

Kishore Mahbubani, a career diplomat, native of Singapore, and former Ambassador of the country to the United Nations, originally wrote a thought-provoking essay called *Can Asians Think?* in 1998. Now, he is using the same title for a collection of essays (including the original one) he wrote between 1991 and 2001, each augmented with more recent additions and comments. If anything, his key ideas may have become even more relevant, with the experiences of 9/11 and the effects of globalization casting long shadows on the historic view of East-West relationships.

The author offers his perspectives on world and regional issues, urging people to retool their thinking about the future. In one of his most provocative articles, "The West and the Rest", Mahbubani offers a critique of the post-Cold War export of the West's social institutions. Other essays deal with general aspects relating to Asian values, the Asia Pacific Region, the Asean pact, Cambodia, Japan, and Singapore.



In diverse pieces such as "The Dangers of Decadence: What the Rest Can Teach the West" and "The Ten Commandments for Developing Countries", Mahbubani asserts that

Westerners are largely unaware of their condescending attitudes and practices toward the East. While his own line of arguments is not free of similar cultural arrogance, he confronts both sides with equally tough issues. His first question goes to his fellow Asians, challenging them to look inward and ask why they have slipped so far behind European societies, whom they had once left far behind.

Also, the author aims to open new windows for the West, helping it to see beyond its tradition of intellectual rigidity, which he hopes will allow people to see themselves as the rest of the world does. He warns that Westerners maintain their outdated world view at their own peril, a point for which there is plenty of supporting evidence. After all, it is now widely believed that Asia's economies are poised to surpass those of both Europe and North America within the next fifty years or less.

Mahbubani's work lays a foundation for a far-reaching discourse between East and West. After 500 years of Western domination of Asia, we are hopeful to see a two-way exchange of ideas in the 21st century. In a way, Mahbubani's thoughts might be viewed as an Asian equivalent of Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations", sending a wake-up call to Asians and Westerners alike. It comes very timely and is hard to ignore.

Leadership Crossroads™ 10865-B Hazelhurst Dr. #11793, Houston, TX 77043
469-522-3389

info@leadershipcrossroads.com www.leadershipcrossroads.com

This book review solely represents the opinions and conclusions of its author. It does not claim to be accurate, complete, or objective.

© Leadership Crossroads™, 2005



Lothar Katz is the founder of Leadership Crossroads. He has a wealth of experience in achieving productive cooperation across cultures and driving business success on a global scale.

A seasoned former executive of a Fortune 500 company, he regularly interacted with employees, customers, outsourcing partners, and third parties in more than 25 countries around the world. These included many parts of Asia, e.g., China, India, and Japan. Originally from Germany, he has lived and worked both in the United States and in Europe.

