

BEYOND ORIENTALISM: DECOLONIZING ASIAN STUDIES*

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This article argues that proponents of an 'Asian capitalism' were rendered theoretically defenseless by the economic crisis of 1997-98 because the institutionalization of Asian Studies programs over the last 50 years had not generated a genuinely comparative framework. Diversity of research environments and the dominance of the modernization perspective till the 1970s, the first section shows, implied that social change in Asian societies were studied as deformed versions of a normative pattern of social transformation derived from a distorted rendition of English development. Given the continued exoticization of Asian societies, the second section shows, paved the way for culturalist explanations of the spectacular growth of economies along Asia's Pacific Rim in the 1980s and 1990s. The stress of cultural values meant that they were unable to challenge Western analysts when their economies suffered a meltdown. Finally, it is suggested that increasing globalization entails the development of a broader comparative framework and some research strategies are explored.

Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental.

— Edward Said

INTRODUCTION

Just as the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 punctured the balloon of Sovietologists, the unpredicted meltdown of the 'miracle' economies along Asia's Pacific coasts in 1997-98 deflated the pretensions of Asianists.¹ Like the Sovietologists who had a common interest with the Soviet *nomenclatura* in projecting the strength and endurance of the Soviet Union, Asianists had joined the new 'Oriental despots' to rhapsodize about the virtues of Confucian capitalism and the alleged superiority of 'Asian values.' While they could condemn the venality of former Indonesian President Suharto's children, or deplore the authoritarian excesses of

*An earlier version of this article was presented at the First International Convention of Asia Scholars, Noordwijkerhout, the Netherlands, 25-28 June 1998. I gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments by Chang Kyung-Sup and the other editors of this journal.

¹For an analysis of the collapse of the Asian 'miracle' economies, see Palat (1999).

China's nonagenarian leadership at Tienanmen Square, or denounce patriarchal employment relations in Japan, almost without exception, they assumed that the spectacular rates of growth achieved by several East and Southeast Asian economies would continue indefinitely. So pervasive was this belief that almost any state in the region which attained growth rates over five per cent for two consecutive years was proclaimed to be a new 'tiger' or 'dragon!'² So insistently did bureaucratic and governmental elites proclaim the exceptionalism of the 'tigers' that on the eve of the bailout of the South Korean economy by the International Monetary Fund, they had to be reminded by Daniel Tarullo, President Clinton's international economics advisor, that "The Asian miracle did not repeal the laws of economics" (quoted in Sanger, 1997).³

In conjunction with the collapse of centrally-planned economies in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and an earlier shift to the market in China, the meltdown of the miracle economies on Asia's Pacific Rim — impacting most adversely on Indonesia, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand but with its tremors reverberating all across the region — denoted an end to conceptions of multiple paths to modernity. Voicing the consensus among mainstream economists and financial analysts, Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the US Federal Reserve, prophesied in January 1998 that the collapse of the economic dynamos of yesterday like a house of cards signaled the coming triumph of "the Western form of free market capitalism" (Sanger, 1998). Across the Pacific, Chung In-Moon and Sang-young Rhyu (2000: 98) despondently concluded that "Asian capitalism" had merely been a footnote in the history of capitalist development, "a temporal detour in the longer historical evolution of capitalism." Concisely put, if the extraordinary rates of growth registered by economies along Asia's Pacific Rim since the 1970s had promised the possibility of dethroning unlinear paths to a modernity patterned on a presumed Euro-North American experience, the meltdown of the Asian 'miracles' has once again de-historicized world-relational patterns of large-scale social change.

Proponents of the superiority of an 'Asian capitalism' so unresistingly evacuated their trenches because the proliferation of Asian Studies scholarship over the last half-century had not led to the creation of a genuinely comparative framework to transcend the Eurocentrism that permeates the analytical categories of the historical social sciences. The institutionalization

²The concept was so flexible (and hence amorphous) that it was applied to Ireland which was recast as a 'Celtic Tiger' even after the Asian originals had lost their teeth in the Great Crash of 1997-98 (O'Hearn, 1998; Sweeney, 1999).

³For the crisis of Sovietology, see Burawoy (1992).

of Asian Studies programs in North American and West European universities, and the dominance of the modernization perspective everywhere after the Second World War, the first section demonstrates, merely reinforced Eurocentric narratives of socio-historical change. Rather than the promised synthetic, multi-disciplinary perspective of a vast geocultural area stretching from Afghanistan to the Pacific coasts of Eurasia and its off-shore satellites (Indonesia, Japan, and the Philippines), a shift in the site of knowledge production to metropolitan universities and the fierce imperialism of disciplinary departments led to the pronounced idiographic nature of Asian Studies. As each area was defined by its cultural specificity and iconically exhibited in a case of curiosities, Asianists were increasingly unable to speak to each other. Hence, comparisons were routinely made not between the varied Asian societies but between each of them and a misleading reading of English history enshrined in the modernization perspective. By framing the histories of the several social formations in Asia in terms of why they did not develop in the prescribed normative manner, attention was diverted from the patterns of socio-historical change they actually experienced. Modernity itself, as Aihwa Ong (1999: 251, n. 9) once noted, is almost unflinching used without specifying its location since it is axiomatically equated with the Western experience.

As industrialization proceeded apace in Asia after the Second World War, however, it was steadily becoming apparent that instead of converging towards presumed, normative Western standards in industrial organization, labor relations, and social policies, Asian states exhibited significant divergences. Simultaneously, increasing competition between enterprises, and growing wage demands by women and ethnic minorities in high-income states, and the growing assertiveness and resource nationalism of many low- and middle-income states began to serially undermine the dominance of West European and North American states. In tandem, the exhaustion of extensive growth signaled the irreversible decline of centrally-planned economies. Seizing the moment, government and business elites along Asia's Pacific Rim began to advocate their own culturally based variant of capitalism as a more egalitarian and beneficial alternative. However, rather than forcefully refuting Eurocentric narratives of socio-historical change and recasting the rise of capitalism as a world-relational phenomena, advocates of Asian capitalism merely argued that features identified as obstacles to capitalist development in Asia were more efficient in promoting capitalist development than the Puritan work ethic (Dirlik, 1995: 267). The widespread currency given to conceptions of a uniquely Asian capitalism, the second section demonstrates, stemmed from its resonance with long-held

Western stereotypes of Asian, specially East Asian, cultures.

Precisely because the spectacular growth of several economies strung along Asia's Pacific Rim had been cast in culturally specific terms, the meltdown of these economies pulled the carpet out from under the proponents of an 'Asian capitalism.' An emphasis on cultural specificity had meant that each case had largely been discussed and debated in self-referential enclosures as epistemologically distinct fields. Hence, Asianists were not only unable to speak to each other, but were also unable to locate their studies within larger circuits of exchange and networks of accumulation. In particular, the emergence of major centers of capital accumulation in Asia not only rendered the parochial identification of capitalism with the organizational forms it assumed in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century West anachronistic but also suggests that the only way to break out of the sterile dichotomy between tradition and modernity is to forge world-relational categories of analysis. Accordingly, the last section suggests some strategies towards this end.

A CASE OF CURIOSITIES

If East is East and West is West
Where will Japan come to rest?
– Arthur Koestler⁴

Appearances to the contrary, the metamorphosis of Orientalists into Asianists after the Second World War did not fundamentally challenge the essentializing procedures of Orientalist conceptions on Asian societies. Ironically, though Asian Studies programs were conceived as multidisciplinary assemblages of scholars to provide a catholic perspective on a vast geo-cultural area, their institutionalization in universities progressively narrowed the focus of research and debate.

In the first instance, with the decolonization of European colonial empires, the site of knowledge-production for Europeans on Asia shifted from the areas of study to metropolitan centers of learning. Prior to the Second World War, colonial bureaucrats and missionaries stationed in the Asian colonies had used their easy access to archival materials and their intimate familiarity with local customs and social mores as a springboard to produce richly detailed ethnographies and local histories. As colonialism ebbed and European bureaucrats returned home, universities became

⁴Quoted in Littlewood (1996: 6).

increasingly important for the study of the peoples of Asia. This was reinforced by the practice of granting scholarships to students from the former colonies to study in metropolitan universities. This shift in the site of knowledge production meant that university professors no longer had the linguistic competence or the ready familiarity with indigenous sources of their predecessors. After all, an occasional field trip or the odd sabbatical is no substitute for living in the area of study for the better part of one's professional career (Anderson, 1992).

Paralleling the European withdrawal from Asia, the growing intensity of the bipolar rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union led to a deepening American involvement in Asia and to a rapid expansion of Asian Studies programs in the United States (see Wallerstein, 1997; West & Martin, 1997; Palat, 1996a; Koppel, 1995; Cumings, 1998). However, though it was designed to provide policy makers with a comprehensive and synthetic perspective on this vast geocultural zone, fierce resistance by the disciplinary departments frustrated the promise of multidisciplinary. By ensuring that Asian Studies programs had a weak institutional base—most, if not all, of their faculty depended on disciplinary departments for tenure and promotion—university administrators virtually made certain that most Asianists worked within disciplinary boundaries rather than ranging widely across several fields of study. The resulting intellectual division of knowledge by spatial and by disciplinary categories admirably suited both communities of scholars: disciplinary and area studies specialists. It absolved disciplinary specialists from the responsibility of testing their theories against the experiences of the vast majority of humanity, and of familiarizing themselves with the work of their colleagues in cognate academic disciplines. Disciplinary specialists also assumed, almost as a matter of course, that their Asianist colleagues were ill-equipped to provide insights relevant for the nomothetic social sciences since they spend inordinate amounts of time in particularistic investigations which detracted them from the study of “theory.” Conversely, Asianists faced with the challenging task of learning a difficult language and negotiating an alien culture were absolved from simultaneously mastering a vast theoretical literature, especially when the boundaries between disciplines became increasingly porous.

The colonialist construction of an area studies approach to Asian societies and a disciplinary approach to the study of other European cultures is vividly illustrated by the practice of American or English historians of France or Germany who routinely publish their work in French or German. Silhouetted against this canvas, few Western Asianists can write scholarly work in the languages of their areas of study. It is scarcely an exaggeration

to say that the numbers of American specialists on Korea or Kerala who can publish — or even lecture — in Korean or Malayalam can be counted on one's fingers! Harry Harootunian (1999: 607) even reports that a Japanese Studies scholar still teaching at Harvard University said that it was "pointless" to read books in Japanese when Japanese scholars can provide the required information! While it is unwarranted to generalize from such anecdotal evidence, the ethnic composition of Asian Studies programs in the United States is nevertheless striking. An Arif Dirlik or a Harootunian apart, faculties and students in these programs are overwhelmingly staffed by people who trace their ancestry to their areas of study or by white Americans. African-Americans and Hispanic Americans are equally conspicuous by their absence from Asian Studies programs, as are Asians from African and Latin American programs. Though this may be determined in part by the paucity of facilities in India, say, to study Laos — and the consequent lack of information precluding Indians from applying to Southeast Asian Studies programs in the United States — it must also be in part because patterns of recruitment to Asian Studies programs are skewed towards 'native informants.' Even if this is charitably attributed more to accident than to design — US scholars forging networks with the places of their research — its effect is to project that universalistic interests are the province of whites while the rest of us and consigned irremediably to parochial visions!

The narrow idiographic nature of Asian Studies has also meant that rather than engaging the various disciplines to forge truly trans-disciplinary, and world-relational categories of analysis, papers presented in Asian Studies conferences and journals were either so specialized or so generalized that there is little real engagement with fundamental issues. "Crisis" in Asian Studies denotes shortages of funds rather than an epistemological questioning of the field and Asianists often appear immune to the theoretical winds of change sweeping across many of the disciplines. This is indicated by the generally hostile reception accorded to Edward Said's *Orientalism* by Asianists (West & Martin, 1997; Pletsch, 1981; Palat, 1996a; Hough, 1977; Bencomo & Colla, 1993).⁵

Area studies' promise of comprehensive and integrative knowledge of large geocultural areas was also undermined by the linguistic and cultural diversity of Asia. Whereas a dominant language like Spanish had promoted

⁵In a hostile review of Said's book in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, David Kopf (1980) outlined his own notion of historical research: "that a primary responsibility of the historian is to allow the past to speak for itself." That the premier US journal on Asian Studies could even publish a piece based on so anachronistic a premise speaks volumes.

a certain degree of genuinely comparative approaches like the *dependencia* tradition or the bureaucratic-authoritarian model in Latin American Studies, no similar paradigm pervades Asian Studies scholarship. The apparatus of translation and circulation of texts also frustrated comparative studies. While most scholars in North America and Europe are acquainted with at least one metropolitan language besides their own, few would know more than one non-European language. Additionally, the sheer frequency of translations back and forth between European languages ensures that even those with a limited command of languages other than their own are at least familiar with the broad themes of research in cognate disciplinary specialties and neighboring geographic areas. Conversely, though most Asianists are comfortable in at least one European language, only a few would know another non-European language besides their own, and translations are woefully inadequate (Ahmad, 1992: 97). In the absence of a complex grid of scholarly exchanges — translations, comparative analyses, collaborative research — the enclosed self-referential character of the various sub-regions of Asia has reinforced Chinese, Japanese, Tamil, Javanese and other exceptionalisms rather than a unified and coherent body of knowledge about the macrocultural region. Thus, we have historians of South India, political scientists of China, and anthropologists of Java rather than scholars well-versed in all cognate social science disciplines pertaining to a jurisdictional entity or in the literature in a single discipline on several jurisdictions. In short, by defining each geocultural area as an epistemologically distinct field, Asianists are unable to speak to each other (Bencomo & Colla, 1993).

The tendency towards a proliferation of country-specific, sectoral, and sub-national studies was further reinforced by the definition of areas of study by the political ecology of the Cold War rather than by the historical evolution of patterns of social interaction within this geocultural region. This redefinition of the units of analysis had consequential consequences. By restricting research and debate to 'South Asia' or 'East Asia,' relationships falling outside the boundaries of these arbitrarily constructed units were rendered inconsequential. Thus, historical and contemporary relationships between peoples of South Asia and of the 'Middle East,' and/or 'Africa,' or between 'India' and 'Southeast' Asia were simply ignored in mainstream studies apart from one-off references. Simultaneously, the linguistic and cultural diversity of geo-cultural areas as large as 'South' 'Southeast' and 'East' Asia ensured that most studies were of national or sub-national units and quickly laid to rest any pretensions to comprehensive, multi-disciplinary scholarship. In either case, the arbitrary redefinition of sub-areas obscured long developmental continuities and distorted percep-

tions of socio-historical change.

Conversely, the intellectual dominance of the modernization perspective implied that scholarship within the various Asian states themselves was unduly focused on each state's peculiar path to a modernity modeled on a presumed Euro-North American pattern of social change. On the one hand, leaders of nationalist and liberation movements had claimed that colonial or 'feudal' structures of governance had stifled economic development. The political project of nationalism and liberation was hence directed at mimicking the presumed pattern of development of states in Western Europe and North America. In the dominant unilinear narrative of development, industrialization was abstracted from the wider matrix of relational networks as the singular mark of economic achievement. Once independence was attained, even if token obeisance was paid to notions of small-scale industries and handicrafts, heterodox thoughts like Mohandas Gandhi's notion of self-sufficient 'village republics' were consigned to the margins of the political project of nationalism. The object of national liberation was unambiguously to 'catch up' with the advanced industrial states of Western Europe and North America. Even where socialist movements were triumphant, while markets were replaced by centralized economic planning, the goal remained unchanged as demonstrated by the parallel between Vladimir Lenin's famous aphorism that communism equals soviets plus electricity and Jawaharlal Nehru's equally famous proclamation that hydro-electric dams are the temples of modern India!

On the other hand, though the victory of national liberation movements signaled the end of direct political rule it did not signify the end of Western influence. Former colonial powers continued to exercise intellectual and political influence: the elite continued to be schooled in colonial languages and national intellectual agendas were set by metropolitan institutions in London, Paris, the Hague, and Washington. Foreign aid and preferential access to markets in the former colonial power continued to shape economic policy. In East Asia, an American Co-Prosperty sphere was fashioned on the ruins of the French and Japanese colonial empires. If it was arguably more benign than the earlier essays in imperialism, not only were there overt efforts to shape economic and political policy but there was also the more covert influence of the pervasive spread of American culture. Most notably, the unchallenged hegemony of Western intellectual traditions meant that indigenous modes of knowledge were marginalized. Unbroken traditions of learning in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Persian, or Sanskrit had been so subverted by the influence of Western knowledge that they survived only as antiquarian curiosities. As educational institutions prolifer-

ated in the non-Western world, the organization of knowledge production — university departments, scholarly associations, academic journals — were modeled on the Western academy. The origins of modern science and the humanities were genealogically traced to Graeco-Roman antiquity, and apart from an odd course on 'Indian' mathematics, or 'Islamic' philosophy, or 'Chinese' science hanging on the line like a single sock, indigenous traditions were ignored as anachronistic to the contemporary project of national self-generation.

Despite tracing its intellectual pedigree to Graeco-Roman antiquity, the reorganization of the Western academy in the mid-nineteenth century had been carried out by governments to produce citizens for the emerging nation-states. Thus, while old disciplines like political economy and moral philosophy re-emerged as politics, economics, and sociology the nation-state was presumed, almost without exception, to be the self-evident unit of analysis. In this reorganization of the intellectual subject-matter — complemented by history being the study of the past, geography of space, and anthropology of 'primitive' societies — all peoples were presumed to be progressing towards nationhood. In this reigning orthodoxy, the wider international context of development was obscured and a misleading reading of English economic history was theoretically enshrined as a series of 'stages of growth' through which all states had to progress in minutely choreographed steps to arrive at the holy grail of high mass consumption.⁶

State-bounded narratives of progress gained additional legitimacy since the reconstitution of the world market under the aegis of the United States led to a expansion of material prosperity almost everywhere in the world in the quarter-century after the end of the Second World War, the so-called 'golden age of capitalism.' However as reconstruction proceeded apace in Western Europe and corporations increasingly trespassed on each other's

⁶To fully comprehend the absurdity of casting the experience of Europeans and their transplants in North America and Australasia as the normative pattern, William Martin and Mark Beittel (1998: 150) suggest turning the model upside down and deriving European trajectories of socio-historical transformation from the historical experience of non-Western peoples. The pattern that would emerge would be starkly different from those suggested by the modernization perspective. It would be one "of war, coercion, and the construction of national states, not from within but from without, leading to the creation of states as part and parcel of the forging of nations under conditions of resistance to colonialism and then constant foreign intrusion. ... Is it possible, one might ask, to create strong states and democracy without the high levels of wealth that arose from the domination of other states and peoples? Or in more contemporary European and U.S. terms: Can high levels of national income exist without equally high levels of interpersonal violence, crime, imprisonment, racism, inequality, and the erection of new barriers against foreign refugees, migrants, and products?"

market niches, limits of extensive economic growth was being attained in the centrally-planned economies of Eastern Europe and narrow domestic markets were constraining possibilities of import-substituting industrialization in many low- and middle-income economies in Asia and Latin America.

The conjunction of these processes appeared to confirm the validity of the modernization thesis even as challenges by dependency theorists and world-systems analysts undermined its theoretical foundations. Nationalization of mineral resources in the sixties and the massive oil hikes in the seventies seemed to suggest that primary producers could shift the terms of trade against high-income states. This was accompanied by a spurt in industrialization in many low- and middle-income states as West European and North American manufacturers relocated their manufacturing operations to offset higher raw material costs and demands by women and ethnic minorities for higher wages in their home bases. The rapid industrialization of many low- and middle-income states in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia seemed to suggest to some analysts that even if these countries remained dependent on high-income states for access to markets and technology, 'dependent development' progressively reduced global inequalities in income and wealth (Evans, 1979). Others adopted a rosier perspective and claimed that the rapid spread of industrialization to low- and middle-income states was so fundamental that it denoted a 'new international division of labor' (Frobel et al., 1980). Finally, the humiliating defeat of US forces in Vietnam seemed to signal a reversal of the positional advantage Western powers had held over the 'Third World' for well over one hundred and fifty years.

Yet, just as soon as 'dependent development' and 'new international division of labor' gained currency, their claims were horribly exposed by the collapse of many of these 'newly industrializing countries.' The vast expansion in global liquidity after the oil price rise of 1972 due to the recycling of petrodollars in the supra-national currency markets had undergrid the rapid industrialization of most Eastern European and Latin American states. Very low interest rates had enabled dominant one-party regimes and military dictatorships to pursue a debt-led strategy of industrialization and they had envisioned that they could repay these loans with revenues from increased exports. However, while the pursuit of multiple parallel patterns of industrialization lowered the benefits accruing to each state, a sudden cut-off of low-interest loans following the United States government's entry into the market for mobile capital in a bid to stem its domestic inflation, undermined the high-flying economies of Latin America and Eastern

Europe. In sharp contrast, economies along Asia's Pacific Rim were able to withstand the collapse of most other low- and middle-income economies because they had not resorted to overseas borrowings to finance their drive to industrialization, with the partial exception of South Korea. Rather than adopt autonomous, state-bounded strategies of industrialization, the spread of manufacturing had been closely coordinated by pilot economic bureaucracies in the region. Hence, if the East and Southeast Asian manufacture and export of light industrial products seemed to pale before the manufacture of automobiles and jet aircraft in Latin America, the latter proved to be more enduring (Palat, 1999: 9-10).

To recapitulate, diversity of, and distance from, their research environments meant that rather than the integrative scholarship on broad geocultural regions promised by the institution of Asian Studies programs in West European and North American universities, the focus of research and debate was confined to units of analysis defined by jurisdictional boundaries. These tendencies were reinforced by the dominance of the modernization perspective as Asian governments pursued state-bounded strategies of development. The resultant absence of a comparative framework to investigate divergent and parallel trajectories of socio-historical development within the several societies in Asia meant that their histories were framed in terms of why they did not follow the normative pattern of development derived from a distorted model of Euro-North American development. In particular, the idiographic nature of Asian Studies scholarship led to the continued persistence of Orientalist conceptions of knowledge as each Asian state was defined by an essential and unchanging culture. This attribution of a timeless essence to each Asian society seemed particularly self-evident for East Asian states as we shall see in the next section.

A HOUSE OF GLASS

Already a fictitious past occupies a place in our memories, the place of another, a past of which we know nothing with certainty — not even that it is false.

— Jorge Luis Borges (quoted in Daniel, 1996: 13)

Economies strung along Asia's Pacific Rim did more than simply withstand the general collapse of low- and middle-income states in the early eighties. While the old industrial heartlands of North America and Western Europe continued to decline and centrally-planned economies everywhere entered into a phase of irreversible decline, East and Southeast Asian

economies continued to register exceptionally high rates of growth (see Palat, 1999). Given the long pedigree of state-centered narratives of progress, it was not surprising that commentators and policy makers readily reached for cultural explanations to account for the exceptionalism of the East and Southeast Asian 'miracle' economies. The plausibility of cultural explanations gained added ballast from the fact that East Asian states enjoyed a relatively high degree of ethnic homogeneity and from the long continuities of political formations in the region. This orthodoxy was aptly encapsulated in a recent review article by Karen Wigen (1999: 1187):

China, Korea, and Japan are among the most venerable nations in the world; although their boundaries have shifted over time, and the style of their imagining has been continually debated, the notion of nationhood has resonated long and deeply with the majority of each country's inhabitants. This produces a sense of region quite different from what might be encountered elsewhere in Eurasia or in Africa, where national space is often complicated to a greater degree by cross-cutting affiliations from a colonial or pre-colonial past.

Spared the experience of formal colonization by Western powers, critical scholarship on the cultural traditions of East Asian states have been remarkable slow to develop (Greenhalgh, 1994: 748). Requirements of colonial rule had entailed the formal codification of indigenous cultural traditions in colonial educational curricula, and the processes of systematization had evoked sharp contestations which revealed the extraordinary diversity and fluidity of cultural formations within each colonial jurisdiction: in Africa, India, the Middle East, and even among the considerably smaller populations in Australasia (see Dirks, 1987; Hoodfar, 1997; Mafeje, 1971; Mamdani, 1996; Mani, 1990; Ranger, 1983; Reece, 1987; Ralston, 1993). Disputes on interpretations of indigenous cultural forms and their alleged superiority over those of their colonizers, and counter-claims on the inferiority of native cultures, formed the ideological battleground in the struggle for national liberation in the former European colonies.

No similar confrontation occurred in East Asia. Even when the Japanese colonized Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria, the colonial encounter was of a different kind. Colonizers and the colonized had long been enmeshed in a delicately woven filigree of interactions. Though Japanese colonial conquests altered the regional parallelogram of power, the cultural interface was qualitatively different in East Asia from the precipitate clash of unfamiliar cultures that characterized the European conquest of the Americas, Africa, Australasia, and parts of Asia. The more arms-length relationship

that Europeans and North Americans had with the peoples of East Asia meant that their traditions continued to be perceived in a dehistoricized and essentialized manner. Indeed, the presumption of a unified and coherent national culture was the bedrock of the Asian Studies project from its inception in programs to train military and civilian administrators during the Second World War. The instrumentalist concerns was so deeply inscribed in the project that its central idea has long been that language-acquisition prepared students to empathetically identify with natives. In this scheme of things, as Harootunian (1999) observed of Japanese Studies, the field was seen as "filled only with raw, unmediated data, occupied by natives waiting to be observed and studied."

If this resembled the anthropological moment of European colonial encounters, governing elites in Japan and South Korea after the Second World War both welcomed and promoted a dehistoricized and essentialized depiction of their cultural legacies since it reinforced existing hierarchies of power and privilege in these states. After all, as John Dower has so compellingly demonstrated in his *Embracing Defeat* (1999), the Orientalist assumptions of the American occupation forces were manipulated by the Japanese elite to create a state structure more powerful than before. Emblematic of this was the retention of the emperor whose status was never challenged. Rather than prosecuting the emperor for war crimes, General Douglas MacArthur's occupation government transformed him into the foundation stone and symbol of Japanese society! American support was equally crucial to the construction of relatively autonomous state structures in South Korea and Taiwan. In return for free access to high-income consumer markets in the United States, and for aid and military procurements, all three client governments adopted a tutelary relationship with the hegemonic power as they strove to industrialize. By the mid-seventies, however, as trade tensions with the United States began to intensify and divergences in industrial structures and labor relations between the American client states and the Euro-North American model became evident, government elites in East Asia began to capitalize on American Orientalism and attribute their economic success to their cultural legacies.

In this view, East and Southeast Asia states consistently registered very high rates of growth because their societies were firmly rooted in strong families where loyalty to the group superseded individual self-interests. The transposition of family ties to the political and corporate spheres implied an emphasis on consensus rather than confrontation and social harmony and economic development were achieved through moral principles and strong government (Robison, 1996). Since this positive reevaluation of their cultural

heritage ideologically legitimated authoritarian states and the idiom of the family licensed gender and generational inequalities in rewards and privileges, it was not coincidental that the institution of market-oriented reforms in China in 1978 was accompanied by the organization in Beijing of the first conference on Confucianism since the Revolution of 1949. Soon afterwards, when the Singaporean government decided to promote Confucian teaching in schools to counter-act what was perceived to be disruptive influences from the West, the government invited eight foreign experts — seven of whom were from the United States — to help devise an appropriate curriculum (Dirlik, 1995: 238-40). Quite insidiously, this (re-)invention of a Confucian culture in Singapore was accompanied by the suppression of the local *Peranakan* culture, created through the interaction of Chinese and Malays, with its own distinctive language and religious practices (Dirlik, 1995: 271).

The reification and reassessment of Asian cultural traditions was also reinforced by material changes in conditions of accumulation. When new technologies of production and communication facilitated an unparalleled fragmentation of manufacturing operations and the widespread spatial dispersal of part-processes, it has led to the re-emergence of patriarchally-organized sweatshops all over the world. In an age of corporate downsizing and outsourcing of work, a positive reassessment of a Confucian tradition gained resonance because the idealization of patriarchal familial hierarchies cast a patina of ideological legitimacy over relations of production in small, family-based sweatshops just as the Protestant work ethic was the ideological expression of production relations in an earlier epoch. Confucianism in this sense is the articulation in East Asian vernaculars of the narrative of capitalism as regional corporate elites made their own distinctive contributions to the history of capitalism and by its emphasis of hard work and education, and its respect for authority and filial loyalty towards the collective group, inequalities based on gender and generation were obscured (Dirlik, 1994; Greenhalgh, 1994).

What is especially noteworthy in this Confucian revival, as Dirlik has pertinently underlined, is that it homogenizes and essentializes both Confucianism and East Asian societies more generally. Rather than conceptualizing culture as an historically evolving phenomenon, it is de-historicized and conceptually refrigerated. Simultaneously, the binary opposition created between East and West also de-historicizes and reifies the West:

Thus, the West is individualistic against the communalism of East Asia, as if individualism does not have a history. Chinese are distinguished by their familism, as if 'Westerners' never heard of the idea; it is hardly ever

acknowledged that this may be a privileging of a patriarchal family structure. Chinese society is hierarchical, as if 'Westerners' have reached the pinnacles of equality (Dirlik, 1995: 264-65).

Equally importantly, while a reappraisal of Confucian values is often portrayed as a repudiation of the Weberian thesis — that Confucianism was an obstacle to the development of capitalism in China — in practice, this 'repudiation' amounts to little more than Weberizing Confucianism — in other words, finding in Confucianism traits similar to those that Weber had identified in protestantism, and thereby 'demonstrating' that what Weber had diagnosed as obstacles to capitalism are in fact dynamic forces of a different kind of capitalism (Dirlik, 1995: 267).

This 'self-Orientalizing' procedure served to legitimate existing hierarchies of power and privilege in East and Southeast Asia and it is not surprising that the most ardent proponents of 'Confucian' values — or 'Asian' values when no plausible claim to a Confucian legacy existed as in the case of Mahathir Mohamad's Malaysia — were the most authoritarian leaders and regimes (see Mahbubani, 1995). Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew even contended that "[T]he exuberance of democracy leads to undisciplined and disorderly conditions which are inimical to development" (quoted in Rahim, 1998: 62).

When federal grants to US universities began to peter out by the mid-seventies, governments of East and South East Asian states seized the opportunity to fund area studies programs and thereby influence American foreign policy just as trade tensions intensified between them and the United States. Investigating grants channeled by South Korean presidents Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan through private foundations, a US House of Representatives study discovered that grants were given to the University of California at Berkeley on the explicit understanding that Korean politics be excluded from the university's Korean Studies program. Similarly, it was uncovered that a vice provost at the University of Washington had promised the military government a veto over faculty appointments to the Korean Studies program. Even after democratization, the South Korean government has been endowing professorships, creating fellowships, and sponsoring Korean Studies programs in a number of universities in West Europe and the United States.

The government of Taiwan has also been using grants to project its influence and in 1996, a government-controlled foundation withdrew a \$450,000 grant to the University of Michigan in retaliation for a senior Michigan academic supporting the 'one China policy.' Earlier, the Taiwanese government

had withdrawn a \$400,000 grant from Columbia University for giving 'unwarranted' prominence to Taiwanese dissidents and Harvard University had been compelled to return \$40,000 to the Taiwan government as it objected to the university's choice of a lecturer for a major address (Soley, 1998: 234-36). In times of fiscal constraint, these chilling examples made many universities perhaps over-cautious and over indulgent of their benefactors' sensitivities. Of course, in influencing area studies scholarship, these East Asian states were merely following a trend instigated by successive US administrations during the Cold War and copied by Middle Eastern and South Asian governments and diasporas (Simpson, 1998; Chomsky et al., 1997).

Be that as it may, though claims of a 'Confucian' capitalism did not challenge unilinear narratives of modernity, culturalist and particularist explanations for the dynamism of East and Southeast Asian economies were especially appealing to both Asian Studies experts and disciplinary specialists. If the dynamism of these economies was due to their peculiar cultural heritages, it highlighted the importance of Asian Studies scholarship as a means to translate and mediate between Asian and Western societies. Their ability to interpret Asian cultures gained them access to policy makers and research funds and their courses attracted increasing numbers of students seeking skills to do business in Asia, especially when the waning of the Cold War and the debt crisis of the 1980s led to a sharp decline in funds to other area studies programs. Harootunian and Naoki Sakai (1999: 615-18) also charge that editors of major journals such as the *Journal of Japanese Studies* and *Monumenta Nipponica* routinely reject articles on the basis that they represent the Japanese inaccurately — implying that there is a correct or accurate way to represent the Japanese and that translation is an ideologically-neutral and transparent technical operation, a premise that has been at the root of Asianists' dismissal of Said's critique of Orientalism (see Palat, 1996a). Conversely, as cultural legacies were inherently not transferable, the East Asian pattern did not provide a 'model' that could be applied elsewhere and disciplinary specialists were absolved from the need to revise their unilinear narratives of progress towards a Eurocentric modernity.

The consequence of this intellectual division of labor, though, was that it continued to exoticize the experiences of the peoples of Asia. This is vividly illustrated by Clifford Geertz's reaction to the massive popular protests in Indonesia in April and May 1998 that eventually led to President Suharto's ouster:

The whole thing has a structure, a plot, in terms of how regimes

change. The king loses his power, and there's disorder in the realm and there are attacks on him. And then slowly the old guy goes out and the new guy comes in. There's almost a staged scenario for how a dynasty ends and to me this looks eerily like it (quoted in Kristof, 1998).

In casting the unseating of Suharto in cyclical terms, as merely the latest re-enactment of an endless Javanese saga, not only does Geertz not breathe a word about the wider nexus of economic linkages that undermined Suharto's regime but he also continues to emphasize the fantastic and exotic nature of Javanese politics. Veneal as the Suharto regime may have been, the hollowing out of the rupiah was caused by an intricate web of cross-border financial flows over which the regime had little control. What is particularly noteworthy in this regard is that Geertz, even though he is not an expert on contemporary political economy, is perfectly willing to offer an explanation of the Indonesian crisis. In other words, befitting a true Orientalist, he can proffer expert opinions on issues in which he has no special expertise only because he can make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type; and, above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because nothing in the Orient seems to resist one's powers (Said, 1985: 86).

If this seems unduly harsh, consider whether an anthropologist specializing on the peoples of the Appalachian mountains would be asked for an expert opinion on the U.S. trade deficit.

Paradoxically, despite the well-entrenched orthodoxy that essentialized, dehistoricized, and conceptually refrigerated East Asian cultures, the proliferation of scholarship on the region has fractured notions of timeless unitary cultures in China, Japan, and Korea. However, the riotous compartmentalization of bodies of research and debate by national, disciplinary, and chronological boundaries quarantined these investigations within narrow enclosures and insulated reigning orthodoxies from localized challenges. The corpus of Orientalist texts reducing the cultural traditions of Asians to a few timeless axioms had, through "the restorative citation of antecedent authority" (Said, 1985: 176) become so authoritative, that discordant findings were easily dispatched to obscure footnotes, of interest only to narrow circles of specialists. While it is beyond the scope of this article to compile an inventory of the plethora of studies indicating ever-finer discriminations and distances among allegedly monocultural national traditions in East Asia, a few examples would suffice to indicate the range and fluidity of cul-

tural processes in China, Japan, and Korea.

Probing the carapace of a homogenous Han ethnic identity in China, Emily Honig (1996) has demonstrated that once native-place networks are seen as socially constructed categories, a variety of significant ethnic distinctions emerge into daylight. Native place identities not only served as a metaphor for class, but they were also highly malleable as individuals could choose which generation's home was to be designated as the native place. And Evelyn Rawski's work indicates that when southern and coastal populations had little chance of preferment under the Qing, they often created a putative Han identity for themselves (Wigen, 1999). Far from Sinification being a relentless process, studies have also shown that when Hokkien men married aboriginal women in Taiwan, it was not unusual for the men to adopt aboriginal customs, dress, and names (Wigen, 1999). If ethnic identity is ascribed not merely by racial or religious markers but more broadly by perceived differences, regional differences between the people of the Chulla provinces in southwest Korea and those of the Gyongsang provinces in the environs of Seoul have been especially pronounced in recent years (Byong-Je Jon, 1990).

The promotion of regional differentiation within the shell of formal unity, John Fitzgerald (1994: 27-28) has argued, was the key to the longevity of China as a political formation:

The state insisted upon a high degree of formal similarity in its bureaucratic procedures and ritual practices, not because it feared internal differentiation, but out of fear that undifferentiated patterns of heterodox belief could at any time sweep across communities and override the barriers of local differentiation which served to contain them. The Empire tolerated variety among localities because it feared mass horizontal communication of the kind we now associate with political nationalism (emphasis in the original).

This observation highlights the fact that before the invention of the census and the map, identities of individuals were "distributed in several different social practices: a kind of layering" in which his or her links to 'native-place,' village of residence, craft or occupation, and kinship would all have figured in "context-dependent fashion" as individuals were not exclusively one of these things, nor under pressure to yield an undeniable lexical ordering of such features. It was not only individual identity which was plural and flexible; the structure of identities in the world itself was fuzzy in a related sense. ... Traditional societies arrange identities in the way colours are arranged in a spectrum, one shading off into another, without revealing

closed systems with clear demarcatable boundaries (Kaviraj, 1994: 116-17).

Sudipta Kaviraj compellingly argues that even though individuals in these societies operated within intricately detailed classificatory systems, they could not “generate a global picture of the spaces in which social groups lived” without the new cognitive maps created by the census and the map. It follows that the sort of deep horizontal comradeship denoted by modern national identities presupposed the nation state. *Ergo*, national cultures are a product of modernity rather than pristine survivals from antiquity.

This is illustrated in the case of Japan where Mary Elizabeth Berry (1997) has argued that political consolidation in Tokugawa Japan was accompanied by increasing cultural differences manifesting themselves in distinctive styles of clothing and architectural styles, diverse diets and vocabularies. Even though eighteenth-century Japanese accounts of the Ainu bears more than a passing resemblance to early European accounts of tribal societies in Africa or Latin America, Tessa Morris-Suzuki notes that there was widespread awareness that the Ainu shared a common ancestry with the Japanese and that many of the people of northern Honshu were descended from the Ainu. Assimilation of the Ainu of Tsugaru and Nanbu in northern Honshu also suggests that rather than being a matter of blood, ‘Japaneseness’ was something that could be created (Morris-Suzuki, 1994: 10-11). Yet, if Japaneseness was equated with life-styles and the Ainu were classified lower on the evolutionary scale because of their hunting and gathering life-style, she argues that their incorporation into Japanese society had led to their ‘de-agrarianization.’ This counter-intuitive process, she shows, stemmed from the breach of their self-sufficient economy. Hence, they reconstituted themselves as a hunter-gatherer society to capitalize on their ‘comparative advantage.’ This perpetuation of their difference, nevertheless, suggests a fluidity of cultural forms that undermines de-historicized and essentialist conceptions of Japanese culture. In a similar vein, historians like Amino Yoshihiko and Nishikawa Nagao have underlined the diverse ethnic origins of the Japanese and the multiplicity of lifestyles within the archipelago (Amino Yoshihiko, 1992; Wigen, 1999). The notion of Japaneseness in the sense of a national culture, was hence a relatively recent development. Morris-Suzuki (1995: 761-63) argues that term *bunka* acquired its present connotation as a unique Japaneseness in the 1920s. Prior to that it had denoted ‘tools of civilization’ and had often been equated with ‘Westernization’ by the Meiji reformers.

Similarly, James Palais has argued that nationalism originated in Korea as a response to Western imperialism and Japanese colonization in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jun Sang-In (1999: 197-98) has also argued that though Confucianism certainly emphasized education, mass education in East Asia was at best a nineteenth-century phenomenon and in Korea itself it was introduced by Christian missionaries and Japanese colonizers. Finally, broad value-systems can incorporate vibrant heterodox ideas leading Kim Dae Jung to claim that “[t]here are no ideas more fundamental to democracy than the teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Tonghak” (Kim Dae Jung, 1994).

Nevertheless, the institutionalization of Asian Studies and its pronounced idiographic nature has meant that these findings rarely intrude into broader policy discussions. In the first instance, the ever-narrower focus of inquiries and the triumph of micro-perspectives have meant that it is increasingly difficult to involve scholars of different eras or countries in the same debates. Disciplinary divisions serve to further compound the difficulties of amending received perceptions with the results of new research. Culturalist explanations for the economic achievements of East and Southeast Asian states also gained plausibility because the reigning neo-classical orthodoxy was quite unable to account for them as indicated by the routine characterization of their performance as ‘miraculous.’ Finally, Morris-Suzuki (1995: 772) also suggests that the breakneck pace of growth also rendered the notion of an unchanging cultural essence attractive to the peoples of the region. The same search for an anchor in a rapidly-changing and racially-charged environment may explain attempts by wealthy Asian diasporas in the West to increasingly fund cultural studies of their home countries.

THIS EARTH OF MANKIND

To do something interdisciplinary it’s not enough to choose a ‘subject’ (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one.

– Roland Barthes (quoted in Clifford, 1986: 1)

Precisely because explanations for the rapid growth of economies along Asia’s Pacific Rim were largely couched in culturalist terms, proponents of an ‘Asian capitalism’ were rendered theoretically disarmed by vertiginous fall of these economies during the Crash of 1997-98. Though they were unable to respond theoretically to Tarullo’s taunt that their experiences had not repealed “the laws of economics,” these ‘laws’ themselves remained inadequate since the historical experiences of the Asian economies were not

incorporated within the theoretical frame of reigning orthodoxies (see Johnson, 1988; Amsden, 1992). After all, this is why their economic performances were termed 'miraculous' suggesting that they were not susceptible to rational analyses! Or, as Jagdish Bhagwati once put it: "It is not entirely wrong to agree with the cynical view that India's misfortune was to have brilliant economists: an affliction that the Far Eastern super-performers were spared" (quoted in Khilnani, 1999: 97).

The inadequacy of neo-classical economics to analyze the Crash of 1997-98 is illustrated by the IMF economists and Western analysts attributing the meltdown to high levels of corporate debt in the East Asian 'miracles' and to their banks not adhering to prudential lending protocols. However, as Robert Wade and Frank Veneroso (1998) have pointedly argued, government support and access to loans at preferential — even negative — interest rates were essential for the South Korean *chaebol* (industrial conglomerates) to challenge well-established American and West European corporations in some of the most difficult markets in the world. Retained corporate earnings and equity markets were simply insufficient to generate the resources necessary to launch a concerted attack on major world industries, in consumer electronics or automobiles for example. Indeed, the fact that companies from no other low- and middle-income economy have established beachheads in these technologically-sophisticated markets is testimony to the veracity of this proposition.

However, despite the differences separating them from the IMF economists, Wade and Veneroso also share with them the assumption that the economic performance of states can be analytically isolated from the broader relational networks in which they are located. This insistence is all the more remarkable given both the constant invocation of 'globalization' as an all-purpose explanation for all manner of things — at least until *El Niño* came along — and the inter-relatedness of structures of accumulation along Asia's Pacific shores denoted by the popularity of the designation 'Asia-Pacific.' Networks of accumulation were so integrated that by the early 1990s, intra-Asian trade had surpassed that across the Pacific (Islam & Chowdhury, 1997: 11-16; Katzenstein, 1997: 3-4; Kwan, 1994: 4-5, 11-12, 100-01, 106-09; Selden, 1997: 321-32). And once the current contagion began in Thailand the 'flu' spread relentlessly across the region, devastating even those economies that were not as exposed to short-term loans as were the worst-affected cases of Thailand, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

In this context, the penetrating insight that the dependency theorists offered was to underline the world-relational character of the accumulation process, their insistence that the global expansion of capitalism, far from

producing similar outcomes everywhere leads to the 'development of underdevelopment.' However, even when *dependistas* posed the problem of capitalist accumulation as a world-relational process, they remained trapped within state-bounded narratives of change. Thus, though they argued that the modernization narrative was a misleading reading of the economic history even of metropolitan states since it neglected the role of colonial plunder, by advocating 'delinking' as a strategy for economic 'development' for peripheral states, analysts like Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin continued to adhere to the mythology of the construction of multiple, nationally-bounded, replicable social structures. Moreover, all too often they tended to rely on the exchange mechanism in their specification of the links between metropolis and periphery "retreating back to the political economy Marx himself sought to supersede" (Martin, 1994: 156).

When the inadequacy of the universalization of the European narrative of modernity enshrined in the theoretical categories of the modern social sciences becomes manifestly self-evident, we can get out of our current theoretical impasse only by forging genuinely world-historical, transnational, relational concepts. Rather than deriving these concepts from the reified traits of a world market or of nationally-bounded 'traditional' entities, they need to be reconstructed in their time-and-place specificity. In other words, if we are to construct a framework to debate world history, not merely as "the complete Europeanization of the earth and of mankind" in Martin Heidegger's words (quoted in Halbfass, 1988: 167-68), but as global history we need to reconstruct the histories of the several historical systems on our planet before their collusion with the capitalist world-economy (Palat, 1998).

Only if we see Cambodian, Filipino, or Sri Lankan histories not as arrested, distorted, and travestied models failing to evolve autonomously towards the universal goal of capitalist development, but as representing historically original possibilities can we appreciate the rich diversity of human experiences and imagine more emancipatory possibilities for humanity. In this vein, rather than seeing the history of China as a history of absences, Kenneth Pomeranz (2000) begins his innovative study of large-scale social change in China with the intriguing question "Why wasn't England the Yangzi Delta?" Like his colleague, Roy Bin Wong (1997), rather than accept jurisdictional units as self-evident units of analysis, Pomeranz proceeds to make a number of highly suggestive comparisons between the Yangzi Delta and England, often bringing into the frame other parts of Europe, Japan, and India as well. Whatever archaeology-like errors there may be in their accounts, by studying socio-historical changes in China on its own terms rather than as a failure to evolve autonomously towards capi-

talism, both Pomeranz and Wong take us a long way towards 'provincializing Europe' to employ Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) felicitous phrase. In a similar exercise, others have demonstrated that societies based on wet-rice cultivation in southern China, peninsular India, and Tokugawa Japan exhibit a distinctive pattern of technological change where, counter-intuitively, progress is denoted by the substitution of simpler instruments for more complex tools rather than *vice-versa* (Bray, 1983; Palat, 1995).

Pioneering analyses of more recent patterns of socio-economic change too have demonstrated the analytical power of metabolically integrating several cases within a wider organizational frame. Thus, Bruce Cumings (1987) has stressed the essential context of Japanese colonialism and American hegemony for the development of Taiwan and South Korea. Other studies on the emergence of the 'Four Dragons' have emphasized that while a *dirigiste* and relatively autonomous state and free access to high-income markets in North America provided a common context, these were refracted, modified, or otherwise amended by local class structures and cultural traditions (Bello & Rosenfeld, 1990; Haggard, 1990; Deyo, 1989). Similarly, though these 'miracle' economies all suffered from massive currency hemorrhages, studies have indicated that the impact of the Crash of 1997-98 was not uniform across the region and, more importantly, while the surface manifestations may have appeared identical the structural causes were fundamentally different (Henderson, 1999; Bello, 1998; Palat, 1999).

For our present purposes, what is most striking about these studies is that by refocusing their lens from jurisdictional entities to a larger nexus of relationships, they were able to encapsulate different patterns of social relationships within this more comprehensive frame of analysis. In contrast to the highly fractionated corpus of Asian Studies scholarship, the emphasis on larger structural linkages does not flatten differences. Unlike studies that examined narrow segments ('agrarian relations' in Java, cotton production in Jiangnan province, cotton weaving in the Coromandel), these studies attempted to cohere their component parts by reinterpreting them from a higher level of integration. In other words, by encompassing existing studies within a wider informational range, these analyses provided them with a more precise conceptual context.

Concretely, it suggests that if we are to break out of the twin confines of Orientalism and the modernization perspective, we must begin to map the distinctive patterns of social evolution across Asia. Rather than comparing the trajectories of individual states with a normative model derived from the erroneous rendition of the English 'stages of growth,' and casting the problem of economic change in terms of why Korea, Bangladesh, or

Myanmar did not develop like England, we need to trace their the multiple autonomous paths of social transformation. Similarly, rather than abstracting forms of industrial organizations and labor relations from the broader relational networks in which they were embedded, we need to locate the recuperation of Confucian value-systems within the context of the fragmentation of manufacturing operations into part-processes and the associated revival of a wide range of subcontracting, part-time, temporary forms of self-employment, including family- and kin-based sweatshops.

It follows that if we are to fracture the Orientalist mould of Asian Studies, we need to locate our investigations not in narrow parochial frames of inquiry determined by *a priori* units of analysis, but within the broadest frameworks possible when the units of analysis are constructed during the inquiry itself. This implies in the first instance that we frame our operational questions not by reference to a reified and dehistoricized Western model, but with reference to patterns of change in neighboring societies. Rather than complacently accepting the authoritative weight of Orientalist conceptions of societies other than our own, we need to attend to new studies with greater care. Listening to debates on culture among South Asianists may provide East Asianists with an archive of analytical tools which they can selectively access to critically analyze Chinese or Korean cultures. Chinese patterns of industrialization, or the Japanese essay in colonialism, or corporate strategies of South Korean conglomerates, in turn can provide South Asianists with new conceptual tools.

These considerations also make it imperative for us to recast labor /capital relations from its narrow mooring in the wage relation, not only for Asian societies but also for Euro-North American societies. For instance, while Marx (1977: 270-80) had equated wage levels to the necessary costs of the reproduction of labor power, these 'necessary costs' were left indeterminate as 'historical and moral elements' peculiar to each country entered into their composition.⁷ Such formulations not only obscured the high levels of non-waged contributions to the necessary cost of the reproduction of labor even in the heartlands of capitalism, but also produced an invidious, male-centered bifurcation between 'productive,' waged work and 'unproductive,'

⁷"...the number and extent of [the laborer's] so-called necessary requirements, as also the manner in which they are satisfied, are themselves products of history, and depend therefore to a great extent on the level of civilization attained by a country; in particular they depend on the conditions in which, and consequently on the habits and expectations with which, the class of free workers has been formed. In contrast, therefore, with the case of other commodities, the determination of the value of labor-power contains a historical and moral element" (Marx, 1977: 275).

domestic work as feminist scholars have demonstrated (see Scott, 1988). However, precisely because production networks spanned state boundaries and encompassed both peripheral and core zones, and included not only formal units of production but a variety of informally-organized units, it does not suffice simply to add new elements to the costs of reproduction of the labor force.

To devise adequate theoretical categories we need to relate waged and non-waged forms of labor by arguing that the restructuring of household structures and kinship relations were integral elements of the ongoing processes of the capitalist world-economy. This conceptualization “requiring the specification in different locales and times of the gendered and generational antinomies of household relationships, the configuration of labor and commodity production within the boundaries of the household, and the reproduction of labor through the pooling of resources” (Martin, 1994: 163) from both waged and unwaged forms of labor synthesizes a host of compartmentalized bodies of research and debate ranging from micro-level ethnographic investigations of patriarchal structures of family and kinship relationships, to studies on labor force formation and ‘petty commodity production.’

From this vantage point, non-egalitarian hierarchies of privilege and power appear *not* as residual forms of social relations destined to disappear with the spread of capitalism as modernization theorists would have us believe, nor as ‘precapitalist’ anachronisms as some contemporary variants of Marxism would have it, but as forms of social relations that are crucially shaped and molded by the spread of capitalism. Thus, for instance, several studies of the caste system in India have shown that colonial rule gave a fixity to these structures of social stratification that they never had had before the incorporation of India into the capitalist world-system (see Dirks, 1987; Dirks, 1992; Ahmad, 1991). In other words, rather than conceptually freezing the traditions of non-Western peoples — the Confucianism of East Asia or the caste-structures of South Asia — either as anachronistic survivals, or as the representations of a more authentic and pristine past, they are to be seen as a cluster of responses to the onslaught of capitalism, their traditions and cultures representing *not* a transhistorical primordial ‘essence,’ but the symbolic resolutions of political struggles.

Differently put, if the reorganization of the institutional sites of knowledge-production in the mid-nineteenth century was the ideological reflection of the European subordination of peoples elsewhere in the world and the rise of nation-states in Europe and the settler colonies in the Americas and Australasia, the ongoing reorganization of production processes, cultur-

al forms, and population transfers we invoke by the idiom of globalization and multiculturalism requires an equally fundamental transformation of the organizational forms of knowledge production. When manufacturing operations are fragmented into part-processes and widely dispersed across the world, when massive population transfers changes ethnic compositions in kaleidoscopic-fashion, when brand names no longer reflect the country of manufacture, and when state structures are increasingly unable to protect the livelihoods of their subjects, the inadequacy of nation-states as units of analysis becomes transparent. Recuperating historical possibilities of social change in Asian societies, in this context, paves the way for us to begin imagining alternative scenarios for the future.

In short, while the creation of Asian Studies programs has led to a profusion of empirical information, it has not contributed to an assimilation of the distinct historical experiences and contemporary realities of the peoples of that vast continent into our theoretical categories which remain mired in their narrow Euro-North American referential bases. Diversity of research environments meant that scholarship on these societies proceeded in narrow and self-referential compartments rather than in an integrated and comprehensive manner. Meanwhile, the dominance of the modernization perspective meant that 'development' was conceived as a convergence to Westernized forms of industrialization. When it became apparent that patterns of industrial organization and labor relations were not converging towards a normative standard derived from a Euro-North American experience, this was explained as a manifestation of a timeless Asian culture. If such explanations served authoritarian patriarchs in the several Southeast and East Asian states, it perpetuated Orientalized conceptions of Asian societies as reified, monolithic, dehistoricized entities. By attributing their rapid economic growth to their cultural legacies, these proponents of an Asian capitalism were theoretically disarmed by the precipitous fall of these economies in the Great Crash of 1997-98. Rather than subscribe once again to a unilinear narrative of history derived from a distorted rendition of English development, this article has argued for a new strategy of comparative analysis to recuperate specific patterns of socio-economic transformation in the several social systems in Asia before their incorporation into the capitalist world-system and their subsequent patterns of large-scale social change.

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