

Asian Power, Asian Values

BIG IDEAS FORUM

Sydney, 8 August 2005

Introduction: [Susan Windybank](#)

Address: [Kishore Mahbubani](#)

Comments: [Alan Dupont](#)

Comments: [Owen Harries](#)

Rejoinder: [Kishore Mahbubani](#)

[back to top](#)

Susan Windybank: I'd like to thank everyone for coming tonight to what is the fourth annual CIS Big Ideas forum.

I'd also like to thank several organisations for their support in circulating information about tonight's event—in particular, the Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific (at Sydney University), the Asia Society, Asialink (at Melbourne University) and the Australia-Singapore Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

And I'd like to give special thanks to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, James Spigelman, for allowing us to use this marvellous venue for tonight's forum.

This is not the first time CIS has held a Big Ideas Forum at the Banco Court. Some of you here tonight will remember the inaugural Forum with Francis Fukuyama back in 2002 when we put on mock trial two of the 'big ideas' of the 1990s: the 'end of history' and the 'clash of civilisations'. Then in 2003 the Forum travelled to Melbourne to address the fracturing of the political concept of 'the West'.

The topic to be addressed tonight—Asian power, Asian values—will be no less momentous. It encompasses the apparent rise to superpower status of China and India and what this will mean for the future shape of the Asia Pacific region, the international system—and, of course, what it will mean for Australia. As far as ideas go, they don't get much bigger than this!

Before introducing our speakers, let me just add that the CIS Big Ideas Forum is not exclusively devoted to foreign policy. It examines important and pressing issues on the domestic front as well. Last year's, which was held at parliament house just up the road, looked at welfare reform and ideas and policies on this subject from around the world.

Which brings me to a few quick points I'd like to make about the Centre for those in the audience who may not know that much about us. CIS is unique amongst think tanks in Australia for at least two main reasons: the first is that we deal with both domestic and foreign policy issues. In doing so we aim to step back from the white noise of day-to-day events and news media cycles so that we can focus on the bigger picture. In the case of foreign policy this means looking not only at individual policies or individual countries but also the assumptions and concepts behind our whole approach to thinking about Australia's place in the world.

The second reason is that the Centre is independently funded, which means we do not receive any government money. We are also non-partisan. But this does not mean that we do not have a point of view. The Centre was established to promote the values and institutions that underpin a free society. This ultimately underpins our work in foreign policy as well as domestic policy.

With this in mind, there are two things I'd like you to bear in mind as you listen to our speakers tonight: the first is that, historically, Australian foreign policy has largely consisted of following the lead of 'great and powerful friends', first Great Britain and then the United States. The second is that Australia has only ever had to make foreign policy in a world dominated by the West—or, more narrowly, the Anglo-American West. These two premises are likely to come under increasing pressure in the decades ahead.

We have three speakers tonight who will address us for roughly half an hour. We will then open the floor to questions. I will moderate this discussion and bring it to a close soon after 7 o'clock.

Our keynote speaker is Kishore Mahbubani. I'm going to ask Owen Harries to introduce him because they have their long association with each other. But first, I'd like to bring your attention to a change in the programme for tonight: Greg Sheridan has had to fly to Asia at very short notice and sends his apologies. Owen Harries has graciously agreed to step in and speak in his place.

I'd now like to introduce our second speaker tonight. Dr Alan Dupont is a Senior Fellow for International Security at the Lowy Institute for International Policy. Prior to this he was Senior Fellow and Director of the Asia Pacific Security program at the Australian National University's

Strategic and Defence Studies Centre.

Alan has published extensively on political and strategic developments in East Asia. His most recent publication for the Lowy Institute looked at Japan's changing security policy. Those of you who subscribe to *The National Interest* will also have seen his recent article on Japan, 'the Schizophrenic Superpower'. Alan has also published widely on transnational security issues and the changing nature of Australian national security and defence.

Alan has over 25 years experience in government with the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs and Trade, and served in the Australian embassies in Seoul and Jakarta. He's a member of the Australian National Committee of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, a member of the Council of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, and a member of the Foreign Affairs Council.

Our discussant tonight, Owen Harries, is a Senior Fellow at CIS. He has been an invaluable source of guidance and counsel in helping develop the CIS foreign policy programme. Owen was a senior adviser to former Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock and Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser in the late 1970s, and he was Australian Ambassador to UNESCO from 1982-83. He also taught at the Universities of Sydney and New South Wales from 1956 to 1975.

In 2001, Owen returned to Australia after 16 years as founding Editor-in-Chief of the Washington-based foreign policy journal, *The National Interest*. He is the author of *Understanding America*, published just months after 9/11. In 2003 he presented the ABC's Boyer Lectures on American hegemony, later published as a book. He is a regular contributor to the opinion pages of Australia's major newspapers, and he's frequently invited to appear on radio and television current affairs programmes to comment on international affairs. His most recent publication for the Centre is a paper called *Morality and Foreign Policy* (available outside). It has been reprinted six times (at last count), including in overseas publications such as *Prospect* magazine and the American journal *Orbis*.

I'd now like to ask Owen to introduce our keynote speaker for this evening.

[back to top](#)

Owen Harries: During my 16 years in Washington I met a lot of very impressive people, from Henry Kissinger down, or up or sideways, depending on your ideology. Kishore was ranked very highly amongst those people. I first got to know him when an unsolicited manuscript came through the post. One's expectations were never high about

unsolicited manuscripts, but when I opened this and started reading it I realised that I had the lead article for my next issue before I had even finished the first page. When the article was published it was called 'The West and the Rest' and it became a key article in the discussion during the 1990s of Asian values and the relationship between Asia and the West, particularly the United States. Margaret Thatcher, in her memoirs, saw fit to quote from this splendid article. He also wrote another article for me later on called, rather provocatively, 'Can Asians Think?'. I can't remember what conclusion he came to now, but it was a jolly good article. He played a key part in presenting an Asian point of view in the debate over Asian values that was badly needed in the Washington of that time.

Kishore is probably, I think, the most distinguished product of the most talented foreign ministry in Asia; that is, the Singapore foreign ministry. He has had a very distinguished career indeed, serving in various Asian posts. He served in Washington, he served as Ambassador to the United Nations, he presided over the Security Council of the United Nations for a year, he was permanent head of the Singapore foreign affairs department for five years. He retired last year and became the Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore. A very distinguished man indeed, and we are very pleased to have him here today. I look forward to hearing what he has to tell us.

[back to top](#)

Kishore Mahbubani: Thank you Owen. If there is one simple, overriding message I would like to give to you tonight, it is this: The Asian century is not coming. The Asian century is here. It has begun. It has begun primarily because there is a remarkable new level of confidence among young Asians about the future that they see ahead for themselves.

I think you have seen the projections. They suggest that by 2050 or so the top four economies will be China, the United States, India, and Japan [in that order]. So three out of four top economies will soon be Asian. And the world as a consequence will change. Indeed, in some ways the world has already changed. When you meet young Asians you get the sense that some kind of magical switch has gone on in their minds. They see the future as full of possibilities for them. Whenever I travel either in China or India I am always impressed by the degree of confidence I encounter.

The question is: what are the implications for the world when the Asian states become strong and powerful? These are questions that Australians should also ask. In fact, being in Australia, the question you might want to ask is: are you going to be a lonely outpost of the West, cut off from the West in the midst of all this Asian dynamism? Are you going to feel besieged, surrounded by these billions of confident Asians?

Are you going to feel different and apart from this New Asia that is emerging? My answer to all these questions is a positive one. You need not fear that Asia will be different from you because the New Asia that is emerging is not one that is purely a revival of the old Asia. It is a New Asia that is coming about through a fusion of the best of the East and the best of the West. So you will see in Asia a fusion of civilisations and because there's a fusion of civilisations the best practices of the West will be absorbed and used in Asia. In that sense Australia can also make a major contribution and Australia can be an inclusive partner of this New Asia and not one that is detached.

Let me give some examples to illustrate my point about the fusion of East and West that you find in Asia. The easiest country to pick, of course, is India. I think you all know India very well. It speaks English and if you look for example at English literature today some of the best writing is coming from authors in India. Indians also play cricket so you know that they belong to the same world. It's not difficult to make the case for India and to show a fusion of East and West taking place in India.

It's much harder to make the case for China but I suggest that you look carefully at China and try to understand why China is so successful today. Look at all the policies it is adopting. On the economic front, for those of you who do business in China, it is not communist economics, it is capitalist economics. China is not trying to create an alternative economic model. It wants to use the Western capitalist model to do better.

Then look at the Chinese communist party, and here perhaps one of the most useful contributions I can make is to suggest that you should not, when you look at the Chinese Communist Party, assume that what you are seeing is a replica of the Soviet communist party. In fact, what you are seeing is the exact opposite. You had a group of ageing cronies running the Soviet Union. You have in the Chinese leadership probably one of the youngest set of leaders in the world—not only one of the youngest set of leaders, but also one of the best-educated set of leaders. Many of them, you will find, have been educated in North America and Australia and elsewhere. Their perception of the world is not very different from yours. They understand the modern world and they want to integrate into that modern world. They do not live in a world different from yours. This is the thing that I notice when I talk to the young communist party leaders.

Please forgive me if this sounds a bit like a commercial break, but as you all know I run a school of public policy now, and in that school we have 108 students from 19 countries, including some of the brightest young Chinese who come to our school. I can tell you that when they come to

our school their standards of English are high and they perform as well as, and often a lot better than, students who come from other places. They are perfectly comfortable in what you might call the modern Western environment. By the way, the only thing that we find missing in our school, and I hope you don't mind if I say this, is that we haven't had a single Australian student yet. So I ask you to pass on the word and tell young Australians that if they want to network with future generations of Asian policymakers, come to the Lee Kuan Yew School. And that's the end of the commercial break.

I speak optimistically about the rise of Asia and the success of Asia, but it's clear that there will be problems. In some ways it's good that the Asians have already seen several crises. They've seen the Asian financial crisis and the SARS crisis. These crises could have broken Asian countries, but they didn't. The region survived these crises and moved on. And the fact that the region did so showed that there is some resilience that is driving Asian countries forward. There will be future crises. I don't see history as moving in one straight line, there will be ups and downs. But I'm confident that Asian countries can handle these crises.

But there is one wildcard that I worry about. I see this as the biggest wildcard that hangs over the future of the region. And this wildcard, unfortunately, comes from the United States of America.

In some ways it's both puzzling and tragic that the United States should loom as a factor of great uncertainty in the region. If Asians wanted to thank any one country for having sparked the rise of Asia, then that country would be the United States of America.

America has done more to develop Asia than any other country. I'll give you three quick examples. First, what held back Asian societies for centuries was the feudal mentality, the belief that what you became in life was determined at birth—whatever class, caste, clan you were born into it meant you were stuck there for life. This went on for centuries. Then America came along and shared the American dream and made many Asians believe that their destiny was not determined at birth. If you want to understand the dynamism that you see among young Asians today it is because they have bought the American dream. They believe that they can make a better future for themselves than their ancestors did. This is America's gift to Asia.

Another way that America has helped develop Asia is through the hundreds of thousands of Asian students who have studied at North American universities. If you want to understand the yeast that is causing the rise of Asia, much of this yeast comes from the hundreds of thousands of Asians who have studied at North American universities.

This is remarkable. It is true not just of India but also true of China. There are probably 80,000 students in North America, of which 60,000 are Chinese. This is another big gift of America to Asia.

Third, and probably most important for Asia, was America's decision to create in 1945 a world order that allowed other nation-states to succeed and grow. This, by the way, was a reversal of the European world order in which when countries became powerful, they colonised, they dominated and did not allow potential rivals to emerge. America created a new set of rules in 1945 and on the basis of this rules-based order new powers re-emerged. Germany re-emerged, Japan re-emerged and China is emerging on the basis of the 1945 rules as well.

So why then is America the cause of so much uncertainty? There is a raging debate going on in Washington D.C. about how to react to the rise of China. The rise of China, in some ways, poses a very different problem for America. Up until now America has been comfortable about allowing new powers to emerge because it could look benignly at them and say 'do well Germany', 'do well Japan', because none could ever surpass the United States at least in terms of the size of the economy. Now for the first time since America emerged as a global power at the beginning of the 20th century, America sees the prospect of another power emerging which could be larger and in some ways more powerful and influential than America. And so it's quite natural for some voices to advocate that it's time for America to actually prevent the rise of China, to do something to stop it from happening. This debate has not been resolved. There are as usual conflicting signals, which in some ways are a natural feature of Washington D.C. But these conflicting signals cast a shadow over the region and lead to huge uncertainty.

This is where Australia and other countries in Southeast Asia can work together. We have a common interest in preventing this huge rift between America and China because if, say, five years from now, a Cold War breaks out between America and China all of us will be put in very uncomfortable positions, and forced to make difficult decisions about what positions we take on various issues. To prevent that from happening, now is the time to act. Now is the time to do something about it.

I'll just give a couple of examples of how Australia can help to send the right messages to both sides—to Beijing to make them understand how China too has to play by the rules and also to Washington D.C. In some ways the message to Washington is a much more important one. I have an article coming up in *Foreign Affairs* called 'Understanding China'. The essential point I make to the American audience is that you have to remember that China cannot do anything to destabilise America. America is very strong, very powerful, and its political system is very

resilient. China, by contrast, has a fragile political system. It knows it has to change and become democratic in due course but to make the change now, at this point, would be disastrous for China. This is why the Chinese resist moves towards instant democratisation. They see pressure from Washington to democratise not as a sign of goodwill but as an effort by America to trip up China at one of its most promising moments. This is how misunderstandings grow and this is why we have to come in and prevent these misunderstandings from growing. (And of course there is the Taiwan issue. But I'm reaching the limits of my 20 minutes.)

I want to talk very briefly about another dimension where I think Australia can also play an important role. If indeed we have to worry about a possible great divide between China and America, we also have to worry about an existing divide between the West and the Islamic world. We've seen the consequences of this divide. I was in Manhattan when 9/11 happened. I could see how Americans were shocked and bewildered by what happened. You saw what happened on the 12th October in Bali. We all saw what happened in London recently. Clearly, there is a dangerous world emerging out there. The fact that Australia is located in this region, next to the most populous country in the Islamic world, Indonesia, gives you an understanding of trends in the Islamic world and this understanding is something that you should try and share with Washington. We do not want a situation where Southeast Asian Muslims begin to feel as alienated from America as some in the Middle East are. You know also that there is a trend that we should all worry about, a trend that my Muslim friends in Southeast Asia call the Arabisation of Southeast Asian Islam. That is not a positive trend. We have to try and do something to prevent this from happening. Again this is a common goal that Australia and Southeast Asia should work on together.

Having said that, I'd like to say something about Asian values because Owen asked me to. The point I want to make is that as Asian countries become more successful, the good news is that they will become more self-confident, more self-assured. But the other side of the coin is that they will be less willing to be lectured to. In the past, in the debates on democracy and human rights, my Asian friends tell me that they've accepted this lecturing. But now they believe the time for lecturing is over. On the question of human rights, one influential Chinese intellectual said to me recently that in the past when Americans lectured China on human rights he would disagree with them, but in private in his heart of hearts he would agree with them because he knew that America's practices on human rights were far superior to China. But he said that after Guantanamo, everything has changed. The Chinese people have seen that the Americans beat up people too just as the Chinese regime beats up people. What's the difference? This change is something that you have to be sensitive to because you cannot go on using the same means of talking to Asian societies as you did in the past. This will require a big adjustment.

The final point is to consider the possibility that all these issues may be linked. I have put the issue of China in one basket, and Islam in another basket. If in a sense our final goal is to advance the cause of modernisation of the Islamic world, to create a more hopeful future for young Muslims in the world, the success of China could be a model for the Islamic world. It's difficult for young Muslims to go and tell their colleagues to learn from the West. There's far too much historical baggage between Islam and the West. But there is no historical baggage between Islam and China. So if China succeeds and grows and develops, it may actually provide a role model that could transform the nature of the Islamic world and also help us take care of one of the most challenging issues of our time.

Thank you.

[back to top](#)

Alan Dupont: Kishore, you are always a difficult act to follow, particularly with a presentation so broad and sweeping as the one you have given us. My task is to comment on what you have said in the ten minutes allocated to me. So all I can do is pick some of the eyes out of this and that's what I am going to attempt to do.

The first point I want to pick up on is your introductory comment that the Asian century has begun. I remember writing something along these lines ten years ago, and I got it wrong because, like a lot of people, I didn't foresee the Asian crisis of 1997. So while I agree with the broad thrust of your comment, if you look forward, perhaps a century ahead, the Asian time is clearly coming. But a word of caution: it may not yet have begun, because there is a long way for this region to go before it realises its true potential economically and politically. And of course the point is that the two are deeply connected. You cannot have the sort of economic prosperity that you see in North America and Europe in Asia until Asian political systems learn to accommodate certain changes that underpinned the economic success of Europe and North America. These underpinnings include greater transparency in decision, openness, the rule of law, and all those things that are essential prerequisites to delivering economic prosperity. I think Asia still has some way to go in that particular respect.

The other obvious point that comes through is when we talk about Asia, Asians and the West. We need to use these terms when we talk in these kinds of forums. But I would just like to make the point that we do need to deconstruct the term Asia and Asians a bit. There is an assumption of the part of some people, who argue that Asia is an entity bound together by cultural homogeneity, that it is the culture of Asians which is the glue that is going to bind this region together. I beg to differ. I think that it is

Asia's diversity that is its great strength, and the point that I really want to make is that cultural homogeneity doesn't exist to the extent that a lot of people assume. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir used to argue that Australia could not be part of Asia because we are not Asians, and that there was a unique culture that bound Asians together. I actually think that if you look at that in some detail it doesn't stand up. The differences between Korea and Indonesia, for example, where I have spent many years of my life, are greater in many respects than you will find between Western countries and some Asian countries.

So the assumption that culture is going to bring Asians together and lead them to develop in certain unique ways needs to be looked at very closely. I think there is greater diversity in Asia than many people give credit for, and I think that diversity is the strength of the region. That diversity needs to be harnessed in terms of common goals and common interests. I might note that the East Asian Summit confirms, I think, the point that I am making, because it represents a new regionalism *not* based on exclusiveness. That is, it is not a region based on Asians only. In fact Asians have decided to invite Australia, New Zealand and India into the East Asia Summit because they are different, because they add something that Asia needs. And that something is economic as well as the ability to counterbalance China's rising power. New Zealand, Australia and India are clearly part of the region. Australia and New Zealand are not Asian, but that doesn't really matter. I think that this has now been accepted by many Asian elites. Kishore wrote about these things in the early 1990s when there was a tendency to argue that Asians had a unique way of doing things and when it looked as if the regionalism of the early 1990s was going to develop into a much more closed, exclusive kind of club than it actually has.

On China's perceptions of the world not very different from ours, your point about fusion—the convergence of east and west—is a good one. We see this at the most prosaic level if we go to restaurants in Australia. We see fusion food everywhere. If I go out into the region I find that I can connect with my counterparts in China, Japan and Indonesia perhaps better than I can sometimes with my fellow Australians in certain areas. There is a convergence and fusion, particularly at the elite level, in terms of seeing the world and understanding the processes that are drawing us together. I think that's a very important point.

But the question is: where is the region going? Do we assume that because the Asian century is upon us that this will necessarily translate into a more prosperous region, one which is essentially conflict free? I don't think that necessarily follows at all. To give you one example: if you look at what is happening between Japan and China you can see quite clearly that though both countries are becoming increasingly interdependent economically, political and security tensions are rising. So it does not necessarily follow that as we converge and become more

like-minded that we are going to necessarily see greater prosperity and a reduction in conflict and tension.

On the United States being the wild card: The Bush Administration has been seen as a revolutionary force, a force that has challenged the status quo. I think there is an element of truth to that characterisation, but I think it can be exaggerated in two respects. First, this is one administration only and I do not think that we should project what the Bush administration is doing into what American foreign policy will be five or ten years down the track. The United States could quite easily revert back into being a much more status quo power than it appears to be at the moment.

Second, while it is true that tensions between the United States and China are growing, and that the United States sees China as its only potential peer competitor in the future, it doesn't necessarily follow that competition and conflict are the inevitable result of that. One of the features of the last three years is the tremendous co-operation and collaboration between Washington and Beijing on a whole range of issues, including of course the war on terrorism. This would certainly have been unforeseen three or four years ago. So whilst it is quite easy to sketch out a future of increased competition between the US and China, I would also add that the future could bring greater co-operation and a *modus vivendi* between the two great powers, essentially because there is too much at stake for both of them. There is too much to lose now. The main reason for that is the tremendous economic growth between China and the United States over the last ten years. It has really changed the political dynamics of the relationship.

I would now like to draw out a couple of implications for Australia. This is a much more complicated and demanding security environment for us, there is no question of that. Our foreign policy is going to have to be a lot more agile than in the past. It is going to have to accommodate both our alliance relationship with the United States, and our growing interest in Asia, and particularly with China. Now I think that it is quite possible to walk and chew gum at the same time but nevertheless there may be situation in the future where Australia may be in the position—reluctantly—of having to choose between China and the United States. That is a position we do not want to get into as a middle power, because having to choose between the US and China is going to be a lose/lose situation for us. So our foreign policy has to get us to the position where those sorts of choices do not have to be made. For example, when there are tensions between the two countries an offer might be made to Australia, not necessarily to mediate in the tensions, because I think that is well beyond our capacity, but to help explain to both countries, because we have good relations with both Beijing and Washington, what the consequences might be for the broader region of any competition that

developed to military conflict or serious political fallout in the region, notably over Taiwan.

The final point I want to make is that we have only talked about states in this region and I think that we need to mention the fact that there are other forces out there that are not states. I am talking about non-state actors, I am talking about terrorist groups who do not owe allegiance to any one country. They are impacting on the security environment in this region, and have major implications for Australia's future as to how we deal with them. So let us not forget that this is not a world dominated only by nation-states. There are other powers out there, transnational powers and other forces that need to be factored into our calculations about how Australia navigates its way through the next century.

back to top

Owen Harries: I'd like to propose some questions which seem to me to be central to this whole discussion.

The first question I would propose is this: Are globalisation and its values going to shape Asia, or are Asia and its values going to shape globalisation? I think that's a real question and an important question. You could put it differently if you like. Do economics and technology trump history and culture, or do history and culture—traditional values—trump economics and technology?

Now the easy way out of handling that question is to say that it will be a two-way process. But that doesn't settle the matter. Which is going to prevail, which is the stronger of the two forces? And to complicate things further there is a third logic involved—the logic of power politics, which has been very evident and has shaped much of the world and its history for the last 400 to 500 years (indeed, the last 3000 years). Does this get scrapped? If not, how does it fit into the equation of globalisation and local cultures and values? How does it relate to those?

From what he said, Kishore seems to put his money more on globalisation and the capacity for technological change to shape and change history and custom. I'm not so sure about that. I think in this case it's relevant and useful to think about a part of the world that hasn't been mentioned so far in this discussion, and that is Europe. This is not the first globalisation we have had. We had an attempt at globalisation roughly 100 years ago in Europe. And Europe had a much stronger common culture than Asia has. Alan says Asia is remarkable for its diversity, but Europe had very cohesive culture. Yet when push came to shove the expectations people had about globalisation—that it would produce a harmonious, single entity that could live together peacefully—when that came up against the cultural forces in Europe, it was the cultural forces, particularly of nationalism, and particularly of German

nationalism, that prevailed, with terrible and disastrous effect.

Is it possible that something like that may happen in the case of Asia. Certainly I don't think it is impossible. Kishore was saying that he doesn't believe in straight line history, apart from certain depressions and deviations, but perhaps one has to allow for more than that. Those of you who have heard me speaking over the years know that I tend to quote one phrase *ad nauseum*: 'those who lack the imagination of disaster are doomed to be surprised by the world'. It has happened very often, and I think there is no reason to believe that the capacity of the world to surprise us has come to an end. I think not. I think it is well worth looking for as possible sources of drastic discontinuity over the next four to five years between now and when India, Asia and China are supposed to be dominating forces in the world. What would be the effect of a great depression, of a serious depression in the economic life of the world? What would be the effect of a serious natural disaster? I don't know, but it's worth factoring those into our thinking.

Finally, on China and America, the relationship between them is going to be crucial, and that in itself is not an entirely happy prospect because these two countries are not normal countries. They are not normal nation-states. China was the middle kingdom. It saw itself as the centre of the universe around which everything else revolved. And everything else paid tribute to it. Countries like that don't think of other countries as their equals very easily and naturally. The United States, the City on a Hill, sees itself as special, as different from all other countries in the world. It is difficult for two such entities to come to terms with possible rivalry between each other and it's very hard for them to think in terms of compromise. The notion that the United States might one day be the world's second power, that America could conceivably be number two, would be an appalling prospect for many, if not most, Americans.

I don't know how this is going to play out and I don't think anybody else does. But I don't think we should approach it all with an optimistic glow and a belief that the heavy lifting has been done and from now on it will be reasonably easy.

Susan Windybank: Thank you Owen and Alan for your comments. I can see out of the corner of my eye that Kishore would like to make a few quick points in response before we open up the discussion to questions from the audience. So, Kishore, you have the floor.

[back to top](#)

Kishore Mahbubani: On the critical point that Alan made: has the Asian century arrived or not? For me, yes, in terms of economic growth it has arrived. But the most critical thing before you can have success is that people have to believe. And in that sense I would say that the confidence

that you see among the young Asians to me confirms that it has arrived, because they now believe that the future is theirs. This generation can see that the future will not only be better for them but that it will be better for their children. This is a whole new mindset.

Second, on cultural diversity in Asia. Let me take an example from my own situation. I am a Hindu. But my name, Mahbubani, comes from an Arabic word, Mahbu, which means Beloved. Now Hindus and Muslims are supposed to have a divide, but they have cultural links. When I was traveling in India recently I met a young Korean girl and asked her what she was doing there. She said that Koreans are rediscovering their cultural roots in India because that's where Buddhism came from. Buddhism, as you know, spread through China, to Japan, to Korea. If you look at the bedrock of civilisation—that is, cultural influences—they are Chinese, Indian and Islamic. These different cultural flows in Asia have intermingled for thousands of years. Yes, they may be in different baskets, but don't forget the common connections. When I went to Iran, again as a Hindu Indian, I was amazed to find a huge degree of cultural affinity, going back to the times when the Mongols ruled India. So there are these cultural connections.

My final point concerns the issue that Owen raised. Yes, it is going to be very difficult for the Middle Kingdom and the City on the Hill to sit comfortably with each other. Both sides have to make huge adjustments—which is why all of us have a lot of work to do.

ends

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre's staff, Advisers, Directors or officers.

All material is copyright of The Centre for Independent Studies or the stated author. Please contact the Centre (cis@cis.org.au) for permission to reprint.

The Centre for Independent Studies