

Some Perspectives on Modernization in Asia: Japan and India

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The process of modernization is of increasing concern to Asian specialists and to others interested in the developing areas of the world. Japan is the most successful of the world's "late modernizers," while India is one of the less successful to date. Here I propose to suggest some considerations and raise some general questions which may apply to these and other cases in Asia.

Modernization has become the dominant theme for students of developing nations. As a technical term which includes the main features of the process of modern history, "modernization" is of fairly recent origin. It has been studied and described also under the names "westernization" and "industrialization," with which it has sometimes been confused. The confusion is natural, since modernization came first to the West, and one of its cardinal features was the industrial revolution. It then reached Asia through Western intermediaries. Modernization is a specific case of what sociologists and anthropologists refer to more generally as social and cultural change. The process of modernization has been identified and analyzed in various ways by scholars in all disciplines of the social sciences.

There appear to be two related problems. First, what are the requisites in an undeveloped society for setting the processes in motion initially; and second, what are the characteristics of a society in which the process has gone far enough to characterize

the society as modern? In other words, can and must we distinguish between a pre-modern and a modern society? This problem is well exemplified by Tokugawa Japan. For a long time scholars assumed that the political, social, and economic institutions which existed in Tokugawa Japan were a barrier to Japan's modernization. More recently a revisionist view has it that in precisely these feudal arrangements and institutions lay the seeds of Japan's successful modernization during the Meiji period. This kind of *ex post facto* analysis raises the question of whether we can identify stimulating factors in a society which has not yet reached the "take-off" stage in development. There is no empirical model of traditionality or modernity in pure form. Furthermore, to follow this line of analysis too far would lead us to attempt to convert logical conditions into historical preconditions. For whatever list of requisites we compile, we can find exceptions in countries which have successfully found substitutes. For example, Japan, with an exceptionally poor natural-resource base for industrialization, found substitutes in commercial and political arrangements with her neighbors and in organizational and technical skills.

I want to turn later to the question of whether there were identifiable requisites of modernization in late Tokugawa or early Meiji Japan but absent in India. Some maintain that a comparison between Japan and India is unfair, that the differences between the two are too great. But it is precisely in the magnitude of the difference that I believe lies the value of the comparison. Of course the experiences of the two nations have been different. But how and why have they been different? Again, if the term "Asia" has any validity, I believe there is value in attempting to answer these questions. If Japan and India are at opposite extremes of the Asian spectrum, consideration of the two experiences should be of use in evaluating the process of modernization in the rest of Asia as well. The usual comparison is between Japan and China; actually, the Indian and Chinese experiences display many similarities.

Can we identify an X factor which accounts for the difference? Should we accept David McClelland's suggestion that there may be a certain "mental virus" which provides a stimulus for achieve-

ment, and that the "infection level" in Meiji Japan was very high.²¹ Perhaps the Indian value system had built-in immunizers against change.

Returning for the moment to the problem of identification and definition of a modern society, there have been as many attempts at definition as there are disciplines, and more, because of the generalists and those who posit single-causation theories. There are economists who describe the economic essentials of modernization: the application of scientific techniques and skills to production, the transition from subsistence agriculture to specialized commercial agriculture, the shift from rural to urban concentrations, and the shift from animate to inanimate sources of energy. Political scientists identify mass participation in government, the appearance of political parties, bureaucratization of government processes, and centralization of government functions. Sociologists emphasize the decline of kin groups and increase in functionally specific roles, again the increase in urban over rural agglomerations—the widening horizons of individual choice and social mobility—and the increase in the value of achievement over ascriptive roles. Philosophers and theorists point to an increase in education and literacy, proliferation of mass communications media, increase in the value placed on the individual, acceptance of the concept of social change, and weakening of religious and cultural dogmas.

Is it possible to derive a unified and objective conception of modernization from such a complex congeries of criteria? Some recent studies have dealt with the problem of creating a unified concept of modernization out of the views of various specialists or in the view of generalists like Weber, Marx, or Toynbee. Perhaps modernization is too complex a process for any single theory to be tenable for long. However, there have been attempts.

One such, for example, is Marion Levy's reduction of the concept to two essential factors: the extent to which tools are utilized to multiply or otherwise increase the effects of the application of energy to materials, and the ratio of energy supplied from inanimate sources to that supplied from animate sources. "No society can have these two characteristics without having many others variously named simultaneously," says Levy.²²

But the problem is a complex and paradoxical one, for seemingly a society must change in all ways simultaneously. It is extremely difficult to conceive a plan for a regulated, co-ordinated pattern of growth in all areas at once, to say nothing of the problem of allocating priorities of resources to fit a plan. And in the process, conflict between traditional and modern ways engenders social unrest, which begets further unrest in a cumulative process difficult to control. This raises the question of the usefulness of analytic models to planners in developing societies.

Turning now to the more difficult problem of identifying the factor or factors which give impetus to the process of modernization, again numerous attempts have been made to identify the initiating X factor, the motive force of modernization.

For the economic determinists, of course, the process is easily analyzed as an aspect of the dialectic. Modernization is simply a late stage in the inexorable evolution of all societies from tribal, through feudal and bourgeois capitalistic stages. Many of the characteristics of a modern society may be identified in the capitalistic or bourgeois democracy stage.

Among economic historians who emphasize the role of economic factors in stimulating modernization is Alexander Gerschenkron, who contends that there is no correlation between value systems and level of modernization, that many different value systems exist in modernizing societies. Gerschenkron posits a model for development in pre-industrial societies. The requisites for development, he says, are: tension between the actual state of the economy and the potential, a backlog of technology which can be borrowed from more advanced countries, a labor supply that can be divorced from the land (but need not necessarily be "cheap"), application of the most advanced techniques, and a preference for large units of production. Large-scale industrialization is necessary on all fronts to produce a spurt, according to Gerschenkron.⁸

Johannes Hirschmeier, another economic historian, would take issue with Gerschenkron. For Hirschmeier, "the will to succeed is the most important resource for development. If it is possible to mobilize that resource, capital can often be requisitioned from hidden sources, and it will be newly created by the

increased efforts of planning entrepreneurs and a toiling population." The Japanese experience appears to bear out Hirschmeier's contention.⁴

There are also ideological determinists who find in the realm of values and ideas the impetus to modernize. For Max Weber the stimulus derived from a prophetic individual God and the Puritan ethic which evolved specifically in Western Europe in connection with faith in that God. It was this ethic which produced the individualism and value system which in turn underlay the industrial revolution and social adjustments to it constituting the essential features of modernization in its Western setting.

Others have singled out other value factors as responsible for producing the initial take-off of development. Among these are the concept of rationality and rationalization—rational control by man of his environment—a concept which again Max Weber saw as lacking in traditional China and India. However, Milton Singer and M. N. Srinivas, disagreeing with Weber, cite evidence for adaptability to change within the Hindu system.⁵

Still others have found in the acceptance of the concept of progress the germ of modernization. This ideology was of course particularly well developed in its nineteenth-century European environment. Several students of Japan have discovered in Japan the analogues of these ideological requisites to account for Japan's successful modernization. Robert Bellah found in the samurai ethic of bushido with its emphasis on diligence and thrift the counterpart of the Puritan ethic.⁶ He also considers the primacy of secular, political values of great significance for Japan's modernization. Hirschmeier, as mentioned above, found the greatest asset to Japan's industrialization in the Meiji entrepreneurs' will to succeed, coupled with their sense of public vocation. These he feels were Japan's most important resources, together with a hard-working populace.⁷ Many of these values have been notably absent in India, and if we are to give credence to the ideological determinists, the absence of these concepts in Indian life and thought is significant for any analysis of India's development.

Other analyses of the early stages of the process of modernization have indicated several variables in operation simultaneously.

Some studies have emphasized the role of a relatively small number of individuals in making rational choices in the modernizing society. This group of modernizers has often constituted an elite which has become separated from the more tradition-oriented masses. The emergence of such an elite of modernizers presupposes an intellectual class with a high degree of political involvement. One of the questions for later discussion is why did the Meiji elite turn Japan toward modernization, and why has the Brahman elite of India not succeeded in doing the same thing for India? Some recent studies of the Meiji elite have emphasized the element of self-conscious rational choice on the part of the Meiji oligarchs. Of course there are limits within which any choice—national or individual—takes place, and the fact that choices were rational did not preclude mistakes by the Meiji oligarchs. Rational planning does not automatically eliminate the process of trial and error, as the successive changes of priority in India's Five Year Plans have shown. However, this is not to underestimate the importance of planning for developing or modern societies.

In Asia there have been certain factors operating which differentiate the process there from its Western counterpart. In Japan modernization was undertaken more deliberately and consciously than in the more gradual process of the West. Japanese planners were able to take advantage of some Western experience, though this did not eliminate mistakes. The timing of the Western impact on Japan and India was an important factor. For Japan the West arrived at a propitious time, when internal forces for change conjoined with the external impetus. Japan was in addition spared the experience of direct colonial rule which other parts of Asia underwent. The Western threat was enough to produce a creative response, not enough to stultify it.

But since modernization came to Asia through Western intermediaries, it is difficult to define the process apart from Western models, and this confusion has extended to scholarly attempts at analysis. Colonialism has been an important modernizing force in Asia in that it has directly demonstrated the roles of commerce and bureaucracy in modernization. The Asian elites which have participated in modernizing colonial governments have been

westernized in varying degrees through education and exposure to Western thought and technologies. Western influence in the guise of socialism and communism has also appealed to some late-developing nations of Asia as modernizing systems, as effective means of overcoming obstacles posed by tradition-bound societies. The more formidable the obstacles posed by existing systems, the further innovators have gone in search of contrasting systems. China is an obvious case in point. But even in Japan, the earliest and most successful of the late modernizers, Meiji capitalism was strongly diluted by the government role as investor and manager, that is, as entrepreneur.

In some developing nations of Asia the role of the government as planner is guaranteed by military coercion. There is no necessary correlation in Asia between democracy and modernity on the one hand and authoritarianism and traditionalism on the other. Technology is instrumental, not normative, although in the long run it may affect goals. India has achieved a degree of political democracy without modernization in most areas.

Education is another factor which conditions economic and technological progress. A developing nation must make crucial policy decisions regarding who shall be educated and what type of education shall be given. A unified nation with a common language is at a tremendous advantage in many stages of modernization, as the example of Japan has demonstrated. In a developing nation there must be priority decisions for education in agriculture and technological and industrial skills; otherwise the white-collar intellectual elite will grow disproportionately to the needs of the nation, as in India and the Philippines. The needs for elementary and university education must also be balanced off against each other.

Late-nineteenth-century Japan had a tremendous advantage over India in the size of the literate populace. By most estimates at least 40 per cent of adult Japanese males were literate, and among the samurai the percentage was much higher, close to 100 per cent. While universal literacy was one of the goals and significant achievements of Meiji Japan, India is still struggling to raise the rate above 15 per cent. The school system of Tokugawa Japan—the domain schools, private schools, and parochial schools

—created a sizable educated populace which was receptive to new ideas and learning. Western education has played an important role in the modernizing elites of both countries.

In India the language problem is one of the nation's most pressing, and affects the growth of separate nationalisms and of education. It is impossible to make decisions regarding educational policy without encountering the problem of separate languages—linguistic nationalism (which is in a sense a tautology, since nationalism in most of the world has been inextricably connected with attachment to language). The creation of separate linguistic states has only exacerbated the problem rather than solving it. Many observers have noted the decline in the English facility of Indian university students without a corresponding rise in facility with Hindi.

Another phenomenon closely related to modernization is nationalism. Many students of modern Japan have noted the significance of nationalism in Japan's modernization. Japanese nationalism, while perhaps distinct in the antiquity of its roots, has nevertheless played a crucial part in the modernizing process. It has performed a dual function: on the one hand it has preserved the national identity and continuity with tradition, and on the other it has created a new set of attachments centering on the nation state. The new government was able to innovate because it was thus confident of loyalties. The transfer of loyalty from Tokugawa daimyo to Meiji nation-state was relatively easy and enabled the state to harness the disciplined endeavors of the populace to the needs of the modernizing state, as determined by the political elite. The strength of the sense of personal identification with Japan felt by the individual Japanese is also perhaps without precedent, even today. It never occurred to Meiji Japan's avid peripatetic students of Western institutions not to return home from Europe and the United States to put their newly acquired knowledge and skills to use for the development of Japan. A "brain drain" such as the Indian government is presently deploring was inconceivable in Meiji Japan. Meiji oligarchs and entrepreneurs closely identified national with personal goals. There was a realization common to most of Japan's leaders that the need for change was urgent. Among key mem-

bers of the elite the shift in attitude toward institutional change was rapid.

One of the social and intellectual disruptions accompanying culture change is typically a loss or confusion of the sense of identity of the individual. This was reflected in the writings of certain of the Meiji authors, especially in their concern with the boundaries between the rights of the state and the rights of the individual. However, it is only in the post-war youth of Japan that observers have noted a sharp break in the sense of connection with the past, a loss of sense of identity with their own heritage. This phenomenon has also been noted among the Western-educated Indian elite.

This brings us to a consideration of differences between Japan and India. Why were the Meiji oligarchs so much more strongly motivated than the Indian elite have been in the modern period, and why have the efforts of the Indian leaders taken a different direction from that chosen by the Meiji oligarchs? In Japan the Western advent was seen as a military and technological threat to her independence which she could and must meet by first bridging the technological gap. The samurai as a military elite were better able to appreciate the Western technological and military challenge. There was a remarkable degree of coherence in Japanese attitudes toward tradition and change. Change was possible and necessary. Equal status with the West had to be achieved at all costs. There was little preoccupation with the past in the urgency of the problems posed by the present.

The Indian response to the West and specifically to the British arrival was weakened by various political, cultural, and social divisions, many of which still debilitate Indian unity today. Indian nationalism and sense of unity developed only after the British Raj had been established (with some precedent under Mogul rule). In fact, nationalism was itself a response to the negative stimulus of British colonial rule. Indian civilization was turned back on its own past, defensively, in search of cultural unity. The Indian sense of unity today is still strongest when faced with an outside threat—as for example in the recent Chinese invasion and the Pakistan war. But even such outside threats—which, after all, do lend a sense of urgency to any

nationalism—do not enable India to overcome her internal dissensions and obstacles to unity. These are not theoretical considerations but practical political concerns which the Indian government must face in a realistic attempt to implement any policy.

The traditional Indian world view has been inimical to the idea of change through foreign tutelage and to the ideology of catching up with the modern world which was so important in Meiji Japan. The Indian has always seen Indian civilization as the mother civilization, home of great philosophies and religions, capable of absorbing foreign ideas into its own all-embracing tradition. India, not foreign sources, was the wellspring of civilization. For Japan, on the other hand, cultural borrowing was a familiar, conscious, and profitable experience. The pragmatic advantages of Western technology were as obvious to the Meiji oligarchs as Chinese institutions had been to the Taika reformers.

The Japanese value system, unlike the Indian, was not inimical to change. Changes which were revolutionary in impact were introduced without changing the traditional values. Japan successfully defied the adage about new wine in old bottles. But theirs were not as encrusted as Indian and Chinese bottles. The Meiji Restoration was a revolution in the name of old values, with the traditional symbol of the Emperor used to great effect. That the values were secular, political, and community-oriented contributed to the success of Japan's modernization.

Those who point to the weakening of religious and cultural dogmas as a requisite to modernization use the Indian example as a case in point. For Indians, "secular" means not the replacement of religious dogma, but equal opportunity for all religious dogmas to coexist in India. The Western or modern concept of secularism has not made much headway against traditional religious faith in India.

There was in Japan no universal ethic comparable to the Hindu ethic to which all new ideas had to be made to conform. Japan, as Reischauer, Benedict, and others have pointed out, had a situational ethic which proved highly adaptable. For India, however, Hindu civilization was conceived as capable of absorbing all non-Indian civilization, much as it had in the past (with

the notable exception of Islam). Science and technology, to be acceptable, had to be legitimized by reference to Vedic authority. The attempt was therefore made to find the roots of Western ideas in the Sanskrit texts. A parallel attempt was made in China to reinterpret Confucius as a reformer, to read back Western science into the Confucian Classics. In neither case was the attempt successful.

To turn to some more material aspects of modernization, Gerschenkron and other economists have invoked models and combinations of economic factors which they consider as requisites to an economic take-off toward industrialization, as mentioned above. Indian government economic advisers, recently discussing the aims of India's Fourth Five Year Plan (which has been delayed for a year) stated that it was hoped this plan would bring the Indian economy to the take-off stage. Indian economic planners have introduced several changes in emphasis over the second and third plans, notably in according priority to birth control programs and to increasing agricultural productivity, in the attempt to redress the imbalance and introduce a change of pace in economic growth. The Indian government, then, is still desperately attempting to reach the early stages of economic modernization, with an underdeveloped agricultural base.

In agriculture, in Tokugawa Japan commercialization and specialization in cash crops had already made notable advances. The shrinking size of the agricultural unit plus primogeniture created a reservoir of rural labor which could be tapped for industrial use. The requisites of intensive cultivation in addition had made the Japanese farmer relatively receptive to technological innovation. The rate of development in this area has continued to accelerate through the modern period.

Agriculture is a particularly vexing problem in the Indian case. Myron Weiner and Kusum Nair indicate that, though the desire for personal economic gain is assumed to be universal, this economic-man model cannot be postulated for India.⁸ In the view of the agricultural economist Clifton Wharton, it is not necessary to transform values and attitudes of peasants in order to make agriculture more productive.⁹ But Kusum Nair (an agricultural historian) I believe would dispute this view. Her conten-

tion is that the barriers to an increase in agricultural productivity in India are human and attitudinal, not inherent in the natural-resource base. There are improved seeds available if the Indian peasant would use them effectively. There is water not far below the surface if the villagers would drill wells, and so forth. The problem lies rather with motivation and values, not in opportunity.¹⁹

Let us look more closely again at the question of Japanese and Indian elites, with respect to modernization. The Meiji elite was, like the Brahman elite, an educated, intellectual class (in both cases, partly Western-educated). The Meiji elite had a strong sense of "public vocation," partly due to samurai origin. The samurai traditionally had a sense of public responsibility and that commitment continued into the Meiji years. The strength of this involvement with the national interest and welfare was evident whether or not the individual held office in the new bureaucracy. Fukuzawa Yukichi is a good example of a man who, partly because of his samurai background, was strongly committed to the goals of the new Japan, and remained out of office where he felt he could contribute most.

In Tokugawa Japan the traditional Confucian derogation of manual labor and commercial activity, although still present, was already breaking down, along with traditional class distinctions. In India even today the traditional attitude toward manual labor and the predilection for intellectual pursuits remain characteristic of the upper castes. The Brahman elite is thus reluctant to take the lead in nonintellectual pursuits, and the Jains and Parsis have instead become the modern entrepreneurs. By contrast with the degree of social mobility in late Tokugawa Japan, in contemporary India traditional loyalties to caste, community, and family in many cases still take precedence over national loyalties and interests. These aspects of tradition, to be sure, are weakening through urban life, through the bureaucracy, and through law. There is in India today a class of intellectuals which is different from the traditional Brahman elite. These are the proponents of modernization, but like the traditional elite, they feel isolated from the rest of the Indian populace. The gap between modernity and traditional India has led them to feel they

are outsiders, alienated from India. They are part of the "brain drain."

Another difference between ideological modernization in Japan and in India is in the acceptance of the ideology of science. Associated with this is the above-mentioned idea of progress. Leaders in Meiji Japan accepted the ideology of science; India has not yet done so, with the exception of a small part of the elite (by and large, the alienated segment). In the first two decades of the twentieth century this ideology was rejected by two of India's greatest leaders, Gandhi and Tagore. Tagore, visiting Tokyo in 1916, said in a lecture to Japanese intellectuals that Japan should beware of accepting the motive force of Western science and technology as her own and return to the ancient truths of Asian religions. Western science was a fad in temporary ascendancy in Japan, but the ultimate victory would go to Asian spirituality.¹¹ Some of the Japanese audience resented Tagore's patronizing advice. One wonders what Tagore would have said to Japan today.

A modernizing nation also requires a professional and technical elite, a large corps of engineers with essential skills. Many technical advisers in India today on UNESCO, WHO, and Colombo Plan aid missions feel that India is presently passing through a phase of resentment against modern nations, of bitterness over failure. This resentment is often directed by political leaders against outside objects, for example, against President Johnson's proposed Indo-American Education Foundation. Indian national pride poses a formidable barrier against acceptance of foreign technical advice. British oppression is still a common explanation for the state of the Indian economy. This is in sharp contrast to the Meiji government, which in the early Meiji years employed over two thousand foreign advisers in various capacities—as legal experts, technical advisers, and educators. The advice of these foreigners was avidly followed by the Japanese government, which trained Japanese to replace the foreign experts as soon as possible.

Japan in the Meiji period had a historical, geographical, material, and ideological heritage which provided a fortunate combination of factors favorable for development and which she

was able to utilize successfully for planned modernization. By contrast, India today is still struggling to overcome cultural, material, and ideological barriers to development. The two experiences provide the opposite extremes on the spectrum of the process of modernization.

NOTES

1. David C. McClelland, "The Impulse to Modernization," in Myron Weiner (ed.), *Modernization* (N. Y., 1966), p. 29.
2. Quoted by John W. Hall, "Changing Conceptions of the Modernization of Japan," in Marius B. Jansen (ed.), *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization* (Princeton, 1965), p. 25.
3. Henry Rosovsky, *Capital Formation in Japan, 1868-1940* (Glencoe, Ill., 1961), pp. 57-58.
4. Johannes Hirschmeier, *The Origins of Entrepreneurship in Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 288.
5. Milton Singer, "The Modernization of Religious Beliefs," in Weiner, *Modernization*, pp. 55-56.
6. Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion* (Glencoe, Ill., 1957), pp. 195-196.
7. Hirschmeier, *The Origins of Entrepreneurship*, pp. 288-289.
8. Weiner, *Modernization*, p. 11; Kusum Nair, *Blossoms in the Dust, The Human Element in Indian Development* (London, 1964), pp. 192-193.
9. Clifton Wharton, "Modernizing Subsistence Agriculture," in Weiner, *Modernization*, pp. 258-269.
10. Kusum Nair, *Blossoms in the Dust*, pp. 190-191.
11. Rabindranath Tagore, *The Message of India to Japan* (Tokyo, 1916), pp. 16-17.