


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Performing civilisational narratives in East Asia: Asian values, multiple modernities, and the politics of economic development

Yong Wook Lee* 

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Korea University

*Corresponding author. Email: yongir@korea.ac.kr

(Received 1 July 2019; revised 12 May 2020; accepted 12 May 2020; first published online 18 June 2020)

Abstract

This article aims to uncover the socially constructed normative foundation for the alternative East Asian economic development paradigm to neoliberalism in the context of civilisational politics. The question I seek to address is why East Asian states make value claims when promoting their alternative method of economic development. In addressing this question, I make two interrelated arguments. First, I argue that the politics of Asian values can be understood as another case of non-Western society's struggle to demonstrate multiple paths to modernity. Second, on a deeper level, I show that the discourse and narratives on Asian values is part of civilisation politics aimed to recalibrate the place of East Asia in a world consisting of the civilised and the uncivilised, a divide that still remains today in various forms following European expansion in the nineteenth century. In so doing, I shed light on the performative power of 'the standard of civilisation', which naturalises the temporal and sequential hierarchy of civilisational identities in world politics. On the basis of this article's findings, I draw out implications of a recalibrated East Asia for the ideas of hierarchy and progress in world politics.

Keywords: Performative Power; Civilisational Narratives; Asian Values; Multiple Modernities; East Asian Economic Development

Introduction

This article aims to uncover the socially constructed normative foundation for the alternative East Asian¹ economic development paradigm to neoliberalism in the context of civilisational² politics. Since the late 1980s, East Asian states have promoted state-led economic development as a viable alternative to neoliberal market fundamentalism. Japan challenged the 'Washington Consensus' during this time.³ Southeast Asian leaders, including Dr Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew, have heavily emphasised the positive role of the state, particularly in the early stages of economic

¹In this article, East Asia refers to the geographic region that includes China, Japan, Korea, and ASEAN countries.

²Combining insights of Hobson, Katzenstein, and Bettiza, I conceptualise civilisations as 'the broadest, loosely coupled, internally differentiated, cultural and social constructs that help relationally constitute political actors' identities and interest'. See John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 7–11; Peter J. Katzenstein, 'A world of plural and pluralist civilizations: Multiple actors, traditions, and practices', in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 5; Gregorio Bettiza, 'Civilizational analysis in International Relations: Mapping the field and advancing a "civilizational politics" line of research', *International Studies Review*, 16:1 (2015), p. 7.

³Robert Wade, 'Japan, the World Bank, and the art of paradigm maintenance: The East Asian miracle in political perspective', *New Left Review*, 217 (1995/1996), pp. 3–37; Yong Wook Lee, *The Japanese Challenge to the American Neoliberal Order: Identity, Meaning, and Foreign Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

development. China has recently become second to none in spreading worldwide its own experience of successful economic development, with the concept of a 'Beijing Consensus' a case in point.⁴ By challenging the dominance of the neoliberal economic development paradigm, East Asian states have showcased their successful state-led economic development for the world as a new model to be emulated. Arguably, the East Asian model has remained the most viable alternative over the last thirty years in the eyes of developing countries.

No less important, however, is the fact that East Asian states have advanced value claims (such as 'ie' society, Confucian values, and Asian values)⁵ as the equivalent of Weber's Protestant ethics in terms of being an essential enabling factor for the functioning of their alternative economic development paradigm. What this suggests is that these East Asian states take seriously the relationship between values and economic success.⁶ As such, the challenge to the neoliberal doctrine is not simply about promoting a different method of economic development; it can be claimed that it constitutes a cultural revolt against the universalistic neoliberal assumption about how states and individuals within states should behave to promote economic development.⁷

These Asian value claims have not gone unnoticed because they have significant implications for how the global economy would work in the context of the rise of East Asia. Conventional wisdom says that this 'Asian challenge' (or Asian revolt against the West) is the epitome of soft power politics popularised by Joseph Nye, in which developing countries are told that they can become rich through the application of an alternative economic development model. Japan and China's 'charm offensive' strategy⁸ certainly fits this narrative.

However, what is missing in this theoretical account is the link between hard power (economic success/strength) and soft power (value exports/promotion). In other words, the question I seek to address is why East Asian states make value claims in the first place when promoting their alternative method of economic development. After all, they could have argued for their economic model without necessarily making any value claims; pointing to their own enormous economic success would have been sufficient to justify their alternative economic development paradigm. There is no obvious thread connecting the two.

Similarly, the idea of Asian values, a term that was coined in the 1970s and that has since been utilised by various Asian leaders as a way to account for the economic success of East Asia, has not gone unchallenged. Critics often claim that the idea of Asian values is nothing but a ploy that authoritarian Asian leaders use to legitimise their authority. According to this political expediency perspective, Asian leaders deliberately constructed the idea of Asian values to counter the Western liberal interpretation of East Asian economic success. In so doing, they positioned themselves as the agents of success in the eyes of the domestic and international public. Additionally, Asian leaders could bolster their domestic political legitimacy precisely because the idea of Asian values inexorably appealed to nationalism in their countries with colonial experience by or

⁴See, for example, Matt Ferchen, 'Whose China model is it anyway? The contending search for consensus', *Review of International Political Economy*, 20:2 (2013), pp. 390–420.

⁵Drawing on So Young Kim's extensive conceptual survey of Asian values, I broadly define Asian values here as a set of values that are putatively, perceptively, and distinctively shared among Asians, which are believed to be responsible for Asia's successful economic development. More specifically, the four major components of Asian values are familism, communalism (the primacy of group goals over individual welfare and freedom), authority orientation (deference to authority, penchant for order and stability), and work ethic (hard work, thrift, and emphasis on education). See So Young Kim, 'Do Asian values exist? Empirical tests of the four dimensions of Asian values', *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 10 (2010), pp. 317–22.

⁶See Hyeong-kyu Chey and Eric Helleiner, 'Civilizational values and political economy beyond the West: The significance of Korean debates at the time of its economic opening', *Contemporary Politics*, 24:2 (2018), pp. 191–209; Eric Helleiner and Hongying Wang, 'Beyond the tributary tradition of Chinese IPE: The indigenous roots of early Chinese economic nationalism', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 11:4 (2018), pp. 451–81.

⁷John M. Hobson, 'Part 2 – Reconstructing the non-Eurocentric foundation of IPE: From Eurocentric "Open Economy Politics" to intercivilizational political economy', *Review of International Political Economy*, 20:5 (2013), pp. 1055–81.

⁸Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

subordination to Western powers: the construction of Asian values would be a trick to create the sense of a nationalistic 'we' identity between leaders and the general public largely for the leaders' political benefits.

Although very suggestive, this account of rational political expedience has some clear weaknesses. First, going against the Western liberal interpretation of East Asian success has potential costs for these leaders. Making value claims (or creating a distinction by differentiation) can lead to the antagonistic identity construction of us vs them, which would not be beneficial for East Asian states in a strictly materialist sense, given that they rely on Western markets for their exports. Second, if political expediency is all that matters, making value claims can be counter-productive for this purpose. Value claims by their nature attribute the success of a domestic economy to society at large. By pursuing this line of reasoning, leaders do not allow themselves to take full credit for improving their economy. To truly achieve political expediency, they could have just sold to the public the vital role of the government in their country's economic success. It would have been better for them to attribute it to the effective management and rational strategies of the state to bolster political legitimacy and provide justification.⁹

Last, but not least, the claim that Asian leaders promoted Asian values to boost nationalism for their domestic political legitimacy is indeed plausible. But this account is not sufficiently corroborated on two empirical grounds. On the one, Asian leaders mainly targeted Western audiences rather than the domestic public when they challenged the Western liberal interpretation of Asian economic development.¹⁰ Otherwise, Lee Kwan Yew, Dr Mahathir, or Chinese leaders would have respectively advanced Singaporean, Malaysian, or Chinese values for their countries' economic success instead of Asian values. On the other, these ('soft') authoritarian Asian leaders' domestic legitimacy critically and invariably hinged on economic performance of their leadership, not necessarily on social peace or cohesion.¹¹ As such, rather than pursuing nationalism in and of itself (by manufacturing Asian values) for social purpose of creating a 'we' identity, it would be fair to say that Asian leaders capitalised on anti-colonial nationalism to implement mass mobilisation for developmental purpose.¹² Admittedly, this observation does not completely rule out the possibility that Asian leaders could indirectly garner their political legitimacy when they were credited by the domestic public with their capacity to translate local values into building a viable national economy.

In addressing this question regarding Asian value claims in the context of challenging (neo) liberalism, I make two interrelated arguments. First, I argue that the politics of East Asian value claims can be understood as another case of non-Western society's struggle to demonstrate *multiple paths* to modernity.¹³ An earlier form of this is found in the slogan 'Japanese Spirit and Western Technology' from Meiji Japan, which is founded on the concept of *Ti Yong*. Second, on a

⁹Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925–1975* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982).

¹⁰Michael Barr, *Cultural Politics and Asian Values: The Tepid War* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 26–9, 39–44.

¹¹Manuel Castells, 'Four Asian tigers with a dragon head: A comparative analysis of the state, economy, and society in the Asian Pacific Rim', in Richard Appelbaum and Jeffrey Henderson (eds), *States and Development in the Asian Pacific Rim* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), pp. 51–2.

¹²Meredith Woo-Cumings, 'Introduction: Chalmers Johnson and the politics of nationalism and development', in Meredith Woo-Cumings (ed.), *The Developmental State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 7–10; see also Meredith Woo-Cumings, 'Back to basics: Ideology, nationalism, and Asian values in East Asia', in Eric Helleiner and Andreas Pickel (eds), *Economic Nationalism in a Globalized World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 93–5.

¹³I take advantage of Eisenstadt's conceptualisation of '[Western] modernity' here, as it is not only authoritative in its own right, but also it resonates with this article's emphasis on East Asian agency ('East Asian struggles to recalibrate its place in world politics by challenging neoliberalism', for example). According to Eisenstadt, modernity, which is rooted in Western Enlightenment's twin premises of autonomous human agency and progressive view of history, refers to a secular humanist programme/movement entailing that human beings can create and chart the world as they design and plan (as opposed to God-ordained cosmos). See Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, 'The civilizational dimension of modernity: Modernity as a distinct civilization', *International Sociology*, 16:3 (2001), pp. 321–4.

deeper level, I show that the narrative on Asian values (or ‘multiple modernities narrative’ as detailed below) is part of civilisation politics aimed to recalibrate the place of East Asia in a world consisting of the civilised and the uncivilised, a divide that still remains today in various forms following European expansion in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ I intend to examine the socially constructed nature of ‘the standard of civilisation’ lurking behind the narratives on civilisation, which naturalises the temporal and sequential hierarchy of civilisational identities in world politics.¹⁵

In developing the argument, I analytically draw on a combination of discursive/narrative analysis¹⁶ and performative theory of power. Central to this combinatorial theoretical insight is that the importance of narrative formation, reproduction, and reformulation hinges on their performative capacity not only to describe but also to *engender* empirical realities. As detailed below, this performativity is embedded in a narrative ontology in which the power of a narrative comes from its role in constituting (not just describing) the world as we know it. I empirically illustrate this theoretical insight by examining how East Asian value claims to economic success have historically been framed in the multiple modernities narrative. Here I utilise Shmuel Eisenstadt’s concept of multiple modernities,¹⁷ which is defined as ‘multiple interpretations and responses to Western modernity’, to capture the core meaning structure of what *underlined* East Asian practices of linking local values to economic development in a civilisational context. I thus use multiple modernities as an interpretative concept.¹⁸ The validity of this analytical move is illuminated by considering that the ideas of civilisation and modernity have historically developed in East Asia as standing in a mutually constituting relationship. By associating local values with economic success, East Asian states not only describe why and how they succeeded economically, *but also reconstitute the world of what is possible, what is natural, and what is normal for the economic development process.* East Asian states’ claims for ‘multiple paths to economic development’ is an evaluative expression of multiple modernities that subverts the dominant neoliberal narratives and practices of a one-size-fits-all universal prescription. As such, the idea of multiple paths to economic development is repetitively, recurrently, and unmistakably observed in East Asian development narratives informed by civilisational politics.

In so doing, I aim to make two interrelated theoretical and empirical contributions to the existing literature on *civilisational politics*, whose analytical focus is to explore how historical actors (not analysts) make sense of and organise their international relations in civilisational terms.¹⁹

¹⁴Bettiza, ‘Civilizational analysis in international relations’, pp. 1–28; Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 2009); Alan Chong, ‘Civilizations and harm: The politics of civilizing processes between the West and the non-West’, *Review of International Studies*, 43:4 (2017), pp. 637–53; Julian Go, ‘Civilization and its subalterns’, *Review of International Studies*, 43:4 (2017), pp. 612–20; ‘The “revolt against the West” revisited’, in Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit (eds), *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Martin Hall and Patrick Jackson (eds), *Civilizational Identity: The Production and Reproduction of ‘Civilizations’ in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*; Katzenstein, ‘A world of plural and pluralist civilizations’; Andrew Linklater, ‘Process sociology, the English School, and postcolonialism: Understanding civilization and world politics’, *Review of International Studies*, 43:4 (2017), pp. 700–19.

¹⁵Janice Mattern and Ayşe Zarakol, ‘Hierarchies in world politics’, *International Organization*, 70:3 (2016), pp. 623–54.

¹⁶In this article, I broadly define discourse as a constitutive structure of meaning for what can be said and done, while a narrative is taken to be a subclass of discourse with the key characteristic of having ‘a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way’. See Lewis Hinchman and Sandra Hinchman, *Memory, Identity and Community: The Idea of Narrative in Human Sciences* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001).

¹⁷Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, ‘Multiple modernities’, *Dadalus*, 129 (2000), pp. 1–29.

¹⁸Since I use the concept of multiple modernities analytically, the question of what the proper meaning of modernity is, which is extremely important in its own right, goes beyond the scope of this article. For the role of concept in interpretation, see Alessandro Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), ch. 6; Ronald Dworkin, *Law’s Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), ch. 2; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), ch. 2; Sandra Harding, *Is Science Multi-Cultural? Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 9–28.

¹⁹Bettiza, ‘Civilizational analysis in international relations’, pp. 5–9. Bettiza categorises *civilisational politics* as one of four research paradigms in the field of civilisational analysis. The other three are ‘civilisational dynamics’, ‘inter-civilisational

Theoretically, I newly shed light on a key underlying mechanism of production and reproduction of civilisational politics by drawing analytically on performative theory of power ('constituting social reality by describing it'). To my best knowledge, no previous work has utilised this analytical potentiality in a fuller way for civilisational analysis. Empirically, I extend the scope of civilisational analysis by applying the nexus of modernity-civilisational politics to international economic relations and East Asia, both of which are relatively rare.²⁰

This article is structured as follows. First, I sketch out the analytical framework of the article, which is a combinatorial analysis of discursive/narrative and performative power. This section specifies how East Asian value claims can be empirically examined. The section that follows introduces a discussion of civilisational politics and the associated concept of multiple modernities, leading to a working hypothesis for East Asian value claims. The next section empirically illustrates the development and deployment of East Asian narratives on the relationship between economic development and values. I conclude by outlining the implications of this research for the politics of civilisation and modernity in East Asia.

Narrative power and performativity

If power is the ability to effect outcomes,²¹ how can discourse and narratives bring out outcomes? In its most basic form, adherents to discourse theory claim that the power of discourse lies in its ability to generate social meaning for actors and their action environments. Inasmuch as social reality cannot exist outside of language in the strong version of constructivist and poststructuralist social ontology, discourse shapes the structure of identity and interests. The analysis of discursive formation is critical in this regard because it can lead into explicating the origins and development of the web of meaning that privileges a certain mode of identity and actions while marginalising alternatives.²² Jennifer Milliken's notion of 'discourse productivity' is pertinent

ethics', and 'the politics of civilisation'. 'Civilisational dynamics' research mainly investigates the historical patterns of civilisational interactions. 'Inter-civilisational ethics' research, which has a strong normative orientation, is concerned with the ways in which inter-civilisational dialogues and understandings are best promoted for international peace. Lastly, 'the politics of civilisation' research critically examines how civilisational discourses and invocations are called in as rhetorical tools to legitimise unequal power relations and practices among concerned parties. In contrast, the centrality of *civilisational politics* research lies in 'the desire to investigate how actors come to perceive the international as a place where civilisations and their relations *matter*; and how actors, when reshaping international politics along these beliefs, bring civilizations into existence as social facts at this historical juncture in world politics' (ibid., p. 4, emphasis in original). For a similar survey of civilisational analysis and research, see also Gregorio Bettiza and Fabio Petito, 'Why (clash of) civilizations discourses just won't go away? Understanding the civilizational politics of our times', in Davide Orsi (ed.), *The 'Clash of Civilizations' 25 Years On: A Multidisciplinary Appraisal* (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2018), pp. 37–51.

²⁰Recent exceptions include Daniel Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Brett Bowden and Leonard Seabrooke, 'Global standards of market civilization', in Hall and Jackson (eds), *Civilizational Identity*, pp. 119–33; Hyoung-kyu Chey and Eric Helleiner, 'Civilizational values and political economy beyond the West: The significance of Korean debates at the time of its economic opening', *Contemporary Politics*, 24:2 (2018), pp. 191–209; Eric Helleiner and Hongying Wang, 'Beyond the tributary tradition of Chinese IPE: The indigenous roots of early Chinese economic nationalism', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 11:4 (2018), pp. 451–81; Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*; Hobson, 'Part 2 – Reconstructing the non-Eurocentric foundation of IPE'; John M. Hobson, 'Reconstructing International Relations through world history: Oriental globalization and the global-dialogue conception of inter-civilizational relations', *International Politics*, 44 (2007), pp. 414–30; John M. Hobson, 'Part 1 – Revealing the Eurocentric foundation of IPE: A critical historiography of the discipline from the classical to the modern era', *Review of International Political Economy*, 20:5 (2013), pp. 1024–54; Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *Sinicization and the Rise of China: Civilizational Processes beyond East and West* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Kenneth Pomeranz, 'Without coal? Colonies? Calculus? Counterfactuals and industrialization in Europe and China', in Phillip Tetlock, Richard Lebow, and Geoffrey Parker (eds), *Unmaking the West: 'What-If' Scenarios that Rewrite World History* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009).

²¹Peter Morriss, *Power: A Philosophical Analysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

²²Jennifer Sterling-Folker and Rosemary Shinko, 'Discourses of power: Traversing realist-postmodern divide', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33:3 (2005), pp. 637–64; Ronald Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

here. In her words,²³ ‘discourses make intelligible some ways of being in, acting towards the world, and of operationalizing a particular “regime of truth” while excluding other possible modes of identity and action’. Discourse productivity takes the form of ‘ontological narratives’ in a sense that connects identity (the understanding of self) and agency (the conditions for action).

As such, it is not surprising that discourse analysis is closely linked to the constitutive analysis of human agency. Discourse analysis is performed to uncover the elements of human agency, which is conceptualised as ‘a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its iterational or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a projective capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a practical-evaluative capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)’.²⁴ For this purpose, discourse analysis is often devised to explicate the deep-seated meaning structure in which actors find themselves (‘particular interpretive dispositions’ in Roxanne Doty’s words)²⁵ and that opens up the possibility for certain courses of action while constraining others. For example, before a potential policy can be deemed valuable, it first has to be rendered ‘thinkable’ on the part of the actors.²⁶ Jutta Weldes stresses this point clearly when she argues that state officials’ understanding of international politics is ‘necessarily rooted in collective meanings already produced, at least in part, in domestic and cultural contexts’.²⁷

But the problem of the aforementioned conventional discourse analysis (that is, the discursive dimension of power) is that, because of its analytical emphasis on the social construction of collective meaning rooted in the past, it tends to pay less than satisfactory attention to the political *intervention* aspect of discursive power. That is, it neglects the other half of discursive power, which is performative in the sense of ‘making it happen’ rather than expressing something that is already there. Discourse (and narratives) *intervenes* in the functioning of social reality by *representing* it. The concept of ‘performativity’ captures this dual aspect of discourse.²⁸ Economics as an academic discourse, for example, ‘performs, shapes, and formats the economy, rather than observing how it functions’.²⁹ In this respect, Michel Callon, who is the main progenitor of the analysis of performativity, argues, ‘[A] discourse is indeed performative ... if it contributes to the construction of reality that it describes.’³⁰ Importantly, Callon’s succinct formulation of performativity finds its early and exemplary expression in Judith Butler’s works on gender performance.³¹ In the vein of the performativity linkage of description and constitution,

²³Jennifer Milliken, ‘The study of discourse in International Relations: A critique of research and methods’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:2 (1999), p. 229.

²⁴Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, ‘What is agency?’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 103:4 (1998), p. 962; Hayward Alker, ‘Discussion: On the discursive turn in civilizational analysis’, in Hall and Jackson (eds), *Civilizational Identity*, p. 57.

²⁵Roxanne Doty, ‘Foreign policy as social construction: A post-positivist analysis of U.S. counterinsurgency policy in the Philippines’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 37:3 (1993), p. 298.

²⁶Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 13–16.

²⁷Jutta Weldes, *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 9.

²⁸Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999 [orig. pub. 1990]); Donald MacKenzie, Fabian Muniesa, and Lucia Siu (eds), *Do Economists Make Markets? On the Performativity of Economics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Michel Callon (ed.), *The Laws of the Markets* (London: Blackwell, 1998); Donald MacKenzie, *An Engine Not a Camera: How Financial Models Shape Markets* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁰Michel Callon, ‘What does it mean to say that economics is performative?’, in MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu (eds), *Do Economists Make Markets?*, p. 316.

³¹As Butler herself acknowledges in her 1999 preface of *Gender Trouble*, pp. xiv, xxiv, her idea of performativity has changed or evolved over time in response to criticisms. In Butler’s own assessment of how she has clarified and revised the use of performativity, she was initially interested in employing the concept of performativity to highlight the performative role of gender discourses (‘regulative discourses’) in creating ‘the anticipation of a gendered essence’ for a socially sanctioned

Butler shows that gender discourse does not just describe a gendered social reality out there: it actively constitutes, reproduces, and reinforces the gendered social reality by fixing it in a particular way through gender performance.³²

This neglect of the performative aspect of discursive power thus amounts to the loss of ‘the inner meaning of the notion of an act of language’.³³ This neglect is also ironic in that discourse analysis is putatively most interested in studying how language *constitutes* social reality.³⁴ As such, one real advantage of adding performativity to discourse analysis is to be able to utilise the discursive mechanism of ‘the reflexive looping-effect’ for the relationship between representation and intervention.³⁵ As Stefano Guzzini aptly puts it, ‘Categories we use for classifying/naming people interact with the self-conception of those people.’ What is described structures a new set of identities and interests, thus engendering new action possibilities.³⁶

When the above performativity insight is applied to a narrative form of discourse, the power of narrative thus derives from a given story’s capacity to frame the realities of what is legitimate, what is normal, and what is politically possible by offering ‘the meaningful orderings of an otherwise bewildering variety of different action descriptions’.³⁷ A narrative ties together descriptive elements of various facts into a coherent whole that effects meaning for action possibilities.³⁸ The nexus of collective meaning and social action is established through the performativity mechanism of narrative, which brings out the mutually constitutive relationship of narrative description of and intervention in social reality. The power of narrative depends on the degree of its success in performativity.

There are, for example, multiple ways in which the concept of civilisation could be historically narrated. As detailed below, however, when the concept of civilisation became closely associated with the idea of progress in the dominant Western narrative, it engendered a hierarchical, stage-based reality of relations among civilisations. As such, the idea of civilisation as progress in the dominant Western narrative has a conditioning relationship with the emergence and development of the multiple modernities-based value claims of Asian elites. In short, the idea and practices of multiple modernities in East Asia have remained coextensive with the dominant Western narrative of civilisation in alternatively producing, normalising, and naturalising the civilisational subjectivities of the East and the West.

Based on the theoretical discussion of discursive/narrative power above, the empirical analysis used in this article is now described. Given that meaning is basically a system of signification that

ritual of gender performance, which in turn reinforces the gendered anticipation in a self-fulfilling prophecy fashion. In her subsequent writings, Butler more explicitly elaborated on the performativity link between gender scripts/descriptions and gendered ontologies. See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997). For her claim that performativity is useful to analyse the processes that engender the naturalised assumptions of what constitutes reality; see also Judith Butler, ‘Performative agency’, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 3:2 (2010), pp. 147–61. In fact, both MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu (eds), *Do Economists Make Markets* and Mackenzie, *An Engine Not a Camera* recognise Butler as a pioneer who utilises the notion of performativity for social analysis.

³²In Butler’s own words, ‘Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.’ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 173, emphasis in original.

³³Callon, ‘What does it mean to say that economics is performative?’, p. 327.

³⁴Rodney Hall, ‘The discursive demolition of the Asian development model’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 47:1 (2003), pp. 71–99.

³⁵Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

³⁶Stefano Guzzini, ‘The concept of power: A constructivist analysis’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33:3 (2005), p. 499.

³⁷Hayward Alker, *Rediscoveries and Reformulations: Humanistic Methodologies for International Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 400.

³⁸Jonathan Moses and Torbjørn Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 207.

is relatively anonymous, arbitrary, and conventional in its make-up, and diffuse in its presence and effects,³⁹ any empirical analysis should capture a whole (or an umbrella meaning) into which many divergent specific discourses coalesce. Thus, it should attempt to uncover the core meaning structure that all discursive actions, say, Asian elites' narratives of East Asian state-led economic development, in some ways commonly presuppose. In what follows, a key feature of this article's approach to narrative performativity is longitudinal, intertextual analysis. That is, this article demonstrates that, despite the different political, economic, and historical settings across East Asia, Asian elites have since the late 1970s contextualised and narrated their economic development in terms of 'civilization-multiple modernities' meaning structures; they have constituted the world of multiple paths to economic development by narrating the role of local values in facilitating East Asian economic success. The meaning structure of multiple modernities is the pivot on which the role of local values and multiple paths to economic development conjoin. This intertextual treatment of longitudinal analysis enables this article to escape the trap of deriving a meaning-based argument from behavior or policy outcomes, which is the source of tautological reasoning of which meaning-oriented analysis is often accused.

Civilisational politics and multiple modernities in East Asia

As noted at the outset, I contend in this article that, in order to fully understand the sources of Asian elites' narrative construction and deployment of value claims in their attempt to challenge the (neo)liberal understanding of economic development, one has to approach these value claims in the broader context of their challenge to the modern Western-centric global culture that originated in the West around the time of the European Enlightenment and in the early years of the Industrial Revolution. With this in mind, this section historicises the rise of East Asian value claims in world politics. It does so by building the historical context for civilisational politics in East Asia. More concretely, it illuminates how the idea of progress, which is the central presumption of (Western) modernity, contributed to the ascendance of a Western narrative naturalising a hierarchical understanding of civilisational relations, thus resulting in the notion of the standard of civilisation.⁴⁰ The dominance of this Western narrative and its associated practices engendered the practice, idea, and narrative of multiple modernities in East Asia. As detailed below, the dividing line between the civilised and the uncivilised is neither inevitable nor determined in its content and boundaries that constitute civilisational relations. The narrative-performativity analytical link foregrounds these historical processes.⁴¹

Modern global culture remains Western-centric in that it exalts the West as the primary subject in world history, driving the world forward and transforming others as objects.⁴² Arguably, almost all global institutions are permeated by constellations of symbols and values that privilege the West and relegate others to passive roles. In other words, the West acts while others react. When others react according to values that are inconsistent with Western-centric modern global culture, they are depicted as illegitimate, subversive, and uncivilised. In the world economy, for example, Brett Bowden and Leonard Seabrooke argue that the notion of a standard of civilization goes hand-in-hand with the golden straitjacket of free market capitalism because it provides 'the basis from which peoples and states are ranked according to their capacity to fit within market

³⁹Isaac Reed, 'Power: Relational, discursive, and performative dimensions', *Sociological Theory*, 31:3 (2013), p. 200.

⁴⁰See fn. 13 for the discussion on two premises of Western modernity.

⁴¹See, for example, Katzenstein's discussion on two modes of analysis for the concept of civilisation, dispositional and discursive. Discursive analysis examines how the idea of civilisation shapes the constitution of 'gender, kinship, territory, language, or race'. Katzenstein, 'A world of plural and pluralist civilizations', pp. 6–14.

⁴²John Meyer, John Boli, George Thomas, and Ramirez Francisco, 'World society and the nation-state', *American Journal of Sociology*, 103:1 (1997), pp. 144–81.

globalization'.⁴³ The politics of global standards in global economic governance⁴⁴ may indeed be an enactment of the 'global standards of market civilization' set by the West.⁴⁵

For Asian societies and elsewhere, encountering modern global culture and its associated value system put them in a profoundly difficult situation: how much of what they considered to be their core values should be sacrificed to facilitate the import of modern projects, such as industrialisation and economic development linked to military modernisation? Ever since the European expansion in the late nineteenth century, virtually all Asian states have faced this dilemma, and one solution was the conceptualisation of this process in terms of selectively borrowing from the West in *Ti-Yong*.⁴⁶ *Ti* denotes a given society's imagined collective essence or identity, with *Yong* denoting the Western technology and institutions that might be used to defend the *Ti*. Earlier forms of this are found in the Chinese slogan 'Preserving the Chinese Essence and Applying the Western Technology' and the Japanese one 'Japanese Spirit and Western Technology', used during the Meiji Restoration.⁴⁷

Conceptually speaking, this arguably constitutes an earlier effort on the part of East Asian states to establish a multiple modernities project in East Asia. As Eisenstadt suggests,⁴⁸ multiple modernities imply that modernity and Westernisation are not identical. The Western form of modernisation is only one way of realising modernity or 'Enlightenment ideals' in a civilisation of modernity committed to institutionalising the improvement of human welfare.⁴⁹ As such, non-Western societies can achieve the secular enlightenment ideals of elevating the socio-economic conditions of human existence in different forms. In other words, there are multiple pathways to substantiating Enlightenment ideals, and non-Western societies have achieved and will achieve them by combining Western values and their local values. As Katzenstein puts it, 'the civilization of modernity embodies a multiplicity of different cultural programs and institutions of modernity that derive from the interaction between West European modernity and the various civilizations of the Axial Age'.⁵⁰ The final outcome is 'multiple' third ways in embedding modern values in each society's domestic political and economic institutions.

In the sphere of economic activity, for example, proponents of Asian values claim that the Western individual orientation has given birth to a 'market' society while the Asian collectivistic orientation generates institutionalised state-led economic development (that is, catch-up economic development). Meredith Woo-Cumings observes this in the context of multiple third ways:

Originality and creativity in the development of the distinctive form of Asian nonliberal capitalism came not from copying, followership, or one-size-fits-all dictums based on the Western experience, but from inventive and iconoclastic deviations – sudden industrial spurts and leaps forward, skipping over Rostovian 'stages', carving out new sequences [of industrialisation], and reinventing the role of states and markets.⁵¹

What is noteworthy in the above discussion is that the idea and practice of multiple modernities on the part of non-Western society are inseparable from the civilisational politics of

⁴³Bowden and Seabrooke, 'Global standards of market civilization', p. 120.

⁴⁴Daniel Drezner, *All Politics is Global: Explaining International Regulatory Regimes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Walter Mattli and Ngaire Woods (eds), *The Politics of Global Regulation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁴⁵Bowden and Seabrooke, 'Global standards of market civilization'.

⁴⁶See Christopher Hughes, 'The enduring function of the substance/essence (*Ti/Yong*) dichotomy in China's nationalism', in William Callahan and Elena Barabantseva (eds), *China Orders the World: Soft Power and Normative Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Press, 2011), pp. 118–42.

⁴⁷Derek Hall, 'Japanese spirit, Western economics: The continuing salience of economic nationalism in Japan', *New Political Economy*, 9:1 (2004), pp. 79–99.

⁴⁸Eisenstadt, 'Multiple modernities'.

⁴⁹Eisenstadt, 'The civilizational dimension of modernity', pp. 320–40.

⁵⁰Katzenstein, 'A world of plural and pluralist civilizations', p. 17.

⁵¹Woo-Cumings, 'Back to basics', p. 92.

international relations. As many English School writers have noted, the European expansion in the late nineteenth century brought about the divide between civilised and uncivilised states.⁵² The notion of ‘the standard of civilisation’, which was widely shared among European states, exemplifies the divide. It was European states themselves that determined the boundary between the civilised and the uncivilised.⁵³ As such, the issue was how non-Western states would accept the institutions of European international society (that is, international law and the European style of diplomacy) and reconfigure their domestic political organisational structures along modern European lines, thus fulfilling the standard of civilisation.⁵⁴

The question of whether a non-Western state was regarded as civilised was vitally important for that state. As Gerrit Gong aptly observes, ‘The standard of civilization was a response to the philosophical problem of determining which countries deserved legal recognition and legal personality in international law and provided a doctrinal rationale for limiting recognition in international law to candidate countries.’⁵⁵ A non-Western state could not be recognised as having statehood and sovereignty without being recognised as civilised by the imposition of great European powers; a non-Western state would face a serious dilemma in terms of its ontological existence in world politics if it did not gain ‘civilised’ status in ‘civilised’ international society.

This dilemma was clearly evident in Edward Keene’s work.⁵⁶ The upshot of Keene’s findings is that there were indeed two modes of interaction (or two separate sets of rules and norms) in European international society. One set was applied between civilised European states while the other operated between civilised European states and uncivilised non-European states. The former implies ‘tolerance’, ‘coexistence’, and the ‘mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty’. In the latter, the ‘civilised’ European states were not obliged to follow such rules and norms to the extent that they could act imperialistically over ‘uncivilised’ non-Western states. Building on Keene’s work, Shogo Suzuki argues, for example, that Japan was socialised to want to become an imperial power in the late nineteenth century, as imperialism was an integral part of modern international society.⁵⁷

As such, the concept of civilisation was instrumental in establishing the hierarchical relationship between the West and the rest. It provided Europeans with a powerful tool to differentiate and evaluate others in relation to their self-understanding or universal standards while compelling the rest to be exposed to European judgements of who and what they should be.⁵⁸ Importantly, however, the concept of civilisation in and of itself does not contain any inherent link to the hierarchy of world politics. This is so empirically, behaviourally, and contingently.

On an empirical level, the formation and development of civilisations have always been the outcomes of multidimensional encountering of human groups. The Huntingtonian essentialist understanding of civilisational ontology notwithstanding,⁵⁹ the history of civilisations is full of ‘mutual transmission (Toynbee 1953),’⁶⁰ ‘mutual borrowing,’⁶¹ ‘the dialectics of civilizations,’⁶²

⁵²Gerrit Gong, *The Standard of ‘Civilization’ in International Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁵³Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Suganami, *The English School of International Relations: A Contemporary Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 146–7.

⁵⁴Yannis Stivachtis, *The Enlargement of International Society: Culture versus Anarchy and Greece’s Entry into International Society* (New York: St Martin Press, 1998).

⁵⁵Gong, *The Standard of ‘Civilization’ in International Society*, p. 24.

⁵⁶Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁵⁷Shogo Suzuki, ‘Japan’s socialization into Janus-faced European international society’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 11:1 (2005), pp. 137–64.

⁵⁸Jacinta O’Hagan, ‘Discourses of civilizational identity’, in Hall and Jackson (eds), *Civilizational Identity*, p. 19.

⁵⁹Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

⁶⁰Ian Hall, ‘Clashing civilizations: A Toynbean response to Huntington’, in Orsi (ed.), *The ‘Clash of Civilizations’ 25 Years On*, p. 21.

⁶¹Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilization* (New York: Penguin, 1993).

⁶²Nobert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

'civilizational processes',⁶³ and 'the oriental West'.⁶⁴ Civilisational boundaries are empirically porous and multifaceted in the seamless processes of making, unmaking, and remaking their temporal and spatial existence. As such, civilisational hierarchy cannot readily be available from reading off what civilisations are. If Katzenstein's notion of internal pluralism of civilisations is added to this complexity of civilisational processes,⁶⁵ a hierarchy of civilisations (or a hierarchy of 'civilisational singularity' in Katzenstein's term) becomes a far more remote possibility when there is no necessary *political* intervention. It is precisely because there cannot be such an entity as an internally coherent, externally exclusive civilisation capable of dividing up civilisations hierarchically.⁶⁶

Furthermore, behaviourally, civilisations are not entities that are usually associated with the notion of (corporate) agency.⁶⁷ Gregorio Bettiza, for example, compares states' agency to that of civilisation as follows:

Take states for instance. There are multiple and contested debates when it comes to defining what states are. Yet, their identifiable centralized institutional underpinnings, the sovereign rights which are bestowed upon them, and their legally recognized territorial borders provide some hooks to which scholars can give states some sort of corporate agency or conceptual coherence. Civilizations lack all of that.⁶⁸

As such, civilisations do not possess by themselves any tangible legal, institutional, or symbolic basis for fostering particular social actions, such as constructing a hierarchical order in world politics. On the contrary, anyone can speak for and act in the name of civilisation without 'having to first establish their authority or receive a seal of approval from any particular organization'.⁶⁹ What all these strongly suggest is that civilisations are social processes whose political consequences are open and variegated as to how political entities dialectically shape and are shaped by civilisational discourses and practices; the hierarchy of civilisations cannot be overdetermined, as it remains just one possibility among many alternative civilisational arrangements.

Lastly, contingency involves problematising the popular narratives of the rise and fall of civilisations, as they presuppose the existence of civilisational hierarchy. Given that civilisations are deeply entwined and mutually constitute each other (as discussed above), the rise of one civilisation over others is not solely attributable to the risen civilisation's intrinsic prowess. It is rather a *contingent* outcome. John Hobson's notions of 'the oriental West' and 'oriental globalisation', which preceded the rise of the West, exemplify this position.⁷⁰ As Hobson aptly puts it, 'with the Rest, there would be no modern West'.⁷¹ Phillip Tetlock and his collaborators' counterfactual analyses also tellingly demonstrate how Western ascendancy could have stopped at various historical junctures.⁷² Perhaps more fundamentally, the very idea of the rise and fall of civilisations is socially constructed in the sense that there has never been the standard yardstick against which all

⁶³Hayward Alker, 'If not Huntington's "civilizations", then whose?', *Review*, 18:4 (1995), pp. 533–62.

⁶⁴Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*.

⁶⁵Katzenstein, 'A world of plural and pluralist civilizations'.

⁶⁶Otherwise, it is hard to fathom the empirical fact that clashes occur primarily within rather than between civilisations. For this empirical insight, see, for example, Hemada Ben-Yehuda, 'The clash of civilization's thesis: Findings from international crises, 1918–1994', *Comparative Civilizations Review*, 49 (2003), pp. 28–42; Giacomo Chiozza, 'Is there a clash of civilizations? Evidence from patterns of international conflict involvement, 1946–97', *Journal of Peace Research*, 39:6 (2002), pp. 711–34.

⁶⁷See above the discussion of agency.

⁶⁸Bettiza, 'Civilizational analysis in international relations', p. 10.

⁶⁹Patrick Jackson, 'Civilizations as actors: A transactional account', in Hall and Jackson (eds), *Civilizational Identity*, p. 47.

⁷⁰Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*.

⁷¹Hobson, 'Part 2 – Reconstructing the non-Eurocentric foundation of IPE', p. 1070.

⁷²Tetlock, Lebow, and Parker (eds), *Unmaking the West*.

historical civilizational developments are objectively measured. Civilisations cannot rise or fall, but they are made to rise or fall by political intervention.

Then, where does the narrative power of the concept of civilisation in performing the aforementioned evaluative function (advanced/backward, right/wrong, natural/unnatural) come from? It is a European political project in the nineteenth century that endowed the concept of civilisation with the evaluative narrative power. Central to this political project was to embed *the idea of progress*⁷³ into the core meaning of what constitutes civilisations.⁷⁴ Since the idea of progress would work on the linear progression of history couched in ‘totalistic, essentialistic, and absolutizing terms’,⁷⁵ European elites found it useful to foster a taken-for-granted sense of reality that civilisational hierarchy would indeed exist. The idea of progress helped naturalise a normative hierarchy between different cultural communities.⁷⁶ This produced a host of binaries, such as civilised/uncivilised, advanced/backward, modern/premodern, and superior/inferior, while silencing the mutually constitutive aspects of civilisational relations.⁷⁷

The idea of progress thus furnishes civilisational identities with their operational meaning as the grammar of constitutive and performative narrative. The idea of progress is how and why hierarchical civilisational identities are typically invoked. In Jacinta O’Hagan’s words, ‘[T]he concept of civilization and of civilizational identities provides a powerful resources for framing identities and interests at the global, regional, and individual level and is used to evaluate and differentiate actors and actions in world politics.’⁷⁸ In short, while civilisations themselves are fluid social processes, the idea of progress gives rise to the belief that they move up and down the ordered stages of history.

In the field of political economy, the theory of modernisation is an exemplary manifestation of civilisational politics. Robert Nisbet recognises that ‘abundance in the social sciences of foundations and government agencies dedicated to such concepts as “underdeveloped”, “modernization”, and “developed” is tribute to the persisting hold of the idea of progress in the West’.⁷⁹ The idea of progress is undoubtedly expressed in, for example, W. W. Rostow’s stage theory of economic development. Rostow’s five well-known stages of socioeconomic progress are, in the following order: (1) traditional society; (2) the preconditions for take-off; (3) take-off; (4) the drive to maturity; and (5) the age of high mass consumption. Beyond the notion of ‘stages’ deeply embedded in the idea of progress, what is more interesting about Rostow’s stage theory for the purpose of this article is Rostow’s own belief about what his theory is actually about. According to Rostow,⁸⁰ his stages are ‘not merely descriptive, nor are they merely a way of generalizing certain factual observations about the sequence of development in modern societies ... Rather, they [the stages] have an inner logic and continuity’. Rostow’s explanation of his stage theory tellingly attests to the fact that the idea of progress works in evaluative terms from the vantage point of a hierarchical world.⁸¹

In this context, I posit that the narrative of multiple development paths by Asian elites based on value claims in relation to their economic success can be understood as an effort at

⁷³Interestingly, Zhang empirically tracks how China helped shape the formation of European civilisational subjectivity as a superior other during the Enlightenment period. As such, China was indispensable to the development of European ‘idea of progress’ in the eighteenth century. See Yongjin Zhang, ‘Worlding China, 1500–1800’, in Dunne and Reus-Smit (eds), *The Globalization of International Society*, pp. 204–23.

⁷⁴Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization*, pp. 50–3.

⁷⁵Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, ‘Modernity and modernization’, *Sociopedia.isa* (2010), available at: {doi: 10.1177/205684601053}, p. 13.

⁷⁶O’Hagan, ‘Discourses of civilizational identity’, p. 22.

⁷⁷Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, pp. 7–11.

⁷⁸O’Hagan, ‘Discourses of civilizational identity’, p. 16.

⁷⁹See Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 308, cited in Bowden and Seabrooke, ‘Global standards of market civilization’, p. 124.

⁸⁰See W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 4–13, cited in Bowden and Seabrooke, ‘Global standards of civilization’, p. 125.

⁸¹Bowden and Seabrooke, ‘Global standards of market civilization’, p. 125.

‘recalibrating’ their civilisational identity and place in world politics. *The* standard of civilisation should be a standard of civilisation, being stripped of the pretension of its cultural universalism and linear historical progress in the image of Europe. As discussed above, these recalibrating efforts have a prehistory stretching back to the late nineteenth century. Asian elites’ value claims for economic success can be a new form of cultural recalibrating towards a civilisation of multiple modernities.⁸²

Value claims and multiple modernities in economic development narratives

This section empirically tracks the development and deployment of East Asian narratives on the relationship between economic development and values. Building on the above theoretical and methodological discussion, the point of the empirical analysis here is twofold. First, it identifies a range of value claims Asian elites have advanced to account for economic development in East Asia. Second, the analysis shows how these value claims have historically been constructed and deployed as counternarratives to the dominant civilising force of (neo)liberalism in the world economy. This analytical effort is about historicising East Asian value claims synchronically and diachronically with the aim to reconstruct the core meaning structure that all narratives in some way assume, which is the idea of multiple modernities. It starts with debate over Asian values, and then moves onto a discussion of Japanese value claims. Finally, this section critically engages in the Chinese narratives of economic development at greater length to elucidate the *performative* aspect of multiple modernities behind the link between the concept of civilisation and the multiple development path narrative. China is selected because of its current role and policies (for example, the Belt and Road Initiative, the establishment of New Development Bank in the context of BRICs, and recipient-based ODA policies) most aggressively align with an alternative economic development paradigm.

Value claims

The successful economic development of East and Southeast Asia despite the 1997–8 Asian financial crisis has attracted a great deal of attention from scholars and pundits over the last forty years. At the heart of the issue has been the question of why and how East Asian states produced their ‘miracles’ in the context of how close or different their experiences were from the perceived liberal interpretation of Western economic development. The interpretation of the sources of East Asian economic success has not been completely objective. As Woo-Cumings observes, for example, ‘the American discourse of the political economy of East Asia (Japan and NIEs) tends to go through periodic and predictable permutations, depending on the state of American bilateral relationships with these countries’.⁸³

In the 1960s, the American academic community portrayed the economic systems in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan as liberal and open, and their successes came from market-led development, often under American supervision. This portrayal is not altogether independent of these countries’ support for America in the Vietnam War. In sharp contrast, this narrative changed in the 1980s, characterising East Asian success as deriving from illiberal practices of state-led economic development, such as industrial policy, administrative guidance, and ‘getting price wrong’. The popularity of this ‘new’ narrative was linked with the perception of American decline and the loss of American competitiveness in the 1980s. The World Bank offered its own version of this by standing somewhat between the two early narratives, claiming that the governments of East and Southeast Asia were interventionist in a ‘market-friendly’ way.⁸⁴ This ‘illiberal’ narrative

⁸²See, for example, Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Vision of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁸³Woo-Cumings, ‘Back to basics’.

⁸⁴Wade, ‘Japan, the World Bank, and the art of paradigm maintenance’.

arguably culminated in the American/Western coinage of 'crony capitalism' for the illiberal nature of the state-led political economies in East Asia during the Asian financial crisis.⁸⁵ These periodic reversals of American/Western opinions on the nature of the East Asian economic system illustrate the vast space between the imaginings of Western economists and the realities of East Asia.

The debate over Asian values, as a way to explain why economic development in East Asia was not clearly and closely following the Western liberal model, sprang from this context of the politically and socially constructed nature of economic development narratives on East Asian success in the West. Here, Asian values have a close association with Confucian values emphasising group loyalty, harmony, deference to authority, a strong family system, paternalistic leadership, thriftiness, education, and hard work. These values have been institutionalised in the form of lifetime employment, house unions, the vertical integration of industries, state-led investment, and meritocratic selection into a powerful civil service.⁸⁶ Bruce Cumings captures these institutional expressions in the Bureaucratic, Authoritarian Industrializing Regimes (BAIRs) model.⁸⁷

The Asian values debate was initiated by Lee Keun Yew in 1977 when he launched an academic seminar on Asian values and modernisation. He attributed Singaporean success to the unique value system in Asia and claimed that 'we were an Asian-Oriental type society, hardworking, thrifty and disciplined, a people with Asian values, strong family ties and responsibility for the extended family, which is a common feature of Asian cultures, whether Chinese, Malay or Indian'.⁸⁸ He again juxtaposed Asian and Western values in 1995 and praised the 'East Asian values of hard work, sacrifice for the future, respect for education and learning, and an entrepreneurial spirit' even in the midst of the Asian financial crisis of 1997–8. Another major proponent of Asian values, Dr Mahathir (the former prime minister of Malaysia), launched his 'Look East' policy in 1981. This policy was basically a 'Learn from the East' campaign that upheld Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan as models of successful economies built upon East Asian work ethic and culture. In 1987, Dr. Mahathir commented on his 'Look East' policy by saying 'to study work ethics and management skills from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan was alive and well'.⁸⁹

As So Young Kim notes, the nature of the Asian value debate was an informal exchange of views about the cultural foundation of Asian politics and the Asian economy among high-profile politicians, journalists, and public commentators.⁹⁰ To some critics, the Asian values forwarded by authoritarian Asian leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew and Dr Mahathir served to do nothing but disguise, justify, and preserve the semi-democratic regimes prevailing in East and Southeast Asia at the time.⁹¹ Nevertheless, the politically charged nature of the Asian values debate aside, a group of scholars emerged who explored how Asian cultural orientation influenced the level and pattern of political and economic development.⁹²

Of course, proponents of Asian values do not make the simple claim that having a certain value system is sufficient for economic development. Rather, in the tradition of the late-industrialiser theory advanced by Albert Hirschman and Alexander Gerschenkron, they

⁸⁵Richard Higgott, 'The Asian economic crisis: A study in the politics of resentment', *New Political Economy*, 3:3 (1998), pp. 333–56.

⁸⁶Barr, *Cultural Politics and Asian Values*, p. 8.

⁸⁷Bruce Cumings, 'The origins and development of the Northeast Asian political economy: Industrial sectors, product cycles, and political consequences', *International Organization*, 38:1 (1984), pp. 1–40.

⁸⁸Barr, *Cultural Politics and Asian Values*, p. 3.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹⁰Kim, 'Do Asian values exist?', p. 318.

⁹¹Dae Jung Kim, 'A response to Lee Kuan Yew: Is culture destiny? The myth of Asia's anti-democratic values', *Foreign Affairs*, 73:4 (1994), pp. 189–94; Fareed Zakaria, 'Asian values', *Foreign Policy*, 133 (2002), pp. 38–9.

⁹²Francis Fukuyama, 'Social capital, civil society, and development', *Third World Quarterly*, 22:1 (2001), pp. 7–20; Chung-Si Ahn and Won-Taek Kang, 'Trust and confidence in government in transitional democracies: South Korea in comparative perspective', *Journal of Korean Politics*, 11 (2002), pp. 3–40; Clair Apodaca, 'The globalization of capital in East and Southeast Asia: Measuring the impact on human rights standards', *Asian Survey*, 42:6 (2002), pp. 883–905; Junhan Lee, 'Primary causes of Asian democratization: Dispelling conventional myths', *Asian Survey*, 42:6 (2002), pp. 821–37.

give considerable credit to the role of the state in effectively allocating limited resources to target industries for world market competition.⁹³ This presupposes a powerful but smart/intelligent bureaucracy that is able to strategically respond to signals from the world market.

However, a powerful state could not accomplish what it sets out to achieve without people who are willing to and capable of executing the state's plan for national economic development and follow its guidance. These people need to be disciplined, diligent, hardworking, and well educated, reflective of and/or derivable from the Asian/Confucian values embedded in East Asian societies.⁹⁴ As such, Asian values are regarded as one of the two pillars that make East Asian economic success possible. Associated with this, proponents of Asian values started to use the term 'Confucian work ethic' in the image of Weber's Protestant work ethic, positioning it as a competing ethical value system that rewards hard work and frugality.⁹⁵

Although it may be ironic from a Northeast Asian point of view (which is known as the cradle of Confucianism) that it was Southeast Asian leaders who picked up Asian values, coined the concept, and spurred the debate on Asian values, this was not the first time Asians had become involved in the politics of values. The precursor to the Asian values debate is arguably the pan-Asian culture/values advanced by Meiji thinkers in Japan and Chinese intellectuals in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth centuries.⁹⁶ Japan played a pivotal role in constructing and promoting the pan-Asian culture of peace, beauty, and refinement as opposed to the violent Western culture of war and conflict. China's revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen, for example, also embraced the superiority of pan-Asian values. He contrasted Asia's *wangdao* (the way of an ethical monarch and peaceful rule) with Western *badao* (the unethical and violent way).

Postwar Japan has not been a major participant in the Asian values debate *per se*. This perhaps reflects their ambiguous role in prewar pan-Asianism, which is often associated with Japan's imperialism. Nevertheless, Japanese thinkers and policymakers have advanced value claims when interpreting Japan's economic success. They have also used value claims to promote state-led economic development strategies in various international meetings and forums for economic development.

For example, Murakami, one of the most influential developmental state thinkers, is famous for his analysis of social values and their role in promoting or restricting industrial growth.⁹⁷ He argued that Japan's successful industrialisation was heavily indebted to its collectivism-based traditional family values, the famous 'ie' thesis. Japan's success came from the Japanese state's ability to harness the sense of group solidarity originally centred around the family for use in industrialisation. Along with this, Morishima also stressed the collectivist ethos as an antecedent for Japan's economic success.⁹⁸ *Nihonjinron* (the theory of Japaneseness), which became extremely popular in the 1960s and 1970s, explains Japan's economic prosperity in terms of what Japan is. At its core, Japan is underpinned by social harmony, which is often proposed to be the secret behind Japan's economic achievements.⁹⁹ The politics of value claims is not limited to academic circles. When Japanese policymakers (that is, the Ministry of Finance) started to actively promote the Japanese model of economic development in the late 1980s, they questioned

⁹³Albert Hirschman, *The Strategy of Economic Development* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958); Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

⁹⁴Kuan Yew Lee, 'Culture is destiny', *Foreign Affairs*, 73:2 (1994), pp. 109–26.

⁹⁵Jana Rosker, 'Modern Confucianism and the concept of Asian Values', *Asian Studies*, 4:1 (2016), pp. 153–64.

⁹⁶Sven Saaler and Victor Koschmann (eds), *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism, and Borders* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁹⁷Yasusuke Murakami, 'Ie society as a pattern of civilization', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 10:2 (1984), pp. 281–363.

⁹⁸Michio Morishima, *Why Has Japan Succeeded? Western Technology and Japanese Ethos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁹⁹Jongtae Kim, 'The West and national identities: A comparison of the discourses of Korean *Seonjinguk*, Japanese *Nihonjinron*, and Chinese new nationalism', *Social Science Research*, 19:2 (2011), p. 19.

the universalist pretension of the Washington Consensus. They called for the importance of local knowledge and culture in designing and implementing successful economic development strategies, particularly emphasising the *Asian* experience.¹⁰⁰

China, the mother country of Confucius, also makes value claims in narrating its economic success and selling the Chinese economic development experience to developing countries in other parts of the world. Chinese value claims are frequently advanced in the context of Asian values. There are several layers to Chinese value claims. First, a group of scholars and policy-makers emerged in early 1990s who urged that any interpretation of the Chinese economic development experience be firmly rooted in China's local attributes, such as social values and culture.¹⁰¹ Second, the rise of China's economic power over recent decades has increased the confidence of the Chinese and helped to engender 'new nationalism' in China. This new nationalism envisions China as an alternative to Western modernisation. Proponents of new nationalism emphasise traditional values, particularly Confucian values, when they account for China's socio-economic development.¹⁰² In this context, Asian values, which were once disregarded as groundless, started to be reevaluated in a more positive manner as a common factor that cuts across Chinese and Asian economic development.¹⁰³ The discussion of East Asian development models no longer sees Asian values as an obstacle to economic development, but as a vital determining factor:¹⁰⁴ 'Traditional culture could play an important role in robust economic growth.'¹⁰⁵ Last but not least, the fourth generation of Chinese leadership has capitalised on Confucian values since President Hu Jintao proclaimed in 2005 that his major policy goal would be to make China a 'harmonious society'. Chinese values and Asian values have often been combined into one-value system that is seen to have facilitated economic success in both China and East and Southeast Asia in general. President Hu Jintao's speech at the Boao Forum of Asia in 2011 resonates in this respect:

The people of Asia have an unyielding spirit of seeking self-improvement. In their long history, the people of Asia have created a colorful and brilliant civilization that remains the envy of the world ... The people of Asia have an open and inclusive spirit of learning from others ... By promoting their own fine cultural tradition and at the same time drawing extensively on the fine cultural achievements of other nations, the people of Asia have contributed to the common development of Asia and the world.¹⁰⁶

Chinese narratives and the world of multiple paths to development

As evident above, Asian elites have advanced value claims to make sense of their country's economic development and that of other Asian countries. They have done so by countering the dominant (neo)liberal rendering of their social ontology in the dialectic of universal civilisation and local values. Below I further investigate this point using multiple samples of Chinese narratives. Empirical samples are collected from various speeches by members of the Chinese top leadership at major regional and global forums from 2006 to 2017. The task of this investigation is to decipher the structure of Chinese narratives on economic development in demonstrating how

¹⁰⁰Lee, *The Japanese Challenge to the American Neoliberal Order*, pp. 119–24.

¹⁰¹Yongnian Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁰²Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

¹⁰³Kim, 'Do Asian values exist?', p. 22.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁵Suisheng Zhao, 'Chinese intellectuals' quest for national greatness and nationalistic writing in the 1990s', *The China Quarterly*, 152 (1997), p. 739.

¹⁰⁶Hu Jintao, Keynote Speech at Opening Ceremony of Boao Forum of Asia Annual Conference 2011 (15 April 2011).

these narratives are in fact reflective of Chinese concerns with multiple modernities in civilisational politics. The evidence for the performativity of multiple modernities within a broader civilisational sensitivity is threaded through these speeches' efforts to constitute the world of multiple paths to economic development.

The Chinese narratives on economic development of China and East Asia began to take shape in the early 2000s. From early on, the Chinese leaders denied the existence of a universal path to economic development and emphasised the importance of harnessing local values and socio-economic contexts in their calling for multiple paths to economic development. The earlier form of Chinese development narratives, which was made public under the leadership of Hu Jintao, paid considerable attention to divergent economic development strategies in line with local values. Premier Wen Jiabao, in his speech at the Fourth Asia Cooperation Dialogue in 2005, attributed the economic success of East Asia and China to the regional states' exploration of development paths suitable for their local contexts:

In modern history, people in Asia once suffered from the invasion and humiliation of colonialism and imperialism and eventually realized national liberation and independence after long-term and arduous struggle ... *Since the latter half of the last century Asian countries have been committed to exploring the development roads in accordance with their own realities and a group of industrialized countries emerged out of them. Asia has become the most dynamic region with the fastest growing economy in the world ... China is a member of the Asian family. With years of exploration, we have found a development road suitable for China's national conditions.*¹⁰⁷

Similarly, President Hu Jintao pointed to the positive impact of Chinese values on economic development when he argued that 'The distinct cultural tradition of the Chinese nation that developed in the long course of history has exerted a strong influence on contemporary China.'¹⁰⁸ He further elaborated on the narrative of local values and multiple development paths in the context of civilisational sensibilities. Hu Jintao noted in his speech at the Boao Forum of Asia in 2011:

The people of Asia have a shared mission to promote common development and build a harmonious Asia. To this end, I would like to make the following proposals: *First, we need to respect diversity of civilizations and promote good-neighborly relations. We should continue to respect each other's choice of development path and efforts to promote economic and social development and improve people's lives. We need to translate the diversity of our region into a driving force for more dynamic exchanges and cooperation.*¹⁰⁹

As shown above, the concept of civilisation also appeared in these narratives along with multiple paths of economic development. It was often presented in association with local values. This means that the earlier usage of the concept of civilisation by the Chinese leaders stemmed from their attempts to naturalise a necessary logical conclusion of multiple development paths. Against this backdrop, President Xi Jinping, who took office in 2013, substantially streamlined and strengthened the narrative linkage between multiple development paths and civilisational politics. In short, the Chinese narratives started to meet the idea of progress behind the (evaluative) concept of civilisation head on. To quote Xi Jinping in length for his speech at the Boao Forum of Asia in 2015:

¹⁰⁷Wen Jiabao, Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the 4th Foreign Ministers' Meeting of Asia Cooperation Dialogue (6 April 2005), emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸Hu Jintao, 'Scientific Outlook Development', Lecture for Yale University (24 April 2006).

¹⁰⁹Jintao, Keynote Speech at Opening Ceremony of Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2011, emphasis added.

*Over the past 70 years, more and more Asian countries have found development paths that suit their own national conditions and embarked on a fast-track of economic growth ... To respect one another and treat each other as equals, countries need to, first and foremost, respect other countries' social systems and development paths of their own choice, respect each other's core interests and major concerns and have objective and rational perception of other countries' growing strength, policies and visions ... day, Asia has proudly maintained its distinct diversity and still nurtures all the civilizations, ethnic groups and religions in this big Asian family. Mencius, the great philosopher in ancient China, said, 'Things are born to be different.' Civilizations are only unique, and no one is superior to the other. There need to be more exchange and dialogue among civilizations and development models, so that each could draw on the strength of the other and all could thrive and prosper by way of mutual learning and common development.*¹¹⁰

In the same year, Xi Jinping went beyond the confine of East Asia and extended the narrative of civilisation-cum-multiple development paths to the BRICS (that is, Xi's speech at the 7th BRIC Summit) as well as African leaders (that is, Xi's speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation). The Chinese narratives of civilisation-cum-multiple development paths have subsequently grown stronger. Xi addressed the World Economic Forum in 2017 and made the narrative linkage unmistakably clear:

*China has become the world's second largest economy thanks to 38 years of reform and opening-up ... China has come this far because the Chinese people have, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, blazed a development path that suits China's actual conditions. This is a path based on China's realities. China has in the past years succeeded in embarking on a development path that suits itself by drawing on both the wisdom of its civilization and the practices of other countries in both East and West. In exploring this path, China refuses to stay insensitive to the changing times or to blindly follow in others' footsteps. All roads lead to Rome. No country should view its own development path as the only viable one, still less should it impose its own development path on others.*¹¹¹

In the same vein, Xi Jinping juxtaposed the Chinese vision of civilisational coexistence with the Western practice of civilisational hierarchy. To quote in length Xi's speech at the Opening of Belt and Road Forum in 2017:

As we often say in China, 'The beginning is the most difficult part.' A solid first step has been taken in pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative. We should build on the sound momentum generated to steer the Belt and Road Initiative toward greater success. In pursuing this endeavor, we should be guided by the following principles: First, we should build the Belt and Road into a road for peace ... All countries should respect each other's sovereignty, dignity and territorial integrity, each other's development paths and social systems, and each other's core interests and major concerns ... Second, we should build the Belt and Road into a road of prosperity. Development holds the master key to solving all problems ... Fifth, we should build the Belt and Road into a road connecting different civilizations. In pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative, we should ensure that when it comes to different civilizations, exchange will replace estrangement, mutual learning will replace clashes, and coexistence will replace a

¹¹⁰Xi Jinping, Keynote Speech at Opening Ceremony of Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2015 (28 March 2015), emphasis added.

¹¹¹Xi Jinping, Keynote Speech at the Opening Session of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2017 (17 January 2017), emphasis added.

*sense of superiority. This will boost mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual trust among different countries.*¹¹²

In sum, the Chinese development narratives are firmly rooted in and sensitive towards the implications of civilisational politics for multiple modernities. The idea of multiple modernities (with emphasis on local values) structures the Chinese narratives to the multiple paths of economic development of China, East Asia, and elsewhere. The above analysis corroborates the evidence of how value claims, multiple modernities, and civilisational understandings are intermingled and narratively ordered to shape East Asian challenges to the neoliberal development paradigm.

Indeed, East Asian states practice their challenge by applying the idea of the multiple paths of economic development bilaterally and multilaterally. Bilaterally, China, Japan, and Korea, for example, implement the so-called 'request-based' ODA (Official Development Assistance) policy. In contrast to the imposing, universalistic, one-size-fits-all neoliberal paradigm, the core tenet of the request-based ODA is that it is the recipient government who figures out its development needs and initiates policy consultation with donor states rather than the other way around.¹¹³ As such, this request-based ODA policy presupposes the multiple paths of economic development, as it is designed to work with divergent social, economic, and political conditions of recipient states. Multilaterally, Japan-led Asian Development Bank (ADB) remains the only multilateral development bank unscathed by neoliberal lending principles, priorities, and prescriptions. The ADB heavily emphasises a recipient state's capacity building (i.e., education, infrastructure, public work, and government sector development) in the form of the aforementioned request-based loans rather than the development of private sectors in the recipient state.¹¹⁴ The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which China established in 2014 as a major financial pillar of its Belt and Road Initiative, also operates in a project specific manner while attending to local conditions and contexts.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

This article has made three claims. First, I illuminated the importance and relevance of the concept of civilisation in world politics. Second, I showed that the nature of value claims by Asian elites for their economic success is rooted in recalibrating their place in world politics. Recalibrating is expressed in the narrative of linking local values to multiple development paths in the context of multiple modernities in civilisational politics. Last, I illustrated with the examples of Southeast Asian, Japanese, and Chinese narratives the interconnection of value claims, multiple modernities, and civilisational assessment.

The notion of civilised and uncivilised does still powerfully shape what a state wants and what it ultimately does. As Gong claims in the context of globalisation, one cannot speak of modernisation, or the 'process of becoming modern' without referring to 'what an earlier age called "civilization" and the process of becoming civilized': 'there is no value-free models of development or economic and financial interaction'.¹¹⁶ Outside the field of political economy, the taboo about the

¹¹²Xi Jinping, Keynote Speech at Opening of Belt and Road Forum 2017 (14 May 2017), emphasis added.

¹¹³Thomas Kalinowski and Hyekyung Cho, 'Korea's search for a global role between hard economic interests and soft power', *European Journal of Development Research*, 24:2 (2012), pp. 242–60; Barbara Stallings and Kim Eun Mee, 'Japan, China, and Korea: Styles of ODA in East Asia', in Hiroshi Kato, John Page, and Yasutani Shimomura (eds), *Japan's Development Assistance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 120–34.

¹¹⁴Takehiko Nakao, 'Economic outlook for Asia and the role of the Asian Development Bank', *Asia-Pacific Review*, 24:1 (2017), pp. 37–57.

¹¹⁵Bin Gu, 'Chinese multilateralism in the AIIB', *Journal of International Economic Law*, 20 (2017), pp. 137–58; Inna Andronova and Anrey Shelepov, 'Potential for strengthening the NDB's and AIIB's role in the global financial system', *International Organization Research Journal*, 14:1 (2019), pp. 39–54.

¹¹⁶Gerrit Gong, 'Standards of civilization today', in Medhi Mozaffari (ed.), *Globalization and Civilizations* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 80.

use of chemical weapons and nuclear weapons is, for example, a case in point. Nina Tannenwald claims that taboos have a role as a form of disciplining discourse with regards to the civilised conduct of international society.¹¹⁷ This is also true of the changing characteristics of the purpose of military intervention.¹¹⁸ The notions of ‘being civilised’ and ‘belonging to a civilisation’ continue to have an undeniable political and practical resonance.¹¹⁹

That said, what would be the implications of a recalibrated East Asia for world politics? Would it overcome the Western modernity that underpins the hierarchical civilisational identities? On a closer inspection, two equally plausible, but *paradoxical* interpretations emerge out of the East Asian multiple modernities argument with respect to the ideas of hierarchy and progress. On the one hand, East Asian recalibrating can be interpreted in a transformative sense. As shown, for example, in Xi Jinping’s statement that ‘civilizations are only unique, no one is superior to the other’, this recalibrating is an East Asian strategic vision seeking to bring civilisational pluralism back in by upsetting the status quo; recalibrating (with local values and narratives) is open as well to all other civilisations. On the other hand, the recalibrating can also lead to a *recentering* East Asia in world politics. Put it differently, the recalibrating can be viewed as nothing but an epitome of a struggle for power to establish a new hierarchical order centred on East Asia. It implies that East Asia would subsume other civilisations under the presumption of an East Asian standard of civilisation. As such, there are critical tensions between the two positional possibilities, and indeed the precise meaning of ‘what a recalibrated East Asia is and should be’ has since the late nineteenth century continued to baffle Asian elites and scholars.¹²⁰ Even in today’s China, for example, the notion of ‘Harmonious Society’ runs parallel to that of the ‘New Tianxia Principle’. The unfortunate fate of Japan’s pan-Asianism in the early twentieth century is another example of this age-old dilemma. An analogous contradiction is also historically observed in Western liberalism’s shift from a tolerant and pluralist orientation in the first half of the nineteenth century to an imperial one in the latter half.¹²¹

Which of the two trajectories will be more likely to be a historical force crucially depends on the unfolding nature of international relations from both inside and outside East Asia in the dynamic processes of negotiating knowledge, power, and collective identities.¹²² The above analysis of the development of multiple modernities in East Asia can suggest two issues on this score. First, one should recognise the fact that modernity (or Western modernity) is a global condition (or a master narrative) in response to which various interpretations are formulated and contested, not something to be arbitrarily discarded. After all, the East Asian notion of multiple modernities does not make sense at all if the idea of modernity is denied in the first place. Second, there is indeed a possibility for East Asia to be the author of its own civilisational narrative based on a plural and pluralist perspective. This possibility is conditioned on the continuing practice of reflexive awareness of why and how multiple modernities historically and politically matter to East Asia’s imagination of a better international society.

Acknowledgements. My heartfelt thanks go to my late teacher, Hayward Alker, who introduced to me the concept of multiple modernities as a way of seeing world politics. The earlier versions of this article were delivered at the Annual Meeting of International Studies Association and World International Studies Committee Conference. I would like to thank Joo-Youn

¹¹⁷Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹¹⁸Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹¹⁹Hall and Jackson, *Civilizational Identity*, p. 2.

¹²⁰Hong-luen Wang, ‘The relevance of modernity to contemporary East Asia: An outline’, *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, 27 (2018), pp. 48–51.

¹²¹Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹²²Erik Ringmar, ‘Performing international systems: Two East Asian alternatives to the Westphalian order’, *International Organization*, 66:1 (2012), pp. 1–25.

Jung, George Yin, Linus Hagström, Karl Gustafsson, and Björn Jerdén for their invaluable comments. I am also grateful to the *RIS* editors and two anonymous reviewers who greatly helped me shape up the article theoretically and empirically with their constructive criticisms and suggestions. This research is supported by Korea University Grant (K2009401).

Yong Wook Lee is Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Korea University (Seoul, Korea). He is author, editor, and translator of seven books, including *The Japanese Challenge to the American Neoliberal World Order: Identity, Meaning, and Foreign Policy* (Stanford University Press, 2008). Lee's works appeared in various academic journals, such as *International Studies Quarterly*; *Journal of International Relations and Development*; *Politics*; *Review of International Political Economy*; and *Review of International Studies*. Prior to Korea University, Lee taught at Brown University and the University of Oklahoma.