RESEARCH NOTES

Social Capital in Ten Asian Societies

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Abstract

On the basis of seven questions asked in the AsiaBarometer survey conducted by the author in 2003 in ten Asian societies, Uzbekistan, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, China, Korea and Japan, the author analyzes the key dimensions of social capital, permeating the ten societies, (1) general trust in interpersonal relations, (2) trust in merit-based utility; and (3) trust in social system and comes up with the five groups of societies on the basis of three major dimensions of social capital and comes up with the five groups of societies (1) China and Vietnam, (2) Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan, (3) Malaysia, Myanmar and India, (4) Japan and Korea, and (5) Thailand. Conceptual examinations are also done in relation to the work done by Ronald Inglehart and Christian Weltzel and broad empirical corroborations are noted.

1   Introduction

Social capital is defined as something that can be most useful in minimizing the costs of misunderstanding and transactions when one tries to forge bridges and enhance bonds, when one ventures into joint undertakings, and when one tries to regularize reciprocities. Social capital is such a broad concept that it is often used to mean 'what you mean' (Bacon *et al.*, 2002). Yet of all the matters that are conceptualized as being 'caused' by social capital, directly or indirectly, two stand out. They are democracy and prosperity. Putnam (1993) champions the causal chain of social capital facilitating democracy, whereas Fukuyama (1995) upholds the causal path of social capital promoting prosperity. To make a long story short, Putnam argues that where there is the tradition of civic engagement, democracy is much more deeply rooted. For instance, it is the tradition of republican rule in Florence; it is the tradition of civic associations in mid-nineteenth-century America. Likewise, Fukuyama argues that where there is the tradition of social capital, prosperity is created in a civilized form. Fukuyama uses high and low trust societies whereby civilized and not-so-civilized

business transactions take place. His argument is that without civilized trust permeating in society, sustained prosperity is more difficult to create. His anthropological evidence supporting his argument is marshaled on Chinese, Korean, Indian, Japanese, French, German, American, and other social relations. Although one may take issue with Putnam or Fukuyama in one way or another like Bacon *et al.* (2003), I find the concept of social capital very useful in understanding the propensity to take initiatives, to avert risks, to cooperate or defect, and to shape and share values, norms and rules, especially when some measures are given.

In this research note I attempt to identify some major dimensions of social capital as found in the AsiaBarometer data, to place ten countries on those dimensions, and to reflect on the nature of political culture in ten Asian societies as revealed by the AsiaBarometer survey data focusing on social capital. By so doing I try to make a first step of gauging the democratic, developmental, and regionalizing trends in Asia. After all, social capital is conducive to building democracy, so argues Robert Putnam; social capital is facilitative to creating prosperity, so argues Francis Fukuyama; and social capital is essential to integrate countries into a region, so argues Karl Deutsch. The exercise is admittedly a big project. I must admit that this paper will not be able to map out what must be far more complex causally interpretable schemes of the democratic, developmental, and regionalizing evolution of Asia and its sub-components. But at least I will try to show how one might be able to say something meaningful on these prospects on the basis of social-capital-focused survey data. Before moving on to some empirical analyses of social-capital-related data, I must touch, if briefly, on what is the AsiaBarometer and what the AsiaBarometer aims.

The AsiaBarometer, an annual survey covering many Asian societies, was launched in 2003 by the University of Tokyo's Institute of Oriental Culture under the leadership of the author of this paper (Inoguchi, 2003a). Here let it suffice for me to say that the AsiaBarometer represents an ambitious and productive initiative with three broad aims in mind:

    (1)   annually monitoring the daily lives of ordinary people in Asia – East, Southeast, South and Central – a vast area that has not been so friendly to empirically oriented social scientists interested in comparing and generalizing their observations and empirically testing their hunches and hypotheses;

    (2)   helping to develop social science infrastructure in Asia, an area which has not been endowed with services to social scientists, as well as governments, business firms and non-governmental individuals and organizations (Inoguchi, 2001);

    (3)   helping to facilitate interactions among social scientists engaged in teaching and research in Asia, an area not well linked with each other (Inoguchi, 2004b).

In the spirit and scope of the AsiaBarometer, its operational details in terms of the sizes and methods of sampling in each society, and the simple tabulations of all questions and answers, see (Inoguchi, Tanaka and Dadabaev, forthcoming).

2   Social capital questions

The social capital questions examined here are as follows:

Q1   Generally, do you think people can be trusted or do you think that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people (that it pays to be wary of people)?
1   Most people can be trusted
2   Can't be too careful in dealing with people
3   Don't know

Q2   Do you think that people generally try to be helpful or do you think that they mostly look out for themselves?
1   People generally try to be helpful
2   People mostly look out for themselves
3   Don't know

Q3   If you saw somebody on the street looking lost, would you stop to help?
1   I would always stop to help
2   I would help if nobody else did
3   It is highly likey that I wouldn't stop to help
4   Don't know

Q4   If you had no descendants, would you think it desirable to adopt somebody in order to continue the family line, even if there were no blood relationship? Or do you think this would be unnecessary?
1   Would adopt in order to continue the family line
2   Would not adopt in order to continue the family line. I think it would be pointless
3   It would depend on the circumstances
4   Don't know

Q5   Suppose that you are the president of a company. In the company's employment examination, a relative of yours got the second highest grade, scoring only marginally less than the candidate with the highest grade. In such a case, which person would you employ?
1   The person with the highest grade
2   Your relative
3   Don't know

Q6   If the main breadwinner of your household should die or become unable to work due to illness, how would your household maintain the household budget? Select up to two of the following measures.
1   Another adult member of the family would become the main breadwinner
2   Would send one or more of the children out to work
3   Would get support from relatives
4   Would get support from neighbours and the community

5 Would get social welfare payments
6 Retirement allowance
7 Have an insurance policy to cover such a situation
8 Other
9 Don't know

Q7 Do you think that on the whole men and women are treated equally in your country? Please indicate which of the following is closest to your opinion.
1 Men are treated much more favorably than women
2 Men are treated somewhat more favorably than women
3 Men and women are treated equally
4 Women are treated somewhat more favorably than men
5 Women are treated much more favorably than men
6 Don't know

Q8 What should a person who needs a government permit do if the response of the official handling the application is: 'just be patient and wait.'
1 Use connections to obtain the permit
2 Nothing can be done
3 Wait and hope that things will work out
4 Write a letter
5 Act without a permit
6 Bribe an official
7 Don't know

My purpose here is to identify some underlying dimensions of social capital that might be hidden by using multidimensional analysis methods and then relating them back to the conceptual discussion on social capital. Before moving on to statistical multidimensional analyses, I might attempt a preliminary 'intellectual factor analysis' of these questions.

Questions 1–3 are fairly common questions often used to see how much trust prevails in interpersonal relations. They are the questions on civic trust. The approach that focuses on civic trust is called communitarian (Inglehart and Weltzel, forthcoming). In addition to questions 1–3, questions 4–6 are intended to measure how narrow or broad trust is. Whether it is more or less confined to blood-based trust or not is what I am interested in measuring. The response category, use of private insurance scheme in question 6, is singled out to measure the degree of anonymous communitarian trust when the bread earner has deceased. Question 7 is also meant to measure the broad or narrow scope of trust in terms of gender. It asks about the emancipative aspect of trust. The approach that focuses on self-expression values and liberty aspirations is called emancipative (Inglehart and Weltzel, 2004). The response category, males are very privileged, is singled out to measure the degree of discriminatory and the oppressive nature of trust in terms of gender. Question 8 is meant to measure the degree of confidence in officials of official institutions. It asks

about the system support aspect of trust. The approach that underlines confidence in concrete institutions and support for democracy is called the system support approach (Inglehart and Weltzel, 2004). The response category, making use of connections, is singled out for this purpose.

High trust and low (Questions 1, 2, 3)

Question 1, a very general question on trust, has yielded the following contrasts. East Asians, Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, and Vietnamese, tend to trust people more than South, Central, and Southeast Asians. Without further examination, it is observed that religious/cultural factors might play a certain role: more concretely, Mahayana Buddhism and Confucianism in East Asia; Islam, Hariyana Buddhism; and Confucianism in Southeast Asia; Hinduism and Islam in South Asia, and Islam in Central Asia. Needless to say, a sizable number of populations subscribing to Christianity exist in various parts of Asia. Not only religious, but also linguistic and ethnic diversities prevailing in these regions seem to lower trust among persons. However, without further investigations one cannot go very far in advancing causal arguments.

Question 2 asks about trust in general, but in a more specific situation. The picture that emerges here is very different from the picture emerging from Question 1. Chinese and Vietnamese answer that people generally try to be helpful rather than they look out for themselves. Malaysian and Korean register higher figures than Chinese and Vietnamese. In ascending order, Thais, Sri Lankan, Indian, Uzbekistani, Myanmarese, and Japanese show higher trust. To give some simple causal explanations seems immensely difficult.

Question 3 asks about trust in a specific situation. Most simply, lower-income societies exhibit higher inclinations to lend help to those on the street looking lost. Chinese, Sri Lankan, Indian, Vietnamese, Uzbekistani, and Myanmarese more readily help those looking lost than Japanese, Koreans, Malaysians, and Thais, or generally higher-income people.

Broad trust and narrow

Question 4 asks about the narrowness of trust in terms of family succession: a son in law has been chosen most by Sri Lankan and least by Japanese. Japanese, Thais, Koreans, and Chinese show less inclinations here than Sri Lankan, Uzbekistani, Malaysians, and Vietnamese. The distinction seems to have much to do with the development of market capitalism. But, without further examination, it is difficult to make more than causal observations.

Question 5 asks about the narrowness of trust in a specific setting. The response category, employing the best in grade but unrelated rather than second in grade but related, is chosen in descending order by Indians, Sri Lankans, Myanmarese, Uzbekistani, Vietnamese, Chinese, Koreans, Thais, Malaysians, and Japanese. Can one interpret this as follows: The more affluent the more leeway or space becomes available

for blood related nepotism. But without further examination it is difficult to say one way or another. Looked at from another angle, one starts from the assurity that the poorer a society is, the stronger the incentives to hire those related. But because of this kind of expectation widely prevailing, one is normally more constrained to answer in a politically correct way.

Collective trust

Question 6 is not necessarily a question on trust. One can argue that it is a question of household financing given the availability and non-availability of means of financing the house when the main bread earner has deceased. Looked at from another angle, it is also a question on how society is able to create confidence in a system of insurance, retirement fee, or state run welfare. The response category, privately run insurance is looked at here. Koreans, Indians, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Malaysians use insurance scheme more heavily than most others. Aside the role of family and relatives, the private run insurance may indicate something of communitarianism or collectivism, although it is not based on a visible space and inhabitants.

Gender-related trust

Question 7 focuses on gender. If male chauvinism is strong, trust is half limited. In descending order, male chauvinism is strong in Uzbekistan, Korea, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Japan, Vietnam, and Malaysia. This is a 'fascinating' order in a sense. I need to examine this further before I can say more about causal logics.

Power and non-confidence

Question 8 is an interesting question. It has to do both with recognition of the power held by government officials and with non-confidence in government officials. I use the response category, (1) power of connections. In the descending order, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, India, China, Malaysia, Thailand, Korea and Japan stress the power of connections.

3   Ten country pooled data

Of the above questions, Question 8 was not answered uniformly in Vietnam and Myanmar. Therefore I have dropped question 8 from the statistical analysis instead of dropping Vietnam and Myanmar. Of Question 6, I focus on question 6–4, only because it is deemed to tap something that has a lot to do with social capital, especially its breadth or parochialism. Therefore we have in the data set:

The ten countries pooled together are Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, India, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan; and the seven questions pooled together are Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6-4, and Q7.

Parameterization

Answers to the selected questions were parameterized (re-scored) according to the methods outlined below. All 'don't know' answers were treated as missing values (MV).

Q1 'Generally, do you think people can be trusted or do you think that you can't be too careful in dealing with people (that it pays to be wary of people)?' Respondents had to choose between 'Most people can be trusted (+1)', 'Can't be too careful in dealing with people (0)', and 'Don't know (MV).'

Q2 'Do you think that people generally try to be helpful or do you think that they mostly look out for themselves?' Respondents had to choose between 'People generally try to be helpful (+1)', 'People mostly look out for themselves (0)', and 'Don't know (MV).'

Q3 'If you saw somebody on the street looking lost, would you stop to help?' Respondents had to choose between 'I would always stop to help (+1)', 'I would help if nobody else did (+0.5)', 'It is highly likely that I wouldn't stop to help (0)', and 'Don't know (MV).'

Q4 'If you had no descendants, would you think it desirable to adopt somebody in order to continue the family line, even if there were no blood relationship? Or do you think this would be unnecessary?' Respondents had to choose between 'Would adopt in order to continue the family line (+1)', 'Would not adopt in order to continue the family line. I think it would be pointless (0)', 'It would depend on the circumstances (MV)', and 'Don't know (MV)'.

Q5 'Suppose hat you are the president of a company. In the company's employment examination, a relative of yours got the second highest grade, scoring only marginally less than the candidate with the highest grade. In such case, which person would you employ?' Respondents had to choose between 'The person with the highest grade (+1)', 'Your relative (0)', and 'Don't know (MV)'.

Q6-4 'If the main breadwinner of your household should die or become unable to work due to illness, how would your household maintain the household budget? Select up to two of the following measures.' Respondents had to choose from a list of answers including 'Would get support from neighbors and the community (+1)', all other answers (0), and 'Don't know (MV)'.

Q7 'Do you think that on the whole men and women are treated equally in your country? Please indicate which of the following is closest to your opinion.' Respondents had to choose between 'Men are treated much more favorably than women (+1)', 'Men are treated somewhat more favorably than women (+0.5)', 'Men and women are treated equally (0)', 'Women are treated much more favorably than men (−0.5)', 'Women are treated somewhat more favorably than men (−1)', and 'Don't know (MV)'.

4 Principal component analysis

The seven questions were then factor-analyzed, using principal component analysis. There were 4092 valid cases that had no missing values. There were three

components with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and they were subsequently rotated using the varimax method. The three components together accounted for 53.368% of the total variance. Both the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.554), and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (<0.001) were satisfactory, indicating that the used data were approximately multivariate normal and acceptable for factor analysis.

According to the rotated component matrix, factor loadings for Component 1 were 0.783, 0.769, and 0.383 for Q1, 2, and 3. Similarly, factor loadings for Component 2 were 0.691, 0.653, and 0.575 for Q4, 5, and 6, while those for Component 3 were 0.768 and −0.663 for Q6–4 and Q7, respectively. Based on the factor loadings, it seemed reasonable to label the three components 'general trust/altruism', 'trust in merit-based utility', and 'trust in social system', respectively.

Country ranking

Averages of the three component scores were taken to rank the ten Asian countries. The country scores were then incremented by 1.0 to facilitate visual comparison.

Similarities and differences among the ten countries were more evident when the country scores of the three components were plotted on two-dimensional scatter plots (three plots in all).

The first dimension is a bit like the famous contrasts between Hobbes and Rousseau, between Confucius and Mencius. It is about from where one starts in dealing with other persons, from the point that views humankind essentially of good nature or from the point that views humankind essentially of bad nature. It taps whether one trusts others most directly.

The second dimension is like the trade theory of comparative advantage in which the postulate is done to the effect that somehow mutually beneficial outcomes are stable outcomes. It taps one's contributions to the rest on utility or merits.

The third dimension is like confidence in institutions and systems with which respondents are embedded. It taps whether one engages in community affairs or not. In other words, it taps the difference between broad and narrow trust in terms of blood and gender.

Along these dimensions the rankings are shown in Figure 1. Along the first dimension are placed Confucian heritaged societies at higher ranking, whereas Hinduist/Buddhist/Islamic heritaged ones are placed at lower ranking. Along the second dimension are placed English speaking or former British colonial heritaged ones at higher ranking whereas the rest are placed at lower ranking. Along the third dimension are placed communist-dictatorial heritaged societies at higher ranking with some notable exceptions. In other words, the three major dimensions that have emerged from the factor analysis of the pooled data in the AsiaBarometer are (1) general trust in interpersonal relations, (2) trust in meritocracy and mutual utility, and (3) trust in society/system. When I map the ten countries' factor scores along these dimensions, it has turned out that they are also fairly strongly culturally favored dimensions. They are (1) Confucian-heritaged, (2) English-speaking, and (3) communist or former
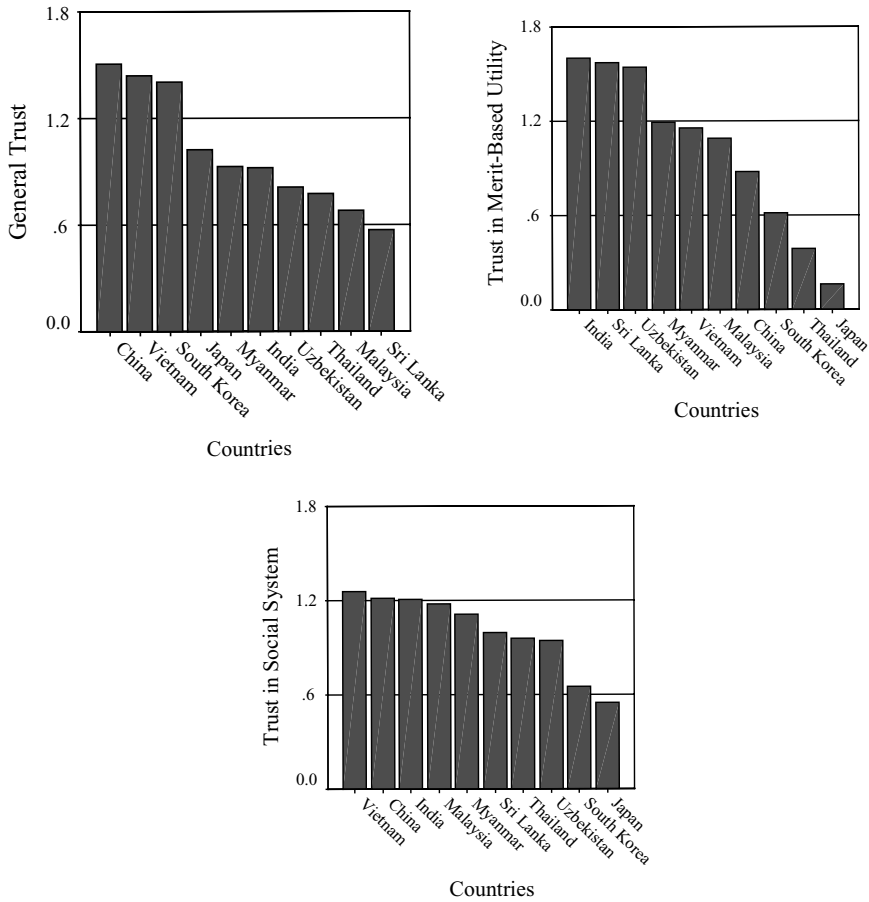
Figure 1

communist. In other words, East Asia constitutes a distinct sub-group; former British colonies and thus English speaking societies in South Asia and Southeast Asia robustly retain some of the common characteristics; communist or former communist societies remain a distinct sub-sub-group. As far as Asia is concerned, it is remarkably similar to results derived from the World Values Surveys (Inglehart and Weltzel, 2004) and the Asia-Europe Survey (Inoguchi and Hotta, 2003). To see whether methodological biases might have led me to place the ten societies in wrong locations, let me try another method of grouping the ten countries.

5   Hierarchical cluster analysis

The similarities and differences observed in the above scatter plots indicated that each of the ten countries could be grouped in some way; countries with similar trust
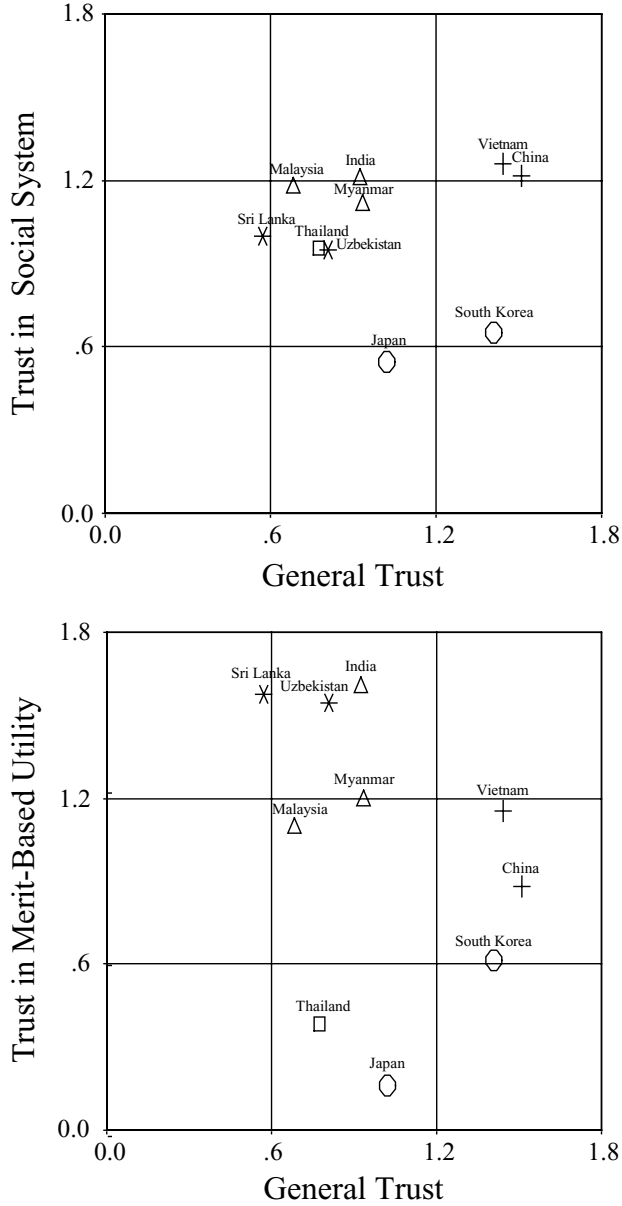
Figure 2

mechanisms would belong to the same group. In order to stochastically group the ten countries according to the country scores of the three components, hierarchical cluster analysis was employed using the three trust components. The chosen methodology mix was Ward Method, square Euclidean distance, and Z-score value standardization.
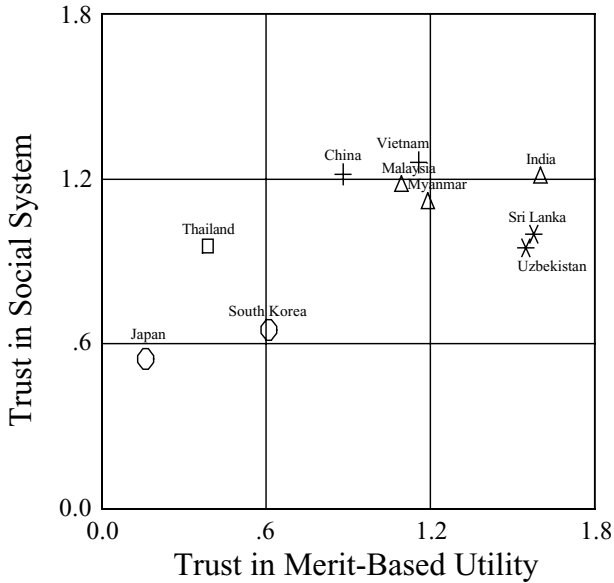
Figure 2 *Continued*

As shown in the dendrogram, the ten countries were grouped into five groups according to their trust mechanisms.

Group 1   China, Vietnam
(General trust – very high/trust in merit-based utility – medium/trust in social system – very high)

Group 2   Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan
(General trust – very low/trust in merit-based utility – very high/trust in social system – medium-low)

Group 3   Malaysia, Myanmar, India
(General trust – medium-low/trust in merit-based utility – very high-high/trust in social system – high-medium)

Group 4   Japan, Korea
(General trust – high/trust in merit-based utility – very low/trust in social system – very low)

Group 5   Thailand
(General trust – low/trust in merit-based utility – very low/trust in social system – low)

Discriminant analysis
Finally, discriminant analysis was conducted using the country scores of the three trust components and the five groups derived from hierarchical cluster analysis. The

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Dendrogram using Ward Method
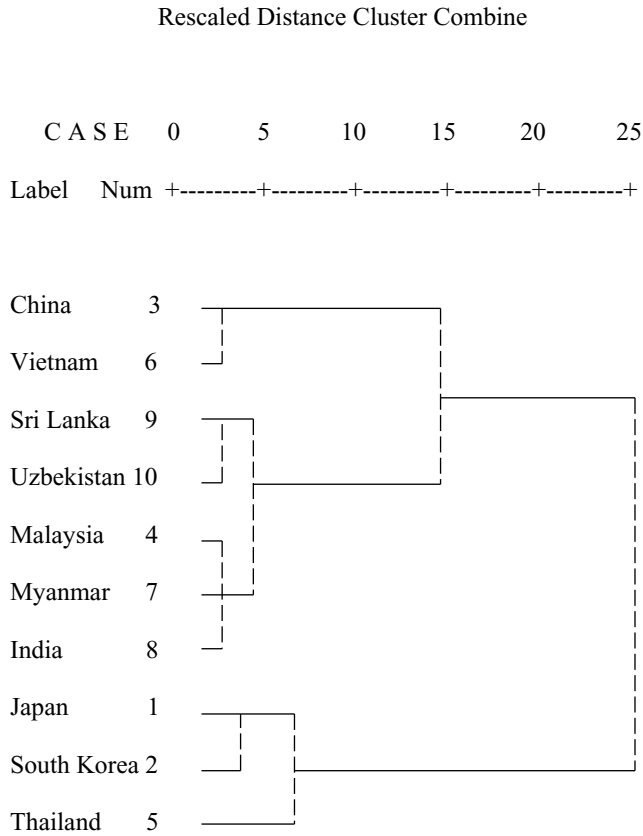
Rescaled Distance Cluster Combine

Figure 3

primary purpose was to check that the above grouping was stochastically acceptable.[1] In our case, as expected, there was a 100% match between the predicted and actual groups. The second and the more important purpose was to plot the ten countries

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[1] Discriminant analysis predicts membership in two or more mutually exclusive groups and compares the match between the predicted and actual groups. In our case, the actual groups have been derived from hierarchical cluster analysis, so the resulting match is expected to be approximately 100%. In short, discriminant analysis helps us check the validity of grouping that took place in hierarchical cluster analysis.
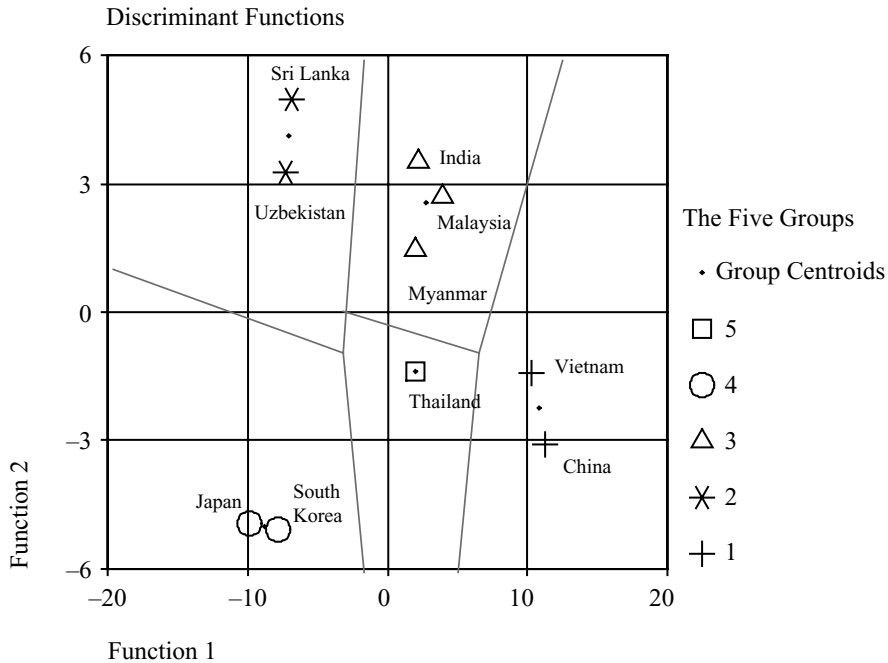
Discriminant Functions

Figure 4

according to their discriminant scores for the first two discriminant functions (high canonical correlation). Such plot would enable a two-dimensional visualization of the five groups, which represent the countries' trust mechanisms based on all three trust components.

6 Conclusion

I have analyzed some of the social capital-related questions contained in the AsiaBarometer to identify some key dimensions of social capital and to group the ten countries along those dimensions. The three key dimensions are called (1) general trust in interpersonal relations, (2) trust in merit-based utility, and (3) trust in social system. Placing the ten countries along these dimensions enables me to see that the three key dimensions are highly flavored by cultural heritage. One can see from the rankings of the ten countries along the three dimensions, that the first dimension can be called Confucian-heritaged, the second dimension can be called English speaking or former British colonial-heritaged, and the third dimension can be called communist or former communist. Use of a little more rigorous method called hierarchical cluster analysis enables me to locate the ten countries in two-dimensional space with three-dimensional locations taken into account most efficiently. This exercise enables one to have five groups: (1) China and Vietnam, (2) Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan, (3) Malaysia,

Myanmar, and India, (4) Japan and Korea, and (5) Thailand. This result is broadly convergent with the result that has been obtained using another cross-national survey I organized: the Asia-Europe Survey done in nine East and Southeast Asian countries and nine West European countries in 2000 (Inoguchi and Hotta, 2003). The fact that the broad convergence has been attained between those questions factor-analyzed in the latter survey data which are broader and less focused enhances dimensionality and country grouping hereby obtained.

Looking back from a distance on the three major dimensions of social capital, I would like to give further reflections on conceptualizations of social capital. Three diverse lines of thought have been given on social capital: utility, fairness and institution. Utility is used normally by economists and rational choice theorists, arguing that cultural differences are not significantly detected in cross-cultural game experiments (Roth *et al.*, 1991), thus playing down the notion of social capital. Fairness is deployed normally by philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists, arguing that political cultures matter when differentiating the way in which bridging and bonding trust is conducted (Scott, 1976, Putnam, 1993, Fukuyama, 1997, Blondel and Inoguchi, 2002). Institution is brought in by anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and political scientists, arguing that 'the role of government institutions as the engine of higher levels of generalized trust and cooperation' (Ensminger, 2001).

Therefore it is not a coincidence that our three major dimensions have turned out to be slightly differently labeled surrogate dimensions of fairness, utility, and institution. General trust in interpersonal relations is very close to fairness. What is called the Equity Law in England concerns this dimension as contrasted to the utility dimension which governs the Common Law. If the Common Law is the world of Adam Smith, the Equity Law is the world of English Social Democrats. Both co-exist in one society, a vindication of one country, two systems! The salience of fairness in our analysis in Vietnamese political culture resonates nicely with James Scott's *Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (1976). The commonly detected importance of meritocracy in former British colonies or English-speaking societies in South and Southeast Asia in our analysis is harmonious with the spirit of colonial meritocratic absolutism under Britain. Where there are no countervailing forces in society like colonies or in lower-income societies or in non-democracies, this utility dimension gets utmost salience. Thus only when experimental games like the ultimatum bargaining game or the dictator game are conducted both in low-income societies and high-income societies, or both in formally better institutionalized societies and not-so-well institutionalized societies, cross-cultural differences emerge (Roth *et al.*, 1991, Ensminger, 2001). This is what our analysis has exactly achieved on the AsiaBarometer data in which the diversity in terms of per capita income level is vast over the ten countries. Our third dimension of institution taps the basic difference between communism (and former communism) and market capitalism. Social systems based on different institutional incentives and coordinations are bound to constrain and reinforce certain sets of norms and values. Thus our third dimension is quite

harmonious with some traits in ideologically and bureaucratically organized market economies as distinguished from much freer market economies and in formally under-institutionalized societies as distinguished from formally institutionalized societies (Ensminger, 2001). Our next task, i.e., the AsiaBarometer survey in 2004, would be to sort out those social capital questions a little more systematically along fairness, utility, and institution to state more directly some significant implications to Asia's democratic, developmental, and regionalizing potentials in the next decade.

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