her into something of a figure of authority regarding their history. The reader is distanced from the survivors, and does not know that there may be a Lor Chunty in Phnom Penh or Sith Sarath in Kratie who has lived the story they are reading. To know more about these survivors, the reader is forced to turn instead to Thien. In this way, *Dogs at the Perimeter* reinforces literary, social and economic inequalities.

The novel — and perhaps Thien — may not be aware that it is doing any of this, for such appropriation has long been an accepted way of working. Academics have noted how anthropologists conduct studies in distant countries and bring raw data back, often to Western universities, where the data is refined and exported to the world as valuable "theory". Some documentary film-makers use the term "extractive film-making", referring to the archetypal colonial and neocolonial practice by which companies sell products globally — whether textiles, cars or jewellery — without adequately compensating, monetarily or otherwise, the farmers and miners who sourced the raw material.

Dogs at the Perimeter ends with James and Hiroji meeting in Laos, Janie still the novel's narrator. James' history is a novella within this novel, its tale almost self-sufficient. Taken prisoner by the Khmer Rouge, James struggles to let go of his attachment to his wife, who married him not long before. The Khmer Rouge inform him that she has been killed. Thirty years later, Hiroji seeks out his brother to find him in Laos in a changed state, the brotherly relationship seemingly lost, and Hiroji lets go. The novel's final sections contain poignant moments that bring us closer to the brothers.

These short-lived emotional transformations nonetheless feel shallow against the Khmer Rouge's devastation. With most of the novel proceeding intellectually, in static scenes, these brief transformations are left to do too much work, and they overreach in their emotional implications. James' forgetting his wife apparently leads him to forget himself almost entirely and become a new person: a mute smuggler, with an identity a Khmer Rouge leader gave him called "Kwan".

The Khmer Rouge seem here used for effect, much like World War II is sometimes used as a canvas against which all loves and sorrows are more intense. A mother doesn't just lose her child, she loses the child to the Nazis. A lover is not merely killed, but killed brutally by the Khmer Rouge. The character James leans on the Khmer Rouge rather than illuminating the regime through his experience. James' loss, terrible as it is, seems unfit for the implications the novel seeks for it. We are then told — again, not shown — that James had a son who survived the Khmer Rouge, and that he stayed in Cambodia in pursuit of this child.

There must exist a freedom from even memories of the overwhelming violence inflicted by the Khmer Rouge. Buddhism says this is true of the mind's greatest worry just as it is true of a small concern that flits away. It tells us that the mind, to directly know this truth, must embark on a journey of self-awareness. Janie, struggling with her trauma from the Khmer Rouge, appears condemned in these pages to her psychological trap. On the novel's last page, she speaks to Hiroji in Laos about a time when "everything is finished here". Perhaps she refers to Hiroji's lengthy hunt for James. Or perhaps she alludes to her own decades-long pursuit of peace, for her personal escape, which she will probably have to reach somewhere outside this novel's pages.

Janie may, one day, meet a writer who not only knows the ideas about personal liberation but is also intimate with her experience of the Khmer Rouge. That writer must be willing to offer this knowledge to Janie, as her own experience to transcend. Such a writer then walks beside Janie, the two of them moving seemingly together, though each one becomes aware that they will find release only in isolation. ☐

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Tunnel visions

Kishore Mahbubani

MICHAEL AUSLIN
The End of the Asian Century: War, Stagnation, and the Risks to the World's Most Dynamic Region
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As a child in Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s, I had direct experience of the poverty that was prevalent throughout most of Asia in the period. When I started primary school, I was put on a special feeding program because I was undernourished. Our home had no flush toilet until I was thirteen. I also experienced ethnic riots in which my neighbours were beaten up. Singapore's per capita income at its independence in 1965 was the same as Ghana's: US$500 a year.

Singapore was also a British colony until I turned fifteen. Most historians portray British colonial rule as relatively enlightened. In many ways, it was. However, the psychological consequences of colonial rule were devastating: it created a deep sense of inferiority. Most young people in my time saw little hope for Singapore or for Asia. We thought that the only way to secure a better future for ourselves was to emigrate to Europe or the United States.

As a young adult, as I travelled and lived in different parts of Asia, I saw a lot of pain and grief. As the chargé d'affaires of the Singaporean embassy in Phnom Penh in 1973-74, I lived in a city that was shelled virtually every day by the Khmer Rouge. With each passing month, the siege of the city grew tighter and tighter. And when I visited the neighbouring countries of Laos and Vietnam, I also saw conflict. Right into my late twenties, I saw little hope for Asia.

Against this backdrop, the economic and social success stories of Asia have been nothing short of remarkable. Singapore's per capita income has soared from US$500 to over US$50,000 per annum. Singapore's story is not exceptional, however. China's GDP has gone up more than ninety-one times, from US$89 to US$8,123, in the past fifty years. India's has grown sixteen times, from US$104 to US$1,709. Even previously conflict-ridden countries have experienced progress. Cambodia's per capita GDP is now US$1,270, a thirteen-fold increase since the end of the first phase of its civil war in 1975. No country has suffered as much conflict as Vietnam did from 1954 to 1990. But in 2016, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim said: "In just thirty years, Vietnam has reduced extreme poverty from 50 per cent to roughly 3 per cent — an astounding accomplishment."

If you were searching for a metaphor to describe the success stories of Asia, what would you choose? A dragon waking up after centuries of slumber? A flock of geese flying in formation? Either of these would capture the exceptional flight that the Asian economies have taken. But what does Michael Auslin, author of *The End of the Asian Century: War, Stagnation, and the Risks to the World's Most Dynamic Region*, pick? He crawls into a tunnel dug by North Korea to penetrate into South Korea. This tunnel, he says, "is a metaphor for all of Asia". In his choice of metaphors, Auslin fails to understand or explain the remarkable transformation of Asia. For an Asian like me, who has lived through this period, it is clear that the author sees Asia through a glass darkly. "To put it starkly," he says, "what we are seeing today may be the beginning of the end of the Asian century." In the same preface, he says that he wants to warn "prudent investors, managers, diplomats and policymakers" of the risks in the Indo-Pacific region.

Social scientists make a distinction between the notion of risk (a condition where we can assign probabilities to the event happening/not happening) and uncertainty (a condition where we cannot assign such probabilities). If Auslin wants to use the term risk rigorously, he needs to go beyond just cherry-picking where Asia could go wrong. He should say, for example, that there's a 70 per cent chance of war by 2030, or something to that effect. This would make his thesis credible, but he didn't do this.

When I lived in New York in the 1980s, both Harlem and the Bronx were in bad shape. If I had written a book then, saying that we were seeing the end of New York, I would have been proven wrong. This is the mistake that Auslin makes. He sees only the dark side, ignoring the success stories.

Equally importantly, he fails to see the resilience that the region has developed. He is right in pointing out that Asia still faces many challenges. However, the region has quietly developed a culture of pragmatism to manage challenges. As a result, even though many informed observers predicted conflict between China and Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands and between China and Southeast Asian states over the South China Sea in 2014, no such conflict occurred. This was not a consequence of luck, but of careful and patient diplomacy.

If Auslin's portrayal of the region were correct, we would have seen regular eruptions of conflict. Yet, quite remarkably, the guns have been silent since the end of the Cold War. His book fails to explain this period of peace and growth in the region.

Even more shocking than this flawed book are the positive reviews it has received in the Western press, including the *Wall Street Journal, Financial Times* and *National Interest*. Their enthusiastic endorsement only confirms the wishful thinking among Western intellectuals that Asia's rise is just a blip. They would prefer to see the continuation of the past two centuries of Western domination of world history. Western scholars on Asia, it seems, need to begin some serious introspection. They need to ask themselves: are they preparing their populations for not just an Asian century but an Asian millennium?

The biggest change that has occurred in much of Asia has been the growth of cultural confidence. When the West trampled all across Asia, Asians felt inferior. Their performance, consequently, was also sub par. But this inferiority complex has disappeared. Asians today believe that they can perform as well as, if not better than many other societies. This confidence will propel Asian societies to greater heights in the decades ahead. The ability to feel this pulse and appreciate its power is not evident in Auslin's book. ☐

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