

## Asia 2200\*

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I am here today as a person who is a product of Asia in terms of origin, nature and nurture for over a third of my life, but whose experiential background is completely Western for the other two thirds. I, therefore, have had the singular good fortune of being a participant in and an observer of both milieus in thought, word and deed.

Further, I am an engineer by profession, with business management experience for over 30 years, and have indulged in eclectic pursuits in various fields of knowledge. If, indeed, then, a meaningful perspective is possible, I daresay I am in a position to attempt it.

With that in mind, let me address the issue before us today—‘Asia 2200’. I should point out that I am currently involved with the **Foundation For the Future** in Bellevue, Washington. This Foundation has for its mission the examination of the long-term future of humanity, in evolutionary terms. Our horizons are in the 1000-year range. I am encouraged to note that we are gathered here to think about Asia in 2200. So the challenge for the occasion is to emphasise perspective. Perspective, to me, is a function of time and distance. I will attempt today to incorporate both in sufficient measure.

I will begin by stating that human civilizations evolve within dominant paradigms in evolutionary time frames.

Asia, in its drive to modernity in the last 100 years, has superimposed a set of new driving forces on a millennia-old paradigm, willingly and unwillingly. These new contradictory driving forces are rooted in the Judeo-Christian traditions and/or extensions of it. Extensions that have been universalised and secularized into an irresistible package of liberal democracy and

egalitarianism, with three main components which are--to quote Professor Uday Kumar-- 'nation-statism-democracy, scientism and developmentism, standing on a more basic paradigm the Judeo-Christian tradition, viz:

- God and man are wholly separate;
- Man is unique and at the top of creation;
- Man has dominion over nature;
- The fall from Eden has to be regained by good works;
- All that are not of this tradition must be brought into the flock (conversion); and
- The Anti-Christ must be defeated (prepare for righteous battles).

Every era, stage, and episode of western civilisation, with respect to itself and the 'other', can be satisfactorily explained as an outcome of these tenets implemented (I recommend the book, *The Religion of Technology*, by Noble.) And this backdrop is crucial to understanding Asia.

These driving forces are centrifugal in nature. Centrifugality that is apparent in the denuding of the earth's resources, centrifugality apparent in the creation of bigger and bigger tragedies of the 'commons' now assuming global proportions, centrifugality apparent in the alienation and anomie of individuals, centrifugality apparent in the ongoing proliferation of the number of disenfranchised groups seeking equity, worth, identity and rights. This centrifugality has taken western Civilization to near exhaustion. These driving forces superimposed on Asian societies have initiated the same centrifugality at its core.

The eye of this storm now raging in Asia is characterised by the emphasis on 'individualism', 'rights', 'autonomy', 'atomisation. What this has meant is the relegation of

duties, obligations and responsibilities to the background, accompanied by a removal of the same from the realms of the commons by virtue of an institutionalised system of rules, laws and codes that presumably ensure centripetality. The result is the undermining, corrupting and replacing overnight of the social, cultural, political and economic structures that were hierarchic, traditional, patriarchal, etc. and which historically, largely coerced the cohesion and integrity of the whole and the collective in these societies with primary emphasis on duties, roles, obligations and responsibilities.

There has been a second major deception implicit in this attempted transformation of Asian societies. The deception is that the transformation will be relatively painless, quick and easily managed. Asia thus entered into a Faustian bargain.

The Faustian bargain, of course, is that, in exchange for democracy, developmentism and scientism promising individual rights, sustenance and survival; it had to give up its paradigm and the centripetality that was inherent in it. This was an attractive bargain for a majority of these populations crushed under the weight of tradition, hierarchy, patriarchy, and noblesse oblige for centuries. More appropriately, these populations were brainwashed into agreeing to the proposition by the radical literate, liberated intellectuals of these societies, who were themselves brainwashed or perhaps taken with and have thus succumbed to the idealism implicit in this bargain. Who wouldn't?

Again, keeping the very long term in view, past and present, what I see happening today is an Asia in transition between these paradigms. The Asian paradigm that has been lost or replaced, as I am sure must be conceded, is opposite in all respects to the Judeo-Christian tradition:

- Man and God are one and the same;
- Man is of nature and part of it;

- Righteous behaviour and responsibility serves the larger interest of the community first and the individual second;
- Man's search for meaning and God is a process internal to oneself.
- Divinity is omniscient

The tragic irony, of course, is that, first, societies anchored on the Judeo-Christian traditions are becoming increasingly aware of the impending exhaustion of their paradigm as the logical outcome of its inherent centrifugality, but are still energetically promoting the same panaceas but with some sobriety brought into the picture. This kind of sobriety attempts to moderate the heretofore evolutionarily unstable strategies in new but still anthropocentric prescriptions and imperatives.

I am sure you have heard of concepts like 'sustainability', 'concern for future generations', 'global ethics', 'cosmic evolution', 'gaia', and 'systems approach'. All are pale imitations of profound intuitions and understandings existing and used for millennia before in our own Asian philosophies and cultures. Something the Tasaday of the Philippines I am sure understood from day one.

Second, as most Asian societies attempting this transformation are finding out, the road is arduous, long, painful and it will take centuries to take them to where the so-called advanced economies are today and not the years and decades as the time frames taken into account. I doubt anyone would contest the following, for instance:

There are more illiterate, undernourished, impoverished people in Asia today than at any time in their entire history. Additionally, there is more social discord, ethnic conflict, racial and caste hatred than at any time in their histories. The historically disenfranchised groups are even more so, and in truth, these societies are not any less traditional, hierarchic or patriarchal! By

enshrining centrifugality and discarding the structures of centripetality, we have created vacuums filled by caricatures of democracy, scientism and developmentism. All practised in the main as free choice built on rampant ignorance and illiteracy that now ELECT godmen, kings, and dictators!

And not much else has changed. The Faustian bargain I refer to has been a bad one. We must confront the disconcerting realisation that we have been had; we know it but are unwilling to face the truth. Or, we try to face the truth by demonising the west for demonising us and reverting to our historic glory as the repository of all that is great in human civilisation, which is nothing but a 'feel good' pacifier that we have firmly planted in our mouths.

The situation is not unlike a high wire act, where we are losing balance; there is no going back and what we are going to leads back to where we were.

I have painted a gloomy and sombre picture, but facing reality is the first step in moving towards a resolution.

The strategies for going forward for Asia, then, is to manage the problem of going forward in the evolutionary context--by reverting to its own paradigm.

If we are to take a managerial view of things (which, I might add, is a western invention premised firmly in positive convictions about human agency, control over one's destiny and the possibility of realising desired futures) then, at a minimum, the requirements are:

1. Extend the time frames under consideration to centuries instead of the delusional approaches we take in terms of decades.
2. The units of consideration should be top-down from the largest and the most general to the smallest and the particular. Example: start with the earth as the unit of measure, and view smaller aggregations in order down to the individual. In

other words, optimise the larger first and the smaller next.

3. Focus on the paradigms that will guide us into the future, even as we are respectful of what evolution teaches us, however distasteful those lessons might be.
4. Consider things in a framework of hierarchic, interacting multi-system complexity and focus on boundary areas, the areas where systems interact rather than on areas internal to a particular system.
5. Concentrate on the processes that will carry us to our objectives rather than the events that we desire.
6. Insist on discipline in the problem-solving process. Identify the true, deep, underlying causes rather than the ones too near the effect.
7. Keep in mind evolutionary lessons as they pertain to human capacity and limitations when it comes to the size of organisation and the clarification of roles and responsibilities alongside of rights and privileges.

At a minimum, we must walk away from the ‘one-minute manager’ concept that has so captivated and enthralled all of us. This enthrallment is betrayed by the servile acceptance of criminally short time frames used by all of us in our respective pursuits with the best of intentions, coupled with the gross neglect of ‘complexity’ and ‘evolution’ in all its considerations.

We must, instead, aim for multiple solutions, multiple inputs, multiple entries into the solution space interacting and resulting in some self-organized outcome. It implies that we must maintain diversity, difference and uniqueness as inputs because that is the grist for the evolutionary mill.

We must also keep in mind that this evolutionary mill is a slow moving mill. If it took the West two thousand years to get to where it is, we must understand and accept that the process we must now undertake will take just as long if not longer, simply because of the circumstances and conditions that prevail.

It would require the idealists and the radicals amongst us to moderate their rhetoric into a slower and less strident mode, or else be prepared to accept responsibility for turbulence and turmoil unleashed by revolutions caused by impatience, arrogance and servitude to any single belief system or alternative and, more importantly, disregard for the evolutionary juggernaut. History is replete with single utopian ideologies and designs as alternatives that have failed. The only overriding requirement of these alternatives should be that they are rooted in our own paradigm.

We must muster the courage, the appetite and the strength of will to take a more radical approach. It would require us to stop the train, get off it and, in a sense, redirect our selves within the framework of our own paradigm but again in the evolutionary context.

It would be well worth the effort to consider implementing alternative strategies. Asia might do well to set up enclaves that experiment with a hundred visions that provide fresh inputs to the evolutionary process in terms of the socialising of the individual and the varieties of social, economic, political organisation. It will be the interplay of these varieties within our own all-encompassing paradigm that will yield the results we need. We would have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

I will end by reiterating that human civilisations evolve within dominant paradigms in evolutionary time frames using evolutionary processes. The current dominant paradigm with its one-dimensionality is nearing its end. The re-emergence of Asian paradigms is timely and

relevant.

In the next 200 years Asia would do well to go home to its own paradigm. The central idea of this paradigm, restated in secular modern terms would be, to quote **Sohail Inayatullah**, ‘communities that are ecologically conscious, spiritually aware, socially progressive, (and) embedded in the culture of the area.’