

The Age of New Paradigms*

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The theme of paradigm shift is of great interest to scholars all over Asia. I am happy to see that the organizers have chosen this theme. I am reminded that the idea of paradigm as used by Thomas Kuhn is now some 50 years old. Since then, there have been numerous claims that paradigm shifts have taken place. It may not be too much of an exaggeration to say that new paradigms have been proposed regularly ever since then, not least in the social sciences disciplines. There is now something of an industry to check the validity of social science paradigms. Forgive me if I confess that I am skeptical of many of such claims. But it would be true to say that the possibility of finding a new paradigm has driven many scholars to come up with important and sometimes brilliant insights in numerous fields of study. Certainly the idea of a paradigm shift has been a major research tool in advancing scholarship.

I shall not argue about whether the paradigm shifts that have been suggested are justified or not. I do not define paradigms very strictly myself. As long as a new pattern or model is accepted as being valuable for research purposes, I would be prepared to take that as paradigmatic. What I shall try to do here is to place the idea of new paradigms in a longer-term perspective. This seems to me to be appropriate here given the historical origins of IAHA.

When Thomas Kuhn convinced us of the paradigm shift following the scientific revolution in Europe, we were struck by the logic and beauty of his presentation. He identified what such a transformation in world-views

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meant for the scholarly world and showed how we could connect and explain a variety of revolutionary changes that had occurred. Underlying these changes was the idea of universality as something that we could find in the past and also expect to find in the future. Thus, looking back, we might ask, was there a specific paradigm before the one that Thomas Kuhn had identified? If there was, what was it, and how long did that last? And, looking forwards, we might also ask, could a new paradigm shift be permanent? If not, could a shift lead back or revert to an older one, or be replaced by another new paradigm?

In the context of the theme of this conference, what does a paradigm shift in Asia mean? Is it truly new or something more like a reversion to an earlier paradigm and represents some kind of pendulum swing? Also, as one might well ask, is this something we in Asia discovered for ourselves or, as often happens these days, was it pointed out to us by scholars working in the West? I shall explore these questions and also offer some reflections on the age of paradigms in Asia and elsewhere, asking historical questions like, how old did the replaced paradigms get before they were replaced? In other words, how long did paradigms survive, and how long can any paradigm survive today in a world that seems to be changing so rapidly? This would also lead me to distinguish between different kinds of paradigms, for example, the old and the new and the perennial. Many of the conference papers here will be examining this vast subject in all sorts of different ways. I merely offer to kick off with a few questions and invite you to put the issue of paradigm shifts in Asia in a historical context.

Let me begin with Kuhn's paradigm and ask what kind of paradigm was there before the scientific revolution. I am not even sure that there was any one paradigm that could be easily identified. But, since Kuhn's new paradigm has gained universal acceptance, we might argue that what it replaced had also been universal in some way. At least it would have had common features around the world that might be recognisable. Because the new paradigm was linked to the scientific revolution, we could assume that the replaced paradigm was "not scientific". Furthermore, there would have

been regional differences around the world, and obviously different “unscientific” ways in various contemporary civilizations that sometimes helped to advance knowledge.

For example, the state of “non-scientific” thinking in the 16th and 17th centuries in Western Europe was distinct from that prevailing in Asia. On the eve of the scientific revolution in Europe, when Tycho Brahe and then Galileo and Kepler were re-charting the skies against received views of the Catholic world, Muslim mathematicians and astronomers were quiescent in the Middle East. But some were still active alongside those in India and China. As for Chinese astronomers, they were stubbornly pragmatic and shied away from new ideas and methodologies. When the Confucian mandarins encountered the new “scientific” ideas of Matteo Ricci in the late 16th century, and then those of his Jesuit colleagues like Giulio Aleni, Adam Schall and Ferdinand Verbiest during the next hundred years, they consistently rejected what did not conform with their ideas. These mandarins demonstrated a range of “unscientific” thinking that had little in common with that found in India and the Middle East. Nevertheless, we could argue that each kind of resistance to radical re-thinking was part of a broader “non-scientific” paradigm that depended on religious backgrounds and other kinds of traditional faiths. Today we think the Chinese mandarins were so backward not to have appreciated the progressive ideas and institutions that the Jesuits had brought. In fact, we may have gone too far the other way, so much so that we are likely now to take seriously and sometimes uncritically any new paradigm that came out of an European or American university.

But there were other paradigms at work in the 17th century. In various ways, people in Asia at the time would place their faith in some force or superior Being that determined the course of their lives. Such faith demanded that any quest for knowledge should obey given values or laws. Effective ways to acquire new knowledge and advance the cause of learning were already there. For most people, there was profound meaning in their acts of faith as well as the rituals and habits that grew around these acts.

Inspired by these faiths, people could still be inventive and creative in the acquisition of new knowledge, and society could advance from simple to complex, rural to urban, even from barbarism to the rise of civilisation. Each of these historical stages could be said to have been the product of its own paradigm.

But what precisely were the paradigms before the scientific revolution of the 17th century in Europe? Had there been earlier paradigm shifts and, if there were, what was the nature of such shifts in the past? Since the people then did not have the concept, I am hesitant to apply the word paradigm retrospectively. But if we find similar ingredients in the various ways they studied their societies, why not? If we go far back enough, what about the way knowledge was used by hunter-gatherers to re-learn and acquire new knowledge needed to establish agrarian economies? Was there not a paradigm shift there? After that, when people learnt to live in towns and cities, they would also have required another paradigm shift. One can imagine totally new ways of thinking replacing the older ways. There would then follow new generations of people who would examine their lives more self-consciously with even more different sets of premises. Of course, the different mix of rural and urban environments called for greater varieties of knowledge seeking. The particular mix that produced the scientific revolution in Europe was unique and no other mix of ideas and institutions had been able to lead to that particular phenomenon. I have learnt to welcome new paradigm shifts. But could future paradigm shifts turn backwards? Could older paradigms be revived?

Kuhn's paradigm shift did imply that it marked a total negation of previous paradigms and gave the impression that it is a path of no return. I do not know if he had intended it to be so absolute. Of course, the nature of the scientific paradigm itself led to revolutionary methods that seem to have overturned everything. On the other hand, we know that the new paradigm that Kuhn identified had evolved from the cruder methods that had been tried in earlier times. What happened in the 17th century were the systematic use of improved methods and the crystallization of the laws and

principles that could be derived from them. As these accumulated, they confirmed the idea of progress and reinforced hopes of an ever better world. But, at its base, the paradigm was more modest. The seeming methodological discontinuity was not a total break with the past but more an enrichment and enhancement of the values and ideas that had long been known.

Nevertheless, the impact of the new paradigm has been profound. We in Asia are now all prepared for more paradigm shifts to come. We look out for them in ways our ancestors had never done, notably in our centres of higher learning and through our scholarly journals. So much so that some years ago I identified the influence of paradigm shifts on the research and teaching in our universities and found the following contrast in our search for paradigm shifts. This is what I said,

“In universities in Western Europe, North America and Australasia, paradigm shifts come more from academic and intellectual activity, or cerebral responses to social and cultural changes over time, taking in the larger picture in the context of universal science and progress, and of modern civilisation, as the main driving force in history.”

“In Asia, especially in the newer nations over the past half century, paradigm shifts are more situational, much more influenced by contemporary political and economic developments. Thus, we might distinguish between responses to academic shifts emerging from the major scholarly centres in the West and those responses to situational changes (which sometimes produce paradigm shifts) that have been experienced in Asia itself.”

I shall not examine whether the paradigm shift in Asia referred to here as the theme of this conference is a knowledge-driven shift or a situational one. I consider it self-evident that, with the economic rise of Japan and then East Asia, and now of India and Southeast Asia, we are more ready to accept suggestions of paradigm shift in our research that reflect that situational change. I see nothing wrong with situational responses that could produce

new paradigms. The change in Asia has occurred at two levels. More people now believe that power has really shifted from the kind of colonial and imperial domination by the West to one where Asian entities can more or less determine their own fates. Therefore, there are more options for Asians to map out their own paths to progress. This perspective had begun early with K. M. Panikkar's *Asia and Western Dominance* (1954) that pointed to the end of Western dominance and Jan Romein's *The Asian Century*, which he wrote in 1956. Looking back, both judgments were premature, but clearly both authors were groping for some kind of paradigm shift. Actually Kuhn first wrote on the structure of scientific revolutions about the same time in 1955, but his work was not known to most of us until Chicago published his book seven years later, in 1962.

At another level, some scholars in the West had themselves become discontented with the idea of Western civilisational dominance. This led to the post-modern discourse that seems to have been knowledge-driven. It had come from a re-discovery of "non-Western" history and culture, or a reaction against the positivism of the Enlightenment project, something that had begun with artists and writers like Ezra Pound and gained wide recognition with Jack Kerouac and the Beat Generation in the 1950s. Yet another source was the systematic reappraisal of facts and interpretations that had previously confirmed the supremacy of "Western-modern" values. This included the powerful demonstration of imperial European construction of an Oriental past by Edward Said and the enthusiastic following that he inspired. More recently, we have seen many books like Andre Gunder Frank's *Re-Orient* and John Hobson's *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*. And there was the drive for change within Asia itself, most notably the turn to Islam and religious authenticity. Many other communities were also engaged in the return to conservative values, wherever there was felt the need to fill the moral and spiritual vacuum in a triumphant capitalism.

Whatever the reason for the knowledge-driven shifts, it supported the emerging reality today, one of Asians recovering their self-confidence. That

reality helped to confirm the assertion of paradigm shifts. It has led us to be receptive of some shifts that we now more or less take for granted. Let me focus on a few examples that have been influential in Asia. I have chosen four that are well known and can be used to support what I have said above. The four have also been chosen to illustrate different kinds of paradigm shifts, what call the recurrent, the continuous, the contested and the cumulative. An example of the recurrent paradigm shift would be “Culture Matters”, something that has found a new lease of life following the powerful image of “the clash of civilisations”. The second example, of the continuous shift, are the many manifestations of the “Core/Centre and Periphery” paradigm. The third example is more controversial. I have chosen the “Party Politics” phenomenon often linked with the advent of democracy. This would be an example of the contested paradigm shift. Finally, the fourth example is that of “International Systems” which I call a cumulative paradigm, something akin to Kuhn's original paradigm, with the shifts being cumulative over centuries. I have chosen these examples to show that, in this age of paradigms, it would be useful to have a typology of paradigms. I shall now explain the differences among the four and why I think marking these differences could be useful.

Culture Matters

Let me begin with the recurrent paradigm. It probably surprised people in Asia that there should be a book entitled *Culture Matters: how values shape human progress* (2000) [edited by Samuel Huntington and Lawrence Harrison]. The title invokes the word “culture”, and the idea that culture is important seems to be self-evident everywhere in Asia. At least, I am not aware of anyone in Asia who would disagree with that general statement. The editors of the book, however, are more focused, and take on the argument about the place of culture in the social sciences. This is an issue that has been debated for several decades and was most recently stimulated by Huntington's own essay on “The Clash of Civilisations”. Not surprisingly, that essay has attracted attention all over Asia.

We are all familiar with the uses of the scientific model to set aside matters pertaining to anything linked with “culture” because they are not quantifiable and often unreliable. This was essential for certain kinds of experiments and calculations. But many scientists also recognise the limits of the technical and narrow approach, limits which remind us of those what used to encumber the traditional methods of the classicists, philosophers, rhetoricians, philologists, theologians, and historians in the past. Those scholars were mindful of the cultural baggage they carried into their work. Many of them would agree that their methods had reached the point of when they found breakthroughs in knowledge increasingly difficult. Hence the strong urge in the social sciences to break out of the old paradigms.

Why do we need a book to affirm that “culture matters” now? Attacks on the unscientific use of culture in social studies go back a long time, and dates back at least to the rise of fields like economics and sociology at the beginning of the 19th century. Karl Marx was probably the most powerful proponent of what was to be called “scientific socialism” in a positivist era. I was much influenced by Marx but, at the same time, I was restrained by the cultural arguments in R. H. Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Tawney first developed this in 1922 and confirmed what Max Weber had argued some twenty years earlier in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [only translated into English in 1930]. Soon after that, I was further struck by Weber's famous essay on Confucianism and Taoism, and excited by the explanatory power of ideas and cultural values. Since then, despite my faith in the scientific revolution and the brilliance of Kuhn's paradigm, I have never been able to shake off the conviction that culture has mattered all along, and that attempts to leave it out have not been convincing. Thus I was surprised by the intolerance shown to historical and cultural explanations among many social scientists since the 1980s. New paradigms that sought to replace the value of history and culture have been favoured. This has led many to turn away from the reality of cultural factors in human behaviour, whether in war and peace or in the management of complex organisations. I am convinced that the pressure of that reality will

counteract this trend. The age of the culture-less social science, for better or worse, may not last all that long. Of course, there had always been periods of doubt about the explanatory power of the idea of culture. But cultural elements have continued to demand attention. There may therefore never be real paradigm shifts where culture is concerned. Hence this is an example of the recurrent paradigm.

Core and Periphery

The next example of “core and periphery” I have called a continuous paradigm. It has always had wide appeal in Asia. The paradigm was given its fullest expression by Immanuel Wallerstein, notably in his world-systems theory. In familiar dialectical terms, he has raised the core-periphery paradigm to the level of a global phenomenon, and the tension it represents has now become part of the anti-globalisation agenda. In fact, this paradigm has an ancient pedigree and has always been so useful that it has been extensively applied to the widest possible range of human, technical and natural phenomena. In Asia, the paradigm shift today could be couched in terms of the rise of new Asian regional cores to which may be attached some realigned peripheries. For example, we identify a core in the Japanese economy since the 1960s to which the Newly Industrialised Economies (NIEs) were the periphery. One could predict that China's dynamic shift to capitalistic ways since the 1980s might ultimately produce a new core for Asia. In both cases, the peripheries would include parts of Southeast Asia and beyond.

Such changes may be seen as simply a stage of development and does not prove that any paradigm shift has occurred. The key question is, how long do these core-periphery relationships last? The paradigm has had many precedents and may therefore be called a continuous paradigm that has taken different forms and been given different names. At the risk of sounding contradictory in terms, I would suggest that the pattern is a perennial one. Scholars have been playing with similar ideas from ancient times. For example, among its different names, there have been comparable

pairings made in religious discourse between the head and heart of a great faith and the outer limbs of the faithful. Similarly, the images of court and country, and even the rulers and the rule, and there are analogies that separated the civilised from the barbarous, and the centre from the local. In all these relationships, the underlying principle was hierarchical and the superiority of the core and the power relationships that were projected were never questioned. However, there is something that distinguishes the modern core and periphery paradigm from the others, and that is the high degree of flexibility implied in modern usage. At any one time, the core not only bore an interdependent relationship to the periphery but, as Wallerstein suggests and can be variously demonstrated, the core could also change and move, and in time the periphery could even become a new core to which the former core would become dependent.

Thus the continuous paradigm where the continuity has helped knowledge-seekers from the earliest times to frame their studies. It is something that could be adapted for different purposes to explain different power and cultural relationships. Its use today, in association with analytical methods, has demonstrated the impermanence of such relationships. We now have a better understanding of the core-periphery patterns throughout history and can identify its evolution under different geographical and economic conditions. And, in so far as it could be modified to become an open system of core-periphery interchanges, we can say that the paradigm is continuous. There is really no new paradigm, only a series of shifts in meaning in response to changing contexts. Hence there is no difficulty for Asians to say that we have had this paradigm all along and a new shift from any periphery to an Asian core is not at all surprising.

Party politics

My third example is of a contested paradigm. This is drawn from the theory that party politics is inevitable as we push towards democratic governance. I refer in particular to the writings that have followed Maurice Duverger's famous study of political parties. As he shows, during the past

two centuries, party politics has come to dominate all varieties of political activity. In so far as this is the backbone of democratic organization, something alien to traditional Asia, this would seem to qualify as a totally new paradigm shift for Asia. That is, there was a paradigmatic shift when courtiers and mandarins gave way to political professionals who organised themselves through political parties in order to control popular or democratic systems. Certainly the idea that kings and other rulers were legitimate by the will of God or Heaven has been superceded. But in what way do their successors rule by the wish of the people (however that is determined) is far from uniform. On the surface, a paradigm shift has occurred, at least, in theory and in the political rhetoric used today. Even in practice, we have seen the growth of the phenomenon of party politics everywhere. However, what is important is the assumption that party politics evolved when more than one party was needed to compete for the right to rule. Maurice Duverger considers the role of parties mostly in nations that already have democratic systems. He does not consider parties that have to function where a nation does not yet exist. Nor does he deal with post-colonial states that experienced democracy only after the colonial officials had left.

I would like to use examples from Southeast Asia after de-colonisation. We have at least three kinds of countries. The first distrusted political parties and no real parties were allowed to be active. Here the governments believed that they were above parties. Thus they only permitted or encouraged "royal" parties, as for a while in Thailand and Brunei, or the military-dominated ones as in Myanmar and, from about 1965 to 1998, in Indonesia. And then, there are the single party countries, for example, where a revolutionary communist party was victorious, as in Vietnam and Laos and almost so in Cambodia. Where a single party is enough, its politics could not qualify as party politics. Finally, there are countries like the Philippines, Thailand for the past two decades, Malaysia and Singapore (and now also in Indonesia and the new Cambodia) where some desire for democracy has survived, although variously interpreted by each of the

parties concerned. In such cases, there has been room for one, two or more parties, including alliances of a number of parties.

The presence of three such different examples in a single region like Southeast Asia is intriguing, especially when they seem to tolerate one another enough to seek to work in harmony and to maximise their common interests in ASEAN. It is also interesting that ASEAN members are only pushing Myanmar to be more democratic but not Vietnam or Laos. Is this because Myanmar has no political parties and does not believe in having them? As long as there is one modern party (as with the Communist parties of Vietnam and Laos), and the party affirms that other parties may be allowed, would that meet the paradigm norm? What is fascinating is how quickly various countries have accepted the idea that it is the existence of the political party that marks the key paradigm shift. Power has to be organised, if not shared, through something called the party. Once it was established that a party is in control, the paradigm has been fulfilled. But how real is the shift in paradigms? If the power elites agree that one party is enough, or as long as they have something called a party, does that mean that a shift has occurred? There is danger here that we are playing with words, and that this will do little to help the search for knowledge. I therefore suggest that we are really dealing with an incomplete or contested paradigm, something that everyone would claim to have but where definitions of what the key concept of party really means cannot be agreed upon. Where there are such disagreements, how can we be sure that we have a paradigm shift?

International Systems

My fourth example turns to the prevailing international system, one based on the idea of equal sovereign states in a United Nations Organisation. This is on the surface quite straightforward. In principle, it has gained the respect of most Asian national leaders. I have described this shift as a cumulative one that is based on changing distributions of power. Let me explain why. By international systems, I refer to the system of international rules (or, as some would prefer to call them, laws) that was the product of

many efforts by European powers from the Congress of Vienna to the League of Nations. The final product after the Second World War was the United Nations, together with the linked institutions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and all the international organisations that have been established since. Under-girding these efforts was developed a body of theory that now guides all thinking and research about the future of war and peace in the world. What is remarkable is that, in less than half a century, this body of theory has become the foundation of all features of globalisation that we experience today.

The significant point to make is that these efforts by the European powers did finally produce what was a paradigm shift, that is, moving us from a state of continuous conflict (if not anarchy) to a rule-based condition. However reluctantly countries were led to accept the new set of rules, the deadly wars of the 20th century (1914-1918 and 1939-1945 in particular) made it compelling for them to transform themselves into determined peace-seeking nations. Thus the victors of 1945 devised the rules to signify the advent of a new paradigm. And the trebling of new nations that joined the UN after the decolonisation processes of the 1950s quickly confirmed the efficacy of that change. The shift of the paradigm was delayed if not frozen by the nuclear rivalry of forty years of the Cold War (1950 to 1990). The relentless struggle for power during this period, through proxies when not dealt with directly by the superpowers themselves, left little room to test the efficacy of the paradigm. When the Cold War ended, there was great relief that “the end of history” (as propounded by Francis Fukuyama) was here. At last, the paradigm of a ruled-based world order could be given a chance to show its explanatory power.

So far, this has not happened, although there is no shortage of scholars who would say that this has been an obvious case of a paradigm shift. Perhaps this seems to be so because it is not old enough, that is, if we take it that the shift did not really occur until the 1990s. On the other hand, if we consider the two centuries of effort and the many tragedies that resulted from earlier failures, perhaps the shift simply has not been completed. It

may be argued that the ideals behind the systems, with organisations that would check the strong and support the weak, have been difficult to realise. The more cynical would conclude that the systems were, in the first place, set up to enable the strong to consolidate a status quo that would keep them in power indefinitely. In short, the rules drawn up could not be fully enforced and the key international laws were largely ineffective or often contradictory. Much more work has yet to be done. In both arguments, it would seem that we need more time and we need to try harder to bring about the paradigm shift that would enable us to examine and test the system.

Let me underline the fact that everything in the last sixty years point to a paradigm shift in thinking and explaining international events. The scholars of international relations theory have been right to recognise that the ingredients are there to draw roadmaps for a respected international system. Indeed they have opened up many vistas to such a system. But there are intractable problems here that suggest that this paradigm shift is totally subject to the actual distribution of power at any one time. That power distribution can, of course, be corrected through economic or political means without the use of force. But it is far from agreed who should have the right to act where there is an obvious maldistribution of power. Nor is it clear who would have the capacity and will to act beyond the given rules and laws. So the paradigm is still an ongoing exercise that is building upon at least two centuries of history. The experience and results so far have been cumulatively leading to a broader understanding and wider acceptance of the need to succeed here if we want a more peaceful world. This accumulation raises our hopes for a decisive shift, but I for one am not confident that the desired paradigm shift has yet occurred.

The survey of the four examples of paradigm shifts reminds us that the age of paradigms that we live in today encourages us to search for more. But it also suggests that not all paradigms are necessarily what they seem and certainly not all of them are equal. I have shown that there are some that really date back a long time and have been useful concepts off and on and in

various forms in different parts of the world. Others, however, are new and still very young and still have to be widely accepted. The older ones, whether we call them recurrent or continuous, have happened through different mindsets, even using different names for similar qualities. Yet others seem quite incomplete. They are either still somewhat indeterminate and are therefore much contested or they have accumulated a lot of historical and theoretical mileage without having arrived at a uniformly usable condition.

I am sensitive to the fact that scholarship in the 21st century needs to function in an age of paradigms. The theme of this conference has highlighted the paradigm shifts in Asia, especially through comparisons of the three regions of East, South and Southeast Asia. My remarks here cannot encompass all the regions nor raise all the issues that need attention. They are meant to point to the larger phenomenon of moving from the particular to the universal that many of the paradigms imply. If we are serious about these paradigms, however, we would have to recognise that they all need some test of universality across the board. The conference theme has emphasized the comparisons across the Asian continent. I have used this lecture to draw special attention to the need to recognise that any test of universality also requires us to exercise the test of time. We may never know the age of any paradigm, nor when exactly a shift has occurred. But it would be a mistake to assume that paradigms and the shifts they bring are all new.