



Academic Paper

# The Asian Political Mind and the Arab Pivot East



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## **Introduction**

In the recent period of 2018–2020, Arab political literature contained calls to reconsider the configuration of Arab international relations, to respond to the profound shifts taking place in the international order and its central interactions. In this context, the call for a pivot East in the direction of Asian powers has been the starkest.

In order to leverage such calls strategically, it is important to identify the motivations behind it, then examine the central features of the Asian political mind, in the great Asian powers beyond the Asian Muslim states, in order to understand the source behind the rise of the region between East and West Asia on the global stage, including on the eastern fringe of the Arab world. It is also important to learn the common denominators of the political epistemology of these Asian powers, in terms of their perspectives of modern international relations, to allow Arab planners to chart out relations with these powers, based on understanding the political mind of these powers, and the reasons behind the rapid evolution of Asian relations with Israel.

Managing international relations with one or multiple parties in the international order requires first identifying the epistemological and ideological reference frame of these parties, and the hierarchy of their political values, in order to learn the primary and secondary values of the state or regional system under study. Perhaps the record of Orientalists in studying Arab and Muslim societies are a salient example of the importance of this approach in managing relations between two parties.

## **First: The Justifications for the Pivot East**

There are several historic, contemporary, and forward-looking factors behind the calls for an eastern pivot, most notable of which are:<sup>1</sup>

1. The allure of the current Asian rise: One of its manifestations is that the combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measured in terms of the purchasing power parity, not the nominal GDP, of four Asian countries (namely China, India, Japan, and Russia<sup>2</sup>) represents 34.3% of the global total output, equivalent to the combined GDP of the United States (18.2%) and European Union countries (16%).



2. The total trade surplus of Asian countries ranks them first in the world. Indeed the US trade deficit with China and Japan alone is approximately \$487 billion, while the European trade deficit with China is around €185 billion (about \$221 billion). China controls 13% of global trade and it ranks first in the world, while Japan has maintained its global trade between 2012 and 2020.

3. Asia has the largest number of nuclear countries compared to the rest of the continents. It has 6 nuclear states: North Korea, China, India, Pakistan, Russia, and Israel. It also has 41.13% of the total number of operational nuclear reactors in the world (188 of 457).

4. Asia is the largest continent in the world in terms of both population (59.54% of the world population), and surface area (21.7% of the global surface area).



5. The cultural and societal structures in these countries are “relatively” closer to Arab societies compared to Western societies. Moreover, the Islamic presence in a large number of Asian societies reinforces this closeness, as demographic data indicates Asian Muslims (non-Arabs) constitute 74.5% of the world’s Muslims, and 28% of the entire population of Asia.

6. Studying Arab history from the angle of international conflicts unequivocally indicates that the mental image the Arabs hold about Asians is less hostile compared to the Arab image of the West. As Hadley Cantril and his research team concluded, the crystallization of a mutual Mirror Image between peoples is the result of the nature of the historical relationship between them.<sup>3</sup> This makes the development of the Arab relationship with Asia liberated from the concerns surrounding colonial capitalist domination, and the Western supremacist view held in the Arab historical memory, creating a favourable environment for the Arab diplomat’s mission to pivot east.



**Hadley Cantril**

7. Asia represents the top trade partner for the Arab region, with mutual trade growing steadily. Arab trade with Asia accounts for 55% of total Arab trade, which is 15% higher than its value in 1999.<sup>4</sup> The value of Chinese investments alone in Arab countries amounted to about \$150 billion by the beginning of 2020, concentrated in Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Iraq,<sup>5</sup> not to mention that the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) includes 12 Arab countries, whereas the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum constitutes a regulatory framework for Arab-Chinese relations.



## **Second: The Level of Arab Awareness of the Asian Theoretical Frame of Reference**

In light of these political, economic, military and social indicators, a question arises about the extent of Arab familiarity with Asia in general, and of the key powers in this continent, especially China, Russia, India and Japan in particular, in terms of their epistemology and values. Here we present the following problematic: Is this accelerated Asian development taking place without an intellectual framework that organizes and guides it? Is the political decision in these rising Asian powers isolated from both old and modern Asian intellectual theories? What are these theories? How do they see the world? How is political life philosophized? What are the solutions they present? What are their highest values?

In order to answer the previous questions, in-depth and specialized knowledge in this regard is necessary, but my observations on the syllabuses in political science departments in our Arab universities, and on publications issued by our Arab research centers in particular, and contemporary Arab political thought in general, reveals an insistence, voluntarily or involuntarily, to remain trapped in the cage of Western theories in our political literature. Yet with the rapid growth of the role of the Asian powers, especially China, Japan, India, and Russia, it has become necessary to identify the political intellectual orientations of these powers, in order to understand their future orientations towards the Arab world in particular and the world in general. Since one of the trends in contemporary international relations embraces the idea that the twenty-first century is an “Asian century,”<sup>6</sup> it is necessary to alert Arab researchers to two aspects, namely:

1. The theoretical framework of Asian thinkers, especially China, Japan, India and Russia, which we will pay attention to in this study.
2. The applied dimension, that is, studying the behaviour of these countries, especially towards the Arab region, in light of the Asian political literature, which we will study later.

## **Third: The Call to Pivot East in Israel**

A study by the Stroum Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Washington underscored the rapid growth in Israeli-Asian relations focusing on North Asia (Japan, South





Korea, and China) and South Asia (India, Vietnam, and Singapore). The study attributed the reasons for the Israeli pivot East to the following factors:<sup>7</sup>

1. “Garrison State Diplomacy,” which has been described by the researcher Jacob Abadi, meaning a state located in a hostile political territory region such as Israel. Such a state is keen to find a space outside this environment to enhance its recognition and break its regional isolation, in addition to investing in rising powers in the international system, which are Asian powers at this stage.

2. Improving the image of Jews in the Asian mind. In a previous study, we referred to the image of Jews in general and Israel in particular in the Japanese mind, and this image has roots that Israel seeks to uproot.<sup>8</sup>

3. Economic motives; Whereas 3 of the 7 largest economies in the world are located in Asia, and since China is Israel’s second largest trading partner after the US with a volume of \$15 billion, and since China is facing US restrictions, especially in technology, Israel needs to invest in all these aspects, not to mention the Israeli partnership in the BRI, which we covered in a previous study.<sup>9</sup> If we

add to this that Israel is the second biggest supplier of arms to China and India, and that in 2016 it joined the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment



Bank (AIIB) in addition to seeking to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, we can see how Israel may be tempted to plan to become a bridge between East and West, with all the resulting gains that it will employ in its struggle with its neighbours.

4. Comparing Western reactions to Israeli military operations in Gaza with Asian reactions, clearly indicates a decline in Asian interest in Israeli policies against the Palestinians, a matter that needs attention where Israeli studies and research guide the Israeli decision-maker in this direction. Here, there is a strategic question: Why did European public opinion become more interested in the Palestine issue, while Asian non-Islamic interest in it waned? This is what Israel seeks to cement further going forward.

#### **Fourth: Pivoting East and the Priority of Understanding the Asian Perspective on International Relations**

As is known, the development of political theory concerned with the internal dynamics of authoritarian organization predates the development of international relations theories concerned with external dynamics. While attempts to theorize international relations began as an academic discipline in 1919, the forces of globalization and the blurring of borders between the inside and the outside “hastened” the development of international relations theories. For many historical, economic and social reasons, Western theory became



**Christine Sylvester**

hegemonic, and the theory of international relations, as Christine Sylvester says, has become a white male dominated western theory, which echoes Martin White’s question; why is there no non-western theory for international relations?<sup>10</sup>

The study of the contemporary Asian, non-Islamic, perspective of international relations is a strategic matter needed to understand how to interact with this major international bloc. Without realizing this, the possibility of building a solid foundation for pivoting eastward becomes futile, whereas looking at the Asian rise through the Western value and knowledge system remains deficient. Therefore, it is necessary to see the Asian rise based on the peculiarity of the Asian epistemological and value system, which is what this study seeks to achieve, as follows:

##### **1. The Genealogy of the Asian Perspective on International Relations<sup>11</sup>**

In reviewing theories on Asian international relations, five major intellectual approaches can be identified. They set the framework in which to consider political problems, especially internal ones, given that the international perspective in its contemporary sense had not at the time sufficiently crystallized. However, these approaches have left their imprint on the later development of the Asian perspective on international relations. This calls for a return to these approaches in order to understand the framework of Asian knowledge with which we live these days.<sup>12</sup>

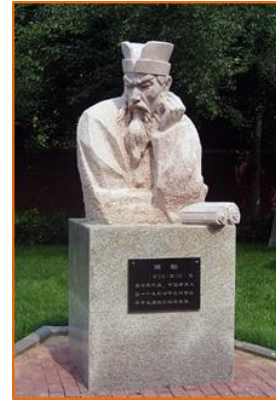
**The first theoretical framework: Daoism: Lao Tzu:** This framework emphasized the role that nature should play in any effective political theory. This philosophy is based on a critique of the pursuit of wealth and power, while



attempting to present a normative perspective aimed at providing a solution to alleviate these desires that Daoism describes as “unnatural.”

The second aspect of this school of thought is that it makes "self-education" a tool for enlightening political thought, and through freedom from self-tendencies.

**The second theoretical framework:** Is what is called legalism, which is embodied in Shang Yang's views. The followers of this school did not rely in their political theories on a normative basis, but on the world as it is. Accordingly, they sought to present a vision of how to establish strong and stable states without the need for a mass culture like the one demanded in Confucian political theory (and Daoism). Moreover, they have developed and argued for not only a comprehensive legal system, but also an extremely complex bureaucracy, realizing that the success of any political model does not depend on a single ruler, but on a stable system that can be implemented regardless of who is in charge.



Shang Yang

**The third theoretical framework:** Mohism: From which the Logicians branched out. This school paid attention to the meaning of concepts such as existence, time, place, etc., which made some call it the school of names. This theory was founded by Muzi in the 5th century BC, and calls for the necessity of individual piety and submission to the will of heaven, or Shangdi (supreme deity), and denounced the Confucian emphasis on rituals and ceremonies as a waste of government funds.

This perspective is based on what they call the state sequentialism, meaning that building a fair government requires providing material and moral needs of society through the development of education and knowledge for each individual, in contrast to the Confucian ethical ideal represented by the Ren (“Humanity” or “Charity”). This school distinguished between the private love of parents and the family, and the general love that is manifested towards others. The Mohists advocated manifesting love indiscriminately (Jianai). They attacked Confucianism, and especially Mencius for its orientations towards the concept of discriminatory love, and challenged the basis of Confucian family harmony, which was in fact the basis for the social harmony of the Confucian state.

But there were other schools like Yangism that focused on the importance of individual interests, and the Agrarians who focused on the values of equality.

**Fourth theoretical framework:** Besides this view there is the Japanese Shinto perspective. These ideas do not have a clear author. Generally, they do not believe



in the absolute, and they see that man is inherently good, and the mistakes he commits are only a result of the interference of evil spirits. The Shinto perspective promotes the idea of the divine origins of the emperors.

**The fifth theoretical framework:** the Hindu framework: About 82% of the population of India are Hindus, and here we find two levels of Hinduism: The Great Tradition and the Little Tradition. The first reflects the culture of 20% who are the upper class (Brahmanic Hinduism or Sanskrit), and these are divided into two currents, one of which is less attracted to Western culture and have strong suspicions of other minorities (especially Muslims). They represent the roots of the Indian nationalist movement, and they are the ones working to unify Hindu

movements and insist on excluding Muslims and others, and it is from them the current ruling party, Bharatiya Janata, emerged. The second movement is the closest to Western culture and to accepting other minorities, nevertheless the first is the strongest. The second level is for the lower caste (other than Brahman or Sanskrit), which includes



**Bharatiya Janata**

the poorer castes. But the most noticeable feature in both levels is that they are less “humanist” than Confucianism and Daoism, and the weakness of the Buddhist trend (the number of Buddhists in India is less than 9 million people out of about 1,350 million) does not change this picture much.

## **2. The Development of Asian Political Thought<sup>13</sup>**

**The first stage:** Asian political thought saw a great overlap between religious heritage and political heritage, especially in the period before contact with the West. The culture in that period was marked by the domination of the metaphysical dimension in Hinduism in India, while Buddhism constituted what can be considered a Protestant trend in Hinduism. Then came the Islamic influence, which began when Caliph ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan’s sent the first “envoy” of the Islamic state to Confucian China, at the time dominated by the duality of yin and yang, which expresses the dialectic of existence (through the contradiction between its components) and the hierarchical structure of society. This is in addition to the contributions of the Manchu family by adding a sacred character to the emperor and linking him to heaven. Here, it should be noted that the secular tendency in the



Chinese heritage is deeper than in the Indian heritage, as Confucius was not concerned with heaven, and it is noticeable that it was the upper classes who were most interested in linking the ruler to the divine.

In Japan, the Shinto Yamato class considered themselves deities, borrowing the organizational dimension of their society from Confucianism and Buddhism. They believed that the peaceful aspect (of daily life struggles) in particular, was left to women in some stages, while the status of the samurai and after them the Shogun (who represent militaristic tendencies) rose in certain stages, and that left a later impact, as we will see, on Japanese political thought.

**The second stage:** The period of subjugation to Western colonialism saw the beginning of the emergence of nationalism among Asians, most evidently in India, especially with the dominance of the English language. For example, the Indian writer, Rabindranath Tagore, won the Nobel Prize for novels he wrote in English, and the analysis of his novel “Home and the World” reveals that it favors acculturation with outside societies.<sup>14</sup> Foreign missionaries played a key role in cementing a culture that sought to mix the Bible with Hindu heritage, such as Brahmo Samaj, established by Keshab Chunder Sen (19th century). His movement faced many splits, but left a trace in deepening the rationalist perspective in Indian culture.

In China, despite the alternation of different movements in its cultural perspective, the constant return to the Confucian perspective is clear. In Japan, the greatest impact in curbing Western influence happened during the first period of so-called isolation that lasted 200 years with the rule of the Shogun, during which leaving and entering Japan was prohibited, foreign trade was banned, and missionaries were expelled (sometimes violently). Things remained that way until the reign of Emperor Meiji, who made the Western political, development and industrial model the standard for development until 1912. After the defeat of World War II, Japan knew the second period of so-called isolation, through self-retreat, restoring what the war destroyed, and getting rid of the effects of defeat.

It is necessary to clarify, after presenting the stages of evolution, before and after contact with the West, that this Asian heritage, and through its interaction with the West, engendered “Asia” as a geopolitical cultural concept seen through three main perspectives:<sup>15</sup>

1. The idea that Asia as a political entity has no meaning without Europe: This perspective is evident in the Asian literature that believes Asia is a geocultural concept that must be abandoned and linked to Europe, for example in the

discussions of the Japanese thinker Fukuzawa and his “theory of shedding Asia” which became popular in 1885.

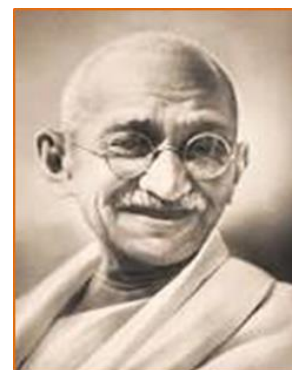
2. The idea of Asia has a sociological substance based on peasantry and nationalism, which was manifested in the domination of Narodism as an expression of the ideology that defends the peasants, and calls for the distribution of feudal property among them. This has been called the application of rural socialism in Russia (1861), in parallel with the attempt of Chinese President Sun Yat-sen in China to build a nation-state from 1913–1925.



**Sun Yat-sen**

3. The concept of Asia (as a geopolitical region) between the perspective based on the “Great Asianism” vision proposed by the Chinese revolutionaries, the Japanese vision of “East Asia or (TOYO),” and dealing with East Asia based on the theory of “New Regionalism.” The latter means freedom from broad pan-Asian association and focusing on Asian decentralization, while deepening interdependence between country units, without limiting it to economic and security ties, only along the lines of traditional regionalism.<sup>16</sup>

**The third stage:** The stages of independence (after World War II): Here we see two trends: the first is evident in Western influence and its continuation, which in India is manifested with the influence of the Fabian socialist movement on former Indian President Jawaharlal Nehru, the influence of Western democracy on Mahatma Gandhi, the influence of Marxism on Mao Tse-tung, and the radical change in the Japanese political system under the constitution imposed on Japan after its defeat in World War II. The second trend is represented by “Asian fundamentalism,” that is, adherence to the Asian historical perspective, while working to adapt it to the requirements of the current era.



**Mahatma Gandhi**

### **3. Modern Asian Theories of International Relations**

The Asian efforts in this aspect are evident as follows:<sup>17</sup>

**a. The contributions of Nishida Kitaro (1870–1945):** Kitaro is the most influential modern theorizer of international relations in the Japanese school, focusing on the role of religion, culture, extremism, ethics, and nationalism, in international relations and the behavior of government



**Nishida Kitaro**



systems. He can be considered the most important political philosopher in Japan in the pre-World War II period, while Western scholars place him among the founders of the constructivist perspective in contemporary international relations theories.

**b. Akamatsu Kaname (Japan) (1896–1974):** His focus was on the division of labor in regional systems through his theory of the Flying Geese Paradigm, which he had published in 1960 receiving wide resonance. The theory focuses on the role of the leader in restructuring production due to the contrast between world economies, and arranging the stages of regional political and economic development based on transformation in economic production. He relies in part of his theory on the Kondratiev theory, which we will refer to shortly. Kaname divided the flock of geese into four levels based on regional hierarchies determined by the levels of industrial development. It is evident from the shift in manufactured goods from the most developed to the least as follows: the leading goose (Japan), the new industrial economies: South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong; the ASEAN countries: Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia; and the fourth level the less developed group at the time, China, Vietnam, the Philippines, etc). The theory is based on the following assumptions:

- Increasing labor costs will push the leading country (Japan) to restructure its production.
- Because of the comparative advantages it has (at the global level), this country gradually shifts from labor-intensive production to capital-intensive production, with the former relocating to less developed countries that in turn begin to develop as a result. Perhaps one example is the textile industry that Japan left to other Asian countries, which in turn left it later, such as Korea and Taiwan, and turned towards the automobile and electronics industry, etc.
- Countries in the second tier (behind the leader) start exporting raw materials, then shift to primary manufacturing, then move to export, taking advantage of their comparative advantages.

**c. Shiratori Kurakichi (1865–1942):** Kurakichi is a Japanese historian and scholar, and one of the foremost pioneers in the field of “Oriental History.” He is a sociologist, who focused on what he called Oriental history, as he sought to prove that the Chinese civilization, the Yellow Emperor, is the most influenced by and an extension of the Babylonian civilization and the Mesopotamian civilization, which represents a continuation of the



**Shiratori Kurakichi**

Frenchman Lacouperie's theory. Kurakichi tried to reinforce the idea of a "historical Asia" in response to Fukuzawa's theory (to which I referred earlier).

**d. Asian theorizing in the scope of future studies:** Most postmodern and post-positivist theories focus on predicting from two aspects: future theories of international relations, and theories of future studies in political science. They are based on the central premise that if you know the laws of a phenomenon you can forecast its direction. Here we find the following Asian contributions:

- The long wave cycle theory of Nikolai Kondratiev, in which he predicted the collapse of communism and the survival of capitalism (1928). Many western universities have returned to this theory after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup>
- Soviet dissident Andrei Amalrik in his 1970 study "Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984," predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1984, noting that Mikhail Gorbachev took power in 1985 after which the series of collapse began.<sup>19</sup>



**Andrei Amalrik**



**Nikolai Kondratiev**

#### **4. Contemporary Asian Theories**

These theories are related to shifts in the internal structure of these Asian countries as follows:

**a. Pragmatist theories at the expense of ideological perspective: the example of China:<sup>20</sup>**

Until the 1990s, discussions in the Chinese political literature focused on the nature of the international system, and on the questions posed by Qin in 1978, namely:



- Do we view the international system from the angle of war and conflict, or from the angle of peace and development?
- Can China achieve its goals through integration into the international system or by competition and force?

The Chinese theory sought to achieve three strategic goals referred to in the theory of peaceful rise, which turned into the theory of peaceful development, formulated by the Chinese thinker Zheng Bijian as follows:

- Formulating an international system according to a pluralistic perspective.
- The transformation from a state seeking to change the existing international order, as was the case in the Mao Zedong period, to a state seeking integration into the existing order.
- China wants a special place in the international system worthy of its rise.

These trends were based on an intellectual perspective identified by two theories that prevailed in contemporary Chinese thought, after the death of Mao Zedong, namely:<sup>21</sup>

- The cage bird theory proposed by Chen Yun, which is based on the idea of not abandoning socialism, while deploying some capitalist mechanisms. That is, China should remain in the “cage of socialism” with the need to expand the space of the cage.

- The cat color theory, which was formulated by Lou Jiwei, which is an expression of the pragmatic tendency in China, in the post-Mao Zedong period. The color of the cat is not important, what’s important that it hunts mice. That is, what matters are economic and political results no matter what the “ideological color” is.



**Lou Jiwei**

These two theories were accompanied by nationalistic intellectual orientations, such as:

- Revival of the Chinese heritage since the reign of Xia (Hsia) (2200 BC), and the work on building more than one hundred national centers to accomplish this task.
- A change in curricula that reflects significant indicators; For example: replacing the interpretation of building the wall from repelling the invaders, to the tendency for national unity, and that the watch towers were to facilitate communication between the various Chinese groups.

### **b. Theories of the continuation of the Mercantile tendency: Japan:<sup>22</sup>**

After World War II, there were two important questions that defined the course of Japanese political thinking in international and domestic relations, namely: Why was Japan defeated? And how can Japan secure its interests in a highly polarized international system?

The answer was the shift towards topics such as: international trade, international political economy, international interdependence, international institutions, etc., and here discussions arose about:

- Is Japanese idealism responsible for the Japanese defeat, or does the responsibility rest on the shoulders of the militarism that dominated Japan at the time?
- Are Japanese interests best protected through alliance with the US, or by trusting in international institutions?
- Will the future be dominated by interdependence or by power politics?
- Will the Mercantile Policy, with a degree of pragmatism, lead Japan to the position it seeks?

### **c. Theories of a return to religious fundamentalism: India:<sup>23</sup>**

The theorizing of Indian international relations is based on a number of determinants:

- An assessment of India's role from independence to the early 1970s (especially the period of non-alignment).
- The dominance of Chinese and Pakistani regional threats strengthened the dominance of the security perspective in Indian thinking.
- Criticism of the Western perspective through some Indian literature, especially the studies of Ashis Nandy, has provided the opportunity for the Hindu Janata Party to emerge with a national perspective



**Ashis Nandy**

### **Asian models in contemporary theories:**

Asians are particularly involved in this field, and even have important propositions, which often contradict the core content of Western theories:<sup>24</sup>

1. Yaqing Qin Theory; Qin, who is a professor at the Chinese University of Foreign Affairs, is one of the foremost critics of Western theories of contemporary international relations. In his theory, he focuses on the role of cultural dimensions, especially the images that those interacting with each other store, in shaping the nature of international relations.

2. The theory of the Peaceful Rise, which was developed by Zheng Bijian and supported by The Global Convergence of Interests theory. Bijian is ranked 44th among the 100 most important thinkers in the world today. The theory is based on analyzing the relationship between “soft power and international peace” through the convergence of global interests, and not through traditional theories such as the balance of power or deterrence, etc.

3. For Russia, as we indicated at the beginning of this study (endnote 2 of this study), Lenin considered Russia an Asian country. We did not consider Soviet or pre-Soviet literature because it is well known to Arab researchers, however, contemporary Russian theorists such as Aleksandr Dugin—described by Westerners as the most influential thinker in Putin’s circle—deserves more attention from Arab researchers and policymakers, and his contributions are exemplified by his theories such as:<sup>25</sup>



**Aleksandr Dugin**

- a. The Fourth Political Theory (2009). This theory tries to integrate and transcend the theories of Marxism (class as the unit of analysis), liberalism (which makes the individual the unit of analysis), and fascism (which makes the state the basis). He focuses on the civil society alternative that transcends class, national affiliation, and individualism due to globalization, and proposes new perspectives about this.
- b. Eurasian Theory (1997) The Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia, in which the focus is on the Russian role in building alliances around Russia, such as with Iran and Muslim countries, and on employing oil and gas in adapting European policies, and strengthening ties with southern and central America.

4. Kenichi Ohmae:<sup>26</sup> It can be said that the theory of the end of the nation-state (globalization) was the most influential among the theorists of globalization, starting from Anthony Giddens, Roland Robertson, to Thomas Friedman. The theory of “the end of the nation-state” and the erosion of the concept of sovereignty is an extension of Ohmae’s theory of a world without borders that he developed in 1990 (Borderless World (1990)).

Ohmae’s main idea is that the organic interconnectedness of the world (i.e., technology, economic and financial interdependence, etc) dismantles the default interdependence (national, religious, cultural, etc.), thus destroying the basis of the nation-state that emerged from the post-Westphalian period since 1648. It states that regional blocs, on the one hand, and functional civil society organizations, on the other hand, have put international borders and the concept of sovereignty in a state of continuous decline.

5. Rejection of US hegemony in Asian affairs:<sup>27</sup> This movement is represented by Shintaro Ishihara and Akio Morita in Japan, and their study, “Japan That Can Say No,” focuses on severe criticism of US policy, with emphasis on the importance of employing Japanese soft power, such as technological superiority, educational level, and moral level in international relations and political negotiation with the central power, which is the US.



**Shintaro Ishihara**



**Akio Morita**

The Japanese study is consistent with a Chinese study written by a number of Chinese researchers, most notably Song Qiang, and has the same main title “China That Can Say No.” It is based on the idea of challenging the US specifically from the cultural angle, while getting rid of the feeling of inferiority towards it.

6. Advocacy for international acculturation:<sup>28</sup> This movement advocates reconciling global values with local Asian values in international relations theories, and drawing steps for international interaction on the basis of ensuring the preservation of Chinese cultural heritage. It advocates positive interaction with the developments of the times, on the one hand, and with the rise of China on the international stage, on the other hand. This was highlighted in the Chinese study by Hung Jen Wang published in 2013.

7. Indian subscription to the idea of preserving the historical character of society during interaction with international powers.<sup>29</sup> The studies of the Indian thinker Navnita Chadha Behera represent the most prominent example in this direction. Navnita tried to attribute the level of violence by any country in its relations with other countries to the cultural component and the historical identity of the community of that state, which is evident in her analysis of the historical heritage in five Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka). But Western theories constitute the theoretical frame of reference for Navnita's explanation of the phenomenon of violence, which reinforces what we previously indicated in terms of the depth of Western influence in India, in a way that surpasses other major Asian powers.

8. Although socialist studies initially criticized the theories and methods of future studies in political science (theories and not only methods), their popularity is increasing in Asia. Recall that the well-known future studies scholar Alvin Toffler was the first guest of the Four Modernizations group in China after the death of Mao Zedong. The contributions of Sohail Inayatullah, who works at Taiwan University, especially his 2008 study, *The Six Pillars: Future Thinking of Transformation*,<sup>30</sup> can be considered one of the most important contributions, besides his role in developing Causal Layered Analysis techniques in future studies.



**Sohail Inayatullah**

## **5. Common Features in the Current Asian Perspective:<sup>31</sup>**

From the previous presentation, it seems that the theories of Asian international relations have common features, in the literature on international relations in the central countries as follows:



a. Focusing much more than Western theories on the cultural dimensions (religion, nationalism, ethics, and arts) in the interpretation of international relations.

b. Attempting to employ soft power, contrary to the Western perspective, which is dominated by the perspective of hard power. It is noticed that the idea of soft power was circulated in traditional Asian literature before Joseph Nye's theory of leadership was put forward: *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* 1990. It turns out that most used term in four thousand Chinese scientific journals was the term "soft power." And increasingly since 2006, the Chinese have focused on the "role of intellectual heritage" as part of soft power, especially legitimacy and international morals, etc. This is clearly evident in the following:<sup>32</sup>

- The strong return of Confucianism: From the demolition of Confucius' home in an earlier period, to the opening of 516 cultural centers in the world bearing the name of Confucius by 2017, and planning to reach one thousand by the end of 2020.
- The return of Hinduism in India to the top of the political scene.
- The great response to the Japanese Ishihara studies that we referred to against the US.
- The influence of Alexander Dugin's writings, especially on the fourth political theory, on Russian thinking, which makes the Orthodox tradition one of its most important pillars.

c. The humanistic horizon in Asian theories is more pronounced than in the Western heritage, which is evident in the lack of clear distinction between what is international and what is local, and in making the unit of analysis predominantly in Western theory the individual. The focus in Asian theory is on communitarianism, as evidenced in the series of articles by Lee Kwan Yew, former prime minister of Singapore<sup>33</sup>.



Lee Kwan Yew

d. The Asian rise has a peaceful character, while the Western rise has an aggressive character, which explains the higher value of individualism in comparison to the Asian collective tendency. It is not possible to explain Western economic growth in isolation from direct or indirect colonialism, while the literature of the peaceful rise of Bijian forms the intellectual basis for the Chinese, Indian and Japanese recent rise. There is



confusion on this point on the Russian side, where the Russian thinker Alexander Dugin appears more belligerent in this aspect.

e. Comparing the Asian theory of non-alignment (and its African extensions) with the European concept of “neutrality” indicates an important difference between them ... Neutrality is a negative behaviour in which there is an individual tendency and narcissism, while non-alignment is positive, as an expression of a higher sense of responsibility towards others, as Nehru said.<sup>34</sup>

f. There is conflation between the content of the Western perspective in the theory of the center and the periphery developed by Immanuel Wallerstein in particular, and the perspective of Asian thought developed by Inoguchi in Japan or Yongjin Zhang in China, or Kanti Pajipia in India. The Western view here is based on a perspective of conflict (starting from Charles Darwin to Karl Marx to Sigmund Freud to Hans Morgenthau, etc.), while the Asian perspective is based on a metaphysical perspective whose goal is “harmony” between human beings, any human being regardless of color, class, nationality, etc., and the laws of the universe, including those related to human relations. This makes me argue that the eastern perspective has a tendency to soften Western (political) thought. But the Indian thinker that we referred to earlier (Navinita Chadha Behira) does not see the importance of proposing an Asian theory based on the desire to critique the Western perspective, saying, “I do not want my theory to be motivated by confronting the theory of the other.”

## **6. The Impact on Our Region: The Social and Political Phenomenon is not an Absolute Good or an Absolute Evil**

Dealing with social and political phenomena requires an awareness of them and the laws of their interactions. In addition to the common features that we have referred to in Asian thought, which can be used in favor of Arab issues, there are subjective tendencies in the countries of the Asian Center that seem more complex and negative, such as:

a. Hindu zealotry and its hostile stance towards Muslims and Arabs, despite Ram Mohan’s ideas in the 18th and 19th centuries on humanity and tolerance, the traditions of Hindu-Islamic conciliation of Guru Nanak, or the tendency to root all religions in Hinduism, such as in the views of Swami Vivekananda<sup>35</sup> and others.

b. China’s BRI implies a Mercantile tendency, and its early phases suggest it will militarize later.

c. The continuation of the mercantilism in Japanese politics.

d. The Russian view, through Dugin, to the Arab region as a protective belt against Western expansion.

Accordingly, pivoting east will not bring positive results to Arab countries except under three conditions:

a. Accurate knowledge of the intellectual framework of Asian thinking, which is something that Arab knowledge does not seem sufficiently familiar with yet, but rather improvisation prevails.

b. Increasing the percentage of Asian studies in Arab universities, and working to increase specialized Arab studies centers in Asia.

c. Utilizing commercial, political and historical relations, especially in the major Asian countries with Islamic minorities, to influence Asian stances towards Arab issues.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Report for Selected Countries and Subjects, site of international Monetary Fund, <https://www.imf.org/>; The 20 countries with the highest trade surplus in 2019, site of Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/256642/the-20-countries-with-the-highest-trade-surplus/>; Countries With Nuclear Weapons 2020, site of World Population Review, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-with-nuclear-weapons>; Number of operable nuclear reactors as of April 2020, by country, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/267158/number-of-nuclear-reactors-in-operation-by-country/>; and Houssain Kettani, "Muslim Population in Asia: 1950–2020," *International Journal of Environmental Science and Development*, no. 1, January 2010, pp. 136–142.
- <sup>2</sup> It may seem problematic in considering Russia an Asian country, as the coat of arms of Russia is an eagle with two heads, one looking at Asia and the other looking at Europe; moreover 77% of Russia's land mass is located in Asia, while 75% of the population (104 million) live in the European sector, compared to 36 million in Asia. While the capital Moscow in the European part, most of the raw resources are located in the Asian part, and the separation between the two parts is marked by the Ural Mountains or the Volga River. Yet Lenin considered Russia "without a doubt an Asian country." See Site of Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1912/jul/15.htm>; Alexander Lukin, "Russia between East and West: Perceptions and Reality," Paper presented at the Joint Session of the European Consortium for Political Research, Edinburgh, 28/3–2/4/2003, site of Brookings Institution, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/lukin20030328.pdf>; and Is Russia European or Asian ?, site of Russia Beyond, 19/1/2018, <https://www.rbth.com/arts/327309-is-russia-europe-or-asia>
- <sup>3</sup> William Buchanan and Hadley Cantril, *How Nations See Each Other: A Study in Public Opinion* (Urbana (Illinois): University of Illinois Press, 1953).
- <sup>4</sup> Nasser Saidi and Aathira Prasad, Background Note: Trends in trade and investment policies in the MENA region, MENA-OECD Working Group on Investment and Trade, 27–28/11/2018, <http://www.oecd.org/mena/competitiveness/WGTI2018-Trends-Trade-Investment-Policies-MENA-Nasser-Saidi.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> file:///C:/Users/marina/Downloads/CASCF5-1%20(1).pdf  
Site of Silk Road Briefing, <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2019/06/21/chinas-belt-road-initiative-middle-east/>
- <sup>6</sup> This idea dates back to 1924, when the German thinker Karl Haushofer predicted the 21st century would be dominated by Asia, specifically China, India, and Japan. See Hans Weigert, "Haushofer and the Pacific," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1942, p. 735. Also see recent studies on the same idea: Christopher Layne, The End of Pax Americana: How Western Decline Became Inevitable, *The Atlantic* magazine, 26/4/2012.
- <sup>7</sup> Sam Gordon, Israel in Asia? Why global trends are pushing Israel to "look east", site of Stroum Center for Jewish Studies, University of Washington, 25/4/2018, <https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/israel-hebrew/israel-in-asia-global-trends-israel-china-east/>
- <sup>8</sup> Walid 'Abd al-Hay, Japanese Public Opinion and Israel: A Phenomenon that Deserves Attention, site of al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 6/3/2020, [https://eng.alzaytouna.net/2020/03/06/political-analysis-japanese-public-opinion-and-israel-a-phenomenon-that-deserves-attention/#.XzZcL\\_MzbIU](https://eng.alzaytouna.net/2020/03/06/political-analysis-japanese-public-opinion-and-israel-a-phenomenon-that-deserves-attention/#.XzZcL_MzbIU)
- <sup>9</sup> Walid 'Abd al-Hay, Israeli Status in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative Project, al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 15/11/2019, <https://eng.alzaytouna.net/2019/11/15/political-analysis-israeli-status-in-the-chinese-belt-and-road-initiative-project/#.XzZkLfMzbIU>
- <sup>10</sup> Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge University Press, 1994), passim; and <https://www.scielo.br/pdf/cint/v40n2/0102-8529-cint-2018400200249.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> Kosuke Shimizu, *Critical International Relations Theories in East Asia: Relationality, Subjectivity, and Pragmatism*, IR Theory and Practice in Asia (Routledge, 2019), passim; Amitav Acharya, Theorising the international relations of Asia: necessity or indulgence, *The Pacific Review Journal*, April 2017, pp. 4–7; Benjamin Tze Ern Ho, "Chinese Thinking about International Relations From Theory to Practice," *Asia Policy Journal*, National Bureau of Asian Research, vol. 14, no. 3, July 2019; and site of The Jakarta Post, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2016/04/01/time-to-rethink-theories-of-international-relations-from-asian-and-african-perspectives.html>

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- <sup>12</sup> Prior to contact with Europe, Asia's ancient political thinkers included:
- Kautilya: Most Western thinkers link Kautilya (4th century BC) with Machiavelli (16th century). Kautilya addressed issues such as the foundations of political governance, political organization, financial aspects of governance, foreign policy, national defense, and warfare. He was also considered an ancient pragmatist of realpolitik, tackling issues like alliances and relations between countries and their near and far neighborhoods.
  - Confucius, who focused on ethical issues of politics. It is possible to say that Confucius is the first known human rights philosopher.
  - Sun Tzu (5th century BC), who focused on war strategies and planning. See "The Political Thought of Asia: A Contextual Pedagogical Essay," <https://sites01.lsu.edu/faculty/voegelin/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2015/09/Timothy-Lomperis.pdf>
- <sup>13</sup> "The Political Thought of Asia: Contextual Pedagogical Essay," <https://sites01.lsu.edu/faculty/voegelin/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2015/09/Timothy-Lomperis.pdf>; and David M. Jones, *The Metamorphosis of Tradition: The Idea of Law and Virtue in East Asian Political Thought*, Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science, vol. 21, no. 1, 1993, pp. 21–30.
- We find him trying to identify how Western values are adapted politically (democracy and human rights) and economically (capitalism), especially in light of the legalist and Confucian heritage mentioned earlier. See important details in: Daniel A. Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context* (Princeton University Press, 2006), *Passim*.
- <sup>14</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Al-Bayt wa al-Alam* (Home and the World), translated by Mary Shahrstan (Damascus: Syrian General Book Authority, 2011), see the analysis of Tagore and the novel from page 5 to 23.
- <sup>15</sup> Wang Hui, "The Politics of Imagining Asia: A Genealogical Analysis," Translated by Matthew. A Hale, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1–33; Pan-Asianism in Japan: 18th Century to Present, <https://ariseasia.blogspot.com/2011/04/pan-asianism-in-japan18th-century-to.html>; and Yumiko Iida, "Fleeing the West, Making Asia Home: Transpositions of Otherness in Japanese Pan-Asianism, 1905–1930," *Alternatives Journal*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1997, pp. 405–422.
- <sup>16</sup> Stephen Buzdugan, New regionalism, site of Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/new-regionalism>
- <sup>17</sup> Pierre Lavelle, "The Political Thought of Nishida Kitarō," *Monumenta Nipponica Journal*, vol. 49, no. 2, 1994, pp. 139–165; [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2294324](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2294324); and John S. Brownlee, *Japanese Historians and National Myths 1600–1945* (University of Tokyo Press, 1997), pp. 195–199.
- <sup>18</sup> This is evident in the study by Johan Galtung "On the Coming Decline and Fall of the US Empire" in 2004, in which he explained 14 structural contradictions in the USA, and predicted the collapse of the American empire (not the republic) and that it will no longer be a super power. He now predicts this will happen in 2020. He was clearly influenced by Kondratiev. See Johan Galtung, *On The Dialectic between Crisis and Crisis Perception*, Berlin, 1983, pp. 20–28.
- <sup>19</sup> Andrei Amalrik, *Will the soviet Union Survive Until 1984* (Harper & Row Publishers, 1970).
- <sup>20</sup> Benjamin Tze Ern Ho, "Chinese Thinking about International Relations From Theory to Practice"; and PAN Chengxin, "Peaceful Rise and China's new international contract: the state in change in transnational society," in Linda Chelan Li, *The Chinese State in Transition, Processes and contests in local China* (Routledge Studies on China in Transition, 2009), p. 129.
- <sup>21</sup> Walid 'Abd al-Hay, *Al-Makanah al-Mustaqbaliyyah lil Sin fi al-Nitham al-Duwali 1978–2010* (Future Status of China in the International System 1978–2010) (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Studies and Research, 2000), p.51. Also see Kerry Brown, China and the balance between sustainable growth and pragmatism, site of The Conversation, 17/7/2013, <https://theconversation.com/china-and-the-balance-between-sustainable-growth-and-pragmatism-16121>
- <sup>22</sup> Kazuya Yamamoto, "International Relations studies and theories in Japan: a trajectory shaped by war, pacifism, and globalization," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific Journal*, April 2011, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275386647\\_International\\_Relations\\_studies\\_and\\_theories\\_in\\_Japan\\_a\\_trajectory\\_shaped\\_by\\_war\\_pacifism\\_and\\_globalization](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275386647_International_Relations_studies_and_theories_in_Japan_a_trajectory_shaped_by_war_pacifism_and_globalization)
- <sup>23</sup> Muthiah Alagappa, "International Relations studies in Asia: distinctive trajectories," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Volume 11, Issue 2, May 2011, <https://academic.oup.com/irap/article/11/2/193/716935>
- <sup>24</sup> Yaqing Qin, *A Relational Theory of world Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 239–256.
- <sup>25</sup> <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2020/04/08/alexanders-dugins-neo-urasianism-in-putins-russia/>; and Kirill Kalinin, "Neo-Eurasianism and the Russian elite: the irrelevance of Aleksandr Dugin's geopolitics," *Post-Soviet Affairs Journal*, vol. 35, 2019, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1663050>





- <sup>26</sup> Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of Nation-State: the Rise of Regional Economies* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1995); and Kenichi Ohmae, *The Borderless World* (Harper Business, 1999).
- <sup>27</sup> Fei-Ling Wang, "Ignorance, arrogance, and radical nationalism: A review of China can say no," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 1997, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10670569708724272?journalCode=cjcc20>; and Shintaro Ishihara, *The Japan That Can Say No: Why Japan Will Be First Among Equals*, translated by Frank Baldwin (Simon & Schuster, 1991).
- <sup>28</sup> Hung-jen Wang, "Being Uniquely Universal: Building Chinese International Relations Theory," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 22, no. 81, 2013, pp. 518–534.
- <sup>29</sup> Navnita Chadha Behera, *International Relations in South Asia* (SAGE Publications India, 2008).
- <sup>30</sup> Sohail Inayatullah, "Six pillars: futures thinking for transforming," foresight, vol. 10, no. 1, 2008, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/196f/36b4b630776f971bf94c94cca025f1643b7a.pdf>; and [https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/3683509/Inayatullah\\_Causal\\_layered\\_analysis.pdf?response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DCausal\\_layered\\_analysis\\_Poststructuralis.pdf&Expires=1597477651&Signature=D9yhMZgnyq1xXM3jjdG1TR6VURbl3P3VhmA1ueY3R5Zsx0QqnHkXHV-WGGVsudTgewslawCbiQhIvIBhnBAi~revb2wqv~YJ3NPWReCV-of5wFXjGyV3SA6pPKaGemN9EOVt46RymlySPpTa0xnqrW0ja-VNK3NtCjSJRPOmIuYYz-h5JLja5hk~OjPtqjLZdq~CsVGyrYIBLxxqfkoL-aTO3OHq1Af8ELCnseWALqc0Z9w~eloU6p2asheYgsvZfXjc7ZluxGzisM4mcJK7gfhNPYO3zreUF9nP99vk0GYbFnih1Trl838g9rqpLeEpkuEyB9sk2nH5pB6WOaWQw\\_\\_&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA](https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/3683509/Inayatullah_Causal_layered_analysis.pdf?response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DCausal_layered_analysis_Poststructuralis.pdf&Expires=1597477651&Signature=D9yhMZgnyq1xXM3jjdG1TR6VURbl3P3VhmA1ueY3R5Zsx0QqnHkXHV-WGGVsudTgewslawCbiQhIvIBhnBAi~revb2wqv~YJ3NPWReCV-of5wFXjGyV3SA6pPKaGemN9EOVt46RymlySPpTa0xnqrW0ja-VNK3NtCjSJRPOmIuYYz-h5JLja5hk~OjPtqjLZdq~CsVGyrYIBLxxqfkoL-aTO3OHq1Af8ELCnseWALqc0Z9w~eloU6p2asheYgsvZfXjc7ZluxGzisM4mcJK7gfhNPYO3zreUF9nP99vk0GYbFnih1Trl838g9rqpLeEpkuEyB9sk2nH5pB6WOaWQw__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA)
- <sup>31</sup> G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 213–243.
- <sup>32</sup> Hongying Wang & Yeh-Chung Lu, "The Conception of Soft Power and its Policy Implications: a comparative study of China and Taiwan," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 17, no. 56, 2008, pp. 425–447.
- <sup>33</sup> Mark Richard Thompson, "Whatever Happened to "Asian Values"?" *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2001, pp. 155–164.
- <sup>34</sup> Dilip Mohite, "Ideological Foundations of Nehru's Non-alignment," *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 53, no. 1, 1992, pp. 24–33.
- <sup>35</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20120330175816/http://www.belurmath.org/swamivivekananda.htm>