

**Professor Kishore Mahbubani reveals many surprises in his
interview with Al Ahram:
The world power is heading to the East and any country can grow
like the Asian Tigers
The Asian miracle; 7 pillars are the key; Europe will turn into “the
biggest open museum” in the world...**

(Interview by Mohamed Sabreen)

Kishore Mahbubani is an important person and one of the “great brains” in the international arena. He studied philosophy and history. He had occupied several diplomatic posts in Singapore. He is currently the Dean and Professor of Public Policy at the Lee Kuan Yew School for Public Policy, National University of Singapore. He is also a Board member in many international institutes, including the International Institute of Strategic Studies.

Mahbubani came to Cairo to launch the Arabic version of his book “The New Asian Hemisphere”. In his book, he predicts the huge transition of global power towards the East. His book appeared to carry a huge prediction, like the prediction of Fukuyama in “The End of History”. The difference is that this time it is a prediction of the end of the West as we know for two centuries. He is calling us to be ready for the new Asian era. He calls on the Arab elites to adjust itself to a world with several powers led by China, India and other Asian powers, even as Europe shrinks demographically and economically; and consequently its weight in the international arena. He indicates that some of the elites in the US go to Singapore for education, such as mathematics at the preparatory stage. Mahbubani was surprised with how the Egyptian elites find it difficult to accept his vision.

The attempt by Dr Mahmoud Mohieldin, Minister of Investment, to present the writer and his book is very vital and important. It shows the insight of Mohieldin. Despite admitting that he disagreed with the writer, Mohieldin believes that there is a need to exert and enhance efforts to engage with Asia. Here is the interview with the quiet and controversial writer.

Q: What can be learned from the Asian experience?

A: The most important message is that other developing countries can learn a lot because the Asian countries were poor like these developing countries yet it witnessed rapid economic growth in the last 30 years. These Asian economies are now the fastest growing in the world. The most positive message here is that any country can develop. The other message is that we know how countries can develop.

Q: So, from your point of view, how did the Asian countries develop?

A: The Asian countries developed because they understood, realized and applied the pillars of Western success, which had enabled the West to excel over Asian societies throughout the last two centuries. There are at least 7 pillars. Each pillar supports the other pillars. The Asian societies prospered when they started applying those pillars; free market economics, science and technology, meritocracy, pragmatism, the culture of peace, the rule of law and education. I would like to emphasise here that if any country applies these seven pillars, it will succeed.

Q: In spite of this amazing prescription, other people say that the Asian experience depended or is indebted to two things; cheap money and the open Western markets, especially the American markets. These people think that these two factors are not present anymore, unlike when the Asian Tigers started their “journey” of economic growth. What do you think?

A: I think that this is inaccurate. It was also difficult to grow in the past or in the last 30 years. When the Asian countries started to build their economies, no one believed that these countries would be able to develop, achieve an economic miracle and become economic “tigers”.

I think that it is easier now because the world is more open. We are now witnessing greater flow of investments. Investors are also seeking promising countries with better opportunities for higher profits. Hence, we now have low interest rates. It is noteworthy that when Singapore started to grow its economy, the interest rates in the international market was between 5 to 7% but now it is 1%.

On the open markets, the American economy and the world trade system are still open. The world is also witnessing the rise of new businesses and industries, which present new and excellent opportunities. For instance, the mobile phones industry had generated many other business

opportunities as it grew. In the past, the world depended on the US and Europe but now there are multinational companies in Asia. There are Asian markets and money to be made for those who seek opportunities for growth.

Q: There remain reservations and open debates regarding the Asian experience. There are people who said that, “but look at the painful experience following the collapse of the Asian currencies, as well as the Japanese companies who had to abandon their lifetime employment policy”.

A: Yes, the collapse of the Asian currencies in 1997 was a painful experience but as the Chinese proverb says “A crisis is an opportunity riding the dangerous wind”. The currency collapse was painful and brought about bankruptcy, currency depreciation and retrenchment. But this was also a good chance to learn.

During the 2008/09 financial and economic crisis, the performance of the Asian countries were better because they had learned from the past experience. The Asian countries had fixed their financial system and had also saved more. This helped them to face the crisis and overcome it better than others.

Q: Whoever reads your book “The New Asian Hemisphere” will clearly notice your admiration towards China. What is the secret behind that deep admiration?

A: China is a ‘live’ case study and the best example of applying the seven pillars for the development and modernization of a nation. When the Chinese Leader Deng Xiaoping applied the policy of economic liberalization and openness, the Chinese achieved amazing growth. Former Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji also insisted that his country join the World Trade Organization despite knowing that this will impose burdens on his country and force the Chinese industries to compete in the tough open environment. It is said that good is measured by the number of people you helped. With this principle, China was able to get 600 million of its citizens out of poverty. This is amazing and worth admiring. China is also taking steady steps towards becoming a great global power.

Q: Why do you think that China as a global power will act differently from other great global powers in history?

A: First, having China as a global power is something good. It is not useful to have only one global power (the US) but several global powers on the international arena. I think that the world will be more stable with several global powers. Second, the world system (with its rules which were put by the UN, WB, IMF and other international organizations) has already established the rules of being a responsible global power and China seems ready to apply those rules. That is why we have to maintain the current world system.

Q: What makes you very confident and optimistic, especially when you have indicated in your book that dialogue is better than containing, which we are currently not witnessing in the international arena?

A: Because the world now is safer than it was in the past. Although we are witnessing huge transformations in the balance of power in the international arena, we do not see any geopolitical tensions. Instead of seeing tensions between the US and China, despite China's transformation, we see a serious attempt for dialogue and cooperation because they believed that the continuity of the world system is better for stability and has to be maintained. I believe in the necessity of maintaining dialogue between countries and I am still optimistic. I also think that going to war in Iraq was a mistake.

Translated by:
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