A morphology of liberalism, development and trusteeship: Some implications for South East Asia

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ABSTRACT—This paper will apply Freeden’s morphological approach to the analysis of liberalism and development to explore the centrality of trusteeship (as defined by Cowen and Shenton) in both modes of thought. There is an intellectual kinship between development as an idea and liberalism in that both emerged from a Western Enlightenment context that emphasized progress and the prospects for human development through the growing influence of rationalism and the application of scientific method to human endeavor. Both development thinking and liberalism bear the imprint of these influences, one of them being that of trusteeship. The morphological approach will be employed to examine the genealogy of development and to trace the various pathways that development thinking has taken, particularly with a view to illustrating its continued affinity with contrasting strands of liberalism. Such affinities extend from what Freeden might term the “social welfare values” implicit in Sen’s Capability Theory to the so-called liberal turn of what many see as the hegemonic account of development today: neo-liberalism and its manifestations in the Washington and Post-Washington Consensuses.

Some implications of this analysis will then be examined in the South East Asian context. A few of the central accounts of development to emerge from Asia, notably the analysis founded in Asian values and the approach to development implicit in the typology of the Asian Developmental State, will be analyzed to assess how far they bear any imprint of trusteeship. The aim of this analysis will be to draw some tentative conclusions as to the prospects for a liberal and Asian approach to development and the variant forms that trusteeship might take within that context.
Keywords: liberalism, neo-liberalism, morphology, development, trusteeship.

Introduction

Many analysts date the origin of the concept of development to US President Harry Truman’s Four Points Speech of 1949. However, other analysts have noted that it has a much longer history, dating back to the Enlightenment period of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Notably, Cowen and Shenton (1996) trace its emergence alongside and to some degree within the complex system of variegated ideas that constitute the intrinsically Enlightenment political philosophy known as liberalism. In this paper, we shall use Freeden’s morphological approach (1996) to the analysis of political ideologies in order to trace the affinities and differences between development and liberalism (although development may be seen as an academic subject it has undeniably been endowed with various forms of ideological content and most would accept that it has an integral value component). The first section of the paper will examine Freeden’s analysis of liberalism together with Cowen and Shenton’s examination of the role of liberal thinking in the emergence of development. This will lead us to the consideration of a phenomenon that Cowen and Shenton would see as an integral part of the liberal legacy to development, this being the concept of trusteeship. Whilst Cowen and Shenton’s conception of trusteeship is that it is essentially repressive, the second section of the paper will indicate that Freeden’s examination of liberalism is suggestive of the idea that trusteeship can potentially have a more emancipatory character. The variant manifestations of liberal ideas and of trusteeship in some radically contrasting approaches to development will be analyzed, notably Sen’s capability founded approach and neo-liberalism’s market approach. This will be the basis for the argument that trusteeship can indeed take different forms in different development approaches, some of which may be more emancipatory and some of which may be more orientated to control by “Trustees.” The insights afforded by this analysis of the relationship between liberalism, development and trusteeship will then be applied to the Southeast Asian context with a view to drawing tentative conclusions as to how far some Asian approaches to development (such as the “Asian values” debate and the model of the
developmental state) reflect the influence of such ideas. This has the potential to raise such questions as how far a liberal model of development might emerge in the Asian context and how the phenomenon of trusteeship might be manifested in any such model.

**Morphology, liberalism and development**

Freeden developed a morphological approach to examine the structure and development of political ideologies. He explains that:

The answer to the question ‘what is an ideology?’ must, from the morphological perspective, be sought in identifying, describing and analyzing the building blocks that constitute it and the relationships among them. (Freeden 1996, 48)

Freeden continued to argue that all ideologies have one or more core or ineliminable components that are formulated to promote or defend, noting for example that various forms of liberalism emphasize liberty as a crucial element in their belief system. However, ideas such as liberty can be the subject of different interpretations, some of which may conflict. For example, liberty may be interpreted as the freedom to do what one wishes but may also be seen as a right to freedom from molestation by others who are seeking to operationalize the first view of liberty. Freeden observes that this is because such concepts as liberty are essentially contestable inasmuch as they can legitimately be argued to have more than one meaning. He explains:

That happens because there is no objective or final way of ranking preferences among values, such as: is it better to be free from discrimination or free from poverty. (Freeden 2015, 59)

However, many systems of ideas are characterized by a commitment to one particular sense of their core concept. As Freeden points out, different strands of liberalism advocate their own views of liberty. We might cite as examples welfare liberalism, which places an emphasis on the need to work towards greater socio-economic equity to maximize chances of achieving liberty, and neo-liberalism, which by contrast analyses actors as individual rational maximizers of utilities who seek
liberty through maximizing the advantages they can gain through participation in the market.

Freeden argues that the essential contestability of such ideas as liberty (or another core liberal idea, progress) gives rise to the propensity of such systems of ideas as liberalism to enter a process of decontestation with a view to establishing and justifying the particular meaning that sundry liberals may wish to attribute to a particular core concept (Freeden 2015, 59). The above contrast between welfare liberalism and neoliberalism illustrates how contending exercises in decontestation of a complex concept can result in quite different meanings being allocated to the same word. Indeed, it shows how this differentiation can take place not only between different ideologies but between different tendencies within the same ideology, in this case liberalism.

Freeden observes that the process of differentiation together with synchronic (arising out of the intension/internal logic of the concept) and diachronic (arising from cultural/historical factors) influences combine to drive the development of an ideology. He points out that liberalism can be analyzed as consisting of five layers, each with quite different characteristics, and that these different layers were shaped by the combination of particular projects of decontestation combined with such intentional and diachronic influences. The first layer was what Freeden referred to as a constitutional liberalism in which the rule of law guarded the individual from the tyranny of unaccountable rulers. Central to this phase was the notion of liberty enshrined in certain rights but subject to limits set by the law. The second layer emerged with Britain’s industrial and economic expansion and also emphasized freedom of the individual but in relation to the ability to make a profit in the free market. The role of the state was reconfigured from that of guardian of constitutional law to that of minimalist state that supported the market without intervening in it in such a way as to cause market distortions. Freedens particularly associates the third layer of liberalism with the work of Mill, noting his extension of freedom to an enabling role in the human development of the individual. This tendency is taken further in the fourth layer, the aforementioned welfare liberalism with its emphasis on human development through state sponsored welfare programs to promote equity. Freedom is yet again developed in Freeden’s fifth layer that envisages a
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pluralist division of power between identity groups seeking to protect or assert their respective rights (Freeden 2015, chapter 3). It can be seen that Freeden’s morphological approach enables us to examine the variant notions of such concepts as liberty and power that can emerge due to the interplay of processes of decontestation and synchronic and diachronic forces. Such diachronic forces as the emergence of industrial markets with regard to second layer liberalism and the growing importance of identity politics associated with the fifth layer contributed to the formation of radically different ideas of freedom, for example. In second layer liberalism the prominence of the market gave rise to ideas of economic freedom, whilst the fifth layer frames freedom in relation to the status of identity groups. Nevertheless, the variant strands of liberalism reveal high levels of continuity in their concern with seven core concepts, these being freedom, rationality, individuality, progress, sociability, the general interest, and limited and accountable power (it should be noted that Farnan develops persuasive arguments concerning the importance of security to liberalism in his paper in this volume).

Freeden’s morphological approach can also quite effectively be applied to the system of ideas known as development. Clearly, development is essentially contestable in that it is internally complex, contains rival descriptions of its component parts, is open to modification in light of changing circumstances and can reasonably be subject to quite different interpretations. Indeed, rival schools of thought actively contest each other’s views of development and they aggressively defend their use of the concept through decontestation. Development incorporates an ineliminable component in the form of the concept of “progress”—but what sort of progress? Both synchronic and diachronic influences have helped shape variant strands/schools of development theory with quite different views of progress. It can be seen how a conceptualization of progress as industrial growth would lend itself to theoretical outcomes dealing with such issues as economic growth, investment, finance and economic management as opposed to (for example) human flourishing, which lead to theoretical outcomes dealing with capability and wellbeing. We also have to take account of diachronic factors such as the emergence of much development analysis and policy in the context of the Cold War and a post-colonial world in which nascent Third World nationalisms were seeking
to throw off colonial domination. Such influences are clearly traceable in major development theories: modernization with its emphasis on progress framed in terms of US capitalism; dependency which envisages progress in terms of Southern states throwing off the imperial domination of the West; the neo-liberal influenced Washington Consensus which emphasizes progress through the spread of the global market; and post-colonial analysis, which often seeks liberation from Western imperialist discursive power structures.

The foregoing paragraphs also illustrate certain commonalities between liberalism and development, not least in the fact that progress features as a core or ineliminable component in both systems of ideas. Cowen and Shenton trace the emergence of development from various strands of liberal thinking at the time of the Enlightenment. They note that Smith has been viewed as offering a new notion of progress in his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Whereas the traditional view was that nations went through cycles of rise and decline, Smith proposed “a new description of rich and poor countries interlocked in a system of free trade reflecting the realities of a changing world. He could see the possibilities of development (i.e. progress) both for rich and poor countries offered by a system of natural liberty in foreign trade” (Cowen and Shenton 1996, 16 citing Williamson 1992, 380). However, this view of the possibility of unfettered progress was criticized by those, notably Thomas Malthus, who argued that such progress was far from assured. His warnings about the dangers of war and famine (caused by high population growth combined with a lower rate of growth of food production) raised serious questions about optimistic nostrums positing unlimited progress.

According to Cowen and Shenton (1996, 22) an answer to such doubts was gradually formulated by early positivist thinkers and analysts such as James and, particularly, John Stuart Mill. Saint-Simonian positivists criticized laissez-faire markets for their lack of central organization and consequent lack of coordination, which had the propensity to lead to overproduction crises and a lack of “balance between production and consumption.” Their solution was that a more constructive order should be imposed on the disorganized markets of early capitalism. In other words, the flow of progress should not be reliant on the spontaneous action of markets. Instead they should be regulated to ensure steady, uninterrupted progress.
Cowen and Shenton (1996, 22) observe that in coming to this conclusion, the Saint-Simonians “conferred agency upon development and gave it constructivist purpose. No longer was development that which happened during a period of history. It became the means whereby an epoch of the present was to be transformed into another through the active purpose of those who were entrusted with the future of society.” Such were the origins of a modern development structured around a new account of progress that no longer viewed progress as immanent but as something that needed to be shaped by the agency of humans—or, more specifically, those humans who were entrusted with this responsibility. Therein lie the origins of what Cowen and Shenton refer to as trusteeship.

John Stuart Mill was influenced by the Saint-Simonians and Comte in his statement of 1831 when he argued that nations are always in one of two conditions, these being the natural state and the transitional state. In the natural state, power is held “by the fittest persons whom the existing state of society affords” and the “material interests of the community” are “managed by those of its members who had the greatest capacity for such management.” By contrast, the transitional state is one where beliefs are uncertain and there is an absence of leadership. This state continues “until a moral and social revolution … has replaced worldly power and moral influence in the hands of the most competent,” so society is “once more in its natural state’ and can resume its normal progress” (Cowen and Shenton 1996, 34, citing Mill). Thus, for Mill, a steady state of progress is contingent on the trusteeship of the most competent to rule wisely and bring about development. The necessity for this situation of trusteeship was emphasized by Mill’s belief that the capacity for development is dependent on an education that enhances the faculties of perception and judgement so that good choices can be made. Given that such an education could only develop autonomously in societies that are rational and tolerant of free discussion rather than societies bound by custom, Mill deemed it essential that the latter type of society needed to develop under the tutelage of rational, tolerant societies. For example:

… India…needed to be governed despotically through the exercise of trusteeship in order to create the conditions under which ‘education’, ‘choice’, ‘individuality’—in a word ‘development’—might
occur. For Mill … development could only occur where the conditions of development were already present. Societies in which the conditions were not present had to be guided by those from societies where such conditions were already present. (Cowen and Shenton 1996, 39).

Of course, the rationale for trusteeship can be based on factors other than education, such as greater expertise and capacity that enable developed countries to better provide advice to poor countries. This account indicates how Cowen and Shenton argue that a liberal belief in immanent progress led to the emergence of the concept of a proactive development in which human agency functioned to correct propensities towards decline in order to achieve a smooth process of progress. However, such an agency would only be exercised by a group of qualified or competent trustees on behalf of those less qualified. Cowen and Shenton argue that this concept of trusteeship is necessarily implicated in all proactive approaches to development. If they were to adopt Freeden’s terminology they would probably identify trusteeship as one of development’s core concepts.

It must be acknowledged that Cowen and Shenton see trusteeship as an element that deeply compromises any emancipatory claims that might be made for development. Their central objection to trusteeship is that it entails a trustee (often, though not necessarily, the state) undertaking development activities that are usually targeted at a population that has little or no possibility of calling the Trustee to account for its actions (Cowen and Shenton 1996, 454–5). As in the case of Mill’s view on India, trusteeship may take an authoritarian form that is largely unaccountable.

This line of argument frames development as a problematical system of thought. Cowen and Shenton persuasively relate its emergence to the work of central liberal thinkers such as Smith and Mill. It is also clear that there are significant affinities between liberalism and development with progress as a clear core concept in both. Common synchronic influences can also be inferred, with such concepts as freedom and equality implicit in various forms of both liberalism and development, imbuing them with an emancipatory sense. However, to the extent that Cowen and Shenton demonstrate that liberal thinking (particularly that of J. S. Mill) played a part in configuring develop-
ment based on an ineliminable component of trusteeship, it also indicates a potentially authoritarian component implicit in both liberalism and development. We shall proceed by examining how both liberalism and trusteeship have marked various approaches to development, before turning more specifically to a consideration of the prospects for a liberal developmentalism in Asia.

**No clear path from trusteeship to free development?**

In turning our attention to the impact of liberalism and trusteeship on development thinking there are two reasons why it seems natural to start with the neo-liberal approach that was most famously manifested in the Washington Consensus. Firstly, it remains a prime influence on contemporary development policy and, secondly, it explicitly claims liberal intellectual antecedents (although that contention is disputed by Freeden).

The genesis of neo-liberalism can be traced back to the work of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek. Von Mises (1912, 204) mobilized what he claimed as classical liberalism as a bulwark against the threat to freedom constituted by socialism. He viewed individual freedom as being manifested through the market which acted to harmonize all interests through the price system. This assertion founded his theory of laissez faire which he saw as emphasizing the liberal tenet that state power should be minimized in order to avoid restricting freedom through its interference in the operation of the market. Von Mises regarded the validity of laissez faire as being scientifically demonstrated (Gonce 2003). Hayek developed these views, further emphasizing the role of the free market as a self-regulating guarantor of individual freedom and counter-posing it against the threat to liberty that he attributed to central planning (particularly of the socialist variety). He associated his views with Manchester School liberalism (so-called due to the laissez faireist preferences of Manchester cotton industrialists of the 19th century), arguing that this classical liberalism “derives from the discovery of a self-generating or spontaneous order in social affairs … an order which made it possible to utilize the knowledge and skill of all members of society to a much greater extent than would be possible in any order created by central direction, and the consequent desire to make as full use of these powerful spontaneous ordering
forces as possible” (Hayek 1984, 365). The spontaneous order of the market was infinitely preferable to central planning, which Hayek saw as unavoidably entailing the development of powerful oligarchies that would inevitably restrict freedom.

This highly summarized account of some of the central tenets of neo-liberalism demonstrates that both of those who are often regarded as its founding theorists saw themselves as intrinsically liberal in their views. We can also see that certain core concepts associated with liberalism play a role in the definition of neo-liberalism, notably freedom/liberty, individualism, limits on state power and the importance of markets. Freeden, however, notes that many of the core concepts retained by neo-liberalism have been radically transformed, whilst other liberal concepts have been relegated to an irrelevant status. This gives neo-liberalism a quite different world view from other branches of liberalism. For example, liberty is defined by Hayek as a situation “in which a man is not subject to coercion by the arbitrary will of another or others” (Hayek 1960, 11, quoted in Freeden 1996, 303). Freeden notes that this particular definition of liberty emphasizes the absence of constraint by other people, an account that we can see as complementary to Hayek’s wish to value the spontaneous and unplanned movements of the market order as compared with the evils of central planning. However, it also leaves out of the account the Millite view of liberty which also values non-constraint but places it in a context of the individual development of the human faculties, entailing education and a progressive ability to make choices informed (though not necessarily narrowly determined) by reason (Freeden 1996, 145–54). This not only indicates the paucity of the neo-liberal account of liberty but also of its views of the individual and of rationality. The Millite view of the well-rounded individual that sees an intrinsic value in human sociability and “the general good” (Freeden 1996, 145–54, for observations on Mill’s views on these issues) is foregone in favour of a reduction to “individual rational maximisers of utilities,” single units with the sole goal of maximizing their own gains from the market, whether as consumers or producers. Rationality is selfish utility maximization that is civilized by the operation of competition and the price mechanism on the market, a formulation that leaves no room for traditional liberal values of sociability. Such a view is also unconducive to what Freeden might claim as a mainstream liberal view that would endorse
the possibility of rationally planning progress (Freeden 1996, 308). All of this leads Freeden to argue that the neo-liberals have shifted the grounds of liberal thought to a point where it can no longer be seen as liberalism, but rather as a form of conservatism. Whether or not one agrees with that contention it is clear that a neo-liberal view of development leaves little room for any form of planning, with development becoming simply a matter of marketization.

It might be thought that the neo-liberal claim counter-posing individual freedom based on the impersonal working of the market to the tyranny of planning would render it uncongenial to any form of trusteeship. However, any such conclusion would be precipitate. Freeden (1996, 308) notes how Hayek associated progress with the efforts of the few entrepreneurs who were driven forward in anticipation of the rewards they would reap. Equalization through redistribution would only serve to disincentivize those who were at the forefront of progress. Hayek saw lack of egalitarianism as intrinsic to a progress (1996, 375) that would be driven by and disproportionately benefit a limited entrepreneurial elite. Thus, Hayek’s insistence on the pre-eminence of the free market is by no means incompatible with the emergence of a form of trusteeship. Indeed, it arises from the automatic working of the market that allows some to prosper whilst others must fail—and this working is legitimated by the claim that it is underwritten by science. Both Von Mises and Von Hayek insisted on the scientific basis of neo-liberalism. This claim has been fully embraced by the modern trustees tasked with overseeing the implementation of neo-liberal policy in the developing world, the Washington institutions of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the US State Department. Naomi Klein (2009) quoted the then Chief Economist at the Bank, Larry Summers, to the effect that “the laws of economics are like the laws of engineering”—in short, immutable. Also, the Bank has played a central role in enforcing those laws, given that its approval was essential for developing states to be allocated aid from most official sources.

However, the scientific status of neo-liberalism is far from assured. We have already noted the reductionism implicit in the neo-liberal view of humans as individuated rational maximizers of utilities. Many analysts argue that people often act against this ahistorical stereotype. Sen cites Adam Smith to the effect that individual self-interest is complemented by such values as “humanity, generosity and public
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spirit,” going on to argue that any workable economic system has to be characterized by such attributes as trust, honesty and reliability if business is to take place (quoted in Sen 1999, 272). Kuttner also argues that the neo-liberal conception of the market is fundamentally unscientific in the sense that it makes two basic assumptions; firstly, that almost all elements of the world can be understood in market terms and, secondly that markets optimize outcomes. These two premises will always lead to the same conclusion- that markets are both natural and benign. If a particular market fails to optimize, it cannot be because there could be something wrong with markets but must be due to some interference in the natural order of the market that must be removed. Kuttner (1997, 6) refers to this as “an epistemological sleight of hand” that “establishes a no-fail system for guaranteeing that theory trumps evidence.” Any failure of the market cannot be due to the invalidity of the theory. In this sense neo-liberal market theory fails Popper’s falsification test of science, which asserts that for a statement to be scientific it must be capable of empirical invalidation. Popper avers that a typical characteristic of pseudoscience is the formulation of its central concepts in such a way as to be impossible to disprove them. To the extent that neo-liberals define the market in such a way that their assumptions about its benign and natural status can never be disproved, they undermine their scientific credentials.

This is indicative that neo-liberalism provides no trustworthy scientific basis for its reductionist account of human nature or for its devaluation of the liberal value of sociability, nor for its affirmation of a spontaneous and benign market. The trusteeship exercised by the Washington institutions through liberalization programs based on “prudent macroeconomic policies, outward orientation, and free market capitalism” (Williamson 1990, 18) have been founded on shifting sands (a clear indicator lies in the failure of the American government to follow such policies itself, pumping subsidies into US agriculture). Harvey (2005, 154) points out that the economic record of neo-liberalism has been dismal:

Aggregate global growth rates stood at 3.5 per cent or so in the 1960s and even during the troubled 1970s fell only to 2.4 per cent. But the subsequent growth rates of 1.4 per cent and 1.1 per cent for the 1980s and 1990s (and a rate that barely touches 1 per cent since
2000) indicate that neo-liberalization has broadly failed to stimulate worldwide growth.

There are those who might argue that neo-liberalism should not be blamed for a decline in world growth. However, as Harvey indicates, neo-liberalism was sold as a solution to such problems. As such it has clearly failed. Even the World Bank and the IMF, the traditional guarantors of neo-liberalism, have recently published comments to the effect that it was oversold. A recent paper in *Finance and Development* observes the following trends of neo-liberal development strategy. Firstly, “(t)he benefits in terms of increased growth seem fairly difficult to establish when looking at a broad group of countries.” Secondly, “(t)he costs in terms of increased inequality are prominent…” Thirdly, “(i)ncreased inequality in turn hurts the level and sustainability of growth. Even if growth is the sole or main purpose of the neo-liberal agenda, advocates of that agenda still need to pay attention to the distributional effects” (Ostry, Loungani and Furceri 2016, 38–41). Indeed, Harvey suggests that neo-liberalism’s sole success has been a redistribution of wealth from the lower paid to the wealthy. Freeden (2015, 109–10) concludes that:

In its most recent forms, neo-liberalism champions a world in which huge multinational corporations and mega-banks increasingly control and dictate the way we live.

As such, it fosters a trusteeship that is red in tooth and claw. If neo-liberalism is based on the type of authoritarian and unaccountable trusteeship that Cowen and Shenton find objectionable, let us turn to a form of trusteeship that they find slightly less objectionable, Sen’s capability approach. Sen’s approach might be summarized as positing that each of us has certain endowments, which can take the form of money or land that we have inherited or simply our physical ability to work. Such endowments can be used to obtain entitlement to the resources we need to live such as food and shelter and should we have enough of them they can be used to develop our capabilities and functioning, these being the ways we are able to exist and the things that we can do. It follows that the more capabilities and functioning we have, the freer we are to do the things we value in life and live the
sorts of lives we would prefer. This also indicates that those with fewer endowments are at a disadvantage in that they have less opportunity to develop the capabilities needed to live a “good” life. Hence, for Sen, the essence of development is to enhance capability so that people are free to exercise agency and to live fuller lives. He argues for the state to play a central role in this process through enhancing employment because most of humanity is dependent on wage labour in order to live (Sen’s elaboration on the role of the state is a focus of Cowen and Shenton 1996, 419).

It can be seen how trusteeship enters the equation through the state’s role as guardian of development in performing its responsibility as the provider of employment. This is also the source of Cowen and Shenton’s ultimate disapproval of Sen’s approach. They are sympathetic to Sen’s identification of capability as key to development because it fits with the Marxist conception of free development outlined in The Critique of the Gotha Programme. Sen actually quotes from the latter to suggest that an enhancement of capabilities can lead to a situation analogous to the communist utopia described by Marx, in which it is “possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic” (quoted in Cowen and Shenton 1996, 449). For Cowen and Shenton (1996, 417–18) the problem with this is that Marx envisaged free development emerging in a situation where communism had been achieved, which would mean that it had to be based on a number of conditions including material abundance, absence of the social division of labour and the end of the state, leaving society free to regulate general production. Sen, however, wanted to promote development in countries that were generally characterized by scarcity. Cowen and Shenton (1996, 418–19) argue that this objective is most unlikely because a situation of scarcity tends to lead to states putting the emphasis on maximizing production at the expense of free development. They note that, throughout the 20th century, state led development strategies have indeed attempted to raise worker capabilities but have subordinated the free use of those capabilities to the demands of enhancing production in order to resist the perceived threats associated with scarcity. Consequently, by relying on the state Sen lapses into trusteeship with the state enabled to hijack develop-
ment in the cause of production, one of the most extreme examples being Stalin’s Russia (Cowen and Shenton 1996, 417 and 419–20).

Does this mean that capability theory should be dismissed as a repressive instance of trusteeship along with neo-liberalism? Before doing so, we should look more closely at Sen’s roots in welfare liberalism, which lead in a quite different direction from neo-liberalism’s roots in the untrammelled free market. Freeden argues that the welfare liberalism of the 20th century extended the Millite vision of individual development in the context of sociability by advocating the removal of such obstacles to that project as the “five giants of ‘want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness’” (Freeden quoting Beveridge 2015, 46–7). In the British context this version of liberalism led to the development of the welfare state with its broadly based objective of relieving poverty. This is clearly analogous to Sen’s view of the state’s role in his vision of human development through the expansion of capabilities.

It would surely be fatuous to deny that the welfare state is very different in nature and in its political effects from the neo-liberal state. The welfare state is associated with the general provision of such social benefits as education, health care and social insurance. However imperfect such provision might be, this presents a very different picture from the effects of neo-liberalism throughout the developing world, where Structural Adjustment Programmes have led to growing inequality (as belatedly acknowledged by observers within the Bank and the IMF). Cowen and Shenton (1996, 420) go some way towards recognizing this in their statement:

Whatever the merit of public welfare in attempting to make good the deficiency between actual and potential well-being, state action stands between need and the capability of free development.

In Derridian terms this could be identified as the trace in Cowen and Shenton’s arguments which reveals a residual awareness that in their advocacy of a position counter-posing a generally undesirable trusteeship against free development, they are omitting an important element. This is the welfareist forms of trusteeship that can deliver very real benefits to ordinary people and which have the potential to enhance capabilities in the ways envisaged by Sen. Furthermore, these are often substantive benefits that can be delivered in the short to medium
term future, rather than the utopian vision of free development, which is premised on the achievement of communism, an objective that seems as distant now as it did in 1996 when their book was published.

We may conclude this section of our analysis by observing that Cowen and Shenton convincingly argue a position that trusteeship represents a core element of existing development approaches. However, in their anxiety to extricate development from what they rightly see as a problem of trusteeship, they ignore the very salient point that some forms of trusteeship may be more benign than others. As we have noted, welfareist approaches have the potential for delivering benefits and enhanced capabilities to those at the base of their societies. In the next section we shall move on to speculate briefly on the development strategies and associated forms of trusteeship that might be available in the Asian context.

**What kind of development for Asia?**

In addressing what kind of development strategies might emerge in the Asian context, probably two strands of development thinking have been particularly prominent in Asia, both of which have been invoked as explanations for the economic success of the Tiger states such as South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. These are the Asian values thesis and the analysis of the developmental state that is thought to have taken a lead role in inducing such development. As we shall see, both of them entail variant forms of trusteeship of the sort that Cowen and Shenton would probably object to.

The invocation of Asian values as an explanation for the development of the Tiger states emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s and the charge was led primarily, though not exclusively, by Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and Malaysian prime minister, Mohamed Mahathir. The most strident and essentialist statement of the Asian values thesis is to be found in Singaporean foreign minister Tommy Koh's “Ten Asian values that help East Asia's economic progress and prosperity” (1993). The following statement of Asian values is from Milner rather than Koh but it captures his tone:

… a stress on the community rather than the individual, the privileging of order and harmony over personal freedom, refusal to
compartamentalize religion away from other spheres of life, a particular emphasis on saving and thriftiness, an insistence on hard work, a respect for political leadership, a belief that government and business need not be natural adversaries, and an emphasis on family loyalty (Milner 1999).

Such were the qualities attributed to Asians by commentators like Koh, which were seen as playing a central role in creating an environment conducive to development. Clearly, this ascription of a uniform set of values to Asian people in general without any appeal to hard evidence is essentialist.

Connors (2017) elaborates on the work of Mark Thompson to indicate how the emergence of the Asian values position in the 1990s constituted an Asian response to the West’s increasingly active international promotion of liberalism. He notes that the US began advocating that trade rights should be conditional on respect for labor and human rights, at least partly motivated by the view that enforcing such rights would undercut the competitiveness of certain Asian states. Asian leaders such as Lee and Mahathir, in particular, countered such arguments with the assertion that Asian values emphasizing communitarianism and political order are more conducive to Asian development than the individuated and disorderly imperatives promoted by the West. In this sense the Asian values thesis might be seen as a manifestation of resistance against a Western liberal trusteeship that sought to impose liberal values in Asia for reasons of self-interest. However, Connors (2017, 317) also notes that this advocacy of Asian values is often criticized as placing a “smokescreen around the government’s real intent—which is largely to maintain its authority against other claimants, by advancing its moral claims to power over a disorderly population.” From this point of view it seems clear that the Asian values discourse itself is an exercise in authoritarian trusteeship by certain Asian political leaders.

Although the propensity to appeal to Asian values fell into abeyance in the wake of the Asian economic crisis of 1997, it is undergoing a revival under the influence of Chinese economic success. Whilst this may not mean that states in the region will embrace the Chinese communist model, the success of Chinese development in recent decades lends general support to the contention that authoritarian
political values are conducive to development in the Asian context. As Connors (2017, 321) puts it “in the past decade China’s authoritarian endurance has provided a counter-hegemonic ideational structure in which a recalibrated Asian values position could emerge.” In this way, the Asian values position could continue to challenge Western liberal hegemony on the one hand, whilst simultaneously underwriting the trusteeship of authoritarian states in many parts of Asia.

An alternative account of the success of the Tiger states is available in the analysis known as the developmental state model, which attributes their success to the characteristics of their state mechanisms. One of the earliest proponents of this analysis was Chalmers Johnson (1982) who examined the guiding role in shaping the private sector taken by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MITI) in Japan. He noted that the developmental states actively directed investment into designated areas that would raise wages for their citizens, an intervention in the market that would be unacceptable under the terms of neoliberal thinking. Wade (1990, 120) noted that they went even further by intervening to raise profits and minimize risks for selected industries. Such policies saw states like Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan maintain growth rates of some 4 per cent during the last quarter of the 20th century (Leftwich 2008, 12). This was at the same time when many states adhering to the neo-liberal consensus were experiencing reduced global growth rates from some 3.5 per cent in the 1960s to 1 per cent in 1990s.

There is no question that this economic success was engineered under the trusteeship of the state. Leftwich observes that in order to play this interventionist role there had to be “substantial concentration of political, military and ideological power in the hands of the state.” Whilst few would deny that there has been an authoritarian aspect to many of the developmental States, Leftwich (2008, 12–16) argues that a distinguishing feature “has been their commitment to growth and equity” if only to ensure the political stability necessary to achieve growth. He notes that the success of the Tigers in stimulating job creation, redistributing resources (e.g. South Korean land reform) and social provision (e.g., housing in Singapore) has underwritten their legitimacy despite the aforementioned authoritarian tendencies.

Cowen and Shenton object that such measures are not designed to raise capabilities and popular agency but simply to enable the popu-
lace effectively to service economic growth. However, Kwon makes the point that states such as South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore reacted to the 1997 meltdown by enhancing welfare coverage and making it more inclusive thus drawing the conclusion that the “East Asian experience shows the synergy between social and economic development” (Kwon 2009, S20). Even if we accept that Kwon may be thinking of social progress in terms of improving indices (for example in health and education) rather than enhanced human capability, it surely follows that improved health and education are likely to have a positive effect on capabilities. What does not follow is the proposition that a state policy directed towards economic growth must obviate an enhancement of agency, which seems to be the implication of Cowen and Shenton’s critique of the developmental state. They treat the categories of free development and trusteeship as mutually exclusive factors in a zero-sum game. That is not the only way of framing the issue. As Kwon’s point indicates, even welfare policies conceived in support of economic policies can still help to deliver enhanced capabilities. Whilst the said enhancements may not measure up to the ideal of free development achieved in a context of communist society, they still represent real developmental increments.

This brief examination of some Asian approaches to development tends to bear out the conclusions of the last section to the effect that trusteeship is a variable phenomenon. It might, at least, partially be conceived as running along an axis from the more authoritarian (neoliberalism) to the more inclusive (capability theory). Clearly, the Asian variants examined here lie towards the authoritarian end of the axis notwithstanding the developmental state’s association with certain welfare policies. This raises the question of whether or not there are any strategies at the inclusive end of the axis.

Many commentators look to the NGO movement as a force to mobilize civil society for development. Over the years at least some NGOs have garnered a reputation for working effectively at the grassroots of society, using participatory and empowering development strategies. However, there can be risks associated with such approaches. Lewis (2001, 78–9) has noted that the work of some NGOs in Asia has led to a level of political mobilization that could lead to conflict, putting at risk project gains. Such episodes have also led to a measure of government suspicion of NGOs. This was manifested when several
Asian states intervened in the selection of civil society representatives to speak at the 15th ASEAN Summit in 2009. Debbie Stothard, coordinator of the Alternative Network for ASEAN on Burma commented that the ASEAN leaders’ unwillingness to have a dialogue with NGOs showed the “negative mentality of the ASEAN elites” (Bangkok Post, 25 October 2009). It would seem that the heavy hand of state trusteeship made itself evident yet again.

There are examples of indigenous movements; one such example from Thailand being Buddhadasa’s Dhammic Socialism. To simplify, Changkhwanyuen (2003) analyses Dhammic Socialism as a form of utopian socialism that envisages an inclusive society that mirrors the unity of nature and views the accumulation of surplus as exploitative. In this sense it can be seen that such a vision is both inclusive and socialist. However as Changkhwanyuen points out, this vision is premised on the leadership of a Dhammaraja, an absolute monarch whose virtuous rule was based on Buddhist teaching. He further observes that there can be no guarantee that such a monarch will arise and this leads him to advocate a system where people have at least some power even if it is imperfect. One such system would be the democratic state, which also fulfils Changkhwanyuen’s criterion of being a better system than autocracy. It will be remembered that Sen sets great store by democracy and his allocation of a central role to it in development is based, at least in part, on its capacity for inclusiveness and for giving a voice to the different sectors of society. This leads us back to consideration of the role of the democratic state as trustee—and of what form of state is likely to arise in Asia. In this context Connors’ analysis (forthcoming) of the emergence of a “decisionist” liberalism in Thailand is both interesting and stands as a warning. His analysis of how a liberal inclusive discourse has been deployed to justify the 2006 Thai coup indicates how authoritarian influences can clothe themselves in a rhetoric of liberal democracy (as Freeden argues neo-liberalism has in the economic sphere) in order to justify highly undemocratic measures (such as a military coup d’état) and agendas.

**Conclusion**

This analysis has argued that liberalism and development have both been shaped by the Enlightenment matrix of ideas. It indicates
that development has been influenced by liberalism in manifold ways. Both share a core concept of progress, which can be manifested in various ways. The welfareist strand of liberalism envisages progress in terms of the advance of human flourishing in the context of sociability. This emancipatory tendency finds expression in the field of development through the emergence of such approaches as capability theory. However, the liberal vision of progress also entails the need for human agency to plan and smooth the path of development. To the extent that this function must fall to a designated group, often in the form of the state, it necessitates trusteeship. Cowen and Shenton object to all forms of trusteeship on the basis that trustees are not accountable to those on whose behalf they are supposed to be acting. They see trusteeship as being inevitably authoritarian and can only see it being overcome by the achievement of free development in a communist society.

Whilst this paper accepts that trusteeship may well be inextricably entangled with development, it puts the view that the impact of trusteeship may not be as invariably authoritarian as Cowen and Shenton seem to suggest. Some development approaches, notably capability theory, draw on the influence of welfare liberalism to elaborate a more inclusive and emancipatory vision of progress. In this context it is worth remembering the emphasis that Sen gives to democracy as what Rawls described as “the exercise of public reason.” Sen (2003) defines this as including “the opportunity for citizens to participate in political discussions and so to be in a position to influence public choice.” Whilst such a position may not entirely eliminate the authoritarianism implicit in trusteeship, it can significantly ameliorate it.

With regard to the Asian context, it seems clear that development has tended to manifest a somewhat authoritarian brand of trusteeship, although even in the relatively suppressive Tiger states there have been welfare policies that benefitted ordinary people. The danger that Connors alerts us to is the emergence of a “decisionist liberalism” that has the potential to cloak an authoritarian state in the role of independent guardian of society with few limitations on its power. Such an authoritarian form of trusteeship lends urgency to Changkhwanyuen’s imperative that we find a system where the people have at least some power even if it is not perfect.
References


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