

Reconciliation or Irreconcilably Different to the Western Model of Development and Modernity: A Case Study of Japan to Understand the Asian Model of Development

Shaolee Mahboob*

Abstract: This essay explores how Asian Values came to theory as a motivational device of the economic growth in Asia, how far this subject “Asian values” was so distinctive than that of Western values. Were Asian values a myth? Are there same causes and consequences of the development all over the world? Besides Asian Values, were there other reasons for economic development in Japan and other East Asian countries? In this essay, Japan has been taken as a “case study” to justify the entire hypothesis.

1. Introduction:

It is believed that cultural values, like Asian values were responsible for the remarkable post-war economic success in Japan in the 1970s and 1980s, in the four “tigers” (Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) in the 1980s and in the aspiring tigers (Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia) until the middle of 1997. The proponents of “Asian Values” were former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, Japanese Nationalist Shintaro Ishihara and the former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia and so on. They attribute economic success to the role of Asian cultural values, particularly to Confucianism. Mahathir Mohamad and Shintaro Ishihara jointly wrote one of the best-selling books in 1995 namely “*The Voice of the Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century*” where they wrote “Economist and Business leaders tell us that Asia Pacific region will replace the West as the hub of economic growth in the coming century (Mohamad and Ishihara 1995:14).” Mahathir and Ishihara vigorously reject Western “liberal” values and insist that Asian cultural values underlie an Asian model of capitalism. They maintain that an Asian renaissance is challenging Western domination of the region. It may be noted that *The Japan that can Say No* (1991), authored by Ishihara, is the first Asian book to publicly reject American-imposed trade policy. Likewise, in 1996, a Chinese best-seller titled “*China can Say No*” expressed a high level of Han chauvinism in criticising American trade policies (Ong 1999: 197). Again, Lee Kuan Yew wanted to improve relations with China by promoting a mildly anti-Western sense of Chinese cultural identity. Chinese President Xi Jinping dreamt to rejuvenate

* Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jagannath University, Dhaka
Email: shaolee3@yahoo.com

Chinese nation and publicly asked "for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia, and uphold the security of Asia (Economy 2014:1)."

The concept 'Asian values' is also prevalent in many other writings. Francis Fukuyama, an American political scientist, showed how Mahathir wanted to fend off the Bush administration's push to create a forum known as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, in favour of a new Asian political bloc that would exclude "white" power like Australia and United States (Fukuyama 1998:23). According to the renowned news magazine *The Economist*, it is believed that military-run Thailand's "tutelary democracy", in which, a bunch of royalist elites control the state, is nothing less than a return to Asian values (The Economist 2014:1). Despite the economic crisis in mid-1997, the achievements of East Asia are extremely impressive. So, it can be said that Asian values have a place in the history of economic development.

This essay explores how Asian values came to theory as a motivational device of the economic growth in Asia, how far this subject "Asian values" was so distinctive than that of Western values and whether it is relevant today or not. Are there the same causes and consequences of the development all over the world? Besides Asian Values, were there other reasons for economic development in Japan and other East Asian countries? The present essay is based on secondary materials and used case study as a method of explanation. Japan has been taken as a "case study" to justify the entire hypothesis.

2. Asian versus Western Values: In Pursuit of Development and Modernity

1) Modernization in the East and in the West: Modernity vs Multiple Modernity

It was not easy for the Asian leaders to establish Asian values as an apparatus of the development against West and the Western development concept. The concept of the 'West' identifies two different kinds of societies- i.e. Western and Non-western. It functions as a part of a language, a system of representation. Stuart Hall calls it a system as it represents a set of images like western = urban = developed or "non-western" = non-industrial = rural = agricultural = under developed. Again both positive and negative feelings are there as "the west" = developed = good = desirable; or the "non-west" = underdeveloped = bad = undesirable. So the concept of the 'West' produces certain kind of knowledge and functions as an ideology. "The west" and "the rest" became related elements in the same discourse (Hall and et al ed. 1996:186). Stuart Hall perceives the concept "the West" as complex one and constructs it as historical not geographical. "The west" is no longer only in Europe; United States also belongs to the western countries. Nowadays, technologically Japan is called "Western" though it is in Far East (Hall and et. al ed. 1996:185). Hall

conceptualizes the West as “a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern...they were the result of a specific historical process - economic, political, social, and cultural (ibid 1996:186). Modernized and developed countries are those western countries during sixteenth century which have experienced industrial revolution and the ultimate result was economic development (an increase in productive capacity and labour productivity), and economic growth (an increasing GNP). For example, the industrial revolution in Britain has been described as a process of total change: ‘a change of social structure, of ownership and economic power in society; as well as change of scale (Allen and Thomas 2000:31). Marshall explains modernity as “Modernity is associated with the release of the individual from the bonds of tradition, with the progressive differentiation of society, with the emergence of civil society, with social equality, with innovation and change. All of these accomplishments are associated with capitalism, industrialism, secularization, urbanization and rationalization. Thus, the eighteenth-century enlightenment philosophers see modernity in contrast to traditional social order and beliefs. The modern state became the representative of the nation of individuals, and a trustee of their interests, hopes, and ambitions for a better future (Schech and Haggis 2000:2).” Generally, it was believed that modernization had destroyed traditional customs and had broken structure of authority. Trying to deal with the problem, there was a search for indigenous concepts of development since the early 1980s, like the Asian way, to make a distinct path to the concept of modernization (Schech and Haggis 2000:41).

Here comes the concept of multiple modernities which challenges the monocivilizational narratives of “western modernity”. Multiple-modernity raises the question of whether there can be “alternative” higher forms of modernity.

TuWeiming defines modernity and multiple modernities as “modernity is both a historical phenomenon and a conceptual framework. The idea of multiple modernities is predicated on three interrelated assumptions: the continuous presence of traditions as an active agent in defining the modernizing process, the relevance of non-western civilizations for the self-understanding of the modern West, and the global significance of local knowledge (TuWeiming 1996:1).”

Furthermore, Weiming writes that Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore are industrial developed East Asian countries which are located in different geographical settings. The philosophical, religious, historical, sociological, political and anthropological backgrounds of these countries are immensely complex. However, these developed countries are heavily influenced by these backgrounds and Confucian traditions or Asian values which are active agents of the development of industrial East Asia (TuWeiming 1996:1).

II) Asian Values: Concept and Critiques

Asian values were a political ideology of the 1990s which identified common cultural features and common social and historical aspects of the nations of Southeast and East Asia, that were essential to create a pan-Asian identity (Wikipedia 2017:1). Asian values have been depicted as Confucianist which has been treated as the power of the economic development in most of the East Asian culture. The salient cultural features of Asian values are briefly identified as follows:

1. Human relations and social harmony based on the idea of filial piety;
2. Respect for authority and a strong identity with the organization;
3. Subjugation of individual rights in favour of community obligations and diligence (Schech and Haggis 2000:41).
4. The Confucian tradition has had little faith in law, and has emphasized the practice of civility and mutual respect through the observance of “rites” (Bary 1998:90).

Huat conceives that in Singapore People’s Action Party (PAP) Government has always prided itself for being “pragmatic” and the national ideology has come to be known as “Shared value” which contains:

1. Nation before community and society above self
2. Family as the basic unit of society
3. Community support and respect for the individual
4. Consensus instead of contention
5. Racial and religious harmony (Huat 1998:39).

Asian leaders persuade Asian values as a means of avoiding such social degeneration. Supporters have compared ‘Asia’ with a West where crime, drugs, pornography and all manner of other degenerations are endemic (Freeman 1998 in Rigg 1997:70). For example, as it is found in Singapore, in censorship, violence is allowed especially in the Chinese “Kung fu” martial art films but nudity in any form is banned (Clammer 1997: 506). Former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew dramatized the combination of authoritarian direction, high speed economic progress, and the promotion of Confucian values (Bary1998: 4). According to Lee, “we were fortunate we had this cultural backdrop, the belief in thrift, hard work, filial piety and loyalty in the extended family, and most of all, the respect for scholarship and learning (Rigg 1997:72).’ In Malaysia, there were attempts to compare Confucianism with Islam. Osman Bakar suggests that, “A Muslim does not go against the teaching of his or her religion if he makes the claim that Confucius was a prophet of Islam (Alatas

2002:114).” According to these writings, it can be said that Asian Values are not a myth.

However, there were many problems with the Asian values:

a) Westerners think, in other ways, that the real point of “Asian Values” is to give power to Asian authoritarians who do not want to surrender power (The Economist 1994:13). For example, Malaysia's former Deputy Premier Anwar Ibrahim has said repeatedly, "it is altogether shameful to cite Asian values as an excuse for autocratic practices and denial of basic rights and civil liberties (Ibrahim in Hoon2004:1).” Anwar's case shows that basic civil liberties can be disregarded to serve the goals of the national leader. In many Asian countries "anyone who dares to challenge the authority is quickly labelled as 'bad' and discredited. Conformity is of a very high order". So, sometimes Asian values have been used as a political instrument to legitimize authoritarian rule.

b) Two central problems with the Asian Way system are

- i. It ascribes to Asia a common set of values
- ii. It assumes that Asian equals Confucian (Rigg 1997: 72).

c) The 1997 Asian economic crisis highlighted the controversy surrounding the “Asian Values” discourse, as excessive loyalty to family, clan, and “in-groups” leading to nepotism, cronyism and corruption (Wolf 2000: 1). These are the reasons why sometimes many thinkers opine that Asian values are not relevant in today's world.

3. Japan: A Case of Modern, Industrial, and Westernized Society with Unique Cultural Heritage

In this section, we shall take Japan as a case study to examine whether there exist true Asian Values or not. The section examines that Japan is modernized and has a strong economy like westerners. At the same time, it contains strong Confucian cultural values that is very much similar to the Asian values which demonstrates that Japanese path to the development is unlike to other western societies. The country is a very good example of reconciliation between eastern and western cultures but contains strong symbols of uniqueness. It can be said that Japanese modernity is irreconcilably different to the western modernity and a model of multiple-modernities.

I) Japanese Development: at a Glance

After centuries of seclusion from the world during Tokugawa period, Japan's modernization during Meiji period was outstanding. Japan drew world's attention when the country defeated Russia in Russ-Japan war in 1905. The country was devastated in the Second World War. But it astonished the world by rapid economic and social development during the decades following the

war, mainly fifties to eighties of the last century. Currently Japan is considered one of the most developed countries in the world. According to World Bank, Japan's gross domestic product(GDP) was 4,383,076.30 million US \$ in 2015, the 3rd largest in the world, only after USA and China (World Bank 2015:1). As per UNDP, life expectancy in Japan was the second longest, 83.7 years, only behind Hong Kong (84.4 years) (UNDP 2016:198). Japan's Human Development Index(HDI) score was 0.903 out of 10 in 2015. Though, it was ranked 17th that year, trend of HDI change in this country is very impressive. UNDP estimates that average HDI growth in Japan over 2010-15 period is .44, which is the highest among G-7 countries. Average HDI growth in other 6 countries is as following: Canada- .38, France and Italy .34, Germany .30, USA - .20 and UK - .16(UNDP 2016: 201). Japan is the only member of G-7 from Asia, and also an influential member of OECD countries.

II. Cultural Images of Japan: Suit for Asian Values

The following paragraphs will describe the connection between Asian Values and economic development in Japan.

a. Stereo typicality that is similar to Asian Values:

In 1946, anthropologist Ruth Benedict in her outstanding work *"The Chrysanthemum and the Sword"* showed the rigidities of obedience, unbending hierarchy the extremes of duty and honour in Japanese society that waged World War II. In *Images of Japanese Society* Ross Mauer and Yoshio Sugimoto deconstructed the stereotypical generalization about Japanese culture which emerged in the *Nihonjiron* (Discussion of the Japanese people – Cultural Essentialism) in 1970. These stereotypes shows that

“Japanese society is superior and somehow racially unique; it is unknowable through its impenetrable language; it holds the secret to world economic power through its harmonious industrial relations based on feudalistic paternalism, lifelong loyalty of the workers; it has achieved social stability through self-restraint, self-effacement and the practice of voluntary group-consensus (Myers 1995: xv).”

These stereotypical phenomena are very much similar to the concept what is called Asian Values. The next part of this essay will discover how far Japan was connected and interacted with the other Asian and the Western countries throughout its history. Moreover some cultural features will be discussed to discover their contribution to the Japanese economy.

b. Values (religious and others) and Strategies of Japan: Impact on the Economy

Murakami contends that unlike Anglo-American societies, Japan could not achieve political integration suitable to industrialization at its initial phase. To cope, it had to devise a strategy, a catch-up industrialization by preserving some

elements of traditional heritage, while establishing a powerful bureaucracy which steered the process of development. Another version points to the possibility of “Confucian capitalism” in which the ethic of obedience to authorities and emphasis on self-devotion to work leads to a path of development different from the western type but conducive to rapid economic growth. Murakami, Kumon, Sato have argued that Japanese society is built upon what they called *Ie* civilization, which emphasizes quasi-kinship lineage and functional hierarchy. They maintained that the *Ie* principle permeates Japanese history as a “genotype”, playing a central role in the formation of Japanese-style capitalism. They refute the assumption of unilinear development and argue for a model of multilinear development in which the Japanese represent a distinctive type. Samuel P. Huntington sees the fundamental division of the world in the clash of several civilizations, singling out Japan as the only non-western civilization that has succeeded in the quest to become modern without becoming Western (Sugimoto 2003: 20-21).

Religious value played an important role in Japanese economy. Confucianism, Daoism and the Strategic arts - products of the Chinese Civilization - explain much about the economic success of Japan (Little 1995:141). Eamonn Fingleton, Chalmers Johnson (Japan: Who Governs?- The rise of the Development State) and James Fallows (Looking at the Sun – The Rise of the New East Asian Political and Economic System) are three contemporary writers who emphasize that the Japanese and other East Asian ‘miracle’ economics cannot be understood in the terms of Western economics. Eamonn Fingleton argues that Japanese bureaucratic institutions, like “The ministry of finance (MoF) is the capstone of Confucian system of power that is roughly pyramidal. Just under the MoF are big banks; a group of key bureaucratic agencies, of which the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) is the best known in the west; and the cabinet (Fingleton 1995: 142).” Contemporary forms of the Confucianism are:

1. Giving competition in the education system primacy over competition in the marketplace.
2. Focusing more on a national entrepreneurial culture than on a corporate entrepreneurial culture.

During the sixth century A.D. Buddhism became popular in Japan. Buddhism emphasizes resisting one's own selfish desires and placing little importance on the material things in life. There has been massive pollution of earth, air, rivers and sea due to industrialization and this seems ugly as the Shinto religion stresses the pantheistic divinity of nature (Myers 1995: xviii) and Buddhism is also called the religion of nature (Rigg 1997: p.63). Today, both Shintoism and Buddhism play an influential role in the daily lives of many Japanese. As a result, of this dual religious heritage, the Japanese show a greater concern for nature and are more interested in their ancestors. At the individual, psychological level, the Japanese are portrayed as having a personality which lacks a fully developed ego

or independent self (Dao's notion of *amae*). Secondly, The Japanese attach great importance to the maintenance of harmony within the group. Ishida argues that inter-group competition and loyalty make groups conform to national goals and facilitate the formation of national consensus (Sugimoto 2003: 36).

The third important dimension of Chinese tradition in contemporary Japan is that of the military strategists (Little 1995:146). It is evident that Japan was ruled by a series of warrior aristocrats, the samurai, for centuries. Japan believes that military strength meant international respect and independence.

III. Relations between Japan and the other Countries: Reconciliation or Irreconcilable

By 500 A.D. the government sent many of Japan's youths to China to study China's philosophy, laws, arts, sciences, architecture and governmental structure. The knowledge brought back by these young people influenced Japanese arts, crafts, and learning. The first Japanese university, for example, was founded around 900 and a system of provincial schools was established. During the sixteenth century, for example, the tea ceremony, flower arranging (*Ikebana*), the traditional theatrical arts of *Nob* and *Kyogell*, as well as *Kabuki* and other artistic endeavours like painting and sculpture increased among the common people.

Samuel P. Huntington perceives that there are three ways through which the political and intellectual leaders of the non-western societies have responded to the modernization and westernization:

1. Rejecting both modernization and Westernization,
2. Embracing both
3. Embracing the first and the rejecting the second

Japan followed the rejectionist course from its first contacts with the West (Europeans) in 1542 until the mid-nineteenth century. The Portuguese came first as traders to expand their vast commercial empire and then as missionaries to spread the word of Christianity. They were followed by the Spanish and then the Dutch and the English. But only limited forms of modernization were permitted, such as the acquisition of firearms, and the import of Western culture, including most notably Christianity, was highly restricted. The Japanese were greatly disturbed by the religious quarrels between Protestants and Catholics in the mid-seventh century. All foreigners were expelled from Japan, with the exception of a few Dutch and Chinese traders who were restricted to a small island in Nagasaki. Japan remained isolated from the rest of the world for the next two hundred and fifty years.

This restriction came to an end with forcible opening of Japan by Commodore Perry in 1854 and the dramatic efforts to learn from the west following the Meiji Restoration in 1868 (Huntington 2002:25 in Schech and Haggis 2002:2).

Emperor Meiji is considered to be the founder of modern Japan. After more than 200 years of isolation, Japan was ready to rush into the modern age. Major political, economic, social and military changes took place rapidly. As had occurred during the Heian Period, in 1871 the best of Japan's youth were sent as part of the Iwakura mission to selected Western countries which included the United States, England, France, Sweden and Germany. Their task was to learn as much as possible about Western civilization and its superior technology. The observations of the Iwakura mission were published in 100 volumes during 1878. With the knowledge gained from the Western world, the Japanese reworked their government, their economy, and their social institutions. The result of the Meiji Restoration was a harmonious blending of Western ideas with the traditional Japanese culture. Thus, Japan borrowed the value of Confucianism from the East (Chinese Civilization) and technology and knowledge from the West.

Conclusion:

This essay explored how Asian values came to theory as a motivational device of the economic growth in Asia. Japan has been taken as a case of this article. It is seen that with all of changing trends, Japan is still unique with its Confucian cultural values and strong economy side by side. As Ken'ichi Ikeda and Sean Richey wrote 'through its cultural transformation, Japan retains a multifaceted values system that includes Confucian values, with a strong impact on private, non-public beliefs (Ikeda and Richey 2012:22).'

Many Western analysts have made a positive assessment of the coordination of national public bureaucracy especially the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry. Japanese education system attracted international attention. Japan's *koban* (police box) system is being instituted in many parts of the world. Any westerner who has enjoyed Japanese hospitality in the sushi bars or the karaoke rooms or seen the national love of sumo wrestling or baseball, knows that there is much more to Japanese lifestyles than making money (Myers 1995: xviii).

"Japan a multicultural society" is a fascinating concept as its cosmopolitan cities celebrate the *haute couture* and designer labels of Europe, the classical music of Europe, the cinemas of the USA, the cuisine style of Europe in their international hotel and the popular culture of the USA in baseball and Disneyland. But it is true that Japanese are proud of showing the symbol of samurai, the Shinto shrine, or the Geisha's kimono. They are also proud of their own cuisine style such as the *sushi*, the *sashimi*, the seaweed, the sticky rice, the *tempura* and so on (Myers 1995: xxi). With these entire features in Japanese society and Culture, it can be concluded that Japanese Development is a blending idea of Eastern and the Western Culture. Whether there exist Asian Values or not, Japan is prominent for its long traditional cultural values and

identity which worked as an economic force. Today technologically Japan can be defined as Western but still it is Eastern with its cultural distinction.

References

- Alatas, Syed Farid (2002). Religion, Values, and Capitalism in Asia in Wee, C.J.W.L. eds, *Local, Cultures and the "New Asia": The State, Culture, and Capitalism in Southeast Asia*, Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore.
- Allen, Tim and Thomas, Alan (2000). *Poverty and development into the 21st century*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Bary, Wm. Theodore de (1998). *Asian Values and Human Rights: a Confucian Communitarian Perspective*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Clammer, John (1997). Culture, Values and Modernization' in Hui Ong Jin, Kiong, Chee Tong, Ser, Ern Tan ed. *Singapore: An Overview in Understanding Singapore Society*, Times academic Press, Singapore.
- Economy, Elizabeth C. 2014, Xi Jinping Quoted in "China's Imperial President: Xi Jinping Tightens His Grip," *Foreign Affairs* 93 (November/December 2014), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142201/elizabeth-c-economy/chinas-imperial-president> viewed on 12 January 2017.
- Fingleton, Eamonn (1995). 'Japan's Invisible Leviathan', in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 74, no. March/April, pp. 69-85.
- Fukuyama, Francis (1998). 'Asian values and the Asian crisis', *Commentary*, Feb 1998 vol.105, no.2, p.23(5).
- Hall, Stuart, Held, David, Hubert, Don, and Thompson, Kenneth (eds.) (1996). *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Society*, Blackwell Publishers, Victoria.
- Hoon, C.Y. 2004 Revisiting the 'Asian Values'* Argument Used by Asian Political Leaders and Its Validity, Cited in Louis Kraar, "What Pacific Century?", *Fortune* 140, no. 10, 22 November 1999 in THE INDONESIAN QUARTERLY, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2004: 154-174. http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1832&context=soss_research viewed 12 January 2017.
- Huat, Chua Beng 1998, Racial Singaporeans Absence after the hyphen in Kahn Joel S.(ed) 1998, *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand* Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.
- Huntington, Samuel P. (2002). A Universal Civilization? Modernization and Westernization, in Sussane Schech and Jane Haggis (ed.) *Development: A cultural Studies*, Blackwell Publishing Company, Oxford.
- Ikeda, Ken'ichi and Richey, Sean 2012, *Social Networks and Japanese Democracy: The Beneficial Impact of interpersonal communication in East Asia*, Routledge, New York.
- Ishihara, Shintaro (1991). *The Japan That Can Say No: Why Japan Will Be First Among Equals*, Simon & Schuster, New York.

- Mohamad, Mahathir and Ishihara, Shintaro (1995). *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century*, Kodansha International, Tokyo.
- Myers, David (1995). Beyond the Haiku and the Cherry Blossoms, in Ishido Kotaku and Myers David (ed) 1995, *Japanese Society Today*, Central Queensland University Press, Rock Hampton.
- Ong, Aihwa (1999). *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Duke University Press, Durham.
- Rigg, Jonathan (1997). *South East Asia: The Human Land scape of Modernization and Development*, Routledge, London
- Schech, Susanne and Haggis, Jane (2000). *Culture and Development: A Critical Introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford
- Sugimoto, Yoshio (2003). *An Introduction to Japanese Societies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- The Economist, May 28th (1994). Asian Values.
- The Economist, 2014 "Thailand's Asian Values: Looking Inward," <http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2014/08/thailands-asian-values> viewed on 12 January 2017.
- UNDP 2016, Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf last viewed on 30 June 2017.
- Weiming, Tu 1996, Multiple Modernities: A Preliminary Inquiry into the Implications of the East Asian Modernity http://www.sociostudies.org/almanac/articles/files/globalistics_and_globalization_3/104-111.pdf last viewed on 30 June 2017.
- Wikipedia 2017, Asian Values https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian_values viewed on 14 January 2017.
- Wolf, Charles Jr, (2000). Are "Asian Values" Really Unique?" www.hooverdigst.org/002/wolf.html viewed on 7th December 2016.
- World Bank 2015, GDP (current US \$) <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD> viewed on 30 June 2017.

