

Modernity and Subjectivity: Enabling Asian Consciousness of Multi-Identity

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Beyond cultural diversity

The philosophical dialogues which frame today's multicultural world usually revolve around comparisons of the varied traditions of world views which are said to characterize the regions concerned. Of the comparative approaches which examine various philosophical traditions in terms of elements of commensurability or incommensurability, there seem to be two opposing views. One view argues that no meaningful comparison of differences can be made because the differences are so profound as to be incomparable. The other argues that the core content of any cultural tradition can be identified and that it is essentially the same, no matter what the culture. Though interpretive details of the core content differ, the core itself provides a framework for dialogue and discussion among cultures.

The argument presented here concurs with this latter view for, in spite of ostensible, even oppositional, differences, diverse traditional thoughts invariably deal with the nature of reality, modes of knowledge and how people ought to live together. There can be found a great deal of commonality as well as elective affinity among cultures and it is suggested here that these have developed and continue to do so through the many avenues of societal interaction. We can see evidence of this development in today's historical moment in which both new and advanced industrial societies appear to be shedding or transforming certain aspects of their purported respective traditional cultural worldviews. The result is a harmonious convergence of world views among different peoples especially with regard to how people ought to live together.

A comprehensive socio-historical explanation for such convergence is articulated in the United Nations' Alliance of Civilizations Report (2006: 5) which asserts that "civilizations and cultures reflect the great wealth and heritage of humankind; their nature is to overlap, interact and evolve in relation to one another." All civilizations share a history of mutual borrowing as well as accommodation and assimilation of one another's ideas and customs. Because cultures and civilizations evolve through interaction with others, local customs, knowledge, and ideas are transformed in

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the processes of their transfer from one culture to another, around the globe. The narratives played out by the individual and collective lives in each culture are shaped by complex social, experiential interactions within the dynamics of histories, cultures, cultural identities, globalizations and so on. No one of these alone can claim to be the primary sculpting force of humankind's destiny. Neither can any one of them exist without the others. Indeed, the complexity of the interactions involved in the dynamic and ever constant developing of selves and cultures over time and space can only be hinted at, never charted precisely. All that can be said with a fair degree of certainty is that societal change, whether subtle or stark, recognized or unrecognized, is constant and multiple by its nature.

What better example of the complexity of change can there be than the newly industrializing societies in East Asia, long considered the region of timeless, changeless traditions and now hailed as "emerging markets" in the global economy? They have been rapidly progressing in achieving greater scientific-technological renovations in production, thus creating material abundance and enhancing the quality of life for larger and larger numbers in their respective societies. As their economic structures become increasingly modernized, the daily lifeworlds of the metropolitan areas of Beijing, Seoul, Bangkok, Manila, Kuala Lumpur, and Djakarta are becoming so immersed in techno-scientific culture that it is now impossible for citizens of such metropolitan areas to think of perceiving and negotiating daily life without technology.

Indeed, for emerging markets, development, economic growth, science, and technology have become vital appendages to each other. As science and technology move forward and encompass the globe, East and West, North and South are operating more and more in the same sphere of rationality, and thus the concepts of objectivity and rationality can no longer be claimed as only characteristic of Western civilization. Both empiricism and rationalism, once considered to constitute the main developmental phase of Anglo-European intellectual history, are now merging seamlessly into the history of world philosophy.

An ancient bond ties the legacies of these two schools of modern philosophy to the *Zeitgeist* of East Asia's new industrial societies as surely as it does to today's Anglo-European societies. Traditional societies and modern societies share elements or orientation schemata that are rooted in rationalism and empiricism. For example, the primary type of action in both agrarian societies and industrial ones is work or labor in which humans relate to their physical environment. From earliest times, tilling arid lands, sowing seeds and tending them, or devising hunting spears, and other means and tools of securing food were planned actions, requiring observation, calculation, and collaboration, all in the interest of survival. In the long ago beginnings of human societal living, work, whether it took place in the deserts or the wetlands, came to be viewed as a way to release humans from their physical bonds to their natural environment. Work prompted them to contrive entities out of their environments which were not part of the environments' essence. From this effort of contrivance arose science and technology whose principles are objectivity and rationality.

Science is a form of knowledge about nature, and technology is a tool with which humans control nature to serve their needs. Science and technology spurred and assisted the establishment of towns and cities, the building of dams and temples, and, most significantly, they spurred rationalization for constant productivity and the institutionalization of commerce and trade, thus generating whole civilizations. The ubiquitous human propensity to work with tools is a powerful common element in the orientation schemata of both traditional homeworlds and modern homeworlds. Such elements act as mediators and resonate from one age or culture to another. As complex and intricate mediators, these elements are forces which unify humanity.

Cultural contradictions

In essence, all labor is social and interactive, even when performed in isolation. That work is essentially communal is evident in the earliest divisions of labor by gender. The product of work is no less communal for it is always shared or traded. Working with others both enhances and creates anew a sense of solidarity and communal purpose. From such solidarity stem the codes of morality for living together in peace. It is really not too far fetched to assert, as Hegel did in his *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) that ideas such as mutual recognition, social justice, and civil rights are derived from our awareness of the true collaborative, collective character of human labor.

Indeed, in the current project of globalization, the power of collaboration in labor is often cited as a means to successful development. And successful collaborative development is conducive to peace. Yet, for some time, the social nature of labor with its potentialities for peaceful co-existence has been denied in instance after instance during this current economic globalization, just as it had been in periods characterized by empire building and colonization. This denial is, of course, a contradiction of the goals for democratization, which all of the nations participating in the globalization project claim to espouse. One of the most blatant examples of this denial is the practice of moving industries to locations where safeguards for laborers and the environment are weak or non-existent, in order to cut operation costs. These relocations provide enormous profits to shareholders and to the governments of those countries which both provide the land and the poorly paid workers. Workers do not benefit from the increased profits, since those profits are a result of not spending money on safety for them and of not paying them proper living wages. For the workers in developing countries, the promise of freedom through development and labor is effectively nullified.

Advanced developed nations began to promote this practice within their own borders in the 70s, but for some years now, they have been moving industries to developing countries which often compete with one another in offering the lowest wages and lowest safety costs. What has ensued, of course, is growing pockets of impoverished and unemployed workers in the advanced developed nations, a guarantee of continued, worsening poverty in the developing nations, and a concentration of extreme wealth and power in the hands of small numbers of citizens in both types of nations.

The trend to move production industries to low-cost areas no longer only applies to those industries which depend mainly on low-skilled to non-skilled workers for production; it now embraces numerous service industries and cyber-world professionals. Nations of long-standing advanced development are now witnessing job losses among certain professional and service oriented groups. No one wins in this game, for jobless professionals can not be consumers. Markets dry up and the emerging or growing middle class entrepreneurs and professionals in developing countries find themselves abruptly cut loose from vanishing markets. With a decreasing upward mobility for the working class and an increasing downward mobility for the middle class, modernity becomes a gilded, sinking vessel.

The new industrial nations of East Asia have not had modernization thrust upon them by the tides of history. On the contrary, they chose economic development so that they could enjoy the same human dignity, individual freedom, and social justice that they perceived those societies, advanced in modernization practices, enjoy. Yet one wonders why most of the nations of the world today appear to have embraced the neo-liberal modernization scheme that favors a market breeding plutocracy over democracy. The plutocracy that plagues our nations today is not the classical one exemplified by certain of the ancient Greeks or the Italian merchant republics of a later era. Those were all characterized by rule of the wealthiest and thus, by economic inequality. The plutocracies of today are insidious and more fluid. Today's plutocrats do not have to hold

office, or even be named as rulers. Nonetheless, their disproportionate influence on the political process capably finds its way into democracy and dictatorships. There are many examples to give here but, in an effort to economize by using one, let me refer again to the practice of moving, or even of threatening to move, an industry from one country to another in order to cut production costs and increase shareholder profits. The plutocrats in these instances are corporation managers, shareholders, and a handful of government officials in the host countries. The nations to which the profit takers belong can be democracies or monarchies and all else in between. Under the neo-liberal interpretation of modernity, nameless, faceless plutocrats are the ones wielding the power.

Though important to ask, the answers to why any nation would choose the deleterious neo-liberal path to modernity will always be too speculative to be useful; exploring how the path is chosen, in conjunction with why, might help us find a redeeming reformation of our modernization policies and practices.

Kant and Hegel, whose writings still inspire modernity proponents, were concerned with both the why and the how of modernity in their time. Writing at the dawn of the Great Industrial Revolution, both these philosophers believed that citizens' awakening to themselves as individuals in a collective was the catalyst for realizing modernity in advanced developed societies. Historically, it has come to be believed that a high degree of social class mobility is a necessary component for developing an awareness of individuality in an expanding middle class. Modernization through industrialization and urbanization, offering expansion and social mobility, holds the promise of leading new industrial societies to acknowledge the rationality principle of the contractual relationships in a market economy. Contractual relationships, so the rationale goes, allow every person to stand on his or her own merits, free from traditional bonds of caste. When modernization is so interpreted, it becomes essential to its success that each citizen become aware of being an individual, possessing a right to self-subsistence. For the people of East Asia, it can be said that the process of such self-awakening has already set in and, therefore, political development ought only to deepen through its dynamic growth.

Unfortunately, in many East Asian nations, there are some great stumbling blocks lying ahead on the path to unfolding individuality and the growth of civil society. Despite the steady progress of science and technology in the instrumental rationalization of productivity, changes in traditional ways of thinking and perceiving proceed at a slower pace allowing an unsettling discrepancy between modernity and tradition to widen proportionally. While productive forces revolve on the axis of instrumental rationality, political and social consciousness holds fast to traditional value systems so that patrimonial political and social consciousness pilot the rationalization of economic development. These entrenched patterns of thought strongly influence the orientation and disposition to action of those who make decisions and manage affairs at the level of rationalized formal institutions. Accordingly, most of East Asia's newly proclaimed democracies are conflicted, unwieldy, disastrously oxymoronic authoritarian-democratic hybrids.

Historically, such a phenomenon can be understood as intrinsic to the very nature of society itself. Certainly, resistance to modernity has been recurring in one form or another in the West over the past two or three centuries, and in contemporary developing countries, we witness its unmistakable signs again and again. It is the driving force behind the divisive doctrine of cultural relativism. When modernization is deliberate, as it is in most developing countries, traditional sentiments counter reforms by seeking to absorb them into the old system. In this age of globalization, counter-modernization moves are often masked by an appeal to tolerance of feudalistic traditions in the name of various multicultural doctrines. Beseeking tolerance from the world at large, many East Asian political leaders espouse an ideology of development which is solely

dependent upon their authoritarian and, ultimately, repressive rule. When traditional authoritarianism combines with modern technology, the result is an undemocratic technocracy. This form of government is most debilitating to those societies wherein a civic culture has not yet experienced those circumstances by which it could mature because institutionalized structures and activities such as access to education, a free press, active interest groups, and access to dissent and participation through the internet are stifled or nonexistent. Yet these are the very means by which today's civic culture develops and asserts influence.

Political leaders defend stifling real democratic institutions by rationalizing that stable economic development through technocratic management creates citizens with "full bellies" who will eventually be able to embrace the freedoms and responsibility of democracy. Such a rationale generally appears to yield results in the beginning. But, as time passes, it becomes very clear that the process of self-awakening for citizens as individual subjects does not emerge simply because the quality of their lives has been enhanced by abundance. In the absence of self-awakened citizenry, authoritarian leadership encourages people to become consumers, concerned only with economic growth managed by an efficient government. For such a state as this, they reason, there is no need for democracy.

Surely, one of the greatest hindrances to the self-awakening of individual citizens as subjects of thought and action is consumerism. Consumerism is not new, nor does it necessarily have to stifle subjectivity, but when it is driven by the pervasiveness of high technology, it can hardly avoid becoming totalitarian. As Marcuse (1964) so aptly noted in his critique of modern technology and consumerism in the West, illusory needs, fueled by techno-scientific innovations, are concocted by mass media and the consequence is that workers, who were supposed to have been freed by technological advances, are instead socially and psychologically forced to work harder and longer in order to satisfy an insatiable need to possess.

Presumably, technology is neutral. It is a tool. It is the rhetoric of a positive and idealistic view of modernization that technology should be used to support a good quality of life in every aspect for all citizens. In the less than utopian world we inhabit, technology has always been and, is still, a formidable instrument for political and social control. Consumerism, invigorated by endlessly refined information technology, paralyses the intelligence of even reflective citizens by glossing over reality and luring them with materials and convenience to a shallow, vacuous consciousness. This callow sense of individuality, described so well and lamented so vigorously by Marcuse, now pervades in emerging market societies. Material satiation alone does not foster subjectivity. Indeed, in the world Marcuse described, materialism encourages insensitivity to others and to one's environment, creating a numbed ignorance and indifference to life itself. Marcuse, of course, was describing the consumerism of post World War II renewed industrialization. That period, in the America he was writing about, also produced a robust middle class, in part because higher education was made accessible not only to veterans but to children of the working class as well. But the expanding middle class and the materially comfortable working class were contented and famously uninterested in society's ills. Their progeny were characterized by self-involvement, culminating in the "me" generation in the 80s. In many developing countries, the same pattern was repeated a little later and, in others, it is only flowering now.

Endangered modernity

Cultural contradictions conflict the modernization process in debilitating ways, but modernity is most confounded by its own achievements in technology and science. The shift from industrial

technologies to cyber technology is most revealing of modernity's endangerment. Don Ihde (1996), eminent philosopher of technology of long standing, places the shift in technological paradigms from mega-industrial technologies to the information technologies of the cyberage in the 1980s. This shift was certainly very apparent in advanced nations, but, even today, for most developing countries, such as those in East Asia, the two stages exist side by side. Even so, in the metropolitan areas of East Asia's newly industrialized countries, the cybercultural world of computers and the internet, that is, the world of virtual, not actual, reality already constitutes the life-world of many an urbanite.

It may be needless to point out here that for those whose daily routines belong to cyberworlds, virtual communities regulate their perceptions, thoughts and, consequently, their actions, forming their identities. Not so very long ago, sociologists warned that cyberculture would eventually become the prime determining force in the lives of citizens in every country (Jordan 1999: 4–5). Today, we see that this is already true for a great many of the younger generations in East Asia. China, with 56 million broadband users, is second to the United States which has 60 million, Japan is next, and South Korea is slightly behind Germany, placed 5th in the world for its use of high speed internet, at the time of writing at least.

How did cyber use become so pervasive and influential in countries which have only recently become industrialized and are still in the throes of that phenomenon? For East Asian developing countries, one might say the dangers and the blessings generally have been divided between the more rigidly defined lower and middle classes, with the lower classes feeling the brunt of whatever industrialization has to wield and a middle class caught in a cyber web. Many East Asian countries had a middle class primed to enter into cyber use and, as that class has expanded, so has access to the many uses of the internet, not only in the workplace, but in the home. Despite varying degrees of government restrictions, these countries have been able to make extensive, communicative use of cell phones, blogs, discussion forums and internet networking to stage huge protests and rallies. South Korean teens were able to organize one of the largest anti-government demonstrations in this century. Yet reputable social scientists and observers of democratic trends noted that misinformation sped across the internet faster than rumor in a small village, firing up students who accepted it without question and mobilized their protests electronically. While, presumably, web forums are a place to debate both the pros and cons of an issue, that did not happen in this instance. Those who wanted to enter the web discussion forums to critique the issues were not welcome and were, instead, rudely dismissed. The instant and frenzied gratification for the young people involved resembled the hysteria of shamanism with its reliance on fetishes and emotional release. Like justice is said to be, the communication tools generated by cyber technology are blind; they work just as well for noble causes as for mindless ones.

From the nations which use the internet heavily, we also learn of young people playing internet games for 16 or 17 hours a day. In Korea, desperate parents elect to send such youngsters to camps where they are forced to engage in physically demanding sports and activities and to take risks in the outdoors. As well, they are restrained from using the internet or watching TV for the duration of their stay. Boot camps for cyber addicted teens seem like a drastic measure. A million teens organizing themselves for protest based on misinformation and taking to city streets with fiery torches is a nightmare. Is it we who have lost our way in modernity or has the advancement of modernization failed us?

Every new technology ushers in a new way of communicating and thinking, of responding and relating to each other and ourselves. This has always been so. While we all know of ways in which technology isolates individuals from society, intersubjectivity, and action, we also know that technology brings people together, invites collaboration, and creates new modes of collaborating as

well as new language and concepts to do it with, and thus, it creates new norms for interacting and reflecting. We need to be sensitive to ways in which technological innovations can serve the humane values found in every society to thrive and advance. But as societies little acquainted with the responsibilities of freedom in our past traditions and, being new to the competitive side of market globalization and modernization, our internal resources, more often than not, appear to be no match for the task. Yet, whose task is it to bring subjectivity to citizens? How does a nation that has deliberately chosen modernity and modernization also deliberately go about assisting the growth of subjectivity in its citizens? Marcuse wrote as witness of what not to do. Neither a materially satiated working class nor a self-absorbed middle class can advance the lofty goals of modernity's vision.

Unfortunately, there is even more to the endangerment of the modernity project than technology's potential to wed with consumerism and produce mindless, ineffectual citizens. Technology, as a tool of modernism, poses other dangers, most notably the creation and use of weaponry capable of destroying the entire world, but the culprit behind modernity's greatest endangerments may be modernity itself for modernity's quest to tame nature to social uses and to constantly create more markets and uses are justly considered to be as deadly as any weapon of destruction.

Any concept with the power to influence the structures and thrust of governance on so many levels is open to interpretation and criticism. In fact, its life expectancy, so to speak, depends on its potential to respond to criticism and new knowledge by changing course. As well, the concept must contend with other worldviews which also influence governance. These views tend to take in and absorb or merge the concept's development into already established practices. I spoke of this phenomenon in relation to countries which came late to an acceptance of the modernization agenda and tend to fit their efforts at developing modernity into their traditional structures of governance, characterized by dictatorship and other forms of authoritarianism. The same tendency, of course, is true of modernity itself. Modernization has always had to contend with the lingering ghosts of colonialism and the constant rebirthing of nationalism and authoritarian leadership, all of which were in full bloom when modernity was first conceived. Now, modernization is endangered by ever reincarnated practices and ideologies of both colonialism and nationalism which entrench themselves easily in modernism's ideology. But modernity is endangered as well by the failure of its champions to recognize new knowledge and information about the effects of modernization projects on this planet and all of its inhabitants.

Modernization was first promoted as a way to freedom for all and, most importantly, a way of gaining control over nature, both in terms of controlling the harm nature could inflict and in transforming nature to serve human needs and desires. While this view is still prevalent, it began losing ground rapidly in the latter decades of the 20th century when it became apparent to scientists that the accelerated advances in science and technology, while proliferating development and trade on a global level, were critically harming the environment. The damage provided insights into their human and ecological costs. Moreover, these new insights allowed many to see for the first time the inequities in social justice that modernization imposes, and has always imposed, in every society especially when the welfare of all citizens is not considered.

The welfare state had come about as a reform response to the devastating effects of irresponsible market development by balancing market activity and growth with social needs and distribution of wealth. Generally, the term welfare state is used to connote a modern state's institutionalized concern for the welfare of all citizens. Just after World War II, it was touted as essential to the modernity project. Equity in access to sound education was considered a viable way to promote upward social mobility. Equity in access to health care is another and freedom from want of basic needs such as food and housing, which would include access to gas, oil,

electricity and the like. Legitimizing certain organizations like labor and trade unions and enacting laws to protect workers were also deemed important to successful modernity. The poor of modern nations were to be assisted in this system, but most of the institutions were meant to assist upward mobility of working and middle classes. With the promotion of neo-liberalism in the 80s, the concern for the welfare of all citizens was dismissed. Deregulation and the dismantling of established protective institutions and the laws governing them occurred in many of the most powerful and successful developed nations.

Just at this juncture, characterized by an awareness of the dangers inherent in modernization and neo-liberalism's rise, many countries decided to join the modernization project. Seemingly unaware of the dangers of modernization, they carried hopes for freedom from want and the good life into their venture, but as I mentioned, they had no mature civil society and no institutionalized structures from which to voice dissent or seek alterations when modernization methods created more poverty, not less. Moreover, there were no longer any models of success in terms of sustaining a good life for all to be found in the modernity of well-established developed nations. Critics now rightly point to the spiraling dismantling of the welfare state in advanced developed countries of the West as a leading component of modernity's current collapse, though it cannot be separated from other toxic components such as what appears to be the permanent destruction of the earth's environments.

Responses to the endangerment of modernity are varied. Some critics believe that the problems of modernity and neo-liberal economic globalization are inherent in the concepts themselves. For example they believe that capitalism and modernity, of necessity, must cause ecological damage and injustice and harm to groups of people, or markets will suffer and modernity cannot advance. Some, cynically, even argue that history will work through all the injustice and harm and that new resources, perhaps in outer space, will be found to replace those destroyed so that surviving members of one destroyed group will be the leaders of a similar cycle. Still others argue that the means to modernity are unjustifiable, and have, as is always the case, become the unjustifiable end. These critics insist that ecological modernization is a possibility, and sometimes, even now in some projects, a reality. They further maintain that embracing ecological moderation policies now will encourage standards based on justice for both people and their environment. This last belief, assuming that it is not too late, can come about only if we can envision modernity in a radically different way than we do now. My contention is that a revised vision is already here and that its roots can be found in the earliest rationalizations of subjectivity.

Modernity as subjectivity

Though it would not be apparent to an intelligent visitor from another planet today, the fundamental distinguishing feature of modernity is the awareness by the subject of his/her own existence as actor. Some Western intellectual historians assert that this self-awakening became manifest in the political form of the 1789 French Revolution on one hand and in the intellectual form of German Idealism on the other. This historical perspective suggests that the process of individuation, occurring now in new industrial societies and elsewhere in this region, requires that we reflect, more deeply than we have been wont to do thus far, on the drastic changes in individual and collective mentality brought about by rapid rationalization of social structure.

In our attempt to link philosophy to reality, we will look now at some anthropological accounts which Kant and Hegel construed from their observations of the political and social conditions of their time. One of the political implications of Kant's transcendental theory of knowledge is the

problem of subjectivity, characteristic of creative spontaneity. Those who achieve subjectivity become the self-determining, free individuals that Kant presumes to be essential to his political philosophy. For Kant, the uniqueness of human dignity rests in subjectivity: the fluid integration of awareness, moral agency, and identity.

Reading Kant, it is difficult to believe that he lived his whole life in the same city and never ventured more than a few miles outside of it for, without aid of any of the modern means of communication available today, he knew much about the world outside of his city, his country, and Europe. Indeed, the depth of his knowledge puts today's complacent citizen to shame. He ranted against slavery and against wars and the oppressive means used to open up markets in faraway lands. He never wavered in his premise that all men were autonomous and rational subjects. For Kant, modernity could only be truly realized and sustained by a constitution binding a federation of states. The federation of states that he conceived included those lands which were considered by most Europeans to be inhabited by savages. Kant (1891) commented that, in his view, the practices of the Europeans were far more barbaric than those of the "savages." Article III in the conditions of a Perpetual Peace is titled "The Rights of men as Citizens of the world in a cosmopolitical system, shall be restricted to conditions of universal Hospitality." In it, he sets out his belief that every nation wants to trade with other nations but only under hospitable conditions. He argues that under the conditions of an agreed upon practice of hospitality, Anglo-European countries "would be unable to treat foreign and strange lands as if they belonged to nobody whatsoever and [were] available for them to conquer and plunder."

Yet, this same Kant, who insisted that hospitality among nations was necessary and possible, nevertheless, well understood the conflicted, oppositional nature of all human beings. He is justly famous for his exploration of the "unsocial sociability" of human nature (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*). Kant (*Ideen zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbuergerlicher Absicht*, 1784, IV & V s.) held that disciplining one's unsociability in order to get along in society was the mark of a civilized person. Human beings, as individuals, came to this discipline because they realized that they needed to live together in society in order to survive. Nations would come, indeed, had to come, to the notion of keeping a Perpetual Peace for the same reason. When Kant ranted about the abuses which European traders inflicted upon countries weaker and less developed than their own, he might well have been predicting the problems of today, though he surely must have believed that there would be a Cosmo-political constitution by this time. He had the faith of the Enlightenment that human kind would surely use reason to keep the human race from obliterating itself. We have yet to know if his faith was justified.

Though today, there are some international laws regarding crimes against humanity, they are often contested when they conflict with domestic laws, as they invariably do. Lamentably, there is no Cosmo-political constitution which provides for hospitality between and among nations and their citizens. Instead, civil society, in the forms of various non-governmental organizations, urgently presses for the establishment of some sort of global governance to achieve social and environmental justice through a global-political constitution or laws because modernization, as it is practiced today, has created unparalleled inequality among citizens within a single nation and among nations. Individuals and organizations throughout the world, including the UN, promote the creation of an environment for the practices of perpetual peace, but nations have not come to this resolution. Even as modernization has opened state boundaries, cultural and class boundaries within and among nations have become more rigid.

Kant wrote about the ruination of nature through war, colonization, and coercive marketing methods, but there is no evidence that he thought modernity, as he perceived it, might actually topple the vital resources of the world. However, just as Kant believed that human beings would

reconcile their oppositional natures in order to envision, create, and maintain a peaceful society, so too, I think his message would be the same regarding re-visioning modernity so that the environment can be sustained. Nor would he have any trouble linking the sustainability of the global environment with the sustainability of humanity. Indeed, he anticipated the still developing concept of “environmental justice” when he protested the ruination of the lands of so-called savage peoples by European business entrepreneurs. Alas, the numbers of those who are ruined and those who ruin have increased; and not only have their names changed and, often, interchanged, science now tells us that ruination in one place can mean eventual ruination everywhere.

Of the relationships which make up society and form the lives of the individuals engaging in them, Hegel cites labor as the prime catalyst for actualizing subjectivity. In work, we relate to objects of nature and to our fellow human beings. In labor too, one individual may subsume others through intersubjectivity, but in the end, Hegel asserts, those enslaved attain subjectivity when they realize the worth of their labor and rebel. It should be inserted here, as it was in my discussion of Kant above, that the recent conceptualization of “environmental justice” expands on the definition of enslavement upon which Hegel drew. Ideally, of course, labor binds subjects together through its sociality and intersubjectivity in ways which are edifying. Labor is the objectification of human potentialities realized communally. Hegel is keen to point out that, by virtue of being communal, labor allows human beings to receive the recognition they inherently crave from others. This need for recognition can be met in the division of labor within communities because each individual’s importance to the success of the whole engenders the mutual recognition of equals.

Truly mutual recognition among homo laborans means that subjects are autonomous individuals bearing responsibility for others and, in this way, collectivity is exalted and treasured. In the early days of communal living, perchance, such labor lent itself to resting and sharing food and drink together at day’s end. By such conviviality, the hardships of work receded and play, that is, imagining what is not, came into being. The capacity to imagine and so to conjure up alternative realities is uniquely human and related to labor, for labor brings the dreams of imagination into reality. Thus have great civilizations come into existence. And thus, have they been twisted and deformed, for imagination is also subservient to ideas and ideas grow in the oppositional gardens of humanity’s unsocial sociability.

Both Kant and Hegel were well aware of the consequences of a flourishing market economy, and their portrayal of subjectivity as awareness of one’s ability to think and act independently as well as to collaborate was certainly a response to the problems accruing to the modernization of German society in the turmoil of the epochal changes. Hegel demanded the transcendence of a state in which individuals were objectified and treated as cogs in a market machine. He envisaged a society which fosters personal subjectivities and universal recognition of the free, thinking individual (Hegel 1936: 219–20, cited in Avineri 1972: 11). This thought is echoed in the Critical Theory of late capitalism where the basis for doing so is even stronger, simply because there is even more evidence to suggest that subjectivity exists in all lifeworlds. As well the hallmark of subjectivity, free will, even when stifled, muffled, and maimed, has managed to prevail in the most authoritarian and oppressive and repressive of states.

The task of philosophy now is to reinstate dynamic subjectivity and intersubjectivity in a flailing modernity characterized by ecologically disastrous projects, including wars and the destruction of the environment to meet capitalism’s insatiable consumerism, and cyber dreams which deaden imagination, creativity, empathy, reasoning, agency, and reflection. In sum, it is philosophy’s task to re-envision and refashion, if you will, modernity, so that it does not destroy itself and humanity along with it.

Resetting modernity in East Asia

Let me reiterate here that much of what I say regarding reforming modernity in order to protect universal subjectivity with its power to transform and influence our lifeworlds is applicable beyond East Asia, but as all states are in different stages of modernity, so the application, if not the reform itself, will be varied from state to state.

Modernity's goal is the equality of all human beings with respect to what we now have come to call human rights. These rights are integral to, and allow for, the maturation of individual and collective subjectivity. By subjectivity, I mean that individuals are aware of their ability to think for themselves and engage in practical reasoning with each other. Subjectivity means not only the self-consciousness but also awareness of one's moral responsibility and of oneself as an agent in some role or position, including class consciousness and the like. And this subjectivity has no single identity. Rather, it has multi-identity. Every individual has multiple roles, multiple allegiances and interests, and is a member of a wide variety of groups, each of which is a part of the self. The farther an individual goes from his/her homeworld and engages with others, the more does that individual enlarge and pluralize his/her identity, and the more does the plurality of the individual's identity relate to, and accommodate the identity of others.

In the modernity scheme, global trade and interaction are meant to be an engine for widespread prosperity and peace for cosmopolitan citizens, whose many faceted identities are in a state of continued formation as a result of interactions with various cultures, customs, and ideas. According to Kant's articulation of cosmopolitanism and its relationship to perpetual peace, the equality of these citizens of the cosmos must exist at three levels, all sanctioned by laws: first, within a single, republican state; second, among states in their relations with one another, while the third level encompasses all citizens everywhere in the world. This third assurance of global legal equality is based upon the first two, for according to Kant (1995: 107–8), once the nations of the world have entered into the second level, that of international law, they will have “entered in varying degrees into a universal community, [which] has developed to the point where a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere.”

For Kant, legal assurances for tolerance of differences and hospitality toward one another are necessary for the peaceful commerce and trade among nations, which will promote fulfilled lives and subjectivity for all. But all three levels are not realized uniformly or in sequence. Moreover, the levels are always to be works in progress as a result of humanity's social/unsociability. But, of course, the more fulfilled the first level, that is, the more democratic are individual nations, the easier it is to approach the second and third levels. It would benefit those states who long for a true realization of modernity to find spaces in their governance for democratization practices and institutions to take hold even if they appear first as awkward grafts on traditional institutions and practices.

Kant's notion of hospitality is much discussed and elaborated upon, even today, as it should be. Kant said simply that hospitality meant treating a stranger as an inhabitant of one's land for a period of time if one receives the stranger in the first place. And since Kant expected that inhabitants of the many republics in the federation of states listened to one another and respected one another, treating someone as an inhabitant involved the same mutual respect. Mutual is key here. The stranger has as much responsibility as the native.

One would imagine that nations which have a great deal in common, such as those of East Asia, would have no difficulty extending hospitality among themselves, particularly, at this juncture in history when so many states around the world have formed federations and are seeking ways to make them work. Indeed, many in the West have seen Asia, in general, as leading in the

next century because Asia has entered into modernity deliberately and late enough in the game to learn from the mistakes of the West, especially the mistakes attributed to virulent and aggressive nationalism. But that hasn't happened.

Region building in East Asia, especially, has been scuttled time and again over the last several years because one or more nations want to be the leader and each (or nearly each) of the nations in the region boasts that it is superior to all the others. Joshua Kurlantzick, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, lists incident after incident involving petty, and very serious, bigotry between nations in the Asian region. Kurlantzick (2008) cites the reason for this as: "Calls to nationalism and an obsession with sovereignty are drowning out calls for cooperation." Old animosities and new are being drummed up to sometimes wreck cooperation and sometimes to make a mockery of it. Worse, the animosities exist within countries as well as between them. Politicians are making sure their nation's past misdeeds are not in text books. Even at the university level, many students are not aware, that before they were born, their governments perpetuated atrocities upon their own citizens or the citizens of other countries. Kurlantzick is correct in saying that the 21st century does not yet appear to be Asia's century of world leadership, though ironically, he points out that many in the West still believe it is possible based on successes they have seen. They have even developed "an entire industry around [their] predictions that the Asian century will replace the American one" (ibid.). What might happen if Asian nations were to convene and study those predictions in terms of their potential, as that potential is perceived by other parts of the world? What if they then agreed to try to achieve the goals of modernity through embracing the highest goals of modernity: equality and subjectivity for all their citizens?

Asian governments have done no more really than approach modernity with the same sort of flawed reasoning as many nations in the past and present have. And yet, notions of equality, of human rights, of living in peace, of providing a good life for all are very strong throughout the world and indeed, among the peoples of Asia. Subjectivity can be blunted but it exists and the ways in which East Asians can become conscious of their multi-identities and nurture them are more prevalent than ever before.

The prime structural means to achieve that consciousness resides in our humanity, in our ability to reconcile our oppositional inclinations, and especially in our ability to accommodate transformational ideas into our lifeworlds. In the evolution of human history, oppositional categories are always paired and intertwined: unity and division, peace and conflict, creation and destruction exist together in tension. This complex of commonly acknowledged meanings is imbued with oppositional tensions which humans acquire from childhood on. Mediation of the meanings takes place through the social relationships involved in the modes of living together: love and hate, work and play, and living and dying. Constantly nuanced through mediation, these meanings in turn constitute the basis of our intersubjective understanding by virtue of which we relate to our environments and fellow human beings in thought, feeling, and action. Practical reasoning in every society grows through the mediations of primary and secondary social relationships and matures in articulation at those societal levels, so that conciliation of divisions and hostilities can come to be addressed collectively. Mediating the oppositional elements of societal life, or, as Kant would have said, our "unsocial sociability" takes place at every level.

If a virulent nationalism or narrowed life views occur in our societies, so does awareness and critical evaluation by subjects not smitten by these ills. Today, there is no doubt that there is a global network of such subjects, communicating across cultures and nations. Books, articles, media presentations, projects for peace and equity, environmental justice and more carried out by various and numerous organizations often in collaboration have surely made it clear that there is a powerful civic community devoted to the notion that practical reasoning about these issues can change

the course. Contradictions, cultural and otherwise, abound in the pursuit of modernity but somewhere, close by the contradictions, are awareness of counter ideas and some means for practical reasoning mediating among them.

Awareness as catalyst for intersubjectivity may come from the stranger, like Kurlantzick, the visiting scholar in our midst, but it will also come from home, from fellow citizens whose subjectivities brim with awareness of their multiple potential. Think of those parents who send their cyber-game addicted teens off to no-computer wilderness survival camps. In that instance, saving the nobility of modernity meant opening a new industry to counter cyber-land mentality and salvaging traditional, treasured values of self-reliance and enjoying and respecting nature. Note that the parents did not denounce the technological developments of modernity. Rather, they were insisting on their right to help their children use the fruits of that development wisely. The citizens of many Asian nations cannot engage in intersubjectivity and agency as easily. And that is all the more reason for those Asian nations which can foster the reform of modernity to do so.

The growing network of civic society calling for international development ethics and global governance is a resource for governments and citizens. International Development Ethics is an active discipline though it is a relatively new field of applied ethics. Philosophers and social critics working formally and informally in this area have reached out to the popular media and are often consulted on world affairs. The more courses in the issues of international development are taught in those Asian universities that will accommodate them, the better. Awareness comes from knowledge after all. The networking, conferencing, and concern with these issues should reach secondary education in every nation, of course, for awareness of both self and other is paramount to subjectivity. Differences will abound certainly, but ethics is about understanding and honoring particularities and universally accepted goals.

Note

1. This article, 'Modernity and Subjectivity: Enabling Asian Consciousness of Multi-Identity', had simultaneous publication in *The Mundialization of Home: Towards a Transcultural Ethics* by In-Suk Cha, published by LIT Verlag (2011).

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