state-making. As such Asia became a region where billions of people shared the experience of having more or less clearly defined territorial boundaries, more or less integrated national populations, more or less functional capital cities, and more or less legitimate central governments, that were more or less committed to not interfering in each others' affairs.

“Asia” also became a well-established domain of European-style market-making. As such it is now a region where billions of people share the experience of being part of state-based markets, within regional and global markets, and where the liberal capitalist mode of production predominates.

In addition, “Asia” became a well-established domain of European-style self-making. As such it is a region where billions of people now share the experience of individuated individualism. As such, its inhabitants are able to claim human rights in general, and democratic rights in particular. They are also able to respond as nationalists and collectivists, despite the immediacy of their own societal experiences, and despite being individuals who are still, in the main, communally and sacrally embedded.

The advent of modernist production methods in Asia resulted in a modernist division of labor as well. Capitalist forms of class construction, meanwhile, reproduced the European experience of wage work, private ownership, and industrial management.

The experience of European thought-forms became pervasive, too. The values and norms characteristic of European culture found widespread resonance throughout the Asian region.

All of the above both exacerbated and mitigated “Asian” gendering practices, and “Asian” ways of treating the natural environment, indigenous peoples, and the poor. For example, highly hierarchic gendering practices made it possible for capitalist owners and managers to make industrial wage labor extremely cheap in Asia. They made it possible, that is, to recruit and exploit women at extremely low wage rates there, under conditions where they could be treated poorly with impunity. The result was an ability to maximize short-term profits regardless of the human cost.

Regional sentiments of a communalist kind also made it possible to ignore what the reproduction of European industrialization practices did to the environment. A similar process also obtained with regard to the cultural integrity of indigenous peoples.

Most radically, the Asian region became one where rationalism was, if not hegemonic, then at least a meta-discourse of widespread politico-cultural significance. This was largely because of the access it provided to industrial production methods, modernist medical and engineering sciences and technologies, modernist modes of communications and transport, modernist armaments, and modernist modes of organization. There is no denying the scientific success that rationalism made possible, a success that is readily recognizable in its most unequivocal form, namely, direct imitation. Rationalism's intrinsic shortcomings as a way to know and to be did elicit the

same critiques in Asia that emerged in rationalism's European heartland, however. It elicited, that is, Asian critiques of a hyper-rationalist, post-modernist, post-structuralist, romanticist, phenomenologist, and post-pre-modernist kind. For example, postmodernist Asian analysts began to critique not only the grand narrative of rationalism itself, but the stories of Asian identity constructed in these terms, and the European narrative of cultural difference that was the basis for this construction.

Rationalism's secularizing propensities directly impinged upon Asian peoples' sacral practices, too. They directly impinged, for example, upon the Asian experience of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, and Animism. Those Asian rationalists who started from a non-sacral context learned, like many Europeans, to put the sacral at mind's length as the anti-rational form of the non-rational. By contrast, those who started from a sacral context of some kind saw rationalism in a sacralist light.

*Asian perspectives: the product of Asian values?*

The European experience, as it impinged upon those peoples Europeans thought of as Asian, was never an unmediated one, since those who embodied that experience encountered the full panoply of Asian cultures and sacral traditions. While the Europeans "westernized" the Asian "East", that is, Asians "easternized" the European "West".

Which leaves one to wonder: how much was the European experience, so-called, replicated in Asia? How much was the European experience compromised by Asian experiences, and even determined by Asian experiences? And how much did something else happen to both, that was not reducible to either one or the other?

In the main European modernists continued to see Asians as pre-modernists. They continued to see them as only partly modernized and industrialized, and as still substantially imbued with communalist and sacralist understandings.

Asians saw themselves, however, and their societies and cultures, in less reductionist terms. They acknowledged the relative superiority of early European science and industry, but they saw themselves as civilized regardless, indeed, they saw themselves as more civilized than the European imperialists proved to be.

In practice, this took a number of different forms. One of these was to reject the European experience outright. Another was to embrace it more or less uncritically. The most common response, however, was to try and effect a kind of synthesis, that is, a hybrid outcome that gave Asians access to the military and industrial power the European experience made possible, while continuing to foster their own perspectives.

Meanwhile, as Europeans began to acknowledge and explore the shortcomings of the civilization they had built world-wide, they began to look elsewhere for constructive alternatives. They began in the process to take more seriously Asian critiques of the

European experience, as well as Asian ideas about practices that looked like they might help them transcend the limits and distortions of that experience. Some of these Asian critiques were self-serving attempts by authoritarian leaders to bolster their own power. Other critiques went to the epistemological and ontological heart of the European experience, however. They provided radically different perspectives on the kind of world the Europeans had made, a world that was arguably far from the best of all possible worlds, as well as one that Asian peoples had credible ideas about transforming and transcending.

Consider the statist construction of modernist/European world affairs. It is apparent that wherever we look in the Asian region there are traditions of governance that are at odds with the experience that Europeans promote. For example, Asian traditions typically entail respect for authority and hierarchy, and the stringent avoidance of conflict and confrontation. These traditions can be difficult to reconcile with the European experience of equality, competitive democracy, and *realpolitik*. This does not mean that state-making in Asia cannot be described and explained in realist, liberalist and globalist terms, or that it is not possible to make the appropriate policy prescriptions. After all, state-making in Asia is now predicated upon the same state sovereignty, the same fiction of state equality, and the same received idea of the necessity for state non-intervention that originated in Europe. Asian regional inter-state institution-building, though, is notably more consensual than European inter-state institution-building, despite the institutional success of the European Union as a supra-statal confederation, and the amount of consensual agreement that building this Union involved. Asian inter-statism, is arguably more about the communalist relationships between those taking part, and the practice of a pre-modernist form of solidarism, than about the promotion of the individual national interests of those taking part, and of rationalist/liberalist internationalism. Is this difference sufficiently distinctive to posit a discrete “Asian way”? If so, is this way one that we might prefer to a putative European one? Or are the Asian mores that make this perspective possible simply more rudimentary than the European experience, in that they are so far simply less reflexive? Or is something else occurring, whereby European-style state-making is being counter-colonised by other ways of thinking and being, and rendered more civilized as a consequence?

Now consider the advent in Asia of modernist European marketeering, and the effect it has had on the societies there. The competitive, instrumentalist mores of European-style marketeering have been well received by Asian materialists. The less materialistic Asians, however, have found these mores highly corrosive of Asian traditions of familial or communal production and work (as they still are in the European experience.) Others again have looked for a hybrid result, one that does not oppose modernist European-style attempts to foster liberal or bourgeois capitalism, but tries instead to practice that particular form of capitalism in a more communally-mediated way. Is there enough evidence here to warrant our talking of a separate “Asian” way? Can this way be deemed preferable to the European one? Are we seeing an earlier version of the same process, being played out in Asian societies? Or are we seeing some kind of accommodation taking place, with an outcome superior to all previous European and Asian practices?

Consider, finally, the advent in Asia of modernist European forms of civil society, like nationalism, or democratic individualism, or collectivism. The values that are still prevalent in Asian societies tend to foster individuals acting in harmony with the group. They still promote family relationships and filial piety. They do not yet promote, to the same extent as the European experience invites them to do, modernist self-assertion and alienation, familial and social fragmentation, or nationalist or collectivist compensation. Many Asian civil societies have proven to be highly receptive to rationalist and liberalist notions of personal emancipation, inter-personal reciprocity, and human rights. Regardless of the root of the doctrine, there are many Asians who see it as relevant to, and quite capable of flowering in, their particular cultural context. They continue to exhibit, nonetheless, a sense of social respect that no people can eschew without losing their capacity to sustain their communal integrity. For example, while the desirability of popular accountability is acknowledged throughout the region, particularly by ordinary Asians; and while those there who do not have the chance to hire and fire their governments might well esteem such an opportunity should it be given to them; Asian mores that foster social conformity rather than individual self-assertion, and the humbling of the self in relation to the society as a whole, mean that modernist democracy, where it does work in Asia, works differently in Asia. It is practised formally in India or Japan, for instance, but it is not practised there in the same way that it is in Britain or France, where long established rationalist and liberalist traditions of respect for individual autonomy and equality result in a relatively rigorous version of the democratic way of making governments accountable. In the former the on-going respect for communal integrity and hierarchy compromise the extent to which democracy is possible in more than a trusteeship sense. Is this difference the result of values particular to most Asian societies and cultures, however, and are the values that are seemingly involved preferable to those that now prevail in most European societies and cultures? Or is this the result of the more protracted experience Europeans have had with democratic practice, and with its ontological premises, as compared with the relative lack of Asians' experience in this regard? Or is it something else again, whereby the European experience of democracy is being mediated by Asian experiences, and a European-style world affairs is being made more habitable and harmonious as a consequence?(Blondel and Inoguchi,2006)

Southeast Asian leaders have been prominent in arguing the first and last cases - that of a particular Asian perspective; that of particular Asian values preferable to those the European experience provides; and that of Asian mediation of the European experience as a civilizing process. Their arguments are not new, however. Japanese thinkers, for example, have expounded them for generations. They are clearly exemplified, for instance, by Okakura's conclusion, drawn more than a century ago, to the effect that the diversity of Asian cultures, including the "mighty" difference between the Chinese and Indian ones, does not preclude Asians sharing a common "thought-inheritance". This he saw as their "love for the Ultimate and Universal", a love that enabled them historically to produce "all the great religions of the world", and one that stands in stark contrast to the sentiments manifest by the "maritime peoples" of the "Mediterranean and the Baltic" who "dwell on the Particular" and who search out the "means" rather than the "end" of life instead.(Okakura,1970[1904],1) More recently,

arguments like these were forcefully expounded by a director general of the Economic Affairs Bureau of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who said that “[t]he big issue for Asia from now on will not be how to modernize itself further so much as how to achieve global solutions for the problems that have led Western-style modernization and industrialization to a dead end, since Western civilization may not be able to offer the key to the solution of these problems”.(Ogura,1993,42)

Malaysia’s former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, was a Southeast Asian leader of the kind referred to above. For years he forcefully expounded the view that authority and order was preferable to democracy, and that the individualism that made democracy possible was a distortion of our human potential, and not, as the European experience suggested, its crowning achievement.

Lee Kuan Yew, one time Prime Minister of Singapore, was well-known for making a similar case. He regularly cast democracy more in terms of paternalism and trusteeship than popular plebiscite.(Langlois,2001,13-16,21-4;Teik,1998)

European critics of leaders like these have tended to favor the rationalist and liberalist sense that perspectives like these are basically perspectives of “convenience”. They have tended in the process to highlight the “legacy of wrongs done by Asians to other Asians”.(Leifer,1996) Even when they have been prepared to concede that neo-Confucianism promotes the welfare of the community as well as the rights of the individual, critics like these have tended to see the so-called Asian values involved as an ideological “insult” to the “millions of Asians who ... fought for their freedoms, against the colonialists and against the dictators who too often replaced them”. They have also tended to see the articulation of these values as an insult to all those Asians who have “died, suffered torture, known humiliation, [and] escaped into exile in pursuit of basic respect”.(Davies,1994) More specifically, they have tended to see such values as a “grubby” cover for “economic positioning for profit”.(Hein and Hammond, 1995,12)

European and European-style marxists have been even more explicit. They have pointed out, for example, the role that the imposition of the European experience has played in taking away human rights across the region, and impeding the progress of “real” democracy there. They have highlighted in the process the neo-imperial support Europeans have provided (both military and economic) to comprador Asian elites, and the use of the European-style sovereign state to construct forms of economic development that work to the near-exclusive advantage of the local fraction of the global bourgeoisie as well as its global corporate confreres.

European and European-style critics, aware of the peripheries that rationalism creates, have highlighted in turn the continued male dominance of Asian societies, and the commensurate oppression of Asian women, as well as the continued repression of local ethnic groups and social castes, the use of family networks to corrupt society rather than consolidate communalism, and the greed and aggression that characterizes capitalism throughout the region. They have also highlighted the prevalence of extreme poverty beside extreme affluence, as well as the pervasiveness of people trafficking,

resource exploitation, profound ecological insult, and the perversion of what it is that Asian values are meant to represent.

This said, there are also Europeans, and European-style analysts, who have observed how in Asia there are “multiple religious, philosophical and cultural approaches” to doctrines (like those of human rights); how there are “genuine claims to difference” there; and how these “multiple accounts” are “not just different conceptual schemes with common behavioural consequences”, because the “various traditions define ‘the good’ differently, and thus lead to different standards of behaviour, some of which are common, some of which are incommensurable.” Langlois, for example, has observed that while there is “no single set of Asian values, just as there is no single set of Western values ...”, that “the sets of values held by social actors in Asia” result in “certain areas of overlap”, which are “significantly different ... to those commonly found in the West”. He concludes as a consequence that it is “[t]hese findings, that different metaphysics lead to different ethics, [that] support the view that there needs to be a major reconceptualisation of the notion of human rights”.(Langlois,2001,48)

Despite European and Asian cynicism, that is, despite the reservations of European critics and of many Asians themselves, Asian perspectives on the European experience do exist. Indeed, it is from the reformulation of Asian values in the light of the European experience that we may well get in the future a science and technology that is more animate, more energy efficient, and closer to the natural forms we find in life, as well as a new awareness of the value of individual duty and humility, the value of a more social form of capitalism, and the value of a more communalist form of democracy.

#### *Particular Asian perspectives on particular European experiences: the past*

The argument that there are discrete and discernible Asian perspectives on the European experience is supported here by two brief case studies. One is on the Japanese concept of heritage. The other is on the Japanese concept of economic growth.

Japan is not coterminous with Asia. Indeed, given its historic success in reproducing the European experience of territorial imperialism in the region, there are many Asians who would strongly reject any suggestion that it might be.

The Japanese are Asians, however. Their perspective may not be the same as that of all other Asians, but it is an Asian perspective nonetheless, and as such is part of any comprehensive account of the Asian perspective on the European experience.

The European experience of the past is in the main modernist. Because of the penchant Europeans have for objectifying and reifying, Europeans construe time, in politico-cultural terms at any rate, as the product of an objectifying and reifying mind-set, that is, as a linear sequence, with a tangible and a quantifiable past, present, and future. Each part of this sequence is seen as a kind of place. Moreover, each such place is seen as

having discrete “things” in it. The past is one such place, and consistent with the European experience of putting a high cultural priority on the rationalist mind-gaze, the European perspective of that place is one of “things”, such as culturally significant artifacts or naturally undeveloped landscapes.

The European experience of the past takes its most conspicuous global form in the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (Titchen,1995). This *Convention* is a small part of the liberal internationalist body of international law. It is that part, however, that invites those state-makers who formally endorse it to nominate cultural and natural sites for a World Heritage List that contains several hundred items by now. This List represents what Europeans consider to be items of outstanding, universal significance. The Exhibition Centre and Park in the middle of Melbourne, for example, is one such world wonder. As such it is said to represent a point of reference for our identity as an entire species, an irreplaceable source of “life and inspiration”, and one component of our most valued bequest as a species to those we hope will succeed us.(UNESCO,2000)

As an explicit expression of the European experience of the past, the World Heritage List is modernist. As such it is skewed in favor of the material and the artefactual, and away from the non-material and the non-artefactual. It does not, for example, include practices from the past, such as festivals or particular skills, or intangible products, like traditional stories.(Gruzinski,1993)

And yet, when we consider the past as a global possession, we find people making a wide range of bequests, only some of which take a modernist form. We find much more than old “things”, that is, within or without that most curious and telling of modernist institutions, the museum, and we find much more than “national parks”. Indeed, modernist reservations to the contrary, recognition of the shortcomings of the European experience eventually resulted in a convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.(Blake,2001;Prot,2001)

To the extent that the Japanese are modernists they subscribe to the objectified and reified view of the past that the World Heritage List represents. Since 1992, for example, they have nominated old buildings, and relatively pristine parts of their countryside, for inclusion on this List. They have done so in the same modernist spirit that has prompted them to build museums, or to designate national parks.

To the extent that they remain traditionalists, however, or non-modernist communalists, they also subscribe to the idea of conserving their heritage in terms of living practices in a continuously found present, however. This is radically different from the desire to preserve dead things from a long lost past.

The hybrid character of the Japanese idea is coded in the Japanese word for heritage, that is, *isan*. This word means not only the inheritance of family assets but the inheritance of cultural assets and ancestral achievements as well. It means more than the transmission from one generation to the next of valued things. It means the transmission

of a sense of what is valued *and done*, a sense we find enshrined in the relevant pieces of Japanese legislation since 1950.

The best known manifestation of this particular Japanese understanding of the past is the *juyo mukei bunkazai hojisha* (“important intangible cultural asset-holder”) program, or more informally, the *ningen kokuho* (“living national treasures”) program. This program honors particular artists and crafts-people for their traditional skills. It provides them with an annual stipend, and high cultural status, in the hope that they will be encouraged to keep practicing their skills, rather than let them lapse because of their lack of viability in an industrialized, capitalistic economy. (Bunkazai hogo-bu, 2000) The perspective this program represents has also inspired a growing number of other countries to do like-wise, countries that include one that is at the heart of the European experience, namely, France.

The Japanese provide social and financial support for many other intangible cultural assets as well. These include the local and national festivals that regularly dot the Japanese calendar, traditional art forms like *Noh* and *Kabuki* theatre, and traditional customs like the practice of *giri*, or ritual gift-giving. (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2001)

The point being that the Japanese concept of the past, and what is worth conserving from the past, is a compound one. It is both modernist and non-modernist. Moreover, the non-modernist component of the Japanese experience has original features that have inspired other countries to replicate its communalist perspective. It is no surprise, therefore, to learn that the Japanese were a driving force behind UNESCO’s move to open for signature a very different and more communalist world heritage convention than the one first made by modernist Europeans.

#### *Particular Asian perspectives on particular European experiences: the future*

Asian attempts to emulate the industrial power of the European experience have resulted in a range of developmental strategies. These provide a range of perspectives now on this aspect of the European experience, that is, on how a country might become technologically innovative and economically more prosperous.

Historically, the Japanese were the most successful in the Asian region in terms of their ability to replicate European-style wealth-making, and to turn that wealth into politico-strategic power. Once they lost the Second World War, however, they eschewed their territorial ambitions, and became instead the second biggest economy in the world after the United States. This position they were able to maintain despite regional competition from Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong, all of which used “developmental state” tactics to foster rapid economic growth. What is more, they continue to maintain this position despite regional competition from China and India, both of which have used state-monitored liberal capitalism to move towards the centre of the world politico-economic stage from its contemporary wings.

More recently, Japan's growth-centred strategy gave way to a more steady-state one. A dynamic form of economic equilibrium replaced the preference for unlimited growth, in part because of the bursting of a large speculative bubble in the late 1980's, but in part because of the sense that Japan did not need to grow any more.

We take for granted the need for boundless economic growth, which is why we see the successful modern state as one that is able to post significant annual economic growth figures, year in and year out, and why we see countries not doing this as being stagnant ones. We see them, that is, as not raising the standard of living of those who inhabit them.

The "developmental state" is conceptual short-hand for the commitment by governments to this model of change-by-growth. The concept denotes active political support for the growth model by economic planners, and the conclusion that there is no alternative form of mature economy.

Post-war Japan is a spectacular example of a developmental state. It posted record annual growth rate statistics for decades, and the standard of living of its people improved dramatically at the same time.

After 1989, however, Japan stopped growing, and its economy became a more steady-state one. Despite a no-growth economic profile, however, the standard of living of its people remained relatively high. This does not accord with the dominant theory of international political economy, namely, liberalism, which depicts such an economy as non- or under-performing. Liberals see growth as the basis for material well-being, which is why liberal leaders institute policies designed to stimulate growth, and why they reject the idea of dynamic equilibrium that underpins that of steady-state economics. It is also why they promote policies deliberately designed to foster expansion. If Japan was non-or under-performing, however, how was it able to hold its own against other major economies after 1989? How was it able to continue to provide its people with a superior standard of living? How appropriate, therefore, is the current government's desire to re-instate economic growth?

The story of the way Japanese state-makers turned a provincial agricultural country into an industrial, and ultimately, an imperial powerhouse, is well-known by now.(Morris-Suzuki,1994) Equally well known is the story of how they turned defeat in World War Two into global economic victory.(Johnston,1982) The industrial policies they implemented, the trade and investment policies they applied, and the role successive Japanese governments played in coordinating the efforts of entrepreneurs and administrators to these ends, are staples of international political economy teaching and research.(McCormack and Sugimoto,1988;Morris-Suzuki,1989;Sugihara and Tanaka, 1998;Ikeo,2000)

The critique of Japan as economically stagnant since 1989, and as having lost its expansionist way, is also familiar fare.(Huang,2005) Accounts of the failure of successive

governments to provide more generally for an open environment for contemporary Japanese entrepreneurs to work within, as well as accounts of their failure more particularly to deal with bad debts in the banking sector, or corruption in the construction industry, are teaching and research staples, too.

What is less familiar is a story of this ostensible stagnation as a story not of failure but of success. What is not widely recognized is the extent to which Japanese state-makers, in a period of high growth, were able to foster *both* intense market competition *and* communal control over the consequences of market competition. Come the leveling off that took place in 1989, Japanese leaders were arguably then able to create the world's first large-scale, industrially based, internationally competitive, steady-state economy. To the extent that they did so, moreover, recent initiatives designed to stimulate economic growth can be seen as radically misjudged.

In other words, the mainstream stories about Japan's developmental success, and its subsequent stagnation, are liberalist ones. They provide a rationalist account of the international political economy that assumes that human nature is essentially calculating. As a consequence, they promote the self-realisation of the modernist individual as the point of the human project. Liberalism's strength is its emancipatory potential. It valorises self-satisfaction, rather than the welfare of the society as a whole. It seeks to free the individual from the constraints of cultural expectations, and their political, economic and social consequences. Liberalism's weakness, on the other hand, is its failure to acknowledge the significance of other assumptions about our essential human nature, and the essential nature of our nurturing practices, as well as its failure to account for the perspectives of those pushed to the margins of the modernist project for being insufficiently rational. Liberalism does not, for example, acknowledge the significance of the mercantilist or economic nationalist perspective, or the socialist perspective, or the marxist, meta-marxist and constructivist perspectives, or the feminist or environmentalist perspectives. Nor does liberalism acknowledge the rationalist context in which liberalism itself is articulated, and the significance of non-rationalist perspectives like the so-called traditionalist/communalist ones.

Japanese state-makers are liberalists *par excellence*, however, they are also good mercantilists, and they also promote non-rationalist and communalist economic practices. The result is social capitalism, that is, a market tempered by values that prevent the formation of large disparities in wealth. These values are communal values. They allow the Japanese to make free markets, without the resulting inequalities that market freedoms tend to cause.

The Japanese government embraced liberal capitalism to catch-up with the West. Because of the nature of Japanese culture, however, it did not recreate liberal capitalism of the kind that was globalised in terms of the European experience. It created a developmental hybrid instead, in line with the Japanese idea of *wa-kon yo-sai* ("Japanese spirit/Western knowledge"). It created an economy where having enough wealth was seen to be better than having ever-increasing wealth, and dynamic equilibrium was seen to provide a sustainable alternative to perpetual growth. The ecological consequence of

this hybrid creation are becoming notably more significant as the consequences of global warming become more apparent. Economic development is essential for every country. Without sustainable economic development, however, our species may well not survive. (Mill, 1848; Daly, 1977; Daly, 1996) The idea that the Japanese might have made a sustainable steady-state economy largely unnoticed is not wide-spread, though the significance of their having done so, if that is what they have done, is arguably considerable. Should it prove to be the case that this is what they have done, then it also becomes the case that boundless growth is not the only credible way to maintain a modernist economy, and to have a high standard of living. The implications for the environment are considerable. The global environment is already highly stressed by high growth economic policies. Nor is it likely to be able to sustain high growth economics indefinitely, as the hegemonic doctrine of liberalism assumes. Constructive alternatives are therefore called for, with the Japanese realisation of a steady-state economy being one of the more compelling.

### *Conclusion*

The impact of the European experience upon the societies and cultures that Europeans called Asian ones, was and continues to be profound. It was not an unmediated impact, however. Asians responded to the imposition of European forms of political order, wealth-creation, self-assertion, class construction, mental voluntarism, gender imbalance, and environmental malprotection, in a wide range of ways. The richness of the Asian experience in this regard resulted in turn in a wide range of perspectives upon, and responses to, the European experience. This can be seen in the concept of Asian values. Though espoused in the main by authoritarians, and though arguably a rather exaggerated sense of cultural difference, these values remain a stubborn reality across the region, as well as articulating alternatives to European ways of living, knowing, and being that we ignore only by doing violence to, or radically modifying, the cultures concerned. The richness of Asian perspectives upon the European experience is also seen when we look more closely at particular Asian cultures. The Japanese, for example, embraced the European experience in a determined bid not to be colonized by European powers. They succeeded, but they did not surrender their own cultural values in the process. This is clearly apparent in the way they maintained their own conception of the past, that is, their own conception of what to conserve in terms of their cultural heritage, and how to conserve it. It is also arguably apparent in the way they constructed a steady-state economy that allowed them, having reached a high level of economic maturity, to maintain that level without having to grow.

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