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**‘Asian Values’ as Reverse Orientalism:
The case of Singapore***

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‘Asian Values’ as Reverse Orientalism: The case of Singapore*

Michael Hill

Beginning in the 1970s, but increasing in emphasis in the following two decades, the role of ‘Asian values’ (and this term is used throughout the paper between quotes, in order to render the implied concept problematic) has been advanced as an explanation of the rapid industrial growth of East and Southeast Asia. In addition, the notion of a set of distinctively ‘Asian values’ has been promoted by some political leaders in the Southeast Asian region - notably Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia - as an explanation not only of their economic success but also as a justification for their resistance to Western, and especially American, concepts of human rights (Moody, 1996:167).

In this paper I shall first examine the discourse of Orientalism and its association in particular with the work of Max Weber, whose interpretation of the absence of an entrepreneurial spirit in Asia in contrast to the West represents a classic statement of Orientalism. It will be shown that the ghost of Weber stalks the discussion of ‘Asian values’, not only in the discussions of social scientists but also in statements by political figures such as the former Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten (Patten, 1996:5). Just as Orientalism in its origins provided a discourse within which Western intellectuals could perceive the trajectory of their own culture by constructing an ‘Other’ with diametrically opposed values, so the concept of ‘Asian values’ promotes a similar polarised contrast in which the positive and negative polarities are simply reversed (Hill and Lian, 1995:194). The irony of this ‘180-degree flip-flop’ (Whyte, 1994:40) lies in the origins of ‘Asian values’ as a largely Western social scientific artefact which was later adopted by Asian leaders as an ideological component of their nation-building projects.

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It is particularly appropriate to trace the evolution of the 'Asian values' debate in Singapore because there is wide consensus that Lee Kuan Yew has been one of the most prominent proponents of the claim that a discrete set of values is characteristic of East and Southeast Asian cultures. The more sceptical literature on 'Asian values' is replete with references to the "Singapore model" (Ng, 1997:20; Kausikan, 1997:26), the "Singapore School" (Dupont, 1996:14; Lingle, 1998:309) and the "Lee thesis" (Sen, 1999:89), while Chan (Chan, J., 1997) attributes the popularity of 'Asian values' to the outspokenness of the Singapore government, so it will be of significant interest to follow the emergence of these ideas in Singapore and to observe their Western pedigree. By way of anticipation, it might be noted that George Lodge - who in 1987 with Ezra Vogel produced one of the major texts of the reverse Orientalist literature (Lodge and Vogel, 1987) - was honoured as Lee Kuan Yew Distinguished Visitor to Singapore in 1991.

More immediately, although my interest in reverse Orientalismⁱ dates back to 1995, it was in January 1998 at the height of the 'Asian crisis' that it was starkly prompted. It was then that the media in Britain - 'unable to suppress their *Schadenfreude*' (Thompson, 1999:2) - deployed the artefact of 'Asian values' as a weapon with which to castigate the perceived hubris of Asian leaders faced with the collapse of their economies. Here are two representative extracts from British newspapers:

As the [Asian] region teeters on the edge of financial meltdown, the political fallout is spreading. A popular revolt, peaceful for now, is gaining strength as long-docile workforces turn against the "Asian values" preached so enthusiastically by their leaders." (*Sunday Telegraph*, 11 January 1998:24)

And under the headline '*No more talk of Asian values*', a leader in the *Independent on Sunday* claimed:

For some years Western politicians and businessmen have been expected to listen penitently as East Asian leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore and Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia have lectured them on the supremacy of "Asian values", by which they mean a fairly free-market economy controlled by a tightly knit political elite which the people fail to elect at their peril...Sooner or later the Asian economies are likely to revive, although the failure of many governments to recognise the scale of the problem, let alone their part in it, will delay recovery. Next time, however, we must not allow ourselves to be fobbed off with talk of "Asian values" or deterred by claims that attempts to strengthen democracy constitute unacceptable interference. (*Independent on Sunday*, 11 January 1998:4)

In the same issue the newspaper featured the views of George Segal, who was presented as one of the lonely sceptics who questioned the existence of an "Asian miracle"

and who thus threw in doubt the scenario of a Pacific Century in which the West would have to learn “Asian values” to keep up: significantly, Tony Blair’s admiring visit to Singapore was underscored in this item.

Though there were more balanced appraisals in the ‘Asian values’ debate, especially among journalists in the Asian regionⁱⁱ, the theme of ‘pride before a fall’ was characteristic of a considerable genre of Western critique, of which two examples will suffice. The *Financial Times* correspondent Victor Mallet, who had been based in Bangkok for three years in the mid-1990s, dismissed as arrogant posturing the claims of Asian leaders to a set of ‘Asian values’, and indeed the idea that Asians had any intrinsic values at all (Mallet, 1999). In his view, Asia had no such prosperity-engendering values. Christopher Lingle’s critique of the ‘Asian values’ concept, especially when these were linked with the illusion of an impending “Asian century”, was equally dismissive (Lingle, 1998). In light of this debate, it seems opportune to revisit the concept of Orientalism, to explore some of its recent recapitulations, and to track its importation into the discussion of values in Singapore.

In any discussion of Orientalism it is essential to acknowledge Edward Said’s formulation of the construct. A recent appraisal of his work summarises the content of Orientalism and highlights one of its central characteristics as an ‘overarching style of thought, with a history going back to antiquity, based on an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the ‘Orient’ and the ‘Occident’ (Sardar, 1999:68). Said saw Orientalism as embodying the claim that Asian language, culture, religion, and politics can be interpreted as essentially different from their Western counterparts. Within this contrast, the West is the knowing agent and Asia is the object to be known. And at a deeper level, ‘Orientalism is motivated by the West’s desire to establish its own identity as the historical agent that created the modern spirit and civilization’ (Inoue, 1999:38-39). Though much of Said’s survey is concerned with Western depictions of Islam, and incorporates a substantial body of literary criticism, Said directs an explicit critique to the social sciences. He points to the use by social scientists of models or “types” which accentuate certain features of social and cultural phenomena, frequently by deploying dichotomous “types”. ‘Orientalism’ was just such a dichotomous concept, he suggests, designed to contrast the rationality of Western culture with the traditional or mystical (i.e. non-rational) features of Asian culture. In one important passage discussing the use of “types” he refers specifically to the work of Max Weber:

No less important and methodologically formative a cultural force was the use in the social sciences of “types” both as an analytical device and as a way of seeing

familiar things in a new way. The precise history of the “type” as it is to be found in early-twentieth-century thinkers like Weber, Durkheim,... and the other sociologists of knowledge has been examined often enough: yet it has not been remarked, I think, that Weber’s studies of Protestantism, Judaism, and Buddhism [to which Said might have added Hinduism, Confucianism and Taoism] blew him (perhaps unwittingly) into the very territory originally chartered and claimed by the Orientalists. There he found encouragement amongst all those nineteenth-century thinkers who believed that there was a sort of ontological difference between Eastern and Western economic (as well as religious) “mentalities”... [Weber’s] notions of type were simply an “outside” confirmation of many of the canonical theses held by Orientalists, whose economic ideas never extended beyond asserting the Oriental’s fundamental incapacity for trade, commerce, and economic rationality. (Said, 1979:259)

There is not space in this context to rehearse Weber’s explanation of the rise of modern rational capitalism (see Weber, 1976), and it can be assumed that the basic contours of his argument are sufficiently well established to render this unnecessary, but it is important for the subsequent treatment of reverse Orientalism to focus on his comparative studiesⁱⁱⁱ Having set up his explanation of why such a modern rational form of capitalism arose in the West, in which he indicated the Protestant work ethic as providing a unique source of value motivation, Weber then asked the reverse question, why did anything like it *fail* to appear in any of the other great civilizations of the world?’ Here his answer utilises the Orientalist dichotomy in which Asian cultures stand at the non-rational pole and Western mentality is characterised by increasing rationality. In both his study of Chinese religion and his study of Indian religion Weber uses the same term - a ‘magical garden’ - to describe the world-view which interprets the natural order as being pervaded by magical elements (Weber, 1958:336; 1964:227). In both cases, the crux of his argument is that these Eastern religions did not manage to create the radical tension between this-worldly and other-worldly concerns which in the West, especially under the influence of Calvinistic Protestantism, had brought about the attitudes of rational calculation and manipulation within social and economic life that were so necessary in the growth of capitalism. In contrast to the tremendous tension towards the ‘world’ which Puritanism created as a result of its rational, ethical imperative - and which, like a stretched spring, propelled its adherents into a systematic, ascetic confrontation with worldly affairs - Confucianism created very little tension

between nature and deity, between ethical demand and human shortcoming, consciousness of sin and need for salvation, conduct on earth and compensation in the beyond, religious duty and socio-political reality. Hence, there was no leverage for influencing conduct through inner forces freed of tradition and convention. (Weber, 1964:235-6)

It is above all the dead weight of tradition and the capacity of Western religious beliefs to break through this obstacle to economic development that interests Weber, and to this

extent he thought that Confucianism provided no basis for the type of radical impingement on the world that occurred in the West.

To take an example that Weber clearly regarded as crucial: one of the great achievements of ascetic Protestantism - in terms of economic development and the unleashing of the individualism which Weber saw as an essential component of Western rational capitalism - had been to 'shatter the fetters' of the kinship group (Weber, 1964:237). Since they viewed each human being as a mere creature of a hidden, transcendent God and as owing strict duty overwhelmingly to him, the Puritans had been led to appraise all human relations, including the relations of a person to their family, in terms of ethical criteria that were unbounded by primary relationships. The significance of this for an economic system that demands impersonality in business transactions and a separation of the business enterprise from the household is patently obvious. Confucianism, on the other hand, placed a strong valuation on primary group relations and tended to tie the individual strongly to the other members of the kinship group.

Although the importance of the religious factor was a key interest in Weber's study of China, he went far beyond this to an analysis of Chinese social structure. While his analysis indicated many unfavourable conditions for the development of capitalism there were also factors that might have given rise to its growth: among these were the absence of legal restraints on usury or trade. Hence, 'From a purely economic point of view, genuine bourgeois capitalism might have developed...' (Weber, 1964:100). The factor that was significantly absent was the 'particular mentality' - note the use of the term "mentalities", to which Said points in social scientific constructions of Orientalism - which in the West had been provided by ascetic Protestantism. Confucianism, Weber concluded, enjoined *adjustment* to, rather than mastery of, the world.

He also emphasized the lack of a radical tension between this-worldly and other-worldly concerns in the Indian religions. The aim of the latter, he thought, was to achieve 'a state of ecstatic Godly possession through orgiastic means, in contrast to everyday life, in which God was not felt as a living power' (Weber, 1958:337). Escape from, rather than systematic engagement in the world became the true sphere of interest of the educated Hindu or Buddhist. Since the *gnosis* (or special knowledge of the otherworldly), which is the goal of Indian religion, is not a source of rational domination over man and nature but the means of mystical and magical domination over the self and others, its implications are charismatic rather than rational. In these ideas we see encapsulated the key contrast of Orientalism: the West is typified by the positive values of progress, technical rationality, and inner-worldly

asceticism; while the Orient is characterised by the polar negatives of tradition, magic and mysticism, and other-worldly preoccupation.

The discourse of Orientalism has direct and contemporary relevance for the debate over alleged 'Asian values'. What I wish to explore in this paper, and demonstrate using Singapore as an example, is the way in which the attribution of a set of 'Asian values', especially to the emerging 'Tiger economies' (Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore) in the 1970s, represented a *Western* project that is best labelled 'reverse Orientalism'. This process entailed the attribution of a set of cultural values to East and Southeast Asian societies by Western social scientists in order to contrast the recent dynamic progress of Asian development with the stagnation and social disorganization of contemporary Western economies and societies. The contrast provided legitimation for some of the nation-building policies of political leaders in such countries as Singapore and was incorporated in attempts to identify and institutionalise core values. While originating in the conceptual constructions of Western social scientists, these 'Asian values' were widely assumed to embody a concrete distinction in the cultures of East and West.

By the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s there was considerable interest among Western social and political scientists, especially those working within a structural functionalist perspective - in which the role of core values played a central role in modernization scenarios - in the utility of Weberian concepts for interpreting such processes. As a rough distinction it might be suggested that while the transformation of emergent African states was often framed within the dynamics of charisma (see for instance Apter, 1968; Fabian, 1969) - and while the term 'charisma' was given enhanced plausibility by the Presidency of John F. Kennedy (see Worsley, 1968:x) - in East Asia the preferred model was more often based on Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis and on the comparative studies of Oriental religion which were intended to test his initial hypothesis.

The seminal contribution to this approach was Bellah's study of the role of religion in Tokugawa Japan (Bellah, 1957). In that work Bellah explicitly states the direction of his investigation:

The sociologist influenced by Max Weber's great work on the relation of religion to the development of modern Western society, especially the modern economy, naturally wonders whether religious factors might also be involved in the Japanese case. The problem stated baldly is, *was there a functional analogue to the Protestant ethic in Japanese religion?* (Bellah, 1957:2-3, my emphasis)

During the 1950s most social scientists still subscribed to the Weberian version of Orientalism, and thus saw Confucianism as a serious obstacle to economic development, but

Bellah was one sociologist who saw Japan as an important exception (Whyte, 1994:39). In his book, Bellah attributed considerable influence to the rationalizing influence on ethics, philosophy, and psychology of Confucianism and saw this influence as being maximised during the Tokugawa Period (Bellah, 1957:69). He furthermore detected in Confucianism one of the decisive mechanisms that Weber had found in Western Protestantism, namely an inner-worldly asceticism (Bellah, 1957:195-196). Such a search for functional analogues or equivalents was to set the agenda for much subsequent research into the role of values in modernization (and, as will later be shown, it remains influential among contemporary observers of Asian modernization). For instance, McClelland engaged in research that attempted to operationalize psychological elements of the Protestant Ethic thesis in the concept of 'achievement motivation' (McClelland, 1967). In a subsequent collection, which Bellah edited, the focus was still on the motivational inputs into modernization but the role of Confucianism was marginal to a much fuller discussion of the contribution of Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism (Bellah, 1965). Based on papers presented to a 1963 conference on Cultural Motivations to Progress in South and Southeast Asia this volume treated tradition as problematic and was especially concerned with the resistance to modernization of traditionalist elements in culture (Bellah, 1965:xiii; xi).

A more agnostic and sceptical approach to 'Asian values' characterised the comparative exploration of Asian modernization in the 1960s and early 1970s and, as will be demonstrated shortly, was represented in the thinking of Singaporean social scientists and politicians until the late 1970s. One of the most formidable critiques of the notion of 'Asian values' was mounted by Gunnar Myrdal who, in his major work *Asian Drama* in 1968, found it necessary to dispose of

generalizations about "Asian values" or the "values" of one or another of the religions or nationalities of the region. There is a large literature expounding this general theme, and many more works refer to these values in explanation of behavior... Insofar as there are considerable and systematic differences in conditions among the several South Asian countries, there is undoubtedly something to the concept of a "national character." The same may be said of religions. And as the differences in conditions are much more pronounced between these countries as a whole and the Western world, there is room also for the concept of the "Asian" or "South Asian" - mind. *But these terms are not suitable for scientific use.* They have been contaminated by being made to serve - in South Asia as in the Western world - speculative, nationalist, aggressive, or apologetic ideologies... Even those intellectual leaders who have questioned their accuracy in general or specific terms... often refer to these "Asian values" in addressing their countrymen, as do visiting statesmen and scholars from the West. (Myrdal, 1968:94-95, emphasis mine)

Myrdal seems also to have captured the logic of 'reverse Orientalism' when he contended that the tenacity of the myth of such stereotypical 'Asian values' was 'very much in the nature of an indigenous protest against the colonizers' opinion of the natives (Myrdal, 1968:98). He also anticipated another 'opportune interest' which was identifiable in the Western propagation of these values, namely the supposed immunity they conferred against Communism (Myrdal, 1968:99): this was to become a central issue in the debate during the post-Cold War period, when it might be said that the 'opportune interest' was seized by Asian leaders attempting to deflect the hegemonic demands of Western liberal-individualism (see, for instance, Inoue, 1999:27-29).

A major transformation in Western discussions of 'Asian values' occurred in the pivotal year 1979 with the publication of three influential books. In *The Japanese Challenge: The Success and Failure of Economic Success* Herman Kahn and Thomas Pepper offered an assessment of the high rates of economic growth in East and Southeast Asia that owed a substantial part of its explanation to the significance of the Confucian cultural tradition. Their account cautioned against an exaggerated contrast between Western and predominantly Confucian societies (Kahn and Pepper, 1979:144-145) and gave limited validity to the notion that the twenty-first century might be anticipated as a neo-Confucian century, but it did acknowledge that neo-Confucian countries were 'in many respects more adept at industrialization than predominantly Western countries' (Kahn and Pepper, 1979:144). Here can be seen the emergence of an explicit Eastern-Western positive-negative polarity.

In a second volume in the same year, *World Economic Development 1979 and Beyond*, produced under the auspices of the influential Hudson Institute (Kahn, 1979), Kahn was unrestrained in his advocacy of neo-Confucian values in the process of industrialization. Under current conditions, he claimed, the neo-Confucian cultures of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore - together with the ethnic Chinese minorities in Malaysia and Thailand - had much strength and very few weaknesses and seemed 'more adept at industrialization than the West' (Kahn, 1979:118)^{iv}. Kahn expanded on the 'Confucian Ethic', emphasizing the personal qualities it encouraged - those of a hardworking, responsible, skilful and ambitious member of society who would contribute to the group rather than pursuing individual, selfish interests - and thus contributing to a society that was based on complementarity rather than the fractious society characterised by the Western pattern of interest groups (Kahn, 1979:121).

The Weberian polarity was decisively reversed in contrasting the neo-Confucian ethic with its Western predecessor. Since the most vital issues in contemporary society centre on cooperation and organizational efficiency, he argued,

[The] neo-Confucian cultures have great advantages. As opposed to the earlier Protestant ethic, the modern Confucian ethic is superbly designed to create and foster loyalty, dedication, responsibility, and commitment and to intensify identification with the organization and one's role in the organization. All this makes the economy and society operate much more smoothly than one whose principles of identification and association tend to lead to egalitarianism, to disunity, to confrontation, and to excessive compensation or repression. (Kahn, 1979:122)

For these reasons, Kahn predicted, the neo-Confucian cultures had potentially higher economic growth rates than other cultures. To this contrast Kahn added a further negative feature of Western cultures, which was to attract considerable attention in some versions of reverse Orientalism: they were, he claimed, 'decadent':

Young people appear, superficially, to be less patriotic than their parents and grandparents and also distinctly less willing to make sacrifices for the public interest or even their own careers... They are distinctly less willing to accept military training or any kind of onerous task or discipline, no matter how valid or important the local or national need. There is extreme hedonism, self-indulgence, decadence, and vice. There is general concern in all of the neo-Confucian societies, the Soviet Union, and East Germany, that some of these "diseases of the West" be kept away from their own people. In this respect, the current Western campaign in favor of human rights may backfire badly because in many Confucian societies it looks like a campaign for selfish, self-indulgent, and reckless individualism and egoism. (Kahn, 1979:125-126)

Having rehearsed what was to become the established rhetoric of those Asian leaders who sought to 'inoculate' their populations against undesirable Western values, Kahn proceeded to encapsulate the negative features of Western values in what he termed the 'Fourteen "New" Emphases and Trends in U.S. Values' (Kahn, 1979:141). These included such corrosive values as risk avoidance, environmentalism, hedonism, excessive regulation, and concern with self. These he depicted as 'sand in the gears' of economic growth and he elaborated them at length, contrasting them with what he labelled the 'Thirteen Traditional Levers'. These were presented as the historical basis of middle class American values which were all now under challenge. The latter included tradition, respect for authority, earning a living, economic rationality, the "Puritan ethic", and high group loyalty. On examination they contain quite disparate elements, and one might speculate that this is perhaps because they are meant to signify not only the "world we have lost" but also the contemporary values of successful neo-Confucian societies. Thus, while economic rationality and the "Puritan ethic" form part of the Weberian paradigm of Western progressive values, respect for tradition and group loyalty is emphatically not components of the individualistic ethic he emphasized.

Finally, by stark contrast with the less desirable value traits of American society, neo-Confucian cultures were singled out as 'heroes of development'. In giving approval to the 'extraordinary and attractive political philosophy' of such societies, Kahn concluded on a personal note:

I hope the reader will excuse my almost childlike enthusiasm for these countries, but I have spent many years in trying to make various policies more rational; it is nice to know that others are pursuing the same goal and even putting it into practice. (Kahn, 1979:380)

The third of the influential Western books to appear in 1979 was *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* by Ezra Vogel, who was later to make a significant contribution to the ideological project of political elites in Southeast Asia. The East-West dichotomy was encapsulated in the term 'lessons' and in the further claim that there were 'costs' entailed in an inadequate American response to the Japanese challenge. Citing the work of George Lodge, he noted that the individualism of the bygone days of free enterprise had now given way to a 'communitarian vision' in which the interests of the group or society took precedence (Vogel, 1979:234-235). Though there were costs and dangers incurred in importing Japanese patterns into American enterprise, such as smothering individual rights, ignoring opposition, over-conformity, and excessive nationalism, many of the Asian virtues could be imported because they were 'surprisingly consistent with America's basic values' (Vogel, 1979:255). Like Kahn, Vogel based his prescription on a perceived congruence between certain core values of an American past and those of a current Asian culture. Reverse Orientalism was thus invoked by Western observers as a reinstatement of indigenous tradition^v: as will be shown later, a parallel 'revitalization' movement was about to be initiated in Singapore.

The argument of the paper to this point can be reiterated. Based on a Weberian dichotomy of Western economic progress and Oriental retardation, social scientists from the 1950s - mainly in the United States - began to search for functional analogies or surrogates to the Protestant ethic in Asian countries, and especially in Japan, which might explain their late but increasingly successful development tracks. Despite well-articulated scepticism about the concept of 'Asian values' in the 1960s, by the 1970s there was considerable interest in the value premises of neo-Confucianism, which, it was claimed, had underpinned economic growth not only in Japan but also in a number of other East and Southeast Asian countries. This interest culminated in the publication, in 1979, of three influential studies that - with varying emphasis - hypostatized 'Asian values' as an explanation of this growth.

Before tracing how these representations were transposed into a Southeast Asian discourse there remain two further contributions to the process, both of which were first published in 1982. First, Michio Morishima's popular book *Why Has Japan 'Succeeded'? Western Technology and the Japanese Ethos* took as its starting point Weber's Protestant ethic thesis and the fundamental difference it claimed between Puritan and Confucian conceptions of rationality. Much of Morishima's book was concerned with the development of a specifically Japanese variant of Confucianism and the contrast between this and the form of Confucianism found in China. It concluded by identifying parallels between Weber's distinction between the implications for worldly behaviour of Catholicism and Protestantism and a similar divergence between Chinese and Japanese Confucianism^{vi}.

Also published in 1982 was Hofheinz and Calder's *The Eastasia Edge* which took a similar approach to that of Kahn and Vogel in maintaining that 'Eastasia has an edge on us today because it is organized and thinks differently from the way we do' (Hofheinz and Calder, 1982:41). Confucianism, together with other ideological underpinnings, was seen by these observers as contributing to the strikingly shared patterns of behaviour and organization across the countries of the Eastasia region. The authors acknowledged the insights of Max Weber^{vii} and while they concluded that Eastasian history offered no direct analogy to the ethical transformation which characterised the capitalist development of Western societies they found a number of equivalents in Confucian philosophy (Hofheinz and Calder, 1982:121): these included prudence and frugality, deferred gratification, and concern for the future of the group, which were seen as its principal contributions to a work ethic. Of particular interest was the book's portrayal of Singapore as an outstanding example of Confucian virtues and its then leader Lee Kuan Yew as a quintessential Confucian leader - 'austere, remote, authoritarian, and intensely concerned with national welfare' (Hofheinz and Calder, 1982:58). The moralism represented in public campaigns - such as those on family size and short haircuts - were also evinced as thoroughly Confucian in origin.

Thus by 1982 Singapore was depicted by influential Western observers as a distinctively Confucian society which embodied an ethos characterized by 'Asian values'^{viii}. For the next stage of the argument, it is necessary to trace the discussion of core values among politicians and social scientists based in Singapore from the 1960s onwards. In this way, I think it is possible to show that the construction of a distinctive set of 'Asian values', and in particular a set of values seen as specifically Confucian, only began in the late 1970s and that it coincided with - and in its Confucian dimension followed - the transmission of these representations by Western social scientists. In other words, at least in some measure it

is appropriate to regard the rhetoric of 'Asian values' in Singapore as an ideological variant of the 'looking-glass self'^{ix}.

There is no disagreement that the initial value concerns of Singapore's political elite were overwhelmingly pragmatic. After the trauma of separation from Malaysia in 1965 and the reversals and exigencies of the first decade of independence, the emphasis was on survival and on the pursuit of material goals. Lee Kuan Yew himself emphasized this in his advice to students at the Raffles Institution in a speech in mid-1969:

And by 'right values' I mean the values that will ensure you a reasonably secure, a relatively high standard of living which demands a disciplined community prepared to give of its best and ready to pay for what it wants...(quoted in Tamney, 1988:111)

The extent of this pragmatism has been discussed elsewhere (Hill and Lian, 1995:188-193) and there is not space to explore it fully, but it is important to note that by the early 1970s social scientific observers in Singapore were depicting an 'ideology of pragmatism' as the main legitimation of the nation-building process (Chan and Evers, 1973). The pragmatism of the People's Action Party (PAP) was identified in the early 1970s as being entirely compatible with Weber's category of purposeful-rational action:

The pragmatism to which the national identity refers is one of purposive rational action, one of means-end calculation, one of technology and science. Citizens are admonished to identify with the economic success of the state which demonstrates that the correct policies have been applied. As these policies are not based on an explicitly stated ideology nor even on purely political considerations, but on rational and scientific principles, any criticism of these policies can be branded as irrational. The prestige of science and technology is thus used to buttress not only the day-to-day policies but also the social and political system resulting from such policies, because leaders will ask if such a system is not derived from the very principles of scientific and rational action. The supremacy of this pragmatic identity or technocratic consciousness can thus be used to legitimize tight political control and eventually an authoritarian political system (Chan and Evers, 1973:317).

As an example, the adoption of the English language as the principle medium of education was initially 'rationalized entirely on the basis of its utility for science, technology and commerce' (Chua, 1985:35). It was only after 1979 that the teaching of a 'mother-tongue' alongside English - of either Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil, depending on the ethnic category to which an individual was assigned - was linked to the transmission of 'Asian values' which, it was claimed, would counterbalance undesirable Western ones.

Social scientific discussions of values in Singapore during the late 1960s and early 1970s were focussed on the themes of national consciousness or identity and made no reference to the concept of 'Asian values'. Among the more perceptive contributions were those of Alatas, who effectively uncoupled the concept of modernization from that of

Westernization (Alatas, 1969:221) and provided a critical assessment of the relevance of the Weber thesis to an analysis of the differential economic development of Malays and Chinese, suggesting that structural as well as ideological factors were a key variable (Alatas, 1973). Only in a volume published in 1977 did discussion turn to the topic of 'Asian values' and it is crucial to the present argument to note that among both social scientists and politicians the initial reception of the concept was deeply sceptical. In a contribution on 'Asian Values and Modernization' Ho elaborated on the ideals of modernization and found most of them lacking in Asian countries - which, incidentally, he did not distinguish from other Third World societies (Ho, 1977); indeed his account adopted a number of the negative features derived from the original content of Orientalism. In Asian societies, for example, he found the rational injunctions of modernization undermined by superstition; the equalizing of economic opportunity negated by the 'sort of caste system' of Confucianism (Ho, 1977:6) and a lack of innovation in the face of traditional life-styles. His dismissal of the concept of 'Asian values' and his insistence that the values of Asian peoples show a marked diversity have a strong affinity with the position of Myrdal. Ho made this affinity with Myrdal explicit in a 1989 paper in which he reiterated his rejection of politicians' 'glib statements about Asian values' (Ho, 1989:688). The latter paper represents a high degree of consistency in light of the intervening amplification of 'Asian values' - a development that will shortly be examined.

If Singapore social scientists found little value in the discussion of 'Asian values' before 1980, so did its politicians. In the same 1977 edited volume on *Asian Values and Modernization* there is a decisive rejection of the concept by Rajaratnam, one of the founding group of PAP leaders and an articulate ideologist, who declared

...I have very serious doubts as to whether such a thing as 'Asian values' really exists - or for that matter 'Asian' anything - Asian unity, Asian socialism, Asian way of life and so on. It may exist as an image but it has no reality. If it has any meaning at all it is merely a convenient way of describing the heterogeneous, conflicting and complex network of beliefs, prejudices and values developed in the countries which for geographical purposes have been grouped as being in Asia. Only as a geographical expression does the term 'Asia' have any reality.

So were I to talk about modernization (which though real is itself a very imprecise concept) and Asian values I would be talking about nothing in particular. (Rajaratnam, 1977:95)

Instead, Rajaratnam concerned himself with the distinction between modernization and Westernization, dismissing the latter as either the pursuit of the latest fashion trends or as a source of phoney intellectual pretensions, and suggesting that if 'Asian values' were supposedly a barrier to modernization, so were those Western values that proliferated corruption. Elsewhere, the same speaker characterized the prevailing Singaporean values as

"moneytheism" (Milne and Mauzy, 1990:24). Nor was Rajaratnam the only Singapore politician to speak candidly about wider social values. Of particular interest are the remarks of another of the founding group of PAP leaders, Goh Keng Swee, because he was later to become intimately associated with the Confucian values project. In 1970, however, speaking to a student group on the subject of 'The Hippy Threat' and deploying his inimitably robust brand of irony and wit, he had observed:

If we are honest with ourselves, I think we can detect in contemporary Singapore a strange but striking similarity of intellectual climate and social values with Victorian England, together with much of the hypocrisies and cruelties of that age. (Goh, K.S., 1972:176)^x

The statements contrast markedly with the legitimacy that was later assigned to 'Asian values' - and especially to Confucianism - as a source of 'cultural ballast' (Goh, K.S., 1979:1 - 6) and of protection against the corrosive influence of perceived Western values. To what do we attribute this considerable shift in orientation?

Goh's preoccupation with hippies provides an important symbolic indicator, and Maslow's model of a hierarchy of developmental needs (Maslow, 1970) provides a psychological analogy to the reorientation that occurred at the end of the 1970s. For the first decade after independence in 1965 the overwhelming imperative was to develop the economic base through rapid industrialization and to develop an infrastructure, especially of housing and education, which would both attract overseas capital and enhance the government's legitimacy. Once these more pressing economic and political exigencies had been addressed there began to emerge in the late 1970s a growing anxiety over core values. As Kuo describes it:

By the late 1970s, when most of the basic needs of the population had been fulfilled, there came the time for soul-searching and reflection, and there emerged a new and increased concern over the non-material (social and cultural) dimensions of nation-building. Alarmed by increasing (or at least socially more visible) numbers of crime, delinquency, drug-abuse, abortion and divorce (and despite the fact that the rates of such social indicators were comparatively low in Singapore compared to other equally urbanized societies), there emerged a collective sense of moral crisis, calling for collective action (Kuo, 1992:4).

Given the already noted uncoupling of modernization and Westernization, it can be understood why the crisis was identified as one of 'Westernization'. Furthermore, this problem was seen to be more acute in Singapore than in other Asian societies because of the use of English as a common language. However, in the light of the subsequent discussion of allegedly 'Asian' - and specifically Confucian - values, it is important to establish that before 1979 'Confucianism was not even a topic for public discussion in Singapore' (Wong and Wong, 1989:517). Among early migrants, Confucian moral teachings had been transmitted

through the family and “little traditions” rather than formal teaching (Kuo, 1992:10). As a general thesis it has been suggested that Singapore shared with other migrant Chinese societies a correspondingly limited immersion in Confucian values:

Among the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia, Confucianism made a slight impact. It was a pioneering community of labourers and traders: the Confucianism of individual self-cultivation rather than of scholar and state was exported to Southeast Asia, and it was never dominant there. Confucian revival in Singapore at the turn of the century was shaped by exposure to, and dialogue with, missionary Christianity than by the distant reference point of the late Qing empire. (Harper, 1997:514)

For a population of predominantly male migrants it might also be suggested that the traditional family values that were retained owed as much to the obligations of remittance payments and arranged marriages than to the ideological glue of Confucianism (see Chan, K.B., 1994).

Decadent Western elements thus acquired a symbolic focus during the 1970s in the image of the long-haired hippie, embodying the philosophy of ‘patched-up jeans and patched-up souls’ (Gopinathan, 1988:134). From the late 1970s the desired cultural values were increasingly labelled ‘Asian values’ and were claimed to include such traits as ‘thrift’, ‘industry’, and ‘filial piety’. Whether there existed in a readily identifiable form a set of values that could be seen as distinctly ‘Asian’ was, as has been shown, a matter of sceptical comment even among senior government Ministers (see also Chua, 1985:35) and the polarised conception of a set of desirable Asian values confronting the decadent lure of those imported from the West had attracted critical comment (Clammer, 1993). Nevertheless, attempts to articulate such values began in the latter part of the 1970s and became a major project during the 1980s. An early statement of the issue, using a distinctly medical metaphor, was made by Lee Kuan Yew in his National Day Speech in 1978. Arguing that Singapore had ‘already been infected’ by the West, he suggested that the ‘antidote’ was the ‘strong assertion of the Asian values common to all Singapore’s ethnic groups, stressing the virtues of individual subordination to the community so as to counteract the disruptive individualism of western liberalism’ (quoted in Berger, 1997:270).

Although only brief attention can be given here to the details, the key date in the fostering of concern with cultural values was 1979 (for details, see Hill and Lian, 1995:85-90; 196-205). The project to establish a set of core values in the process of nation-building attained great prominence in that year, mainly as a result of the two government reports, the first, which was chaired by Goh Keng Swee (the ‘Goh’ Report) addressed the role of bilingualism and multiculturalism in schools, and the second (the ‘Ong’ Report) explored the

need for moral education. Bilingualism in particular was viewed as a means of protecting the young against the decadent influences of Westernization, as a medical metaphor employed by one proponent shows:

Bilingualism will serve to inoculate our young people against the epidemic of unwholesome fads and fetishes and make them understand that they are they, and we are ourselves. (quoted in Clammer, 1981:233)

The goal of 'inoculation' provided the starting point for the policy of bilingualism and the later search for Asian values; thereafter the process developed into a search for an ideology to legitimise social discipline and an exploration of substitutes for the Protestant work ethic. It was also around this period that the government initiated an extensive programme of national campaigns such as the National Courtesy Campaign, Senior Citizens' Week Campaign, and the Speak Mandarin Campaign (Kuo, 1992:5).

The Goh Report dealt only briefly with Moral Education, since this was the remit of the second Report, but it did note that 'One of the dangers of secular education in a foreign tongue is the risk of losing the traditional values of one's own people and the acquisition of the more spurious fashions of the west' (Goh, 1979:1 - 5). The Report also noted the ineffectiveness of much of the existing moral education and civics material and suggested the need to instil a common set of values in order to ensure that a population of recent migrant origin would be willing and able to defend their collective interest. The solution in the Report's view was not to teach moral values in the context of abstract ideas but in terms of great men in Asian history, and furthermore to do this in the language of the students' 'mother-tongue': this, it was argued, would overcome the danger of 'deculturisation'.

Lee Kuan Yew's reply to the Report concentrated on its moral education aspect and summarised the characteristics of the good citizen in what might almost be a reverse image of Kahn's undesirable young American (see above, page 11):

What kind of man or woman does a child grow up to be after 10-12 years of schooling? Is he a worthy citizen, guided by decent moral precepts? ... the litmus test of a good education is whether it nurtures good citizens who can live, work, contend and cooperate in a civilised way. Is he loyal and patriotic? Is he, when the need arises, a good soldier, ready to defend his country, and so protect his wife and children, and his fellow citizens? Is he filial, respectful to elders, law-abiding, humane, and responsible? Does he take care of his wife and children, and his parents? Is he a good neighbour and a trustworthy friend? Is he tolerant of Singaporeans of different races and religions? Is he clean, neat, punctual, and well-mannered? (in Goh, 1979:iv-v)

At this point the proposal was made by Lee Kuan Yew of an amalgam of the best characteristics of eastern and western values, so that Confucian ethics, Malay traditions, and

the Hindu ethos might be combined with more sceptical Western methods of scientific inquiry. The Ong Report on Moral Education that followed shortly afterwards reiterated the idea of an amalgam:

Emphasis should be placed on the inculcation of the desired Eastern and Asian moral concepts, values and attitudes so as to help in the preservation and strengthening of our cultural heritage. (Ong, 1979:10)

Adoption of the mother tongue was seen as the most 'efficient' way of transmitting Asian moral values. The proposals in the Ong Report led to the rapid development, under the guidance of the Singapore Jesuit, of a moral education syllabus and curriculum (Gopinathan, 1988:138).

In view of the prominence given by Western commentators to the Confucian dimension of the 'Asian values' project in Singapore, it is important to observe that the inclusion of Confucian Ethics in the moral education syllabus was something of a hesitant afterthought. As announced in January 1982, only five religious subjects were to be offered - Bible knowledge, Buddhist studies, Hindu studies, Islamic religious knowledge, and World religions:

Confucianism, as a secular ethical system, could have no place as a part of the religious teachings. It was at the suggestion of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, and after spending "many of his wakeful hours and several sleepless nights", that two weeks later in early February 1982, Goh [Keng Swee] announced that Confucian Ethics was to be included as an additional subject for those Chinese who might not be religiously inclined, "to give young Singaporeans a cultural ballast against the less desirable aspects of western culture". (Kuo, 1992:6)

A few days later Lee Kuan Yew reinforced the programme when, at a Chinese New Year Reception speech he emphasized that

Our task is to implant these [Confucian] values into our children when their minds are young and receptive, so that when they grow out of their teenage years, these attitudes harden and are forged for a life-time. (quoted in Kuo, 1992:6)

Thus Confucianism - supposedly the keystone of East Asian values - only became a major preoccupation of the Singapore government after 1982. Once the government had announced that Confucian Ethics would be included in the Moral Education syllabus in secondary schools, eight "Confucian scholars" (as they were labelled) from the United States and Taiwan were invited to Singapore in 1982 for consultation (Gopinathan, 1988:139-140). The necessity of importing such expertise is a further indication of the hitherto low level of interest in Confucianism within Singapore.

However, support for the Confucian curriculum thereafter attracted a disproportionate share of the resources devoted to the moral education programme, and the establishment of the Institute of East Asian Philosophy in 1983 to encourage the study of Confucian ideas, with Goh Keng Swee, by then retired from politics, as its first chairman, and Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong - who was responsible for the 1979 Report on Moral Education - as vice-chairman, was especially important in providing the movement with legitimacy (Kuo, 1992:9). The Confucian project was enhanced by the now well-established perception that other economically successful Asian countries - Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan - had a Confucian tradition of ethics. Confucian ethics, it was thought, were playing a similar role to that played by the Protestant ethic in the West: what was important about Confucianism was not just its emphasis on hard work but its stress on social obligations.

Religious Knowledge became a compulsory subject for Secondary Three and Four students in 1984 but within little more than two years the problematic nature of religion had been highlighted in the wider society. The emerging crisis of religion and the Singapore government's response to it in the period 1986-89 are the subject of more detailed analysis elsewhere (Hill and Lian, 1995:205-210; Hill, 1997; 1999) but the main features can be summarised as being fivefold: first, there was concern over the question of Malay ethnicity and Islamic identity which might come into conflict with loyalty to the country; secondly, there emerged the prospect of renewed religious vitality leading to conversion activity, especially among Christian fundamentalists, which contained the undesirable possibility of inter-ethnic strife; thirdly, the acute problem of religious activity leading to political activism appeared with the discovery of a 'Marxist conspiracy' involving Roman Catholic personnel; fourthly, the Confucian Ethics programme failed to secure more than a minority of Chinese school students since most of them opted for Buddhist studies; and finally, the broader Confucianisation programme had generated allegations among other ethnic groups of chauvinism on the part of the Chinese majority. The government's response was many-sided and included invocation of the Internal Security Act, the commissioning of social scientific research into the religious situation in Singapore, the abandonment of the Religious Knowledge programme in 1989, and the passing of the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act in 1990. With religion apparently compromised as a source of socially cohesive values, was there an alternative ethical basis around which civic virtues might be nurtured?

Once again, a possible model was suggested by Western social scientists and quite consciously and candidly promoted by the Singapore government. In 1987, at the height of the debacle with religion, George Lodge and Ezra Vogel published the edited volume

Ideology and National Competitiveness under the imprint of the Harvard Business School (Lodge and Vogel, 1987). The book was firmly grounded in the mould of reverse Orientalism but made only marginal reference to Confucianism and neo-Confucianism; in fact, these topics only surfaced in a discussion of traditional Korean values. Instead, the dichotomy around which the book is organized is that of individualism *versus* communitarianism, the former being characteristic of Western societies, the latter of East Asian societies.

The book was addressed to policymakers, especially corporate managers, and began by setting forth three propositions. First, it was argued, countries could be analysed according to their 'ideological strength' (or comparative advantage), which was measured by the degree to which their ideology was both coherent and adaptable to the changing environment. On this measure, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan ranked highly, followed by Germany, then by France and Brazil, while the United States and the United Kingdom together with Mexico fell in the lowest group. The second proposition maintained that in the coming decades developments were likely to reinforce the initial ranking. And finally it was contended that if the East Asian nations continued to be more competitive than other industrial nations, then other members of the world trading system would necessarily become more communitarian (Lodge and Vogel, 1987:vii-viii). The tradition of Max Weber was credited with having introduced the concept of ideology as an analytical tool and dichotomous ideal-type constructions of individualism and communitarianism were constructed, with the advantages of the latter for global competitiveness being clearly delineated. Among their conclusions Lodge and Vogel noted:

In Europe in the 1980s "communitarianism" was a bad name because of the disappointing experience in France and Britain with government planning, the "welfare state," and attempts to prop up industrial losers...

But the major trend now seems to be toward a more communitarian solution, and the new competitive environment clearly demands a different version of communitarianism that restrains government spending and excessive regulations yet increases the range of cooperation between business management, labor, and government.' (Lodge and Vogel, 1987: 320-321)

Noting various Western attempts to rectify systemic flaws, they nevertheless conclude that 'All these efforts, however, seem inadequate thus far in stemming the competitive pressures from East Asia' (Lodge and Vogel, 1987:321).

The publication of this book at a moment when the promotion of core 'Asian values', through the agency of indigenous religious and ethical traditions, had become acutely problematic, provided the keystone for the next stage in the building of a set of national values. It was inaugurated in October 1988 when the First Deputy Prime Minister (and Prime

Minister designate) Goh Chok Tong gave a speech on “Our national ethic” to the PAP Youth Wing. In it he noted that the values of Singaporeans were being transformed as a result of their daily exposure to external influences:

Relying on the two major concepts of “individualism” and “communitarianism” used in George C. Lodge and Ezra F. Vogel’s book, *Ideology and National Competitiveness: A Analysis of Nine Countries*, Goh argued that during the last decade “there has been a clear shift in our values” from communitarianism to individualism especially among the younger Singaporeans. (Quah, 1990:1)

This value-transformation was regarded with concern by the government because it was seen to influence national competitiveness, prosperity, and even survival as a nation. It was thought that since Singaporeans shared the core values of hard work, thrift, and sacrifice with Japanese, Koreans, and Taiwanese, these values should be somehow enshrined in a national ideology. This ideology would be inculcated in schools, homes, and workplaces as the Singaporean “way of life” and was necessary for two reasons: the first was to immunize the population from undesirable alien influences; and the second was to bind them together as a nation. Thus Lodge and Vogel’s concepts of ideological strength and communitarianism were directly incorporated in the construction of a national ideology. As we have noted elsewhere, there is a certain symbolism in the fact that just as the transition to a new cohort of political leaders was occurring, the configuration of core national values was being modified from an overtly Confucian design to a refurbished global systems model (Hill and Lian, 1995:210).

After Goh’s initial proposal for a national ethic, the idea was reiterated by the then President Wee Kim Wee at the opening of Parliament in January 1989. He warned that if Singaporeans were not to lose their bearings they should preserve the cultural heritage of each of their ethnic groups and uphold a set of common values:

These core values include placing society above self, upholding the family as the basic block of society, resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention, and stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony. We need to enshrine these fundamental ideas in a National Ideology. Such a formal statement will bond us together as Singaporeans, with our own distinct identity and destiny. We need to inculcate this National Ideology in all Singaporeans, especially the young. (quoted in Quah, 1990:1-2)

Two days later, Lee Hsien Loong, Minister for Trade and Industry (and the son of Lee Kuan Yew) expanded upon the proposed four core values, which he considered an adequate starting point for a National Ideology because they were compatible with Chinese, Malay, and Indian cultures as well as with the values taught by the major religions. He also thought they should be distinctive and that they should differentiate Singaporeans from the citizens of

other countries. Shortly afterward, the Institute of Policy Studies, which is based at the National University of Singapore, was given the task of identifying a set of national values that would help to unite all Singaporeans. The Institute initiated a Study Group on National Values which comprised academics, businessmen, a journalist, the former Director of the Institute of East Asian Philosophies, and Rajaratnam, the former senior politician who had previously shown intense scepticism towards the idea of 'Asian values'. The Study Group worked on the Report throughout 1989, opting to replace Lodge and Vogel's term 'ideology' (which was thought to have pejorative connotations (Quah, 1990:2) with the more neutral term 'values'.

The Institute's Report covered a range of issues related to national values, first examining the history of nation-building in Singapore with particular emphasis on the ethnic dimension and on bilingualism in education. The role of national ideologies in other Asian countries was analysed and particular attention was paid to those in neighbouring states, focussing on Indonesia's *Pancasila* (or "five Principles") and Malaysia's *Rukunegara* (or "pillars of the state"). Sri Lanka's Sinhala Only policy and the special position given to Buddhism were cited as a lesson that Singapore should heed in not giving preference to the Chinese language or to Confucianism in constructing its national values. Aspects of government policy cited in the Report as components of the nation building process included economic development, public housing, military service, the religious education in schools programme, bilingualism, and the mass media. Research on inter-ethnic attitudes was presented, and the question of young Singaporeans' exposure to Western ideas and their consequent adoption of individualistic values was given prominence.

In its conclusion, the Institute of Policy Studies Report reviewed the four core values that had been proposed. The Report's discussion of the primary value of 'Community over Self' returned to Lodge and Vogel's dichotomy of "individualism" and "communitarianism", and quoted their strictures on individualism:

Individualism suggests an atomistic conception of society, one in which the individual is the ultimate source of value and meaning. The interests of the community are defined and achieved by self-interested competition among many, preferably small, proprietors. Communitarianism, however, takes a more organic view, regarding the community as more than the sum of its individuals and requiring explicit definition of its needs and priorities. (quoted in Quah, 1990:93)

The necessity of emphasizing such a value in Singapore was seen as being underscored by an excessive focus on individualism, part of which derived paradoxically from the meritocratic structure of education that reinforced this attribute among the "brightest and

best". The second core value, of the family as the basic institution of society, was supported by comparative research but caution was advised on the part of the government against being seen by minority ethnic groups to be promoting a Confucian model of the family. Further circumspection was advocated in preventing the importance of family ties from degenerating into nepotism.

The third core value, Consensus not Contention in decision-making, was linked in the Report to a perceived change in leadership style to a more consultative form of government.

The fourth value, Racial and Religious Tolerance and Harmony, was emphasized as being distinctively relevant to Singapore with its racial and religious mix, and as a result served to demarcate the society from the more homogenous East Asian examples of Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. The significance of the 1989 White Paper on Maintenance of Religious Harmony was indicated in this regard, especially in its advocacy of moderation and tolerance among religious groups as well as the principle that religion and politics should be kept separate.

Finally, the Report proposed two additional values to supplement the four core values. These were: Honest Government, which was seen to distinguish Singapore's firm anti-corruption policies from the way of life in many other countries, and Compassion for the Less Fortunate. The latter value was presented as emphatically *not* a recommendation that Singapore should become a welfare state (a prospect which the Singapore government has repeatedly disavowed, often alluding to the advice of the Dutch industrialist Albert Winsemius, a 'practical, hard-headed businessman' (Lee, K.Y., 1998:347) who headed the United Nations Technical Assistance Board team on economic planning in 1961). Instead, the destitute should be "helped to help themselves" since government provision of social welfare might "sap individual initiative, thereby also undermining growth" (Quah, 1990:102). With the recommendation of these six core values, the Report was presented to the government in mid-1990 and was widely covered in the media in the latter part of that year.

In December 1990 the new Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, gave a speech to a Chinese audience in which he assessed the long-term survival of the nation. He made clear that Chinese values alone could not be promoted for the nation as a whole, and proposed the development of values appropriate to each ethnic community as long as they did not conflict with core values. While the Chinese should promote the values that had characterised Chinese civilization for over 5,000 years, Goh cautioned: 'But please do so within the context of a multi-racial society' (Goh, C.T., 1990:28). The following month, January 1991, saw the publication of the White Paper on Shared Values (Cmd 1 of 1991) which contained five core

values: 1) Nation before community and society above self; 2) Family as the basic unit of society; 3) Regard and community support for the individual; 4) Consensus instead of contention; and 5) Racial and religious harmony.

Various agendas have been seen behind the propagation of the White Paper, in particular the suppression of a new political culture and a monopolization of distinctively 'Singaporean' values by the PAP, rendering challenges to its legitimacy as challenges to the national consensus (Rodan, 1993a:91). Another interpretation sees the articulation of core values as an attempt to pre-empt the growth of a 'new self-confident middle class who would not easily stomach an autocratic form of government' (Bell et al., 1995:156). Two further hidden agendas have been seen as the pre-empting of social change - or at least its steering in a suitable direction - and a process of 'counter-modernization' (Clammer, 1993:36).

However, in light of both the origins and the fate of the Shared Values project these attributed agendas demand critical scrutiny. First, as has been clearly shown, the origin of the project lay in the reverse Orientalism of Lodge and Vogel's non-Confucian version of 'Asian values', which had considerable plausibility in the multi-ethnic social environment of Singapore. Given the sensitivity of any attempt to impose Confucian values on the minority ethnic populations, who are not Chinese, a more neutral set of core values based on national competitiveness was very attractive. As to the fate of the Shared Values project, it has been rather similar to that of the Religious Knowledge programme. The project was first launched at a time of ideological contention surrounding religion which coincided with a period of leadership transition, but with the greater consolidation of the PAP's leadership (Rodan, 1993b:xix-xii) and the emergence of a more participatory style of government, it is arguable that the mobilization of ideological support for social discipline has become a less pressing priority. At all events, the White Paper on Shared Values has been left quietly to lie on the table, while a more focussed set of Family Values was initiated in 1994 (*Singapore's Family Values*, 1994). These values comprise love, care and concern; mutual respect; filial piety; commitment; and responsibility. Not only are these values more tightly defined around the family as a basic social unit, but also their practical impact on social policy is more immediate: for instance, the potential problem of dependency in old age as a demand on government welfare provision has been mitigated by legislation which makes it possible for older parents to claim financial support from otherwise defecting children. Perhaps this indicates the extent to which the pragmatic values from which the Singapore political elite originated are still very much in evidence in public policy.

This paper has traced the construction of 'Asian values' to a version of reverse Orientalism that began with a search for surrogates to the Protestant Ethic and subsequently developed into a canonization of neo-Confucianism as the new motor of capitalist development. It remains to offer some explanation and interpretation of this ideological transmutation. First, a number of commentators trace the origin of 'Asian values' to the collapse of the communist regimes in East Europe and the U.S.S.R. and the resulting hegemony of liberal democracy (Berger, 1997:271; Inoue, 1999:27). This is obviously misleading as a depiction of the 'Asian values' construct in its totality since, as has been demonstrated, the constituent ideas in Singapore were being mooted in the late 1970s, long before the demise of communism. On the other hand, it would be accurate to date the controversy over 'Asian values' in the context of their more specific implications for human rights to the aftermath of the Cold War. This controversy has produced a lively debate in which leading officials of the Singapore government have been prominently involved in a spirited defence of its policies (Kausikan, 1997; Mahbubani, 1998). Not least among their arguments is the claim that Western and especially American political leaders are content to uphold double standards when it is in their interests but are less inclined to maintain a level playing field when they perceive economic advantages in protectionism based on human rights rhetoric (Mahbubani, 1998; Mauzy, 1997:212).

A second reason for the appeal of the 'Asian values' scenario is a perception, by many in the West as well as by their Asian observers, that Western freedoms have resulted in a reversion to something resembling Hobbes's state of nature. This has particular resonance with the Singapore context, since the PAP has built much of its nation-building enterprise on the image of a Hobbesian past and the threat of the political jungle re-establishing itself in the absence of social and political discipline (see Hill, 1999: 72). The idea that Western human rights practices reflect a 'corrosive, hedonistic individualism that gives inadequate attention to social duties and is incompatible...with any plausible conception of human dignity' has been encapsulated in "The Central Park Thesis" - the idea that human rights 'have returned the Western world to an anomic, Hobbesian state of nature best represented by New York's Central Park at night' (Donnelly, 1999:76). This is an extreme portrayal of the theme of Western decadence, though in a more measured form it finds its representation not only in Asian critiques of the West such as Mahbubani's 'The Dangers of Decadence: What the Rest can Teach the West' (Mahbubani, 1998:81-87) and in the speeches of Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad, but in the troubled musings of Herman Kahn and his intellectual colleagues. Critics of such scenarios have pointed out that some of the more extravagant

forms of Western depravity are more properly viewed as the excesses of American liberalism, and ignore the role of the state and community in protecting collective interests in other Western countries (Robison, 1996:312).

This leads to a third source of Western investment in the 'Asian values' enterprise. Notably with the resurgence of the New Right in the 1980s - represented in the United States by the Reagan Presidency and in Britain by the Premiership of Margaret Thatcher - there was a coalescence between socially conservative and economically neo-liberal policies which saw traditional values as being not only compatible with but even conducive to the freedom of the market (Robison, 1996:321)^{xi}. From this perspective, the operation of the market in Western societies was seen as being hampered by excessive democracy, which had encouraged demands on public funds by interest groups and thus generated increased taxation and consequent restrictions on the private sector. Since too much democracy was a block to economic growth, there should be a reassertion of traditional moral values enjoining social discipline. In this respect it is interesting to compare Goh Keng Swee's rather cynical portrayal of 'Victorian Values' with their enthusiastic advocacy by Margaret Thatcher. Business interests in particular were impressed by the prospect of relocating in a region characterised by low taxation and the relative absence of social welfare systems. What was less evident in these images of a free-market yet socially restrained environment was the degree to which its proponents were prepared to acknowledge the extent of state infrastructural investment in a country like Singapore.

A fourth source of support for 'Asian values' came from the strong appeal they conveyed - among both Western protagonists and their Asian supporters - to a "world we have lost": in other words, what were now perceived as a positive source of dynamism and discipline in the newly industrialised counties of East and Southeast Asia had much in common with the work ethic that had once propelled the West into global prominence. Reference has already been made to some of the more nostalgic representations of this comparison among Western commentators, and similar allusions can be found in statements by Asian politicians such as Malaysia's Mahathir, who noted 'I do know that many of these "Asian values" were once also "Western values"' (*New Straits Times*, March 16 1995:10). Other observers have seen an important distinction between first-comers to the modernization process and latecomers, among whom are the Asian nations: Levy, for instance, has suggested that while the individualistic ethic of early Protestantism may have provided a vital starter-motor for early capitalist development, insertion into the environment of late global capitalism requires a collectivist ethic of a Confucian type (Levy, 1992).

This is an appropriate point to bring the paper to a conclusion by returning to the notion of reverse Orientalism and to the original construct of the Protestant ethic in the work of Max Weber. It should be recalled that while Weber saw the ethic as a necessary component of the initial growth of Western capitalism, he foresaw its demise as capitalism came to maturity. In place of the religious ethic he anticipated an 'iron cage' of stifling bureaucratic rationality. One interpretation of the emergence of a revised interest in Confucianism is perceptively developed by Lee:

We may even argue that the exhaustion of the Protestant ethic in the West has very likely redefined the significance of the Confucian ethic in East Asian development. Because Confucianism is not strictly a religious ethic, its emphasis on cosmic harmony and personal morals is conducive to the development of a capitalism that has no original transcendental goals but is continuous with the notion of prosperity based on values of reciprocity. In other words, Confucianism is not only world-adjusting but also world-transforming without a necessary separation of emerging institutions and traditional values. (Lee, R.L.M., 1997:267)

Here the analogy of the 'looking-glass self' is once again appropriate, because with the increasingly fragmented nature of Western identity in postmodernity, Western intellectuals in the mould of Kahn, and Lodge and Vogel can be seen as 'attempting to redefine non-Western identities to the extent that centre and margin are reversed or their differences cancelled out' (Lee, R.L.M., 1997:269)^{xii}. It is little wonder that East Asians have been quick to seize on this re-evaluation of a cultural system that has long been regarded as a 'poor relative' of Western Protestantism, but, Lee emphasizes, 'It is not the East Asians themselves who have accentuated the role of their Confucian heritage to explain their economic success' (Lee, R.L.M., 1997:270). Furthermore, if Western and Asian observers alike have come under the lure of a fresh 'spell of Orientalism', it has been suggested that it is Asians who, in the last analysis, hold the initiative to demystify it. This is because

...although both Asian and Western publics are not free from the spell of Orientalism, Asians might be said to be generally in a better position to break it, because it is easier for the targets of stereotypes to break it [sic] than for its perpetrators. (Inoue, 1999:59)

Since the content of Orientalism was largely contributed by Western Enlightenment rationalism, its proposed demystification from an Asian direction represents a truly paradoxical reversal.

Notes

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- i. Although Lian Kwen Fee and I had referred to the polarities of the Orientalist construct as having been 'simply reversed' (Hill and Lian, 1995:194) we did not coin the term 'reverse Orientalism'. The credit for this, as far as I can trace in the literature, is owed to Alan Dupont, who speaks of 'a kind of reverse 'Orientalism'' (Dupont, 1996:21) and to Mark Thompson (Thompson, 1999:16). Related references to the reversal of Orientalism can be found in Lee (Lee, 1997:269) and Robison (Robison, 1996:310), while Inoue refers to "West-centric" misperceptions of Asia (Inoue, 1999:30).
 - ii. See for example Frank Ching's comment 'Are Asian Values Finished?' (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, January 22, 1998:32).
 - iii. The current discussion of 'Asian values' within a Weberian framework takes me full circle to my earliest work on 'the Weber thesis', which is discussed in chapters 5 and 6 of *A Sociology of Religion* (Hill, 1973).
 - iv. This is a curious formulation in view of the West's much earlier experience of the 'industrialization' process: how can the West currently be 'adept' at a stage of development which is now potentially complete?
 - v. In *The Religious Order* (Hill, 1973: chap. 4) I explored the concept of the 'revolution by tradition' based on Weber's typology of legitimate domination. More recently Giddens has emphasized the power and resilience of tradition and makes the important point that 'the continuing influence of tradition within modernity remained obscure so long as 'modern' meant 'Western'' (Giddens, 1994:57).
 - vi. Morishima is one of the few Asian contributors to the initial development of the 'Asian values' construct, though it is perhaps noteworthy that his academic base is Western - at the London School of Economics - and that virtually all his other publications are on aspects of Western economic theory. Interestingly, Morishima is not discussed among the exponents of 'Japan Theory', which took a distinctly Weberian turn in the 1970s and 'spawned a new sub-discipline devoted to the explanation of Japan's economic success' (Davis, 1998:178).
 - vii. They also acknowledge the contribution of Ernst Troeltsch, which as far as I am aware is unique among the 'Asian values' proponents (Hofheinz and Calder, 1982:121).
 - viii. A further influential volume linking Confucianism with economic success - once more premised on 'the Weber thesis' - appeared in the United States in 1989 under the imprint of the Washington Institute (see Tai, 1989).
 - ix. Cooley's concept of a 'looking-glass self' refers to identities which are conferred by others.
 - x. In view of his later association with the Confucian Ethics programme, it is interesting to examine Goh Keng Swee's stated position on the cultural and value elements in economic growth. On the one hand Goh had complained that economists refused to consider non-economic factors in economic growth (Goh, K.S., 1972:2), but on the other, he would claim

that Singapore's industrialization could be attributed primarily to the application of policies common to most developing countries, albeit in a more thorough and principled way (Goh, K.S.,1972:101).

xi. Here is a reminder of the fundamental contradiction in utilitarian philosophy between social discipline and economic laissez-faire, typified in the coexistence within Bentham's thought of the panopticon and the 'hidden hand'. This was at the heart of Halévy's seminal account of English utilitarianism (see Hill, forthcoming).

xii. Though here Thompson (1999:13, fn 46) offers the tantalizing prospect of a series of mirrors reflecting the import and export of cultural constructions when he points out that Meiji Japan's influence on the rest of the Asia-Pacific already contained much of the political system and ideology of Imperial Germany which had been brought back by Japanese delegations in the 1870s and 1880s which had met Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I.

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