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*Review of *The New Asian Hemisphere, The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East**

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Kishore Mahbubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere, The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2008. pp. x, 314.

Reviewed by Paul Bracken, Professor of Management & Political Science, Yale University.

A number of new books have appeared this year on the world's shifting power structure accompanied by the rise of Asian giants China and India. This in itself is a noteworthy development. Apparently the period of America as sole superpower, or the American Empire to its critics, is over. Having lasted a very few short years American power seems not so much in decline as checked by many realities.

Professor Kishore Mahbubani, Dean and Professor of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore, has written an absorbing account of some of the consequences of the rise of the two Asian giants, and also of the smaller countries who are part of this new power system. His perch in Singapore give Mahbubani, a widely respected observer of international politics, a refreshing view which is not contaminated by many of the U.S. based accounts of what's going on. One may disagree with some of his arguments. But his larger message is the need to open up and broaden the global dialogue. Here, his book is right on the mark. Its critique of the U.S. is a friendly one, of someone trying to be helpful. This is a good thing and is likely to get more sympathy than the more harsh critiques which come from those lacking this friendly attitude.

His core thesis is that the West which has been running the world for two-hundred years created institutions – organizations and laws – to maintain its hold on things. The incapacity of these institutions to come to grips with the challenges of the 21st century is evident, and so Asia must come to the rescue to insert its own values and interests into the global dialogue. He foresees major transition problems, largely around the difficulty of accepting the new powers into the global system by the United States.

Mahbubani offers some trenchant insights into important matters. On democracy, he describes how it has become an ideological crusade for the United States, which in the process overlooks many of this form of governance's deficiencies. You will not find many American accounts that openly say how the spread of democracy, pushed by Washington, to Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq has proven disastrous. Again, Mahbubani is speaking as a friend when he says these things. On the positive side, he emphasizes how many aspects of Western democracy have spread around the world. Chinese, Indian, or Singaporean citizens who start a business, point out environmental degradation, or stand up for

human rights are empowered to do so, in part, because Western democracy points to just such actions.

Mahbubani's greatest fear is the reluctance of Western minds to acknowledge the unsustainability of Western global domination. His critique of Western institutions in this regard is the best I have seen. In particular, his acidic comments about the self promotion of the G-7 as the arbiter of everything from macroeconomic order to climate change, and every other problem in between is brilliant. I know I won't ever be able to listen to a G-7 communiqué quite the same way ever again.

The policies he advances to avoid disaster scenarios follow from his fear. Openness to the views of others, and consideration of the best of Asian values (meritocracy, order, competence) rank high here. His comparison of the U.S. occupation of Japan after World War II and of Iraq is quite telling. He underscores the sharp decline in simple competence, leaving aside the merits of the Iraq war. In 1945 the U.S. took the occupation of Japan as a serious matter. In 2003 it did not, with respect to Iraq. He describes American ignorance of history and culture as inevitably leading to disaster, regardless of the cause. What is frightening about his observation is not only how valid it is. It is also how general it is, applying to so many policy arenas that go beyond the war in Iraq. What he's saying, I think, is that the Iraqi occupation is symptomatic of a lack of seriousness that has overtaken the American policy process generally.

His advice on where to go next is centered on pragmatism. But it is a two way pragmatism. Each has to listen to the other. Asian hectoring of the U.S. isn't likely to be any more effective than the West trying to keep its grip on the U.N. Security Council by pretending that France and Britain are the serious world powers that they once were.

Pragmatism was once considered a definitive American characteristic. It was the American positive spin to existentialism. Mahbubani thinks that Asians have a good pragmatic streak as well. The two worlds could meet on this basis. This requires the U.S. to give up some of its cherished illusions of recent years. But it's a path that offers a meeting ground between new and old power centers where a more productive conversation could tackle the challenges facing the global order.