

INTELLECTUAL DUTY IN THE TURBULENCE OF GLOBAL CHANGES

by Darwis Khudori, for the NIEO+50 Congress in Havana, April 28-May 1, 2024

We are in the turbulence of global changes in which the wars in Ukraine and in Palestine are the most spectacular manifestations. And we do not know where are these changes going, whether they go to the best or to the worst of the world. This raises question to me, as a scholar as well as a simple human being: what should I do?

There are many ways to identify the why and the how of these changes. I would propose to identify the changes following what Kishore Mahbubani called *“The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East”*. Several internationally well known academic works converged to that direction, including the giant reference of World System Theory Immanuel Wallerstein who wrote *“That Asia has risen in the world economy since at least 1960, and especially since 2000, is a proposition that is widely accepted”*. Other names strengthen the statement, such as Frank B. Tipton (*The Rise of Asia: Economics, Society, and Politics in Contemporary Asia*, 1998), Terutomo Ozawa (*The rise of Asia: The 'flying-geese' theory of tandem growth and regional agglomeration*, 2009), Parag Khanna (*The future is Asian: Commerce, Conflict, and Culture in the 21st Century*, 2019) and Deepak Nayyar in his two complementary books: *Asian Transformation: An Inquiry into the Development of Nations* and *Resurgent Asia: Diversity in Development* (2019).

Some authors indicated the direction of changes. Kishore Mahbubani, for example, is very confident to write that *“the rise of Asia will be good for the world”*. Deepak Nayyar concluded that it is possible to rise together in diversity, and not necessarily following the single way of capitalism. Asia were marked by differences between countries in geographical size, embedded histories, colonial legacies, nationalist movements, natural resource endowments, population size, income levels, and political systems. The politics, too, ranged widely from socialism through State capitalism to capitalism, from authoritarian regimes to political democracies, and from one-party states to multi-party systems. There were different paths to development, because there were no unique solutions, or magic wands. Hence, there were choices to be made, which were shaped by a complex mix of economic, social and political factors in the national context, where history mattered. Yet, despite such diversity, there are discernible patterns, pointing to substantive analytical lessons that emerge from the Asian development experience.

Beyond the economy, Parag Khanna saw Asia becoming more integrated and moving closer towards a “system”. The Asian system does not, and will not, have rules as formalized as those of Europe. There is no supranational Asian parliament, central bank, or military – no “Asian Union”. Instead, the Asian approach to integration involves building complementarities and deferring dangerous issues. Fundamentally, Asians seek not conquest but respect. A sufficient degree of respect for one another’s interests is enough. The Asian system has never been an Asian bloc. To the contrary, for most of history, there has been stability across the many Asian sub-regions and fluidity rather than hierarchy. There will be therefore no Chinese unipolarity – neither globally nor even in Asia. Asians are much more comfortable with the idea of global multipolarity than are Americans, for whom recent history (and most scholarship) has focused on unipolar orders – especially their own. But the more multipolar the world becomes, the more the global future resembles Asia’s past. The biggest geopolitical phenomena of the past three decades have come in rapid succession: the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the consolidation of the European Union, the rise of China, the US shale energy revolution, and now the emergence of an Asian system.

On the other hand, a Bangladeshi economist Rehman Sobhan warned that *“This transformation in the world economic order will not be painless either for the East or for the West. Indeed, the transition has the potential for causing much grief to the world as no established order is likely to cede its hegemony without challenge. The significant point of departure during this phase of transition lies in the fact that the receding economic power of the West (also more broadly classified as the North), dominated by the US, remains and is likely to remain in the immediate future the dominant military power. [...] This erosion of the economic power of the West while retaining military dominance with the US*

and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, does not bode well for an easy transition for the global order. [...] How far the hitherto dominant West will go to preserve their hegemony over their economic order remains critical in determining whether the Asian century will evolve peacefully or through a process of turmoil”.

So, what should I do as scholar and activist of social and solidarity movements?

I defined my own duty in four points:

- 1) To form united forces of intellectuals, scholars, activists of social and solidarity movement for a shared global future based on the Bandung Spirit Ideals of Peace, Independence, Equality, Solidarity and Emancipation. The initiative of Progressive International is perfectly in line with this point.
- 2) To accompany The Rise of Asia in Progressing Globally towards a Sustainable Prosperity in Peace, Justice, Cooperation Diversity and Solidarity, so that the Rise of Asia will benefit not only Asia but also the rest of the world, and not to repeat the historical path of the Rise of the West characterised by the genocide of indigenous peoples in America, Australia and other parts of the world, the slavery, the colonialism and the world wars.
- 3) Not to let anyone left behind, in line with the Bandung Spirit Ideal of Solidarity, translated into the empowerment of the victims of global injustice (including Africa in general, certain countries like Cuba and Palestine).
- 4) To go beyond NATO (No Action Talking Only), meaning translating our thought into actions. It is in this respect that we founded AFRASI (African-Asian and International Studies) Institute in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, as a training centre for the youth of Africa and of other parts of the world in the perspective of Bandung Spirit Ideals.

Quoted works

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