

ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA  
NO. 28

ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA

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Professor Roman Sławiński  
(1932–2014)



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## Introduction

Dear Readers!

We are presenting you yet another, already the 28th, issue of *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia* devoted to the countries and culture of Asia. Over the years of its activity the journal started to be issued in English and it has hosted on its pages many eminent experts on Asia, yet still it remained faithful to its formula which was proposed thirty years ago by Professor Roman Sławiński, the founder of the journal and its permanent editor in chief. This formula stipulated that the Asian cultures should present themselves in the journal and talk directly with their own voice. The idea was both: to include in the group of authors and editors of the magazine scientists who grew up in Asian cultures, as well as to publish materials based on or referring to the texts – philosophical, linguistic, historical, sociological, religious studies or political studies – which were created by the Asian culture. These could be proper names as an object of linguistic research, religious texts, political documents, ideological declarations, but also biographical materials, historiographical elaborations, experience of meeting other cultures and mutual acculturation phenomenon resulting from the relations.

Professor Roman Sławiński left us in November 2014. The more time passes from his death, the more I feel his absence and the more I realize how unique a character he was in the world of research on China. Professor Marianne Bastid-Bruguière, a prominent French scholar from Institut de France in Paris, who met Roman Sławiński in the times of his studies in Beijing, writes about that fact. Most striking is the variety of interests and multidimensionality of research on China which he ran. He was trained as a linguist, and he knew perfectly well not only the classical language, but also many dialects. There was even a time it was appreciated by Mao Zedong himself. Roman Sławiński was interpreting a conversation of the Chinese leader with the Polish state authorities. During the conversation Mao Zedong changed as usual from the classical language to the dialect of Hunan province, which was his place of origin. When he realized he was using the dialect, he noticed that it was not a slightest problem for the interpreter to understand his statements. Then he asked: „Who is that young man who understands the Hunan dialect?” It was known that many Chinese from the surroundings of the Chairman did not understand him when he spoke in the native dialect. It so happened, that Roman Sławiński knew the dialect.

He was interested not only in the language. History, politics, culture as well as China's economy were the subject of his interest and research. His views, opinions and insights on these matters were the inspiration for many researchers of China, some of which are the authors of the materials contained in this issue. Of the many research interests of Professor Sławiński in recent years at least two may be mentioned. First one became Confucianism, especially its latest colours and shades. Professor persistently sought and discovered them in the texts of Chinese scientists, government documents, archives and everyday citizens of China. In this regard he was a dedicated explorer and a keen observer. Even the slightest detail was important to him. Minor personnel changes on the bureaucratic ladder were important for the formation

of general conclusions. From my conversations with him, I got the impression that he was rather skeptical about the possibility of a revival of Confucianism under the supervision of the communist authorities. So he concluded after examining many texts of the so-called new wave of Confucianism in China. His works on the latest Chinese historiography constitute an invaluable contribution to global research on contemporary China. His second passion was the research on the minorities of China Southern. The field research among the peoples of Miao and Tujia that he ran and in which I had the opportunity to participate assumed getting to know the nature of change in the cultural identity of these minorities in the era of globalization and accelerated socio-economic transformation in China. These studies had not been completed, and we can only hope that one of the students of Professor will continue them in the near future.

The arrangement of contents offered to you in the 28th issue of *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia* refers to the research passions of Professor Sławiński. The first article, written by Stanisław Tokarski – Indologist and long-time associate of Professor Sławiński, concerns dialogue between the East and the West and the possibility of mutual understanding and agreement. Understanding another culture is also the ability to read the symbols contained in the letters and that aspect of the intercultural dialogue interested Professor Sławiński in particular. The question of so-called Asian values – presented in the articles written by Adam Jelonek, Adam Raszewski, Artur Kościański and Larisa Zabrowskaia – was very close to Professor Sławiński and he dealt with it for many years as part of his research on the so-called new Confucianism. The issue of Chinese migration in the world was also in the interests of Professor – mainly in the context of global economic and social phenomena. This part of the research on China is presented in the article on the Chinese migration to France by Nicolas Levi. The issue of Chinese language was obviously important for Professor Sławiński as a linguist and he always welcomed in the columns of *Acta* the authors writing about language and linguistic issues. This area of research is presented in the current issue in the article on Chinese names written by Irena Kałużyńska. On the other hand, the artistic part of the culture is referred to in the articles by Izabella Łabędzka, Lidia Kasarełło, Ewa Chmielowska, Fu-sheng Shih and Diana Wolańska. The first three of these articles relate to Taiwan, where Professor conducted research for many years which resulted among others in a monograph *History of Taiwan*. The further three articles penned by Waldemar Dziak, Iwona Grabowska-Lipińska and Anna Mrozek-Dumanowska refer to the political sphere. Political sphere is inextricably linked with the ideology which was also the case of China. Confucianism and the new Confucianism emerged and developed in the shadow of the emperors, presidents and chairmen of the Chinese Communist Party. Researching them without the analysis of the political scene was not possible. The part of articles is closed by two texts unrelated with China, but with the Middle East. Their authors – Dorota Rudnicka-Kassem and Marcin Styszyński present materials based on the Middle Eastern sources and thus relate to the traditions of *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia*. The issue is closed by the report from field research in southern China by Professor Sławiński and me. For me it was a unique opportunity to get to know at least a little piece of China – a unique one, because my guide was Professor Sławiński – such a great scholar and such a seasoned expert on Asia.

I would like to thank the authors – students, colleagues and friends – for participation in the preparation of the issue, and the Directorate of the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures of the Polish Academy of Sciences for the possibility to dedicate the anniversary issue of *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia* to Professor Sławiński.

Jerzy Zdanowski

ADAM W. JELONEK

## On the So-Called Asian Values Once Again

### Abstract

Over the period of the last two or three decades, East Asia has achieved remarkable success. It is hard to imagine today that yet in the 1960s this region was among the poorest in the world. Since then, a fierce discussion has started over the directions of Asian modernity. With some influences of the Huntingtonian thesis placing cultural differences at the forefront in explaining international instabilities, several scholars have started quite seriously asking questions about the potential linkages between cultural values and political change in East Asia. In this article, I shall attempt to answer how important the role of cultural factors was in bringing about the general change of image of contemporary Asian communities and economies. After making a few preliminary comments on the theoretical relations between culture and development, I shall proceed to indicate some basic elements of both scientific and political discourse, concerning a concept of the so-called Asian values, which is presented as an example of a highly-ideological attempt at contrasting the two following cultural and social contexts: Asian and Western. In the conclusion, I shall try to contrast some myths about the cultural differences with the results of empirical research

**Key words:** Asian values, East Asian societies, cultural traditions, history experiences, occidentalisation, diversity.

At least, prior to the financial crisis of the late 1990s, East Asia had become a synonym for spectacular economic success. No surprise. If we travel back in time to the 1960s and compare then with current condition of Asian economies, we will be able to fully appreciate the full scale of this success. In 1960, Asia was producing only 4% of the global GNP (gross national product), at the beginning of the 1990s that figure had risen to as much as 25%. Half a century ago, the income of an average inhabitant of Japan, at that time the richest country of the region, amounted to no more than 15% of the average US citizen's income. South Korea was no wealthier than Sudan, whereas Taiwan was almost as poor as Zaire during that time. Back then, the countries of East Asia boasted an impressive rate of growth, reaching 10% per annum. In the middle of the 90s, one-third of the global currency reserves were located in Asia. It started to gradually dawn on the Western population that the image of Asia as one of the world's peripheries was a thing of the past.<sup>1</sup>

As has been noted by the World Bank specialists, the dynamics of developmental pace in East Asia is unprecedented on the global scale. Within a quarter of a century, the average

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<sup>1</sup> J. Rohwer, *Asia Rising*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995, p. 28.

national income in the region's countries rose by four times. The states of the region had quickly managed to integrate their local markets with the world economy, minimise the areas of social poverty and evidently improve their living standards. Following closely behind the success of the so-called Asian Tigers, another group appeared, broader in scope, consisting of rapidly industrialising and dynamically growing economies, which – like the Chinese economy – gradually began to be seen as fostering global growth.<sup>2</sup>

For years, the attempts at explaining the reasons behind the surprising dynamics of East Asian development have been subject to key areas analysis, undertaken by economists, anthropologists, sociologists, as well as by economic *insiders*. Some specialist argued that a reason for the Eastern Asian civilizational leap lies in the existence of the principal differences in the cultural and social systems of East Asia and “the old world” countries, including the United States and Western Europe, as the most dominant players on the global market.

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The notion of culture has been evolving to take on more and more attributes. More than a century ago, Edward Tylor, in his classical work entitled, *Primitive cultures*, defined culture as being “the complex whole, which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by virtue of the fact that one is a member of a particular society”.<sup>3</sup> In the middle of the last century, Alfred Kroeber, in his work *Anthropology*, described culture as a phenomenon encompassing speech, knowledge, beliefs, customs, arts and technologies, ideals and rules inherited through intergenerational communication. Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, in their classic work, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, supplemented the notion of culture with another essential statement. What they noticed is that culture encompasses a set of rules and modes of behaviour acquired and passed on by means of symbols. The cultural system, specific to a given society, may be thus understood not only as being the sum of experiences acquired by man in a given society, but also – and more so – it may constitute a basis for determining his or her future behaviours and configurations.<sup>4</sup>

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It happened in April, 1994. The Court of the Republic of Singapore was examining the case of an American teenager, Michael Peter Fay, who had been accused of vandalism. Fay, almost a year e, together with a group of his colleagues, had painted graffiti over the cars parked at Chatsworth Road. The judge, Yong Pung How, after hearing the testimonies of the involved parties, made his decision. The American was to be punished by inflicting six cane strokes on his buttocks. This incident of seemingly little importance gave rise to a genuine media event: “the clash of civilisations”. The Singapore authorities, despite explicit pressure exerted by the White House, refused to renounce the punishment. The

<sup>2</sup> D.M. Leipziger, T. Vinod, *The Lessons of East Asia: An Overview of Country Experience*, Washington: World Bank, 1993, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> K.C. Alexander, P.P. Kumaran, *Culture and Development: Cultural Patterns in Areas of Uneven Development*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> A.L. Kroeber, C. Kluckhohn, ‘Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions,’ *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Vol. XLVII, No. 1, 1952.

case had taken on a symbolic meaning. Asia, through the words of the Singapore Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, defended its image, its Asian social order and values. Asia raised accusations against immoral Western youth. The West was deeply indignant at the barbarity of Asian regimes. In the wake of this negligible, though dramatic, incident the essence of civilizational disputes over Asian values came to the fore of public attention.

The first symptoms of Asians' growing awareness of their new place in geopolitics had been noted even prior to this incident within Asia itself. In 1989, a book by a Japanese politician and publisher, Shintaro Ishihara, entitled, *The Japan That Can Say No*<sup>5</sup> turned out to be a great success. Ishihara, relinquishing all diplomatic conventions, put forward the argument that Japan ought to take its rightful place, equal to that of the United States, in the system of world geopolitics. In so arguing, he provided much evidence for the existence of the huge, though still unexploited, potential of Asia. Some of Ishihara's comments were truly surprising. American strategists dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, instead of some German city, solely because they were guided by purely racist premises. The Empire of Japan, in its conquest of particular Asian states, had brought civilisation and freedom to them; American colonisation resulted only in enslavement and backwardness. The book, which sold millions in the United States, was acclaimed as "a racist manifest and a call for bloody confrontation". Asian readers though, received it in a more moderate way – as an attempt at recovering Japan's national pride and a reminder that not only Japan, but also the entire region, is now in the power to say "no".

At the turn of the 80s and the 90s, the economic success achieved by East and Southeast Asia countries triggered a fierce debate over the changes taking place in the contemporary world. Asian countries were facing very serious historical dilemmas. The improvement of living standards generated fundamental discussions as to the nature of social, cultural and finally political changes on the continent. The questions were raised regarding the democratisation of political life, the legitimisation of government, as well as – and often neglected by Western observers – the identity of the people and nations inhabiting the East. For many people, the ongoing processes of globalisation meant the inevitability of the gradual 'occidentalization' of the region – a relinquishing of former points of reference, an annihilation of traditional social organisation, and an ensuing loss of a sense of identity.

Many ideological concepts, referred to as the Asian values programme, fit into this discourse. The Singapore Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, recognised the concepts of Asian values as a new ideology of Asian rebirth. The concepts were further promoted, with great success, by the Malaysian leader, Mahathir bin Mohamad. A well-known Vietnam political scientist, Nguyen Gia King, observed with sarcasm that it did not escape his attention that both the Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad – the two forerunners of Asian values – were themselves descended from deeply westernised elites of their respective countries, and both of them, and particularly Mahathir, played essential roles in the processes of westernisation in their countries. The Asian values programme was nevertheless, too advantageous for those pragmatic Asian politicians to disregard it.

The peak of its popularity was in the period of the region's highest economic prosperity. The fundamental theses underlining Asian values found their expression in the so-called Bangkok Declaration, signed in April 1993 by a series of leaders from East and Southeast Asia countries, including China, Malaysia and Singapore. The Bangkok Declaration,

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<sup>5</sup> Sh. Ishihara, *The Japan That Can Say No. Why Japan Will Be First Among Equals*, New York: Touchstone Books, 1992.

which was meant to codify the essence of Asian values ideology, oscillated between a few interrelated issues, which are worth mentioning. Firstly, the declaration authors raised a simple *cultural* argument that any definition of an individual's role in a society would not be complete without due consideration given to his or her special historical, social, economic and political context, in short – it was to be civilisation-specific. Secondly, the declaration also listed arguments for a *communitarian* nature of Asian societies. According to this view, an individual's duties towards his family and society constitute the core of social life, contrary to Western individualism and an atomistic comprehension of Western society. If community interests override individual interests, then consequently any demonstration of an individual's right would pose a threat to the order and harmonious functioning of a society. The declaration states further arguments to support a notion of citizens' voluntary subjection to discipline in all dimensions of social life, including family and workplace relations, as well as politics. The self-discipline of Asian societies, according to the authors of the declaration, is a result of their culturally conditioned needs to achieve economic success. The conclusion that stems from such suppositions is a preferential treatment of social and economic rights over citizen and political rights – with a high value placed on “a right to develop”. Finally, an *organic* argument is propounded, according to which state and society constitute one integral body – with the government exerting its authority in the interest of common good. A simple consequence of this line of thinking is to admit that any criticism of government is in conflict with the interest of people at large.

The arguments presented in the Bangkok Declaration were interpreted by the majority of observers as being in line with Confucian tradition, as it glorified the state and its structures. Confucianism, as the amalgamation of religious and philosophical thought, has a natural correspondence with Chinese tradition. Although, a large part of East Asia was directly affected by these teachings, it would be an exaggeration to say that Chinese political values were prevalent in Southeast Asia and, more so, Asia in general. Many enthusiasts of the Asian values and ideology that Confucianism spread throughout the entire region in a belief – by an analogy with Weber's idea of protestant ethics – that their adherence to this philosophy would secure economic success for the region. Moreover, Confucianism called for an acceptance of hierarchy, a necessity to maintain social harmony, respect for and subjection to family and government, which were seen as a natural extension of the former. This concept – one of the basic premises of the Asian values programme – demonstrated the inadequacy of Western democratic rule for Asian countries. The Asian concept of power is based on the supposition that there exists some special quality, attributed to specific individuals or social groups, rather than on the necessity to achieve special goals, important for a society. Consequently, for an individual to achieve success within governmental structures, it is sufficient to live in accordance with his or her status. Any opposition to authority is regarded as an attack against the social system, and one cannot expect to be supported by society in his or her rebellion against the system, because society constitutes such a system.

Religion is an integral element of Asian cultural values. In fact, it does not only accompany the life of each Asian, but it also rules their existence from birth to death. It defines the value systems at work and in social, economic and political life. This remains true, regardless of the obvious multiplicity of religions in East Asia (Buddhism, Islam or Christianity) and noticeable secularisation processes at work. Asian leaders claim that the consistent separation of church and state that took place in the West – which restricted religion to private life – has resulted in a complete absence of moral values in public life and a harmful growth of

individualistic tendencies. In Asia, religion was attached to the sphere of politics. Under Asian tradition, both God and rulers are notions that are very closely linked, if not equivalent. In Confucian China, the emperor was the God; in the Muslim countries of Southeast Asia the God is the ruler; in Hindu India or Buddhist Thailand the ruler is God's envoy.

The politicised nature of the debate on Asian values was not only motivated by the differentiation of basic cultural elements. The essence of the matter was that "Asian values" were, and still frequently are, mistakenly contrasted with "Western values" – a different, not wholly defined concept. Some politicians, such as Mahathir bin Mohamad, used these contrasting strategies in the context of Asian values regeneration, by contrasting them, in a moral and economic sense, with the decadent West. The power of Asian values consisted of the fact that they were antagonistic to liberal, Christian and cosmopolitan values flooding in from the West. Asian values are frequently discussed in the context of East-West dichotomy, which increases a tendency of exaggeration and generalisation. Asian values – contrary to the intentions of their creators – with their commitment to community and family as the foundations of society, with respect for science, hard work and social obligations – were often shown in opposition to the West, specifically the breakdown of the notion of family, and the destructive forces of decadence, hedonism, exuberant individualism, and moral degeneration contributing to the inevitable fall of Western civilisation.

This rhetoric was often resorted to in the absence of real arguments. The West was described as a hotbed of decadence and depravity. Asia was to triumph over the West because of its "superior" value system. The arrogance and imperialism demonstrated by Western civilisation, which was trying to impose its own rules over the world, were to come to an end. The future was to belong to the Asians. A Singapore ambassador at UNO, Kishore Mahbubani, was the master of rhetoric in Asian values. He exclaimed: "Go East, young people! We've reached the end of a 500year period of Western dominance. The Mediterranean Sea was the ocean of the past, the Atlantic is the ocean of today, the Pacific will become the ocean of tomorrow".

A slightly more moderate position in that regard was taken by a new generation of Thai politicians. One of the Thai ministers, Surin Pitsuwan, expressed this new stance in the following words: "I say to Americans: look at us, we are developing the same as you are. In many aspects, we are almost like your mirror reflection. But you should understand that we also have the right to differ from you in some respects".

The economic crisis of the late 90s, brought about by a rapid decrease of exports in the region, and the subsequent breakdown of the currency system of East and Southeast Asian countries, contributed to lowering the temperature of the debate on Asian values, and sharp edged rhetoric figures gave way to much more moderate statements by Asian leaders and intellectuals.

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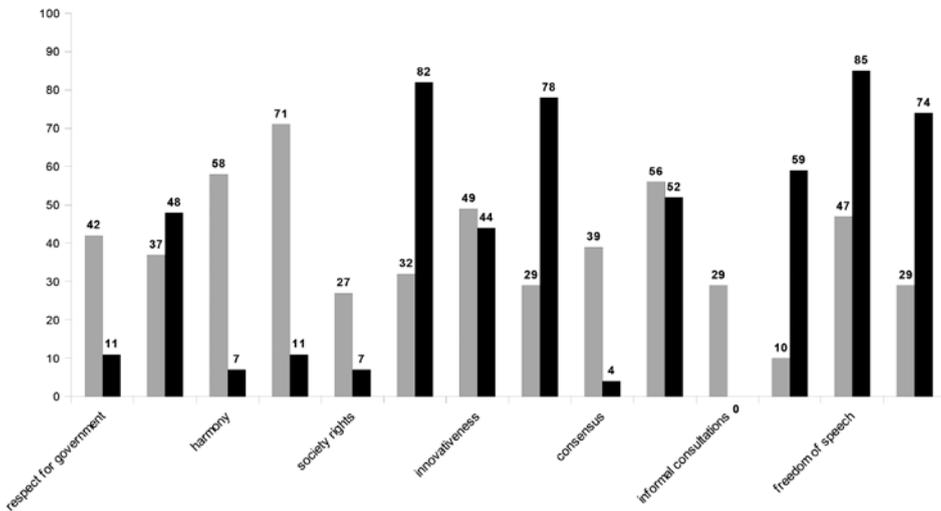
The discourse, concerned with relations between traditional Confucian values and modernisation processes in East Asia, has gradually become a matter of interest for scholars and researchers. Apart from considering the theoretical aspects of these interrelations, some of them undertook complex field observations, which would verify the nature of the interdependence between models and the actual attitudes of respondents. One of the first scientists who raised the issue of Asian values in the context of their influence on the organisation of social relations and political life in contemporary East Asian countries, was

an American scholar, David I. Hitchcock, from the Washington Centre for Strategic and International Studies.<sup>6</sup>

In his study on Asian values (Figure 1 and 2), he asked one hundred respondents from the United States and seven East Asian countries (China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand) to rank what personal and social values or traits, from the two presented lists, they believed were particularly important to their countrymen. Two out of five of the most frequently indicated values or personal traits and correspondingly, two out of the six most popular social values were on the priority list of both Asians and Americans. The answers supplied by the Americans and Asians differed most significantly with respect to the relative importance that both sides attached to such issues as “social order and harmony”, “personal liberty” and “individual rights”. The first of the aforementioned items was marked as “particularly important” by 11% of Americans and 71% of Asians, whereas the two remaining variables were indicated by 82 % of Americans and 32% of Asians, and 78% of Americans and 29% of Asians, respectively.

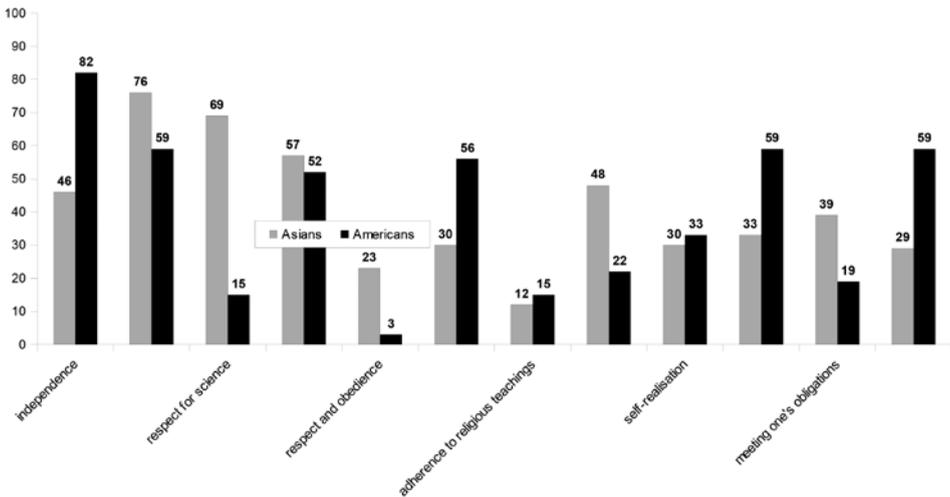
In a further part of his study, Hitchcock once again interviewed one hundred respondents from East Asia and eighteen Americans, by asking them to carefully examine twelve different ruling practices. The respondents were to mark those items on the list which in their opinion, were the most important and those which were considered the least important. While compiling the list of practises, Hitchcock avoided using expressions, such as “right to something” or “freedom of something”, trying to formulate his questions in such a way as to obtain the highest possible level of objectivity.

**Fig. 1. Social values as shown by Hitchcock’s research: Asians and Americans**



Source: study on the basis of D.I. Hitchcock. 1994. *Asian Values and the United States: How Much Conflict?*, Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

<sup>6</sup> D.I. Hitchcock, *Asian Values and the United States: How Much Conflict?*, Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994.

**Fig. 1. Social values as shown by Hitchcock's research: Asians and Americans**

Source: study on the basis of D.I. Hitchcock. 1994. *Asian Values and the United States: How Much Conflict?*, Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Three out of twelve positions, i.e. “freedom of speech”, “choosing leaders in free elections” and “lack of discrimination due to race, religious faith, and skin colour, gender, age or physical disability” were marked as the most important by 100% of Americans. With regards to the Asian respondents, the most frequently indicated items were: “free elections”, “honest work” (with reference to local conditions), “humanitarian terms and conditions of work and working hours”, and subsequently “lack of discrimination”. In comparison with the Americans, the Asians placed a higher value on social order and harmony, respect for authorities, maintaining the *status quo* with respect to harmony, and a respect for knowledge. At the same time, both the Americans and the Asians showed considerable appreciation for hard work, honesty, self-realisation, responsibility in public officials and innovativeness.

In summarising the results of his studies, Hitchcock arrived at roughly the same conclusion as the spokesmen for relativistic order, according to whom there is a fundamental difference in the hierarchy of values between Asian and American respondents. Apart from evident differences in the scope relating to “the ruling practises”, what emerges from Hitchcock’s questionnaires is a fundamental difference in the so-called “world of hidden convictions”, relating to personal and social values. Hitchcock’s research studies had wide repercussions among the groups of scholars dealing with Asian values, and their results were used, more than once, to justify the legitimacy of different social systems in Western and East Asian civilisations, as well as to prove their possibly different evolutionary directions.

However, some serious methodological objections have been raised against the research made by Hitchcock, contesting a ‘too universal’ nature of the received results. The sample analysed by Hitchcock was too small to formulate such far reaching conclusions. Hitchcock, an American, had conducted his research in person, a fact which undoubtedly affected the contents of the answers given. Furthermore, questionnaires (the fact which the American researcher was open about)

were submitted for answers to the so-called opinion leaders – politicians and representatives of scientific and business circles. The opinion leaders of East Asia, with a few exceptions, at the time of conducting the research, were in the middle of a great ideological, inter-civilizational debate, in which the universality of Western values was shown in opposition to the relativistic view presented by the East. These groups, by the natural course of things, projected such an image of the value system as they would wish for their own communities. This programmatic subjectivism of the examined group, was certainly not conducive to showing the actual condition and scope of the traditional Asian values embedded in the contemporary societies of this region.

By means of comparable research instruments, a team of students from the Sociology Institute of Warsaw University, together with the Social Sciences Faculty of Hanoi University, took up in 2003 under my guidance, research into the value system of Hanoi University students. In our studies, we tried to avoid making excessive generalisations on civilisations, as Hitchcock did, planning to make our project a small scale endeavour. While conducting our research, we tried to provide maximum anonymity. What is more, the questionnaires in Vietnam were carried out by local co-workers, and each respondent was informed that the sole organiser of the research was the Social Sciences Faculty at Hanoi University, which allowed for a reduction of possible answer distortions.<sup>7</sup>

Having analysed our research, we noticed the essential similarities, as well as no less important differences, in the respondents' comprehension of values hierarchy, when compared with the published results of David Hitchcock's questionnaires. These discrepancies, reaching now and then 30%, have a bearing on the configuration of the values most frequently declared as essential. Inasmuch as the most frequently indicated personal values in Hitchcock's research were: "hard work", "respect for science", "individual achievements", "honesty" and "self-discipline", a set of the most frequently declared values, as revealed by our research, were as follows: "independence", "achieving success in life", "helping others" and "honesty".

Basically, the traditional model of individual beliefs and conduct is undermined only by a drastic fall in the number of people who consider "self-discipline" as an essential value.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the young Vietnamese respondents regard values promoting an exceptional role of community, such as "helping others" and "respect for parents", fundamental in Confucian tradition, with even more seriousness than the Asian elites examined by Hitchcock.

In light of the above, we may ask ourselves if there is any essential change taking place in the way individuals define themselves and in the way they perceive social reality. It seems that the results of the research allow for a positive answer to this question – the proof is the high position assigned to the variable "being successful in life". This value has been indicated by respondents almost as many times as "hard work", "respect for knowledge" or "independence". (The Asian elites examined by Hitchcock indicated "success" far less often than "hard work": 26% and 76%, respectively). What can then be a meaning of such change?

Basic personal values, which attest to the vitality of tradition, including the Confucian tradition, seemingly still have many followers in contemporary Vietnam society. The same as before, a considerable number of our respondents set much store by such traits as "hard work", "respect for knowledge", "independence", "honesty" and "obedience to and respect

<sup>7</sup> See: A.W. Jelonek, *Młodzież wietnamska. Systemy wartości. Stereotypy Zachodu* [Vietnamese Youth. System of Values. Stereotypes of the West], Warszawa: Scholar, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> See K. Tomala, 'Prawa człowieka w Chińskiej Republice Ludowej', in *Chiny. Przemiany państwa i społeczeństwa w okresie reform 1978–2000* [Human Rights in the People's Republic of China, in China. Changes of State and Society in the Period of Reforms 1978–2000], Warszawa: TRIO, 2001, p. 141.

for parents". Although, in comparison with the results obtained by Hitchcock, such values as "hard work", "respect for knowledge" and "honesty" have received a slightly lower percentage of indications, there are still no grounds to say that this scope of values lost its social significance, to any larger degree. The more so if we assume that, in as much as the age and status of the people examined by Hitchcock created a bias towards a conservative estimation of social significance attached to traditional values, the relatively young age of the Vietnamese respondents inclined them towards more radical judgements.

From the point of view of the relations existing between the traditional system of Confucian values and modernisation processes, the results of the Vietnamese research, in comparison to Hitchcock's analysis, yield slightly different conclusions. We are dealing at this point with a process of supplementing traditional values with new values. In this way, a new cohesive and logical whole is formed, within the framework of which traditional values are, contrary to expectations, not being superseded by new, Western specific values, but are just becoming more entrenched, because of their connection with the goals set by a new reality. Thus, obligations rooted in tradition become in this model, interconnected with rights – in this case the right to achieve success. Success, in the eyes of young Vietnamese students, is not inevitably seen as stemming from individual achievements. The individualisation of goals, manifest in an individual's striving for his or her own success and in an individual's awareness of his or her rights, does not entail an individualisation of actions, although, theoreticians of individualism often interrelate an individual perspective of goals with an individual model of action (based on self-steering responses and self-reliance). Under Vietnamese conditions, the most pragmatically convenient way to realize one's goals is still apparently, as part of a collective action – an attitude which is treated not so much as a value in itself, but as a convenient and effective method of action.

A considerable shift, in comparison with Hitchcock's results, can also be noticed with respect to a set of social values, most frequently declared as essential. The most highly estimated values of the Hitchcock research, such as "harmony" and "social order", in the Hanoi results give way to such notions as "community rights" and "individual freedom". On the other hand, "respect for public officials" occupies third position in terms of the frequency of indications in both studies. A similarly high position is taken, in comparable results, by such variables as "respect for government" and "innovativeness". A substantial, 20% difference between the respective indications for "individual freedom" leads to the conclusion that this value, in the opinion of Vietnamese students, should not be included in the catalogue of values considered as the most essential. In turn, 48% of the indications for the "resolution of disputes by means of a public debate" means that this social value occupies the fifth position in terms of the number of indications.

As much as 65% of the indications for "individual freedom" (in comparison with 31% from the Hitchcock research) may be taken as a harbinger of a growing importance attached to the ethics of rights; in the results from the Vietnamese research, it is the most frequently marked value as well. It is also important to note that the surveyed Vietnamese students passed over the values highly estimated by the respondents from the Hitchcock research. Such omitted values include: "harmony" (28% against 58% in Hitchcock's research), "social order" (28% against 71%) and "consensus" (12.3% against 39%). The special importance attached to these values was, according to the American scholar, perhaps the most fundamental feature of the Asian view of the public sphere, in addition to being a key to understanding the role of an individual in East Asian society.

In light of the Vietnamese research, some new scientific hypotheses claims our attention. A simplistic version of the "relativism" of political systems, emerging from Hitchcock's

research, does not seem to find confirmation in this case. Global transformations and their impact on Vietnamese youth, both seem to attest to the ongoing hybridisation process, by which traditional Confucian values are being supplemented with the selectively treated values, borrowed from the liberal West.

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I have decided to additionally verify the hypothesis on the deep divisions between the value systems of Western and Confucian traditions, by analysing the durability of the traditional Confucian value system in an Asian country, undergoing the most advanced processes of social, political and economic modernisation, namely Taiwan. My point of reference for the Taiwan research was the measurement applied to the value system of Polish society – as a representative of Western civilisation.

Taiwan, one of the famous Asian Tigers, apart from achieving spectacular economic success over the recent years, has become the arena for fundamental transformations in political life. The rapidly advancing reforms of the main public life institutions, began in 1996, were tantamount to the transformation of a political stage model – from an authoritarian state, through various intermediate stages (the so-called, ‘limited democracy’), to a fully democratic system, based entirely on models derived from the West. Such a revolutionary change of the country system is considered by politologists to be a historically unprecedented event.<sup>9</sup>

In 1949, the activists from the Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang* – KMD), having suffered defeat at the hands of communist forces and having escaped from continental China, made an attempt to establish their strategic abutment in Taiwan. Few observers believed that they would ever succeed in establishing in Taiwan an efficiently operating economy and civil administrative structures, let alone the foundations of a democratic system. These fears as it later turned out, proved unjustified to a large extent.

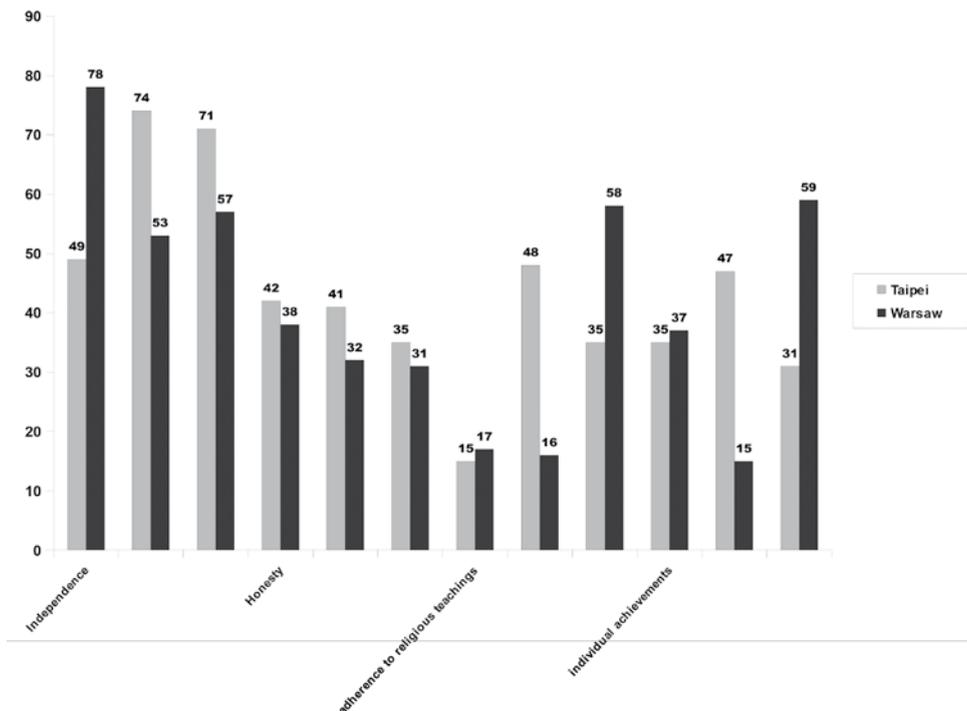
The applied research procedure did not basically differ from the one adopted for the aforementioned research in 2003. It was also based on a questionnaire model, as was previously applied by Hitchcock, which consisted of contrasting traditional Confucian values with idealised liberal values of the West. The Taiwanese research was performed over the period from October to December 2007, and involved a quota sample of 418 students (215 women and 203 men). It covered the three biggest academic centres in the city (two public ones: the National Taiwan University and the National Chengchi University and one private, Tamkang University). The second part of the research relied on questionnaires, which were carried out among the students of Warsaw universities. Within the period from March to May 2008, 463 people were examined, including 240 women and 223 men. The studies covered the greatest public universities in the capital city of Warsaw, including Warsaw University, Warsaw University of Technology and Warsaw School of Economics, as well as the private school, B. Jański Higher School.

Although, the conducted studies registered only a state of facts at one specific moment in time, which does not provide grounds for making legitimate statements on the course of the processes of social change and political values modernisation, it would be reasonable to expect that, within two decades of democratic rule, the interactions between a sphere of axiology and political *praxis* should take place.

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<sup>9</sup> L. Chao, R.H. Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy: Political Life in the Republic of China on Taiwan*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

**Fig. 3. Personal values as shown by the research into the preferences of Taiwanese and Polish students**



Source: own work.

The research results yield very interesting conclusions. As far as personal values are concerned (figure 3), almost all the answers given by Taiwan respondents reveal their tendency to indicate traditional Confucian values equally frequently or even more frequently than the respondents of both the Hitchcock and the Hanoi research. And thus, 74.3% of the examined subjects opted for “hard work”, i.e. slightly fewer than in Hitchcock’s research, though far more than in the Vietnam research. The indications of the typically Confucian values, such as “respect for education” (71.1%), “obedience to parents” (41.1%), “self-discipline” (33.2%) or “fulfilling one’s obligations towards others” (47.2%), are more frequent or noticeably more frequent among the Taiwanese respondents than it is the case in both the Vietnamese research and the research conducted by the American scholar. The values from within the scope of Western liberal values, which were indicated as essential by Taiwanese respondents, are similar to the answers indicated in the previous research carried out in the territory of East Asia. “Self-discipline” was indicated by 49.2% of the examined persons, “self-realisation” – 36.3%, “individual achievements” – 34.8%, and “success in life” – 31.7%.

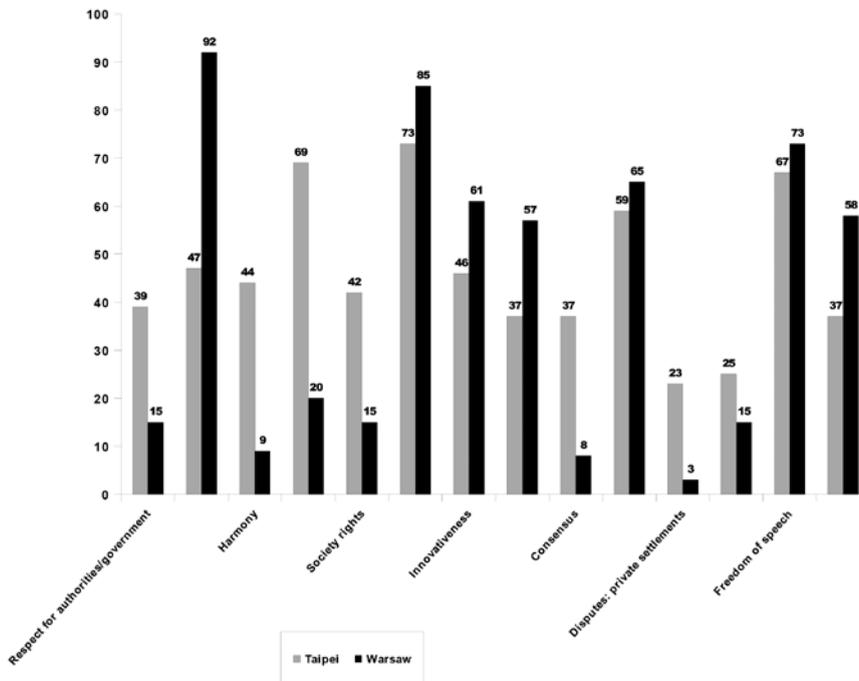
It is necessary to note at this point that the value system chosen by the comparative group of Polish students, paradoxically bears greater resemblance, in many respects, to the idealised model of traditional Confucian values, than to the model of ‘the liberal West’. With regard to such issues as “independence” (77.3%), “meeting one’s obligations” (14.6%) or “individual success in life” (59.4%), Polish students are, in actual fact, catching up with

American respondents. However, in the case of such values as “respect for education” (56.4%), “hard work” (52.8%) or “obedience to parents” (32%), the Polish respondents appear to be, on the basis of their answers at least, very Confucian-like.

Coming back, however, to the analysed issue of the influence of the democratisation process on a hypothetical transformation of the system, it seems that, within the observed time horizon, the system has remained largely unchanged. What is also worth highlighting at this point is that the respondents in both studies were students, that is to say, people who were born, or at least brought up, in a new democratic reality.

Even more interesting conclusions on the relations between Asian values and liberal democracy can be drawn from the second part of the questionnaire, concerned with the analysis of social values. It is evident at first sight that the value system of Taiwanese youth, on most dimensions, is not essentially different from the value systems held by the respondents from the Hitchcock or Vietnamese research. For example, a relatively high number of indications of Confucian values among Taiwan respondents were noticed with reference to such variables as: “respect for authorities” (39.1%), “harmony” (44%), “consensus” (37.2%) or “society rights” (42.4%), as well as a relatively low position for “resolution of debates by means of a public debate” (31.6%) or “independent thinking” (25.4%) from the set of liberal values. At the same time, one can notice a considerable growth in the area of such variables of liberal values as: “making decisions by majority” (46.7%), “individual freedom” (73.3%) or “freedom of speech” (67.4%).

**Fig. 4. Personal values as shown by the research into the preferences of Taiwanese and Polish students**



Source: own work.

In comparison with the values estimated highly by Polish youth, Taiwanese students are still the adherents of the considerably different values of a traditional Confucian type. The most notable differences between the two could be observed within the scope of the meaning attributed to such variables as “social order” (49%), “harmony” (35%), “society rights” or “consensus” (each 29%). The probable reason is that the terminology used in the questionnaire could be partly incomprehensible for Polish respondents. Additionally, the non-existence of such terms in the public discourse could lead to their meaning being distorted by subjective perspectives or interpreted differently, in accordance with distinct cultural contexts (for example, “resolution of disputes by means of private settlements”). What really deserves to be highlighted in our analysis of the relations between traditional Confucian values and procedural democracy is the fact that most of the values presented to respondents as belonging to a liberal sphere are considered, by both societies, as very important. With regard to the above, both societies differ only negligently (except for the variable “decisions made by majority”), taking into account that the two groups of students come from completely different cultural contexts and political traditions. The occurrence of such discrepancies may be a result of the deeply rooted Confucian tradition, but other explanations are also possible.

The results of the comparative studies carried out in both Taipei and Warsaw, as well as the conclusions from the previous Hitchcock research and the “Vietnam 2003” project, shed some interesting light on the changes occurring in East Asia. These results also reveal an interesting correlation of Confucianism and liberal democracy, or at least its constitutional procedures. On the basis of the collected scientific samples, it is hard to believe unreservedly in a vision of two completely different cultures, the liberal West and Confucian East, as proposed by cultural relativists. Similarly, it is hard to convince oneself that the existence of the alleged internal obstacles to democracy development in traditional Asian value systems, is an indelible fact.

The obtained results prove the applicability of a modernity model, according to which value systems are subject to slowly, though inevitably, advancing convergence processes. It is not advisable, however, to reach unambiguous conclusions on this point. An essentially binary vision of the communal, hierarchical reality of Eastern society, promoted first by cultural relativists and then by Hitchcock, contrasted with the individualistic and liberal Western society, does not suffice in making an accurate analysis of the changes on an axiology plane. In as much as the obtained statistical data provides grounds to observe that a traditional model of society, based on harmony and social consent, has partially lost its impact. The obtained data does not allow for stating unequivocally that the change in this case consisted of a noticeable shift in the subjects’ indications of a Western value system. Due to the multiplicity and variety of relations between different cultural and social-organisational aspects, it is insufficient to discuss them solely in terms of models’ undertaking and adaptation to the context of a domestic culture.

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What are Asian values in essence? To what roots can East Asian societies, now at a crossroads, own up to? The fact that this issue is exploited for political ends both by Asians themselves and external critics alike often leads to very convenient generalisations. Professor Krzysztof Gawlikowski, one of the Polish scholars specialising in Asian values, states in one of his works: “The distinctiveness of philosophical and religious traditions of Asia is basically indubitable”. There is a general consent on this point. Nevertheless, if we care to take a closer look at the phenomenon of Asian values, we will see that it is based on a whole series of premises which

cannot be defended on methodological grounds. In fact, the term “Asian values” is in itself suggestive of some uniform social, economic and political systems; that we can determine and distinguish a set of values shared by inhabitants of Asian states, which reaches beyond the dividing lines of national states and of religious and ideological influences. Is this really the case?

First and foremost, if we look at the issue of Asian values outside of their special context, we can notice that they are similar to a set of conservative values, which are absolutely commonplace and prevalent not only in the analysed area, but are also frequently attributed to societies in general as well as non-modernised societies. Such values include strong leadership, respect for governments, law and order, communitarian orientation placing emphasis on the priority of community interests over individual interests, and stressing the importance of family. In light of the above, it is difficult to answer the question whether or not Asian values are merely a stage in the modernisation process in the “taking-shape” of Eastern societies.

A similar ambiguity accompanies the consideration of the second issue. Asian countries were founded on the basis of very distinct and mutually independent traditions. We can roughly assume that East Asia, with respect to culture, bears an unmistakable mark of Chinese influence and is imbued, to varying degrees, with elements of Confucian philosophy. Western Asia is a mixture of Hindi and Muslim culture. Southern countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, are Islamic to a considerable extent. On the other hand, Thai and Burmese cultures are shaped by Buddhist influences, whereas the Philippine reality would be difficult to understand without a reference to Catholicism. In any case, Western culture put down its roots globally, particularly from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The respective countries know very little about each other. Even an educated Japanese citizen may find it difficult to answer the question as to whether Iran and Iraq are located in Asia.

The meandering of history adds more complexity to this situation. It is difficult to find any trace of Asian solidarity. The Japanese still consider themselves as the elite, superior to the rest of the Asian nations. The inhabitants of Thailand regard any concept of “common values” with great distrust, perceiving it not so much as a sign of a Western cultural invasion, but more so as an expression of Malaysian or Chinese imperialism. The Chinese, regardless of the dramatic historical events of the last century, did not quite renounce their ancestors’ belief that Chinese people are the centre of any perceived civilised world, surrounded by prevalently barbarian nations, deprived of any value system. The great Chinese Diaspora, which plays an essential role in the economy of almost all regional states, is seen by local populations as a natural enemy. The studies show that an average Malay, when asked about a potential threat to his or her own traditions, is certain to point to the “excessive presence of Chinese culture”, rather than to occidentalisation.<sup>10</sup> The idea of Asia, as one entity with uniform value systems, raises serious doubts even if only confronted with these arguments.

To summarise, Asia is too large and too diversified – considering its richness of cultural and historical traditions, and its multiplicity of colonial and modern history experiences – to be reduced to a common denominator. What is more, culture itself is too dynamic and creative a phenomenon to allow for very stereotypical constructions. It is so, because each culture covers independent, historically co-occurring traditions and interpretations, as well as competing values and constant intercultural exchanges with other systems. Such diversity does not only pertain to entire geographical regions or civilizational areas, but also to states, nations or even local groups themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> H. Wan, *Race Relations in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983, p. 84.

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