INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN ASIA: CULTURE, NATION, AND STATE

by

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It is a real pleasure to be back at George Washington University and a great honor to be delivering this year's Gaston Sigur Annual Lecture. David Shambaugh reminded me that in Washington people are mainly interested in policy questions. I knew that that was the case in 1993 when I spent the spring semester at GW, but I had the impression from the news media that people inside the Beltway were now only interested in sex! In any case, I am going to steer clear of China policy for you have here in Washington in addition to a stalwart band of government specialists an awesome collection of academic specialists on China led by David, Harry Harding, Mike Lampton, Nick Lardy, Marty Whyte and others. Furthermore, policy for Asia is in pretty good shape as we look forward to the second Clinton-Jiang summit, and with the IMF running interference for Washington in the rest of East and Southeast Asia. I am not sure what to make of the prospects of more American lecturing to the Japanese on how they should manage their economy, because after several decades of telling the Japanese that they should keep separate their banks and their brokerage houses, now when that turns out to be precisely right, what should we do but allow such mergers in this country!

What I want to do tonight is to step back from the immediate policy world and explore some cultural factors which I believe to be relevant for understanding the behavior of Asian states. First, I want to note how the Asian state system is rather different from the Western system which we tend to use as the basis for International Relations theory-building, and thus for many of our instinctive assumptions about foreign relations. Second, I want to examine the character of the nation-state as it has taken form in Asia. I will argue that the nation-state was not

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a natural development in Asia, where quite different forms of traditional authority existed. The modern nation-state came out of the European experience and was culturally transmitted to Asia. I will thus deal with, first, the problems of nationalism and national identity, and second, the distinctive characteristics of state-society relations in key Asian countries.

I am sure you have had quite enough of the "politically correct" police telling you that we are too ethnocentric, and when it comes to Asia we remain too Eurocentric. Their message is that we can overcome our biases by flattering Asians by talking about a looming "Pacific Century." My message, however, is that there are in fact some significant differences and that it *is* inappropriate to apply to Asia concepts and theories that were shaped out of the European experience but which can operate to make us insensitive to special Asian characteristics.

Asia is Not Europe

The modern nation-state was a European invention, and it was in a sense imported into, if not forced onto, Asia. Both Western scholars and policymakers have tended automatically to apply to Asia concepts which were shaped by European history and which constitute what has been called the Westphalian model. The central constructs of the model are that the international system operates in a condition of anarchy, and hence security has to be the paramount concern of all states. Therefore, all states must seek to maximize their power, until countered by the power of another state or combination of states. Consequently the balance of power process is a "law of nature," as fundamental as the law that water runs down hill. This is the theory advanced by both the Realist and the Neo-Realist/Structuralist schools of IR theory, especially as expounded by Hans Morganthau and Kenneth Waltz. John Mersheimer is now finishing a new book which applies this model to the post-Cold War world.

Asians historically did not have such a system of international relations in large part because their basic unit of government was not the nation-state. They had independent empires, kingships, shogunates, and tribal groupings. All these entities did not fit together to form a coherent, interactive system

in which changes in one set of relationships could be expected to cause changes in the others, as occurred in Europe. There was no system-wide balancing of power or of bandwagoning. Note the contrast between Japan and Britain: both islands just off of their respective continents, but Britain played a balancer role and thereby got the title of "Perfidious Albion," while Japan remained largely in isolation, except for erratic interactions with continental Asia, as when the Japanese tried to conquer all of it – something Britain never sought to do. Japan still does not have a coherent role in Asia and remains unsure of what its systemic position should be in any Asian system of states.

There is no need to dwell long on China's historic role as the Middle Kingdom in which their rulers were more concerned about dignity, status, and ritual than power relationships. True China did engage in conquests, but the game was more that of suzerain and vassal, of tribute missions and the granting of audiences. S.C.M. Paine's account of the clash of the Chinese and Russian empires in *The Imperial Rivals* makes clear that the Chinese placed a higher value on ritual and dignity than territory. After the Treaty of Nanking ceded Hong Kong to Britain, China lost more territory to Russia than all of the United States east of Mississippi, yet for 150 years the Chinese have focused their sense of being mistreated on the Western Europeans who had concessions in China, and not on the loss of territory to Russia. The Chinese have kept alive the memory of the burning of the Summer Palace by the British and French expeditionary force, which was sent to revenge the killing of some members of the British diplomatic negotiating mission who had been imprisoned in the Summer Palace. The Chinese forget that at that time the Russian diplomat Count Nikolai Ignat'ev conned the Chinese with the story that the real goal of the British was to advance up the Liaotung peninsula and take over the heart of Manchuria. He promised that Russia could prevent this from happening, if China would cede to Russia all the territory down to the banks of the Amur and Ussuri rivers. This was one of the great con tricks in all diplomatic history, but it did not seem to pain the Chinese as much as the symbolism of the "Unequal Treaties."[1]

[1] One of the curiosities of history is that the British commander of the British expeditionary force was an Elgin, the son of Lord Elgin of the marbles fame. It seems that plundering others' grandeur ran in the family. For a rich history

The story in Southeast Asia before the Europeans arrived was one of the rise and fall of kingdoms and dynastic wars of conquest between separate and isolated kingdoms. There was never a Southeast Asian system of interstate relations. Then during colonial times the external focus of each colony was on only its imperial master, and not even on its neighbors. Thailand did remain independent by playing off Britain and France and by inviting advisors from a variety of Western countries.

During the Cold War Washington tried to introduce into Asia the concept of balancing power, but the effort to mobilize a balancing alliance against China and USSR failed, for SEATO was in no way comparable to NATO which adhered to the European tradition of power balancing.

To this day Washington is left with a congeries of separate bilateral relationships in Asia. American policy is oriented to the separate countries, and with each one our single-minded goal is just to "improve" relations. There seems to be no possibility of formulating a grand design. We have our separate policies with Japan and China, and we seek to "improve" relations with each as if the other did not exist. We have even been so compulsive in seeking to "improve" relations with North Korea that we have verged on forgetting that we have an ally in the South. Needless to say, this fixation on the importance of just "improving" relations can be self-defeating for American diplomacy, since all China or any other Asian state needs to do is to proclaim that some U.S. action has "set back" relations, and thereby make Washington feel guilty and on the defensive.

Historically in Europe there was a tradition of statesmen being able to make fine distinctions in evaluating relative power. Today in Asia there is no consensus about the significance of power, and no common reading of what is, or should be the role of power in interstate relations. The United States has over-whelming

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of the Summer Palace and of its destruction, including how after the British and French forces moved through it was the surrounding Chinese peasants who happily took over the looting, see: Geremie R. Barme, "The Garden of Perfect Brightness. A Life In Ruins," The 57th George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology, East Asian History, No.11, June 1996.

military superiority, but even pathetically weak North Korea and Burma feel that they can thumb their noses at the United States.[2]

Unable to fully appreciate Asian political cultures, Washington has not been able to transform its overwhelming power into effective authority. We have not been able to design appropriate methods to match the techniques of gunboat diplomacy which bolstered Pax Britannia and which gave the world stability for a century.[3] Some critics have suggested that American policy is driven by a craving to be liked rather than respected or feared. Indeed, they would say that our egalitarian spirit compels us to wish that we could just be equals with others, just one of the boys, and that we lack the essential skills for managing a superior-inferior relationship. This could be a manifestation of what has been said to be the craving of American fathers to be a "pal" to their sons, and their vulnerability to any suggestion that they have been "unfair," which stands in contrast to practices in most Asian cultures in which a prerogative that goes with a father's authority includes the pleasures of being unfair and of whimsically playing favorites.

There has been some loose talk that, in the post-Cold War world, economic power will replace military might as the key element in international relations. Yet, on this dimension, the United States is also orders of magnitude greater than the others, but we are still unable to exploit any presumed advantage. Congress keeps believing that there is such a thing as economic muscle, but every time it tries to use sanctions the result is only more frustrations. In the three years from 1993 to 1996 the United States applied sanctions a total of 61 times, but

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[2] With respect to North Korea we have a situation unheard of in European history: the expectation that the weaker a state becomes the more likely it is to go to war. In Europe the rule has always been "Power on the rise, prepare for trouble," but in Asia it seems to be, "Power in decline, take warning." I am told that there are people in the Pentagon who in all earnestness can picture in their mind's eye a Politburo meeting in Pyongyang at which one official says, "I think we have become weak enough to start a war," but another says, "No, I think we can get even weaker." And thus the danger of war recedes.

[3] In part the problem is that we can't get around our squeamishness about what we euphemistically call "collateral damage" if we were to unleash our military might. One can easily imagine the reactions of a typical Colonel Blimp who once manned the forces supporting Pax Britannia: "I say, Jolly good show, what you call collateral damage -- the more the merrier."

in nearly every attempt the result was what the Chinese call, "Picking up a rock to drop it on one's toes," in that the only ones hurt were American businesses. The failure of economic success to count for more has been an even greater disappointment to Asians. Japan and the East Asians with their "miracle" economies, and even China have all been deeply frustrated, to the point of spinning out conspiracy theories, because they have not received the rewards they expected and thought they deserved for their economic accomplishments.

In sum, inter-state behavior in Asia has not operated according to the rules of International Relations theories as advanced by either the Realist or the Neo-Realist schools. How wrong the theories have been can be seen in Waltz's prediction that with the collapse of the Soviet Union we could expect to see a new power arrangement in Asia and the Pacific with the United States and Japan as the two principal antagonistic poles. In reality what has happened is that without the military threat of the Soviet Union it has, paradoxically, turned out that Japan is more willing to cooperate as a military ally of the United States than it had been when there was a real threat.

The Search for National Identity

The source of the differences between the European and Asian patterns lie in their different histories and cultures. To understand the operation of foreign relations in Asia it is necessary to appreciate the fact that the concept of the nation-state was foreign to the region and only came with the Western impact and modernization. The various Asian countries have all taken on the forms and institutions of the modern nation-state, but in most cases there has yet to be a coherent bonding of state and nation. The process of nation building in connection with state institutionalization has not yet resolved fundamental questions about national identity and of how state and society should be integrated.

It may seem outlandish to suggest that Asians have a problem with national identity and nationalism, especially given the incontrovertible fact that Asians have great historic cultures and intensely strong feelings of cultural identity. The problem is in linking those sentiments with the institutions of the modern

state. As I have said elsewhere, "China is a civilization pretending to be a nation-state," and this is true of much of the rest of Asia. Thus, while throughout Asia people have a strong sense of ethnic, cultural, religious, and even racial identity, they still have problems as to what are the values, ideals, and principles that they want to hold up as the essence of their national identities. These should be the values and ideals which give the state its legitimacy, but which in doing so must also set very strict limits on the actions of the state leadership. The ultimate test of nationalism is the constraints it places on the actions of the rulers because some actions would violate the national ideals.

The Chinese today clearly have a xenophobic sense of the difference between the Chinese "we" and the foreign "they," but they are unable to articulate what ideals, principles and values they stand for as a nation. For nearly a century the Chinese people have been exposed to relentless attacks on their great cultural heritage; first it was the intellectuals of the May Fourth movement who denounced Confucianism and praised Western "Dr. Science and Mr. Democracy," and then for fifty years all the "brain-washing" powers of the Communist Party were directed toward scathing attacks on all aspects of traditional Chinese civilization. As a result the Chinese have had to learn to live with the alien philosophy of Marxism-Leninism as the supreme principles for state legitimacy. It is an amazing political fact that while China has one of the world's richest folk cultures, not a single Chinese national political leader has sought to exploit the symbolism of that popular culture. Today the Chinese feel that in spite of being a country on the move, they are not getting the international respect that is their proper due, but when you ask Chinese officials what they believe others should find honorable about China as a modern nation, they find it hard to come up with worthy principles. "To get rich is glorious" is hardly an appropriate ideal for the heirs to one of the world's greatest civilizations.

The Japanese also have a vivid sense of their uniqueness as a race and a culture, but when it comes to the content of Japanese nationalism there is also a problem. Ever since they over-did their dreams of emulating the European imperial powers and then suffered defeat and occupation, the Japanese have had confused feelings about patriotism and are unsure of

what sentiments they should have for their nation-state. They have been uncomfortable about singing their national anthem at school commencements. The Nagano winter Olympics gave them a chance to revel in their traditional religion-based culture and to wave their flag, but in the main the Japanese remain uneasy about expressing any feelings of nationalism. Or when they do it is likely to be an irrational explosion, as for example, flocking to a ludicrous movie that makes Tojo into a benign figure, interested only in freeing Asians from Western colonial rule.

In Southeast Asia it was nationalism that led the way to independence from colonial rule, and thus it would seem that there should be no problems of national identity there. Yet, what started out as dreams of melding the best of their traditions with the best values of their former colonial masters to create new wonder countries has over time turned out to be disappointing realities which seemed to combine the worst of both worlds. The nationalist leaders sought to monopolize power and thus what had been the idealistic visions of a national movement became in time the partisan tools of corrupt rulers. In all of the countries there are powerful cultural traditions which give the peoples strong senses of cultural identity, but these have not been transformed into feelings of national identity. Thailand with its beloved king and the symbols of Buddhism and royalty has the least problems, while Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines have extensive ones. For a time economic successes helped to mask the difficulties, but then, when the 1997 financial crisis came, the chip-on-the-shoulder responses of Mahathir in particular showed the lack of a mature nationalism. The shallowness of Indonesian nationalism can be seen in their "national car" which is made entirely in South Korea and is "national" only because it does not have to pay any tariffs. Moreover, stripped of Suharto's autocratic rule, Indonesia suddenly appears vulnerable to fragmentation.

Nearly all of the Asian countries in their search for national identities need to create new national myths through which they can express their sense of national pride. Such myths must not only tap their distinctive traditional legacies, but also express values which are universal, and hence can command the respect of the outside world. If a country is to realize its natural quest for honor, deference, esteem, respect and prestige then its

nationalism must embrace some universally recognized values. When a national identity lacks such a universalistic dimension the result is the quaintness of, say, an African tribe that has only curiosity value in the eyes of others.

Constructive national myths must be based on the collective memories of a people. It is memory that energizes fantasy and stimulates the imagination, and hence releases the creative powers of myth-building. But when there is a repression of memory, the creative process is inhibited and thus it cannot be truly creative. We know from clinical psychology that when memory is blocked or suppressed, fantasy is inhibited, and there can be no creative workings of the imagination. The sorrow of much of Asia is that there are for historical reasons profound blockages of the collective memories in country after country.[4]

The dead grip of Marxism-Leninism paralyzes the Chinese spirit and prevents any process of rethinking their recent history. The Chinese now have blocked memories over the horrors of the Great Leap, the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen. Indeed, the real tragedy of Tiananmen is that without a "reversal of the verdict" that the event was the work of a handful of bad people, the Chinese people are prevented from getting on with the dialogue necessary for articulating a new vision for Chinese nationalism. The Chinese are left without an uplifting sense of their collective identity, but rather must operate with only a shallow, essentially racist form of xenophobia which encourages a prickly distrust of outsiders. Some day maybe a Chinese leader will feel free enough to speak out like Eduard Shevardnadze did to the Communist Party leadership when the "new thinking" was taking place in the Soviet Union: "The belief that we are a great country and that we should be respected for this is deeply ingrained in me, as in everyone. But great in what? Territory? Population? Quantity of arms? Or the people's troubles? The individual's lack of rights? Life's disorderliness? In what do we, who have the highest infant mortality rate on the planet, take pride? It is not easy answering

[4] I have analyzed in some detail the problems of blocked memories inhibiting the creation of new national myths in Asia in, "Memory, Imagination, and National Myths" in Gerrit W. Gong, ed., Remembering and Forgetting: The Legacy of War and Peace in East Asia, (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1996).

such questions: Who are you and who do you wish to be? A country which is feared or a country which is respected? A country of power or a country of kindness?"

Japan has its problems with blocked memories as it is still in a state of denial about World War II, and particularly the rape of Nanking, Pearl Harbor, and their general wartime role in Asia. They pretend that that history was the work of the bad "militarists" who are somehow not really related to the Japanese people of today. One of the cruelest things the Japanese have done is to deny to their former colonies of Korea and Taiwan the opportunity to work through one of the most complex "memory" problems in history – that of the colonial master-subject relationship. Much of the irrational hatred of the Koreans for Japan can be traced to the refusal of the Japanese to play their part in dealing with the memory of the colonial experience. The Japanese behavior is particularly perverse because the Japanese could take satisfaction from the fact that it has a better tutelary record than any of the European imperial powers in that all of their former colonies have become successful democracies. Yet, in contrast to the British and French who manifest pride in any noteworthy successes of their former colonies, the Japanese fail to show any signs of being a proud "father."

Civil Society, Social Capital and Civility

Beyond the problem of articulating new national myths, the Asian countries have some deeper problems of political and social development which help to explain the character of the state in the region. Indeed, at a fundamental level it is the nature of state-society relations in Asia which makes inter-state behavior there different from that in the West. To examine this problem I would like to use three interrelated concepts.

These are, first, *Civil Society,* which consists of those institutions which can assert the interests of society so as to challenge the state, or at least check state authority. Second, *Social Capital,* which is the level of trust in a society that makes voluntary associations possible, and hence it constitutes the foundation of civil society. This is the concept made popular by Robert Putnam with his "Bowling Alone" article. He noted that there has been a decline in bowling teams in America as people

now seem more inclined to bowl alone, and he associates this development with the decline in the voluntary associations that de Tocqueville observed as a key to American democracy. The third concept is that of *Civility,* which consists of the norms of human interaction which make society possible. It is the glue that holds society together for without it there would be anarchy. It is possibly the most basic concept of sociology.[5]

Civility Among Friends but Not With Strangers

All Asian cultures have elaborate norms of civility, but there are also some critical limitations. Civility standards are great with respect to ritual and custom, but weak where it counts for political behavior and nation-building. First of all, throughout Asia the rules of civility are exceedingly strong at the level of interpersonal relations among knowing people, but strikingly weak when it comes to impersonal relations. There are generally elegant standards in face-to-face relations, but few standards for relations with strangers. Note for example, that of the five relationships which Confucius said were essential for producing his ideal of a harmonious and stable society, three deal with the family, (father-son, husband-wife, and brother-brother) the fourth is neighbor-neighbor (still acquaintances) and the fifth is ruler-subject. What is striking is the absence of norms for impersonal relations. Nothing on how to conduct relations with strangers. The implied rule is that with strangers the game is to cheat them before they cheat you. This silence about strangers explains how in Chinese culture it is possible to become instant "old friends" because only among acquaintances is it possible to have civility.[6]

The strong bonding among acquaintances in Asian cultures in general does give great strength to social networks, but the striking weaknesses as far as impersonal relationships is a serious liability because these are precisely the relationships that are basic to the operations of a modern society and a modern state with open politics. The impersonal norms of

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[5] I have dealt with these three concepts in, "Civility, Social Capital, and Civil Society, Three Powerful Concepts for Understanding Asia" which will be forthcoming in The Journal of Interdisciplinary History.

[6] Some people have observed that the current American practice of instantly using first names reflects a comparable problem of a decline in American norms of civility and a need to use pretended intimacy as a cover.

civility essential for a modern society depend upon having a universalistic ethic and not the particularistic role relationships of a traditional society. The lack of norms about relations with strangers contributes to the Asian tendency to be suspicious of others who appear to be close to each others because they are inclined to believe that such parties are probably up to no good.

A second dimension of civility that is critical for state-society relations consists of the norms concerning the controlling of aggression and the management of adversarial relationships. All of the Asian societies manifest anxious concerns about any surfacing of aggression. Harmony is arguably the supreme value in Confucian cultures, and in Southeast Asia the dominant rules of conduct emphasize the need to suppress any hint of aggressive sentiments. People there are seen as being like buzz saws, easily provoked and hence dangerous, and therefore one should always repress any aggressive feelings. In Javanese culture there can be no hints of disagreement for everyone must be all smiles even when not in agreement. Clifford Geertz has elegantly described the Javanese ideal of *alus* – "pure," "subtle," "refined," "civilized" – and the horror concept of *Kaiser* – "impolite" "coarse," "vulgar." Of course the total suppression of aggression is impossible and hence the sudden explosion of people in these cultures – indeed the word "amok" is a Malay word. When confrontation is unavoidable the result can be explosive violence, as we have seen with the ending of both Sukarno's and Suharto's reigns.

The implications for state building is that in these cultures there is a constant need to suppress disagreement and to pretend to harmony. The need to avoid confrontations makes constructive open politics difficult, if not impossible. When disagreement cannot be suppressed, the only alternative is explosive demonstrations and violence. Thus, again the norms of civility fall short of being helpful for bringing together society and state to form a coherent national identity.

A third dimension of civility important for nation-building is that of superior-inferior relations. All Asian cultures have a vivid appreciation of hierarchy, for they are essentially inegalitarian cultures. Superiors know who they are, and inferiors know their place. This reduces many sources of social

tensions, for there is no need to worry over the balance in the relations, as is required in egalitarian cultures. This clarity in superior-inferior relations helps to provide a strong basis for authority in the Asian cultures.

Indeed, in most of the countries there are well-established rules about the exchanging of the dignity and deference which superiors expect to get in return for the protection and security they give to their subordinates. The exchange provides remarkable stability to superior-inferior relationships. The superior as authority asserts a claim to dignity, while subordinates manifest deference, but get in return the benefits of benevolence which is the hallmark of authority. It is this relationship that is at the base of the great Chinese political art form of feigned compliance, in which high authorities will issue their decrees and the lesser officials will hail the correctness of the decisions, but then go and do what they think is best at their locality. This was a key practice that gave stability to the Chinese imperial system over the millennia.

The Confucian ideal of the benevolent ruler is matched in Japan and Southeast Asia by their ideal of consensus in decision-making. It is significant that consensus-building needs the role of a superior figure. Anyone who has seen the Indonesian process of *gotong rojang* in operation knows that it usually takes the form of the most junior members speaking first with great enthusiasm about bold actions. Then older, and presumably wiser heads speak up, but in the end it is the senior figure who will announce the consensus – which can be totally different from anything said before. The logic is that consensus is a precious thing, not easily discerned, hence hard to spot, and therefore only an exceptional person is capable of recognizing it. In the operations of the Indonesian Parliament the prior expression of the opinions of the rank and file are dispensed with, and all that needs happen is for the leadership to announce what the "consensus" is. The members apparently feel that it is less disgraceful to be a rubber stamp than to be conspicuous nonconformists.

This need for an authoritative leader to make "consensus" work is apparent in the operations of ASEAN. In its early years, driven by the force of Lee Kuan Yew's personality and the need to put a check on Indonesia's bigger-than-others

status, the organization did have a sense of direction, but in more recent times it has not been able to operate as an effective force. Indeed, in more general terms the Asian norms of civility has colored international relations in the region in that the instinctive distrust of strangers and a general suspiciousness about status rankings have worked against the building of close alliance relationships. Diffuse distrust of others affects diplomacy in the region, not only among the Asian states but also with outsiders, especially the United States. It is more natural to idealize an "independent" foreign policy than to be a trusting ally. American diplomats instinctively strive for closeness with Asian officials, while Asians find it natural to be more standoffish. Again Japan is the main exception.

In sum, the norms of civility in Asian cultures sharpen the divide between rulers and subjects, giving rulers considerable flexibility in decision-making, but at the same time the norms keep society and state far apart. And in international relations they keep the states apart so that there is less collective or alliance actions. Weakness in norms about impersonal relations, lack of rules about adversarial relations and the management of conflicts of interests, and well established hierarchical relations, all give both society and the state separate but also remarkably stable patterns of basic relations. Finally, the inequality that is so much a part of the norms of civility in Asia is also basic to the patron-client relationships which are fundamental to the question of social capital, which we turn to next.

Social Capital - Networking and Learning to Work Together on the Basis of Trust

The concept of social capital builds on that of civility by focusing on the potential within a society for people to spontaneously come together in pursuit of their common interests. It is presumed that societies will differ as to the "amount" of such "capital" they may have for creating voluntary associations, which in turn constitutes the foundations of civil society. The key ingredient which determines the level of social

capital is basic trust; when trust is commonplace, social capital is great, when distrust prevails there will be little social capital.[7]

With the exception of Japan, all Asian cultures have major problems with trust, especially in impersonal relationships. Francis Fukuyama in his book *Trust: Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* points to the contrast between the limits of trust in Chinese culture and the more general existence of it in Japan, which he sees as basic in explaining their differences in economic growth. Adam Seligman in *The Problem of Trust* makes the significant argument that general trust came with modernity, and that traditional societies lacked generalized trust, but rather had strongly defined role relationships among knowing people.

Yet, of course, we all know about the importance of *guanxi* among the Chinese and the role of patron-client relations in the Southeast Asian countries. These would seem to provide the prototype forms for the creation of social capital. The problem of both as far as social capital is concerned is that they are not based on universalistic norms and thus are operative only on particularistic terms. Thus, *guanxi* ties together people who have some particularistic connections – they came from the same town, county, or province, went to the same school, served in the same regiment, worked in the same company.

The Chinese generally feel that *guanxi* is somehow a national embarrassment, but it is a practice that they know they cannot get along without. The problem is that they have never

[7] Robert Putnam is now working on a book-length manuscript on social capital in which he will try to counter criticisms that, while bowling leagues may be out of fashion, other forms of voluntary group activities still characterize American social life. The problem of the decline in trust can, however, be seen in other areas, such as in the rise of homelessness which in part has come about because of the disappearance of the cheap housing that was once provided by boarding houses, but which are now rare because widows and other landladies are afraid to let strangers into their homes. Another example of the supposed decline in social capital is the rise in the number of gated communities with their private security arrangements. See: Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1998). There is a conceptual problem here in that the rise in private security systems in relation to the state-provided police might be seen as a sign of increased "social capital" since they involve a form of voluntary association.

established public standards for differentiating "good" kinds of *guanxi* from "bad." All societies have to honor proper, civilized practices of reciprocity, which, however, are not to be confused with dishonorable acts of plotting, scheming and corruption. The Chinese have historically never explicitly established any standards for distinguishing between the respectable forms of networking that can produce socially productive associations and the bonds of an establishment, on the one hand, and the corrupt forms of bonding that makes possible rule by a Mafia, on the other hand. All networking thus ends up operating in what the Chinese sense to be a gray area – as happened with the operations of factional politics among cadres during the Mao era.

The problem with *guanxi* is further complicated by a profound Chinese cultural abhorrence of any assertions of self interest. The ultimate Confucian sin was that of selfishness, and of not yielding to the primacy of the collectivity. Any admission that one had material interests was seen as a manifestation of selfishness. The ruler was expected to be able to articulate the interests of all the people, who in return were expected to place their faith in his benevolence. Thus, the coming together of people to assert their private interests in the political realm was never seen as a proper activity. Interests had to be masked, and thus there was no way of openly identifying the use of *guanxi* for respectable interests as against dishonorable ones.

All of this has had profound consequences in the lack of development of a civil society in China. Although in traditional China merchant guilds existed, they could not operate as pressure groups seeking to effect policy, as they did in Europe and Japan, but rather they had to perform as protective associations which sought to get special favors in the application of laws, not in the making of laws. It would have been dishonorable for merchants to have pretended that they could usurp the imperial courts' role in defining the general interest, and therefore they focused their attention on asking the local magistrate for exemptions in the enforcement of the decrees. Thus the recognized sin of articulating interests produced the unacknowledged but universal practice of corruption.

In Southeast Asia the widespread role of patron-client relations has influenced the development of social capital.

Socialization practices throughout the region instill in people a pervasive sense of distrust of others, especially strangers, and hence the need to seek out bonding relationships with strong patrons. In Indonesia the practice of *bapakism* means that any potential leader or person in a fortunate position will soon be surrounded by clients who will voluntarily pledge their loyal support as the "children" or *anak buak* of the *bapak* or "father." One only needs to mention here the word "crony-capitalism" and the rule in Suharto's Indonesia that "The First Family comes first" to make the point that this form of social capital does not produce the kinds of voluntary associations which Putnam sees as being so essential for democracy.[8] When conditions are good the Indonesian *bapak* system can produce great stability, particularly if the *anak buaks* feel that they can exploit the authority potential of their leader for their own advantage. The system however has sever limitations when it comes to what to do about a failing father figure, as the messy ending of both Sukarno's and Suharto's reigns demonstrated. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia the combination of patron-clientism and socialization practices which instill a frightening view of the unknown, produces an intense need for bonding, but again not the open advancement of interests that is essential for social capital to operate in constructive ways.[9]

Civil Society – The Non-Existence of It

When we come finally to the question of civil society in Asia, it is apparent that while there are strong norms of civility for personal relations and widespread potential for networking, there does not exist the kind of bonding that would make it

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[8] The accounts of the dominant role that Suharto's children played in creating huge monopolies might suggest that they had exceptional entrepreneurial skills, but this was not the case. It was the entrepreneurs who sought out the children, declared themselves to be their *anak buaks* and thus established the children as figurehead *bapaks* who could provide protection for the enterprises. Now many such enterprising businesses, including some major American companies, find that what was a good arrangement under Suharto's rule has become a liability.

[9] For details on the ways in which political behavior in all of the Southeast Asian cultures are affected by the ways in which children are socialized by being frightened about the evil powers that exist in an unseen world of spooks, ghosts, and spirits, see my, Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

possible for the various interests of society to be easily mobilized to challenge the state. State and society simply operate at different levels. There is great strength in the norms of civility which give astonishing stability to social relations, but such bonding is not easily translated into anything resembling public opinion. In contrast the state has amazing freedom of initiative once it can claim a consensus exists in its favor.

This inherent tilting of power in favor of the state is readily magnified into a substantial advantage whenever an Asian state has sought to legitimize authoritarian rule. It is true that autocratic rulers, especially ruling Communist Parties, have been vigilant in suppressing or co-opting any budding of civil organizations. At the same time, however, the built-in advantages that the state has means that authoritarian rule can be remarkably stable without heavy reliance upon harsh repressive techniques. It is wrong to argue that Asians enjoy authoritarian rule and find it quite acceptable; what they find is that the state can readily make it difficult for them to organize to oppose such rule.

It is not surprising that when the economies of East Asia were in their "miracle" mode, public support for the legitimacy of the state was high; but what is indeed surprising is that when the "crisis" came and huge segments of the public took a shocking loss of wealth there was not more effective public reactions, except for explosive student demonstrations.[10] Only in Indonesia, where the faltering father figure of Suharto was too weak to withstand rioting in the streets, did the economic crisis produce a serious political upheaval. In Thailand and South Korea there was just enough democracy to relieve the strains before any substantial break-down happened.

[10] Throughout Asia governments tend to look with suspicion towards students because they are the one group who, living on their campuses, have easy access to the communications networks what can make them instantly into an effective civil society. No other potential grouping has such an advantage. But of course, the lack of any recognized legitimate channels for students to advance their protests means that violence often becomes the only way. The fact that students have this unique potential for political action also means that at times some outside party may secretly act to mobilize the students for its ulterior motives – a possibility some believe may have happened in triggering the demonstrations that forced out President Suharto.

Japan stands out as having a historic basis for civil society because, out of its history of feudal conflicts and the pattern of indebtedness of *daimyos* to merchants, there developed a tradition of interaction between political authority and significant social and economic interests. Also, in the Southeast Asian countries the early nationalists in their anti-colonial conflicts did play the role of opposing the colonial administration, but once in power the new rulers repressed any continuing growth of civil society.

In the main, Asian rulers confront relatively passive societies and have astonishing freedom of action. The Chinese government has been able to make startling policy initiatives and set out to do the impossible with few society-based constraints. There were the dramatic zigs and zags of policy under Mao, then Deng's total reversals of policy under his reforms, and now Zhu Rongji is off to another "great leap" with his boldly declared policies of cutting in half the number of state and party cadres and thereby producing 4 million angry but politically skilled people who thought they were the elite. In addition he says he will eliminate 60 plus million jobs in the state owned enterprises, thereby adding to the pool of unemployed. Finally to top it off, he says he expects to make people pay market rates for their housing at a time when the cheapest apartments being built in Beijing cost 18 times the average annual salary of people there who are accustomed to paying only $2 a month. One would think all this would be a formula for creating a huge pool of mad and mutinous people, and thus a society that would be ungovernable. But Chinese leaders are able to plunge ahead with initiatives even without any understanding of how they expect the policies can be carried out – as for example with the Three Gorges project – because they have supreme confidence that they can somehow muddle through by always "finding a way out."

Thus, the very lack of civil society gives Asian states the capacity for bold actions. None of the countries in the region would welcome the system of checks and balances of American democracy with its potential for gridlock. At the same time the weakness of civil society has its implications for the prospects for stable democracy. There may be great strength in the web of society, but there are few channels for expressing coherent

opposition or to advance collective interests, and thereby guide the state. As a result one party rule can be remarkably stable.

Conclusions: The Challenge of Bringing Together State and Society to Form a Coherent Nationalism

In pulling together these various strands of observations about civility, social capital and civil society in Asia we come up with a picture of developments that are significantly different from Western history. The norms of civility and the patterns of networking give extraordinary stability to society as a whole, but at the same time this potential for power does not get translated into an effective capacity in the society for checking the state. Instead, the state has remarkable freedom as long as it upholds a reasonably benevolent posture toward the people. The result is a strong propensity towards soft authoritarianism. However, when a leader falters, as when the *bapak* fails to be a proper and worthy father, there is no finely calibrated mechanism for society to show its displeasure and guide developments. The only alternative is for society to explode in revolt. Thus, in a paradoxical way, the two logical extremes of passivity and rebellion are in fact in close balance in several Asian societies, as both Sukarno and Suharto discovered.

As we have noted, the concept of the modern nation-state was a foreign import to Asia. Thus, while it is still endowed with many of the features of the traditional systems of rule, the state in Asia, as a result of being imported from the West, also embraces much that is highly modern. The combination has produced the peculiar mixture of soft authoritarianism and a technocratic approach to policy. The results are systems which have the potential for reasonably good governance, but which are also extremely vulnerable to corruption.

The combination of the old and the new in the character of the state has not, however, been matched by a comparable blending of the two in the formation of national identities and in the creation of new myths of nationalism. What still needs to take place is the articulation of the values, principles and ideals that each of the peoples want to have as their way of expressing what is unique about their collective selves and what others

should universally respect them for as nation-states. This is a process for the people as a whole, and not just the work of a few intellectuals, as has been the case in the past. What is required is that in each society people should identify what it is in their historic traditions that they most value, and what are the universal values with which they most want to be associated.

This need to combine the parochial and the universal is of course at the very heart of the modernization process that all the Asian countries have had to deal with in this century. Up until the last couple of decades the challenge was not unduly complicated because what was modern could be regarded as positive and its adoption not an unmanageable task – even though it might be psychologically threatening, especially to traditionalists. Today, however, the sorting out and blending of the elements of the parochial and the universal is far more complicated because now the universal comes in the form of the massive powers of globalization, and the parochial has become re-energized local ethnic forces, including various forms of religious fundamentalism. The process of nation-state building in Asia must now work itself out in an environment in which it will not be at all easy to keep in check the contending forces of globalization and renewed localization. Elsewhere in the world the state is also under siege, as the contradictory forces of globalization and assertive local cultures squeeze the legitimacy of the state and narrow its scope of action.

Thus, what we have in Asia are a variety of cultures in which long-established patterns of social relations are in the process of going through fundamental changes in order to become modern political systems. The ultimate character of the modern Asian nation-state is still in the process of formation, but given the differences in their histories we can be certain that they will be somewhat different from the original European model. The issue should not be whether they will turn out to be either better or worse than what the West produced. Rather the important point is that in the conduct of foreign policy these differences need to be taken into account, and we should not operate as though our theories and assumptions about state behavior, formed out of the European experience, are automatically applicable to Asia.

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Professor Pye was invited to deliver the second Gaston Sigur Annual Lecture in April 1998, on which this publication is based.