

RESEARCH

Open Access

# Locating the 'East' in the Global South: question of self image in traditions and transitions

Muhammad Faisal Awan

Correspondence: [taaib@hotmail.com](mailto:taaib@hotmail.com)  
Department of International  
Relations, University of Karachi,  
Karachi, Pakistan

## Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the socio-political and economic dimensions of increasingly becoming popular rise of the Global South. It is argued that the slogan of the rise of Global South which seemingly implies that the Global South in its pursuit of development as an ideal will end up being different than the North is questionable. Scholars have long debated on the nature and spirit of development in South and explain the rising South either in terms of gradual expansion of Westernization or in terms of emerging indigenous alternate model of development or alternate modernity. This distinction in describing the emerging economies rely primarily on the specific use of notion of capital as somewhat Western and the culture it produces as Western culture or either in the sense of internalizing the spirit of capital yet maintaining distinctive identity (other than the Western) which tends to reflect in the vocabulary of the Global South. This is to argue here that the spirit of capital is neither West nor East. And similarly it is neither North nor South. It is only the question of when and how the forces underlying capitalism will emerge in particular geography. The development discourse emerged primarily after the WWII put all post-colonial nations pursuing development instead of questioning it. There may have been changes in the vocabulary of development in the Global South to adjust in local cultures and perhaps also in the structure. There may have been call for alternate modernity. Notwithstanding the spirit remains the same. It is in this backdrop locating or understanding the very notion of the East not as a homogenous civilization but rather a pool of civilizations intending to express power of traditions in transitions becomes important. The purpose of this paper is to understand the withering traditions of East in the Global South development process dominated by the spirit of Capitalism. It is asked in environmental debate that can capitalism go green, in the political and cultural realm I would try to explore can capitalism go *East* in the Global South; can traditions survive in transitions? If not then Why?

## Background

The fall of the Berlin Wall and with that of subsequent fall of communism reflected a befitting scenario for the free market Capitalism's onward movement. The post-Cold War order heralded a new epoch where the market forces took a leap forward from being sub-national or national to transnational and in a sense assuming a universal character. However, this new epoch echoed the post-WWII structuring of the world on the basis of processes of economization of the others' somewhat non-economic 'being' in the world. This *other* was the Third World. Third world countries, even the characterization is largely economic, also took a course akin to the West in pursuit of

their quest for finding their right place in the world. The postcolonial experience of the Third World, now commonly referred to as the Global South in view of some rising economies, was characteristically a bearer of colonial legacy; the modern '*economic self*' yet to be fully realized. The present paper is an attempt to understand the Global South's quest for this self-realization. This is also to understand the self-image as it is perceived by different societies in the Global South in the context of their historical traditions and the momentous changes they are confronted with in today's internalization of values of globalization. First part of paper deals with the historicity of the spirit of Capital personified in economic man while arguing that it is Western only in a sense that it emerged in European thought at a particular shifting time and space. It was a result of profound changes in the moral foundations, more deeply at epistemological and ontological level, of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe. However, intrinsically it has become the *modern faith* and the Western creed. The spirit of it lies in the inescapability of any society that absorbs it, to avert the market morality replacing the traditional values, morals and beliefs. In this context it transcends the Western geography and operates at conceptual level and in specific circumstances assumes global dimension wherever it goes. Second part deals with the Eastern traditional societies' economic subjectivity to North-south political-economic discourse to achieve dignity and honor defined in terms of economic development. The colonial experience would be a typical reference point where the spirit of Capital meets the Eastern societies. The consequences of Capitalist dominant discourse may bind these Eastern societies to the market forces thus dispossessing them of richness and values of their traditions that gave them the very meaning of life for thousands of years. It also reflects that the spirit of Capitalism is not all about economic determinism. Rather it has far reaching consequences beyond economic realm. In this context it will be analyzed how the spirit of Capitalism expressed itself (through dominant development discourse) in relations between Eastern societies and West along with its consequences while making particular references to the Chinese socio-cultural aspects. It will be of interest in case of China that why and how the *Eastern* values expressed in the power of tradition are dying out in the process of economic development thus making it clear that the Global South in pursuit of economic development is paying the cost in the form of losing the very identity of being the *East*.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Modernity and the making of capitalist economic man**

Modernity with its major instruments of technology and the market is swaying across in the age of globalization. To understand the well-grounded developmentalism influencing the whole minds or cultures one needs to evaluate the essential characteristics of what it means to be 'human' that Capitalism conceives. Life, liberty and pursuit of happiness are the hallmarks of its nature. When put in the moral framework these notions lead us to a series of other pertinent questions which during the Enlightenment and later arouse particular response. Enlightenment led to a modern sense of what 'life' actually involves. This involvement required freedom and self-realization to be placed as its basis. The human self, it was presumed, had inherent capacity to reason truth. Immanuel Kant argues that the human understanding is the source of the general laws of nature that structure all our experience; and

that human reason gives itself the moral law. (Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy. n.d. 2010) Epistemologically this implied that reason could lead to universal claims based on truths through deductive and empiricist methodologies. Juxtaposing it with traditional man it reveals the modern essence of being 'human' is one whose self is liberated through and through. In other words Enlightenment reason requires that 'the pursuit of happiness' be accepted as the sole purpose of the organization of individual and social life and human progress (attainment of higher levels of happiness) is regarded as inevitable for it is a consequence of human self-realization (Ansari 2004: 4). Lockean liberty in his trinity of natural rights commanded the central attention of modern Western moral outlook. Thus being autonomous took a central place in being respectful. This language of rights soon translated into expression of universal moral norms. Charles Taylor noted this transition; "We began to speak of "natural" rights and now to such things as life and liberty which supposedly everyone has" (Taylor 1989: 11).

This universalistic tendency that enlightenment held in its view of reason as the source determining one's self was though questioned yet incorporated by Romanticism. Reason alone cannot be a motive to the will, but rather is the "slave of the passions". (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy n.d. 2010) What differentiates Romantics from Enlightenment thought is their giving priority to passion over reason. Nonetheless both considered reason essential viable in its instrumental use. On treating the conceptualization of *self*, Ansari explains the Kantian construction of self as all knowing and based on essential goodness of self "The self, says Kant, does not derive its laws from but prescribe them to nature for it possesses an order which is fixed and immutable in all of us" (Ansari 2004: 5). This is because in enlightenment thought the world is not "out there" but "in us" and the individual knows the world because the self determines the structure of his experiences (Ansari 2004: 5). The world for this self is an object to be defined and to be given form. This self determines structures upon the world in view of whatever way it understands by categorizing sensations to develop relations between and among objects and thus developing concepts through this reasoning. Human experiences and feelings stem from this self which rests upon transcendence of reason as its basic source. Moreover this "transcendental" self is not just the source of knowledge it is the will determining all action and all-knowing and in this sense the transcendental self is consciousness in general (Ansari 2004: 5). It cannot be known for it is the source and not the object of experience and the recognition of the self requires not knowledge but faith (Ansari 2004: 5). It is the faith in freedom that encapsulates the essence of the self.

Many streams of thought coming out of Enlightenment and Romanticism have been challenged and debated but the essential notion of freedom as an ideal has been idealized/worshipped. This anthropocentric self-image manifested powerfully in different forms (social, political, economic) and in different periods. This even went to the extent of announcing the death of God by Friedrich Nietzsche and shifting the moral compass of the modern man to a new quest for identity and meaning of life in nation, class, race etc. With Capitalism this identity was founded in the market. Outside philosophy the modern self found its most powerful expression in a new valuation of commerce. Charles Taylor identifies it that the new valuation is reflected in the coming to be of

the very category of the 'economic' in its modern sense (Taylor 1989: 286). He further explicates this changing moral outlook:

*"The eighteenth century saw the birth of political economy, with Adam Smith and the Physiocrats. Louis Dumont has shown what a shift of outlook was required before it could become conceivable that there be an independent science of this 'economic' aspect of social existence. In terms of a categorization drawn from Marx, economics focuses on the interchange between humans and nature as a domain with its own laws, distinct from (even though potentially disturbed by) what happens in the domains in which humans relate to each other through politics and culture. The isolation of this domain cannot be seen just as a 'scientific' discovery that people stumbled on. It reflects the higher value put on this dimension of human existence, the affirmation of ordinary life.*

*In addition, the new science was grounded on the notion, utterly absent in previous ages, that the events in this domain form a self-regulating system. This was the great innovation of the Physiocrats, taken over by Smith, and it might be considered the founding move of modern economics. Indeed the very notion we have today of 'the economy' or 'a (national) economy' suppose some such system"* (Taylor 1989: 286).

Any other mode of narrating the self appeared somewhat strange for it was articulated in the spirit of capital as being natural. Capitalism owes much of its strength as an economic system to its guise of neutrality, to its illusion of belonging to the order of existence (McGowan 2013: 3). Challenging Capitalist gets even more difficult keeping in view the obstruction owing to its perceived relationship with human nature granting it a natural status thus making Capitalism's dominance sustainable and it is the notion of self-interest inherent in human nature that gives foundation to Capitalism. Capitalism seems natural, and nature comes to appear inherently capitalistic (McGowan 2013: 3). With the construction of this economic self emerged a new valuation of life itself which clearly reflected the capitalist metaphysics; the spirit of it. The concern for life develops out of a sense that life is itself the source of all value and that nothing exists outside of life (McGowan 2013: 7). The development of this valuation of life depends on the dominance of Capitalism, an economics system that passes itself off as identical to the structure of natural life (McGowan 2013: 7). It could be put as if it is *the* way of life. But the word '*the*' implies both moral and universal connotations. Life itself was transmogrified in the universal language of development and progress embodied and epitomized in developmental ethics as outlined later by Professor Dennis Goulet in the form of core values of development; sustenance, self-esteem and freedom in his work on development ethics as an independent field of study. This set of socio-political norms also translated into the global language of what it takes to be 'human' in the world; thus replacing all other traditional alternatives. This is considered to be the modern panacea against all the obstacles in pursuit of happiness; the goal of humanity.

So what does it have to do with the Eastern societies especially in the context of defining themselves as the Global South? How does the spirit of Capital, veiled in modernity, operate in the Eastern societies? The recent rise of the Global South reflects

*self*-assertion and demand of recognition in the power circles in international relations, albeit ipso facto losing the grip over their traditional ethos. In pursuit of economic objective of progress and development they use economic mirror and find themselves still catching up with the West. Even when they call for alternate modernity they do it under the umbrella of the same Capitalist dominant discourse and ideological predisposition of developmentalism. Whereas the power of tradition that is East is somewhat absorbed by the economic discourse of the North–south. The subject East is seemed to have disappeared. The North–south has replaced it. But what does the *self* in this self-assertion actually constitute? How and when was it formulated? And what does this recognition mean and from whom? There can be no possible explanations of understanding the rising Global South other than or without referring to colonial experience of Eastern societies and their rebellion expressed through revolutionary discourse in anti-colonialism yet absorbed in the language of modern discourse.

### **Colonialism, anti-colonialism and the Global South**

Industrial Capitalism is primarily featured by colonialism and modernity. To understand better the complex nature of East's encounter with the West and the post-colonial experience of the Eastern societies (traditional civilizations), a closer look at the emergence of self-image of the Eastern societies is needed. This will also help us understand the Global South's quest for catching up with the West.

The painful history of colonization of non-European societies and the advent of modernity put colonized nations into a somewhat state of self-denial reflecting the colonization of self-image. For almost two to three centuries the non-European societies came under direct or indirect colonial rule and under pressure, from both within and without, succumbed to the material and technological edifice and cultural onslaught of the West. Those that were not militarily invaded were transformed into colonial peripheries. The same circumstances however put them in a situation where they had to recognize self-evidently foreign cultural supremacy and voluntarily absorb the basic values and categories of colonial Europe. The result might be named "hegemony without domination" (Kiossev, n.d., 2013). The modern age of colonialism left deep impact on social-imagination of both the West and the Eastern societies. Generally social imagination is the perception of one's self shared by the social imaginary of bulk of or whole society. The colonial processes of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century shaped the social imagination of subordinate and rulers alike. Influenced by the forces of modernity encapsulated in the spirit of Capitalism the colonial powers compartmentalized the world into different social beings. Within the mature modern age, explains (Kiossev, n.d., 2013), it is precisely the colonial processes that form the collective imagination: the asymmetry between the European métropoles and the colonized rest of the world underlines the common oeuvre of shared knowledge, ideological representations and popular myths. Its purpose was to explain and justify European expansion from the 16th up until mid-20th century, which is why these perceptions ranked peoples and geographic spaces as "superior" and "inferior", delineated them not only geographically but in terms of value into "Western", "Eastern", and "Southern", defined them as "big" and "small", "historic" and "nonhistoric" (Kiossev, n.d., 2013). And also later "developed" and "underdeveloped", "modern" and "backward" described what they were and what "others" were. The "other" in European thought existed in Enlightenment age as well. This other was like heathen; defined in terms of the savage.

So the 'savage' was defined as one who would grow up and enter the stage of civilization and though he lived now, he was assigned the status of a child in the biography of mankind, a child which was not yet fully mature, and was in need of guidance by a strong father (Sachs 1993: 104). Alexander further explains that "Since the middle of the 19th century, amid the formation of nations, the large European colonial empires believed they had a new duty: to spread progress and modernity, freedom from Asiatic tyranny, self-determination, and human rights among the backward ones. This duty fitted well into the practices of asymmetrical evolutionism, administrative social engineering, progressivist technological arrogance, racism, and social Darwinism" (Kiossev, n.d., 2013). In the Western discourse by the mid-20th century the term 'underdevelopment' had taken the place of the 'savages' (Sachs 1993: 104).

However there was another corresponding self-image in making; that is of colonized people. Europeans were despised because of colonial brutality they imposed on colonized. People would identify Europeans and the West as an enemy that snatched from them their independence and integrity, and shattered their honor and self-esteem. In their political antagonism they invoke modern vocabulary to express themselves. Alexander says, "the communities circumvented by colonial occupation had another vantage point and a different perception. They were not entirely excluded from colonial processes as they were exposed to the same ideas, ideologies, and stereotypes: the colonial imagination spread its power far beyond the physical colonial boundaries. In a number of ways, this imagination became global and without alternative as early as in the 18th and 19th centuries" (Kiossev, n.d., 2013).

The resistance built up against colonial masters soon translated into political and armed struggle for freedom and self-determination. The elite from local cultures, mostly educated in cross border universities, steering the resistance movements across the East was uprooted from their traditional roots and was mesmerized by the scintillating life world of European countries. They used soft means to portray a new reality (modernity) where the traditional societies had to redefine themselves. They took a mode of thought from where their traditions were void of the spirit needed to "be" in the modern world. A universe of technical progress, political and intellectual figures, freedom and independence, philosophy, science, and arts of European quality and magnitude, social life and glamour, manners and style—i.e., the whole overseas civilization model was absent and as if the whole identity was missing (Kiossev, n.d., 2013).

So the new vigor for progress was to be interiorized in local cultures and norms for it became progress which would define them as it defined the modern man. The lost honor was sought with utmost vigor in economic development. The spirit of Capital speaking through modernity and its necessary instruments was to materialize this vigor. At international level this was established as a commonly sought goal in Bandung Conference 1955.

The goal of independence from their colonial masters, thus, was to bring recognition of their *self* through assertion of their 'own' ascent to modernity; an exalted state. The Global South, in its pursuit of catching up with the West, assumes today to be standing nearer than ever in accomplishing this task. The imperial legacy; the non-White man's burden they want to put off from their shoulder to become new life line for sustaining modern man's burden of modernity.

The Global South has its origin in 20<sup>th</sup> century anti-colonialism with a symbolic sense of cohesion defined in terms of oppressed nations. The much courteous word “Global South” replacing the “Third World” does not also reflect any unified cohesiveness attributed to any culture, region or civilization. Yet the significance in understanding the Global South lies not in its withering socio-political diversity but in its conformity to the capitalist uniformity. Though with no concrete central structure, no central command and no appointed spokesperson the Global South inherits or take on the spirit of the Third World in asking for a re-examinations of the intellectual, political and moral foundations of the international system (Grovogui 2011: 175). Also the expanding trade volume within the Global South exhibits confidence in playing an active role for global economic restructuring for a better *laissez-faire* spirit in international market. This sense of confidence comes along with ownership of capital. For example according to UNDP Report 2013 by 2020, the Report projects, the combined output of the three leading South economies—China, India, Brazil—will surpass the aggregate production of the United States, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy and Canada (Malik 2013). Trade between countries in the South will overtake that between developed nations, the same Report projects. This ownership disowns any other alternative to self-confidence other than what it needs to be expressing confidence in international market.

But absorbing and internalizing the spirit of modernity has been a more troubled and daunting task in the entire era of modernization and development with its socio-cultural and spiritual cost than in the West. This was because their modern self-realization through economic development and progress was both from within from without. In this due process what was lost was the “East” to become the “Global South”; unsatisfied with anything else other than infatuated desire to become developed.

There can be no better deciphering of the rise of the Global South in the shadow of Capital than understanding its spirit in China the leading country with to an extent self claimed leadership owing to its anti-imperialist foreign policy. The recently published work by United Nations with scintillating statistical data describing the phenomenal economic growth of the Global South shows how spirit of accumulation of Capital has permeated in Eastern societies bringing to the fore the modern “economic man” (Shirotori and Molina 2009). However the mesmerizing and rapid economic growth is not without its cost. While taking multidisciplinary approach the next part of this paper examines the socio-cultural-environmental changes in modern China to understand how the traditions in Eastern societies are in the process of Capitalist metamorphosis. Two broad categories of family and environment have been used for the analysis because it is most particularly in these two important features of one’s *self* the transmogrification can be observed most. China has been selected owing to its strong Confucian past and rich cultural traditions.

#### **From Mao to the market and the lost east in the Global South**

From Mao to the market China, especially after Deng Xiaoping’s *gaige kaifang* (reform and opening up) project that began in 1979, has taken great leap forward towards market economy to determine China’s interest even more pragmatically by integrating it with international market. However this was no less than different than the Mao’s dream because epistemologically the end objective ‘progress’ sprang from the same

episteme. It means that Mao was not a symbol of tradition rather even in his era as well several socio-economic conditions started changing. But Deng is more important because it is from his era and reforms we see exacerbated pace and intense face of permeating market forces in Chinese society. Deng was interested more in making China economically developed through market economy and translate this autonomy in political sovereignty at international level. However the genealogy of this approach towards self-determination goes back even further.

After the October 1911 overthrow of Manchus Dynasty replacing it with republican characteristics the modernizing elite attempted to adopt western values and institutions into Chinese society in order to establish a new modern China. These elite included both leftists calling for radical modernization and liberals favoring gradual transformation through education and other peaceful methods (Tsai 1986: 20). On the other hand traditional Confucians maintained that strength lied in upholding Confucian values and institutions. Some of the traditional elite even declared that someday the Confucian theory will regain its glory in the world when the Western materialistic civilization collapses (Tsai 1986: 21). The modernizing elite found one of the most powerful voices in the form of Hu Shih for overt Westernization to get China out of wretched and dismal conditions. In his methodology for emancipating China from such a perceived dismal condition Hu Shih reflected a typical modern post-colonial mentality when he said:

*“My own attitude is that we must unreservedly accept this modern civilization of the West because we need it to solve our most pressing problems, the problems of poverty, ignorance, disease and corruption. These are the real enemies we are facing and none of these can be subjugated by the old civilizations.....And I am convinced that the old traditions will not be lost even when we take extreme view of the need for modernization, because civilizations are conservative by their nature. By the natural inertia of cultures, the vast majority will take good care of those traditional values. But it behooves the leaders to go as far as they can in order that they may bring the masses to move a few steps farther in the direction of solving the most urgent problems of the nation by means of every instrumentality which this new civilization can offer”* (Tsai 1986: 26).

On the other hand some moderate liberals in modernizing elite maintained that one must not forget that China is China and has its own peculiarity and hence to adopt western civilization is necessary; but the adoption should be based on the needs of present day China and not the blind imitation. However in their thought also fundamental telos became catching up with the West and thus contribute to the world civilization while at the same time preserving the best of one's own traditions (Tsai 1986: 27). Thus China's faith in progress and development becomes more intellectual than merely a result of inferiority complex.

This reformism rooted in this modern faith has guided several phases of modern Chinese history up until Deng Xiaoping's *gaige kaifang* and his so called socialism with Chinese characteristics. The famous Chinese proverb is usually attributed to Deng Xiaoping when he used it to formulate his (reform and opening up) policy, that it doesn't matter if a cat is black or white so long as it catches mice it's a good cat. This could be applied to the fundamental vigor needed to serve capitalism, no matter even



under socialist garb, that everything that could promote development project is good. State, science and market, since then as a blend mixture, have served as an instrument to achieve development. But this serving has not been without cost; both social and environmental.

### **Traditions and transitions in chinese family system**

China today stands at a juncture facing a crisis of cohesion particularly at a basic family level owing to its rapid economic modernization. For some the crisis lies precisely in the incompetence of the state in reproducing social cohesion and a broad alliance of the general public in the face of widening social and economic polarization (Liu 2004: 12). However in asking for further proactive state's engagement in overcoming this deficiency of social cohesion a fundamental question is usually abandoned; that is to question the increasingly permeable forces of modernity which necessitated the demand to ask to take up the burden which earlier was shared by individuals themselves in a group like family.

Cultural and social collisions between modern and traditional values seem to have become real in many instances (Yang and Neal 2006: 113). Though these changing normative and pragmatic concerns are emerging in many East Asian societies sharing Confucius cultural heritage where development project has hastened such changes China being an epicenter of Confucian thought is important to locate the changing values. Owing to modernity Chinese family system is one of the most unwelcomingly affected spheres in the modern history. The increasing demand for more proactive role of State, for instance, to supplement the diminishing role of the family in looking after the elderly people reflects the declining moral influence of *Filial piety* (one of the founding pillars and a moral virtue for caring and respect towards elders). It is at this level particularly the question of self-image in times of transitions is put in a broader context to see what is living and what is dead in finding "East" in the recent rise of the Global South.

In Confucian China the strongest loyalty that any individual would show was to his family. Two 'H' in Confucian thought harmony and hierarchy embodied in them a central place for family; a very important stabilizing force in society. People are normally expected to respect their parents and all elderly people in society and in general perceive filial norms to be morally and socially acceptable and they internalize such norms during the process of socialization (Chui 2007: 4). With the emergence of modern values in China the moral virtue of filial piety has been transmogrified into a legal responsibility. The increasingly felt necessity to maintain social harmony by protecting family has pressured several Confucian societies, particularly China, to have introduced legal responsibilities of young people towards their elderly; responsibilities which were earlier naturally internalized through socialization ingrained in the traditional Confucian family system. According to Ernest Chui, in China, Article 183 in the Criminal Law (1979), The Law on Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elder (1996) and The Law on Maintenance and Support by Families are all relevant legislations stipulating the responsibility of adult children to support their parents and parents-in-law. Specifically, the Criminal Law penalizes adult children who refuse to perform their duties in supporting an aged family member by a sentence of not more than five years' criminal detention (Chui 2007: 6). In Taiwan, the government enacted the Senior Citizens' Welfare Act in

1980, which was subsequently revised and improved in 1996 and 2000. The government has incrementally improved its provision of and/ or regulation on elderly services in such aspects as medical services, subsidy to low income elders, day care centers, home care services, and the like. The law, in addition to the Civil Law, stipulates the children's maintenance duty of their elderly parents and lays down penal codes to prevent elderly desertion and abuse (Chui 2007: 6).

The economic development in Confucius societies has resulted into reducing inter-generational co-residence. This reducing rate is concomitant to emerging market society as reflected in study conducted by the United Nations (2005) that there is a global trend towards independent forms of living arrangements among older persons (either living alone or with spouse only), and a corresponding decline in co-residential arrangements (Chui 2007: 9). This is more reflected in urban middle class aspiring to a more private life free of traditional normative bonds. For Gerald Berthoud globally the middle-class ideal of our time is to establish a fully competitive society, composed of individuals for whom freedom of choice is the only way to express independence from their natural and social environment (Berthoud 1992: 76). In fact, there appears to be a universal trend whereby intergenerational co-residence and support of the elderly by their children is less profound in the more 'modernized' sectors of the population, that is, those with advanced education, modern-sector occupations and high levels of income (Chui 2007: 10). According to Ernest Chui, even in China from where Confucian cultural norms originated, some surveys reported that the traditional ideal of the joint family has already withered, and the majority of people in cities prefer nuclear households (Chui 2007: 10). Ernest Chui further explains this intensifying moral vacuum that:

*“Alternatively, there arises another strategy of compromising the normative expected role of family care-giving and occupational aspiration, that of employing domestic servants. The affluence afforded by the increase in income from dual earners thus enables the couple to 'buy in' the service of domestic helpers for taking up or at least sharing part of the household chores, including child care and elderly care..... More recently, with sprouting economic prosperity, some big cities in China, namely, Beijing and Shanghai also join the bandwagon in having domestic helpers”* (Chui 2007: 11–12).

Those who are not much well heeled expect from state in times of economic transformation to take a proactive role in providing social services to overcome this problematic. This too is not a demand emanating from a moral conviction but pragmatic economic concern. Same is the economic spirit residing in state's increasingly becoming active role in providing social services for elderly people, to continue the processes of development and progress unabated by letting young masses actively pursuing their economic goals. When social obligations like solidarity, generosity or mutual aid are replaced by administrative measures provided by the state, the self-interested individual is set free to act fully within the market sphere (Berthoud 1992: 85).

This freedom is not only accompanied with the reducing care for older people but also increasing negative attitude towards elderly people thus making them think of giving preference to separate living albeit nearby the child than living in Confucian

collectivity as a part of hierarchy. The increasing desire of older people in China to live separately is not an act of choice but rather radical imposed freedom. This in turn is no less than the result of metamorphosis of Children's moral duty embodied in love towards elderly people into their economic freedom or capacity to purchase services for older people embodied in increasing self-interestedness. The one child policy has added to the further decline in filial piety. This is especially true today when many parents in urban China seemingly invest in their only child's education, and accordingly, provide their only child an opportunity to pursue opportunities in other parts of country, or abroad (Xie and Xia: 2005).

This is not the phenomenon with the care-giving to older people but also with children. New commercial domestic services have developed rapidly as a result of the expansion of the market sector as explained by Sue Ya Xu (Xu 2005: 123). Until women particularly in urban areas in China were fully economically active (or in modern sense financially free) the traditional family system maintained the harmonious equilibrium of society. Sue Xu explains that "between the 1970s-1990s, more than one third of the urban labor force in China was composed of working mothers in full-time employment. Given the inherent incompatibility between childcare and mothers' working careers, these mothers needed external resources to solve the role-conflict. Who was the "helping hand" looking after the child when the mother was at work?" (Xu 2005: 125) The childcare provision has also been commercialized with the introduction of more services offered in market. Many enterprising businessmen and women have established private nurseries, kindergartens, and pre-school education centers under reform policies permitting private enterprise and they, together with other market facilities, have provided the commercial childcare (Xu 2005: 127). Sue Xu in concluding this research reflects an important fact that "the commercial services are more an option for those with better economic conditions. Ordinary working women, especially those with lower wage incomes, still rely on the old welfare provisions. The decline of the welfare childcare provision in recent years represents a new challenge for this group of women" (Xu 2005: 123).

In this case the traditional role of motherhood care in Confucian culture has been transformed into an economic challenge of meeting good standard of life. In the process of meeting this economic challenge the best time from mother for a child to be given care and love from age 1 to 6 is given to the market to purchase best possible services for childcare. Consequently in a sense this disconnects the last bond in traditional family hierarchy leaving the last Confucian behind isolated and depending on either State's public services or money provision with domestic servants for elderly people and kindergarten for child care. Traditional love and care in Confucian culture expressed through presence of loved ones nearby, because presence has its own value which money can't buy, have been either disappearing fast or, if exist, commoditized and the Confucian immediate harmony of 'self' with family hierarchy ipso facto losing grip in the emerging 'economic self'.

Gerald Berthoud has reflected this quest of economic self for further realization in terms of development project. He writes:

*"With the present tendency to impose market mechanisms and principles on a global scale, development is held to be possible only for those who are ready to rid themselves entirely of their traditions, and devote themselves to making economic*

*profit, at the expense of the whole gamut of social and moral obligations. Too often a radical choice is imposed between individual freedom and collective solidarity. Such seems, today, the price to pay if one wishes to walk the long path of development”* (Berthoud 1992: 70).

### **Confucian harmony with the nature and China's capital**

Another important feature of Confucian thought is its inherent emphasis on equilibrium among Heaven, Earth and Human defined in terms of “the unity of heaven and men”. But in this case also the Chinese society is standing at its odds these days with mounting environmental pollution owing to China's fast development. What is at stake is not the Confucian society only but rather entire human survival for the transnational effects of growth obsession in market economy results into never green growth. The dominant development discourse in today's world including that of China conforms to this obsession. This tendency translates environment not as natural asset but rather an obstacle to further growth and therefore must be managed. Nature, when she becomes the object of politics and planning, turns into ‘environment’ (Sachs 1993: 34). For the Capital then it is not self-limitation or self-control, the hallmark of Confucian thought, that must be imposed but rather overcoming the limits the nature imposes in response to the development project. After all the control over nature is an essential characteristic of expressing freedom of modern economic man. While raising a question “Can Capitalism Go Green?” Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster in their book “*What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know about Capitalism*” expressed that:

*“A system that has only one goal, the maximization of profits in an endless quest for the accumulation of capital on an ever-expanding scale, and which thus seeks to transform every single thing on earth into a commodity with a price, is a system that is soulless; it can never have a soul, never be green. It can never stand still, but is driven to manipulate and fabricate whims and wants in order to grow and sell more . . . forever. Nothing is allowed to stand in its path”* (Magdoff and Foster 2011: 96).

Some facts about China's burgeoning environmental problems will make it clear how not different the spirit of Capital thrives there. All these facts have been taken from Jared Diamond's book “*Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed?*” To begin with:

*1. The household size decreased from 4.5 people per house in 1985 to 3.5 in 2000 and is projected to decrease further to 2.7 by the year 2015. That decreased household size causes China today to have 80 million more households than it would otherwise have had, an increase exceeding the total number of households in Russia. The household size decrease results from social changes: especially, population aging, fewer children per couple, an increase in previously nearly non-existent divorce, and a decline in the former custom of multi-generation households with grandparents, parents, and children living under one roof. At the same time, per-capita floor area per house increased by nearly three-fold. The net result of those increases in the number and floor area of households is that China's human impact is increasing despite its low population growth rate.*

2. *What defines China in the context of environmental issues is the world's largest producer and consumer of coal, accounting for one-quarter of the world's total, the world's largest producer and consumer of fertilizer, second largest producer and consumer of pesticides, the largest producer of steel, the largest user of agricultural films for mulching, the second largest producer of electricity and chemical textiles, and the third largest oil consumer.*

3. *Since economic reform began in 1978, environmental degradation has continued to increase or accelerate. Air pollution in some cities is the worst in the world, with pollutant levels several times higher than levels considered safe for people's health.*

4. *Acid rain, confined in the 1980s to just a few areas in the southwest and south, has spread over much of the country and is now experienced in one-quarter of Chinese cities for more than half of the rainy days each year.*

5. *Similarly, water quality in most Chinese rivers and groundwater sources is poor and declining. The famous Guanting Reservoir in Beijing was declared unsuitable for drinking in 1997.*

6. *If all that were not enough, under way in China are the world's largest development projects, all expected to cause severe environmental problems. The South-to-North Water Diversion Project, which began in 2002, is not scheduled for completion until around 2050, and is projected to cost \$59 billion, to spread pollution, and to cause water imbalance in China's longest river.*

7. *Some First World countries reduce their mountains of garbage by paying China to accept untreated garbage, including wastes containing toxic chemicals. In addition, China's expanding manufacturing economy and industries accept garbage/scrap that could serve as cheap sources of recoverable raw materials. Just to take one item as an example, in September 2002 a Chinese customs office in Zhejiang Province recorded a 400-ton shipment of "electronic garbage" originating from the U.S., and consisting of scrap electronic equipment and parts such as broken or obsolete color TV sets, computer monitors, photocopiers, and keyboards. While statistics on the amount of such garbage imported are inevitably incomplete, available numbers show an increase from one million to 11 million tons from 1990 to 1997, and an increase in First World garbage transshipped to China via Hong Kong from 2.3 to over 3 million tons per year from 1998 to 2002. This represents direct transfer of pollution from the First World to China (Diamond 2006).*

Enough of the facts for brief reference this clearly reflects in China the consumption obsession marked by particularly the last two decades of phenomenal material progress.

How then the equilibrium of Confucian self with that of nature can be located? There are many Chinese scholars who express their nationalist fervor in response to the historical Western imperialism in calling for their own modernity as an alternate peaceful rise by avoiding exploitative nature inherently present in the modernity. However the necessary harmony of the *self* with the nature has been destroyed in the process of

catching up with the West. The two “H” (Harmony and Hierarchy) are now the victim of modern market consumption culture. Deeply ingrained hedonism in the Capitalist self is contrary to the moderate self that Confucian self-cultivation entails. China in the Global South is becoming a place where Capitalism explodes consumption obsession in the market with even more force than in other societies. This is reflected by the massive consumption culture at the societal level and State’s quest of power through progress and development. Besides other consequences, emphasis on materialism, consumerism, and hedonism has also resulted into sexual anomie in China affecting intimate relationship between husband and wife thus discrediting it the worth it has always had for Confucian culture (Yang and Neal 2006: 116). The expanding wants and desires growing out of increased personal freedom has resulted in a weakening of the normative restraints previously demanded by traditional Chinese society (Yang and Neal 2006: 116). This hedonism has been explained by the fact that consumers are not really buying a better world, they are buying the sense of pleasure that comes with the illusion that they are buying a better world (Hickle and Khan 2012: 218). According to Badiou, though he champions communism, this competitiveness is a war dictated by self-interest and turns itself into animality which is the other name of competition in Capitalism (McGowan 2013: 9). It is not the modern economic man which owns Capital rather the Capital which owns the economic man. What else lies in the *East* than hollow fantasy about civilizational admiration of past when the questions of *vice* and *virtue* are abandoned and when greatness by means of material growth eventually becomes an end itself. Rephrasing in different words the famous Chinese proverb Deng used, it does not matter then what constitutes vice or virtue in line with traditional ethos; what matters is as long as one could serve Capital one is virtuous.

## Conclusion

The dominant post WWII discourse produced economic entity of North and South. This in itself reflected the process of economization of traditional self-image from being the East to becoming the South. The rise of the “Global South” both as an idea and a possible global alliance formation with a revolutionary urge to take on alternative path to development and greatness is epistemologically absorbed into South-South neo-liberal cosmology while ironically aspiring to be different than the North. How not different they are, is a fact to be reckoned with when it comes to the reign of transcendent spirit of Capital. The Global South has sprung epistemologically from the same consensus developed in 1960s around the development discourse albeit with somewhat revolutionary spirit. Capitalism has been successful in absorbing revolutionary/rebellious criticism as well. The development discourse as it emerged in the Global South tried to redress structural inadequacies in the global economic system without ever questioning at the epistemological and ontological level the very nature of man and his self that Capitalism produces. Indeed, it is more powerful than the church ever was; Marx nailed his theses on the door, and capitalism has only grown in power, crushing its reformation in a way the Catholic Church never could (Pinkard 2013: 31). This is understood by understanding the Capitalist recuperative capacity.

*“It is recuperative in the sense that it organizes forms of resistance (rebellion/dissent) in such a way that they advance capitalism’s goal of creating ever-greater consumer demand for commodities that are produced within a regime that is exploitative at its*

*core. It trades a deeply felt political urge (revolution) for a passive instantiation of identity and difference (consumerism). It supplies people with a sense that they are expressing their unique and authentic selves and therefore produces the illusion of choice and freedom. In the end, each individual seeks to be different and unique, but they all do so in exactly the same way. By purchasing the signs of their identity, they mask their conformity in a thin veil of difference” (Hickle and Khan 2012: 214).*

However the power of the Capitalist discourse does not let the traditional societies incapacitate to defy the economic self and bring forth a moderate, contended, traditional self to harmonize with the nature. Nonetheless any serious attempt by the Global South to align itself with the rich traditions and cultures cultivated in thousands of years in the traditional societies; to become distinctive *East* will need a soul searching and a complete epistemological and ontological reorientation yielding the desired results; alternate path to what it means to be human in the *East*.

## Endnote

<sup>a</sup>Here the term *East* is being used to refer to the diversified but traditional social values and norms upheld by traditional societies; the hallmark of traditional Civilizations. They are homogenous in essence but diversified in expression. Though at times the term *East* is used to refer to largely East Asian or Subcontinent societies I refer here *East* as traditional life world and world view that stands against the modern life world and world view which modernity entails. In that sense it may be argued that even the West was not West before it became West since such power of traditions and values could be traced in pre-modern Christian Europe as well.

## Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

Received: 25 November 2014 Accepted: 25 November 2014

Published online: 25 July 2015

## References

- Ansari, Javed Akbar. 2004. Rejecting freedom and progress: the case against capitalism. *Jareeda* 29: 49–224.
- Berthoud, Gerald. 1992. "Market". In *The Development Dictionary*, ed. Sachs Wolfgang. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Chui, Ernest. 2007. Changing norms and pragmatics of co-residence in East Asian countries. *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 33(1): 1–24.
- Diamond, Jared. 2006. *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail Or Succeed*. London: Penguin.
- Grovogui, Siba. 2011. A revolution nonetheless: the global south in international relations. *The Global South* 5(1): 175–190.
- Hickle, Jason, and Arsalan Khan. 2012. The culture of capitalism and the crisis of critique. *Anthropological Quarterly* 85(1): 203–227.
- Kiossev, Alexander. 2013. "Atlas of Transformation." Monument to Transformation. n.d. <http://monumenttoformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html> (accessed 2013).
- Liu, Kang. 2004. *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Magdoff, Fred, and John Bellamy Foster. 2011. *What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know about Capitalism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Malik, Khalid. 2013. *The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World*. New York: UNDP.
- McGowan, Todd. 2013. The capitalist Gaze. *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 35(1): 3–23.
- Pinkard, Lynice. 2013. Revolutionary suicid: risking everything to transform society and live fully. *Tikkun* 28(4): 31–41.
- Sachs, Wolfgang. 1993. "Development". In *The Development Dictionary*, ed. Sachs Wolfgang. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Shirotori, Miho, and Ana Cristina Molina. 2009. *South–South Trade: The Reality Check*. Geneva: UNCTAD.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. n.d. 2010. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant/> (accessed January 2014).
- Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tsai, Wen-hui. 1986. *From Tradition to Modernity: A Socio-historical Interpretation on China's Struggle Toward Modernization Since the Mid 19th Century*. Occasional Paper Series 72 (1). Maryland: University of Maryland.

- Xie, Xiolin, and Yan Xia. 2005. Attitudes towards the elderly people in china: comparison of college students and baby boomers. *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 31(2): 145–158.
- Xu, Sue Ya. 2005. Who take care of their children when mothers work: a case studies of chinese urban working mothers. *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 31(2): 123–143.
- Yang, Rexnin, and Arthur G Neal. 2006. The impact of globalization on family relations in China. *International Journal of the Sociology of the Family* 32(1): 113–126.

**Submit your manuscript to a SpringerOpen<sup>®</sup> journal and benefit from:**

- ▶ Convenient online submission
- ▶ Rigorous peer review
- ▶ Immediate publication on acceptance
- ▶ Open access: articles freely available online
- ▶ High visibility within the field
- ▶ Retaining the copyright to your article

---

Submit your next manuscript at ▶ [springeropen.com](https://www.springeropen.com)

---