



Kansai university and Faculty of Economics



International Symposium

Africa and Asia Entanglements in Past and Present : Bridging History and Development Studies

**“We want to be like them!” Economic policy models as status signalling: Reflections
on South Africa’s ‘developmental state’ debate¹**

Janis van der Westhuizen, University of Stellenbosch.

Can economic policy models or discourses be considered to be identity signifiers? By drawing on the developmental state debate in South Africa, this paper argues that economic development plans especially for ‘rising’ powers in the developing world constitute a basis from which state elites’ aspirational identities can be ‘read’ and can therefore be seen as useful forms of signalling that are often not treated as such in much of the development studies literature. Likewise, despite the growing interest in the significance of identity in International Relations, these interests are often not extended to issues in political economy. To do so, the paper is structured as follows. After some conceptual clarification, the developmental state debate in South Africa is contextualised. Doing so enables highlighting ambiguities and contradictions with a view to the next part of the paper, namely identity signalling and the significance of especially the East Asian cases as a particular type of *status* signalling.

¹ Draft paper not for citation. Prepared for the Third International Symposium, ‘Africa and Asia Entanglement in Past and Present: Bridging between History and Development, 31 July-1 August, Kansai University, Osaka, Japan.