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Contemporary Japan is clearly displaying all the symptoms of a serious malaise. The economy shows no sign of emerging from its decade-long slump, the political system is bogged down in the mire of factional in-fighting, the bureaucracy is seemingly inept and both politicians and bureaucrats have about them a whiff of corruption. As a consequence Japanese citizens are staying away in droves from retail outlets and voting booths alike. The short-term implications of this for the global economy are discussed almost daily in the quality press. These discussions suggest that the continued prostration of the Japanese economy can do nothing other than spell bad news for all of us, especially since the US economy has yet to show signs of a sustainable recovery following its flirtation with recession throughout 2001. This is well taken. What is also needed, however, is an analysis of the medium-to-long term implications for the global political economy of the changes underway within Japan. This article aims to do just that by assessing the contemporary condition of the Japanese political economy and by pointing to some of the implications of prolonged recession for the country and the regional and world orders of which it is such a vital part. In the round, the article suggests that the effects of continued Japanese misery will be felt the world over and will impact not only upon established economic structures and relationships but on political, social and strategic structures and relationships also. The argument unfolds in three stages. A brief section laying out the theoretical framework is followed by a survey of the nature and origins of the Japanese crisis, while the third section details the Japanese response and the impact this is already having on the world around it.

Theoretical frameworks: the need for eclecticism

Mainstream IPE theory is not well suited to an analysis of this sort. In one way or another realism and liberalism, as well as variants of Marxism such as World Systems Theory, promise more than they deliver. In varying measure they lack sensitivity to the historical record, fail to appreciate the complex dynamics between Japanese society and the 'outside' world and between the strategic, political and economic realms, and insist on maintaining the fiction of a neutral, 'value free' standpoint for observation. As a consequence, the conclusions often drawn from work of this stripe—that the end of 'Japan Inc.' as a potential

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hegemonic successor to the USA suggests that the global economy is in danger of fracturing into competing regional blocs—may well be accurate but are based upon weak theoretical foundations and are thus insufficient as explanations in themselves. Post-'miracle' Japan is not a sulky child sitting in the corner plotting revenge upon its rivals because it did not win First Prize or become Head Boy. It is a complex social whole deserving of attention not only because of the turmoil being experienced by millions of its inhabitants, but because how they react to the conditions in which they find themselves will determine the future prospects of people throughout the world.

An analysis that can move beyond the limits of the mainstream is readily available in the form of that variant of historical materialism introduced to the field by Cox and taken up by Gill, Rupert and others. This body of 'critical' theory is self-reflective, historically grounded, sensitive to both structure and agency and openly supportive of political and social struggle. It is, moreover, open to the insights of 'classical' international relations theory and draws upon this in order to develop powerful conceptual tools. Nevertheless, useful as it is, this type of critical theory is also not quite up to the task of analysing in a satisfactorily coherent manner the processes underway in Japan at present and the attendant effects this is already having on the wider world.

The key problem is with the concept of hegemony, which Cox suggests can be used—in tandem with associated concepts such as the 'extended' state, historic bloc, passive revolution and others—to analyse struggles for power at the level of social forces, forms of state, and world orders. At each of these levels, however, it is clear that the concept of hegemony requires a degree of measurement and precision which the theory cannot sustain. We are given no suggestion as to how much power is needed to secure hegemony in any given situation, and no guidance as to the elements constitutive of hegemony nor of the relative importance and necessary mix of each. This implies that Cox fails to provide us with the tools we need to put his method of historical structures defined as configurations of social forces (material capabilities, ideas and institutions)—fully into operation. In other words, by employing his concept of hegemony we are required to ask questions to which we can gain no clear answers. Cox himself solves this problem by going around it: by pursuing careful historical analysis of previous world orders and drawing on these to inform our understanding of the unfolding nature of the contemporary scene. The results are often as compelling as they are elegant.⁴ What this leaves us with, however, is the problem of the here and now. How do we make sense of a world order that is still dominated by sovereign states but where, as many have argued, the USA has moved from a position of hegemony to one of dominance?

The response of the mainstream has been, by and large, either to speculate on the emergence of competing regional blocs, or to talk up the significance of international regimes.⁵ While there is some merit in both of these research/policy agendas, each can provide only partial, limited explanation. The regional bloc scenario is largely derived from an inappropriate re-reading—and perhaps misreading—of the historical record, while a focus on regimes ignores too much of importance in the world to be entirely credible. It fixates on the role of the

governments and bureaucrats of powerful states to the exclusion of other actors, issues and processes deserving of attention.

Meanwhile, many 'critical' theorists have been ploughing a different furrow altogether and directing their efforts toward analyses of the structural power of capital and the emergence of what is sometimes called a 'business civilisation' supportive of the widening and deepening of capitalism and liberalism as a socioeconomic system.⁶ Again, this has merit, and yet there is a sense in which these analysts are leaving aside unfinished business. For if we accept that the state per se is not about to wither away under the corrosive forces of global capitalism, then we must also accept the possibility that rival forms of state can yet make a bid for hegemony. Of these Japan remains the only credible candidate and, while global hegemony appears virtually impossible, some form of regional hegemony is not out of the question. Indeed, much (though far from all) of the available evidence suggests that it appears likely. In place of a bid for mastery driven by power-political impulses, however, the Japanese challenge will be halting, contradictory and partial, and will be driven by ordinary Japanese citizens acting in their own interests as much as by decisions taken by the Japanese government.

In order to take the analysis forward a way must be found to mitigate the limitations associated with the Coxian notion of hegemony. To reiterate, these are, first, the problem of 'measurement'—approaching an understanding of the amount of power required to attain hegemony in a given situation; and, second, the difficulties associated with identifying and unravelling the constituent elements of hegemony and the relevant mix of each. Given that others working within the field have largely ignored this problem, I suggest that an eclectic approach that combines Cox's method of historical structures with Strange's concept of structural power might open new doors.⁷

To some this will no doubt prove heretical. There are, however, good grounds upon which to base such a union. First, they each display an awareness of and broad sympathy towards the other's work. Second, while each brings their own approach to the subject of world order, both share a concern with values—with the promotion of a more equitable world. As is the case with Cox, Strange's work has an ethical and moral agenda, evidenced by her insistence on placing core values—security, wealth, justice, and the freedom to choose—at the centre of her analysis. It is such a pity that this is so often overlooked in the scramble to get to her notion of structural power. Valuable as these four structures are, they are only a device, a means to an end, not the end itself. Be that as it may, if the work of these two scholars is directed towards the same object of study and similar emancipatory goals, it is also the case that there is evidence of common theoretical and methodological ground. Like Cox, Strange's work rejects the simplicity of realist conceptions of power, arguing that power lies not in a simple numbers game but in predominance across all four of her major structures: in production, finance, security and knowledge. There is little doubt that her work emphasises the coercive face of hegemony at the expense of a closer consideration of the power of persuasion, but this can be seen as a question of emphasis—the implication that persuasion is a component of hegemony is present but rarely picked up. One consequence of this was a failure

to agree with Cox over the continued hegemony of the United States, where Strange saw US hegemony as undiminished and perhaps even enhanced in the contemporary era. ¹⁰ This particular disagreement does not, however, preclude a synthesis which joins his method of historical structures to her concept of structural power.

The same can be said of the only other major disagreement between them, which is that Cox, while supportive of her notion of structures of power, insists that there is in fact a hierarchy of structures. It is his contention that the production and knowledge structures are primary, and that the security and financial structures, although important, are of less significance. With regard to the latter, Cox argues that, unlike the production structure, the financial structure is not firmly connected to the 'real' economy. With regard to the former, he argues that, as the security structure is a temporary manifestation of the interactions of the production and knowledge structures, it is derivative and transitory. This is again a matter of degree, for in discussing the inter-relationships between the structures Strange herself has said that 'no one facet is always or necessarily more important than the other three'.

It appears, therefore, that there are few if any obstacles precluding a synthesis between the work of these two scholars using the method of historical structures proposed by Cox in combination with the concept of structural power proposed by Strange. Cox's method of historical structures gives us the ability to unpack the state—to uncover the material and ideological sources of power which coalesce within it, and which are moulded into the form and shape of an historic bloc. This historic bloc is both a source and a manifestation of hegemony at the level of social forces and at the level of the state. It is potentially a source of hegemony at the level of world order. Strange's concept of structural power bridges the gap. It gives us the ability to analyse the manner in which this hegemony is expressed on the domestic and the international scene. It enables us not only to trace the combination of pathways through which hegemony is expressed at any given moment, but also to formulate a more accurate estimation of what we may take hegemony to mean in that situation and at that moment. The remainder of the article puts this to the test through a case study of the current Japanese crisis and the attendant effects on the East Asian and world orders.

The Japanese historic bloc and the lineaments of the Japanese crisis

In any concrete situation an historic bloc emerges when the interests of the hegemonic class embodied in the extended state become indistinguishable from the interests of civil society. An historic bloc is, therefore, 'a dialectical concept in the sense that its interacting elements create a larger unity', and is more than simply a collection of loosely combined interests which may or may not come together to form a hegemonic class. Such a bloc is formed when the 'interacting elements' (the extended state and civil society) come together to form a 'solid structure'. The underlying motive force behind this union is not purely economic self-interest, but the result of a complex series of inter-relationships between the economic, social, political and ethical spheres from the

workings of which emerges the potential for the formation of an historic bloc. ¹⁶ It takes the coercive and persuasive efforts of a hegemonic class acting through the extended state to transform this potential into reality, with the state maintaining 'cohesion and identity through the propagation of a common culture'. ¹⁷

The concrete situation in Japan in 1945 illustrates this process in reverse—revealing an historic bloc in its death throes. In material terms, the country was devastated by the Second World War. The Japanese Empire ceased to exist as all the territories it had seized over the years were stripped away. The loss of fishing rights attendant on confinement to the four main islands resulted in a fall in the annual catch from one million to 360,000 tons by 1950, a disastrous turn of events given that the Japanese diet relied heavily on fish. Japan lost approximately one quarter of its productive capacity, leaving the total remaining in 1945 equivalent to the amount existing in 1935. By the end of the war there was a shortfall of 4.5 million houses, and total fatalities among the Japanese population have been estimated at 2.5 million.¹⁸

Adding to the personal tragedies associated with these statistics was the institutional chaos and psychological distress caused by defeat in war and the arrival of the US forces of occupation.¹⁹ Uncertainty and speculation led to rampant price inflation as the populace began hoarding what little they had and as the black-market expanded in the face of the collapse of the real economy exacerbated by the threat of mandatory reparation removals of plant and machinery, the dissolution of the *zaibatsu* (financial–industrial groups) and the purge of war-time business and military leaders, bureaucrats and politicians.²⁰ Finally, the complex of ideas and understandings—based on a mixture of 'emperor worship' and 'enterprise familyism' loosely associated with the philosophical, religious and martial teachings of Confucianism, Shintoism and Bushido—that had held the prewar historic bloc together began to unravel as the military machine and imperial family were stripped of their power and as the existing land settlement, civil service and education system all faced major efforts at reform.²¹

It is from this melange of changing material, institutional and ideational circumstances—all within the context of US occupation, the Cold War and the beginning of the postwar economic boom—that the contemporary Japanese historic bloc emerged. It is well known that a combination of the Korean war and the Dodge Plan were prime movers in the Japanese recovery. What is less familiar is the contribution made by a series of compromises between the 'extended' Japanese state and civil society made in the Diet, the workplace and the home without which, arguably, the 'miracle' would not have happened. This series of compromises, resulting in the forging of a new historic bloc, were hammered out in the years (roughly) between 1945 and 1960 and thus involved not only the Japanese themselves but the US forces of occupation also. It is, then, an example of a 'passive revolution' in the sense that it was carried out 'from above' but also, and crucially, from 'outside'.

Building a new historic bloc

Our sketch begins with an argument frequently debated within the Japanese

studies literature. This is that the occupation of Japan was less than successful in its stated aims of 'democratisation and demilitarisation', due to the exigencies of the Cold War which persuaded US planners to alter their strategy for the country in order to counter Soviet power and a newly-communist state in China, the resistance of US business interests which saw an opportunity to re-enter the Japan market, and resistance from the Japanese themselves as entrenched interests clashed with sections of a newly enfranchised populace in a struggle for control over the shape and direction of a new historic bloc. Clearly changes were made in every one of the major areas targeted for reform, but these changes were often partial, sometimes cosmetic and frequently reversed—leading to a far murkier and blurred image of a 'new Japan' emerging from the ashes of war than is presented in much of the literature.²² In other words, the postwar Japanese historic bloc was built on the remnants of the old, using materials already to hand, by well established forces—represented in the Diet by the Japan Liberal Party (Jiyuto) and the Japan Progressive Party (Minseito) shadowed, of course, by bureaucrats acting at both local and national levels, and in the business world by the Federation of Economic Organisations (Keidanren, formed in 1946) and the Japan Federation of Employer's Association (Nikkeiren, formed in 1948) accustomed to pulling the levers of power.

Despite the continuities, however, the remnants of the hegemonic class who had avoided death in war and the war crimes trials faced a very different set of circumstances on both the domestic and the international scene. Most obvious was the rise to economic and military dominance of the USA, which led Japanese leaders to conclude, happily for the most part, that Japan's military would remain sidelined and that the country would rely on the USA for its protection for the foreseeable future.²³ Equally apparent was the need to be seen to be responding to calls from a previously disenfranchised populace for inclusion in the arena of decision making. Agitation towards this goal was widespread and was carried out largely under the direction of the Japan Federation of Labour (Sodomei) and the Congress of Industrial Unions (Sanbetsu) which had links in the Diet with, respectively, the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and the Japan Communist Party (JCP).²⁴

If these were the key players, the terrain upon which they struggled was largely dominated by industrial relations and the signing of the Peace and Security treaties between Japan and the USA as we shall see below. In the meantime, drawing extensively on the prewar template, an institutional structure was being set in place that would not only serve the interests of reconstruction, but go on to underpin the economic 'miracle' of the late 1950s and 1960s.²⁵ These included the Economic Stabilisation Board established in 1946; the Reconstruction Finance Bank established in 1947; the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) in 1949; the Export Bank of Japan in 1950 (renamed the Export–Import Bank of Japan in 1952); and the Japan Development Bank, a creature of MITI's, set up in 1951 as a replacement for the Reconstruction Finance Bank. These institutions were buttressed in the security sphere by the creation of a national police reserve in 1950, joined by a 'maritime' police force

two years later to form the core of what would become the Self-Defence Force (SDF) in 1954 under the administrative control of a Defence Agency.²⁶

In the political sphere, the LDP was brought into existence in 1955 by the merger of the *Jiyuto* and *Minseito* in reaction to the renewed unity of the Socialist Party engendered by opposition to the Korean War and effective Japanese rearmament following the signing of the Peace and Security Treaties with the USA in 1951. In the years following, the LDP secured its grip on power by ensuring that what amounted to a rural gerrymander remained in place through the operation of a system of subsidies to rice farmers, by indulging to an unprecedented degree in pork barrel politics, and by maintenance of an election system based on multi-member constituencies bound to favour incumbents.²⁷ In this way, the conservative elements in Japanese political circles, bureaucracy and business ensured for themselves continuing influence and control over the country by smothering the one institution—the Diet—explicitly set up in order to safeguard the democratic gains made during the Occupation.

In the workplace, meanwhile, victory for reactionary forces over Sodomei and Sanbetsu had been foreshadowed in November 1946 by the agreement of the Council of Electric Power Industry Workers' Unions (Densan) to accept a system of wages based on seniority, or age.²⁸ The advantages accruing to big business from the operation of the Densan wage system and enterprise unionism were further added to by the virtual emasculation of radical labour following the rise to pre-eminence of the General Council of Trade Unions (Sohyo) after 1950.²⁹ Sohyo was quickly tamed by business and government toleration of the annual 'Spring Offensives' it led in pursuit of wage increases, albeit that these were lame affairs characterised by the rapid acceptance by individual unions of the figures set within peak corporations in particular sectors.³⁰

In the event, victory for conservative forces in quelling unrest in the work-place was not sufficient to persuade these same forces to relent in their efforts at turning back the clock. The strike-breaking at the Miike mines, involving brutality on an unprecedented scale by hired thugs, the police and the army, took place with the consent of the Prime Minister of the time, Kishi Nobusuke, himself an indicted war criminal. Likewise, it was he who pushed through the signing of the revised Security Treaty with the USA in 1960. However, so great was the opposition to the treaty that thousands took to the streets of Tokyo and surrounded the Diet, while inside the building socialist members boycotted and picketed the chamber. Kishi reacted by having the entire body of socialist members forcibly removed by the police, and the revised treaty was ratified in their absence. The protests continued until formal ratification on 18 June 1960, at which point Kishi resigned and calm was restored.³¹

After 1960 it was, however, a control based not upon the outright domination of the industrial workforce and society at large, but upon a certain amount of compromise on both sides of the perceived boundaries separating the state from society. In other words, the emergent historic bloc was maintained on a broad measure of consensus as to the nature of Japanese society and the limits to which it could be stretched, the economic and political direction it had to take in the postwar era, and the methods to be employed in reaching the agreed destination. The 'destination' was economic growth, given substance in ordinary people's

minds by the announcement in 1961 of Prime Minister Ikeda's plan to double the national income within the space of ten years.³² This approach, the adoption of 'low posture' politics on both the domestic and international scene, had been the goal of former Prime Minister Yoshida from the very start.³³ Nevertheless, its adoption at this stage was in part a recognition that the conservative, reactionary elements in Japanese politics, business and bureaucracy had triumphed over their adversaries in the labour movement and the Diet, and were seeking to put an end to political debate. Thus began the period of high speed economic growth.

The fracturing of the postwar Japanese historic bloc

A consideration of the era of high speed growth is not central to the argument we are pursuing here.³⁴ Suffice it to say only that the 'low posture' policy, combining the single-minded pursuit of economic growth and subservience within the US alliance structure, succeeded beyond expectation, allowing Japan to take its place as the third largest economic power in the world. In other words, despite its many inherent contradictions, maintenance of a 'low posture' policy ensured not only that the existing Japanese historic bloc would survive, but that it would thrive—thrive, that is, until a series of developments on the domestic and international scene coalesced around one or two major events to deal it a massive blow from which it has arguably never fully recovered.³⁵ On the domestic scene, these events—the Nixon and oil 'shocks' (dollar devaluation, US recognition of China, oil price rises), the officially-sanctioned cover up of the mercury poisoning suffered at Minamata, and domestic opposition to Japanese support for US actions in Vietnam—signalled the end of high speed economic growth and the rise of domestic expressions of social discontent ranging from non-conformism to outright attack on the visible institutions of the Japanese state. On the international scene, they signalled a gradual divergence of Japanese and US interests and the pursuit of a more proactive Japanese foreign policy, albeit still within the straitjacket of the US-Japan Security Treaty.³⁶

The conventional wisdom has it that Japan bounced back from these shocks apparently with the same breathtaking ease with which it had overcome its defeat in war: that is, by using the mechanism of state intervention coupled with the now legendary capacity for self-sacrifice of the average 'salaryman' to raise productivity whilst at the same time cutting costs. This is partly true, but obscures the harsher reality of fundamental restructuring that went on throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the effects of which are being felt even now.³⁷ This restructuring took place not only in the economic realm but in the social and political realms also.

The spiralling costs brought about by the dollar devaluation in 1971 and the oil price hikes could not all be soaked up by the traditional shock absorber of the Japanese economy—those small and medium-sized businesses where the privileges accruing to the salaryman were little more than a dream. As a result big corporations began shedding jobs, mainly through a process of greater subcontracting and investment in automation but also through initiating a programme of redundancies. Redundant males have increasingly been replaced

by lower-paid, part-time, non-unionised and therefore more vulnerable female workers entering or re-entering the workplace. Thus, not only has the 'jobs for life' system begun to be dismantled by big business, but so too has its counterpart in the social realm, the implicit patriarchy which keeps women at home.³⁸

Concurrently, big corporations began to put pressure on their employees to raise productivity while accepting a falling rate of return on their labour. At one level, this meant forcing the adoption of new working techniques associated with such terms as 'lean production', 'continuous improvement' or, more cynically, 'management by stress'.³⁹ At a second level, this meant squeezing the union movement by discouraging membership of any union, including enterprise unions, through intimidation; and by bringing in non-unionised staff (female and foreign workers). These initiatives were matched by government adoption of a policy of privatisation in the public sector, including the militant rail industry, that was to result in the dissolution of Sohyo in 1989 and the move by most of its member unions to the rival—and even less 'militant'—Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo).⁴⁰ These measures prompted a fall in the percentage of those workers belonging to unions from a high of 35.4 in 1970 to 24.1 by 1994 and a low of 22.6 in 1997.⁴¹ By 1994, this relentless pressure on salarymen had led to the first fall in average earnings in the private sector for 44 years.⁴²

Finally, big Japanese corporations began to move their operations offshore, where costs were lower. These movements were the international equivalent of the subcontracting out by big business of stages of the production process taking place on the domestic scene and can be viewed as an early sign that in its attempts at self-repair the Japanese historic bloc was reaching out beyond its traditional borders.⁴³ Not only were cheap, desperate foreign workers being drafted in to the country as replacements for their Japanese counterparts, but so too were Japanese workers being sent abroad as the managers of foreign workers.⁴⁴

From the 1970s onwards, then, the position of labour within Japanese society has been progressively weakened relative to the period of high growth. Insecurity, which has always been present in the lower portion of the 'dual-structure' economy, has not only deepened but widened to embrace core workers previously sheltered from such worries. Recent figures show that the unemployment rate is continuing on a more or less upward trend (1.7 per cent in 1960, 1.1 per cent in 1970, 2.0 per cent in 1980, 2.6 per cent in 1985, 2.1 per cent in 1990, 2.9 per cent in 1994), with the official unemployment figure reaching 4.9 per cent in July 1999, before falling slightly to 4.7 per cent by September. The increasingly visible public demonstrations on the streets of the country indicate a growing pessimism about the ability of government and industry to lift Japan out of its current crisis, which can only exacerbate the discontent manifest in other areas of Japanese society.

This discontent coalesced around several sites of opposition.⁴⁷ The first of these can be (artificially) bundled into a series of single issues associated with economic growth such as pollution of the environment, the sacrifice of 'traditional' values, and redressing the balance in favour of those regions left economically disadvantaged. The second site of opposition manifests as a

general disillusionment with government as a result of its perceived failure to address and solve the single-issue problems outlined above, and a particular disgust with government as a result of its failure to root out what has become known as 'structural' corruption in Japanese politics. ⁴⁸ There is no doubt that the Japanese populace have made the connection between the ailing economic fortunes of their country and the fact that seats in the Diet are either for sale to the highest bidder or 'reserved' for the children of incumbents. ⁴⁹ They are aware, also, of the excesses of public servants and of the casual nature in which public concerns are either dismissed or covered up. ⁵⁰ And the Daiwa and Sumitomo scandals must confirm in their minds the fact that corruption extends deep into the private sector. ⁵¹ Little wonder, then, that ordinary Japanese savers cannot be persuaded to invest their money in domestic institutions but are instead putting it into safes and cash boxes, whilst other countries insist at every turn that Japan reforms its financial system.

Finally, a third site of opposition relates to the gradual abandonment of the pacifist principles laid down in Article IX of the constitution, despite the absence of a clear mandate to do so. Participation, albeit largely indirect, in military engagements ranging from the Korean, Vietnam and Gulf Wars to the current 'war on terrorism', and in the wider US strategic plans of the postwar period, has continued to tarnish Japan's already murky international reputation. Just as important, however, has been the manner in which this participation has been achieved. It has been done not only in violation of the constitution strictly interpreted, and against the wishes of the majority of the Japanese people, but also in violation of the procedures and principles of democratic accountability supposedly guaranteed by the Diet. The Security Treaty has been expanded from a strictly regional to a global commitment without ever being re-written, and the role of the SDF has developed to an extent which makes it unrecognisable as the controversial 'defence force' tacitly allowed for in a loose reading of the constitution. 52 All this has been despite opposition in the parliament and Japan at large, and has been made possible by the arrogation of power by the Cabinet at the expense of the Diet. It was, for example, through the use of a Special Cabinet Order that the Japanese government secured SDF participation in the Gulf War. More recently, the LDP forced legislation through the Diet, over the objections of its coalition partners, allowing for the revision of the Guidelines for Cooperation with the USA (perhaps) requiring Japan to enforce regional naval blockades, take part in mine-sweeping operations and provide greater logistical support to US forces in Japan.⁵³

This creeping militarisation of Japan links directly with the issue of structural corruption. The use of Cabinet Orders and other methods of directly by-passing the floor of the Diet is the functional equivalent of the wider by-passing of the parliament implied by the perversion of the democratic process by money politics. Militarisation is therefore a loaded weapon pointed not just potentially at East Asia but at the very heart of the Japanese historic bloc, as the demonstrations against revision of the Security Treaty clearly showed in 1960 and as protests over the legal recognition of the national anthem and the Rising Sun flag as national symbols showed again in 1999.⁵⁴

Japan in the contemporary world order

The analysis thus far shows that not only are the wheels beginning, finally, to fall off the contemporary Japanese historic bloc but that efforts to hold them on are impacting not just on the Japanese themselves but on others—in East Asia and the wider world. In the final part of this article I sketch the main aspects of these impacts in the structures of production, finance, security and knowledge.

Production

It is perhaps in this structure that the activities of the Japanese state-society complex are most familiar, since Japan's capacity for producing world-beating products in key industries at prices below those of rival producers has attracted the most praise and the strongest criticism. Suffice it to say here that just as the economic travails of the country have resulted in the erosion of the rights and benefits enjoyed by core Japanese workers, and in the employment of an ever-larger proportion of non-unionised, part-time, female and foreign workers in Japan, so too have they resulted in the employment of workers from other countries under sometimes similar (Europe, USA) but often worse (Mexico, Southeast Asia and, increasingly, China) terms and conditions. This strategy has variously enabled Japanese business to avoid trade barriers and to take advantage of lower costs and investment incentives and thus boost competitiveness. It has been achieved largely through the ability of key Japanese sectors to pursue long-term market share rather than short-term profit—a major source of advantage derived from the pattern of industrial ownership in Japan (itself an important component of the 'developmental state'). This pattern has been imprinted most deeply on East Asia because it is rooted in an historical relationship that in the postwar era alone has seen successive waves of 'investment' (war reparations, aid, trade and capital and portfolio investment) that have resulted in a Japanese grip on the productive capacity of the region only slightly loosened by the economic crisis of 1997.55

Despite the obvious benefits, all this exacts a price. It demands consistently high performance from the Japanese bureaucracy in actively managing the economy—something that is proving increasingly difficult in a more globalised world. It comes at some cost to workers employed by Japanese firms at home and abroad—in terms of their remuneration packages, their ability to organise collectively and their relationship to the production process itself. It also comes at some cost to other states and in particular Japan's chief economic and strategic partner, the USA, in the shape of persistent trade imbalances.⁵⁶ This impacts in several ways on the world order: first, by exacerbating already tense trade relations with the USA, which has the knock-on effect of damaging the security alliance; and, second, by pushing Japan to seek a more pro-active role in global institution's such as the World Trade Organization, World Bank and International Monetary Fund and regional counterparts like the Asian Development Bank.⁵⁷ Thus Japanese criticism of the handling by Washington of the bilateral trade relationship and increasing unilateralism in US trade policy has become far more pointed and even bitter, while at the same time Japanese attempts at re-writing

the rule books guiding international institutions have become more open and determined—if not stunningly successful.⁵⁸

Finance

Japan's finances are in a perilous condition. At over one hundred per cent of GDP the level of government debt is by far the highest of all developed countries, while the banking sector remains threatened by meltdown should the true scale of bad loans be revealed.⁵⁹ Suffice it to say here only that levels of public debt have risen spectacularly as, facing criticism over exchange rate policy and with interest rates set (seemingly permanently) at zero, successive governments have come to rely increasingly on emergency and supplementary budgets to artificially stimulate demand in the economy. According to some, much of this money has been funnelled, corruptly, toward the construction industry where it has been squandered on make-work projects such as riverstraightening and dam construction. 60 Meanwhile, the 'bursting' of the infamous bubble economy just as the Ministry of Finance was setting in motion an overhaul of the financial services sector that was to culminate in a 'Big Bang' in 1998 not only banished the spectre of global dominance for Japanese finance but led to the virtual collapse of the financial system and the 'lost decade' for the economy that was the 1990s.61

It is true that much of the blame for this can be laid at the feet of a bungling, unimaginative bureaucracy interested as much in internecine turf wars as it was in fixing the financial system; at the feet of big business which by the late 1980s (following the Plaza Accords) had become disillusioned with the stately progress associated with core productive activities and seduced instead by the idea of making fast profits on the money and stock markets; and, finally, at the feet of the banks which proved willing to lend to anyone who owned real estate and wanted to try their hand at the financial roulette table. Just as important, however, has been the steady pressure on Japan to liberalise its financial markets in line with the 'best practice' set by New York and London. This was bound to upset the long-established relationships between financiers and producers in what had been one of the most tightly controlled sectors in the world—and another key component of the developmental state. Where ever the fault lies, in an environment where business (and the government) have found it more expensive to raise money at home or abroad, and where Japanese consumers are so frightened that they cannot be persuaded to part with their money, the world economy was bound to suffer.

More than this, however, the 10-year hangover has persuaded the Japanese that they must begin to take a more active role in the international corridors of power. This has meant, firstly, acceptance of a larger international role for the yen. A commitment to this role was first announced in May 1998 at the APEC Finance Ministers' meeting. Six months later, Prime Minister Obuchi swept through Europe on the wings of his desire to see the yen take its place at the heart of the global financial system alongside the dollar and the euro. All this followed on, of course, from Japan's response to the Asian financial crisis of 1997—a response that came under fire from some quarters for its sluggishness,

but was in fact timely, fairly effective and, moreover, widely welcomed throughout the region itself.⁶³ This welcome was made all the warmer by dint of the fact that Japanese loans were made under softer conditions than those set by the IMF, and that Japan pressed very strongly for the creation of an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) through which to carry on with this strategy. US objections scuppered the initiative at the time, but it is an idea that refuses to lie down ⁶⁴

Security

Economic woes have a tendency to bring out the worst in people and states, and Japan is no exception. It is all too easy to see that nostalgia for the good old days of the 'miracle' economy has led some to look a little further back to the days when Japan had a leadership capable of making decisions and a military to be proud of. To claim that Japan is becoming more militaristic only because the economy is in such a poor condition would be a mistake, however, since the process of militarisation has been underway since at least the 1970s. 65 Rather, it is economic success that has given Japan the means to spend more on its military than any other state except the USA while at the same time driving a wedge ever more deeply between it and its closest ally as a consequence of calls from Washington for Japan to play a bigger role in US global military strategy in recompense for the persistent trade imbalance. Demands for 'burden sharing' have combined fruitfully with memories of old glories and begun to erode the anti-militaristic principles underlying Japanese foreign policy. As a consequence, not only has the existing Japanese historic bloc been placed under enormous strain, but so too has Japan been forced to take a more active role first in the prosecution of the Cold War and now in the 'war against terrorism'. 66 One effect of all this has been to encourage Japan to push hard for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC), where it would be in a position to promote its own agenda based on notions of 'comprehensive' security bolstered by its reputation as a 'civilian' power.⁶⁷ At the regional level, meanwhile, Japan has played a major role in initiating the first genuinely multilateral security organisation (the Asean Regional Forum); has taken part in US-led 'war games' (the biennial RIMPAC exercises); and has raised the visibility of its armed forces through port calls and diplomatic and officer exchanges.⁶⁸

Knowledge

For many, Japan remains a little known country inhabited by strange people who spend much of their time either working, honing their skills in the martial arts or participating in ridiculous game shows. This widespread ignorance of Japan and the Japanese contrasts starkly with the seemingly all-pervasive nature of US-spawned dreams and ideas. However, the working practices adopted in many of the world's biggest corporations and industries, and the lifestyles and life chances that go with them, were first conceived and developed in Japan under the roof of the world's biggest automobile manufacturer, Toyota. ⁶⁹ Likewise, many have found themselves torn between the game console and the television

in their pursuit of pleasure, all too unaware that it is ever more likely that the 'software' that they are accessing and the hardware through which they are doing it will have been either produced or manufactured by a Japanese firm.

This, of course, does not add up to much in terms of power and hegemony. However, Japan's former glory as the original 'Asian Tiger' and the leading developmental state lent it a certain cachet in Asia and the wider world upon which it is still attempting to trade. It was for this reason that the Japanese government was so determined to see the World Bank's 'Miracle Report' published in 1993, and for this reason also that Japan has been so hard-nosed about pushing the idea of an AMF. Both the Miracle Report and the AMF idea confirm and re-confirm in Japanese minds, and the minds of other Asians, the significant differences between so-called 'Confucian' capitalism and its Anglo-Saxon equivalent. This plays into arguments suggestive of the fact that there is an 'Asian Way' of doing things in the political, social and economic spheres that is not only different from but inherently superior to anything the Enlightenment has to offer. 70 In Asia, this concept has been used as a political weapon in any number of ways—from defending human rights records to placing the blame for economic troubles on western financiers. More positively, it has been used to assert the differences between social, political and economic systems in an aggregated 'West' and an aggregated 'East'. In Japan itself, it has been used to reassure the public that the government and bureaucracy still know what they are doing and thus, subliminally, to bolster confidence in the existing historic bloc. Meanwhile, there is little doubt that Japan has begun to push for a seat on the UNSC not just to make up the numbers or continue to play second fiddle to the USA, but so that it can begin to assert its own understandings of the changing nature of 'security' in the contemporary world—which rank economic growth and social stability alongside military preparedness in order of importance as policy goals, and also, therefore, necessarily highlight the various levels (domestic, bilateral, regional and global) through which security policy must be pursued.

Conclusion

The obvious methodological point made here has been that understanding both the source and the implications of the activities and behaviours of the Japanese or any other state—society complex is more likely to come through careful historical and empirical analysis of a particular case than it is through the application of sterile 'models' that trumpet the pursuit of parsimony as if it were an end in itself. Less obvious, but perhaps more important, is the still-pressing need for continued experimentation with ideas and frameworks that move not only beyond the mainstream of theorising in IPE but challenge also the 'new' and more 'critical' thinking that has emerged at the fringes. In regard to the case study undertaken here, we have found that Japan is not, and never has been, seeking, as some would have it, either to take over the world or to re-impose the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. Rather, the country is struggling to come to terms with a series of deep changes to the society, economy and polity that have been in train since the early 1970s. This process, which involves both

the Japanese state and ordinary Japanese people, will continue to have growing consequences for other states and for other peoples in East Asia in particular but also in the world beyond. The leading edge of these consequences can be found variously in the structures of production, finance, security and knowledge. In all of these areas the Japanese state-society complex promises to be more active, and more combative, in the future than it has been in the past. In other words, Japan and the Japanese will play a major part in the 'new world order' not despite the prolonged economic downturn but because of it.

Notes

My thanks to the editors of New Political Economy and two anonymous reviewers for comments on an earlier draft of this article.

- Robert Cox, Production, Power, and World Order (Columbia University Press, 1987); Stephen Gill, American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Mark Rupert, Producing Hegemony (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Kees van der Pijl, The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class (Verso, 1984); Enrico Augelli & Craig Murphy, America's Quest for Supremacy and the Third World (Pinter, 1988); and Henk Overbeek, Global Capitalism and National Decline (Unwin Hyman, 1990).
- Various criticisms have emerged. See *inter alia* Randall Germain & Michael Kenny, 'Engaging Gramsci: International Relations Theory and the New Gramscians', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1998), pp. 3–22; and Peter Burnham, 'Neo-Gramscian Hegemony and the International Order', *Capital and Class*, Vol. 45 (1991), pp. 73–93.
- 3. Robert Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1983), pp. 162–75; and 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1981), pp. 126–55.
- 4. See Robert Cox, with Timothy Sinclair, Approaches to World Order (Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- Robert Keohane, After Hegemony (Princeton University Press, 1984); and Andrew Hurrell, 'Explaining the Resurgence of Regionalism in World Politics', Review of International Studies, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1995), pp. 331–58
- See, amongst many others, Stephen Gill & David Law, 'Global Hegemony and the Structural Power of Capital', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 33 (1989), pp. 475–99; and Kees van der Pijl, *Transnational Classes and International Relations* (Routledge, 1998).
- See, principally, Susan Strange, States and Markets, 2nd edn (Pinter, 1994); and 'An eclectic approach', in: Craig Murphy & Roger Tooze (eds), The New International Political Economy (Lynne Rienner, 1991), pp. 33–49.
- 8. For Cox on Strange, see Robert Cox, 'Take six eggs', in: Cox, with Sinclair, Approaches to World Order; 'Realism, political economy and the future world', in: Roger Morgan et al. (eds), New Diplomacy in the Post-Cold War World (St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 27–44; and his book review of States and Markets in Millennium: Journal of International Studies, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1989), pp. 107–10. For Strange on Cox, see her review of Approaches to World Order in New Political Economy, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1996), pp. 425–6.
- 9. In his review of *States and Markets*, Cox makes the following point: 'In a social relations approach, Strange's four primary structures could be used as an heuristic device with which to undertake an enquiry into the genesis and transformation of global historical structures' (p. 109). This is precisely the use to which I attempt to put them in the latter part of this article.
- Susan Strange, 'Finance, Information and Power', Review of International Studies, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1990), pp. 259–74.
- 11. See Cox, 'Take six eggs', pp. 179-83.
- 12. Robert Cox, 'Production and security', in: Cox, with Sinclair, Approaches to World Order, pp. 276-95.
- 13. Strange, States and Markets, p. 26.
- 14. For a discussion of these concepts, see Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations'.
- 15. Ibid., p. 167.
- 16. See *ibid.*, pp. 167–9.

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- 17. Ibid., p. 168.
- 18. This is drawn from Shigeto Tsuru, Japan's Capitalism (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- See John Dower, Embracing Defeat (Penguin, 1999); and Robert E. Ward & Yoshikazu Sakamoto (eds), Democratizing Japan (University of Hawaii Press, 1987).
- See Hans H. Baerwald, The Purge of Japanese Leaders under the Occupation (University of California Press, 1959); Kent E. Calder, Strategic Capitalism (Princeton University Press, 1993); Eleanor M. Hadley, Antitrust in Japan (Princeton University Press, 1970); and Victor Minear, Victor's Justice (Princeton University Press, 1971).
- 21. Ronald P. Dore, Land Reform in Japan (Oxford University Press, 1958), and 'Education', in: Robert E. Ward & Dankwart A. Rustow (eds), Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey (Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 176–204; Carol Gluck, 'The past in the present', in: Andrew Gordon (ed.), Postwar Japan as History (University of California Press, 1993), pp. 64–95; and Chalmers Johnson, MITI and the Japanese Miracle (Stanford University Press, 1982).
- 22. The best short statement I have seen on this period is John Dower, 'The useful war', in: Dower, *Japan in War and Peace* (Fontana, 1996), pp. 9–32.
- 23. John Dower, Empire and Aftermath (Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1979).
- See Joe Moore, Japanese Workers and the Struggle for Power, 1945–1947 (University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).
- 25. Johnson, MITI and the Japanese Miracle, pp. 198-241.
- 26. See John Welfield, An Empire in Eclipse (Athlone, 1988), pp. 60-87.
- 27. See Karel van Wolferen, The Enigma of Japanese Power (Charles E. Tuttle, 1993), pp. 79-85 and 167-81.
- Details in John Halliday, A Political History of Japanese Capitalism (Pantheon Books, 1975), pp. 211–13.
 For an alternative view, see Andrew Gordon, 'Contests for the workplace', in: Gordon, Postwar Japan as History, pp. 373–94.
- Sohyo replaced the more militant Sanbetsu (which was effectively destroyed in 1949 during the 'red purge').
- 30. Details in Joe Moore, 'Democracy and capitalism in postwar Japan', in: Joe Moore (ed.), *The Other Japan: Conflict, Compromise and Resistance Since 1945* (M.E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 364–5.
- 31. W.G. Beasley, The Rise of Modern Japan (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1990), pp. 236-8.
- 32. See L. E. Hein, 'Growth versus success: Japan's economic policy in historical perspective', in: Gordon, *Postwar Japan as History*, pp. 99–122.
- 33. A former diplomat and Prime Minister, Yoshida was the dominant figure in Japanese politics in these years. See Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*.
- 34. See William Tabb, *The Postwar Japanese System* (Oxford University Press, 1995); and Kyoko Sheridan, *Governing the Japanese Economy* (Polity, 1993).
- 35. See Michael Yahuda, The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific, 1945-1995 (Routledge, 1996).
- 36. See Shigeto Sudo, The Fukuda Doctrine and ASEAN (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1992).
- 37. See T. J. Pempel, Regime Shift: Comparative Dynamics of the Japanese Political Economy (Cornell University Press, 1998).
- 38. See Michio Nakamoto, 'Death of the salaryman', *The Financial Times*, 17–18 May 1997, p. 1. In 1975 the proportion of women working in all industries was 32.2 per cent. This had risen to 39.5 per cent by 1997. Figures from the Management and Coordination Agency, various years.
- See Makoto Itoh, 'Is the Japanese Economy in Crisis?', Review of International Political Economy, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1994), pp. 29–51.
- See Toru Shinoda, 'Rengo and policy participation: Japanese-style neo-corporatism?', in: Mari Sako & Hiroki Sato (eds), Japanese Labour and Management in Transition (Routledge, 1997), pp. 187–214.
- 41. Figures from the Japanese Ministry of Labour, various years.
- 42. Gerard Baker, 'Japanese salaryman's earnings fall by 0.6%', The Financial Times, 5 October 1994, p. 4.
- See Mitchell Bernard, 'Regions in the Global Political Economy: Beyond the Local–Global Divide in the Formation of the Eastern Asian Region', New Political Economy, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1996), pp. 335–53.
- 44. The number of foreign workers legally entering Japan jumped from just over 80,000 in 1988 to more than 110,000 in 1991 and 100,000 in 1994 before falling back to 94,000 in 1997. Meanwhile, the number of illegal entries reached a high of 64,341 (45,144 male and 19,197 female) in 1993 before falling back to 41,604 (25,781 male and 15,823 female) in 1997. The actual figures for illegal workers are probably far higher. Figures from the Japanese Ministry of Justice, various years.

- 45. Trend figures from the Japanese Management and Coordination Agency, various years. 1998 figures from Michio Nakamoto, 'Japan's hidden army of unemployed takes to the streets', *The Financial Times*, 8 May 1998, p. 6.
- 46. Nakamoto, 'Japan's hidden army.'
- 47. In 1995, *The Economist*, basing its remarks on a series of editorials by the conservative *Daily Yomiuri*, was prepared to say that 'in most areas of life, people agree that Japan's post-war formula no longer works' ('The decline of faith and discipline', *The Economist*, 18–24 November 1995, p. 94).
- 48. See Chalmers Johnson, 'Tanaka Kakuei, structural corruption, and the advent of machine politics in Japan', in: Chalmers Johnson, *Japan: Who Governs?* (W.W. Norton, 1995), pp. 183–211.
- 49. Roughly a third of all MPs in the Diet are the children of MPs, as are nearly half of all LDP members.
- 50. In 1996, for example, an internal investigation revealed that the Ministry of Health and Welfare had systematically covered up evidence of its involvement in a scandal involving the sale of HIV-contaminated blood for treatment of haemophilia sufferers. Again, in March 1998 the Governor of the Bank of Japan resigned following police raids on the Bank in pursuit of an investigation into insider dealing. In the months following, three officials committed suicide, 44 received severe reprimands, 58 were warned and the Minister of Finance and his vice-Minister, Sakakibara Eisuke, were forced to take a pay cut of 20 per cent for one month.
- 51. On Daiwa, see *The Economist*, 2–8 March 1996, p. 7; on Sumitomo, see *The Financial Times*, 12 May 1998, p. 7.
- 52. See Glenn D. Hook, Militarization and Demilitarization in Contemporary Japan (Routledge, 1996).
- Michio Nakamoto, 'Japanese-US defence support agreement signed', The Financial Times, 29 April 1998,
 p. 8.
- 54. See 'Flying the Flag', The Far Eastern Economic Review, 12 August 1999, pp. 18-9.
- 55. Walter Hatch & Kozo Yamamura, Asia in Japan's Embrace (Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 56. The Financial Times (18 April 2002, p. 36) reported recently on the growing US trade deficit, which promises to reach its highest level ever (in absolute terms and as a share of the economy) in the next few years. The trade deficit with Japan jumped from US\$4.8bn in April 2001 to US\$5.7bn a year later.
- 57. David Rapkin & J. Strand, 'The US and Japan in the Bretton Woods Institutions: Sharing or Contesting Leadership?', *International Journal*, Vol. 52 (1997), pp. 265–96; and Richard F. Doner, 'Japan in East Asia: institutions and regional leadership', in: Peter J. Katzenstein & Takashi Shiraishi (eds), *Network Power: Japan and Asia* (Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 197–233.
- 58. Robert Wade, 'Japan, The World Bank, and the Art of Paradigm Maintenance: *The East Asian Miracle* in Political Perspective', *New Left Review*, No. 217 (1996), pp. 3–37.
- 59. It is worth remembering, however, that despite its problems Japan remains the source of enormous sums of money for the international community, disbursed both privately in the form of investment and publicly in the form of contributions to international organisations such as the World Bank and IMF (where, in voting terms, it has remained consistently in second position behind the US) and through its aid policy.
- 60. Gavan McCormack, 'From Number One to Number Nothing: Japan's Fin de Siècle Blues', Japanese Studies, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1998), pp. 31-44.
- 61. See Kazuo Tsuda, 'Japanese banks in deregulation and the economic bubble', in: Kazuo Sato (ed.), *The Transformation of the Japanese Economy* (M. E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 267–90; and M. J. B. Hall, *Financial Reform in Japan* (Edward Elgar, 1998).
- Michio Nakamoto, 'Japanese PM in call to boost profile of yen', *The Financial Times*, 4 January 1999,
 p. 2; and S. Iskandar, 'Japan's PM calls for currency co-operation', *The Financial Times*, 8 January 1999,
 p. 2.
- Christopher W. Hughes, 'Japanese Policy and the East Asian Currency Crisis: Abject Defeat or Quiet Victory?', Review of International Political Economy, Vol. 7 (2000), pp. 219–53.
- 64. See Richard Higgott, 'The Asian Economic Crisis: A Study in the Politics of Resentment', *New Political Economy*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1998), pp. 333–56.
- 65. See Hook, Militarization and Demilitarization in Contemporary Japan.
- 66. For the latest episode in this re-emergence, see D. Ibison, 'Japan considers changes to preparations for war', *The Financial Times*, 18 April 2002, p. 37. On revision of the Constitution, see Glenn Hook & Gavan McCormack (eds), *Constitutional Revision—The Japanese Debate* (Routledge, 2001).
- 67. See Reinhard Drifte, *Japan's Quest for a Permanent UN Security Council Seat* (Macmillan and Iwanami Shoten, 1999); Tsuneo Akaha, 'Japan's Comprehensive Security Policy', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 31 (1991), pp.

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- 324–40; and Hans Maull, 'Germany and Japan: The New Civilian Powers', Foreign Affairs, Vol. 69, No. 5 (1990/91), pp. 91–106.
- 68. Christopher W. Hughes, 'Japan's Subregional Security and Defence Linkages with ASEAN, South Korea and China in the 1990s', *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1996), pp. 229–50.
- 69. See Shigeo Shingo, A Study of the Toyota Production System from an Industrial Engineering Viewpoint rev edn (Productivity Press, 1989).
- 70. See Alan Dupont, 'Is there an "Asian Way"?', Survival, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1996), pp. 13-33.
- 71. See Mark Berger, "The triumph of the East?" The East Asian miracle and post-Cold War capitalism, in: Mark Berger & Douglas Borer (eds), *The Rise of East Asia* (Routledge, 1997), pp. 260-87.