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# **Driving the Modern Dream**

## **Contemporary Japanese Modernity in Theoretical Perspective**

**By**

**Peter Matanle**

Faculty of Law, Niigata University (2000-2001)

e-mail: [peter\\_matanle@yahoo.co.jp](mailto:peter_matanle@yahoo.co.jp)

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‘Thou shalt labour by the sweat of thy brow!’ was Jehovah’s curse that he bestowed upon Adam. A. Smith conceives of labour as such a curse. ‘Rest’ appears to him to be the fitting state of things, and identical with ‘liberty’ and ‘happiness’. It seems to be far from A. Smith’s thoughts that the individual, ‘in his normal state of health, strength, activity, skill and efficiency’, might also require a normal portion of work, and of cessation from rest. It is true that the quantity of labour provided seems to be conditioned by external circumstances, by the purpose to be achieved, and the obstacles to its achievement that have to be overcome by labour. But neither does it occur to A. Smith that the overcoming of such obstacles may itself constitute an exercise in liberty, and that these external purposes lose their character of mere natural necessities and are established as purposes which the individual himself fixes. The result is the self-realisation and objectification of the subject, therefore real freedom, whose activity is precisely labour.

Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*

The puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order ... Victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer .... The idea of duty in one’s calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs.

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*

### **Introduction**

Modernity is as much a state of mind as it is a material condition. As such its quality can most clearly be described as a transformative ethic that has as its engine pushing it forwards and outwards the positivistic and economic rationalism that is capitalism.

That is to say, with capitalism as its mechanism and its fuel, modernity seeks a progressive and linear transformation of the human experience into a rationally and reflexively ordered lifescape that can be pro-actively controlled and manipulated for the purposes of providing an ever more comfortable, fulfilling, liberating, challenging, and

complex life for its human architects. Mediating the mental and the material aspects of modernity are the institutions and organisations which individuals and groups construct in order that they might express their consciousness through the process of creative adaptation. In other words, institutions and organisations are the social mechanisms by which people not only create their environment out of the mental images they have developed but also are the method by which people accommodate themselves to the circumstances of their lives. For at the heart of modernity is the individual's moral responsibility to discover his or her authentic inner consciousness and substantiate it in lived experience.

Moreover, because capitalism requires expansion if it is not to implode under the weight of its own internal contradictions, so capitalist modernity compulsively expands out from its centre in the West<sup>1</sup>. In so doing, it becomes both a globalising and a totalitarian phenomenon. Globalising in the sense that it ceaselessly and ineluctably extends into previously untouched areas of the world and totalitarian in the sense that as it enters into and interacts with ever deeper and wider realms of the human consciousness it becomes a seductive and beguiling yet enforced and problematic liberation from traditionalism. Like a giant seismic sea wave it colonises and envelops the future as well as the present and the past in its steady irresistible advance across and around the earth. Yet, just as the advancing wave, by dint of the underwater terrain it encounters, must possess within it cross- and counter-currents, so modernity, as it spreads out from its epicentre, contains the capacity to mutate according to the character of the domains it confronts. Consequently, through the process of the globalisation of capitalism, modernity becomes not a singular phenomenon but evolves to develop and exhibit a variety of forms according to the circumstances of its initial appearance and subsequent development in any particular region of the world.

Nevertheless, an epiphenomenon of the globalising tendency of capitalist modernity is that of the collision and convergence of different versions of the modern. Specifically, the inherently compulsive expansion of capitalism eventually and inevitably leads to the collision and perhaps even convergence of different versions of itself. Accordingly, the ongoing transformative process of the destruction, reconstruction, and mutation of ever more complex versions may also have within it the capacity for capitalism to evolve itself into a singular global phenomenon. Thus, with capitalism as its engine, is it not possible that different versions of modernity might also collide and

converge to form a globalised singularity?

### **Theories of Western and Japanese Modernity**

What does modernity feel like? How can it best be described? Is there a family likeness that can be discerned when comparing different versions of the modern or, conversely, is it possible to speak of different versions of modernity existing alongside one another?

Probably the most influential treatise on modernity in the 1990s is that of the British sociologist Anthony Giddens. In sketching out a preliminary definition of the contours of modernity Giddens states:

As a first approximation ... “modernity” refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence.  
Giddens (1990: 1)

Explaining further, he states that modernity represents, in a general sense, a fundamental discontinuity with previous periods in human history and is characterised most clearly and neatly by the sheer pace of change and its breadth of scope (Giddens, 1990: 6).

Therefore, modernity sets itself up as a negation of the perceived stability and continuity of the past and of the traditional order through the appropriation of reflexively ordered incoming knowledge and rationality and the establishment of the modern transformative order.

Inherent in the idea of modernity is a contrast with tradition. .... The routinisation of daily life has no intrinsic connections with the past at all, save in so far as “what was done before” happens to coincide with what can be defended in a principled way in the light of incoming knowledge. To sanction a practice because it is traditional will not do; tradition can be justified, but only in the light of knowledge which is not itself authenticated by tradition. ... this means that, even in the most modernised of modern societies, tradition continues to play a role. But ... justified tradition is tradition in sham clothing and receives its identity only from the reflexivity of the modern.  
Giddens (1990: 36-38)

However, for Giddens, modernity is not an embracing of the new for its own sake, but the presumption of wholesale reflexivity, including reflection on the nature of reflection itself, the outcome of which is a feeling of unending uncertainty arising from the designation of all knowledge, relationships, and institutions as being permanently provisional, or in a constant state of potential revision<sup>2</sup> (Giddens, 1990).

Modern life, therefore, comes to be characterised by what Bauman (1995) calls an “endemic indeterminism.” For, the more individuals and groups are attracted by the possibilities of self-determination and self-construction that open out as a result of the gradual collapse of the traditional order, the more they actively and reflexively attempt to reconstruct and control their social world in the light of rationally revealed but permanently provisional knowledge. Consequently, this mode of life inevitably introduces the elements of trust and risk. Trust because automatic and unthinking, or received and non-reflexive, reliance on traditional modes of life is impossible in modern life and people must depend on, or trust, rational expert systems and unfamiliar persons for even the simplest of life tasks. Risk because, “No matter how well a system is designed and no matter how efficient its operators, the consequences of its introduction and functioning, in the context of the operation of other systems and of human activity in general, cannot be wholly predicted” (Giddens, 1990: 153).

In these circumstances of what Giddens calls a reflexive, radicalised, or high modernity appear the institutionalisation of doubt as well as fundamental problems of ontological security and existential anxiety, which in turn result in the potential for a feeling of personal meaninglessness. Ontological security refers to the confidence that people have in the constancy of their own identity and surroundings and, therefore, central to an understanding of modernity is an appreciation of the psychological problems arising out of the collapse of certainty in traditional systems of knowledge about the world and traditional orders of hierarchical and external ascription. The resolution to this psychic problem of the disembedding from traditional structures requires what Giddens (1991: 9) calls a “reflexive project of the self” to generate programmes of self-discovery, self-mastery, and self-actualisation for which the individual is solely responsible.

Thus, Giddens (1991) goes on to explain, the search for and the discovery of self impacts on us all and invites individuals to actively intervene in and transform their internal and external world through future oriented life-planning and the acting out and continuously reflexive revision of those plans in social life. In these circumstances the notion of lifestyle assumes a particular significance as individuals are forced to negotiate choices which are increasingly important in the construction and constitution of self-identity. In this way the institutional reflexivity of modernity individualises the participant as it penetrates and transforms the core of the self. For the ideology of modernity is characterised by the belief that one’s individual self-identity is no longer externally determined or staked out by the traditional order but must be explored,

constructed, and transformed as part of the reflexive process that connects the personal, the institutional, and the social.

A person with a stable sense of self-identity, therefore, must acquire a feeling of possessing a rational biographical continuity that can be grasped reflexively and communicated to others. Identity comes to be found in the capacity to maintain a sense of narrative and, in a world of lifestyle options, strategic life and career planning, thus, achieves a crucial role. Life-plans come to constitute a substantial part of the reflexively organised and linear “trajectory of the self” (Giddens, 1991). Individuals are gradually less able to choose to live passively according to externally determined demands and increasingly are compelled pro-actively to enact in society a pre-determined and continuously reflexively administered life-course.

An intrinsic part of the construction of this rationally contiguous biography is the reflexive monitoring of action, or the deliberate connection of motives, actions, and results in an endlessly repeating cycle that moves through ever more challenging, more absorbing, and more vivid stages, or thresholds, of experience. Motives are the “well-springs of action” (Giddens, 1991: 63), which are themselves connected to the construction of identity through the acting out of one’s strategic life-plans. Further, the moral thread connecting motives and identity through life-planning is the principle of authenticity, or being true to oneself. Thus, Giddens argues, if successfully achieved, the end result of connecting motives, actions and results by the thread of authenticity through ever deeper and more complex experience thresholds and life stages is a rich feeling of what Abraham Maslow (1987 [1954 and 1970]) referred to as “peak experiences” and “self-actualisation” or what Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (1988) calls “optimal experience” or “flow”.

But motives do not exist as discrete psychological units (Giddens, 1990). They are an underlying state of feeling and imply a cognitive anticipation of a state of affairs to be realised in the future and this brings us to another important aspect of modernity that Giddens, among others, takes up. Modernity is oriented to the future whereas tradition is oriented to the past. In addition to reflexively preserving existing structures of power and learned dependency, traditional systems gear themselves non-reflexively to protecting the meaning and legacy of the past through the received repetition of both custom and the life-cycle of the generations. In Giddens’s schema the possibilities inherent in modernity open up a linear consciousness towards time, or the lifespan, where the future becomes a territory, or a vista, to be colonised in the present through reflexive and strategic

life-planning. Life becomes full of the opportunities for realising one's authentic self in the future through the actualisation in self-determined experience of one's true nature. Modernity is thus a profound change in the temporal structure of human experience. Time, self, and life are to be mastered. Central to the ideology of modernity, therefore, is the process of individuation and self-determination whereby the individual's biography becomes a reflexively planned and rationally contiguous story consisting of active and purposive growth and transformation culminating, ideally, in the optimal psychological end-state of authentic self-actualisation.

It is in this process of individuation, subjectification, and self-construction of identity where the characteristics of modernity are most clearly identifiable. For, at the base of modern conceptions of life is the principle of reflexive rationalism which, like a rust, corrodes the supporting structures of the edifice of the traditional order. We are left with little to substitute for the certainties of the past and are condemned to be free to determine our own nature and, thus, our own destiny.

Giddens's description of identity and modernity is, perhaps a little optimistic as he neglects to draw a clear boundary between the unilateral construction and determination of modern institutions and ideologies that elites undertake for themselves and then thrust upon a somewhat unwilling and dependent mass society. Bauman (1995) describes a more realistic version of modernity and its consequences. For Bauman the endemic indeterminism of modernity leads, paradoxically, to a desire by the masses for a new level of certainty and stability. However, the restlessness of modernity and the pace and scope of change are characterised by the search for an order which cannot be secured. The ideology of identity construction is experienced as a reactionary urge to fill the void vacated by the disappearance of the certainties and externalities of the pre-modern period. Thus, for Bauman, individuality as expressed in the compulsive need to construct one's own identity is experienced as the modern predicament as well as a modern liberation.

Who am I? Where shall I live? What shall I do with my life? These are all, for the majority of those of us who live in modern society, fundamentally problems to be solved rather than opportunities to be celebrated and exploited. Bauman goes on to explain this idea more explicitly through a periodisation of experience. Elites were the first to be cast into the choosing mode and the masses were spared it, with the consequent development of a relationship of domination and dependency. The two responses to the modern identity crisis were, thus, the individuation of self-determination and the communalism of fictive or contrived collectives such as the nation and the corporation.

The globalisation of capitalist modernity, however, is now tearing up the ideological foundations of even these communities in its incessant push towards the polar opposites of hybridisation and individuation.

Moreover, not only has the ideology of identity choice been forced upon the dependent to some extent against their will, the ideology itself is a fiction that can only fully be realised by the few. For, while the dependent have been forced to subscribe to the totalitarian ideology of modern identity construction, most are prevented from achieving full participation in the modern world by the very forces of modernity and globalisation that were supposed to release them from the chains of the ancien regime. Maximum flexibility for self-construction of identity for the elites in the developed world necessitates at least some inflexibility for the masses and those in the developing world. That is to say, the elites require the masses to accept and believe in the ideology of choice in order that cynicism and disillusionment not collapse the edifice of modern self-determination from within. The structural conditions enforced by competition in market capitalism require that, even if the majority fully subscribes to the ideal of limitless self-construction, most are condemned eventually to feel that they have, in one way or another, failed. Into this arena enter the media conglomerates sponsored by the trans-national corporations through their proxy the advertising industry, and one can see the gradual and inconspicuous, but unplanned, formation of a new and global mode of ideological subjugation of the many by the few. As John Clammer (1997) so perceptively asks, has seduction, therefore, replaced repression as the principal form of social control, manipulation, and domination for modern life?

### **Tradition in Japanese Modernity**

Giddens's work on modernity, a little unfairly in my view, suffers from the accusation that it is ethnocentric. In his theoretical examination and description of the particularities of Japanese modernity Clammer (1995) throws up a challenge to what he refers to as the "universalist pretensions" of Giddens's rendering. The central thesis of Clammer's study is that Japanese modernity exhibits quite different characteristics to those which exist in the West and that Japan, as a non-Western though materially developed society, is a unique and powerful challenge to the preoccupations and epistemology of much conventional sociological and cultural thinking.

Clammer sees the maintenance and management of tradition as an essential

ingredient of Japanese modernity and criticises what he calls Giddens's "unargued assumption" that modernity is fundamentally a post-traditional order. Clammer contends that Japanese modernisation has perhaps proceeded more quickly and more successfully precisely because tradition was reflexively and actively incorporated into the development effort. Giddens's reply might be that a strategy of using tradition in a rational and purposive manner is simply "sham" tradition. However, it cannot be denied that in order for the strategy to work a substantial proportion of the masses had to subscribe to and internalise these ideologies in a non-reflexive and received manner such that to all intents and purposes they functioned in a manner akin to traditional systems of thought and action.

Andrew Gordon's (1998) historical examination of the invention and use of industrial paternalism as a traditional ideology describes well the seductive capabilities of various elite groups in achieving and maintaining dominance through appealing to the communal sympathies of the masses. Nevertheless, although managerial, union, and government leaders actively and purposively incorporated traditional structures into their construction of Japan's political economy in the interests of furthering Japan's modernisation project (Gordon, 1998 and Vlastos, 1998), many ordinary Japanese certainly internalised a genuine belief that their society was and perhaps even does incorporate an authentically Japanese traditional ideology.

Moreover, there are powerful arguments to suggest that, for example, the incorporation of the patriarchal family, or *ie*, ideology into the national polity and socio-economic system was not solely the result of a liminal strategy devised by Japan's elites in order to pursue a developmentalist agenda, but was also an emotional and subconscious attempt to cope with a rapidly changing and confusing environment through an application of experience, knowledge, and culture in a process known as "cultural modeling" (Ashkenazy, 1996). This seizure, transference, and then adaptation of a practice or ideology, often a religiously inspired custom or tradition, from a previous social milieu is valuable for the sake of efficiency and organisational strength because of its familiarity. But it is not simply employed in a reflexive and pro-active manner for rational political or economic reasons but also in a reactive or defensive and unconscious or instinctive manner in order to establish zones of comfort in response to confusing and unfamiliar developments in the external environment. Does this indicate, therefore, that genuinely traditional systems can be re-embedded into a modern Japanese cultural fabric and become important to the modern Japanese world view in and of

themselves, thus partially overcoming Giddens's somewhat restrictive interpretation of the meaning and role of tradition in modernity?

### **The Japanese Relational Self**

Again in Clammer's description of Japanese modernity, the emphasis in modern Japanese life is on the social nexus rather than on developing the individual. For Clammer the Japanese self, while reflexive, is also relational, which leads to a greater closure of social life. That is to say, risks are greatly moderated by ongoing relations of interdependency leading to less personal autonomy and less reflexive discourse about authenticity and self-actualisation. Such a society, although possessing a deep sense of practical reason in the application of technological developments to the problems of everyday life, emphasises the particularistic, personal, and emotional as normative guides to behaviour over and above the universalistic reflexive philosophical reason and individualistic rationalism of the West. Clammer claims that Japanese society is thus more realistic in its understanding of the human condition but that it is also profoundly utopian in character in its search for a genuinely humane solution to the dehumanising and alienating potentialities inherent in modern urbanism and capitalism.

Loiskandl (1998) goes further than Clammer in this regard to contend that if the Japanese psyche "knew an original sin it would probably be that of individualism." For Loiskandl, Japanese thought is based on "trans-rationality" where the search for beauty and harmony can be equated with the Western search for rationality. More weight is given to group consensus in decision-making and the Japanese prototype for the ethical person is one with a strong sense of loyalty to others rather than the lonely angst-ridden philosophical hero possessed of intellectually derived universalistic ethical principles. Further, while Western ethics concerns itself with the Socratic dictum of the "unexamined life" not being worth living, the Japanese system proposes a sacredness of experience and aesthetics that transcends the rationalistic surgical scalpel of Western reflexive analysis (Clammer, 1995 and Loiskandl, 1998). Again, according to this critique, the Japanese have been able to transmit, adapt, and use to their advantage value orientations from an earlier era into modern times.

After having lived in Japan for more than seven years now, it is hard for me to accept completely Clammer's description of the modern Japanese relational self. Japanese society appears to me to be relational, emotional, and flexible if one possesses

power and status, if one is rich, or if one is able and prepared voluntarily to subscribe and conform to others' expectations and the singular normative model for living. It can sometimes be frustratingly and disappointingly uniform, procedure-bound, unsympathetic, and inflexible for the weak, the poor, or the distinctive. By way of example, Plath's (1983) edited volume of life-course studies of various Japanese individuals and groups challenges the generally accepted view of the Japanese submerged self and leaves one with the feeling that the group works best for those that have the task of making decisions that have consequences for others. In both Skinner's (1983) and Noguchi's (1983) essays in the same volume the ideal career path that is set down in the ideology of the group centred corporation is seldom realised in practice. Uncertainty and anxiety are extremely high for those individuals who are at the mercy of senior managers and central government bureaucrats who often manipulate the system to ensure continued security for themselves and their cadres at the expense of loyal, hard-working, and expectant company employees' interests.

Nevertheless, despite these reservations, Clammer correctly identifies in Japanese conceptions of the self an important challenge to the Western epistemology of modernity. If identity lies at the centre of conceptions of the modern and if the Japanese relational self is so very different from that of the West then the challenge that Japanese society poses to sociologists is indeed a powerful and intriguing one.

However, it may also be the case that, as a result of the achievement of a developed economy and society and the external pressures arising from the process of economic globalisation, the Japanese self is itself undergoing a profound transformation of the sort that renders standard interpretations obsolete. If this process is occurring, how can we include it in terms both of our understanding of the Japanese self and of our understanding of capitalist modernity as a globalising social phenomenon?

Before discussing contemporary social change in Japan, we must first examine the historical circumstances of the emergence and development of modernity in the West and its later appearance and development in Japan. Through this approach it is possible to demonstrate that the Japanese experience has been historically distinctive and that this may also have influenced the formation and character of contemporary Japanese modernity.

## **Modernisation in Europe and Japan**

It is now widely agreed among historical sociologists that the fulcrum around which the transformation from a medieval to a modern society in Europe turned was the twin cultural revolutions of the Renaissance and the Reformation. This thesis was first put forward forcefully by the German sociologist Max Weber (1976 [1904]). Although Weber's work remains controversial, his main contribution to sociology is in making a formal and causal link between cultural values and the organisation and development of society or, more specifically, between ascetic and reflexive rationalism and modern bureaucratic capitalism. Although Weber fully recognised the interpenetration of culture and economy, he posited that cultural values mark out the parameters or possibilities for social and economic development. As a part of this general theory he specifically attributes the rise of modern capitalism in Europe to an elective affinity between it and the Protestant ethic. He goes on to expand this idea into a general hypothesis on the rationalisation and bureaucratisation of all areas of social, economic, and political life and the enslavement of all participants within what he called the "iron cage" of rationality, regardless of whether they continue to, or ever did, believe in the religious principle of predestination.

Beginning with and occurring alongside these cultural changes there were, in addition, philosophical developments that provided the intellectual conditions for the growth of reason, secularisation, and instrumental rationality that formed the foundations of the enlightenment, modern science, and the birth of modern capitalism. The culmination of this firmly placed humankind at the centre of the known universe for the first time since classical antiquity and caused Europe to pass through a series of social, political, and economic revolutions that rooted themselves in social mobility, industrial development, capitalist markets, rational bureaucracy, the consolidation of the nation-state, liberal democracy, and which ultimately fostered a conception of the modern person as an essentially autonomous and reflexive individual. The seedbed of Western modernity, therefore, was a transformation of consciousness; the belief that at the center of the universe stands the individual and that the individual has the capability to guide, if not determine, his own destiny<sup>3</sup>.

Japan's development into a modern capitalist economy and society, however, followed quite a different path, and this has in all likelihood resulted in social life in Japan possessing quite different characteristics. For when Japan was confronted by the superior military power of the West in the middle of the nineteenth century, the course of

action chosen by the Japanese elites, after much internal debate and some strife, was to agree to Western demands to open up to trade and embark upon a defensive and reactive policy of rapid national strengthening through industrial development, or what Maruyama (1965) called “purposive modernisation”. Contrary to conditions in Western Europe, economic modernisation in Japan did not occur in an ad hoc manner as a result of the activities of reflexive, pro-active, and autonomous individuals who were steeped in the cultural, social, and political transformations of the Reformation and beyond. Economic modernisation was imported into Japan from the West and enforced methodically and comprehensively by the new Meiji and subsequent governments from above precisely because Japan’s new elites did not want Japan to become like the West in a spiritual and cultural sense.

Tominaga accepts the basic Weberian proposition and, further, divides the social system into the four components, or sub-systems, of economy, polity, society, and culture. According to this schema European modernisation occurred with a modernisation of the cultural sub-system first and then progressively that of society, politics, and the economy. However, Tominaga contends that Japan, on the other hand, because of the peculiar circumstances of its seclusion and enforced opening, modernised along precisely the reverse path. Not only was economic modernisation a policy instituted first in a planned and deliberate manner by the new Meiji government, the people of Japan were psychologically, emotionally, and culturally somewhat unprepared for the requirements of the industrial age in terms of their semi-feudal consciousness and were educated and persuaded to accommodate to economic modernisation and then to embrace it. Tominaga then goes on to explain how the process of modernisation in Japan encompassed the political and then the social sub-systems through the tumultuous events of the twentieth century. However, he also suggests that if cultural modernisation means the rationalisation of religious thought, because, according to Weberian analysis, religion is the foundation of culture, then Japanese society has yet to achieve cultural modernisation because there never has been a functional equivalent of any real significance to the Protestant Reformation in the Japanese religious system. Thus, might it be possible to assert that Japanese society is still pre-modern in one of its basic components?

Though Tominaga’s thesis is very persuasive, it is difficult wholeheartedly to accept his contention that Japanese economic modernisation could have taken hold so comprehensively and so rapidly from the Meiji period onwards upon such a *tabula rasa*. There were powerful forces for change and modernisation building up within all sections

of society even before the arrival of Commodore Perry's Black Ships. For example, Thomas C. Smith's (1959) scholarly account of agricultural change in the Tokugawa period shows clearly how the steadily increasing power of agricultural markets caused a gradual hiving off of economic rationality from the social sphere such that he feels able to claim:

These changes, however, were of great importance for Japanese history, perhaps justifying comparison with the agricultural revolution in Europe. ... their central feature was a shift from cooperative to individual farming.

This change is easier to describe than explain, but if one of its causes may be singled out as especially important, it must be the growth of the market, with all that implies about changes in men's ways and ideas. More than any other influence the market lifted economic life in the village out of the context of traditional social groupings. Economic exchange ... became increasingly independent of social organization and created values of its own.

... Thus the power of status, traditionally defined, was greatly reduced, and new routes were opened to social position and political power.

Smith (1959: ix-x)

In addition, Tominaga's interpretation of the order of European development, while admittedly deliberately schematic for the purposes of explanation, could, perhaps, take greater account of the role of structural developments that presaged the emergence of capitalism, particularly in England, and the overlap and interweaving of the cultural, social, political, and economic forces at work even before, but certainly after, the Renaissance and Reformation. These changes included, for example, the social and cultural dislocations following the series of plagues in the mid- to late-fourteenth century that provided great impetus for gradual but dramatic changes in Europe's social, agricultural, and urban life. Moreover, the earlier appearance of industrial capitalism in England owes much to structural social, economic, and political developments over the whole period of the middle ages. It is important to recognise that the Renaissance and Reformation were not just a new beginning in Europe but were as much a culmination of the processes that preceded them as they were the start of an altogether new construction and representation of reality.

More importantly, however, can we now confidently assert that religion continues to be the basis of culture in contemporary developed society? What if religion, in the sense of it being the cultural logic of mysticism and faith, ceases to be the basis of culture in both the West and Japan and comes to be either supplanted or simply marginalised by the cultural logic of another ideology, or combination of ideologies, such

as for example market capitalism, scientific rationalism, and or secular humanism? In this scenario there would be a real and genuine case for a reinterpretation of the idea that Japanese society is pre-modern in one of its basic components and that Western and Japanese modernity are distinctive from one another in a categorical sense. For is it not the case that religious imperatives are losing their capacity to guide people's thoughts and behaviours and these are being replaced by the logic of the market, of science, and of the self-constituting subject in society?

### **The Self and Modern Society in the West and in Japan**

There is a powerful ideology existent in the West that individual purposive action to control and manipulate the external world is possible and, even, that it is morally correct. Active intervention by individuals to realise in their social world the future oriented mental images they have created for and about themselves has achieved the power of a normative value in society. This belief derives itself from the placing of the individual at the centre of the universe during the cultural revolutions of the Renaissance and Reformation and the subsequent developments in the Western world-view that emanated from the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. Thus, deeply embedded in the Western consciousness is the idea that people can and should develop their ideas and then act them out in social life. In this ideological schema, therefore, life is lived from the inside out. That is to say, and speaking in only the broadest sense, transformations and developments in the inner world of cognitive experience precede transformations and developments in the external material and institutional environment.

In contrast to the West, Japanese people believe the self to be deeply embedded in social relationships. So much so that there is little confidence in the power of the individual to devise, control, and execute his or her own destiny, especially if those plans run counter to prevailing external social and structural norms and conditions. To do so, moreover, means the individual must run the very real risk of exciting public opprobrium for having disturbed the psychological and emotional comfort and harmony provided by adherence to the normative moral aesthetics of proper social behaviour. Of course, Japanese people are possessed with self-consciousness and a basic understanding of the self as a distinct biological entity, but there is also a real recognition of, or assumption about, the deep interdependency of selves in society (Markus and Kitayama, 1991) which is less powerful, though by no means absent, in the West. But this leads Japanese to an

accommodation with existing reality rather than an active attempt to control and mould the external world. The expressions *shikata ga nai* or *shou ga nai* (loosely translated: nothing can or could be done to alter the situation) are uttered by Japanese people with such frequency and regularity in both public and private life that this alone convinces me that Japanese people feel more heavily constrained in their actions by external conditions and by a deep and complex hierarchically arranged web of social relations.

The comparative lack of faith in the power of the individual successfully to act out his or her mental maps in the external or material world is, perhaps, both a direct consequence and an indication of the direction of the process of Japan's modernisation. Modernisation was thrust upon the Japanese people from without and from above, and the process of modernisation began with transformations in the external and material worlds, not the inner world of the self as it did in the West. In this representation the Japanese self has yet to experience a cultural transformation that places the individual at the heart of the Japanese world-view. As a result, Japanese social life remains deeply conservative. In this ideological schema, then, life is lived from the outside in. In other words, transformations and developments in the external material and institutional environment precede transformations and developments in the inner world of cognitive experience.

Thus, the Western ideology of the modern self stresses the individual's moral responsibility for the realisation of his or her authentic nature as an autonomous, independent, and distinctive adult in society, and the Japanese ideology sees the mature ethical adult, or *shakaijin* (literally: social person), as voluntarily becoming embedded in and adapting to a social nexus that requires negotiation with others for the realisation of an essentially dependent, communal, and common nature. The former sees society as an open and linear system full of possibilities for action and self-determination and the latter sees society as a closed and cyclical system full of inherent conditions that, perversely, require voluntary adaptation. Naturally, this is a very schematic description but nevertheless, we can therefore, at this stage, qualify Western societies as being broadly progressive, philosophical, and idealistic and Japanese society as being broadly conservative, practical, and realistic.

### **Contemporary Social Change**

The American political scientist Ronald Inglehart posits the interesting idea that a

profound generational culture shift in value systems is taking place across the whole of the developed world including Japan. Marshalling an impressive range of empirical data Inglehart carefully builds a controversial thesis that there is a dialectical relationship of cause and effect between economic development and cultural change and that, therefore, the interrelationship between economic growth and value change is predictable in a general sense. He divides contemporary society into two phases; the modern, where material values take precedence and where the core project is economic growth, and the postmodern, where postmaterialist values are paramount and where the core project is individual well-being (Inglehart, 1997).

This change, Inglehart claims, arises out of a complex set of economic, social, and psychological processes. He describes how, after World War II the increases in material wealth that came with rapid economic growth across the industrialised world as well as the implementation of comprehensive social welfare and security programmes, basic survival was no longer precarious and feelings of existential security began rising as a result (Inglehart, 1997). This process has been so successful that economic growth in advanced societies is now progressively generating decreasing marginal returns as to the concrete psychological benefits that can be accrued from continuing material expansion.

For example, using data from the World Bank's *World Development Report, 1993*, Inglehart shows that beyond an average annual per capita GNP of approximately US\$7,500 life expectancy does not appreciably rise thereafter (Inglehart, 1997: 59-60). Thus, Japan and Switzerland, with an annual per capita GNP of US\$28,000 and US\$33,000 respectively, have a life expectancy similar to countries which have an annual per capita GNP of approximately US\$20,000 less. However, countries such as Guinea-Bissau, with an annual per capita GNP of around US\$500, have an average life expectancy at birth of less than half that of those countries that have an annual per-capita GNP of only US\$7,000 more. Again, taking data this time from the longitudinal World Values Survey and the same World Bank report, he shows that a similar graph can be constructed that shows levels of subjective well-being rising steeply with the early stages of economic growth and then slowing down and even stalling as an advanced stage of material prosperity is achieved (Inglehart, 1997).

Thus, there appears to be a threshold beyond which economic growth brings diminishing returns in terms of subjective well-being. Once beyond this people begin to place greater emphasis on lifestyle, self-expression, and other quality of life concerns in an effort to increase their personal happiness. People, thus, begin to spend more time

thinking about the meanings and purposes of their lives, the means by which they may achieve satisfaction, fulfillment, and self-actualisation, and the consistency of fit between their beliefs and aspirations and their substantive expression.

With specific reference to Japan, Inglehart has been criticised on a number of points that purport to throw up not only questions about Japan's place in his basic framework as a non-Western but developed society, but also question the very basis of his thesis (Flanagan, 1982). Taking data from the Japanese Election Studies and the National Character Surveys Flanagan attacks Inglehart's materialist-postmaterialist dimension saying that, instead, it should be separated into two scales, the most significant of which relates to the political value scale of authoritarianism and libertarianism. Thus, Flanagan goes on to say, austerity, frugality, pietism, conformity, and deference are the prevailing normative values in agrarian societies because they are characterised by scarcity as their principal functional constraint. However, industrialisation causes a change in socio-economic conditions from "insecurity, interdependence, and scarcity to those of economic and physical guarantees, self-sufficiency and affluence" (Flanagan, 1982: 408) which alters the conditions for individual success and thus permits changes in values in the direction of weaker moral constraints, or a move from authoritarianism to libertarianism. Flanagan interprets Inglehart's theory as associating value change with a decrease in acquisitive and materialist values while Flanagan argues value change is more correctly interpreted as being associated with a decline in inhibiting authoritarian values which themselves are derived from the basic material condition of scarcity.

Inglehart defends himself (Inglehart, 1990) by attributing to Japan's comparatively recent industrialisation the apparent difference between the structures of Japan's and Western countries' value systems. That is to say, Japan only began industrialising in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, Inglehart argues, pre-modern, modern, and postmodern values systems have come to exist simultaneously within the same society and give off a confusing and often misleading picture. For example, Inglehart cites Japan's cooperative pre-modern wet-rice culture as a cause of Japanese society's apparent groupish tendencies but states also that this is waning with industrialisation, urbanisation, and affluence (Inglehart, 1990). He further states that while Japanese show much less inclination to score highly on the belonging index, in contrast to people in advanced developed Western countries, this is a consequence of their different histories, Japan having an extreme form of authoritarian groupishness in the pre-modern period while individualism has been strongly emphasised in the West.

My own feeling about this debate is that both scholars are correct, but for a different reason. It is my contention that the ideology of self in Japan has, until recently at least, been so thoroughly conditioned by the individual's culturally enforced embeddedness in the social nexus that he or she not only perceives himself or herself as largely unable to actively engage in fashioning the external order to his or her own tastes and preferences, but that he or she does not wish to do so because upsetting the aesthetics of the social, political, and economic order is tantamount to immoral behaviour and may result in social opprobrium and a consequent isolation from the community. Thus, both change and, especially, discussion of it are associated with negative feelings of discomfort and fear. The philosophical order of Western modernity is, however, built on entirely different ethical foundations of active intervention in and transformation of the external and material world with change and, especially, talk of it being highly valued for their own sakes.

Furthermore, far from attributing value change in Japanese or any other society to the impact of westernisation or even cultural imperialism, both Inglehart and Flanagan, perhaps distancing themselves from possible accusations of ethnocentrism, flatly reject this thesis by asserting strongly that it emphasises superficial concerns and neglects or ignores the core process. Inglehart writes, "Wearing Western clothing was not crucial; industrialisation was" (1997: 24).

This is the area where Inglehart's thesis is most vulnerable and where he ignores the totalitarian and globalising tendencies of capitalist modernity. Capitalism requires that all people become simultaneously both consumers and producers of its products (Bell, 1996 [1976]). In an age where the capitalist process is expanding ceaselessly and exponentially it makes demands on our time, as well as our mental capabilities, to such an extent that we may become slaves to the process rather than its masters, and in this sense, alongside other intellectual and cognitive developments, it comes to condition even the basis of culture itself. In the intense glare of mega-competition within which people now find themselves they discover that the globalisation of liberal democratic market capitalism is thrusting upon them an environment where it is no longer satisfactory merely to stand still; for that will only ensure that they will get left behind. On the contrary, more and more people are discovering that they are having to run ever faster and harder merely to keep abreast. Once more, enter into this arena the tremendous subliminal persuasive power of the global media conglomerates, their sponsors and bedfellows in the form of trans-national corporations and the advertising industry, plus

the steady proliferation of supra-national governmental economic and political organisations, and we can see that industrial development is not and, indeed, cannot be separated from the processes of cultural and identity commodification and hybridisation within which global capitalist modernity ensnares us all.

Capitalist expansion and industrial development are intimately bound together with modernisation and all possess a globalising dynamic which itself has transformative consequences for the basic characteristics of these processes. Nevertheless, it is also inescapable that, for all the optimistic and politically correct, though culturally barren, globalist pretensions of the trans-national elites, all three processes originated in and are dominated, if not controlled, by the West. For better or worse, they are all also seen in the eyes of many, if not most, non-Western people who have to cope on a day-to-day basis with the incessant onslaught that is inflicted upon their systems of meaning, as essentially Western phenomena that penetrate into and disrupt their own essentially stable and cyclical ways of life from the outside, but that are at the same time impossible to resist. Notwithstanding, globalisation and westernisation can also be forces for good in pushing back the frontiers of ignorance, oppression, and exploitation and are often, therefore, welcomed for these reasons by the very people that subsequently and unwittingly become ensnared in newer, subtler, or more seductive modes of domination and dependence. The value changes that occur within modernisation, therefore, cannot be so neatly disentangled from globalisation and westernisation and thrown at the feet of industrialisation. We must, in addition, take account of these processes that, like an ever tightening net, envelop, squeeze together, export, and hybridise the process that Inglehart describes.

### **Globalisation and Convergence**

Nevertheless, while the preponderant weight of media and commercial interests lie in the West, or even the United States, globalisation does not equate with either westernisation or americanisation. Looked at positively it is a process of hybridisation that allows for a plurality of cultural, institutional, and organisational forms to exist within a melange that allows individuals and groups to choose the forms most suited to their particular needs, and use a variety of them simultaneously, while caring little for where they first originated (Pieterse, 1995).

However, this is perhaps not a sufficient explanation since particularism, in the

form of, for example, strong ethnic or national identities, appears to be itself a product of globalisation and contact with the other (Robertson, 1995). For Robertson, it is the contemporaneous expansion within society of the local and the global and the interpenetration of particularism and universalism. It is the creation and incorporation of the local within the global and the global within the local.

Anthony Giddens (1999) is more blunt: “The era of the nation state is over. Nations ... have become mere ‘fictions’.” Giddens goes on to emphasise that globalisation, while assumed by many to be purely an economic phenomenon, incorporates virtually every aspect of our lives. It is in addition intensely political, social, and cultural. For Giddens, globalisation is only partly westernisation since it also involves a decentering from the West as non-Western cultural systems seek to be and are incorporated into the global system.

Perhaps, however, neither Giddens nor Robertson give enough consideration to the relative weight that westernisation and americanisation play within the multi-directional process of globalisation and, moreover, the feeling, rightly or wrongly, among most non-Western peoples that globalisation has come to mean the colonisation of their life-space by the expansion of Western, read Anglo-American, capitalism and modernity. For, although globalisation has been a more or less permanent feature of human development, it is only in the recent past, with modern capitalism as its engine, that it has accelerated, widened, deepened, and intensified to the extent that no-one can now avoid its consequences. Those who live outside the core networks and processes of global capitalism are coming to feel that they are being compelled to capitulate to and collude with alien forms of life and work merely to protect some vestige of the meaning that their previous existence had given them from further dilution by the tendency towards rationalisation, commercialisation, and commodification that are generated by the expansion of Western modernity and the globalisation of Western market capitalism.

Nevertheless, the British political philosopher John Gray (1998) argues against any form of convergence, homogenisation, or hybridisation as consequences of globalisation since, he reasons, if economic systems are predominantly built upon and predicated by culture then as capitalism spreads across the earth it will come to be incorporated into differentiated systems of belief and, thus, take on forms specific to the cultures into which it is absorbed. Globalisation, therefore, in Gray’s view, leads to precisely the reverse of convergence, or an increasing proliferation of differentiated capitalisms as capitalism expands into previously untouched regions of the world.

Gray uses the Japanese example to propose his idea that global capitalisms will proliferate and strengthen themselves and that the Anglo-American version is merely one singularity among many. However, his arguments appear to be based upon popular though outmoded beliefs about the strength and stability of the Japanese economic system as well as somewhat stale assumptions about the history of Japanese modernisation and the traditionalist ideological roots of Japanese economic organisations. Even with these arguments he feels forced to concede that the Japanese system may have to change without giving the reader much idea as to the sources of such change or any indication as to what kind of system may thus develop (Gray, 1998: 174). Further, and more tellingly, Gray neglects to explore the question of how the nature of a particular version of capitalism might change if the culture upon which it is based evolves or develops in the direction of the dominant cultural model, in this case the Anglo-American system of liberal democratic market capitalism.

Bauman (1998 and 2000) also argues against global homogenisation but from a different perspective. For him globalisation leads to a hierarchy of mobility between what he calls “tourists” and “vagabonds”. That is to say, global capital needs flexible and compliant governments, weak labourers, and credulous consumers in order to reproduce itself and these it gets. For, the primary criteria that global capital requires before investing and locating in a particular area is the conditions whereby it can sell up and leave whenever circumstances become inconvenient or uncomfortable. Shareholders become the new absentee landlords demanding flexibility and deregulation as they move themselves and their capital around the world without consequences for themselves and virtually without opposition to wherever they can achieve maximum return on their speculative investments. This deprives the ‘other’, or labour, of its gripping or resistant nature, thus polarising a hybridising global society into elite global “tourists”, who can come and go as they please, and local “vagabonds”, who remain and depend almost for their very existence on the apparently capricious decisions of the trans-national elites.

Writing some twenty five years earlier Ronald Dore (1973) concluded from his empirical investigations that, because of what he called the “late development effect”, Japan had been able in some measure to leap ahead of the United Kingdom, and by implication the United States too, into a more advanced or more modern form of industrial organisation upon which henceforth the UK would converge. The implications of Dore’s work, therefore, were profound because it implied strongly that the incorporation of Western technology into the traditional Japanese ethos had indeed been

successful, so much so that Japan had been able to develop significant comparative advantages and efficiencies in production management. His work also implied that, while systemic convergence is a product of the globalisation or intensification of competition, it is by no means a given that this is a one-way process flowing inexorably out from the West.

Since that time there has without doubt been a certain Japanisation of US and British management and production systems in response to the Japanese competitive economic challenge. Lean production as practiced by the Toyota Motor Corporation has been studied extensively by many scholars and practitioners for any aspects that might be transportable to the West. However, since Dore's influential work, in other industrial and business sectors there have also been studies on the subject of global convergence and hybridisation that focus on Japan and some of these have come to the opposite of Dore's original conclusion. For example, Malcolm's (1998) recent examination of the consequences for the Japanese financial services industry of the 'Big Bang' regulatory reforms argues for what he calls a "nuanced convergence". He takes a gradualist approach and concludes that the Japanese system is reluctantly converging on the dominant Anglo-American system, but that it has managed to retain some distinctive features of its own.

Within the process of the collision and confrontation of the modern and pre-modern as well as of different forms of modernity, is it not probable that, first, some kind of convergence is taking place, not just of capitalist systems of production or in the material aspects of people's daily lives but also and more importantly, in the forms of consciousness that are developed to respond to and actively engage with the new and global forms of social, economic, and political life that are taking shape around us? Moreover, as the preponderant power of Western capital comes to dominate an increasingly global capitalist modernity, is it not possible, second, that such a convergence might come to be coloured mainly, but not exclusively, by Western or even American modernity? Third, is it also not possible that, because modernity and capitalism are generally perceived to be aggressively exported out from the West, the material and psychological consequences of economic and social development and modernisation are perceived as a process of westernisation, even though they may be to a large extent endogenously generated?

As we observe the gradual attenuation of, for example, the lifetime employment system in large Japanese corporations and research indicates to us some radical shifts

taking place in the value orientations of Japanese young people, are we not witnessing, therefore, the perhaps irresistible emergence of a totalitarian liberal democratic capitalism that is dominated by the Western system and which elicits from the non-Western 'other' a reluctant and defensive retreat from distinctiveness and exceptionalism into what loosely amounts to a global hybrid of the 'American Way'? Are not Robertson's somewhat hopeful interpenetration of the local and global, or Pieterse's globalised smorgasbord of the local, merely an intermediate stage in a process of a real and perceived deepening of Western, or more precisely American, hegemony beyond the economic and political into the social, the cultural, and even the psychological worlds?

The present period is one of confusion, flux, and contradiction in Japanese society. Japan is a developed though non-Western society and thus it is, I think, helpful to use the analogy of a mirror with which to compare and contrast Japan and the West<sup>4</sup>. It is a mirror in the sense that the image presented resembles closely the original that stands before it. But, when we examine it more carefully we see that the image, while appearing identical, is in fact reversed. Correspondingly, Japan's modernity appears in many of its material and ideological manifestations to be similar to the West, but some of the most crucial of its aspects appear also to be reversed. The history of the ideology of Japan's modernity is perhaps the reverse of Britain and the USA, as might be the ideology of the role of the self in fashioning or being conditioned by external social reality.

Within the flux and contradiction which Japanese society appears to be facing are we not now witnessing the cultural revolution that Tominaga claimed was missing from the Japanese experience and which, in his view, prevented Japanese society from being viewed as truly modern? Is this an individuation of the Japanese consciousness which seeks to fashion or remake human experience to conform to individually constructed pre-determined mental images; a Japanese version of the "reflexive project of the self"? While this revolution may not be religious in its orientation, it is perhaps even more momentous because, if it is the case, then it signifies not only the ideological and cultural culmination of Japan's transformation to high modernity but also, perhaps, the Japanese expression of an ongoing worldwide tendency toward the supplanting of religion as the basis of culture by the ideologies of market capitalism, scientific rationalism, and secular humanism, or what amounts to being a systemic and ideological convergence on Anglo-American liberal democratic market capitalism. Is this not, therefore, the formation of a global hybrid modernity?

## **Contemporary Japanese Modernity**

Japan's emergence into modernity has been an extended transition period between the pre-modern ascriptive Tokugawa Settlement and a new form of modernity that is now in the process of formation around the world. This period of transition can be divided into two secondary or dependent phases, with the Second World War as their divide. That is to say, the first phase was a purposive developmental and technological project initiated by the new Meiji elites and was primarily predicated by Japan's peculiar circumstances as a late-comer to both modernity and industrial capitalism. Notwithstanding the issue of whether the Western powers had possessed the intention to colonise Japan, its initial confrontation with the West had provoked a defensive urge to secure and promote national survival and strengthening through purposive material development.

When the internal contradictions inherent in the pre-war radical combination of spiritual mysticism and technological rationalism were resolved by military defeat in 1945 (Kitagawa, 1990), the Japanese people were presented with another opportunity, albeit this time more democratic, to construct anew. The material destruction and deprivation that they faced prompted a renewed sacrifice of the individual to the immediate needs of the total collective as the elites of the Japanese political economy sought first national reconstruction and then international recognition and parity through economic development. As in the pre-war period traditional ideologies were manipulated for these purposes and, in addition, put to use in developing a strategy for satisfying the immediate needs of the collective for security and stability, or equality of outcome, in order that the national polity would support and contribute to the new set of directions that had been mapped out. Thus, the dominant value system of post-war Japan has been an egalitarianism that was born out of the circumstances of the immediate post-war years and a desire to construct a new society and polity based around the ideology of democratic materialism.

Within both the national polity and its socio-economic microcosm, the corporation, the political and economic elites were able to battle and then negotiate their way through to accepting this solution with the masses because, for different reasons, it was congruent with both of their ideologies. In other words, the political and economic elites accepted it because it conformed to their developmentalist agenda for achieving international recognition and economic strength and parity, and the masses, represented

primarily by the newly legalised labour unions, were willing to accept it because they succeeded in achieving their aim of a materially comfortable and stable life for all.

By the 1970s and 1980s this state of affairs had come under considerable strain as the Japanese economy reached the limits of its high speed developmentalist growth trajectory, international developments intruded more forcefully into the domestic arena, and consumption and lifestyle patterns began to change as the effects of mass-longevity, urbanisation, and affluence made themselves felt. Moreover, various negative feedback effects symptomatic of hyper-development also began to appear on the horizon in the form of, for example, environmental disasters, political scandals, and, finally, unsustainable asset-price hyper-inflation.

After having attained a brief period of national self-confidence during the 1980s when the learn from Japan movement in the West was in its ascendancy, Japan's elites appear to have slipped back into a renewed defensive posture in response to the intensification of economic competition unleashed both by the rapid globalisation of market capitalism and the continuing effects of the collapse of the asset inflation induced 'Bubble Economy'.

Perhaps in preparation for more radical measures to come the elites of the political economy are engaged in a contradictory process of conservatively striving to preserve their own gradually eroding spheres of interest and support while simultaneously attempting to construct the national and corporate culture anew with the inclusion of a new spirit of individual responsibility. The aim of this is to make individuals responsible for their own skills and abilities and successes and failures as well as their own life and career trajectories. While ostensibly couched in the language of openness, fairness, and accountability, the new culture is an attempt to have people re-orient their selves and their behaviours into being commensurate with the newly emerging global hybrid modernity. Albeit defensively motivated, this is in actuality an external imposition resulting from the apparent capitulation by the political and managerial elites to the perceived irresistibility of the globalisation of institutional structures and cultural and social forms around a rapidly hybridising Anglo-American liberal democratic market capitalism. For the real meaning of flexibility for the elites is, in its actual substance, insecurity and instability for the masses.

This is, in effect, a reactive, defensive, and manipulative fabrication of the internal consciousness of modernity. For while the elites concede to the masses their right to determine themselves in this new flexible age of the globalised hybrid individual they

also send out the contradictory message that the new consciousness is only really acceptable if it is in the interests of Japan's political economy. I note, for example, with increasing irony every time governmental and business elites exhort the Japanese people to increase their consumption while knowing that most Japanese people already have everything that they need and more besides. And anyway, even if the Japanese people do begin to consume more, for whom are the resulting benefits ultimately intended?

### **Modernity and the Individual**

Modernity requires modernisation for its achievement and modernisation is the reflexive and pro-active intervention in and transformation of the external material and institutional environment that fulfills the purpose of achieving modernity. But modernisation does not end once modernity has been set in place because that would be an internal contradiction, which modern rationalism cannot tolerate. For crucial to modernity is the presupposition that, given the correct tools and a suitable environment, the potential for all individuals to achieve their hopes and expectations from living in society is almost limitless. If the tools for achieving this are not correct then they should be replaced or new ones developed and if the environment is not suitable then it should be changed and made to be so.

Further, because modernisation has become virtually synonymous with purposive improvement, being modern also constitutes being up-to-date with the most advanced material conditions and institutional practices. Therefore, progress through modernisation becomes not only continuously and invariably achievable but, because it is also indissolubly linked to the possibility of improving the conditions of human life, it becomes a moral and philosophical condition to be brought about and, once achieved, continuously maintained through the reflexive and strategic implementation of material expansion, technological improvement, institutional innovation, and personal development.

Modernisation and modernity also individuate and differentiate their participants. For without ascription as a frame of reference for living in relation to each other, each person is compelled to chart his or her own path through life and, moreover, this comes laden with the modernist's moral baggage of unbounded progress. Moreover, once we recognise that each person is a unique individual who encounters a unique set of environmental circumstances, with the removal of ascription and fate and their replacement by self-construction and risk, people will necessarily become differentiated

from each other as they take personal responsibility for forging their own paths through life. As modernity broadens, deepens, and intensifies, therefore, so long as the basic material and institutional conditions necessary for living have been secured, in other words equality of outcome, society becomes increasingly conditioned and predicated by the principle of removing the material and institutional barriers to psychological and emotional fulfillment for the purpose of ensuring equality of opportunity; the logical consequences of which, of course, are institutional flexibility and differentiation of outcome.

In the broadest sense, active intervention in and transformation of the external world for the purpose of achieving the material and institutional environment that is most appropriate for the realisation of our needs, desires, and values presupposes the presence in each person of an individualised and internally regulated capacity for a detached reflexive analysis of existent external circumstances, a belief in the possibility of effecting changes to them through pro-active strategic engagement, and a vision of what the future might be like once strategic change has been successfully implemented. In other words, the modern condition requires us to have simultaneously three interdependent capabilities and ideologies. The first is the cognitive capacity for individual detachment, reflexivity, and prediction. The second is a confidence in the efficacy of purposive social action, and the third is a moral orientation that seeks not to preserve the past but to manipulate, or even eradicate, it for the purpose of bringing an imagined and idealised future backwards into the present. Notwithstanding, inter-subjective negotiation and learning are integral and indispensable to this process but, for the ideology of modernity to become a reflexive consciousness, the individual must also believe completely that this idealised vision is an authentic projection or representation of the inner self and not borrowed from or imposed by the outside.

This is not to say that reflexivity and active engagement with the external environment were entirely absent in pre-modern eras. The difference between the pre-modern and the modern lies not in an absolute absence or presence of a reflexive pattern of thought and pro-active engagement with the outside world for the purpose of enacting change but whether it has become a generalised condition in such a way that nearly all people feel not only that they are able to control and direct the pattern of their own lives but that, even if they do not feel like they are in control, they are, perversely, compelled both to be so and to show others that they are so in a moral and a practical sense. In this way, and speaking ideally, modernisation and modernity can be understood

as the process of the practical implementation of and achievement in mass society of the ideology of secular humanism.

Put another way, the ideology of modernity presents itself in direct contradistinction to the ancien regime. Indeed the very expression for that era suggests that its time has past and a new more progressive and uplifting age has come into being. Modernity, thus, is intended as an ongoing liberation of the individual from the restrictions, deprivations, and structured inequalities of the past. By the successful resolution through social action of the conflict between our ideals and the concrete reality that we face, modernity is intended as the achievement of the material and institutional conditions whereby all people, whatever their origins, might have the opportunity to manifest their authentic selves as individuals in society through the substantive realisation of their potentials and ambitions.

But for this to happen, individuals must be capable of understanding themselves at a deep and complex level, society must arrange an open and flexible institutional environment whereby people might be able to gain that inner awareness through education and experiments in living (Se, 1999), and, once this has been gained, society must provide the circumstances whereby people may be able to live out their inner selves. To be achieved as a permanent state this requires a dynamic set of institutional arrangements that can flexibly adjust to the demands placed upon it by an ever more differentiating and developing population. Again, modernity sets itself off against the past. For the culture of tradition, as it is oriented to the past, tends towards stasis, simplicity, and order. However, modernity, as it is geared to bringing the future backwards into the present, tends towards dynamism, complexity, and differentiation. Therefore, what is distinctive about modernity is, first, its difference from the traditional order, second, its orientation towards change rather than continuity, and third, is its idealism and its inclusiveness. For the idealism of modernity is that no one be excluded from reaping the rewards accrued to humanity by the release from servitude that was heralded by the slow collapse and then rapid disintegration of the ancien regime which enlightenment and revolution brought about.

Besides, if no-one else is going to tell us as individuals who we are, why we are here, and what we are supposed to do with our time then, to avoid sliding into a self-destructive void of personal meaninglessness, we simply must start to define our own identities and construct our own lives. And here we discover one of the paradoxes of modern life. In the cause of setting us free from the tyranny of servitude to others'

representations of ourselves, modernity individualises the consciousness and imposes a new, more subtle, tyranny on those who do not know what they want to do or who they want to be. For every person for whom modernity is experienced as the freedom to enact one's own life plans there will be others who feel that having to develop one's own authentic recipe for success and fulfillment is a frightening burden that they would rather do without. Instead of accepting what fate serves up to us in the form of the circumstances and events that form our lives from the outside in, we must learn to manage the risk that comes from being condemned by liberty to living our lives inside out.

Even more troubling, perhaps, is modernity's potential for hopelessness. For if we combine the ideologies of modernisation and modernity with the practical institutional arrangements of market capitalism the result is an apparently unrelenting competitive struggle to achieve and maintain a state of material and institutional ascendancy. In order to continue to function capitalism requires expansion and it therefore sets people off against each other in competition to penetrate, infiltrate, and colonise progressively wider and deeper realms of the human experience. The effect of setting people off against each other in ever widening and deepening competition is that, although the responsibility for failure to achieve one's hopes and expectations is now the individual's, the possibility of being able to live out one's dreams increasingly runs the risk of being hindered by the material and institutional obstacles set in place by those who possess the power and wealth to colonise the life-chances and life-space of others. Thus, while in a strict sense capitalist modernity is not a zero sum scenario, in order that every competition might have its winners there must necessarily also be losers. Thus, we have the prospect of having to bear the unique pain of discovering that modernity has set us free to write our own biographies while knowing that the practical circumstances of life and work in capitalism makes its complete achievement difficult at best. That is to say, it is becoming increasingly evident that, under capitalism, the probability of the ideal state of modernity being realised for all in actual experience is so remote, we risk condemning ourselves to a permanent state of chasing the unobtainable.

Moreover, in order that one can be victor rather than vanquished in this battle for supremacy it is necessary to acquire and put into practice a preponderance of technological and material interests in combination with the most effective and advanced system of institutional arrangements that can be developed. Consequently, modernisation and capitalism together also facilitate material and institutional convergence and

hybridisation, or what is sometimes rather euphemistically referred to as globalisation. For the easiest and least costly route to advancement, and thus to avoid falling prey to the tendency in capitalism for the strong to expand into the territory of the weak, is to search out the most advanced and effective technologies and practices wherever they may be and attempt to graft them onto what already exists at home or, even, to replace one's own system entirely with a copy of that which is being done elsewhere. Under these circumstances the expansion of competition in market capitalism tends to lead both to the self-contradictory temptation for all to rely on others' leadership and creativity and, more significantly, an unleashing of the potentially damaging effects of unrestrained competition through liberalisation and marketisation. Either way the result is mediocrity and insecurity. In other words, the power of capital and its inherent tendency to expand thus has itself a tendency to influence institutions to innovate in such a way that they have the potential to arrange themselves to the detriment of the individuals living and working within them, and eventually, of course, to the detriment of the institutions themselves.

Further, when we combine the dictates of work and life in modernity with the material and psychological rhythms of production and consumption that are inherent to the successful operation of market capitalism we can see how work, modernity, and capitalism begin to penetrate into the core of the self such that the cultural logic of rationalism, economism, and humanism at best either marginalise religion to a peripheral role as a foundation of motivation and behaviour or even come to supplant religion altogether and become the basis of culture in capitalist modernity. Work ceases to be, therefore, a calling or a duty or a role to be fulfilled or a custom to be repeated, but becomes, instead, a circular process of the consumption of the experience of producing and reproducing the self in the quest for its own actualisation. The cultural logic of the consumption of human experience has, thus, come to replace religion in its role of providing the moral basis for and sanctification of behaviour in society. Religion, as the moral and ideological basis for the production, reproduction, and transmission of belief, tradition, and custom, and of the fulfillment of duties, roles, and callings, in other words as the basis of culture, does not disappear. However, it is thus marginalised to its present status as a quaint ideological museum piece to be used for the beautification, though not sanctification, of what have become essentially secular activities justified only by the rational, economistic, and humanistic reflexivity of capitalist modernity.

Moreover, the competitive pressures that arise from the globalisation of market

capitalism in modernity are such that even secular humanism as an ethical basis for social action is struggling to be heard above the noise of the rhythmic engine of modern rationalism and economism. For the process of hyper-development appears also to be instilling a change in the dynamic of reflexive self-actualisation itself such that the desires for self-determination and self-definition are being subverted, or short-circuited, and are becoming subordinate to the superficial requirements and concerns of capitalist production and its corollary, consumption.

In such a world dominated by the principle of competitive attrition the pressure to succeed, or merely to keep up, becomes so onerous that people capitulate to or even collude with the forces of their own exploitation and are steered into succumbing to the overwhelming dictates of the war of permanent attrition that is competition in market capitalism. The result is a modern dystopia in which culture becomes a simulated yet resolutely defensive response to the requisite demands of a decentred or diffuse, and thus unchallengeable and irresistible, economic globalisation. It produces, because it mitigates against the achievement of authenticity, a chronically anxious and narcissistic consumer self (Casey, 1995) that is unable even to locate the source of his or her anxiety let alone confront and overcome it. This is not the authentic realisation of self that modernity heralded but a short-circuiting of the idealism of modernity and its replacement by mediocrity, insecurity, and meanness. Thus at the very moment when modernity appears to be offering to deliver humankind from the bondage of repressive ascription have we not already become seduced by and ensnared in a new culture of repressive manipulation?

### **Contemporary Japanese Modernity**

If we take modern to mean up-to-date in an applied technical sense then in many respects Japan is modern or is certainly more modern than most other societies. But if we take modern to mean the realisation of the idealism of modernity then the answer is not quite so clearly and easily derived. Yes, the structured finality of the ancien regime has been overthrown and yes, a liminal, reflexive, and individualised modern consciousness is indeed in the process of formation. However, set against the strict criteria of the ideal state, has any society achieved modernity? Or are we not all caught, therefore, within the permanent war of competitive attrition that is modernisation for modernisation's sake?

In Japan's case modernisation and modernity have for the greater part of the

period since the Meiji Restoration possessed quite a different meaning, intention, and dynamic from those of the European or American examples. Japan's modernisation has been, at least until very recently, circumscribed and limited to being a developmental project. That is to say, it has been an effort in material development for the purposes of, first, resisting domination from without and, later, achieving material prosperity and strength and, finally, parity with the so-called advanced nations of the world.

And here lies one of the critical differences between Japan, Europe, and the United States. European modernisation was born out of a gradual and progressive individuation of the consciousness while Japanese modernisation was brought into being rapidly through the suppression of individualism for collective ends. In Europe it was a cultural and intellectual revolution that sought to tear down the rotten edifice of the ancien regime such that all people might one-day manifest their true nature in society as fulfilled self-constituting subjects. Material and institutional change developed out of and was a substantive expression of this transformation in the European consciousness. The United States, on the other hand, was a modern project from the very start. It was born out of a desire to escape from the ancien regime by starting anew and realising in concrete reality the ideals of the early modern settlers. In this sense, therefore, American society has never been anything but modern. Once more, material and institutional development and change took place from within and was an expression of the dynamics of this cultural system.

Japan's modernisation has always been an altogether more practical, immediate, and purposive affair and has possessed little of the hopeful idealism of its European or American counterparts. For Japan's project was a collective effort and was an organised and purposeful modernisation of the material and institutional environment, not because Japan's elites wished to make these consistent with any newly emerging modern consciousness but because they, on the whole, wished to preserve what they could of the pre-modern consciousness. Of course the spirit itself was manipulated and redefined by Japan's elites to achieve their desired material and political objectives but in the above sense, Japan's experiments with the reflexive construction of modernity have more often than not been a conservative and backward looking retreat into materialism.

Nevertheless, it is also true that the Japanese people have been able to find a prolonged but temporary resolution to the contradiction between tradition and modernity and this has been through a realisation of the self in democratic materialism and in the various fictive socio-economic communities of which the nation and the corporation are

the most exemplary models. Japan's route into modernity may have taken a different path to Europe and America due to its different circumstances and different cultural logic, but this does not mean that Japanese society has not achieved at least some measure of modernity. It now appears, however, that this was a transitional phase in the cultural consciousness between the pre-modern world of the Tokugawa settlement and a global hybrid modernity that is taking shape around us now; a transition that was conditioned by the peculiar nature of Japan's relationship with the West and then its response to the developments that unfolded as a result of that relationship.

And this brings us to another theoretical issue and that is the possibility that modernity can now be divided into two phases, one national, corporatist, ponderous, and rigid and the other global, individualistic, nimble, and fluid, and that these can be separated by a change in the institutional environment brought about by the globalisation of economic competition (Bauman, 2000 and Beck, 2000). At first glance this essay might point to complete agreement with Bauman's and Beck's thesis, but on closer inspection there are some dissimilarities and these are derived from the fact that Japan participated in the first phase as a reluctant latecomer and came out of an entirely different cultural milieu. What this paper suggests is that Japan may indeed be entering into what Bauman refers to as "Liquid Modernity" or what Beck calls "The Risk Regime" or what I have called here a global hybrid modernity. However, the point of entry into modernity that Japan took was entirely different from that of Western Europe and the USA and this conditioned an entirely different passage through the stages of industrial and technological development and the achievement of material well-being that may appear to have been similar in its rigidity but is different as to its nature. The result of this difference is revealed in the 20th century resolution of the relationship between the individual and the institutional arrangements of the political economy.

What I propose here is that, at an individual level, a culture of individual reflexivity is now beginning to take a hold on the Japanese consciousness but it is a product of economic development and globalisation rather than a cause of them. Thus, although Japan and the societies of the West appear to be headed together into a new era of globalisation, because, speaking from a European perspective, Japan entered the scene backwards, it faces consequences that are altogether different from elsewhere in the modern world. That is to say, unlike in the West where modernisation and modernity began with an individualisation of the subject, Japanese society is now having to get to grips with the consequences of a collectivisation of the individual. For what is now being

proposed is a complete reversal from being a culture based on the principle of equality of outcome to one based on equality of opportunity. The meaning of this is that individuals may in future no longer be able to depend on the collective for sustenance in return for an abandonment of individuality. Instead, individuality as a compulsory right, with all its attendant responsibilities of self-determination and self-construction, is being thrust upon a somewhat unwilling population by a mechanism that ceaselessly and ineluctably expands into every crevice of social life while simultaneously undermining the values that have until recently given Japanese society support and contiguity but are now beginning to show their age and inappropriateness for the new era of global hybrid individualism that is itself a consequence of the expansion of capitalist modernity.

At an institutional level, therefore the end result appears to be that Japan and the countries of the West are converging on or perhaps even imploding into a hybrid version of the Anglo-American system of institutional arrangements and conceptions of the self as each country feels compelled to ratchet-up and intensify its competitive environment in order not to be outdone by the others. However, what the globalisation of market capitalism also does, through the expansion of economic competition and its penetration into and colonisation of social and cultural life, is to impoverish the human spirit. The consequence is not the outward expansion into individual complexity and differentiation that modernity promises but a capitulation to the regimented mediocrity of narcissistic hyper-consumption. For the only way that capital is able to continue to satisfy the insatiable desire for what it calls an “adequate return on investment” is for everyone to become progressively more enslaved by the repetitive and ultimately self-destructive cycle of consuming the experience of working to produce to consume.

### **Conclusion: Dreaming of Modernity**

One of the most enduring memories I shall have of living and working in Japan is my gradual awakening to how great a conceit is the fabrication that is global capitalist modernity. The following example is a case in point and is used here as a metaphor for the emerging global hybrid modernity that this article attempts to describe.

In 2000 Japan’s premier motor manufacturer began a new media campaign. The commercials feature various scenes depending on the type of vehicle being advertised with one showing, for example, an idyllic drive-scape with a beautiful couple, a handsome man at the wheel with his adoring wife at his side, driving smoothly and

silently along a painted rural vista with, of course, no other vehicle in sight. Commercials for smaller vehicles feature pretty young twenty-somethings in bizarre dreamscapes or bombing around trendy European cities complete with romantic roadside cafes and beautiful ancient buildings. The commercials always end with the same slogan: “Drive Your Dreams!”

These advertisements represent nothing less than a violation of the internal consciousness of modernity. For the cars in question are not the dream automobiles that the commercials would like the viewer to believe and rarely if ever are actual driving conditions ever commensurate with the scenes that the advertisers invent for our entertainment and seduction. Moreover, in order for someone to drive his or her dream it is necessary first to discover and decide for him or herself what that dream is. It is in this area that these commercials become so important to our discussion because modernity, ideologically and practically, both enables and forces us all to decide what our dreams are and then to go out and realise them. However, what the advertisers and manufacturers whisper to us through the sub-text of their commercials is that we do not have to struggle to define our dreams because they have already decided it for us in advance. What they conveniently neglect to inform us, of course, is that nothing of any enduring value was ever achieved without effort and struggle. The dream that they propose to us is not the authentic self-actualisation of modernity but the seductive and complacent mediocrity of hyper-consumption. The advertisers seduce us with the fabricated promise of ultimate satisfaction, or gain without pain, but almost invariably deliver only a small fraction of what they have led us to expect.

This metaphor for modern life points us towards the final characteristic of Japanese, and Western, or global hybrid modernity that this essay proposes. The idealism of modernity is progressively being usurped by the globalisation of market capitalism to the extent that we are all now in thrall to a subversive and seductive process of subliminal manipulation. In this new world of ours apparently no-one is in control and everyone appears to be a victim of circumstance. For capitalism has come to dominate our lives in such a way that it really is a self-perpetuating and self-regulating system over and above and independent of its human architects and engineers. This is what Max Weber meant when he referred to the “iron cage” of capitalism or what Anthony Giddens refers to as a “juggernaut” in danger of careering out of control. What market capitalism manages to do is to feed off people’s faith and hope in the modern idea while simultaneously only delivering on a small fraction of its promise. The result is the mediocrity of

hyper-materialism disguised as the self-realisation of the subject. However, we are so keen not to have to face the sad truth that we are being systematically duped and manipulated, we even pretend to ourselves that we are willing and active participants in this magnificent yet terrible charade. Thus we comfort ourselves with the knowledge that we can participate in the modern dream to enough of an extent that detached and reflexive criticism of the circumstances of life in late-capitalism are deflected by the muted and transitory satisfaction that we gain from the fetishism of hyper-consumption.

And this is the predicament within which we now find ourselves. For modernity was not supposed to be like this. It came to us full of promise and salvation for the future and for a while it delivered on its promise as we experienced its benefits. But it is beginning to fail in its purpose of giving us everything we expect of it because it has become bound up with and perhaps even replaced by a mechanism that works to undermine the very foundations of our most deeply held beliefs and ideals.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms the 'West' and 'Western' are highly problematic, as are 'Asia' and 'Asian'. By the 'West' or 'Western' I mean, in a general sense, Western Europe and North America. However, although Western countries and cultures, such as Spain and Ireland, without doubt possess unique characters of their own which give colour to what might very loosely be called Western culture, the principal countries involved in the outward expansion of industrial capitalism and capitalist modernity have been the United States and Britain. Thus the Western paradigm is heavily dominated by what might be called the Anglo-American system.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the work of Karl Popper (1959 [1972]) for a philosophical 'proof' for the idea of permanently provisional scientific knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it is important to state here how modernity has been for much of its history a masculine condition and a masculine consciousness. Certainly throughout the majority of the period since the mid-seventeenth century the ideology of modernity has applied almost exclusively to men. Women were very much regarded as being dependent on and inferior to men, both in the practical and philosophical worlds. Without wishing at all to underrate the contribution of women to world development, their experience of the ideology of modernity has both been restricted to more recent decades of the twentieth century and more restricted areas of the world. Thus we must be mindful of this fact when we make judgments as to the generalisability and applicability of modernity as a social condition.

<sup>4</sup> See Vlastos, Steven (ed) (1998), *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press