

Received September 5, 2016

Revised November 6, 2016

Accepted November 30, 2016

## **East Asian Authoritarian Modernism: From Meiji Japan's "Prussian Path" to China's "Singapore Model"**

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The significance of Meiji Japan's "Prussian path" to authoritarian modernity has largely been ignored in the social sciences because it contradicts prevailing modernization theory. Meiji Japanese reformers, after carefully examining several Western country's political systems, chose the German model because of its illiberal but modern politics. This argument regarding the authoritarian modernity of Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan contradicts modernization theory which claims that advanced industrialization leads to liberal democracy. Similarly, Meiji Japan's influence on the "developmental states" of East Asia (East and Southeast Asia) has not been given much weight by modernization theories. More recently, Singapore's successful combination of non-democratic rule with advanced capitalism has been dismissed as a (literally) small exception to the general democratizing rule, with even autocratic China expected by modernization theorists to democratize soon given its rapid economic growth over the past generation. This article explores the impact of the Imperial German model of authoritarian modernism on Meiji Japan and, in turn, Japanese influence on political development in East Asia as well as the influence of the "Singapore model" on China. It explores three forms of linkages: social structural, state formational, and ideological.

*Keywords:* East Asia, Authoritarianism, Modernization  
Theory, Meiji Japan, "Singapore Model"

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DOI: 10.16934/isr.17.2.201612.125

## I. INTRODUCTION

The significance of Meiji Japan's "Prussian path" to authoritarian modernity has largely been ignored in the social sciences because it contradicts prevailing modernization theory. Barrington Moore, Jr. (1966) argued that Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan pursued an elite-led, authoritarian "revolution from above" that resulted in fascism. These similarities between Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan were not coincidental but rather the product of political learning. Meiji Japanese reformers, after carefully examining several Western country's political systems, chose the German model because of its illiberal but modern politics (Pyle 1974; Martin 1987; Lehmbruch 2001). This argument regarding the authoritarian modernity of Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan contradicts modernization theory which claims that advanced industrialization leads to liberal democracy. This theory is still very much alive despite repeated efforts to refute it (Knöbl 2003; Przeworski and Limongi, 1997; Thompson 1996). The historical frame of reference of modernization theorists is strongly influenced by the examples of Britain and the U.S. which both industrialized and democratized, with the former clearly influencing the political trajectory of its former colony. That Germany and Japan successfully pursued an authoritarian "path to the modern world"-with the latter modeling itself on the former-in which industrialization did not lead to democratization, has often been overlooked.

A classic example of holding to modernization theory despite historical counterexamples is Seymour Martin Lipset's *Political Man* (1959). In the early part of the book, Lipset stresses that the chances of consolidating democracy improve with higher rates of economic development. Later in the book, however, he explores why the middle class that arises in the course of modernization can come to favor fascism. But he does not explore what implications of the attraction of fascism for the middle class in Germany, Italy and elsewhere might have for the validity of modernization theory. Lipset remained a "high priest" of modernization theory despite the fact that his own findings appeared to contradict it.

More recently, Singapore's successful combination of non-democratic rule with advanced capitalism has been dismissed as a (literally) small exception to the general democratizing rule, with autocratic China expected by modernization theorists to democratize soon given its rapid economic growth (Pei 1995; Rowen 1996 and 2007; Diamond 2012; Liu and Chen 2012). Singapore is the proverbial "red dot" on the map (Ho 2015), allowing modernization theorists to use its small size as an ad hoc explanation of its continued non-democratic rule. Singapore's prime minister is little more than "a lord mayor with sovereign powers" (Lam 1999, 261). But statistical analysis shows "small is democratic": compared globally small countries are more likely to be democratic than large ones (Dahl and Tufte 1973 and Ott 2000). In his comparison with Hong Kong, Stephan Ortmann (2010)

analyzes how Hong Kong emerged as a much more liberal (if still undemocratic due to the absence of universal suffrage) territory than Singapore, despite it being a colony longer (both of Britain and, at least according to the emotional sense of many Hong Kongers, under mainland China today). That Singapore is small does not diminish the importance of its authoritarian exceptionalism.

Similarly, the diffusion of authoritarian developmentalism from Japan to South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore is also widely known but not considered theoretically relevant (an important exception is Cumings 1984). Meiji Japan's influence on the "developmental states" of East Asia (East and Southeast Asia) has not been given much weight by modernization theories. In a recent exposition of modernization theory focused on East Asia (Morley 1993), it is argued that economic growth "drove" the democratization of both South Korea and Taiwan. But this ignores the authoritarian strategy of both South Korea and Taiwan which imitated the Meiji formula of "development from above" while repressing popular participation from below (Kohli 1999 and Suehiro 2008). *Driven by Growth* also attempts to dismiss the importance of a highly advanced country (with ad hoc explanations not related to modernization) that has not undergone a transition to liberal democracy: Singapore. Singapore is also an important case in which the democratic legacy of British rule was rejected in favor of illiberal rule influenced by Meiji Japan. Singapore, in turn, has become a model for China as a guide to authoritarian persistence during and after economic modernization (Ortmann and Thompson 2014, 2016).

This article explores the impact of the Imperial German model of authoritarian modernism on Meiji Japan and, in turn, Japanese influence on political development in East Asia, with an additional focus on the influence of the "Singapore model" on China. It explores three forms of linkages: social structural, state formational, and ideological. The social structural analysis takes Moore's examination of the parallels between Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan as its starting point. It is argued that a "progressive" section of the elite launched an authoritarian industrialization drive in several East Asian countries. Furthermore, it is suggested that these systems have been "labor repressive" in nature and have created a dependent group of industrialists. But it is argued that these similarities are not accidental because Imperial Germany influenced Meiji Japan which in turn had a strong impact on much of the rest of East Asia, particularly Singapore and, via this Southeast Asian city-state, on China.

In the next section, the role of the state in Meiji Japan's rapid industrialization is considered. Japan can be understood as a "late developer" in the sense that Alexander Gerschenkron used the term for his European cases and which Henry Rosovsky later applied to Japan (Gerschenkron, 1962; Rosovsky, 1966). There were important differences among the "late developers" Germany and Japan, and so too are there variations between Japan's "developmental state" as originally

analyzed by Johnson (1982) and the (even later) industrializing states in the rest of East Asia. But I will argue a general “model” of authoritarian modernism has persisted in the region and that the very idea of “East Asia” originated largely through the spread of such developmentalist regimes.

In the final section I suggest that a key similarity among developmentalist dictatorships in East Asia is their culturalist-based authoritarian ideology. The ideological attack against “Western democracy” echoes the Imperial German critique of Western civilization. This culturalist strategy of immunizing their societies against pro-democratic ideas and movements was widely diffused throughout East Asia, most recently in China which was again influenced by Singapore and its leadership’s appeal to “Asian values.”

## **II. SOCIAL STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS**

Moore speaks of a “capitalist and reactionary” route to the modern world shared by Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan (Moore 1966, chp. 8). In both Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan a “progressive” section of the elite launched an authoritarian industrialization drive while at the same time repressing workers, coopting the middle class, and creating a group of dependent industrialists. Moore stresses the importance of leadership among modernizing conservatives, which he exercised by Bismarck in Germany and the Meiji reformers in Japan. The situation in post-Mao China was similar in that revisionist leaders took over the regime, detached themselves from the rest of society and launched a “conservative version of modernization” to use Moore’s phrase (*ibid*, 252). On the one hand, in order to “catch up” with other earlier industrializers, modernization had to be promoted despite the resistance of more “backward” members of the elite who resented the loss of privileges and discontinuities that industrialization brought with it. Moore memorably describes the *déclassé* samurai who opposed the Meiji reforms as a “lumpenaristocracy” (*ibid*, 236). In China, Deng had to face down orthodox communists who opposed further market-based changes. On the other hand, Moore points out that authoritarian developmentalists had to fend off liberal challenges to their authoritarian rule (*ibid*, 253). In Japan, the Meiji reformers faced a growing popular pressure in the early 1880s from the Freedom and People’s Movement calling for civil liberties and universal suffrage (Sims 2001, 58-65). In China, the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests represented the high point of nearly a decade of intellectual and student-led protests calling for greater pluralism in China (Zhao 2001, part 1).

The second relevant point of Moore’s analysis is his focus on the repression of peasants in the modernization process in Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan. If we extend his concept of “labor repressive” rule to industrial workers, its relevance becomes obvious in East Asia. The work of Frederic Deyo (1987) has stressed the

importance of the repression of organized labor in the export-oriented authoritarian developmental model that has become widespread throughout East Asia. Because regional development has emphasized exporting labor-intensive industrial manufactured goods on the world market, wages have to be strictly controlled in order to be competitive in the earlier stages of industrial production. Authoritarian regimes throughout East Asia have done this with strict regulations on organized labor. Organized labor was repressed, its leaders jailed, and state-corporatist unions put in their place. The Chinese regime had a particularly “easy” time repressing labor as the All-China Federation of Labor did not engage in collective bargaining but rather promoted production and enforced labor discipline. Although in the post-Maoist period there have been numerous labor protests, with workers being a significant contingent in the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations (Wang 1993) and “wildcat” strikes, on the whole China remains a “labor-repressive” regime with the party subjecting workers to strict supervision. China’s export orientated industrialization and its reliance on foreign direct investment led it to change but not liberalize its labor laws to be a more effective competitor in global capitalism, again challenging the assumption that economic transformation will lead to democratic change (Gallagher 2007). Labor repression in East Asia provides an additional explanation for the authoritarian character of regimes in the region.

While workers were demobilized, capitalists were made economically dependent on the authoritarian state. The state could dominate industrialists because they lacked an independent power base. They were either dependent upon state subsidies or vulnerable to state sanctions/blackmail (and often a combination of both). This corresponds roughly to Moore’s argument about the lack of independence of the “merchant class” in Meiji Japan. This helps explain why, in Moore’s terms, the rise of a bourgeoisie did not result in democratization. Moore’s famous phrase “no bourgeois, no democracy” is based on the idea of an economically and politically independent bourgeoisie. The dependence of the bourgeoisie in Meiji Japan on the state parallels that lack of independence of leading industrialists in much of East Asia today. In studies of China, the rise of “red” capitalists has received much attention (Dickson 2003, 2008). Although they enjoyed growing economic power, due to their close links to the party-state, these crony capitalists did not challenge the regime. The rise of industrialists to economic power is not matched by political power. Moore has said famously in this context that the bourgeoisie in Germany exchanged “the right to rule with the right to make money.” This is another reason to be skeptical of the modernizationist claim that industrialization inevitably results in democratization.

Yet, modernization theorists might well point to a group neglected by Moore in his analysis—the middle class—is chiefly responsible for democratization during an industrial drive. Such an argument has become influential in the study of the politics of East Asia, particularly regarding the democratic transitions in South

Korea and Taiwan, beginning in the second half of the 1980s (see Morley 1993; Laothamatas 1997). It is often asserted that the large middle class that arose in these two countries in the wake of rapid economic growth was the chief actor that led to democratization. Putting aside the issue of whether social classes can be political actors (for a skeptical view, see Przeworski 1986) and whether other explanations are not more plausible (such as international pressures, particularly from the U.S.), there are other cases in the region that do not “fit” this explanation. Despite the rise of a proportionally large middle class in Singapore and Malaysia, both countries remain exceptions to the “rule” that wealth leads to democracy (Thompson 1997). Some scholars have pointed to the middle class’s often illiberal attitudes toward politics in East Asia (Bell et al. 1995). More generally, it has been argued that in historical perspective (Weimar, Chile under Allende, etc.) the middle class often has an ambivalent, if not downright hostile, attitude to democracy (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). Despite the rise of the middle class during economic development, authoritarianism remains a possible “path to the modern world.”

But the parallels Moore draws between authoritarian modernizers in Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan were not coincidental. The historian Bernd Martin (1987, chp. 2) shows that after examining various Western models the Meiji-leadership decided to take the German “path to the modern world.” The famous Iwakura mission of leading Meiji oligarchs learned key “lessons” from their two-year world tour (1871-1873), first to North America and then to Europe. In 1873, this Meiji-government delegation met with German Chancellor Bismarck. A year later the Japanese finance minister was present at the opening of the Imperial German *Reichstag*. After coming to understand how different the paths to modernization among Western countries had been (Takii 2014, 37), the influential Meiji leader (and later Prime Minister) Ito Hirobumi had become a staunch advocate of the “Prussian model” (Martin 1995, 19). Ito was impressed by the strength of the monarchy at the cost of parliamentary power in Germany, as well as by the strong position of the bureaucracy and military, characteristics that later found their way into the Japanese constitution. The draft of the 1889 constitution was written by a Prussian jurist, Herman Roesler.

Similarly, China’s interest in Singapore can be traced back to Deng’s visit to Singapore in 1978 but it became central to regime efforts to legitimize authoritarian rule after the Tiananmen Square massacre. Despite being a tiny city-state, China remains obsessed with Singapore as no other country in the region has managed to achieve advanced economic industrialisation without experiencing substantial political liberalisation (Ho 2015; Ortmann and Thompson 2014; Zheng 2010). The key “lesson” China is trying to learn is the combination of authoritarian rule with “good governance” (meritocratic one-party rule). This fits well with Xi Jinping’s so-called “Four Comprehensives” which seeks to develop a “moderately prosperous society” while strengthening economic reforms, rule by law and

party discipline.

Deng's historic tour of the southern Special Economic Zones in 1992 was also the point at which "Singapore fever" was spread by his comment that China could learn from Singapore in order to eventually surpass it (Cartier 2011, 210). This "Learn from Singapore" campaign triggered intense interest in Singapore's governance model among Chinese academics and officials. Dozens of books and thousands of academic papers have been published over the past quarter of a century, with about a thousand more being added every year. Since 1990, more than 22,000 Chinese central and local-level officials came to the city-state to explore various aspects of national and local governance, visiting nearly every ministry, government department, and statutory board. Nanyang Technological University has even created a programme in public administration specially tailored to Chinese officials, which has been dubbed the [Chinese] "mayors' class" (Ortmann and Thompson 2014). Many Chinese scholars and officials who have visited the island nation have addressed the issue of how Singapore has successfully resisted democratising, despite the pressures of modernisation. For instance, Nanjing University history professor Lu Zhengtao argued in *Singapore-Modernization under Authoritarianism (Xinjiapo Weiquan Zhengzhi Yanjiu)* that the Southeast Asian city-state demonstrates that countries can successfully modernise under authoritarian rule and that the Chinese Communist Party can successfully follow this example (Lu 2007).

### III. STATE FORMATION AND THE ADVANTAGES OF "BACKWARDNESS"

In his classic study of economic "backwardness," Alexander Gerschenkron argues that the "development of a backward country may, by the very nature of its backwardness, tend to differ fundamentally from an advanced country" (Gerschenkron 1962, 7). In particular, he argues that the more backward a country is before it industrializes, the more organized capitalism becomes. In the case of Imperial Germany, universal banks played a crucial role in industrialization. By contrast, in Great Britain, the first country to industrialize, banks did not play a significant role in long-term industrial investment. The universal banks of Germany "accompanied an industrial enterprise from the cradle to the grave, from the establishment to liquidation throughout the vicissitudes of its existence" (ibid, 14). Oligarchic industrial branches were established as banks limited competition among their "children." Bank-led development in Imperial Germany proceeded much faster than the earlier laissez-faire capitalism of Great Britain.

Meiji Japan clearly falls into Gerschenkron's next phase of late industrialization. As in Russia, the state played the dominant role in the industrialization of Japan in the late nineteenth century. Meiji Japan, like Imperial Russia, not only industrialized later than the already "late" industrializing Imperial Germany, it was

also had a more “backward” economy to begin with

(ibid, 16-17; Rosovsky 1966, 93-112). Meiji Japan can be seen as the classic case of state-led capitalist development (more so than Imperial Russia, whose capitalist economic system was ultimately overthrown in the October Revolution). Japanese reformers created a bureaucratically-rational state that transformed society by intervening actively in the economy to increase agricultural productivity, launch industrial activity, and train the manpower needed for these efforts.

Gerschenkron’s approach goes beyond Moore’s in two senses. On the one hand, he shifts attention from class structure to the state. Moore’s argument about the “progressive” segment of the elite pushing through reforms of course implicitly assumes that its chief instrument of change is control of the state. But by making this argument more explicit, we can better understand, for example, how an authoritarian elite used the state to create an obedient industrial elite. The *zaibatsu* in Japan (and the *chaebol* in South Korea which closely imitated the Japanese zaibatsu) were closely linked to the state as are Singapore’s government-linked corporations while China’s state-owned enterprises remain highly influential with even large “private” businesses also cultivating close state ties. Businesses were not only established during a state-led industrial drive, but they were kept dependent on the state thereafter through a series of incentives for obeying state directives and penalties for disobedience. Dependent on the good will of the state for capitalist accumulation, the industrial bourgeoisie could pose no threat to the authoritarian political system. The state also led the effort to demobilize labor, either through direct repression or indirectly through anti-labor union laws or legislation that created “friendly,” corporatist-style unions. Furthermore, the state played an active role in co-opting the professionals of the new middle class. In particular, state jobs were often seen as highly desirable to young university graduates, which put a premium on conformist political behavior economically. But the state also had other ways to co-opt professionals, such as through the licensing of the professions, allowing them to regulate who would enter these “private” occupations and keeping out potential dissidents.

Second, Gerschenkron’s approach shows that the comparative analysis of “late industrializers” does not require that the way in which rapid modernization is achieved must be the same in every country. This is a refinement of Moore’s less differentiated authoritarian “revolution from above” approach. In Imperial Germany the banks led the industrialization drive, while in Meiji Japan it was chiefly the state. Subsequent authors have tried to generalize the Japanese experience with the concept of the “developmental state” (Kohli 1999). But such a static concept misses important differences in the “even later” industrialization processes in East Asia.

There were differences between the “top down, heavy industry conglomerate dominant model in Japan and South Korea (Johnson 1982; Araki 2004; Amsden

1989) and the “bottom up” models with a larger role for a family-owned small and medium size-driven industrialization in Taiwan (Wu 2004) as well as government-linked corporations in Singapore (Rodan 1989) and the “market-Leninist” state capitalist model in China and Vietnam (London 2009). What became widespread in East Asia were not uniform “developmental states” but rather dictatorships justified by developmentalism (Suehiro 2008, chp. 5).

Networked economic development and the rise of developmentalist dictatorships is what has made East Asia into the widely recognized “region” it is today. At first glance, “East Asia” is neither geographically nor culturally convincing (Thompson 2004). Covering Northeast and Southeast Asia, it is difficult to distinguish geographically in any meaningful way from the borders of South Asia, the South Pacific, Australia, Russia or Central Asia. Culturally, all the major religions of the world are represented in the region. One common historical tradition that this region shares is the legacy of the Chinese empire, to which smaller states paid tribute. Another historical precedent—the “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” of militarist Japan during the Second World War—is ignored because of bitterness about Japanese war crimes. Politically, ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) plus three (China, Japan, and South Korea) has tried to provide some regional unity but has thus far has largely been limited to security issues (although there are some indications economic cooperation is deepening). However, there is nothing approaching close European Union-style political cooperation as national sovereignty remains closely guarded and tensions between many countries in the region remain high.

What is “East Asia” when its geographical arbitrariness, cultural diversity, limited historical precedents, and weak regional organizations make the drawing of regional borders an arbitrary undertaking? The region has largely been defined economically and rapid economic development was used to justify authoritarian rule. It was the fastest growing region in the world between 1965 and 1997. Its economic growth has commonly been described in terms of a “flying geese formation.” Japan, the region’s economic superpower (although this leadership was weakened by nearly two decades of stagnation), took the lead. It was followed by the “four dragon” economies (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan), then the “little dragons/tigers” of Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand), and finally by the communist converts to capitalism (China and Vietnam, but not Stalinist North Korea). Through so-called production cycles, older, more labor-intensive technologies were transferred down from leader countries to follower ones (Hatch and Yamamura 1996). Foreign capital (particularly Japanese and Western but later also Taiwanese and ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia) played a major role in this process. Networked with major corporations, developing country affiliates of more modernized states shared in a region-wide, export-orientated industrialization strategy, which stretched from raw

materials to high tech. Region-wide boom was followed by a regional economic crisis in 1997-1998. Nothing shows the extent of capitalist networks better than their failure. A currency crisis in Bangkok had no business causing economic havoc from Jakarta to Seoul. But the ties that bind in good times can rebound during the bad patches. Because they perceived their investments to be within a common region, foreign investors withdrew their money regionally, even if the crisis had originally been localized.

In East Asia, development was used to justify authoritarian rule. Autocrats declared democracy an unaffordable luxury until sufficient economic prosperity was achieved. One after another, developmental dictatorships were established in the region, replacing either weak democracies or economically lagging authoritarian regimes (Suehiro, 2008, chp. 5). They were sometimes military regimes (in South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia), and sometimes civilian regimes (in Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan). This provided a snug fit into the Cold War ideological context. Protected by U.S. military power, one anti-communist, authoritarian state after another turned to mercantilist policies of export promotion integrated through production cycles. Despite the Vietnam War and its heavy dependence on U.S. foreign aid, even South Vietnam may have been on its way to developmental success before the North Vietnamese so unkindly overran it. But capital was to have its revenge. Vietnam followed China (in the mid-1980s with the *doi moi* economic reforms) in converting from state socialism to venture capitalism, with the growth being particularly fast in the South, which was well versed in capitalist ways. After the Cold War divide was bridged (earlier than in Europe), capitalist-style development was promoted by these still officially communist regimes. The “flying geese” of Pacific Asia were developmentalist dictatorships.

#### IV. CONSERVATIVE CULTURALISM

Moore also points out that given the intact, “reactionary” social structure it is not surprising that the state propagates a “feudal ethic” that, despite a massive industrialization drive, even suffused the merchant class in Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan (Moore 1966, 40). Such an argument cannot be made in contemporary China given its state socialist past. But a turn to Confucianism as part of a conservative “Chinese moral national thinking” strategy of authoritarian legitimation (Page 2015) can be considered a functional equivalent. In this sense, post-Maoist China was again following the example of Singapore where the discourse of “Asian values” had been used to fend off demands for democracy linked to the modernization of society. Thus, another key similarity between Meiji Japan and contemporary China is a culturalist-based authoritarian ideology aimed at immunizing their societies against pro-democratic ideas.

The Meiji slogan “Eastern ethics and Western science” showed clear parallels

to the Prussian-German critique of Western civilisation (“*Zivilisationskritik*”) in the name of German *Kultur*. While some Meiji intellectuals, such as Fukuzawa Yukichi and Okuma Shigenobu, favoured British liberal thought, the Meiji reformers (particularly Ito Hirobumi) preferred authoritarian notions influenced by their focus on the Germany as an appropriate “model” for Japan. They favored the ideas of Sakuma Shozan, who called for a selective process of Westernization, asking that Japanese “ethics” be preserved despite the adaptation of Western scientific techniques. Morris-Suzuki (1992, 184-185) has commented:

In practice, of course, such a simple division between ‘ethics’ and ‘science’ could not be maintained, but Sakuma’s formula did provide a basis for a selective approach to foreign borrowing—one in which the relatively authoritarian model of countries like Prussia came to be regarded as ‘more appropriate’ to Japan’s circumstances than the relatively liberal model of countries like the United States.

The Imperial German critique of Western civilisation helps us better understand “Asian values” by showing that the real issue involved is not “Asia” versus the “West,” but rather authoritarian versus democratic modernity (Thompson 2000). Imperial Germany was a European country whose ideologues denied that it belonged to Western civilisation. But this claim to cultural difference merely covered over a deeper dispute about the way in which the modern world should be constructed. Conservative thinkers in Imperial Germany, like today’s “Asian values” advocates, tried to prove that authoritarianism could go hand-in-hand with an advanced form of modern living. The historian Jeffrey Herf has aptly termed this phenomenon “reactionary modernism” (Herf 1984).

The Singaporean government has never hidden its admiration for the “Japanese model.” Clearly, however, this conscious imitation has little to do with Japan’s democratic system since WWII but rather much to do with its authoritarian development during the Meiji period. Robin Ramcharan (2002, 12) argues that Lee Kuan Yew’s notion of paternalistic authoritarian “Asian values” was inspired by his interest in the Japanese model. Lee drew culturalist lessons about the importance of Confucian culture from the Japanese experience as “appropriate for economic growth and societal cohesion” but it also inspired the implementation of a “Japanese style system for internal security, surveillance and control” (ibid). Japan, going back to the Meiji era, “was used ideologically, as a model Confucian society, in the process of consolidating a Singaporean nation responsive to [People’s Action Party] PAP goals. Such a nation is characterized by its hierarchical nature and the respect for authority” (ibid, 280). Lee praised the Japanese for maintaining their conservative Confucian values despite rapid modernisation. This suggests Singapore was the link in authoritarian developmentalist diffusion between Japan

(symbolized by Lee's "Learn from Japan" campaign), on the one hand, and post-Mao China, for which Singapore serves as a model, on the other.

Singapore seemingly demonstrates that Asian culture and competitive democracy are incompatible. This reinforces the growing interest in Confucianism, seen by Chinese observers as highly influential in Singapore's ruling circles, which stresses moral leadership over political competition. In the process of ideological formation, the Chinese leadership is experimenting with a regime-supportive interpretation of Confucianism, as discussed above. Despite the Singapore government's "Asian values" argument being discredited internationally in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Thompson 2001, to sympathetic mainland observers, Singapore's version of Confucianism appeared to underpin the People's Action Party's (PAP) success in maintaining authoritarian rule, in which the ruling party leads by moral example and incorporates a paternalist understanding of individual rights, which promotes consensus instead of conflict. As a consequence of this learning process, Chinese reformers are using lessons from the Singaporean model in their efforts to bolster the CCP's ideological legitimacy and strengthen the governance capacity of one-party rule, thereby reducing pressures for democratization.

Since the revival of economic reforms without political liberalisation following the Tiananmen protests, nationalist conservatives in China have been extensively criticising "radical democratic" positions (Gries 2004; Moody 2007). One important alternative that has emerged within conservative in China has been from the "political Confucianists" (Jiang 2013; Fan 2012; Bell 2010) who call for the replacement of Western-style parliamentarianism with an elitist system of representation based more on merit than popular participation. The hope of these conservative Confucianists is that the return of this traditional thought with its emphasis on hierarchy will enhance the obedience of the people to the government and avert the desire for more individualist values such as those found in liberal democracy. While this political Confucianist vision is viewed critically in some more orthodox party circles because of its critique of communism and advocacy of (limited) parliamentarianism, these views suggest a growing intellectual interest in conservative Confucianist "solutions" to China's problems of modernisation (Bell, 2010). For example, in 2014 the communist party ordered Chinese officials to attend lectures on Confucian classics once deeply reviled under Mao's rule. The campaign has been described as an attempt to counter the diffusion of Western democratic ideas (Page 2015). But Pang Qin (2013) has suggested that while some powerful factions in the central state still resist "Confucianizing" the CPP, local governments acting as "ideological reformers" have moved to co-opt a growing and already widespread urban middle class interest in reviving Confucianism to strengthen the local party's legitimacy. Advocacy of political Confucianist ideas by intellectuals and its growing influence in civil society makes it potentially a

much more significant ideological force than the semi-official, but socially shallow advocacy of “Asian values” in 1990s Singapore (Emmerson 1995, 2013).

## V. CONCLUSION

The “Prussian path” to authoritarian modernism was consciously followed by the Meiji reformers and later spread throughout East and Southeast Asia and in particular to Singapore which influenced post-Maoist China. Following the argument of Barrington Moore, this path reveals how “progressive” authoritarian elites pushed through a programme of modernization against reactionary conservatives. Simultaneously, they were “labor repressive,” controlling workers through capitalist and coercive mechanisms. Adapting the “theory of backwardness” of Alexander Gerschenkron to the East Asian contest, it can be suggested that given the greater role of the (developmental) state in “late, late” industrialization (Amsden 1989), it follows that the authoritarian regimes were well placed to repress labor. Labor had been allowed little or no independent collective voice to keep wages low and export-oriented manufacturing competitive, to make business leaders dependent through a series of incentives for obeying state directives and penalties for disobedience, and to co-opt professionals through state jobs and controlled entry into desirable modernizing segments of the economy. The “flying geese formation” in East Asia has consisted of a group of authoritarian developmentalist dictatorships. Another important characteristic they had in common was an Asian version of Imperial German *Zivilisationskritik*, the critique of “Western” democracy in the name of (in this case) Asian culture. Authoritarian rule was justified by a culturalist ideology derived originally from the criticism of Western civilisation in the name of German *Kultur* by authoritarian Prussian modernisers. In Singapore, authoritarian elites propagated a discourse of “Asian values” to fend off pressures for “Western democracy,” an ideological model that was very influential in post-Tiananmen China and that was articulated by political Confucianists who argued Chinese culture provided a justification for continued authoritarian rule despite economic modernization.

The interest of Meiji Japan leadership in the “Prussian path” of authoritarian constitutionalism influenced its own constitution making and efforts to legitimize non-democratic rule in the face of growing demands for popular participation. Similarly, the leaders of post-Mao China have tried to learn lessons from what they themselves refer to as the “Singapore model.” Their obsession with Singapore shows how even such a small state can be a major influence on a great authoritarian power. Chinese communist leaders have sought to emulate Singapore because it appears to prove that a regime that follows traditional “Asian values” will be able to combat corruption and achieve effective governance. This appears to demonstrate that “good governance” is not linked to liberal democracy, but can be

achieved through pragmatic decision-making by a determined ruling elite under authoritarian rule (Ortmann and Thompson 2014 and 2016). This puts the spotlight upon the dissemination of anti-democratic and illiberal lessons drawn in an effort by Chinese leaders to extend their rule.

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