Introduction

We live in hugely paradoxical times. We will see greater change in the twenty-first century than we have in any previous human century. Huge leaps in science and technology, accompanied by huge economic and social advances in many societies around the world, especially Asian societies, will mean that the texture and chemistry of the twenty-first century will be massively different from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

How will it be massively different? It will be different in three significant dimensions. First, we will see the end of the era of Western domination of world history. Second, we will see the return to the success of many Asian societies, especially the two most populous societies of China and India. Third, as a result of the rapid shrinkage of the world, through both technological leaps and growing interdependence, partly through global trade, humanity is no longer living on a vast planet. It is living in a small, densely interconnected global village. Indeed, when future historians look at the twenty-first century, they will marvel at how many big changes happened in the human condition in a small space of time.

In theory, the human species represents the most intelligent species on planet earth. One key test of intelligence is the ability to adapt to different circumstances. Sensible and intelligent adaptation and adjustment to changed circumstances explain how our human species has survived and thrived for thousands of years. Of course, some human tribes have performed better than other tribes in making these adaptations and adjustments.

Over the past 200 years, the best performing human tribe has been the Western tribe. Through their extraordinary performance, both in the fields of human organization and in science and technology, the Western societies outperformed the rest of the world. They didn't just outperform the world. They conquered the world.

It's not surprising that larger European societies like the British and French, were able to conquer territories around the world. Indeed, it was said in the nineteenth century that the sun never set on the British empire, as the British had conquered territories in all corners of the world. What was truly surprising was the ability of small European societies, like Portugal, to conquer territories all around the world.

In the nineteenth century, the population of Portugal was only a few million. Yet, this small country, with a population of about the size of contemporary Singapore, was able to conquer territories in South America (like Brazil) and in Africa (like Angola and Mozambique). But what was truly astonishing was small Portugal's ability to conquer territories in the sixteenth century from India (population 115 million) and China (population 160 million) in Goa and Macau, respectively.

Given this extraordinary performance of the West for over 200 years, it would have been perfectly natural for the West to make intelligent and sensible adaptations and adjustments to the very different world of the twenty-first century. Instead, to my absolute shock and astonishment, the West has failed to make intelligent adaptations. The failure to make intelligent adaptations explain why many key Western populations, especially in the United States and Europe, feel very lost and pessimistic about the future.

As a friend of the West, I have been trying to explain to Western intellectuals why Western societies should adjust and adapt. This is why, for example, I published *Beyond the Age of Innocence* in 2005 in an effort to tell American intellectuals how the US should adapt to a different world. I learned a very important lesson when I published the book in 2005. In theory, the US is an open society, full of intellectuals open to listening to the views of the rest of the world. In practice, it is an open society with a closed mind. American intellectuals don't listen to the rest of the world. One small practical reason why this happened is because some American universities abolished "area studies" (for example, studying "Southeast Asian studies") because "area studies" were not considered "scientific" by American "social scientists", although some universities still do so. They include, for example, Asian Studies at Harvard University and Southeast Asian Studies at Yale.

What shocked me, even more, was to discover that the most "closed" minds in the American intellectual scene were the "liberal" minds. These "liberal" minds believed that on huge questions of how human societies should grow, develop and succeed, there could only be simple black and white answers. The "white" answer was that only the societies which copied the Western liberal ideal would succeed. The evidence for this strong claim is provided by the enormously enthusiastic response that all Western intellectuals gave to the essay published by Francis Fukuyama at the end of the Cold War. The essay was entitled *The End of History*. It made the preposterous claim that humanity had reached the "End" of History because it should now be clear to the rest of humanity, especially after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the USSR in 1991, that the only way for all human societies to progress (no matter which culture or geography they belonged to) was to copy the Western liberal democratic model. Clearly, this was an absurd claim. Yet no major Western intellectuals disagreed with this thesis. Indeed, one of the most surprising things I have discovered about Western intellectuals is that they engage in "strategic groupthink". Fukuyama's essay gave a boost to this "groupthink" among Western minds.

This is why I have written in several places, including in my book *Has the West Lost it?* that this essay by Fukuyama did "brain damage" to Western minds. What was this brain damage? Since Western minds were convinced by Fukuyama's argument that

the world had reached the “end of history” in the early 1990s, they didn’t notice that instead of seeing the “end of history” at that time, humanity was instead experiencing the “return of history”. What was this “return of history”? This was the “return” of the two most populous societies in the world, China and India. In the 1990s, both China and India made the strategically correct decision to open up their economies and integrate with the world around the same period. China began a little earlier in 1977 when Mr. Deng Xiaoping launched the “Four Modernizations” program. India started a decade later when the then Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh (who later became Prime Minister) launched the reforms that opened up India’s economy in 1991.

Many of the problems faced by the West can therefore be explained by these two major strategic mistakes made by the West. The first is the failure to see that in the twenty-first century we have reached the end of Western domination of World History. The second is the failure to see that the world is now seeing the return of Asia, especially the most successful societies in East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia. These two major failures by the West explain why the first two sections of this book are devoted to these two big themes. In part one, we explain why the era of Western domination is over. In part two, we explain how and why Asia is reforming.

In part one, several essays try to explain why the West refuses to accept the painful reality that the West can no longer dominate the world. It may be useful to give one major concrete example of how the West is unable to see that it has developed some huge strategic weaknesses. For decades, especially after the end of World War II, the US outperformed the rest of the world because it provided “equality of opportunity” for even the poorest Americans to succeed and thrive. In short, American society created a level playing field. The rich could succeed. The poor could also succeed. All this explains why in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the American middle classes saw their incomes and standards of living improve. The US then probably had the happiest society on planet earth.

Now we know, both from the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and the storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021, that the US is today an unhappy society. Why has the US become unhappy? The simple answer is that American society no longer has a level playing field for the rich and poor. The rich can succeed. The poor cannot. Anyone who doubts this claim should read the essay entitled *Democracy or Plutocracy? America’s existential question* in this volume.

This essay provides a vast amount of evidence to show that the US has become a plutocracy. What is a plutocracy? The simple answer is that a plutocracy is the opposite of a democracy. In a democracy, a society is structured to take care of the interests of a vast majority within a society, say 80 to 90 percent. In a plutocracy, a society is structured to take care of the interests of a small affluent minority, say the top 10 to 20 percent. Fortunately, I am not the only person to describe the US as a plutocracy. Many leading Western figures have described the US as a plutocracy. They include Mr. Paul Volker, the late Chairman of the US Federal Reserve, the Nobel Laureate Professor Joseph Stiglitz and Mr. Martin Wolf, the economics commentator from the Financial Times.

An even more significant Western philosopher, Plato, had warned the West about 2400 years ago about the dangers of having a society dominated by the rich and serving the interests of the rich. This is what he said, "...for what would happen if someone were to choose the captains of ships by their wealth, refusing to entrust the ship to a poor person even if he was a better captain? They would make a poor voyage of it." Yet, despite all these warnings, the US has effectively transformed itself into a plutocracy, allowing the wealthy to restructure American society to benefit the wealthy, not the poor.

In theory, since the US is the world's most open society, where there is a lot of freedom of speech, there should have been a healthy debate on how and why the US has become a plutocracy. It is therefore shocking that there is no such debate. This is therefore what makes this volume of essays truly special and unique. It provides unique insights into the failings of several Western societies that are not provided anywhere else.

It also provides insights that Western intellectuals refuse to confront honestly. For example, Western societies like to portray themselves as defenders of human rights. Yet, they refuse to acknowledge the instances when they have either violated human rights or aided or abetted the violation of human rights. In short, Western societies have been massively hypocritical. This is why the essay entitled *The Hypocrisy of the West* states categorically "In theory, the West condemns hypocrisy. In practice, sadly, it indulges in hypocrisy massively". This essay provides some examples of blatant hypocrisy.

Another issue that the West fails to confront honestly is that a healthy society requires more than just democratic elections. It needs to raise the living standards of its people. This means that the fruits of the economy must be shared across the entire population, and not just the top one percent, as in a plutocracy. However, the US is the only developed country in the world where the incomes of the bottom 50% declined in the three decades from 1980 to 2010. As I argue in the essay entitled *Trump, Macron and the Poverty of Liberalism*, many in the West believe that being able to vote freely in elections is enough for social stability, ignoring the critical insight from the American political philosopher John Rawls that social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to "everyone's advantage".

The West also refuses to acknowledge the key philosophical insight that, even for a liberal society, the concept of freedom must come hand in hand with the concept of responsibility. Indeed, as I argue in the essay entitled *What do US Capitol attack and the West's Covid-19 death rates have in common?*, one crucial factor underlying both the storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 and the high death rates from Covid-19 was that liberty was pursued without due regard for other important philosophical principles like responsibility and equality.

In part II of this volume of essays, I try to document how the evidence shows clearly that the world is experiencing the "return" of Asia. Indeed, our experience with Covid-19 in the year 2020 shows that overall the East Asian societies have handled Covid-19 much better than either the US or European societies. This is why I was happy to accept the invitation by the Economist, a leading Western publication, to explain why the East Asian societies have performed better. Indeed, I also argue

that the better performance of East Asian societies confirms that we are seeing the dawn of the Asian century.

I have actually been writing about the return of Asia for several decades now, since the early 1990s. Indeed, the very first essay I published to discuss the return of Asia was in the year 1992 when I published an essay entitled *The West and the Rest* in another prestigious Western journal, *The National Interest*. In that essay, I said:

The stark picture of an affluent West and a poor Third World is complicated and confused by the increasing importance of the East Asians, the only non-Westerners already in, or poised to enter, the world of developed nations... For Japan and the other East Asian success stories are setting off ripples of development in the Third World in a way that no Western society has ever succeeded in doing.

Many readers of this volume are probably aware that I have written a lot about the reemergence of China and why the West should accept, not try to block, the return of China. Several essays in this volume, including for example *The West Should Heed Napoleon's Advice and Let China Sleep* and *What China Threat?* discuss the reluctance of the West to accept the return of China. However, the Asian story is not just about China. It is also about other parts of Asia, including India and Southeast Asia. This is why this volume discusses the surprising resilience shown by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and also discusses how India can play a valuable role by serving as a moral leader in the world. In these essays, including *Why 'the India Way' May be the World's Best Bet for Moral Leadership*, *ASEAN's Quiet Resilience* and *Can Asia Help Biden?*, I argue that both ASEAN and India can play a trusted role as a mediator between the US and China and as supporters for free trade and multilateralism.

Future historians will try hard to understand why the underperforming societies of Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries bounced back in the twenty-first century. The answers will be complex. However, one key reason why Asian societies have done so well in recent decades is that they were brave enough to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by globalization. This wasn't an easy decision to make. There were risks. President Xi Jinping described these risks well when he addressed the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2017. I was present in the room when he spoke there. I was particularly struck by the following paragraph in his speech:

There was a time when China also had doubts about economic globalization and was not sure whether it should join the World Trade Organization. But we came to the conclusion that integration into the global economy is a historical trend. To grow its economy, China must have the courage to swim in the vast ocean of the global market. If one is always afraid of bracing the storm and exploring the new world, he will sooner or later get drowned in the ocean. Therefore, China took a brave step to embrace the global market. We have had our fair share of choking in the water and encountered whirlpools and choppy waves, but we have learned how to swim in this process. It has proved to be the right strategic choice.

Globalization was in many ways a gift from the West. For globalization to succeed, it had to rest on three pillars. First, for countries to interact and trade with each other, they needed to have a common set of rules. The West provided this when it created a

rules-based order, centered around the United Nations (UN) in 1945. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is also part of the UN family. Thanks to the WTO, global trade has exploded from USD 61 billion in 1950, three years after the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the legal predecessor of the WTO, was created, to USD 19 trillion in 2019, an increase of over 300 times. Significantly, China's economic growth rate increased sharply after it joined WTO in 2001.

Second, for trade to succeed countries had to accept the law of comparative advantage. This law was gifted to us by a Western economist, David Ricardo, who explained comparative advantage in the following way:

To produce the wine in Portugal, might require only the labour of 80 men for one year, and to produce the cloth in the same country, might require the labour of 90 men for the same time. It would therefore be advantageous for her to export wine in exchange for cloth. This exchange might even take place, notwithstanding that the commodity imported by Portugal could be produced there with less labour than in England. Though she could make the cloth with the labour of 90 men, she would import it from a country where it required the labour of 100 men to produce it, because it would be advantageous to her rather to employ her capital in the production of wine, for which she would obtain more cloth from England, than she could produce by diverting a portion of her capital from the cultivation of vines to the manufacture of cloth.¹

This is why after World War II, the biggest champions of free trade were the Western countries. When Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, addressed a joint session of the US Congress on 9 October 1985, he paid tribute to the West for convincing the world of the virtue of free trade. He said:

When the war ended in 1945, the US set out, with her European allies, to establish an open and fair trading system under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (in force since 1 Jan 1948), and a stable system of currency exchange under the original IMF Agreement at Bretton Woods. These agreements led to the huge growth in trade, banking, and finance throughout the world... In the 1950s and 60s, trade with the US of all countries in the Western Pacific, except communist China, North Korea, and North Vietnam, increased. Many received US investments. The US was the dynamo which hastened economic developments.

The US was the biggest promoter of the law of comparative advantage.

Third, in addition to the theory explaining the virtues of free trade, we also needed in practice some champions who could provide leadership in opening borders and persuading other countries to open up. Indeed, the main reason why the global trading system progressively opened up from the 1950s to the 1980s was because both the US and EU (who represent the core of the West) championed free trade and pushed for the successful completion of global trading rounds, with the last round completing successfully in 1994 when the Uruguay Round was completed in Marrakesh.

Sadly, even though these three pillars, created by the West, have delivered decades of global prosperity (and which consequently led to the reduction of global poverty) the leading Western countries have walked away from these three pillars. When Lee Kuan Yew addressed the joint session of the US Congress in 1985, the US Congress

¹ Ricardo, David. *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

was the global champion of free trade. Today, the US Congress has become the chief opponent of free trade deals.

Equally dangerously, the US Congress has also become an opponent of the rules-based order, especially the UN. I experienced this personally when I served as the Singapore Ambassador to the UN from 1984 to 1989 and 1998 to 2004. In both instances, I saw the US take the lead in trying to reduce the budgets of the UN and its affiliated agencies. Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has come under a lot of attention as a result of the surge of Covid-19 in 2020. The Trump Administration was ferocious in its attacks on WHO and accused it of incompetence in handling Covid-19. The Trump Administration used this as a justification for pulling out of the WHO. Yet, the criticism by the Trump Administration of the WHO was manifestly unfair because it was the US that had effectively weakened the WHO for several decades. Anyone who doubts this should read an excellent book on the WHO by Professor Kelley Lee.² In it, she documents how the Western countries, led by the US, reduced the compulsory assessed contributions to the WHO from 62% in 1970–1971 to 18% in 2017.

Since this campaign by Western governments to weaken or sideline UN organizations had been going on for decades, it would be natural to assume that this big and obvious truth would surface in the “open” Western societies. Hence, every well-informed Western intellectual, especially those who write on global issues, should be aware of this massive Western campaign to weaken multilateral institutions, including crucial global multilateral institutions like the WHO.

Yet, sadly, there is no awareness of this big truth in the West, even though I published an entire book to document this in 2013. The book was entitled *The Great Convergence: Asia, the West and the Logic of One World*. Indeed, this book was endorsed by the late UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who said, “In exploring the tensions that arise as our global community draws ever closer together, Kishore Mahbubani provides a compelling reminder that humanity is strongest when we work together for the benefit of all.”

Kofi Annan was very prescient when he spoke of the necessity for humanity to “work together for the benefit of all.” This is actually the big message that Covid-19 is trying to send to humanity. Fortunately, some Western intellectuals acknowledge that Covid-19 is telling us that humanity as a whole should cooperate. Yuval Noah Harari has emerged as one of the most influential Western intellectuals of our time. On 27 February 2021, he wrote a brilliant essay in the *Financial Times* describing well the lessons that humanity should learn from Covid-19. The most obvious lesson is that humanity needs to cooperate as a whole to prevent future pandemics. As he said, “we should establish a powerful global system to monitor and prevent pandemics. In the age-old war between humans and pathogens, the frontline passes through the body of each and every human being. If this line is breached anywhere on the planet, it puts all of us in danger. Even the richest people in the most developed countries have a personal interest to protect the poorest people in the least developed countries. If

² Kelley Lee, *The World Health Organization (WHO)* (London: Routledge, 2014).

a new virus jumps from a bat to a human in a poor village in some remote jungle, within a few days that virus can take a walk down Wall Street.”

He then goes on to make another obvious point: we can work with the WHO. As he said, “The skeleton of such a global anti-plague system already exists in the shape of the World Health Organization and several other institutions. But the budgets supporting this system are meager, and it has almost no political teeth. We need to give this system some political clout and a lot more money so that it won’t be entirely dependent on the whims of self-serving politicians.”

This observation by Yuval Noah Harari is truly shocking. He makes the factually correct point that the budget for the WHO is “meager”. However, he doesn’t say who has made the WHO budget meager. Clearly, it was the Western governments who did so. Did he not say this because he was unaware of this? If someone as well informed and as influential as Yuval Noah Harari is not aware that Western governments, led by the US, have systematically tried to weaken UN and UN-affiliated multilateral organizations over several decades, this is truly shocking. This shows that the Western media, which claims to be free, open, and objective, has occasionally hidden large truths which prove to be inconvenient to Western governments. To ensure that we can achieve the goal that Yuval Noah Harari has set of strengthening the WHO, the Western governments, therefore, need to be honest and confess publicly that they had been trying systematically to deprive the UN-affiliated organizations of resources.

Why did the West try to reduce the compulsory assessed contributions and increase the voluntary contributions? The simple answer is that the Western countries were the largest “voluntary” contributors. They wanted to use their “voluntary” contributions to control the agenda of the WHO (and other similar UN organizations, like the IAEA). I can also speak with some confidence about the efforts of Western governments to starve the IAEA of badly needed funding. In 2007/8, I was invited both by the former President of Mexico, Mr Ernesto Zedillo, and Mr Mohamed ElBaradei, the Director General of IAEA, to join a Commission of Eminent Persons and review the future of the IAEA and provide recommendations on how to strengthen it. This Commission included many renowned personalities, including the distinguished Sam Nunn, former United States Senator (1972–1997), Wolfgang Schüssel, former Federal Chancellor of Austria (2000–2007), Gareth Evans, former Australian Foreign Minister (1988–1996), and Qian Qichen, the former Foreign Minister of China (1988–1998).

I thought that it would be an easy exercise to persuade the West to provide more resources to IAEA since the Western countries are terrified of nuclear proliferation. The IAEA is the prime UN vehicle to prevent nuclear proliferation since only the IAEA has the legitimacy and resources to conduct intrusive inspections of nuclear facilities all around the world. To conduct nuclear inspections effectively, the IAEA had to recruit and retain for their lifetime careers extremely competent and capable nuclear inspectors. Since the IAEA could only fund lifetime nuclear inspectors from long-term guaranteed and compulsory assessed contributions, it would be logical for the Western governments to support more assessed and less voluntary contributions for the IAEA. Instead, the West did the opposite. Hence, the IAEA has reported that it “has been experiencing limited growth in its Regular Budget”, and even saw

a “decrease in real terms” in its Regular Budget in 2019. As a result, this unwise Western policy had resulted in a weakening of the IAEA, in the same way, that the WHO had been weakened.

When the West tried to do this, they didn’t ask themselves a simple question. The West represents 12% of the world’s population. The rest represent 88% of the world’s population. Was it ethical for the West to use its financial clout to control the agenda of a global organization, like the WHO, which is supposed to represent the interests of humanity and not the interests of a Western minority?

The failure of the West to answer this big moral question points to a huge paradox about Western behavior on the world stage. Domestically, all Western countries believe in democratic governance and insist that all domestic government institutions must represent the wishes and interests of the majority of the people. Globally, all Western countries believe in dictatorial governance and insist that all global governance institutions must reflect the wishes and interests of the minority, 12% who live in the West and not the 88% who live outside the West.

Sadly, in working to weaken or undermine global multilateral institutions, especially those in the UN family, the West is actually acting against its own interests. The only Western leader who has the courage to say this is former President Bill Clinton. In a speech he gave in Yale University in 2003, he said that the US “should be trying to create a world in which rules and partnerships and habits of behavior that we would like to live in when we’re no longer the military, political, economic superpower in the world”.³ The West should heed the advice of Bill Clinton.

Since this volume of essays is entitled *The Asian 21st Century*, it would be useful to conclude this introduction by recommending three concrete steps that Asian countries, including China, can adopt to ensure that we have a peaceful and prosperous Asian century. All these three concrete steps will build on the key argument that in the small interdependent global village we live in, today (as demonstrated by the common global challenges we face like Covid-19 and global warming), humanity as a whole should come together to strengthen global multilateral institutions. Since Asians make up the largest share of the global population, representing 60% of humanity, it would be natural for Asians to take the leadership in proposing three concrete steps that can strengthen multilateralism.

The first step is to restore the primary role of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to serve as the global parliament for humanity. Indeed, the only body that can legitimately claim to represent the voices of all humanity is the UNGA. Hence, if we really want to know what humanity thinks of an issue, we should table this for discussion at the UNGA. This is exactly what the ASEAN countries and China did after Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978 and the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. China and ASEAN supported resolutions that call for the overturning of these invasions. In the end, since the large majority of countries supported the resolutions proposed by the ASEAN countries and China, the invasions were overturned.

³ Kishore Mahbubani, *The Great Convergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013), 8.

The UNGA also does not support interference in the internal affairs of countries. The West has been very critical of the actions taken by the government of the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of Hong Kong to restore law and order after the violent demonstrations in Hong Kong. Many Western governments claim that the “international community” is critical of the actions taken by Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong. Yet, if the Western governments were to table a resolution in the UNGA criticizing the actions taken by the Hong Kong government, they would get no support at all from the vast majority of countries in the world. The UNGA is therefore one vehicle that Asian countries can use to demonstrate that Asian perspectives on the world now enjoy far more support than Western perspectives. The Asian countries should therefore work together to strengthen the UNGA.

The second step that Asian countries can take is to strengthen key multilateral organizations, like the WHO and IAEA (as indicated above) by providing them with more resources. In some cases, we may not need to spend more money to strengthen them. In the case of the WHO, for example, it was a mistake to reduce the compulsory assessed contributions from 62% in 1970/1 to 18% in 2017. Without spending more money, we should revert to the old formula of funding and increase the compulsory assessed contribution back to 62%. This would strengthen the WHO enormously because it would enable the WHO to make reliable long-term plans and also recruit more long-term expert staff to handle future pandemics.

One key point needs to be emphasized here. The amount of money needed to strengthen the UN family of institutions is “peanuts”. Yet, many Western governments keep trying to reduce funding for the UN. When I served as the Singapore Ambassador to the UN from 1998 to 2004, the US Ambassador to the UN, Richard Holbrooke, led a ferocious campaign in the UN to reduce the US contribution to the UN from 25 to 22%. He succeeded. So how much money did he save for the US each year? He saved USD 69.6 million. How significant of a sum is USD 69.6 million? It amounts to only 0.01% of the annual US Defence budget for 2020. Yet, as we have learned from the experience of Covid-19, the huge amount of money spent in the US Defence budget could not save the lives of over 537,000 Americans who died from Covid-19. Indeed, Covid-19 killed more Americans than all the Americans who died from fighting wars since World War II. And yet the US happily spends over USD 700 billion a year on its Defence budget while complaining about the USD 70 million it contributes in assessed contributions to the entire UN system.

Fortunately, the Asian share of the global GNP has been steadily rising. Hence, Asian countries can take the lead in calling for more financial resources to the UN system while paying their fair share of the global burden. This is the second concrete step that Asian countries can take to strengthen global multilateralism.

The third step for the Asian countries to take is to share with the world one of the best models of regional multilateral cooperation. To some extent, ASEAN has already done this, as documented by my co-author, Jeffry Sng and I, in our book *The ASEAN Miracle*, which was fortunately translated into Chinese by the Peking University Press. We can build on the success of ASEAN by strengthening the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). RCEP was proposed by the ten ASEAN countries and also includes five other East Asian countries -

China, Japan, South Korea as well as Australia and New Zealand. Unfortunately, India decided not to join at the last minute, even though it had been participating in the negotiations for over ten years.

The RCEP can therefore be strengthened in two ways. First, a major effort should be made to persuade India to join RCEP. This should be possible since India will benefit from integrating its economy with the dynamic economies of East Asia. Second, we should accelerate the concrete implementation of the RCEP. The goal should be to significantly increase the volume of trade conducted among the 15 RCEP member countries to ensure that it becomes by far the largest free trade agreement in the world. Right now, the total trade among the three countries in NAFTA amounts to just over USD 2.3 trillion, and that among the 27 countries of the EU amounts to USD 2.3 trillion. By contrast, the total trade among the 15 countries of RCEP amounts to USD 2.5 trillion.

One simple goal of the RCEP should be to ensure that the total trade conducted among the 15 RCEP countries is larger than the combined trade conducted by NAFTA and EU. If RCEP can achieve this, it would send a clear and powerful signal of the validity of two key points emphasized at the beginning of this Introduction. Firstly, we are reaching the end of the era of Western domination of world history. Secondly, in the twenty-first century, we will see the return of Asia. Hence, without a shadow of doubt, we will soon be sailing full steam ahead into the Asian twenty-first century.

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