

From fever to flu: the rhetoric of reporting Asia in a Swedish business magazine

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Abstract

In this paper some aspects of the stereotyping of China and Japan is explored by using a sample of articles from a Swedish business magazine. The main objective is to show how stereotypes are adapted to capture new developments in economy and technology. During the years of high hopes for the largest Asian economies, stereotypes proved to be far from time-less and unchanging. Also a large number of metaphors were used to express perceived similarities between east and west, further undermining a traditional western understanding of Asia as inert and eternally different. The recent decline of Japan put an end to this, creating a return to a vocabulary of cultural characterizations and explanations.

Keywords: stereotypes, metaphors, business media, economic and technological change, China and Japan.

The economic journalism to be discussed in this article follows what the historian Benedict Anderson has called a special "grammar of representation" based on seriality (Anderson 1998:34). Starting with the U.S. national population count of 1790, the world has been carved into nations that can be placed on a number of statistical scales to facilitate comparisons. These bring out both differences and similarities with an attractive aura of comprehensiveness and solidity. Quantity takes on a qualitative character. Another rhetorical device to be studied is the way the idea of culture figures in financial reporting. It faces three ways:

- serving as the raw-material of stereotypes
- standing in for hinted or unknown knowledge
- mobilizing flexibility and grounding for action

Our material in this article is three years of reporting Asia, 1996-98, in Swedish business magazine *Veckans Affärer* (in English: 'Business Weekly'). We will concentrate on China and Japan as these countries got most of the coverage during the period. They also figure as contrasts, not only economically and culturally, but also in terms of the rhetorical devices used in narrating the stories.

The attention the magazine awards to Asia is somewhat distracted, as its main focus really is the Swedish market. Asia intrudes on the reality of the local readers both as promise and threat with dramatic changes during the years. Old stereotypes are modified or discarded and new ones are sometimes invented. As already stated the idea of culture, as it turns up in different contexts, indeed proved to be ambivalent. If Asia seems to be far away most of the time, it is also notable that a lot of space is devoted to the Swedish telecom company Ericsson, which presently is the largest of the foreign actors on the Chinese mobile phone market. No longer passive bystanders in a small and peripheral country, the readers here are

invited to identify with a story of success with Swedes that know how to pull the strings in China. Reporting Asia obviously has some flattering aspects for Swedish readers. But most of the material just parades well-known stereotypes. This is especially true for a Japan hard-hit by recession.

During the years covered, the favorite metaphor of media commentators switched from China-fever caused by glowing prospects to Asian flu as the market dwindled. Finally the attribute "flu" was dropped, as the name of the continent itself became congruent with crisis, no particular attribute was needed to bring the message home. In fast changing times like this even a short historical perspective give valuable distance. At the end of the article we offer some speculations about the future of stereotyping Asia in the case of an economic recovery.

Some remarks has to be done with reference to the period studied. *Veckans Affärer* reports on economic development in different parts of the world. During the recent years Japan has come to be described more and more as a country loosing economic power, while China is seen as the big promise for the future. An idea launched in the articles is that Asia soon will become the center for the world economy. These circumstances give a certain perspective to the articles. There is an established way of analyzing the relation between Japan and China that creates stereotypes as well as becomes the matrix on which descriptions are modeled. It should be emphasized that the discourse to be analyzed is distinctively subcultural as it only concerns the business community. More positive images of Japan and Japanese culture are produced in other contexts, for example gardening, film making or martial arts. But these images are beyond the scope of this article.

A Swedish journalist placed in Hong Kong has written a large number of the articles about Asia during the period studied. His position as a journalist for a major business newspaper frames the way stories are told (or not told). Almost nothing personal about his whereabouts in Hong Kong, China or other places is suggested. The profile of the magazine is not personalized journalism. The policy of the newspaper is to write about companies and markets and to some extent about politics and culture, from the angle of how it affects business. Historical change and processes are emphasized and underpinned by circumstances presented as 'facts' - economical, political, and organizational - that 'causes' change. More about this non-personal and hard-line empiricism will be discussed as follows.

The journalistic coverage of Asia contains a mixture of genres, from global overviews of great abstraction to in-detail information of particular business deals. A somewhat special category is stories about people in the region placed in situations that give light to different problems or opportunities. These stories are told, so it seems, for pedagogical reasons. They can function as handbook of knowledge, something to learn from, when doing business in Japan and China.

Stereotypes and metaphors

As ethnologists we have an interest in cultural stereotyping, the way simplified images of a cultural 'Other' are created and handled in different contexts. A short characterization of the concept stereotype will be given (Oakes 1994). For reasons of space we will stick to the classic definition given by Walter Lippman in the twenties and for the moment disregard later formulations of this tricky concept.

Generally stereotypes are considered to consist of individual traits projected on groups. The traits are distinctive, that is what is perceived as most different tends to dominate the image created. Stereotypes are often negative, but sometimes the distortion works the other way around. The 'Other' is idealized. Stereotypes are usually viewed as unchanging. Sometimes they are. Actually they may change when the circumstances demand. The interesting point is that people seldom notice. Stereotyping involves selective forgetting of the moments of change - and often it is exactly for this reason they are perceived as unchanging. Stereotypes are taken for granted generalizations. Their authority is based on wide and repeated use. They come to mind easy and unreflective. No need for explanation exists. Epistemologically stereotypes work in a circular and non-empirical way. Their character of self-fulfilling prophecies is often noted. While not being based on experience they (tragically) tend to become true because they rule peoples behavior. As an overview of some aspects of the concept stereotype this will do as a background to the more specific purpose of our discussion of the Swedish business magazine material.

Changing images of China and Japan

In the many critical works published in recent years on east-west relations one of the most basic observations is that the west created the east as a negative mirror image (Moore-Gilbert 1997). The newly discovered civilizations of China and Japan were used as contrasts in order to bolster the self-image of the west from the early modern period and on. If Europe was modern, the east had to be pre-modern. If Europe was dynamic and changing, the east was given the opposite characterization. Much racist and colonialist imagery was developed in this crude way (although instances of idealizations also may be traced like the 'timeless wisdom' of China or 'delicate estheticism' of Japan (Littlewood 1996, Barthes 1982).

These were obvious cases of stereotyping close to being ideal types: circular, negative and distinctive. In aggressive power-games like the Opium war, self-fulfilling prophecies were also created by the West, China was forced into submission, that is the submissiveness of Chinese was 'proved' through brute action.

Later developments, the modernization of Japan and the Chinese revolution changed eastern imagery of the East. In the eighties Japan took the center of the stage, shaking up age-old conceptions of the East by posing as more modern than the west. At that time China, of course, still figured prominently as a typical oriental despotism. 1996, the year beginning our study of the business material, positions in the east were shook up once more. Japan's economic glory was in vane, as China moved forward in a geopolitical game that seemed extremely consequential to Western observers. 'The Pacific Era' was one of many catch phrases coined, however distant this may sound at the time of writing when the crisis of Japan is getting deeper day by day.

Geographical metaphors

The examples of language use in *Veckans Affärer* that will be analyzed first concerns geographical metaphors, as similarity is stressed at the expense of difference. One of the many meanings of the concept of metaphor is describing the less known with the help of what is familiar (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Meanings get exported in a process that makes, in this case, different places, economic environments or particular companies similar in a profound way.

An example that often figures in the articles is this. The U.S. used to be the number one economy of the world. In a short time China may take its place. This proposition is an example of the exchangeability to be discussed. The non-exchangeable aspect consists of propositions about the culture of U.S. or China, a lot more difficult to describe and comprehend. We will pay close attention to statements of this kind later on. As the magazine is aimed at the business community the interest in culture proved to be slightly ambivalent. Cultural understanding is no end in itself when it comes to a business magazine.

The parallel established between different objects is often placed in the context of a time scale. One place is becoming what another geographical object used to be. Size is measured the same way. It is by growing and diminishing in size or movements in time that similarity can be established in order to stimulate fantasy. Geographical objects are not directly interchangeable as the focus of interest is on possible developments. Simple equivalencies are disregarded for obvious reasons. A prime is put on change and possible developments, the metaphors are all dynamic and temporally aimed at clarifying the future. The following examples are all crude and reductive, but at the same time have a creative dynamic by putting a well-known world on its head. They may prove dead wrong, but this language works on the imagination in a way that opens the mind. Curiosity is stimulated and a vigilant attention towards change is bolstered. In these contexts culture is extremely downplayed as a brake on creative fantasy.

Some of the examples have a headline character of briefness. More developed and complicated metaphors also figure. Shanghai to day is on the way of becoming number one marketplace of Asia, that is the world. This is a possible future development, the magazine states. At the same time this works metaphorically as Shanghai not becoming different, but rather more of itself, as the city regains a

position it held until the twenties. Using a rubber time-scale, the Mao-years are described as more distant than the twenties. Mao belongs to timeless dynastic China, while the twenties acquire a quality of the present.

To ignorant Swedish readers Shanghai is made knowable through a rhetorical strategy using a collage of economic, geographic and infrastructural facts. These raw data are brought together by the metaphorical suggestion that the city will be like Hong Kong, a more familiar place to the readers. More speculatively is added that Shanghai in the end will turn out as the Tokyo of Asia, also a place known to the readers. However, one more thing is needed to give life to this vision of Shanghai growing and changing. Here culture finally shows up through evasive hinting of the very special mentality of the Shanghai business community. But this concept is never defined. As the reader gets to know all-important similarities between the city and a number of geographical entities, its real difference is not described, only suggested. Culture here clearly works as a catalytic component - always there, always important, but never to be defined. Culture becomes pure 'otherness'.

Hong Kong garment retailer Jimmy Lai has problems opening new stores in mainland China because of promoting political dissident issues. This is a strictly Chinese story, but Jimmy Lai comes alive to the Swedish readers as the H&M of China. The enormous goodwill of the garment retailer H&M in Sweden gets projected on Jimmy Lai and readers will probably get to identify with him. His great courage in risking his business for political reasons get transported the other way too, as the similarity is established. This is however not very accurate, as H&M has never taken a stand to defend freedom anywhere. This metaphor is clearly a case of the so-called cathacresis, its meaning absurd. As the magazine sometimes succeeds in its use of metaphor, some meanings get muddled.

Examples of understanding mediated metaphorically through similarity figure regularly. The present situation in China is made vivid through the proposition that it is in the same situation as the U.S. a hundred years ago. Meaning gets transported through time, suggesting two large countries on the threshold of industrialization and world dominance. The statement has this obvious meaning, but innumerable meanings of other kinds also are made to work on the mind as you ponder this metaphor. It is not to be seen as an isolated idea, but as one that rapidly tends to get mixed up with other metaphors also suggesting east-west parallels. A popular criticism of the American labor market is that it is getting too much tied up with credentials, losing creative talent. This is described as 'Confucianism', highlighting a parallel to the age-old examination system of dynastic China (Morley and Robins 1995). As China moves on to take the place of the U.S., the latter tends to look like the former in the past.

Metaphors not only describe, but also provide models for action. The main point of one article is that Sweden should give the same economic leadership to the Baltic countries as Japan offered its Asian neighbors. The metaphor is projective, Sweden is presently no Japan and the Baltic Sea no Pacific Ocean. But this is the desired future - making the tiny Estonian republic another Taiwan or South Korea. Criticism is brought home the same way as the Swedish minister of industry, Anders Sundström is likened to North Korean head of state Kim Jong Il. Not many words are needed, but a lot of meaning gets transported thorough space this way - both ways. With a minister of Industry like Sundström Sweden moves away from its desired affinity to Japan and turns out to be the North Korea of the Baltic. What does this movement make of Latvia, the reader may wonder? Other examples of this kind of language use is Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson on the cover of *Veckans Affärer*, cast as 'The Little Helmsman', a diminutive variation of one of the honorary titles used by Mao during the Cultural Revolution. Four Swedish bankers are presented on the cover of the magazine as 'The Gang of Four' - also hinting on less flattering parallels to Maoist China. More cryptic is the campaign of the Swedish Center Party analyzed in an article. With perhaps postmodern irony it describes itself as the 'Middle Kingdom', words that are prominently displayed on the party's posters. China is huge, and this is really a minor party even in Sweden. It is in fact placed in the middle - between left and right. Also both China and this party has a lot do with peasants. Still this is a cathacresis, making absurd analogies. But the point is that China being well known as a country proves to be a source of metaphors - examples, personalities and expressions that make meaning quite effectively in faraway Sweden.

As the economic crisis in Japan remains unsolved and even deepens the magazine tries to untangle the situation to its readers. The country is supposed to consist of two sides, the export industry and the government bureaucracy. The former is admired as well adapted to the competitive conditions of the

world market. Metaphorically it represents good business everywhere. The bureaucracy causes all problems as anyone would suspect. Bureaucracy also takes on the same interchangeable quality, being just like red-tape fixated government organizations everywhere. Explicitly the Japanese are put in the same situation as England during the early Thatcher-years. Deregulation should be effected the same way. In order to be like England today Japan should take the strong measures of England in the 80ies. As possible basic cultural differences are downplayed meaning is constructed through similarities.

During the most hectic 'China-fever' (as it is called) the very basis of the continents was doubted. As the world entered its Pacific Era, other continents were evaluated by measuring the way they were closing in or sagging away from Asia. The U.S. is described as practically placed in Asia, just as the distance getting greater measured the backwardness of Europeans.

In this context culture is heavily counterbalanced by the need to measure results of different economic units, companies, regions or nations. This makes for a very cautious attitude towards culture. The readers of *Veckans Affärer* are living in a small country on the other side of the globe. Everything written about Asia has to be carefully selected not to put too much strain on the relative ignorance of the readers. They are to be informed, but everything must be greatly simplified often using this strategy of metaphorical compression.

Culture making a difference

The metaphors clearly make Asia come closer to its Swedish readers. But difference also has to be created in order to facilitate understanding. Many stereotypes show up. The stories told pick out distinctiveness. They may be true. But more interesting is really the way they rely on confirmation through ideas already well known to the readers. Japan offers the best examples, as interest in Chinese cultural difference is decidedly lower. As shown below, in this context, China really is a country of numbers, not qualitative stuff of any kind.

The first example concerns Japanese consumer behavior, which predictably turns out to be like the Swedish - only in reverse. The journalist tries to give the Japanese point of view on the basic problem of western tradesmen - why is it so difficult to make the Japanese buy foreign products? The answer is all about culture. The connection between price and quality is said to be 'stronger' in Japan. If the price is too low the customer gets suspicious and wonders what is wrong. It is implied that the ones without demands for quality are the westerners. Consumers in the west have a taste for insipidity and vulgarity. This is said to be one of the reasons why capitalism was successful right from the start. The idea of Japanese as highly cultivated and sophisticated, and therefor hesitant towards undemanding consumerism, can be traced back in history. The Japanese sense of aesthetic is sometimes even drawn to the limit of the inhuman, with a flavor of cruelty, as described by Ian Littlewood (1996).

The Japanese demand for order and style has other implications for westerners that are going to deal with them. It is suggested that differences in moral can be manifested in a somewhat surprising behavior. In Japan it is not enough to promise a certain week of delivery. It has to be on a specific day. A story is told about a deliverance from the Swedish ball bearing company SKF. The shipment was returned from Japan unopened, as the Japanese customer did not think the package even was worth being unwrapped: the boxes had been piled in a way so that the text on some of the boxes was turned the opposite direction from the rest. The Japanese reaction is derived from an idea about the relationship between Japanese aesthetic and business moral: if the Swedes can not wrap the goods right it must be of bad quality. Obviously many things happen as Swedish companies deal with Japanese counterparts. Of interest here is not truth-value, but matters of selection when it comes to narrating this reality. The stories do not deliver anything really new, but works through latent stereotypes already in circulation. When in Japan, watch out for difference, that is the message. But this substance of otherness can only be suggested through manipulating images of previous knowledge. This may be a judgement too harsh, actually some new pieces of information get through using this medium of traditional stereotypes. As shown next, there are also some changes to be documented. Culture is not only presented as a given background.

Studying culture as economic strategy

This Japanese attitude to quality being represented by expensiveness is called a 'traditional reputation'. On the other hand Japanese consumers are said to be abandoning more and more of this traditional distrust of foreign goods. Just a few years ago it was common in Japan to say that 'a Japanese stomach can only take Japanese food', or that 'the Japanese snow is so special that foreign ski does not work very well'. In a survey made in 1997 the Swedish car Volvo was ranked almost as high as Toyota in Japan. This was seen as astounding and a good promise for the future. Even if the car was not selling much, this change in attitude was enough to make market analysts use the word 'sensational'. The explanation is focused on de-regularization and a new attitude of the Japanese. In 1994 it became legal to own ones telephone. A new kind of individualism is blooming together with rapid changes. Volvo is considered to be a car for young people in Japan.

This is, however, not saying that Japanese are starting to rely upon western culture. Merely that they are loosing some of their 'traditional' preferences of quality and becoming more like western consumers who have both money and a positive outlook on life and want to create new images of themselves. If positions in terms of quantities and economic might be highly interchangeable, culture is less so. Cultural change seems to take on a larger import as it moves out of the background and is brought into explanations of the way markets work (Applbaum 1998).

There is another dimension to this example, telling something of how the relations between the east and the west are changing. In the 1980s western researchers and management gurus launched the idea of Japanese car production in the west under the name of 'lean production'. The Japanese had come up with a concept for car production that made it possible to produce enormous amounts of cars while keeping quality on a high level. How was it done? The authors of 'The machine that changed the world - The story of lean production' (Womack, Jones & Roos 1990) mean that the secret behind the success was the unique Japanese business culture. While the westerners were stuck with Henry Ford and Alfred Sloan's 1920s idea of mass production, where the workers were seen as replaceable as the machines, the Japanese built their production on the workers lifelong commitments to the company. This was Japan's 'secret weapon in the global auto wars', which the western industry now had to take into consideration. Not only if they wanted to survive. They could make it a weapon and revolutionize western industry and thereby regain some of the market shares.

In the light of this Volvo's success in Japan is fed with another dimension. Volvo is not just the major car brand name in Sweden; it is also challenging its Japanese competitors and can, in the long run, break its way into the heart of the Japanese lean production by culturally attracting a new generation of west oriented Japanese consumers. Here quantifiable knowledge gets shoved into the background. In this case culture figures not as unchanging background, but as the heart of business itself, both companies and consumers are constructed out of this substance. Culture also takes on a distinct quality of unpredictable dynamism. There is less of timeless stereotypical content, but of course, these may just be the stereotypes of the future.

Risks and opportunities

Economic prognoses are offered by *Veckans Affärer*, being one of the main concerns of a business magazine these are given lots of space. The widely circulated prophecy of China soon to take the place of U.S. as most powerful economic actor in the world is often repeated. That things will go wrong with terrible consequences is the contrary suggestion. As dominating actor on the world market China would buy all surplus food, causing starvation in many countries (Martin and Schumann 1997). What happens if China as a developed country makes the same ecological demands as the U.S.? The green house-effect of millions of combusting Chinese cars would flood the world's coastlines, including China itself. The west writes Chinese history of the future based on an evolutionary understanding of its own history, suggesting that it will pass the same stages of technology and mentality that we once did. In this vision Chinese turns out to be as ignorant as we were ourselves a hundred years ago. Some stereotypes of colonial origin disappear, but new ones are formed picturing the west, not as stronger, but as older, more experienced in handling societal change and with a given role as truth-teller. When some older stereotypes go away, new ones are created.

Being placed in the middle of competitive action, businessmen have little time to think about what may be good compressed information and poor-quality stereotypes. They have no obvious differences, both being short and distinctive. Things get even more complicated as institutionalized stereotypes tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies.

At the same time as the magazine circulates old stereotypes and creates new ones it tries to police the epistemological borders by suggesting its readers to be careful. It tells readers to keep a check on stereotypes as distorted information that may prove to be lethal in underestimating competitors. The strong side of this argument is that western business has been defeated before, one of the main reasons said to be prejudice. That high quality products from the east could flood the west was seen as impossible. Because of this cultural idea the competition on economic and technological level was lost. Interestingly, in this case the basis of business is given in cultural terms, not the quantifiable stuff that dominates the magazine.

The ongoing crisis of the Japanese economy made this country a lot less competitive than in previous years. Writing about Japan the journalists seem to sigh with relief. Culture tends to grow in importance as the Japanese get into difficulties. There is a legitimate search for cultural information to explain the crisis, but also, less legitimately, old stereotypes are given free reign to an extent not seen in the case of China. The images of China and Japan are not only different; our conclusion is that they are made of different stuff. In still showing rapid growth china-images are substantiated with the help of quantification, while a stagnating Japan becomes more 'cultural'.

Ericsson in China

China enjoys a special place in the imagination of this magazine, not only because of general growth and prospects for business, but by the role of a Swedish company, Ericsson, as the largest foreign telecom operator in that country. Ericsson is used to ascribe to, or exemplify, the globalization of economy from a Swedish perspective. Ericsson does a lot of business in China selling mobile phones and technology to support it. It is a large transnational company with interests in many parts of the world and China has been one of Ericsson's fastest growing markets during the last years.

Furthermore Ericsson seems to have an interest in associating itself with China. In advertisement it presents itself as an old company in China, doing business there since the end of the 19th century. Lately this colonization has both extended and enlarged. A bond of identification between the Swedish business community and China is tied. Sweden is in itself a marginal player in the world economy. Through fantasies of Ericsson's greatness Sweden acquires importance, might and dignity.

Ericsson started doing business in China 1892. China's history is interpreted from this point of view. Before Ericsson made contact dynasties did not change. The Ericsson people met 'the eternal China'. Changes started about the same time as Ericsson made their first business agreements with the Chinese. They have been there ever since China moved from 'eternity' to 'history'. Ericsson knows 'the whole' of China's history, which gives the company knowledge competence to understand this history and, as a result of that advantages when negotiating and making deals.

But Ericsson's success in China is not only a result of their extensive presence in the country. It is also described as a result of a conscious study of what is different in China from the western way of producing and selling products. This is dramatized in stories about how Ericsson people learned China 'the hard way'. One example is when one of Ericsson's managers came to China and got a telling-off by a Chinese manager for speaking with the wrong person in the hierarchy. China is understood as ruled by clan behavior, which gets its contrast when compared to western flexibility and more informal way of making social contacts. Cultural differences are attenuated but followed by a recipe for how to cope with them. Long acquaintances with the foreigners is a good starting-point for strategic understanding and can function as a contingency plan alerting the need to be observant and willing to learn the other's culture and customs.

The magazine projects the future and a lot of its China-coverage really consists of speculations in quantitative terms. This means that China takes on a special quality of futurity and pure numbers. This is very far from the conventional stereotyping of China as timeless, mysterious and unmoving. In the context of Ericsson and mobile telephones we see an entirely different imagery. No one would

characterize Denmark and Burma this way, making figures the main story. When appearing in the magazine, some countries seem to have more of qualitative essence. Having the largest population in the world, China seems to be the unique case of a country that has its qualities substituted by quantities. Being reduced to pure numbers the least graspable nation of the world somehow gets real handy. It is made of the same cognitive stuff as business itself, numbers. Some of the tables showing the staples of raising investment and consumer demand published by *Veckans Affärer* have an interesting decoration, being crowned by a traditional Chinese roof.

Discussion

In perhaps the most influential work on east-west relations, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, western conceptions of the east are depicted as crudely self-serving and also extremely rigid (Said 1995). Little change is observed in the material his research is based on, cultural science and literature for literally hundreds of years. Reading the Swedish business magazine *Veckans Affärer* shows us stereotypes of a somewhat new kind compared to the 'old' ones. The articles also show an awareness of the traps posed by common stereotypes. They should be kept in check, not for any abstract humanistic reasons, but because they provide distorting information. One can only speculate on why this awareness seems to grow. In this section some possible reasons and future scenarios will be presented and discussed.

A possibly deepening crisis in Asia might reduce this incentive to openness and revitalize old patterns of stereotyping. Asia will become more 'cultural' in western eyes, which means more talk about eastern irrationalism and mysticism. The kind of geographical equivalencies analyzed above will discreetly disappear. The continents will move apart, North America and Europe once more sliding away from an Asia disappearing in the haze of oriental mysticism. This of course is deplorable. However the 80ies and early 90ies should not be idealized as the economic threat posed by the east gave rise to a thoroughly warlike imagery in the west. Today the ruling metaphors become pathological. The business magazines comment the Asian crisis in terms of a highly contagious disease threatening the healthy western economies. If, on the one hand business for sound reasons is scary of stereotypes as they provide poor information, on the other hand economy and high technology can actually be said to create a new register of crude and violent misconceptions all on their own. Computer magazine *Wired* suggests that not only Chinese political authorities hamper the future development of the Internet in China (*Wired*, June 1997). Beyond these facts lies the fear that China is so big that by relying on sheer numbers, its huge population, it may possibly be capable of developing and sustain systems not compatible with the west. Rumors about the same thing happening in the field of mobile phones have also been reported by *Veckans Affärer*: the Chinese are experimenting with a new and more updated infrastructure for telecommunication than the GSM. This would pose a very serious threat to the Ericsson company, who's success story in Asia figures so prominently in the Swedish business imagination.

At the turn of the century the German emperor Wilhelm's catchword 'yellow peril' spread. Asia posed an imaginary threat expressed strictly in racial terms. Japan's postwar economic success led to metaphors mixing racism and economic might. Today the threat is cast in terms of disease and economic weakness - bad money will wreck havoc on the western markets and possibly bring them down in a worldwide depression. This is the currently dominating motive. However, as shown here, there is also a latent imagery just under the surface that formulates possible consequences of renewed prosperity in Asia. This is a theme expressing fears of Asian self-reliance. If communism fades away altogether in China, nationalism and outright disregard of the west may logically take its place. This vision becomes most threatening to the west because it is molded out of what is considered as the most substantial material of the future: high technology. In this case one can foresee a future stereotyping of Asia using very old ideas indeed. On the threshold of the Opium war the British viewed the Chinese as arrogant, this seems to have been a key conception as western consumer goods were not in demand because of low quality and attraction. Japanese consumers have, of course, been depicted this way too - perhaps for good reasons. A future high technological development in an autonomous direction would probably get stereotypically coded this way, emphasizing Asians as arrogant. Soft mysticism would be replaced by hard otherness. Stereotyping will not go away, but many interesting changes are possible. As high technology gets more and more synonymous with the future, so will stereotyping probably take place in this medium, using digital, rather than racial metaphors.

To summarize, business and technology is a field with a very complex relation to stereotyping. Three tendencies have been observed: competition on the market creates demand for undistorted information. The magazine repeatedly reminds the readers to be aware of prejudice; competition generates hopes and fears of future developments. Both tend to generate stereotypes to raise the morale and give expression to aggressions or envy; as images of the future gets more involved in the prospects of high technology, so will stereotyping in general increasingly forge its imagery in such terms. Race and odd customs would at the same time tend to get redundant in future conceptions of the basic subject of stereotyping, 'otherness'.

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