

Culture Shifts of the Post-Western World

Rohan Hazell:

The cultural tapestry of the 20th century, arguably even stretching back to the renaissance, has been heavily threaded with Western influences. From Hollywood blockbusters to influences on music, sports and pop culture in general, Western norms have set the global stage.

But as the world order veers to world multipolarity, the vestiges of old powers in the East are stirring, awakening dormant cultural wells, bringing about a renaissance of the rest.

Let's hear more about the cultural shifts on the horizon from Professor Kishore Mahbubani, former President of the UN Security Council, and Distinguished Fellow at the Asian Research Institute.

Professor Kishore Mahbubani:

I think the real excitement from the resurgence of Asia is going to come from the cultural dimension, because Asia has always had the world's oldest civilisations in China, India and Southeast Asia.



As you know, history teaches us that when civilisations come back, they first have an economic resurgence, which is what you're seeing in Asia. But following the economic resurgence, you will see a cultural renaissance take place. And the most exciting thing that you're going to see over the next 20 - 30 years is the major renaissance of our great Asian civilisations, like the Chinese civilisation, the Indian civilisation, the Islamic civilisation, and also many Southeast Asian societies. So the next 20 - 30 years will be fascinating. And here I must say that a few countries have led the way.

I would say India in some ways has led the way with its cultural exports. I remember many years ago when I was travelling in Morocco, in the middle of the desert in Morocco, I heard the songs of Muhammad Rafi. And I, of course, listen to the songs of Muhammad Rafi every day, because without listening to Mohammed Rafi, I cannot do my writing.

And similarly, what is equally shocking is the explosion of the cultural export from South Korea to the rest of the world. I met people in the United States who spend all their time watching Korean soap operas, because Korean soap operas are among the best in the world.

Therefore, you will find also, just as you'll see a resurgence of material goods being exported from Asia, you'll see an equally strong resurgence of cultural goods being exported from Asia. And of course, the cultural renaissance of Asia is something that the whole world can enjoy, including people living in the United States and Europe.

How do post-Western cultural shifts relate to leaders in the non-Western world?

My main message to them is that for those who live in the non-Western world, this is the most exciting and the best decades for the non-Western world. I mean, certainly if you see the success, especially of China over the last 40 years, in the year 1980, China's GDP in purchasing power parity terms was only 10% of the United States, 10%. But by 2014, 34 years later, it had become bigger. So the Chinese people have just experienced the best 30 to 40 years in 4,000 years of Chinese history.

Similarly, I believe that the people of India are about to experience the best 30 years in Indian history under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in 3,000 years of Indian history. All the societies in Asia and Africa now have tremendous opportunities to improve the standard of living of their people. So I believe therefore, that we Asians should not be drowned by the pessimism that you find in the Western world.



We should focus on developing ourselves and if possible, share our optimism with the Western world. Because the Western world seems to believe that the growth and development of Asian societies, including China and India and ASEAN, is a negative for them. Whereas we should persuade them that the success of the rest of the world, the 88% who live outside the West, is a plus for the Western world and the West should take advantage of these opportunities.

So my big piece of advice to all the people who live in the non-Western world is please try to share your optimism with those who live in the West and maybe then they will stop resisting the rise of the rest.

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Although the post-Western world will see rising powers like China and India having greater influence on the global stage, this does not mean that the West will become redundant.

Rather, Professor Kishore argues that the multilateral rules-based order set up by the West, including the UN, should be preserved, and strengthened for the benefit of all.

This will require the West to become more accepting of sharing power with non-Western countries and respecting their wants.

This is the geopolitical reality facing the West, and neglecting it could lead to unwelcome tension and even conflict.