

EAST AND WEST, THE TWAIN HAVE MET

COMMEMORATIVE LECTURE AT FITZWILLIAM COLLEGE

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"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never
the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's
great Judgment Seat:"

So Kipling wrote in 1889 in The Ballad of East and West. Recent history has provided an ironic rebuttal in over half a million Asians, mostly Indians and Pakistanis, now permanently settled in Britain.

East has met West. Together with over fifty million Britons, half a million Indians and Pakistanis will have a second generation soon born and bred in Britain, knowing nothing of India or Pakistan. Cheap, convenient, safe, and rapid mass transportation has resulted in considerable immigration of peoples. From their former dependencies, people from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean have moved into the high leisure-seeking societies of Britain, France and Western

Europe. They take up jobs, mostly in the lower social and income brackets. East and West have met, albeit unequally, in one society, in the West.

Meeting on unequal terms

When the West first sailed out to the East, they met on unequal terms. Large areas of Asia were colonised by the superior naval, and industrial strength of the West. The only country to avert Western domination was Japan. Even China had to grant extra-territorial concessions in her main ports.

Twenty-three years after independence for India and Pakistan, in 1971, East meets West, still on unequal terms. The exception is Japan. China will dispute this. They probably consider themselves more than equal to the West. Certainly, they believe theirs to be a superior society, cleansed of selfishness and the profit motive, freed from the clutches of greedy capitalists. But Japan and China are East Asia. For South and Southeast Asia, whether it is the Westerner who visits the East, or the Easterner who visits the West, both are conscious of the inequality of their respective positions.

As individuals, there are many East and South Asians, whose ability and competence in their professional fields, are equal to the best of the Europeans and Americans. As Kipling wrote at the end of his ballad:

"But there is neither East nor West, Border,
nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though
they come from the ends of the earth!"

But that is not the point. More to the point is why, in group performance as nation states, except for East Asia, they have not been able to equal the West? Why can they not organise themselves, maintain effective administrations, ensure political stability and provide proper sanitation, clean potable water, reliable electric supply? Why have they not controlled population growth? Why have they not widened the base and raised the levels of education of their people, and trained them in industrial techniques and technology? Why have they not made better use of machinery and equipment they have bought, on soft-loans, from the West, and made the economic and social progress which would have made them equal to the West?

The great Hindu and Sinic civilisations, going back well beyond 2,000 and 3,000 years respectively, could only have been created by peoples of considerable talent. They must have had the capacity for organisation and administration to sustain cultivated living over long periods of time. They must have maintained a surplus in agricultural and pastoral production, to enable a significant portion of their people to cultivate the arts. For music, literature, painting, sculpture, and architecture flourished. The genius expressed in solid granite chiselled and carved into the Ellora Caves near Aurangabad in Maharashtra, in the 6th to 7th centuries, the temples of Mahabalipuram near Madras in the 7th and 8th centuries, or more recently, in the 17th century under the Mogul emperor Shah Jehan, the Taj Mahal, these monuments of South Asian civilisations surpass any architecture of the same period in the West. In modern times, the poetry of Tagore bears witness to Bengali artistry in both the English and Bengali languages, whilst India was still under the British Raj.

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What is it that has made Japan such an outstanding exception to the long catalogue of other not so successful attempts at modernisation and industrialisation in the East? Just over a century after the Meiji Restoration, in 1868, Japan has the second-highest G.N.P. in the non-Communist world,* although in per capita income, she ranks below West Germany. In 1969, she had surpassed Italy.

* Appendix

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Now, China appears as though by another 30 years, she will have most of the intermediate technological implements between the shovel and the satellite, between the bicycle and the I.C.B.M.

In order to learn the technology of the West, the Japanese sent scholars abroad. They learnt the languages of the advanced nations. In a thoroughly eclectic manner, they chose from each his best: from the Prussians, their military system and strategic doctrines, from the British, their shipbuilding. The French have also made a contribution to Japan's transformation. But, unfortunately, to this day, the grapes grown in Japan will not make wines like French wines. And this is not for want of trying.

By the beginning of this century, the Japanese had defeated the Russian fleet. They grew in strength and confidence. They systematically learnt from countries more advanced than themselves. They bought the sophisticated products of the West, took them apart, studied the components, then re-produced almost identical products, albeit of unequal quality. However, a generation is

now growing up, where the label "Made in Japan" denotes high quality at medium prices.

In their attempts to identify the factors that made the West superior in the sciences and technology, the Japanese even copied the dress styles of the West. The black hat and grey gloves, striped trousers and black tails, they have become part of Japanese protocol. But now they tailor all these out of their own felt, textile and leather. At the same time, they have preserved as much as they could of their traditional forms of dress, styles of architecture, and way of life.

After their defeat in World War II, and during the years of American occupation, they decided that perhaps their diet was deficient. This might have been a factor accounting for the better performance of the Americans. So with characteristic thoroughness and zeal, Japanese leaders set out to get their people to consume more animal protein and wheat, in addition to their traditional diet of fish, pickled vegetables and rice. It is not by accident that one of the cheapest drinks available in Japan today is pasteurized milk, subsidised by a government determined to ensure that their next generation will grow up taller, stronger and brighter. In fact, they have produced a taller generation. Some doctors say that the extra inches have been due as much to animal protein as to a change in

habits, sitting at tables, instead of on the floor, thus improving blood circulation in the legs.

What can South and Southeast Asian nations, some with ancient and glorious civilisations, learn from the experience of Japan? Can they industrialise and modernise the faster, with Japan having shown the way? Can they avoid the fanatic excesses of the Chinese Communists? What are the mistakes they should avoid repeating, like the despoliation of Japan's once beautiful and gracious environment, the pollution of her air, rivers and beaches? Can they do it without the monotonous Communist exhortation to hard work and self-sacrifice? Can it be done without the zealous regimentation of the Chinese Communists, or the intense patriotism of the Japanese?

China and India had set out to catch up in science and technology by two different political systems. The Chinese have been successful in detonating hydrogen bombs and sending a satellite into space whistling "the East is Red". But this is in spite, not because, of the isolationism they have imposed upon themselves. The men who made possible their technological advance were Chinese scientists, who had worked long years in American research establishments on nuclear and astro-physics, and aerospace sciences. Also, from 1949 to the time of their conflict with the Russians in the early 60's, they were

receiving Russian machinery and know-how. Until the split became open, Russians was the first foreign language taught in schools and universities in China. Now English has again become the first foreign language.

In theory, it should now be easier for the less developed to develop. There was the recent UNCTAD agreement in principle at Geneva, in October 1970. The developed countries can now reduce tariffs on the manufactured products of the less developed, without having to give the same concessions to all, including the developed, as required by GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). New countries should be able to sell more of their simple manufactures for foreign exchange, buy more capital machinery, and industrialise further. World Bank soft loans, United Nations agencies, bilateral and multi-lateral aid programmes, they are all designed to ease the painful and difficult process of industrialisation, to make it less strenuous and exacting an effort. In theory, these concessions should shorten the time taken for industrial transformation.

How to catch up?

But there are some harsh realities which must be recognised, and several contradictions which must be overcome, by new countries before they can advance. Only then can they the better refurbish their societies, and have their old civilisations made more relevant to the mass-production, high consumption age. High consumption and high leisure comes only after sustained endeavour.

Looking at the great relics of past Hindu and Buddhist civilisations in South and Southeast Asia, Mahabalipuram, the Ellora and Ajanta Caves in India, Borobudur in Java, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, what is forgotten is that there were long periods of order and discipline, provided by a firm framework of administrative efficiency and discipline. Whenever incentives failed to work, coercion or compulsion were applied. Otherwise, their architects and engineers could not have created, in granite, sandstone, or marble, the ideas and the imagination of their artists. For some of these monuments took several centuries, and five times as many generations, to complete.

First contradiction

The first contradiction South and Southeast Asian societies face is how to revamp their value systems and culture patterns, to meet the needs of an industrial society. It is not possible to move from the agricultural economies of Asia, equivalent to those of 15th and 16th century Western Europe, into the "technetronic" era the Americans have created and named, without jettisoning parts of the value systems and culture patterns of the past. Some of them inhibit instead of encourage punctuality, work discipline, the desire to increase

production norms, the acquisition of scientific knowledge and engineering techniques. Industrial status can be achieved only if new value systems and behaviour patterns are grafted on the old. It is in part the difference between the more intense and exacting Sinic cultures of East Asia and the less intense and less demanding values of Hindu culture of South and Southeast Asia, that accounts for the difference in industrial progress between Eastern and Southern Asia. The softer and more benign Hindu civilisation spread through Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, meeting the Sinic civilisation on the borders of Vietnam, hence the name, the Indo-China Peninsula.

It requires bold and determined leadership to eradicate those values which hamper the advance of a people into the higher sciences. It requires strong will to force the adoption of values and attitudes which can quicken the pace of change. Rapid acquisition of knowledge in the sciences, industrial know-how, management expertise, marketing techniques and higher manipulative skills are only possible if the people are intense in the pursuit of these goals. They do not go with a relaxed culture, in which fatalism is a tranquiliser for anxiety over failure. Further, it requires a practical turn of mind to modify these new disciplines and techniques, so as to fit them into the different social and cultural

moulds, which their different histories have imprinted on South and Southeast Asian peoples.

Gunnar Myrdal, in his "Asian Drama" voluminously sets out the reasons for lower achievements amongst these peoples. He terms them "soft societies". Their expectations and desire for achievement are lower. Had he studied the Sinic civilisations of East Asia -- Korea, Japan, China and Vietnam -- he would have come to the opposite conclusions, that these were hard societies. Of course, there is a price to be paid for it. A recent survey by American doctors of the anxiety ratings of different ethnic nations groups, places the Japanese at the top. They are the most anxiety-ridden of all peoples. The doctors were unable to evaluate the Chinese. The Germans are high up. The Americans are well down the neurosis ladder. The British even lower. But this happy state of serenity can only be afforded by those who have already arrived, like the British.

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To compound the problem for the less developed, the Protestant work ethics, of the West which make virtues of diligence, thrift and enterprise, are at present being discounted in the West. The youth of the West is seen to be rejecting these virtues. The abundance of Western post-industrial societies has been accompanied by an ostentatious flouting, by students and unionised

workers, of these conventional values, without which the wealth and leisure could not have come about in the first instance.

This confuses students and workers of the less developed countries. It is more comfortable to believe that with the latest industrial innovations, hard work, thrift and industry are no longer necessary to lift their agricultural and pastoral economies on to the higher income levels of the industrial economy. It is more congenial, if the application of science and technology to industry could do the trick, without sweat and toil, which make for a strenuous life.

For the less developed in South and Southeast Asia to achieve standards of life comparable to those of the post-industrial West, two or more generations may have to toil away. The result is that many professionally competent, but impatient, young men in the less developed parts of Asia choose the easier way out. By migrating, they can, and do, immediately enjoy standards of life of developed societies. And many have done so. Because most of them are English-speaking, they have gone to the English-speaking countries of the West - Britain, Canada and America.

American officials go out of their way to facilitate this brains drain. For example, they hold examinations for doctors trained under the British system in

India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Malaysia and Singapore, to enable them, ostensibly, to pursue research in America. The Indian and Pakistani governments have prohibited the holding of these examinations. So does Singapore. But the Malaysians still allow the Americans to hold such examinations. The result is that hundreds of Indian and Pakistani doctors find the means to fly to Kuala Lumpur in West Malaysia to take these annual examinations.

Too few take the patriotic road, because it means a long period of self-denial, and hard work, for which the only reward is the satisfaction of helping to raise the quality of life for one's own people.

Second contradiction

The second major contradiction to be resolved is that of language. Pride in one's past is necessary for self-confidence and morale, essential ingredients of success. With independence comes a revivalist, romanticist streak. The indigenous language, modes of dress, even manners and mannerisms, are resurrected and given pre-eminence. Often they are the external manifestations of a supposedly glorious past. It is a phenomenon to be found not only in older civilisations. The pre-occupation of the black Americans with Afro-American studies, new hair and dress styles, these are assertions of their right to a dignified

and not inferior past. And it is worth noting that the Japanese have preserved as much of themselves, as is compatible with the industrial society.

To get access to new knowledge, the best course would be to continue using the language of the former metropolitan power, particularly where this happens to be English. The contradiction between pride to one's own language, and the mastery of a foreign language, can be reconciled. The developed foreign language, is a useful legacy of empire. It should continue to be taught and used, whilst the indigenous language, over the decades, can be modernised and enriched by extensively borrowing ideas and words from the languages of the developed. Eventually it can develop its own modern literature. In this way, scholars can go abroad. More important, the textbooks, journals and publications of the developed countries can be imported, enabling more students to acquire the knowledge and disciplines for industrial advance. Professors and experts from advanced countries can visit the universities of the less developed, and instruct much larger numbers of students than can be sent abroad.

This is what the Japanese did. They had some of their best students learn the languages of the advanced countries of the West, and sent them abroad to learn what the West had, which Japan did not. After several decades, the Japanese built up their own technical institutes and universities, using Japanese

language textbooks for even technical and scientific subjects. But even today, they have scholars studying English, French and German to go abroad, and keep abreast of the latest developments in the higher sciences. They also import foreign publications, and keep in touch with contemporary work in all important fields. The assiduous learning of the language of an advanced country, and the fostering of one's own, are complementary, not inconsistent policies.

But, so many new countries deliberately stifle the foreign language they had inherited and which can give them access to superior technology. Sometimes, this is done, not so much to elevate the status of the indigenous language, as to take away an advantage a minority ethnic group has by having greater competence in the former colonial language. This has been damaging. It blindfolds the next generation to the knowledge of the advanced countries. Worse, it leads to an exodus of the professionally trained. They can emigrate to the advanced countries, and do, because they do not intend to allow their children to be crippled by language blinkers.

Language - key to modernisation

No matter how good the translation from the English, Russian, French or German text can be, it often takes two to three editions to have it translated and sent to the printer. Another two to three editions would have passed before the publication of the translated texts are available. Further, the range of books or

journals which can be translated is narrow and limited. Translations can never equal access to direct sources, nor can they enable direct communication with specialists in the advanced countries.

Problems of one ever smaller world

Western science and technology have created one ever smaller world. It has led to mutual exposure of peoples of the West and less developed East. It is difficult to ward off external influences. To close a society, rigid controls have to be constantly maintained. Even the Russians have found this unprofitable. Their "Intourist" now encourage more travellers from the wealthy countries of the West, both to see their achievements, and to get more convertible currency. Their ballet and cultural troupes perform abroad. Their scientists and scholars attend congresses in the West, despite occasional defections. This trend is unlikely to be reversed. For the meeting of minds trained in similar, but somewhat different, disciplines can lead to a creative stimulus, when ideas are exchanged and disciplines cross fertilize.

The question leaders of less developed South and Southeast Asia have to answer is not whether or not to modernise. Affluent tourists and the mass media have already aroused the appetites of their peoples for the sophisticated products, particularly consumer durables, of the advanced countries. The question to

which they must find an answer is how rapidly to modernise and, equally important, how much of their traditional past can they retain, so that they are not just poor imitations of the West, with all the fads and fetishes, the follies and foibles of the contemporary West. One world need not mean one dull, grey, uniform world. The science, the technology, the computers, the automation, and the cybernetics for the mass-production of high-consumption economies, they have to be the same, based as they are on the physical sciences. But the architecture, social mores, styles of life, modes of dress, they need not be the same. The intake of calories, proteins, minerals and vitamins may have to approximate certain optimum levels. But the culinary arts need not be the same.

Each leadership must decide what to keep and what to jettison of the old, to make progress and yet to keep enough, to remain one's own distinctive self.

Cultural continuity is compatible with the absorption of new technology. It will

also lessen the problems of disorientation consequent of rapid changes in ways of working and modes of life.

Ethnic attributes

Another major problem for many of the less developed countries is that they have to raise not only levels of knowledge and skills, but levels of intelligence, ability and dexterity. The controversy over whether ethnic

differences correlate with low or high I.Q. will never be resolved, so long as political and emotional considerations prevent dispassionate academic research and discussion. Whether it is nature or nurture, one problem especially acute in the societies of South and Southeast Asia is that the abler and more educated segments of their population tend to have much smaller families than the less educated. Even if genetics have no bearing on ability, and it were the environment, opportunities, diet, care and education which determined performance, very large families amongst the poor is still a grave problem. But if it turns out that nature as much as nurture decides the level of achievement, then some system of incentives and disincentives must be found to make sure that, with each succeeding generation, standards of education and skill, levels of performance and achievement, will rise both as a result of nature and of nurture. Whether it is genes, or the environment, or both, to catch up with the technology and match the capital accumulation of the developed, the problem of population control must be squarely faced. The solutions once decided upon must be vigorously implemented. Then standards of life will rise as levels of education and performance rise.

Over the next few decades, there will be more in the East who can meet the West on equal terms. By the end of this century, there could be over a thousand million people in East Asia who will equal the West in the sciences,

technology, and in the arts. But most of South or Southeast Asia will probably be still unequal.

It is more than a coincidence that those Asian countries which were able the better to resist Western domination are the ones that have emerged or are emerging into strong industrial nations. Japan and China, Korea and Vietnam (if they can be re-united), are meeting the West, especially the Canadians and Americans across the Pacific, and are dealing more on equal terms.

China is anxious not to have to develop all her middle and higher technology industries from first principles, the way she developed her hydrogen bomb, her satellite and missile system. She wants to widen her field of potential collaborators in science-based industries in the West. Suspicious that the Americans will be the hardest to get industrial know-how from, she is cultivating the West Europeans and the Canadians.

But it is only the East Asians who are self-confident when dealing with the West. Both have put satellites into orbit, which only America, Russia and France have done. Pride in their long and glorious past is reinforced in the case of China, of having nuclear bombs and rockets, and in the case of Japan, of

knowing that they can make them. They are both confident that it is only a matter of decades before they are equal to most of the West.

Meanwhile, in the less developed countries of South and Southeast Asia, disillusionment and near despair has set in because of their failure to make the grade. The despondency is all the greater, because of earlier beliefs that growth was the natural and effortless result of the transference of capital equipment, and work techniques, from the developed to the less developed. This has not happened because there never was this easy ride towards the industrial society.

The absurdities of the Che Guevarist insurgency in Ceylon, the terrifying tragedy of Bangladesh, and India's difficulties in dealing with over eight million refugees in West Bengal, underscore the present sorry state of affairs.

The willingness of the developed West, and of the developed East in the case of Japan, and later China, to pass on the technology, capital equipment and skills on terms which are not too onerous, may regenerate optimism, and on a more realistic basis. An appreciation of each other's cultural differences which make for a higher or lower speed in developing the human and natural resources of each country will also help relations across ethnic and national boundaries.

When the South and Southeast Asians understand that the developed can, and are willing to help them, but that the decisive factor is the quality of their own leadership and the intensity of their own efforts, then East-West relationships will improve. If South and Southeast Asians can re-establish the firm framework of administration which is competent and not corrupt, if social and work discipline can be re-imposed, then self-confidence will be restored. Then mutual respect will be established between most of the East and all of the West.

NOTE: This lecture is an elaboration of a theme on which I spoke about a year ago, on a different occasion.

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APPENDIX

GNP AND PER CAPITA GNP OF SELECTED COUNTRIES,

1969 AND 1970

(AT CURRENT PRICES)

	GNP (£million)		Per Capita GNP (£)	
	1969	1970	1969	1970
United States(1)	387,156	405,907	1,905	1,976
Japan(1)	69,589	82,090	680	793
West Germany(1)	62,734	N.A.	1,068	N.A.
France (1)	61,243	N.A.	1,217	N.A.
United Kingdom(1)	45,930	50,340	827	904
Italy (1)	34,307	N.A.	645	N.A.
Canada (1)	30,283	33,332	1,436	1,557
India (1)	16,979	N.A.	32	N.A.
Australia (1)	12,470	13,749	1,014	1,096
Mexico (1)	11,144	N.A.	236	N.A.
Pakistan (2)	6,431	6,700	50	51

Indonesia (1)	2,969	N.A.	26	N.A.
Malaysia (3)	1,514	1,610	142	147
Ceylon (1)	817	N.A.	67	N.A.
Singapore (4)	714	820	353	396

Notes: Data for Mexico and Indonesia refer to 1968 which are the latest available.

Exchange Rate: Data on GNP and Per Capita GNP of the selected countries were first converted from their respective national currency to US Dollars at the prevailing exchange rates published in the International Financial Statistics. In converting these estimates from US \$ to Pound Sterling the rate of US\$1.00 to 0.4167 was used.

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Source:

- (1) International Financial Statistics, September 1971.
International Monetary Fund.
- (2) Monthly Statistical Bulletin, December 1969 and August 1971, Central Statistical Office, Pakistan.

- (3) Quarterly Economic Bulletin, March 1971, Bank
Negara Malaysia.

- (4) Department of Statistics, Singapore.

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