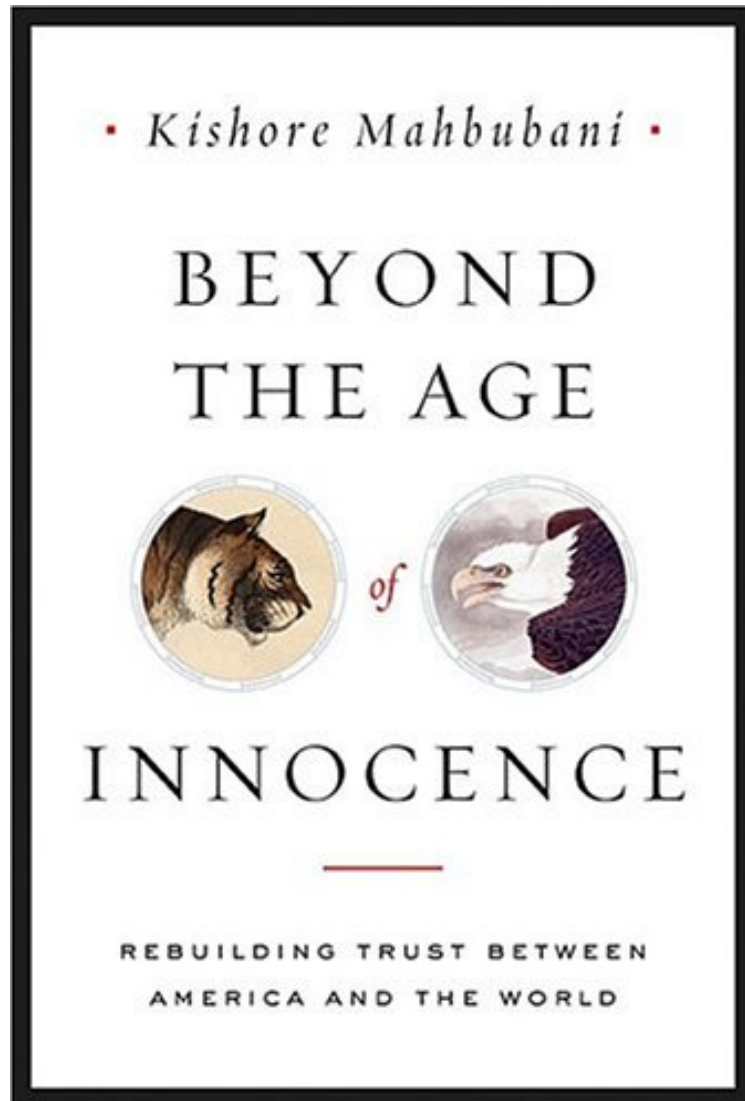


Beyond the Age of Innocence: Rebuilding Trust Between America and the World

Kishore Mahbubani

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Kishore Mahbubani : Beyond the Age of Innocence: Rebuilding Trust Between America and the World before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Beyond the Age of Innocence: Rebuilding Trust Between America and the World:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. America, there is a world out there!By Steve ChernoskiMr. Mahbubani's book is a valuable resource on foreign policy. He hopes the book will help "make American society aware that daily, billion of pairs of eyes are watching, studying and judging America." - xix. Mahbubani came from a

poor Hindu family in Singapore and luckily got a scholarship to university. His perspective is very interesting because of his view from having been poor AND privileged. He also looks to America as a shining example in the world, but has some problems with some of our policies of the past thirty or so years. I first saw him on "Foreign Exchange" with Fareed Zakaria and it should be noted that his style of writing is very similar to that of Zakaria and Thomas L. Friedman, both of whom he quotes a great deal. The book is very strong in the beginning when he talks about how America has helped and harmed the world as well as America's relation with Islam and China. Mahbubani's chapter on China where he suggests that having China become the major dealer with Islamic countries is VERY interesting: "Even though China has a sizeable Muslim population of its own, this Muslim minority has not dictated the terms of China's engagement with the Islamic world. As a consequence, without any historical baggage (unlike, say, Islam with Christianity and the Crusades), there is no natural antipathy between Islam and China. Instead, there has long been admiration of the great Chinese civilization within the Islamic world. If China successfully modernizes, its success may have a powerful ripple effect throughout the Islamic world. Many Islamic thinkers are reluctant to use the West as a model for Islam to emulate . . . But these same thinkers would have no hesitation to use China as a positive example." - pp.125-126

Toward the end, Mahbubani starts to sound like a NY Times columnist like Kristof, Dowd or Krugman attacking (and repeating) how America has harmed the world with farm subsidies, Iraq, Kyoto and the IMF. He has lost some of his great faith in America and you can see this. One of his biggest wishes (and I am in full agreement with him) is that regular Americans need to know more about international affairs. According to Mahbubani, Americans (and even many government officials) rarely know how their actions in international affairs have ripple effects on others around the world, in many ways they never would know or realize. Many Americans have no idea how a good deal of the world holds them in contempt for things America didn't necessarily think was bad at the time, but may have turned out differently later on. This is his main point of the book: America has to implement its policy while examining ALL of the possible effects on others, because it could come back to haunt you. Sure, one policy might not be favorable to another group or groups, but you must be cautious and wise. Two movie quotes would sum up this review: Spock (from Star Trek II) said, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one." And from Spiderman (and Mahbubani uses this): "With great power comes great responsibility." Overall, a recommended book on what America can do to re-shape its image in the world while also dealing with the rise of China.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A very important book for any US citizen - especially one working in Asia or anywhere in another nation. By PHILTHESKIERA well written and profound analysis of why the SE Asians and Chinese, along with the Islamic world, have reasons to doubt the dependability of US policies and tendencies to use a military solution for all problems. It is written by a FRIEND of the US and Ambassador to the UN from Singapore who combines excellent story-telling with clear writing. I highly recommend it to students intending to study outside the US or other Americans working overseas, and would suggest that it might help us all re-think policies we've taken for granted - and that are not effective - and will not work. Phil the Skier (PhD in cultural anthropology)

20 of 21 people found the following review helpful. An important book on international affairs. By Dennis Littrell Singaporean scholar and diplomat Kishore Mahbubani is a great admirer of the United States. He is also a stern critic. I think these qualities are exactly what America needs now at the time of our greatest strength. What Mahbubani wants is to gently admonish the United States for acting unilaterally and without the benefit of international law, while at the same time remind us all of America's greatness and all that America has done for the world. He emphasizes that the US is not and has not been an ordinary superpower. Unlike other great states, it has not sought empire or the economic enslavement of the vanquished. Instead it has rebuilt the enemy, as in Germany and Japan, and as it is presumably trying to do in Iraq. These extraordinary behaviors by a nation state mark the US as an enlightened nation, a nation that knows that world stability and the economic success of other nations only contribute to stability and the good life at home. "America is...an atypical human society," he writes, "unlike any other. Until recently, it has served as a powerful beacon, pointing to a future for all of humankind. That is its essence, its real mission: to remain true to its soul and remain an extraordinary society." (p. 211) Mahbubani adds that in other parts of the world, the men who open doors for you...look down in a sort of implicit bow," but that "New York doormen never look down. They look you straight in the eye and behave as total equals... They may work...in the building" and "receive tips...but they possess not an iota of inferiority." (p. 210) He calls this "an enormous leap upwards in the human evolutionary ladder." He believes that "America has largely escaped the pernicious effects of class stratification prevalent in the rest of the world." (p. 211) His main point, however, is that America's power reaches with its tentacles, both soft and hard, into every country of the world and affects everybody from the poorest to the wealthiest. Yet the only people who have any direct say in what the US does are Americans who can vote for its leadership. Consequently there is great frustration throughout the world with a power that to some extent controls them, but that they cannot control. Mahbubani believes that it is especially important that America use its military power wisely. If we do not, the rest of the world will view our "soft power" suspiciously "as an increasingly frayed velvet glove that covers a mailed fist." (p. 197) As an example of the wise use of military power, Mahbubani notes that "Global trade continues to grow steadily. Many reasons explain this: technology, open markets (an ideology spread by American influence), political stability, global trading rules (another American legacy). But one important factor that is rarely mentioned or

recognized is the spread of American military power around the world. American military power keeps global sea and air routes open. Any force that tries to disrupt these routes will have to reckon with America. Since no country can, global trade has flourished." (p. 140) Consequently, Mahbubani argues, the rest of the world benefits "enormously and directly from the global American military presence, which costs American taxpayers over \$400 billion a year. But other nations pay not a penny for this." (p. 141) What Mahbubani would like to see--barring a sharing of power--is a foreign policy by the US that understands the extent of its power and uses that power wisely for the benefit of all and not just for narrow, short-term American interests. He believes that what is good for the rest of the world is good for the US. If the rest of the world suffers because of unenlightened US policy, as it sometimes has in the past, the US itself will suffer as well. He makes it clear that the neocon dream of an American Empire is a delusion based on an unrealistic understanding of both America and the modern world. He writes, "With all the military power in the world, America appears incapable of subjugating one medium-sized country in the Middle East because it is incapable of administering the kind of brutal suppression the British applied when they conquered Iraq in 1917." (p. 10) He adds on page 202, "If America cannot tolerate the sight of its soldiers abusing a few Iraqis, how can it build an empire?" Then there is the question of legitimacy. Although they have no vote on who is elected president of the United States, Mahbubani believes that the planet's 6.3 billion citizens "are the ultimate custodians of legitimacy in the international environment." (p. 186) Since most Americans believe in the rule of law and in the idea that some actions are legitimate within its scope and others not, it behooves our government to act accordingly. Mahbubani's point is that if our use of power (as in the invasion of Iraq) is not seen as legitimate, we will lose prestige and credibility in the world, and with that loss, we will abdicate moral leadership and ultimately become isolated from the rest of the world. In the "Age of Innocence" that would have been okay. China existed for centuries isolated from the rest of the world as did the US (for the most part) until the first world war. However in the modern world where everyone is so closely connected, such isolation is not possible. A note on Mahbubani's choice of title and his message: "The Age of Innocence" was before the modern age, before the globalization of the planet. There is a novel by Edith Wharton with the title *The Age of Innocence* published in 1920 (but set in the 1870s). With every country in the world affecting not only its neighbors but countries around the globe, there can no longer be any innocence of intent in foreign affairs.

After publishing articles in leading American journals for over two decades, Kishore Mahbubani was described as "an Asian Toynbee, preoccupied with the rise and fall of civilizations" by *The Economist*. Trained in philosophy in North America and Asia, and well-experienced in real politik as a diplomat on the world stage, Mahbubani has unusual insight into America's ever more troubled relationship with the rest of the world. In *Beyond the Age of Innocence* Mahbubani reveals to us the America that Asia and the rest of the world see. We are a country that has given hope to billions by creating a society where destiny is not determined at birth. After the Second World War, we created a global order which allowed many nations to flourish. But when the Cold War ended, America made a terrible mistake. We started behaving like a normal country, ignoring the plight of others, indifferent to the consequences of our decisions on others. America was imprudent in its policy towards two large masses of mankind: the Chinese and Muslim populations. Guantanamo damaged our moral authority, but Abu Ghraib, paradoxically, may have demonstrated the accountability of American institutions. Still, disillusionment with America has spread to all corners. To allow any lasting gap between America and the world, Mahbubani argues, would be a colossal strategic mistake for America and a huge loss to the world. But there is still time for the US to change course; and in this thought-provoking, visionary book, Mahbubani shows us how.

From *Publishers Weekly* The author of *Can Asians Think?* spent several years in the U.S. as the U.N. ambassador from Singapore, gaining firsthand experience with what he dubs "the best human society ever seen in history." Yet Mahbubani also knows that much of the rest of the world doesn't see things that way, resenting the U.S. for its "betrayal" in retreating from the geopolitical scene after the end of the Cold War - and then seemingly stomping around at will. The lucid analysis of America's diminishing prestige is underscored by Mahbubani's insistence that this isn't merely a reaction to the Bush administration and its policies, but a "tectonic shift" in international perceptions. Although his suggestion that America should stop acting merely in its own short-term interests and develop a global perspective smacks of the obvious, considerations of specific tensions in Islamic and Chinese cultures are thoughtfully detailed. The emphasis on pragmatism does lead in sometimes unsettling directions: while Mahbubani lends credence to the idea that American "abandonment" of foreign concerns led to 9/11 and the Bali nightclub bombing, he also justifies the Chinese crackdown in Tiananmen Square as a political necessity. For the most part, however, he celebrates America's generosity and the beacon of hope and prosperity it can represent for millions, and would be glad to see its luster restored. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *Booklist* *Starred* Mahbubani's provocative previous work, *Can Asians Think?* (2002), pressed Westerners to reexamine their ignorance of the East and earned its diplomat-scholar author comparisons to Arnold Toynbee and even Max Weber. His latest book expounds an essentially similar thesis, packaged to draw American readers to Asia by way of post-9/11 concern about the image of the U.S. abroad. The U.S. has done more good for the

world than any other civilization, Mahbubani exuberates, his credibility bolstered by years spent in New York as Singapore's ambassador to the UN. But the U.S. has harmed the world, he continues, by opportunistically shirking the expectations the rest of the world hopes it will live up to, as evidenced by Afghanistan's jilted mujahadin, but especially by fickle fiscal policies toward Thailand and Indonesia during the recent Asian financial crisis. Mahbubani's obligatory discussion of the U.S and Islam is eclipsed by his astute analysis of Chinese-American relations; less alarmist than most tellers of tales of sleeping dragons, he nevertheless credits the Chinese for patiently and profitably strategizing their way through decades of American mixed messages. Pragmatic tough love for the new century.

Brendan Driscoll Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "A reasoned and sympathetic analysis of America's "benign" global power... strongly critical." -- Washington Times, March 7, 2005 "Cogent, constructive criticism and practical, well-timed advice... Americans can't ask more than that from Kishore Mahbubani." -- Strobe Talbott, President of the Brookings Institution "Everyone who is puzzled by the global distrust of [America] should read Beyond the Age of Innocence." -- Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. "In this elegant book [Mahbubani] describes his hopes and fears about [America] and the new world it finds itself in." -- Fareed Zakaria, author of The Future of Freedom "Lucid analysis of America's diminishing prestige... thoughtfully detailed." -- Publishers Weekly "Mahbubani establishes himself as the best interpreter of the world to Americans -- and of Americans to the world." -- John Lewis Gaddis, Yale University "Mahbubani provides an absorbing, eloquent, and insightful perspective, enriched with personal reminiscences... of American power on the world." -- Samuel Huntington, author of The Clash of Civilizations, and Who Are We "This is a lovely book, very personal and very reflective." -- Paul Kennedy, author of the Rise and Fall of the Great Powers "[America's] leaders would surely benefit from reading Beyond the Age of Innocence." -- Kirkus s, January 15, 2005