

# BEYOND THE 'ASIAN MODEL' OF DEMOCRACY?

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The financial crises which hit a number of East and Southeast Asian economies with greater or lesser degrees of severity in the latter half of 1997 was greeted with varied reactions in non-Asian countries. Amidst anxieties that this 'Asian flu' would be caught by other major economies and spread to the whole global financial system could be found some expressions of satisfaction – even elation – that the 'Asian model' of economic development was shown to be flawed. For many years the idea that East and Southeast Asia (or more broadly the Pacific Basin) had become the economic powerhouse of the whole world was the received wisdom among many commentators, both within the region and outside it. According to the standard view<sup>1</sup>, the process began with Japan in the 1950s and 1960s, moved to the 'Asian Tigers' (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) and spread from there to other parts of Southeast Asia and most portentously, to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Clearly, the economic record of the region over the past three decades or so had been outstanding, and this led easily to the argument that there must be some kind of 'Asian model' – deriving presumably from Asian values – that provided the secret of Asian economic successes<sup>2</sup>.

A variant of the argument of Asian values will be the subject of this article, namely the idea that the concept of democracy – a set of political ideas originating in Europe and North America – has a specifically Asian variant incorporating specific advantages over the original model. It seems important, however, first of all to place the argument in a broader context. In the modern history of East and Southeast Asia, the impact of Western powers and Western civilization has been profound. Most contemporary states of the region have over the past century and a half gone through the experience of becoming colonies of one or other Western power, or (in the case of China) becoming a quasi-colony of several powers. Japan is a variant case in that in avoiding a colonial fate herself she learned from the

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<sup>1</sup> For an early expression of such a perspective, see HOFHEINZ and CALDER (1982).

<sup>2</sup> For a perceptive weighing of the arguments about 'Asian values' and their implications, see FOOT (1997).

West the art of taking colonies of her own. But even in the case of Japan, the Western impact from the middle of the nineteenth century had a profound effect on the way Japanese viewed the rest of Asia, the Western world, and Japan's international position and role. After the defeat of Japan in 1945 a radically changed international order prevailed in the region, in which the division between Communist and anti-Communist regimes became salient, but where for the region as a whole the United States became the essential point of reference for the concept of 'Westernisation'. Even in the post-Cold War era of the 1990s, the expectation of an American withdrawal from Asia has hardly been fulfilled, and both economically and in terms of international influence, the United States has been re-establishing a position difficult for other states to rival.

At the same time, the four decades stretching from the 1950s to the 1990s have been an era of economic, social and political transformation more or less throughout the region. During that period, the world was put on notice that a great new centre of economic performance and growth was emerging in a region which had routinely been dismissed as mired in pre-modern value systems and incapable of effective development. There had, of course, been straws in the wind in an earlier period. The Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905 showed that a European power could be defeated in war by an Asian power, thus giving a boost to anti-colonial and anti-Western movements throughout the world. Even though the subsequent Japanese attempt to make the whole region into its own colony in the late 1930s and early 1940s ended in abject failure, it hastened the departure of the Western colonial powers. The Chinese revolutions of 1911 and 1949, though in the short to medium term failing to solve the manifold problems of China, showed at least that there existed in China a nationalistic drive and a will to transform the world's most populous society. Even though, by most objective criteria, both the Japanese and Chinese bids to create radically new political and social orders were appallingly flawed, they were hardly compatible with the dismissive view of Asia as backward and incapable of fundamental change.

Taking a positive view of the matter with the benefit of historical hindsight, it seems reasonable to argue that East and Southeast Asia, starting in the 1950s, was beginning to get things right. The path from the 1950s to the 1990s was anything but smooth, and included such distractions as the Korean War, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution in China, the late-Sukarno period of extreme instability in Indonesia, leading to an attempted coup, widespread killings and a change of regime in the mid-1960s, the Vietnam War, the massacres in Cambodia during the Pol Pot period of the late 1970s, the Sino-Vietnamese border war and Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The sum total of human misery, killing and dis-

ruption which these and other more minor episodes entailed beggars belief. Nevertheless, over the same period, one country after another was discovering effective mechanisms of economic development and finding that such development in turn was a means of transforming society.

## 2. THE 'ASIAN MODEL' OF DEMOCRACY

Given the historical background and widespread experience of the transformative effects of sustained economic development, it is hardly surprising if commentators of various kinds should seek to make sense of what had been happening by constructing theories about it. One prominent theory, upon which we shall focus in the rest of this article, is the so-called 'Asian Model of Democracy'. The most prominent exponent of this approach is Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia. Writing in 1995 of what he called 'The Pacific Age', he expounded a vision of 'Asian History Shaped by Asian Hands'. The following extracts give the flavour of his approach:

Over the last several hundred years, the West – initially Europe and later the North Atlantic community – has been the dominant center of the world. The fate of Asia, it is fair to say, hung on the decisions and actions of this central hegemony. We existed on the periphery, so much so that Asia was called, and even called itself, the "Far East". Today, however, the Asia-Pacific economic community, led by East Asia, is undergoing a radical transformation. ... Economists and business leaders tell us that the Asia-Pacific region will replace the West as the hub of economic growth in the coming century. Japan, South Korea, and the countries of ... ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] ... are growing faster than any other region. ... Asians have good reason to be proud. In the space of fifty years – a mere blink of the eye – Japan has risen from the ashes of war to become the world's second-strongest economy, after the United States. In addition, four NIEs [Newly Industrializing Economies] – South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan – have also achieved outstanding success. Malaysia and Thailand are recording some of the fastest growth rates in the world, and Indonesia is not far behind. As recently as a decade ago, these achievements were hardly dreamed of. ... We may not become the center of the world, but we should at least be the center of our own part of it. We must commit ourselves to ensuring that the history of East Asia will be made in East Asia, for East Asia, and by East Asians (MAHATHIR and ISHIHARA 1995: 13–16).

It is abundantly clear from these extracts that a good part of the motivation in Mahathir's writing lies in his pride in East Asian achievements in recent decades. In addition, however, it is possible to detect a desire to draw a clear line between East Asia and 'the West' and to assert the autonomy of the former, if not the actual superiority of its systems. Such a position may probably be understood as a mixture of pride in achievement, resentment at past humiliations by 'the West' and concern to consolidate current achievements in such a way as to avoid the likelihood of future Western encroachments<sup>3</sup>.

Mahathir and those who think like him in Asia today can be particularly harsh on alleged manifestations of Western 'decadence' and 'hedonism':

Western societies are riddled with single-parent families, which foster incest, with homosexuality, with cohabitation, with unrestrained avarice, with disrespect for others and, of course, with rejection of religious teachings and values. The people living in such milieux have nothing to hold on to. They are as uprooted and directionless as flotsam adrift in the ocean (MAHATHIR and ISHIHARA 1995: 80).

The 'Asian Model of Democracy', in Mahathir's formulation, clearly follows on from his strictures against Western 'decadence', so that he makes the sharpest of distinctions between democracy in its 'Western' and 'Asian' formulations:

In the West democracy means different things to different people, but in Asia it means that citizens are entitled to free and fair elections, that they can choose their own government. Once a government has been elected, we believe it should be allowed to govern and to formulate and implement policies. ... [W]e believe that strong, stable governments prepared to make decisions which, though often unpopular, are nevertheless in the best interests of the nation, are a prerequisite for economic development. They take the long term view in planning and are not preoccupied with surviving the next election. When citizens understand that their right to choose also involves limits and responsibilities, democracy doesn't deteriorate into an excess of freedom or, in extreme cases, virtual anarchy. These are the dangers of democracy gone wrong, and in our view it is precisely the sad direction in which the West is heading.

... Democratic fanatics are no better than religious fanatics; neither

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<sup>3</sup> In another passage, he warns against complacency: "... Asians should not drift passively on the currents of historical change" (MAHATHIR and ISHIHARA 1995: 15).

can see the woods (*sic*) for the trees. In any case, to Asians democracy does not confer a license for citizens to go wild. Democracy misconstrued benefits neither the state nor the people (MAHATHIR and ISHIHARA 1995: 82–83).

Two things seem evident from these quotations. One is, as we have already remarked, a fierce determination to distinguish the image of a decadent and anarchic 'West' from that of a well-governed, harmonious and successful 'Asia'. The other is a concept of democracy in which participation by the people (or the electorate) is notably more restrictive than in most contemporary formulations outside Asia.

Some have argued that therefore the kinds of 'model' of democracy set up by Mahathir and others is not really democracy at all, but rather some form of more or less benevolent semi-dictatorship (see TREMEWAN 1994). However this may be, and however much one may regard Mahathir's rhetorical castigations about Western civilization at the end of the twentieth century as exaggerated, it must be acknowledged that the practice of democracy at various times and in various places has had to contend with license, sectional irresponsibility, lack of discipline and economic stagnation. The questions are whether such problems are necessary consequences of democracy in its more classic versions, and indeed, whether an 'Asian model' can avoid similar types of problems in the long term.

### 3. ELEMENTS OF THE 'MODEL'

Before attempting to answer these questions, an attempt will be made to list what appear to be the principal elements in the 'Asian model'. In this we shall be abstracting from diverse sources, few of which are presented in schematic form. No single proponent of such a model has put forward precisely this version, but the elements in it seem to be inherent, to varying degrees, in much of this kind of thinking, and indeed political practice in the region:

1. Procedural democracy is taken as less important than economic and social democracy. That is to say, although elections are held, the electoral process is seen as less important than the maintenance of strong government, which in turn is regarded as the *sine qua non* for the satisfaction of the economic and social needs of the people. Similarly, human rights and freedoms are tolerated so long as they do not interfere with the effective working of government, and the mass media is expected to show restraint in relation to criticism of the established order.

2. 'Western' democracy is defined as centering on the individual, whereas 'Asian' democracy finds its roots in the family, the local community, the company or the nation. The true identity of the individual is to be found in relation to these various groupings to which he or she is attached and owes loyalty, including ultimately to the nation and the state. Pursuit of individual interests without regard to broader group loyalties is regarded as selfish and potentially subversive, rather than being one of the key building blocks of democratic practice.

3. 'Western' democracy is seen as resting on an intellectual foundation of equality between individuals, whereas its 'Asian' counterpart is compatible with a hierarchy of loyalties. Deference to leaders at various levels is expected.

4. While the idea of political opposition is enshrined as an essential part of 'Western' democratic thinking, with opposition expected to criticise government fearlessly, but fairly and loyally (a "loyal opposition"), political opposition does not have full legitimacy in the 'Asian' model. In some Asian countries, "opposition party" is translated, rather, as "party out of power"<sup>4</sup>, and this has implications for the ways in which such parties are expected to behave. Instead of making concerted criticisms of government policy and performance and vigorously formulating alternative policy prescriptions, Asian opposition parties have often been hard to distinguish from parties in power, their criticism of which often amounts to little more than rhetoric.

5. Following closely from item 4, the idea (believed, not wholly accurately, to be an essential element in 'Western' democracy), that parties should alternate in power with reasonable frequency, is replaced in the 'Asian' model by a preference for (or positive acquiescence in) a regime based on single-party dominance. This is regarded as advantageous, on the grounds that it facilitates long-term planning, gives settled expectations about policy to businessmen and others, and is conducive to political stability. Power struggles, in so far as they occur, and personnel realignments, are handled within the dominant party, and more broadly, within the broad politico-economic power structure.

6. Relations between government and business are expected to be close and mutually supportive. In contrast to a 'Western' ethos which is thought of as prescribing relatively strict 'boundary maintenance' between the two, in the 'Asian' model they are expected to co-operate in pursuit of the aims of economic and social development. It follows from this that policies designed to prevent monopolies (American-style trust-busting) are greatly played down, and practices such as rigged bidding for contracts or var-

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<sup>4</sup> In Japanese *yatō* (literally "party in the field").

ious forms of kickback to politicians are regarded rather leniently. What from a Western point of view would be regarded as corrupt practices are thereby made endemic, but given the fact that all parties are seen as working to a common goal of economic progress, a prevalent view of such practices is that they 'lubricate the wheels of the economy' rather than that they represent a distortion of economic rationality.

7. It follows from item 6 that a variety of protectionist policies are regarded as acceptable in so far as they promote the increase of national wealth. Because of the dynamism built into the system through the application of the group ethic, it is not expected that protectionism will lead to a significant loss of efficiency.

8. Any 'Asian' model of democracy should mostly derive from 'Asian' traditions rather than from the Western Judaeo-Christian tradition. Confucianism tends to be the most commonly tapped source of traditional legitimation for the model, though of course it is not the prevalent source of social ideas in all parts of the region<sup>5</sup>.

It will be immediately evident, not only that the 'model' outlined above is an abstraction from a variety of ideas, but also that, East and Southeast Asia being a diverse region, the extent to which the 'model' fits reality differs substantially from country to country (STOCKWIN 1998a). Moreover, much the same is true of the entity discussed under the generalised rubric of 'the West'. 'Western' countries include in their historical experience an enormous variety of types of regime, ideologies, successes and failures of political approach. The kinds of 'Western'-'Asian' contrast built into the 'model' discussed above may also be easily discovered within particular Western political systems. To take one example, disputes between a politics based on the individual and a politics based on groups were the stuff of politics in much of Europe during the inter-War period. It is also clearly the case that many of its formulations contain special pleading, in which an idealised 'Asia' is graphically contrasted with a demonised 'Europe' or 'United States' for the political purpose of justifying regimes or policy platforms that are notably repressive in important aspects of their day-to-day performance.

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<sup>5</sup> Indonesia, for instance, is a predominantly Islamic country, though a considerable part of the business elite consists of Chinese, in whose culture Confucianism has historically played an important part.

#### 4. GOING BEYOND THE 'MODEL'

These, though they are vital aspects of the subject, will be left aside at this point in favour of a more interesting agenda. The question that needs to be posed given the popularity of the 'Asian model' and the recent Asian financial crisis which has robbed the 'model' of some of its lustre, is as follows: is there sufficient substance in the 'Asian Model of Democracy' as it is outlined above that it can be modified in such a way as to eliminate its evident deficiencies and produce a better model? In other words, is it practicable to go beyond the 'Asian Model of Democracy'?

In order to answer these questions it is necessary to begin by reiterating its defects. First it is deficient in positing much too sharp a contrast between 'Asia' and 'the West', since both are highly complex entities, containing a variety of different systems and practices within them. Second, it errs in supposing that the contrasts it makes between desirable and undesirable forms of political system and practice correspond at all closely with the 'Asian'-'Western' divide. Third, it misunderstands both the theory and practice of democracy in asserting that free elections, an active parliament, a vigorous political opposition, the upholding of citizens' rights as well as duties, the rule of law and a free press must lead to anarchy, vice and economic degeneration. When properly understood and managed in the context of an educated population they will often lead to precisely the opposite. Fourth, the Asian financial crisis, in alerting the world to the unexpected vulnerability of some Asian economies, has revealed that in contemporary circumstances of the free and rapid flow of goods, capital, management, labour and finance, it may be increasingly difficult for any state to hold out against globalising trends and maintain successfully for long a system based on radically different principles from that now prevailing almost world-wide.

The fourth point is one worth exploring a little further. If true, it suggests that those states which fail to adjust to best practice as defined in the 'global' system (in practice a system strongly influenced by American norms and values), face loss of competitiveness and inevitable decline. Obviously, the dilemma is worse if the state concerned is small and weak, but even in the case of an economic giant like Japan, it now seems possible that severely adverse consequences may follow if there is a failure to adjust, and adjust much more rapidly than has been the case during the 1990s.



## 5. AN ALTERNATIVE TO GLOBAL UNIFORMITY?

Is there, then, a viable alternative model to that of global uniformity, a model that might incorporate elements of 'Asian' principle and practice into something compatible with the pressures being exercised by the global economy? In the rest of this article the focus will be on Japan, often regarded as the flagship of the Asian development model. A discussion of the considerable differences that do exist between Japanese ways of doing things and those prevalent elsewhere in the region is beyond the scope of this paper, but Japan is an interesting case both because of the extent to which its model has been influential in the region and the degree to which it now appears to be under threat from globalising tendencies.

The following elements may be identified as characteristic of Japanese practice in recent decades:

1. A high, if declining and far from universal, degree of social solidarity based on values closely associated with family cohesiveness and respect for ancestors.

This has gone along with a fairly high level of social control, through the education system, through at times intrusive local policing, and by various institutions which enforce community discipline. It is generally acknowledged that these factors lie behind the low crime and delinquency rates and the rather high levels of conformism in relation to social goals imposed from above. The advantages are obvious enough in terms of peaceful streets and prevalent social orderliness, even though phenomena such as violence, bullying and truancy in schools, and the existence of – and even official toleration of – mafia-like gangs of *yakuza* suggest some strains and imperfections in the prevailing pattern of social order. On the other side of the ledger, some Japanese complain about the elements of repression of personal freedom which the maintenance of social order entails.

2. A high level of responsibility for their employees on the part of organisations, especially private firms.

Even though the celebrated permanent employment system has never covered more than around a third of the total workforce, it has nevertheless set a kind of norm for employment security which is widely aspired to. The contrast with a system of free hiring and firing is obviously sharp. In-house benefits and bonuses of all kinds are also an important feature of employment practices in Japan. A widely proclaimed benefit of this way of doing things is the fostering of loyalty and commitment to the organisation concerned, and firms have a rational motive to train their employees to the highest level in the realistic expectation that they will retain the services for a long time after training is undergone. The system, on the oth-

er hand, is criticised for its constraints on the freedom of the individual employee (or, indeed, employer), the tendency to foster blind loyalty to the interests of the firm at the expense of broader social purposes, and the difficulties that it creates for any principle of hiring, firing or promotion according to criteria of merit.

3. Relationships between groups of all kinds (including companies) forged on the basis of personal linkages built up over a period through networking and face-to-face meetings rather than more impersonal, contractual relationships.

In justifying a way of doing business based on carefully cultivated networks rather than on the principle of cold contract, its advocates point to the importance of trust in the smooth implementation of agreements. If you trust those with whom you are doing business because you and they are lodged in a chrysalis of shared understandings, there is little need to check every item in a formal contract in fear that the other party will renege on contractual obligations if given half a chance. But the other side of the story is that such relationships are likely to become so exclusive as to remove the disciplining and efficiency-inducing mechanisms brought about by free competition and open tendering for contracts<sup>6</sup>. Hence the pervasive set of phenomena grouped under the general – but difficult to define – heading of corruption.

4. Decision making in politics and many other spheres of life, based on the laborious construction of consensus among participants, rather than through open debate and votes to determine which view commands a majority.

It is important here to observe that decision making in Western countries is by no means as consistently founded in vote-taking, nor is vote-taking so absent in Japan as to demonstrate complete polarity between Western and Japanese practice. Even so, few would deny that there is a particular predilection for forging consensus as the essential stage in coming to a decision. The vote-taking stage is then often *pro forma*, with voting, if conducted at all, done to demonstrate unanimity. A standard justification for this is that if the decision entails a course of action of some complexity, then it is preferable for all those who are likely to be involved in implementation to be brought into the decision making process at the planning stage. If this is done, their moral commitment to successful fulfilment of the task at hand will be thereby the stronger. Against it can be urged the argument that consensus-making is a slow, laborious process,

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<sup>6</sup> The phenomenon of *dangō* or rigged bidding for contracts is particularly prevalent in the Japanese construction industry and is often associated with bribes and kickbacks.

appropriate enough for the taking of routine decisions, but hopeless in an emergency, when time is of the essence.

5. Very closely associated with the previous item is the tendency for real decisions to be taken behind closed doors and by those in strong power positions rather than through open debate.

Again, it is important to guard against the fallacy of a complete Japanese/Western polarity here, but clearly in many sorts of formal Japanese decision making bodies, those who decide do so away from the formal arena, which becomes something of an empty shell<sup>7</sup>. Such a practice undoubtedly pays dividends for those in power because it is broadly conducive to political stability and predictability, but it is readily possible to criticise it both for lack of democracy, and for the lost chance to present genuinely innovative alternative strategies.

6. Relative dispersal of leadership.

It is well known that in Japan there tends to be a gap between real and formal power. The person at the top is not necessarily – or even often – actually in charge. Prime ministers and other chief executives change rather frequently and appear in the main to exert less personal influence on the course of events than their counterparts in other countries. Those at middle – or slightly above middle – levels in a hierarchy often exercise more power than their counterparts would elsewhere. This tendency has frequently been condemned for reducing the capacity of the system to exhibit bold and innovative leadership (though there have been such leaders, even in Japan). But on the other hand, dispersal of leadership has the possibly beneficial effect of preventing over-concentration of power: a phenomenon with baleful effects in various countries at diverse periods of history<sup>8</sup>. The issue here is complicated, because dispersal of power may be consistent with a pattern of checks and balances which maintains reasonable stability and inhibits dictatorship, but it may also create severe problems of accountability.

7. A power balance in which élite career government officials tend to control much of the political agenda as well as merely implementing legislation, and where elected politicians are disproportionately concerned with distribution of benefits to their constituents rather than with the making of policy.

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<sup>7</sup> This is true to a considerable extent, for instance, in local government, where the local assembly rarely witnesses real and effective debate.

<sup>8</sup> It makes sense, however, to be cautious in applying such an argument to Japan. Dispersal of power in the 1930s did not prevent – and may even have contributed to – descent into war.

The issues here are complex and controversial<sup>9</sup>, but the kind of programmatic party-based politics to be found in Britain and elsewhere is much modified, to say the least, in the case of Japan. There are indeed tangible advantages to such a system, from certain points of view. It has brought systemic stability and facilitated long-term planning. With much political activity being little more than froth on the top of the system, those effectively in charge (the bureaucrats with some help from politicians and relevant interest representatives) manage to keep the lid on politics and pursue an agenda which, in the period of economic development at least, was beneficial to the national interest. The difficulty is, however, that it is this very system which now appears to be inhibiting change sorely needed in the light of new international conditions.

8. Finally, the system has been based – in principle and partly in practice – on fair shares for all, and redistribution of wealth to those who would otherwise be disadvantaged, particularly the remoter regions.

This can only be done by government intervention, since the uninhibited operation of market mechanisms would tend to have the opposite effect, though they might make the sum total of national wealth grow faster. The problem is that such a system is generally acceptable when the national economy is growing fast, but tends to produce frustrations when the growth has slowed, at which time a policy of fair shares may be blamed for decelerating growth.

## 6. A POSSIBLE COMPROMISE

It is to be hoped that Japan, and *mutatis mutandis* other Asian countries, might seek to reform their systems of governance in such a way as to retain the advantages, while attacking the disadvantages, of these systems. This argument deserves treatment at much greater length than is possible here, but it may make sense to indicate the broad directions that reform might take. In terms of the eight categories listed above in relation to Japan, the following approach may be useful to contemplate:

Over the medium term social policies could be devised, whereby personal freedoms are gradually increased – indeed this is already happening to a great extent at least in urban areas – while the mechanisms of social and family solidarity are kept in place and continue to be actively fostered. Social change has already brought to the fore the nuclear family, and the extended family is less important than it used to be, but family loyalty retains an impressive strength which should be regarded as a social merit.

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<sup>9</sup> For an extended treatment, see STOCKWIN (1998b).

In the realm of employment, hard economic times are bringing about changes in labour relations, so that permanent employment contracts can no longer be so watertight and pervasive as they used to be. Nevertheless, the concept of firms taking responsibility for their employees and employees feeling responsibility for their firms continues to prevail widely, and has great advantages in terms of incentives and stability. What is essential, however, is to ensure that this system does not become so inflexible as to inhibit innovation and creativity. This is the focus of much contemporary debate.

Relationships based on personal linkage rather than legal contract may not please foreign firms working in Japan, but they have many advantages and need to be fostered and fine-tuned. Once again, more competitive elements probably need to be injected into the system, but its abolition would not be helpful.

Political decision making through the construction of consensus creates obvious problems in the handling of non-routine situations (such as the slow and confused official reaction to the Great Hanshin earthquake in 1995), but it seems quite possible to devise appropriate procedures for such situations provided that more attention is paid to the needs of contingency planning. The advantages of ensuring that everyone is on side before an important project is begun seems to justify the time which has to be spent on doing so. So far as decision making behind closed doors is concerned, there seems little doubt that the quality of decision making would be greatly improved by a much more open process at all levels. The sudden emergence of such a process would raise fears of disruption and irresponsibility, so that simply moving to all-out openness all at once may not be desirable. Here the loyalty factor might be brought in to play in order to mitigate such reactions.

There seem to be some distinct advantages, as well as problems, with dispersal of power. In reforming the system, what is needed is the promotion of frameworks consistent with accountability, while still inhibiting too great a concentration of unchecked power. Here again, what is important is to foster openness in place of behind-the-scenes dealing. Bureaucratic dominance is itself undergoing something of a trial by ordeal, as instances of corruption, formerly assumed to be the exclusive province of politicians and businessmen, are found increasingly in even the most prestigious bastions of bureaucratic power. Here it is critical that reformers must assuredly uphold the responsible democratic role of the people's elected representatives, to make government officials more clearly responsible to those representatives, while streamlining the ministries in order to make them more efficient in their implementation of policy.

Rather than enshrining the principle of the small state in terms that would render government incapable of implementing redistribution, a better way for reformers would be to make sure that redistribution is conducted more by objective criteria and less through the murky mechanisms of pork-barrel politics.

There is undoubtedly a need for slimming and streamlining throughout the system, in pursuit of the kinds of efficiency required in the rapidly changing circumstances of the contemporary world. To carry this out, however, in slavish imitation of American or European ways of doing things would be to jettison many of the objective merits of the methods of action devised over a long period by the Japanese themselves. The Japanese have their own history and traditions, some – though by no means all – of which have provided and still provide fruitful material for the solution of contemporary problems.

## 7. CONCLUSION

How then, does this relate to the ‘Asian Model of Democracy’? The argument developed in the latter part of this article has been that in the Japanese case there is at least some merit in what might be described as the ‘Japanese Model of Democracy’, though significant faults with it as well. Asia is diverse, with a range of different sorts of problem. Even so, the various countries of East and Southeast Asia have enough in common for it not to be a total nonsense to speak of an ‘Asian Model’. Unfortunately, a so-called ‘Asian Model’ has been used with a strongly anti-Western and arguably anti-democratic purpose by Prime Minister Mahathir and others. Debates about the pros and cons, advantages and problems, inherent in democracy are extraordinarily similar in Western and in Asian countries in recent times. These debates concern such questions as how to devise a system of governance in which governments are accountable, and how popular representation is to be achieved without leading to anarchy and grossly irresponsible behaviour. None of these questions is inherently ‘European’, ‘American’ or ‘Asian’, but universal.

It is, however, clearly preferable if universal principles of political economy can be activated in a particular environment, not mechanically, according to a false principle that history somehow ended with the collapse of Soviet-style communism, but rather taking due account of the history, traditions and social norms of the peoples concerned. History has not ended, but is a tapestry that continues to be woven with richly variant patterns in different parts of the world.

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