Offering challenges and insights to scholars and policy-makers from both East and West

Western scholars have long studied China, Japan and Korea (among other Asian countries). However, in recent years we have seen the study of western societies launched at certain Asian universities while an interesting new development is the establishment of Nordic studies in China, Japan and South Korea. Why is this? What possible interest could the low-tax, entrepreneurial countries of East Asia have in the high-tax, social welfare-oriented Nordic region on the opposite edge of Eurasia?

In the past few decades, all three Asian countries have experienced rapid economic development and as a result their societies are becoming more complex to govern. Several issues related to public welfare – for instance, the need to deal with an ageing population, income redistribution and provision of social security – were not considered important even 25 years ago. Today, their resolution is seen as essential to the countries’ continued, sustainable development. Such issues have long been in focus in the Nordic region and important lessons can be learnt from how they have been addressed. On the other hand, the Nordic countries are at risk of stagnation and have much to learn from the dynamism and flexibility found in East Asia. Meanwhile cultural and political differences between East and West pose challenges to mutual understanding and learning. However, the two regions are not uniformly distinct from each other; there are in fact distinct differences within the regions and interesting parallels between them.

In short, this pattern of convergence and diversity makes a challenging point of reference for scholars and policy-makers from both regions. The exploration of how both regions have much to learn from each other is the focus of this intriguing volume of essays by both Eastern and Western scholars.
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Preface

The background to this volume is the initiative taken in 2010 by the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies at the University of Copenhagen, and the Institute of East–West Studies at Yonsei University, Seoul, to establish a Nordic–Northeast Asian research network with funding from NordForsk and the Academy of Korean Studies. This network is based on mutual interests in the Nordic and the Asian research communities within the humanities and the social sciences to broaden and deepen mutual understanding between two geographically distant regions on the Eurasian continent. The network aims at establishing long term research cooperation between Nordic and Northeast Asian scholars within the fields of the social sciences and the humanities. The Northeast Asian group is mainly represented by Korean colleagues presently engaged in establishing a Center for Nordic Studies in the Institute of East and West Studies at Yonsei University. The Nordic group represents scholars within Nordic studies and scholars within Asian studies. By bringing specialists together from areas remote from each other on the Eurasian continent and having scholars with insights into both worlds working together, the network will contribute important cross-cultural perspectives to both Nordic and Asian studies.

In 2010 when the network was first established the aim was to hold two meetings, one in Copenhagen and one in Seoul. At the first meeting, the level of cooperation was decided upon. At the second meeting, a conference at Yonsei University, each participating scholar gave a presentation on an East–West related topic, and the majority of these have been worked into the chapters making up this volume. At the Seoul meeting the research strategy was further elaborated and future activities planned. Next, a third meeting, the conference “Mapping the two corners of EurAsia: Harmony as a historical, philosophical and socio-political theme”, was held in Reykjavik. A follow-up workshop after this conference has further consolidated the research network, and plans have been made to develop an international research project. The research network activities have emphasized the existing mutual interests in establishing strong and durable cooperation between Nordic and Northeast Asian scholars focusing on Nordic affairs, between Northeast Asian and Nordic scholars focusing on Northeast Asian affairs, and in establishing a number of comparative projects, utilizing the different disciplinary and regional insights.
As a successful intercultural and interdisciplinary research network, a status that we strive to reach, we aim at producing creative ideas and solutions to societal problems that may be less obvious to more homogeneous groups. When the research cooperation also includes research training and education, the long-term perspectives are further strengthened. We envisage that the network will contribute to bringing Nordic studies to Northeast Asia, and promote interdisciplinary studies of Northeast Asia in the Nordic Region. There is, however, one regrettable aspect in the first volume of this new and promising East–West collaborative project. There are only three representatives from the Northeast Asian side, and only one female researcher is represented. We are painfully aware of this and will work hard to achieve a better balance in our second volume.
Acknowledgements

A majority of the chapters in this volume are the product of an international conference on ‘Mapping the Two Corners of EurAsia in Comparative Ideas, Society and Politics’, held at the Institute of East–West Studies of Yonsei University on 16–17 December 2010. Twenty participants from seven countries participated and presented papers at the conference. The eleven chapters included in this edited volume have all since been revised and updated. The editors would like to thank all those who participated in the conference and contributed valuable ideas and suggestions to this volume, as well as our colleagues, particularly Professor Jong Kun Choi, whose assistance and advice was essential to this volume. We would also like to thank Professor Young-Ryeol Park, Director of the Institute of East–West Studies, who helped to make the conference a great success.

The editors are grateful to the East Asia Foundation, the Yonsei-Seri EU Center, The Academy of Korean Studies and the National Research Foundation of Korea for sponsoring the conference, to the Nordic Research Council NordForsk for sponsoring the Nordic participants and the preparations for this publication, and to NIAS Press for publishing it.
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INTRODUCTION

Ras Tind Nielsen and Geir Helgesen

It may be an old truism that the Nordic countries make up a region worthy of imitation. It becomes noticeable, however, when countries in other areas of the world, such as Northeast Asia, actually are establishing research centres focusing on the Nordic region. The establishment in 2010 of a Center for Nordic Studies at one of the most distinguished South Korean universities, Yonsei in Seoul, is a testament to this. At Kobe University in Japan similar initiatives are under preparation, and in Shanghai and Nanjing the activities of the Nordic Centers there are increasing steadily. We hope that the idea of a Center for Nordic Studies may be spread from these locations to other universities in Northeast Asia.

Most of the Northeast Asian economies have experienced rapid development in the past few decades and as a result these societies are becoming more complex to govern. Several issues, related to public welfare, that were not considered to be important just a few decades ago, have now become essential to the continuing of a sustainable development of society. Central questions are for instance how to manage the ageing of population; the redistribution of income; the provision of social security. This is why the Nordic countries make up a challenging point of reference.

It is not only our internal ways of organizing our societies that have caught the interests of Northeast Asian scholars. The fact that the five Nordic countries have established an open and borderless region where people, companies and the politically elected leaders are working together to find reasonable solutions to common problems is seen as remarkable. In this global era there seems to be a new role to play for regions, and the Nordic region has a comparative advantage due to its long-standing and well-established collaborative institutions. The divided Korea, as well as the neighbouring countries in the Northeast Asian region, could draw inspiration from the Nordic experience in turning hostile relations into fruitful friendships.

The Nordic countries should, however, not turn a blind eye to their own societal problems and difficulties and overestimate homegrown performances.
Instead they should be open to alternate societal models and be able to receive inspiration from the experiences of others in order to achieve better results and find new solutions. South Korea, and most of Northeast Asia, has proved to be able to transform society at high speed, while maintaining their roots in a strong, traditional culture. Impressive, though sometimes excessive, stress is put on education and research, and this has enabled Northeast Asian societies to achieve remarkable results. Recently a move away from fossil energy to green or sustainable energy is an example in point. A more flexible relationship between the public and the private sectors is another trait that empowers Northeast Asia in relation to the Nordic region as well as Europe. And to mention a more soft sector: the prevalent respect towards the elderly people in society, not always followed by active policies, is nevertheless a cultural trait that seems to be missing in the West.

A research network between scholars from the Nordic region and from South Korea, where both groups are interested in the ideas and practices of the other, is a novel construction, but well-timed at the beginning of the 21st century where East Asia makes up the most vibrant, and also the most populated region of the world. We are bound to relate to Asia, but the more we know, and the more insightful and subtle our knowledge is, the better for our relations and our common future. It is in accordance with our best Nordic ideals that we allow others the same access to our world, our views and our practices as we have had to theirs for a long time. The mutual interest in the other that characterizes this network has the potential for being a solid platform for long-term research and educational cooperation.

The Structure of this Volume

This book, as the title suggests, deals with the ideas, society and politics of Northeast Asia and Northern Europe, with both topical and comparative perspectives contributed by scholars from various countries. It focuses on perspectives and policies in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Japan, North Korea, Norway, China, South Korea and Sweden. A wide range of themes are analysed, and therefore the book is organized into three parts, each part taking up a certain theme for consideration.

The first part, The Northeast Asian and Nordic Regions: Different Traditions, Shared Challenges, sets the stage for this volume by highlighting, first, the very different cultures and traditions that exist in the East and
the West, and second, by providing an insightful example of how people, societies and polities in the East and the West face similar challenges due to the pressures of globalization. What do we learn from the two chapters in this opening section? On the one hand we learn that Nordic and East Asian societies have very different intellectual cultures, which require attention if greater cross-cultural understanding is to be achieved. On the other hand we are shown that processes of national education that aim to teach responsibility and social values to young generations are challenged by globalization and liberalization in both the Nordic region and East Asia. As we shall see throughout this volume, this is just one of many challenges that the Nordic and Northeast Asian regions share. Despite our differences our two regions could benefit greatly from closer cross-cultural dialogue, not only to enhance mutual understanding but also to gain new and useful ideas and perspectives on how to handle some of the most important challenges to our societies in the 21st century.

Chapter 1, *Duality or Polarity: Modes of Thought in East and West*, by Bent Nielsen is not only the starting chapter of the first of the three parts that make up this volume, it could also be seen as an opening chapter for the volume altogether, as our attention is directed to the importance of self-reflection whenever we study ideas and positions that are unfamiliar to us. In this particular chapter Nielsen uses this self-reflection as a vantage point to study the very different traditions of philosophy and science that exist in Europe and East Asia. As Nielsen states, for several centuries the West has made the mistake of thinking of itself as the birthplace of the true course of mankind, not paying attention to the rich East Asian philosophical traditions. Recognizing a need to scrutinize the foundations of these different modes of thought, Nielsen elaborates elements central to Western and Eastern thinking. In the Western tradition, he argues, the idea of a transcendent God, a God that exists outside or apart from the world, has given rise to both dualism and the idea of objectivity. In the Eastern tradition, on the other hand, an immanent world view where God is located within the world has resisted this idea of objectivity: one cannot stand outside the world, but one needs to speak from a certain position, place and time within it. Nielsen shows us how concepts such as truth, the self, individuality and freedom are shaped differently in the East and the West, due to these different philosophical traditions, and thereby provides food for thought for scholars about to analyse, compare and evaluate East–West ideas, models of society, and politics.
In Chapter 2, *New Demands, Obsolete Values? Global Challenges to National Education*, Geir Sigurdsson takes a concrete look at some similar challenges that Western and Eastern societies face. Here he employs a comparative perspective on the development of national education in Iceland and the People’s Republic of China. In these two countries, albeit in different ways, he sees growing tensions between two general models of education, the traditional ‘national education’ and the neo-liberal individualist education. In both Icelandic and Chinese society there are signs that the traditional educational model is giving way to the neo-liberal kind. Sigurdsson argues that while both models claim to be in the interest of society, the latter is not only ineffective, but also risks undermining the functioning of the social welfare state. To back up his claim, Sigurdsson traces through the philosophical and practical foundations of modern education. He critically highlights how the end goal of education in modern society is changing from the preparation of individuals for responsible participation in society to the acquisition of certain technical skills in order to function in the globalized market economy. The problem with this tendency, he states, is that it empties education of its most important content: the teaching of people to fulfil civic duties and to have a sense for that which regards the common good. In both the East and the West, the loss of these virtues gives way to a form of extreme individualism that is detrimental to sustainable global development.

The second part, *Democracy and Welfare under Pressure: Responses to Globalization and Financial Crises in the Two Regions*, scrutinizes Nordic and Northeast Asian approaches to democracy, welfare and economic policies in a changing international environment. It considers how international and national pressures, such as financial crises and political reforms, are altering welfare models and regimes in both the Nordic countries and East Asia. Some of these alterations happen in different ways in the East and the West, but we are also presented with a number of interesting and quite similar trends in welfare developments. Finally we see how the Nordic socio-economic model could be a valuable source of inspiration to handle not only the current Euro-zone crisis, but also the rapidly developing Asian economies.

In Chapter 3, *Nordic Democracy as a Model-Building Concept*, Johan Strang and Jussi Kurunmäki trace the development of the notion of ‘Nordic democracy’ and how it has become linked to the Nordic welfare state. They
argue that the notion of democracy is not only shaped by its immediate cultural context, but is also greatly impacted by specific political manoeuvres and speech acts that tie it to particular regions in concrete historical situations. Specifically, a particular Nordic version of democracy has been produced and reproduced by a series of rhetorical efforts from the 1930s onwards and has now become closely interlinked and almost synonymous to the ‘Nordic welfare state’. The authors show how the term ‘Nordic democracy’ was initially launched to demarcate the Nordic countries from the militaristic and totalitarian regimes in Europe in the 1930s, but was later used by Social Democrats to provide cultural and historical legitimacy for their own particular politics. During the Cold War the notion of Nordic democracy was provided with new weight, signifying a sort of ‘middle way’ between capitalism and socialism. Later on, in the 1980s, the emphasis in Nordic democracy shifted from middle-way positioning to describe exemplary and firmly established welfare societies. As Strang and Kurunmäki argue, the rhetoric of ‘Nordic democracy’ is not one, but has been changing, motivated by both geopolitical circumstances and by a strong social aspect related to the welfare state.

In Chapter 4, The Nordic and East Asian Welfare Models: On Converging Paths?, Stein Kuhnle takes a look at the recent development of welfare policies and practices in the Nordic and East Asian regions and compares these trends. After giving a short introduction to the characteristics of a welfare state, Kuhnle notes that the Nordic welfare model has been given more attention internationally in recent years due to its successful combination of strong public welfare responsibility, social equality and economic growth. The author notes that the concept of a Nordic model is simplified, as the Nordic countries represent 5 quite different welfare states, yet there are many important similarities both in orientation and outcome of policies. East Asian countries on the other hand cannot as easily be grouped under one type of welfare regime, and Kuhnle divides them into two groups (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan on the one hand, and China, Hong Kong and Singapore on the other) due to qualitatively different types of welfare policy orientation. In both the Nordic and the East Asian regions, however, Kuhnle sees an increased public social expenditure, and overall processes of democratization have increased the use of social policies to promote social security and redistribution. Despite continuing differences between the East and the West, the author expects challenges of social inequality, population ageing, changing labour markets and family structures to be common to both the Nordic countries and to
East Asian countries in the future, and these challenges will lead to greater convergence in social policy thinking at a general level.

In Chapter 5, *Scandinavian Welfare Regimes in the Current Crisis: Reform or Retrenchment?*, Peter Abrahamson looks closely at how the financial crisis has been handled in the Nordic countries in particular. He states that reactions to the crisis have been similar to what has happened elsewhere, but argues that due to the preparedness and robustness of the particular Scandinavian welfare regime the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish governments have experienced a relatively high degree of success concerning crisis governance. Through his analysis Abrahamson discusses the Scandinavian model vis-à-vis other welfare models, and provides a detailed description of the Scandinavian government initiatives taken as a response to the crisis. In Denmark and Norway, the author notes, concerns have been about labour shortage not about unemployment. Therefore, changes in times of crisis have gone in the direction of increasing work incentives by rolling back social entitlements. This is not, however, to be seen as a rolling back of the Scandinavian welfare state, as social expenditure per capita is in fact increasing. These reforms in addition to a highly flexible labour market have steered the Scandinavian welfare regimes securely through the current crisis. According to Abrahamson, however, we should be careful about the transferability of the Scandinavian experiences as these are made within a particular Scandinavian political culture based on consensus and compromise.

In Chapter 6, *Comparing the Nordic and South Korean Models: Labour Market Regulation and Social Welfare in Times of Crisis*, Johannes Dragsbæk Schmidt continues that very discussion and provides a comparative perspective on welfare under pressure. He scrutinizes how labour markets have been adjusted in the Republic of Korea and the Nordic countries to cope with the recent financial crisis. Schmidt argues that Korea and the Nordic countries faced similar situations as they were all particularly hard hit by the crisis due to their export-oriented economic models. However, domestic and external demand was reduced in varying degrees across different countries due to different methods of crisis management. As Schmidt notes, the Korean economy experienced a relative soft economic landing due to a rapid response by the Korean government initiating stimulus packages and

1 ‘Scandinavia’ refers to three of the Nordic countries, namely Denmark, Norway and Sweden.
labour-market policies, while increases in exports to China helped growth rates to recover. The Nordic countries were hit harder by the crisis in terms of declining growth, and pre-existing high-tax policies and a reduction in the labour supply due to an ageing population required the Nordic countries to refine welfare state policies in order to maintain long-term competitiveness. The analysis shows quite a number of interesting similarities in socio-economic management between what the author terms a Capitalist Developing State model (CDS) in the East and a Nordic model in the West.

In Chapter 7, Inchoon Kim takes on an analysis of the Nordic welfare model against the backdrop of the financial crisis spreading in the Eurozone. In her chapter *Europeanization and the Nordic Models: Reforms for Welfare and Competitiveness* it is emphasized how the crises of several southern European countries have created widespread concern about the common monetary system of the Euro as well as European integration itself. Yet she highlights how the Nordic countries and their successful combination of competitiveness with social protection and cohesion have in fact thrived in the global economy. High levels of taxation, wages and public expenditures in what she terms ‘highly efficient, rational and democratic systems’ have not depressed growth, but have rather sustained stable economic development. Kim also explains that the Nordic countries may provide some remedies for the institutional rigidities and the problems of inefficiency and unemployment that characterize southern European countries today. In her concluding remarks, Kim considers how the experiences of the Nordic countries could be transferred to South Korea and finds several positive results.

The theme of the third part of the volume *Dialogue, Engagement, and Reconciliation in the East and the West* revolves around international relations and political cooperation within and between the Nordic and Northeast Asian regions. We see how an East–West dialogue on human rights should reflect the very different perspectives on social, economic and political rights that exist, not only between, but also within different regions. We are presented with different takes on how to deal with conflict and cooperation on the Korean peninsula, and we are shown how the Nordic countries were not always so peaceful, cooperative and equal, and how the present-day perception of the Nordic region as a homogeneous region in terms of political culture has come into being.

In Chapter 8, Daniel A. Bell starts out this section by looking at *Human Rights and ‘Values in Asia’: Reflections on East–West Dialogues*. He places
a suitable frame around the following contributions as he highlights and exemplifies the debate between the Western ‘human rights’ concept and the Eastern ‘Asian values’ position. However, as the author reasonably claims, it does not make much sense to talk about one set of ‘values’ that encompasses all of Asia, given its demographic, political and cultural diversity. Instead Bell sets out to identify relatively persuasive East Asian criticisms of traditional Western approaches to human rights without placing them all under an ‘Asian values’ label. Four sorts of arguments put forward by East Asian critics are presented. The first is a discussion of how rights should be prioritized, the second of how rights should be justified, the third brings up the argument for greater rights pluralism, and the fourth articulates the need to incorporate East Asian viewpoints into the current international human rights regime. Bell raises several important questions along the way and provides us with many relevant examples that illustrate both the difficulties and complexities in this sort of cross-cultural dialogue.

In Chapter 9, Geir Helgesen follows in the tracks of exploring dialogue between the West and the East in his contribution Aiming for Results: Preconditions for a Constructive Dialogue between North Korea and the World. Helgesen adopts a pragmatic approach to the question of how to promote dialogue between North Korea and its surroundings. The author exhibits scepticism towards most media and to some degree intelligence in Western and East Asian countries for producing and reproducing negative and highly doubtful stories about the DPRK, which distort both government and public opinion and create a confrontational attitude towards the country. Such an attitude does not promote dialogue, but rather reinforces the processes by which the DPRK isolates itself from the world. Instead Helgesen suggests an approach where more attention is paid to the complex internal dynamics of North Korean politics, as well as to the cultural differences that often reinforce miscommunication when it enters into dialogue with the outside. On these terms Helgesen proposes engagement with North Korea and suggests that the Nordic countries have a particular role to play.

In Chapter 10, Jong Kun Choi also contributes to the exploration of dialogue with North Korea. Choi however takes another point of entrance to the situation on the Korean Peninsula, namely that of South Korea’s domestic politics and its impact on the dynamics of engagement–containment of North Korea. In his chapter Sunshine in a Barren Soil: Domestic Politics of Engagement and Identity Formation in South Korea Choi assesses the reasons and rationales behind South Korea’s engagement policy from 1998 to 2007,
also termed the ‘Sunshine Policy’, and argues that the policy itself, despite its problems, contributed to a changing role–identity of South Korea vis-à-vis North Korea, to some extent helped change the role–identity of North Korea, and did clear some obstacles towards inter-Korean reconciliation. However, full reconciliation in the conflictual relation between North and South, the author notes, has a long way to go, and ‘Sunshiners’ of the past administrations face tough challenges if the engagement policy is to return.

In Chapter 11, Uffe Østergård takes up the question of identity and political culture among the Nordic countries. The theme in his chapter *Cooperation Among Equals: Political Culture in the Nordic Countries* is the image of the Nordic societies, both internationally and regionally, as carriers of a very homogeneous political culture. Østergård notes that the Nordic countries are often perceived as a unit, ‘Norden’, of peaceful and egalitarian democracies, internationally oriented and strong supporters of law and order. However, Østergård questions this very image as he analyses some of the particularities of each country and their very different choices regarding regional and international cooperation over the course of modern European history. He asks whether ‘Norden’ or the Nordic region could best be described as a historical region, a mental construct, or a model, and argues that it is a product of politically conscious choices that allow for a certain kind of national identification. ‘Norden’ as a region, Østergård argues, consists of independent nation states with their own quite different histories and separate political traditions. However, they also share a wide range of culture traits, e.g. the Lutheran version of Christianity, economic flexibility, absence of corruption and a high degree of social equality. Østergaard offers great examples of successes and failures of Nordic collaboration. One lesson from this historical analysis is that no objective laws bind together the people of the Nordic countries, but that the common Nordic identity has been built on a number of historical and cultural traditions and discourses.
Part 1

The Northeast Asian and Nordic Regions: Different Traditions, Shared Challenges
Chapter 1

DUALITY OR POLARITY: MODES OF THOUGHT IN EAST AND WEST

Bent Nielsen

In order to begin to understand ideas and positions that are unfamiliar to us, it is important to understand our own assumptions. That is, the ideas we take for granted and never – or almost never – question the validity of. One thing it seems we have taken for granted for several centuries is that the West is the birthplace of the true course of mankind whether that is Christianity, Enlightenment, Industrialization, Socialism, Democracy, Human Rights or Philosophy. East Asian philosophers of the twentieth century are virtually unknown in the West. Generally speaking, many of these philosophers opt for a continuation of an Eastern tradition that may engage Western philosophy in a dialogue. A widespread attitude among them is that Western philosophy has reached a stalemate. They see many weaknesses in Western philosophy and religion but the most important limitations are perceived to be the notions of duality and transcendence, which lead to such abstract concepts as objectivity and permanence. In the East Asian philosophical traditions there is a vigorous and very different, exciting and challenging alternative to Western ways of thinking. It seems that the West has chosen not to pay much attention to it and not to take it seriously. This is not only an unwise decision; it may inadvertently get us into more trouble than we care to think about. Recalling recent cultural misunderstandings (for instance the so-called cartoon crisis) arising from either arrogance or ignorance or both, we may wish to be better equipped when dealing with some of the most important players in the world today. We can do that by recognizing the fact that our mode of thinking is neither the only one nor the only legitimate way. In the following I shall concentrate on a few aspects of an East Asian mode of thinking that has had and continues to have an impact on – allowing for a gross generalization – how people in China, Korea and Japan think.
Elements of Traditional Thought in the East and the West

Elements of tradition and traditional thought may present themselves in different ways in modern societies. Some more persistent elements may have shaped people's way of thinking for centuries and are thus internalized and part and parcel with being culturally Chinese, Korean or Japanese today. The concepts of the self and the individual are examples of traditional East Asian modes of thought that are distinctly different from those entertained in the West. Other elements may have been picked out and used consciously and politically to reform people and/or to support the authorities. This happened in traditional societies and it happens today.

The history of East Asian philosophy is just as diverse as the Western tradition and has undergone many radical reinterpretations. Still, mainstream Confucianism has over the centuries adopted and incorporated various strands of thinking associated with other often rival thinkers in such a way that it has become more or less synonymous with East Asian philosophy. What little we know about what the historical Confucius was thinking is vastly different from the Confucianism of the last thousand years. Since I will be speaking in very general terms about East Asian philosophy, it need not worry us here but the label ‘Confucianism’ is in itself meaningless as it is used to explain everything from foot binding (a custom which occurred 1,500 years after Confucius had died) to the economic miracles of the last decades. By designating a phenomenon as ‘Confucian’ we often envision a society based on a family-oriented hierarchy, which resembles our own Western societies a few generations back when young people spoke politely to the elderly. This allows us to conclude that, for example, China is no different from the West; China is only lagging behind in certain areas. Another common view – often characterized as ‘orientalist’ – sees Confucianism as an expression of a romantic ideal of sagacious rulership where the benevolent emperor or father takes care of and educates his children. Although perhaps closer to reality, this is also a misrepresentation, the downside of which is the despotic and cruel oppression of the people.

Immanence, Transcendence, and Characteristics of East Asian Modes of Thought

Two American philosophy professors, Roger Ames and the late David Hall, rank among the leading experts transmitting and promoting Chinese
philosophy to a Western audience (Hall and Ames 1998; 1995; 1987). They believe that since Western languages are substance-oriented, they constitute a serious obstacle when it comes to describing and interpreting traditional Chinese thought, which is primarily characterized by continuity, process and becoming. With this in mind and greatly inspired by Ames and Hall, I would like to introduce a few important aspects of East Asian thought, which are (though not entirely absent from Western philosophy) defining characteristics of East Asian modes of thinking.

The large circle with a black circumference in the illustration is supposed to represent the totality of things: everything, the world, the universe. The small solid circle may either represent an individual or a divine being such as the concept of a God. The solid circle may be envisioned outside or inside the large circle.

This gives rise to the concepts of immanence and transcendence. An immanent worldview sees the individual as well as the God as a part of the world in which everything else also resides whereas the transcendent worldview allows that man and God can exist outside or apart from the world. For example, the Jewish and the Christian God supposedly created the world in six days and oversees what is going on. God intervenes whenever he sees fit to do so. This gives rise to a dualism – and this may
be the time to point out that the concepts of *yin* and *yang* do not constitute a dualism. Originally, *yin* and *yang* referred to the shady and the sunlit sides of a mountain, and as cosmological and philosophical concepts they constitute antagonistic but complimentary principles. You cannot have one without the other, and as the one increases, the other decreases. Also *yin* and *yang* are not fixed entities; rather they are *ad hoc* filing categories so that what is *yin* in one relationship may be *yang* in another. For example, in the relationship between father and son, the son is *yin*, whereas in relation to his sister, he is *yang*.

The dualism rising out of a transcendent worldview is very different from that. The two components of a true dualism are not complimentary; you can have one without the other. In the dualism of body and soul in the Christian faith, the soul is believed to live on independently of the decay of the body. Also, to explain the world and its workings in a Christian frame of mind we need to resort to God. God, on the other hand, if at all definable, could be defined without recourse to his creation. So in the Western tradition God transcends the world and oversees it from a unique vantage point. In the East Asian tradition gods and spirits are of this world, and there is no notion of a divine creator who is beyond and apart from his creation. Creation mythologies are more concerned with the creation and rise of civilization.

A corollary of the notion of a transcendent God is the idea of objectivity in Western thought. In the Western tradition man has dreamt of taking the divine vantage point from where he can – without interfering with the world – describe and understand its workings and thus, ultimately, understand its creator, God. This is represented by the small solid circle outside the large circle. Although the idea of objectivity flies in the face of experience, we still cling on to the notion and use it as an abstract standard against which we measure statements and judgements. It is, however, not uncommon that in intercultural communication we confuse our own opinions with an objective standard. Similarly, we rarely concede other opinions the same privilege.

The idea of objectivity or an objective standard is far less common in East Asian traditions. The same is true with regard to the idea of a transcendent God. It is generally acknowledged that you speak from a certain position, place and time within the world and that this affects what you are saying. This also has a direct bearing on the concepts of self and individualism to which I return.

A further consequence of the analysis of differences in terms of immanence and transcendence is the antagonistic concepts of relativism and
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absolutism. For example, traditional Chinese philosophy is rich in relativist attitudes such as “How do we know that we know what we know?” and most thinkers are acutely aware that what seems true from one standpoint may not be so from another. Just like what is yin in one situation may be yang in another. Opposed to this is Western absolutism, which entertains ideas of objective truths and absolute values. Here we are entering the threshold of the debate on human rights. Can we insist that the human rights that have evolved out of a Western philosophical tradition apply to the rest of the world? Can China or Korea insist that these human rights do not apply to the Chinese or Koreans? This is an explosive philosophical issue with far-reaching political ramifications, which I will leave for the moment to explore another ramification of immanence and transcendence: the relationship between knowledge and action.

Knowledge and Action in the East and the West

In the Western tradition the philosopher uses his faculty of reason to transcend the world to get to know God or the principles of the world’s underlying structure. This act does not necessarily entail any consequences as far as the structure, the world, or the philosopher is concerned. However, since the source for understanding transcends the world of the philosopher, it is possible to make mistakes and get it wrong. Even so we are faced with choices to be made every day. Ideally, the longer we postpone these decisions, the more time we have to think the problems through. So it is important to separate knowledge from action. It is vital to make a clear distinction between theory and practice. The Western enterprise then is the search for the truth, and once we know the truth, we can choose it.

In contrast to this, knowledge and action in the East Asian tradition are like yin and yang. You may imagine the one without the other but it doesn’t make sense. Knowledge without action is worthless, and action that is not based on knowledge is reckless. The relationship between knowledge and action in the Chinese tradition is often compared to the linguistic category of performative statements, that is, the statement is the action. So in the Chinese tradition language is considered a kind of action whereas in the West there is a tendency to separate the two. Consider the proverb “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me”. In East Asian traditions words hurt as much as, if not more than, sticks and stones.
For a statement to be performative in the West, you need to be an authoritative person like a priest, a police officer or a judge. When the latter pronounce you guilty, you are guilty. In a somewhat similar manner, traditional Chinese philosophers were less occupied with searching for an objective truth underlying the world than they were with defining the world they saw before them. At first philosophers of the Confucian persuasion were especially concerned with defining relationships between people, and only later during the Song dynasty a thousand years ago did they truly embark on metaphysical explorations of the relationship between man and the world of which he is a part.

To these Chinese philosophers searching for and even finding an absolute truth didn’t seem rewarding since they were not looking for something to agree on. Rather than agreement they sought harmony, and insistence on one true explanation out of several possible could dangerously disrupt the harmony. The consequences of uttering truths were – and still are – carefully evaluated beforehand. The Western insistence on the truth and nothing but the truth is in China regarded as a sure sign of lack of intellectual and moral maturity, since there is absolutely no consideration of the context of the situation and the feelings of the persons involved. This is actually not so far removed from the Western point of view, as it may seem at first glance. In Danish there is a proverb to the effect that the truth is only told by children and drunks, that is, people who are without or who have switched off their social skills.

So the insistence on the truth is in the West often held up as a non-negotiable ideal while actually far more often than we might realize it is mitigated by the circumstances. In our daily lives we also preserve some sort of harmony by not telling our spouses that their new hairdos look silly, when we conceal the fact that a disease may be fatal or when an impending catastrophe needs be properly assessed before it is announced to the public in order to avoid unnecessary chaos. That is to say, in our practical life and actions we actually do concede that even if we still believe in an absolute truth we don’t necessarily adhere to it all the time. The difference between East and West in this respect seems to be the degree to which we are willing to dispense with the truth out of consideration for the feelings of others and preserving a harmonious situation. In some situations we are willing to go a long way like, for example, during the annual family gathering, when we quite consciously suppress all individual attempts at the truth in order to preserve a happy atmosphere. Many social situations in East Asia work this way all the time.
The ideal of an absolute truth leads us to judge things accordingly, and when something is not true, it must be false. The Western tendency to hold on to what is true and attempt to eliminate what is false makes it difficult for us to appreciate that, for example, the Chinese seemingly are capable of containing and accepting ambivalence and contradiction. The Chinese do not possess any urge to denounce an apparent fallacy, which from another standpoint may appear in another light. Therefore, in the Chinese tradition things and events are named adequate or inadequate as the case may be instead of true or false. This allows an event to be adequate one day and inadequate the next. Again it is hard to escape the thought how much more this attitude corresponds with our daily experience.

The Self, Equality and the Moral Education of Man

The last topic I will touch upon is the concept of self and individuality. The difference between East Asian and Western concepts of self may also be viewed as arising from a dichotomy between immanence and transcendence. While Westerners are all born in the image of God and therefore all should be treated equally, independent of race, gender or social position, East Asian children are born into this world with the same moral capacities. In the philosophical tradition this means that all East Asian children by realizing their moral capacities through education and self-cultivation may reach the level of the Confucian sage. Education in East Asian traditions puts a heavy premium on internalizing social norms and skills. The choice you have is to apply yourself and if you work hard enough – and if a number of external factors are favourable – you may succeed. If you succeed you may become a role model for others and thus you are more valuable for the community than those who fail in their efforts. Combined with the hierarchical relationships of Confucianism, which subordinates wife to husband, son to father, subject to ruler and so on, this explains why the Western concept of equality did not sit well with the East Asian tradition.

In addition to all persons being equal in the West, we are endowed with a free will to choose between good and evil. A person who chooses evil is despised and punished if caught and found guilty but is still in a philosophical and religious sense equal to the rest of us. Even when sentenced to death, we allow the perpetrator to communicate with his God and thus a chance to repent and be saved. On the other hand, the person who chooses the good, the truth, is a person of great integrity, a person who is true to himself and
his ideals. He is not easily swayed by others or misled by false ideas. Being the same person in all situations and with different people is highly valued in the West, and such a person is regarded as having a strong, individual personality. Changing your behaviour and attitude according to the context entails a number of negative connotations such as being weak, giving false impressions and so on. In China, Korea and Japan, on the other hand, this behaviour characterizes a culturally well-adjusted person, a person of ability or talent who encompasses the five virtues of Confucianism.

Mastering these five virtues is tantamount to commanding superior social skills, that is, to knowing how to behave and react in any social situation. Rather than a loss of freedom, this gives a person a sense of freedom, since one doesn't have to spend any energy figuring out what to do in this or that situation. The concept of self in traditional China is made up of all the social roles a person has: son, father, husband, scholar, clever mah-jong player, the one in the village who can eat the most spring rolls fastest. The same person can embody all of these roles, and naturally he acts differently in the different roles: authoritative as the father, submissive as the son, etc. In Confucian understanding an individual entirely lacking social roles is not only the saddest thing on earth, but he is impossible because it is precisely social roles that define the individual and set human beings apart from animals. In this context it makes little sense to talk about individuality and personal freedom in a Western understanding of these concepts.

References


Chapter 2

NEW DEMANDS, OBSOLETE VALUES?
GLOBAL CHALLENGES TO NATIONAL EDUCATION

Geir Sigurðsson

This chapter presents some initial attempts to fruitfully compare the notion of education, and, to some extent, current developments of education systems, in the Nordic countries, on the one hand, and in East Asia, on the other. An emphasis will be on Iceland as a representative of the Nordic Countries, and the People’s Republic of China as a representative of East Asia, while it is readily acknowledged that neither of the two can be taken as the most typical representative of the areas in question, being, respectively, by far the smallest country in the former and the largest in the latter.

The discussion focuses in particular on growing tensions between two general models of education. The first is of a more traditional nature and could be termed “national education”, as it primarily understands education as a process of “person making” or “edification” that aims at preparing the individual for responsible participation in the particular social environment in which he or she subsists.1 The second outlook is more recent, and can more or less be identified with the neo-liberal individualist upsurge in the world at large during the last few decades. It did not however, rise out of a vacuum. Its inchoate beginnings can be located as far back as in the late Renaissance period with Galileo Galilei’s demand for quantificational methods in science, and, more recently, with the rise of rationalized, bureaucratic capitalism

1 In these times of professed political correctness, the term “national education” may admittedly not be fashionable, as it conjures up an image of exclusion of some kind. I argue, however, that if it is acceptable to speak of “national economy”, then I cannot see why “national education”, understood as the official education policy in a given nation, designed to further the interest of both society as a whole and its individual members, is in any way problematic. After all, as I emphasize in this chapter, there are many other values beside economic values that are important, indeed necessary, for the healthy development of a nation.
during the course of industrialization in Europe, leading to the gradual infiltration of the view into all spheres of life, including education, that the value of human action should primarily be considered in economic terms. This is not the proper forum to trace back this long and complex history. In what follows, I shall argue that, while both models claim to be in the interest of both individual and society, the second model is not only ineffective but also downright pernicious to the future existence of a properly functioning social welfare state as we have hitherto known it in the Nordic countries.

While the challenges facing education today are particular to systemic features of contemporary societies, they nevertheless also belong to a strand of thinking closely accompanying and influencing developments in pedagogic reflections at least since Plato and Aristotle. In their suggestions for the construction of an exemplary society, both Plato and Aristotle were concerned with what constitutes ‘the good life’. Plato, as is well known, prioritized the interests of society as a whole, while claiming that his hierarchical model of society would result in an overall harmonious condition in which the individual eventually found his or her ‘proper’ place, although during the course of socialization it would seem that he or she had to sacrifice most if not all personal wishes and preferences. Plato’s disciple, Aristotle, however, criticized both his overemphasis on the whole as well as the implication found in Plato’s theory of ideas ‘that the manifoldness of the good can be subsumed under one idea’ (Höffe 2003: 150). Instead, Aristotle was concerned with the individual and his or her autonomous self-development as an atomistic part of the social whole. Thus, a tension between the communal and individual has been present in western intellectual history ever since its foetal beginnings.

Despite their many differences, Plato and Aristotle are in agreement that what is beneficial to the individual is also beneficial to society. They simply diverge on whether to start from above or below. Since then, history has provided us with some extreme and gruesome versions of the former paternalistic kind. My argument here, however, is that during the last few decades, we have been witnessing a development of corresponding extremities of the individualistic kind. These may certainly seem less gruesome than the social experiments conducted by fascist and communist dictatorships of the twentieth century. However, their eventual consequences may turn out to be even more detrimental to human civilization than the documented consequences of the former. Paradoxically, they even turn out not to be worthy of the name “individualistic” as they are based on a superficial resemblance
to and therefore a distorted view of human freedom. These issues will be explored further during the course of the chapter.

**Education and Civilization: Some Earlier Considerations**

It is certainly not without significance that Plato and Aristotle, arguably the founding fathers of western civilization, should have assigned education such a central place in their social philosophy. How we design and implement education is directly pertinent to the structure and character of our society. It is also significant that during the course of the twentieth century an increasing number of intellectuals voiced their concern about the status of education in the West. In lectures given in 1933, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset criticized the modern attitude to education as vocational specialization. He deplored the inherent lack of passion in the Western educational system, whereby students are made learn things for which they do not feel any need. This, he said, has produced a culture of knowledge that does not concern us in our daily life any more, a culture of apathetic specialists, a culture utterly alienated from the knowledge of that which constitutes the good life:

This culture, which does not have any root structure in man, a culture which does not spring from him spontaneously, lacks any native and indigenous values, this is something imposed, extrinsic, strange, foreign, unintelligible, in short, it is unreal. Underneath this culture – received but not truly assimilated – man will remain intact as he was; that is to say, he will remain uncultured, a barbarian. When the process of knowing was shorter, more elemental, and more organic, it came closer to being felt by the common man who then assimilated it, recreated it, and revitalized it within himself. This explains the colossal paradox of these decades – that an enormous progress in terms of culture should have produced a man of the type we now have, a man indisputably more barbarous than was the man of a hundred years ago; and that this acculturation, this accumulation of culture, should produce – paradoxically but automatically – humanity’s return to barbarism. (Ortega y Gasset 1969: pp.23f.)

Ortega y Gasset would most likely accept Max Weber’s well-known description of the dominant kind of ‘modern man’, the commercialized human being, or, as Weber refers to this kind, the ‘last’ or ‘latest’ humans, a phrase borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche: ‘Specialists without spirit, hedonists without heart: this nullity imagines itself to have attained a hitherto
unknown stage of human civilization’ (Weber 1988: 204). Weber recognized the profound dangers inherent in rationalized modernization that consisted, among other things, in a tendency to approach reality from an increasingly narrow point of view: that of its potential economic profitability. Thus, both thinkers identified a seminal paradox of modernity, namely that the specialization demanded by the increasingly complex sciences tends to undermine the very foundation of humanism that made scientific progress possible during the renaissance period. This tendency is further exacerbated by the increasing commercialization of human society leading to an even stronger demand for instantaneous ‘practical’, understood narrowly as financial or economic, gain from any given human activity. In tandem, then, specialization and commercialization will resist educational policies aiming at the long-term adoption of socially beneficial and holistic values that serve to maintain and support a society as a community. These have been joined by a dominant sense of individualism that rejects any efforts to inculcate certain values or ideas on the basis of a highly questionable version of the enlightenment view of the person as the source of values.

Thus, there is much to indicate that the previous humanist kind of education is at best peripheral in the modern educational system in much of the industrialized world. Vocational education and specialization yield of course tangible results. After graduation from school, a student finds an occupation and produces, in most cases, measurable goods, at least in terms of revenue. The fruits of character or moral education, of a developed sense or judgement, on the other hand, are intangible, immeasurable and thus statistically non-presentable. Moreover, it may very well be the case that keeping people technically specialized without a developed faculty of judgement serves certain political and economic purposes. Referring to what he calls ‘the banking concept of education’, in which students passively receive, memorize and repeat the ‘deposits’ made by the teacher, Paolo Freire, in his classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, argues that it is a dominant tendency among educators.

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2 I therefore do not agree with the all-too common interpretation of Weber as an unambiguous adherent of rationalized modernization. Nor, for that matter, do I share the view that Weber held Confucianism to be an obstacle to modernization in general. He certainly held that it did not give rise to the ‘way of life’ (*Lebensführung*), including ways of thinking and valuing, that eventually generated institutionalized, rationalized capitalism in the Western part of the world. In my understanding of Weber, however, this function of Confucianism is to be seen as benign rather than pernicious.
. . . to regulate the way the world ‘enters into’ the students. The teacher’s task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to ‘fill’ the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge. And since people ‘receive’ the world as passive entities, education should make them more passive still, and adapt them to the world. The educated individual is the adapted person, because he or she is better ‘fit’ for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it. (Freire 1970: 76)

Educators and other intellectuals have thus identified a parallel process accompanying the great scientific and technological progresses of modernity, in which education is reduced to a simple tool to realize narrow ends, which again contributes to the increased one-dimensionality of human civilization. In some cases, perhaps even more than we are ready to admit, education may be used deliberately as an indoctrinating scheme to preserve the dominant relations of power and wealth in our societies. All of this directly contradicts the civilizational aim of education to empower the members of society to contribute to its further development as a continuous cooperative undertaking.

**Education as the Basis for the Nordic Model and the Special Case of Iceland**

The Nordic countries have, for quite some time now, been regarded as model countries in the world. They have been peaceful, prosperous and their citizens have enjoyed more equality in terms of both wealth and status than in most other countries. This success is predominantly based on elaborated ideas about the aims and content of public education. Denmark and Sweden were forerunners in this respect, establishing some of the earliest universities in the world, and being heavily influenced by the romantic–enlightenment-based German ‘Bildungspolitik’ of Johann Gottfried Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt, as, for instance, exemplified in the ground-breaking works of N.F.S. Grundtvig. According to Grundtvig, universal culture must be seen as consisting of smaller parts, i.e. national cultures. An individual should adopt, through education, primarily the cultural heritage of his own nation. Thereby, the individual becomes a member of his own people. It was in this
manner that the function of liberal education and folk high schools was to develop the consciousness of ordinary Danish citizens in such a manner that common people would turn into a nation (*almue - folk*). The objective was popular–national enlightenment in the form of a civic society. Essential in this process was the history and mythology, the language and, particularly, the vernacular of the people. There is no doubt that this programme turned out to be decisive for the successful development of the modern Danish welfare society, as well as, in fact, other welfare societies, such as the one that took shape in Iceland in the twentieth century after the country gained independence from Denmark in 1918.

The Nordic success-story can, in other words, be traced back to the high quality of the education system that has been producing civilized, responsible and creative individuals with a strong sense of community. This value-based education seems, however, to be on the retreat. The impact of globalization has of course been real for quite some time (and it was certainly present in the time of Grundtvig), and some signs of the dangers described above by Ortega y Gasset, Weber and Freire have been present for at least a century. However, I believe that the Nordic countries have mostly managed to steer clear of these until rather recently.

Decisive was the introduction of radical new technologies of communication in the 1990s that led to even more intense demands for (relative) uniformity. The end of the Cold War and the ensuing explosion of a neo-liberal marketization of human goods have also undermined a narrower embrace of ‘particularist’ visions and values, such as ‘national’ or ‘pan-Nordic’ ones, as such views tend to be regarded as excessively parochial, nationalistic and even questionable with regard to individual human rights. The fragmentation of the Nordic region has also been exacerbated through stronger EU integration in the last couple of decades, resulting in weakening the role played by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the nationalization of many previously pan-Nordic institutes and a somewhat diminishing interest in Nordic collaboration within the region itself.

In line with this trend, global commerce has managed to produce an increasingly dominant image of education as an adoption of universally applicable and specialized technical know-how or ‘skills’ that leaves little if any space for national or culture-specific considerations, in other words, a

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‘curriculum’ true to its name. With regard to higher education, the British educationalist Ronald Barnett has argued that

... the concept of ‘curriculum’ is being emptied of substance. A curriculum here becomes nothing but its endpoints. Matters of educational process, of the character of the pedagogical transactions between tutor and students and between student and student, and of any general educational aims that the curriculum might serve are being airbrushed out of the picture. In short, in this discursive shift, in this reduction of curriculum to specifications largely of skills, we see a framing of the curriculum in instrumental terms. A curriculum is nothing but the production of a set of skills, and is only to be valued providing it delivers skills. (Barnett 2003: 564)

Such skills, Barnett goes on, ‘include to a significant degree ones that are assumed to be pertinent to the demands of both a global knowledge economy and a changing social order.’ While knowledge used to be ‘its own end’, it now ‘appears to be valued for the particular ends it serves’ (Barnett 2003: 565). Barnett then continues:

The absence of a serious debate about curriculum, accompanied by a subtle reshaping of curriculum so as to generate personal competences for a fluid economy and society, ushers in a new performative universality. This universality, however, is only skin-deep. Its deep structure is one of difference, diversity, local ‘needs’ ... and flexibility associated with economic changes, as concepts and techniques take off that are likely to have economic value. (Barnett 2003: 565)

Barnett is primarily concerned about the status of universities as institutions that produce knowledge of a universal character. While this is in its own right a contested issue, one may perhaps replace the term ‘universal’ with ‘objective’ to shed light on the apparent dissolution of the university today. I quote Barnett at length in this respect:

The dissolution is not a dissolution in space. It is not that universities are now institutions that are distributed in virtual space (with the onward march of electronic communications), even though that is part of the picture. The dissolution in question that the universities are facing is conceptual. Universities no longer stand, it appears, for anything in particular. Nothing of substance attaches to their formerly core concepts.
Their key practices run into those of the surrounding world. The private sector and university research units form private companies. Technology is ‘transferred’. Individuals study in their own time and in their own place and can choose between private sector profit-making organizations or accredited ‘universities’. Universities compete with and enter partnerships with management consultants in taking on consultancies, many of which have research dimensions. There is no fixity to any of the concepts or practices of the twenty-first-century university. Indeed, as if to underline the point, many private sector profit-making corporations now arrogate to themselves the term ‘university’. It appears that no practice, no idea, and no responsibility attaches to the term ‘university’ any more. (Barnett 2003: 567)

Universities are in the process of becoming an instrument of economic life. What is much worse is that this is gradually gaining normative acceptance. At least in Iceland, all universities, be they public or private, brag about their ‘strong rapport with business’ in vying for new students. Thus, public universities in Iceland have found themselves compelled to follow the route taken by the two private universities after their foundation in the 1990s in order to defend themselves from the accusation that they have not been keeping up with the times and thus to demonstrate their ‘competitiveness’ in the increasingly blatant marketplace of higher education.

Within the universities, skills for businesses are being manufactured on a grand scale, in some cases with a quite peculiar implication. Take, for instance, the plethora of novel university subjects termed ‘management’ (e.g. human resource management, project management) that essentially present a one-size-fits-all technique for organizing corporations and institutes (and their staff). This is particularly interesting, not to say ironic, considering the current emphasis on individuality. If we are all so individual and particular to the point of transcending cultural influences, as appears to be implied by neo-liberal individualism, how come one can justify teaching one universal way to manage human institutions?

There are, in other words, many combined factors that have been contributing to the weakening of ‘national’ education in the Nordic countries. In Iceland, the situation may be even more serious than in the other Nordic countries as Icelanders tend to be much more susceptible to the temptations of neo-liberal economics. The primary reason for this is that Icelanders have always been more receptive to ideas that emphasize the individual's freedom
to pursue his or her ends rather than his or her responsibility to the community. The idea of individual rights based upon the notion of negative freedom, as endorsed by British utilitarians such as John Stuart Mill, has appealed to Icelanders more than a focus on social duties based upon the notion of positive freedom, as argued in particular by continental European thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and G.W.F. Hegel. Iceland has therefore always had a significantly weaker welfare model than the other Nordic countries. As a result, a sense of responsibility to one's community is also weaker, which is obviously reflected in both parent-upbringing and education at large. It would therefore be fairly easy for Icelanders to slip into the neo-liberal view that education should primarily be a means to gain freedom, perhaps even understood as freedom from the physical presence of others through wealth that enables one to isolate oneself from them.

To be fair to Icelandic intellectuals, some of them have voiced strong criticism of the country’s education policies. In 1987, Páll Skúlason, who was later to serve as the rector of University of Iceland, went even so far to argue that ‘It is a fact that there exists no conscious Icelandic education policy’ (Skúlason 1987: 331). In the same paper, he states:

The main goal of political education in a democratic society must consist in disciplining and training independent critical thinking in its subjects. Aiming at such a goal will have wide-ranging implications for the education system as a whole. Schools in general should and must not consider it their only task to enable students to undertake particular jobs when transferred to society. Even special schools with the explicit purpose of training people for particular jobs must fulfill their democratic duty: to make their students capable of fulfilling their civil (or political) duties by training their independent judgment and strengthening their understanding of social issues. The main goal of democratic political education is to teach people how to have a sense for different interests and for that which regards the common good (Skúlason 1987: 334).

More recently, a similar discussion has been taken up by Ólafur Páll Jónsson, of the School of Education, University of Iceland. In his analysis of recent national curriculum guidelines for primary education, Jónsson argues that nothing has changed since Skúlason brought up the matter almost 25 years ago, and that education turns out to be largely conflated with practical and technical training for certain jobs (Jónsson 2007: 94–109). In short, the Icelandic education system seems to incorporate rather clearly the tendency, identified by Barnett, that a curriculum true to its name is being replaced by various ‘skills’.

No wonder, then, that the leading educational institutes in Iceland, in particular the University of Iceland, were mostly silent during the economic madness taking place during the ‘boom years’ leading to the collapse of the Icelandic economy in 2008, during which the banking sector exceeded the country’s economy by around ten times with obvious indicators in society. Not only was the university mostly paralyzed through its ‘strong rapport with business’, as it was afraid to bite the hand that fed it, but it also seems that the education system has failed to produce a sufficiently critical, in this case, self-critical, attitude and ability.

**Chinese and Confucian Education in the Modern World**

Interestingly, the European romantic notion of education has much in common with the Confucian view of education as a process of co-creating socialization and thus enhanced humanization. Ancient and hopefully also contemporary Confucianism portrays education as a mode of transformation in which persons perceive themselves as not merely being *in* a world, but *with* it and *with others*. They are not merely spectators but re-creators of the cultural tradition (Freire 1970: 75). Whilst the importance of tradition is certainly underscored in Confucian philosophy, it mainly serves to guide the evolving personality on his or her path towards improving and integrating the world. Confucianism is, or could be, a revolutionary philosophy, but it is revolutionary in that the revolution, the re-creation, is continuous and never comes to an end.

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New Demands, Obsolete Values?

Now this was of course not the Confucianism that was abolished and denounced by the modernizing powers of China of the post-Qing era. Having been a state ideology for centuries, it is probably a rather accurate portrayal by one commentator that Confucianism kept ‘swallowing ancient learning without digesting it,’ having become no more than a petrified relic of the past (Jin 1998: 6). An Enlightenment-based criticism of the last Confucian empire is therefore not without some justification.

As it turned out, however, the baby was thrown out with the bath water: the merits of the ancient Confucian philosophy were sacrificed on the altar of modernization. The traditional Hanlin Academy, certainly an out-dated institution in many respects, was abolished, and in the decades that followed, China strove to modernize its educational system by appropriating methods and policies designed in the West. This would eventually, from 1934 onward and even more so with the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, result in a heavy concentration on specialized courses of study at universities at the massive cost of liberal education or character education (Wang and Li 2001: 315). This policy of specialization was always somewhat of a controversy, which then culminated after the opening of the country in the early 1980s, generating the justified worry that the education system is not producing students who live up to the demands of a healthy society:

With its new-found wealth, China was building better schools, and with their new-found freedom, Chinese educators and local officials were actively seeking out alternative ways of teaching which might help alleviate what many saw as a nation-wide problem – namely, that in the course of preparing children for the college examination system, China’s

6 The Chinese system of higher education was, during the Republican years, largely influenced by the German, French and American systems. After 1949, however, a Soviet model was adapted in order ‘to achieve socialist construction within a decade. . . . This resulted in a huge number of highly specialist institutions under specific ministries, a small number of so-called comprehensive universities, which had departments only in basic humanities and sciences, and polytechnical universities mainly focusing on the engineering sciences.’ Ruth Hayhoe, ‘Lessons from the Chinese Academy,’ in Knowledge Across Cultures: A Contribution to Dialogue Among Civilizations, eds. Ruth Hayhoe and Julia Pan (Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong, 2001), p. 341.

7 It is interesting, as the authors further explain, that in the PRC, ‘[w]hen specialized education failed to meet all the requirements placed on it, increasing specialization was the response. Thus the number of specialties increased from 215 to 627 between 1953 and 1962. In 1963, the Ministry of Education intervened. It issued an official list of general specialties in universities and colleges, which reduced the number of specialties to 432. This regulatory measure was not fully followed through however.’ (pp. 315f.)
schools were producing students who were good at memorizing, but disinclined to think critically, creatively, and independently (Colvin 2004: 37).

Ironically, Chinese ‘traditional’ education, having originally developed from largely Confucian sensibilities, appears to have become thoroughly anti-Confucian in nature in that it does not elicit the individual student’s elaboration on the subject, but has resorted to the method of ‘filling,’ to use Freire’s expression, the students with standardized knowledge. Consider, for instance, a recent description by a Chinese middle-school teacher:

In a Traditional class, the teacher always makes the lecture from the very beginning to the end. The students have no time to think, to practice. They can only stand straight and listen, or say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ together. They have no time for their own opinions or ideas. They can only memorize the answer that teachers give them and the answer is the same (Liu 2004: 47).8

Whilst moral or character education in the People’s Republic has been promoted by all higher educational institutions in later years (Wang and Li 2001: 319), the obstacles due to ideology and methodological codification are not easily overcome. First of all, the promoted values tend to be ones that seem to serve the interests of the authorities, which by now is obvious not only to teachers but also to students themselves. Secondly, the usual ‘inculcation’ method for transmitting these values, using exemplary individuals and models of morality, such as Lei Feng, is so heavy handed that it ‘has rendered the public and even school children cynical’ (Hawkins, Zhou and Lee 2001: 203). Thirdly, however, the Chinese educational authorities, though certainly not neo-liberal in the usual sense of the word, seem to be buying into the neo-liberal view of education as a training field for economic activities. Character education seems to be thought of as measures to bring

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8 Cf. also the following description of Chinese university pedagogical practices: ‘Classrooms are still places that encourage neither critical nor creative thinking. In the worst scenario, the teacher enters the classroom and opens a book. The bell rings. The teacher proceeds to read. Some students pay attention, anticipating that the material may be included in the examination. Other students doze off or chat among themselves, knowing that they can read the text when they cram several nights before the exam. The final bell rings. The teacher closes the book. What substitutes for learning and teaching has closed another session.’ Michael Agelasto and Bob Adamson, ‘Editors’ Conclusion – The State of Chinese Higher Education Today,’ in Higher Education in Post-Mao China, eds. Michael Agelasto and Bob Adamson (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998), p. 407.
about social stability *in order to* enhance creativity in the domains of science and technology. Consider the remarks of Li Lanqing, former Vice Premier and a major proponent of the current educational reforms in the PRC:

Schools are expected to provide an intellectual education while placing more emphasis on moral education and advancing physical and aesthetic education, as well as work skills and social practice so that these fields may become integrated and achieve balanced development for our students. Unless these issues are addressed, efforts to improve the overall quality of students will be affected, and education as a whole will fall short of the demands of the 21st century for economic, scientific and technological development and social progress. (Li 2005: 313)

With such an attitude to education, the Chinese authorities may be putting the cart before the horse. Confucius, while fully aware of all the practical consequences of a harmonious society, understood that learning, education and morality must, in order to be effective, be practiced for its own sake, and not merely for the sake of reaching some distant aims. To learn and practice what one has learnt is in itself a source of human joy, as he famously states in the opening passage of the *Analects*. A truly creative society that stimulates meaningful learning and innovation for its own sake and lays just as much emphasis on humanities and arts as on science and technology is sure to yield creative results in the latter fields from within the student. Critics of higher education policies in the People’s Republic have pointed out that the ‘overwhelming policy emphasis on higher education as an instrument of economic success tends to ignore the discourse of the ideas of a modern university’ and have cast serious doubts upon ‘the change of university as a social institution to university as a market-oriented enterprise’ (Zhao and Guo 2002: 217).

**Concluding Remarks**

While dissimilar in many important respects, the Nordic countries and China with its Confucian legacy share at least the feature that their societies

9 *Lunyu*, 1.1.
enjoyed relative ‘inner care’ through the implementation of educational standards and methods over an extended period of time. This both established and maintained social practices that contributed to the continuous and progressive regeneration of the societies. But they also have a common dilemma, namely that the pillars of their success, the value-based education systems, are not being duly acknowledged in the modern world. In fact, they are being heavily challenged.

The challenge is multi-stranded, complex and takes different forms depending on each region. In China, of course, the Confucian legacy was rejected by most modernizers throughout the twentieth century. Recently, it has been gaining ground again in China, but it is still very unclear what form it will take or to what extent the authorities will accept its comeback. Should there be a level of Confucianization in the sphere of education (and it could be argued that without one, there will be no Confucianization to speak of), it will have to compete with both the state’s apparent penchant for producing a skilled workforce for the Chinese economy, and demands from the general public, primarily parents, to dedicate most of education to the inculcation of skills that enable students to get well-paid jobs. Thus, though the future may prove me wrong, there seems limited space for a Confucian-based character education in Chinese schools.

In the Nordic region, policies of national education are currently being sacrificed on the altar of the globalized neo-liberal economic model, conjoined with a rather extreme kind of individualism that in its pure form recognizes only rights or entitlements but no duties. That we should be buying into this model is tragic, considering that it has amply demonstrated its failures in the world, except, perhaps, for the wealthy and powerful. Wherever its policies have been implemented, it has resulted in serious income inequality, disharmony within society, a breakdown of democratic values and an increased crime-rate, not to speak of distasteful greed and one-dimensionality among individual members of society. To this may be added that it does not even work as an economic model. It has been seen that the uncontrolled liberalization of the market in the global economy is bound to produce inflated prices or bubbles that lead to regular economic crises. The crises add insult to injury by affecting mostly the worst-off segment of society, leaving states heavily indebted and thus forcing them to make severe budget-cuts in the welfare system, and therefore further widening the gap between rich and poor. It should be clear by now that the neo-liberal, indeed, the entire capitalist model in its present form is very possibly
the least sustainable model available, as it can only be kept alive through growing consumption, which is extremely detrimental to our vulnerable environment. Humankind, especially those better off in the world, should reduce rather than increase consumption.

In this context, however, I argue that neo-liberal individualism is downright pernicious to the possibility of maintaining a functional welfare society. There are many and fairly obvious reasons for this. A welfare society requires that its population, or at least a reasonably high proportion of the population, understands, respects and seeks to protect the common good. An economic-individualist way of thinking will necessarily find itself in tension with a view of the common good. Further, and related to this, a dominance of a neo-liberal attitude will necessarily lead to an increasing pressure to privatize welfare institutions. As soon as such a process begins, the end is in view. Thus, should these globalized demands prevail, which may very well be the case, then we may also be witnessing the demise of the Nordic welfare state as we have known it up to now.

References


Part 2

Democracy and Welfare under Pressure: Responses to Globalization and Financial Crises in the Two Regions
Chapter 3

NORDIC DEMOCRACY AS A MODEL-BUILDING CONCEPT

Johan Strang and Jussi Kurunmäki

Even the most universally oriented philosophical or theoretical accounts of democracy often discuss a number of paradigmatic cases.\(^1\) While the Athenian democracy is commonly taken as the ancient birthplace of democracy,\(^2\) democracy has had a number of additional places and cultural contexts that have provided us with a wide range of different democratic models, perhaps also equally applicable in other places and times. There is French revolutionary democracy, the direct democracy of the Swiss cantons, American democracy as famously described by Tocqueville, and democracy associated with the idea of mixed government and parliamentarianism in Britain.\(^3\) Much has been written about the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of democratic regimes as well as their institutional settings. By contrast, not much is known about the political manoeuvres and speech acts by which ‘democracy’ has been tied to particular regions and cultures in concrete historical situations. The aim of this chapter is to discuss such manoeuvres by exploring a series of efforts to rhetorically produce and reproduce a particular Nordic version of democracy. In particular, we will underline the model-building nature of this rhetoric.

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1 This chapter is essentially an abridged and updated version of our chapter ‘Nordic Democracy in a World of Tensions,’ in *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy* (Studia Fennica Historica 17, Finnish Literature Society, Helsinki, 2010), co-edited by Johan Strang and Jussi Kurunmäki.


The focus here is on the uses of the particular term ‘Nordic democracy’ in a series of volumes that have been published from the 1930s onwards. Our aim is to discuss the different meanings that different historical actors have given to ‘Nordic democracy’ in various circumstances. The focus is rhetorical (Skinner 1996; 2002) and as such compatible with the main ideas of conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*), according to which the meaning of a concept is always potentially contested and likely to change when it is used in different contexts by actors with diverging political intentions. The aim is not to judge whether there actually exists a particular Nordic democratic tradition or a special Nordic form of democracy that could be said to characterize the histories and traditions of all the five different Nordic countries. We are interested rather in the instrumentality and political function of the claim that there is such a thing as Nordic democracy.

**Nordic Democracy in the 1930s – the Democratic Haven of the North**

The term ‘Nordic democracy’ emerged in the 1930s as an antidote against both geopolitical and ideological threats, which often were quite difficult to separate from each other. It was used to demarcate the Nordic countries as an island of democratic order in contrast to the militaristic and totalitarian regimes in Europe. However, as the term ‘Nordic democracy’ seems to have been launched primarily by Social Democrats, there were also strong domestic intentions behind this rhetoric. In using ‘Nordic democracy’ the

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Social Democrats fought the radical political factions of the right and the left by providing a cultural and historical legitimacy for their own particular politics.

‘After the Nazi takeover, Nordic democracy [det nordiske folkestyre] discovered what it was like to have a Dictatorship as a neighbour.’ This is how the Danish social democratic intellectual Hartvig Frisch opened his book *Pest over Europa – Bolschevisme, Fascisme og Nazisme* (Plague over Europe – Bolshevism, Fascism and Nazism) (1933: 5). According to Frisch, it was time for the Nordics to show that there was strength in Nordic democracy [det nordiske Demokrati]. For him, the political democracy and parliamentarianism of the Nordic countries had been created by Nordic peasants. But now, it served as a foundation on which the labour movement was able to build a ‘social democracy’ (Frisch 1933: 9 (emphasis in original)).

This link between the legacy of peasant freedom, existing parliamentary institutions, and the current social democratic agenda of the labour movement in the context of the rise of totalitarianism was also characteristic of the most notable event in the promotion of the concept of ‘Nordic democracy’: the celebration of the ‘Day of Nordic Democracy’ in Malmö in August 1935 by the Swedish Social Democratic Youth and the Socialist Youth International.6 In his speech at the event, Per Albin Hansson, the Swedish Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party (the Social Democrats) boldly argued that Norden7 should become a mighty agitator against dictatorship and a model for other countries (Fyra tal om nordiske demokrati 1935: 5, 11). But the rhetoric of Nordic democracy was more than just a principled statement against totalitarianisms, for it was also a tool by which the Social Democrats established themselves as a party that was a respectful bearer of a national and Nordic cultural and historical heritage. In this sense it was largely synonymous with folkhemmet (the people’s home), which was another culturally nationalistic phrase of the Social Democrats. The promotion of ‘Nordic democracy’ can be seen as one of the rhetorical ‘moves’8 by which social democracy de-radicalised its own societal vision while simultaneously

6 Four speeches held on the occasion by leading social democratic politicians from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden (H.P. Hansen, Väinö Tanner, Johan Nygaardsvold, and Per Albin Hansson) were published in *Fyra tal om Nordisk Demokrati* (1935). Stockholm: Frihets förlag

7 Common name for the 5 Nordic countries.

8 On rhetorical moves in argument, see Skinner 2002, 115.
aiming at improving the prevailing bourgeois conception of democracy by adding an egalitarian societal and economic dimension to it.

These re-profiling efforts of the Social Democrats gained positive attention abroad. The single most important person from outside Norden to promote the idea of Nordic democracy was the American journalist Marquis W. Childs. To be sure, Childs picked up the very formula ‘Nordic democracy’ only once, in an article in which he claimed having found ‘evidence of the underlying vitality of this “Northern democracy”’ in Sweden (Childs 1937/38: 35). However, in the 1930s he published a series of works presenting a highly favourable picture of Scandinavian political and social life, including the condition of democracy in the North. A favourable presentation of Swedish (and to some extent Scandinavian) politics from the 1930s can also be found in the volume *Democratic Sweden*, produced by The New Fabian Research Bureau in 1938, and in Ernest Darwin Simon’s book *The Smaller Democracies* (1939).

The revised Social Democratic position was positively received in internationally progressive quarters, and often it was seen as compatible with the intentions of the ‘American way’ as it was understood in the New Deal period (Ruth 1984: 56). Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish economist and social scientist, who at the time was in the United States writing his *An American Dilemma* which was to give him an international reputation, contributed to this opinion-building, by show-casing democracy in the Nordic countries in two articles published in the progressive American journal *Survey Graphic* in 1939. Myrdal explained to the Americans that the Nordic countries were too small to maintain an external defence that would make them safe in a military sense, and that the only way they could defend their democracy was by making the population immune to communist and Nazi propaganda. This, in turn, was something that the social democratic governments of the Nordic countries had accomplished through a skilful economic and social policy that ‘delivered the goods’ (Myrdal 1939).

Myrdal was to some extent drawing on another Swedish scholar whose name was also to become internationally known. The political scientist Herbert Tingsten, the foremost specialist on political ideologies in Sweden

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9 It should be noted that ‘Northern’ was a common translation into English of the Scandinavian term ‘nordisk’ in the 1930s.

Nordic Democracy in the Cold War – the Middle Way

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the concept of democracy was intensively discussed everywhere. A couple of decades after its celebrated breakthrough, democracy had managed to outlive its most severe crisis. It was commonly held that democracy had established itself as the most powerful political system, both morally and militarily. Democracy was univocally supported, and sometimes interpreted as an ‘over-ideology’, underneath which a variety of practical implementations were feasible. This is what Tingsten suggested in his book *Demokratiens problem* (The Problem of Democracy) in 1945 (Tingsten 1945). Tingsten’s attempt at de-ideologizing democracy by placing it above everyday politics was one of many rhetorical moves in the political struggle over the meaning of the concept of democracy during the immediate post-war era. As it was, the victorious powers of the Second World War were divided into two camps, both claiming to represent true democracy and denying the legitimacy of the other. The UNESCO report *Democracy in a World of Tensions* (1951) profoundly illustrates both the ambitions and the impossibility of finding a common ground for understanding democracy.11

11 The enterprise was an ambitious study of the idea of democracy, based on an enquiry that was sent to more than five hundred experts in the fields of philosophy, law, history,
It is in such a context of a ‘world of tensions’ that the second wave of literature on Nordic democracy or Scandinavian democracy, emerging in the 1940s and 1950s, should be understood. The notion of Nordic democracy not only survived the transformation of the international context, but the emerging polarization of the Cold War actually provided it with increased weight, particularly regarding the middle way associations. Simultaneously, the partisan social democratic use of ‘Nordic democracy’ of the mid-thirties was largely deserted, and the concept was now used beyond party lines in order to signify features of the Nordic countries as a whole. It is possible to view this as a sign of the augmented position of the Social Democrats in the Nordic countries. In other words, the Social Democrats had succeeded in establishing their party and the labour movement as respectful bearers of the national heritage. Moreover, the new international context made it possible for the Social Democrats to more strongly than before present their partisan standpoint as something of a national destiny.

In the preface to the volume *Nordisk Demokrati* (1949) the two Danish editors Hal Koch and Alf Ross noted that ‘[t]he war was barely over before it became overwhelmingly clear that there existed no common understanding of the meaning of democracy’ (Koch and Ross 1949). The explicitly stated purpose of the book was to show to the world that somewhere between New York and Moscow there was a Nordic area where a superior and more harmonious form of political and social life had grown out of the experiences of the peoples themselves. In his own contribution to the book, Ross followed Tingsten in his attempt to de-politicize democracy and to stress its formal and procedural aspects. According to Ross, who had established himself as a democracy theoretician through his book *Hvorfor Demokrati?* (Why Democracy?) in 1946, democracy was characterized primarily by the majority principle, while capitalism and socialism represented different economical policies applicable under both democratic and totalitarian rule (Ross 1946).

The other editor of *Nordisk Demokrati*, the theologian Hal Koch, had a different conceptualization of democracy. Drawing on the famous Danish political science, sociology, economics, communications analysis, and logic. The turnover was about one fourth of the total. The questionnaire was conducted and analysed by two Norwegian scholars, Arne Naess and Stein Rokkan, who gained international reputations in the study of democracy during the Cold War era. See McKeon & Rokkan 1951.

nineteenth-century educationalist N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), Koch emphasized enlightened discussion and education as the main features of ‘the democratic way of life’ (Koch 1945). To be sure, Koch and Ross have often been presented as the main protagonists of the Danish democracy debate, but in this particular historical context they had a common motive: to resist communism by defending a social democratic interpretation of democracy. By using ‘Nordic democracy’ they were able to give national, cultural and historical legitimacy to their own account. Moreover, by the anthology *Nordisk Demokrati* they were able to gather Scandinavian support for their cause as they brought together an impressive number of distinguished Danish, Norwegian and Swedish scholars and politicians in order to present and defend the idea of a specifically Nordic type of democracy, more successful – and ultimately more democratic – than other political systems of the East and the West. According to K. K. Steincke, the former Social Democratic Social Minister and Minister of Justice of Denmark, who was handed the job to write an epilogue to the volume, it was ‘not the Nordic countries that should learn from the East or the West, but Russia and America that could learn from the Nordic democracies; the champions of peace, freedom and social politics in a chaotic and mentally deranged world’ (Steincke 1949: 458). It was also the explicit wish of the editors that the volume would soon be published in English, so that the world could be informed about the ‘democracy of the middle’ that successfully combined the political freedom of the West with the ideals of economic and social levelling of the East (Koch and Ross 1949: XV).

When the volume was finally remade into English under the title *Scandinavian Democracy: Development of Democratic Thought & Institutions in Denmark, Norway and Sweden* in 1958, (Lauwerys 1958) the message of the social democratic middle way reformism and class compromise had already been presented to an international audience by the Scandinavian–American anthology *Scandinavia: Between East and West* (Friis 1950). As the editor


14 Henning Friis (ed.) (1950) Scandinavia: Between East and West. Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press. It should be noted that the editor of the book explained the omission of Finland and Iceland by maintaining that these two countries were, despite their historical and cultural closeness to the Scandinavian countries, ‘too different in many respects to be profitably included in this survey’. Friis 1950, ix.
of the book, Henning Friis, put it, the book was ‘based on the conception that Scandinavian culture is a distinctive culture somewhere between that of free-enterprise democracy in the United States and that of the Communist dictatorship in Soviet Russia’ (Friis 1950: x). It is noteworthy, however, that both English-language anthologies were supported by The American–Scandinavian Foundation. Despite the repeated emphases on ‘the middle way’ and the mapping of the Scandinavian countries in-between the blocs, Scandinavia was evidently regarded as nonetheless belonging to the Western hemisphere. Indeed, the editor of Scandinavian Democracy, J. A. Lauwerys, a University of London professor, stated that the purpose of the book was to present ‘an account of the special manner in which the democratic principles upon which Western society is founded operate in Scandinavian countries’ (Lauwerys 1958: 7).

Nordic Democracy from the 1980 Onwards – the Threatened Welfare State

It took more than twenty years before ‘Nordic democracy’ was next internationally promoted in a form of an anthology. For sure, the language of ‘Nordic democracy’ was not absent in the 1960s and 1970s but it is, nevertheless, possible to suggest that during this period ‘Nordic democracy’ was giving way to an emerging use of ‘the Nordic Society’, ‘the welfare state’ and ‘the Nordic model’. When the volume Nordic Democracy was published in 1981 (this time with support from the Nordic Cultural Fund), in which both Finland and Iceland were included, the emphasis had shifted from ideological argumentation to a thorough presentation of the institutional design of the five Nordic countries (Allardt et. al. 1981). As indicated also by the lengthy sub-title of the compendium, Issues and Institutions in Politics,

15 A specialist in social policy issues, Friis was at that time Adviser in Social Science to the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and United Nations Adviser on Social Welfare to the Government of Egypt. The book was the outgrowth of a series of lectures that were given at the New School for Social Research, New York.
16 See e.g. Friis 1950, v.
17 For example, ‘Nordic society’ was the key category and the point of departure for the historical investigation in Eino Jutikkala’s Pohjoismaisen yhteiskunnan historiallisia juuria (Historical Roots of the Nordic Society), which is one of the most influential Finnish studies of modern political history of the Nordic countries. See Jutikkala, Eino (1965) Pohjoismaisen yhteiskunnan historiallisia juuria. Porvoo: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö. On ‘Nordic society’ and ‘the Nordic welfare state’, see Kettunen 2005.
Economy, Education, Social and Cultural Affairs, the middle-way positioning of the early Cold War context had given way to multi-dimensional descriptions of exemplary and firmly established welfare societies. The language of international relations and political theory was, by and large, replaced by the language of social policy and sociology. ‘Nordic democracy’ was now understood as virtually synonymous with ‘the Nordic welfare state’.

In the foreword to the book, K. B. Andersen, former social democratic Foreign Minister and then President of the Danish Parliament, claimed that ‘democracy, as we look upon it in Scandinavia, is not only a form of government but also comprises social and economic democracy as well as the democratic principles underlying justice, education, and culture, etc. This broadened concept of democracy is held in common by these five nations, not only in the sense that it has put its stamp on society in all the Nordic countries but also in that it as a form of government is not solely the vehicle for an elite but is based on the support of the people as a whole’ (Allardt et. al. 1981: i–ii). This conceptualization of Nordic democracy diverged considerably from the formal and procedural account defended by Tingsten and Ross in the 1940s. Yet, the belief and the message that there was something superior in the Nordic version of democracy lived on. To be sure, Andersen issued a warning about the potentially patronizing tone of the book. Nevertheless, he insisted that Nordic democracy was being presented as a model for others with ‘much useful information […] that may be applied in the task of harmonizing the often vexing relationships between society and the individual in the complex world in which we live’ (Allardt et. al. 1981: ii).

‘Nordic democracy’ was also treated as synonymous with ‘the Nordic welfare model’ in the volume Nordisk demokrati i förändring (Nordic democracy in transition) in 1999, half a century after the first anthology. However, by now, the previous optimism and expansionism was replaced with protectionism, even sentimentality. According to the editors of the book, the prosperity and the future of the welfare state was threatened by the process of European integration and a globalizing world (Karvonen and Ljungberg 1999: 410–413). But a revision of the social democratic vision of politics can nevertheless be noted here, as one of the editors emphasized the importance of judicial guarantees of the rights of citizens as well as the principle of the separation of powers if Nordic democracy was to survive in the future. According to him, changes in society had bypassed ‘the old collectivistic view of democracy’ that was based solely on the majority
principle (Karvonen 1999: 403). Accordingly, Nordic democracy was to be reformed in conjunction with the idea of the Rechtsstaat (Karvonen and Ljungberg 1999: 404, 412).

An indication of the departure from the earlier social democratic conception can also be found in Demokrati i Norden (Nordisk Ministerråd 2005), which was a report from the Democracy Committee of the Nordic Council of Ministers. As the title of the report indicates, the notion of a particular Nordic version of democracy was substituted with the unspecific language of ‘Nordic democracies’ (Nordisk Ministerråd 2005: 157). For sure, the Democracy Committee did use the specific figure ‘Nordic democracy’ on some occasions, but these were rare and it seems that ‘Nordic democracy’ had lost ground as the majority of the Nordic countries had become members of the European Union and as the Nordic welfare state had lost some of its previous status as an international beacon.

However, this is not the whole picture. In 2002, the Nordic Council's fiftieth anniversary was celebrated under the title ‘Nordic Democracy 2020’. Not only the title but also many speeches given by members of the Council and other key-note speakers in the jubilee meeting indicated that the idea of a particular Nordic democracy was not, and should not be, dead. At the same time as the virtuous effects of gradual democratization, broad popular participation in politics and welfare policy were pointed out, the overall spirit of the event was nevertheless a concern over the consequences of European integration and globalization. In order for Nordic democracy to maintain its status as a model for the rest of the world – it was once again openly spelled out – a number of challenges such as the consequences of a global market economy, the decreased turnout in elections, the democracy deficit on the national level, and the problems caused by immigration had to be tackled.

18 In its recommendations it was maintained that ‘[t]he Nordic countries and autonomous areas are facing a number of challenges which simultaneously deepen and counteract the development of Nordic democracy’ (Nordisk Ministerråd 2005: 157). It was also stated that ‘[b]oth local referendums and popular initiatives are deeply rooted aspects of Nordic local democracy.’ (Nordisk Ministerråd 2005: 167).
19 This is not to say that arguments concerning the democratic character of the Nordic countries were unimportant in the political campaigns concerning the EU membership of the Nordic countries in the 1990s, when Sweden and Finland joined the union and Norway decided not to join. For an illuminating analysis regarding the Swedish case in the early 1990s, see Trägårdh 2002: 168–169. On the decreased role of the Nordic countries as bridge-builders after the Cold War era, see Arter 2008: 334.
20 It should be pointed out that most of the participants in the jubilee meeting were active politicians and not scholars, which marks the nature of the comments made on the occasion.
Conclusion

The literature explicit on Nordic or Scandinavian democracy portrayed above shows that the rhetoric of ‘Nordic democracy’ was motivated by the changing geopolitical circumstances. It also reveals that this rhetoric included a social aspect strongly related to the welfare state, which was anchored in the idea of a common Nordic democratic tradition and a shared set of Nordic values.

When trying to estimate and explain the career of the figure ‘Nordic democracy’, a first conclusion is that the rhetoric of Nordic democracy was considerably more successful domestically than internationally. While it had some success in justifying both the neutrality and welfare politics, it seems largely to have been ignored abroad. The success of ‘the Nordic welfare state’ during the last couple of decades has made ‘Nordic democracy’ an attribute of the welfare state rather than a forceful catch phrase in its own right. After all, the Cold War division of the ideological and geopolitical blocks did not provide enough space for ‘Nordic democracy’ to establish itself internationally. And now that the Cold War is over, when there are no longer two opposing sides to profile oneself as a superior middle way between, there is even less international interest.

In the age of European integration, ‘Nordic democracy’ has lost much of its momentum as a spearhead. Now it is primarily about defending the domestic national and Nordic traditions of democracy and welfare in the face of the external threats of modernization (Hansen 2002: 224). One might even argue that ‘Nordic democracy’, as well as ‘the Nordic Welfare State’, have become nostalgic figures – the future is no longer conceptualized in terms of Norden or Nordic (Kettunen 2005: 31). In the debates on European integration, it was the sceptics who tried to play the Nordic card, referring to Nordic co-operation as a more democratic and ‘folklig’ form of international collaboration.21 But although concerns about democracy deficit in the European Union are common in the Nordic countries today – Norway and Iceland are not member states of the union and Finland is the only Nordic country in the European Monetary Union – the issue of the European Union

It should also be pointed out that opinions regarding the pros and contras of European integration and global markets varied as did the participants’ party political commitments. See Nordisk demokrati 2020: Rapport fra Nordisk Råds temamøde om demokrati, København: Nordisk Ministerråd, 2002.

has arguably been treated more as a question of the future of the welfare state than as a question about the future of Nordic democracy.

Does this mean that the life of the term ‘Nordic democracy’ is over? Surely not. If history is to teach us something it is that nothing is certain and that history matters as the source for political arguments. In the current discussion, where the ‘Nordic Welfare State’ is mostly used nostalgically to designate a particular ‘model’ or ‘project’ that was completed in the 1960s or 1970s and which now has to be defended against different threats, the rhetoric of the ‘Nordic Welfare State’ is in desperate need of a vision for the future. One can therefore speculate about whether there might be an opening for a new rhetoric of ‘Nordic democracy’ that would serve as an alternative to those nostalgic and nationalistic usages of the ‘Nordic Welfare State’ that have been put forward by xenophobic right-wing populist parties in recent times. It remains to be seen whether the history of ‘Nordic democracy’ in the twentieth century can provide a legitimizing and less nostalgic source for future politics.

References


Chapter 4

THE NORDIC AND EAST ASIAN WELFARE MODELS: ON CONVERGING PATHS?

Stein Kuhnle

Given an interest in an assumed globalization of the welfare state, this chapter draws attention to characteristics of the Nordic and East Asian welfare models. In what way do they differ, and in what directions are they moving? Taking South Korea as an example of the East Asian model, are the Nordic and East Asian paths of development converging? The welfare state is a form of government in which the state through legislation takes on the responsibility of protecting and promoting at least the basic well-being of all its members. It covers income maintenance in case of occupational accidents and disease, sickness, disability, old age, and unemployment, as well as health and social care services, family support, housing support, and assistance in finding employment. Normally, education and re-education and life-long learning will be regarded as part of a welfare state’s remit.

Different conceptions of ‘welfare’ prevail. Partly for that reason, perceptions also differ as to what the role of government for welfare provision should be. Variations exist among Western welfare states as to comprehensiveness of needs covered, methods of financing, population coverage, organization, regulation, benefit levels, eligibility, and conditions for support (for overviews of models of welfare and state-of-the-art research, see Arts and Gelissen 2010; Castles et al. 2010). A number of theoretical perspectives on the evolution of (different types of) welfare states have been outlined: e.g. socio-economic structural change, logic-of-industrialism, demographic change, ‘parties matter’, ‘ideas matter’, ‘power resources’, political institutionalism, path dependency, and diffusion. None of these perspectives are mutually exclusive. In recent years, inspired by the comparisons of Western and non-Western welfare state development, more attention has been given to culture and entrenched societal values as variables explaining the persistence of different welfare models (e.g. Oorshot, Opielka, Pfau-Effinger...
One theoretical perspective alone cannot capture the development of the complex and many-dimensional phenomenon called ‘the welfare state’, and different factors obviously have different weights across time and space and political systems.

The conception of a specific ‘Nordic welfare model’ – or, alternatively labelled, the ‘social democratic’ model or welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1990) – has become an important component of the rapidly growing comparative welfare-state literature since the late 1980s (Eriksson et al. 1987, Abrahamsen 2002, Kautto et al. 1999, Kuhnle 1990, 2009). However, the origins of the idea of a Nordic model of society – welfare policy being one component of the model – dates back at least to the 1930s (Petersen 2006).

The notion of an ‘East Asian welfare model’ (Goodman and Peng 1996, Kwon 1997, Tang 2000, Walker and Wong 2005) – or, alternatively labelled, the ‘Confucian’ welfare state or regime (Jones 1993, Lin 1999) – is more recent, and is an indication of the global diffusion and differentiation of conceptualizations of types or models of welfare states, inspired by the significant growth of comparative welfare-state research and the globalization of social and welfare policy attention and action in a growingly democratic world. The distinction between types of welfare states also indicates increased interest in the normative foundations of welfare policies and the recognition of different roads to welfare and wellbeing.

There is no end to the discussion of labels and the analytical – and political - usefulness of typologization (Arts and Gelissen 2010), and some scholars are adamantly sceptical (Ringen 1991, Baldwin 1996). There is reason to be critical, but it is a worthwhile exercise to discuss to what extent the differentiation of welfare models helps us understand different patterns of the emergence of welfare states, different trajectories of welfare states and their characteristics, robustness and different degrees of path dependency, and also to what extent they help us understand social, economic and political outcomes of various ways of organizing welfare institutions, e.g. in terms of social cohesion, income distribution, poverty, political trust, stability, and resilience.

The Nordic and East Asian Welfare Models

The Nordic model of welfare has been presented under varying labels, such as ‘Nordic or Scandinavian (welfare) model’, ‘the third way’, ‘the middle way’, ‘the politics of compromise’, ‘consensual democracies’, ‘coordinated
market economies’, ‘neo-corporatist systems’ (see a.o. Alestalo, Hort and Kuhnle 2009). Whatever the labels, most authors seem to agree that the Nordic model of welfare encompasses specific principles and characteristics of welfare institutions and policies, such as: normative foundations relating to conceptions of social rights, universalism and egalitarianism, and characteristics relating to a strong public responsibility measured in terms of employment, financing, organization, generosity and policy scope. Also agreed is that the model refers to certain outcomes of social and welfare policies, such as relatively equal income distributions, limited poverty, and social stability. What has given this model attention internationally in recent years (to the extent that the Nordic model was one of the main topics during the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2011) is the seemingly successful combination of strong public welfare responsibility, social equality and economic growth, thus challenging much classical economic thought on the relationships between incentive structures, economic growth, competitiveness and societal dynamism.

Another component of the overall Nordic model, a component which also affects the development and characteristics of welfare policies, is the way politics works, the way policies are made through a consolidated system of consensual democratic governance, with the strong participatory role of civil society, in particular trade unions and employers’ associations in the field of economic and social policy, which routinely maintain regular contact with the government of the day. Of course, the concept of a Nordic model is simplified, since it refers to a ‘package’ of characteristics and evolutionary patterns of five independent nation states. They all differ in various ways, and it could also be argued that Iceland in many respects is an exception to the Nordic model (e.g. in terms of both the scope of social expenditures and the qualitative dimensions of some social policies) (Olafsson 2005).

The East Asian welfare model most often refers to two groups of countries: Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan on the one hand, and China, Hong Kong, and Singapore on the other, the two groups sharing some commonalities in terms of a cultural value basis, but being distinguished by qualitatively different types of welfare policy orientations. The first group shares the characteristics of having developed redistributive social insurance institutions and universal pensions and health care systems, while the second group has relied on the individual’s capacity to mitigate social risk (Peng and Wong 2010), i.e. social protection has been made to rely on private savings, which are less redistributive.
China might perhaps be on its way towards the first group, having during the last decade made reforms and programmatic statements on the goals of social policy which promises a development towards inclusiveness and universality (Zhu 2009, Saich 2004). It seems that China actively seeks to develop by 2020 more active and comprehensive social policies to remedy the rapid increase of social and regional inequality in the wake of more than twenty years of market reform and economic liberalization. A re-orientation of Chinese social policies will likely have regional and even global impact.

Both groups of countries share trajectories of rapid economic growth over an extended period of time, thus illustrating, as among Western welfare models, that economic growth can be promoted and sustained with different types of welfare regimes, and different types of political systems – authoritarian and democratic. The first group of countries has achieved (or maintained) relatively egalitarian distributions of income, in contrast to the second group, thus both in terms of universality, redistribution and egalitarianism these three countries seem closer in their characteristics to the Nordic model – or European models – than to the second group. But as seen in Figure 1 below, according to OECD statistics the Gini coefficients for Korea and Japan are slightly higher (0.31–0.32) than the OECD average (0.31), but are in the company of Canada and Spain. The Nordic countries are among the world champions – with Denmark as the champion (Gini coefficient of 0.23) – as to equality of income distribution. From other sources we know that the Gini coefficient for China is about 0.47 (Matijascic and Kay 2010), and for Hong Kong even higher. Thus, also in terms of the outcome of the economic and welfare systems and policies, East Asian countries cannot meaningfully be grouped in one type of welfare regime.

In terms of public social expenditures as a percentage of GDP, East Asian countries generally spend a lesser proportion than the Nordic (minus Iceland), and most Western, countries. According to OECD statistics (OECD 2009), Japan spent in 2005 18.6%, Korea 6.9% (up from 16.5% and 5.0%, respectively, in 2000). Sweden in 2005 spent 29.4%, top among OECD countries, Denmark 27.1%, Finland 26.1%, Norway 21.6% and Iceland – below Japan – 16.9%. The OECD average (30 countries) was 20.6%, up from 19.3% in 2000. These percentages provide a rough picture of the role of the state in income maintenance and welfare provision, and are of course influenced by the overall development of the economy (GDP), but proportions have been relatively stable since the mid-1990s in a period characterized by overall economic growth. Thus, in absolute terms, all countries mentioned
Figure 4.1: Income inequality in OECD countries in the mid-2000s

Note: Countries are ranked, from left to right, in increasing order in the Gini coefficient. Data refer to the mid-2000s for all countries. The income concept used is that of disposable household income in cash, adjusted for household size with an elasticity of 0.5.

Source: OECD Income Distribution questionnaire.
spend more per inhabitant now than ever before. Comparative figures on total public social expenditures per head at current prices and purchasing-power parities in 2000 and 2005 are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 illustrates that in all Nordic countries and in Japan and Korea, there has been significant growth of social expenditures in absolute terms, most remarkably in Korea, Iceland and Norway if we consider the relative growth – a per cent increase of 79%, 37%, and 34%, respectively. But the variation in public social expenditures per head between the Nordic countries and Korea is great, and has widened in the first half of the last decade.

The Nordic welfare states have a longer history than the East Asian welfare states. The strong role of the state in Nordic welfare provision has been ascribed to a number of factors, such as the early fusion of state and church bureaucracies after the Reformation in the 1500s, the ethnic homogeneity of the countries, the relatively egalitarian pre-industrial social structures (in Norway in particular), the strength of social democracy, and state support for political parties and the trade unions since the 1930s and especially in the early post-WWII decades. Other factors are (1) the organization of agrarian interests into separate political parties who could negotiate compromises over social policies in political systems with many parties being conducive to coalition government formation, and (2) a relative strong role for the parliamentary opposition during most of the last hundred years. In the post-WWII period parties both on the left and the right have most of the time, both in opposition and in government, been supportive of welfare state expansion, competing for voter support, and thus signifying a broad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>7,431</td>
<td>9,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>6,237</td>
<td>7,953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>4,393</td>
<td>6,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>7,688</td>
<td>10,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>7,913</td>
<td>9,645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>4,221</td>
<td>5,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>1,465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD (2009).
consensus on strong public responsibility for welfare. Studies have shown that trust in political institutions is high, and that a large majority of voters expect the state to be active in welfare provision.

In East Asian societies a 'common' Confucian heritage is emphasized by many (Peng and Wong 2010; Jones 1993), in which stress has been on values such as the centrality of the family and kinship, filial piety, deference to authority, and patriarchy. Respect for education has also been emphasized, perhaps a characteristic historically shared with the Protestant Nordic countries, and reflected in relatively high levels of public resources used for this purpose. (The Nordic countries and Korea spent well above the OECD average on education in 2000 and 2007, while Japan spent less; see OECD Education at a Glance 2010.) The characteristic 'company welfare' which developed during industrialization in East Asia has been seen in the light of paternalistic–filial norms (Peng and Wong 2010). East Asian countries (with the exception of China) have, in contrast to the Nordic countries, not been marked by a political left with an ideological preference for a strong state role for welfare provision and taxation. Their welfare approach has been 'productivist', i.e. social policy has in general been developed not so much primarily to promote social security and redistribution as to promote economic growth. This approach must, however, be said to have been increasingly challenged after democratization in Korea and Taiwan since the late 1980s, which has resulted in the vitalization of civil society and party competition and open popular demands for – and actual expansion and universalization of – pension-, health- and unemployment-insurance, and other social programs.

Conclusion: Converging Welfare Policy Paths?

In spite of marked differences in proportion of GDP and public resources spent on social and welfare policies in the Nordic countries and Korea, the trend in the Nordic countries is that this proportion has been more or less stable since the mid-1990s (OECD Social Expenditure Statistics), while it has increased markedly – from a very low level - in Korea since the end of the 1990s. In absolute terms, (the equivalent of) dollars spent per head, the pattern is a uniform one of steady, marked increase. The countries have also approached each other on qualitative dimensions. The Korean welfare state has moved significantly closer to the universalistic Nordic model over the last fifteen years. This is exemplified by: the introduction of a national
pension, implemented in 1988, and universalized to “all citizens” in 1999 (but, not made compulsory for “housewives and students”); a basic old age pension (social assistance), introduced in 2007; a national health insurance, implemented in 2000; a long-term care insurance, introduced in 2007; an industrial accident compensation insurance scheme, steadily amended since the mid-1960s, now covering all employees of establishments with at least one employee; an (un)employment insurance scheme, introduced in 1993 and gradually extended until 2005 so as to cover all employees (with some exceptions) younger than age 65. (See US Social Security Administration: Social Security Programs Throughout the World, 2008.)

On one score Korea has moved further than the Nordic countries, namely by introducing a Minimum Wage Act in 1986, and a national basic livelihood security system in 2000. Still, it has recently been argued that the slogan of ‘productive welfare’ and the ‘growth first’ doctrine have hindered ‘the successful development and expansion of the Korean social welfare system’ (Yong Soo Park 2009). But public responsibility for welfare has undoubtedly increased in Korea over the last two decades, and will probably not be retrenched – even at times of increasing challenges due to population ageing, globalization and changing labour markets – given the consolidation of democracy. And in terms of outcome, Korea is closer to the Nordic countries than any other non-European OECD member, with the exception of Australia, as to equality of income distribution.

The basic public, universal and egalitarian character of the Nordic welfare states persist, and the growth of public resources for welfare per inhabitant continues to rise, but basically because of established social rights and benefits to which a growing proportion of (ageing) citizens are entitled to. Pension reforms with the aim of saving future costs and making the systems financially sustainable have been introduced in Sweden and Norway with the effect of reducing state responsibility for the future generosity of pensions and with the likely consequence of increasing inequality among pensioners in the future. At the same time, both private pensions and private health insurance have been on the increase, also indicating a trend towards less reliance on the hitherto almost total public responsibility for welfare, also making for more social inequality as to benefits and access to medical and care services, but not necessarily implying leaner overall state welfare provision. Public and private welfare can increase (or decrease) simultaneously – this is not a zero-sum game. More spending on private welfare in the Nordic countries
also reflects the fact that these societies have become richer and that more citizens can afford to spend more on welfare and health needs.

The challenges of social inequality, new social divisions of welfare, population ageing, changing labour markets and family structures (e.g. more divorces; more single-member households), migration, and globalization are common to both the Nordic countries and East Asian countries. At a very general level, there are some indications that common concerns and expanding international epistemic communities lead to greater convergence both in terms of social policy thinking and governmental reform actions.

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Chapter 5

SCANDINAVIAN WELFARE REGIMES IN THE CURRENT CRISIS: REFORM OR RETRENCHMENT?

Peter Abrahamson

The collapse of many banks and other financial institutions in the US in 2008 quickly spread to other parts of the world, including Europe and East Asia, creating the current financial crisis. Governments across the globe have responded rather uniformly to the crisis by instigating relief packages for the financial sector, expanding social rights and increasing private consumption, in the hope of cushioning the population and reversing the business cycle. The degree of success however has been rather unevenly distributed across regions and states. In this chapter I discuss the current crisis of governance in Scandinavia against the backdrop of its particular welfare regime, and I conclude with a discussion of the limits and preconditions for exporting Scandinavian experiences to other regions of the world.

The relative success of contemporary Scandinavian crisis management is to a great extent attributable the high degree of robustness and well preparedness of the welfare states in this region. In Scandinavia, there is a very long tradition of public intervention in society in order to increase citizens’ welfare and create social cohesion and integration. In general, as it has been convincingly argued by Giuliano Bonoli (2007), the Scandinavian countries adjusted much earlier than most other European states to the new risks of post-industrial society and have not appeared as ‘welfare frozen landscapes’ as has been the case elsewhere. Hence fiscal and social policies and labour-market measures were already very well developed in the whole region when the crisis occurred. Another important precondition was that even though the Scandinavian welfare model had its specific features, it was constantly developing, and the various governments had often created commissions of experts to produce reports to advise them on feasible changes to welfare arrangements (for details in the Danish case,
see Abrahamson 2009). Since these welfare state developments are taking place within a particular Scandinavian political culture, they are not easily transferable to regions with other traditions and experiences.

**Defining the Scandinavian Welfare Regime in Contrast to Other Welfare Regimes**

In Scandinavia the criteria for welfare entitlements are based on (constitutional) rights, not on a selective assessment of needs as in the Atlantic model, or on the basis of contribution as in the Continental model. Entitlement is based on membership of different communities from model to model. In both the Scandinavian and the Atlantic models being a legal resident is the criterion, i.e. being a member of society, a citizen. Affiliation with the labour market is the criterion in the Continental model, and belonging to a family or local community is the criterion in the Southern or Mediterranean model. The political ideology promoting a particular Scandinavian way is Social Democratic, while e.g. the Southern model reflects a Christian Democratic ideology. The dominant societal institution regarding welfare provision in Scandinavia is the state, not the market as in the Atlantic model, nor voluntary organizations as in the Continental one, nor the family as in the Southern model. Both the Scandinavian and the Continental welfare models are expected to be extensive, appropriating many resources, while both the Atlantic and the Southern models are expected to be cheaper. Small or big, the financing of welfare comes from different sources. Ideally both the Scandinavian and the Atlantic models are financed out of general taxation; the Continental one is financed out of contributions from the social partners of the labour market; and the Southern model is financed by collections and donations from religious organizations. (Further to the distinction between different welfare regimes, see Abrahamson 1999.)

In other words, and with a few qualifications, the Scandinavian model of welfare: is universal and (therefore) expensive; is tax financed; is based on the public provision of both transfers and services; emphasizes personal social services vis-à-vis transfers; provides high quality provision; has high compensation rates and is therefore egalitarian; and is based on a high degree of labour market participation for both sexes. Joakim Palme (1999: 15) summed it up thus: The Nordic model is about . . . universalism, generous benefits, social citizenship rights, dual-earner model, active labour-market policies, and extensive social services.’ Duane Swank included tax policies and full employment:
The Nordic countries are generally characterized by publicly funded and administered programs that have comprehensive and universal coverage and relatively egalitarian benefit structures. Traditionally, they have been supported by redistributive general taxes and strong work orientations, in terms of both programmatic emphasis on work and economic policies that stress full employment. (Swank 2000: 85).

To Stein Kuhnle and Sven Hort the hallmark of the Scandinavian institutional welfare state boils down to three elements: ‘a comprehensive social policy; a social entitlement principle that has been institutionalized (social rights); and social legislation that is solidaristic and universalist in character’ (2004: 2). It has, however not always been so. These features have developed gradually since the late nineteenth century and were not fully developed until the 1980s. The development of the Scandinavian welfare regimes took about a hundred years and they are constantly in a process of reform and adjustment.

The most recently released figures show that indeed the Scandinavian countries are big welfare spenders, but they do not spend more than other Northwest European countries such as France and Germany (Table 5.1). Table 5.1 also shows that there are some differences among the Scandinavian countries. Denmark and Sweden are the biggest spenders in relative terms, with social protection as a share of Gross Domestic Product around 30 per cent; and in absolute terms Norway and Sweden are the biggest spenders, with around €9,000 to €10,000 per capita.

### Table 5.1: Total social expenditure, relative and absolute, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social expenditure . . .</th>
<th>as % share of GDP</th>
<th>per capita PPP €</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>8,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>7,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>6,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>10,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>9,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>8,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>7,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU-25</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>6,806</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat (2010).
Another important characteristic of Scandinavia is that nearly everybody is employed in the formal labour market: young and old, men and women. In other countries many women are also gainfully employed, but many of them find themselves within the informal sector. One major characteristic of the Scandinavian welfare regime is its emphasis on personal social services delivered by the local public sector – the municipalities. This is a reflection of a public responsibility for care that is largely absent elsewhere, particularly in East Asia. Because of comprehensive care services, Scandinavian women can both pursue a labour-market career and have children at the same time. The care services are backed up by extensive parental leave entitlements, with guarantees to return to the previous job after leave. (For further on recent welfare reforms in Scandinavia, see Abrahamson 2005.)

Welfare States in Times of Crisis

The so-called golden age of welfare state development in Europe – the period from the end of the Second World War to the first oil shock in 1973 was, generally speaking, a period of full employment. Most of the Scandinavian countries managed to maintain relatively low levels of unemployment into the early 1990s, but then the consequences of financial market liberalization were felt, particularly in Finland and Sweden, but also in Iceland and Norway; in Denmark unemployment had been high since the mid-1970s.

In Finland unemployment stood at 3.2 per cent in 1990, in 1994 it had reached 16.8 per cent, and a similar increase occurred in Sweden where the unemployment rate was 1.8 in 1990, but by 1997 it had increased to 9.8. In Iceland and Norway unemployment ‘only’ doubled in the mid-1990s. As is clear from Table 5.2, Finland and Sweden never really recovered from the 1990s crisis before they, together with most other countries, were hit by the current crisis. Thus, developments had been rather uneven in Scandinavia before the current crisis. While poverty increased by 75 per cent in Finland and by 50 per cent in Sweden from 1997 to 2008, very modest increases occurred in Denmark, Iceland and Norway, as seen in Table 5.3. Norway stands out as the only country hardly affected by the current crisis, which can be explained by its considerable oil revenue.

Norway was the only country in the region that was expecting a positive growth rate in 2009. In Denmark the expectation was minus three per cent growth, in Finland and Sweden minus five per cent, and in Iceland minus eleven per cent. Iceland furthermore has had considerable inflation, which
stood at 18 per cent in 2008 and dropped to 12 per cent in 2009 (NOSOSKO 2009: 7–19; NOSOSKO 2010: 14). As it turned out all countries experienced negative economic growth. The smallest rate was Norway with 1.5 per cent; the highest rate was Finland with 7.8 per cent. Iceland managed to end 2009 with a GDP growth rate of minus 6.5 per cent, which is bad, but much better than expected (Eurostat 2010).

The Scandinavian societies are, like other welfare states, spending the lion’s share of social expenditure on health care, pensions and elderly care. Table 5.4 shows how these sectors take up 75 per cent of all expenditure.

However, as mentioned, in Scandinavia welfare is mainly financed out of general taxation, not contributions as is customary in Continental Europe, as it is shown in Table 5.5.

**Table 5.2: Unemployment rates 1970–2009**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
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<td>8.3</td>
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<td>..</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
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<td>..</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD (2010).

**Table 5.3: At-risk-of-poverty (less than 60 per cent of median income after transfers)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>..</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU-25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat (2010).
For a number of years Finland has had a surplus regarding its public finances at the level of four to five per cent of GDP; in 2009 it experienced a deficit of four per cent, and the same went for Denmark. This was a reflection of the attempt to stimulate private consumption to alleviate some of the crisis symptoms. That is the topic of the next section.

Table 5.4: Functional distribution of social protection in Scandinavia in per cent, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Iceland</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families and children</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old age and survivors</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and social assistance</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5.5: Funding of social protection 2006 in per cent*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public sector</th>
<th>Employers</th>
<th>Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
<td>49</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat (2009)

* The category ‘other receipts’ have been excluded which is why the figures do not add up to 100.
Government Approaches to the Current Crisis in Scandinavia

Iceland, which had enjoyed very good economic development for many years, with growth rates of 7–8 per cent in the mid-2000s, took the hardest hit when the international financial crisis came to this North Atlantic island state. The Icelandic banking and financial systems collapsed completely, and the Icelandic kroner was seriously devalued. Consequences have been serious in economic and social but also in political terms. In April 2009 unemployment peaked with 9.1 per cent, which is very high, particularly in a country that had enjoyed full or close to full employment in most of the post World War Two period. For all of 2009 unemployment was 8 per cent, and in June 2010 it had only crept down to 7.6 per cent; it has disproportionately hit young people (NOSOSKO 2010: 14).

As a response the government made a number of changes to unemployment legislation and tried to make the labour market more flexible, allowing for a reduction in working hours (making more people share the same jobs). Unemployment insurance was changed accordingly so that it is now possible to receive benefits while working part-time. The period in which one can receive benefits has also been extended. Furthermore the self-employed have gained easier access to unemployment insurance. Some of the improvements are temporary and depend upon future development. The Icelandic government is planning a revision of the whole social protection system in order to be better able to provide extra provisions for the lowest income groups (NOSOSKO 2009: 14–15). A number of specific initiatives have been taken to relieve people of various debt burdens, including improved legislation on so-called debt adjustment, the establishment of an ombudsman for citizens burdened by debt, help to people with car loans in foreign currencies, and some initiatives related to housing. To monitor the whole process of crisis development the Icelandic government has established a so-called ‘welfare guard’ (velferdsvakten), which has been suggesting various prophylactic initiatives, for instance regarding families with children. The crisis has also led to a strengthening of activation policies, particularly for those 24 years old and younger. Finally, the crisis has led to initiatives to reform the administrative structure of welfare provision by decentralizing services for the handicapped and elderly from the state to the municipalities in 2011 and 2012 respectively. (NOSOSKO 2010: 15).
Many citizens reacted strongly to what they saw as the government’s poor management of the economy, and demonstrations finally made the government step down, and the opposition parties took over. The parliament (Altinget) established a committee of investigation into the causes of the financial crisis, which gave its report in April 2010 (NOSOSKO 2010: 14). The most radical consequence so far has been Iceland seeking membership of the European Union, having up to this point always been against such membership.

Finland, which at least in terms of unemployment never fully recovered from the prior crisis, is trying to expand and streamline its welfare institutions to better service and support its vulnerable citizens. The government set up a committee which at the end of 2009 suggested reforms of the social protection system in directions where it pays better to work, where poverty is reduced and where basic security is ensured. Some of these suggestions have already led to new legislation improving various transfer payments. The conditions for people living on low incomes have been improved: a child allowance for single parents has been increased with 10 € from January 2008 and is now 46.6 € monthly; and from January 2009 the minimum level of maternal, paternal and parental pay and sick pay have been increased to the level of unemployment insurance benefits. Old age pension were increased by 20 € monthly. The minimum level of benefits have been improved substantially since 2009 regarding sickness pay, parental, paternity and maternity leave, and rehabilitation pay. Care allowances have also been improved. Furthermore, child allowance for the third and following child/children has been raised by 10 € monthly. An initiative which will ease the unemployment situation of some from 2010 is the extension of paternal leave by two weeks (NOSOSKO 2009: 11–12; NOSOSKO 2010: 12). However, some changes have put more burdens on the shoulders of families with small children by increasing user-fees for child-care centres, but this change was decided just before the new crisis struck: from August 1st 2008, user fees increased from €200 to €233. Services for the elderly were improved from January 2009 by lowering the age level from 80 to 75 years of age for receiving means-tested social services. Since August 2009 the use of service vouchers (servicesedel) has been expanded to include all social and health care services, with the aim of increasing the choices of clients, enhancing access to services, diversifying service production, and encouraging cooperation among municipalities, business and private service producers (NOSOSKO 2010: 13). Finland is planning a restructuring of its local government level and encouraging better cooperation among the municipalities.
with the objective of enhancing more equality in social protection across the country. This is parallel to what happened in Denmark when the number of municipalities was reduced from 271 to 99 from January 1st 2007 as a means of enhancing the capacity and diversity of service delivery at the local level. For the coming years Finland expects to expand services for children, young people and families.

In Sweden the high level of unemployment (for this country very unusual) is expected to continue for some years. In 2009 it was 8.3 per cent and increased to 8.5 per cent in 2010, but it is expected to decrease slightly to 8.2 per cent in 2011. However, the Swedish economy has actually recovered from the crisis. The GDP growth rate of minus 5.2 per cent for 2009 is turned into a positive growth in 2010 and in 2011. This development is accredited to the expansive fiscal policies which have been pursued together with the historically low rates of interest. Nevertheless, the condition of high unemployment has had a disciplining effect on those in work. Since 2002 when absence from work due to sickness was at its highest, absence has decreased by one third.

In order to increase employment and decrease dependence on transfer payments the government has reduced taxation on work and pensions. Tax reductions are constructed so that they benefit lower income earners disproportionately. The tax cuts have been calculated to increase net incomes for low-income Swedes by SEK 200 to 250 (€ 27) per month. However, there have also been cut-backs of some programs. Since 2007 unemployment benefits are reduced to 70 per cent after 200 days of unemployment, and further to 65 per cent after 300 days; and for the first 100 days there is now a ceiling which in effect also reduced this payment. Since 2008 sickness pay has been reduced to 75 per cent after one year of sickness. Finally, also since 2008 two more waiting days have been added within the unemployment insurance system so that now the total number of waiting days is seven. But one improvement has been made regarding childcare. Since July 1st 2008 it has been possible to care for one’s own child/children ages one to three at home receiving a care benefit of maximum SEK 3,000 (€ 293) monthly. There is furthermore a bonus dependent upon the degree of equality as to how the parents share the care time between them. If they share it completely they are sure to get the maximum. Child allowances have been increased for the second child by SEK 50, 100 SEK for the third child, SEK 150 for the fourth child, and SEK 200 for the fifth and following children (NOSOSKO 2009: 18–20; NOSOSKO 2010: 18–20).
Regarding Denmark, an important background factor is that the period of time immediately prior to the crisis was one that saw the highest employment rates and the lowest unemployment rates ever recorded. Hence, the government’s primary concern was in the first place to take measures against an ‘over-heating’ of the economy, because of lack of labour power, resulting in upward pressure on wages and salaries and subsequently on consumer prices, leading to an acceleration of inflation relative to other European Union countries. When it became clear that Denmark was experiencing the world-wide phenomena of declining exports, a ‘freezing’ of the housing market, bank collapses and an increase in unemployment, the government’s initiatives were mainly of a fiscal policy nature and less of social policy interventions. The most important interventions have been the introduction of aid packages for the financial sector and a tax reform aimed at increasing private consumption by reducing personal income taxes.

Some of the initiatives taken by the Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs have also been predominantly of a fiscal nature, e.g. the proposed measures to increase the construction of more public housing units. Hence, on April 21st 2009 the newly appointed Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen presented the government’s work program for the coming six months, and stated that ‘the handling of the crisis is of course the dominating objective’ (Prime Minister’s Office 2009: 1; author’s translation). One month earlier in March 2009 The Danish government and the Danish People’s Party agreed on a tax reform and additional measures to stimulate activity in the Danish economy. The tax reform continues in the direction set out in the Spring Package from 2004 and the agreement on Lower tax on earned income from 2007 by substantially reducing tax on work, including marginal income taxes. It is expected that the tax reform will reduce income taxes (including the ‘green check’) by more than 28 billion DKK (1½ per cent of GDP) (long-term, permanent effect) (Ministry of Finance 2009).

The Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs has taken a number of initiatives which directly or indirectly relate to the current crisis. On March 27th 2009 it was announced that an agreement between the government, the Danish Peoples Party and the Radical Party (De Radikale) had been made concerning housing, which was intended to fight ghettoization. By ghettoization is understood public housing estates where a large group of citizens are unemployed or otherwise outside the labour market. There has been an unfortunate concentration of ethnic minority marginalized people in many public housing estates. Part of the agreement consisted of
de-bureaucratization measures, which will enable the municipalities and the housing associations to more quickly change and experiment. They will also be allowed to leave apartments empty until so-called resource-strong tenants want to move into the estate. ‘The many and rigid rules will be substituted by dialogue and collaboration’ a communiqué from the Ministry said (Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs 2009a: 1). The agreement supposedly makes it cheaper to rent apartments within the public housing estates. The demands of the new apartments to be ‘energy friendly’ were specified and increased. It is expected that in total the agreement will lead to some 4,000 to 5,000 more units per year (Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs 2009a: 1). Since July 1st 2009 a new act has been effective with the objective of reducing the number of citizens being evicted from their apartments because of arrears. The tenant will have a longer period of time between the notification of behind payment of rent and actual eviction. The municipality will also be notified earlier that something is wrong. After notification the municipality must contact the tenant and judge if it can help and eventually what it can do to help. Furthermore, the Ministry speculates that some tenants have a too high rent in relation to their income and should receive assistance in finding a cheaper apartment. As a new thing the municipality in those cases can help out with the moving costs (Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs 2009b: 1).

April 30th 2009 the Ministry announced that it would support five voluntary organizations with DKK 16 million in order for them to establish debt counseling for socially marginalized people in a number of cities across the country. The counseling will be performed by people with a background in the financial sector such as bank clerks and accountants. People with debt, low income and low net disposable income may contact the newly created debt counseling services and receive advice free of charge on how to get rid of debt and to create a personal/family budget (Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs 2009c: 1).

From a financial point of view the largest initiative taken by the Ministry was the creation of funds amounting to more than DKK 850 million which shall enable the municipalities to move investments up in time, i.e. carry them out earlier than otherwise expected. The funds are a combination of grants (DKK 212 millions) and loans (DKK 649 millions). They can be used for the renovation of existing institutions such as schools, kindergartens and old-age homes, or to build new such institutions which ‘are close to the citizens’ (Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs 2009d: 1). The Minister
Karen Ellemann stated that she expected this initiative to strengthen employment.

Apparently The Danish government considers these initiatives to be so successful as to warrant the tightening of expenditures in the coming years in order to restore the Danish economy. This has been done through the so-called ‘restoring package’ (*genopretningspakke*). Part of this is a reduction of the period of time during which one can receive unemployment benefits, including activation, from four to two years. Furthermore, a ceiling for the total amount of child allowances has been adopted. It has been set at DKK 35,000 and will be gradually introduced during 2011 and 2012. This will in reality reduce child allowances for most families with three children and all families with four children (NOSOSKO 2010: 7–8).

As already mentioned Norway is a particular case. When approaching colleagues in Norway with the intention of collecting data for this paper the immediate reaction by one was: ‘What crisis?’ This reflects among other things a relatively low level of unemployment. In 2008 it was 2.5 per cent and it had only increased to 3.2 per cent. Currently Norway is experiencing an increase in private and public consumption due to an expansive government budget policy since spring 2009. Parallel to what is happening or has happened recently in the other Scandinavian countries, Norway is also planning changes in the organization and content of social protection, and is trying to find ways to increase employment and decrease dependence on social transfers. The welfare reform seeks to create a more user-friendly, coordinated and effective system based on a one-entry-door-only principle, regardless of what particular problem is encountered. In February 2009 the government introduced a bill in parliament concerning the reform of the pension system. The objective is to ensure that the pension system is sustainable in the long run. If accepted it will be possible to draw an old age pension in a flexible manner from 62 to 75 years of age by combining pension and work without reducing pension entitlements. Changes were stipulated to begin in 2010 and 2011. By the end of 2009 an agreement between the social partners and the government in Norway concerning a more inclusive labour market expired. The objectives were to reduce absence due to sickness by 20 per cent from 2001 to 2009; to increase work among people with disabilities; and to increase the actual retirement age. From 2004 to 2008 the actual retirement age increased from 63.1 to 64 years of age, but there are not more disabled in employment, and absence due to sickness has only been reduced by six per cent since 2001 (NOSOSKO 2009: 15–18; NOSOSKO 2010: 16–18).
Conclusion

The well-preparedness and the robustness of Scandinavian welfare society is one important backdrop for the way the economic crisis was met. The well-preparedness was in no small way a result of very recent welfare reforms that have meant significant changes in both labour-market policies and social policies. The robustness is a reflection of many years of commitment to a public responsibility for citizens’ well-being. Advice given to governments from the various expert commissions and their own civil servants has been rather uniform. In Denmark and Norway the concern has been about labour shortage not about unemployment. Hence, suggested changes have gone in the direction of increasing work incentives by rolling back social entitlements, which is a continuation of what happened in Denmark with the labour-market reform in the mid 1990s and the reform of social assistance during the 2000s (Abrahamson 2006). The recent changes and the suggested changes cannot, however, be interpreted as a rolling back of the Scandinavian welfare state. Total social expenditure is not decreasing, relatively speaking, as a share of GDP. It is stagnating, but in absolute terms, per capita spending and social expenditure have increased every year since they have been measured.

What is important to keep in mind is that the Scandinavian welfare states are, quantitatively speaking, not so much about supporting the poor and/or unemployed through targeted measures, but rather about supporting the population as a whole through universal services, such as high quality health care free of charge, education including higher education free of charge, heavily subsidized daycare, comprehensive elderly care also free of charge, family allowances to all families with children irrespective of their income, and an old age pension to all seniors irrespective of their income and wealth. A precondition for this is a tax burden of about fifty per cent of GDP and a very high level of formal employment. Female employment is very high in Scandinavia and is interlinked with the comprehensive care services provided by various welfare state institutions. As a consequence of this Scandinavian women are both able to raise children and be formally employed, which shows up in a relatively high absolute fertility rate of currently around 1.9.

The Scandinavian countries have highly organized labour markets, with working conditions and wage negotiations institutionalized through
agreements between the social partners. Denmark, in particular, has developed a very flexible labour market. There is a high degree of mobility and short job tenure in Denmark. Supposedly this leads to a very dynamic labour market where it is not risky for employers to hire in good times, since they can easily fire in bad times. Coupled with an extensive system of social security and facilitated by active labour-market policies, the Danish model has been dubbed flexicurity.

A number of similarities in crisis effect and governance have occurred in Scandinavia. As a reflection of the particular welfare regime the increase in unemployment has hit men harder than women. Since women are predominantly occupied in the public sector they have been better protected against lay-offs. As to the reactions, all of the countries in the region have taken initiatives to reform their administrative structures in general and the welfare systems in particular. When discussing this development internationally it is important to keep in mind that the welfare reform and other public initiatives taken immediately prior to and during the current crisis in Scandinavia were all made within a particular Scandinavian political culture based on consensus and compromise and a tradition for taking inspiration and advice from ad hoc policy commissions. They were, furthermore, embedded in a culture characterized by a high degree of trust both in government and in each other, which again is a reflection of the extremely low levels of corruption that prevail in Scandinavia. This poses limitations to the transferability of Scandinavian experiences to regions with different traditions and conditions.

References


1 The Nordic countries have the highest trade union membership rates in the OECD. The highest rate was in 1982 of 82 per cent. In 2007 69 per cent of Danish workers were members of a trade union (OECD 2009). Concurrently, most employers are also members of an employers’ association.


Chapter 6

Comparing the Nordic and South Korean Models: Labour-Market Regulation and Social Welfare in Times of Crisis

Johannes Dragsbæk Schmidt

The current crisis is not only a financial and economic crisis but also a crisis of neo-classical hegemony in economics. It is a crisis of the Anglo-Saxon or ‘Western’ mental imperative of ‘Homo economicus,’ which has had an almost worldwide dominant position in its impact on thinking and discourses about globalization among policy elites. Some observers argue that the crisis spells the end of the much heralded globalization model itself, with its emphasis on export-orientation and unlimited growth (Schmidt 2009); others see it as a conjunctural phenomenon, a recession with solutions through state bail-outs and nationalizations of banks and industries; while still others regard it as a typical Schumpeterian phase of necessary ‘creative destruction’ with more winners than losers.

Whatever the outcome may be at the global level it also raises many important questions for export-oriented economies such as the Nordic states (Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark) and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Once the world economy experienced the downturn, the Nordic economies, with their high dependence on exports of capital goods and consumer durables were particularly hard hit,1 while in the ROK capital outflows associated with global capital flight resulted in sharply lower asset prices and initial dislocations in the money markets. Moreover, exports collapsed, which quickly spilled over to domestic demand (IMF 2010).

The Nordic region’s and Korea’s dependence on export-orientation and trade was challenged by the unresolved status of the elements which

1 Starting with the financial meltdown in Iceland, which is a special case with its unusually high exposure to speculative capital – quite the opposite to oil-rich Norway.
originally created the crisis, namely the unregulated financial markets, income inequality and global trade imbalances. These countries have in common the general outcome of the crisis as external demand declined because of the erosion in their trading partners’ growth. However, the crisis-induced collapses in asset prices and trade flows reduced domestic and external demand to varying degrees across different countries (IMF 2010) and as we shall see this was also the case in the Nordic region and in Korea.

This chapter raises a number of questions about the impacts of and responses to the crisis in a comparative perspective. It asks the following questions: Where has the Nordic model versus the Korean model delivered strong results, and what are the weaknesses? What are the human costs and collateral damages in the context of the new types of regulation of labour markets and social welfare in the broadest sense, and what are the differences and similarities between the models in general, specifically with regard to crisis management? The approach guiding the analysis is based on a critical political economy perspective, which utilizes a comparative and eclectic methodology (Rasiah and Schmidt 2010: 25–27).

The first part of the chapter briefly describes the causes and impacts of the US-induced financial crisis cum ‘Great Depression.’ The second part discusses the status of the three models of contemporary capitalism: the discredited Anglo-Saxon finance-driven model versus the export-driven production model of growth, with weak safety nets, adopted by East Asian countries in contrast to the export-oriented Nordic social welfare model. The third part documents the impact of the crisis on the economies, and discusses core examples of state intervention in the socio-economic sectors such as labour markets and social welfare in both the Nordic and Korean contexts. The final part discusses some tentative conclusions about the resilience of the Nordic and Korean models and their potential for recovery.

The Worst Economic and Financial Crisis since the 1930s

The damaging results of the last few decades of free-wheeling Ponzi capitalism were predictable from the very beginning, when the neo-classical counter-revolution replaced the golden decades of Keynesian capitalism. At the beginning of the 1980s, the real economy began to crumble into an artificial and speculative ‘casino economy’ (Strange 1986). Labour markets were increasingly deregulated, resulting in the emergence of a global work force constituting a non-regular, informalized and casualized reserve army
(Schmidt 2006). Simultaneously, there was the growth of an underground parallel economy, estimated to be in the range of 15–20 per cent of the real economy, in the forms of global crime and shadow activities (Schmidt 2009: 18).

When the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression broke out in full fury in 2008, it was the result of the crash of asset markets and extreme volatility in speculation in the leading capitalist economy, the USA. IMF estimates show the loss of asset values at $55 trillion, equivalent to almost one year’s global output of goods and services (Harvey 2009). World trade collapsed by more than 13 per cent in volume and by as much as 23 per cent in value in the first half of 2009 (UNCTAD 2010: 19). Volatile capital flows made things much worse for the developing countries that had been fiscally and externally ‘disciplined’ and ‘punished’ by the international financial institutions as they were affected by a crisis that was not of their making (Ghosh 2010: 209).

Bailing out the private banking and other financial institutions is estimated to have cost the United States and the European Union a total of US$11.4 trillion – an unbelievable one-sixth of world GDP (Torres 2010: 231). However, the collateral damage has been even more detrimental. With 210 million people currently out of work worldwide, official unemployment has reached its highest level in history (IMF 2010).

**Model Convergence or Divergence**

It can be argued that the three prototypes of industrial capitalist societies, characterized by different labour-market institutions and social welfare levels and modes of functioning, can be analysed on their own merits. Such an approach is justified in spite of the hegemonic position neoliberalism had achieved in policy-making institutions until the financial crisis revealed it to be more of an ideological construction than a scientific economic theory.

The first model, the neoliberal or Anglo-American model, is characterized by the leadership position of the United States in the race to the bottom in wages, benefits, working conditions and social protection. The discourse associated with the implementation of neoliberalism in the United States, during the era of Ronald Reagan and in Britain at the time of Margaret Thatcher, was that market liberalization would become a universal paradigm and spread to the entire world. In the words of the British Prime Minister, “There is no alternative.” The basic characteristic of the Anglo-American
Comparing the Nordic and South Korean Models

model, as related to the accumulation of capital and societal arrangements, is that economic decisions are overwhelmingly left to the discretion of private actors, who are given the space and opportunity to maximize the short-term profitability of enterprises and to raise needed capital in available financial markets. As far as the socio-political dimension is concerned, labour enjoys limited legal, industrial and social rights, with workers’ livelihood dependent on the wages they can negotiate with employers in an unregulated labour market. With regard to state involvement in the economic sphere, it is primarily centred on creating and protecting a favourable environment for industrial and especially financial capital markets. ‘In these societal arrangements, politics, morality and ideology lean towards promoting individualism and liberalism. In the laissez-faire model of US capitalism, the role of the state with regard to social protection is one of minimal allocations to low-income groups. Private insurance schemes are worked out at the place of employment’ (Schmidt and Hersh 2006: 74).

The second prototype of a capitalist economy, the Nordic model (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), relies on production based on trade and exports. Socially and politically, the Nordic socio-economic model can be interpreted as aiming at collective risk sharing with a view to fostering an acceptance of open markets, new technologies and the need for change. In a broad sense the model includes a set of labour-market organizations allowing for an important degree of negotiation, a comprehensive social safety net and a high rate of state-supported investment in human capital. Embracing globalization and sharing risks are mutually reinforcing planks of the Nordic model (Andersen et al. 2007: 32–33). The Nordic countries are characterized by a mixed economy, predominated by the private sector, but with an extensive role for government and the public sector. The government is involved in financing and organizing welfare benefits to a greater extent than in most other countries. The system is universal, covering every citizen and financed by taxes. The development of the tripartite cooperation between unions, employers and the state has had a great influence on political life in all the Nordic countries. To a great extent this has historical reasons.

The Nordic model builds on a developed capitalist economy with a regulatory state managing the socio-economic and political contradictions. Its origin is to be found in the post-World War II period when the US in its new found hegemony was trying to rebuild the capitalist world system to serve its economic and geopolitical interests. This was done by giving the European political systems a certain degree of autonomy and freedom
to control the economic reconstruction. The welfare state that took shape arose around the ‘historical compromise’ between labour and capital, with the state as the intermediary and the ‘passive revolution’ of the bourgeoisie, as discussed by Gramsci. Economically, the capitalist system encompassed what has been called ‘Sozialmarktwirtschaft’ and after the reconstruction period following the war it became export-oriented.

The Scandinavian prototype shows variations of policy implementation with, however, a certain degree of similarity. Under such a regime of capital accumulation the mutual interests of the enterprise and those of employed personnel are combined for the benefit of a harmonious relationship between the different actors, including the political supervision and moderate intervention of the state. Labour-market institutions and policies provide both relatively low employment protection (advantage for employers) and high unemployment protection (advantage for the wage-earners), coupled with high income-support benefits, strict activation policies and a high degree of centralized wage coordination. There are comprehensive social benefits and public-provided social services, openness to trade and competitive product markets, as well as large state investments in education and research and development financed through fiscal policies. These features together offer a collective mechanism for risk-sharing and play a key role in securing the political acceptability of structural reforms (Gurria 2008). On the down side is that this socio-economic arrangement is dependent on the fiscal policies of the state and translates into a rather high degree of taxation. At times of economic difficulties the fiscal revenue of the state becomes strained, pitting political forces behind a continuation of this arrangement against populist parties favouring a reduction of taxes. In addition, because of the tax question and the increasing costs of production, many labour-intensive enterprises and industries outsource, thus creating a problem for the model.

The third prototype of contemporary capitalism has emerged in Northeast Asia. The model combines late economic development with the establishment of capitalism. Historically speaking, it can be associated with the experience of economic nationalism that was implemented by former countries of the periphery to catch up to the level of the core nations. The South Korean societal and economic model is related to the Capitalist Developing State (CDS) as conceptualized by Chalmers Johnson (1982) in his analysis of the New Industrializing Countries.

Seen in the context of the world capitalist system, late development has historically taken place in opposition to the advanced countries’ control
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of the world economy. However in the post-World War II era and under the challenge of Asian socialism, the CDS phenomenon was accepted and supported by the leading capitalist nations. In Korea’s case it encompassed the willingness of the United States to accept the Korean chaebol model (zaibatsu in Japan - often family-based conglomerates with interlinked shareholdings – closely monitored by, directed by, and collaborating with the state and bureaucracy). The economic strategy implemented was based on a certain mix of import substitution, export orientation, protectionism and internal reform of agriculture. The political structure was that of military dictatorship, which with economic development evolved towards a kind of soft democracy characterized by a high degree of labour exploitation. This model of ‘corporatism without labor’ (Schmidt 2000) has emphasized government protection and a ‘command capitalist’ industrial strategy in the formation of an industrial capitalist society.

The joker in this evolution of late development and catching up is related to the ability of the capitalist world system to absorb the overproduction and overcapacity that are the results of the accumulation of capital on a world scale. The real problem is associated with the fact that according to a recent UNCTAD ‘Trade and Development Report 2010’, entitled ‘Employment, Globalisation and Development’, we have reached ‘the end of the export-led growth model.’ ‘The global economic and financial crisis has marked the end of the model of export-led growth for everybody, since ‘there must be somebody who imports and somebody who exports,’ Dr Supachai Panitchpakdi, UNCTAD secretary general, stated at the presentation of the report in Geneva. He further explained, ‘Export-led growth prescriptions are associated with the neoliberal capitalist Washington Consensus’ (UNCTAD 2010; Agazzi 2010).

Another problem is related to the fact that while the crisis originated in the financial system, a more fundamental factor in the build-up to its outbreak was the inefficient distribution of the gains from growth during the pre-crisis period. In most countries, wages grew less than would have been justified on the basis of productivity gains during the two decades preceding the crisis. This explains the fact that wages as a percentage of GDP declined in the majority of countries, while the GDP share of gross profits increased accordingly. In many countries, ‘wage moderation’ has meant stagnant real incomes for low-paid workers and their families (Torres 2010: 229). In Korea, however, real wages almost doubled from 1995. Korean firms were able to afford these wage hikes because of soaring productivity,
which not only financed higher real wages, but also brought about more leisure time. Back in the early 1980s, the average Korean worker laboured a stunning 2,900 hours per year, compared to 2,100 in Japan and 1,900 in the average OECD country. Today, Koreans work 25 per cent fewer hours per year, a still-high 2,240 number of hours compared to 1,700 in Japan. Yet, despite working 25 per cent fewer hours per year, each worker has increased his output from $11,500 in 1980 to $40,300 in 2008 (in 1990 US dollars). On the other hand the Nordic countries have managed to maintain high employment rates and fairly egalitarian wage and income structures. The Nordic trade unions have managed to retain a strong influence on overall wage developments and, in spite of growing differentiation, have kept alive a legacy of egalitarianism and solidarity in working life policies (Dølvik 2008: 9, 35). Although the Nordic model is characterized by high wages it is also clear that wage restraint is part of its corporatist framework.

In the context of the global economy, no country can stand outside the structural and conjunctural changes that are taking place. All societal models of welfare and employment are being tested by the current global financial crisis, and the growing stress caused by what seems to be a strategy of compliance with the phenomena of increasing globalization and pressure on exports. The Nordics and ROK are directly exposed to the current crisis but in different ways.

**Labour-market and Social Policy Responses**

The comparison between the present global crisis and the Asian financial crisis, which struck Thailand, Indonesia and ROK in 1997 is revealing. At that time, the IMF and the United States insisted on the implementation of a rise in interest rates in the bailed-out countries. In Korea's case, Seoul undertook ‘Washington-Consensus style’ reforms to receive the financial assistance it needed to deal with the capital flight bringing down its currency. Unemployment rose to around 8 per cent, real wages declined, and labour unions battled management and government in a futile effort to preserve job security for workers in large firms. Growth and employment recovered quickly, but the new jobs were primarily in ‘non-regular’ and temporary positions with limited benefits and low wages. Inequality in the ROK went from very moderate levels to the second highest among advanced OECD countries, just behind that of the United States (Freeman 2010: 173; Schmidt 2000; Schmidt 2007; Schmidt 2008).
In 2009, trade declined 5.2 per cent and manufacturing contracted 6.2 per cent. The Korean CDS appears to be paying off its debt in terms of a relatively soft landing process. The rapid turnaround from the recent financial crisis was in part due to the size of its stimulus package, starting with US$11 billion in November 2009 and to the rapidity with which it was passed and implemented by the government. A further reason was the degree of Korean social and political cohesion, which allowed the stimulus package to be targeted more precisely. ‘In times of crisis, Koreans come together,’ said one analyst, contrasting it with Washington, where a crisis is an opportunity to eviscerate one’s political enemy (Williams 2009). This time the Korean government seems to have been prepared to think ‘out of the box’. It introduced two types of active labour-market policies, consisting of measures to sustain labour demand and measures to improve employment prospects. In concrete terms this meant carrying out the following steps: (i) temporary expansion of public sector job creation schemes; (ii) youth internship program for small and medium-size enterprises with wage subsidies for hiring interns at the end of the internship: (iii) easing of the eligibility for STW (short-time-work) schemes by reducing the proportion of workers to be reassigned and reducing the minimum training hours to be eligible for STW subsidy; and (iv) increased employer subsidy for STW. Furthermore, policies to improve employment prospects for existing workers and those out of work were implemented: (i) increase in PES (public employment services) staffing and expanded use of private employment agencies; and (ii) increased funding for expansion of training places for the unemployed. In 2009 the government established a program of short-term employment in the public sector for older and long-term unemployed (‘Hope Work Program’) coupled with exceptional downward wage flexibility (IMF 2010: 10–14). It seems that ROK has transformed its contract-based employment system into a more flexible one. The process took ten years and was brought about through intense tripartite bargaining, pressure from the IMF and the Asian financial crisis (Vandenbergh 2010: 34).

Helped by increases in exports to China, South Korea surprised the world by achieving a 3.9 per cent annual economic growth in 2011, the highest rate in the OECD. Korea’s jobless rate rose at the slowest pace among the world’s major economies - up by 0.4%, to 3.4%, compared with a year earlier, indicating that its employment conditions remain relatively better than others in the face of the economic slowdown (Williams 2009). To counterbalance the move towards more flexible employment protection, an unemployment
insurance scheme covers 36 per cent (in 2006) of the workforce, which excludes public servants and most private-school teachers. Benefits are provided for between three months and two years, depending on age and contribution record (Vandenberg 2010: 43–44).

In the Nordic region, in contrast, the global crisis has seen a GDP decline of between 4.5 per cent and 7 per cent. The region has had the world’s highest tax rates for decades, and as Reuters mentions: “Now they’re seeing the pay-off.” Despite the government stimuli in 2009, Denmark’s GDP was expected to contract by 4.5 per cent, Sweden’s 5 per cent and Finland’s nearly 6 per cent. Norway, buoyed by a huge offshore oil sector, saw a more modest 1 per cent decline. The four economies grew by a weighted average of 2.8 per cent in 2007. ‘The Nordics’ social safety net provides high unemployment benefits - in Norway, two-thirds of an employee’s last salary for two years - plus hands-on help in job training and counseling, including crash courses on job interviews’ (Wojciech 2009).

Overall, Denmark is relatively more exposed to the housing market crisis, while Sweden and Finland are more reliant on their export industries, which have been hit by the drop in demand in the global market. Finland is expected to do better, given that its financial sector is relatively well shielded from the direct impacts of the global crisis. To maintain long-term competitiveness in the face of globalization – which puts pressure on their high-tax policies – and a reduction in the labour supply due to an ageing population, the Nordic countries are refining their welfare state policies by mixing tax cuts or freezes with reductions in government expenditure. They are attempting to improve competition in certain sectors and to adjust their labour markets to meet the challenges identified in the EU’s Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs.

The Korean government’s labour-market response to the crisis has been multi-faceted but especially harsh as workers have experienced declines in real wages, hours worked and temporary employment cuts. The reduction in working hours took place through both government programs and direct negotiations between employers and employees, depending on the sector. ‘A program to reduce long-term unemployment through short-term government job opportunities also proved effective during the downturn. Employment initially fell in most sectors, with the exception of non-manufacturing industry and public sector employment, but has fully recovered more recently. In addition to macro-economic policies and financial sector support measures, exchange rate flexibility may also have supported the economy at the onset of the crisis’ (IMF 2010: 20).
In contrast Sweden was affected primarily in both the financial and real sectors. ‘Concentrated exposures of domestic commercial banks to troubled emerging economies forced credit tightening, reducing private consumption and investment demand, while the collapse in world demand for manufactured goods caused a contraction in export demand and a substantial drop in manufacturing employment. Increased labor-market flexibility following reforms in the last decade and labor-market policies in response to the crisis muted the impact of these shocks. Labor hoarding by firms also played a role, as they expected the shocks to be temporary. Exchange rate flexibility may have also helped absorb the external shocks’ (IMF 2010: 20).

In 2005, gross public social expenditure was 20.6% of GDP on average across OECD countries, with spending on cash benefits as on services. Cross-country differences in public social spending are wide, ranging from 7% of GDP in Mexico and Korea to just over 29% in France and Sweden (Adema and Ladaique 2009). On average public expenditure on health services amounted to just over 6% of GDP in 2005 while spending on other social services was just over 2% of GDP. The latter exceeds 5% of GDP only in Denmark and Sweden, where the public role in providing services to the elderly, the disabled and families is extensive, whereas it fluctuates around 1% of GDP in the US, where there is a greater reliance on private and informal care (Adema and Ladaique 2009).

In the World Bank’s index for the rigidity of regulations covering hiring, firing and hours of work, the United States scores a zero on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 indicating the greatest degree of regulation. The score for most European nations falls between 40 and 65. Korea and the Nordic region score approximately 40 indicating a middle position not far from the OECD average (World Bank 2010).

**Concluding Remarks**

The two socio-economic models, the Nordic and the Korean, share a number of interesting characteristics. There is a shared emphasis on egalitarianism, which plays a paramount both symbolic and real meaning in terms of social cohesion and ethnic homogeneity. In the Nordic case this feature contains the tendency to trigger xenophobia, anti-foreign discourse and nationalism as a cultural matrix against ‘the other’. Historically speaking both models have experienced radical land reforms that originally acted as motors for
the economic take-off and created the conditions for both equality and development. Both regions also share experiences from the Cold War as frontline states neighbouring communist countries and as such received special treatment from the United States through Marshall Aid and the US military presence in ROK.

It is interesting to note that the UNDP’s Human Development Report ranks ROK and the Nordic countries in the top 20 league among the 169 countries surveyed. Between 1980 and 2010 Korea’s HDI rose dramatically by 1.2% annually from 0.616 to 0.877, which gives the country the rank of 12th out of 169 countries with comparable data (UNDP 2010).

The official discourse in both entities concerning free trade comes at a time when the world market has become ever more competitive. Seen from the position of the political and economic elites, this requires the disciplining of labour through productivity increases and decreases in living standards. Korea, just like the US, Germany and the Nordic countries before them, grew their industries to maturity in the greenhouse of protectionism before exposing them to competition (Williams 2009). The signing of bilateral free trade agreements with the EU and recently with the US shows a readiness on the part of the Korean corporatist elite to compete with the big players on the global scene.

It seems safe to say that the crisis response in both settings share a number of important similarities. In terms of the response towards labour markets and employment both entities have taken a pro-active and progressive Keynesian-inspired attempt to shield labour from the caveats and pitfalls of the crisis. However it is safe to say that there are huge differences in terms of taxation, social entitlements and publicly covered health and education: the traditional signifiers of the Nordic welfare state.

References


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Chapter 7

EUROPEANIZATION AND THE NORDIC MODELS: REFORMS FOR WELFARE AND COMPETITIVENESS

Inchoon Kim

Several European Union (EU) member countries have been confronting fiscal problems since the 2008 global financial crisis. These countries, especially southern European Eurozone countries, have serious fiscal deficits and sovereign debt crises, mainly due to weak economic competitiveness and unsuccessful welfare and labour reforms in the era of globalization. Even though the sovereign debt increases have been most pronounced in only a few Eurozone countries, they have become perceived as a problem for the area as a whole. The Eurozone crisis threatens the common monetary system of the Euro as well as European integration itself.

On the contrary, the Nordic countries have no serious deficit and debt problems and are successfully combining competitiveness with social protection and cohesion. They have thus been ranked among the most globalized and competitive economies in the world. Furthermore, they prosper with their high levels of taxation, wages and public expenditures. This has been possible since they are highly efficient, rational and democratic systems. The strong Nordic performance shows that well-regulated, egalitarian economies with sophisticated welfare systems are no obstacle to thriving in the global economy (Sapir, 2005).

Under the rapidly changing circumstances of the 1990s, and 2000s, the EU, particularly the European Commission, has treated globalization as an inevitable process, and taken an optimistic approach to it (Hager 2009). The European Commission has accommodated neoliberal reforms to balance transnational capital with social protection and cohesion. The balance between economic reform and social cohesion must confirm action to create a dynamic economy as well as to promote social inclusion and solidarity. Thus, the European Commission has proposed many measures to promote both the competitiveness and the social cohesion of the member countries, and has pursued a Europeanization process in which domestic
adaptation to the EU has been emphasized. The EU believes that gaps in institutional competitiveness and economic potential between member countries will become obstacles to European economic integration. Several member countries have had trouble in reforming their rigid welfare and labour-market institutions that cause inefficiency and unemployment.

The Lisbon strategy has been one of the key measures to accomplish the Europeanization process in the reform of national social policies toward convergence connected to the evolution of European policies. This strategy, initiated in 2000 by the European Council and regarded as a new ‘renaissance for Europe’, has played a role as a strong pressure on member countries. The open method of coordination, a Europeanization tool of domestic reform, has been the main standardized procedure to monitor national policies in the field of employment and social exclusion, based upon benchmarking and best practice promotion (Heidenreich and Zeitlin, 2009; Saari and Kvist, 2007).

This chapter explains how Nordic countries may provide some remedies for institutional rigidities and, thus, for problems of inefficiency and unemployment. After analysing Nordic experiences, I argue that southern European Eurozone countries have had difficulty in translating European pressures into domestic policy change, and have failed to implement the Lisbon strategy over the last ten years. Welfare and labour-market institutions in these countries have not undergone a process of Europeanization along the lines of the Lisbon strategy. The governments of Spain, Greece and Portugal have chosen to follow US and UK neo-liberal reforms, which have seriously undermined social protection and cohesion.

Meanwhile, the Nordic countries have undertaken supply-side reforms since the crises in the 1980–90s. They have gained support from the main domestic institutional and social actors in the politics of reform. The revitalized Nordic models have been possible since they have realized negotiated flexicurity and adjustment, with the participation of social actors at national as well as EU levels. The aim that the Europeanization approach could lead to convergence among the various welfare regime models is questionable. What is needed most are market and public sector reforms, policy coordination and social partnership. Southern European countries should have adopted Nordic models, although they are hard to follow and constitute difficult tasks. What these countries can learn from the Nordic models is a matter of discussion. Yet, the Nordic experience can provide examples of institutional reform and change for other EU member countries to achieve both a competitive economy as well as social inclusion and solidarity.
The Lisbon Strategy and the Nordic Models

Europeanization and the Lisbon Strategy
The Lisbon strategy was intended to deal with the low productivity and competitiveness and the stagnation of economic growth in the EU. The broader objectives set out by the strategy were to be attained by 2010 through the formulation of various policy initiatives to be taken by all EU member states. The principal challenge facing Europe in the 1990s had been a job problem and, mainly, this led to the Lisbon strategy (Ferrera, Hemerijck and Rhodes, 2000). The European Commission has developed many policy measures especially for employment policies. Many EU member countries have tried to conform to such policy measures to fit the EU policy structure, and some countries have succeeded in policy transformation and policy adjustment (Graziano, 2011).

The Lisbon strategy or the Lisbon agenda also presented the notion of socio-economic transformation and restructuring (Hager, 2009). The agenda was noteworthy for its calls for a ‘radical transformation of the European economy’ to make the EU into the most ‘competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’ by 2010 (European Council, 2000). The agenda’s twin goals of economic competitiveness/growth and social cohesion/protection were intended to settle the historically ‘conflictual and contradictory encounters’ between capital accumulation and social welfare at the EU level. Under the Lisbon strategy, a stronger economy would create employment in the EU that, alongside inclusive social policies, would themselves drive economic growth even further.

Thus it was apparent that social protection was not just a national concern but also one of the EU’s most important issues. The Lisbon agenda noted that EU-level developments had increasingly been interacting with social protection in all member countries. This project of Europeanization had seen a remarkable transformation since the 1980s. Europeanization is here defined as the process through which EU economic and social dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making (Borzel and Risse, 2003). As many European countries have demonstrated, the Europeanization of employment and social protection differs across countries or regime models, reflecting EU diversity. This is

1 The Lisbon strategy was introduced in the spring of 2000 at the European Council meeting in Lisbon, Portugal.
because the forms and extents of Europeanization are different and different national strategies toward the European social model have brought different results. Differences in the Europeanization process reflect not only different political and social legacies but also different adjustment pressures in terms of the national welfare regime and the degree of national competitiveness. Proponents of a neoliberal Europe argue that the welfare states are doomed and that neoliberal reforms are inevitable.

The Nordic models have changed significantly since the 1990s. The Nordic countries have introduced financial market liberalization, product market competition and several supply-side reforms. These changes have contributed to high levels of mobility, equality and employment, also termed flexicurity, and, consequently, to renewal and revitalization of the Nordic models. These models have for many decades been considered a realization of equality and social security. Recent reforms have, however, challenged this assumption. The institutional setting and the objective of the welfare states changed a lot during the 1990s and 2000s. The Nordic model has cut welfare expenditure, reduced and privatized public provisions, and adjusted labour-market institutions. These changes have pushed the Nordic model toward some kind of neo-liberal European model, but not a neo-liberal American model. Another distinction of the revitalized Nordic model is the growing importance of management–union negotiations and dialogue at the company level. Negotiated flexibility and adjustment in Nordic labour markets have been important for flexicurity (Dolvik, 2008).

Reforms in the Nordic Countries
The Nordic members of the EU and Norway are all fully incorporated in the single market, implying that domestically they are largely facing the same opportunities and constraints. The Nordic countries have been practicing their versions of the EU’s Lisbon strategy since the 1990s, long before the Lisbon strategy was initiated. They have had the highest overall employment rates among the EU countries and have pushed forward welfare reforms. They have had the highest active labour-market policy expenditures as a percentage of GDP and have been well known for their flexicurity models. The EU’s Lisbon strategy aims at achieving sustainable growth, increased employment and a competitive economy. In fact, the Nordic countries achieved these goals of sustainable growth, full employment and a very competitive economy in the 1990s and 2000s with their own institutions, including labour-market institutions.
Nordic institutions and practices that had been developed during the 1950s and 1960s have contributed significantly to economic growth, full employment and general welfare. These Nordic institutions and practices were renewed and reformed during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s to adapt to the challenges of social change, globalization and European integration. Other EU countries, especially the southern European countries, have had problems with low growth and high unemployment. Many have mentioned the European social model’s inefficiency in general and several southern and continental EU countries’ institutional rigidity and high unemployment in particular. A common view among critics of several EU countries’ social policy and labour-market institutions has been that the economic inefficiency and social inequity they ascribe to those institutions can be remedied by transforming them in the direction of the Nordic social model (Hassel, 2008). France and Germany have initiated important reforms recently, but most southern European countries have failed to achieve labour-market and welfare-policy reforms. This is one reason why the southern Eurozone countries are suffering from a budget deficit crisis now.

The major Nordic institutional reforms are as follows:

Labour-market reforms: Flexicurity
Industrial relations reforms: Balance between centralized coordination and decentralized negotiations
Pension reforms: more incentives for work
Tax reforms: more incentives for work
Educational reforms: educational diversity and competitiveness
Unemployment insurance reforms: more incentives for work and social inclusion
Welfare policy reforms: sustainability and social cohesion

The changes resulting from these reforms have been evaluated both positively and negatively. Some argue that there has been a general tendency towards retrenchment that has threatened the very nature of the conception of social citizenship that has been integral to the European social model (Ryner 2009). Others argue that the Lisbon agenda is a positive turning point for EU-level social policy and that the reforms contribute to enhancing competitiveness (Ferrera, Hemerijck and Rhodes 2000). Despite the extensive reforms, the Nordic models and, particularly, the Nordic welfare states are still distinct, but less so than a decade or two ago. The new elements are features usually
associated with social models at play within the European Union. Therefore, welfare and labour-market institutions in Nordic countries have undergone a process of Europeanization along with the Lisbon strategy. This is why many argue that the Nordic models’ performance of economic competitiveness and social protection in the era of globalization is exemplary for the European social model (Palme 2005; Sapir 2005).

**Europeanization, Varieties of Capitalism, and the Nordic Models**

The Nordic models occupy a special theoretical place between the Europeanization theory and the varieties of capitalism theory. The Nordic models have achieved Europeanization goals while maintaining their unique welfare capitalism model. A comparison of national economic performance or of welfare provision seeks to explain the distinguishing structural conditions of each domestic system and to group countries into relevant capitalism models. Models of production regimes and welfare regimes, i.e. varieties of capitalism, have an important place in the study of comparative political economy and of labour policy, in particular (Hall and Soskice, 2001).

Continental European countries, especially the Netherlands and Germany, have succeeded in policy adjustment to conform to the Europeanization process. Southern European countries, such as Spain and Greece, have initiated many reforms since the 1990s, i.e. Europeanization processes to fulfil the Lisbon strategy. But they show an inability to sustain social cohesion due to coordination problems. The welfare systems in Greece and Spain are expensive, wasteful and socially exclusive and, similarly, the economic systems display inefficiencies and dysfunctions (Featherstone and Papadimitriou, 2008; Moreno, 2006). We see juxtapositions of over-regulation and a large black economy, of business collusion and dependence on the state, of strong labour protection and high structural unemployment. Spain and Greece display a division between the protected core of the labour market and the rest. This is the character of the southern European labour market, where one side shows rigidity and the other excessive flexibility and irregularity. These features are far from the Nordic models as well as the Lisbon agenda itself.

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2 There is a typology of five ideal types of capitalism in Europe: the market based, the social democratic, the continental, the Mediterranean, the transitional economy.
The Europeanization and varieties of capitalism approaches define different paths for European economic systems and welfare systems. The Europeanization approach asserts the likelihood of increasing convergence, and the varieties-of-capitalism approach asserts the likelihood of sustained divergence. Europeanization seeks to account for domestic change as a result of pressures arising from the EU or the Eurozone, such as the Lisbon agenda. The Nordic countries have successfully adjusted to the Lisbon agenda and sustained their unique institutions, and this explains the competitiveness and efficiency of the welfare systems of the Nordic models. This shows that different institutionalized varieties of capitalism generate distinct re-regulations of the Single European Market. Menz argues that both strongly neo-corporatist systems of political–economic governance and statist systems are capable of creating swift, comprehensive and thorough national re-regulations (Menz, 2005). This applies to the Nordic countries.3

Certainly, the varieties approach appreciates that the institutions underpinning coordination are subject to constant negotiation and re-negotiation and, thus, understands strong changes during the 1980s and 1990s in the Nordic countries. Policy coordination and social partnership among the main domestic institutional and social actors have been important in the (re)negotiation.

Most Nordic Countries Utilize the EU’s Regional Globalization
The Nordic countries have actively utilized globalization. Of course, there exist anti-neoliberalism, anti-EU and anti-globalization groups. With the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and the ‘1992 initiative’ embodied in the Single Europe Act of 1986, EU countries shifted their trade and monetary regimes. The EU has become an agency dedicated to market liberalization. The advent of a single market forced all major firms to reorganize to meet more intense European competition. As a result, EU member states faced a supranational agency that puts continuous pressure on them to deregulate protected markets, and to promote free flows of capital and goods. Across its member states, the EU imparts a liberal bias to initiatives for institutional reform.

3 According to Menz, Austria, France, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Belgium and Luxemburg are the cases of national re-regulation. By contrast, countries with less strongly embedded neo-corporatist structures (in which due to organizational deficiencies trade unions face difficulties blocking employer demands) create liberal response strategies, permitting a stratification of wage levels. Hence, both Germany and the Netherlands have implemented liberal business-friendly re-regulations.
Thus, the Europeanization processes operated by the EU have neoliberal ideas and practices (Hager, 2009; Ryner, 2009; Apeldoorn, 2009).

In 1992, the EU member states agreed to create an EMU (Economic and Monetary Union) managed by a central bank independent of political control. The EMU, and its entry requirements, restricted the macroeconomic instruments available to national governments for responding to economic shocks. The scope for responding to a downturn in demand with a fiscal stimulus was restricted, and member governments lost control over monetary policy altogether. Devaluation was no longer an option for offsetting the impact of wage increases on national competitiveness. As a result, the member states have had to address adjustment issues on the supply side, through labour-market policies or structural reforms to markets. These are the problems that southern Eurozone countries have been facing, but they are still unsolved.

Sweden and Denmark have not participated in the EMU yet. But the Nordic countries have actively addressed adjustment issues on the supply side, through labour-market policies or structural reforms to markets in the 1990s. In the case of Sweden, socialist and bourgeois governments abandoned devaluation during the financial crisis of 1991–2 as a last resort. They gave up an easy solution and chose a politically dangerous option. They joined the trade-exposed employers’ and unions’ cross-class alliance for international competitiveness and domestic reforms. They believed that international competitiveness and domestic reforms would generate national wealth, institutional efficiency and more jobs. And that national wealth and efficiency could bring economic growth and distribution. Nordic countries, especially Sweden, enjoy high economic performance, employment and high welfare in the wake of the global financial crisis and Eurozone debt crisis.

The EMU project within the EU represents the final stage in the process of the institutionalization of neo-liberalism across Europe. The EU believes that market liberalization is beneficial because it involves the removal of market distortions. The argument was made that the strict convergence criteria would make it impossible for the member states to maintain high levels of public intervention. And that a race to the bottom regarding welfare provision was to be expected. However, as many have argued, that has not happened and new empirical evidence showed that the welfare states were merely in a constant process of transformation. The Nordic models were the examples.
Jobs and Employment: More Active and Productive

Employment has been a common European concern since the 1970s. During the 1990s, the EU adopted a specific strategy aimed at the development of a coherent European Employment Strategy (EES) (Graziano, 2011; Goetschy 1999). The EU countries have had to respond to the challenges of the 1990s and 2000s. When the corporate sector was shedding labour to reorganize, first for the European single market and then for emerging markets, demand was shifting towards service. Jobs had to be found for displaced workers and jobs in services had to be found for workers equipped with industrial skills. In Sweden and Denmark, investment in education and job training increased dramatically in the 1990s. Swedish governments enhanced the mobility of labour by intensified spending on active labour-market policy in the 1990s. This made people and the labour market more active and productive.

Swedish labour-market institutions proved effective enough to secure high levels of employment and growth during the 1980s. But Sweden experienced a crisis at the beginning of the 1990s. Sparked by the deregulation of financial markets in 1985, an asset boom fuelled wage pressures that a bargaining system could not contain. In 1983, the famous Swedish centralized negotiation system between key organizations of social partners, which had maintained wage restraint for almost three decades, collapsed. After about ten years of reeling from the collapse, the government and employers re-established a stable system for wage coordination in the mid-1990s. This system could not support a ‘solidarity’ wage, and thus the market wage gap has widened. But redistribution via the income transfers of the welfare state is narrowing the gap of disposable income.

The Collective Bargaining System: Coordinated Decentralization

In Sweden, the collective bargaining system has changed a lot. Central negotiation practice has diminished and there has been more scope for firm-level agreements on wages and working conditions. Swedish firms have used changed institutions to reorganize production in the face of international competition and the system has proved durable. By 2000, Sweden’s competitiveness had been restored and Swedish firms could embrace a more competitive market.

The institutional innovations have worked well. For almost a decade, Sweden has again secured rates of growth well above the EU average and
rates of unemployment well below it. Its institutions for wage-setting have been rendered more flexible but remain coordinated enough to deliver real wage increases commensurate with increases in productivity. Denmark’s organized decentralization of industrial relations goes with flexicurity, combining high labour-market mobility and flexibility with social security. The EU regards the Danish case as a ‘Danish Miracle’ that entails the social partners’ dominant role in labour-market regulation, a lax protection against dismissals, and a generous system of income security financed by tax (Dolvik, 2008).

Nordic Countries at the Core of the EU
Nordic countries are famous for their normative values. These concern for example human rights, a multicultural society, environmental protection, climate change issues, gender equality, and universal welfare. Denmark, Sweden and Finland contribute to the EU’s international role in expanding these values. The EU’s ‘social Europe’ is closely connected with the Nordic countries. A fusion between EU and Nordic characteristics is the Nordic dimension.

Economically, the Nordic countries belong to the core of the EU. Sweden is the strongest voice for free trade in the EU. Three quarters of Sweden’s trade is conducted in the EU internal market. By strengthening cooperation with other countries that favour free trade Sweden can do more for free trade than it can accomplish on its own. The Services Directive of the European Commission is an important component in the development of the EU internal market. The services sector is currently the fastest growing part of the Swedish economy, and the Directive promises good prospects for increased trade in services in the EU.

In an era of globalization, welfare states are not transformed in national isolation but are heavily influenced by transnational economic, political and cultural interdependencies. The Nordic welfare models have kept their unique characteristics, but they have also flexibly conformed to the changing circumstances of the relationship between globalized capitalism and social political regulations.

The normative foundation of the ‘Nordic welfare state model’, the principles of ‘universalism’, ‘public responsibility for welfare’, and ‘work for all’ are genuine and competitive features of the current Nordic welfare models (Kuhnle and Kildal, 2006). In spite of external economic and ideological pressures, these principles are still alive. They seek a high level of employment
in a globally competitive economy. Key to their functioning and success is
the avoidance of class conflict, with appropriate arrangements that support
overall adaptive capabilities. The goals of the Nordic models are achieved
through a particularly successful engineering of industrial and political
relationships. I contend that the particularities of the Nordic models can
to a significant extent be applied elsewhere. Neoliberal economics and the
ideology of market self-regulation are at the root of the disasters that have
hit Ireland, Iceland, Portugal, Spain, and Greece (Joly and Olsen, 2011). The
Nordic models represent an interesting alternative.

Nordic capitalist societies are not only more fair and egalitarian in their
distribution of income, wealth and power. They are also better able to avoid
self-destructive tendencies, while protecting the political institutions of
the state. Nordic societies are remarkably individualistic, perhaps more so
than any others (Berggren and Tragardh, 2011). Part of the mystery of their
success is to be found in their extended welfare systems that in practice
enhance individual freedoms and flexibility for the many, who can actu-
ally realize their individual interests and potentials. Thus, strong popular
support for the welfare state is not a reflection of a collectivist ideology, but
rather of the people´s trust in a state that supports an infrastructure that
fosters individual freedoms and opportunities (Joly and Olsen, 2011).

The broad characteristics of the Nordic countries have substantial simi-
larities to other European countries, in particular those of the Northern part
of the continent. All of these have been through their own hard times, and
have experienced their own reform problems. This is also true of the Nordics,
who went through a particularly troubling financial meltdown between 1989
and 1993. Sweden and Finland particularly have undergone serious financial
crises. Now the Nordic countries are maintaining a steady balance of trade
and government budget surpluses. These countries learned that they must
have a measure of competitive exports and keep control over strategic in-
dustries in order to build and finance a sustainable welfare state. These goals
have been attained through the welfare and labour-market reforms of the
1990s.

Conclusion and Implications for South Korea

Despite the high taxation rates and extensive welfare policies, institutional
competitiveness and flexibility have allowed the Nordic capitalist nations
to achieve Europeanization while maintaining their unique welfare models.
On the other hand, the South European capitalism model has failed to Europeanize, due to the rigidity of its institutions and its inefficiencies, which have led to fiscal crisis. It does not possess the required institutional competitiveness. For the past ten years, the Eurozone has functioned as a cushion for South European nations, but the global financial crisis has revealed their weak competitiveness. The Nordic nations have improved their competitiveness through continued reforms. As a result, despite their integration into the EU’s internal market, EU level control and regulation over the nations’ budgets and social policies has been recalibrated and regulated at the national level, allowing them to maintain their institutional characteristics. A diverse capitalism is being continued.

Institutional reform and comparative advantage (or efficiency and complementarity) have become important in responding to the pressures and influences of Europeanization. Structural reforms to suppress and control public and private sector wages while raising productivity are required. This leads of course to political reaction and social resistance. But the responses of the Nordic nations were based on the existing institutional tradition of social compromise. As a result the Nordic nations, through a high-cost high-efficiency system based on strong competitiveness, have achieved good results in both growth and distribution of wealth. Globalization and European Integration have required the EU member states to initiate institutional reform in their labour relations and policymaking. The members that have responded well now possess institutional competitiveness and flexibility.

The Nordic countries and South Korea share many important aspects. Sweden, Finland and South Korea experienced serious financial crises in the 1990s. Sweden and Finland turned to the EU and South Korea turned to the OECD and the IMF during their financial crises. This means that the Nordic countries and South Korea are fully globalized and liberalized. Sweden and Korea experienced a ‘regime change’ during the financial crises of 1991–2 and 1997–8, respectively. They abandoned their full employment regimes, such as lifetime employment by the Chaebol in Korea, that sustained a political culture of independence from neo-liberalism.

The turn to international bodies fragmented unionism. In Korea and Sweden governments benefited from this fragmentation of unionism as different unions pursued either routine or contentious policies. The Swedish Social Democratic government undertook liberalizing reforms during the 1980s and 1990s. In Korea, two successive, comparatively progressive governments undertook liberalizing reforms during the late 1990s and 2000s.
The Nordic countries and Korea have open and export-oriented economies and are among the core globalized countries. In short, the Nordic Countries and Korea are closer than ever before as regards a liberalizing economy and state-society relations. In other words, traditional democratic corporatism in the Nordic countries has weakened significantly and authoritarian corporatism in Korea is gone. This means that social democratic governments in the Nordic countries are not ‘genuinely social democratic’ anymore and that the developmental state in Korea is no longer nationalistic and state-led.

I argue that the Nordic models can provide solutions for Korea’s problems. The Nordic models still have powerful systems. Their systems, including the welfare system, are very efficient and productive compared with Korea’s systems. Low corruption is a necessary precondition and Korea needs to learn more in this area from the Nordic models. Below I point out three implications for Korea.

Firstly, the utilization of rational class alliances or class collaboration is important. Historically, Nordic countries developed an institutionalization of class conflict (the tripartite system). These institutions have been transformed but still contribute to class collaboration and social peace. South Korea needs to establish social cohesion to institutionalize severe class conflicts. Moreover, Nordic welfare policies to reduce income gaps and secure income lost from unemployment and illness will prove valuable for Korea. Secondly, labour issues must be concentrated on. Labour-market reform is needed for job creation, activating the labour market, and alleviating the dual labour-market problem. Korea needs to learn from the Nordic labour relations system: Nordic countries have historical experience of industrial peace and flexicurity. Finally, Korea can learn from the Nordic models about how to deal with its transnational capital, an important source of investment, national wealth, and jobs. The Nordic model of corporate governance that shares internal major stockholders has performed positive functions and is the key institution for Nordic social and economic governance.

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Nokia (Finland), Maersk Group (Denmark), the Wallenbergs (Sweden) are the cases.


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Part 3

Dialogue, Engagement and Reconciliation in the East and the West
Chapter 8

HUMAN RIGHTS AND ‘VALUES IN ASIA’: REFLECTIONS ON EAST–WEST DIALOGUES

Daniel A. Bell

In the early 1990s, the economic and social achievements of modernizing East Asian states became too conspicuous to ignore. Senior Asian statesmen such as Lee Kuan Yew and Dr Mahathir trumpeted their high GNPs on the world stage, arguing that the ‘Asian miracle’ rested on distinctive ‘Asian values.’ The point was to cast doubt on the normative superiority of Western-style human rights and to question the desirability of exporting that model to East Asian societies. If Asians can do well with their own moral values and conceptions of political organization, then why should defenders of Western-style human rights seek to impose their ideas on the rest of the world?

The ‘Asian values’ debate, unfortunately, generated more heat than light. In retrospect, the substantive problem seems obvious: the debate was neither about Asia nor about values. Asia is a huge and exceptionally diverse landmass, encompassing much of the world’s population. It hosts a number of religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity, and Judaism, as well as a myriad of races, ethnicities, customs, and languages. The assumption that Asia has its own cultural essence fundamentally different from that of the West is, to say the least, dubious. In fact, as Tatsuo Inoue has argued, the ‘Asian values’ thesis ironically owes its roots to Western intellectual imperialism and its ‘Orientalism,’ the very force that was being criticized by official Asian critics of human rights (Tatsuo, 1999).

There are no distinctly Asian values, and anything that goes by the name of ‘Asian values’ tends to refer to values that are either narrower (distinctive only to some societies, or parts of societies, in Asia) or broader (the values characterize societies both in and out of Asia) than the stated terms of reference. More surprisingly, perhaps, most claims made on behalf of ‘Asian values’ were not even about values. Consider some claims typically put forward by politicians under the rubric of ‘Asian values’: Political rights
conflict with economic development; free speech leads to racial and religious conflict; Confucian values promote economic development. Whatever the merits of these claims, they are ultimately empirical claims that must be answered by social scientists, not by moral philosophers. The only way to evaluate these claims is by means of historical and sociological analysis.

Of course, political actors tend to be motivated by considerations other than clear thinking and it may not be fair to blame elderly Asian politicians for the obfuscating discourse on ‘Asian values.’ The interesting part, however, is that the debate attracted so much global attention, suggesting the presence of something besides obfuscation and self-promotion. Several East and Southeast Asian societies did modernize quickly, while seeming to build upon traditional values somewhat at odds with Western liberal approaches to human rights. Fortunately, the less publicized but more nuanced views of critical intellectuals in East Asia help to make sense of the key issues underlying the debate. Over the last decade, I have been fortunate to participate in several East–West dialogues on the subject of human rights, and this chapter constitutes my reflections on these dialogues. My aim is to get beyond the rhetoric that has dogged the human rights debate and

1 Lee Kuan Yew, to be fair, has backed away from the term ‘Asian values,’ arguing that he was referring (only) to values shared by East Asian countries with a Confucian heritage.
2 In the mid-1990s, the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs convened several workshops involving dialogues between East Asian and Western intellectuals on the subject of human rights in East Asian societies. The project was planned and administered by Joanne R. Bauer, director of studies at the Carnegie Council. Workshops were held in Hakone (Japan), Bangkok (Thailand), and Seoul (Korea), with a final wrap-up session at the Harvard Law School. My reflections on the Hakone workshop appeared as the article, ‘The East Asian Challenge to Human Rights’ (Human Rights Quarterly, Vol. 18, No. 3, August 1996) and my reflections on the Bangkok workshop appeared as the article ‘Minority Rights: On the Importance of Local Knowledge’ (Dissent, Summer 1996). I have also coedited (with Joanne R. Bauer) a book that is the product of this multiyear project, The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Chapter 1 of my book East Meets West: Human Rights and Democracy in East Asia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) also draws on the findings of this project. Over the past several years, I have also participated in a multi-year cross-cultural dialogue on Confucianism convened by Hahm Chaibong of Yonsei University and UNESCO that has dealt with the topic of human rights (among other topics). I have coedited two books that result from this project, Confucianism for the Modern World, co-edited with Hahm Chaibong (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and The Politics of Affective Relations: East Asia and Beyond, co-edited with Hahm Chaihark (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004). This chapter draws on all these sources and some unpublished arguments made by East Asian participants at these workshops. My own qualifications and elaborations of these arguments are largely confined to the footnotes and the concluding section. I have also updated the arguments and examples by drawing on other sources.
identify relatively persuasive East Asian criticisms of traditional Western approaches to human rights.

One can distinguish between four sorts of arguments put forward by East Asian critics of Western approaches to human rights. (I do not mean to imply that these arguments are distinctly or uniquely Asian.) First, the argument often asserted by East Asian governments that a right must be temporarily curtailed in order to deal with an unfortunate set of particular social and political circumstances. Once the perceived crisis is over, according to this view, then the rights denial is no longer justified. This viewpoint is not in the first instance a ‘cultural clash’ over human rights, as both the government in question and the human rights activist share a common set of moral and political aspirations as an end goal. However, cultural factors can affect the prioritizing of rights, which matters when rights conflict and it must be decided which one to sacrifice.

The other challenges to Western liberal conceptions of human rights are more directly disputes over cultural values. Supporters of universal human rights tried to discredit the ‘Asian values’ discourse by pointing to the diversity of values within the Asian region, but such arguments also undermined their own position. As Randall Peerenboom argues, “If such diversity precludes the common values within the Asian region, then it also precludes a fortiori the possibility of universal values” (Peerenboom, 2005: 38). Hence, I will use the term ‘values in Asia’: one that is sensitive to the pluralism of values within Asia yet retains the implication that such values can pose challenges to Western liberal approaches to human rights.

The second challenge is an argument over the justification of rights. As against the claim that the Western liberal tradition is the only possible moral foundation for human rights, many East Asian human rights activists argue that their own cultural traditions can provide the resources for local justifications of ideas and practices normally realized through a human rights regime in Western countries. This argument is not merely theoretical; it has strategic importance for advocates of human rights reforms in East Asia.

The third challenge is an argument for moral pluralism. That is, cultural particularities in East Asia may justify a different moral standpoint vis-à-vis the human rights regime typically endorsed by Western governments, scholars, and human rights activists. To repeat, the East Asian region is a complex mix of societies, cultural traditions, and political viewpoints. It is also true that values change significantly over time in response to various internal and external pressures and this is evident in the region. However,
some ‘values in Asia’ may be more persistent than others and may diverge from some human rights ideas and practices typically endorsed in Western countries. If these values are widely shared by both defenders and critics of the political status quo, there is a strong presumption in favour of respect for those values.

The fourth challenge is the argument that the current ‘international’ human rights regime needs to be modified to incorporate East Asian viewpoints. East Asian critics have argued that the current rights regime has been forged largely on the basis of Western liberal-democratic norms and that the people of East Asia can contribute positively to the evolution of a truly international human rights discourse in which they have not heretofore played a substantial part. The point here is not to displace human rights in favour of some other set of principles (Langlois, 2001) but rather to allow for the possibility of learning from ‘values in Asia’ so that the human rights regime reflects the outcome of an international dialogue between peoples of different cultures. The section ends with my own doubts regarding the feasibility of such a project.

Trade-Offs and Priorities

Rights versus Development: A Zero-Sum Game?

A common East Asian argument is that Western-style civil and political liberties need to be sacrificed in order to meet more basic material needs. Most famously, Lee Kuan Yew argues that political leaders in developing countries should be committed to the eradication of poverty above all else: ‘As prime minister of Singapore, my first task was to lift my country out of the degradation that poverty, ignorance and disease had wrought. Since it was dire poverty that made for such a low priority given to human life, all other things became secondary’ (Gardels, 1992). If factional opposition threatens to slow down the government’s efforts to promote economic development or to plunge the country into civil strife, then in Lee’s view tough measures can and should be taken to ensure political stability. Such is the message Lee delivers to receptive audiences in China, Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines.4

3 Unless otherwise specified, the examples from this section were provided by East Asian participants at the workshop held in Hakone, Japan, in June 1995.

4 The idea that the government’s first obligation is to secure the means of subsistence has Confucian roots and has been influential throughout East Asian societies with a Confucian heritage.
Nobel-prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, however, casts doubt on the validity of this proposition. He argues that there is little empirical evidence that civil and political rights lead to disastrous outcomes. Systematic cross-national statistical studies do not support the claim that there is a correlation or a causal connection between authoritarianism and economic success. Civil and political rights in fact help to safeguard economic security in the sense that such rights draw attention to major social disasters and induce an appropriate political response:

Whether and how a government responds to needs and sufferings may well depend on how much pressure is put on it, and the exercise of political rights (such as voting, criticizing, protesting, and so on) can make a real difference. For example, one of the remarkable facts about famines in the world is that no substantial famine has ever occurred in any country with a democratic form of government and a relatively free press.5

Following Lee Kuan Yew, the Burmese military junta argue that rights must be curtailed in order to provide the political stability said to underpin economic progress. At least some freedoms, however, need to be restored in order to allow for economic growth. In the words of Yozo Yokota, then UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma:

If the government allows economists to freely engage in research and to make necessary recommendations to improve the economic situation of the country, and if the people are allowed to do business freely by traveling without government restrictions and collecting information and conducting negotiations as they like, there is a great chance that the country would grow rapidly. (Yozo, on file with author: 3)

The current status of Burma and North Korea – desperately poor countries governed by the region’s most repressive rulers – supports Yokota’s doubts.

The Need for Specificity

While the general claim that civil and political rights must be sacrificed in the name of economic development may not stand up to social scientific scrutiny, East Asian governments also present narrower justifications for curbing particular rights in particular contexts for particular economic or

5 If the problem is severe malnutrition, however, the record is not so clear: since Deng’s reforms, autocratic China has a better record in this respect than democratic India (Sen, 1999: 92).
political purposes. These actions are said to be taken as a short-term measure to secure a more important right or more of that same right in the long term. Xin Chunying, a lawyer working at the Human Rights Center of the Chinese Academy of the Social Sciences, notes that East Asian governments emphasize ‘the particularity of human rights protection and the priority determined by the specific conditions of each country’ (Xin, on file with author: 9). Such claims are put forward by government officials, but often attract significant local support.

Consider the following examples of situation-specific justifications for the temporary curtailment of particular rights:6

1. Kevin Tan, then professor of constitutional law at the National University of Singapore, noted that Singapore in the 1960s was plagued by ‘the threat of a communist takeover, and communal and ethnic divisions, which pitted Singapore’s majority Chinese population against the minority Malays.’ (Tan, 1999: 266). Tan noted that Singapore made use of emergency powers (originally established by British colonial rulers) to counter these threats when it was expelled from Malaysia in 1965. The Singapore government argued that without these powers, including the authority to detain without trial persons suspected of being subversives, it might not have been able to prevent the country from plunging into civil strife.7

2. The Malaysian government sometimes deprives indigenous populations of access to forests and waters, thus restricting their right to a secure cultural context. The Malaysian government asserts that control of such natural resources is necessary for economic development in that country.

3. When Korean President Park issued a threat to execute blackmailers, a capital outflow that was haemorrhaging the country’s economy ceased.

4. Post World War II land reform in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan would have been much more difficult to accomplish without a U.S. occupying force. If instead there had been a democratic context in each country, the

6 These examples were made by East Asian participants at the Hakone workshop, but they were not necessarily endorsed by them. They were raised as examples of justifications that cannot be rebutted without the acquisition of local knowledge.

7 Needless to say, it is difficult to ‘prove’ that such powers were necessary to prevent civil strife, because the alternative scenario is counter-factual. Experience from other contexts, however, does suggest that civil liberties can contribute to communal strife if left unchecked: the freedom of the press in Rwanda, for example, allowed Hutu demagogues to whip up hatred against the Tutsi minority and thus provided ideological justification for the 1994 genocide (see Chua, A. 2003: 168–170).
political process may have been captured by landed interests that would
have posed serious obstacles to land reform.

5. The existence of underpaid labour, denied the right to protest, has
attracted much international investment in China’s coastal regions,
leading to high growth rates and increasing opportunities for enrichment.
As international enterprises along the coast become increasingly capital
and technology intensive, foreign firms requiring cheaper labour move
inland. There is an argument that the whole process has a spill-over effect
that, in the end, may benefit much of the country.

Whatever one thinks about these justifications for rights violations, it is
important to note that they are not offered as general arguments for repres-
son and hence cannot be refuted by social scientific evidence based on
generalizations. What makes these arguments for human rights violations
plausible is that they include a description of a pressing social problem (for
example, communal strife, capital outflow) and an account of why a rights
violation (for example, the right to detain without trial, a threat to execute
blackmailers) is the only effective way of dealing with that particular prob-
lem. To counter such arguments with the claim that most countries do not
have to face similar problems or that not all rights need to be curtailed for
purposes of economic development seems beside the point.

Nor is it appropriate to respond to this ‘Asian’ challenge with the claim
that human rights are universal and hence cannot be restricted under any
circumstances. The so-called Asian side of the debate often concedes that
human rights are universal and that ideally governments ought to try to

8 While the central government does oppose, at least rhetorically, this kind of maltreat-
ment of labour, Dorothy Solinger points out that its own economic policies (decentralizing
profit retention to local governments and allowing tax receipts on local industry to be col-
lected and kept locally) have disposed local leaders to solicit rights abusing investors. As
Solinger observes, ‘The problem is pretty complex - it’s not just a question of “the state” and
its approach to rights . . . the various echelons of the state may have separate interests and
different reasons for their stances on rights.’ Letter from Dorothy Solinger to Daniel Bell (23

9 It is worth noting that Article 4 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and
Political Rights (1966) explicitly allows for short term curbs on rights if these are necessary
to deal with particular social crises: ‘In time of public emergency which threatens the life of
the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed, the States Parties to the present
Covenant may take measures derogating from their obligations under the present Covenant
to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, provided that such measures
are not inconsistent with their other obligations under international law and do not involve
discrimination solely on the ground of race, color, sex, language, religion or social origin.’
secure as many rights as possible. The point being made here, however, is that certain rights may conflict and that consequently governments may either have to sacrifice some rights in order to safeguard more important ones or to sacrifice a certain right in the short term in order to secure more of that same right in the long term. Put differently, the real East Asian challenge is often not so much a dispute about the ideal of promoting human rights or different cultural ‘essences’ as a plea for recognition of the (alleged) fact that certain East Asian governments often find themselves in the unenviable position of having to curtail certain rights in order to secure other more basic rights. To paraphrase Isaiah Berlin, not all good rights go together, contrary to the optimistic and well meaning pronouncements of some Western human rights activists.

When countering plausible government justifications for rights violations of this sort one can question either the premise that the East Asian country under question is facing a particular social crisis (for example, a high risk of inter-communal warfare) requiring immediate political action or the idea that curbing a particular right is the best means of overcoming that crisis. Whatever the tactic, the social critic must be armed with detailed and

10 For example, Article 8 of the Bangkok Declaration adopted by several Asian states in April 1993 states that ‘While human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, [and] bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds.’ Michael W. Dowdle argues that this formulation is wholly consistent with the conception of rights as principles (rather than hard commands) defended by John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin in the context of Anglo-American jurisprudence (Dowdle, 2001: 125–152). The challenge to the universalization of human rights is more explicit in the case of Islam, however: The Cairo Islamic conference in August 1993 contrasted Islamic values with the UN Declaration (Rubio-Carracedo, 2001: 277).

11 The U.S. government’s reaction to the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks shows that such arguments are not distinctly Asian: as Randy Peerenboom puts it, ‘When stable, Euro-America can afford to preach to developing countries struggling with terrorists about the value of civil and political rights and the importance of the rule of law. But when faced with threats, much cherished rights go out the window. If there is anything universal, it would seem to be disregard for rights whenever there are real or perceived threats to stability or order’ (Peerenboom, on file with author: 89). The September 11th terrorist attacks have also led to rethinking in some human rights circles regarding the possibility that social crises may justify the temporary curtailment of rights: see, e.g., Schulz (Executive Director of Amnesty International U.S.A.), 2004: 20.

12 Of course, human rights groups and NGOs are likely to look harder for feasible alternatives to rights violations than government officials, but if they look and find nothing, it may be time to move on to something else.
historically informed knowledge of the society that finds itself in a specific, historically contingent condition.\textsuperscript{13}

Even if it turns out that (1) the social crisis is real and (2) curbing rights is the most effective way of overcoming it, such local justifications for the denial of rights are, as Jack Donnelly put it, ‘at best a short-run excuse’ (Donnelly, 1999: 72). Once the economic or political troubles are more or less successfully overcome, then according to the government’s own logic the denial of rights is no longer justified.\textsuperscript{14} This leads us once again to the point that the ‘Asian values’ debate is something of a misnomer. Some government arguments for curtailing rights turn mainly on the validity of empirical facts, not on culture. These arguments are sometimes used to call for curtailling rights in such a way that the traditional cultural values are actually violated. As Amartya Sen observed, the Chinese government justifies its one child policy by claiming (erroneously, in Sen’s view) that it is necessary to deal with the population crisis. In fact, the resulting policy violates, not honours, a deeply held cultural preference for siring male children.\textsuperscript{15}

Nonetheless, the argument is not purely a matter of how best to stamp out undesirable cultural values. Traditional values can be widely adhered to and considered defensible by members of a particular community, and

\textsuperscript{13} The social critic, in other words, must first concede the possibility of situational constraints on the part of the power-holder, and then proceed to show (on the basis of a contextual argument) that those constraints do not apply in that particular situation. Social critics in East Asia may be better culturally prepared to engage in this sort of contextual criticism. In experimental settings, according to Richard Nisbett, ‘Americans in general failed to recognize the role of situational constraints on a speaker’s behavior whereas Koreans were able to’ (Nisbett, 2003: 190). For whatever concatenation of historical reasons, there may be perceptual and cognitive processes that make Americans (typically) think in ‘black and white’ terms (perhaps helping to explain the readiness to condemn ‘foreign’ practices without any understanding of different cultures as well as the popularity of such U.S. presidents as Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush).

\textsuperscript{14} Note, however, that the ‘short-term’ can last a long time, particularly if the social crisis is replaced by another that similarly justifies the rights curtailment. E.g., in the late 1990s, pressure was building on Singapore and Malaysia to repeal internal security acts that allowed indefinite detention without trial because the initial justification, viz., fear of communist takeover, was no longer plausible, but the September 11th terrorist attacks, along with the concomitant fear of terrorist attacks by Islamic ‘fundamentalists’ in Southeast Asia, put an end to that debate. Moreover, if the main reason for rights curtailment is insufficient economic resources (e.g., few countries can afford to subsidize sign language interpreters in all political forums so that the hearing impaired are guaranteed equal rights to meaningful political participation), then the ‘short-term’ restriction on rights will not ‘wither away’ in the foreseeable future.

\textsuperscript{15} Sen, comment at Hakone workshop.
this can affect the prioritizing of rights. Different societies may rank rights differently, and if they face a similar set of disagreeable circumstances they may come to different conclusions about the right that needs to be curtailed. For example, U.S. citizens may be more willing to sacrifice a social or economic right in cases of conflict with a civil and political right. If neither the constitution nor a majority of democratically elected representatives support universal access to health care, then the right to health care regardless of income can be curtailed. In contrast, the Chinese may be more willing to sacrifice a civil or political liberty in cases of conflict with a social or economic right: there may be wide support for restrictions on the right to form free labour associations if they are necessary to provide conditions for economic development. Different priorities assigned to rights can also matter when it comes to deciding how to spend scarce resources. For example, East Asian societies with a Confucian heritage will place great emphasis upon the value of education, which may help to explain the large amount of spending on education compared to other societies with similar levels of economic development. Note, however, that these choices are not meant to be celebrated; they reflect the difficult circumstances that may bind political actors in the short to medium term.

In short, these arguments for curtailing rights do not undermine the quest for a truly universal human rights regime. Cultural arguments for the systematic denial of basic civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights, cannot withstand critical scrutiny, even allowing for justifiable moral and political differences and for plausible accounts of situation-specific curtailments of particular rights. At best, different cultural values can justify different priorities given to rights in cases of conflict, but both ‘sides’ can agree that such hard choices are unfortunate and hopefully temporary.

The other challenges to Western ideas of human rights are more directly arguments over cultural values. Several East Asian intellectuals have argued that Western-style human rights discourse and instruments have not yet adequately incorporated ‘values in Asia.’ The proposed remedies draw on the positive – potential and realized – contributions of East Asian cultural traditions.

16 To repeat, I do not mean to imply that such beliefs justifying constraints on civil and political rights are necessarily distinctive to the East Asian region. What I do mean to argue is that they will seem more plausible to a wider array of constituents compared to people in Western liberal democratic countries.
Asian Justifications for Human Rights: Is Liberalism the Only Moral Foundation?

According to the prominent human rights theorist Jack Donnelly, ‘the idea that all human beings, simply because they are human, have certain inalienable political rights’ was essentially foreign to traditional Asian political thought as well as to pre-modern Western political thought (Donnelly, 1999, 62). The theory of human rights was first fully developed in John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government*. These ideas spread broadly in response to the dual threats to human dignity posed by modern centralized states and socially disruptive free markets in seventeenth-century Europe.

The claim that the concept of human rights is foreign to East Asian political traditions may be out of date. China, for example, has been the site of a rich discourse on rights for the last century or so, ever since the term ‘rights’ began to be translated as the Chinese term *quanli*. Moreover, several East Asian intellectuals argued that values similar to (aspects of) Western conceptions of human rights can also be found in some ‘pre-modern’ non-Western traditions. For example, the distinguished Islamic scholar Nurcholish Madjid notes that ‘Islam too recognizes the right to found a family, the right to privacy, the right to freedom of movement and residence, the right to use one’s own language, the right to practice one’s own culture and the right to freedom of religion.’ The University of Hong Kong political philosopher Joseph Chan argues that values similar to aspects of Western conceptions of human rights can be found in the Confucian tradition. The notion of *ren* (variously translated as benevolence, humanity, or love), for example, expresses the value of impartial concern to relieve human suffering. In Mencius’s

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18 Madjid, unpublished, on file with author: 7. Quoting Chandra Muzaffar. Since the downfall of Suharto, Nucholish Madjid has played an important role in aiding the transition to democratic rule, and his views have been respected partly, if not mainly, because he appeals to Islamic foundations and is personally respected for his religious piety.

19 In the same vein, Stephen Angle argues that the Chinese rights discourse owes much to neo-Confucian theories about legitimate desires that date back to the sixteenth century. Angle’s main argument is not that there is an exact convergence between Western and Chinese views on human rights, but rather that the Chinese background has shaped a distinctively Chinese discourse about rights. I have critically evaluated this argument in my review of Angle’s book, ‘Human Rights and Social Criticism in Contemporary Chinese Political Theory,’ *Political Theory*, June 2004, Vol. 32, No. 3, 397–400.
famous example of a child on the verge of falling into a well, a person with *ren* would be moved by compassion to save the child, not because he or she had personal acquaintance with the child’s parents, nor because he or she wanted to win the praise of fellow villagers or friends, but simply because of his or her concern for the suffering of a human person. Such concern shows that Confucianism allows for duties or rights that belong to human persons *simpliciter*, independent of their roles (Chan 1999, 218).

In addition, the functional equivalents of some human rights *practices* can be found in Asian traditions. For example, the idea of curbing the ruler’s exercise of arbitrary state power figured prominently in Confucian political regimes. Jongryn Mo argues that the Censorate provided an effective institutional restraint on the ruler’s power in Choson-dynasty Korea. The Censorate consisted of three organs that were explicitly designed to prevent abuse in the exercise of political and administrative agents. The censors were not only judicial and auditing agents, but also voices of dissent and opposition, playing roles similar to that of opposition parties in modern democracies (Mo, 2003).

There were also functional equivalents of some social and economic rights. Classical Confucians strongly emphasized that the first obligation of government is to feed the people, and this norm was often put into practice in Imperial China. In the Song dynasty (A.D. 960–1279), the central government established a granary in each district for the storing of rice which came from the public land as rent. Each of the four classes of people was given rice and sometimes clothes. In the Qing dynasty (A.D. 1644–1911),

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20 It is rather surprising that Alasdair MacIntyre, known for his supposed hostility to Western-style rights discourse, has argued that modern states necessarily must draw on that discourse in a way that precludes Confucianism: ‘My view does involve a denial that any modern state, Asian or Western, could embody the values of a Mencius or a Xunzi. The political dimensions of a Confucianism that took either or both of them as its teachers would be those of the local community, not of the state’ (MacIntyre, 2004, 217). But if some aspects of Confucian-inspired practices and institutions can serve as the functional equivalent of Western-style practices and institutions that secure civil and political rights, then why take such a hard line against ‘political Confucianism’? MacIntyre underestimates the potential of Confucian-inspired political institutions, just as he overestimates the potential of Confucian ethics to structure ethical life at the level of local community. Few contemporary adherents of Confucianism regard Confucianism as a ‘well-defined concept of the kind of community within which relationships could be defined by the relevant norms, and the four virtues would provide the standards for practice’ (Ibid, 215); rather, Confucianism is viewed as part of the good life, particularly relevant for structuring relationships with elderly parents, but most Confucians freely draw upon other ethical resources such as Christianity and Buddhism for structuring ethical lives.
there were strict legal sanctions to punish officials who failed to secure the ‘right to food’: According to the Law Code of the Tsing [Qing] Dynasty, if the officials do not support the four classes, the very sick person and the infirm and superannuated who need public support, they shall be punished by sixty blows of the long stick’ (Chen, 1911: 599).

In short, the Western liberal tradition may not be the only moral foundation for realizing the values and practices associated with human rights regimes. But why does this matter, practically speaking?

Increasing Commitment to Human Rights in East Asia: Strategic Considerations

While it may be possible to defend the argument that human rights ideas and practices resonate to some extent with Asian cultural traditions, are there any particular reasons for proponents of human rights to adopt culturally sensitive strategies for the promotion of rights, either instead of, or as a complement to, other strategies? If the ultimate aim of human rights diplomacy is to persuade others of the value of human rights, it is more likely that the struggle to promote human rights can be won if it is fought in ways that build on, rather than challenge, local cultural traditions.21 To deny the possibility that human rights norms and practices are compatible with Asian traditions translates into dependence on a foreign standard for promoting human rights. This approach has a number of drawbacks.

First, the argument that Western liberalism is the only moral foundation for human rights unwittingly plays into the hands of nasty forces in East Asia who seek to stigmatize human rights voices as ‘agents of foreign devils’ and defamers of indigenous traditions. Similarly, the argument that the development of human rights is contingent on the development of capitalism strengthens the position of anti-modernists who oppose human rights, while the argument that human rights is contingent on anthropocentric arguments strengthens advocates of a theocentric view who oppose human rights.22 Worse, arguments that present a stark choice between religion and

21 The conception of tradition refers to an ongoing argument about the good of the community whose identity it seeks to define. The cultural traditions of interest to human rights activists, in other words, should be living in the sense that fundamental values still have the capacity to motivate action in the contemporary era. For similar accounts of tradition, see Robert Bellah et al., 1985: 27–28, 335–36; and Alasdair Maclntyre, 1988.
22 John L. Esposito points out that ‘Too often analysis and policymaking have been shaped by a liberal secularism that fails to recognize it too represents a world view, not the paradigm
Human rights (as opposed to an approach that promises to reconcile religious insights with human rights ideas) may lead politically moderate religious persons into developing feelings hostile to human rights positions. Second, it is a widespread belief within the United States (currently the dominant voice/actor on the world diplomatic stage) that exporting American political practices and institutions is necessary for the promotion of human rights abroad. As Stephen Young, former Assistant Dean at the Harvard Law School puts it,

Many Americans seem to believe that the constitutional pattern of governance in the United States today – as formalized in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights – is a necessary prerequisite for protecting human rights. Thus, they evaluate the performance of other countries in the field of human rights by comparing their conduct with the standards of American politics (Young, 1980: 187).

It may well have been feasible to act on this belief in the post World War II era, when the United States was powerful enough to insist upon human rights norms. The American capacity to dictate appropriate forms of government to Japan in the immediate post World War II period is a classic example. Today, however, the relative economic and military strength of East Asia for modern society, and can easily degenerate into a “secularist fundamentalism” that treats alternative views as irrational, extremist, and deviant (Esposito, J., 1994: 24). The problem with ‘secularist fundamentalism’ is not just that it fails to respect nonliberal cultural traditions, but that it plays into the hands of ‘religious fundamentalists’ who also seek to reject wholesale values and practices associated with the Western liberal tradition.

This is not to deny that aspects of religious traditions are inconsistent with contemporary human rights values and practices, but only to suggest that aspects of religious traditions may be supportive of human rights and to offer the possibility that contemporary members of religious traditions may be able to formulate persuasive interpretations while excising ‘contingent’ aspects inimical to human rights concerns. See the discussion of Islamic feminism below.

It is important to note that Young proceeds to criticize this standpoint: ‘Although the Anglo-American political and legal tradition has been a forceful expositor of human rights causes, it is not the only basis upon which to build a political system that respects individual dignity’ (Ibid). Nonetheless, Young falls into his own universalist trap when he fails to distinguish between democracy and human rights, apparently assuming that Western style electoral mechanisms are necessary and sufficient to secure basic human rights (see Ibid, 187–88, 209). It is important to keep in mind that nondemocratic governments sometimes do fairly well at securing human rights (e.g., contemporary Hong Kong or the Republic of Venice for most of the last millennium), whereas democratic governments can sometimes have atrocious human rights records at home (e.g., Sri Lanka and El Salvador under Duarte) and abroad (e.g., the U.S. in Vietnam and Iraq).
means that the United States must now rely primarily on moral authority to promote human rights in Asia. However, several factors undermine US moral authority in this respect.

Widely publicized domestic social problems in the United States no longer make the United States the attractive political model that it may once have been. For example, Tokyo University’s Onuma Yasuaki is an active proponent of human rights in Japan but he is also a harsh critic of the attempt to export the U.S.-style rights regime, which emphasizes civil and political liberties over social and economic rights. Onuma argues that this regime – with its excessive legalism and individualism – contributes to various social diseases, such as high rates of drug use, collapsing families, rampant crime, growing economic inequality, and alienation from the political process (Onuma, 1999: 107).

It is obvious that recent foreign policy developments, particularly since the Iraq War, have undermined U.S. moral credibility in Asia and elsewhere. The tendency to subordinate human rights concerns when they conflict with security and commercial considerations contributes to cynicism regarding the true motivation of U.S. policymakers, not just among government officials, but also among ordinary citizens. The refusal to make amends for past misdeeds such as the Vietnam War further undermines U.S. moral authority in Asia, just as Japan’s refusal to fully accept full responsibility for its war of aggression weakens its own moral authority in Asia. For the

25 The U.S.-style priority of civil and political rights refers to the official policies of the U.S. government (its invocations of ‘human rights and democracy’ tend to refer to civil and political rights), the works of leading American political philosophers (e.g., John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*), and U.S.-based human rights groups (e.g., Human Rights First, formerly known as the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights). It is worth noting, however, that the U.S. branch of Amnesty International is explicitly critical of the official U.S. devaluation of economic rights (see the following chapter).

26 Its lack of moral authority in the rest of world was explicitly recognized by the U.S. State Department when it postponed the annual release of its (2004) Country Reports on Human Rights Practices following the public release of photos depicting the torture (‘abuse,’ as the U.S. government called it) of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison.


28 The Bush administration, needless to say, is not likely to apologize for the Vietnam War. More surprisingly, perhaps, the Clinton administration added insult to injury by pressurizing the Vietnamese government to repay $145 million in debts incurred by the U.S.-backed government of the former South Vietnam, effectively putting ‘Hanoi in the position of retroactively footing part of the bill for a war against itself’ (Chandler, 1997).
foreseeable future, the attempt to export ‘American ideals’ is likely to fall on
deaf ears, if not be counterproductive, in the East Asian region.

Third, appeal to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a
standard for promoting human rights in East Asia is not without drawbacks.
Although the UDHR has served as an effective tool in some human rights
struggles in East Asia (for example, by human rights campaigners in the
Philippines during Marcos’s rule), in many parts of East Asia the UDHR
and other U.N. documents are not nearly as relevant.

Since the UDHR was formulated without significant input from East
Asia, it is not always clear to East Asians why the UDHR should constitute
‘our’ human rights norms (the Bangkok Declaration was significant because
it was the first organized expression of Asian opposition to the UDHR). Although the UDHR is normatively binding, most East Asian states have
endorsed it for pragmatic, political reasons and not because of a deeply held
commitment to the human rights norms it contains. The UDHR thus does
not have the normative force and political relevance of a constitution that
emerges from genuine dialogue between interested parties keen on finding
a long term solution to a shared political dilemma. The lack of a proper
enforcement mechanism for the International Bill of Human Rights, as the
UDHR and subsequent documents are called, further reduces the practical
viability of this standard.

29 One can explain this phenomenon in part by the fact that the Marcos regime depended
to a great extent on United States economic and military support. Because of this, Marcos
was extremely conscious of his public image before the world. This, in turn, led him to em-
ploy legalistic justifications for his policies. As Maria Serena Diokno puts it, ‘What better way
than to apply international instruments he had publicly proclaimed as the guiding principles
of his rule?’ Letter from Maria Serena Diokno to Daniel Bell (20 Nov. 1995) (on file with
author).

30 Sumner B. Twiss notes that the Chinese delegate P. Chang to the drafting process of
the UDHR argued for the inclusion of the Confucian idea of ren in article 1, which was
eventually reflected in the idea that human beings are endowed not just with ‘reason,’ but also
with ‘conscience’ (Twiss, 1998: 41). If that is the only concrete manifestation of an East Asian
contribution to the UDHR, however, it won’t quell the critics who view it as a ‘Westcentric’
document.

31 One might also ask why the government’s voice should count as the normatively bind-
ing final interpretation of human rights issues in East Asia. Ironically, the same critics who
point out that East Asian governments illegitimately present their own interpretations of
human rights (often self-interested arguments for the denial of rights) as though it represents
a society-wide consensus are saying, in effect, that international human standards upheld in
the UDHR should be upheld because their governments endorsed this document.
Another fundamental weakness of the U.N. documents is that they are pitched at too high a level of abstraction (perhaps necessarily so in view of the need to reach agreement among many states) to be of use for many actual social and political problems. For example, does the ‘right to life’ (Article 3 of the UDHR) mean that capital punishment should be abolished? It is much easier to secure agreement at the level of high principle than to secure agreement over the application of those principles to particular cases. Moreover, U.N. documents do not provide much guidance when rights conflict or need to be violated pre-emptively in order to prevent further violations of rights.

In short, U.S. and ‘international’ justifications for human rights do not seem particularly promising from a tactical point of view, and to be effective human rights activists need to pay more attention to local justifications for human rights in Asia. There are also positive reasons in favour of drawing on the resources of indigenous cultural traditions to persuade East Asians of the value of human rights.

First, awareness of ‘values in Asia’ allows the human rights activist to draw on the most compelling justifications for human rights practices. Many rights battles will be fought within societies according to local norms and justifications. Consider the example of the Sisters in Islam, an autonomous, nongovernmental organization of Muslim women in Malaysia (Othman, 1999). This group challenges the way that Islam has been (mis)used by powerful forces to justify patriarchal practices, often contravening Islam’s central ideas and animating principles. It tries to advocate women’s rights in terms that are locally persuasive, meaning that it draws upon Islamic principles for inspiration. For example, the Sisters in Islam submitted a memorandum to the prime minister of Malaysia urging the Federal Parliament not to endorse the hudud law passed by the Kelantan state legislature. The hudud punishments included such troubling features as the inadmissibility of women as eyewitnesses. Sisters in Islam argued against the endorsement of these pun-

32 Similar problems arise with principles laid out in state constitutions: on the (mistaken) tendency to think that constitutionalizing property rights is sufficient to secure those rights, see Greg Alexander, ‘Property in Global Constitution-Making: Avoiding the Formalist Trap’ (unpublished manuscript on file with the author).

33 Similar arguments have been put forward by Islamic feminists in Morocco: see Kristiansen, 2004: 20. In Kenya, the argument that female genital cutting is inconsistent with the teachings of the Quran (Koran) has been relatively effective at changing the minds of (former) practitioners of genital cutting (Lacey, 2004).
ishments by rejecting the crude equation of hudud with Sharī'a and Sharī'a with Islam that helped to justify the Kelantan enactments. Apparently this campaign was effective, because the Federal Parliament states that it will not pass the Kelantan hudud code. The Sisters in Islam also engage in long-term human rights work, such as distributing pamphlets on Quranic conceptions of rights and duties of men and women in the family that provide the basis for a more egalitarian view of gender relations than the regressive ideas typically (and misleadingly) offered in the name of Islam itself. The assumption is that building human rights on traditional cultural resources – on the customs and values that people use to make sense of their lives – is more likely to lead to long-term commitment to human rights ideas and practices. Conversely, the group seems to recognize that defending rights by appealing to ‘universal human rights’ (not to mention Western feminist ideas) is likely to be ineffective, if not counterproductive.34

It can be argued that predominantly Islamic societies present a special case, where people’s outlooks and ‘habits of the heart’ are profoundly informed by religious values. In this context, it seems obvious that defenders of human rights are more likely to be effective if they work within the dominant tradition. But cultural traditions may also be relevant for human rights activists and democratic reformers elsewhere. For example, Wang Juntao – a long-time democratic activist who spent nearly five years in jail after the 1989 Beijing massacre – argues that many of the key figures in Chinese democracy movements drew inspiration from Confucian values. From the late nineteenth century to the present, nearly all the important figures in the history of democracy movements in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong tried to revive Confucianism in order to support democratization. Wang Juntao supports this aspiration, partly on the grounds that democracy may be easier to implement in the Chinese context if it can be shown that it need not conflict with traditional political culture: ‘If Confucianism is consistent with democracy, the traditional culture may be used as a means of promoting democratization in East Asia. At the very least, the political

34 Note, however, that the strategy adopted by Sisters of Islam is not without controversy. At the Bangkok workshop, a representative of the group was severely criticized by a devout Muslim from Malaysia, who questioned the Islamic credentials of the group, including the fact that some members could not read the Quran in Arabic. Such criticisms suggest that local justifications are most effective if deployed by ‘true believers’ of the tradition: in the case of Islam, if a non-believer draws on Islam to push forward values similar to human rights in an Islamic context, the strategic use of the religion is not likely to be viewed as sincere and may be rejected as another form of cultural imperialism.
transition will be smoother and easier, with lower costs, since there will be less cultural resistance’ (Wang, 2003: 69). Of course, there is an element of speculation here since the ‘effectiveness’ of Confucian-based arguments for democracy remains to be proved in mainland China, but such arguments, at minimum, can be deployed to counter official attempts to use ‘Confucianism’ to justify constraints on democratic rule.

Second, local traditions may shed light on the groups most likely to bring about desirable social and political change. For example, Han Sangjin of Seoul National University suggests that students from universities in Korea, centres of ‘cultural authority,’ could draw on the Confucian tradition of respect for intellectual elites and hence play a crucial role in establishing a society-wide commitment on the need for improving the human rights situation in Korea (Han, unpublished manuscript on file with author, 21). It may be that intellectual elites are granted uncommon (by Western standards) amounts of respect in societies shaped by Confucian traditions, with the implication that human rights activists need to target this group in particular, as opposed to investing their hopes in a mythical liberalizing middle class that often supports human rights reforms only in so far as they maintain a political order conducive to the accumulation of wealth (Brown and Jones, 1995: 78–106).

Third, regardless of the substance of or the moral justification for one’s arguments, awareness of local traditions may shed light on the appropriate attitude to be employed by human rights activists. For example, Onuma Yasuaki reminds us that ‘In Japanese culture, modesty is highly valued. Even if one believes in certain values, proselytizing for them is regarded as arrogant, uncivilized, and counterproductive. Instead, one should find ways to induce others to appreciate these values in a quiet and modest manner’ (Onuma, 1996: 4). This has implications for cross-cultural critics of human rights violations. Instead of the high-decibel ‘naming and shaming’ approach that is often seen in East Asia as high-minded and self-righteous, even by dissident intellectuals, criticism of human rights violations in East Asia is often more effective if it is presented in more subtle and indirect ways.

Fourth, local traditions may also make one more sensitive to the possibility of alternative, non-legalistic mechanisms for the protection of the vital human interests normally secured by a rights regime in a Western

35 See the discussion in the following chapter of the ‘naming and shaming’ approach defended by Human Rights Watch.
context. As Onuma notes, ‘Legalistic thinking has been rather foreign to many Japanese . . . to resort to juridical measures and to enforce one’s rights is not appreciated. Rather, one is expected to reach the same goal by resorting to less forceful measures such as patient negotiations, mediation, and other conciliatory measures’ (Onuma, 1996: 4). In such a context human rights activists can suggest non-juridical mechanisms for the protection of vital human interests, emphasizing that legal means are to be employed only as a last resort.

It would seem, then, that strategic considerations of practical relevance speak strongly in favour of local justifications for the values and practices that, in the Western world, are normally realized through a human rights regime. Perhaps, however, the deepest and most controversial question remains to be addressed: Can one identify aspects of East Asian cultural traditions relevant not just in the strategic sense of how best to persuade East Asians of the value of a human rights regime, but also in the sense that they may provide a moral foundation for political practices and institutions different from the human rights regimes typically favoured in Western countries? It is to this topic that we now turn.

‘Values in Asia’ versus Western Liberalism: Justifiable Moral Differences?

A human rights regime is supposed to protect our basic humanity – the fundamental human goods (or needs or interests) that underpin any ‘reasonable’ conception of human flourishing. But which human goods are fundamental? There is little public dispute over rights against murder, torture,

36 If human rights practices and institutions refer by definition only to the legal protection of individual rights, then, needless to say, nonlegalistic mechanisms for the protection of those same individual rights cannot be termed ‘human rights practices.’ However, if the end result is the same (i.e. the protection and promotion of vital human interests, which is presumably the whole point of a human rights regime) it is unclear why one should place too much emphasis on this terminological issue.

37 See also Chen, 2003. Several areas of conflict such as traffic and industrial accidents that would be dominated by private litigation in the U.S. are settled by administrative procedures in China. William C. Jones points to the Imperial roots of such practices and suggests that administrative agencies can also protect and promote freedom in China’s future (Jones, 2004: 55–6).

38 For the view that legalistic human rights language is generally counter-productive (i.e., not just in the East Asian context) given what it’s trying to achieve, see Charles Blattberg, ‘Two Concepts of Cosmopolitanism’ (unpublished manuscript on file with author).
slavery, and genocide (though needless to say many governments continue
to engage in nasty deeds off the record). As Singaporean government official
Bilahari Kausikan puts it, ‘It makes a great deal of difference if the West
insists on humane standards of behavior by vigorously protesting genocide,
murder, torture, or slavery. Here there is a clear consensus on a core of
international law that does not admit of any derogation on any grounds’
(Bilahari Kausikan, 1993: 39).39 However, beyond this agreed upon ‘core’ it
might well be possible to identify ‘civilizational’ fault lines with respect to
differing conceptions of vital human interests.

To repeat, both Western and Asian cultural traditions are complex and
change a great deal in response to various internal and external pressures.
Nonetheless, it is possible that most politically relevant actors, both officials
and intellectuals, in East Asian societies typically endorse a somewhat dif-
ferent set of fundamental human goods than their counterparts in Western
societies at this point in time and for the foreseeable future. Different socie-
ties may typically have different ideas regarding which human goods must
be protected regardless of competing considerations, and which human
goods can be legitimately subject to trade-offs with other goods as part of
everyday politics. If there is some truth in these propositions, it is essential
for purposes of improving mutual understanding and minimizing cross-
cultural conflict to take them into account. It may mean that some Western
conceptions of human rights are actually culturally specific conceptions of
fundamental human goods, not readily accepted elsewhere, too encompass-
ing in some cases and too narrow in others.

Limiting the Set of Human Rights for an East Asian Context
For example, it is not only defenders of ‘Asian’ autocratic rule who question
the ‘American’ idea that individuals have a vital interest in speaking freely,
so long as they don’t physically harm others, along with the political impli-
cation that the government has a ‘sacred’ obligation to respect this interest.
Consider the case of Dr Sulak Sivaraksa, a leading pro-democracy activist

39 The consensus, needless to say, soon breaks down once it comes to the application of
general prohibitions to particular cases, as illustrated by disputes over the whether the abuse
of Iraqi prisoners constitutes ‘torture.’ There may even be disputes over the application of
‘torture’ in everyday, familial settings. An American student of Indian descent told me that
her parents forced her to eat spicy food as a child even after she was crying from the pain,
telling her that God would punish her if she didn’t eat it. If the point of this child-rearing
practice was to promote the development of a love of spicy food, it was effective in this case.
in Thailand and a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1991, the Thai ruler, General Suchinda, pressed charges against Sulak for lèse-majesté – derogatory remarks directed at the royal family – and for defaming him (the general) in a speech given at Thammasat University in Thailand. Fearing for his life, Sulak fled the country but returned in 1992 to face charges after the Suchinda government had fallen. In court, Sulak did not deny that he had attacked the ‘dictator’ Suchinda, but he did deny the charge of lèse-majesté, referring to the many services he had performed for the royal family. Sulak explains:

I did not . . . stake my ground on an absolute right to free speech. My defense against the charge of lèse-majesté was my innocence of the charge; my defense was my loyalty to the King and the Royal Family and, even where I discussed the use of the charge of lèse-majesté in current Siamese political practice, it was to highlight abuse and to point to the ways in which abuse might undermine the monarchy, rather than to defend any theoretical right to commit this action. I am not affirming, nor would I affirm, a right to commit lèse majesté. This aspect of the case is particularly concerned with my being Siamese and belonging to the Siamese cultural tradition (Sulak, 1996).

In other words, Sulak aimed to persuade fellow citizens that the dominant political system should be replaced with an alternative, relatively democratic political structure, but he made it explicit that this did not mean advocating the removal of the existing constraint on direct criticism of the Thai king. Perhaps Sulak, like many Thais, would feel deeply offended, if not personally harmed, by an attack on the king. In such a case – where a constraint on the freedom of speech seems to be endorsed by both defenders and critics of the prevailing political system – there should be a strong presumption in favour of respecting this deviation from American-style free speech.40

40 I do not mean to deny that this presumption can be overridden. For example, the foreign human rights advocate would not have an obligation to refrain from critique of the Thai king if the king were to call for an unjustified war against a neighboring state, even if all Thais support this call. But such an eventuality is very unlikely, hence the strong presumption in favour of deferring to the ‘Thai’ constraint on free speech.

41 At the Bangkok workshop (March 1996), Charles Taylor pointed out that relatively uncontroversial laws against hate speech also exist in Canada. It could be argued, however, that the Thai case is more of a deviation from American-style free speech, because the ‘core’ of this ideal is the right to criticize political leaders, which is precisely the right being called into question here.
Other examples put forward by East Asian intellectuals regarding the possibility of narrowing the definition of vital human interests than would typically be the case in liberal Western countries – hence narrowing the list of rights that belong to the ‘core’ of the human rights zone – include the following:

1. In Singapore, there is a law that empowers the police and immigration officers to ‘test the urine for drugs of any person who behaves in a suspicious manner. If the result is positive, rehabilitation treatment is compulsory’ (Chan, 1995: 25, 36). Joseph Chan comments that ‘This act would be seen by Western liberals as an unjustifiable invasion of privacy. But for some Asians this restriction may be seen as a legitimate trade-off for the value of public safety and health’ (Chan, 1995).

2. In democratic South Korea, each household is required to attend monthly neighbourhood meetings to receive government directives and discuss local affairs (Kim Dae Jung, 1994: 190). What may be viewed as a minor inconvenience in Korea would almost certainly outrage most U.S. citizens and it is likely that the U.S. Supreme Court would strike down a governmental policy that forced citizens to associate for political purposes of this sort as a violation of the First Amendment. Once again there seems to be more willingness in East Asia amongst the general population to serve the common good by limiting individual freedom, perhaps as a residue of the Confucian cultural tradition.

3. Islamic legal scholar and human rights activist Abdullahi A. An-Na’im offers the following example from Islamic criminal law. According to Islamic law, which is based on the Qur’an and which Muslims believe to be the literal and final word of God, and on the Sunna, or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, theft is punishable by the amputation of the right hand and homicide by exact retribution or payment of monetary compensation. An-Na’im notes that,

Islamic law requires the state to fulfill its obligation to secure social and economic justice and to ensure decent standards of living for all its citizens before it can enforce these punishments. The law also provides for very narrow definitions of these offenses, makes an extensive range of defenses against the charge available to the accused person, and requires strict standards

of proof. Moreover, Islamic law demands total fairness and equality in law enforcement. In my view, the prerequisite conditions for the enforcement of these punishments are extremely difficult to satisfy in practice and are certainly unlikely to materialize in any Muslim country in the foreseeable future (An-Na’im, 1992: 34).

Notwithstanding the practical impediments to the legitimate implementation of corporeal punishment under Islamic law, An-Na’im argues that Islamic criminal law is endorsed in principle by the vast majority of Muslims today (An-Na’im, 1992), whereas most Western liberals and human rights activists would almost certainly regard it as a violation of the human right not to be subjected to ‘cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.’

Expanding the Set of Human Rights for an East Asian Context

The East Asian challenge, however, is not simply an argument for shortening the set of rights typically endorsed by members of Western liberal societies. In some areas, there may be a case for widening the scope of fundamental human goods to be protected by a rights regime. In Japanese society, for example, well-developed empathetic ability is regarded as one of the necessary conditions for the pursuit of the good life. Such ability is normally acquired via warm, intimate human relationships in early stages of life, leading Teruhisa Se and Rie Karatsu to argue that ‘a new right could be included in the category of human rights: a right to be brought up in an intimate community.’ (He and Rie, 2004: 283)

Consider also the value of filial piety, what Confucians consider to be ‘the essential way of learning to be human’ (Tu, 1989: 15). East Asian societies influenced by Confucianism strongly emphasize the idea that adult children have a duty to care for elderly parents, a duty to be forsaken only in the

43 He and Rie point to the possibility that such new rights can improve the human rights scheme prevailing in Western cultures (He and Rie, 2004: 284–5), though my view is that ‘well-developed empathetic ability’ is not nearly so central to Western liberalism and is not likely to be adopted as the foundation for new rights in the West.

44 Interestingly, this moral outlook still seems to inform the practices of Asian immigrants to other societies. According to the New York Times (11 July 2001), fewer than one in five whites in the U.S. help care or provide financial support for their parents, in-laws or other relatives, compared with 28% of African-Americans, 34% of Hispanic-Americans and 42% of Asian-Americans. Those who provide the most care also feel the most guilt that they are not doing enough. Almost three-quarters of Asian-Americans say they should do more for their parents, compared with two-thirds of Hispanics, slightly more than half of African-Americans, and fewer than half of whites.
most exceptional circumstances. Thus, whereas it is widely seen as morally acceptable in the West to commit elderly parents to nursing homes, from an East Asian perspective this often amounts to condemning one's parents to a lonely and psychologically painful death and thus should be considered as a violation of a fundamental human good. In political practice, the value of filial piety means that it is incumbent on East Asian governments to provide the social and economic conditions that facilitate the realization of the duty to care for elderly parents. This can take the form of laws that make it mandatory for children to provide financial support for elderly parents, as in mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, and Singapore, and/or reliance on more indirect methods such as tax breaks and housing benefits that simply make at-home care for the elderly easier, as in Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore. In some cases, the right to be cared for by adult children is secured in the constitution itself, along with other ‘constitutional essentials’.

In sum, East Asian conceptions of vital human interests may well justify deviations from the human rights standards typically endorsed by liberal theorists, Western governments, and international human rights documents.

45 The obligations of filial piety do not end with the death of one's parents. Equally, if not more important, are the mourning period and the subsequent rituals designed to show ongoing respect for one's parents. In Korea, for example, the large majority of families endorse the practice of ancestor worship (Helgesen, 1988: 128). A contrasting approach was expressed by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the film 'Pumping Iron,' where he seemed proud of the fact that he chose to train for a body-building competition rather than return home for his father's funeral.

46 This is not to deny that Westerners sometimes agonize over the decision to commit a parent to an old age home. It is only to say that generally speaking, East Asians are more likely to provide personal care for elderly parents.

47 In the case of elderly parents without family members, Mencius argues that the obligation falls to the state: see the discussion in Chan, 2003: 238–42.

48 It is interesting to note that laws meant to secure the traditional value of filial piety are not subject to political debate in Taiwan, one of the few areas of consensus in an otherwise highly polarized society, where the government seems intent on casting aside manifestations of traditional ‘Chinese’ values and practices.

49 The Singapore state, for example, promotes the ideal of ‘three generations under one roof’ by means of policies that give priorities of allocation for publicly-subsidized accommodation or additional housing subsidies for newly married couples who live within a certain distance of their old neighborhood where their parents continue to live (Rappa and Tan, 2003: 90).

50 The right to be cared for by adult children may not be expressed in rights language – for example, the 1992 Mongolian constitution specifies the duty to care for elderly parents. But if adult children can be punished for neglecting their elderly parents, the difference is terminological rather than substantive.
formulated without substantial input from East Asia. The position that different societies can draw different lines between the ‘core’ of the human rights regime and less important values is not particularly controversial in East Asia. However, many otherwise progressive liberal voices in the West still seem compelled by a tradition of universalist moral reasoning that proposes one final solution to the question of the ideal polity, yet paradoxically draws only on the moral aspirations and political practices found in Western societies.

One obvious implication of these reflections is to allow for the possibility of justifiable deviations from Western-style human rights regimes in East Asia. If otherwise critical East Asian voices endorse their government’s ‘autocratic’ measures, Western human rights activists need to think twice before intervention. Let me put it differently. Given the extent of human suffering in today’s world, with so many obvious and uncontroversial violations of the minimal conditions of human well-being, it is difficult to understand why Western human rights groups would want to spend (scarce) time and money criticizing human rights ‘violations’ that would not be viewed as such by East Asians with no particular axe to grind.

**Cross-Cultural Dialogues on Human Rights: What’s the Point?**

But it is not just a matter of defending parochial attachments to particular non-liberal moralities. Far from arguing that the universalist discourse on human rights should be entirely displaced with particular, tradition-sensitive political language, some critics of Western-style human rights have criticized liberals for not taking universality seriously enough, for failing to do what must be done to make human rights a truly universal ideal. If the ultimate aim is an international order based on universally accepted human rights, the West needs to recognize that human rights have been in constant evolution and allow for the possibility of positive non-Western contributions to this process. Such critics argue for more cross-cultural dialogues on

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51 I leave aside the question of cultural differences that may affect different ways of determining the core of human rights within societies. For example, newly-arrived Hmong immigrants to the U.S. believe that ritual killings of animals are necessary to heal sick family members, but once the practice became known to residents of Merced (California), the city passed an ordinance banning the slaughter of livestock and poultry within city limits (Fadiman, 1997: 107–8). Were the Hmong to frame their grievances in terms of the language of human rights, they would have a good case to argue that their basic rights are being violated.
human rights, with the perspective that Asian proposals for improving the current ‘West-centric’ human rights regime should be welcomed, not feared. These critics – let us label them ‘cosmopolitan critics of liberalism’ – have suggested various means of improving the philosophical coherence and political appeal of human rights. In this section, I discuss their proposals and raise some doubts regarding their feasibility.

As mentioned, there is little debate over the desirability of a core set of human rights, such as prohibitions against slavery, genocide, murder, torture, prolonged arbitrary detention, and systematic racial discrimination. These rights have become part of international customary law, and they are not contested in the public rhetoric of the international arena. But political thinkers and activists around the world can and do take different sides on many pressing human rights concerns that fall outside what Michael Walzer terms the ‘minimal and universal code’ (Walzer, 1987: 24). This ‘gray’ area of debate includes criminal law, family law, women’s rights, social and economic rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, and the attempt to universalize Western-style democratic practices. For cosmopolitans, the question is: How can the current ‘thin’ list of universal human rights be expanded to include some contested rights?

The Perils of Inclusive Dialogues

Onuma Yasuaki proposes an ‘intercivilizational approach to human rights’ that would entail dialogue between members of ‘civilizations’ with the aim

52 There is less reason to ‘welcome’ such proposals if they are likely to be motivated by economic or political self-interest, but it still doesn’t mean that seemingly self-interested proposals should be rejected, a priori. In reaction to a suggestion by then Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) might be in need of review to allow for more input from developing nations, then U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright vowed that the U.S. would be ‘relentless’ in opposing any review of the UDHR. Leaving aside the point that the U.S. does a poor job of living up to the social and economic rights enshrined in the UDHR, the problem with Albright’s position is the assumption that the particular rights affirmed in the UDHR should be valid for eternity. As Peter Van Ness puts it, ‘Mahathir should instead [of being condemned] have been encouraged to make a concrete proposal, because one of the basic requirements of achieving and sustaining consensus is to be prepared to reshape global standards whenever better principles are discovered’ (Van Ness, 1999: 11).

53 Terrorist groups that justify the mass killing of civilians are an obvious exception. It is interesting to note, however, that even Osama bin Laden did not straightforwardly proclaim responsibility for the September 11th attack, presumably on the grounds that this would undermine his base of support.

54 See also Walzer, 1994.
of achieving the widest possible consensus on human rights (Onuma, 1999). Such a dialogue would seek to address the concern that most international human rights groups interpret and prioritize rights according to the Western liberal tradition, and that international human rights instruments have not yet adequately incorporated non-Western views. Onuma’s proposal, however, is not without problems. For example, the boundaries between ‘civilizations,’ if they exist at all, are never easy to delineate, especially when considering the fact there are disputes over these issues even within particular traditions. More serious, this dialogue would exclude those not belonging to the major religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions: marginalized groups and individuals who may be particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses (see Gordon, 2004). For example, members of small indigenous tribes, sex workers, refugees, and the mentally ill would not have their interests represented at the intercivilizational dialogue on human rights.

Addressing this problem by increasing participation, however, would raise its own set of problems. Amitai Etzioni, for example, proposes a worldwide moral dialogue that would not be limited to representatives of the major civilizations: ‘Before we can expect to see global mores that have the compelling power of those of various societies, the citizens of the world will have to engage in worldwide moral dialogues’ (Etzioni, 1996). But does it mean that five billion people must participate in the global dialogue? Leaving aside the issue of cost, the main obstacle such megalogues face is getting participants to agree upon anything more than vague aspirations and empty platitudes. Put simply: the more inclusive the deliberations, the more difficult it will be to arrive at any politically meaningful resolutions.

So participation needs to be limited. One might reasonably argue that a representative sample of leaders and citizens from around the world, if the sample were kept small enough, would be able to reach agreement on the global values that are supposed to guide and constrain policymakers. But this leads to a number of questions. Should the dialogue involve political leaders, diplomats, international lawyers, leaders of religious traditions, academics, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, ordinary citizens, or a combination of these? How many from each group? How many from each country? If the outcomes of these deliberations are meant

to command international legitimacy and trump the decisions of national political leaders, there will be endless disputes over the right way to select ‘representative’ participants.

Can Tolerating Disagreement Lead to Meaningful Resolutions?

Following an extended period of study in Thailand with Buddhist practitioners and thinkers, the Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor has put forward another proposal for establishing an unforced, cross-cultural consensus on human rights (Taylor, 1999). He imagines a cross-cultural dialogue between representatives of different traditions. Rather than argue for the universal validity of their views, however, he suggests that participants should allow for the possibility that their own beliefs may be mistaken. This way, participants can learn from each other’s moral universe. There will come a point, however, when differences cannot be reconciled. Taylor explicitly recognizes that different groups, countries, religious communities, and civilizations hold incompatible views on theology, metaphysics, and human nature. In response, Taylor argues that a ‘genuine, unforced consensus’ on human rights norms is possible only if we allow for disagreement on the ultimate justifications of these norms. Instead of defending contested foundational values when we encounter points of resistance (and thus condemning the values we do not like in other societies), we should try to abstract from those beliefs for the purpose of working out an ‘overlapping consensus’ of human rights norms. As Taylor puts it, ‘we should agree on the norms while disagreeing on why they were the right norms, and we would be content to live in this consensus, undisturbed by the differences of profound underlying belief’ (Taylor, 1999: 124).

While this proposal moves the debate on universal human rights forward, it still faces certain difficulties. For one thing, it may not be realistic to expect that people will be willing to abstract from the values they care deeply about during the course of a global dialogue on human rights. Even if people agree to abstract from culturally specific ways of justifying and implementing norms, the likely outcome is a withdrawal to a highly general, abstract realm of agreement that fails to resolve actual disputes over contested rights. For example, participants in a cross-cultural dialogue can agree on the right to political participation, while radically disagreeing upon what this means in practice: a Singaporean official may argue that competitive elections are sufficient, whereas a Western liberal will want to argue that meaningful elections must be accompanied by the freedoms of speech and association.
The Failures of Cross-Cultural Dialogues

The problems noted above are not simply theoretical possibilities. In the last decade or so, there have been many attempts to put forward truly universal moral values and the response has ranged from hostility to indifference. None has come even close to supplanting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a normative frame of reference, notwithstanding the ongoing controversy regarding the ‘West-centric’ perspective of this document.

The attempt by a group of former heads of state to formulate ‘A Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities’ illustrates some of the problems with global dialogues. This Declaration was supposed to complement the UDHR but its main effect would have been to dilute it. Most of the Declaration consists of vacuous moralizing. Article 3 is not atypical: ‘Everyone has the responsibility to promote good and to avoid evil in all things.’ Such platitudes are not necessarily harmful, but they serve to draw attention from the really important rights that do need to be enforced.

The more serious problem is that some sections of the Declaration would be politically dangerous if they were taken seriously. Consider Article 14:

‘The freedom of the media to inform the public and to criticize institutions of society and governmental actions, which is essential for a just society, must be used with responsibility and discretion. Freedom of the media carries a special responsibility for accurate and truthful reporting. Sensational reporting that degrades the human person and dignity must at all times be avoided.’

It is interesting to note that the group of former heads of state includes the father of the ‘Asian values’ debate, Singapore elder statesman Lee Kuan Yew. In Singapore, Lee has often advanced similar arguments about the need for ‘responsible’ journalism that ‘at all times’ avoids ‘sensational reporting that degrades the person or dignity.’ The result? Singaporean newspapers have been completely defanged, and foreign newspapers like the Asian Wall Street Journal and the International Herald Tribune have had to pay huge damages for having ‘defamed’ members of the Lee family. Not surprisingly, article 14 met with vigorous opposition from journalists.

ensured that the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities never did get far in the UN general assembly.\footnote{The UNESCO effort to develop ‘A Common Framework for the Ethics of the 21st Century’ similarly ended in failure.}

In short, the aspiration to develop values of more universal scope with substantive content may not be realizable.\footnote{Fred Dallmayr expresses a more optimistic view: ‘The point of comparative political theory, in my view, is precisely to move toward a more genuine universalism, and beyond the spurious “universality” claimed by the Western canon and by some recent intellectual movements’ (Dallmayr, 2004: 253). I do not mean to imply that cross-cultural dialogue and comparative theorizing should not be done (quite the opposite), but the main aim would be to identify areas of justifiable moral difference, thus teaching us ‘about the diversity and richness of what human beings may reasonably prize, and about the impossibility of reconciling all they prize in just a single ideal’ (Wong, D., 2009. \textit{Comparative Philosophy: Chinese and Western}, plato.stanford.edu/entries/comparphil-chiwes/, 9), as well as learning from other cultures with the aim of improving flaws in one’s own culture.}

Cross-cultural dialogue will lead to either empty platitudes or politically controversial conclusions likely to be rejected by affected constituents. The good news is that no major damage has been done to the human rights movement (other than, perhaps, wasting funds that could have been more productively spent elsewhere). The truth of the matter is that only philosophers and theologians will be deeply concerned about the need to secure truly universal foundations for human rights. For governments concerned with implementing human rights, national laws usually serve as the normative point of reference. For local human rights groups (or their functional equivalent), it is sufficient to ground their work in the local values and traditions that members of the community use to make sense of their moral lives. For international human rights organizations, much of the work will consist in exposing the gap between public allegiance to uncontested rights (such as the right not to be tortured) and sad reality of on-going abuse. They won’t waste time writing about or deliberating about the desirability or practices that everyone condemns at the level of principle. Such organizations will also provide funds and expertise to local and national human rights NGOs, and here too the lack of a truly universal foundation for human rights isn’t an obstacle: everybody agrees on the shared ends.

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Chapter 9

AIMING FOR RESULTS: PRECONDITIONS FOR A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN NORTH KOREA AND THE WORLD

Geir Helgesen

The aim of this chapter is to shed some light on relations between North Korea and the world outside its borders. On the one side the most isolated country on earth, on the other an increasingly globalized international community with mutually extensive relations bridging all kinds of differences: economic, political and ideological, as well as geographical and cultural. The gap between how the world sees North Korea and how it sees itself is huge. It is a necessary and urgent task to bridge that gap in order for the 70 plus million people on the Korean peninsula to re-establish normal relations with each other and with the outside world. A worst case scenario is that peace in the whole region is at threat.

A Bleak Picture

Few countries, possibly no others in our contemporary world, are branded as negatively as North Korea. ‘North Korean conditions’ is a term almost universally used to depict the worst possible state of affairs. And more than that, the apparently formidable military force of North Korea is used as a strong reason for the West to stand by the USA in its global defence strategies. North Korea has long occupied a position as a pariah state. No event is too horrific to be believed, if it is said to be happening in North Korea. During the periods of hunger in the early 1990s, cannibalism was reported and since it happened in that country, it was not only cannibalism that was reported on but also that the human flesh that was being consumed came from children – North Koreans were said to be eating their own children.
Recently the transfer of the dictator’s mantle from father to (third) son has preoccupied world media to an astonishing degree. Nothing substantial has been reported about the next generation leader in Pyongyang, but this has not stopped the media from reporting this ‘nothing’ again and again. At the time of writing the website of *Strait Times*, a Singaporean news outlet, reports from Seoul that according to the former ‘Sushi’ Chef of North Korea’s leader, the successor, Kim Jong Un will not change North Korea, but leave it as isolated as it was when he took over. One wonders what Kim Jong Il’s Kimchi Chef thinks about this, or what about the Bulgogi Chef, he might also want to share his views.

Rumours from the intelligence world concerning the designated leader of the Pyongyang regime claim that as a boy he had been observed enjoying inflicting pain on insects and animals. One could relate this to a different attitude and behaviour in people’s dealing with animals in East and South East Asia compared to the USA. On the other hand it may be more appropriate to remember a statement by the former US ambassador to South Korea, Donald Gregg, who before that important post was head of CIA activities in South Korea and later National Security Adviser: “I refer to North Korea as the longest-running intelligence failure in the history of US espionage.”

The problem with the monotonous media focus on negative and really bad stories from North Korea is that the general picture of that country turns out worse than necessary, creating obstacles for the establishment of contacts and dialogue. By demonizing the country, the population of North Korea is basically being divided into two very unequal groups, the crude oppressors and the poor oppressed. The first group is obviously small, commanding an extensive repressive apparatus; the second group is thus the majority of the population, with no way to influence their life situation short of fleeing the country.

When such a crude picture is repeatedly transmitted through media outlets with no space left for alternatives, even plain descriptions of daily life activities in North Korea risk being seen as pro-regime propaganda. Although terms such as *axis of evil* and *outpost of tyranny* are less frequently used now than they were a couple of years ago, the North has never escaped its extremely negative image. This directly affects relations between the North and the outside world, which the following illustrates.

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The Aborted Human Rights Dialogue

Some years ago the EU engaged in a human rights dialogue with North Korea. There had been some meetings in Brussels and also in Pyongyang, when the EU at a UN human rights session in Geneva proposed a declaration condemning the human rights situation in the North. North Korea immediately pulled out of the dialogue process.

I happened to meet representatives from both the EU side and the North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs shortly after the collapse of the dialogue. The EU representative justified the condemnation by pointing to the fact that, according to available information, the human rights situation in North Korea was dire. This diplomat said directly that it would be impossible for elected politicians in Europe not to support a declaration condemning North Korea in the light of the very negative press coverage of the country.

From the opposite side of the table the reality looked different. For the North Korean regime to engage in a dialogue with Western powers took some guts. After long and difficult internal deliberations, it had been decided that it was reasonable to meet the EU in a human rights dialogue, even if this was the other’s ballgame and particularly as the North Koreans had to prepare themselves for criticism. But they did not prepare for outright condemnation. That was too much for the leadership in Pyongyang, and from their perspective unacceptable, as it was then no longer a dialogue, but a relationship between a superior and an inferior power, a picture to which the regime is allergic, based on historical experience. Whether the North Korean perspective is seen as right or wrong has no bearing in this connection, as we are dealing with the attitude and behaviour of the country’s elite in their relations with the outside world.

A senior North Korean official wondered how the EU could propose a dialogue and initiate a condemnation at the same time? ‘They should have been aware,’ the official said, ‘that some people on our side are in favour of a dialogue, while others reject it. The EU-sponsored condemnation of the human rights situation in North Korea was a welcome support to those who reject any dialogue.’

One younger government official said that if the whole world is preoccupied with the human rights situation in North Korea, there should be a dialogue on this issue. In his opinion it was too defensive to refuse such a dialogue, because it would only make it easier for enemies of North Korea to capture the scene and paint the darkest possible picture of the situation in the
country. Talking about his colleagues he claimed that the younger generation want more openness to meet the challenges from the outside world, while the old guard is not at all keen on this, as they claim that this is like playing with fire. He described the human rights dialogue with the EU as an example where the younger and the older generations were in disagreement. ‘After the collapse of that dialogue, we the younger officials were criticized for having put ourselves and also them in a weak or even impossible position.’ His conclusion was that the EU, in this case, benefited the hardliners who are fighting opening and change. But how then can the North Korean regime be dealt with? How can one enter into involvement with North Korea without fortifying the existing system’s most conservative forces?

Cultural Difference Increases the Likelihood of Misperception

There is obviously no scientifically correct approach to the North Korea problem; engagement stands as the opposite of containment, and the choice between the two is both a moral and a political one. But what could an input from the social sciences be? Robust knowledge based on cross-cultural studies relevant for the subject at hand is now readily available. From psychology we know that the basic structures in people’s mental map are affected by cultural traits; from sociology we know that societal institutions and structures differ in the way they are operated by the personnel who populate them; and from political science we know that the fundamentals in politics, such as power and legitimacy, are perceived differently in different political cultures, often but not always following political-geographical borders. We also know that although cultural differences are not static, the process of change can best be measured in decades, if not generations. In the short run these differences are therefore to be reckoned with and taken seriously.

One important consequence for international politics is that this challenges the rational actor perspective, the basic assumption ‘...that governments and their leaders think and act rationally in their quest for power, wealth, and prestige’ (Rosati, 2000: 45). It is generally assumed that political actors in international relations perceive the world as it is, and that misperceptions, if they occur, will be corrected in the larger systems such as government agencies, international organizations and diplomacy. This view is not at all supported by studies in social psychology. In recent years psychologists have made some efforts at disturbing the beautiful theory of the rational actor
perspective, and their contribution is as simple as it is necessary. In short the
claim is that: organizations, institutions and countries do not act; people act.
And because this is the case, ‘human cognition matters – in politics, foreign
policy, and world politics.’ (Rosati, 2000: 47)

If it is naïve, according to psychological research, to expect rationality
in actors, what then is to be expected? What psychologists have found is
that there is a universal tendency to overemphasize the external situation
when explaining our own behaviour; we say we act as we do because of
certain external reasons. While trying to explain others, it is common to
overemphasize internal and dispositional factors: they act as they do because
they are bad, aggressive etc. (Rosati, 2000: 61). This does not only apply
when trying to explain the negative actions of others. If the other, contrary
to our expectations, acts positively, it is because certain characteristics
of the situation have forced them temporarily to act friendly; it could be
because our actions have forced them to do so (Rosati, 2000: 61).2 This
links to another general finding holding that if the other acts positively, one
is inclined to attribute this to one’s own conduct; that is, an overestimation
of one’s own importance. A third universal perceptual pattern holds that
the other acts in an absolute manner, there is no room for dissent. And a
fourth finding reveals that people are inclined to be either pessimistic or to
indulge in wishful thinking. In addition to all this comes a general human
inclination to try to make sense of reality by ‘assuming that, in some sense
the future will resemble the past’ (Rosati, 2000: 63).3

In ‘The Power of Human Cognition in World Politics’ Jerel A. Rosati
stresses that ‘cultural differences accentuate the likelihood for misperception
and miscommunication,’ and that, ‘Variations in patterns of perception and
cognitive dynamics occur across cultures and sub-cultures, and they must
be examined if we are to better understand the dynamics of world politics,
especially beyond the United States and the West’ (Rosati, 2000: 71–72).
Relating this to North Korea, it seems clear that the impact of more than
half a century’s isolation must have had psychological consequences and
affected people’s understanding of reality and the surrounding world. The
good news is that the North Korean elites are acutely aware of this.

2 Rosati refers to a study by Daniel Heradstveit (1979) The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Psycho-
logical Obstacles to Peace, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p.4.
3 Rosati refers here to one of the classic studies in this field: Robert Jervis (1976) Percep-
tion and Misperception in International Politics, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
Looking for Change in Daily Life
Experiences: Personal Observations

The present-day North Korean elites, by whom I refer to people populating the governmental agencies in Pyongyang and in particular those who are authorized to meet foreigners, find themselves deprived of knowledge and insights that are widely distributed among people outside their country, and this they regret.

During my last three visits, in 2004, 2006, and 2010 I observed a marked difference from the 1980s in expressed attitudes towards reform. At the beginning of this period there was a marked difference between older and younger officials. The old guard emphasized the difficult security situation while the younger generations revealed a more daring attitude and an expressed desire for an opening to happen in the near future. During the recent visits this generational discrepancy was less clear, as there was a general thirst for establishing international contacts and a readiness among all the people we met to admit local shortcomings and search for better solutions. An example can illustrate this. A diplomat explained that much had changed in his country during the four years he was in Europe (this conversation took place in 2010). The most impressive part of this story relates to his two children. He said, ‘I do not believe that what my kids learn in school today is enough to prepare them for the future. Our schools are somewhat out-dated, and our future society will not be like the one we have today. So I use a great part of my salary and savings for private tutoring. My son is quite a mathematician, but he needs more training than he gets in school. My daughter plays the piano, she wants to be musician. Both of them go to extracurricular training by private tutors.’ Is this sanctioned by the party? Hardly. Will it contribute to changing North Korean society? Likely.

And to me this is particularly impressive because it so strongly reminds me of something that is termed ‘educational fever’ in South Korea. Parents there invest both considerable economic funds as well as impressive energies in hoping to secure their offspring the best possible position in their future life, and – of course – at the same time protecting the family honour, by hopefully promoting filial piety.4 When a North Korean father thinks and

4 North Korean Confucianism? Yes, this traditional trait is also a part of the cultural luggage, or their traditional social capital, if one likes. Distorted or not.
acts as described, it tells me that the state is not omnipotent any more; it tells me that among the elite there is an ability to react to new challenges; and it tells me that although North and South have been totally separated for about 60 years, and have developed very different political and social systems, some similar basic values and norms linger on.

This might seem commonplace and irrelevant to the subject under study. I disagree and believe that this way a North Korean family deals with present challenges will have far-reaching implications. The same family was ready to invest in their flat. It was not their privately-owned flat, not yet, but they expected that they would be allowed to buy it soon, which is why they were planning its renovation. There were already, as my source stressed, craftsmen operating on a private basis in this upcoming job market.

When solid supporters of the system who belong to the chosen elite and have some amount of privileges search and find ways of manoeuvring towards an unknown future, one can conclude that even in North Korea and even among trusted government officials, there are different views and opinions regarding how to move forward, how to realize their dreams of a better future. Thus the burning question is, how can the outside world act to promote the drive towards change in North Korea?

Is Empathy Warranted?

In an insightful article entitled ‘Seeing North Korea Clearly’ Saunders and Pinkston, two scholars from the Monterey Institute’s Center for Non-proliferation Studies, simply advocate that ‘empathy is required’ (Pinkston and Saunders, 2003). The authors stress that one should not confuse empathy with sympathy: to understand reality as it is understood by others does not imply any kind of agreement. It is vital, however, to understand the world as viewed from Pyongyang in order to avoid, at best, sub-optimal solutions, and at worst, inadvertent war (Pinkston and Saunders, 2003: 91). Such an understanding is extremely important in order to be able to engage with North Korea in a constructive dialogue.

Empathy presupposes an ability to accommodate differences, and that the parties concerned – despite their differences – are able to establish bonds, and build mutual trust. This should not be alien to any of the parties concerned, as the ability to put oneself in ‘the other’s’ place is considered a virtue both in Christianity and in Buddhism, the main religions of the West and East Asia respectively.
The importance of trust in human relations as well as in international relations is one of the main and most important contributions of the social sciences in the twentieth century. This insight is also increasingly acknowledged in real world politics. In the joint statement of the 2007 meeting of the six-party talks in Beijing it was stated that ‘The Parties reaffirmed that they will take positive steps to increase mutual trust . . . ’ (paragraph VI).

One can hardly imagine, however, that mutual trust can be established without a certain level of acceptance between the parties concerned. The present relations between North Korea and the Western world are based on anything but trust. An approach based on empathy may prove to be the most creative and productive approach between adversaries, and a search for a remedy is urgent. A point of departure for establishing better relations must be to acknowledge the legitimacy of the other party. This is why any demonization of the other is poison to the process of establishing bonds and creating trust.

Equipped with empathy, or at least making an effort to understand the opposite side’s positions and views, what would then be the next step? Leon Segal (Segal, 2002: 8–12) of Columbia University has documented over a lengthy period of time that North Korea’s foreign policy more than anything else is reactive, implying that they almost instinctively or automatically respond to outside action with a reaction of the same colour. Positive signals from the outside world get a positive feed-back; negative signals receive a corresponding response, usually magnified to an extreme. The media often ignore what ignited their anger and solely focus on their so-called irrational behaviour.

The Military First Policy as a Reaction to Present World Affairs

After the attack on Iraq, and the execution of Saddam Hussein, the North Korean leadership were convinced that their country was next on the list. Ever since the collapse of the Soviet-style communist regimes, when Nicolae Ceauşescu of Romania, a friend of North Korea, was toppled and shot, the leaders in Pyongyang have felt insecure and vulnerable. Their response was a new doctrine termed ‘military first’ and whatever could be channelled from the state’s scarce resources for a military build-up was taken for exactly that purpose. A better illustration of the reactive foreign policy of North Korea can hardly be found.

There are three interconnected and extremely negative consequences of this relational situation:
The enmity between North Korea and the outside world holds the North Korean population hostage in a miserable situation, partly due to the system’s struggle for survival. The continuing tug-of-war confirms and supports the position of the present regime in Pyongyang, which depicts the world at large as a hostile place against which the whole North Korean population has to stand united. People in North Korea trying to evade such unity are easily considered enemies of the people and of the country. Such people are not kindly dealt with.

This policy can be criticized and deemed unwarranted, even paranoid, but it is not irrational. It is a convenient myth subscribed to by most Western news media that the North Korean leadership is unpredictable, and thus irrational. From this position one does not have to take anything coming from Pyongyang at face value, and even if it sounds right and good, we in the West know better.

From a purely humanitarian perspective, the Western world would help millions of innocent people in North Korea by changing its approach from the present negative, repudiating, more stick than carrot relationship to a relationship where the situation as it is were accepted as a given point of departure. Such a change would also in all probability make it easier for proponents of reform to promote their ideas and views within the system, the only existing place to operate in North Korea. This strategy was implemented by the Korean President and Nobel Laureate Kim Dae-jung under the slogan of the ‘Sunshine Policy’. But unfortunately the Western world only half-heartedly supported South Korea’s efforts during that period of engagement. Comparing the improvements achieved then with the present deadlock, it seems obvious that engagement is preferable from several perspectives, including the humanitarian, political and economic, and possibly even more importantly from the perspective of security and peace on the peninsula.

Concluding Remarks: A Possible Nordic Contribution to Peace in East Asia

How can we get back on track with this more accommodating approach towards North Korea? The Nordic countries could (and should) play a significant role in creating the circumstances and a platform for the necessary
constructive dialogue with North Korea. A main reason for suggesting this is that the Nordic countries established diplomatic relations with Pyongyang in the 1970s, long before a majority of the EU countries who did the same only a couple of years ago. Another reason is that the Nordic countries are small with a relative high international standing, and in this respect it is also of importance that Pyongyang has expressed an interest in learning from ‘the Nordic model’. Our relations with all the other players in the region are basically very good, only occasionally disturbed by temporary disagreements. What is it then that representatives from the Nordic countries could contribute that is different from what officials and diplomats from the regional powers and the USA have done so far?

One basic difference is that the Nordic countries are located far from Korea and have never been engaged in the Korean conflict (except on humanitarian missions during the war). In this respect our countries differ from all the actors in the six-party talks. The fact that all existing parties in the talks are part and parcel of Korea’s history, and not the most positive and bright periods of that history, is a disturbing fact. The two Koreas have their particular preferences and agendas, but when the four other parties likewise have a host of issues to promote and defend in the dialogue, a solution seems remote. Besides their more neutral position vis-à-vis the Koreas, the Nordic countries might be relevant as peace-brokers because they have created inter-governmental institutions and popular forums of inter-national relations that could form a source of inspiration for future inter-Korean relations.

But why the Nordic countries, why not the EU? A straight-forward and practical reason is that the Nordic countries are five, not 27, and in general they are quite close in their foreign policy approaches, not a trait that yet characterizes the EU. Another reason is that a Nordic initiative may be considered a preparatory project. There will come a time, after a better groundwork has been laid, when the economic muscles of the EU will be highly appreciated by all the countries concerned with the developments in North Korea, and not least the 70 plus million Koreans.

References


Chapter 10

SUNSHINE ON A BARREN SOIL: DOMESTIC POLITICS OF ENGAGEMENT AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN SOUTH KOREA

Jong Kun Choi

South Korea’s engagement policy over the 10 years of the Kim and Roh administrations (1998–2007) in Seoul invited much heated debate about whether its engagement policy could induce any significant changes within Pyongyang in terms of North Korea’s consistent drive for nuclear development and a viable reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula. Critics argued that Seoul’s engagement policy would foster Pyongyang’s nuclear program, not hamper it. Moreover, South Korea’s engagement policy towards the North created coordination cracks within the ROK–US alliance during the G. W. Bush administration. It also generated domestic political cleavages within South Korea between the Sunshine supporters and the Sunshine opponents. In short, South Korea’s engagement policy was nothing but a pain in the neck for Washington in its campaign against the North, the conservatives in Seoul and above all the Sunshine policy makers themselves.

The quest of this chapter is to assess the reason and rationale behind South Korea’s engagement policy. I argue that Seoul’s engagement policy during the 10 years of the liberal administrations imitated a politics of identity reformulation between the sunshine proponents and opponents. In fact, throughout the 10 years, the liberal administrations’ sunshine policy contributed to the changing role identity of South Korea vis-à-vis North Korea by resetting the concept of national interest, the identity of North Korea and the means to move from containment to engagement. I argue that the state’s role identity had to go through a political struggle with the established security identity of the state. Reconciliation through engagement

1 A version of this chapter has already been published in Asian Perspective, Vol. 34, No. 4 (December, 2010), pp. 115–138. The editors are grateful to Jong Kun Choi and the journal for their agreement to let his paper be part of our research-in-progress publication.
in a protracted conflictual relationship had to successfully win out against the old idea of containment.

**Why Seoul Kept Giving to Pyongyang**

Reconciling with an enemy state is not an easy choice in a protracted conflictual relationship (Howard-Hassmann and Gibney, 2008: 2–6). Its success is uncertain, and requires a dramatic policy shift from a policy of containment to that of reconciliation. Moreover, reconciliation with an enemy invites harsh criticism and opposition from within the domestic politics of the reconciling state. A new idea of reconciliation is also politically fragile, lacking solid domestic support, while the old idea of containment may enjoy habitual but sturdy support. Force of habit is oftentimes stronger than a new idea of change. Therefore, in a protracted conflictual relation, reconciliation with the enemy state as a new idea has to be implanted in a politically barren soil. In this respect, South Korea’s comprehensive engagement or sunshine policy with Pyongyang for the 10 years of the Kim and Roh administrations faced fierce opposition from the conservative section of Korean society, created strained alliance relations with the G. W. Bush administration, and invited harsh criticism in and outside Seoul about how its policy was essentially spoiling and nurturing the regime in Pyongyang on the verge of its collapse. Moreover, Pyongyang was not helping the proponents of the engagement policy; it was deceiving too often, demanding too much and derailing too rapidly.

With hindsight, Seoul’s engagement policy had to overcome many hurdles within its domestic political constituencies and then face its alliance partner, the United States, only to deal with the unfriendly regime in Pyongyang. Whether its engagement policy did cause any noticeable change to Pyongyang’s policies still remains a topic of hot debate in Korean society. Pyongyang conducted long range missile rocket tests a few times, a nuclear test twice and engaged in naval skirmishes with South Korea three times. Pyongyang’s economy has not shown any signs of recovery from its decaying recessions. Despite these, as critics of the engagement policy argue, Seoul kept giving to Pyongyang. The two minority liberal governments of Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun for 10 years continued to show their persistent

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2 I define reconciliation as a process by which conflictual states intentionally establish structures and procedures for transforming the relational status of confrontation to durable peace.
commitment to the engagement policy with North Korea, while utilizing their political and diplomatic resources in order to maximize their comprehensive engagement with their hostile neighbour in the North.

Given that political reconciliation on the Korean peninsula may become the structural cornerstone for regional stability in East Asia, South Korea’s policy to Pyongyang is more than just an important factor: its policy choice between containment and engagement will critically determine a directionality of constructing a peace structure in the Korean peninsula and a security landscape in Northeast Asia. Thus this chapter raises an important point – how was it possible for Seoul to continue its commitment to the engagement policy with Pyongyang despite the cohesive domestic and international coalition of opposition? In short, why and how was Seoul able to pursue such a difficult policy at such a difficult time?

Seoul’s comprehensive engagement policy required attitudinal and cognitive changes within South Korea’s public and security expert groups towards its enemy – something that looked like a change in South Korea’s collective identity toward the unfriendly regime in Pyongyang. Not only was its policy success uncertain, but also it had to wage an uphill battle to rally the support of both the public and the experts whose perceptions had been used to advance the idea of containing North Korea. The choice of comprehensive engagement by Seoul’s two liberal governments was also risky for the proponents, as it could have cost them their fragile political foundation. In this respect, Seoul’s persistent choice presents a puzzle not susceptible to structural or interest-based explanation, and provides an opportunity for idea-based research to expound the underlying causes behind ‘why Seoul kept giving to Pyongyang’ even by risking South Korea’s traditional alliance with the United States in times of North Korea’s nuclear venture.3

I will not introduce the details of the engagement policy in terms of its policy principles, as many have already written about this.4 Neither will


I discuss how the policy interacted with Pyongyang in times of nuclear crises nor will I emphasize why the engagement policy is important in achieving reconciliation between two Koreas, since there are numerous polemical works in this domain. Rather, my inquiry will focus on how engagement as a new idea was fiercely opposed by the established identity groups of containment across South Korean society and how the new idea was advanced by the liberal administrations. Stating the domestic political dynamics of engagement-identity formulation can shed insight on why Seoul was able to keep giving to the North. I hope to offer an important insight into how a policy of reconciliation can survive and prevail even when its policy environment is not so friendly, when its body of policy drivers is not a political majority and when its policy target and partners are not cooperative. This chapter is in essence about sunshine on a barren soil.

The Domestic Politics of Collective Identity
Reformation towards an Enemy State

A state’s identity is the product of regime types, dominant religions and its geographical location. Therefore, a state can be an Asian state, a democratic state and a Buddhist state. However, more intriguing is how a state forms its role identity, which is the product of a dyadic (oppositional) relationship between two states; states may be friends or enemies, and allies or rivals (Wendt, 1999: 224). In essence, a role identity is a relational concept. One’s identity is essentially defined vis-à-vis others surrounding one’s self. Animosity and enmity toward others often lasts centuries, but can cease to exist and can shift after critical junctures (McSweeney, 1999). Thus, a state’s role identity determines its preferences and actions. The role identity is constructed within the social environment of both domestic and international politics.

In a world of realist power politics, structural interest determines a state’s identity; my enemy’s enemy becomes my friend (Waltz, 1979). Also, in a material world of realism, distribution of power in the forms of either power-balance or power-transition determines my identity as a balancing or a band-wagoning actor. However, such interest-based or structure-determined identity formation does not explain how one’s identity lasts and changes within (Katzenstein, 1996). At the end of the Cold War dramatic changes in Vietnam’s, China’s and Russia’s foreign-policy behaviour towards their ‘enemy’ the US are a few such examples indicating role changes due to shifts in domestic politics. In this regard, one can argue that identity is a domestic
attribute arising from changes in prevalent ideas set forth by the dominant political groups (Marnett, 1999).

Collective identity formation within a state vis-à-vis its enemy requires much more than redefining its concept of national identity (Bloom, 1990). In the research domain of state identities and foreign policy behaviours, there have been few empirical analyses about how a new ideational political group played its political game, struggled against the old idea, changed the culture of national security, and reconstructed a state’s collective identity towards the enemy state. As the structure does not come with an instruction sheet (Blyth, 2003), a new idea does not automatically get implanted in domestic politics (Dahl, 1971). A new collective identity has to be presented, programmed and planted in the power struggles of domestic politics, which is essentially the marketplace for a new idea. Especially if the new idea is about how differently to perceive and approach the enemy state, then the political struggle between the fresh but fragile and the traditional but sturdy idea groups will become even more fierce and formidable for the new ideational group.

My proposition is simple: the political leadership must engage in a political battle marketing new ideas for justification, competing against vested interest groups and presenting more viable alternative visions of the future (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). Identity formation may be set forth not only through national and/or cultural selection processes but also competitive political processes (Wendt, 1999: 321–324). For any new idea to be accepted as the social norm, it must go through a political process at its beginning. During the political process, new political groups with new ideas will face difficulties in introducing such ideas in terms of incentive and disincentive structures especially vis-à-vis the enemy state. Innovation always invites criticism and strong counter-coalitions, and following the old way to deal with the enemy state seems to be a safer way in protracted interstate conflicts (Kahneman and Renshon, 2007: 34–38). This game of identity formation is not politically safe for the new idea groups as the new idea is by nature uncertain and “the old idea school” tends to be a majority group in a society.

Then how does this game of identity formation play out? Norm entrepreneurs who dislike the existing norms and taboos in dealing with the enemy state have to emerge and often gang together for changes. Obviously, these ideational activists lack conventional political powers compared to the vested interest groups of the traditional containment idea. A constant process of political persuasion vis-à-vis the existing groups becomes an integral part
of forming a new collective culture vis-à-vis the enemy state. The activists may form a small but strong epistemic community of reconciliation within domestic politics and venture on a series of political campaigns in order to spread its convictions based on a new logic of norms and construct a new culture of national security conducive to its new ideas. Naturally, the old schools will also form coalitions and present their own logic as to why the new idea is essentially futile and how it is virtually a challenge to the existing role identity of the state. However, the activists will urge the need of dramatic policy changes toward the enemy state by arguing that past policies of containment have failed to resolve the situation. They call for reconciliation and the adoption of the new ideas in response to an arid policy environment and protracted conflicts (Bukovansky, 2001).

The old identity of the reconciling state cannot change over a short period of time (Rouhana, 2004). The activist government needs to initiate public campaigns, marketing its new ideas in the political process vis-à-vis the traditional security identities and threat perceptions. Usually, a society in a protracted conflict tends to hang onto a particular identity that it believes has protected its valuables. It is difficult to adapt to a different resolution (Bartal, 2000). Especially in a democracy, the process of persuasion becomes the real game to play. In this sense, identity is what political activists must construct after winning the identity game.

Justification for reconciliation will be based on the reformulation of three critical domains: the national interest of reconciliation, the threat perception and a program for dealing with the enemy state. The core national interest of a state is to stay away from unnecessary war and to maximize potentials for mutually beneficial cooperation with the rest of the world. Here, the activist group will present the reasons why reconciliation yields better prospects for achieving the core national interest. In so doing, it will argue that the traditional strategy of containment has failed to meet the national interest. By setting reconciliation as the core national interest, a new idea group reframes the perception of the enemy state as one not so much of threat but rather as an opportunity for collaboration. Reconciliation policy must begin with the logical justification as to why a reconciler needs to reframe his attitude to the enemy state. As actors learn their ‘identities and interests as a result of how others treat them,’ enemies become enemies ‘in ways that do not recognize their life and liberty’ (Wendt, 1999: pp. 171). Thus, a policy of reconciliation naturally resets the threat perception towards the enemy state. The activist group will emphasize how engagement with the enemy
state will essentially lessen the current hostile relationship and bring about more stable and peaceful relations, which are both beneficial to the national interest and critical to national security.

As a methodology for achieving reconciliation, the activist group will present engagement through diffuse reciprocity rather than containment through strict reciprocity. Therefore, the new idea will emphasize non-equivalence and non-contingency. In other words, rather than stick to the strict equivalence of benefits, engagement will provide incentives to construct more stable relations, which is beneficial for the engager’s national interest of peaceful coexistence. Thus, the reconciliation policy through engagement becomes not contingent upon the enemy state’s reaction. Rather, it becomes determined more by a strategic calculus (Keohane, 1986). The new idea-holders must have a high level of network cohesiveness and a similar background identity, which leads to the formation of a strong in-group identity. This shared identity will increase the intensity of intra-cooperation against the old school in the political struggle. Since the new activist group has a strong commitment to its beliefs and an in-group cohesiveness, it will maximize any political opportunities to advance its new ideas.

Sunshine on a Barren Soil: Domestic Political Opposition

The liberal administrations of Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo-hyun faced a decade of identity challenges from the vested interest groups within South Korean society.5 These groups denounced and defamed the policy stance of the comprehensive engagement policy. The debate centred on the administration’s substitution of reunification with reconciliation as the operational goal of South Korea’s northern policy (Levin and Han, 2002: Ch. 4). As the schema of unification with the North essentially constituted the opponents’ identity (such as anti-communism) (Yim, 2002: 42–43), the discourse of peaceful coexistence through reconciliation by way of diffuse reciprocity came as an existential challenge to what they saw as South Korea’s national identity. The opponents perceived inter-Korean relations inherently as conflictual and hostile and resisted the new policy (Liu and Hilton, 2005). For example, the Korea Freedom Federation, a conservative

civic group that had supported the past military governments, called into question the wisdom of comprehensively engaging North Korea, claiming that this detracted from South Korea’s long standing commitment to liberal democracy across the entire Korean Peninsula (Levin and Han, 2002: Ch. 4). The National Action Campaign For Freedom and Democracy, supported by its 189 umbrella sponsoring organizations, denounced the engagement policy as a policy platform denying South Korea’s anti-communist identity and polluting South Korea’s state identity.6

Most contentious was the issue of how Seoul should frame North Korea’s identity in relation to South Korea. While the comprehensive engagement policy optimistically focused on North Korea as an opportunity for engagement, the opponents bluntly argued that North Korea was a national security threat to South Korea and that Pyongyang was unpredictable and unreliable (Hahm, 2005). Opponents criticized the liberalist government of saving North Korea’s face, while failing to objectively assess North Korea’s growing military threat. In their view, security had to come before engagement. These criticisms were constantly raised by the Grand National Party, the main opposition party representing the mainstream conservative forces and also the majority party in the National Assembly for most of the 10 years during the liberal administrations (Steinberg and Shin, 2006). During this period, it constantly argued that South Korea’s aid to North Korea was a one-sided concession that failed to yield the changes that the engagement policy anticipated. Rather the North would only seek additional spoils from Seoul. Moreover, it denounced the engagement policy as an unbalanced policy lacking ‘Sticks’, thereby failing to deal with the contingency of North Korea’s cheating (Levin and Han, 2002: Ch. 4).

The critics argued that an obsession with engagement with the regime in Pyongyang undermined a cognitive preparedness for the North’s potential

6 See its internet homepage at nac.or.kr.

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military provocations and the national unity in the face of the enemy state, and constituted neglecting the looming threats of North Korea. Despite increasing inter-Korean exchanges, summits, high-level official talks with agreements, and intensifying rapprochements with Pyongyang, the essence of the North Korean identity remained offensive to their perspectives. For example, the Korean Association of Retired Generals and Admirals maintained the view of North Korea as the enemy state of South Korea. The Korean Veterans Association, one of the oldest and most established civic groups, focused their opposition on the administrations’ unidirectional assistance as a concession to Pyongyang and a sign of South Korea’s appeasement, which would only weaken South Korea’s position in dealing with the North. The National Congress for Freedom and Democracy, an ultra-conservative civic organization, demanded a formal apology from North Korea for past provocations and a pledge to terminate its nuclear program as a prerequisite for inter-Korean reconciliation (Levin and Han, 2002: Ch.4).

This relational stance of the opponents was based upon what they perceived as Pyongyang’s unwavering commitment to unification only on the North’s terms, its continuing spy campaigns, its ceaseless probing along the demilitarized zone, and its overwhelming budget priority given to the military in spite of a shrinking economy. Thus, they consistently argued that the liberal governments’ sunshine policy was essentially pie in the sky. North Korea’s reception of South Korean aid was a tactical shift and the sunshine policy would not change Pyongyang’s fundamental aggressive strategies, aimed at undermining the South Korean system.

Strident critics from the media were the two conservative media outlets Chosun Ilbo and Dong-A Ilbo. They used their influential positions to manipulate public opinion by attacking the liberal governments. They were fierce and audacious in their criticism of the comprehensive engagement policy. They asserted that it would essentially weaken the South’s national security and endanger its security alliance with the United States. Engaging North Korea and hoping for a change in its identity were naïve policies, they argued. For example, during the Kim Dae Jung administration, Chosun

7 See ‘Gong Ro-Myung Criticizes President Kim’s Foreign Policy’, Monthly Chosun (June 2002), pp. 100–118 [in Korean].
Ilbo published 83 editorials on the government’s northern policy. Among the 83 editorials, 55 responded to the 55 major positive and negative inter-Korean events, and 51 editorials argued that North Korea’s reform ability was impossible as North Korea’s failure to open and reform was not because of a lack of external security assurance but because of its internal security.9 The leadership in Pyongyang knew the implications of openness upon its political survival: any serious reform policy would naturally undermine the regime.10 Therefore, the sunshine proponents were misreading the intentions of North Korea, which was abusing Seoul’s goodwill as the North continued its nuclear development. Throughout the 10 years of the liberal governments, Chosun Ilbo maintained its negative tone in regard to the engagement policy (Shin and Burke, 2008: 297).

All the critics of the sunshine policy demanded that Seoul maintain its traditional stance against Pyongyang, which was strict reciprocity as a requirement for improving inter-Korean relations and securing South Korea’s overall integrity. The comprehensive engagement policy created the illusion that Pyongyang would change if Seoul kept handing out ‘goodies’. To the opponents, Pyongyang’s identity as an enemy state bolstered the notion of strict reciprocity: that a bilateral relation of hostility should start with equal and real-time exchanges of give-and-take; unilateral giving to the enemy state was morally wrong vis-à-vis South Korea’s national identity (Sung Won Park, 2000). North Korea’s continuing delinquent behaviour such as its nuclear program, the naval skirmishes, and the submarine intrusion only confirmed their view that it was simply inappropriate to continue with the engagement policy, which would only harm South Korea’s alliance with the United States.

During the 10 years of the engagement policy era, this policy of the two administrations caused an ideological confrontation between the conservatives and the supporters of the policy (Shim and Jhee, 2004). The conservatives and liberals exchanged a great deal of verbal invective, calling each other ‘North Korea Sympathizer’ and ‘Cold War Retard’ respectively. The new idea of reconciliation with the enemy state generated a political confrontation over South Korea’s relational identity with the North. The

9 Author’s dataset based upon Newspaper Editorial Content Analysis on the Chosun Ilbo editorial based upon the 55 major events of the inter-Korean relations events by using the search engine at www.kinds.or.kr.

engagers had to engage with the South Korean conservatives, who possessed different ideas of national and relational identity.

**Collective Identity Reformation: Engagement Campaigns**

From the power and interest-based perspectives, South Korea’s rational choice would be to define North Korea as its enemy, given its more than a half century of conflictual division and its alliance with the United States. Seoul’s enforcement of the comprehensive engagement policy required more than an interest-based explanation, since the liberal governments of South Korea reacted to the worsening security environment inconsistently, with both an interest- and structure-based explanation. The Kim and Roh administrations followed their own road map based upon their beliefs about how their choice of comprehensive engagement could better guarantee peace and stability in the Korean peninsula. This generated a political process of formulating how Seoul should interact with Pyongyang and what Seoul should be in terms of its relational identity with its longstanding enemy.

The ideas entrepreneur, Kim Dae Jung, upon his election as the first president of the opposition party, presented a new policy idea called comprehensive engagement or the sunshine policy. He framed the national interest of South Korea as peaceful coexistence with North Korea, not unification, which at that time meant absorbing the North’s regime. The Kim administration believed that major Cold War power confrontations had caused Korea’s division, and that South Korea should be in the driver’s seat ‘to demolish the trapping structure of the Cold War and to bring peace and stability on the Korean peninsula through our own initiative.’ In order to meet the newly defined national interest, the new administration attempted to change the identity of North Korea from an enemy for containment to a partner of potential cooperation.

The Kim and the Roh administrations treated North Korea’s nuclear program not as a military problem posing an imminent threat to South Korea’s security. Rather the nuclear problem was perceived as a diplomatic agenda that had strengthened a logical ground for cooperative solutions in

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multilateral settings such as the Four Party and the Six Party Talks. To both administrations, war aversion on the Korean peninsula led to the principle of engagement towards the North. Simply identifying North Korea's nuclear program as a source of imminent threat would result in accepting a surgical strike as an option for the South.

President Roh exhibited this attitudinal shift bluntly and rigidly by stating, ‘As a nation that has built the Korea of today from the ashes of yesterday, we simply cannot be asked to re-live that traumatic experience.’ Such commitment by the Roh administration stayed on when North Korea tested its Taepodong II inter-continental missile. They did not perceive it as threatening, whereas Japan punished Pyongyang with unilateral economic sanctions. Seoul continued its engagement policy by holding a ministerial meeting with the North. Negotiating with the enemy was standard South Korean policy towards North Korea. The stance of both governments was firm in terms of reframing North Korea's identity as a partner for cooperation: “Trust can come only when the North is recognized and is engaged through dialogue” (Moon, 2008: 77).

With this newly introduced identity of North Korea, comprehensive engagement remained centre stage of domestic politics and led towards resetting a collective identity within South Korea. These new idea groups both in the Kim and the Roh administrations deplored the vicious cycle of temporal dialogues, confrontations and crises and argued for a virtuous cycle of institutionalized real-time communication and mutually beneficial exchanges for establishing peace on the Korean peninsula (Hong, 1999). The code of conduct by which Seoul should behave in times of crisis was set during the Kim Dae Jung administration and carried through the Roh administration.

The Roh administration was clearer in reframing Pyongyang as a subject for cooperation as it believed that North Korea could not be perceived as a constant source of threat since Seoul was engaging with the regime in Pyongyang. To reinforce this political stance, Seoul, for the first time in 2004 since the end of the Korean War, did not designate North Korea as


an enemy state in its Defense White Paper.\textsuperscript{15} The interpretation of threats from the North became an inseparable configuration of the identity dynamics of South Korea's comprehensive engagement. In 2005 the Inter-Korean Exchange Law was revised to simplify the bureaucratic and legal processes for inter-Korean individual contacts.\textsuperscript{16} In this way, South Korea's comprehensive engagement policy constituted the basis for behavioural norms of how threats and opportunities were judged.

The Kim and the Roh administrations emphasized the importance of political and economic engagement as a tool for escaping the perils of the security dilemma. Both administrations pressed that North Korea might be forced to choose military options once caught in the spirals of crisis, and that engaging North Korea and socializing Pyongyang with the rest of the world would improve stability prospects across the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, as Moon elaborated, South Korea's engagement policy carried with it a functionalist nuance called ‘a flexible dualism – the separation of politics and economy, moving away from the previous governments’ preoccupation with the primacy of politics and its linkage to the economy.’\textsuperscript{17} As such a functional dualism marked South Korea's paradigm shift in its behavioural norm, it essentially brought about a stimulating discursive acceptance of how and why Seoul should help the North. Engaging North Korea emerged as Seoul's only strategic option short of a military one, and the South Korean public was persuaded. The Roh administration even fostered the creation of an inter-Korean economic community through engagement. This was framed as a contributing process to creating a Northeast Asian regional community, which provided a viable future vision for how peace and stability in the Korean peninsula on Seoul's initiatives would help South Korea's

\textsuperscript{15} The previous Defense White Paper in 2000 stated ‘...those immediate threats from North Korea, which, as the nation’s main enemy, could endanger our survival.’ See Ministry of Defense, 2000 Defense White Paper (Seoul: Ministry of Defense, 2000), pp. 34.

\textsuperscript{16} South Korea's National Security Act used to function as the governing law prohibiting South Koreans' direct contact with North Koreans unless authorized by the Government. Without prior authorization, South Koreans who contacted North Koreans or entered the territory of the North would be legally placed under arrest. But with the revised Inter-Korean Exchange Law, South Koreans can be given a permit from the Ministry of Unification after application, and can contact North Koreans and visit the North as long as the permit is valid.

The Roh government believed incremental changes in North Korea and reconciliation between two Koreas to be a basis for shaping a new regional order in Northeast Asia. The rapid growth of economic relations in Northeast Asia would serve as a locomotive for North–South Korean cooperation. In this way, South Korea identified North–South Korean railroad, energy, and logistics networks as major national projects.

The architects, practitioners, and missionaries of the comprehensive engagement policy safeguarded the integrity of the new idea by forming a sunshine policy activist government, rowing against the opposition tides towards spreading a new set of initiatives and norms of peaceful coexistence on the Korean peninsula. These engagement proponents had the President's unquestionable support and ideational commitments to sunshine.

Kim Dae Jung installed a vanguard of sunshine policy promoters throughout his government. He established the National Security Council for orchestrating the government's Northern policy, used the National Intelligence Service for communicating with Pyongyang and mobilized the Ministry of Unification and his ruling Democrat Party for dealing with the South Korean public. The comprehensive engagement policy was essentially coordinated by the President's closest aide, Lim Dong Won, who was appointed twice as the Minister of National Unification for a total of 13 months in 1999 and 2001. In between, he was appointed Director of National Intelligence, coordinating the first inter-Korean summit from December 1999 to March 2001.

During Kim's tenure, two scholars – Moon Chung In and Lee Jong Seok – assumed the role of so-called sunshine missionaries, taking the sunshine campaigns to domestic and international audiences. Later the two missionaries played critical roles in continuing and strengthening Roh's comprehensive engagement policy. During the power transition from the Kim to Roh, Kim's last Minister of National Unification, Cheong Se Hyun, served as the

20 Author's interview with Kim Geun Sik, Professor of Political Science at KyungNam University, who participated in the 2nd Summit in 2007 and assumed the role of a sunshine missionary during the Roh administration.
21 Author's interview with Moon Chung In, Professor of Political Science at Yonsei University, who participated in both inter-Korean summits and assumed the role of engagement policy architect during the Roh administration.
Minister of Unification for 14 months. His role was to smooth the transition of the institutional continuity of the engagement policy to the Roh administration. Minister of National Unification Park Jae Gyu, who was in charge of managing the first summit, established the first professional graduate school, called the University of North Korean Studies, in 2000, devoted to training professionals in the area of inter-Korean exchanges, thereby hoping to expand the pro-engagement base throughout Korean society.

During the Roh administration, Lee Jong Seok played a critical role as a “control tower” coordinating its Northern policy. As Deputy Secretary General of the NSC, he strengthened the NSC’s role in coordinating between the Ministries of Unification, Foreign Affairs and Defense. Later he was appointed Minister of Unification. Chung Dong Young, a presidential candidate of the ruling Uri party, headed the Ministry of Unification from 2004 to 2005. Moon Chung-in, the Chairperson of the Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiatives, strengthened the logical foundation of Roh’s engagement and foreign policy. All in all, these sunshine proponents formed a cohesive group not only working closely with each other but also networking with middle-level technocrats in the government. Both administrations engaged in a public campaign to persuade the public of the virtues of engaging the North. Persuading the public on this matter was a challenging task as the North Korean government was perceived by many as inhumane, irresponsible, delinquent and heavily armed.

However, the engagement policy may have been a polarizing issue in the politically sensitized section of society. As Figure 1 indicates, public opinion was evenly split when the engagement policy had not yet begun in full force. Support for engagement was 55% while opposition was 44% in 1998. After the first inter-Korean summit, public support for the sunshine policy increased to 87.7%, the highest ever recorded. Public support for the engagement policy during and after Kim Dae Jung’s leadership is an important indicator of the diffusion of the new norm opting for the strategy of negotiation, inter-Korean reconciliation and engagement. Such support was also the political resource that the sunshine proponents utilized in their political campaigns against the traditional advocates of containment. Over the 10-year period of the sunshine era, the stable and steady support for engagement indicates that the new identity of reconciliation had penetrated Korean society. Despite many security crises such as a couple of naval skirmishes, the North’s nuclear test, and Pyongyang’s inordinate provocations, which were in fact framed as the failure of the sunshine policy, South
Korean public opinion stayed in favour of engagement and reconciliation with Pyongyang.

**Time Ahead: The Legacy of Engagement**

Identity does not easily change. Neither does the structure of international relations have an overwhelming influence on the state. The state processes a new identity through a game of political collision between old and new identities. Reconciliation in a protracted conflictual relation requires much more: reconciliation as a new idea has to be introduced to the public, who have to be persuaded why such a policy shift yields a better future than...
the traditional policy of containment. Then fierce discursive battles with the traditional identity groups have to ensue. In short, one should not presume a new identity for a state just because the environment is believed to have changed – politics still matter.

The South Korean case clearly demonstrates the above process. The two minority administrations of the sunshine policy embraced a new identity of self and towards Pyongyang, and set in motion a discourse of engagement in South Korean society. The roles of norm entrepreneurs and their vanguards were important especially because the traditional identity of containment opposed the newly presented idea of reconciliation. Conservatives fought the sunshine campaign for 10 years as a well-placed pan-national conservative coalition.

Seoul’s engagement policy has not achieved inter-Korean reconciliation, and its road ahead is bumpy and uncertain. Nonetheless, the policy has created a new ideational platform that has implications for stability on the Korean peninsula. The idea of war-aversion as the legacy of the engagement policy, which rejects war as a means to resolve the North Korean problem, is now a common ideational feature between both the engagement and the containment groups. In South Korea’s public domain, virtually no one is promoting the idea of military means to counter Pyongyang’s delinquent behaviour. Even with the sinking of South Korea’s Navy vessel, Cheonan, South Korean voters did not rally behind the conservative and ruling Grand National Party in the 2 June 2010 local elections. Rather South Koreans handed the Democrat Party, the political heir of Presidents Kim and Roh, a landslide victory. Fear over national security and the revived inter-Korean tension backfired for the conservative administration. The likelihood of South Korea initiating war in the Korean peninsula is low. The engagement policy continues faintly in the form of war aversion as the de facto security culture of South Korea. The option of engagement still lingers on in South Korea’s national identity, but the prospects for the return of an engagement policy are not clear.

Reconciliation on the Korean peninsula has now returned to zero, as of 2012. Those ‘sunshiners’ of the past administrations are now standing on barren soil, lethargically watching the deteriorating inter-Korean relations as uncertainty coupled with a pessimistic outlook looms large. Prospects for the Six-Party Talks are not hopeful, nor are there for any significant breakthrough in inter-Korean relations. It might be suggested that there is a long-term solution to this protracted conflictual relationship and that it does not
have to do with external pressure, sanctions and threats to use force. Rather it seems possible that reconciliation might be brought about not principally by mechanical reciprocity, but by a wake-up realization that, since containment is essentially irrelevant to reconciliation, it is profoundly foolish.

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Chapter 11

COOPERATION AMONG EQUALS: POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Uffe Østergård

The Nordic countries are normally seen as small, peaceful and egalitarian democracies, internationally oriented and strong supporters of law and order. There is some truth to this conventional wisdom but it does not cover the whole picture. Or rather, there are some backdrops to the total reliance on the principle of national self-determination in sovereign states that have to be taken into account when evaluating the positive sides of the political culture in this northern part of Europe (cf. Østergård 1997c, 2003d and 2006b). The aim of this chapter is to analyse some of the particularities of these homogeneous nation states in order to map the various national routes they have taken to their apparent success of today and the reasons for the different choices they have made vis-à-vis European cooperation. Furthermore, the nature and history of the cooperation among the Nordic states is analysed in some detail. Such an analysis may be of interest to students of Europe and European integration as the many ways of successful cooperation among the Nordic states in the twentieth century builds on the recognition of every nation’s right to independence, regardless of its size. Many observers – in particular in Denmark – long doubted the ability of the Icelanders to establish a successful state on an island with so small a population. Yet Iceland was until the financial crisis in 2008 a thriving and wealthy society with an interesting combination of traditional agriculture, fisheries, hypermodern industries and information technology. Iceland most probably will survive the present economic crisis

1 In 1801, Iceland had just over 47,000 inhabitants, with 307 of these in Reykjavik (Agnarsdóttor 2004, 80). Today the island has 300,000 inhabitants, with almost half of these in the greater Reykjavik area.

2 The Icelandic historian Gudmundur Halfdanarson, though, has directed our attention to an inherent contradiction in Icelandic nationalism and the country’s economic performance.
as a sovereign nation state, although it may rethink its rejection of the EU and decide to join, once the present quarrels with UK and the Netherlands are settled. Much the same can be said of the Faeroe Islands, which have a little over 50,000 inhabitants. The present crisis in Iceland, though, has made the majority of the Faeroese think twice before embarking on the final route to complete independence of Denmark (cf. Østergård 2005d and 2008b).

In early modern times, from 1523 to 1814, the Nordic countries were divided between two multinational, conglomerate states or empires, Sweden under the Vasa dynasty and Denmark under the House of Oldenburg. After defeat in the Napoleonic wars, Denmark in 1814 was forced to cede Norway to victorious Sweden under the newly elected king, Carl XIV Johan, formerly a French general known as Jean Baptiste Bernadotte. Finland had become a separate state entity in 1809, when Russia annexed the Finnish half of Sweden and established an archduchy in union with the Russian empire. Finland gained its independence in 1917 as a result of the Russian revolution. Sweden acquired Norway as a compensation for the loss of Finland, in a shaky union that lasted until 1905, when the union was peacefully dissolved. Iceland broke away from Denmark in two phases, 1918 and 1944 respectively, while connections were suspended because of the world wars, effectively preventing Denmark from intervening. The Faeroe Islands gained their autonomous status in 1948, while Greenland got home rule in 1979 and the status of an autonomous country in 2010, having left the EU after a referendum in 1983.3

According to the nationalist ideology Icelanders ought to live on farms raising cattle and sheep as they had done in the Middle Ages. Because of this ideology they tended to overlook the fact that the real basis of the country’s economic success in the late 19th and in the 20th century was fishing (Halfdanarson 2006). Whether this analysis can explain the predatory nature of so-called ‘Viking’-financial capitalism let loose in the 1990s and early 2000s yet remains to be seen.

3 Greenland (Kalaallisut: Kalaallit Nunaat meaning 'Land of the Greenlanders'; Danish: Grønland) is an autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark, located between the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, east of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. Though physiographically a part of the continent of North America, Greenland has been politically associated with Denmark and Norway for a thousand years. Greenland has been inhabited, though not continuously, by indigenous peoples since 2500 BC. Viking migrants from Iceland lived in Greenland from AD 986 until sometime in the 15th century. In 1721 contact was re-established when Denmark established a colony in Nuuk (Godthåb). With the Constitution of Denmark of 1953 Greenland became a part of the Kingdom of Denmark known as Rigsenheden or Rigsfællesskabet (Commonwealth of the Realm). In 1979 Denmark granted home rule to Greenland. In 2008 Greenland and Denmark negotiated a transfer of power from the Danish government to the Greenlandic government, effective from 2009. According to this agreement the Danish government is in charge of foreign affairs, security
The Sami in northern Norway and Sweden may follow suit as one or several autonomous units someday. The Aaland Islands were accorded the status of a separate, non-militarized part of Finland in 1921 as compensation for not being allowed to join Sweden; in 1951 home rule followed, a status the Aaland Islands interpreted as implying the right to a referendum on their entry into the European Union in 1994, separate from the one in Finland – and the upholding of tax-free sales on the ferries to and from the islands - although both Sweden and Finland are members of the EU.

Altogether the Nordic countries are the size of the German state (Bundesland) of Nordrhein-Westfalen, with around 25 million inhabitants. From this point of view they are hugely over-represented in international organizations such as the UN, which is built on the principle of independent nation states. The Nordic countries also collaborate, primarily through the Nordic Council, which is an interesting blend of cooperation among parliaments, civil society and states (Wendt 1981 and Tønnesson 2002). Nordic cooperation is hugely popular with most of the people, although linguistically the Nordic peoples today seem to be losing the ability to understand each other’s languages. English is the preferred language of communication among the younger generations, also at university level. This tendency is deplored among traditional upholders of the so-called ‘Nordic unity’, but nothing much has been done about this. A common television channel never got off the ground in the 1960s and 1970s, when it might have made a difference. Because of this growing lack of understanding and the importance of the European Union in Northern Europe since Sweden and Finland joined in 1995, political and administrative elites do not invest much energy in Nordic cooperation, although they still pay lip service to ‘Nordic values’ at festive occasions. This tendency seems most dominant in Denmark, but can be detected in different versions in all the countries. Nevertheless, Nordic unity and Nordic values still score highly in surveys and Scandinavians still seem to prefer each other’s societies and values over those of the rest of Europe.

‘Norden’, Scandinavia and Northern Europe

‘Norden’ (literally ‘the North’) and ‘Scandinavia’ are by no means synonymous denominations although they are often used as if they were interchangeable.

(defence-police-justice) and financial policy, providing an annual subsidy of DKK 3.4 billion. The population amounts to 56,452 according to an estimate of January 2010.
The ‘Northern countries’ to which Tacitus referred in his treatise ‘Germania’ were not Scandinavia but the whole of Northern Europe (Lund 1993, 82 and 116). The word ‘Scandinavia’ first occurs in Pliny’s *Naturalis Historia* as a misspelling of *Scandia*, the name given to the southern Swedish province of Skåne, which Pliny believed to be an island. Only in the eighteenth century was the name *Scandinavia* adopted as a convenient general term for the wider region in Northern Europe that Skåne belonged to. Today, Scandinavia is often used by geographers in a limited sense for the peninsula shared between Norway and Sweden. This terminology makes geological sense but has very little historical meaning. Until 1658 a large part of what is now southern Sweden belonged to the Danish Kingdom, while Norway from 1380 to 1814 was ruled by the Danish king and until recently shared a language and literary culture with Denmark. Because of these facts and the similarity of the three languages the term Scandinavia is most often used with reference to the three ‘old’ Nordic countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. ‘Norden’, on the other hand, also incorporates Finland, Iceland, the Faeroe Islands, the Aaland Islands, Greenland and the emerging Sami nation in northern Norway and Sweden. ‘Norden’, thus, is a politico-historical category rather than a geographical category, which is often taken to denominate a common set of social values, i.e. low power distance, informality, equality, lack of corruption, trust in authorities, efficiency. In short the so-called ‘Nordic model’ of the universal welfare state often assumes a certain distance from the ‘selfish’ politics of the world’s great powers and a moral superiority.

Even with all these positive connotations of ‘Norden’ taken into account, the concept has an ambiguous history in most European languages. In the eighteenth century the ‘Northern tours’ undertaken by gentlemen of leisure usually embraced Poland and Russia, as well as Scandinavia proper. Journals with the adjective ‘Nordische’ appeared from Hamburg to St. Petersburg – the ‘Palmyra of the North’. The German historian Leopold von Ranke elevated both Karl XII of Sweden and Peter the Great of Russia to a Pantheon of ‘Northern heroes’ (Kirby 1995, 2). With the rise of an independent notion of a ‘Slavic’ Eastern Europe, however, Northern Europe and Eastern Europe were gradually separated (Wolff 1994). Yet, until the reorganization of the British Foreign Office during the Second World War, Russia as well as Poland was dealt with in its Northern Department. Whether this was the main reason for the disastrous British misjudgements of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939 is another thing. The fact remains that in the traditional European optic Russia was perceived rather as a Northern
country on an equal footing with its Swedish foe and Danish ally than an Eastern country until well into the nineteenth century (Wolf 1994, Kirby 1990 and 1995).

Today, when Finland is unequivocally included in the Nordic family, except for the language, the denomination *Norden* must be preferred to Scandinavia. The Finlanders⁴ still remember the time from 1809 to 1917 when they were a part of the Russian Empire and largely ignored by their fellow ‘Scandinavians’. Likewise, neither the Icelanders nor the Faeroese feel included in the designation Scandinavia, not to speak of the Greenlanders. It thus makes sense to maintain the well-established term ‘Norden’, even if it does present major problems in English and strikes the wrong chords in German. ‘Nordisch’ was the term used by the pan-Germanic dreamers of the last century in reference to the ‘true’, unspoiled Germanic peoples of ‘Norden’ (Henningsen 1997). This use of ‘Nordisch’ as synonymous with ‘Germanentum’ was ominous and with the rise of Nazism the whole German tradition of so-called ‘Nordic thought’ was utterly discredited. As a result, German scholars of the Nordic languages and literatures today refer to their subject as ‘*Skandinavistik*’, despite the fact that the discipline also incorporates the study of the Finnish and Icelandic languages, literatures and societies.

The question of where to place Greenland and the Greenlandic languages, not to mention Lapland and the Sami, remains undecided at the major universities outside ‘Norden’. Only in Canada has the study of Greenland been accorded an independent status as the hitherto only example of the people of a so-called ‘fourth world’ country having established a nation state with its own language, flag and other symbols. In a gradual process, Greenland today has gained co-responsibility for her foreign and security policy, a process that culminated symbolically in the joint chairmanship of the seventh meeting of the Arctic Council in Nuuk in May 2011.⁵ A first

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⁴ A Finlander is a citizen of Finland. This state officially comprises Finnish speakers as well as Swedish speakers. The latter are a small minority of 6% but the nation is bilingual and bi-national. A Finn is a Finnish-speaking citizen of Finland whereas a Swedish-speaking Finlander is normally referred to as a Swedish-speaking Finlander or simply a Swedish Finn (cf. Engman 1995 and Kirby 1995).

⁵ The 7th meeting of the Arctic Ministerial Council was held on 12 May 2011 in Nuuk, marking the end of the joint chairmanship of Denmark and Greenland over this organization. Foreign Ministers representing the eight Arctic States met to discuss future challenges in the Arctic. The Arctic Council was established in 1996 with the signing of the Ottawa Declaration. Its Member States are Canada, Denmark (representing Greenland and the Faeroe
testimony of this newly won sovereignty was the reception of the then American secretary of state, Colin Powell, by the head of the Greenlandic foreign office, Józef Motzfeldt, in his tiny home town of Igaliku in southern Greenland on 6 August 2004. The reason for Powell’s visit was the signing of an accord between Denmark, Greenland and the US concerning the upgrading of the American radar in Thule. Denmark is officially responsible for Greenland’s foreign and security policy, and the then Danish minister of foreign affairs, Per Stig Møller, was also present at the signing ceremony. Yet, Greenland was for the first time also present at such a meeting at an international level as a demonstration of her growing independence. If this tendency towards sovereignty in international affairs continues, Greenland may gradually drift away from the Nordic political culture into the orbit of North America where the huge island belongs geographically. But this result is in no way guaranteed, even though at least one Greenlandic politician has been quoted as saying that Greenland is only one oil-find away from full independence. Most Greenlanders know very well that such independence would mean complete dependence on the US and international companies.

If the designations are ambiguous, the historical sense of community between the Nordic countries is no less ambivalent. In reality the major part of Nordic history is characterized by conflicts and attempts by one country to dominate the others, just as has been the case in the rest of Europe. For a brief period in the nineteenth century the idea of a Scandinavian union of Sweden, Norway and Denmark as a potential great power able to challenge Russia and Germany thrived under the name of ‘Scandinavianism’ (Holmberg 1946). A testimony to this vision has materialized in a somewhat perverted form in a museum in central Stockholm bearing the auspicious name ‘Nordiska museet’ (‘Nordic Museum’). In reality it is little more than a Swedish local-heritage museum with a smattering of Swedish royalism and anti-Danish sentiment thrown in. In the entrance hall the visitor is confronted by an enormous and intimidating granite statue of Gustav Vasa,6

6 Gustav Vasa (1496–1560) was the first king of independent Sweden after the breakup of the Danish-dominated Union of Kalmar comprising all the Nordic countries which lasted from 1397 to 1523. He ruled a centrally organized state of Sweden (with Finland) and introduced the Lutheran reformation from above in 1527, almost at the same time as Lutheranism was introduced in Denmark after a bloody civil war in 1536. In Sweden, though, the
Cooperation among Equals

with a demand to ‘Be Swedish!’ carved into its base. The intention of the museum was to strengthen the union between Sweden and Norway which lasted from 1814 to 1905, but nothing less than ‘Nordiska’ would do when it came to demonstrating the Swedish hold over Norway. The same would probably have happened to Denmark had the ‘Scandinavianists’ in the 1850s succeeded in their plans to place the Swedish king on the Danish throne. As it turned out, nothing came of the plan, as the Danes eventually preferred a king of German descent from the house of Glücksburg.

The structural weakness of Scandinavianism was that Denmark wanted Scandinavian help against what she perceived as a threat from the recently united German state to the south, whereas Sweden wanted help against expansionist Russia to the east. These two interests were impossible to reconcile. As a matter of fact, Germany has always been perceived as a friend and ally by Sweden, while Denmark has been in alliance with or protected by Russia in most of the four hundred years of relations between the two states. It is thus no big surprise that the fellow Scandinavians failed to bail Denmark out in the 1864 war with Prussia. Thus began a process of nation-building in independent nation states that we today have become used to regarding as inevitable and ‘natural’. As mentioned the union between Sweden and Norway was dissolved relatively peacefully in 1905, and positive relations have developed over time, as witnessed in the centenary festivities in 2005, marked by massive scholarly publications (Stråth 2005 and Sejersted 2005). Yet, precisely this recent scholarship has brought to light that the peaceful dissolution of the union was much closer run than we assume today. War between Norway and Sweden was a distinct possibility and was only prevented by good sense and negotiations (Østergård 2008c).

As a result of these more or less conscious choices the ethnically homogeneous nation state has become the exclusively dominating principle in Norden, even more so than in the rest of Europe. Furthermore, these processes of breakup of the former multinational or conglomerate states and the subsequent nation-building have been so peaceful as to persuade Scandinavians and many outsiders that these countries always have been peaceful, egalitarian and uncorrupted havens in an otherwise-inclined world. This peaceful behaviour has been backed by a good record of international solidarity and help to the underdeveloped parts of the world.

reformation took much longer to settle in permanently, because Gustav Vasa’s son Johan III. (1537–1592) through marriage also came to rule catholic Poland.
So persuasive has this interpretation been that Scandinavians have tended
to neglect many of the less peaceful and aggressive features of the history
they share with the rest of Europe. Thus the Nordic peoples tend to over-
emphasize what sets the Nordic countries apart from the rest of Europe
and underestimate the few factors which are really distinct, primarily the
dominance of the Lutheran evangelical religion through state churches,
which until recently led to a virtually mono-religious situation. A recent
attempt to propagate the Nordic experience in social development, efficient
use of energy resources and general good management can be found in Atle
Midttun, *The Nordic Model: Is it Sustainable and Exportable?*7

‘Norden’ – a Historical Region,8 a
Mental Construct or a Model?

Seen from a geographical and geopolitical point of view the eastern majority
of the Nordic countries undeniably belong to the Baltic area. Nevertheless,
over the last hundred and fifty years Denmark and Sweden in particular
have tended to downplay the Baltic and European components of their
national identifications. Many Scandinavians, social democrats as well as
liberals, have perceived the ‘Nordic’ political culture, social structure and
mentality as fundamentally different from that of the rest of Europe. An
indication of this attitude is the use of the concept of ‘Norden’ instead of
‘Northern Europe’ when talking of these countries. ‘Norden’ is perceived as
something not European, not Catholic, anti-Rome, anti-imperialist, non-
colonial, non-exploitative, peaceful, small and social democratic. In short,
the Nordic peoples have perceived themselves as having no responsibility
for Europe’s exploitation of the rest of the world and have spent a good
part of their international efforts trying to make up for the wrongdoings
of their fellow Europeans towards the Third and Fourth Worlds. Hence
the activist role played by these five states in the United Nations in col-
laboration with the Netherlands, Canada, the Republic of Ireland and a
few others.

School of Management, www.ceres.no.
8 ‘Historical region’ has two meanings: either a traditional landscape or province from
the period before the modern nation-states and their subdivisions or a transnational region
with a common history of a group of nations and states. I use the term in the latter meaning.
Still today for many Scandinavians the secret of economic and political success in this remote and sparsely populated part of Europe lies in keeping a distance from all the neighbouring powers, Germany and Russia in particular. There is some truth in this lesson from history if we look at the periods of great power confrontations, but this mentality also testifies to a major naivety as to the real background of the amazing success story of the Nordic nation-states in the twentieth century. The claim that the Nordic states share a collective mentality and political culture different from that of the rest of Europe ignores much of the history of warfare that the Nordic countries share with the rest of Europe, in particular their involvement in the bloody religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is true that Sweden withdrew from European power politics after its disastrous defeat in 1709 at Poltava in today’s Ukraine and gradually replaced its imperial ambitions with those of a smaller nation-state. Yet, the state still harboured revanchist ambitions against the rising Russia, which led to war in 1788–9. The resulting stalemate, however, eventually led to total defeat in 1809 and the loss of half of the Swedish state to Russia. Under Russian patronage this half together with eastern Karelia was reorganized as Finland.

It is equally true that the multinational Danish state – more correctly the House of Oldenburg or ‘Kron zu Dennemarck’ as the composite state was called with a Low German (plattdeutsch) expression until 1864 – was reduced to a medium sized power in 1814 with the loss of Norway. Yet, the multinational state of Denmark-Schleswig-Holstein and Lauenburg still was a player in European power politics until 1863, albeit often in a rather amateurish way. This naive amateurism eventually led to the catastrophic loss in the war with Prussia in 1864 and the reduction of Denmark to the very epitome of a small state (Nielsen 1987; Østergård 2005g). Even today, while Denmark is undeniably the ultimate small state, it still has not completely relieved itself of the burdens of former empire, the Faeroe Islands and Greenland. Denmark the nation-state is at the same time Denmark the Commonwealth, representing three separate nations in the world community.

The fortunate geopolitical situation of the Nordic countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was no achievement of their own. They simply had the good luck of being left more or less alone when, after the Napoleonic wars, the major conflicts between the great powers moved to other parts of Europe. Finland, though, experienced violence on a par with the rest of Europe through a bloody civil war in 1917–18 and two lost wars against the
Soviet Union in 1939–40 and 1941–44. Yet Finland succeeded in keeping her great neighbour at bay and was allowed to move from a Soviet-leaning neutrality in the 1940s, a situation that gave rise to the very concept ‘finlandization’, to a position within the Nordic family in 1955. In April 1948 the Soviet Union formalized Finland’s position in a so-called ‘Pact of Cooperation and Friendship’. This move together with the communist coup in Czechoslovakia scared Denmark in particular. In World War II Norway and Denmark had been occupied by Germany, and Iceland, Greenland and the Faeroe Islands by Britain and the United States. This experience together with the Soviet threat persuaded Denmark, Norway and Iceland to give up their neutrality and join the western alliance of NATO in 1949. Sweden officially stayed neutral during the Cold War but in reality her military was incorporated in NATO’s planning. Only the Swedish voters did not know it and developed an emotional attachment to neutrality, which they still today identify with the success of the Swedish welfare state and the high international standing of their country from the end of World War II to the late 1970s.

To what degree membership of the western alliance has affected the basic neutrality of the political culture is still very much debated, in particular in Denmark, where a series of competing official and unofficial investigations of Danish attitudes during the Cold War have been published. A final verdict is still premature, but it seems fair to conclude that the basic attitudes in neutral Sweden and NATO-Denmark were surprisingly similar until the end of the Cold War, when the two countries parted ways, primarily with Denmark’s military involvement in the international interventions in the Gulf War 1991, Kosovo 1999, Afghanistan 2002 and Iraq 2003 onwards (Østergård 2005c).

Not even the Soviet hegemony in the eastern Baltic from 1945 brought back the Nordic countries to the centre of international political confrontations. Because of their fortunate geographical position the overwhelming majority of Scandinavians were able to live through the Cold War without really noticing that they were involved in a major conflict. Consequently, the populations have not yet realized that they were on the winning side. If noticed at all, the new confusing state of affairs after 1989 is often deplored

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9 Among others the massive publication Danmark under den kolde krig I-IV, published June 2005 by the Danish Institute for International Studies, containing 2300 pages of original research. The most recent analysis of the importance of the different experiences of World War II is Stenius, Östberg and Österling (eds) Nordic Narratives of the Second World War, Nordic Academic Press, 2011.
and many almost long the bad, but predictable, old days of Cold War confrontations (cf. Østergård 1995). Finland of course, with her history of having been affected by the major European conflicts almost to the same degree as the small Baltic countries south of the Finnish Gulf, reacted differently and decided to go all the way towards Europe as soon as possible. She joined the EU in 1995 together with Sweden, but unlike Sweden Finland adopted the Euro in 2000 and thus became a core member of the European Union.

Finland has thus overtaken Denmark and Sweden with their reluctance to join the Eurozone and hand over sovereignty. Norway and Iceland are still outside the EU. These apparently exclusively political choices, though, have a geopolitical base. Norway and Iceland have decided to opt out of European cooperation because of their orientation towards the North Atlantic Ocean, as have the Faeroe Islands and Greenland. These latter entities share a foreign policy with Denmark as members of the Danish Commonwealth (in Danish the *Rigsfællesskab*), but have used their home rule status to stay outside the EU. (Greenland, actually having become a member with the rest of Denmark in 1973, decided to leave in 1982 after a referendum.) These North Atlantic Nordic communities have profited from their peripheral situation to develop their own separate identities within the Danish realm, and today operate as virtual nation states almost on a par with the successful sovereign states of Norway and Iceland, due to the relative lack of interest of the great powers in the North Atlantic area. Because of their inward-looking mentalities when it comes to the understanding of their belonging to Northern Europe, the majority of Swedes and Danes, unlike the Finns, have tended to ignore the Baltic character and determinants of their common history. This short-sightedness has also characterized most of their historians with a few notable exceptions.

‘Norden’ still has to find its Fernand Braudel: a historian who is able to depict the *longue durée* of this European region. Maybe it will turn out to be an impossible task because of the geographical differences among the Nordic countries and the languages needed to investigate the many states involved. Furthermore, the Nordic states, as part of the breakup of the conglomerate states, have divided the archives kept in the capitals of Copenhagen and Stockholm. This goes in particular for the western half: Denmark in the 1920s divided her archival holdings with the recently independent Norway. Later on the same was done with Iceland, in particular with the returning of the world-famous medieval saga and other manuscripts to Reykjavik.
in the 1960s and later. Such well-intended gestures among equal nations have made it virtually impossible to study the politics of the multinational states from the point of view of the decision-makers of the day, as at least some historians today would like to do (Østergård 1992b, 2002c; Jensen and Bregnsbo 2004). To a degree this archival situation explains the lack of truly historical analyses of the past from a non-nationalist point of view that characterizes Nordic historical writing (Engman 1991; Østergård 1992b). Unfortunately, this even holds true for the recently published prestigious first volume of the *Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, edited by the Norwegian historian Knut Helle (Helle 2003).

Yet, in fact the Baltic area can be seen as a functional equivalent to the Mediterranean (Østergård 2005e). But the Baltic area is only a part of Scandinavia or Norden, albeit a very substantial part. A truly comparative history of the region should for example analyse the common characteristics of the two border areas, Schleswig and Karelia (as has now been done by various authors in Imsen 2005). The two regions share a similar historical experience in the sense that both provinces for long periods were attached to neighbouring states.

The British historian David Kirby has attempted to write what no Nordic historian has yet done, an integrated political and social history of Northern Europe organized around the question of the dominance over the Baltic Sea (in Latin *Dominium Maris Baltici*) from 1500 until the present day (Kirby 1990 and 1995). Because of his Baltic perspective, the Atlantic half of ‘Norden,’ Norway, Iceland, the Faeroe Islands and Greenland, has been omitted. This choice runs counter to the popular ideology of a common Nordic identity but makes a lot of geopolitical sense. On the other hand, Kirby does analyse the interplay of Sweden, Finland and Denmark with Poland, Russia, Prussia and the Baltic states from 1500 until the end of the Cold War. Modestly, Kirby in his preface claims that he is no Braudel and that primarily he has written a general introduction to the history and controversies of the Baltic region. In fact, he has given us much more. At times he comes close to Braudel, only with more interest than the French master in international politics and dynastic politics, all consequently set against a background of solid social and economic history. There may not be a lot of ‘*longue durée*’ in Kirby’s analysis, but he offers an extremely interesting description of the interplay between many different national histories, of which he has mastered the languages Finnish, Swedish, Danish, German, Russian and Polish.
One Nordic Political Culture or Several National Political Cultures?

Norden’ as a region today consists of independent nation-states with their own quite different histories and separate political traditions. Yet, they also share a long range of culture traits from the Lutheran version of Christianity to economic flexibility, absence of corruption and a high degree of social equality. Entries in Scandinavian encyclopedias consistently represent the Nordic identity with the following national stereotypes: Norway as 'Norwegian and only Norwegian', Denmark as 'Danish in Europe', Iceland as the 'island of the learned', Sweden as 'Nordic in Europe, with a capacity for self-criticism and tolerance towards immigrants', and Finland as a ‘hard-working advocate of human rights, equality, international understanding and peace’ (Tonnesson 1993, 367). The Faeroe Islands and Greenland, too, have gradually won the right to be recognized as independent national variations of the Nordic political culture. Only the Sami identity is represented as ethnic, though this will in all likelihood hold only until the Sami are recognized as an independent nationality with their own seat on the Nordic Council.

The nation-states of today, then, are the configurations through which the common Nordic identity manifests itself. As these nations have achieved the recognition of the surrounding world, so too have they come to appear as 'natural’ entities, even though Danes and Swedes may have difficulty in appreciating this because of their age-old struggle for supremacy in Northern Europe. Both Denmark and Sweden have a long, unbroken history, though strictly speaking not as homogeneous nation-states, but rather as composite states or small empires, exercising various kinds of hegemony over their neighbours inside and outside Norden. Denmark and Sweden thus belong to the traditions of territorial state-nations basically on a par with France, Britain, Spain, Poland, Hungary and Portugal. Norway and Iceland belong to the family of integral national movements who in the nineteenth century resurrected their medieval nations to independent status (like the Irish and the Czechs). And Finland, as we have already seen, did not even have a medieval past to refer back to (Østergård 2002c and 2004b). The rudiments of a state were established within the conglomerate Russian empire and subsequently gave rise to a bilingual political nation of Finns (Engman 2004).

Geopolitical contrasts have always been a constant in the history of the Nordic countries. But after 1814, common interests dominated over conflict
to the degree that the Nordic countries, with the exception of the occasional threat to Denmark and Finland, no longer felt exposed to direct threats. During the period of the Cold War, they remained in a relatively safe and peaceful situation because of the Iron Curtain that separated the Baltic Sea. At the time the Nordic peoples did not realize how safe they in reality were, but this became obvious after the collapse of communism in 1989. The predictable character of world politics to a large degree explains popular enthusiasm in Denmark for the neutral Nordic alternative to NATO in the years between 1945 and 1989. During this period Sweden was able to play the neutral card, while Denmark quite free of charge was able to emerge on the winning side as member of the NATO alliance. In Denmark at least, NATO only became a popular issue after the need for the alliance evaporated in 1991. The exception among the Nordic countries is Finland. This small state demonstrated a determined will to fight in 1939–44 and thus escaped the tragic fate of the small Baltic States, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

This era of relative peace, however, did not last and today appears as little more than an historical parenthesis. Viewed in the long historical perspective, the Nordic countries differ much less from other European countries than Nordic ideology and the discourse of a Scandinavian or Nordic model would have us believe. There is, however, one major difference. The Nordic countries are Lutheran. They did not become so immediately with the Reformation in the 1530s, but at some time in the eighteenth century the pietist revivalist movements, later to become political and economic in nature, began to gain ground among the ordinary peasants and fishermen in all the Nordic countries (Wåhlin 1987). The Lutheran countries secularized faster and produced fewer fundamentalist movements than countries which embraced the Calvinist brand of Protestantism, once the governments in the eighteenth century moved from strict Lutheran intolerant Orthodoxy to enlightened perceptions of state and society.

It is reasonable to assume that the mental and organizational background of the Nordic welfare state is to be found in the traditions and institutions of

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10 In this context it is important to distinguish between Calvinism and Lutheranism. Normally the two are lumped together as Protestantism: see the influential work of Max Weber on the relationship between Capitalism and Protestantism from 1905. Both versions of Protestantism broke with the supranational Catholic Church in the 16th century and share some points of doctrine. But the differences are enormous, in theology as well as in the perception of the relationship between church and state. National churches are a result of Lutheranism – and of the eastern Orthodox version of Christianity, beginning with the establishment of a national church in Greece in 1833 (Clogg 1992, 50).
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the national churches in these overwhelmingly homogeneous Lutheran states (cf. Stenius 1997). In other polities such as Germany and the United States, Lutheran communities form a constituent part. In other cases Lutherans have been subjects of rulers of a different religion, as was the case in Estonia, Latvia and Siebenbürgen in Transylvania. The German political scientist Klaus von Beyme has suggested that:

The evolution of the welfare state in Scandinavia and Germany can also be partly attributed to this Lutheran, state-church way of thinking. In these countries, the Christian-conservative principle of caring that guided charitable works was superseded at an early stage by provision for the basic needs of the population on a collective and state basis. (Beyme 1992, 204)

The links between Lutheran religious traditions and institutions and the rise of the universal welfare state in particular and the political culture in general have not yet been systematically studied, but from a perspective of the history of mentalities it seems a plausible hypothesis (Østergård 2003a). Should the hypothesis be correct, the consequence would be that the political culture in the Nordic societies is the product of secularized Lutheranism rather than democratized socialism.

The origins of the success of Lutheranism may be traced back to three societal features resulting from the peripheral nature of the Nordic societies in the Middle Ages and Early Modern times. As Max Engman has pointed out in an interesting essay on the place of ‘Norden’ in European history, unitary law codes for the whole realm were introduced in Norway in 1274 (not Iceland) and in Sweden (including Finland) around 1350, while Denmark with her three so-called landscape laws of Jutland, Zealand and Scania (Skåne) only got a unitary law in 1683 (Engman 2002, 29). This too was relatively early in a European context, yet the difference in time testifies to the fact that in many ways Denmark always has been closer to the continental pattern of social development than the rest of Norden. This certainly holds true for the other factor Engman identifies as specific, namely the continued political role of free peasants and as a consequence weak feudal structures and very small and insignificant towns.

Though not yet completely understood, an interesting bond seems to exist between the continued domination of small but free groupings of peasants in the clearances in the forests on the northern peripheries and literacy among ordinary people. The further to the north the more widespread
the literacy seems to be a Nordic rule of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a rule which also holds true for the poor peripheries of Iceland and the Faeroe Islands.\textsuperscript{11} It is true that many Icelandic farmers did hand over their valuable medieval manuscripts to Danish civil servants such as Árni Magnússon. He was a native Icelander who lived and worked in Copenhagen and left his vast collections of manuscripts to the University of Copenhagen in 1730, collections that were turned over to Iceland in 1965 only after a heated debate. The reason why the Icelandic owners parted with their manuscripts was not lack of interest or declining literacy, but because they kept copying the manuscripts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, only now on the cheaper material, paper, instead of parchment. This change enabled the owners to sell the older manuscripts to collectors from the continent as interest in this uniquely preserved literary treasure grew.

Literacy, thus seems to have been widespread, and more so the further to the north in the Nordic countries. This trend was not reversed with the introduction of Lutheran Protestantism. On the contrary, literacy now spread to the south into Denmark and northern Germany in particular. That Lutheranism also meant a narrowing of cultural horizons and a stronger German influence among the elites of society only completes the contradictory picture of the specifics of ‘Nordic’ features and social development. Whether Lutheranism was the cause or the result of previously existing factors is not yet clear, but however that may be, it seems impossible to overestimate the importance for the Nordic countries of the Lutheran reformation in the sixteenth century and the subsequent developments of religious movements on the one hand and an enlightened bureaucracy consisting of priests and other theologically trained academics. This Lutheran background goes a long way to explain what the Polish-Norwegian researcher Nina Witoszek has called the ‘pastoral enlightenment’ of Scandinavia.

Yet, as already mentioned, the dominating tradition in comparative welfare state studies is to describe the welfare state in the Nordic countries as a result of particular Nordic features, the so-called ‘Nordic’ or ‘Social Democratic’ model. Until the breakdown of the Communist bloc the model of the ‘Nordic’ welfare state was perceived to represent a third way between the two dominant superpowers and their attendant ideologies (cf. Stråth

\textsuperscript{11} The high level of literacy in Iceland is reported in Agnarsdóttir 204, 81; the early spread of literacy in the Nordic countries has been investigated in a comparative context in a series of detailed studies.
1992 and 1993 for a critical account of the notions of the Swedish ‘*folkhem*’ and of a distinct Nordic model). Interest in a particular Nordic model is no longer dominant among comparative political scientists and historical sociologists, who now concentrate on describing the specific national varieties of capitalism (cf. the analysis of specific institutional features of the Danish version of capitalism by Campbell, Hall and Pedersen 2006).

Models develop when there is a success story to tell. The Scandinavian states only managed to assume importance in their own right in the interwar years; they did not become a model, though, until after World War II when a social democracy developed, thanks to alliances with agrarian groups. This happened in slightly different ways in the different Nordic states, but everywhere the strength of the hegemony of the working classes reflected the weaknesses of the divided middle classes. Such consensus took longer to evolve in Denmark, Norway and Finland than in Sweden. This explains why the Nordic model, much discussed in the social scientific literature of the 1960s and 1970s, in reality was a Swedish model coupled with an integrationist view of society unparalleled in other countries of Europe. As Klaus von Beyme has observed,

> Only in the 1960s, partly thanks to an international project on the smaller European democracies, was the Scandinavian model discovered as a unique product of the North. The Nordic countries certainly lacked the ‘pillarization’ (*verzuiling*) of sub-units of society which, in multi-confessional societies from the Netherlands to Switzerland, resulted in cooperation among élites. The élites of the Scandinavian model cooperated, though some sections of them still clung to a rhetoric of class struggle, and the non-élite, for whom they negotiated a consensus, cooperated in their own way at the grass-roots level. The less strong the aristocracy had been in the history of the country concerned, the more markedly they did so – with Norway as a case in point. (Beyme 1992, 190–91)

Indeed, one may doubt whether a ‘Nordic model’ in the proper sense has ever existed. Scandinavians have never seen themselves as representatives of one consistent and distinctive social model (Christofferson and Hastrup 1983, 3), national differences always having been considered more important. The notion of ‘Norden’ as a conscious Social Democratic alternative to the continental European class struggles between bourgeoisie, workers and peasants first emerged outside Scandinavia with the publication of the American journalist Marquis Childs’s classic work in 1936, bearing the
The trend culminated in the 1980s with Gösta Esping-Andersen’s analyses of the Nordic welfare states as different variations of a parallel Social Democratic strategy (1985). He distinguished between three versions of ‘welfare capitalism’: the social democratic, the liberal and the conservative (Esping-Andersen 1990). The social democratic character of the Nordic welfare state has come under criticism from an American comparative historian of the younger school (Baldwin 1990), while others, as already mentioned, attempt to trace the origins of the Nordic universal welfare state back to the Lutheran version of Protestantism which was introduced by revolutions from above in Denmark and Sweden in the 1530s (Østergård 2003a, Knudsen 2003).

Despite the dubious character of the notion of a specifically Nordic model, it is an indisputable fact that the Nordic countries have experienced a more harmonious process of modernization in the twentieth century than most other countries in Europe. Thanks to the compromises of the 1930s, Norway, Sweden and Denmark proved largely immune to the temptations of the totalitarian ideologies of Nazism, fascism and communism (Lindström 1985). In many ways the Nordic countries still provide shining examples of social order and internal democracy – exemplary not only for the insiders, but also for surprising numbers elsewhere in the world, and with good reason. The Nordic countries, irrespective of the existence of a Nordic model, function more smoothly than the majority of societies. The problem, however, is that a majority in the Nordic countries have embraced the notion to such an extent that they believe in the mythical notion of Nordic unity as a contrast to the rest of Europe. Nordic history and culture, however, represent but one variation of common European patterns and themes, a variation that, due to geopolitical conditions, has resulted in small, nationally homogeneous, socially democratic, Lutheran states. But a variation, nevertheless, of common European themes it is.12 As Klaus von Beyme noted in his illuminating contribution from the early 1990s:

A model’s greatest success is its death. The things of value which it [the Nordic model] incorporated have already spread far afield in various forms – there is no longer a need to ideologize it. The sober and pragmatic approach of most Scandinavians makes them better equipped

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12 These similarities are the recurrent themes in two books of comparative studies of European history that I have published in Danish, Østergård 1992d and 1998.
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to realize this than the people of other nations who once ideologized the Scandinavian model. (Beyme 1992, 209)

The Failure of Nordic Unity

As already noted, ‘Norden’ is far from a given geographical concept: on the contrary, it first had to be created. The foundations for this were laid with the interest of the Enlightenment in the Icelandic scripts that had been collected in the previous centuries. The rise of ‘Old Norse studies’ produced an idea of a Nordic past different from that of the rest of Europe in the early Middle Ages, the so-called ‘Viking age’ (Østergård 1997b, 34–38). As we have seen ‘Norden’ with its present meaning was a result of the Enlightenment’s invention of ‘Eastern Europe’ and the redefinition of Russia from a northern country to a predominantly Slavic member of ‘Eastern Europe’ (Engman 2002, 19).

The political idea of a common Nordic ‘Scandinavia’ first made it out of learned studies into quixotic student and literary circles in the 1830s, providing an occasion for the emptying of a by no means modest number of punchbowls and the singing of innumerable songs, some of which are even remembered to this day. It was at one such gathering in 1842 that the poet-politician Carl Ploug (1813–94) dashed off the words of the unofficial national anthem of Scandinavia, ‘Længe var Nordens herlige stamme’ (‘Long was Norden’s magnificent stem’), containing such memorable turns of phrase as the following:

Norden’s long magnificent stem was divided into three languishing shoots; the might once able to master the world did pork from foreigners’ tables chew. Once more the divided now intertwines, in time to come to be as one. Then shall the free and mighty North lead to victory its peoples’ cause! (Holmberg 1984, 178)

The manifestos indicate that the Pan-Scandinavian movement was a counterpart to the contemporaneous Italian and German national movements, the only difference being that Scandinavianism did not succeed in allying itself with a militarily strong state as was the case in Italy and Germany with Piedmont and Prussia respectively. There were no interests ‘from above’, there was no national unity ‘from below’. Patriotic Danish elements hoped of course that Sweden could and would play the role

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of Piedmont in their attempt to separate Schleswig from Holstein, with whom Sweden for centuries had made common cause both economically, politically and, to a certain extent, culturally. (See Østergård 2005b on the so-called Gottorp state in Schleswig and Holstein.) The fact that Sweden had its hands full in Norway and anyway saw Russia as its primary foe was overlooked.

The unions that took place in Germany and Italy were not to be repeated in Northern Europe for geopolitical reasons, despite a short-lived interest in the idea on the part of Bernadotte's successor on the Swedish throne, Oscar I 1844 - 1859 (Holmberg 1946). Swayed by liberal ideas and calls for revenge against Russia by Scandinavianist student circles, Oscar I was to abandon his father Karl XIV Johan's conciliatory approach towards the great powers. In 1845 at a student's gathering in Lund he recited his poem 'Finland!' with calls for the recapture of the country that had been lost. When, in the spring of 1848, German-oriented Schleswig-Holsteinian nationalists rebelled against the National Liberals' declaration of the complete union of the two duchies with Denmark, Oscar obtained the support of the Swedish Riksdag to send 15,000 troops to the aid of the sister country. 4,000 reached the Danish island of Fyn, the rest were to remain in Skåne.

However, when hostilities recommenced in 1849 Oscar was less inclined to become actively involved, although the Swedish army of 4,000 did occupy North Schleswig during the peace negotiations as keepers of the ceasefire. Oscar's dream was to succeed the weak Frederik VII as king in Denmark and he proposed a defensive alliance with Denmark in spring 1857. Frederik VII, however, declined the offer, sensing perhaps what was afoot. When Denmark later the same year suggested a resumption of negotiations it was too late; Oscar had died and his successor, Karl XV (1826–72) was pursuing a more cautious foreign policy than that of his father (see Linton 1994, 83–84). Denmark was thus forced to stand alone against Prussia and Austria when foolhardy Danish politicians, reneging on international agreements, annexed Schleswig in 1863. The resultant debacle was to mark the end of political Pan-Scandinavianism, a fact that was clearly recognized by the Danish historian Carl Ferdinand Allen (1811–71) when in 1864 he published the first volume of his work De Tre Nordiske Rigers Historie 1497–1536 ('History of the Three Northern Kingdoms 1497–1536'). In the introduction he somewhat disillusionedly wrote:
The reasons for a unified treatment of the history of Norden are, as stated, to be found in the very nature of the said history and the natural bonds that exist between the countries and their peoples. The effects thereof, and their influence upon the individual, may be supported by what are called Scandinavian sympathies. Such support is unnecessary; the historical interest alone will suffice. Indeed, it is fortunate that this is so, for after the bitter experience of our time it would seem that, as the evil spirit of discord in days of old, so in the present the frigid egoism and the narrow-hearted, myopic and heinous spirit of calculation shall prove the curse of the ‘Scandinavian idea’ and quell her with its might when she means to rise. (Allen 1864, II-III)

But why did the unification of the Nordic countries not occur in the Middle Ages or in the early modern period, as was the case in Spain, Britain and France? Actually, this is a question that has long puzzled Danish historians, even if they until recently were too well-bred in pacifism even to raise the question. As the poet Hans Christian Andersen wrote in 1850, Denmark, after all, was ‘once master of all of Norden and ruled over England’. One can only retort that the spirit, certainly, was more than willing. Yet, because of a narrow perspective very few scholars have analysed why the Kalmar Union of 1397 failed when similar unions between Poland and Lithuania in 1386, between Castille and Aragon in 1492 and later in the British Isles succeeded. The United Kingdom began as a personal union of crowns between England (including Wales) and Scotland in 1604 and later developed into a parliamentary union in 1707, which also included Ireland in 1800. It would thus seem relevant to compare developments in the Nordic countries with Spanish, British, Polish and French history (see Kearney 1991). The Danish monarchy tried for long to achieve mastery of the entire Baltic region – ‘dominium Maris Baltici’, as the slogan ran. In order to win a position for themselves in Europe and compensate for their small populations, the relatively poor states of Denmark–Norway and Sweden in the early modern period established, each in her own way, state apparatuses ‘heavier’ and more expensive than was the European norm (Anderson 1974, 173–91). The degree of centralization and the extent of taxation is still evident in the magnificence of the monumental buildings in the two capitals, Copenhagen and Stockholm.

This taxation was later depicted as ‘national oppression’ by self-professed ‘anti-colonialist’ Norwegian, Finnish, Icelandic and Faeroese historians. This, however, was not the case. In reality, if there was a difference, Danish
and Swedish peasants of the core lands were taxed heavier than Norwegians, Icelanders, Faeroese and Greenlanders, not because of benevolence but because the central state was too weak to exercise full influence in the remoter parts of the vast and thinly populated empire. Denmark had long been the most populous of the three monarchies, and its efforts to achieve sole supremacy only failed because the Danish nobility prior to its defeat in 1660 refused to accept a strong monarchy. On the other hand, the transnational nobility with landed estates in all the countries failed in its attempts to establish an aristocratic republic under elected kings, as happened at the same time in Poland–Lithuania. As a result of the power struggle between aristocracy and monarchy in Denmark, Sweden took the lead and established hegemony over most of Northern Europe between 1645 and 1709. The main reason Denmark survived as a state between 1658 and 1660 was the intervention of the great powers of the day. The Dutch came to the aid of Denmark in 1659, just as Britain and Russia later were to support Denmark for fear of facing a single power at the entrance to the Baltic through Øresund.

**From Scandinavianism to the Nordic Council**

The Pan-Scandinavian movement underwent a complete transformation in the 1860s. Sweden and Norway kept a low profile towards both the united Germany and the recently consolidated Russian Empire following the humiliations of the Crimean War of 1854–1856. The high-political vision of political Pan-Scandinavianism was superseded by cultural collaboration at the level of civil society. Interestingly, this activity was to a large extent carried on by the same Scandinavianist students who now as graduates were able to collaborate by virtue of the positions they held as public servants, teachers and artists. Scientists, lawyers, engineers, educationalists, painters and writers were all able to maintain connections at Nordic meetings and through Scandinavian journals. These networks functioned more efficiently and were far more effective than the former Romantic political visions, precisely because of the limited, realistic goals they now set.13

13 See Hemstad 2004 for a comprehensive and up to date analysis of these undertakings. She periodizes the development of Scandinavian collaboration in the 19th century and stresses what she calls the ‘Indian Summer’ of Scandinavianism from the 1890s to 1905. But she also stresses the delaying effects of the breakup of the union between Norway and Sweden. Many of the initiatives first got under way again after the experiences of World War I, the only exception being the inter-parliamentary meetings which began in 1907 (under considerable resistance from Sweden) and eventually led to the Nordic Council in 1952 (Larsen 1984).
On the whole, Scandinavian collaboration was able to thrive without the help of public subsidy or encouragement. This was true of the artists’ colony at Skagen as well as of the modern literary breakthrough led by the brothers Georg and Edvard Brandes, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg. Despite the innumerable toasts in celebration of the ‘true’ Nordic folk whose instincts these artists naively claimed to understand. The motifs chosen by the so-called ‘Skagen painters’ of the late nineteenth century bear witness to just how great the gulf was between the sophisticated, urbane avant-garde and the hard-working ‘primitive’ fishing communities they portrayed. What really happened was a cultural and economic ‘colonization’ of Jutland in order to compensate for the loss of Schleswig-Holstein in 1864, a process which at the time was presented under the more positive slogan ‘Outward losses must be made up for by inward gains’ (‘Hvad udad tabtes skal indad vindes’, see Frandsen 1996). Cultural modernism merged with political thought and became, under the name of ‘cultural radicalism’, an independent Nordic ideological phenomenon that was to pave the way for a quite particular development at the social level in the twentieth century (Löfgren 1991, Nilsson 1994). The many artistic bonds paved the way for a flourishing cultural journalism in a rapidly expanding press and led to the establishment of a Nordic literary market.

Alongside these purely cultural Nordic circles flourished more unassuming, popular movements. The Danish folk high school movement established by Grundtvig quickly spread to the other Nordic countries via high school gatherings in Norway and Sweden. Similarly, regular educational conferences were held by teachers at the Nordic level from the mid-1870s (Backholm 1994). Interesting, too, in this connection are the efforts, fruitless though they proved, of Nordic philologists to establish a common written language as early as in the 1860s. Outside of this cultural core area may be registered an active policy of cooperation at the economic level, leading to the adoption of a common monetary union on 18 December 1872. Parallel to this collaboration were the Nordic conferences of the legal profession, which among other things resulted in the elaboration of joint stock company legislation that helped establish a larger home market for the emerging Scandinavian industries. The most spectacular result of the cooperation, however, was the series of Nordic industrial, agricultural and art exhibitions that were held, first in Copenhagen in 1872 and 1888, and later in Stockholm in 1893 and Malmö in 1914 (Hvidt 1994).
During and following World War I, cooperation was extended to include a variety of areas, gradually taking on the character of a popular movement. The series of meetings between the three Nordic kings before 1914 received much popular attention at the time. While these were not to have any long-term effects, the opposite was true of the personal connections that were established as a consequence of the collaboration between parliamentarians within the union of Nordic parliamentarians. Operating from 1907 until 1955, the union prepared the way for the Nordic Council, which was set up in 1952 and crowned by the admission of Finland in 1955 (Larsen 1984). At the same time close political ties were established between the labour movements and Social Democratic parties in the Nordic countries. Cooperation among the socialist movements was much helped by the fact that they all were deeply influenced by the socialists in Germany. Many of the influential Nordic Social Democrats received their fundamental training at workers’ high schools in Germany and had German as their first and normally only foreign language.

An Association for Nordic Unity (’Foreningerne Norden’) was set up in 1919 and soon grew in membership. Finland joined in 1924. In the 1930s this organization became the largest cross-national popular organization in the Nordic countries because of fear of the totalitarian regimes in Germany and the Soviet Union. Regardless of the transnational character of the cooperation, it is important to understand that Nordic cooperation is a consequence of the nation-states rather than their alternative. The Association for Nordic Unity was established in 1919, i.e. after Norway had gained its independence in 1905, Finland her independence in 1917 and Iceland in 1918. Thus, respect for an inviolable national sovereignty was the basis for cooperation across the national boundaries at popular level as well as at state level. Hence the particular character of Nordic cooperation. It is successful at grassroots level precisely because it abstains from interfering in the high politics of economics, security matters and external affairs but concentrates on matters of civil society. This even holds true for the the Nordic Council which, as the former Norwegian Minister for Nordic Cooperation, Bjarne Mörk Eidem, rather pointedly once put it, almost is to be understood as an ‘executive organ of the Association for Nordic Unity’.

This characterization, however, also provides us with a definition of what the Nordic Council is not. It is not a government, but a supplement to the national parliaments, providing advice and posing critical – and thereby often annoying – questions across national boundaries to the governments and bureaucracies. The fact that parliamentarians of one country here
are able to pose questions to the ministers of another is quite unique in international affairs. At the same time, the cross-national nature of the activity explains why Nordic unity can never become supranational or be formalized as international legislation as we know it in the European Union. Sadly, this unique character of Nordic cooperation has gradually eroded as a consequence of the creation of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1971. The Council of Ministers is a far more traditional form of state cooperation between governments and bureaucracies (Wendt 1981, Tønnesson 2002). In order to tackle an increasing internationalization the two cooperative organizations have now fused into one, in deference to an “effectivization” that is better achieved within the stronger European community, anyway. Thus, many of the unique features of Nordic cooperation rooted in the particular combination of grass-roots cooperation based on respect for the sovereignty of the nation-states have disappeared over the last decades.

Conclusion

The nation-states of today, then, are the configurations through which the common Nordic identity manifests itself. As these nations have achieved the recognition of the surrounding world, so too have they come to appear as ‘natural’ entities. But although Danes and Swedes have difficulty appreciating it (see Stein Tønnesson’s impressions from a Nordic conference on national identity held on the Faeroe Islands, Tønnesson 1989), this has far from always been the case. These two nationalities today administer the legacy of two multinational empires, which for centuries contended for supremacy in Northern Europe. Or rather, the two states do not administer this legacy, but act, on the strength of their long, unbroken history, as though they nevertheless possess a natural right to their independent existence. This is to a much lesser extent true of the other Nordic countries, which for periods have been subject to Swedish and Danish rule respectively. Hence the insecurity that until recently made Norwegians, Finlanders and Icelanders assertively emphasize their national character, to the mild astonishment of the Danes and Swedes confronted with what to them looked like aggressive nationalism.

Today, in the early twenty-first century, it is so long ago that one nation ruled another that Scandinavians freely converse on an equal footing – even the Faeroese and the Greenlanders in their dealings with Denmark and the Danes. If anything, though, this makes it even more important to remember the difficult, and far from inevitable, genesis of the sovereign Nordic states.
The active entities are states and nations, not a diffuse Nordic identity. Regardless of the widespread opposition to the supra-national cooperation in the European Union, the political cultures of these states ought to be compatible with a European Union where national identity in reality has been strengthened by the exercising of sovereignty in common (Østergård 2004a and 2008c and d).

The Nordic countries of today all share a Lutheran monarchical heritage, even if Finland and Iceland formally are republics (Stenius 1997 and Østergård 2011d). This common heritage is demonstrated by the Christian cross in eight of the nine national flags of the Nordic countries. The peripheral position of the countries with regard to Europe has made it possible to realize democratic potentials that less fortunate smaller nations such as the Czechs have experienced more difficulty realizing (Hroch 1996). But this fortunate history owes much less to homespun ‘Nordic’ merits than normally assumed. The primary reason lies in the optimal geographical situation of the Nordic countries with regard to foreign policy as well as in relation to both economy and communications. The Nordic countries were in various ways useful as suppliers of raw materials to the industrial centres and have moreover been able to profit from a favourable relationship between low transportation costs and high manufacturing costs in the world economy. It was this stroke of cyclical good fortune that rendered the welfare states possible, despite unfavourable climatic conditions.

The Nordic countries, then, happened to be in the right place at the right time. To the extent that this is no longer the case, it will become increasingly difficult to live on the Nordic myths and copious outpourings of yesteryear. Much would seem to indicate that the Baltic is about to regain its former position as the economic and civilizing pivot of Northern Europe as a region in a united Europe. To the extent this occurs, it will prove difficult to bridge the gap between the Atlantic, sea-facing Norden on the one hand and the land-based, Baltic Norden on the other. The Norwegian ethnologist, Brit Berggren, once stressed this important constant in the mental geography of the Nordic peoples in a contribution to a collection of essays on Nordic identity (Berggren 1992). The historical lesson is that there are no objective laws binding the people of Norden. There is no common, manifest destiny. But there is a historical and cultural raw material of traditions and discourses on which such an identity may be built. Providing, of course, that this is what the Nordic peoples want.
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No grand economic or geopolitical laws are at work that provide room for active political and cultural choices. In a cooperating Europe it is important to maintain the strengths embodied in the civil society of the Nordic societies. Such respect for national differences and sovereignty is the basis of Nordic political culture, though it does not amount to much more than an ideal and a discourse. Respect for these specific traditions might even help bridge the gap between elites and voters in the rest of the European Union, running the risk of diluting the ‘Nordic’ principles to what they have probably been all along, namely variations of general European principles.

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Part 4

Looking Ahead: Next Steps for the Nordic–Northeast Asian Research Network
Afterword

Looking Ahead: Next Steps for the Nordic–Northeast Asian Research Network

Ras Tind Nielsen and Geir Helgesen

As the preceding chapters have shown, there is much to be learned from an on-going conversation between scholars studying the East and scholars studying the West. Stein Kuhnle points to this in Chapter 4, when he concludes that ‘The challenges of social inequality, new social divisions of welfare, population ageing, changing labour markets and family structures, migration, and globalization are common to both the Nordic countries and East Asian countries.’ Moreover, current thinking about important questions related to international relations, political cooperation and international conflict management could benefit from a closer dialogue between the East and the West. Recent serious global problems with regard to energy security, climate change, international finance, security and social stability need to be addressed in order to find balanced and sustainable solutions. In a world that is in a process of rapid globalization we are now more interconnected and interdependent than ever before in history. Researchers from both the Nordic and Northeast Asian regions therefore have every reason to turn to each other for ideas and inspiration.

Nordic ways of organizing society; maintaining high educational standards; promoting gender equality; universal welfare including health care; a flexible labour market; financing housing; and raising the quality of life for people at large now attract the interest of colleagues from Northeast Asia. Northeast Asian ways of maintaining high and steady growth rates; inventing new technologies; building efficient infrastructure; government playing a flexible role in the private sector now inspire the research of Nordic scholars. This corresponding growing mutual interest in Nordic and Northeast Asian affairs offers a new possibility of strengthening comparative studies in the
Researchers studying Asia have a long tradition of working together, and over the years they have established numerous networks and associations and shared insights and experiences with each other. The same has been the case with researchers studying the Nordic countries. And certainly it is only natural and productive for researchers to group together around a certain field of research or interest. What is added in this research network, however, and what is quite novel, is to bring together Nordic and Northeast Asian researchers, both those who study Nordic countries and those who study Northeast Asian countries. In this way Northeast Asia is no longer only perceived, studied and analysed in the eyes of people who usually study Northeast Asia, nor is the Nordic region analysed only by Nordic region researchers. By bringing together ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ new perspectives are added to our common pool of knowledge, new insights are shared and the questions we tend to take for granted or ignore, because we might think they are not relevant, are asked.

The Iceland Meeting August 2011

Over 22–24 August 2011, the Nordic–Northeast Asian research network held a third meeting at the University of Iceland in Reykjavik under the title ‘The Third EurAsia Network Symposium’. The theme of the symposium was ‘Harmony as a historical, philosophical and socio-political theme’ and twenty scholars from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of Korea and Sweden were represented. Each participating scholar gave a talk on a subject related to the overall theme of harmony and presented a topical or comparative perspective on the issue in question. A wide range of questions were considered such as: what are the concepts and traditions of harmony in the East and the West; what constitutes a harmonious society and what role does social welfare play in this; and how does harmony fit in international relations, cultural diplomacy, and democracy building?

On the last day of the conference a roundtable was held to sum up and plan further activities within the network. A number of themes were defined to serve as the basis for further research within the network. These are the currently suggested topics for further exploration:
Nordic notions of welfare in an historical perspective. Lessons to be learned for Northeast Asia?
Quality of life in a cross-cultural perspective. Nordic and Northeast Asian experiences.
Nation states, regional cooperation and globalization. Nordic and Northeast Asian responses to new challenges.
Traditional cultural norms in a global context. Hindrance for development or safety net against post-modern normlessness?
Peaceful cooperation the Nordic way. A model for Northeast Asian regionalism?

Lastly, the network initiator and Director of NIAS, Geir Helgesen, asked the participants to commit themselves to continue their good work in the network. The hope is to stimulate concrete research activities between members of the network on one or more of the above-suggested topics.

The Next Phases of the Nordic–Northeast Asian Research Network

We believe that the Nordic–Northeast Asian research network has already come a long way since the first meeting was held in Copenhagen in July 2010. In the initial phase one particularly important issue has been to ‘get acquainted’, both professionally and on a person to person level. It is well known that teamwork can be as difficult as it is rewarding, and often both at the same time. To succeed in a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary project, it is necessary to develop a reservoir of human capital, of mutual understanding, and not least a fundamental acceptance of existing differences. This is not an easy task, bearing in mind that the group of researchers represent different disciplines, different academic training as well as different cultural traditions. Nonetheless the network has grown in terms of size, closer relations, and quality.

The first period of building the research network has been rewarding and the next phase is now under preparation. While the point of departure for the network hitherto has been the different research projects conducted by its members, the ambition is now to formulate a common research project that will involve most of the network members in one way or another.
The network participants have agreed that one main current challenge for Europe as well as for Asia is a basic lack of mutual understanding. Despite ever closer relations and a fast growing number of links between the two regions, practical cooperation between us is still often a grope in the dark, and is characterized by a trial and error process. Although the long-term prospects are bright, as one usually learns from every mistake, we believe that the learning process should be critically observed and analysed in order to explore different and better ways to interact across cultures. We believe that the learning process could be shortened, and some errors avoided, if cross-cultural research with a focus on certain important themes in the East–West relationship were prioritized. Hence we have developed a project application called *The Promise and Challenge of Eurasia: Cultural Interactions in Ideas, Society and Politics.*

The concept ‘EurAsia’ illuminates a new reality where the importance of geographical distance and political difference diminishes while a new relationship between Europe and Asia is under construction. The economic growth in Asia renders the region important to Europe, as it is part of the changing geopolitical landscape we belong to. Novel in this and not yet properly addressed is that East and West are based in quite divergent socio-cultural settings that characterize the way people live their lives and understand the world. The dangers of international misunderstanding are well documented in world history, from ancient times to our present situation. How both sides in the East–West relationship react to and relate to each other and to the incipient new world order will influence the formation of that very order. A major challenge is that our economic and technical abilities far outperform our abilities to grasp and understand each other in an increasingly inter-connected world, and worse, that this discrepancy between our ability to act versus our ability to understand very often is disregarded, or even dismissed as irrelevant.

While Europe has been dealing with Asia in Asia on many levels for centuries, Asia has been less focused on Europe. For a long period in the post World War II era the West, from an Asian perspective, was the United States of America. This attitude is changing and there is a growing interest among Asian scholars to study European ideas and societal solutions. Experience during the last twenty years has, with increasing clarity, revealed an interest in Asia not only for European solutions, but within Europe the Nordic region has often been singled out as being of particular interest due to a balanced political-economic system with a strong state and yet a vibrant
market economy. The Nordic welfare project has particularly attracted world-wide interest, and with growing economic strength Northeast Asia has increased its interest in the Nordic region. The present research project takes advantage of this shift and aims at developing a common knowledge base of cross-cultural understanding. Understanding promotes trust, which is of major importance whether the challenges come from climate change, financial turbulence, security threats or other global imbalances with an inherent conflict potential.

The research project involves empirical studies in intercultural communication, knowledge transfer and identity, as well as intercultural cognition studies in laboratory settings. It also deals with the impact of culture on internal socio-political developments, and on the making of foreign policy within and across regions. By doing this in a Eurasian setting, we strive to promote a common understanding which includes a mutual acceptance of unavoidable differences. In other words, we do not see the development of a homogeneous culture as a realistic goal, or even as a desirable one. Differences may, when we have learned to understand and accept them, make up *a creative force* that is necessary in order to come up with new and sustainable solutions to urgent global problems.

Globalization has clearly enabled new forms of interaction but at the same time brought new and serious challenges, and the one we will be addressing in our research project is cross-cultural understanding. Although globalization renders it normal to interact in cross-cultural settings one can no longer assume universal meanings in business, politics, education and other spheres, even if expressed in a common language. The project we have developed proposes that the universal now urgently needs to be situated in the multiple and that reconsideration must be given to how we approach and deal with the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in cross-cultural settings. Our goal is to study the interactions now commonplace in Asian and European societies with the central aim of facilitating cross-cultural understanding and hence improving relations between key actors and institutions. A further aim is to bring greater awareness of the importance of recognizing, acknowledging and accepting *the significance of difference*, as well as of being able to respond constructively to this in behaviour and understanding. To advance this, we propose the establishment of interdisciplinary comparative research via partnerships between social science scholars in Europe and Asia.

The project thus focuses on the similarities and differences in human relations in and across Northern Europe and Asia, with the assumption that
difference is a fact of life that needs to be identified, acknowledged and not least appreciated before the opportunities of international cooperation can be fully utilized. We propose that these differences are primarily rooted in culture and it is through this lens that the project filters its analysis. The project recognizes culture as something not only embodied, enacted or behaved by one person or group as it evolves but also as something perceived and interpreted by another person or group; it does not travel down a one-way street. Studies will be conducted that pertain to individuals, societies and institutions, and will cross the disciplines of economics, political science, social policy, sociology, social psychology, social linguistics and philosophy. The project is divided into separate yet interconnected themes.

The research group has decided to focus on four research themes that will each be dealt with by an inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary research team:

(1) One theme is group status and intercultural relations. It highlights the significance of recognizing the ‘self’ when confronted with the ‘other’ by studying the impact of group status on intercultural communication under laboratory conditions. Whether differences in appearance and behaviour between groups are enhancing antagonisms and differences in the way people respond to one another will be investigated.

(2) Another theme is intercultural communication, knowledge transfer and identity. Globalization brings with it a range of organizational, social and political processes that internationalize organizations, universities, corporations, knowledge and people themselves. Increasingly, these processes force individuals and institutions to engage in new situations where intercultural communication is a necessity. Intercultural communication processes, cultural identity formation and knowledge transfers between individuals and organizations in Asia and Northern Europe will be explored.

(3) A third theme is culture in welfare ideas and practices. Societies in both the East and the West need to develop new welfare arrangements and practices to suit increasingly diverse populations. Major social challenges in both East and West are the consequences of financial insecurity, growing inequality, population ageing, urbanization, migration and climate change. By way of this theme it will be explored to what extent culture can explain the development of different types of welfare states.
and welfare practices, and how welfare expectations differ between Northern European and Asian countries.

(4) The fourth theme covers the impact of culture on foreign policy. This is a comparatively new theme as foreign policy is seen as chiefly influenced by economic and security considerations. Our assumption, supported by a growing number of cases, is that foreign policy is influenced by many other factors – not least the dominant values in the national political culture, and perceptions of cultural affinity or estrangement. In order to explain the presence of long-term peace, different modes of regional cooperation, and the varying diplomatic practices across Northern Europe and Asia, the cultural and institutional settings of these phenomena will be critically explored.

Much of the research on Asia–Europe relations to date has dealt with security and economic relations based in the political and economic disciplines, while there has been little focus on cultural relations based in the ‘softer’ disciplines of the social sciences, which is where this project fills a gap. Our project is strategic in that it opens a new avenue for the future development of studies of Asia–Europe relations across disciplines.
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