Asia and the Idea of Europe - Europe and its Others

By Peter Bugge

Let me confess at once that Asian values will not be the focus of the present paper.[1] Its subject is Europe, or more precisely the role and function of Asia in the evolution of a European self-perception, of an idea of "European values." This is defensible, I think, because the Asian values debate is intrinsically linked to its European counterpart. For each of the two, the other serves as a symbolic counter against and through which one's own values stand out, as what we might call a constituting "Other."

For centuries the dichotomies of Europe and Asia, West and East, or Occident and Orient have played a great role in European thought, and the significance of a European or Western "Other" in the present Asian values debate is patent. When Tommy Roh, director of the Singapore Policy Research Institute, listed ten values as typical of the East Asian countries, in four of the ten points he explicitly contrasted these values to "Western" ones (Le Huu Tang 2000).[2] Also, the values held up by Roh as typically Asian - respect for hard work, thrift, and simplicity, and an emphasis on education and on family values etc. - have a familiar ring to many Europeans. As Eric Hobsbawm points out,

> we are continuing the old debate, launched by Marx and developed by Max Weber, on the influence of particular religions and ideologies on economic development. It used to be Protestantism which fuelled the engine of capitalism. Today Calvin is out and Confucius is in...(Hobsbawm 1997: 218).

Many of the same values now presented as inherently (East) Asian ones thus have a long tradition of being associated with (Protestant) Europe. Two observations can be made from this. First that collective identities are constituted at least as much by their borders, by how the members of the "we-group" define what or who they are *not*, as by any substance or internal characteristics. And secondly, that the attributes of "Asian" and "European" refer to something more than and different from geography. This is already suggested by the fact that the border between the two continents, as conventionally established, runs right through two countries, Russia and Turkey, and also within geographical Europe it has often been held that some parts are more "European" than others. Even today, the wish to reserve the concept as a whole for a select part of the continent is tangible in the frequent demands that the East Europeans must "Europeanize" to gain access to "Europe", i.e. to the European Union. And also the idea of "Asia" has its centre and its peripheries.

The Asian values debate does not refer equally to the Turks, the Eskimo peoples of eastern Siberia, and the peoples of South East Asia, in Hobsbawm's pointed terms it is "not concerned with Asia as a whole, but with the economic effects of the geographically localized heritage of Confucius" (ibid.).

Thus, the concepts of "Asian" and "European" are not neutral, denotative semantic markers. Both invoke - as self-designations and in the perception of "the Other" - a rich set of connotations, they are themselves value-laden before being associated with any specific values. In the following a brief, and necessarily simplified, discussion will be offered of how, in Europe, the idea emerged that Europe was the home of a particular community with particular values, and how in this context "Asia" (or the "Orient"/the "East") has functioned as Europe's "significant Other." I shall argue that in this "idea of Europe" a tension exists between claims to the universal validity of "European" values or qualities, and attempts to make

1. This paper was originally presented at a workshop on "Asian Values and Vietnam's Development in Comparative Perspective," Hanoi, March 24-26, 1999, and published in a volume by the same name, Hanoi 2000.

2. The listed values were: 1) The East Asian people do not accept the extreme of individualism applied in the West 2) The East Asian people respect the family, seeing it as a support pillar of the society 3) Unlike the Westerners, the East Asian people respect the study. 4) Unlike the lifestyles of consumption of the Westerners, the East Asian people love a life of thrift and simplicity. 5) The East Asian people see hard work as a valuable character. 6) The East Asian people uphold the communal spirit and cooperation in work. 7) There are conventions between the State and the people, upon which the State retains law and social order, and ensures its citizens the basic necessity, including employment, housing, education and healthcare. In turn, the citizens implement the laws, work hard, practice thrift, and encourage the children to study and rely on one's own strength. 8) In some Asian countries, the authorities try to help each citizen to become a shareholder in his country 9) The East Asian people want to maintain a social environment with healthy morality 10) The well-managed authorities in East Asian countries want to have a free press, but unlike the Westerners, they see it as no absolute power.

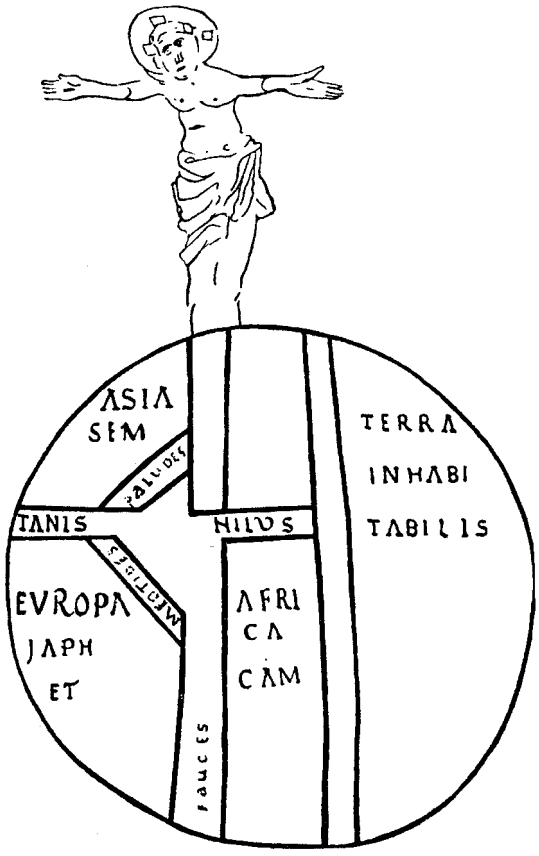
them a uniquely European possession. Needless to say, neither the "Asia" constructed as a mirror for "Europe," nor the "Europe" itself emerging from this juxtaposition must be understood in essentialist terms as reified entities. Both are perceived as discursive constructs, relational and subject to constant negotiations and change.

The Heritage from Ancient Greece

The very idea of continental divisions, and the names of "Europe," "Asia," and "Libya" (later named "Africa" by the Romans), stems from ancient Greece. Its origin is unknown, and already Herodotus wondered why what was obviously a single landmass should be split up and given women's names (den Boer 1995: 14).

The British historian Arnold Toynbee has offered a plausible explanation. He suggests that the divide is a mariner's concept, a Hellenic piece of nautical nomenclature: as one sailed the Aegean Sea towards the Bosporus, Asia was to starboard, Europe to port.

As the Greeks so sailed though the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov they came to the river Don, which marked the end of the then known world and also the border of Europe and Asia. Perhaps for symmetry's sake the Nile was added at the other end as the border between Africa and Asia.



The oldest known map of the world. From a late seventh century codex. (Photo: British Library Board.)

But it is worth noticing that nowhere did this border separate distinct cultures or civilizations - waterways united, they did not set apart (Toynbee 1954: 712). Also, these concepts referred only to limited parts of what is today known as Europe or Asia, and the Greek geographical knowledge of Asia was higher than that of Europe.

So, significantly, there was not and could not be any Greek "Euro-consciousness" at that time. The Greeks lived at both sides of the Aegean Sea, and if distinguishing between self and other it was between Hellenes and barbarians, not Europeans and Asians. Only for a brief, exceptional period of time, during the wars between the Greeks and the Persians in the fifth century BC, the conflict was presented in political terms as a strife between free "Europe" and despotic "Asia." Climatic and behavioural oppositions were added to this, but mostly - as in Aristotle's writings - the Greeks placed themselves *above* both Europeans (the barbarians to the north) and Asians (Persians). And soon, with the empires of Alexander the Great and later of Rome, the Europe-Asia divide lost any significance as a political or cultural divide (den Boer: 16-19; Schlumberger 1994).

The Emergence of a European Self-Perception

The continents do not appear in the Bible, and in the Christian cosmology Jerusalem was the centre of the world, and Paradise placed in Asia. The opposition that mattered in those days was between Christians and non-believers, not between Europeans and non-Europeans (Hay, 1968: 1-15; den Boer: 19-26).

Only in the fifteenth century a systematic association of Christendom with Europe took place. This happened as all of Europe had been christened, and former Christian lands in Asia and Africa conquered by the Moslem Ottomans.

One could say that in this process the Christian community, although potentially universal, began to appear as a territorially rooted entity, living in Europe. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 strengthened this association, since it much reduced the significance of the Schism between Orthodox and Catholic Christendom. But still, crusaders went to fight for Christendom, not for Europe (Hay: Chapters 2-5).

The reformation put a rapid end to this Christian unity in Europe, but instead in the sixteenth century a community of densely communicating territorial states emerged. They shared a set of norms, habits, and institutions, religious and secular, and were tied together politically in a "balance of power" that recognized the interde-

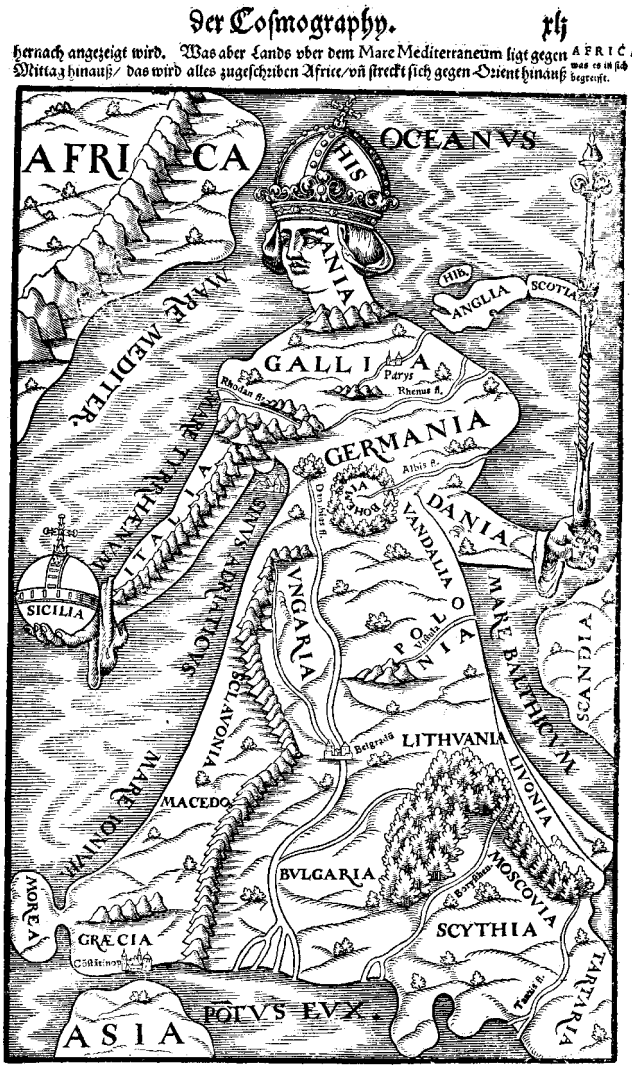
pendence of these states. So, a European community or "system" emerged, which also - in particular when meeting other communities - described itself as "European." Here, finally, a real identification with Europe can be found, and we also meet the adjective "European" suggesting that certain qualities or things (places, peoples) could meaningfully be labelled in this way. A rapidly growing cartographic knowledge also enabled the Europeans to rationally perceive the geographical space in which they lived, and thus to develop a more concrete, secular concept and image of Europe (Hale, 1994: 14-27).

The discoveries and the following colonial expansion only added to this European self-awareness. Samuel Purchas, an Englishman, argued in 1625 that "Jesus... hath long since given a Bill of Divorce to ingratefull Asia where hee was borne, and Africa the place of his flight and refuge, and is become almost wholly and onely Europaean." And so, with divine blessing, Europe has taken possession of the world:

> The Qualitie of Europe exceeds her Quantitie, in this the least, in that the best of the world... Nature has yeelded her selfe to Europaean Industry... Asia yeerely sends us her Spices, Silkes and Gemmes; Africa her Gold and Ivory; America [is] almost everywhere admitting Europaean Colonies (quoted in Hay: 110, 121-22).

The "us," one notices, clearly refers to "us Europeans."[3] Yet, in all their pride, the Europeans granted to Asia a status very different from the one ascribed to Africa or America. This can be seen in many iconographic allegories of the continents. Europe is here the crowned continent, a queen endowed with symbols of wealth, wisdom, technical skills, art and music, etc., but whereas Africa and America appear barbarian, with semi-naked people and wild animals, Asia is also associated with symbols of civility (den Boer: 44-58).

The European attitude to the nearest "Asian" Other, the Turks, was profoundly ambiguous: politically, the European states half accepted, half excluded the Ottoman Empire from their state system, and the conventional image of Turkish infidel inhuman cruelty was countered by the observation that the Turks appreciated learning, the arts and civilized comforts. Comparisons with Turks, and also with the Chinese, the Japanese and other Asian cultures, did not always end favourably for the Europeans (Hale: 38-43). Curiously, the term "Asiatic" was mobilized with pronounced negative connotations from around 1500 in connection with Muscovite Russia, which by the Poles was described as barbarian, Asiatic, and a threat to Christian Europe (Klug 1987).



Europe as queen, from Sebastien Münster, Cosmographia Universalis (1588). (Photo: Basel University Library.)

In sum then, we can say that whereas the Atlantic Ocean and Sahara created a sharp border between a cultivated, a skilled Europe here, and a barbarian, savage non-Europe there, the border to Asia was more complex. Not only was it difficult to separate Asia geographically from Europe, even culturally it was not so clear where Europe stopped to give way to something really different, to Asia.

3. Purchas, it must be added, did not explain the superiority of the Europeans in racist or similar terms. To him, the diversity of humankind had to do mostly with lack of religion and civility, and with Christendom, mankind could be united: "The tawney Morre, black Negro, duskie Libyan, ash-coloured Indian, olive-coloured American should with the whiter European become one sheepe-fold, under one great shepheard... Without any more distinction of colour, Nation, language, sexe, condition al may bee One in him that is ONE, and only blessed forever"(quoted from Hannaford 1996: 171).

The Idea of European Civilization

With the Enlightenment these reflections on the nature of Europe and its borders, on how to interpret cultural encounters with other peoples and societies, were summed up in a new, complex concept, *civilization*, associated again with Europe. Roughly speaking, the idea of civilization had three key dimensions:

- a *universal* dimension, seeing civilization as a universal quality or process in which man moves towards a virtuous society (civilization is a potential in man as man)

- a *spatial* dimension, probably more influential, which sees civilization as a cultural entity or phenomenon located in Europe. Here, civilization is at least partly serving as a secular substitute for the earlier association of Europe with Christendom.

- a *temporal* dimension, which located this spatial configuration in time in a process of development. If a community was said not to be able to move historically from barbarism to civilization, this also, at least potentially, opened up for the recognition of the existence of several civilizations (Ifversen, 1998: 24-34).

The universal aspect was predominant in the discourse of Mirabeau the Elder, who coined the concept in 1756. According to him, societies are upheld by the principle of virtue, and civilization is the process in which virtue is produced and secured as a civilized society develops. The alternative was corruption, which Mirabeau associated with manners, and these again with what was particular in a people. Their predominance may corrupt society. From this point of view civilization is the victory of the universal pole (humanity) over the particular or cultural pole.

But mostly, civilization was perceived as located in Europe and discussed in connection with encounters with non-European others. In 1721, in his *Persian Letters*, Montesquieu used fictituous Persian travellers to discuss European manners and customs with an outsider's eye, and in 1748 in his *The Spirit of the Laws*, he compared the political systems of Asia and Europe, explaining the despotism of the former and the freedom of the latter with climatic factors, thus using the old motif of Antiquity (den Boer: 58-59). Also, the first linking of the two concepts "European" and "civilization" stems from 1766 in a discussion of the French colonies in North America (ibid: 64).

In 1767 the Scot Adam Ferguson added a temporal perspective to the spatial idea by introducing a stage model, according to which rude nations could move toward civil society with progress in civilization. Ferguson defined the driving forces in this process as *arts* (skills or knowledge) and *virtue*, which equalled the spirit of the given community. While every nation knew of virtue, there was in the rude nations (as in America, which so became a model of Europe's past) a lack of arts, whereas the Orient displayed the danger of resting upon arts, while forgetting virtue: society succumbed to "effimination," or to despotism (Ifversen: 32-34). This was an elegant model, where America was virtue without art, and Asia art without virtue, while Europe throned in the middle in possession of both. Naturally, these Enlightenment ideas very much bolstered European self-confidence or self-complacency, but the comparisons with other communities also created a platform for critique of the vices of European society, and for praise of civilizational virtues in other societies. At times, a feeling of collective guilt was expressed, both when civilization's pernicious influence on the Arcadian life of innocent natives was condemned, and in relationship to Asia. In the last three hundred years, the German historian Johann Eichhorn wrote:

> the Europeans have run through all corners of Asia that they have found access to. Not to bring better opinions and laws, better customs and habits, but to bring their bad habits and vices, their diseases and sufferings there. Not to relieve the yoke of the unhappy, but to make their old yoke even heavier through a new one, not to help them to a sensible enjoyment of life through education and the enlightenment of the intellect, but to disgrace their human nature even more, to extort, plunder, oppress and kill them (quoted from Gollwitzer, 1964: 61-62).

On the one hand, Eichhorn and the Europeans were certain that they were most advanced in civilization - that they had the *potential* to enlighten others - but on the other hand actual European behaviour was at times seen as the negation of this potential. So one could talk of a European self-critical self-confidence taking shape in the Enlightenment (Harbsmeier 1988: 88-97).

Still, Enlightenment Europe had - or acknowledged - no equal partner in dialogue. In principle, the enlightened public was potentially universal, and as in earlier centuries the civilized qualities of Asia were recognized. But in reality only a European public was addressed, and even within Europe the attitude was exclusivist. The collective addressed by philosophers like Voltaire transgressed national and state boundaries in Western Europe, but stopped before the peoples of Poland, Russia, Hungary, or the Ottoman Empire (Wolff, 1995). A "semi-orientalized" Eastern Europe was being constructed, which gradually gave way to an "Orient" beginning somewhere in Russia

and the Ottoman Empire and stretching almost infinitely to the East (Wolff 1994, Ifversen). The Enlightenment idea of civilization was a great step towards a theory of man in society, transcending religious or ethnic limitations. But with civilization becoming both the precondition and the result or goal of history (Fisch, 1992: 680), the perceived civilizational superiority of Europe invited explanations (supported by the development of scientific anthropology, and by philosophers like Herder) that sought the key to these differences not *in* history (in variations in the social or political organization of different societies), but *outside* or *beyond* history in the psychological or physical qualities inherent to different peoples or races.

This "naturalization" of civilization or culture (the two words being used nearly as synonyms at that time) was not only a break with the universalist anthropology of the Enlightenment, but also with the old "cultivating" meaning of culture (as cultivation of mind and manners), and it paved the way for more coherent racial explanations of the history of mankind in the nineteenth century (Hannaford: 233).

Europe Supreme

In the nineteenth century the contradictions in the Enlightenment idea of European civilization became more pronounced. In the American and French revolutions the universalist perspective paved the way for an idea of *human* rights and of democracy, which again potentially - although realized by citizens in states - embraced all mankind. But simultaneously, with the rapid advances of scientific and technological developments at home, and the colonization of most of the world abroad, the century up to the First World War witnessed the culmination of European self-complacency. Civilization and Europe became one, and increasingly European superiority vis-à-vis non-Europeans was explained racially, in terms of white and coloured.

The division of Europe after the Napoleonic wars in a liberal "West" (England, France) and an autocratic "East" (Prussia, Austria, Russia) allowed for a linking of the paradigm of civilization to a discourse of political difference. In 1822 a French observer, Abbé de Pradt, explained this split as the outcome of "the division of Europe into two zones of sociability, which fight each other and which make any common language between its two parts impossible." De Pradt drew this dividing line from Stockholm to Cadiz and called it a "degrading line of liberty as you move closer to Asia" (quoted from Gollwitzer 1964: 183, 182). One sees a radicalization of the perspective: now difference is not merely gradual, a question of more or less civilization, now any communication between *zones* of civilization is impossible, and hence universalism. Again, although Eastern Europe was discussed, the loss of liberty was identified with Asia.

From the 1820s, Ferguson's idea of a human progress in stages towards civilization was taken up and applied specifically to (Western) Europe, so that the *history* of European civilization became an idea in its own right. Ferguson had placed Europe on the top of the universal scale of human progress, but his "motors" of development were still the universal principles of arts and virtue. Now, the French historian Francois Guizot in his *The History of Civilization in Europe* from 1828 used specific traits in European history - i.e. first of all in French and English history - to explain the superiority of European civilization: the diversity of its institutions, the competition of rival principles and forms, etc. Guizot did not abandon the idea of civilization in general, but it served him only as a background norm against which to measure the historical advance of European civilization, Europe's historical quest for universal meaning (Ifversen: 34-35).

The German historian Leopold von Ranke added to this "nationalization" of the agents of European civilizational development. In the preface to his *History of the Romance and Germanic Peoples* from 1824 he declared his conviction

> that the complex of Christian peoples of Europe is to be considered as a whole, as one state, otherwise one could not properly understand the enormous difference that exists between the Occidental and the Oriental world, and the great similarity that exists between the Romance and the Germanic Peoples (quoted from Ludat, 1969: 285).

Ranke here reduced the carriers of European progress, civilization and culture to the Romance and the Germanic peoples, and so he excluded the Slavs of Eastern Europe from any share in Europe's development and opened up for a racial interpretation of what separates Europe from non-Europe. We *are* a certain people, Romance or Germanic, unlike them, the rest.

Also, Ranke's opposition between Occident and Orient was very strong, and in the nineteenth century an historical scheme was developed, most overwhelmingly so in Hegel's philosophy of history with its march of the World Spirit toward human freedom (Gollwitzer: 212-14; Groh, 1988: 175-185). The Orient was seen as the original contributor to the forming of the world of culture, but only as a thing of the past, since with the advance of history this torch of light, of culture, was passed over to the Occident, to Europe, in the now familiar stages of Greece, Rome, renaissance Italy, France and England (and later even to America, cf. the Statue of Liberty and the idea of Western

"The Plum-pudding in danger; - or - State Epicures taking un Petit Souper" by James Gillray, 1805. One of Gillray's most brilliant political satires, showing Napoleon and Pitt dividing the world between them. (Illustration: Mansell Collection).

civilization (Davies, 1996: 19-31; Gress 1998; Larsen)).[4] We thus have the idea that history, real history, since Ancient Greece has developed only in Europe or by Europeans, indicating that, as a German historian later summed up Ranke's position, "world historical dignity was acquired according to one's share in European culture" (Gollwitzer: 221).

Marx turned Hegel's idealistic dialectics upside down, but his materialistic historical dialectic preserved the opposition of East and West, past and present, as indicated in his notion of an *Asiatic mode of production*. In Marx's perspective there was only one real civilization, the Western one (Marx included North America), which with the right of progress swept aside everything that came in its way.

Unlike in the eighteenth century there was no room for a recognition of the civilizational virtues of Asian cultures, the image of these was unequivocally negative. As Marx wrote on China:

> Faced with British arms the authority of the Manchu dynasty collapsed; the superstitious faith in the indestructibility of the Celestial Empire was shattered; the barbaric and hermetic isolation from the civilized world was broken.

and on India:

> these idyllic village communities, how harmless they may look, have since ancient times been the firm foundation of oriental despotism, they have narrowed the horizon of the human spirit as much as possible, making it a defenceless object of superstition, a slave of traditional habits, and deprived it of all greatness

4. One relatively recent example from the British Marxist archeologist Gordon Childe: "If our own culture can claim to be in the main stream, it is only because our cultural tradition has captured and made tributary a larger number of once parallel traditions. While in historical times the main stream flows from Mesopotamia and Egypt through Greece and Rome, Byzantium and Islam to Atlantic Europe and America, it has been repeatedly swollen by the diversion into it of currents from Indian, Chinese, Mexican, and Peruvian civilizations, and from countless barbarisms and savageries. Chinese and Indian civilizations have indeed not failed to absorb currents from one another and from further West. But, on the whole, they have hitherto discharged these into placid unchanging backwaters" (quoted from Larsen: 11-12).

and historic energy (quotes from Marx, 1972 edn.: 14, 17). Marx's goal was universalistic, the emancipation of man as man. But this is a universalism that recognizes only one binding model, hence Marx's embrace of European colonialist expansion.

Civilization was thus again thought in the singular, but now unlike in the Enlightenment its positive, universally valid values were not considered accessible to all through reason and virtue, they were reified as European property, a product of uniquely European historical and racial qualities. This segregation was also projected back in time, as nineteenth century historicism met with Hellenomania. So, racist arguments were increasingly used to detach the Ancient "Arian" or "European" Greeks from any ties to their "Asian" or "African" neighbours around the eastern Mediterranean in order to secure the purity of European culture from its very beginning (Bernal 1987, Larsen 1988: 18-29).[5]

America's entering the stage as an independent political actor led in a way to a reversal of the old way of defining the borders of Europe. If before, there had been a sharp border between Europe and the savages in the Americas, and an unclear border to the East, where Europe's superiority was not so indisputable, then in the nineteenth century the border to the West became blurred.

Some - of course especially in the English speaking countries at both sides of the Atlantic - even preferred to talk of Western civilization, while others included America as the extension of European civilization. This civilizational space was expanding, whereas, as in the quotation by Ranke, the border to the East was ever increasingly being perceived as a sharp one, separating a superior white Europe from an inferior, coloured Asia.

So, the Enlightenment admiration of China almost disappeared as China was instead associated with opium, stagnation, cruelty, primitivism etc. With the firm separation of "the East" from Europe romanticizing stereotypes of the exotic could occur, as in the Orientalism discourse (whether or not one accepts the full Saidian scheme), which created an image of the Orient as the very opposite of contemporary European civilization - female, seductive, irrational and luxurious, cruel. One may, perhaps, suggest that whereas the term "Oriental" had exotic connotations, granting it a measure of subversive attractiveness, "Asiatic" had a purely negative ring. But it seems that the closer "the Orient" got to home, the more it was perceived in non-romantic terms as simply menacing. A separate discourse on the Balkans (Europe's "Near East") evolved, portraying it not as an exotic escape from civilization, but as male, poor, filthy, and crude - not an anti-world of the West, but a transitional zone where civilization runs out (Todorova, 1997: 17).

Civilization's Discomfort, Culture and Race

Europe's superiority went hand in hand with Europe's imperialism and granted it legitimacy and meaning. And increasingly (and mostly inspired by Darwinian evolutionism) racialism became the standard mode of explanation of these developments. The biological discourse on human society also allowed for a social Darwinism linking race and class, so that the inferiority of the lower races or classes could be explained with the laws of natural selection (Hannaford: Chapters 9 & 10).

If need be, one could "eradicate the brutes," but mostly Europe's right to rule was explained as a civilizing mission on behalf of mankind, the "white man's burden" of Kipling, which obliged Europeans to spread modern civilization to the ungrateful natives. So, while Europe stood for the white man - in the singular, an individual, and male - superior racial qualities, civilizational progress, and values such as honesty, rationality, will, industriousness, etc., Asia was identified with the coloured masses - in the plural, a collective, often portrayed with feminine traits even when men were mentioned - inferior racial material, stagnation, and values like cunningness, irrationality, fatalism, a propensity for idle luxury rather than hard work etc.

These views are well represented in the pre-war writings of Johannes V. Jensen, Danish author and Nobel Prize winner. Inspired by Darwin and Kipling Jensen fully embraced modernity with its machine culture, and he believed that "Gothic man" was chosen by nature to lead all mankind. Within Europe, he looked down on the Romance peoples, seeing in them representatives of a degenerate Christendom, but in the Orient, all such differences disappeared. He wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century, after some travel in the Orient:

5. The idea of Ancient Greece as the "cradle of Europe," and of the profound civilizational opposition of Greece and the Orient in antiquity has, as hinted at above, little historical justification. But it was and is profoundly influential in perceptions of Europe and Asia, West and East, and of why the two shall never meet. Larsen again offers an instructive example. In his *The Ancient Economy* from 1973 Moses Finley, historian and classical philologist, studied only Greek and Roman societies since, he argued, these cultures were too profoundly different from the cultures of the Near East to allow even for a common treatment: "It is almost enough to point out that it is impossible to translate the word "freedom," *eleutheria* in Greek, *libertas* in Latin, or "free man" into any ancient Near Eastern language, including Hebrew, or into any Far Eastern language either, for that matter" (quoted from from Larsen:21-22). This simply is not true, Larsen adds (ibid.), but as shown by Bernal, the impossibility of cultural "cross-fertilization" between Greeks and Orientals became a *premise* for Ancient studies, not their result. The value of Bernal's study - in spite of his one-sidedness and factographic errors brought up by his critics (as in Lefkowitz & Rogers 1996) - lies in this illumination of the racial background for such assumptions.

> The lowest stoker may ... go ashore anywhere in the East and take up his privilege as a white man and inviolable... an inferior European is and remains an inferior European; but I find his class sovereignty in the East in its order (quoted from Andersen, 1998: 4).

One notices the typical confusion of race and class: though inferior in Europe, the lower classes are natural masters in Asia, since through their race they have a share in the virtues of the upper classes from back home. Jensen also described Asia as a passive object, without history or development, incarnating the past that Europe had done right in leaving behind, and he accepted the "ladder" model of civilization, seeing in the peoples of the East a human material in which civilization must find its reserves.

Still, this whole construction had a problem if its civilizing project succeeded, i.e. if the coloured masses actually did learn from the white man and got out of their alleged lethargy. An early warning came with the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05), when for the first time in modern history an Asian power defeated a European country. The impact was only lessened by Russia's at best marginally European status, which made the country's defeat bearable and explicable by the corruption of its political system or the inferiority of the Slavs. To Jensen again, the universality of European civilization was so self-evident that he in 1905 could side with Japan against Russia, since Japan represented modernity, and Russia "semi-Asiatic" stagnation.

Like the USA, Japan thus became "non-Eastern," a Europe outside Europe, proof of the triumph of the technical age (Andersen: 10). "Asia," then, was a negative principle more than a geographical entity, and Jensen raged against the Asians *within* us (as in the "semi-Asiatic" Swedish playwright August Strindberg), or, with another linking of race and class, *among* us, in the socially degenerate riffraff of Europe.

The Shock of the Great War

The First World War was a profound shock to European self-perception. Now, in all its ruthlessness, European civilization turned against itself. More than before, this war called for interpretation and location of guilt, and again, the Asian stereotype was used to label the enemy.

In Germany and Austria the war was seen as a racial conflict with the Asiatic Slavs, in which the Germans defended a European cultural heritage also betrayed by England and France, while in the British and French propaganda the Germans played the role of the barbarian "Huns" (Bugge, 1995: 88-89, 113-116; Heffernan 1998: 86-88, 97-98).

In the end, the pattern of expansion so far associated with Europe was reversed, as the non-European world had to intervene in Europe to bring an end to the war: the USA and Japan entered the war on allied side, and "coloured" troops from the colonies were brought in to fill the ranks. And meanwhile, Russia jumped from autocracy to revolution in the name of the radical European political doctrines. In all respects, Europe's monopoly on the role of civilization's avant-garde was shaken, and the impact on the idea of Europe was tangible.

So, conservatives increasingly defined Europe and its borders not in terms of civilizational avant-gardism (the USA and the USSR could claim these positions), but in terms of traditions and cultural heritage. The Americans might have bigger houses, but they could never have the medieval cathedrals of Europe, the popular argument went. Even in liberal circles, the unease created by the collapse of the identification of Europe with civilization, and the rest of the world with a lack of it, made itself felt. So, the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset remarked that "in Central Africa the Negroes also ride in motorcars and dose themselves with aspirin," but that did not give them Europe's cultural heritage (Bugge: 123-25).

Also Jensen had to revise his opinions. He called the war a fratricide and was disturbed by Britain's alliance with "semi-Asiatic" Russia, but most of all he blamed England for "letting the Japanese loose on a Christian state." And after a journey to the Far East ("what a difference it makes to see the East from Europe and Europe from the East") Jensen had to change his mind on Russia. One should have understood, he wrote, "that Russia was after all Europe and acted as Europe's outpost, and that Japan was the East." To Jensen, "Asia" ceased to be a negative principle and became instead a concrete threat to Europe's right to rule, and so to Europe's very being. Also, Jensen's earlier linking of European identity to civilizational universalism was shattered by Japan's success: "How deep is our culture, since whole peoples can rise and adopt it in one day?" he lamented. Now "Europe" - with its Christendom, its history and dignity, its non-material traditions despised before - became a value to him in its own right (not as the incarnation of racial and civilizational virtues), and the USA and Japan enemies, no matter how modern they might be (Andersen: 9-11).

Though shattered in its pre-war foundations, neither the idea of Western or European supremacy, nor its racialist foundations were, however, abandoned. In Britain and the USA a "WASP variant" (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) of Western civilization came to fruition, expressed in university curricula as well as in a continued British colonialism, and nor did the French abandon their vision of a "mission civilisatrice" in the colonies. And

in Germany, Hitler's racist theories and policies may well be called, as the British historian Norman Davies does it, "the most extreme versions of 'Eurocentrism' and 'Western civilization' that have ever existed" (Davies: 38, see also 24-26).

In all anti-communist circles, the identification of Bolshevism with Russia, and Russia with Asia was at hand, and again the ultimate conclusion to this logic was expressed by Hitler. The real border between Europe and Asia was, he stated, the one that "divides the Germanic from the Slavonic world" and that "it is our duty to put it where we want to have it" (quoted from Bugge: 107). Genocide then became the ultimate solution to the problem of Europe's borders in this meeting of European geopolitics and European racial thinking.

A Europe Without "Others"

In 1945 calls for a "Europeanization" of the world were not in vogue. The war left Europe exhausted and discredited, a memento more than a paragon, and both laurels and responsibility rested with the two superpowers, the USA and the USSR. A period of retreat - not always voluntary - followed, including a dismantling of the European colonial empires.

In Western Europe a remarkable reconstruction began, which based on ideas of democracy, a social market economy, closer co-ordination of national policies, etc., led to the formation of the ECSC, the EC, and now the EU. Its results in terms of securing peace, regional stability, and economic growth have on the whole been impressive.

In this process the "idea of Europe" for a long time played a very modest role, the scale of its ambitions had changed from the global to the regional, from the ideological to the pragmatic. In Wæver's words now "the project of Europe is itself - not to launch itself on world history but to prevent another world war starting on European soil" (Wæver, 1995: 175).

Western Europe's success consisted at least as much in its breaking with tradition, as in its living up to it. So, slowly the ground was cleared for the "rehabilitation" of Europe. The French philosopher Edgar Morin wrote in the 1980s in a celebration of this new Europe:

> The decolonization pushed the European nations back to their continent and cleansed Europe from one of its worst sides, whereby it also imperceptibly prepared the cleansing of the concept of Europe itself - namely by removing the tragic ambiguity that made Europe intra muros mean freedom, democracy, and human rights, while extra muros meaning oppression, exploitation, and unfreedom (Morin, 1988: 140).

This may be true, but the very mentioning of "muros," of walls, indicates that "Europe" still takes shape in a separation of "ins" and "outs." Until 1989 the Iron Curtain functioned as such a physical and mental wall that allowed the old dichotomy of West and East to endure, and although racial arguments largely disappeared, a host of theories were launched to explain why the political division of the continent also reflected a deeper historical or cultural division, which "naturally" excluded Eastern Europe from Europe proper and associated it with Asia (Davies: 24-29, Wolff 1994).

One may illustrate this with the curious collection of old and new stereotypes in a book from 1950, *Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, in which the author, Eugen Lemberg, tried to balance between an *Occident - Orient* dichotomy, using the Catholic - Orthodox divide, and a division into Western and Eastern Europe placing the historical border along the new Iron Curtain. He explained East Central Europe's peculiarity in Rankian terms: "It is by nature Occidental and yet in important matters different from the original Romance-Germanic West," and distinguished so between "The real East" and "East Central Europe," which together constituted Eastern Europe.

Lemberg insisted that the Occidental *Menschenbild* (view of man) was relative, not universal, and that unlike us, "Eastern Man" had not experienced the occidental Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment: "he is not brought up to causal and rational thinking, not emancipated... The individual is not so important as in the West. Hence Eastern European man's incredible readiness to die" (Lemberg, 1950: 18). Also - with the motif of Montesquieu and Antiquity - Lemberg claimed that the nature of the homelands of Eastern Man to some extent determined his personality (his wildness and brutality), and he even linked this personality with the mode of rule in Eastern Europe.

"Again and again we can see in Oriental rulers the move towards the big, the monumental. The priest-king, the despot... has become a type since the Babylonian and the Persian empires...," Lemberg argued, moving from the Tatar khans, Ivan the Terrible, and Peter the Great to Lenin and Stalin (ibid.: 20 f.). Present-day USSR was thus directly linked to the ancient Orient!

The ongoing "rehabilitation" of Europe contains a significant ambiguity. Towards the USA and the USSR a cultural discourse has often been evoked: certain historically given quintessentially European qualities and values are said to be threatened by the two superpowers, who are perceived as alien to Europe. In this essentially conservative, defensive vision of the continent, modern civilisation is not the hallmark of Europe, but a danger to it.

As Morin again argued: "if European culture has become a civilization by spreading throughout the world, European cultures have remained cultures henceforth menaced by the civilization that issued from Europe itself" (Morin: 71). But within Europe, Western Europe readily assumed its traditional role as a model of civilization for its more backward peripheries to follow, as has been particularly clear since 1989 in the conception of EC/EU enlargement policies and the treatment of Eastern Europe (Bugge, 1999: 25). This ambiguity, which may be said to have marked European self-perception since the First World War, affects present discussions of how to bolster a "European identity" as a corollary to economic and political integration in the EU.

Leaving aside the liberal *laissez-faire* argument, one sees a tension between a "republican" approach, deriving a European "we-feeling" from a commitment to the political values embedded in the EU project, and a "culturalist" approach that seeks to distill a uniquely European essence from the history of the European peoples.

It is worth noticing that culturalism has increasingly become an argument of the xenophobic right, where it substitutes for racial arguments in a discourse of segregation and exclusion. From such a culturalist perspective, Europe has obvious constituting Others in "the Muslims" or in its "hordes" of immigrants with an "alien" background.

For those who do not embrace this world view the problem is that any attempt to bolster European identity by conjuring a new post-1989 significant "Other" - be it the Muslims, the Japanese or the Chinese, or present-day Russia - ends up undermining the very principles that are said to constitute Europe: its secularism, tolerance, non-discrimination, human rights, etc., since millions of people from these "othered" communities already live in Europe.

Concrete values

The aim of this paper has not been to deny that there are cultural differences between Danes and Vietnamese, or between people in Europe and in Asia. I have just tentatively sought to demonstrate how the concept of "Asia" or - with slightly different connotations – "the Orient" has been used in European discourses of identity and difference as a constituting "Other," embodying the negation of "European" qualities.

This opposition of "Europe" and "Asia" is not, I have argued, a perennial or natural thing. "Asia" or "Asiatic" was only used in marked hetero-stereotypes from around 1500, and since then the label has been attached to an immense variety of objects, many of them living outside geographic Asia (like the European proletariat, the Germans, the Jews, or the Russians). Furthermore, the "Asia" of these discourses has been presented as an object of conquest and exploitation, a threat or a temptation, a different civilization, or a noncivilization, the past of modern Europe or its exotic anti-world. Religious arguments have been used to define this "Asia," then cultural-historical, and often also racial ones. Clearly, the "Asia" emerging from these discourses is a symbolic counter of identity, not an ontological entity, and - very importantly - nor is the "Europe" constructed in this opposition.

In the Enlightenment "discovery" of Europe we met three perspectives on civilization, the universal, the spatial, and the temporal one. The temporal perspective with its one-dimensional understanding of the advance of civilization and its "translation" of differences in space into differences in time, is - though still influential in discourses on "development countries" or on regional "backwardness" - of little use today in attempts to define a special European civilization. It is difficult to claim that Amsterdam or Birmingham are more "modern" than Tokyo or Shanghai, or Europe more so than the USA or Japan.

The spatial perspective is much stronger, and it is crucial to a culturalist-essentialist argument. But if one perceives cultures as spatially located closed entities with fixed borders, members of foreign cultures can be stigmatized as intruders or threats if they appear on "your" territory. To define "European" and "Asian" civilization and values in purely spatial terms is to pave the way for ethnic cleansing or strongly assimilationist policies.

The universalist perspective may, however, be useful, once it is freed from the essentialist assumption that certain civilizational values, *because* they are European, reflect the desire of all men (to paraphrase a De Gaulle quotation on French values; see Wæver: 184).

A genuine discussion can begin if only we abandon the assumption that a universalist discourse must also be uniform, and that the values discussed (if one takes democracy and human rights), because they were first formulated *in* Europe, must also necessarily be *European* values. Perhaps, we should altogether avoid the whole terminology and idea of inherently "Asian" or "European" values and speak instead concretely - and with an eye for change and exchange - of "values in Asia" and "values in Europe."

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