Feature Article 【專題論文】

The Indian Self and the Others: Individual and Collective Identities in India
印度的自我與他者： 印度的個人與集體認同

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Abstract

Starting from the influential Western tradition of constructing "Asia" and the "Asians" as distinctively different from "Europe" and the "Europeans," the author discusses how theories about the "self" have proven to be constitutive for culture-specific understandings of the self and the other in one's own and in foreign societies. By contrasting some of the main characteristics of "Western" views of Asians with Hindu and Buddhist theories about the self, he then shows how the tendency to construct "Asians" as distinct others has resulted in many Western scholars' failure a) to understand key aspects of Indian self-theories and b) to do justice to the vast spectrum of traditions of Indian and Asian thought that do not conceive of Asia as a more or less homogenous cultural sphere. Finally, the author discusses how a more thorough analysis of intercultural and intracultural self-theories can shed light on the crucial sociological and psychological role such theories can play in the history and politics of intercultural encounters as well as on the factors involved in India's and other society's ongoing effort to achieve a collective identity.

摘要

本文首先談及具有影響力的西方傳統建構出「亞洲」和「亞洲人」，以與「歐洲」和「歐洲人」明顯區分。接著討論就以文化為特定對象的理解而言，與「自我」相關的理論已被證明乃是瞭解自己本身社會與異國社會中的「自我」與「他者」的組成要素。然後將「西方人」對亞洲人觀點中的某些主要特徵與印度教和佛教有關「自我」的理論兩相對比，並且說明將「亞洲人」建構成截然不同的「他者」的傾向如何導致許多西方學者既無法了解印度諸種有關「自我」理論的關鍵層面，又不能欣賞印度與亞洲思想傳統的浩瀚，不能理解亞洲是一個大體上同質的文化領域。最後，則討論到為何更進一步透徹分析文化間與文化內部有關「自我」的理論可以彰顯社會學與心理學的重要角色：這些理論可能在文化之間彼此邂逅的歷史及政治上扮演要角，同時可能成為影響印度與其他社會持續努力達到集體認同的因素。

Introductory Remark

In the following, I will present key features of Western thinking about the alleged "Asian self" and compare it to prominent Indian (specifically, Hindu and Buddhist) thinking about the idea of a self. I will then discuss how prominent Indian thinking has affected the way Indians see other Asians and how they see the "other" within their own society and, more generally, how an indigenous perspective on Indian self-theories offers an exemplary account of Asian self-concepts which is different from that constructed in the "West's" view of the "East." I will try to show that the discussion about the idea of an individual and a collective self, or about any personal or cultural identity, can hardly be undertaken without reflecting on the intercultural, intracultural, sociopolitical, and historical characteristics of the discussion.

Asia as Europe's "Other"

The term "Asia" is a toponym whose origins are not perfectly clear, but that was mainly used in Ancient Greece and Rome in order to refer to the vast regions and numerous peoples East of Europe using a single collective term that played a considerable role in the self-construction of Europe. It has always been Asia or the "East," that was considered the "other" dominant sphere worth mentioning. The East was the realm of mighty powers and enemies who more than once appeared at and even crossed the European borders. Asia therefore served as the counterfoil Europeans used in order to construct their cultural self-understanding. That did not change when Europe discovered the Americas, which was simply treated as a European extension, i.e., Europe's own Far West. The attitude towards the East has always been (and even today remains) a specific blend of

admiration, contempt, and fear. As a result, very different ethnic and cultural groups such as the Afghans, Arabs, Chinese, Indians, Indonesians, Japanese, Koreans, Persians, Turks, etc., all became "Asians," actually meaning "non-Europeans" or "non-Christians." This can clearly be seen in the context of what is termed "Orientalism," the Eurocentric discourse about the "Orient," analyzed by Edward Said and many others: For some Western intellectuals and scholars, namely, the so-called "Orientalists," the "Orient" meant the Near East, mainly Turkey, the Arabian and Muslim regions as well as northern parts of Africa; for others the Orient stretched much further to the East, including India, Southeast Asia, and the even more distant regions that are called "East Asia" today, namely China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Thus, for millennia, the European view of the East resulted in an abstraction of Asia, making the largest, most populated and extremely diverse continent a quite homogenous region that could thus be easily contrasted to the "West."

This simplification laid the ground for many other simplifications, including the introduction into Western scientific approaches of various dichotomous concepts for differentiating between Westerners and Easterners, between Europeans and Asians, between Christians and non-Christians. Probably the best known of these concepts is the differentiation between individualistic and collectivistic societies, which has been an academic theme in Europe since antiquity and gained special prominence in the individual-centered view of man held by thinkers of the European Renaissance.[1] The theme has been greatly influencing social scientific research for some decades now, ever since Geert Hofstede re-introduced the individualism-collectivism differentiation in his famous cross-cultural comparison of about 40 countries in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[2] The number of countries and subjects have increased since then as

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1 Cigdem Kagitçibasi, "Individualism and Collectivism," in J. Berry, M. H. Segall, & C. Kagitçibasi (eds.), *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 3 (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1996, 2nd ed.), pp. 1-49.
2 For more detailed information on his theory, see Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (Thousand Oaks,

have the number of scientific concepts that draw upon Hofstede's distinction. For example, in order to refer to the psychological outcomes of an individualistic or collectivistic orientation within societies on the personal level, Triandis introduced the differentiation between *ideocentric* vs. *allocentric* tendencies and Markus and Kitayama contrasted the *independent* and *interdependent* self.[3] These and similar theories again draw upon the broader differentiation between Westerners and Easterners (especially US Americans and East Asians) and make use of additional bipolar concepts like autonomy vs. relatedness, separation vs. connectedness, high vs. low self-monitoring, high vs. low context dependence, stability vs. instability, individual orientation vs. group orientation, etc. In short, the oversimplified construction of Asia as Europe's other has had an undeniable yet surprising effect on social scientific comparisons of cultures and their conceptualizations of the so-called self. We should note that in most of the concepts just mentioned, the attributes of a stable, independent, and autonomous self are usually related to Westerners, while attributes deficient in these qualities are usually related to Easterners.[4] G. F. W. Hegel was only one of many leading European thinkers of the 18th and 19th century who viewed these alleged psychological deficits as a source of societal deficits, claiming that the failure of Asian intellectuals to come up with the idea of a stable and autonomous self of the Western kind was to blame for their failure to build modern, clearly defined, stable, and autonomous nation-states like those in Europe.[5]

From most Asians' perspective, the assessment of who they are and what constitutes their identity was and still is different. The Asians themselves never

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CA: Sage, 2000, 2nd ed.).

3 See Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation," *Psychological Review*, 98 (1991), pp. 224-253.

4 Pradeep Chakkarath, "Stereotypes in Social Psychology: The 'West-East' Differentiation as a Reflection of Western Traditions of Thought," *Psychological Studies*, 55 (2010), pp. 18-25.

5 G. F. W. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, H. B. Nisbet (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1975; Original work published 1832-1848).

gave much consideration to the idea of a collective Asia, mainly because they never saw themselves as a geographical or ethnic unity. In their perspective, they have always been extremely varied groups, even within the same territories and societies. For example, interestingly enough, when it comes to cultural and national identity formation, India and China, two of the most influential Asian civilizations for most of history, did not show much interest in contrasting themselves with the "West" as vice versa. It is also interesting that India and China, though they were superpowers at various phases of history, never engaged in an exploration of the West and also never undertook a West-oriented missionary effort that could be compared to the role that exploration and mission played in the history and self-understanding of Europe.

In the following, though, in the history and the discourses of the sciences these terms have been used differently and with varying meanings, for the purpose of this article, I will not deem it necessary to differentiate sharply between them, but consider them as terms with a strong family resemblance that help convey my point.

Indian Conceptions of the Self

Max Mueller, one of the most recognized Western indologists, famously stated that if he was asked "under what sky the human mind has most full developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant," he should point to India.[6] Though this statement found and still finds much support by many other European scholars, too, only a few of them will be leading representatives of

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6 Friedrich Max Mueller, *India: What Can it Teach Us?* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883), p. 24.

academic Western philosophy and even fewer will be Western academic psychologists. At first glance, this is surprising for at least five reasons: First, the different classical schools of Indian philosophy have touched upon almost any topic that Western philosophy has been interested in; second, Indian philosophical and psychological contributions have always focused on the mutual relationship between cognition processes and the development of an individual self and pondered on themes that have been at the core of fundamental scientific discourse in Europe, e.g., in Freud's psychoanalysis or in symbolic interactionism as introduced by G. H. Mead, Blumer, and Cooley; third, the respective analyses resulted in some of the earliest systematized intervention and therapeutic measures, of which the systems of *yoga* and *ayurveda* are only two but may be the best known to the West; fourth, much of India's philosophical and psychological thought has been tightly linked to social philosophy and the reality of Indian society and has frequently served as legitimization for upholding key convictions about social status and duties, including the belief in the adequacy of the Hindu caste system; fifth, for many centuries, key elements of Indian philosophy, psychology, and society had a far-reaching influence on the development of cultures and societies outside the Indian subcontinent, mainly in Southeast but also in East Asia.

In other words, there would be a sufficient number of scientific reasons for Western moral and social sciences, especially for sociologists and psychologists, to show considerably more interest in the Indian contributions to their own fields of interest. However, until recently – with very few exceptions like Max Weber's efforts[7] to integrate the above-mentioned aspects into his theory about the meaning of world views for the development of societies – non-Western thought, including the vast corpus of Indian intellectuality, has mainly been treated as pre-scientific, metaphysical, and/or irrational. Since I have tried to show the ethnocentric sources and the inadequacy of this Western attitude towards non-

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7 See Max Weber, *Religion of India: The sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (New Delhi, India: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2004; Original work published 1916-1918).

Western thinking elsewhere,[8] in the following, I will restrict my line of thought to a presentation of some fundamental aspects of Indian theories about the self without meticulously arguing for or defending their scientific merit. Here, I will emphasize their cultural psychological meaning for the socialization context of more than a billion people in and outside of India, namely, for so-called Asians.

As mentioned above, India developed various traditions of thought and, of course, here it would be impossible to do justice to the richness of the different schools and contents of the theories that resulted from their approaches, analyses, and commentaries. The intellectual discourses they reflect can be traced back to oral and written accounts that stretch over the last 4000 years or so and constitute one of the most extensive, manifold, and continuous scholarly traditions of mankind. Contrary to a misleading perception by many Western commentators, these traditions cannot be reduced to mere spiritualism, idealism, and nihilism,[9] but also include theories of materialism, atomism, rationalism, empiricism, realism, pragmatism, among others. So even if I focus my portrayal of some key features of these traditions on so-called "Hindu" and "Buddhist" contributions, I am not implying that Jainist, Islamic, Sikhist, animalistic, and other traditions are not worth mentioning in this context. On the contrary, I want to emphasize that Hindu and Buddhist scholars refined many of their own theories as a result of century-long debates with all these traditions. However, the following focus on Hindu and Buddhist contributions to self-theory may be justified by a) the fact that over 80 percent of India's population are still being raised in the Hindu tradition and in Hindu socialization contexts, that b) the traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism have been influenced by each other more than by other traditions and for a longer period of time, and that c) it is these two intellectual traditions

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8 See Pradeep Chakkarath, "Internationalizing Education and the Social Sciences: Reflections on the Indian Context," in M. Kuhn & D. Weidemann (eds.), *Internationalization of the Social Sciences: Asia – Latin America – Middle East – Africa – Eurasia* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript, 2010), pp. 87-114; "Stereotypes in Social Psychology: The 'West-East' Differentiation as a Reflection of Western Traditions of Thought," *Psychological Studies*, 55 (2010), pp. 18-25.

9 See Pradeep Chakkarath, "The stereotyping of India: Spirituality, Bollywood, and the Kamasutra," *SIETAR Journal*, 1 (2007), pp. 4-7.

that influenced the regions East of India the most. Of course, what follows is only a very brief sketch of Indian conceptions of the self. However, I hope it will convey some of the main features of Indian self-theory.[10]

Though there are manifold variations in regional practices and related differences in the role that Hindu beliefs play in everyday life, there are central tenets that are shared by almost everyone raised in the Hindu tradition. One of these central tenets is the belief in *brahman* ("universal soul"), the all-encompassing life force that embodies all aspects of existence and which is reflected in *atman* ("individual self"), the life force that makes any living being part of *brahman*. It is the core conviction of Hindu believers that not understanding the relationship between *brahman* and *atman* is deeply problematic and that ignorance of the true nature of this relationship results in suffering which is considered the underlying principle of all existence. These problems arise especially from the nature of the individual self and the psychological processes that cause its development. In other words, it is mainly due to processes within the human psyche that the individual develops the conviction that he is a unique and separate entity, in principle unrelated to the rest of the world which he sees as the "other" sphere of life. Thus, the individual constructs an opposition between himself and the world instead of recognizing that all beings and things and phenomena of the world, including himself, are reflections of one and the same, i.e., *brahman*. This ignorance is the source of egoism – i.e., unawareness of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all

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10 For a more detailed discussion, see Agehananda Bharati, "The Self in Hindu Thought and Action," in A. J. Marsella, G. Devos, & F. L. K. Hsu (eds.), *Culture and Self: Asian and Western Perspectives* (London, UK: Tavistockpp, 1985), pp. 185-230; Pradeep Chakkarath, "What Can Western Psychology Learn from Indigenous Psychologies? Lessons from Hindu Psychology," in W. Friedlmeier, P. Chakkarath & B. Schwarz (eds.), *Culture and Human Development: The Importance of Cross-Cultural Research to the Social Sciences* (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 2005), pp. 31-51; Pradeep Chakkarath, "Indian Thoughts on Psychological Human Development," in G. Misra (ed.), *Psychology and Psychoanalysis in India* (New Delhi, India: Sage, in press); Jonardon Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (New York; NY: Oxford University Press, 2007); Anand C. Paranjpe, *Self and Identity in Modern Psychology and Indian Thought* (New York, NY: Plenum, 1998).

existing things – and results in selfish behavior, driven by uninhibited emotions, greed, the need for a diversified and adventurous life, etc. Since these kinds of desires and needs constitute the basis for failure, disappointment, frustration, aggression, shame, and many other negative states, it follows that the psychological processes that lead to this fateful condition of selfishness need to be analyzed, understood, and controlled. Otherwise – that is another central conviction in the Hindu belief system – the selfish actions and behavior will result in a cycle of endless death and rebirth (*samsara*). As the driving force behind the process of *samsara*, Hindus identify the accumulated sum total of the individual's good and bad deeds which they relate to the universal law of *karma*. The concept of *karma* can be conceived of as similar to the law of gravity that, metaphorically speaking, "weighs" and "judges" the qualities of matter and decides its velocity, direction, and place in the universe. It is a fundamental assumption in this theory that, like matter, psychological phenomena, too, are subject to natural laws. The natural law of *karma* is believed to evaluate one's moral behavior as "good" if one lives according to the cosmic law of being (*dharma*). Since *dharma* is understood as the representation of a just world which attributes a precisely defined place and function to everyone and everything, each Hindu must follow certain rules and fulfill specific duties, recognizing that selfishness will only harm that order. This code of conduct which constitutes the Hindu way of life involves doing what is right for the individual, the family, the caste (*jati*), the society, and the cosmic order. The rules of conduct have been laid down in various *dharma shastras*, compilations of laws that help one to give practical meaning to the theoretical aspects mentioned above and thus show that, from a Hindu point of view, there is no real difference between the religious and the social spheres. This becomes even clearer in the conviction that not only one's membership in a particular caste, but even the biological and social conditions of one's life – whether one ends up being a plant, an animal, a demon, or a human being, male or female, attractive or unattractive, or more or less intelligent – are decisively influenced by one's conduct in one's previous life. Thus, the whole

belief system is metaphysically legitimized, which makes it possible for anyone to perceive social reality as just, an interpretation which has helped stabilize the Hindu society and the caste system for thousands of years.

Here, we should note that – contrary to Hegel's and many other Western thinkers' opinions – the metaphysically induced, psychological pressure put on the Hindu to take care of his psyche actually results in stability, not diffusion. One can easily recognize the importance of a stable self within the Hindu self-theory in the idea of rebirth: The *atman* concept provides that there are core aspects of the individual self that stay unchanged through all rebirths. One could say that, according to this theory, the immortal core identity of a person is provided by a kind of matrix into which the sum total of his *karma* is entered from birth to birth. This core identity ensures that much of the responsibility for the current life as well as for the preceding existences can be attributed to the individual himself. In addition, we should note that following a rigid normative system of rules and fulfilling one's spiritual as well as social duties does not result in world-renunciation – as, for example, Max Weber characterized the Hindu attitude towards reality – but in commitment to worldly things that need to be taken care of for the sake of the societal and cosmic order.

Though the Buddhist belief system has maintained various elements of the Hindu framework (e.g., the idea of suffering as the fundamental principle of all being, the concept of karma as well as the belief in *samsara* and *karma*-dependent rebirth), there are crucial differences, especially when it comes to the conception of the self. From early on, Buddhism rejected the idea of an immortal core self (*atman*) that provides personal identity through all transmigrations. Similar to the Hindu self-theory, the Buddhist theory of the non-self (*anatman*) is closely related to psychological theories of cognition.

The Buddhist theory of cognition and self is based on a detailed analysis of the psychophysical condition of humans, which is believed to be empirically

examinable by anyone through systematic and regularly executed meditation exercises, which play an important role in the Buddhist way of life. With respect to contents as well as abstraction and systematization level, these analyses rank among the most important psychological contributions of Asian thinking. I can only describe them here very briefly.[11] At the core of the analyses is the view that a person or one's "I consciousness" is collectively constituted by the five "aggregates" (*skandha*): 1) physical form (*rupa*), which includes the four elements, earth (solidity), water (liquidity), fire (temperature), and wind (expansion); 2) sensations and feelings (*vedana*): unpleasant, pleasant, or neutral sensations that stem from contact between the six internal sensory organs (eyes, nose, ears, tongue, body, and mind) and the corresponding external objects (appearance, smell, sound, taste, touch, and mental object); 3) perceptions (*sanna*): the perception of appearance, smell, sound, taste, physical form, and spirit; 4) volitional formations (*sankhara*), from which the six expressions of will emerge, which can be directed toward all of the sensations and perceptions specified above; 5) consciousness (*vinnana*), consisting of consciousness of the six sensory organs and the external objects assigned to them.

Humans are thus described as an aggregate of different mutually causal factors that are in constant flux and temporary. The six internal sense bases (organs) and their six external sense bases (objects) are called the twelve sense bases and, combined with the six forms of consciousness, they are called the eighteen elements (*dhatu*). When the physical factors are taken into consideration, every mental procedure can be described as an entirely specific combination of these elements among themselves and with the perception and will phenomena they cause. The key result of this Buddhist analysis is that by means of this thus restructured and constantly changing causal structure, the illusion of a "self" that witnesses all these events is created that does not correspond to anything in reality since this self is also only the result of a process that is constantly

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11 For a more detailed description, see Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1988).

beginning and ending. Thus the notion of a personal soul or a lasting identity, for instance, of the baby growing to become an adult or even the dead person, is refuted. On the one hand, reconstructing, i.e., interpreting, such convictions as the results of psychophysical causal relationships provides a way to explain the development of an individualistic self-concept. In addition, we also see why a key factor for human suffering is seen in this view of self: In the causal nexus mentioned above, it causes selfish attitudes and resultant actions, which lead to negative *karma*, which yet again results in rebirth.

The question concerning what can be understood by "rebirth" if there is no "soul" with lasting identity is the most-discussed philosophical question of Buddhist metaphysics. The perhaps most descriptive and most concise answer, which will have to suffice here, is a parable from the non-canonical text *Milindapanha* in which an Indian Buddhist monk explains the theory to one of the Greek governors installed in Northern India by Alexander the Great in 4th century BC: Rebirth without a soul is like the flame of an oil wick, which was ignited with the flame of another oil wick; the second flame is not identical to the first, but was created as a function of the first and continues on when the first is extinguished. Though, we can admit that there is some causal nexus between the first and the second flame, we do not have plausible arguments to defend the idea that both flames are identical. Buddhism declares Hinduism's belief in an immortal self (*atman*) an expression of psychologically deeply rooted human selfishness: Out of ignorance, fear, weakness, and desire, man develops the idea of *atman* to find consolation.[12] Considering itself partially a critical reform movement, from early on, Buddhism aimed to destroy the psychological roots of these kinds of metaphysical beliefs. However, whatever the discrepancies between Hindu and Buddhist theories might have been, it is noteworthy that for most of the time before the British education system was introduced to India,

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12 See Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (rev. and expanded ed. with texts from suttas and
    dhammapada) (New York: Grove, 1974).

both traditions put the topic of the "self" and its meaning at the center of the academic training at their schools and universities.[13]

The Self and the "Other"

Compared to Hindu self-theory, Buddhist theory gives much greater importance to compassion, that is, the realization that other beings are also suffering and the motivation to free all beings from suffering. How can this attitude towards others be explained by the different self-theory?

According to the Hindu conception of self, it is the ignorant and selfish, that is, immoral individual himself who will be punished with another life and new suffering. Therefore, one can interpret the misery and the suffering of another being as his own fault. The idea that any existence and any biography reflects cosmic justice is one of the main reasons why the caste system has managed to survive the millennia, why even most low-caste Hindus even today accept their caste status, and why there has never been a collective rebellion of the lower castes against the system. Though I do not intend to say that in practice Hindus do not show compassion for the misery of others, it is still interesting to see that, at least on a theoretical level, Hinduism has a more distant attitude towards the suffering of others that follows from the Hindu conviction that each individual forges his *own* destiny.

According to the orthodox Buddhist conception, however, there is no identity between the producer of bad *karma* and the being that results from it. If one is accumulating bad *karma*, one is causing suffering for *another* being. In

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13 See Pradeep Chakkarath, "Internationalizing Education and the Social Sciences: Reflections on the Indian Context," in M. Kuhn & D. Weidemann (eds.), *Internationalization of the Social Sciences: Asia – Latin America – Middle East – Africa – Eurasia* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript, 2010), pp. 87-114; Hartmut Scharfe, *Education in ancient India*, in *Handbook of Oriental Studies* 2, Vol. 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

other words, I am not sinning against me myself, but rather I am responsible for the creation and suffering of an existence which itself is innocent. Therefore, the *karma*-related guilt I am feeling is different from the guilt experienced by a Hindu. Consequently, all Buddhist believers should show compassion for everything that suffers because everything that suffers is suffering innocently. The concept of the non-self (*anatman*) might therefore also have influenced Buddhism's rejection of the caste system because against the background of the Buddhist self-theory, membership to a certain caste could not be justified by *personal* guilt. Moreover, according to this point of view, the caste system does not reflect justice, but adds to injustice and the miserable situation of the lowest castes. Therefore, one needs to show compassion for those who suffer from caste-related misery.

For Hindus, however, their caste is an important aspect of their belief system and their socialization context. First, according to the orthodox understanding, you can only become a Hindu by birth, that is, you cannot be a Hindu without being born into a caste. Second, for most of the last three thousand years, the caste system has been a system of endogamous and hereditary social groups with their own economic as well as ritual privileges and limitations, transferred by inheritance from generation to generation. Therefore, third, the caste status of an individual reflects a biography not of a single biological life but of numerous transmigrations and reincarnations. Taken together, all these aspects constitute an essential part of a Hindu's identity. Of course, within this identity web, the concept of the "other" plays an important and specific role because, without the relative stability of the cast differentiations, an important source of a Hindu's identity would be lost. Interestingly, this system requires you to see the majority of your fellow Hindus as "others," some of them even as "untouchable others." This is interesting because, within the caste system, the social and emotional distance between Hindus of upper and lower castes can be much greater than that between Hindus and non-Hindus or between Indians and non-Indians who do not belong to the caste system at all. In other words, being "the other" in the Hindu

belief system is not only essential for Hindus' identity formation, it even seems to be a stronger criterion of exclusion when it takes place in the relationship with other "others."

Thus, while the Hindu conception of the self constitutes this peculiar interrelationship between members of the same belief and social system, it shares the openness towards non-Indians with Buddhism. To conclude this article, I will briefly address three examples of how the Indian self-theories and their conceptions of the "other" presented above may have affected historical and socio-political aspects of Indian and Asian history.

The first example refers to the Indian culture's influence on Eastern parts of Asia.[14] For over a millennium, starting in around the 3rd century BC, the process known as "Indianization"[15] brought central elements of Indian world views, social philosophy, government and administration, art (especially literature, sculpture, and architecture), scientific knowledge, handicrafts, communication and business styles mainly to Southeast Asia. India also has a long history of cultural exchange with East Asia. Trade with East Asia via the Silk Road and Indian ports like Calicut stretches back two millennia as can be seen in records of extensive early trade networks that the Kushan Empire built with China. Especially through the Buddhist mission and the exchange of Chinese scholars with the once famous Indian universities, e.g., Nalanda and Takshashila, Indian philosophical and scientific thought had a lasting influence on East Asia while East Asian culture also left its traces on the Indian subcontinent. This once flourishing exchange continued until the British rule over India began in the 18th century, ending India's role as an independent actor within the broader Asian scenario and using it as a political and military tool within the empire's rivalry with other colonial forces in the Southeast and East Asian region. Within our

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14 See Hermann Kulke & Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2004, 4th ed.).

15 Ibid.

context of consideration, the process of Indianization is especially remarkable when it comes to the Hindu influence because it brought education and knowledge that were restricted to a very few high-ranking castes within the Indian culture to societies in which there was no caste system and where this privileged, partially even secret knowledge was made open to larger groups of especially Southeast Asian populations. It is worth mentioning that – except for the island of Bali – the century-long involvement of Hinduism did not result in a lasting establishment of the Hindu social system in non-Indian societies outside India. One of the reasons – that also explains why, historically, Buddhism had a more profound impact on Asia's East – might have been that it proved to be quite difficult to export a societal system based on membership by birth. Here, we can say that the *other* Asians outside India were just not as relevant for the identity formation of Hindus as were the *other* fellow Hindus in India itself. Thus is thus an example of how sophisticated and differentiated culturally developed self-concepts can affect individual and collective interactions within one's own and within other societies.

The second example refers to India's attitude towards its experiences with colonialism. The question concerning what role the colonial past plays for the Indian present has always been related to India's history and culture as a whole because Indian history has seen many colonizers (e.g., Aryans, Greeks, Romans, Muslim dynasties, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and British) and various forms of colonization. It was especially in the nineteenth century that Indian historians, based on India's influence in Eastern parts of Asia, developed the theory of "Greater India" which portraits the country as being an imperialistic power itself.[16] There is no question that British hauteur and racism towards Indians had a negative effect on the Indian "psyche" or what one may call the "Indian identity." Nonetheless and especially as compared to the traumatizing effect colonialism had on many African nations, within India as a whole, coping with

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16 Ibid.

the colonial past has always been complex and largely free of bitterness.[17] This can be explained by the similarity of key elements of the British and the Hindu attitudes that, against the background of the preceding paragraphs, can be identified as central aspects of the Hindu conception of the self and the other: the conviction that they rank amongst a very few high civilizations in world history; a far-reaching societal role of status, hierarchy, and authority, including the idea that status comes with birth; the attitude of superiority towards others, even fellow nationals, which many Indians shared because they considered it an expression of cosmic and natural order. We can conclude that the British decision not to challenge India's caste system ensured that it was able to continue to serve as a primary source of identity for most of its members. Thus, from an Indian point of view, British colonialism has never been able to break the backbone of Indian self-understanding. This is an important reason why – when compared to African nations, for example – despite two centuries of British rule in India, Indian scholars and politicians seem to have a relatively relaxed attitude towards the experience of colonialism. Psychologically speaking, coping processes are much easier when a person's or a collective's self-concept remains stable enough to provide the grounds for further development.

My third and final example will show the relatedness of self-theories to historical and sociopolitical processes. It concerns the recent discussion about India's identity and in how far Indian, or more specifically Hindu and Buddhist, theories about "self" and "other" contributed to a portrayal of Indian history that, according to supporters of current Hindu nationalism, needs to be rewritten. One of the main assertions in this discussion is that the history of Islam in India is mainly characterized by cruelty and soaked in the blood of millions of Hindus. Some lament that Indian political leaders and intellectuals, including Mahatma

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17 See Pradeep Chakkarath, "Internationalizing Education and the Social Sciences: Reflections on the Indian Context," in M. Kuhn & D. Weidemann (eds.), *Internationalization of the Social Sciences: Asia – Latin America – Middle East – Africa – Eurasia* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript, 2010), pp. 87-114.

Gandhi and Nehru, have continuously tried to sweep the Islamic rage against Hinduism and other religious groups (whose members Islam regarded as infidels) under the carpet of history. For example, Gandhi's program of Indian "self-rule" is seen as a reflection of the Hindu and Buddhist idea that as long as everyone controls the psychological processes that otherwise produce anger and hatred, nothing – not even the rage of cruel occupiers – can harm you.[18] For Hindu fundamentalists, the problem culminates in the question about whether a Muslim who supports the crimes committed against non-Muslim Indians over centuries and thereby shows disrespect for exactly that tradition of thinking that enabled the success of the attackers in first place can be considered an Indian. Though, these kinds of historical assessments tend to sweep the historically outstanding success of Gandhi's indigenous liberation strategy under the carpet of history, too, they still show how central the topic of self and other can be in currently highly controversial discussions about individual and collective identity.[19]

Analyzing the current political situation in India, Pollock stated that the symbolic meaning system of a political culture is constructed.[20] He also expressed hope that improving our knowledge about these construction processes may help us to understand and even to control them. It is a well-founded social psychological insight that individuals and societies alike want to be known and conceived of by others in accordance with their self-concepts, i.e. their firm convictions and feelings about themselves. At the same time, the divergent views of others may decisively influence these self-verification processes that vice versa affect processes not only on the individual but also on the collective level. I hope that my remarks in this article draw more attention to the fact that

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18 For an example of these kinds of historical analyses, see such different authors like Will Durant, *The Case for India* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1930), and François Gautier, *Rewriting Indian History* (New Delhi, India: India Research Press, 2003, 2nd ed.).

19 See also Michael F. Mascolo & Sunil Bhatia, "The Dynamic Construction of Culture, Self, and Social Relations," *Psychology & Developing Societies*, 14 (2002), pp. 55-89; Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture, and Identity* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2005).

20 See Sheldon Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 52 (1996), p. 264.

attempting to understand how others view the "self" and the "other" is not just a matter of respectability, tolerance, and scientific integrity, but also a way of learning about the other and from the other. It was no coincidence that the topic of learning about the self was at the center of formalized education in Indian schools and universities. The fact that this topic is not considered an important part of academic training anymore may be just another reminder that, in order to assess our development as mankind, we need to look back as well as forward.♦

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