



## Beck, Asia and second modernity

Craig Calhoun

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### Abstract

The work of Ulrich Beck has been important in bringing sociological attention to the ways issues of risk are embedded in contemporary globalization, in developing a theory of 'reflexive modernization', and in calling for social science to transcend 'methodological nationalism'. In recent studies, he and his colleagues help to correct for the Western bias of many accounts of cosmopolitanism and reflexive modernization, and seek to distinguish normative goals from empirical analysis. In this paper I argue that further clarification of this distinction is needed but hard to reach within a framework that still embeds the normative account in the idea that empirical change has a clear direction. Similar issues beset the presentation of diverse patterns in recent history as all variants of 'second modernity'. Lastly, I note that ironically, given the declared 'methodological cosmopolitanism' of the authors, the empirical studies here all focus on national cases.

**Keywords:** Beck; cosmopolitanism; nationalism; reflexive modernization; globalization

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It is an oddity that discussions of cosmopolitanism are overwhelmingly Euro-American. They are about globalization, and about shared risks, rights, and responsibilities in an interconnected world, but they reflect disproportionately views from the old 'core' of the modern world system (and Western-educated elites from formerly colonial outposts). This is the source of at least four biases.

First, though an effort is made to include consideration of poor, developing, or emerging economies cosmopolitan theories reflect the perspective of the rich. Second, though an effort is made to be multicultural, cosmopolitan theories are rooted in the West. Third, the way in which most cosmopolitan theories try to escape cultural bias is by imagining an escape from culture into a realm of the universal (as though those who travel aren't still shaped by their previous cultural contexts and as though there the global circuits themselves don't

1 provide new cultural contexts). Fourth, despite attention to social problems,  
2 because cosmopolitan theories are rooted in the (declining) core of the  
3 modern world system, they tend to imagine the world as more systematically  
4 and uniformly interconnected than it is.

5 Ulrich Beck and his collaborators in this collection of essays (BJS 2010) are  
6 to be congratulated for a major effort to overcome at least some of these  
7 biases. In the present response, I begin with appreciation for Beck's recent  
8 leadership in efforts to improve cosmopolitan theory, and for his and his  
9 colleagues' efforts to adapt and advance this theory in application to several  
10 East Asian countries. I then offer two arguments about ambiguities in the  
11 theory of 'reflexive modernization' on which this project is based and about  
12 the attempt to distinguish empirical cosmopolitization from normative  
13 cosmopolitanism. I conclude by returning to an ironic observation I can state  
14 up front: these analyses elaborate a theory that holds that nation-states are  
15 being transcended, yet it is organized almost entirely in terms of nation-states.

## 16 17 **Appreciation**

18  
19 As a leading cosmopolitan theorist, Beck has been both innovative and  
20 influential. Though I refer to him as an individual, it is worth noting and  
21 appreciating that Beck's work has often been collaborative, that he has nurtured  
22 a number of younger colleagues, and that he has built a collective  
23 research enterprise based in Munich. This is a model, among other things, for  
24 combining the development of theory and the improvement of empirical  
25 knowledge with attention to major public issues. Most clearly in work on risk,  
26 Beck's group demonstrates that public sociology is not simply a matter of  
27 making existing scholarly work more easily accessible, but of harnessing  
28 serious theory and research to the task of understanding pressing collective  
29 concerns. We should appreciate Beck's contributions as specific advances in  
30 understanding the many themes he has addressed, and for their central role in  
31 advancing what he calls 'the cosmopolitan turn in social and political theory'.

32 I think we should understand 'the cosmopolitan turn' as referring both  
33 empirically to the growing number of theoretical publications that explicitly  
34 label themselves 'cosmopolitan', and normatively to the project of making  
35 social and political theory generally more attentive to global interconnection  
36 and less limited to the presumption of nation-states. Beck's project is  
37 thus one of replacing 'methodological nationalism' with 'methodological  
38 cosmopolitanism'. Theories using the concept of cosmopolitanism are perhaps  
39 in its vanguard, but Beck wishes also to claim other work that tries to transcend  
40 the inscription of nationalist categories into much social science. And in  
41 his own work he has advanced both the theoretical project of understanding  
42 cosmopolitanism, and the project of integrating a more cosmopolitan

1 perspective into social and political theory generally. Two valuable innovations  
2 in Beck's work are specific foci of the current collection.

3 First, Beck has recognized and worked to try to compensate for the embed-  
4 dedness of cosmopolitan theory (and sociological research on cosmopolitiza-  
5 tion) in the perspectives of the developed, Western core countries of the  
6 capitalist world system. Beck recognizes that his own earlier work, like  
7 most other work developing a theory of reflexive modernization (e.g. Beck,  
8 Giddens, and Lash 1994) is rooted in a largely implicit understanding of  
9 Western history. He rightly sees the need to reach beyond this, not only for an  
10 understanding of other histories but also for a different perspective on Euro-  
11 pean history (see also Chakrabarty 2000). Beck faults this work also for  
12 relying on a notion of 'society' in general that obscures from attention the  
13 differences among societies in their present structures, cultures, and historical  
14 trajectories.<sup>1</sup> This collection is a partial response, emphasizing distinctive expe-  
15 riences of 'modernization' in one world region and using these to try to make  
16 the general theory more attentive to diverse patterns. We should be grateful.

17 Second, during the last five years or so, Beck (with Edgar Grande, Natan  
18 Sznajder and other collaborators) has worked to resolve an ambiguity that is  
19 widespread in discussions of cosmopolitanism, including even in sophisticated  
20 theoretical and empirical works (and here too Beck self-critically recognizes  
21 that this includes some of his own earlier works). This ambiguity is reflected in  
22 the tendency to use the same terms to refer to (a) a normative account of what  
23 would make the world a better place, and (b) an empirical argument that the  
24 world is in fact changing. Here accounts of cosmopolitanism share much with  
25 accounts of 'progress' as they flourished in the nineteenth Century, and indeed  
26 with the 'modernization theory' of the middle-twentieth Century. The issue is  
27 not just the difference between an abstract ideal and very partial empirical  
28 achievement of that ideal. It is also that the actual changes observed in the  
29 empirical world may not ever issue in the full achievement of the ideal; they  
30 may become part of historical processes leading to other denouements.

### 31 32 **Are diverse histories just varieties of second modernity?**

33  
34 How wide is the variation, how common the path? Beck and Grande begin by  
35 insisting that social theory needs to give up universalization in favor of greater  
36 attention to historical, geographic, and cultural specifics. I agree. For Beck and  
37 Grande and most participants in this special issue, this is compatible with  
38 speaking of varieties (in the plural) of second modernity (in the singular).  
39 While Han and Shim (2010) reject other attempts to conceptualize different  
40 trajectories as alternative or multiple modernities, Beck and Grande (2010)  
41 seem more inclined to incorporate the approaches of Eisenstadt, Therborn and  
42 others as more or less steps in the same direction. They conceptualize second

1 modernity in terms of an epochal break with the institutional structures devel-  
2 oped to deal with first modernity (states, parties, unions, business enterprises,  
3 etc) while the core principles of modernity (mainly market economy)  
4 continue.

5 But Beck, Grande and others in this collection also distinguish first moder-  
6 nity from second by several ‘process variables’: action logic, duration, and  
7 result. Each points to something meaningful, but each is problematic. (a)  
8 There is great variation in how much self-conscious intention is involved in  
9 historical transformations, including those summed up by the idea of mod-  
10 ernization. But it is misleading to suggest ‘that at least in the case of the  
11 Western forerunners of reflexive modernization this process takes place  
12 unintended’ (Beck and Grande 2010: 9). From early in the history of capi-  
13 talism, for example, there were debates about how much governments should  
14 regulate trade. One has only to think of the eighteenth century controversies  
15 over mercantilism and the important role of intellectual arguments and the  
16 rise of the field of economics in the nineteenth century spread of free-trade  
17 ideology and practices – just as market fundamentalism or ‘neoliberalism’  
18 flourished in the late twentieth century partly on the basis of a long cam-  
19 paign led by followers of Hayek and Friedman among others. Neither the  
20 building of market institutions nor the disassembly of regulatory institutions  
21 took place unintended in the West. It may be that East Asian countries  
22 developing both markets and regulatory regimes today have the benefit of  
23 more history from which to learn; it is still the case that history’s lessons are  
24 filtered through ideology, argument, and self-interest. There is also great  
25 variation in who exercises whatever choice circumstances allow. It is prob-  
26 lematic to speak in an unqualified way of societies taking intentional action.  
27 Such language tends to equate the decisions of governments or governing  
28 elites with societal choices – replicating some of the rhetoric of nation=state  
29 otherwise held problematic. More generally, the capacity to make effective  
30 choices about strategies of development or responses to risk is distributed  
31 unevenly and through a variety of different organizations and power  
32 structures.

33 More briefly, (b) we should also question the notion of ‘stretched’ vs ‘com-  
34 pressed’ processes of reflexive modernization. There is no doubt that at differ-  
35 ent points from Japan’s Meiji restoration through the self-strengthening  
36 movement of late-Imperial China and on through the last hundred years many  
37 in East Asian societies have felt pressed to ‘catch up’ to global economic  
38 leaders and/or the West. But it is not clear that one can speak of ‘stretched’ vs  
39 ‘compressed’ processes of modernization without some benchmark of ‘normal’  
40 duration, and I don’t think any such plausibly exists. What is relevant is not the  
41 stretching or compression of some normal period of time, but the way in which  
42 felt pressures translate into different experiences, strategies, institutions, or  
43 outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

1 Likewise, (c) projects of state-building, economic development, or democ-  
2 ratization may succeed or fail. These are projects that may be evaluated in the  
3 agents' own terms. But to say that modernization as such can fail requires  
4 clarification. Is it a project to be judged according to the particular aspirations  
5 of agents in every case (and what counts as a case – the history of a potential  
6 nation-state)? Or is it a more general process that distributes risks and chal-  
7 lenges and differential resources for meeting them? If it is the latter, agents  
8 might fail in their efforts to manage risks or to build stronger institutions but  
9 it is hard to see why that should be called failed modernization (as distinct  
10 from, say, being crushed or crippled by the actions of others or disadvantaged  
11 by geography, demography, or natural resource endowments). We need to  
12 understand whether success or failure is a label placed on relative standing  
13 in an unequally structured world system or an evaluation of more or less  
14 autonomous projects in their own terms. The issue isn't trivial or merely  
15 terminological. It is a basic question about the extent to which the theory  
16 addresses action, impersonal historical processes, or teleology.

17 Take the gloss offered by Beck and Grande (2010: 9) on the idea of failed  
18 modernization: 'the establishment of institutions of First modernity (like the  
19 nation-state) or the transformation into Second modernity fails'. What is the  
20 unit that 'fails' to develop a nation-state? Is it a people, assumed already to  
21 exist as a nation that doesn't succeed in gaining an autonomous state – say,  
22 Palestine? Is it a region brought under the governance of another state within  
23 which its people(s) are national minorities – say, Central Asia under the  
24 USSR? In each case, this seems less a matter of 'failure' than of external  
25 imposition.<sup>3</sup> Chang (2010: 13) says that in East Asia 'modernity initially hap-  
26 pened as an international political incident' – that is to say, East Asian coun-  
27 tries were coerced to open themselves to Western imperialist forces, capitalist  
28 markets, and an 'alien civilization'. They broke away from their pasts to  
29 become modern in a way that meant Western. And even on 'liberation' from  
30 formal colonialism many of these Third World nations remained dominated.

31 Or again, Second Modernity is defined by the incapacity of the institutions  
32 of First Modernity to handle new risks and the consequent effort to develop  
33 new institutions or approaches. But where the incapacity of the older institu-  
34 tions is due partly to their destruction by neoliberal policies, should we judge  
35 this a successful transition to Second Modernity? Conversely, would effective  
36 reform of older institutions so that they provided better protection against risk  
37 constitute a 'failure' to make the transition to Second Modernity? This would  
38 imply that Norway has failed because its state institutions work better than  
39 those of, say, Greece.

40 Or take this to an East Asian context. Aside from such paradoxes, this  
41 conceptualization makes it harder, not easier, to understand the various con-  
42 tending and sometimes contradictory projects by which Chinese people try to  
43 prosper, strengthen the country, and cope with challenges. It is meaningful and

1 coherent to say that the self-strengthening movement of the 1890s, the Republic  
2 Revolution of 1911, the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement of 1919, the Communist Revolution  
3 of 1949, the Great Leap Forward, the Great Proletarian Cultural  
4 Revolution, Deng Xiaoping's reforms, and the expansion of credit, markets,  
5 private enterprise, and cooperation with foreign capital from the early 1990s  
6 were all efforts to modernize. As conscious efforts they were reflexive. But the  
7 actors reflecting on China's circumstances did not have entirely the same  
8 agendas. Is the project of modernity the lowest common denominator? Is it the  
9 encompassing whole? Is it to be judged by some external, objective or universal  
10 measures? Or is it a term that only derives meaning from competition with  
11 other countries or regions?

12 Part of the power of Beck's overall theoretical and empirical contributions  
13 lies in an account of the crisis – and perhaps failure – of the European welfare  
14 state model. An achievement of the twentieth century and especially the  
15 post-WWII period, this involved the institutionalization of a variety of centrally  
16 organized responses to the contradictions of capitalist development.<sup>4</sup>  
17 One might almost call it the attempt to make good on Hegel's (1821 [1952])  
18 account of how the contradictions in civil society demand to be answered by a  
19 unifying, integrating, but also welfare-providing state. It was Bismark's project  
20 in a very conservative and militarist version. It was a social democratic project  
21 in a much more egalitarian version achieved by collective struggles, centrally  
22 of trade unions and social movements. But it came unstuck in an era of global  
23 competition and new risks. I suspect Beck would not be adverse to recognizing  
24 that it had a 'legitimation crisis' (Habermas 1975) even before this, but he very  
25 helpfully points to the extent to which the travails of the welfare states have  
26 been produced or exacerbated by new kinds of prevailing risks, and especially  
27 risks not contained or manageable within nation-state borders. If this is the  
28 central, important, and powerful account Beck has offered, it has a nagging  
29 limit. This is the extent to which his theoretical work and his attention to the  
30 rest of the world starts from this 'problematique'. That is, he takes the welfare  
31 state as normal, and studies most everything else as a deviation from or crisis  
32 of that normal. We should admire Beck's struggle to transcend this path, but  
33 also help him to go further.

34 Beck's intentions are sound. To some extent they are undercut by an  
35 approach that first questions a theorized historical sequence as limited to one  
36 case – Western Europe – then reinscribes other histories as variants of that  
37 same sequence:

38 the first insight is that the sequence from Pre-modernity to First Modernity  
39 and Second Modernity is *not* universal, cannot be generalized. On the contrary,  
40 this sequence is a central feature of the particular *European* path to  
41 modernity' (Beck and Grande 17, original italics)

42 but then

1 The question of how varieties of Second Modernity can be reconstructed  
2 receives a systematic answer here – in terms of different sequences, combi-  
3 nations and mixtures of Pre-modernity, First Modernity, Second and After-  
4 modernity’ (Beck and Grande 2010: 409–43).

5  
6 As Maharaj (2010: 3) notes, this ‘leaves us in the air about whether all moder-  
7 nities are heading for the same thing, let alone chasing after the identical  
8 dream’.

9 Beck and colleagues focus here on two ways of adding diversity to the  
10 empirical basis of social and political theory. They give accounts of East Asian  
11 countries that focus (1) on broad cultural or civilizational patterns and (2) on  
12 relatively recent histories of pursuing rapid economic development. This is a  
13 start at appreciating diversity, not an attempt to be exhaustive.

14 Social and political theory today relies heavily on tacit incorporation of  
15 Western historical patterns into seemingly universal categories. One problem  
16 is that theorists’ understanding of Western history itself is often highly stylized  
17 and reliant on a somewhat stereotyped historical synthesis – what the theorists  
18 learned as students – and not informed as much as it should be by new  
19 historical research. An analogous problem can undermine efforts to incorpo-  
20 rate other civilizational histories into the empirical basis of theory. It is  
21 important for these to reflect serious historical research not simply tacit  
22 incorporation of canonical accounts such as those that inform secondary  
23 school teaching. This means recognizing tensions and contradictions in histori-  
24 cal patterns, not relying on the kinds of national (or civilizational) histories  
25 that achieve synthesis by ironing out such tensions to produce stereotypical,  
26 often ideological self-understandings. Social theory needs history, thus, not  
27 only a diversity of cultural perspectives.

28 The history that social theory needs is not simply a history of other places.  
29 It is a history of the complex processes by which different units of political  
30 power and economic differentiation form and fade, the way these sometimes  
31 overlap broad civilizational continuities and sometimes not, the way patterns  
32 of cultural integration sometimes match political structures and sometimes  
33 not, and the kinds of communication that run along trade-routes and military  
34 frontiers. It is a history shaped by both geopolitics and culture.

35 Beck and Grande rightly appreciate Paul Gilroy’s (1993) account in *The*  
36 *Black Atlantic* and the image of ships in motion as a metaphor for the study of  
37 dynamic connections rather than fixed or essentialized nations. Gilroy’s book  
38 was part of a trend towards histories of interconnections rather than discrete  
39 nations. Bodies of water were often emphasized instead of masses of land, and  
40 seen as connectors not always dividers. Lord Acton (1906) anticipated this in  
41 the second of his Lectures on Modern History, ‘The Portuguese were the first  
42 Europeans to understand that the ocean is not a limit, but the universal  
43 waterway that unites mankind’. Bailyn (2005) traces the idea of the Atlantic

1 world and a specific Atlantic history back to Walter Lippman reflecting on the  
2 relations of America and Europe in the era of WWI. But through the middle  
3 of the twentieth century, thinking in terms of nation-states and civilizational  
4 areas occluded many of these connections. Fernand Braudel's (1949) study of  
5 *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* was  
6 perhaps the most famous exploration of civilization to center on a sea – though  
7 as Bailyn points out it addressed disaggregation as much as integration.  
8 Braudel was a crucial influence on Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) in the devel-  
9 opment of sociology's most important theory of global interconnections, capi-  
10 talism and geopolitics. But it was in the 1990s that the analysis of connections  
11 outside and across conventional regions began to take off.

12 There has been growing recognition that it is not adequate to speak of  
13 Europe and Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is important also to speak of  
14 the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic, the Pacific – and also the links forged by  
15 coastal trade from places like Yemen across all of southern Asia and the  
16 Pacific or inland along the famous Silk Road. There have been periods when  
17 dominant powers were able to stabilize vast territories and periods when  
18 these empires broke up. There have ebbs and flows of trade across regions,  
19 civilizations, empires, and indeed seas. In all of this there are patterns of  
20 ethnic continuity (stressed by Smith 1986), and there are also peoples, lan-  
21 guages, and cultures that disappear (stressed by Gellner 1983). But nation-  
22 states are manifestly only a dominant form of collective organization for one  
23 relatively brief period of world history (important as this modern era is to  
24 us). There are nation-states with a high level of continuity with pre-national  
25 organization (China) and those with much less (Sudan). But all nation-states,  
26 even those with the strongest ideologies of self-sufficiency, exist in contexts  
27 and webs of connections. For each nation-state the context is global – like  
28 the diffusion of the nation-state form of cultural-political organization itself;  
29 it is regional; it is a matter of immediate neighbours. For most the context  
30 includes the vast reach of the world's major religions and the world's major  
31 languages. And connections are forged both within such contexts and across  
32 long-distances by particular paths of trade or migration, like that extending  
33 from Yemen to Indonesia.

34 This isn't the place to trace the importance of the many different kinds of  
35 contexts and connections within which units of political power, economic  
36 differentiation or cultural specificity are situated. The point, rather, is simply to  
37 recognize that the issue isn't adequately posed by the question 'what is the  
38 most appropriate unit of analysis' (Beck and Grande 2010: 20)? There are  
39 necessarily many units of different kinds and many sorts of contexts and  
40 connections. Indeed, Beck and Grande may not disagree; elsewhere they cite  
41 postcolonial theorists approvingly for insisting not just on variation but also on  
42 interdependence. In any case, the account would be improved by clarity on this  
43 issue. Consider the contrast of the accounts here to the notion of a modern

1 world system put forward by Wallerstein (1974). This suggests not only a  
2 general condition of capitalist globalization since the sixteenth century, but  
3 also its internal hierarchy and reliance on states for stabilization. If hegemonic  
4 powers stabilize the larger system, lesser states seek to stabilize local condi-  
5 tions of extraction, exploitation, and accumulation I don't think of world  
6 systems theory as essentialized hierarchival locations but it has been stronger  
7 on enduring structures than structural transformations (though the work of  
8 Giovanni Arrighi makes great strides; Arrighi and Silver 1999, Arrighi 2007).  
9 The work of Beck and colleagues tells us less than world systems theory about  
10 structures of global organization. But it does point up pressures that destabi-  
11 lize and push for change (see esp. Chang 2010).

12 In any case, the issue isn't just units of analysis, it is the organization of  
13 collective action. Addressing risks affecting all humanity is crucial, but action  
14 is not likely to be organized simply on the scale of humanity as a whole, nor in  
15 some sort of 'glocal' connection of the largest and smallest units. It will involve  
16 the forging of solidarity of a range of scales from local communities to ethnic  
17 groups, cities, countries, social movements, and religions. As Beck and Grande  
18 (2010: 29) put it, there are multiple 'we' contexts. It will require formal orga-  
19 nizations operating in a range of structural forms and scales, not as units of  
20 solidarity but as mechanisms for achieving specific effects. These will small  
21 organizations with large global missions like the International Criminal Court  
22 as well as much larger organizations like the World Bank or UN agencies. But  
23 they will also include smaller and less global organizations that still meet  
24 transnational needs: supplying condoms or mosquito nets, monitoring poten-  
25 tial tsunamis, helping neighbouring countries manage trade. I stress this  
26 because cosmopolitan programmes often nurture the illusion that global issues  
27 will be addressed mainly by a 'political subject called humanity' (Beck and  
28 Grande 2010: 28). There is something attractive to the ideal that more and  
29 more people act from a concern for humanity as a whole. But to imagine any  
30 near-term shift to this as a primary organization of political subjectivity is  
31 implausible, as is the imagining everyone and every organization sitting at the  
32 table and achieving balance (Beck and Grande 2010: 28, 31).

33 The point is not just that nations still matter (Calhoun 2007). It is also that  
34 geopolitics still matters, organizational structures of many kinds on many  
35 scales matter, larger patterns of cultural affiliation, religion, or civilization still  
36 matter. And indeed just as nation-states still matter now, all of these also  
37 mattered throughout the era of nation-states. Han and Shin (2010: 18) are right □  
38 that

39  
40 we can no longer explain such global phenomena as unemployment, poverty  
41 new diseases, food contamination, the catastrophic fluctuation of the capital  
42 market, large-scale Hurricane and Tsunami from a nation-centered  
43 perspective.

1 But they are wrong to imply that we ever could. The critique of methodological  
2 nationalism must include the extent to which thinking only in terms of nation-  
3 states was misleading throughout the modern era, not just in a new period.

4 Moreover, many large-scale structures are literally international, creatures  
5 of treaties and less formal cooperation among member countries. Beck and  
6 colleagues clearly recognize this even though they occasionally slip into talk of  
7 'replacing the national' (Beck and Grande 2010: 23–4) rather than compli-  
8 menting national structures with many others. They also exaggerate how new  
9 the development of cosmopolitan political structures is, writing that cosmo-  
10 politanism was active in the eighteenth and 'Centuries, but had disappeared by  
11 twentieth, reappearing only after collapse of the USSR. It is certainly true that  
12 nation-state political structures were ascendant between 1789 and 1989.  
13 However, we shouldn't slight the League of Nations, the UN, the growth of  
14 global NGOs like CARE and OXFAM, the Non-Aligned Movement, interna-  
15 tional socialism or the 1960s Left. And we should ask whether there was ever  
16 a time when nation-state structures were either adequate to manage risks or  
17 quite so completely dominant as stereotype implies. Indeed, it is a Eurocentric  
18 illusion to think of the two centuries from the French Revolution to the fall of  
19 Soviet-style communism as simply an era of nation-states. It was also an era of  
20 empire (and imperialism after empire). Every major European nation-state  
21 was also the 'homeland' to an empire.

22 Up through 1848, nationalism was itself the cosmopolitanism of the day –  
23 the springtime of peoples. National liberation movements had international  
24 supporters; the vision of a world of autonomous nations was precisely a vision  
25 of the world as a whole (sometimes echoing Kant's hope for a federation, often  
26 including the anticipation of the self-determination of colonized peoples). Not  
27 least the idea of nation invoked the solidarity of people living in different  
28 regions and towns, under different feudal authorities, governed in different  
29 ways; it said that all were citizens of the larger country, and directly so, not  
30 indirectly through the mediation of chains of differentiated authority.

31 But though more care for precision is important, the real point is that the  
32 genuinely global challenges to which Beck and colleagues rightly point call  
33 forth a wide range of responses and organizational structures. It is not clear  
34 that 'those who play the national card will inevitably lose'. Even if it is true  
35 that in aggregate nationalist politics is in decline, and even if nationalism does  
36 not offer the basis for solving a variety of large problems like climate change,  
37 this does not mean that nationalist strategies may not yield advantages. I do  
38 not mean merely that the use of force to take advantage of minorities or  
39 neighbours can sadly sometimes pay off. I mean that nationalist protectionist  
40 policies can be effective components of overall economic development  
41 projects (Chang 2002).

42 Moreover, the declining power of the nation-state and growing transna-  
43 tional interconnections could lead to chaos and conflict instead of to a world of

1 effective transnational governance – and if transnational governance grows, it  
2 might look more like empire than like ‘cosmopolitan democracy’. Or again,  
3 universal human rights may become a more urgent ideal in a globally inter-  
4 connected world; the interconnections (not least through media) may lead  
5 more people to pay attention to rights and their violation; but neither of these  
6 guarantees that rights will be respected. Or still again, destruction of the  
7 environment may be proceeding on a global scale, creating shared risks that  
8 put all humanity into a ‘community of fate’, but this does not guarantee that we  
9 will find a cosmopolitan solution – or any solution at all.

### 11 **Distinguishing the normative from the empirical**

12  
13 Beck seeks mainly, he says, to develop ‘analytical–empirical cosmopolitanism’  
14 as a product of ‘value-free’ social science. This will produce a description of the  
15 actual conditions of contemporary social life – which Beck sees mainly as a  
16 ‘world risk society’ in which people are materially interdependent but inescapably  
17 exposed to shared risks. These demand the creation of ‘institutional-  
18 ized cosmopolitanism’ but in the short run they are axes of conflict: ecological  
19 interdependency crises, economic interdependency crises, and terrorist inter-  
20 dependency crises. Beck (2006: 24) seeks to ‘demarcate, though not to neglect,  
21 normative and political cosmopolitanism in a world that has become a danger  
22 to itself’.<sup>5</sup> But of course cosmopolitan and for that matter modernity are  
23 widely used as normative and aspirational terms and it is hard to free accounts  
24 of cosmopolitization or modernization from implicit progressivist teleology.

25 To clarify the relationship between normative aspirations and empirical  
26 transformations, Beck has introduced a distinction between ‘cosmopolitanism’  
27 and ‘cosmopolitization’. Though I appreciate the effort and think Beck is on  
28 the right track, I think the distinction is awkward and doesn’t do the work  
29 needed. Part of the problem is simply that it is very difficult to read ‘cosmo-  
30 politization’ as not entailing progress along the path to ‘cosmopolitanism’.  
31 Indeed, the essays in this collection frequently fail to maintain the distinction.  
32 Yet that is what we need to do for the reconceptualization to succeed. And  
33 here while my appreciation continues – Beck addresses an important issue  
34 many cosmopolitan theorists have skirted – it also gives way to argument. As  
35 we see in the essays on East Asia in this collection, Beck’s account of ‘second  
36 modernity’ invites reproducing many unfortunate tendencies of earlier mod-  
37 ernization theories, including thinking in terms of a single more or less neces-  
38 sary pattern of development (albeit with different ‘varieties’). Like Tolstoy  
39 who said that happy families are all alike but each unhappy family is unhappy  
40 in its own way, the authors here appear to think that there is a single happy  
41 cosmopolitan future made possible by reflexive modernization, though there  
42 are innumerable different risks of disaster that could waylay it.

1 Like its predecessor 'modernization', cosmopolitanism seems to imply a  
2 linear increase either in scale or in depth. How many people or countries are  
3 cosmopolitan or modern; how cosmopolitan, or how modern has each  
4 become? In the case of modernization, this implied linear development  
5 elided the relationship between labeling a period of European history and  
6 participating in an orientation to the past as an inheritance to be overcome.  
7 It turned European (and American) history into a developmental variable to  
8 be applied anywhere. In the case of cosmopolitization, the analogous framing  
9 connects an assertion of sociological trends (migration, transnational flows of  
10 money or media, etc) to an idea of 'citizenship of the world' that has been  
11 presented as a matter of ethical universalism (Nussbaum 1996, 2006; Appiah  
12 2006), appreciation for diversity and the unfamiliar (Sennett 1970, 1977;  
13 Appadurai 1997; Pollock 2000; Pollock et al, 2000), attention to events  
14 beyond the local (Merton 1949; Gouldner 1957–8), or simply sophisticated  
15 style (Calhoun 2003).

16 The echoes of modernization theory with its dangled goal of being truly  
17 modern are evident in the essays on East Asia in the present collection.  
18 They present important insights into the sense of promise and pressure that  
19 motivates many in East Asia and the felt need to 'catch up' to Western  
20 modernization that drives 'compressed' cosmopolitization and economic  
21 development. But some care is needed before reaching firm conclusions. For  
22 example, some of the ills Han and Shim (2010: 20) cite as driving twenty-first  
23 century reflexive modernization in East Asia are identical to those that drove  
24 the building of 'high modern' state institutions in the nineteenth century:  
25 'large-scale accidents, violent crimes, the contamination of foods and tap  
26 water, fraudulent constructions' were all prevalent in 'C Europe and America.  
27 These are indeed products of greed and a rush to make money; whether that  
28 rush is greater in the 'compressed modernization' of East Asia today than in  
29 Victorian London or the cities that grew explosively on the American frontier  
30 is an empirical question. If we used life-expectancy data as an indicator it is not  
31 immediately evidence that more fatal shortcuts are being taken in contemporary  
32 East Asia (but of course more evidence and more analysis would be  
33 needed to be certain).

34 International competition is a feature of the whole modern era (say, the last  
35 500 years). It has driven the development of nation-state structures themselves  
36 and also the use of those structures to attempt to bolster economic  
37 development. As Ha-Joon Chang (2002) emphasizes, the free-trade ideology of  
38 neoliberals and the 'Washington consensus' of the late twentieth century represented  
39 an attempt to deny contemporary developing countries the use of  
40 protectionist and other mechanisms on which European and American powers  
41 themselves relied in becoming rich. The pressure to catch-up was felt intensely  
42 by the British in relation to the Dutch, the Americans and Germans in relation  
43 to the British, and so forth. It propelled not only state interventions but also

1 reluctance to regulate industries that caused harm whether by pollution, or  
2 faulty products, or fraudulent business practices – and manifestly this sort of  
3 pressure hasn't disappeared from US or European contexts. This doesn't mean  
4 that there aren't intense pressures on East Asian countries; there are. But it is  
5 important to sort out what has to do with systemic pressures of capitalist  
6 production, trade and accumulation and what with anxieties shaped by  
7 national ambitions, the reinforcing belief in previous glory, or the projects of  
8 specific leaders. 'We must catch up' can be an ideological proposition justifying  
9 a variety of policies, inequalities, and impunities for abuse.

10 Kyung-Sup Chang analyses this pressure as part of the distinctively 'com-  
11 pressed modernity' of East Asia. Chang (2010: 6) sees compressed modernity  
12 as 'a rather universal feature of contemporary national societies' but acute in  
13 Korea and East Asia generally. He cites David Harvey's (1990) account of  
14 account of time-space condensation as a characteristic of capitalism, and  
15 specifically of attempts to overcome accumulation crises. Harvey extended this  
16 analysis of capitalism into an analysis of postmodern cultural production and  
17 social change and Chang sees similar factors at work in postcolonial contexts  
18 and in Asia more generally. This seems right, but we should be clear that a  
19 'dynamic coexistence of mutually disparate historical and social elements'  
20 (Chang 2010: 2) is not limited to 'second modernity'. Think of the articulation  
21 of different modes of production during Western Europe's transition to indus-  
22 trial capitalism.

23 Capitalism has recurrently brought reckless bursts of investment far  
24 exceeding rational expectations of return (Lamoreaux and Sokoloff 2007).  
25 These may have 'irrationally' financed great technological innovations.  
26 Certainly they led to the coexistence of production processes and capital  
27 accumulation processes rooted in different historical periods and social  
28 organizations. To analyse such phenomena it is important to be more specific  
29 about capitalism – not just modernization – and about different dimensions  
30 of capitalism. Beck and Grande (2010: 2) describe the current consolidation  
31 of global economic power as 'the global victory of industrial capitalism'. Yet  
32 it may actually be more consistent with the accounts of diverse global con-  
33 ditions to recognize the co-existence of industrial and financial capitalism.  
34 Since the 1970s, profits flowed increasingly in the financial sector; much inno-  
35 vation centered on the production of new financial instruments. This was not  
36 really the coming of post-industrial society since in some parts of the world  
37 industrialization was rapidly proceeding. None the less, the centrality of  
38 finance capital has played a key role in shaping booms, bubbles, and the  
39 intensification of globalization. It is a crucial condition of both the opportu-  
40 nities some East Asian societies are seizing and the sense of speed-up and  
41 pressure they experience.

42 Beck is right to recognize the difference between an abstract normative  
43 orientation and an empirical reality – and indeed right to ask what institutions

1 might help to bring order and improvement to that empirical reality. But his  
2 terminology is confusing. Beck seeks to make several points almost at once and  
3 proliferates concepts at a rapid rate. I take this to be his argument, in brief  
4 outline:

- 5
- 6 (1) An earlier phase of modernity was organized primarily in terms of
- 7 national states, which sought to manage many of the risks people
- 8 faced, although markets and other phenomena did cross state
- 9 boundaries.
- 10 (2) Modern social and political theory grew during this growing dominance
- 11 of nation-states in world affairs and internalized the nation-state as the
- 12 tacit model for society itself – influenced both by the actual power of
- 13 nation-states and by the widespread aspiration to organize the world on
- 14 the basis of nation-states.
- 15 (3) An earlier sort of philosophical cosmopolitanism was also developed in
- 16 this context, calling on people ethically to transcend narrow nationalist
- 17 views, though the sociological conditions of their lives did not make
- 18 adhering to this ethics a felt necessity for most.
- 19 (4) Actually existing and accelerating trends have intensified transnational
- 20 connections and flows bringing about a new phase of modernity in
- 21 which there is ‘a growing unreality of the world of nation-states’ (Beck
- 22 2006: 21). This is a matter not only of positive connections but also of
- 23 new shared risks such as environmental disaster.
- 24 (5) This ‘second modernity’ is ‘reflexive’ in several senses including (a)
- 25 growing efforts to try to guide it, and (b) greater consciousness of
- 26 the larger patterns on the part of ordinary people – who for example
- 27 not only mix more across lines of cultural difference but are consciously
- 28 aware of this and often explicitly affirm the virtues of such mixing, and
- 29 who recognize the existence of a global community of fate.
- 30 (6) Material globalization (#4 above) subjects people to a ‘deformed cos-
- 31 mopolitanism’ that is ‘passively and unwillingly suffered’. This ‘cosmo-
- 32 politization’ is to be the object of objective scientific study which
- 33 requires the social sciences to overcome ‘methodological nationalism’
- 34 (that is, the reliance on nation-states as the normal units for all social
- 35 science research).
- 36 (7) Because people are increasingly aware of their integration into a tran-
- 37 snational community of fate (#5 above) they are may choose to counter
- 38 global threats by ‘partaking in the great human experiment in civiliza-
- 39 tion’ which is actively and consciously trying to create new cosmopoli-
- 40 tan institutions. Beck is not altogether explicit about this, but he seems
- 41 to hold that this is not only good but also increasingly likely and perhaps
- 42 even necessary in the sense that it is the only outcome that allows
- 43 civilization to continue.

1 Beck has multiple purposes in developing this argument.

- 2 (a) He wants to urge social scientists to overcome their 'methodological  
3 nationalism' in order to do better empirical research on global  
4 phenomena.  
5 (b) He wants to distinguish between mere moral norms and sociological  
6 attention to empirical reality in order to argue for cosmopolitanism on  
7 the grounds of empirical and practical necessity, free from the implica-  
8 tion of arguing for a pure ought (as 'philosophical cosmopolitans' might  
9 be accused of doing).  
10 (c) He wants to assert that actual empirical changes make adherence to  
11 cosmopolitan moral norms more likely, that while in the 'first moder-  
12 nity' cosmopolitan norms were merely intellectual and nationalism cap-  
13 tured people's hearts, in the 'second modernity' this is reversed. (Beck  
14 2006: 19)  
15 (d) He wants the cosmopolitanism he supports to be 'critical' in defending  
16 only the versions that support social justice and not the 'banal' or  
17 'deformed' versions rampant in the contemporary world.

18 The confusion in Beck's usage comes largely from using the same term or  
19 nearly the same term to refer to (a) an abstract aspiration, (b) an ostensible  
20 existing condition, (c) a possible future trend, and (d) a political or even  
21 existential imperative. But though Beck cites Kant as an exemplar of the  
22 abstract aspiration he offers little evidence that actually existing cosmopoliti-  
23 zation is producing anything like the just universalism proposed by Kant or  
24 other philosophical cosmopolitans. He calls actually existing conditions  
25 'deformed cosmopolitanism' which implies that they are simply misshapen  
26 versions of what Kant and others sought:

27 There can be no doubt that a cosmopolitanism that is passively and unwill-  
28 ingly suffered is a *deformed* cosmopolitanism. The fact that really existing  
29 cosmopolitanism is not achieved through struggle, that it is not chosen, that  
30 it does not come into the world as progress with the reflected moral author-  
31 ity of the Enlightenment, but as something deformed and profane, cloaked  
32 in the anonymity of a side effect – this is an essential founding insight of  
33 cosmopolitan realism in the social sciences. (Beck 2006: 20–1).

34 Of course the cosmopolitanism Kant sought was not merely the interconnec-  
35 tion of different populations and different parts of the world. But though Beck  
36 sharply distinguishes 'philosophical' from 'social science' cosmopolitanism, he  
37 inextricably links them. By using the same word – qualified by 'deformed' –  
38 Beck suggests that the empirical reality is a version of the normative ideal.  
39 Is it?

40 Put bluntly, are the global AIDS crisis, massive environmental degrada-  
41 tion, increasing concentration of capital, human trafficking, the drug trade,

1 the Internet and Interpol simply deformed versions of the cosmopolitanism  
2 that Kant sought? A case can be made that the proliferation of human rights  
3 treaties, the International Criminal Court, and efforts to provide humanitar-  
4 ian relief represent steps in the direction of the Kantian ideal (perhaps with  
5 some deformations). A case could be made that European Unification is a  
6 step in that direction (a step that seems less secure today than it did a  
7 decade ago). But to equate internationalization and globalization in general  
8 with ‘cosmopolitization’ is at best confusing. It attaches an ideal of universal  
9 justice to any reality that is organized in large-scale transnational terms.

10 It is indeed the case that the actual conditions of globalization create innu-  
11 merable connections across lines of cultural difference, challenge attempts to  
12 maintain insularity at national and other levels, and make the world into a  
13 community of fate. In the contemporary world more and more people are  
14 compelled to navigate transnational spaces – markets, media, migration flows  
15 (whether as migrants or coming into contact with immigrants) – in the course  
16 of their daily lives. And experiences of transnational connection do often lead  
17 to a growing consciousness of that larger world. This would appear to be what  
18 Beck and his associates mean by ‘cosmopolitization’. This sometimes leads to  
19 global problem-solving but it would be a challenge – one so far not met – to  
20 show a linear correlation. The same global competition and awareness also  
21 produces anxiety and reliance on national and other non-global institutions for  
22 defense.

23 Beck’s view is perhaps really more Hegelian than Kantian: ‘Realistic cos-  
24 mopolitanism should not be understood and developed in opposition to uni-  
25 versalism, relativism, nationalism, and ethnicism, but as their summation or  
26 synthesis’ (2006: 57). Cosmopolitanism is not mere universalism, which is not  
27 only too abstractly normative but too one-dimensional.

28 Cosmopolitanization is a non-linear, dialectical process in which the univer-  
29 sal and the particular, the similar and the dissimilar, the global and the local  
30 are to be conceived, not as cultural polarities, but as interconnected and  
31 reciprocally interpenetrating principles. (Beck 2006: 73)

32 ‘Global cosmopolis’ thus will subsume and recognize national and other dif-  
33 ferences (see also Held 1995; Levy 2010). And what is overcome is not only  
34 territorially organized cultural homogeneity but class and other oppositions.  
35 ‘Understood in this way, the normatively oriented cosmopolitan account  
36 modulates all dualisms that have divided and separated human beings’ (Beck  
37 2006: 141). This appears to suggest not the strong separation of the normative  
38 account but its leading role in the empirical trend.

39 Beck seeks ways to achieve unity but without reproducing either the divi-  
40 siveness or the rigidities of nation states. This is an important project. I share  
41 the sense of need. But I am concerned that the reality of global connections is  
42 taken to underwrite a much more confident expectation of cosmopolitanism

1 than is warranted, and that a variety of normative ideals inform that expecta-  
2 tion – including that cosmopolitanism will be democratic rather than imperial.

3 Beck rightly stresses the extent to which human beings live in communities  
4 of fate – at a planetary scale when considering environmental disasters but  
5 also at intermediate scales like Europe (which he sees as integrating not so  
6 much because of past common heritage as in order to respond to global  
7 pressures and issues).

8 The situation of Europe is special in spite of everything. Nowhere in the  
9 world are transnationalization and cosmopolitanization so far advanced. We  
10 must speak in terms of an ‘institutionalized cosmopolitanism’ as exhibited in  
11 the EU, for example, by the European Council, European law (the Euro-  
12 pean Court), the single currency of the ‘Euro’ (which has replaced the  
13 sacrosanct national currencies), European frontiers (which have taken pre-  
14 cedence over national frontiers, the symbols of sovereignty), and so forth.  
15 (Beck 2006: 114; see also Beck and Grande 2007).

16 Here again, I think Beck calls our attention to something important and rightly  
17 urges us to be critical of the ‘methodological nationalism’ built into the very  
18 categories and analytic habits of social science. But at the same time, we need  
19 to recognize that the history of European integration is relatively brief and be  
20 cautious about assuming that it will proceed without reversals or successful  
21 resistance. And we need to ask whether the transnational integration of  
22 Europe is necessarily part of a linear process of global integration – cosmo-  
23 politization – or a regional re-organization resistant to some aspects of global  
24 integration (say, migration) and seeking to manage others (say, market com-  
25 petition) for regional benefit. Use of the terms cosmopolitan or cosmopoliti-  
26 zation to name processes taking place on scales much less than global invites  
27 misunderstanding and also neglect of some empirical possibilities.

28 We might ask similar questions about accounts of individualization impor-  
29 tant to several articles in this collection. The distinction of individualism from  
30 individualization is analogous to that between cosmopolitanism and cosmo-  
31 politization, an incomplete attempt to disentangle the empirical from the  
32 normative. The notion of individuals finding it necessary to ‘design their bio-  
33 graphies’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001) is informative. So is notion of  
34 individualization under compulsion – what we might call the forced privatiza-  
35 tion of risk (Calhoun 2006).

36 Is either altogether new? Beck and Grande (2010: 8) present them as the  
37 result of an epochal break between first and second modernities. But surely  
38 individualization is characteristic of modernity in general. Migrants from vil-  
39 lages to cities during the industrial revolution surely experience disembed-  
40 ding and re-embedding. The rise of the novel in Western Europe is partly a  
41 corollary to a new culture of individual biographies. How should we under-  
42 stand the American movement West after the Civil War if not as involving

1 individualization under compulsion. The core distinction between achieved  
2 and ascribed statuses – design and production of one’s own biography vs  
3 acceptance of one’s place in an established order – is wider still (Linton  
4 1936). There is historical variation, to be sure, but also cross-cultural, class,  
5 and gender variation.

6 Several of the essays here describe individualization in contemporary and  
7 recent East Asia. The transformations are enormous. Changes in gender roles,  
8 relations, and aspirations are dramatic as Chang and Song show in their useful  
9 presentation of a rich trove of data on Korean women. Suzuki et al. (2010: 3)  
10 show a burgeoning individualization in to Japan, though two decades later  
11 they think than in the West – partly perhaps because companies rather than  
12 national welfare states managed much risk and families continued to be effec-  
13 tive risk managers longer. Yan (2010) traces comparably profound individual-  
14 ization process in the communist and especially the post-communist era in  
15 China. Yet the limited temporal scope makes it too easy to imagine that before  
16 China was simply collective, simply traditional. What of 1890s, we might ask, or  
17 of 1919?

18 The cultural ferment of these earlier periods was marked by both individu-  
19 alism – like that of the Romantic poet Xu Zhimo and individualization – like  
20 the disembedding of thousands of rural villagers to move into rapidly growing  
21 cities like Shanghai, possibly to be re-embedded in quasi-traditional organiza-  
22 tions like clan societies but also perhaps in organized crime or service to  
23 colonial or merchant elites. It is true as Yan says that some Chinese individu-  
24 alism could be traced to Enlightenment Europe and as my mention of Xu  
25 Zhimo suggests, more than a little to European Romantics. The gender dimen-  
26 sions were important here too, with the anti-footbinding campaign, protest  
27 against patriarchy and arranged marriages, a wave of girls named Nora after  
28 from Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. And individualism and individualization came  
29 together in the initially small numbers of Chinese women able to make their  
30 own careers – like Lin Huiyin, perhaps China’s first female architect and also  
31 the great love of Xu Zhimo’s life (though making the story stereotypically  
32 Romantic after he divorced his wife for her she married someone else, in fact  
33 the son of Xu’s great teacher Liang Qichao.

34 Yan (2010: 16) describes three processes he sees as no longer important in  
35 Western Europe but now occurring in other parts of the world:

- 36  
37 (1) The legitimation of individual desires and intensification of individual  
38 competition by way of the triumph of market economy and global consum-  
39 erism; (2) The surge of social movements promoting individual rights and  
40 freedom by means of the global discourse of and political changes toward  
41 democracy; (3) The shifting balance among three major components of a  
42 given society – the individual, social groups, and modern institutions/the  
43 state-due to the rise of the individual in social life.

1 Yan is right that ‘the individual has become an increasingly important social  
2 category in previously collective-oriented societies’ but it would be a mistake  
3 to think this was all a new process. Perhaps it is better to suggest that mod-  
4 ernization was reflexive from the outset.

5 Still, is ‘individualization’ simply a linear trend of reflexive modernization,  
6 or a recurrent result of some patterns of social change? For example, the late  
7 Roman Empire arguably brought strong examples of the four basic features  
8 Beck and team identify with individualization: (1) detraditionalization; (2)  
9 institutionalized disembedding and re-embedding of the individual; (3) com-  
10 pulsory pursuit for a ‘life of one’s own’ and lack of genuine individuality; (4)  
11 the internalization of risks’ (Beck and Grande 2010: 13; see also Yan 2010).  
12 Isn’t this arguably part of the background to the rise of Christianity among  
13 Jews and others in the merchant cities of the Empire; among ‘seekers’ like St.  
14 Augustine who also explored Stoic philosophy and Manichaeism; and among  
15 the many who struggled to cope first with the disruptions of erratic emperors  
16 – fairly frequent, starting with Caligula and Nero – and then eventually with  
17 the Barbarian invasions? Or again, wasn’t this variable in play as imperial  
18 China shifted between periods of increasingly commercial organization  
19 accompanied by social ‘liberalization’ and an emphasis on individual ethics –  
20 *junxian* – and more military, centralized, and hierarchical organization –  
21 *fengjian* – (see discussion in Schrecker 1995; Duara 1995)? In fact, exploring  
22 any of these comparisons in much detail would probably require breaking  
23 the compound concept into several more discrete variables and exploring the  
24 extent to which they varied together. The very project of disassociating the  
25 concept from the specifically modern Western history that gave rise to it would  
26 seem to call for an examination of the extent to which the bundling together of  
27 different dimensions was or is essential or contingent. And this speaks to the  
28 enumeration of a long list of different ‘individualizations’ by Chang and Song  
29 (2010): reconstructive, nomadist, demographic and so forth. The next step of  
30 sociological exploration will require going behind the labels to analyse the  
31 ways different variables interact.

32 This is not to say that there is nothing new – in scale and perhaps even in  
33 quality. But to see what is new we need more precision and the situation of  
34 sociological accounts in stronger historical contexts. Han and Shim (2010: 3)  
35 suggest that ‘global risks release individuals from dependency on modern  
36 collective welfare system and push them to move elsewhere’. They make the  
37 good point that ‘release’ is often the ‘push’ of neoliberal termination of insti-  
38 tutional support, not the ‘pull’ of ideals or aspirations. We need to distinguish,  
39 though, between global competition putting pressure on collective systems  
40 (say as competition to provide low-cost labor leads East Asian countries and  
41 many others to minimize investment in safer working conditions) and global  
42 risks to which people and institutions respond (like environmental disaster).  
43 Han and Shim (2010: 14ff) draw on survey data to show the coexistence of

1 traditional, modern, and post-modern. The survey seems heavily influenced by  
2 factors specific to its immediate context. None the less the larger point stands:  
3 ways of living and thinking labeled traditional, modern, and postmodern  
4 coexist. But maybe this is less a matter distinctive to East Asia than a problem  
5 with categories. As Maharaj (2010) says, 'tradition' may have a bigger role in  
6 the most modern societies than 'traditional' dichotomies suggest. As Lyotard  
7 (1979) tried to suggest after his famous book on the *Postmodern Condition* was  
8 read as an account of historical change, the postmodern was there all along. Or  
9 as Latour (1993) puts it, 'we have never been modern'. Put another way,  
10 invocation of the categories traditional, modern, and postmodern as though  
11 they demarcated historical periods is inherently problematic.

12 More generally, it isn't really viable to speak of simultaneous and inter-  
13 dependent phenomena as though they are separated by a 'gulf of centuries'  
14 (Beck and Grande 2010: 2)? This use of evolutionary or pseudo-historical  
15 language to speak of contemporaneous phenomena cannot avoid implying a  
16 unilinear pattern of development (Faubion 2002). The simultaneous coexist-  
17 ence of old phenomena – say peasant agriculture with relatively primitive  
18 techniques – with newer ones – say computers or nuclear weapons – is not  
19 well described as a matter of two different time periods. It is a feature of one  
20 time period that establishes connections between these; the articulation of  
21 different modes of production, for example, is a feature of a socio-economic  
22 system in which there are factors limiting change in some areas and chan-  
23 neling benefits to some people rather than others. Or to take an example  
24 from contemporary politics, Afghanistan is not in the middle ages. If we  
25 wonder why Afghan social life is organized partly in ways that remind us (or  
26 at least members of a previous American political administration) of the  
27 middle ages the answer has to be given by a causal analysis (whether of  
28 geopolitics or the drug trade or Islam or patriarchy) and complemented by  
29 recognition of both the many 'reflexively modern' Afghans who have  
30 struggled to remark their society and the many ways in which it is nothing  
31 like medieval Europe.

### 32 **Conclusion**

33  
34  
35 There is much more to the contributions offered here: Levy's account of  
36 the globalization of human rights norms, for example, or Chang's account of  
37 how neoliberalism exacerbates imbalances between economic and non-  
38 economic concerns. I don't pretend to have even touched on all. I hope I  
39 have been able to bring out some concerns about the underlying theory. I  
40 raise the concerns not in order to undermine the project, with which I am  
41 broadly in sympathy, but to push it to greater precision and rigor. I also  
42 want to urge greater consideration of history in efforts to diagnose the  
43 present.

1 But let me close on a small but perhaps not insignificant point. It seems to  
2 me significant that all the main empirical essays in this special issue address  
3 specific nation-states. This does not prevent them from being informative. They  
4 point out ways in which national histories are shaped by international contexts,  
5 global challenges that states find it hard to confront. The different national  
6 cases bring important counterparts to the usual European histories informing  
7 accounts of modernization. But if we seek a more cosmopolitan sociology it  
8 will need to include a variety of accounts focused on other analytic objects.  
9 However, the very prominence of nation-states in these accounts may also  
10 suggest the extent to which they still matter, critiques of methodological  
11 nationalism notwithstanding.

12 (Date accepted: June 2010)

13  
14 **Notes**

15  
16 1. It is true that much social and political theory has been written in ways that confuse  
17 the theory of one of many societies with the theory of society in general. Beck is disarm-  
18 ingly self-critical, listing himself along with many others guilty of this. But a caveat  
19 should be entered about Niklas Luhmann, who in his last work conceptualized a global  
20 'society of societies' (Luhmann 1997). Though Luhmann is an influence on Beck,  
21 he is also a very different kind of theorist. Yet it would be constructive to consider the  
22 relationship between Luhmann's conception of the encompassing whole of the  
23 society of societies and Beck's account of the differentiation of varieties within second  
24 modernity.

25  
26 2. Beck and Grande (drawing on other colleagues writing for this collection (Beck  
27 and Grand 2010; BJS 2010)) identify two patterns they see as distinctive to East Asian  
28 history: 'the victim-constellation of late developing countries' in which the chal-  
29 lenges of Second Modernity come before the institutional resources of First Modern-  
30 ity have been consolidated and 'compressed modernization' in which the  
31 development of First Modernity and transition to Second are speeded up and almost  
32 simultaneous. Arguably these patterns that run through the last five hundred years (and

perhaps earlier histories)? This formulation also sounds very much like accounts of 'late  
modernizers' – notably Germany and Japan – and their propensity for ethnic nationalism  
(Kohn 1944) or state led development (Gerschenkron 1962).

3. Relatedly, it is no doubt right that the West has produced risks with which the rest  
of the world must cope. It has been disturbingly proficient at externalizing dangers and  
damages. Consistent with Beck's emphasis on risk, Beck and Grande speak only of  
dangers, but I think there are rather clearly damages and injuries that manifest them-  
selves directly, not only probabilistically as risks.

4. Is there something new about modernity threatening its own foundations? Is this  
specific to the globalization of capital and risks in second modernity, or has it been the  
case throughout the history of capitalism and the organization of political power  
through nation-states that modernity embodied contradictions that threatened its  
foundations?

5. Beck's argument is presented, sometimes with shifting terminology, in about a  
dozen provocative and insightful though not always systematic books starting with his  
classic *Risk Society* (1992) and continuing unabated.

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