Asia's New Confidence – Challenge to Europe[1]

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> *"The West is concerned with changing the outside world; the East thinks that the process of change begins with ourselves."*

1. Introduction

Europe's ties with the fastest growing region in the world seem to have deepened following the first Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Bangkok during March of this year. Representing Asia at the summit were the seven members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) plus China, Japan and South Korea. The meeting started a process of reconciliation between two regions long divided by distance, culture and the legacy of history. Leaders from both regions have been calling for improved ties in order to strengthen their international standing in the game of global competition. Asian leaders wished to supplement their links with the US by building closer relationships with the European Union (EU) and its members.[2] This ambition was matched by the states of the EU, which are seeking to develop a better relationship with Asia to rival the United States Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. The result of the summit in Bangkok was a strong up-grading of Asia's political status: for the first time, both regions met almost as equals. This marks a recognition of Asia's growing importance in the post-cold war world, not only economically but strategically and politically.[3]

Most leaders of the European Union, however, have still to accept that this corner of the world has become an area of global significance. They

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1   This is a revised version of a paper presented at the international workshop 'Asia in Transition-Prospects of the Transformation Dynamics and their Impacts on Euro-Asian Relations' organized by the European Center for International Security, Starnberg/Germany, 6.-8.12.1994.

2   Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), 6.10.1994, pp. 15-16 / FEER, 4.6.1994, pp. 18-19.

3   International Herald Tribune, 28.2.1996, p. 1 / Wall Street Journal, 27.2.1996, p.1 / Handelsblatt, 4.3.1996, p. 9 / Economist, 2.3.1996, pp. 51-53.

have yet to realize that the end of the cold war has brought fundamental
structural changes to Asian-European relations. Until the end of the cold
war, Asian nations were usually regarded by European governments as a
peripheral area, on which bipolar strategies, security concepts and political
structures were imposed by the world powers. The shift from a bipolar to a
multipolar international system has unraveled the bonds that previously
held Western Europe and the anti-Communist countries in Asia together
under United States (US) leadership: no longer do these countries need to
set aside differences for the sake of unity against communism.[4] To begin
with, the new environment has brought an end to the forced harmonization
of relations and common economic, military and strategic interests have
now to be redefined.[5] Secondly, increased regionalization and the threats
posed by emerging trade blocs have encouraged Asian countries to shift
away from their traditional markets in the US and Europe towards the huge
potential of intra-regional trade and investment. Intra-regional trade is
growing rapidly, and intra-regional investment already accounts for around
40 per cent of Asia's total foreign direct investment.[6] This is fostering an
'Asianization' process and has increased Asia's room for manoeuvre while
reducing European leverage. Third, sustained economic growth based on
an endogenous development model has resulted in growing pride and na-
tionalism. Asian countries are demonstrating forms of political and eco-
nomic development, based partly on traditional or, at least, non-Western
values, that will take them in different directions from those predicted by
Western social science theories and models. Their success is challenging
the Eurocentric belief that the West is the model to follow.[7] Fourth, peace
and security in much of Asia albeit fragile has had the effect of reducing
foreign leverage and influence, while increasing Asian countries' freedom
and flexibility.

The inability of European governments to adapt to these changes, to-
gether with the new confidence exuded by Asian governments, has led to
rising tension between the regions. The summit in Bangkok set a new tone
for future dialogue between them, but the cordiality did not mask the wide
differences that still exist between Europe and Asia. Behind this first rap-

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4   Buzan, Barry: The Post-Cold War Asia-Pacific Security Order: Conflict or Cooperation? in:
    Mack, Andrew/Ravenhill, John (ed.): Pacific Cooperation, Westview Press, Boulder/San
    Francisco/Oxford, 1995, pp. 134-142.

5   Fruin, Mark: Prospects for Economic Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region, in: Asian
    Survey, Vol. 35, No. 9, Sept. 1995, pp. 799-800.

6   Economist, 9.3.1996, Survey of Business in Asia, p. 5.

7   Mehmet, Ozay: Westernizing the Third World, Routledge, London/New York, 1995,
    pp. 138-139, p. 144.

prochement lie deeply differing perceptions of what relations should be like and where they should go.

Asian countries believe that their moment in history has come- they feel they are strong enough to finally join the league of developed countries. The upsurge of interest in culture and values is only a tool in the latest phase of the decolonization process. After the 'territorial decolonization', which brought national sovereignty to the states of the Southeast Asia and after the 'economic decolonization', which brought them economic and military power, this third phase of decolonization aims at 'political decolonization'. Asian countries want to end the era of foreign domination and fully determine their own future, not only on the national but also on the international level.[8] Asian leaders are no longer willing to sit back and let Europe and America dictate terms. Anwar Ibrahim, deputy prime minister of Malaysia, spoke for many when he said at the conference of the Asia Society in Singapore in 1994 that Asians are no longer willing to be "lectured and hectored" by those who "consider that they still have a civilizing mission in Asia".[9] Several incidents, such as the British-Malaysian and Dutch-Indonesian clash over official development aid, or the clash between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) ministers and their European counterparts over human rights in Luxembourg 1991, have made it clear that this is not just rhetoric, but represents a new approach to dealing with Europe.[10] Asian leaders are speaking out more clearly about their concerns and interests and are pushing for a change in the 'balance of power' in Asian-European relations. They do not want a confrontation with European countries, but continued rejection of their demands could start a process of re-thinking. This could produce bitter hostility, fuel nationalism and encourage anti-Europeanism. In a worst-case scenario, these tensions could contribute to a new East-West divide. Therefore, European governments have to change their attitude and take Asian relations more seriously. If they really want to secure political and economic influence, they need to enhance their political presence in the region, especially if they want to help shape events in the next century.

2. Issues

The following paragraph tries to outline the different positions taken by European and Asian leaders on the main issues: a) economic interests, b)

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8   Business Day, 4.3.1996.
9   FEER, 2.6.1994, p. 20.
10   FEER; 20.6.1991, pp. 9-10 / FEER, 29.10.1992, p. 28.

values, c) new world order.[11] The aim is not to go into a detailed analysis of the argumentations on the two sides, but to concentrate on the broader issue of identifying the reasons for the deterioration in relations. It is not intended to assess why perceptions differ, even if some arguments may seem superficial or simply wrong, but to see them for what they are, a 'political reality' which cannot be neglected and which has to be dealt with if relations are to improve.

2.1 Economic Interests

Increased European protectionism and the long recession suffered by West European economies have awoken doubts among Asians over whether Western countries' economic superiority will last forever. Many believe that Europe is suffering from social decay and from structural weaknesses in its economic systems and institutions. Low savings and investment, excessive consumption, expensive social programs, poor education, and a lack of leadership are all perceived to be reducing Europe's competitiveness. Therefore, European countries are perceived to be in disarray- socially, morally and, most importantly, economically.[12] Asian governments regard rapid economic growth and social stability in much of Asia as evidence of a long-term transfer of power to the region. In the 1950s, the US and Europe accounted for 80 per cent of the world's Gross National Product (GNP) and trade, with the result that people envisaged the world economy in terms of a bipolar structure consisting of Europe and the US. In 1993, the picture has dramatically changed, with the combined share taken by East Asia[13] up from about 4 per cent to 23 per cent, or US$ 5.6 trillion. In comparison, the EU and the European Free Trade Association have a combined GNP of US$ 7.65 trillion, which is equivalent to approximately 32 per cent of the total, while the North American Free Trade Area, led by the US, accounts for another 30 per cent of the world's GNP, or US$ 7.28 trillion.[14] Therefore Asian leaders see it as inevitable that sooner or later

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11 This paper concentrates only on three issues that are most important. It is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of all issues as such.

12 Mahbubani, Kishore: The Dangers of Decadence, in: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 72, No. 4, Sept./Oct. 1993, p. 14 / Zakaria, Fareed: Culture is Destiny: A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew, in: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 73, No. 2, March/April 1994, pp. 109-126 / Asian Business, June 1994, p. 4.

13 East Asia includes all ASEAN countries plus Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and China.

14 Research for International Management (RIM), Sakura Institute of Research, Tokyo, Vol. 4, No. 30, 1995, p. 54.

each of these three groups will make up about 30 per cent of the world's GNP. By contrast, more and more Europeans believe, or like to believe, that this success is not sustainable, as problems of underdeveloped infrastructure, pollution, inadequate educational systems, inflation and trade deficits are only beginning to show their negative effects. Professor Paul Krugman, one of the most outspoken critics of 'the myth of Asia's miracle', goes even further and states that East Asia's growth is merely the result of increased inputs of capital and labor, as was the case with the Soviet Union in the 1960s. Since the development was not brought about by productivity improvements, he predicts a limited growth in the future.[15] Sceptical of the hype surrounding the so-called 'Asia-Pacific century', many critics point to the danger that the region is becoming increasingly blind to the many problems that lie ahead. Flattered by the accolades that have been heaped on it by admirers, East Asian leaders are accused of showing the first signs of allowing their success to go to their heads.

Whatever the outcome will be, the shift of economic power in the direction of Asia has made conflicts of economic interest more common between European and Asian states. The rise of the region as a new global force is showing its political impacts. To guarantee their future growth, Asian governments are pushing for a fundamental change in the system of economic interaction.[16] They want to correct the old form of economic relations that favors European countries, in order to step up their share of trade in products in which they have a distinct comparative advantage. The aim is to replace European protectionism with the creation of a new economic system based on free and fair trade. A priority for reform is improved access to the EU market, as sustained growth in Asian countries will depend on a substantial expansion of exports to Europe. Despite the EU's assurances that the Single Market process will not result in a 'Fortress Europe', Asian countries are worried that a Eurocentric regime will be installed at the expense of Asia.[17] There is still a widespread perception in Asia that the EU represents a deliberate attempt to build protectionist walls aiming specifically at Asian exports. The worry is that disguised protectionism will eventually prepare the way for more open trade barriers. The pressure to solve these issues will increase with the growing economic power of Asian countries.

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15 Krugman, Paul: The Myth of Asia's Miracle, in: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 73, No. 6, Nov./Dec. 1994, pp. 62-78.

16 Economist, 5.3.1994, p. 29.

17 James C. Hsiung: Asia Pacific in the Post-Cold War Order, in: James C. Hsiung (ed.): Asia Pacific in the New World Politics, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder/London, 1993, p. 9.

This agenda clashes with a European world view that sees Asia more than ever as a competitor and that is thus eager to protect its interests.[18] Although most European governments still feel that they are at the 'peak of power', Paul Kennedy's thesis of the fall of great powers makes them worry about the future.[19] European governments want to ensure that they stay ahead and preserve a socio-economic status quo that suits them well. There is a tendency not simply to contrast Asia's success with European failures but to imagine that they are somehow succeeding at others' expense.[20] The complaint that Asian countries are somehow responsible for European problems is more often heard. These fears may or may not be justified, but they typify the importance of economic security concerns in the post-cold war world.

As European influence seems to be diminishing, unsolicited advice and demands from European nations are increasing. Asia has heard an almost constant call for greater attention to human rights and democracy, renewed efforts to preserve the environment, and wider recognition of international labor standards. Asian governments think they smell the whiff of 'cultural imperialism' and fear that this could impede their plans for further development. They accuse the European countries of only being concerned with maintaining control over the development of Asian countries and of exploiting trade, labor and environmental issues to justify further protectionism. The sudden concerns about the social dimension of Asia's development are viewed with suspicion, as European countries never paid much attention to such concerns during the colonial period.

The fundamental problem behind the economic issue is the struggle for a new form of economic relationship. The different perceptions about the hierarchy in the relationship makes a solution rather difficult. Asian leaders feel that the European countries are increasingly dependent on Asian economies, but miss the realization of this fact in the relationship. This not only hurts their newly-acquired confidence, but also makes them worry about moves that might limit their future growth. They see themselves as being lectured to and intimidated by European countries which still think they are addressing a subordinate partner as in colonial times. European countries' anxiety over losing their traditionally preeminent position only makes them more eager to maintain the status quo. As long as both sides stick to perceptions based on a mixture of pride and fear, economic common sense will have a hard time improving relations.

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18 FEER, 4.9.1994, p. 18.

19 Kennedy, Paul: Rise and Fall of great Powers, Random House, New York, 1987.

20 Commission of the European Communities (ed.): Growth, Competitiveness, and Employment, Brussels, Dec. 1993.

2.2 Values[21]

Asian countries' economic success has given rise to a new self-confidence that is helping to foster cultural and philosophical resurgence. Therefore the second issue is about culture and inherent values.[22] Differences about values are always complex and a sensitive issue, because they touch on the core of any society. Hence, it is harder to find compromises here, making these issues harder to resolve than political and economic ones. In addition, the diversity and complexity of values allows interpretation in many ways and for many purposes. Apart from the difficulties related to the nature of values, this issue is characterized by confusion and misunderstandings as it is far from clear what exactly is meant by 'Asian values'.[23] While Asian leaders see 'Asian values' as a description of the moral, social and political ingredients for Asia's success, and while some are even starting to proclaim that their economic success is due to the superiority of these values over those of the decadent West, many Europeans regard them as a "euphemism for anti-Western feelings".[24] European and Asian governments have differences over four main points:

• the universality of values versus cultural relativism

The West's triumph in the 20th century was the defence of the idea of democracy against two successive anti-democratic, fascist and communists waves. Many in the West interpret the demise of fascism and communism as evidence of the superiority of the Western ideals of democracy and capitalism. They believe, or used to believe, that history ended with the triumph of Western values over communism.[25] This has further strengthened

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21 The Philippines are an exception in this issue. During the Marcos period the approach of unique national values was used to justify the authoritarian regime. With the end of the Marcos regime the promotion of Asian values was dropped and is now associated with the negative aspects of this period. (Interview with Alfred McCoy, August 1995 in Madison, US).

22 See for example: Huntington, Samuel: The Clash of Civilizations?, in: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 72, No. 3, 1993, p. 25 / Sopiee, Noordin: The New World Order: Implications for the Asia-Pacific, in: Mahmood, Rohana/Asani, Rustan (ed.): Confidence Building and Conflict Reduction in the Pacific, Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 1993, p. 24.

23 For an attempt to define 'Asian values', see International Herald Tribune, 11./12.12.1993 / Asian Business, December 1993, p. 38-39.

24 Hitchcock, David I.: Asian values and the United States, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, 1995, p. 19 / Economist, 28.5.1994, p. 9.

25 The most outspoken representative of this theory is Francis Fukuyama, who coined the phrase "end of history" to describe the triumph of democratic capitalism over communism. "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological

the idea that Western civilization has always understood and will continue to understand itself as the universal civilization. This makes many Europeans and Americans feel they have a duty to help spread democracy to the unfortunates who are still denied it. To withhold that help would be to throw away a historic opportunity.

The concept of 'universalism' is directly at odds with the concepts of the individual, state and nature in the Southeast Asian region. Asian governments argue that values are a product of human evolution and as such evolve over time, being neither absolute nor immutable.[26] They argue that there are universal rights, such as the right to live, the right to be protected from torture or slavery, the right to the due process of law, etc. But some political rights, especially those related to the implementation of democracy, are relative and dependent upon the stage of economic development, a nation's history, cultural and other values as well as its social and political system.[27] Asian governments claim that behind the call for universal norms, Europe is pursuing world domination in a new guise. They suspect that to compensate for its own weaknesses and lack of competitiveness Europe is seeking to export decadence to Asian countries, curtail their economic growth and undermine existing governments.[28] They argue that European governments need to solve their own problems, which are far more serious than any weaknesses in their own societies. Therefore European efforts to propagate 'universalism' are viewed as a threat and tend to reaffirm indigenous values.

Thus, Asian countries are trying to develop their economies and their political systems, while preserving their own identity and indigenous values; by contrast, European countries are trying to promote their values, which they consider universal, in order to protect human rights and spread democracy. Conflict is inevitable.

• individual rights versus the derogation of individual rights to public interests

Different cultures have different views on the relations between individual and group, citizen and state and on the relative importance of rights and

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evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." See, The National Interest, Summer 1989, pp. 3-17.

26 FEER, 4.8.1994, p. 17.

27 Wanandi, Jusuf: Human Rights and Democracy in the ASEAN Nations: The Next 25 Years, in: The Indonesian Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1993, p. 18 .

28 FEER, 2.6.1994, p. 21 / Asian Wall Street Journal, 14.4.1994. The Vietnamese government refers to this policy as "peaceful evolution" and sees it as an ideological threat. For example Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 24.11.1993, p. 1.

responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy.[29] The European concepts center on the individual, while in Asia the individual has traditionally been subordinated to the collective. Therefore Asian nations reject the European view that individual liberty and political freedom are fundamental human rights which take precedence over stability and public interest.[30] An individual's human rights are limited by the individual rights of others, and an emergency can also be limited by the state for the sake of the public interest. Individual rights are recognized, but more important are the group's, and ultimately the nation's collective rights. On the basis of their historical experience of nationbuilding, many Asian people regard authoritarian rule as necessary to maintain 'harmony in society'. Asian leaders see the authoritarian and central role of the state as a decisive factor in their success, as most of them have raced to prosperity under the tight reins of authoritarian governments. Western-style democracy, understood as a continuing clash of individuals and interests, is perceived as being unsuitable for Asian countries that are in a hurry to modernize: it is regarded as a formula for anarchy, factionalism, and revolts.[31] Asian countries do not want a democratic system that "sacrifices the public interest on the altar of re-election."[32] With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Asian governments have lost the threat of communism as an important justification for their rigid political systems. They are under increased pressure from European governments, as political and strategic reasons do not force the latter to countenance non-democratic systems anymore. To some European politicians it therefore comes as no surprise that Asian governments have come up with the 'cultural' justifications for their authoritarian systems. The rhetoric of national cultural uniqueness is often used to legitimize authoritarian regimes, create domestic unity and transfer problems to the outside.[33] European governments see these as an excuse to give a respectable cloak to the personal ambitions of authoritarian rulers who do not want to surrender power or accept a Western political system.

In general it can be said that Europeans and Asians have a different perception of how necessary democratic freedoms are. While Europeans

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29 Huntington, Samuel: The Clash of Civilizations?, in: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 72, No. 3, 1993, p. 25.
30 Asiaweek, 25.5.1994, p. 20 / FEER; 15.4.1993, p. 22.
31 Alagappa, Muthiah: Democratic Transition in Asia: The Role of the International Community, East-West Center Special Reports, No. 3, Oct. 1994, Honolulu, Hawaii, p. 27 / International Herald Tribune, 3.5.1993, p. 1.
32 Asiaweek, 2.3.1994, p. 24.
33 Stiefel, Matthias/Wolfe, Marshall: A Voice for the Excluded: Popular Participation in Development, Zen Books Ltd., London/New Jersey, 1994, pp. 28-29.

tend to overestimate the need for democratic freedom, Asians often play it down.

- political and civil rights versus socio-economic and cultural rights

Asian governments argue that the emphasis should be on economic and cultural rights, as a government's first obligation is to look after the basic human needs of its people as a whole rather than to guarantee the civil and political rights of each individual. Civil and political rights are considered relevant only when socio-economic and cultural rights have been sufficiently attained. Delays in the implementation of human and political rights or their temporary suspension, are also considered important to safeguard national unity.[34] Undue emphasis on democracy and civil liberties can exacerbate domestic conflict in deeply divided Asian societies and undermine political stability, with adverse consequences for economic growth, development, and civil order.[35] Close attention is paid to the nation's, or the state's need for security, because nation-building is still in progress and national consciousness is high in all these states.[36] Citing frequent political conflict and slow economic growth in democracies like India, as well as the desperate political and economic conditions in former Russian states, Asian leaders make the case for gradualism and argue that economic reform must precede political reform. In contrast, many Europeans believe that it is absurd to conclude from Asia's success that authoritarian government is best for development. They argue that political development is necessary for economic development and a stress on socio-economic rights should not be used as an excuse for not implementing political rights. Both rights have to develop together.[37] Asian governments reject this view with the argument that only incumbent governments can decide on issues like the pace of reform and the sequence to be followed, since it is they and their people, not European governments and media, who will have to suffer the consequences of any policy failure. European advocacy is denounced as 'preaching without responsibility'.

The question behind this issue is 'whether more freedom leads to more development or more development leads to more freedom'. One side argues that freedom is a necessary condition to liberate the creative energies of the people and to pursue a path of economic development. On the contrary,

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34 The Nation, 18.10.1993, p. A4 / FEER; 5.5.1994, p. 38.

35 See for example: The Jakarta Post, 8.9.1995, pp. 1-2 / Asiaweek, 25.5.1994, p. 20.

36 Hassan, Mohamed Jawhar bin: Asian Perspective on Security, in: Matsumae, Tatsuro/Chen, C. Lincoln (ed.): Common Security in Asia, Strategic Peace and International Affairs Research Institute, Tokai University, Tokyo, 1995, p. 53.

37 FEER, 20.6.1991, p. 9 / Economist, 27.8.1994, pp. 9/15-17.

others argue that economic development is more rapid if freedoms are curtailed for the sake of a strong state that can maintain the stability and predictability needed to smooth the path for development. It is clear that many policy options are possible.

• the use of sanctions and intervention as a legitimate tool versus full respect for national sovereignty in all circumstances

Sanctions and interventions to halt human rights violations conflict with the principle of full national sovereignty, self-determination and non-interference in the internal affairs of others. The overall structure of world politics has been founded on a system of sovereign nation-states that did not have to answer to a higher authority. For the last few hundred years, the central concept associated with 'sovereignty' was that intervention in the domestic affairs of other sovereign states was not legitimate. Nevertheless, an alarming number of interventions took place for a variety of reasons, ranging from access to important raw materials to strategic interests in the context of the cold war. Since the end of the cold war, the US, with European politicians in the wings, has started to define new principles governing international intervention based on the belief that under certain circumstances intervention is not only legally acceptable but also morally necessary and politically laudable. According to the supporters of this creed, an increasingly interdependent world needs to redefine the old right of self-determination, as 'internal affairs' more and more affect the rights and interests of the whole world community.[38] The rise of such a view threatens the interests of Asian states, since the strong states will be the ones who will determine its very selective application, which is bound to lead to double standards. Asian leaders advocate the principle of non-interference, as each state should have the right to choose the course of its domestic development as long as this does not negatively impinge on the rights and interests of other states.[39] They also reject the EU's policy of linking economic assistance to the implementation of human rights. They protest against the conditionality of aid, regarding this as a form of foreign interference in their internal affairs in the field of human rights.[40] Asian countries are wary of any form of intervention or sanctions, because in many cases they have something to hide on human rights. They want to

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38 International Herald Tribune, 25.1.1995, p. 4.
39 Sopiee, Noordin: The New World Order: Implications for the Asia-Pacific, in: Mahmood, Rohana/Asani, Rustan (ed.): Confidence Building and Conflict Reduction in the Pacific, Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 1993, p. 27.
40 Wanandi, Jusuf: Human Rights and Democracy in the ASEAN Nations: The Next 25 Years, in: The Indonesian Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1993, p. 20.

prevent human rights and democracy being turned into 'a mandate to intervene' for European governments.[41] Therefore international sanctions and intervention are supported by most Asian countries only as last resort in cases of gross violations ascertained in accordance with the guidelines and criteria set up by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.[42]

This leads to the constellation that European countries see sanctions and intervention as a legitimate tool in international politics to react against human rights violations, while Asian countries emphasize the dangers inherent in such interventions and call for full respect of national sovereignty in all circumstances.

What the European countries are facing is that the validity of their values is being questioned. The discussion about the fragmentary mosaic of Asian values is slowly developing into a theory that will pull together all these values and traditions. The comments made by Mohamad Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew may be seen to symbolize this trend. In the near future, one can expect to see the gradual emergence of a mature concept of Asian values or to see the concept die. But at present Asian values are a concept which has become quite influential in Asian politics and is part of a growing 'Asian consciousness'. Therefore Asian values have to be taken more seriously by Europeans. Even if they might only be a political tool used by the ruling elites, and even if they are questioned by many Asians themselves, their political impact cannot be denied. The acceptance of their political relevance will be a first step to solving the psychological issues behind the fruitless discussion over who is right or wrong or, more frankly, whose ideology will lead the world into the 21th Century. If both sides take each others' positions more seriously a better basis for improved relations will be established.

2.3 'New World Order'

As the economic power and cultural confidence of the Asian states increase, so, too, do the political demands they make on the global stage. In recent years, Asia has started to participate more actively in the discussion about global problems, in an attempt to reflect her concerns and interests and enhance the region's international standing. Asian countries see the end of the East-West conflict as a chance to end the last stage of colonialism and become themselves a defining part of the post-cold war order.

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41 Just Commentary (Penang), No. 7, 3.1.1994, pp. 3-4.
42 Wanandi, Jusuf: Human Rights and Democracy in the ASEAN Nations: The Next 25 Years, in: The Indonesian Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1993, p. 20.

They are pressing for 'political decolonization', arguing that peace and security in the world cannot be assured until the international world order has been made more equitable. They argue that the European view of human rights as merely individual rights falls short of the definition.[43] Human rights also encompass the collective rights of communities and nations to have equal status among nations.[44] Asian countries seek a radical change in the international system, yet have not come up with a conclusive concept. Members of the EU have not really defined their international role in the post-cold war area, as they are preoccupied with their internal consolidation. They still have to work out how they are going to relate to the different international players in a new environment free from the influence of US-Soviet rivalry. Nevertheless, they are better positioned for global leadership than at any time since the early decades of the century. Naturally, the last thing they want is a change in the well-established world order and they are therefore reluctant to accept any changes that are not compatible with their own interests.

This leads to the following constellation:

Asian Countries:

- *at the international level:* Asian countries want an international system that gives them equal participation in international decision-making

- *at the national level:* Asian countries are not willing to democratize their own political systems and reject any outside pressure as interference in their domestic affairs

Effectively, Asian countries are lobbying for a more democratic international system while they are not willing to face the same implications for their own political system. Asian countries forget that their demands for more democracy on the international level also trigger demands for their own

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43 United Nations: International convenants on human rights. General Assembly Document A/40/605 (Anm. 26), S. 244 or 250 "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

44 Mahathir, Mohamad/Ishihara, Shintaro: The Voice of Asia, Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo, 1995, pp. 123-124 / Sopiee, Noordin: The New World Order: Implications for the Asia-Pacific, in: Mahmood, Rohana/Asani, Rustan (ed.): Confidence Building and Conflict Reduction in the Pacific, Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 1993, p. 28 / FEER, 4.8.1994, p. 17.

political systems to change. If they reject the latter, their arguments are in danger of losing credibility.

West European Countries:

- *at the national level:* European countries are promoting the values of democracy and liberalism as universal values that should be adopted by all countries in order to reduce violence and bring prosperity to the world

- *at the international level:* European countries are trying to avoid more democratization of the international system and are using their power to resist changes in the international system

European policy is also marked by contradictions. On the one hand, the European countries are promoting democratization and human rights more actively and directly than ever before. On the other hand, they do not measure themselves with the same yardstick and resist democratization on the international level. They are trying to protect their interests by using international institutions and military and economic power to run the world in ways that will maintain their predominance. They tend to forget that a more democratic world on the national level will require more economic and political equality on the international level.

Obviously, the aims of Asian and European countries differ significantly. European governments are eager to preserve their dominant position in the international system, while Asian countries want to change the latter in their favor. This issue reflects the new security concerns in the post-cold war world. Both sides are trying to secure the best possible position for their future development in a world that might be marked by increased competition. The use of double standards by both sides will make it difficult to solve this issue in a constructive manner.

3. Conclusion

None of the above-mentioned issues, handled carefully, have to lead to a 'clash of civilizations'. What European-Asian relations need to adjust to, as harmoniously as possible, is the emergence of a more equal relationship on economic, political and cultural terms. History has shown that problems of instability, tension and even war tend to arise when newly emerging powers are refused their rightful place in international relationships. Strengt-

hened by their economic success, Asian countries finally want to end 'political colonialization' by achieving a new form of relationship which recognizes the shift in power and guarantees their right to more influence. In view of the post-colonial sensitivities between Europe and Southeast Asia and the above-mentioned issues, it will, however, be a difficult undertaking to find a new 'balance of power'.

Consideration of the following points could smooth this process:

a) The economic success of Asian states will definitely change the structure of relations between Asia and West Europe. All the more so, since Asian countries no longer accept the status quo and are increasingly using their economic power to achieve political aims. So far, West European countries have proved unable to come to terms with the shift in power and to develop a viable strategy to deal with the new reality of Asian-European relations. What is urgently needed is a carefully thought-out new concept to forge a long-term partnership based on equality. Equality will be the essential element in future dealings with Asia. Otherwise, Asian leaders will not see mutual cooperation as being in their self-interest. Even though West European countries have talked about a 'partnership of equals', they made only gestures at the Bangkok summit, rather than substantially changing their policies. Asian governments will want to see concrete concessions before they accept European protestations of a new partnership. Without a new form of partnership, attempts by European governments to shape the political and economic environment in Asia are not likely to succeed, and conflict could well result from the failure to develop an equal partnership. So far there is no basis for such a partnership, as no shared values or code of consent exist which could form the basis for constructive, non-confrontational relations. Unless much more than in the past is done to work out a shared basis of values and elements of commonalty, it is unrealistic to imagine that the parties will find a constructive way of dealing with each other. A degree of adherence to minimalist values is what makes trust and cooperation possible. Therefore a code of mutual consent built on commitment, respect, tolerance and cultural diversity should be worked out as the basis for an 'equal partnership'.

b) Growth prospects in Europe, and the development opportunities of Asia and other developing countries, are increasingly dependent on a broad political consensus, and not just on the traditionally limited economic cooperation. A thickening web of interdependence means that countries

need to work together to face environmental and military threats of unprecedented proportions. Threats which transcend national, religious and cultural boundaries and which cannot be overcome by a single nation, region or economic bloc. Environmental destruction, diseases, such as AIDS, and the risk of nuclear proliferation are just some of the challenges that can only be solved collectively. Societies need some common ground on how best to respond to these threats. Both sides will have to re-conceptualize what is to be understood by democracy on the international level so as to de-westernize world politics and give developing countries a more equal say. It is unrealistic to believe that international security and stability can be achieved until global inequities have been corrected. Thus, transforming the status quo can only lead to more meaningful cooperation. All nations should develop a greater willingness to sacrifice selfish national interests for the good of the wider community. Democracy needs to evolve in ways that promotes freedom, prosperity, and justice both within each country and among countries: 'a global democracy'.

c) At the Bangkok summit, the first steps were taken to develop a better understanding of each other, but this is not nearly enough. The stabilizing and disciplining constraints of the cold war have now been removed and this makes the Asia Pacific region a far more important area of study and concern, since it now constitutes, in many ways, a greater threat to the stability of international relations. Thus, higher priority should be given to developing a mutual understanding and to boosting public knowledge about the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying the respective cultures. Especially, the perception of Asian countries in Western Europe must be sharply revised to match reality, as "apart from a few Asia hands ..., most EU officials have a view of the region that is hopelessly out of date. To many of them, Asian countries fall into one of two categories: those that are feared as being excessively competitive, or those that are underdeveloped and need financial aid."[45] This sorry mixture is no basis for mutually advantageous relations. But until governments in both regions are more willing to overcome destructive notions of 'otherness' and 'separateness' and instead start to emphasize interdependence, they will have a hard time finding a way to work together effectively. Lee Kuan Yew has put this in a nutshell: "I have to understand you in order to work together

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45 FEER, 4.8.1994, p.18.

with you, but I don't necessarily have to like you and share your values to do so."[46]

d) All Asian countries face the same major challenge in finding the right economic, political and value system. Questions of government structure, human rights and societal obligations are fiercely debated. A great battle of ideas is raging over the proper shape of Asian societies as they are transformed from rural and agricultural to urban and industrial countries. As has happened in other countries undergoing rapid modernization and trying to build new national identities, a struggle is taking place over how best to strike a balance between tradition and modernization. Asian countries are facing a crisis of identity, as they do not want to be a 'cheap imitation' of the West, but have already accepted much that is Western and will continue to do so in the future. Even though they have managed to reject some features that they are uncomfortable with, they are searching for a way to preserve their culture. Among members of the middle classes and the ruling elites the idea of a civil society is developing. What has come about so far is a more open discussion about politics, but a commonly accepted vision of how the future should be has not been found. Even though Asian governments are reluctant to change their political system, as they naturally perceive this to be a threat to their power, they can not and do not want to stop the democratic process totally, but want a planned change.[47] Thus, international pressure has mainly provoked isolationism and anti-foreign, chauvinist responses from Asian rulers. External pressure may contribute to improving the democratic situation but the key rests with the social forces in the country. A country's political system is more likely to be shaped by its own historical, cultural, socioeconomic, and political circumstances than by external pressure. The promotion of democracy will be more successful if efforts are directed towards strengthening long-term forces that will make democratic principles a durable part of the domestic political discourse, rather than demanding a quick transition by the governing elite. The discussion about democratic governance has already become more and more part of the contemporary political discourse in Asian countries, and indigenous human rights organizations now have the chance to be more outspoken. The existence and activities of these indigenous groups refute the position taken by the governments that democracy and human rights are alien to Asian societies and traditional culture. But even among those promoting de-

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46 Beilage der Süddeutsche Zeitung Nr. 25, 31.1.1996, p. VI.
47 Asian Business, December 1993, p. 38 / International Herald Tribune, 3.5.1993, p. 1.

mocracy, there is a strong belief that the democratic system must be adapted to local conditions.[48] So far, the political influence of these groups has been weak, but in the long run they will become more and more significant in shaping the new political system. This might herald a shift towards a more western form of politics or, more likely, merely mark a further softening of what some call 'authoritarian pluralism'. At the Bangkok summit, great pains were taken to avoid bringing up these issues, since they could have sunk the bridge-building process before it had begun. But in the long term, such an approach does not help to solve these issues. Instead of pushing them aside, a constructive debate should be started to solve the dominant problems of the world community. The question is: how should we organize any modern society and how do we strike a balance between freedom and order, and between individual and collective responsibility.

e) In view of the internationalization and globalization processes that are currently taking place, the acceptance of a common concept of human rights will be necessary. It is possible to grant the fullest respect to all forms of society and yet still insist that there are shared human rights that cut across all ethnic, religious and other boundaries. All nations should strive to protect those values conducive to collective survival. Any claim to diversity that violates these most basic principles should not be tolerated. The differences in human rights interpretation can not lead to different regional standards, as measuring with two yardsticks would only be a new form of imperialism. Asian countries will have to recognize this. What has to be changed is the way this issue is dealt with. Basically, it is not so much the inherent clash of ideas between different cultures, as the European efforts to promote their own definition of such ideas and the deep suspicion such efforts provoke. The European countries have to de-ideologize the human rights discussion and find a way to lead the debate more consensually, more gradually, and at a pace closer to Asian needs. The European countries have to accept that the Asian countries will not stop trying to resist pressure. The restrictions on human rights as practiced in Asian countries are felt to be important, and they are imposed in order to safeguard the results of development. The more Asian countries are able to adapt to the modernization process and find a balance between modernization and tradition,

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48 Alagappa, Muthiah: Democratic Transition in Asia: The Role of the International Community, East-West Center Special Reports, No. 3, Oct. 1994, Honolulu, Hawaii, pp. 12-13 / Rai, Lai Deosa: Human Rights in the Hindu-Buddhist Tradition, New Delhi, 1995 / Payutto, P.A.: Buddhist Solutions for the twenty-first century, Buddhadhamma Foundation, Bangkok, 1995

the clearer their human rights concept will become. This will make it easier to deal with. Asian states are caught between accepted norms, which they have agreed on by signing the United Nations charter of human rights, and their own philosophy of 'development at all costs' to achieve national progress. But considering "how slowly the West progressed on human rights over the centuries since Magna Carta in 1215, the extraordinary rise of human rights sentiment in Asia in the last quarter of the twentieth century can betoken a great future potential for democracy and human rights."[49]

When they talk of forging equal relations, Asian and European governments will have to demonstrate that they are serious and willing to face the costs of launching such a new partnership, even if the costs prove higher than anyone might imagine. The tactics chosen by both sides and the tone of discourse will decide whether the road ahead leads to cooperation or confrontation. Most likely, the outcome will be an untidy mix of both.

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49 Friedman, Edward: What Asia Will or Won't Stand for: Globalizing Human Rights and Democracy, unpublished paper, Madison/US, 1995.