

WE ASIANS

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Being an Asian, in the world that has evolved these past years, is more than a geographical identity: it is a state of the soul, a condition of the spirit. It is a cry of exultation over the freedom that has been won by so many peoples who had suffered centuries of colonial servitude. It is a burning protest against the continued colonization of the few who remain ~~and~~. It is an assertion of equality and dignity. It is a demand for respect. It is a sense of pride in the past glories of Asia, humility in the realization of its present needs, confidence in the inevitability of its future deliverance. All this is what it means to be an Asian.

For the present, nothing unifies Asia as cohesively as its unbridled impatience to catch up with the twentieth century. Colonial exploitation and repression had kept us hewers of wood and drawers of water. Our resources had been drained to feed the insatiable appetites of the industrialized colonizers. We share an ironic kind of equal-



ity: we are equally poor, equally backward, equally under-developed — an Asian leader once said that the most democratic aspect of Asia was the equal distribution of poverty. While rocketships have been shot into space to girdle the globe with human cargo, Asians still move around in bull-carts.

While care for the aged has become an urgent problem in the advanced countries, Asians die young and die by the thousands of such unnecessary diseases as tuberculosis and beri-beri. We have not banished illiteracy. We are still captives of ignorance and superstition. And all of these problems, all of these afflictions are compounded and multiplied by uncontrollable birthrates.

Our problems are undoubtedly awesome: just as undoubtedly, we are determined to fight them. We did not win political freedom merely to be enslaved by the tyranny of poverty. We are going to feed ourselves healthfully, clothe ourselves comfortably,

house ourselves in dignity, educate ourselves adequately. But none of us can do these things alone. We have to help one another. We have to cooperate and work together. But first of all, we have to know each other better.

It is only now that we Asians are beginning to know each other, and what we know is still pitifully small.

This is not our fault, of course. There was a time, many civilizations ago, when we knew one another quite well, since our peoples were always running into each other in the marketing centers and along the trading seaways of our part of the world, but the age of colonialism rang down an iron curtain around each one of us.

We were isolated from one another. The Filipinos learned everything there was to know about George Washington, and never heard of Indonesia's Prince Diponegoro. The Vietnamese spoke French, but had no idea what language the Filipinos spoke.

The Indians kept abreast of

what was going on in London and could not care less about what went on in Manila. Now we will have to fill in the void, expose the distortions, and correct the misconceptions of centuries. And after the peoples of Asia have come to know each other better, with knowledge will come understanding, and with understanding will come acknowledgment and acceptance of the need for them to help each other in meeting their common problems of economic under-development and social stagnation.

I had occasion to suggest the need for Asians to begin thinking of closer economic cooperation, perhaps leading eventually to an Asian common market, to meet the challenge and opportunities of other regional economic groupings, such as the European common market. Many of us supply raw materials to the mills of the West: again, here is an area where we can profitably cooperate and collaborate.

And while we are working

together to promote our material well-being, we should not forget the needs of the spirit. We should also foster cultural and artistic exchanges. All these cooperative endeavors require that the channels of communication among us must always be kept open. Easily one of the most efficient and accessible of those channels is the press of Asia.

No matter how much we Asians help each other, however, our development and progress will be limited unless we make use of the technological resources and know-how and the scientific marvels of the West. Except for Japan and to some extent India, none of us is a highly-industrialized country, and to survive all of us have to industrialize. We can do only with the help of the West.

I am aware of course of residues of resentment and hostility that have been left behind in Asia by the colonial powers, and in many cases it is not difficult to understand why. We cannot allow the memories of the past, how-

ever, to becloud our vision of the future. We cannot build factories with hate, operate machines with bitterness, run tractors and bulldozers and graders with false pride. We need the tools and the know-how and the science of the West, to employ for our own good. To deny ourselves of their aid would be suicidal.

But we will deal with the West, of course, only as equals. We will not barter our sovereignty and dignity for aid or trade. Asia has been abused too long to tolerate further indignity. Another mission is to present a truer and, where we need sympathy, a more sympathetic picture of Asia to the West. The world must be told that while Asia needs help, it will not beg; while it has acquired a new awareness of its identity and dynamic strength, it wishes nothing more fervently than peace, because it is only in peace that it can devote all its manpower and resources to the formidable challenge of twentieth-century progress.

*In a bower of bright bridal roses
This lesson I learned from a bird:
It may be the man who proposes,
But the girl always has the last word.*

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