THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL rise of the non-Western world in the second half of the 20th century brought to the fore the issue of de-Westernization, raising the idea that culture, history and civilization are probably the most important factors for determining the type of market, political system and regime that a given state will adopt. Several countries in Asia — a region that, as a whole, embarked on the path of modernization later than the West — have found their own way, different from the Western one in practical implementation but within parameters accepted in democratic and market theory. By modernizing and at the same time preserving their culture and civilization, they have enriched the process of global development.

Today, there are more and more scholars, both in Western and non-Western countries, as well as in my home country, Russia, who are casting doubt on theories of Western political modernization (or Westernization) and “democratic transition” based on a vision of the world from the 1980s-90s. These scholars do not believe that Western-style democracies are necessarily ideal, and instead see the global political process as based on varied regional and national characteristics. They do not negate the idea of democracy,
or democratic theories and concepts; neither do they deny the prevalence of global democratic trends over autocratic ones. They do, however, argue for expanding the methodological base and the nomenclature of approaches, in particular, by using the methodology of regional and spatial analysis for a less biased, de-Westernized explanation of the global political process.

The roots of this concept are in the idea of political “tutelage” envisaged by the Chinese revolutionary nationalist Sun Yat-sen, attempted unsuccessfully by Chiang Kai-shek in mainland China and later with greater success in Taiwan by him and his son, Chiang Ching-kuo — such that it indeed resulted in the creation of a Chinese democratic regime. A debate in the United States over these issues after the Communist government seized power in 1949 (“Who lost China?” or “Why was China lost?”) found that free competitive elections under certain circumstances can produce more harm than good. The idea that democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others does not deny structural/cultural hegemony or, occasionally, the selfish attempts of the stronger to prosper at the expense of weak political regimes or unstable democracies (Easterly 2006). Democracies first need to be stabilized politically in order to defend their economic interests. The slogans “do like us” and “be like us” do not necessarily result in prosperity and democracy (Nolan 1975).

THE PROBLEM OF POWER
It is clear that some non-Western countries have problems deconstructing a dominant party system; it took Japan, for example, more than 60 years to do this, and even now the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) remains relatively dominant. Because of the fear of economic consequences in a modern world based on structural differences and unfair competition, the leaders of some of these countries have psychological problems stepping down from office, perhaps because power is seductive or because they feel that their societies are still not ready for greater democracy and freedom and might become unstable and unable to compete.

Having pointed out the existence of these problems in non-Western countries, Lucian Pye, among others, formulated rules for defining the “non-Western” political process (Pye 1956, 1985), while Fareed Zakaria (1997) later put forward the idea of illiberal democracy. In liberal democracies, all the democratic conditions are met. By contrast, non-liberal democracies have free and fair elections — hence they can be called democracies — yet their measure of constitutional liberalism is highly limited or absent altogether and they do not provide open socio-political access. At the very least, their rules for maintaining this system are openly contested by full democracies as well as segments of their own population. The least liberal of the non-liberal democracies — the ones that verge on authoritarian rule — are participatory democracies (also called limited plebiscitary democracies) that have clear curbs on the system of socio-political access. Such regimes combine authoritarian party rule with the expansion of national participation in the political process at a grassroots level, which is then managed by legal means. At the same time, the authoritarian ruling party in these regimes generally avoids introducing general suffrage, or limits it by not welcoming the creation of an effective parliament, a system of checks and balances or elections with genuine multi-party participation.

During the last 20 years a heated debate has been going on among the politicians and political scientists of East and West concerning the degree to which countries should adhere to democratic conditions, given the specifics of national character and political development. This discussion, although never quite saying so explicitly, is indeed related to the possibility that there should be some national — as opposed to universal — forms of maintaining socio-political access (North, Wallis, Weingast 2009, 2011) and direct or indirect rules to control this system. This discussion has been expressed in numerous ways: human rights (interpreted differently in the West) and Asian values (Lee Kuan Yew and Kishore Mahbubani in Singapore, Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia); Islam and civil society (Mohammad Khatami in Iran); the “Three Represents” (juge daibiao) (Jiang Zemin in the People’s Republic of China); the harmonious (hexie shehui) socialist society (Hu Jintao in China); and “sovereign democracy” (suverennaya demokratiya) (Vladislav Surkov in Russia). The notion of limited or controlled democracy is generally used to describe the way power is organized in participatory democracies (limited plebiscitary democracies), and therefore differs from those democracies with open socio-political access. These limited democracies, even those with an electoral system, often have non-transparent, but obvious, rules that curb socio-political access.

Non-Western democracies are characterized by a different relationship between democracy and constitutional liberalism from that of liberal democracies, yet they are more democratic than either non-liberal or participatory democracies. Therefore, the parameters to be controlled by this type of democracy (economic, political, social, legal) are greater than in a liberal democracy and they are not consolidated by the approval of the whole society. The distinction lies in the amount of sovereignty parameters that the state controls (Ziegler 2012, pp. 14-20); socio-political access, for example, can be maintained through the educational system or rules on meritocracy. Two clear examples of this system are Singapore and Malaysia, both of which are described by political scientists as “limited liberal democracies”, because their system of socio-political access differs from that of liberal democracies, yet enables socio-political access through their own channels (a highly selective educational system, meritocracy rules on political competition under the umbrella of a dominant party and “personalized” selection of political elites). In such political regimes, religion can play a special role, one that can be guaranteed by the state and/or by law (for example, Islam in Malaysia; Judaism in Israel; Buddhism in Sri Lanka) or state ideologies such as Pancasila in Indonesia. The Asian, non-Western type of democracy is currently present in Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, Israel, Japan, India, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

BRINGING EAST AND WEST TOGETHER
Asian democracies have accomplished a synthesis of Western and Eastern cultures, albeit to different degrees. The individual is free, but moral laws and institutions, including religious ones, play a major role. Notwithstanding this confessional unity, the church is in most cases separated from the state, and its influence on society is exercised largely by moral and ethical example. Society in the non-Western democracy is a socio-centric self-determining system, yet its domain is determined by religious preference and can
be cosmo-centric if this does not hinder the efficiency of the state or contradict personal preferences. In other words, these societies are simultaneously conglomerative and pluralistic. The public sphere in societies of this type is distinguished by the primacy of the law; universal and constitutional legal norms are paramount. The economies of such states are transparent enough, yet may have nation-specific features within international norms (this describes, in particular, the economies of Islamic democracies).

In politics, the societies that have accomplished a synthesis of the two traditions have equality of opportunity, yet one power guarantees the stability of the political process. This is the so-called dominant party, or a combination of the dominant party and the leader-guarantor. As a rule, however, this is not a party created by the authorites, but one that actually creates the authorities. Though political competition in such countries can be limited to some extent, its authoritarian-dominant party and the leader-guarantor. As a rule, however, this is not a party created by the authorites, but one that actually creates the authorities.

In non-Western democracies, the system of open socio-political access described by North, Wallis, and Weingast (2009, 2011) is evolving, but not yet consolidated. The social/political institutions are not yet strong enough to maintain the stability of the state and society without the direct or indirect rules needed at this stage of their historical and cultural development. Under certain circumstances, these rules may be contested by liberal democracies that have strong institutions and a long history of democratic development, and which are at the forefront of social and political innovation, because they are at a different stage of historical development.

AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL
Thus, democracy becomes a process of governing that is maintained through a system of open socio-political access, which is a general rather than a specific parameter for all democracies, although its form may be specific to the civilizational, cultural and historic parameters of the society in question. Even with some restraints in transitional societies, this model has resulted in impressive economic growth in such places as Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea and India. It may be key to understanding the current rise of East Asia and the speed with which it is catching up with the West.

Before proceeding to political democratization, some of these countries created a new and effective political elite and bureaucracy, later entering on a path that led to political strife in the form of parliamentary competition. As a result, they have found a way to foster an efficient elite/bureaucracy rooted in their own history and cultural traditions, and therefore their own way of managing socio-political access — for example, through exam systems and limited access to the type of education needed to be appointed to political or governmental posts, political competitiveness under the umbrella of a dominant party, etc. This model may be contested under certain circumstances by extra-liberal and liberal democracies, because local political elites might hesitate to create an open access system with transparent rules that are approved by social consensus. So, if we agree to the possibility of certain local/cultural/confessional differentiation in the conditions and parameters for maintaining open socio-political access, we may consequently find it useful to introduce the concept of non-Western democracy. If we fundamentally disagree with this possibility, then a Western democracy becomes the only model of best governance. However, the idea of non-Western democracy opens up space for an understanding of how democracy can, and perhaps should, be practiced in countries with different historical, political, cultural and confessional settings from those in the West. Such is the essence of the present-day fierce ideological debate between the West and the political elites of the Rest.

From the point of view of political theory, the study of national variations in “non-Western democracies” of the Asian type — such as liberal constitutional democracy in Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka — and also models of evolutionary transformation of non-liberal democracies (authoritarian states or constitutional monarchies) and participatory democracies (plebiscitary democracies) into non-Western democracies, will probably provide the key to finding such a model in other countries, if a considerable portion of their elites disagree with the Western mode of governing. Meanwhile, always that resist a system of open socio-political access will find their political system contested from outside by other democracies and from within by opposition forces, if any exist.

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