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Occidentalism and plural modernities: or how Fukuzawa and Tagore invented the West

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Abstract. The conflation of the West with modernity is being challenged by new critical interventions on the themes of 'occidentalism' and 'plural modernities'. In this paper I bring these themes together into an account of the way the idea of the West has been employed and deployed in the construction of non-Western modernities. This is done in the company of two important figures in the articulation and invention of the West, the Japanese 'Westerniser' Fukuzawa Yukichi and the Indian poet and advocate of spiritual Asia Rabindranath Tagore. Fukuzawa and Tagore developed contrasting narratives both of the West and of Asia, narratives which they employed to express novel and distinctive visions of the nature of modern life.

Introduction

In this paper I illustrate and assert the centrality of stereotypes of the West in the development of 'non-Western' modernities. Thus I bring together two themes—occidentalism and plural modernities—that have emerged over the last dozen years or so to challenge tautological uses of the phrase 'Western modernity'.

I shall be drawing on the work of two influential interpreters of the West—the Japanese 'Westerniser' and nationalist Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834 – 1901) and the Indian poet and advocate of spiritual Asia Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941)—to show how contrasting stereotypes of the West (and Asia) have been employed to articulate novel and distinctive narratives of modernity. The West that I will be portraying is a project fashioned outside the West. Far from being presented as the world's primordial modern identity, it is found to be an idea produced elsewhere: an idea whose meaning and use reflect both geographically particular intellectual lineages and the wider global context of European imperial authority.

Some British readers may remember John Roberts's *The Triumph of the West*. It was a magisterial BBC television series and book which traced the familiar story of the West's continuous and ever more complete domination. The last line of Roberts's book sums up both the direction of Roberts's argument and one of the central clichés of our era: "the story of western civilisation is now the story of mankind" (1985, page 431; see also Fukuyama, 1992; Mandelbaum, 2002). This paper contributes to a transposition of Roberts's terms. I will be showing that it is more accurate to say that 'Western civilisation is now one of the stories of mankind'. This approach should not be construed as a demotion of the idea of the West. In fact, it represents an assertion of its importance. That the idea of 'the West' was central to the different versions of modernity offered by Fukuzawa and Tagore is indicative of the mutually constituting nature of occidentalisms and modernities the world over.

After introducing contemporary debate on occidentalism and plural modernities, this paper falls into two main parts. Two contrasting accounts of the relationship between occidentalism and 'non-Western' modernity are presented. I begin by addressing the way images of the West (and Asia) were employed by Fukuzawa in order to sustain a vision of Japanese modernity. More specifically, I show that Fukuzawa saw

the West as both forcing and enabling a rationalist and meritocratic revolution in Japanese society, processes that reflected and necessitated a striving for national independence and nationalist consciousness. Fukuzawa's nationalist modernity contrasts sharply with the antinationalist, spiritual modernity depicted in the next part of the paper. Here I explore how Tagore employed and deployed stereotypes of the West in order to fabricate and promote an 'Asian consciousness' and an Asian pathway through the modern. I also take the opportunity to challenge directly the ubiquitous assumption that the idea of Asian spirituality is, simply or largely, a product of Western orientalism. That the modernity of Tagore is not a borrowed device is reaffirmed in a final subsection, where the reflexive aspects of both his own attitude and his social milieu are identified.

The West emerged as a central concept in Western Europe towards the end of the 19th century (Bonnett, 2003; GoGwilt, 1995). However, in other parts of the world it was already a familiar idea. Indeed, the idea of the West had been debated in Russia, in East Asia, and in the Middle East for at least a century before it entered into the West's own lexicon of key geopolitical categories (Bonnett, 2002a; 2002b; 2004; Neuman 1996; 1999). Thus Jalal Al-e Ahmad, summarising the long tradition of Islamic and Iranian interest in the West, expresses a wider history when he notes that "It appears from history that we have always been watching the West." Al-e Ahmad adds, "We used the term 'western' before foreigners called us 'eastern' " (1982, page 11). As this implies, to appreciate how and why the East invented the West it is not necessary to construct some ironic, deconstructive device through which Eastern agency can be read between the lines of Western texts. Rather than focusing on how the 'marginalised' and 'silenced' interrupt the discourse of the dominant West, it is often illuminating to do something a little more obvious, such as read non-Western accounts of the West. In fact, the former approach perpetuates a misleading vision of Western centrality. Western occidentalism and orientalism neither exhaust nor define the modern geographical imagination. This argument leads us to another, closely related, position. For when addressing Fukuzawa's and Tagore's occidentalism we must also confront the ubiquitous assumption that the idea of Asia can be described as a Western invention. "Simply put", says Ravi Palat (2002, page 687), "Asia's unity derives from, and derives only from, its historical and contemporary role as Europe's civilizational other." As the Finnish linguist Pekka Korhonen notes in his account of the complex roots of the term 'Asia', the "modern reader, whose thinking has been influenced by Edward Said's concept of Orientalism" (2002, page 254), tends to seize upon proof of Western hegemony wherever she or he looks. A more balanced analysis suggests that to claim that the idea of 'Asia' is a mere parasitic offshoot of the West is both misleading and Eurocentric. Indeed, as Tagore's work illustrates, 'Asianist' discourse shows a persistent tendency, especially in the first fifty years of the 20th century, to define itself not as a fixed, inverted image of the West but as a mobile site of solidarity and as a transcendence of the West. Fukuzawa, who wished Japan to say 'goodbye' to Asia and join the West, had a very different agenda. However, his 'Asia' along with his 'West' were, like Tagore's, products of a specific, regional spatial narrative that cannot be reduced to an account of Western power.

Occidentalism and plural modernities

To judge by the sudden eruption of new work on the topic, occidentalism is an idea whose time has come. For Western scholars it would be convenient to imagine that what we are witnessing is an evolution of something familiar, namely Edward Said's theory of orientalism. It could then be supposed that a focus on the West's construction of the East is now being supplemented, or merely footnoted, by an interest in

constructions of the West. Yet, on closer inspection, occidentalism is too politically, historically, and geographically heterogeneous and important to be rendered in this manner. More specifically, the assumption that the critique of Western orientalism produced or predates the critique of occidentalism in each and every part of the world is erroneous. This is to argue not that such a lineage does not exist but that it is geographically specific. It is, unsurprisingly, most clearly seen in those places where Said's work had the greatest impact and about which he had the most to say, namely the West and the Middle East. In the West, Said's concern to generate a critique of the West's dominant geographical vision has been consciously extended to arrive at a critique of occidentalism defined as a Western project of self-invention (GoGwilt, 1995; Nadel-Klein, 1995; Venn, 2000). Thus, for Fernando Coronil (1996, page 57), "Occidentalism [must] be unsettled as a style of representation that produces polarised and hierarchical conceptions of the West and its Others." Christopher GoGwilt's (1995) 'genealogy of the West' provides the historical detail demanded of such a project. Calling attention to the 'invention of the West' in the mirror of the Bolshevik revolution and postcolonial aspiration, he notes that "The rhetorical force of the term 'the West' "

> "draws not only from the reconstruction of European history refashioned in the inverted image of Russian history, but also from the construction of a European history articulated in response to and within the specific contexts of a whole range of non-European cultural histories" (page 236).

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) has also instigated a debate on occidentalism in Arabic. The most substantial work to date has been the Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi's *Muquaddima fi 'ilm al-istighrab* [Introduction to the science of occidentalism] (1991). Hanafi views occidentalism as a new science of liberation. He explains that "Occidentalism is a discipline constituted in Third World countries in order to complete the process of decolonization" (1995, page 354). Hanafi's aim is to study and, hence, to objectify the West in order to enable a clearer sense of an independent Islamic (more specifically, Arab Muslim) sense of 'self'. However, Said's role as paterfamilias for Arab occidentalism is easily exaggerated. The critique of the West, more specifically those critiques of the occident that aim to affirm an Arab and Muslim identity, has a complex heritage in the Middle East—including Islamist and left-Islamic currents (for example, Qutb, 1990; Shariati, 1980). This heritage has not been lost on many readers of Hanafi. Drawing these critical voices together Yudian Wahyudi accuses Hanafi of accepting orientalist dualism, of Arab ethnocentrism, and of ignoring the basic fact that

> "making Western thought an object of study, as does the *Muquaddima*, does not amount to establishing a new science, since university and public libraries are full of studies of Western schools of thought. In this regard, [Hanafi's] 'Occidentalism' … constitutes more of a type of ideologically-based preaching than a 'science' " (Wahyudi, 2003, page 242).

Wahyudi's remarks remind us of the diverse heritage of occidentalism. They are also suggestive of the possibility of less reductive approaches than Hanafi's. Indeed, new work on the idea of the West from scholars across Afro-Asia evidences little interest in constructing negative images of the West. Rather it insists on the importance of studying non-Western representations of the West in their own right, as both intrinsically important and possessing a degree of autonomy from Western global hegemony. English-language examples that reflect this perspective include studies of the development of stereotypes of the West in China (Chen, 1995; Ning, 1997; Song, 2000), Sri Lanka (Spencer, 1995), Egypt (Al-Ali, 2000), Japan (Creighton, 1995; Hutchinson, 2001), and Iran, (Tavakoli-Targhi, 1990; 2001). All these contributions build on a large, yet scattered and specialised literature of how the West has been viewed around the world (for example, Aizawa, 1986; Chang, 1970; Hay, 1970; Hirth,

1966; Siddiqi, 1956; Teng and Fairbank, 1979). Yet although individual contributions from this earlier body of work, such as Stephen Hay's (1970) study of Tagore's visions of East and West, remain unsurpassed, the critical focus of the emerging trajectory within occidental studies is distinctive. More specifically, what is exciting about this work is its concern with the political and social *uses* and *deployment* of occidentalism in the context of non-Western forms of modernity, as well as its emphasis on the mutually constitutive nature of Western and non-Western identities.

The Chinese social scientist Sun Ge has made a particularly explicit attempt to refocus debates on orientalism onto the Asian use of ideas of East and West. "In the hands of the Asians", she notes, orientalism "is not positioned against the Western world from the perspective of the East, but rather against an image of the West constructed in Asia" (Sun, 2000, page 14). What is being described by Sun is not Sadik al-'Azm's (1981, page 19) "orientalism in reverse", in which Easterners succumb to "the dangers and temptations of applying the readily available [that is, Western] structures, styles and ontological biases of Orientalism upon themselves and upon others". Sun's analysis does not posit, empirically or theoretically, either orientalism or occidentalism as inherently Western devices. Whilst al-'Azm assumes a primacy and determining power for Western conceptions of the West and its others, Sun's point—which is endorsed in the following case studies—is that 'the West' can be seen as having multiple sites of creation: there is no urtext of occidentalism.

These debates exceed the concerns and canon of the greater part of postcolonial studies. An interest in occidentalism and the Western reification of modernity in its own image does, however, find overlaps with the lively postcolonial debate on non-Western uses of nationalism. Thus, for example, an interest in the paradoxes of using something 'foreign' to assert something 'indigenous' animates Partha Chatterjee's (1986) and Xiaobing Tang's (1996) examination of non-Western nationalism. Tang's work on nationalism in China identifies how it enforced 'subordination' to a European linear and Eurocentric view of modernity, whilst enabling a new Chinese national and global imagination to form, thus "reassert[ing] space in cognitive principle" (page 232). Thus Tang concurs with Chatterjee's point that,

> "Nationalist thought, in agreeing to become 'modern', accepts the claim to universality of this 'modern' framework of knowledge. Yet it also asserts the autonomous identity of national culture. It thus simultaneously rejects and accepts the dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture" (1986, page 11).

Chatterjee's and Tang's concern with ambivalence in respect to the West, a concern with being 'inside and outside' Western modernity, is of immense value. However, if one starts one's investigations with an interest in the way the idea of the West has been employed and deployed around the world, a wider panorama of 'non-Western' agency also comes into view. As the mimetic problematic recedes, the status of Fukuzawa and Tagore as peripheral to Western modernity comes to seem less important than their ability to put the idea of the West to work to help shape the social and political projects to which they were committed.

This brings me to those emergent scholarly traditions that are seeking to pluralise modernity. There remain, at least, four pathways within this body of work. One pathway, and of least relevance to our enquires here, is the attempt by Scott Lash and others to deconstruct Western modernity and show its inner tensions and diversity (1999; see also Featherstone et al, 1995). The other three approaches—namely alternative modernities, coeval modernities, and multiple modernities—each seek to break the equation between the West and modernity. They share a desire to move away from a myopic focus on 'how the West made the modern world' and interrogate other sites of modernity. Something can be learned from each of these approaches.

However, although echoes of each will be found later in this paper, it is within the notion of 'coeval modernities' that I have found the most productive points of emphasis.

'Alternative modernities' is the approach best known within postcolonial studies. The term 'alternative' chimes with the emphasis that postcolonial studies has come to place on the transgressive and subversive nature of the non-Western encounter with the West. Thus the Afro-modernity portrayed by Paul Gilroy (1993) and Michael Hanchard (1999) is a countercultural phenomenon, a product of African agency operating through but in opposition to a hegemonic Western modernity. An emphasis on oppositionality has come to mark both the distinctiveness and the limits of the alternative modernity perspective. The iron cage of 'oppositionalism' locks these authors into a permanently subordinate relationship with Western modernity. Their political stance acerbates the contrast with protagonists of 'multiple modernities'. Indeed, it may be indicative that contributors to the alternative modernities and multiple modernities approaches tend not to engage or acknowledge the existence of the work of each other. There was, for example, no cross-referencing of either scholars or scholarship between the special issue of *Public Culture* (1999) on 'alter/native modernities' and the one of *Daedalus* (2000) on multiple modernities. Indeed, the postmodern radicalism of *Public Culture* and the academic traditionalism of *Daedalus* may be taken to reflect the different institutional basis of the two approaches.

Through a series of wide-ranging comparative historical studies, Shmuel Eisenstadt has helped to establish the concept of 'multiple modernities' in contemporary historical sociology (Eisenstadt, 1999; 2000; Sachsenmaier et al, 2002). One of the most useful aspects of Eisenstadt's contribution has been his attention to the way the cultural reinscription of modernity around the world illuminates aspects of and tensions within modernity that have been neglected in Western-focused studies. Thus, for example, Eisenstadt addresses the way, in all modern societies, 'collective identities' become denaturalised and are "foci of contestation and struggle" (2000, page 7). An interest in this process allows us to see how the inventive power of Fukuzawa and Tagore, with regard to ideas of both 'the West' and 'Asia', is testament to their modern sensibility. Other characteristically modern themes that Eisenstadt emphasises are the conflict between "human autonomy and the restrictive controls inherent in the institutional realization of modern life" (page 8) and the politicisation of previously undisturbed class, ethnic, and other "centre – periphery relations" (page 6).

However, the multiple modernities school must also be seen as part of a longer tradition of comparative studies of civilisation, a tradition presided over by Arnold Toynbee. This pedigree is strengthened by Eisenstadt's identification of Western civilisation as the origin of modernity and of civilisations as having religious cores (cores which provoke different pathways through modernity). These preoccupations have interesting echoes with a variety of popular renditions of the desire to break the link between modernity and Westernisation. The ideas that 'civilisation' is a useful category of analysis and that civilisations have religious cores, combined with a critique of the West's claims on modernity, are all central to Samuel Huntingdon's *The Clash of Civilisations* (1997). A possible correlation between the rise to public prominence of this kind of thinking and the emergence of a 'post-9/11' geopolitical sensibility is suggested by even more recent interventions, such as Roger Scruton's (2002) *The West and the Rest* and John Gray's (2003) *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern*. For both the conservative (Scruton) and the liberal intellectual (Gray), it is time the West moved beyond its traditional, jealous claim on the ownership of modernity.

In the context of the mutual indifference of those writing about alternative and multiple modernities, it is particularly valuable that the Japanese-studies specialist Harry Harootunian appears cognizant of both traditions and, more importantly, has

arrived, largely independently, at a third approach, which he calls 'coeval' (that is, coevolving and coexisting) modernities. Harootunian is particularly critical of the alternative modernities thesis. He casts it as an attempt to demote non-Western modernity to the status of mere resistance. In *Overcome by Modernity*, a book which unpacks Japanese intellectuals' engagements with modernity in the 1920s and 1930s, Harootunian (2000) attacks

> "new, often outrageous classifications like 'alternative modernities' or retroactive modernities differentiated from the temporality of the modern West which … allows us to safely situate societies like Japan in a historical trajectory derived from another's development" (page xvi).

Harootunian's coeval modernity refuses the lexicon of resistance as inadequate to the task of properly critiquing and understanding the different forms of non-Western modernity. In part, this critique reflects a difference in intellectual starting point. 'Alternative modernities' inevitably starts from what it *must* posit as the *mainstream* or *normal* modernity of the West. By contrast, 'coeval modernities' starts from an interest and knowledge of those societies whose production of modernity is to be traced. At the same time, and as the term suggests, 'coevalists' insist on setting any particular modern form within a global and relational setting. As Horootunian notes, "Japan's modernity … [was] an inflection of a larger global process that constituted what might be called co-existing or co-eval modernity" (page xvi).

The idea of coeval modernities also disrupts the emphasis on cultural essence and religious roots that propels the advocates of multiple modernity to be so concerned with locating civilisational units. Harootunian summarises coevolving modernity as follows:

> "What co-eval suggests is contemporaneity yet the possibility of difference. Thinkers and writers responded to Japan's modernity by describing its as a doubling that imprinted a difference between the new demands of capitalism and the market and the force of received forms of history and cultural patterns" (page xvii).

Horootunian's depictions are sustained by the exploration of the modern thought of Fukuzawa and Tagore. In each case, we find distinct pathways towards a form of modernity that can only be understood as having been produced from regional traditions developing within a global scene where the West is both a major (but not all-powerful) force and an evolving idea that is employed and deployed to structure different aspirations towards the modern.

The uses of the West

Throughout the world there are certain clichés about the West that have come to play an important role in the formation of national and pan-national 'non-Western' identities. The supposed individualism and materialism of the West, along with its secular and instrumental culture, are some of the better-known characteristics identified in almost every corner of the globe. By using the capitalised term 'Civilisation' as a synonym for the West, and lower-case 'civilisation' to denote other, nonhegemonic, traditions, Prasenjit Duara makes the following observation of the 'basic' use of the West in Asia:

> "The basic approach involved combining elements that are (a) identical to and (b) the binary opposite of the constituents of Civilisation. One strategy is to rediscover elements identical to Civilised society within the suppressed traditions of civilisation: Confucian rationality, Buddhist humanism, Hindu logic, and so on. Another strategy identifies the opposite of the West in Asian civilisation: 'peaceful' as opposed to 'warlike', 'spiritual' as opposed to 'material', 'ethical' as opposed to 'decadent', 'natural' as opposed to 'rational', 'timeless' as opposed to 'temporal', and more.

> Finally, the nation authorizes its opposition to imperialist Civilisation by synthesizing or harmonizing the binaries after the equivalence has been established. Thus Western materialism will be balanced by Eastern spirituality and modernity redeemed" (2001, page 108).

Duara is arguing for an appreciation of the dialectics of modern regional identities. This model usefully highlights the interaction of conflicting visions of the West. However, dialectics has its own momentum, one that tends to obscure the jagged and unresolvable nature of different representations of the West. More specifically, Duara's approach neglects the utility of different representations of the West for different social groups. What may be functional to the sustainability of the national unit is not necessarily an appropriate focus in the context of social and political struggle over the idea of the West—struggle that is unlikely to produce a clear synthesis.

A similar point may be made about attempts to frame non-Western uses of the West within the terminology of hybridity. Like dialectics, hybridity is a model with its own logical momentum. It suggests the mating of two distinct stocks to create a partially original third form. The racial and breeding connotations of hybridity are critiqued historically by Robert Young (1995). Homi Bhabha (1994), who is often associated with the contemporary currency of the term, tries to distance himself from such interpretations by insisting

> "that colonial authority is not a *problem* of genealogy or identity between two *different* cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism. Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition" (page 114, emphasis in original).

However, this deconstructive emphasis does not resolve the problem of either the political or the logical momentum of hybridity theory, which privileges the original, defining power of the West. I will not be labeling either Fukuzawa and Tagore as hybrid thinkers. Such a categorisation would mislead by insinuating that, relative to Western intellectuals, these men were imitative and secondary. It would also encourage an unhelpful a priori politicisation of their work, implying that what is most interesting about Fukuzawa and Tagore is their role as cultural emancipators and transgressors. In this way, the social and political particularities that need to be understood in order to make sense of Fukuzawa and Tagore would be displaced by a flattening and homogenising emphasis on the achievement of hybridity.

Fukuzawa Yukichi: occidentalism and nationalist modernity

Fukuzawa Yukichi is the most well-known and influential of the 19th-century Japanese Westernisers. Born in 1834, as a child Fukuzawa studied *rangaku* (Dutch learning) at school in Nagasaki, at a time when the Dutch were the only Westerners allowed even limited entry into the country. In 1862 he was part of the Takenouchi mission to the West, the first of a series of official Japanese investigations of Western society, industry, and economic development. His glowing account of what he saw was published in 1866 (see Fukuzawa, 1958) and became an immediate bestseller. Fukuzawa later wrote the primary school textbook, *World Geography* (1959 [1869]), which drew on similar material and explicitly placed Europe at the centre of world civilisation.

One indication of Fukuzawa's influence is that between 1866 and 1878 all nine of the bestselling books in Japan were either Western translations or about the West, and the latter were popularly referred to as 'Fukuzawa books'. Fukuzawa is also credited with writing "a crucial text that marks the beginning of modern thinking in Japan" (Sakamoto, 1996, page 116). This work is *An Outline of a Theory of Civilisation*.

It was published in 1875 (Fukuzawa, 1973; see also Fukuzawa, 1934 [1898]; 1969 [1872 – 1876]; 1985; 1988) and is Fukuzawa's most substantial intervention on the nature and meaning of the West.

In *An Outline of a Theory of Civilisation* Fukuzawa identifies 'the West' (a term he tends to equate with Western Europe) with civilisation and suggests that Japan must reinvent itself as Western for the sake of its own future. His message was uncompromising: merely copying the exterior or superficial aspects of Western civilisation was not enough.

> "we must not import only the outward forms of civilisation, but must first make the spirit of civilisation ours and only then adopt its external forms .... The cornerstone of modern civilisation will be laid only when national sentiment has thus been revolutionised, and government institutions with it. When that is done, the foundations of civilization will be laid, and the outward forms of material civilization will follow in accord with a natural process without special effort on our part, will come without our asking, will be acquired without our seeking. This is why I say that we should give priority to the more difficult side of assimilating European civilization. We should reform men's minds, then turn to government decrees, and only in the end go out to external things" (Fukuzawa, 1973 [1875], pages 17 – 18).

As this passage suggests, the survival of Japanese traditional culture was of little significance to Fukuzawa. This is not because he regarded 'Japaneseness' as unimportant but, rather, because, in the context of expanding and predatory Western global ambitions, he identified 'backward-looking' cultures as doomed. Thus, in contrast to the far more fragile and novel sense of national identity being developed by Westernisers in other 'non-Western' societies (for example, by Ziyâ Gökalp in Turkey; see Gökalp, 1981), Fukuzawa did not bracket off the country's 'inner spirit' as an untouchable and defining essence. The only essence he was concerned to protect was that of national independence, something that Japan had kept "intact from earliest antiquity" (Fukuzawa, 1973 [1875], page 27), but which was now under threat from Western imperialism and required a drastic social revolution to retain.

For Fukuzawa, "sweeping away blind attachment to past customs and adopting the spirit of Western civilization" (page 28) was the only way of ensuring national independence. This would allow Japan to "enter the realm of vital intellectual activity" and harness "the intellectual power of the whole nation" (page 28). Thus Fukuzawa argued that a shift away from blind loyalty to the imperial line would enable a more active national community. Within this community the allocation of rewards and responsibilities would be a matter not of custom or inheritance but of individual merit. The characteristic of the West that most excited Fukuzawa's enthusiasm was its open, transparent, and rational system of social advance. It is an enthusiasm that draws us into consideration of the way Fukuzawa's idea of the West reflected the aspirations of a rising middle class in Japan.

Fukuzawa shared with many other, contemporaneous Westernisers around the world a social background of educated middle-class exasperation. In his autobiography (1934), he identifies his position "in a family of low rank" (it was low samurai) as creating the conditions for his "discontent" (page 189) and "naïve dislike of oppression" (page 199). Indeed, Fukuzawa's constant theme in *An Outline of a Theory of Civilisation* is merit and intelligence: more specifically, the need for Japan to be run on the basis of education rather than lineage. 'Tradition' is identified with the fetters of feudalism and the West is represented as meritocratic in social structure and critical in disposition. "If we seek the essence of Western civilisation", he notes, "it lies in the fact that they scrutinise whatever they experience with the five senses, in order to discover its essence and its functions" (page 111). Fukuzawa paints a portrait of intellectual and

academic enquiry occurring "right down to the remotest village" in the West. "This process is repeated many times" he adds, "in the end, a national opinion takes shape" (page 79). Thus, for Fukuzawa, the West does not contain cleverer people but values clever people more. In Japan

> "the people who felt [the need for meritocracy] were leading inconspicuous lives as doctors or writers, or were to be found among the samurai in this han or that, or among Buddhist monks and Shinto priests. All of them were learned men who could not realize their ambitions in society" (page 65).

Thus the West is used as a tool and as a model to promote the redistribution of power between the traditional elite and an aspirational class. This class agenda also animated another ambition in Fukuzawa: to introduce the concept of personal competition and the ideology of capitalist entrepeneuralism into Japanese society. Indeed, the common identification of Fukuzawa as the intellectual founding father of Japanese entrepenurialism and capitalism (Tamaki, 2001) reflects the continuing salience of an image of 'the West' as a force and a social template able to release the pent-up energies of the dynamic, middle classes.

Goodbye Asia

Fukuzawa did not develop his ideas simply in terms of an opposition between Japan and the West. He constantly referred to China and Asia in order to articulate his position. Although his usage was not consistent, Fukuzawa tended to cast both China and Asia as the opposites of the West whilst placing Japan as more capable of assimilating Western civilisation. In terms of the structure of Fukuzawa's argument, China has as important a role in *An Outline of a Theory of Civilisation* as the West. It is China that is represented as static and passive; it is China that is cast as hopelessly archaic and vulnerable to national humiliation. Where these attributes are located in Japan they are cast as stemming from the age-old domination of Japanese culture by China.

The following passage exemplifies this 'othering' of China, as well as hinting at the aggressive and nationalistic foreign policies that Fukuzawa's work was later taken to condone.

> "Such phrases as 'be gentle, modest, and deferring to others', or 'rule by inaction', or 'the holy man does not have ambition' … all refer to inner states which in the West would be described as merely 'passive'. … The Chinese Classics, of course do not teach only this kind of passive virtue. Some passages imply a more dynamic frame of mind. However, the spirit which breathes throughout those works stirs up in people an attitude of patient endurance and servility" (Fukuzawa, 1973 [1875], page 79).

For Rumi Sakamoto (2001, page 149), Fukuzawa may be identified as holding "Western racialist-Orientalist images" of China. However, the notion that Fukuzawa's vision of Asia was a mere repetition of a master discourse of East and West disseminated from the West is inadequate. 'Asia', 'the East', and 'the West' were ideas already in circulation in Japan before their elaboration in the West. Yumiko Iida (1997, page 412) notes that, as early as 1715, Arai Hakuseki had offered a "proto-type of the notion of Asia" when he contrasted the East as 'spiritual civilisation' to the 'material civilisation' of the West. In *Japan's Orient*, Stefan Tanaka (1993) also details Japan's long history of orientalist and occidentalist commentary. Tanaka argues that the 'shift' from China to the West as the dominant influence on Japanese culture

> "did not entail the simple replacement of China by the West .... The difference between the use of China and the use of the West was that the previous world was one in which all life was construed as being part of a fixed realm ....

The West brought a different perspective, the probable future; knowledge was infinite" (pages 32 – 33).

The most well-known slogan associated with Fukuzawa concerns the relation between Japan, the West, and Asia. The title of his essay *Datsu-a nyu-o* (1997), first published in 1885, has been translated as "On leaving Asia", "Disassociating Asia", and, more simply, "Goodbye Asia". It suggests that Japan must now consider itself part of Western civilisation and thus 'dissociate' itself from its barbaric and doomed neighbours:

"We do not have time to wait for the enlightenment of our neighbors so that we can work together toward the development of Asia. It is better for us to leave the ranks of Asian nations and cast our lot with civilized nations of the West. As for the way of dealing with China and Korea, no special treatment is necessary just because they happen to be our neighbors. We simply follow the manner of the Westerners in knowing how to treat them. Any person who cherishes a bad friend cannot escape his notoriety. We simply erase from our minds our bad friends in Asia" (Fukuzawa, 1997 [1885], page 353).

This stance did not suggest that Japan should cut itself off from Asia but, rather, that Japan was a nation of a different order, a higher type. Saying goodbye to Asia meant, ironically, being more involved with it: not as an equal but in a similar fashion to other Western powers. This position was also developed by Fukuzawa to suggest that Japan was the natural leader and defender of weak and anarchic Asian nations against Western military might. As Sakamoto (1996) has shown, this attitude to Asia, whilst more explicit and clearly colonialist towards the end of Fukuzawa's life, was present throughout his work. He goes on to argue that Fukuzawa's work "annuls the West/Japan dichotomy", leaving the "civilisation/non-civilization dichotomy" intact, and "'Asia' [to function] as the negative Other of civilised Westernised/hybridised Japan" (page 125). Sakamoto's real target here is the political naiveté of contemporary theories of hybridisation. He concludes that

"the construction of a hybrid discourse, at least in Japan's case, led to the exclusion of another Other, which Bhabha's theory ignores. To 'go beyond' one dichotomy without creating yet another may not be an easy project" (page 126).

Clearly, Fukuzawa's work does not sustain a vision of hybridity as a kind of 'open' and reflexive third moment. Indeed, to extend Sakamoto's argument, I would cast doubt on the utility of conceptualising his work as an example of hybridity at all. Rather than importing or translating a readymade idea of the West, Fukuzawa actively fashioned a certain representation of the West to suit his own particular political ambitions (and, in large measure, those of his social class). This process is best understood as a creative and original intervention in the history of the idea of the West. In this way we can position Fukuzawa alongside Benjamin Kidd, Oswald Spengler, and Arnold Toynbee in the West, as well as alongside other intellectuals in the 'non-Western' world (such as Gökalp and Tagore): all people engaged with the similar challenge of working out the meaning of modern national and international identities in an unequal world.

Modernity and national independence

It is through Fukuzawa's desire to invent and shape identity that his modernity emerges most clearly. This attitude, one of the few he shares with Tagore, ensures that collective identities become "foci of contestation and struggle" (Eisenstadt, 2000, page 7). The central identities for Fukuzawa are the West, Asia, and, above all, the Japanese nation. For Fukuzawa modernity is a discourse of national independence. It is a form of resistance to Western hegemony that co-opts Western civilisation in order to preserve

national autonomy. Despite Fukuzawa's reputation as a reformer, his primary motivation is to conserve the nation. "Japan's uniqueness", Fukuzawa notes, "lies only in the fact that she has preserved national polity intact from earliest antiquity and has never been deprived of her sovereignty by a foreign power" (1973 [1875], page 27). At the end of *An Outline of a Theory of Civilisation* he reminds readers that his "ultimate goal" is "national independence and all aspects of life [should be] made to converge on this single goal ... . Whether institutions, learning, business, or industry, they are all means to this end" (1973 [1875], page 196). The ideas of 'the West' and of 'Asia' are employed and deployed by Fukuzawa in order to fashion not just a new Japan but a Japan that is capable of surviving in an increasingly aggressive and predatory world. Fukuzawa's West is a place of meritocracy and rational learning, a place where the middle class thrives, and where a sense of national community and solidarity ensures an active, participatory population. Yet, despite Fukuzawa's desire for a profound cultural shift towards the West, he also continued to conceptualise the West as a set of traits that could be bolted onto an existing primordial national unit: "Western civilization is an incomparable means of both strengthening our national polity and increasing the prestige of our imperial line. Why, then, do we hesitate to adopt it? We should not think twice about the matter" (Fukuzawa, 1973 [1875], page 28). Indeed, Fukuzawa made fun of unthinking Westernisers who had forgotten the national raison d'être of the modernising impulse. Such folk, says Fukuzawa, believed "in the new with the same belief that they had believed in the old" ([1872] cited by Blacker, 1969, page 39). Unthinking Westernisers thus deployed the same uncritical and prerational orientation as those who wished to retain the 'old abuses' of traditional Japan. However, as we shall now see, modernity and the West could be employed in ways that were far less sympathetic to nationalist aspirations.

Rabindranath Tagore: 'true modernism' and the soulless West

The Asian invention of Asia as a space of spirituality saw an effort to live and transcend cultural difference on an extraordinary scale. Although this effort can be identified in many parts of the continent, one of the strongest traditions may be located in Bengal. Rammohan Roy (1772 – 1833), Swami Vivekananada (1862 – 1902), Debendranath Tagore (1817 – 1905), and his disciple, Keshub Chunder Sen (1838 – 84), all identified Asia as the spiritual home of humankind. However, if one name stands preeminent in this lineage it is Debendranath Tagore's son, the poet and essayist Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941). Tagore had a message to Asia and a mission to the world. It was a message that makes contentious claims about the meaning of Asia. Yet it also offered Asian spirituality as a project in the making, something that needed to be willed into existence. Tagore's message about Asia is inseparable from his message about the West. The one defined the other. Tagore saw in the West an unacceptable version of modernity. Western modernity was a misguided form of modernity, Tagore argued, for it represented the despoliation of personality and individuality by an increasingly standardised and industrialised social system. Tagore wished to resist the West through a process of education and transcendence. What cohered this enterprise was a desire to imagine Asia as possessing both a soul and a mind that was distinctively non-Western. Tagore's endeavour offered a vision of the West as a single civilisation defined by its technical achievements but also, and more profoundly, by its lack of a spiritual dimension. Tagore understood the 'spiritual' to refer to an open, meditative form of consciousness—as a form of awareness that privileges individual's unique and transcedental experiences. As this implies, Tagore was far less concerned with the absence of formal religion in the West than with a wider sense of how and why human life is valued.

Dead monotony: the nationalist and urban West

Tagore maintained a highly suspicious attitude to the process of nation building. "In the modern world", he wrote, "the fight is going on between the living spirit of the people and the methods of nation-organising" (Tagore, 1922, page 143). The West, said Tagore, was dominated by the "cult of the nation", a cult which destroys human personality and enforces a narrow and selfish relationship between people. This process Tagore described as "the professionalism [that is, professionalisation] of the people" (page 146).

For Tagore, the West was a mechanical, officious civilisation, the antithesis of the organic culture found within Asia. This distinction mapped onto another: the West was essentially urban, and spread itself around the world by way of urbanisation. Authentic Asia, by contrast, was to be found not in any particular nation but in the countryside. "[D]ead monotony is the sign of the Nation. The modern towns", Tagore wrote in *Creative Unity* (1922, page 144), "are everywhere the same, from San Francisco to London, from London to Tokyo. They show no faces, but merely masks." The artifice and homogeneity of industrial urbanism was a theme that Tagore returned to on several occasions, denouncing, as below in 1924, the Western relationship between town and country that he saw spreading throughout Asia:

> "unlike a living heart, these cities imprison and kill the blood and create poison centres filled with the accumulation of death .... The reckless waste of humanity which ambition produces, is best seen in the villages, where the light of life is being dimmed" (Tagore, 1924, pages 221 – 225).

Tagore cast Asia as a community of tradition that could and should modernise on its own terms. This also implied a vision of Asia as united by its status as a victim of Western modernisation, as a site of solidarity for those oppressed by inhuman versions of the modern. The humiliations of domination thus enabled a kind of resistance, albeit of people 'bowed to the dust'. In *Nationalism* (1991 [1917], page 75) he advises "we of the no nations of the world, whose heads have been bowed to the dust, will know that this dust is more sacred than the bricks which build the pride of power." Thus Tagore gives a spiritual value to abasement: to be forced into humility, to be reduced to nothing, takes Asia nearer to the sacred and further away from the West.

This line of thinking put Tagore on a collision course with nationalist versions of modernity. Indeed, Tagore was scornful of the way Japan was seen to have 'proved itself' in the Russo-Japanese war (1904 – 05) by virtue of its military capabilities. In one of the angriest passages in *Nationalism*, he argues that,

> "the western nations felt no respect for [Japan] till she proved that the bloodhounds of Satan are not only bred in the kennels of Europe but can also be domesticated in Japan and fed with man's miseries. They admit Japan's equality with themselves, only when they know that Japan also possesses the key to open the floodgate of hell-fire upon the fair earth whenever she chooses" (1991 [1917], pages 39 – 40).

The West: not creative and not free

Tagore was not an anti-Westerner. His books swarm with fond images of the English romantic poets and he was keenly alert to the utility of science and technology in the alleviation of poverty and oppression. Indeed, his reformist, conciliatory approach made him vulnerable to accusations of being a Westerniser. Yet, however much Tagore protested his faith in a 'creative unity' of East and West, his dialectical logic was constantly interrupted by the stereotype of the West he had worked so hard to develop. In other words, because Tagore's West was a place of instrumentalism and soulless anomie, it was also a place quite unsuitable for 'creative unity'. It was a civilisation that did not want real contact with others and that was, at root, inherently destructive. Citing the British trade in opium in China as an example, Tagore explained that,

> "The dominant collective idea of the Western countries is not creative. It is ready to enslave or kill individuals, to drug a great people with soul-killing poison, darkening their whole future with the black mist of stupefaction, and emasculating entire races of men to the utmost degree of helplessness. It is wholly wanting in spiritual power to balance and harmonise; it lacks the sense of the great personality of man" (1991 [1917], page 99).

Thus, Tagore roots the rise of mechanical and instrumental thinking in the West's hostile and destructive culture. The West, he says, is trapped by a vision of the "perpetual conflict of good and evil, which has no reconciliation" (page 47).

As this portrayal of the West suggests, Tagore, who traveled extensively and for long periods in both Europe and the USA, was cynical about the claims he heard there about the value Westerners placed on personal freedom. In an open letter from New York, published in 1922, he writes that "In my recent travels in the West I have felt that out there freedom as an idea has become feeble and ineffectual" (Tagore, 1922, page 133). What Tagore saw in the West was not freedom but a "spirit of repression and coercion", driven by the industrialisation of social relations and the "immense power of money" (page 136). Tagore was also clear that, as freedom had diminished, the personality and individuality of Westerners have become superficial and vulnerable to political manipulation:

> "Man as a person has his individuality, which is the field where his spirit has its freedom to express itself and grow. The professional man carries a rigid crust around him which has little variation and hardly any elasticity. This professionalism is the region where men specialise their knowledge and organise their power, mercilessly elbowing each other in their struggle to come to the front" (page 145).

Tagore associated true freedom and real modernity with the possibility of individual and social creativity, a process that he identified in the Asian relationship to the spiritual. Although critical of many areas where freedom and individual development are stymied in the East, he cites Buddhism and the epic poem of Hinduism, the Mahabharata, as illustrations of the possibilities of free expression:

> "[the] great epic of the soul of our people—the Mahabharata—gives us a wonderful vision of an overflowing life, full of freedom of enquiry and experiment. When the age of the Buddha came, humanity was stirred in our country to its uttermost depth. The freedom of mind which it produced expressed itself in a wealth of creation, spreading everywhere in its richness over the continent of Asia" (page 137).

In breaking the association between freedom and Westernisation, Tagore was also challenging the link between modernisation and Westernisation. As Sudipta Kaviraj (2000, page 153) puts it, "Tagore defiantly declared that it was the principle of autonomy of judgement that constituted modernity, not mere imitation of European practice." "Modernism is not in the dress of the Europeans; or in the hideous structures, where their children are interned to take lessons", Tagore argued, "These are not modern but merely European" (1991 [1917], page 90). "True modernism", he continued, "is freedom of mind, not slavery of taste. It is independence of thought and action, not tutelage under European schoolmasters. It is science, but not its wrong application in life" (page 90).

As these sentiments suggest, Tagore did not romanticise poverty or cultural stasis. Yet his visionary geographical imagination was attempting to speak to and speak for a vast and diverse population. His attempts to forge a continent and identify its essence were based on presumptions about distant societies that Tagore knew less about than he did about Victorian Britain. Indeed, although Tagore was self-consciously aware of his own powerlessness in the face of the economic and military gains of the West, his project had an international intellectual reach and an ambition that parallels that of colonialism itself.

Asian spirituality: transcending the West

It has been said many times and for many years that Asia and its associated ideals are Western inventions. This paradox was offered, with some justification, as a *provocative* insight by Tagore's Chinese and Indian critics in the 1920s. Increasingly, though, it has become a cliché, one that explains so much so neatly that it appears to be irresistible. There is much to support the contention that, as Hay has it, "Paradoxically the idea that Asia possessed a uniquely spiritual civilisation was essentially a Western idea" (1970, page 51). However, the historical detail to support this position is often bypassed by a tendency merely to confirm something many people seem to *want to believe*: that the West created the modern world, that the West *is* the modern world. In his discussion of Kakuzo Okakura, Leo Ching puts the thesis with the kind of assurance and certainty that has become characteristic:

> "The principle of [Asian] identity lies outside itself, in relation to (an)Other. If one can ascribe to Asia any vague sense of unity, it is that which is excluded and objectified by the West in the service of its historical progress. Asia is, and can be one, only under the imperial eye of the West" (Ching, 1998, page 70).

The theoretical heritage behind Ching's depiction is certainly weighty. Deconstruction, psychoanalysis, existentialism, and a dichotomising theory of human identity reaching from Hegel to George Herbert Mead are all put to work on what is, essentially, a political argument. In this way philosophical abstractions are given historical resonance, and the non-West turned into the archetypal other. Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre showed us how rhetorically powerful this combination of politics and philosophy could be. Yet how accurate is it? The political merit of casting the non-West as a shadowland, a landscape of victims, is controversial enough. However, I want to argue a more specific and empirical point: that the evidence that Tagore's 'Asia' or his notion of 'Asian spirituality' are either essentially or dominantly Western ideas is far from compelling. A corollary of this position is that Tagore's West was not a mere import but was produced, employed, and deployed by Tagore in Asia to articulate an Asianist modernity.

This argument does not deny that, like Fukuzawa, Tagore was deeply influenced by the West. Tagore was from a very wealthy, Westernised family with a tradition of working closely with the British authorities. Moreover, a great number of particular 'Western influences' can be detected in his work. Some of these are perfect illustrations of the insinuating and pervasive power of Western orientalism. For example, Tagore was greatly influenced by the dissection of "the fundamental antagonism between Western and Western civilisation" described in *Letters from John Chinaman*, written by an anonymous Chinese official and published in English in 1901 (Dickinson, 1901). In his review of the book Tagore wrote: "I have seen from it that there is a deep and vast unity among the various peoples of Asia" (1940, page 403, cited by Hay, 1970, page 34). The anonymous 'Chinese official' was, in fact, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, a fellow of King's College, Cambridge, a man who had never been to China.

The charge that Tagore's work is Western has long been asserted by his many Indian critics. Tagore's use of Western forms (such as the novel), Western ideologies (such as romanticism), and, most damaging of all, his enormous popularity in the West have all been offered as evidence that damages, fatally, his political and cultural pretensions to be either authentically Asian or Indian. The fact that Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 and a knighthood in 1915 has been taken to secure his inauthenticity.

> "Bengal has not given Rabindranath to Europe—rather Europe has given him to the Bengalis. By praising him, European scholars praise their own gift. I would feel more proud if our own poets had received such fame in foreign countries" (Dinesh Chandra Sen, 1979 [1922], cited by Chakrabarty, 2000, page 158).

Some recent critics have been more generous. Dipesh Chakrabarty has sought to draw out the ambivilances within Tagore and position him within a wider project of questioning and 'provincialising Europe'. Moreover, Chakrabarty pointedly observes that Tagore's songs and poems remained something of a private vice amongst those on the left who publicly condemned him. However, we can also offer a more fundamental defence, one that suggests that the evidence that Tagore's notion of Asian spirituality was a Western import appears conclusive only if: (a) we delete an even greater weight of material suggesting Eastern influence; and (b) if we fail to understand that the West was also an idea in the process of development. This is not merely a question of positioning Tagore through the language of cultural autonomy—as someone who managed to eke out a little non-Western agency. Rather, I take Tagore to be amongst those who actively constituted the ideas of Western soullessness and Asian solidarity and spirituality. We have already seen how he developed a vision of the West as materialist, as an industrial civilisation that 'professionalises' and depersonalises its citizens. Yet he also offered a spiritual vision of Asia that, far from being a simple replica of the Western ideal of the static, timeless East, emphasised its own provisionality and role in creating a collective identity in the face of external aggression.

Rustom Bharucha (2001, page 153) makes the point that, for Tagore, "'Asia' has not yet been completely imagined. If it is 'one', it is also multitudinous. Profuse in its possibilities, it also remains unknown." Discussing the work that most clearly shaped Tagore's vision of 'Asia as one', Okakura's *The Ideals of the East* (2000, [1904]), Iida (1997, page 417) notes that "Okakura presented 'Asia' as external to the marks of inferiority imposed by the West, as a category beyond the intelligibility of Eurocentric discourse." What these contemporary analysts are suggesting is that Tagore and Okakura were not merely taking an image of the soulless West and turning it on its head to make a soulful East. Also they cannot be seen as reheating a Western caricature of Asian otherness. Their engagement with Eastern religion was creative and synthetic, drawing on Western ideas, yet largely dominated by Asian spiritual movements themselves. Moreover, theirs was an open-ended project. The privileged point of reference was Buddhism, yet they were even more interested in imagining commonalties between the meditative practice and doctrine of the "Infinite Wisdom and Love" of Buddhism (Tagore, 1922, page 72) and Indian folk religion (cohered as Hinduism). "In both of these religions", says Tagore, "we find man's yearning to attain the infinite worth of his individuality, not through any conventional valuation of society, but through his perfect relationship with Truth" (page 76).

Tagore's occidentalism is more securely placed in a lineage of self-identified 'Asian' commentary than within Western orientalism. Indeed, a specific Bengali tradition of propounding Indian and Asian visions of civilisation and social progress and re-rejecting Western modernity can be identified. For the Bengali religious leader Swami Vivekananada (1862 – 1902), Asia "produces giants in spirituality just as the Occident produces giants in politics [and] giants in science" (no date, page 6). It was a conviction that led him to spend five years as a Hindu missionary in Europe and the USA (between 1893 and 1896, and between 1898 and 1900). Arriving home as something of a national hero, Vivekananada sought to stir his audiences with the idea that Indian thought could conquer the world. As he told one audience in Madras:

> "This is the great ideal before us, and every one must be ready for it—the conquest of the whole world by India—nothing less than that .... Let foreigners come and flood the land with their armies, never mind. Up, India, and conquer the world with your spirituality! .... Spirituality must conquer the West" (1966, page 100).

Vivekananada's lectures had such an impact that a number of his converts were prepared to follow him back to India. His work, though, is just part of a broader

tradition of Eastern involvement with, and influence on, the West. John Clarke (1997) uses the term 'oriental enlightenment' to explain how Chinese, Indian, and Japanese sagacity and learning inspired intellectuals in Europe from the 16th century. Far from being testament to Western creativity, European enthusiasm for the Asian ideal was, in large part, a product of both direct and indirect Eastern agency.

Tagore's willingness to perform the role of venerable Eastern sage before the British and US public, should also be examined in a little more detail. The sentimental, wooden style of Tagore's English translations of his poetry accentuated the cliched nature of his mysticism. They may, then, be taken to represent an act of self-orientalisation before a Western audience. However, in a detailed and persuasive reading of Tagore's 'foreign reincarnation', Nabaneeta Sen explains how Tagore *knowingly and strategically* allowed himself to "[cater] to a rare mystic taste in the Western mind" (1966, page 281). He was prepared to translate his poetry into purple prose, even though this would inevitably "contribute to the irreparable loss of his reputation" (page 278) outside India. Sen's assessment is that Tagore "deeply believed at that moment, that his responsibilities as the 'carrier of the Eastern Light' to the unhappy West were greater than his private responsibilities as an artist" (page 281). This, then, was strategic self-orientalisation for a practical purpose and for a particular audience. It is a project that suggests that the image of 'Tagore, the Eastern mystic', far from being the product of Western fantasies, was designed by Tagore in order to change and shape the West's view of itself and of Asia.

The idea of Asia and the ideal of Asian spirituality can be told as a Western story. It is a neat tale and has long found a receptive audience. Yet it is empirically inaccurate and confused. Tagore's vision of Asia was not the flip side of an established Western notion of the West. It constantly strove to transcend the West, driven by the need to establish a space of solidarity that is better understood as something mobile and new than as something 'non-Western' or 'anti-Western'. Moreover, the idea of the West developed by Tagore and his Asianist contemporaries and predecessors has had a considerable impact. The notion that Western civilisation is secular and, moreover, soulless, alienated, and mechanical still forms part of the background common sense on the topic.

Tagore and reflexive modernisation

Tagore's modernity contrasts sharply with the hopes of national independence fostered by Fukuzawa as well as with the standard portrayal of modernity as an expression of industrialism and bureaucracy. However, the inventive capacity of Tagore, his willingness to realign old identities into new patterns of belonging, suggests he had embarked on a project that is formally similar to these other modernist enterprises. Another parallel can also be drawn, for the logic of modernity is also commonly aligned to a self-questioning and critical sensibility. Themes of uncertainty and reflexivity, along with the challenge of living in 'posttraditional' communities, have become staple topics within Western social theory. They are usually employed to describe the state of consciousness that accompanies post-Fordist capitalism. Thus Ulrich Beck's distinction between modernisation as "[first the] disembedding and second the reembedding of traditional social norms by industrial social norms" and 'reflexive modernisation' as "[first the] disembedding and second the re-embedding of industrial social norms by another modernity" (1994, page 2) is designed to capture both a Western historical process and a recent transition.

The challenges of being alienated both from one's 'own traditions' and from hegemonic authority have been negotiated by those subject to Westernisation and colonisation for centuries. By limiting the possibility of reflexivity and 'another modernity' to a postindustrial landscape, Beck renders the diverse modernities and patterns

of critical consciousness seen outside the West as an irrelevance (see also Lash, 1999). We can make the more specific point here that Asian spirituality, as seen by Tagore, can be understood as a form of reflexive modernisation. As Tagore was opposed to an industrial model of society and, as he did wish to defend certain traditional values, it is understandable that he does not appear in the kind of historical overview offered by Beck. Yet, Tagore considered himself a defender of the modern. What Tagore was concerned with was the identification of progress and modernity with the West, the very mistake that continues to render provincial so much Western social theory. We have seen how Tagore's idea of the spiritual developed mystical and meditative Buddhist and nondoctrinal Hindu traditions, where emphasis is placed on inner reflection and the removal of dogmatic conceit. It is an individualistic exploration that has the restless quality of a perpetual and dissatisfied seeking for 'unity' and 'reconciliation'. "In dogmatic religion", Tagore tells us, "all doubts are laid to rest". Tagore's own understanding of religion is, he says, "indefinite and elastic": it offers "no doctrine or injunction" and "never undertakes to lead anybody anywhere to any solid conclusion; yet it reveals endless spheres of light, because it has no walls round itself" (1922, page 16). This language of spiritual self-discovery found a considerable following and influence in the West, partly because it appears to offer transcendental experience without succumbing to the rigid anachronisms of conventional Christianity. However, there is little that is 'alternative' or hedonistic about Tagore's approach to the spiritual. It represents, rather, a reflexive, self-questioning approach to the problem of modernity, an approach that hopes to embrace modernity without being overimpressed by the instrumental and materialist logic associated with its Western incarnation.

Conclusions

The phrase 'Western modernity' is commonly offered as a tautology. Framing this history of misinformation and ethnocentrism is the conceit that not only is the West a Western invention but so too is every other point on the compass. There are signs today of a coming realignment of focus, of a growing dissatisfaction with Eurocentric visions of the modern. However, this dissatisfaction is not a force that will resolve or otherwise settle the controversies of modernity. If anything, it makes it an even more contentious arena.

To understand the contemporary debate it is useful to differentiate proponents of alternative, coeval, and multiple modernities. In part, this is a useful starting point because through it we can begin to see an even more diverse set of political and geo-historical questions and stances coming into view. The politics of splitting modernity are illustrative of this potential swarm. One could plausibly argue, albeit on carefully selected evidence, that it is a conservative device. One could also plausibly argue the opposite. Certainly the implication, which unites those who wish to pluralise modernity, that undue emphasis has been placed on the way 'the West made the world' is grist to a number of political mills. It will, undoubtedly, be taken by some to imply that 'the West is not to blame' and that world problems (such as racism and environmental crisis) 'are not the West's fault'. By contrast, for others it will imply that the critique of Eurocentric history and geography needs to go further, and that Western arrogance has long presented a myopic vision of the world. Although there is something in both of these positions, the former is the more tendentious and potentially abusive of scholarship in the area. However, I would also question the premise that one can form a coherent political position on the basis of being a 'supporter' of plural modernities approaches. As the debate on Western modernity has already shown us, the a priori politicisation of the modern is inappropriate (Bauman, 1991). This point will need to be insisted upon if the pluralisation of modernity is not to be traduced into a homogenising tale of

'global modernity'. This slippage is already ubiquitous, acting to rearticulate the liberal multiculturalist conviction that by 'listening to each other's stories' we can arrive at a transcendent history of the modern. A sophisticated version is heard from Arif Dirlik (2002, page 25), who notes that "what distinguishes our times from times past is a willingness to listen to invocations of cultural legacies not as reactionary responses to modernity, inimical to its achievement, but as the very condition of a global modernity."

What I take from the coeval approach to modernity is a critical distance from any attempt to 'read back' non-Western modernities from some, supposed, global condition. At the same time, it allows us to see these lineages as being produced within a world context of dominance, co-option, and resistance. By drawing together the discussion of modernity with occidentalism, I have sought to show how non-Western modernity can be seen developing within and beyond distinct regional traditions. However, I have also argued that, in the context of Western hegemony, the two are inextricable: that one cannot understand modernity anywhere in the world without looking at how the West was developed as an idea and as a force.

The specificity of my empirical material has precluded generalisations about Japanese or Indian ideas of the West. Yet, although I have not claimed them as 'voices for their nations', it is clear from the preceding analysis that Fukuzawa and Tagore evidence creative and complex ways in which the West has been not simply assimilated or absorbed but actively created and deployed within specific national debates and struggles. It has also become clear that occidentalism has not occurred in isolation from the construction of other 'other' ethno-geographical stereotypes. Thus we have seen that the idea of Asia and/or the orient was fundamental to the thinking of Fukuzawa and Tagore, although for very different reasons. Neither Fukuzawa's nationalist modernity nor Tagore's Asian spiritual modernity can adequately be understood as either Western or anti-Western. 'The West' has not merely or simply been an external referent, something always 'already there' that defines (but is not defined by) the world. Rather the West is something *used*: employed and deployed to articulate modernity's many forms.

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