



## THE ASIAN RENAISSANCE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF *TAFAHOM* (MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING)

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**A**cademics around the world have become increasingly interested in Asia's experience of modernization, particularly in Japan, China, India and South Korea – an interest reflected in their efforts to discover the secrets behind the sustained economic growth now taking place in most Asian countries. In doing so, they have expanded the scope of their research to include the philosophies of those states, in addition to their religions, politics, culture, heritage, traditions and social life. Some observers attribute those countries' successes to a decline in the liberal values associated with Western capitalism – American as well as European – after US-led globalisation started to embrace far-reaching and controversial notions such as the End of History, the Conflict of Civilizations and the War on Terrorism. While this was happening in the West, the Asian countries, particularly China and India, were continuing to grow and prosper – a process which they had begun some two decades earlier; at the same



time, however, Japan and certain other states in that region were suffering from one political and social crisis after another, including the problem of ageing, a fall in the birth rate, inflation, high unemployment and illegal workers; in addition to all this, in 2010 Japan's public debt was over 200% of GDP.

The governments of some Asian states have adopted a policy of *tafahom* (mutual understanding) and openness towards the outside world as a way of protecting their nations' achievements over recent decades and averting the economic, political and social crises that have plagued some of their neighbours. Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Korean leaders (among others) have visited each other's countries in order to safeguard their regional and global interests and counter the historic causes of tension between them – such as the legacy of the Japanese occupations and North Korea's threats to attack South Korea and Japan with nuclear weapons. The positive results of these exchange visits have included reconciliation and détente in South-East Asia, leading to a series of signed agreements between Japan, China, India and Korea with the aim of reinforcing bilateral relations and making mutual understanding one of their diplomatic priorities; all these developments have taken place against a background of respect for each other's individual political systems and an acceptance of the principle of putting Asia's wider strategic interests above narrow territorial and regional disputes. Consequently, today it would seem that there are positive prospects for the normalisation of relations between the Asian states, accompanied by joint political, economic and cultural co-operation and – eventually – Asian unity based upon sound democratic principles in which every effort is made to ensure that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is quintessentially and pre-eminently an Asian century.

The philosophy of mutual understanding between the Asian countries is based on pragmatism, in which the overriding principle is the protection of common interests and the avoidance of long drawn out crises that could lead to military conflicts in which the only winner would be the United States of America (as the leader of the current phase of globalisation). Most, if not all, the Asian states have developed their own style of “modernisation” based primarily on their inherited traditions and – in the

case of the Japanese, Chinese, Indians and Koreans – their ethical and human values and attitudes, which generally differ significantly from those of the followers of the Divine religions.

As this article does not plan to examine every single event that has taken place during the Asian Renaissance, let us touch briefly upon two of its most representative experiences:

- **The first of these** – that of Japan – is the oldest. It has had the greatest impact upon the outside world as the first successful example of modernisation outside the European orbit. At the same time, it has suffered from acute internal problems which have hampered its progress over the past decade and in 2010, after several decades as the world's number two economic power, its ranking dropped from second place to third.

- **The second** – China – is more recent and its rise only began in 1978. Today, however, it has become the most attractive prospect from a global point of view, leaping up the ladder to become the world's second largest economy and a hot competitor for first place.

### The role of religion and culture in Japan's renaissance

According to their ancient chronicle *Kojiki (The Record of Ancient Matters)*, the Japanese believe that Creation began when the Upper World was populated by a profusion of gods and goddesses, two of whom (a male and a female) married and gave birth to the Islands of Japan. After giving birth several times, the wife died and descended to the Nether World where the souls have their final resting place. Subsequently, her husband longed to be reunited with her and he too descended to the Nether World where he begged her to return and give birth to the rest of their offspring. However, she was unable to do so and the husband returned to the Upper World after purifying himself from the stain of the Nether World with water from the river. When he cleansed his left eye, the goddess Amaterasu (or the Sun) was born. Then he cleansed his right eye and the Moon god was born. Then he cleansed his nose and the god Susanoo was born. The father then distributed the world among the three of them, giving the sky to the



Sun, the night to the Moon and the seas to Susanoo. However, Susanoo pined for his mother, so his father became angry and drove him out from the Upper World to the Nether World, though before he (Susanoo) left he smashed up his sister's property. Terrified by her brother's violent behaviour, Amaterasu, the Sun goddess, hid in a celestial cave and darkness covered the face of the world. Then after the other gods had intervened and persuaded her to leave the cave, the light returned. Consequently, the gods commanded that Susanoo should be punished and driven into exile on earth.

This and other legends have provided the basis for the beliefs and rituals of countless generations of Japanese, and confirm that the Islands of Japan were created by the gods and not by man. Accordingly, the Land of Japan is sacred and the Emperor is sacred and the Spiritual Father of all Japanese, who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their Land and their Emperor. This explains why no invaders ever set foot on Japanese soil until the end of the Second World War, after the Americans had used nuclear weapons to force the Japanese people to surrender and compel the Emperor to abandon his Divine status.

It is these religious beliefs that have given the Japanese a sense of collective solidarity and motivated them to defend their sacred symbols, and it is because of them that Japan is still the "Empire of Rites and Rituals" whose people have a sense of being racially unique and homogeneous with a distinct Japanese identity. The Japanese regard themselves as being one family under the leadership of the Emperor, who symbolises the unity of the nation and its people. This has led to a kind of fusion between individual identity and Japanese nationalism based on ties of blood, earth, language, homogeneity and a rejection of concepts such as social division or class struggle. Hence the famous Japanese novelist Murakami rejects the idea that there is a crisis of identity in Japan. In his view the Japanese have no sense of such a crisis except in relation to the "different other," while within Japan they feel that they are all alike and live together in harmony and solidarity, practising their traditional rituals. They feel no need to devise new values but prefer to keep their inherited rituals and traditions alive and observe and practise them collectively.

Japanese studies have revealed a wealth of interesting information about that country's traditional religions including, among others, Buddhism, Taoism, Zenism and Shintoism. In Japan today there are thousands of religious groups whose leaders and followers train themselves to keep their minds and bodies in good health. At the same time they work to conserve their natural environment and promote respect for traditional Japanese values and morality, while seeking to safeguard national unity and protect their country from social divisions, religious conflicts and civil wars. Religious rites in Japan are a bit of a mixture. Some are of native origin while others have been imported from Korea, India, China and other parts of the world. Some, such as Christianity and Islam, are relatively recent.

One striking thing about the Japanese is that they do not show much zeal for any particular faith or religious practice but prefer to adopt an attitude of "positive neutrality". This means that no fanatical religious group has been able to attract a large following in Japan, and Japanese society as a whole firmly rejects bigotry and sectarianism or the exploitation of religion for political ends.

The end of the Second World War brought radical changes to Japan's political system and cultural ethos. The country showed itself a willing host to the imported Divine religions, though its intellectuals warned of the dangers posed by fundamentalist beliefs imported from the Middle East – Islamic as well as Christian and Jewish – which they saw as a potential threat to the unity of a Japanese society which had never suffered from religious or sectarian conflicts.

On the cultural side, the Meiji Reforms dragged Japan out of the feudal age and into an era of dynamic modernisation that coincided with the massive changes taking place in the rest of the world. At the same time, it also benefited hugely from the strict *Bushido* code that guided the conduct of the *Samurai* – a system of moral training designed to instil obedience, respect and sacrifice on behalf of the Emperor, who symbolised national unity and was the spiritual father of all Japanese. Japan's reformers did not cut their ties with the values and traditions of the past, but opted for a process of gradual development in line with the ethical principles which



emphasised harmony, concord and mutual understanding between the individual and the wider community, while placing the higher interests of Japan above the interests of the individual citizen. Consequently, Japan was able to embark upon a programme of sound and systematic modernisation in which it wholeheartedly embraced technology and modern science along with Western ideas and policies such as democracy, socialism, liberalism, secularism and other concepts. However, while doing so it still preferred to retain its old Imperial system, though in a somewhat amended version following its defeat in the Second World War.

Japan would not have been able to make a speedy recovery from the ruination and destruction after the war without the direct assistance of the Americans, who also provided it with a military umbrella which would guarantee its security. As a result, the Japanese were able to achieve economic domination over all their Asian neighbours and became the world's second most powerful economy. This required their leaders to come to an understanding with the United States, despite their bitter memories. The horrors of the 1945 nuclear attacks on the defenceless Japanese populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were still fresh in the minds of the nation's people, and this was a major reason why the American occupation authorities found themselves in conflict with traditional Japanese culture at a number of different levels; it was brought home to them that the Japanese were staunchly committed to their national independence on their own islands, that there was no way in which they could be weaned off their traditional culture, that demographically they were "resolutely homogeneous", and that they had an unquenchable thirst to learn from others - whether the "others" were Chinese (as had historically been the case) or Western. Other features of this modern Japan included a central role for the state, a protectionist policy (which the state applied to production as well as the markets), the rise of an enlightened Japanese bourgeoisie, a deeply ingrained belief in thrift (at both individual and community level), a policy of compensating for the acute shortage of natural resources by investing vigorously in the country's manpower, and a practice of maintaining a stiff upper lip in the face of adversity and natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanoes and typhoons.

The Japanese leaders needed to reach an understanding with the USA over the 1946 Constitution - announced by General MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the American forces which occupied Japan after the country's defeat in the Second World War. After a brief period of disagreement, the Japanese agreed to promulgate a new constitution, which came into force in May 1947 and was sold to the public as being "more progressive" than the previous Imperial Constitution of 1889. It included several democratic ideas that had been fought for by Japanese reformers, including a number who had died in the Emperor's prisons because they had demanded constitutional changes, though it was also clear that in its application it bore no resemblance to US-style democracy; on the contrary, the entente that existed between the country's political elites gave birth to a kind of consensus democracy with a distinctive Japanese twist. The Liberal Democratic Party ruled Japan continuously from 1955 to 1993, following which it shared power with the Socialist Party between 1993 and 1996. The situation changed with the decline of the Socialist Party and the return of the Liberal Democratic Party, which then ruled without any other contenders until 2009, when the Democratic Party came to power. At present, however, that party is suffering crisis after crisis which may result in a revival of the Liberal Democratic Party's fortunes.

This kind of phenomenon - in which a single party holds the reins of power continuously for several decades, while at the same time observing the practices followed in the world's most advanced nations, respecting the public's choice and protecting the country from internal strife - is virtually unknown in the European and American democracies.

Japan had to reach an understanding with her Asian neighbours, particularly China and the two Koreas, which would enable them to come to terms with the bloody history of her occupation of those countries and the Japanese army's atrocities against their peoples. When China launched its policy of "reform and openness" in 1978 it called for the resentments of the past to be forgotten and a new page to be opened that would lead to the creation of Asian unity. Following this, Japan withdrew a considerable amount of its capital investment from Europe and America and began to establish closer ties with its fellow Asian states, so that by 2009 it had over



200 billion dollars invested in China. And despite occasional local protests against some of the Japanese missions based in Chinese and Korean cities (because of Japan's inflexible attitudes or refusal to apologise explicitly for the atrocities carried out by its armed forces on those countries' soil), significant progress has been made towards greater mutual understanding between Japan and the other Asian countries, which could lead ultimately to Asian unity on the European Union model.

Here we should note that Japanese society is still largely homogeneous and, while courteous to non-Japanese, it is reluctant to assimilate them. The Japanese individual is an organic part of the group, while the country's urban society is overwhelmingly middle class – a factor that provides a safety-valve for preventing internal crises. As highly involved members of a multi-functional group, the Japanese have developed a wide range of communal voluntary activities, though successive governments have endeavoured to wean them gradually away from their “ant-colony,” workaholic attitudes and lifestyles by setting up sports, arts and leisure centres and encouraging them to travel abroad; this was something that very few of them were willing to do until the 1980s, though by the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century over twenty million Japanese tourists were visiting foreign countries.

Education and vocational training are among Japan's top priorities and Japanese families are prepared to make huge sacrifices so that their children can get a good education. As well as providing direct support or bursaries to enable Japanese students to complete their higher education, private companies and state organisations also guarantee them jobs. Japan gives a higher priority to education and research than any other country and invests a large part of its budget in centres for technological development. Government and financial institutions are committed to ensuring that the country's research institutions are supplied with sufficient funds and the scientific research budget is explicitly ring-fenced to guarantee that it will always be protected against any potential downturn in economic circumstances. This means that those employed in scientific research are assured of financial and job security, as well as long working hours and high productivity.

Seen from a non-Japanese perspective, the Japanese educational system is demanding in the extreme. Students are subjected to intense competition and the pressures can drive some of them to suicide. From their side, the Japanese regard it as one of the best educational systems in the world. It gives the student the longest school year and its course syllabi are accompanied by a range of other educational activities. Its focus is on the modern sciences and every year it produces increasing numbers of students who have achieved distinction in advanced disciplines in which a suitable balance is maintained between the theoretical and the practical. Moreover, recent UNESCO reports rank Japanese students as best in the world in mathematics and several branches of the applied sciences, particularly physics, chemistry, astronomy, pharmacology and medicine, to name but a few. In addition to this, the Japanese have established special research centres and universities for top-grade students, including the world-famous University of Tsukuba, which run courses at a different level from those taught at other universities and organise tailor-made programmes to enable the most brilliant students to discover and develop their talents, skills and potential.

There can be no doubt that the amount of money spent by Japan's official bodies and private companies on education, research and cultural activities, the arts and other creative pursuits is equal to, if not greater than, that spent by any of the other advanced countries in the world. A top Japanese researcher or scientist receives unlimited support from state institutions as well as private companies, and this, along with Japan's striking advances in modern science and technology and its stunning achievements in the fields of creativity and invention, explains why the country's research centres are among the best in the world.

With their state-of-the-art communications systems, Japanese researchers are able to pursue their research projects and liaise closely with their colleagues in similar institutions around the globe. Some sections of the Japanese media have pointed out that the impressive rise in the numbers of Japanese who have recently won Nobel Prizes in science reflects a world-wide recognition of the quality of the country's educational system and the role of its research centres in advanced technology,



particularly the development of robots. Japanese governments have issued clear instructions to the effect that talented Japanese scientists of all age groups and across a wide range of disciplines need to be supported so that they can achieve the necessary standard to win international prizes, particularly Nobel Prizes.

### **The role of religion and culture in China's Renaissance**

Along with a number of other countries in South-East Asia, China has embraced the precepts of Confucian philosophy which provide the basis for mutual understanding, or “the Golden Rules of upright governance”. These comprise the general principles governing human relations such as youth respecting their elders, women respecting men, pupils respecting their teachers, servants respecting their masters and citizens respecting their rulers. They also stipulate uprightness and diligence in one’s work and respect for ethical and human values, and define the duties of the good shepherd towards his flock, as well as those of the subjects towards their ruler, the legitimacy of a just state and the qualities of a “good shepherd”. They stress respect for the laws, an upright attitude to work, good and harmonious social relations, preservation of traditions and conventions, and respect for the souls of the ancestors. The way the Chinese observe religious rituals appears to be an expression of close and warm social relations rather than observance of the strict rules followed by devotees of the Divine religions.

Islam, which is widespread in China, is the leading religion of several of the autonomous national groups, who embraced the Faith following the first Islamic conquests. Over the years, Muslims have played a major role in strengthening China’s relations with the Arab region, particularly through the Silk Road, which has been extensively studied. There are also small numbers of Christians and Jews in China.

The Chinese “mutual understanding philosophy” lays emphasis on respect for all religions and strong ties between the country’s different national groups, and forbids the clergy from engaging in politics or proselytising with the aim of recruiting members of other religions to their own particular faith. It calls for the younger generation to be educated in

good conduct, even-temperedness, diligence, social conformity, harmony with their natural environment and patriotism, and it seeks to promote national unity so that a new China can be built that will be capable of confronting the challenges of globalisation. As a primary element in safeguarding the internal cohesion of the country with the world's largest population, the philosophy of mutual understanding between China's different national groups has succeeded in creating strong links between the members of that vast human society, which comprises sixty-five nationalities and numerous different religions.

By respecting national and religious differences, and promoting positive interaction between cultural pluralism and religious diversity, the philosophy of mutual understanding has developed into an ethical system practised by all Chinese as a practical application of the slogan "Internal harmony and compatibility with the Globalisation Age"; this has been the cornerstone of China's policy since the launch of its programme of reform and openness in 1978.

Over the past three decades the Chinese Communist leadership has wholeheartedly embraced reform and openness to the outside world and abandoned some of the slogans of its old hard-line ideology. It is reinforcing the ties between its different communities by rejecting war and applying the principle of mutual understanding as a means of confronting the challenges of globalisation and establishing Asian unity. This raises numerous questions about the underlying reasons behind the leadership's decision to reject the notion of war despite its massive military and economic capabilities.

The answer is that China desperately needs more time to resolve the economic and social problems it has inherited – problems which affect millions of poor people within its borders. Another factor is that the return of Hong Kong and Macao to the motherland has proved that success can be achieved through diplomacy, mutual understanding and peaceful means. This has encouraged the leadership to exercise patience in its efforts to recover Taiwan by diplomatic means, despite the rising calls for independence or separatism by some Taiwanese political parties.



The ongoing global financial crisis which hit most countries of the world in the autumn of 2008 has left China in a strong economic position. It has maintained its high rate of growth of between seven and ten per cent per year for over a quarter of a century, thereby demonstrating that the Chinese leadership is endowed with sufficient wisdom to manage the country's economic upsurge through the application of China's traditional philosophy.

China attaches particular importance to the cultural values promoted by the philosopher Confucius, who continues to be the most important influence on contemporary Chinese political thought. It cracks down harshly on the corrupt and those who spread corruption, some of whom have been given the severest of punishments. In 2010 China issued sentences on over 140,000 officials, including people who had held high positions in the Party and the State administration. With its policy of accountability and transparency - and despite the economic and social problems plaguing some of the rural areas (when compared with the tremendous growth and rise in personal incomes in the major cities) - the country has seen its economy grow in a way that can only be described as "sensible and rational", and it is for this reason that China's policy of sustainable development is likely to lead to a gradual resolution of its outstanding domestic crises. Its current programme recognizes that the Chinese have the ability to solve a range of historic problems that have persisted over several centuries and affected millions of peasants across the country.

On the monetary side, its policy is to encourage saving by individuals and official and private institutions, and it is aware of the importance of setting aside large cash reserves to counter any severe, high-risk, global economic crises in future. Today China's reserves are helping to relieve economic stagnation both at home and abroad and are enabling new lifeblood to be pumped into the world economy in order to pull it out of its slump and boost the international financial indices. This wise policy reflects the Chinese vision and philosophy of harmony and mutual understanding and the close dialectical relationship between – on the one hand – sixty-five different nationalities in a country with a population of 1.34 billion and – on the other – the development of the world economy.

Since embracing the policy of “reform and openness” in 1978, the Chinese leadership has recognized that China’s own economic development is dependent upon two major factors – mutual understanding between its different national groups, and Chinese support for sound global economic growth. Today it is clear that China’s style of economic management for the benefit of its peoples has been a highly effective counterweight to the global economic financial crisis – a crisis which was caused by administrative and financial chaos and corruption, compounded by a lack of transparency and legal accountability. Today China is demanding that the laws on global economic management be radically reformed in favour of the productive forces rather than the financial speculators. In this, the Chinese administration, along with some other Asian countries, has shown more wisdom and sound common sense in managing its domestic economy and protecting it from global crises that the Western (European and American) powers have done in their management of the world economy.

On the cultural side, China attaches major importance to educating its people throughout the length and breadth of the land, and to training as many of its nationals as possible, since human development provides the essence of the human/cultural capital which must accompany its economic upsurge. The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a radical transformation from “quantitative capital” to “human/qualitative capital” capable of coping with the massive explosion that has taken place in the age of technology and the revolutions in knowledge, productivity, the media and communications. Like other major Asian states, China has given particular priority to the teaching of science and mathematics with the aim of expanding its research base in all the scientific fields, particularly physics, chemistry and the natural sciences. Today the haemorrhaging of many of its finest minds to Europe and the United States has stopped and increasing numbers of “emigrant brains” are now returning to work in China. The Third Cultural Report, issued by the Arab Thought Foundation in Beirut in 2010, referred to China’s success in dealing with its scientists in Western countries, while noting that the largest numbers of Chinese expatriates were in the United States. Of the million-plus



Chinese professionals resident in that country, some 62,500 were doctors of engineering working in the USA in 2003. The report added that in 2007 32,000 Chinese students obtained their doctorates in the United States.

China has recognized the vital (and growing) role of information and communications technology, which it has used with considerable success as part of a scheme to attract young expatriates back to the motherland. The thousands of young Chinese scientists who have returned have been welcomed with open arms and those who are highly qualified are provided with high-income employment and a host of other privileges.

The combination of a philosophy of mutual understanding at home, and – abroad -harmony and compatibility with the demands of globalisation, has reinforced China's status as a model of social stability, economic growth and highly advanced, sustainable technological progress. Outside China there is considerable interest in understanding how the country's culture has contributed to its impressive economic development and there is a growing demand for Confucius Institutes to be set up in countries around the world to provide facilities so that citizens of other nations can study the Chinese language, literature and philosophy. Meanwhile, the Chinese leadership uses "soft power" to promote the principles of its philosophy of mutual understanding. This involves propagating Chinese philosophical and moral values which embrace the principle of balance and harmony as a means of rejecting all forms of violence; nurturing a culture of peace and conciliation among its own national groups and across the Asian continent; and seeking to achieve a more humane and just version of globalisation.

By embracing a "soft power" policy China has succeeded in using the Confucian heritage, traditional moral values and Chinese wisdom as tools in its campaign to spread the Chinese ethos among all those seeking to understand the secret of China's success. While the policy is strictly cultural in its aims, it is not designed to impose Chinese cultural values upon other peoples at the expense of their own cultures. The Chinese leadership does not see democracy as being the exclusive province of the West, but as a product of human progress for each society to apply

according to its own particular circumstances. The form of socialism China has embraced has a specific Chinese character and its basic features include an affluent state and democracy with harmony. In the Chinese view no form of democracy can be universally applicable.

The type of democracy a state may choose to adopt must be determined by its economic and cultural conditions and it is not something that can be imposed by force. The Chinese leadership has little interest in the Western democratic model, because it believes that democracy can only be successful if it is able to solve the people's basic problems such as poverty, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy and desertification. It is proud of the economic, social, educational and cultural advances that China has achieved in a very short time, and today it is promoting "democracy with a Chinese face" as a central plank of its programme for the future.

### **Some final observations on the philosophy of mutual understanding within the Asian context**

In the age of globalisation, the Asians understand "mutual understanding" to mean a readiness to embrace every possible kind of civil modernisation under a political regime that seeks to develop individuals who will tolerate, recognize and accept the "different other" (as in the case of India), work together as a cohesive group in order to maximise productivity (Japan and South Korea), or live under a Party leadership (China and North Korea).

While the Asian countries share the aim of a modern – and modernising – educational system, their philosophy of mutual understanding seeks to develop "civil citizenship," in which the individual is an active participant in those of his civil society's institutions that are primarily responsible for improving his level of knowledge, investing in digital technology and making a sound contribution to the knowledge and communications revolutions that have changed the face of the world and made it a global village – a village in which the knowledge economy, the genetic revolution, high levels of productivity and competitiveness and free trade – including the free movement of goods and capital – reign



supreme. Where the Japanese and Chinese are concerned, one result of the global village and the digital revolution has been a heightened level of national and cultural consciousness, accompanied by an open attitude towards other peoples and their multiplicity of cultures. Alongside this, however, they are also intensely aware of the dangers of cultural globalisation and apprehensive about its possible impact upon their own culture and daily lives. They have long recognized that neglecting their national languages and allowing them to be replaced by other languages (whether for general use, education or cultural activities, under the false pretext that this is something required by globalisation) will inevitably lead to cultural subjection (if not enslavement) with all its damaging consequences, including a weakening of the cultural output in their mother tongues. This is why they regard it as vital to safeguard their own languages for the survival of their national identity and culture. For them, their language continues to be the “safe repository” for all their nations’ intellectual and cultural output, just as it has always been over the centuries.

Japan and China are two examples of successful modernisation and respect for the national language – a combination that has produced social progress, human development and sustainable economic growth. A national language is a tool for ensuring that a community retains its ties with its heritage. At the same time, it does not exclude access to other national cultures and traditions, because the cultural and literary output of other nations can be made available in translation.

As a state that has been disarmed and forbidden to take part in military activities beyond its own borders except under the flag of the United Nations, Japan has embraced a policy of non-violence and crisis resolution by diplomatic means. Meanwhile, China has adopted a philosophy of mutual understanding and internal harmony as a means of solving its domestic crises and averting the dangers of military conflicts with neighbouring countries.

At this juncture it might be appropriate to raise a few questions about the role of the “philosophy of mutual understanding” in strengthening the

position of the Asian states under the new world order. Has any Asian state benefited from the West and then succeeded in modernising itself on an Asian model which differs radically from the Western one? Are those states studying how the countries of Europe have succeeded in establishing their European Union through persuasion and democratic action rather than force, so that they themselves can build an Asian bloc based upon internal harmony and cordial coexistence with each other, leading – ultimately – to a more humane form of globalisation than the Western one (which is based on a brutal neoliberalism that shows signs of collapse)?

It would be hard to deny that the Asian countries' current cultural and moral principles have helped them develop economically, while at the same time affording them protection against excesses. They have promoted the values of compatibility and harmony between their numerous national groups and ensured sustainable human and economic development for all their peoples. They boast well trained and qualified manpower and enjoy a high reputation internationally. Moreover, in confronting a barbaric globalisation unfettered by any moral restraints, they are endowed with huge resources to enable them to propagate their cultures outside the Asian region and help create a more humane form of global system. The Asian countries have a rich legacy of moral values and inherited customs that will help them maintain a balance between tradition and modernity as they seek to temper their economic growth with humane and ethical principles.

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century there has been a series of annual conferences on dialogue and mutual understanding between the Asian states. The leaders of the participating states have agreed on a raft of general principles aimed at reinforcing entente and mutual trust in order to safeguard their common interests. Over the past ten years numerous joint agreements have been signed and there has been a significant increase in reciprocal financial investment and trade. Asian leaders have espoused a common-sense policy designed to further their collective interests and upgrade relations between Asian states in order to bolster their ability to tackle America's cultural and economic hegemony and establish an alternative form of globalisation.



The main focus of the discussions on mutual understanding has been on: strengthening partnership and co-operation and boosting investment between the participating states in a wide range of fields; expanding security co-operation and military training; encouraging broader cultural exchanges between Asian researchers by setting up research projects and joint training courses; and increasing media contacts and exchanges of technical and technological expertise.

Most Asian countries belong to the developing world and see central roles for their state institutions, while giving priority to improving their economic structures and providing training programmes in the techniques of sound domestic development. They share similar stances on critical regional and global issues and put forward collective proposals on ways of resolving complex and chronic international problems that threaten world peace and security. Their economic development policies, which are hugely beneficial to the peoples of the developing world, have given a boost to joint projects in the developing states and helped lead to the relocation of the centres of production outside the advanced countries. They look forward confidently to a future of positive dialogue, mutual co-operation and development that will benefit all the peoples of Asia, with the leaders of their countries adopting rational and humane stances in the interests of Asian and global prosperity, peace and security.

The leaders of the Asian countries have repeatedly stressed that the military might exercised by the United States against what it calls “international terrorism” has not only failed to produce solutions to security problems, but has exacerbated them. Their policy is to reject the principle of violence and the use or threat of force, which they see as counter-productive and a threat to world peace. Their rational approach is designed to ensure lasting peace and sustainable development in Asia within the framework of a long-term programme of co-operation in the economic and cultural fields as well as in energy, tourism and other areas. Today Asia is one of the most economically dynamic regions of the world; its huge markets have enormous potential and have played a major role in global economic development for several decades. With the big disparities between the different Asian countries’ markets, accumulated reserves and industrial

enterprises, it would seem that the best course of action for the future would be integration. As well as encouraging economic co-operation and exchanges of technical and technological expertise, this would also enable them to build a powerful Asian trading and financial investment bloc, which in turn would promote dialogue rather than conflict between the world's civilizations and help create a new form of globalisation – a diplomacy- and UN-based globalisation – to replace the present American one.

The philosophy of mutual understanding in the Asian countries is inspired by firm cultural and ethical principles. These include sustainable development, modern education, a clean environment for a better life, cultural diversity, free but responsible media, an understanding of other cultures and respect for the differences between them (with the aim of strengthening ties between them), broader cultural exchanges, rejection of war in all its forms as well as interference in other countries' affairs, prevention of the spread of nuclear weapons, which should be placed under effective UN control, support for UN-sponsored diplomatic solutions, and participation in funding and supporting international institutions so that they can carry out their global role effectively.

The Asian countries are also endeavouring to tackle urgent global problems that threaten the future of mankind such as – among others – weapons of mass destruction, environmental pollution, desertification, the greenhouse effect, scarcity of water resources, the liberation of women so that they can play their part in the production process, issues affecting the younger generation, emigration and unemployment. Their efforts have led to fruitful co-operation in a wide range of fields over the past ten years and they are taking effective measures to cope with the rapid changes taking place in their region and across the world in a highly critical phase of mankind's existence which is crying out for a new, multi-polar world order and a more humane global system. The philosophy of mutual understanding between the Asian nations has helped reinforce mutual trust between neighbours based on the principles of respect for national sovereignty and individual states' political decisions. This in turn has fostered a kind of Asian *esprit de corps* and a collective demand for the liberation of the entire Asian region from any foreign military presence;



instead, the goal is a union of Asian countries with their own effective military forces (on the European Union model) and an ability to confront the challenges of globalisation. This would help their states – particularly Japan and South Korea – to rid themselves of the American military umbrella which has been protecting them since the end of the Second World War; this US presence has continued because those two countries are apprehensive of China’s rising military influence in their neighbourhood and its refusal to take punitive measures against North Korea for its continued provocation of its neighbours.

For its part, the West – both Europe and America – has been afraid of the rising power of the “yellow race” since the rise of Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, followed by China during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today those two nations are ranked second and third on the scale of global economic powers.

The Western leaders have expressed concern over the growing entente between the Asian countries, particularly China and India – the world’s two largest states with a combined population of nearly two and a half billion. In the past, Western statesmen used to say: “When China awakes, the world will tremble.” Today they recognize that the entente between China, India, Japan, Korea and the rest of Asia means that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be an Asian century *par excellence*. The rise of the Asian nations – guided by their traditional values and driven by the steps they are taking to promote mutual understanding and avert conflicts – has put them in a strong position to become the major players in the global economy, and this is why the Americans and Europeans are doing everything they can to drive a wedge between them and exploit the bitter memories of Japan’s historical treatment of China and Korea, as well as North Korea’s insane policies towards its neighbours. However, with its common-sense political practices Asia is creating the right conditions for its states to form a united front capable of curbing North Korean extremism and drawing its people into the mainstream of the region’s drive for progress. By raising the profile of their philosophy of entente and mutual trust, the rising Asian nations are becoming a pivotal element – or indeed perhaps the leading force – of the new world order.