

SPEECH to the EAST ASIA ASSOCIATION, Hamburg

(on 1 March, 1985)

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Mr. Mayor, Gentlemen,

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for your kind invitation. What else can justify the attempt of a layman on things Asian to address the experts on Asian affairs gathered here and meet the expectations that this event with its great tradition gives rise to? For I have to admit that I am a layman as far as Asia is concerned. To be sure, I have visited several countries between the Indus and Tokyo over the years, and I have some good friends in the region. But do I know enough? Have I seen and experienced enough to be able to claim that I am familiar with that highly important and venerable part of the world and its people with a great future ahead of them? I believe that many people bearing public responsibility - be it in the political, economic or cultural sphere - must ask themselves this question, and not just in Germany. It is conceivable that the opposite question is of relevance in Asian countries. Here, our view of Asia is still all too often obscured by our traditional Eurocentric outlook on the world shaped by a historical era that has now passed. In Asia, the revitalization of its own political, economic and cultural resources and the justified pride in doing so may occasionally result in the tendency to observe the old continent of Europe from the wrong end of a telescope, as it were, which makes it appear very remote, very small and without any cumbersome, complicated details.

However, it is a fact that today, at a time when the claim to dominance by the old continent of Europe has been relegated to history, nations have not drifted apart but are moving ever closer together in a world that is constantly shrinking and becoming more populous. Lau-Dse's Dau De Ging contains the following delightful words: "Even if neighbouring countries lie in each other's range of vision and the crowing of cockerels and the barking of dogs in one can be heard in the other, the people will grow old and die without any intercommunication ever occurring." The atmosphere that is described and invoked here touches upon a deep human yearning: to live unhindered as one pleases, but without being isolated. However, this is no longer our world, nor will it be. In the future, Europeans and Asians

will deal with each other to an even greater extent than now. If they are to get on with each other on equal terms and to mutual benefit and with the aim of ensuring stability in this interdependent world, they need maximum mutual trust. This trust will be all the more viable, the more it rests on a familiarity with each other. It is created not just by learning more about one another; no less important is the endeavour of each other to make itself understood by the other through words and deeds.

We know that Asia is important for us. And we know a great deal about Asia. But we do not know enough or - to be more precise - not enough people here know enough so that we can live and work with Asia in the fashion required not just in the future, but even today. And conversely, I would ask the question of whether the Asians, who, in striving to assert themselves, got to know the Europeans only too well in the past, are today as well acquainted with Europe as is necessary for the co-existence and co-operation I have just referred to.

The statement that East Asia and the Pacific region are rapidly evolving into one of the world's key economic and political areas has now become a common place. It is no longer, as it largely was in the last century, a region where alien powers compete for dominance. Asia has taken its fate into its own hands. Admittedly, one cannot speak of economic or even political unity. Highly advanced industrial nations exist alongside developing countries, albeit ones generally with a high level and rate of development, countries belonging to alliances exist alongside non-aligned States, and parliamentary democracies alongside other types of government. The Soviet Union's presence is clearly felt in geopolitical and strategic terms but - though the country maintains fairly good bilateral relations - it is not a member of the family. However, perfect harmony does not exist everywhere by any means; one only needs to recall Cambodia and the division of Korea.

Nonetheless, a surprisingly stable political structure has evolved in Asia. China, preoccupied with itself for centuries, is opening its doors to the world and finding friends and partners for co-operation. Given the size of that country and its population, the event itself is extraordinary important for Asia and the world at large. A decade ago, scarcely anyone would have considered it possible that at the end of 1983 the Chinese Party Leader and the Japanese Prime Minister would jointly invoke Sino-Japanese friendship for the next century and that the historically

strained atmosphere between Japan and Korea would undergo a fundamental improvement.

The members of ASEAN, who now total six countries, are constantly intensifying their co-operation and developing it further and are in the process of becoming one of the world's most dynamic economic regions. India and Pakistan are united together with other countries in the framework of South Asian Regional Co-operation (SARC), which, though only a start, is very promising in view of the history of Indo-Pakistan relations.

All of these developments have required compromises on the part of those concerned. However, one can compromise only if one is confident and self-assured. One may compromise or engage in meaningful negotiations only if one respects the other's self-image and identity. Compromises can perhaps be achieved more easily in Asia because there everyone knows that what matters is not just to be right, but even more to enable the other to save face.

Any increase in political stability in Asia is, of course, in our own interest as well. A major conflict there could, in view of the dimensions involved, develop into a global one and hence threaten our own existence in the European-Atlantic region. For their part, the Asian countries are becoming increasingly aware that a conflict in our region, which continues to be the focal point of the East-West tensions dominating world affairs and which is where the world's greatest and most modern military potentials are still concentrated, would have grave repercussions for them. This is illustrated by the fact that it was particularly the Asian participant in the World Economy Summits, namely Japan, who strongly endorsed the statement made by the Seven at Williamsburg in 1983 that security is indivisible. Admittedly, in doing so, Japan, an ally of the United States, did not act on behalf of the many non-aligned countries of Asia. However, one should remember that it was an Asian country which expressed itself in that way.

We Europeans cannot control or indeed solve Asia's problems, just as Asia cannot control or solve ours. Today's world is characterized by the fact that each of us is incorporated in an unprecedented fashion into a political and economic network which extends beyond our scope of action as sovereign nations. It is therefore all the more important to perceive our own policies as part of this network and to frame them accordingly, even though we are of course most concerned with European problems. Yet the East-West confrontation itself is not merely a European problem. We want long-range nuclear weapons to be subjected to controls

and reductions because this matter greatly concerns us, but not only us alone. The list of examples can easily be extended. We must take account of this interlinkage in the pursuits of our interests. The increasingly intensive political dialogue with Asian countries serves this purpose. German politicians and diplomats have been devoting their efforts to this dialogue for many years now. My predecessor in office and Chancellor Kohl visited China, India, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and Pakistan. Foreign Minister Genscher has for a long time now been striving for closer co-operation between Europe and Asia; he has particularly served the cause of furthering the dialogue between the European Community and ASEAN. All of this is gratifying and will produce results. But have the need for dialogue and the need to observe political events in Asia and to make our interests and motivations continuously clear in Asia become fully accepted not only by political and economic experts but also by everyone concerned with political matters? After all, the support of the latter is required if a strong, steadfast foreign policy is to be pursued in a democracy like ours.

It is very gratifying to note that in recent years the interest shown by our media in Asia has risen considerably. But do we still not have to read foreign newspapers and periodicals if we want to obtain in-depth information on events in Asia? And is Asia not mentioned rather seldom in the public discussion on our own situation and our own interests? It is probably correct to state that Asia is mentioned most frequently in the business section of newspapers. The greatest propinquity to Asia does in fact exist in the economic sphere. Our consumers are familiar with countless products from Asian countries, ranging from high-capacity electronic goods to ingredients for Asian cuisine. In the first half of 1984, German trade with Asian countries for the first time exceeded 7% of our total foreign trade. In 1982, the corresponding figure was still 6.2%. Are 7% a lot or a little, too much or too little? If one bears in mind the fact that our trade with our neighbour, the Netherlands, totals approximately 10% and is thus larger than with the whole of South, South-East and East Asia, the existing percentage is more likely to appear small, even after allowing for the fact that the comparison with the Netherlands, a fellow EC country, is inapposite since our trade with such neighbours is, technically speaking, German foreign trade but at the same time internal trade within the European Community.

It would be like carrying coals to Newcastle if I were to deal here with the economic factors determining those 7%. I should like to cover a few aspects that are not directly of an economic nature. For instance, I find it unjustified to accuse German industry, as is occasionally done, of having failed to notice the developments in East Asia. Bearing in mind that, after 1945, German industry virtually had to start from scratch again on Asian markets, it can be stated that a sound foundation has been created, in many cases through commendable pioneering achievements in competition with established, traditional trading countries. Tribute should be paid in this respect.

Nonetheless, one should be allowed to ask certain questions. Through hard work, high quality and reliability we achieved successes, which opened up for us the safe markets of developed countries. But did this not produce a certain tendency to neglect any involvement in economies that are still developing and hence entail a certain degree of risk or a tendency to make any such involvement overly dependent on security afforded by government guarantees, in other words bureaucratic procedures? For example, was the potential of Japan's economy not considerably underrated in the 1950's and early 1960's simply because at the time we were a few years ahead and some people believed that our lead could not be caught up with? I am citing this example because today we realize that there may be several Japans in Asia. And I cite it with the proviso - which serves to rectify the overall picture - that even then a considerable number of German companies succeeded in gaining a foothold in Japan, as in other countries, in a difficult, but by no means hostile environment. Incidentally, these companies and those that had the courage and ingenuity to follow them seem to complain the least about obstacles. Owing to many years of experience, they view the frequently great difficulties of these markets less as deliberate impediments than as peculiarities of a specifically Asian environment - peculiarities which even differ from one country to another - and have learned to cope with the difficulties by regarding them in this way.

Trade, too, is an element of culture and is influenced by it; international economic processes are a form of mutual acculturation on an international scale. Depending on whether we compete with the dynamic economies of Asia in their countries, on our own market or on third markets, diverse cultural and psychological elements come into play, which are unrelated to the market models presented in economic textbooks. In such a situation, above all in the

face of strong competition, the accusation of unfair practices is made all too easily - especially the accusation of Asian exports being dumped here and of non-tariff trade barriers being erected for our exports to Asia. Of course, I know that these things indeed exist. In such cases, we should strongly oppose them by invoking generally recognized rules, especially those embodied in international agreements. But is there not also a tendency globally to describe as unfair anything that is inconvenient to us - any realistic competition is inconvenient if our business is at a risk. By "us", I do not necessarily first and foremost mean us Europeans. Does anyone who makes such accusations not assume all too readily that the Western world alone can determine what is fair on the basis of its interpretation of justice? Does he not realize that, in doing so, he calls into question not only the economic interests, but also the cultural and moral self-image of our Asian trading partner and thus touches upon his most sensitive nerve? He may appreciate that the factors of our competitiveness - general and incidental labour costs, working hours, and other elements of the social fabric - are aspects of the social acceptability in our society and are therefore exempted from the interplay of forces on the international market. Proceeding from this understanding, he may even show consideration, such as heeding an appeal to exercise restraint in exports. However, his readiness to do so will diminish if the attempt is made to impose upon him as postulates of general validity the criteria that are decisive for our society, in other words, to tell him that he is acting unfairly because he is not the same as us.

Although, on the whole, our political and economic relations with Asia present quite a favourable picture, we cannot fully suppress a feeling that they are not entirely satisfactory, a feeling that political and economic intercourse with nations that have a blood relationship with European culture is easier for us than with the nations of Asia. The Asians fascinate us but they do not really open their hearts to us - at least that is the impression we have. Does this mean that we ourselves ought to be doing more to make them more responsive?

This is indeed a problem, to me the most difficult, the crucial one. Here we are concerned with ancient civilizations of the highest level and of extraordinary vitality. In some sectors they have accepted and incorporated the practical superiority of Western technology, reluctantly at first but then with breathtaking, highly efficient pragmat-

ism. Never have they accepted Western civilization as a whole as superior.

Are we really prepared for relations with such partners? Here, too, it cannot be argued that German and European scholars, writers and journalists have not penetrated deeply enough into the nature of these civilizations and have failed to interpret them properly. The names and works that could be cited to refute that argument are many and significant. I am not concerned at the moment with this specific knowledge, important as it is, but with our awareness of the demands which practical co-existence with Asia make on us, with whether we are adequately coming to terms with the governments and nations of Asia as part of the world of today. In our dealings with them we must see them both as bearing the stamp of their civilizations and as modern or modernizing societies. We have to see both sides of the coin. This means we need knowledge of the foundations of their societies and of their present-day motive forces, structures and problems. We need practical experience in our dealings with them, in other words, we need to rehearse our relationships with them even down to our manner of conduct. And we need to do this to an extent and standard that is commensurate with Asia's importance for us. We need to do so not only in order to assist those individually interested but as part of our public awareness.

This is nothing new to the members and guests of the East Asia Association. I am saying this to support our efforts. What we are concerned with is eminently practical things.

It begins with language. Do we still regard Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, Urdu, Indonesian or Korean as exotic languages? Knowledge of a major Asian language is not yet provided for in our European education systems, although it would give us access to that nation's culture and also to increasingly important markets. In Asia knowledge of a European language is becoming more and more essential for top-level personnel. They have come to realize that world trade presupposes knowledge of the world and knowledge of the world's languages. That is not a sign of inferiority but of an outward-looking, modern society.

Why is that tens of thousands of Asians are studying in Europe and only several hundred Europeans, and certainly far too few Germans, in Asia? Are Asian universities uninteresting? Is one of the reasons that courses of study in Asia are as yet less valuable career-wise than courses in Europe or North America?

We already have reason enough to ponder why young people in our country are becoming less inclined to work abroad. Perhaps the private sector can make additional efforts to provide guidance and motivation for the coming generation. The plan to hold a three-month seminar on Japan developed by the East Asia Association in conjunction with the Institute for Asian Studies might prove to be an exemplary step in this direction. At that seminar company representatives will be taught the language and learn about cultural and economic affairs. Special importance attaches to the gathering and application of mutual knowledge in exchange and in collaboration with the Asian country concerned. I am therefore particularly interested in the proposed German-Japanese Foundation in Berlin which will serve this very purpose.

I deliberately said at the beginning that we must not only receive and absorb from others but must also make ourselves understandable to them. We Europeans still have something to offer in today's world in the field of politics, economics, science and technology and not least in the arts and humanities. Let us prove it! We have no reason to be despondent. We shall remain what else but Europeans. We shall always link our readiness to respect the self-reliance and characteristics of others with the natural expectation that our own self-reliance and characteristics will in turn be recognized and appreciated.

Occasionally there is a tendency in Asia, but also in America, to refer to Europe as being in decline. That is untrue we know. But where did this idea come from? The explanation probably lies in two misconceptions.

First, Europe's relative importance in the world naturally declines as a result of the growing significance of other regions. But by no rule of logic can one conclude from this that Europe - in absolute figures - has become less efficient, less inventive, or less dynamic. It will pit its political, economic and intellectual resources against the new competition and in so doing bring its spiritual and moral potential more into play. We won't run slower because there are more competitors in the race. We should leave no doubt about this.

And the other explanation is that the European experiences life and evolution as something fraught with crisis. It is part of his way of life to reflect philosophically or quite practically about crises and to talk about them out loud. He is not accustomed to others to whom this is alien listening and taking it to be something which in his eyes it definitely is not: a sign of senility. Is it not some-

what ironical that Europe should also sometimes be seen in this light by Asian observers whose own countries are most impressively demonstrating what vitality, dynamism and renewal ancient cultures in particular are capable of? It is no different with our own civilization. We will not change our way of thinking, but we will have to consider the effects of our self-critical monologues on others. We should do without the lamentations that sometimes too easily fall from German lips in particular. Not only do they give an unfavourable impression to others; they also tend to hamper our own self-perception. In recent years there has been rather too much of this.

We have the means to meet the Asian challenge, a challenge which, inspite of all its competitive elements, is one of co-operation, of partnership.

We should not be scared of competition. It is a kind of fitness training which gets us into shape for co-operation in particular. The countries of Asia, and others, should be able to count on us, but they must also reckon with us.

I have used words like "competition" and "reckon". They denote something tangible and practical, but they must not divert our attention from the highly fundamental fact that the shaping of the, as I see it, unique relationship between Europe and Asia is essentially a spiritual task. Both sides bring into this relationship thousand of years of their own human experience, the experience of man's energy and inadequacy, the experience of the *conditio humana*, the answer to which on both sides has ultimately been sought in religion. No wonder, therefore, that as man's condition has changed in our new world each side has become increasingly fascinated with the answer provided by the other.

For the Europeans and the Asians it would be an immeasurable enrichment in all spheres of life if each other were able to absorb the spiritual experiences of the other and thus strengthen its own individuality, its vitality, its power of conviction. The soul will always be involved in relations between Asia and Europe. Neither side will want to lose its own. The Europe of today too draws on the deep sources from which it has nourished itself for thousands of years. Its spiritual strength remains and will continue to influence the world.

And also where the topic is increased exports, scientific exchanges, political dialogue, and so on, we should not lose sight of this stratum of life, also in the co-existence of nations. It is part of our common reality.

I did not feel in a position to make categorical statements as to what the present situation is and what it should be. I have rather posed many questions and left them unanswered. This would seem to reflect the situation today. It is certainly in keeping with the office of Federal President. I comfort you and myself with a Japanese proverb: "To ask questions brings shame on you once, not to ask questions brings shame on you forever." And I can assure you that I have on the whole tried to keep the brahminic maxim: "Let the man say what is true, let him say what sounds pleasant, and do not let him say any unpleasant truth. But at the same time do not let him say any unpleasant untruth."