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Vision of Leadership for East Asian Community
Ladies and Gentlemen

As all of you are already aware The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, the "San Guo Yan Yik" is part of the great literature of the world. Since its creative re-creation by Luo Guanzhong during the Ming dynasty the influence of the romance has crossed the borders of the Middle Kingdom. And today it has become part of the folklore of many Asian countries.

Even if Thai, Malaysian or Indonesian children may not have the opportunity to watch episodes of the romance through the medium of Chinese opera, or even if they have the opportunity they may not be interested at all to watch it. However, I am quite certain that many of them would have enjoyed the heroic exploits of Zhang Fe and Guan Yu and the strategic moves of Cao Cao and Zhuge Liang through computer games.

By nationality I am a Thai and by ethnicity a Malay. But Chinese culture is so important in Southeast Asia and in my country as well. So we cannot afford to be ignorant of a great Chinese tradition. Whether we are Malay, Thai, Indonesian, Filipino, Burmese or Laotian, we should not be ignorant of "The Three Kingdoms".

I was first introduced to the world of the "Three Kingdoms" in my student days in Southern Thailand. What I remembered well is the episode where Lu Bie, with his utmost patience, was trying to woo Zhuge Liang out of his seclusion and to become his strategic advisor.

Zhuce Liang, despite the fact that almost one thousand years separate us from him, has still something to teach us. It was the genius of Zhuge Liang that framed the problematique of his time as a world of a balance of power among the three kingdoms, between the kingdom of Wei which is controlled by Cao Cao, the kingdom of Shu under Liu Bei, and the kingdom of Wu under Sun Qian.

The dynamics of Asia today, mutatis mutandis, could be perceived as a world of regional triumvirate. We can see a world of three dynamic and bustling Asian communities. The community of East Asia, the community of Southeast Asia and the community of South Asia. How the three communities will relate to one another, economically, politically and strategically is a great challenge to current and future Asian leaders.

What is Asia? How do we define Asia? Or is Asia definable at all? My friend Anwar Ibrahim, a respected voice in Southeast Asia, is fond of quoting W B Yeats', description of Asia as "vague immensity". The Irish poet's representation reflects the near insurmountable difficulty of the West coming to grips with Asia. The West, despite its diversity, shared a common and unified history. When a Westerner looks back he sees a common Classical Age, followed by the Medieval Age and now the Modern Age, all of them view Athens and Rome as the founding cities of Western civilization. The Western man and woman, be they come from Europe, North America or Australia, share a common modern experience of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Reformation, the Romantic age, the Industrial Revolution that produced the nation states.

Such a singular and unified vision of Asia is conspicuously absent. There is no common classical age and cities that all Asians can look towards and claim as theirs and consider as their common roots. The Chinese,

Indians, Japanese and Arabs have their own civilizations. Despite that "vague immensity," the Japanese visionary, Kakuzo Okakura, could still assert that Asia is one. And the phrase is carved in the stone pillar that marked his grave in the Japanese province of Izura. Okakura is so much misunderstood and misused and for that he was unjustifiably maligned for his putative jingoism. But readers of his book entitled "Ideals of the East" would have no doubt of what kind of unity Okakura Tenshing had in mind. It was not a coerced and superficial political unity, but it was a vision of oneness and wholeness rooted in shared humanistic ideals.

When some of our friends in Southeast Asia undertook the project of the Asian Renaissance it was the revitalization of these humanistic ideals that they had in mind. To be sure, these ideals were in the thoughts of that great sage, Confucius. When the country officially re-embraced Confucianism recently, China had come around from the aberration of the Cultural Revolution.

Lu Xun did attack Confucianism in his powerful short story "The Diary of a Madman". And Lu Xun is a major figure of the New Cultural Movement that is so intertwined with the May Fourth Movement. But despite its anti-Confucian tendency my teacher at Harvard, and the foremost authority on Confucianism in the West, Professor Tu Weiming, asserted that the May Fourth Movement is also a manifestation of Confucianist persuasion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Such juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory ideas may be incomprehensible to Western students. But it is one of the features of Asian greatness that we can absorb and harmonize what appears on the surface to be a mutually exclusive strand of ideas. The old Javanese has a beautiful expression for it -- *bhennika tunggal ika* -- unity in diversity. The expression was so profound and it summed up the situation in Indonesia that it was adopted as the national motto when the country gained independence from the Dutch. It is an experience of diversity shared by many countries of Asia including China and India.

I am not sure that the late Okakura was aware of this old Javanese expression. But I believe he was expressing the same idea and sentiment. And if we research hard enough we will probably find that there are phrases in other Asian languages expressing the same idea. An Arabic phrase, *syuhud wahdah fil kathrah* -- seeing oneness in many-ness -- is embedded in an 18 century Malay sufi text, Durun Nafis, which was written by a mystic from Borneo.

What does all these tell us? It tells us that Asia is equipped with ideas of fundamental importance, ideas that will be much needed for a creative and productive living in the 21st century. These are the ideas of inclusiveness, diversity and cosmopolitanism. These are also fundamental attitudes that we must inculcate within ourselves if we are committed to build a better Asia.

The fact that we are here today in the compound of Peking University, the best university in Asia, I need not have to overemphasize the importance of these ideas -- inclusiveness, diversity and cosmopolitanism. Suffice for me to say here that when a leading publisher in the United States invited Henry Louis Gates, the most prominent black scholar and thinker in America today, to be the editor of a series of books under the title "Issues of Our Times" the first books that were published under the series was "Cosmopolitanism" by Harvard philosopher Anthony Kwame Appiah and "Identity and Violence" by Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen.

We have every right to be patriotic or nationalistic. Who doesn't love his or her own country? Who doesn't love his or her tradition. Where does one find meaning in life except when one identifies oneself with a particular community and its cumulative heritage? Yet it was Confucius that urges us to transcend our own limitations, to transcend the confines of family and tribes, and finally to identify our concerns, interests and involvements with that of humanity at large.

We live in the age of the global village. We are all interconnected, we are all neighbors. Even if there are

strangers in our midst we must develop the ethic of how to live and co-exist with strangers. This is the great point of Appiah's "Cosmopolitanism", that is ethics among strangers.

The forces of Globalization have intensified human interaction in a way that is unprecedented in human history. Regional integration, not only globalization, has the same effect of bringing peoples together. Asians are interacting among themselves at greater intensity.

The world is now looking at Asia, again, in awe as well as anxiety. Asia is a huge market for their products as well potential challenge to their dominance. If China is just exporting toys they would raise their eyebrows. Seven out of ten toys sold in the world have the sign "Made in China". China is also emerging as a player in capital intensive products such as automobiles. Last year a publication of the Wharton School, a leading business school in the US, said that, after adjusting purchasing power differential, China is already the second biggest economy in the world and "it is on course to surpass the United States as the world largest economy within two decades."

What has sustained the economy is not only the productivity of the factories and efficiency of management. In the long run it will be sustained by the infrastructure for the production and distribution of knowledge. We all know that knowledge is power and whoever constructs institutions of knowledge also construct institutions of power in the future. What are these institutions? They are the Universities and research institutions. Peking University is now ranked 14th in the world, the only Asian university in the global top 15. It ranks no 12 in the world as a science university. But as a non-university institution of science the Chinese Academy of Science is only second in the world after the Max Planck Society.

Other Asian states are also building their knowledge infrastructure. The Japanese Advance Institute of Science and Technology is no 11 in the world as a technology university. Tokyo University is no 10 in the world as a science university and no 7 as technology university. India's Institute of Technology is no three in the world as a technology university. In terms of research capability, investment in knowledge, science and technology Asia, in some areas, has surpassed the Europe, and in a few more decades, if the momentum continues, would only be able to equal the North Americans.

Ladies and Gentlemen

This will happen, and if the future leaders have the right vision, Asia will be again the first, and second to none in the world. I would not say this to promote a sort of jingoism, far from it. Instead it is to remind ourselves of the awesome responsibility that comes with power and leadership. Of all the countries in Asia, the East Asian region will be the first to reach the top. The power and scope of the East Asian economy necessitate the construction of an East Asian community. Since we do not live by bread alone there are humanistic issues -- social, political and security -- that invariably we must address. We need leaders of imagination and courage to confront these issues.

In Southeast Asia we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, this year. But ASEAN, too, requires reinvigoration and reinventing to enable us to forge a truly dynamic regional order. The South Asians are also struggling to grapple with regional human security issues.

But finally all these three groupings, East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia, must come together to create a better and greater Asia. This certainly is not meant to be imperialistic or hegemonic. Far from it. Our Confucius root, our Buddhist background, our Hindu foundation and our Islamic heritage have already produced a dynamic and inclusive cultural civilizational convergence, mutually enriched. The age of imperialism and subduing different identities under one structure is over.

It is imperative that we think of civilizational exchanges and cultural dialogue. It is inevitable that we forge a common platform for cooperation in economic policies to address challenges that arise from the deepening of

regional integration.

Of course we cannot talk about empire today. But there are enough ties – the bonds of humanity - that already bind Asians together.

The challenges for the future leaders of Asia, and you in this room included, is to identify those ties, reenergize those bonds of humanity and put them to work for the betterment of our greater Asia.

It is enormously important that you all realize that this retreat is being organized by a network of Asian intellectuals who have great aspiration of Asia's future. We call ourselves the Asian Dialogue Society. We think of ourselves as a fellowship of citizens and friends of Asia. In a similar fashion, we are inspired by the commitment of Peking University, our host, to strengthen this network of young leaders of Asia.

You should be inspired by this vision of one, integrated and better Asia. You must dedicate all your energies to make this vision a reality.

My generation has sown the seed of peace and cooperation in the wider Asian region. You have the responsibility to nurture this young tree to its full potential. We are all Stakeholders in this sacred adventure for the future.

Much as The Romance of Three Kingdoms 's parting wisdom, a beautiful expression: "The empire, long united, must divide, and long divided must be united".