

THE FP TOP 100 GLOBAL THINKERS

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91 KISHORE MAHBUBANI

For being the muse of the Asian Century.

Dean, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy | Singapore

For years, Kishore Mahbubani has been arguing that Asian powers are ascending while the influence of Western democracies is declining -- and that Western countries have as much to learn from Asia as vice versa. Back in 2001, [he wrote](#), "If my intuition is proven right, we will begin to see, for the first time in five hundred years, a two-way flow in the passage of ideas between the East and the West early this century." With the United States mired in economic crisis and political dysfunction while China and India continue to grow at a healthy clip, this Singaporean diplomat turned academic is now taking a well-deserved victory lap on op-ed pages from Tokyo to New York.

Mahbubani argues that Western governments, instead of rigidly adhering to free market orthodoxy, should "[relearn the virtue of pragmatism](#)" from India and China, which found prosperity by abandoning Nehruvian socialism and Maoism. "I used to be regularly lectured by Westerners on the inability of Asians to slay their sacred cows. Today, the Western intelligentsia seems equally afraid to attack their own sacred cows," [he wrote](#) this year. More controversially, he thinks that U.S. congressional dysfunction and the growing influence of the Tea Party are evidence that American democracy is no longer adequate to meet the challenges of the global economy. "Only one phrase," [he writes](#), "captures the current Asian perception of the West: sheer incredulity."