ETHIOPIA AND JAPAN IN COMPARATIVE CIVILIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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At first blush, it is hard to imagine two societies more dissimilar than Japan and Ethiopia. Consider their religious traditions. With most of its historic peoples adhering to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Ethiopia presents an exemplar par excellence of Semitic religiosity, marked by moral subordination to a commanding supernatural deity—as is its largest indigenous tradition, that of the Oromo. In sharp contrast, Japanese religiosity, which draws from an even more diverse range of traditions—Shinto, Buddhism, neo-Confucianism, and Taoism—has been oriented in ways that sacralize the natural world.

Or consider their economies. With 7% of its labor force in agriculture, Japan ranks among the wealthiest countries in the world; Ethiopia, with a labor force 80% in agriculture, remains one of the poorest. Japan reports a literacy rate of 100%; Ethiopia’s populace is largely illiterate (10% literacy in 1976, about 36% two decades later). Japan’s population enjoys exceptional health, registering life expectancies of 77 (male)/83 (female) and an infant mortality rate of 4 per 1,000, and supporting one physician per 566 persons; Ethiopians still suffer a number of chronic epidemics, register life expectancies of 46 (male)/48 (female) and an infant mortality rate of 123 per 1,000, and get by with no more than one physician for 60,000 people.

Or consider their political records. Japan shows continuous political stability over the past half century. During the same period, Ethiopia witnessed numerous revolts and attempted coups; a rash of civil wars, leading in the case of Eritrea to outright secession; two forcible changes of regime; and, at present, a regime held illegitimate by some sectors of the population and by a vocal expatriate community. Japan has maintained a civil society that permits a wide range of free political and cultural expression, whereas Ethiopia holds more independent journalists in prison than any country outside of China and Turkey.

Their records in the international arena show comparably dramatic contrasts. Japan’s invasions of Manchuria and China in the 1930s helped trigger World War II and led to severe cruelties toward the peoples of East Asia, including China, Korea, Burma, and the Philippines. By contrast, Ethiopia in the 1930s was a victim of unprovoked invasion by Fascist Italy, pursued through a war machine that rained poisoned gas upon peasants armed with spears. In the postwar era, Japan tended to abstain from international efforts to stem Communist expansion and maintain world peace, whereas Ethiopia, earlier casualty of a dysfunctional system of collective security, played a gallant role in United Nations military actions in Korea and the Congo and, through actions of both Emperor Haile Selassie and her

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current Prime Minister, performed statesmanlike services in mediating major conflicts in Nigeria, Morocco, Somalia, and the Sudan.

Given such contrasts, a thesis about basic similarities between the two nations would appear fanciful. To note, for example, that Showan Emperor Haile Selassie I (1931-74) was reckoned the 126th monarch of a continuous Solomonid dynasty while Showa Emperor Hirohito (1926-89) was reckoned the 124th monarch of the continuous Jimmu dynasty must seem part coincidence, part pun. Yet even those who link a thesis about parallels between Ethiopia and Japan to the fevered imagination of a comparative sociologist might pause before this fact: earlier in the present century, writers in both countries expressed acute awareness of their mutual affinities (Zewde 1990). Thus, an issue of The Japanese Weekly Chronicle in 1933 celebrated “the spiritual affinity between Japan and Abyssinia,” while in Ethiopia, pre-war Foreign Minister Blattengeta Heruy Walde Sellasie (in Medhara Berhan Hagara Japan [The Japanese Nation, Source of Light]) and post-war Minister of Education Kebedde Michael (in Japan Indemin Seletenech [How Japan Modernized]) described striking similarities between the two countries. Scarcely noticed among those similarities was the fact that Ethiopia and Japan were the only non-European countries to defeat modern European imperialists (Ethiopia against Italy in 1896, Japan against Russia in 1905). Prior to that, moreover, they had distinguished themselves by withstanding other imperial powers: Japan against Mongols in the 1280s, Ethiopia against Ottoman Turks in the 1580s. Both countries welcomed intercourse with the Portuguese early in the 16th century, whom they then extruded abruptly early in the following century.

Behind those stunning coincidences, I shall now argue, lay societal developments that exhibit strikingly similar trajectories across two-and-a-half millennia, and civilizational forms that are in important respects identical. Appreciation of those similarities may lead to hypotheses about patterns of civilizational dynamics more generally as well as provide some considerations to qualify claims of absolute uniqueness. Against those similarities, moreover, factors that led to such discrepant experiences of modernization come to be seen with increased clarity and security.

A. Historical profiles

The many connotations of the concept of civilization include the notion of a society extended in time and space. Although the spatial extensions of Ethiopia and Japan are not nearly so vast as those of the commonly-cited cases of Chinese, South Asian, Islamic, and Hellenic civilizations, their extension in time is remarkable. Both societies bear marks of continuous development over more than 2,500 years. To represent those developments in summary fashion I have divided them into four periods, which are represented schematically in Figure 1.

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1Such perceptions of affinity fed the pronounced sense of solidarity with Ethiopia expressed by the Japanese public following Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935—evident, for example, in the decision of the Osaka Chamber of Commerce to provide straw sandals to Ethiopians to protect their feet against poison gas, in the dispatch of 1,200 Japanese swords to Ethiopia to assist in the war effort, and in the applications of Japanese volunteers to join the Ethiopian Army that flooded the Ethiopian consulate in Tokyo (Zewde 1990).
# Figure 1

**Developmental Profiles of Ethiopian and Japanese Civilizations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>HISTORICAL EPISODES</th>
<th>ETHIOPIA</th>
<th>JAPAN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I 7C BCE to 8C CE</td>
<td>Immigrants cross channels, upgrade agriculture, mix with indigenous peoples</td>
<td>Semites from SW Arabia invade indigenous Nilotes and Cushites, 1st millennium BCE</td>
<td>Yayoi from Korea invade indigenous Ainu and Jomon, 4C BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENESIS</td>
<td>Prehistoric kingdoms established, ca 7-5C BCE</td>
<td>Pre-Aksumite kingdoms at Yeha and Azbi, ca 7-5C BCE</td>
<td>Mythic Jimmu dynasty at Nara, ca 7-5C BCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>AND CLASSICAL</td>
<td>Historic kingdoms flourish, 1-7C CE Burial megaliths for chieftains</td>
<td>Agazyan kingdom at Aksum, 1-7C CE</td>
<td>Giant mounds (<em>kofun</em>) at Yamato, 3-6C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNTHESIS</td>
<td>Conquest of nearby peninsula</td>
<td>SW Arabia occupied, 3-4C &amp; 520-575 CE</td>
<td>Korea occupied, 360-562; final rout, 668</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Early nature religions, supplemented through imported world religion, 4-7C</td>
<td>Nature spirits, sun, moon, Venus</td>
<td>Nature spirits, sun-goddess; Buddhism enters from Korea, 538;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Classical religious architecture</td>
<td>Christianity enters with conversion of Ezana, 356; diffused by Kaleb and Syrian missionaries, 6C</td>
<td>diffused via Prince Shotoku, early 7C</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Debra Damo monastery, 6C Rock-hewn churches throughout Tigray</td>
<td>Horyuji monastery, 7C Nara temples, Daibutsu, 8C</td>
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</table>

<p>| II 8C to 15C | TURMOIL, TRANSLOCATION, AND MEDIEVAL SYNTHESIS                                      | Expansions of Beja, Agew, Somali, and Arabs isolate Aksumite kingdom, 7-9C | Fujiwara, Taira &amp; Minamoto clans clash sporadically, 9-12C          |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------| Aksum coinage stops, capital moves elsewhere, mid-7C; Aksum sacked, mid-10C | Kammu moves capital from Nara to Heian (Kyoto), late 8C              |
|              | New political center, further inland from point of entry of foreign influence, mid-12C | Center shifts southward to Zagwe Dynasty at Wag and Lasta, 1150-1270 | Civil disturbances issue in Yoritomo Shogunate, 10-12C              |
|              | Great artistic achievements, 12-13C                                                 | Monolithic cathedrals at Lalibela                                        | Center shifts from Kinai eastward to Kanto Plain                     |
|              | Expansion of state and growth of national sentiment spurred by civil strife and clashes with enemies | Ethiopian state expands under Solomonid dynasty, est. 1270, clashes with border principalities National epic redacted, 14 C | Kamakura Shogunate, 1185-1333 Architecture, sculpture, literature flourish |
|              | Efflorescence of religious and aesthetic culture, 13C-16C                           | Christianity spreads, monastic centers flourish, 13-16 C <em>Qene</em> poetry; Royal Chronicles; greatest painting, 14-15C | Repulse of Mongol invasions spurs national consciousness, 1280s      |
|              |                                                                                     |                                                                           | Buddhism spreads, sects flourish (True Pure Land, Lotus, and Zen) in provincial monasteries, 13-16C |
|              |                                                                                     |                                                                           | <em>No drama</em>; <em>ikebana</em>; greatest painting schools, 15 C               |</p>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Protracted warfare, internal and external</td>
<td>Adali jihad, 1527-43</td>
<td>Wars of unification, 1568-1603</td>
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<td>16C to mid-19C</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oromo incursions 1527-1600</td>
<td>Hideyoshi invades Korea and China, 1590-1600</td>
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<td><strong>INTERNATIONAL</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Portuguese Jesuits introduce European culture; alien religion engenders civil strife, expulsion of Jesuits, 16-17C</td>
<td>Portuguese Jesuits arrive (Alvarez mission), 1520</td>
<td>Jesuit mission arrives, 1549</td>
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<td>Emp. Susneyos converts, 1622</td>
<td>Daimyo of Kyushu converts to Catholicism, 1563</td>
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<td>Aggressive Mendez mission arrives, 1622</td>
<td>Hideyoshi Edict curtails work of Jesuits, 1587</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jesuits are expelled, 1632</td>
<td>Christian missionaries are expelled, 1624-1639</td>
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<td><strong>NATIONAL ISOLATION</strong></td>
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<td>2 1/4 centuries of national isolation, 1620-1850</td>
<td>1632-1850s</td>
<td>1614-1850s</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stable capital; construction of major castles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rule by feudal lords, with emperor a background figurehead</td>
<td>Zemena mesafint, ca 1750-1850</td>
<td>Tokugawa Shogunate, 1603-1868</td>
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<td><strong>EUROPEAN INCURSIONS</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Incursions by European powers</td>
<td>British at Magdala, 1868</td>
<td>Americans at Uraga, 1853; British bombardments, 1863-4</td>
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<td>IV mid-19C to mid-20C</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Classic notion of sacral monarchy restored</td>
<td>Tewodros II, 1855-68; Yohannes IV, 1871-89; Sahle Maryam restores Solomonid symbolism as Menilek II, 1889</td>
<td>Restoration of Meiji emperor, 1868</td>
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<td>First defeat of European powers</td>
<td>Dogali, 1887; Adwa, 1896</td>
<td>Russo-Japanese War, 1904-5</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>IMPERIAL MODERNIZATION</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Constitution promulgated, defining emperor as “sacred and inviolable”</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Hirohito, 1926-89 (“124th monarch of Jimmu dynasty”)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reign of last traditional emperor</td>
<td>Haile Selassie I, 1931-74 (“126th monarch of Solomonid dynasty”)</td>
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Period I: Genesis and Classical Synthesis

The prehistories of both nations are conspicuously obscure. In both cases, they have left exquisite pottery: recently-discovered ceramic pots of pre-Aksumites, long-celebrated pottery from Jomon culture. Both prehistories involve the migration of technologically advanced people across waterways—the Yayoi from Korea, Sabaeans from Southwest Arabia—over unknown centuries of the first millennium BCE. Improved agriculture, including irrigation, supported a regime of sacred chieftains, who established cities that were at once political capitals, sacred sites, and commercial centers. They also produced enormous burial structures—obelisks at Aksum, kofun at Yamato. Their religions were oriented to the worship of natural spirits and heavenly bodies.

The period from mid-4C to mid-6C CE formed a turning point in both civilizations. It saw the consolidation of strong kingdoms and initial conversions to a world religion—Christianity and Buddhism, respectively. Growing strength of the kingdoms was accompanied by episodes of return
colonization. Aksumite expeditions to South Arabia date from early 3C, and King Kaleb colonized the Yemen for two decades in the sixth century. Japan occupied, by some accounts, three Korean provinces from mid-4C to mid-6C.

The classical period reached a climax with new impetus toward the diffusion of the world religions in the 6th century. Ethiopia experienced major liturgical innovations and missionary activity carried out by a number of Syrian monks, followed by the creation of enduring valuable religious architecture: the Debra Damo monastery and rock-hewn churches throughout Tigray (Plant 1985). In Japan there were numerous missions to and from Buddhist centers in China, leading to the construction of the Horyuji monastery, numerous Buddhist temples, and the great Daibutsu sculpture at Nara.

Period II: Turmoil, Translocation, and Medieval Synthesis

From about the middle of the seventh century, both societies saw increased skirmishing among rival groups which, for different reasons, had the effect of leading to the abandonment of the classic capitals. Expansions of Arabs, Bejas, and Agews crippled Aksum as a commercial center and led to her destruction in late 10C. Sectarian factionalism at Nara induced Kammu in late 8C to abandon Nara as the imperial capital, and eventually to establish the new capital at Kyoto.

In both places, the societal centers moved inland, away from the shores closest to the points of entry for the migrations and influences from abroad. In Ethiopia this movement pushed southward, leading to the Zagwe Dynasty at Wag and Lasta in 12-13C, then further south to Shoa in 1270. In Japan the movement was generally eastward; although Kyoto stood in the same region as Nara, by the twelfth century the great eastern plain of Kanto had begun to compete with the classical core area of the Kinai Plain, which was located closer to the Korea Strait.

These inland movements were accompanied by a number of indigenizing cultural changes. The elaborate stylized forms of the classical period gave way to earlier traditions more attuned to nature. In Ethiopia, rectangular stone constructions of churches in the north became cylindrical churches with thatched roofs further south. After the Japanese court ended all official communications with the faltering Tang Chinese empire in 894, its culture also became inward-looking. Ornate Chinese styles gave way to the Heian style of palace architecture that used unpainted wood and thatched roofs, and a "Yamato" style of painting came to feature local scenes and incidents. Vernacular languages developed out of the classical forms. Ancestral Ethiopic (Ge’ez) produced Tigrinya and Amharic; ancestral Japanese evolved into modern Japanese and Okinawan.

Developments in the interiors issued in climaxes of political control and cultural efflorescence. In Ethiopia we find a formidable expansion of the Solomonid polity under Emperors Amde Tseyon and Zara Yaqob. We also find the expansion of religious culture through the disciples of charismatic monks like Tekla Haymanot and Ewostatewos, and a new and expanding cultural role played by monasteries generally. Religious and political energies blended in the production of hagiographic chronicles of kings and saints, and a national epic, the Kibre Negest. In the 14-15C came the flowering of esoteric poetry
and what are generally regarded as the finest works of Ethiopian painting in the form of miniatures in illustrated manuscripts.

Japan experienced a comparable medieval synthesis. This was based on the political consolidations under the Kamakura Shogunate (1185-1333) and the repulsion of an attempted invasion by Mongol forces in the 1280s, which did much to stir up national sentiment. That period was also a high point for the growth of Buddhist sects in provincial monasteries, including Lotus, True Pure Land, and Zen. The founder of Lotus, Nichiren (13C), aroused large followings with his transposition of Buddhism into a fiercely nationalistic key. The later Ashikaga Period (mid-14C to mid-16C) was a time of intense economic and cultural growth during which a number of aesthetic genres underwent notable development, including the formalized tea ceremony, no dramas, ikebana (the art of flower-arranging), and what are considered to be the greatest schools of Japanese painting.

Period III: International Tensions and National Isolation

For both civilizations, the sixteenth century marked a crucial turning point. The scale of warfare was magnified as both empires found themselves embattled within and without. The Ethiopian kingdom was attacked in 1527 by Adali subjects from the east, on a jihad that had local roots but was inspired and equipped by the Ottoman Turks. After barely surviving that assault, the kingdom was engaged in decades of struggles sparked by the momentous expansion of Oromo tribes from the south. During a resurgent interval, the monarchy under Sarsa Dengel (r.1563-1597) checked the territorial ambitions of the Turks along the Eritrean coast. In Japan, a century of protracted feudal skirmishings—the period of “Warring States”—led to the massive centralizing military campaigns of Nobunaga (d. 1582) and his successors. Under Hideyoshi (r. 1582-98), Japan attempted to conquer China by mounting two mammoth (but unsuccessful) invasions of Korea in the 1590s.

More consequential for their longer-term histories, the sixteenth century marked the beginning of a shift of Ethiopia’s and Japan’s external focus from their classical sources of stimulation in Semitic and Chinese civilizations to the encounter with European civilization. Navigators from Portugal, who reached both shores at about the same time in the early 1540s, were the prime initiators of this encounter. The Portuguese brought such benefits—military and diplomatic assistance to Ethiopia, trade links to Japan, firearms to both—that they were welcomed in both lands, and Portuguese and then Spanish Jesuit missionaries converted significant sectors of their elites to Catholicism. By the end of the century they had won sufficient converts among the high and mighty, and alienated other elite elements, that intense civil strife ensued. This eventuated in a backlash against European Christians and their abrupt expulsion. Efforts to suppress Christianity in Japan began with Hideyoshi’s edict of 1587 and culminated with the expulsion of the Spanish in 1624 and the Portuguese in 1639. After

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2The very year that firearms entered Japan, 1543, was the year that Portuguese firearms were used to kill Ahmad Gragn and thus reverse Christian Ethiopia's faltering military fortunes.
Emperor Susneyos decided his conversion to Catholicism was disastrous for the country, he abdicated in 1632, whereupon Fasilidas expelled the Jesuits.

These episodes with the Jesuits precipitated a revulsion against Europeans and national policies of isolation and turning inward that persisted for more than two centuries. Although their isolation deprived them of the stimulation and technical advances they would have enjoyed by remaining in contact with the outward world, it gave them opportunities to develop their own political institutions and resources. The dynasty of emperors from Fasilidas through Iyasu II created the first stationary political capital in Ethiopia since Aksum; the dynasty of shoguns founded by Tokugawa Ieyasu constructed a new imperial bureaucracy and consolidated a stable class structure. The new dynasts flaunted their national political muscle from magnificent castle towns, at Gonder, and at Azuchi, Momoyama, and Osaka.

**Period IV: European Incursions and Imperial Modernization**

The centuries of national isolation were interrupted by dramatic episodes that signaled a need to contend with expansionist foreign powers. In Ethiopia the pressures of Mahdist expansionism from Egypt and Sudan and of British, French, and Italian colonialism incited the nation-building efforts of 19C emperors Tewodros II, Yohannes IV, and Menilek II. The cannon at Uraga Bay unleashed a burst of nationalist activity in Japan that included restoration of the Meiji monarchy. In both cases, ancient myths of sacred emperors were revitalized as a way to inspire efforts needed to build a modern nation, and both nations enshrined the symbolism of their ancient sacral monarchy in their modernizing constitutions.3

So mobilized, both peoples mounted major efforts to defend themselves against encroachments from European powers. These resulted in the defeat of Italian forces by Ras Alula at Dogali in 1887 and by Emperor Menilek’s armies at Adwa in 1896, and in the defeat of Russian forces, after two years of intense combat by Emperor Meiji’s troops, in 1905. Their military prowess made Ethiopia and Japan the first two non-European powers to negotiate treaties with European nations at the turn of the century. The internal history of both societies since the late 19C includes numerous efforts to promote modernization from above that were legitimated by the imperial throne.

Compressing this brief summary, one can weave key developments of each period into a single narrative. Both Ethiopia and Japan began their civilizational growth by grafting an idealized external culture onto a proud indigenous base. Over centuries the resulting culture diffused inland over far-flung areas through the institutions of a sacralized monarchy and religious traditions that buttressed those institutions. In the sixteenth century they again found external challenges, and briefly shifted

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3The Meiji Constitution of 1889 designated the person of the emperor as "sacred and inviolable," language that, along with many other passages, was incorporated into Ethiopia's first Constitution in 1931. In Ethiopia as in Japan, the emperor thus came to be conceived, at one and the same time, as "1) a constitutional monarch, head of an authoritarian state established by a constitution granted by the emperor, not demanded by the people; 2) supreme authority over the armed forces, independent from control of the cabinet; and 3) a monarch of divine right" (Eisenstadt 1996, 35).
attention from their classical roots to a newly expanding Europe. After some initial conversions to European Christian faith, their elites evinced nativistic reactions. Ensuing centuries of isolation gave them space to build up internal political might along traditional feudal lines. When at last they could ignore the threats of foreign expansion no longer, they looked toward European models in determined efforts to modernize, while restoring an archaic notion of imperial grandeur.

B. Civilizational form

In addition to comparing their patterns of historical development, one can also think about civilizations by considering certain formal properties they exhibit across their innumerable changes. To do this is to think of a civilization, as Robert Redfield once put it, “as having a form that remains the same while the content, institutions, usages, beliefs change” (Redfield 1962, 373). In comparing the civilizations of Ethiopia and Japan, I find a common form that exhibits a complex of geopolitical and cultural features. These I propose to gloss as receptive insularity; idealization of alien culture; sacralization of an imperial homeland; parochialization; religious pluralism; political decentralization; a hegemonic warrior ethos; and hierarchical particularism.

1. Receptive insularity

Begin with geography. Japan comprises a set of large islands and countless small ones; Ethiopia is a virtual island: a large land mass bordered nearly one third by water, and otherwise ringed by forbidding deserts, lowlands, and mountainous escarpments. Both territories exerted an attraction on outsiders; both contain temperate climates, fertile areas, and sticky borders, in that people tend to stay once they have made it in.

This is true for movements of culture as for movements of peoples. Observers of both civilizations emphasize the extent to which each was eager to import alien cultural elements and then to appropriate them in their home idiom through processes of “Ethiopianization” and “Japanization.” In Storia della letteratura etiopica (1956), Enrico Cerulli described this trait by noting that throughout their history, Ethiopian authors were influenced by foreign writings--by Greek, Syrian, Arabic, and European sources--to an exceptional degree, but in a way that never took the form of passive, literal borrowing:

Rather, one can say that it is precisely a typical Ethiopian tendency to collect the data of foreign cultural and literary experience and transform them, sooner or later, to such an extent that even translations in Ethiopian are not always translations, in our sense of the term; but they frequently contain additions, supplementary material, at times misrepresentations of the original, at other times simply the insertion of
new materials in such a quantity that the literal sense of the original is completely lost. (Cerulli 1956, 12-13).

A pattern of indigenizing incorporation has also been described for painting, music, agriculture, and religion, where “Ethiopian responses reveal a recurrent pattern that indicates neither nativistic rejection nor slavish adherence to imported forms, but a disposition to react to the stimulations of exogenous models by developing and then rigidly preserving distinctly Ethiopian versions” (Levine 1974, 65).

A comparable pattern of importation and indigenization has been ascribed to Japanese culture by many observers. It was manifest over centuries by the deliberate importation from China of forms of writing, architecture, technology, religious belief, and ethical doctrines, which in turn underwent a special coloration in being fashioned to suit the themes of Japanese experience. This reshaping into a Japanese idiom affects virtually everything that has been imported, from Chinese Buddhism to American baseball. Referring to the extensive incorporation of external influences—"ideas, artifacts, technologies, styles of dress"—into Japanese culture, Shmuel Eisenstadt contends that the process of Japanization "entailed, not just the addition of local color, but the transformation of their basic conceptions in line with the basic premises of Japanese civilization" (Eisenstadt 1996, 303-4). This was manifest, for example, in the transformation of the Chinese notion of the emperor as standing under the Mandate of Heaven to the Japanese notion of tenno, a heavenly ruler not accountable to any transcendent authority. Similarly, in his noted novel Silence (1969), Shusaku Endo describes the early Japanese appropriation of Christianity as confounding the Latin term Deus with the Japanese Dainichi—Great Sun; somewhat mordantly, Endo employs the metaphor of a mud swamp for the Japanese pattern of receptive insularity.

2. Idealized alien culture

The receptivity of these two geopolitical islands to foreign cultures displayed a special intensity and poignancy in relation to two major civilizational centers—Solomonic Israel and T’ang China. The path laid by prestigious Sabaeen culture-bearers was followed by waves of later immigrants who converted inhabitants of the Aksumite realm to Judaeo-Christianity, later to Islam. In this process, Jerusalem became idealized as the ancestral center whence originated the two major sources of royal legitimacy, descendence from the line of King Solomon and possession of the Ark of the Covenant from the temple at Jerusalem. This momentous cultural transfiguration was embodied in the Kibre Negest, a text incorporating many oral and written traditions from Ethiopia and the Near East which was redacted by Tigrean scribes in the 14th century. The idealization of Semitic culture anchored at Jerusalem appears as the generative assumption of the Kibre Negest. It appears in total acceptance of the belief in the divine dispensation accorded to the Solomonic lineage and the Christian mission, and
extends to denigration of dark skin color and of the lineage descended from Ham (Levine 1974, 103 ff).

During the same centuries that would lead to the compilation of an Ethiopian epic extolling Semitic symbols, Japan’s elite was drawn toward what they perceived as the superior Chinese civilization. As Ethiopia had imported a Semitic script from Arabia Felix, Japan imported ideographic writing from China. From the sixth century on, Japanese kings sent emissaries to China in a determined effort to enhance their power and prestige. The Yamato court adopted the Chinese calendar, reorganized court ranks and etiquette in accordance with Chinese models, created a system of highways, began to compile official chronicles, and erected Buddhist temples. Prince Shotoku (573-621), in particular, sent many students to learn Buddhism and Confucianism, and promulgated a Seventeen Article Constitution based largely on Han Confucianism. Shotoku’s respect for Chinese culture was so immense that he suppressed any reference to traditional Japanese religious practices or to the Japanese principle of hereditary succession in his Constitution.

3. Sacralized homeland

Although Ethiopia and Japan idealized the foreign sources of Great Traditions which they sought to incorporate, they counterposed to that idealization a strong feeling of national pride and a keen sense of being hallowed as a chosen nation. They accomplished this by creating a divine emperor and by identifying the inhabitant of that office with the sacred mission of his nation, which gave them sufficient self-confidence later to disavow their earlier sources of foreign inspiration.

In Ethiopia, this involved a reversal of values through which Ethiopia came to be defined as a Chosen Nation that had taken the place of the Chosen People of Israel. The Kibre Negest did this, first, by representing Menilek as the first-born of Solomon’s sons, then by having Menilek and his retainers steal the Ark of the Covenant from Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem and spirit it back to the region of Aksum. The transfer of God’s favor to Ethiopia was sealed by their reception of the Christian faith, and finally by condemning the “Roman” Christians for having forsaken the orthodox faith by following the heretical teachings of Nestorius. This signified Ethiopia’s emergence as the sole authentic bearer of Christianity, home of the only people in the world thereafter favored by the God of Solomon.

In Japan, a comparable tension was already hinted at in the reign of Prince Shotoku, in letters he sent to the Sui court that seemed to assert a status equal to that of the Chinese sovereign. As in Ethiopia, the crucial factor in elevating Japan above its idealized source of legitimacy was to claim a special divine status for the country’s emperor by tracing his lineage to a uniquely sacralized apex. This stemmed from indigenous beliefs associated with what came to be called Shintoism, especially the

\[4\text{This text was translated and published in by E. A. Wallis Budge, as The Queen of Sheba and her only Son Menyelek (1922). For further discussion of its provenance and contents, see Levine 1974, ch. 7.}\]
notion that the Japanese emperor was descended from Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. The charisma thus associated with the Japanese emperor became constitutive of the privileged status of the Japanese people. As one of the leaders of the 18C Shinto revival, Motoori Norinaga, reaffirmed: “The Sun Goddess is a universal deity as well as a national one, but she has shown special favor to the Japanese and guides them to a special destiny” (Tsunoda et al. II, 15). (There is solar symbolism in the Ethiopian lore, too, for the Kibre Negest marks the shift of divine favor from the Jews to the Ethiopians by a dream of Solomon in which the sun flies away from Israel to shine brightly ever after over the land of Ethiopia.)

Throughout the past millennium, the emperors, however powerless, never ceased to be the ultimate legitimators of the sacralized political order. Rases and shoguns, however ambitious, could never be invested with the powers and symbols of a legitimate monarch. Although Hideyoshi and Tewodros came from peasant stock, they both sought to legitimate themselves by associating themselves with imperial symbolism. The latent symbolic significance of the emperor made it possible for the imperial symbol to be drastically reconfigured in the Meiji period as the central symbol of the new political regime (Eisenstadt 1996, 249), as happened to a large extent during the reigns of Menilek II and Haile Selassie I.

In both countries, the feeling of being part of a chosen nation has been reinforced at the local level by the dispersal of symbolism that embodies their chooseness. Most Abyssinian homes belonged to a parish which contains a tabot, a replica of the Ark of the Covenant allegedly brought to the land from Jerusalem. Similarly, many Japanese homes in the Edo period came to possess a piece of the shrine of the Sun Goddess at Ise, thus honoring the divine ancestry of the emperor. The sense of being especially chosen referred to land and language as well as to the image of an age-old divine monarchy. Both Ethiopians and Japanese tend to revere their scenic landscapes as exceptionally precious and their national languages as bearing some transcendent imprint.

4. Parochialization

Central to the civilizations of Ethiopia and Japan alike, then, is a collective self-image that rests on a perch facing in two directions, outward toward an idealized foreign culture and inward to a sacralized imperial homeland. One may gain further insight into this combination of outward idealization and self-idealization by considering the formulations of S. N. Eisenstadt in his magisterial Japanese Civilization (1996). Eisenstadt views Japan in a perspective framed by the conception of Axial civilizations—those civilizations within which emerged new types of ontological visions involving conceptions of a basic tension between transcendent and mundane orders (ancient Israel and later second-Temple Judaism and Christianity; ancient Greece; Zoroastrian Iran; early Imperial China; Hinduism and Buddhism; and, later, Islam). This leads him to construe Japan as “the only non-

^For example, one Shotoku letter bore the superscription, “The Son of Heaven of the Land of the Rising Sun to the
Axial civilization that maintained... a history of its own, without being in some way marginalized by the Axial civilizations... with which it was in continuous contact" (14). Moreover, unlike other non-Axial civilizations, Japan evolved an elaborate “wisdom literature” and sophisticated philosophical and aesthetic discourse. The uniqueness of Japanese civilization, he suggests, reflects its pervasive “de-Axialization.” Although Japanese elites imported the Axial traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism, they transformed them in ways that weakened their critical impact on the mundane order. This transformation “was a double-pronged one, manifest, on the cultural and ideological level, in the weakening of transcendent and universalistic orientations and their channeling into an immanentist, particularistic, primordial direction and, on the organizational level, in the relatively low institutional autonomy of the major Confucian schools and scholars and of the Buddhist’s sects’ leaders and seers, who remained embedded in the prevailing social settings and networks—be they familial, regional, or political” (259-60).

The key moment in Eisenstadt's interpretation would seem to be the shift of sacralization from transcendent principles to the glorification of Japan itself. More generally, this can be construed as a process of parochialization. This process has other manifestations. Historically, Japan has been content to hold on to its indigenized versions of universalistic ideologies such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and various Western ideologies without attempting to reexport them. Prior to its expansionist counteroffensive against the West earlier in this century, Japan showed no missionary impulse. And although Japan has continually been oriented to other, broader civilizations, it has never considered itself to be part of a broader civilizational universe (Eisenstadt 1996, 304, 308).

Although one must be careful to avoid distortions when fitting the facts of Ethiopia's civilization into this mold, to the extent that resemblances can be identified, they are illuminating. It is perhaps most accurate to say that Ethiopian civilization tilted heavily in the direction of Japan's parochialization, even if it did not lean quite so far as Japan did. It is true that Ethiopian Orthodox Church was formally under the jurisdiction of the Alexandrian Patriarchate for sixteen centuries (ca 360 CE to 1960); that Ethiopian Christians and Jews alike oriented themselves to what they understood as their ancestral homeland in the Holy Land; and that Ethiopian delegates were welcomed at the Council of Florence in 1441. That said, it is also true that a primary orientation of most Ethiopian elites has been to the suzerainty of their divine emperor, and that no Ethiopian emperor could have been overthrown before 1974, as occurred repeatedly in China or Europe, by an appeal to universalistic principles. The rebellions against Emperors Susneyos and Lijj Iyasu were cases in point, since the charges against them were that they were threatening the national polity by affiliating too brazenly with religiousists from outside lands.

Again, apart from the brief excursion into Yemen at the behest of the Byzantine King Justin, the enlargement of their territory by conquest of adjacent areas, and the exceptional proselytizing of

Son of Heaven of the Land of the Setting Sun.” This quite displeased the Sui emperor (Tsunoda et al. 1958; I, 37).
Emperor Yohannes IV, Ethiopian kings were not disposed to engage in missionary activity on behalf of their parochialized faith. One cannot imagine Ethiopian kings, no matter how powerful, organizing something on the order of a European Crusade or an Islamic jihad. The latter-day diffusion of Ethiopian themes in Jamaica through the Rastafarian movement was a source of embarrassment for Ethiopians. Finally, although Aksumite Ethiopia did indeed figure as an active part of a broader civilizational universe, following the Arab expansions of the 7C which cut her off from much of the outside world Ethiopia became peripheral to the Judaic and Christian ecumenes—as, later, her converts to Islam became peripheral to the Islamic ecumene.

In the encounter with modernity, finally, neither civilization sought to legitimate its reluctant embrace in universalistic terms. The Meiji insistence on progress and on learning from the West, like that of Emperors Menilek and Haile Selassie, appealed to needs to defend their country against foreign imperialisms and to cope with the more successful nations of Europe, not to a discourse that affirmed the general, universalistic values of modern culture.

5. Religious pluralism

One consequence of softening the demands of an axial doctrine has been a relatively permissive attitude toward different faiths. Although all historic religions can be said to involve combinations of cultural traits, there seems to be a distinctive type of syncretic pattern in Ethiopia and Japan that marks their religious experience off from comparable experiences elsewhere, especially in Europe and much of the Islamic world. I shall gloss it as pluralism, to emphasize a certain degree of acceptance and interconnection of distinct religious traditions rather than their syncretic combination in a single faith.

In both countries, this pluralistic acceptance extends to ancient local traditions as well as to world religions, although the former is more pronounced in Japan and the latter in Ethiopia. In Japan, devotion to spirits known as kami reflects an ancestral worship of things of nature that became codified as Shinto. Local kami have been worshipped for protection and have formed a basis for communal identities. They have entered into the national political culture by the myth of Jimmu, a divine warrior. This myth makes subsequent Japanese emperors descendants of the kami whose shrine is at Ise, Sun Goddess Amaterasu. Side by side with these beliefs has been the observance of many forms of Buddhism. The two traditions have not been synthesized, but have functioned in a complementary way, for example, with Shinto rituals being observed for birth and wedding ceremonies and Buddhist rituals at death.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Ethiopian religious pluralism has been the extent to which the different Semitic religions, so often at war with one another in most other countries, have been practiced in ways that have not been absolutely exclusive. Ethiopian Christianity not only incorporates a number of ancient Judaic features but also enjoyed many centuries of intercourse with Hebraized religionists, like the Felashas and the Qemant. The former, it now seems clear, incorporated
Christian liturgy and monastic practices in the course of constituting their distinctive tradition (Shelemay 1986). Indeed, over time there have been numerous conversions in both directions between Christians and Jews (Pankhurst 1992). Relations with Islam began on a cordial foot, with Mohammed reportedly telling his followers of the friendliness of the Abyssinian kingdom; despite severe political hostilities in 16C and more recent times, Muslim traditions have also enjoyed phases of toleration and mutuality. Symbolic of their close relations is the existence of ceremonies and pilgrimages where members of all three religions participate, such as the annual pilgrimage to honor Saint Gabriel at Kulubi.

In addition, Ethiopian national culture continues to draw on pre-Christian local traditions, as in the sacralization of natural phenomena like mountains and trees, and the association of chiefly power with the symbolism of lions and honeybees. The constitution of Christian Ethiopian communal identities in terms of the local tabot has some resemblance to the Japanese association of local identities with their kami. And there is more than a little resemblance between their respective customs of carrying about portable shrines: parading with the colorfully-attended tabot on Ethiopian Orthodox holidays and celebrating the brilliantly-decorated makoshi during matsuri festivals. Indeed, a number of ceremonies and pilgrimages find practitioners of traditional Oromo religion, Christianity, and Islam participating jointly or taking turns. Thus, the Faraqasa pilgrimage draws heavily on Islamic traditions, yet includes elements of Christian and local Oromo symbolism (Pankhurst 1994).

6. **Decentralization of control**

Beyond the fact of their insularity, Ethiopia and Japan further exhibit geographical similarities in the character of their terrain. Both countries possess forbiddingly mountainous topographies, often described as the Alps of Africa and Asia. Their mountains formed borders among numerous localities, affording them distinctive identities as provinces or feudal domains. The political histories of both countries have accordingly been stories of continuous oscillation between efforts to centralize and centrifugal forces that isolated local domains. At the extreme, this issued in periods of feudal organization where the hold of an imperial center was extremely attenuated. Even at its strongest, however, the Ethiopian monarchy always characterized itself as *negusa neget*—King of Kings—indicating that in principle the rulers of provincial regions had some sort of claim to special authority. This devolution of authority reproduced itself at successive lower levels. Folk wisdom on the process found expression in the words of an Amharic proverb, “Ka-Gonder negus/ yagar ambaras”—“the petty district chief [is obeyed] more than the Gonder King” (Levine 1965, 156). When Emperor Menilek embarked on far-reaching imperial expansion that more than tripled the size of the territory under the authority of the Ethiopian state, he was perfectly content to recognize the jurisdiction of local chiefs and kings so long as they submitted to his overarching authority.

The pattern of decentralizing control figures as one of the most frequently noted themes in analyses of Japanese society. It was manifest in the unique *baku-han* system of the Tokugawa political
system, whereby authority was wielded by regional administrators, the daimyo, despite a unified national authority under the shogun. Ruth Benedict (1946) describes this pattern more generally as a parcelization of obligations into separate spheres of activity. Thomas Rohlen (1989) represents it as a devolution of political authority, involving delegated trust, to various peripheral domains. Eisenstadt (1996) represents it in various ways, including flexibility of movement among different social contexts, extensions of trust, and a striking capacity to incorporate protest and oppositional demands. For both countries, a disposition to tolerate political decentralization evinces an elective affinity for the pattern of religious pluralization.

The necessity of decentralization has favored the longevity of a type of social system that has often been described as feudal in character. Analysts have estimated the duration of feudalism in both societies at more than a thousand years (Reischauer 1950, Levine 1965). In thinking of Japan, the definition of feudalism that John Hall formulated with an eye to Japan holds equally well for Ethiopia:

Feudalism is . . . a condition of society in which there is at all levels a fusion of the civil, military, and judicial elements of government into a single authority. This fusion of public and private functions being achieved in the person of the locally powerful military figure, it is also natural that military practices and values become predominant in the total society (Hall 1970, 77).

7. Warrior ethos

The ascendance of powerful warrior-lords and their retainers made martial values dominant in both civilizations during the past millennium, and military prowess was long the royal road to prestige and legitimacy. This was not just a matter of according high prestige to military men; it involved the diffusion of martial attitudes, virtues, and ambitions throughout the population.

This came about through very different routes. In Ethiopia, it meant the diffusion of combative dispositions and abilities throughout the population. This feature so impressed the first European practitioner of Ethiopian Studies, Job Ludolphus, that he described Ethiopians as "a Warlike People and continually exercis'd in War . . . except in Winter, at what time by reason of the Inundation of the Rivers, they are forc'd to be quiet" (Ludolphus 1684, 217). It meant that every able-bodied male who was not a clergyman was assumed ready to engage in battle at a moment's notice—armed, skilled, supplied, and transported, all through his own devices. It meant that boys were encouraged to be combative and that as men they were disposed to be fearless in combat.6 It even meant that, for most of the past millennium, the royal capital took the form of an army camp—"a vast array of tents, arranged in combat-ready formation with the Emperor's tents in the center, flanked and guarded at the front and rear by officers of standard ranks with their entourages" (Levine 1968, 7).

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6It was due to their "unreasoning offensive spirit," an Italian officer wrote in 1937, that Ethiopian troops were easy to defeat by a disciplined modern army (Perham 1948, 167).
In Japan, the hegemony of martial values derived not from universal combat-readiness but from the way in which a military class, the samurai, came to set the tone of the national culture over the past millennium. This class emerged in the late Heian Period as a group of military specialists positioned to serve the court nobility. In time they acquired power in their own right by establishing domination over agricultural land and building their own hierarchical political organizations, culminating in a semicentral regime, the shogunate, in the late 12C. The samurai political organization rested on the formation of strong emotional bonds between military masters and vassals upheld by a strict code of honor (Ikegami 1995). In the Tokugawa Period this code was elaborated into a formal code of martial ethics known as Bushido (the Way of the Warrior). The code enjoined such virtues as loyalty, politeness, diligence, frugality, and a constant sense of readiness to die. At this time, the bushi class became more segregated than ever, since membership in it was hereditary and only those within it were entitled to bear arms. On the other hand, the ethos of this class became hegemonic in the society. In contrast to China of the time, the Japanese insisted on retaining a martial spirit as part of the mark of a gentlemen (Hall 1970, 82). During the Tokugawa period, it has been said, the samurai ethic came close to being the national ethic, for even the merchant class had become "Bushido-ized" (Bellah 1957, 98).

One of the marks of the warrior ethos in both cultures was a disposition to value ascetic hardiness. This is manifest, for example, in the Ethiopian ideal of gwebeznet, a symbol for masculine aggressiveness and hardiness. This virtue has traditionally been instilled by encouraging boys to return insult or injury with sticks and stones, rewarding temper tantrums, and associating proper masculinity with the ability to walk barefoot, go long without food, or eat hot peppers (Levine 1966). In consequence, Ethiopian soldiers have been noted for great endurance—they climb mountains with ease, march rapidly for distances under heavy pack with light rations, and sleep on a rock. In Japan, similar virtues were the pride of the samurai class, who prided themselves on undergoing great hardships without complaint—for example by undergoing a week of arduous training outside each year in the dead of winter (kangeiko).

Another mark of the warrior ethos has been a pronounced concern about honor and a sensitivity to insult that numerous observers have found in the psychological profile of both peoples. This sensitivity probably also reflects the tension between the idealization of outsiders and self-idealization noted above.

One can also associate the prominent place of martial values in both cultures with certain aesthetic dispositions. There may be an elective affinity between the lifestyle of the warrior and an interest in expressive genres that are terse in form and wryly fatalistic in content. Beyond that, both cultures involve a mixture of emotional inhibition, strict control, and a reliance on ambiguous modes of expression that would appear to conjoin a martial ethos with what may be describe as a pervasive pattern of hierarchical particularism.
8. Hierarchical particularism

A number of the features noted above and many others reflect a complex of value orientations that Robert Bellah (1957) began to analyze under the rubric of "particularistic performance" values. Particularism refer to a primary emphasis in social relations on evaluative criteria grounded on personal relations rather than universalistic standards. Kin relations comprise the locus classicus of particularism. In Japan, the family is overshadowed by larger groupings, especially the han or fiefdom, but han as well as other institutions outside the family are permeated by kinship symbolism. The same can be said of extrafamilial institutions in Ethiopia. Performance values stress the achievement of goals rather than the possession of certain qualities. In Japan, Bellah argues, there appears to be no quality or status which, once possessed, is self-validating; rather, persons in all spheres are judged by the contribution they make to achieving the goals of the system in question. The same holds for traditional Ethiopia, where peasants were judged by their abilities in farming, litigation, and following local customs, and rulers were judged by their martial prowess and ability as governors.

I wish to extend this analysis by adding, to the pattern variables of particularism-universalism and quality-performance, a pattern variable which I employed in analyzing the traditional Abyssinian social system: hierarchalism-egalitarianism (Levine 1974). This variable concerns the extent to which a society values differences in status and relationships that involve ruling over others. Here both Ethiopia and Japan stand at the end of the continuum where all social relations are cast into superior-inferior levels, and vocabulary and gestures that register different levels of deference are highly differentiated and prominent. Although both societies honor universalism, qualities, and egalitarianism to a limited extent in certain contexts, it is clear that they place overwhelming emphasis on particularism, performance, and hierarchalism. This is to say that the archetypal social form in both societies is the patron-client relation, in which patrons are owed total allegiance and deference, while clients are supported so long as they perform in ways that enhance the patron's well-being. This pattern is not the only one that can be combined with an emphasis on martial values, but it is constitutive for martial societies that are organized as feudal systems. Allegiance to the emperor becomes a template for all other relations, but one's highest level of allegiance is due to one's local lord.

The pattern of hierarchical particularism links a number of the civilizational features already identified—in particular, features of parochialization, religious pluralism, and political decentralization, ambiguity in expressive culture, as well as systems of cultural features not yet mentioned. The primacy of particularism sets an automatic limit on the extent to which beliefs and actions can be subordinated to universalistic doctrines and standards. It provides the spiritual energy behind processes of de-Axialization that Eisenstadt has analyzed so incisively. It limits the level of universalistic regulation of moral and philosophical doctrines, thereby facilitating the kind of accommodation of differing religious traditions so conspicuous in both countries. The combination of particularism with performance and hierarchical values supports the devolution of authority onto local authorities, such that generalized
criteria of service to their society at large, as evolved in China or Western Europe, can never replace patron-client connections. They translate the notion of truth into the personalistic notion of being true to one's liege, such that the deference owed to superiors in both cultures makes it important to suppress negative feelings and to present a deceptive, congenial response on the surface.

Indeed, both countries evince an aesthetic based on suppression of affect, rigid control, and cultivation of ambiguity. This pattern appears in Abyssinian art and architecture, which reveal highly controlled repetition of geometric motifs. It is also evident in the trope of semm'nnä warq, wax and gold, which has been favored as a way to represent the contrast between a concrete public image and a concealed private meaning. “Wax and gold” symbolizes the configuration behind the Abyssinian’s predilection both for ambiguous verse couplets and for indirection in interpersonal communications (Levine 1965). All genres of Japanese art evince a tightly controlled mastery of form. In Japan the notions of tatamæ and honne (public and private), and its older parallel dichotomy, omote and ura (front and back), signify important distinctions between what one reveals to others and what one keeps to oneself, a mode so constitutive of normal intercourse that outsiders tend to experience it as exasperating deception (Doi 1986). In poetry the use of a concrete image to evoke deep meanings and unspoken feelings is fundamental to the samurai aesthetic, and was articulated in the aesthetic principle of yugen, the mystery behind appearances.

The pattern of hierarchical particularism, finally, generates a mode of cultural transmission in which devotion to a particular teacher becomes a paramount consideration. This appeared in Abyssinia in the special attachments to the masters of diverse schools of liturgical song and religious poetry and, to a greater extent in Japan, in fealty to senseis who impart distinctive ways of fighting, meditating, serving tea, or arranging flowers.

9. Weak public domain

One of the most illuminating dimensions of Eisenstadt's analysis of Japanese civilization concerns his treatment of features of the political system that have been continually reproduced over the centuries, albeit in changing concrete forms. Persisting into the contemporary era, these include traits that disposed a constitutional-democratic system to function in a highly restrictive and repressive manner, including bureaucratic censorship; a weak system of judicial review; weak protection of human rights; and behind these, a set of decision-making processes that are diffuse and secretive, rendering it difficult to pinpoint a locus of responsibility for decisions-developments that have led some to describe the modern political system of Japan as a "pseudo-democracy" (Eisenstadt 1996, 75; Herzog, 1993).

Throughout the Meiji regime, which mediated the transition to a modern political order, public space and discourse continued to be monopolized by the government and the bureaucracy as representatives of the national community, the kokutai, legitimized by the emperor. This meant that the state was conflated with civil society, which prevented the formation of a public arena that could be autonomous from the state yet enjoy access to it.
Although Ethiopia did not develop a widely-shared conception of a national community comparable to that of the kokutai, as I mention below, Eisenstadt's account of Japanese political customs could have just as well have been written about Ethiopia. In both systems, during the crucial modernizing decades under Meiji and Haile Selassie, a continual tendency to conflate the public domain with that of the state disabled any tendencies toward open, principled political discourse. It was due to this conflation of state and civil society with the national community, Eisenstadt and others have argued, that produced so weak a civil society and led to what has been described as a pseudo-democracy.

Although Ethiopia did not achieve a constitutional democracy under Haile Selassie, it did secure a revised constitution in 1955 that provided for a system of parliamentary elections. Even so, under Haile Selassie it proved nearly impossible for participants in a civil society to form professional associations, let alone political parties. It was this difficulty, arguably, that created the vacuum into which the Derg marched during the declining months of the late emperor's regime. Under the Derg, of course, this pattern of central control of all manner of associations was enormously amplified. The pattern persists, albeit in less brazen and conspicuous form, under the current regime, whose leaders publicly advocate a strong opposition-but only after they have armed themselves handsomely, disarmed the opposition, and used their superior might to harass and discredit potential opponents. It is not surprising that one hears references to Ethiopia's current system as a pseudo-democracy (wushet-democracie) even more frequently than in Japan. What is rarely appreciated is how deeply the system that leads to this repressiveness has been rooted in civilizational conditions which, like those in Japan, have a long prehistory-and which, as with Japan, figured in earlier successes in which both countries withstood European imperialisms.

C. Historic differences between the two civilizations

Faced with the profound and extensive similarities between Ethiopia and Japan outlined above, one naturally wonders how they could have negotiated the challenges of modernization so very differently. Yet precisely their extensive base of historic similarities throws into relief the factors that caused Japan to modernize so swiftly and Ethiopia so haltingly. An efficient way to identify those factors might be to ask: what accounts for the fact that in Japan, unlike Ethiopia, an extensive commercial class and a disciplined work force were securely in place when the two countries faced a need to modernize in the course of the 19th century? I shall mention nine such factors.

1. Geographic conditions favorable to trade

Although both countries were mountainous, Ethiopia's mountains were more severe. Japanese travelers could take advantage of the vast plains of Honshu, on which good roads were built during the Heian period. By the 17C a system of five major highways, the Gokaido, radiated out from Edo to connect with the highways of central and western Japan established earlier, thereby creating a national system of good roads. Ethiopia's trails could not even accommodate wheels, and travel by foot or
mule was impeded for months during the annual rainy season. Not until the Italian Occupation of the 1930s did Ethiopia secure a minimal system of national highways.

With respect to transportation abroad, Ethiopia’s single sea coast made it vulnerable. The 7C Arab expansion closed off the Red Sea littoral and drove a wedge between Ethiopia and Mediterranean Europe that had been essential for Aksumite trade. Although moving its center toward the interior meant a radical diminution of foreign trade for Ethiopia, in Japan moving away from the Korea Strait simply meant moving toward other ports (Hakata, Mura, Sakai, Kamakura). Both of these geographic advantages, which brought with them transportation systems for the roads and waterways and skilled merchant seamen, enabled a continuous development of domestic and foreign trade in Japan.

2. **Continuous use of monetary currency**

Monetary currency was widely used in both countries during the classical period. Some five hundred different mintings in gold, silver, and bronze were made in Ethiopia between 3C and 10C. For reasons that have never been fully explained—but surely including the cutting off of Red Sea trade due to Islamic expansion, and protracted internal warfare—the use of monetized coins came to an end with the fall of Aksum and the move to the interior. Early in the 19C Maria Theresa Thalers came into use, but Ethiopians continued to resist the use of coinage until well into the 20C. Not until the 1920s did the peasantry and traditional elites come to accept coins at their face value. For nearly a millennium up to the eve of Ethiopia’s drive to modernize, then, trade beyond barter relied largely on imperfect media like salt bars, cloth, iron bars, and, later, rifle cartridges—a condition that posed an enormous impediment to the development of capitalist enterprise there (Schaefer 1990).

Japanese trade, however, had the advantage of monetized currency throughout its history. By the Tokugawa period monetary currency was used on a national scale. Although the Japanese government was not yet minting coins again in 17C, imported Chinese currency was widely circulated, and unminted gold and silver were used by weight. Cash currency facilitated the expansion of moneylending, credit arrangements, and the one-price system, all of which were highly developed in the Edo period. It promoted the extension of trust throughout the country, a condition that is essential for the capital-intensive development Japan enjoyed and that was so muted in Ethiopia.

3. **Urbanization**

Except for the Gonderine period, Ethiopia’s emperors ruled from mobile capitals for most of her history after the fall of Aksum. Except for Islamic Harar, no cities emerged to serve religious or commercial needs. Trading went on at local markets that were usually held on a weekly basis, although some larger markets were held on a daily basis. Japanese rulers, however, generally resided in urban centers. From an early period, political capitals like Nara, Kyoto, and Kamakura as well as port towns like Hamata and Osaka provided opportunities for lively commercial activity. On the eve of the
Tokugawa Shogunate there occurred an enormous boost in urban development. The three decades after 1580, when the largest daimyos settled down to consolidate their resources and regimes, has been described as a period of urban construction without parallel in world history (Hall 1970, 157). By 1800, there existed a great department store in Edo (modern Tokyo) which employed over a thousand persons, and cities provided an ample supply of formally free labor available for employment in enterprises of many kinds.

4. **Ethnic homogeneity**

   A prime factor affecting the birth of a secure national market in the two countries was the level of ethnic heterogeneity. Although Japan had to contend with provincial parochialisms that impeded trade at times, she had only one sizeable ethnic minority, the Ainu. Consequently, Japan never experienced destructive warfare among groups organized on ethnic and religious lines, and was able to orient nearly the entire population to the symbolism of a Japanese nation with relatively little difficulty. By contrast, Ethiopia’s more severe mountainous terrain favored the separation of habitational enclaves that promoted processes of ethnic and linguistic differentiation. Consequently, the Greater Ethiopia culture area included dozens of diverse ethnic groups, most of whose members probably possessed little or no attachment to the symbolism of the Ethiopian polity. Although trading patterns among them were often of very long standing, the formation of a national market was impeded by traditions of mutual distrust, not to mention the periodic warfare that was so destructive of economic resources.

5. **Centuries of domestic peace**

   Building on the favorable infrastructure of roads, merchant marine, currency, cities, and a nationwide ethnolinguistic community, economic development in Japan expanded enormously during the Ashikaga Period, thanks to a close, mutually supportive association between feudal lords and the merchant class. The destructive domestic warfare that occurred during the century of “Warring States” known as *Sengoku* (1467-1568) came to an end through the actions of the three great reunifiers: Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu. The Tokugawa Shogunate, or Edo period (1600-1868) provided more than two centuries of *Tahei*, the “great peace,” giving Japan an extraordinary opportunity to develop its economic resources.

   Ethiopia had a nearly identical set of geopolitical developments—a period of the princes (the *Zemene Mesafint*, 1755-1855), followed by three great reunifiers: Tewodros II, Yohannes IV, and Menilek II. In Ethiopia, however, these developments took place three centuries later, and were not finished when Ethiopia faced the challenge of economic modernization. The centuries Japan could use to reach a point of takeoff for full-speed economic growth were spent on protracted internal conflicts in Ethiopia.

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7 Indeed, coins minted at Aksum were found as far afield as Egypt, Persia, and India (Schaefer 1990, 24).
6. **Differentiation of political structures**

Japan enjoyed two further structural advantages that favored the stabilization of a national market. One was the separation of the figure of the emperor from the role of the supreme political ruler, a development that was anticipated not long after the Heian period and fully consolidated during the Tokugawa Shogunate. The symbolism of the sacred throne provided some unifying cement in the country even when political differences and competing military ambitions were in play. In Ethiopia, except for the relatively short period of the Zemene Mesafint, emperors were also supreme political rulers, such that disaffection with their policies always posed a threat to the unity of the state.

Japan’s other structural advantage was the development of a somewhat rationalized bureaucratic administration during the Shogunate. The Tokugawa peace turned the caste of military lords into a stratum of civil administrators. The level of centralization achieved by the Shogunate favored the promulgation of numerous legal regulations for them to administer. Ethiopia had to wait until the reign of Haile Selassie for a national bureaucratic administration to emerge.

7. **Legitimation of trade and a commercial class**

The emphasis on virtues such as courage, self-discipline, and loyalty under feudal regimes typically entails the depreciation of commercial activity for being animated by selfishness, greed, and laxity. This was true in both countries during the medieval period. In Ethiopia, trade was left largely to outsiders such as Arabs and Armenians or to members of lower-status ethnic groups. In Japan, however, development of an indigenous merchant class, the *chonin*, was favored by the lack of ethnic differentiation and by the emergence of ideas and attitudes that valorized commerce. Thus, the popular Buddhist sect Jodo Shinshu developed a number of formulations that made the work of merchants righteous by defining their business as “Bodhisattva deeds,” and the widely influential teachings of Ishida Baigan decried those who spread hateful sayings about merchants and insisted that the work of merchants was comparable to that of the *samurai* (Bellah 1957, 120, 158).

8. **Valorization of craft ethic**

Substantial economic modernization, we have known since Max Weber, has involved some sort of cultural support for disciplined manual labor. This entails clothing mundane work with ethical significance such that it can be viewed as an admirable calling. Absent that, manual work will be viewed as drudgery if not demeaning. In traditional Ethiopia, the notion of calling was attached to four roles only: rulers, warriors, clergy, and peasants. If the activity of merchants was morally disfavored, that of artisans was often despised. It was relegated to pariah groups that were treated as outcastes. The work of tanners, potters, smiths, and weavers—however essential their products—was typically looked down on and frequently despised; this was especially often the case for leather workers (Levine 1974).

Although the Japanese too have denigrated certain kinds of labor, most notably in tenacious attitudes toward the outcast *burakumin* who work as butchers and tanners, they nevertheless underwent
a major change over the past several centuries whereby the work of artisans came to be endowed with the same religious valorization as has the labor of those who followed the Protestant ethic in Western Europe. Bellah (1957) describes a number of religious movements that sanctified hard work, frugality, and mundane production—ethical values that may have been directly initially to peasants but that accompanied them as they streamed into the cities to become artisans throughout the Tokugawa centuries. In a widely recognized formulation of Ishida Baigan, not just the *samurai* are retainers, but the farmers are “retainers” of the countryside while artisans and merchants are “retainers “ of the city streets. Besides Shingaku, the popular ethical movement that Baigan founded, other traditions drawing on Buddhist and Confucian ideas, such as Jodo Shinshu and Hotoku, stressed diligence in production and economy in expenditure. Instead of opposing the status honor of war lords to morally suspect activities of merchants and artisans, they drew on the palette of *samurai* values to depict mundane daily labor in a radiant light.

9. **Collectivism versus individualism**

Bellah likened Japanese religious ideas that turned mundane labor into a sacred obligation to the Protestant idea of this-worldly calling depicted by Weber. In addition, however, he emphasized a different kind of value, one that was not prominent in the Protestant tradition. This is the value of selfless devotion to the collectivity and its goals. Bellah finds this value embodied in the Japanese disposition to promote loyalty to various corporate groups: to the family, to the fiefdom, and to the nation. The transference of the imagery and sentiments of family loyalty to the nation informed the notion of *kokutai*, “national body,” a concept of the state in which religious, political, and familistic ideas were indissolubly merged (Bellah 1957, 98-106).

In Greater Ethiopia I designated this value orientation as “collectivism,” in pointed contrast with the pattern found in Abyssinian, or Amhara-Tigrean, society, which I glossed as “individualism.” If traditional Abyssinia and Japan share the values of particularism, performance, and hierarchicalism, they diverge markedly on this pattern variable. Attitudes toward litigation and toward outlaws illustrate that difference conspicuously. Ethiopians tend to maximize the opportunity for self-assertion through litigious disputes; the Japanese go out of their way to avoid confrontation and open conflict. Ethiopians admired the *shifta*, the lone individual who rebels from his lord and takes to the bush; such a career might lead ultimately to the throne, as it did for Tewodros II. By contrast the *ronin*, unattached samurai who wandered about without a political home, were scarcely culture heroes in Japan. Under Tokugawa law, the smallest unit of society was the family (*ie*)—the individual as such did not exist—and it was matter of honor to keep one’s family name unblemished. In Abyssinia, there were no family names. Rules of ambilineal descent gave individuals rights through both parental lines, man and women alike were expected to promote their own interests, prudently but aggressively.
The Meiji Restoration, and the miracle of Japan’s economic modernization more generally, owed much to the confluence of a solidaristic ethic, one that enjoins selfless work on behalf of collectivities, with an ethic of disciplined labor in this world, and to government actions that fostered economic growth by moral exhortation as well as through technical information and entrepreneurial incentives. Economic modernization in Japan, Bellah persuasively argues, stemmed not so much from the industrious strivings of individual entrepreneurs as from the corporate strivings of families, companies, and patriots. In Western Europe and the United States, an ambitious individualism could drive the engine of economic development because it was so thoroughly harnessed to an ethic of universalistic achievement criteria. In Ethiopia, however, hierarchical individualism was tied to particularistic values and to a martial ethic that extolled hardiness and courage more than self-discipline and frugality. Ethiopian religionists and moralists never made the leap from their notion of the Warrior’s Way to an ethic that praised diligence in all forms of homely everyday labor. Abyssinian individualism was tied to strivings to please a superior patron, and the highest worldly honors accrued to those who literally fought their way to the top.

Even today, the modal Ethiopian disposition is probably to promote oneself politically by finding a suitable patron, in a way that looks down on activities like commerce and craft or industrial labor, and with little sense of corporate loyalty of any sort. The current Prime Minister has, like a number of his predecessors, literally shot his way into power, and has publicly boasted of the significance of his guerrilla days in the bush as the schooling of choice for his political career and vocation. At the same time that well-to-do Japanese citizens appear to be chafing under the conformist pressures of a national culture that subordinates individual expression to the demands of hierarchy, performance, and group solidarity, Ethiopians are experiencing frustration over their inability to subordinate individualistic ambitions to the welfare of larger communities, and by a slow pace of economic growth that seems due to a paucity of motivation for rigorous entrepreneurial commitment and regular industrial work. How hauntingly similar, those two civilizations, and yet—how striking the contrast between those two different worlds.

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9I contrasted this pattern with that of the other most extensive population in historic Ethiopia, the Oromo, who tend to exhibit a pattern of egalitarian collectivism.

In an interview in a Tigrinya-language Eritrean quarterly, the Prime Minister expressed his conviction that “To me quality of life means to be part of an armed struggle . . . I don’t think that there is a better life than the life of a combatant. If I were not a combatant I don’t think I would have been a happy person.” (Hwyet 11, May 1997)
REFERENCES
ETHIOPIA AND JAPAN IN COMPARATIVE CIVILIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE
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Abstract

Although Ethiopia and Japan appear disparate, depth-historical analysis reveals striking similarities across four epochs. An epoch of genesis and classical synthesis, ca 600 BCE to mid-7C CE, displays migrations across narrow waterways, prehistoric centers, burial megaliths, worship of nature/heavenly bodies, leading to strong kingdoms (4C CE), conversions to world religions, episodes of return colonization, then (6-7C) spread of those religions and related architecture. Epoch II, mid-7C through 15C, opens with civil warfare, abandonment of classic capitals; by 12C, new centers arise inland (Zagwe, Kamakura), leading to geopolitical expansion, burgeoning national sentiment, and (in 14-15C) efflorescence of religious/aesthetic culture.

Epoch III displays external warfare, then Portuguese Jesuits in mid-16C. Expulsion of Catholics (early 17C) precipitates isolation for two centuries—time for political realignments, magnificent castle towns, new decentralizations. Finally, 19C European incursions disrupt isolation and force modernization. Pressures from Egypt, Sudan, Europe incite nation-building in Ethiopia; Anglo-American ships unleash modernization in Japan. Ancient myths of sacred emperors revive to advance modern nation-building, including victories against Italy and Russia ca 1900. Constitutions of 1889 (Meiji) and 1931 (Haile Selassie) pronounce emperor “sacred and inviolable.”

Comparable formal features of the two civilizations include (1) receptive insularity, (2) idealized alien culture, (3) sacralizing homeland, (4) cultural parochialization, (5) religious pluralism; (6) political decentralization, (7) warrior ethos, and (8) value patterns of hierarchical particularism.

Differences highlighted against this ground of commonalities may explain the two countries’ radically divergent modernizing experiences. Salient factors include (1) geographic conditions favoring trade, (2) use of monetary currency, (3) urbanization, (4) ethnic homogeneity, (5) centuries of domestic peace, (6) differentiation of political structures, (7) legitimation of trade and a commercial class, (8) valorization of craft ethic, and (9) collectivism/individualism pattern variable.
ETHIOPIA AND JAPAN IN
COMPARATIVE CIVILIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Major Strategies of Comparative Analysis

A. Induction of Types (parts 1 and 2)

B. Empirical generalization (part 3)

C. Method of Difference: where a cause is specified by identifying the one respect in which a case where y occurs differs from an otherwise exactly similar case where y does not occur (part 4; Weber on religion and Capitalism)

D. Method of Agreement: pick out as cause the one common feature in a number of otherwise different cases where the y occurs

E. Theme and Variations (Benedict on patterns of culture; Weber on forms and directions of rationalization/routes to salvation)

F. Baseline and variations (Benedict on China, Japan re monarchy)