

# **Transcultural Perspectives and Impacts on the Future**

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***presented at  
World Future 2010  
Boston, Massachusetts  
July 9, 2010***

An illustration of a globe with a white grid on a blue background, surrounded by five hands of different skin tones (brown, yellow, red, white, and tan) reaching in from the sides. The hands are set against a circular background with green, yellow, and blue segments.

# **Transcultural Perspectives and Impacts on the Future**

***Introduction and Summary***

***Dave Stein***

***Center for Transcultural Foresight, Inc.***

## Series Objectives

- Explore how increasing cross-cultural interaction will shape your everyday life
  - *YOUR* workday and disposable time
  - *YOUR* sense of identity
  - What *YOU* value
  - *YOUR* structuring institutions
  - *YOUR* notions of fulfillment, gratification, and happiness
- Share wisdom that can be helpful for meeting the challenges of the future
  - Wisdom from various nations, peoples, and cultures of the present and past

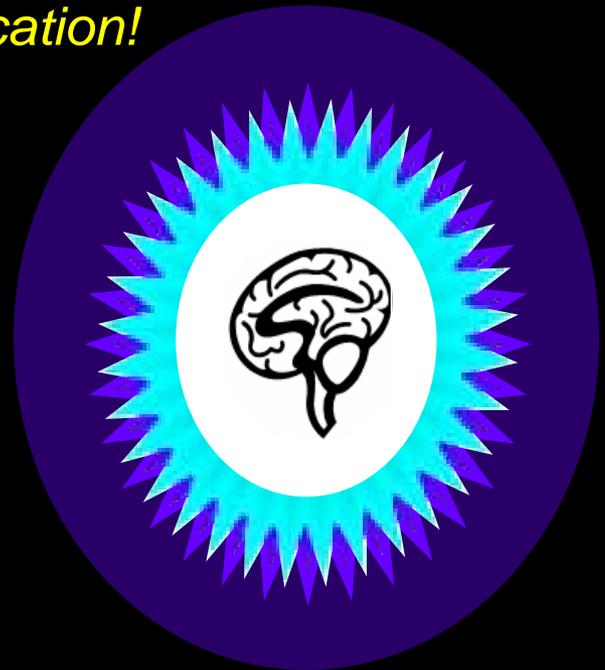
*Asks questions not  
being asked elsewhere!*



## What more will YOU *gain?*

- Appreciation of diverse cultural perspectives
  - *Complementary thinking skills*
  - *Personal and career enrichment!*
- Ability to recognize and think beyond cultural “event horizons”
  - *True diversity – the next frontier in education!*

*Cultures of the present and past offer useful counterpoints that can uncover hidden assumptions and overlooked futures!*



## *Mandate*

- Increased cross-flow among diverse cultures; “exports” and “imports”
  - *Impacts on how YOU will live, work, think, aspire, and interact!*
- Culture clashes, deculturation, and loss of ways of life
- The complex challenges presented by “the future”
  - *Challenges requiring answers that are beyond the capability of a single nation, people, or culture to provide*

*The imperative to share cross-cultural perspectives has never been greater!*

## *Workday Contrasts*

- Europe
  - More vacation days (several countries) than are generally common in other parts of the world
  - Traditional limits on store hours (rationale: more family time)
  - Long tradition of security and the social contract
- US
  - Strong tradition of vibrancy, liberty, and opportunity
  - Considerable emphasis on work and career
    - Working lunch, eat-at-your-desk, eat-while-you-drive, and “uncompensated overtime” more common
- Asia
  - Tradition of dinner with work colleagues, followed by a return to work (in some nations)
- Latin America and parts of Southwest Asia (Middle East)
  - Siesta tradition (less prevalent now)

## Workday Contrast Implications

- Which working lifestyle will prevail in *YOUR* part of the world several years from now?
- With what impacts to
  - Health and well being (and by implication, healthcare costs)?
  - Family life, including parenting?
  - Life expectancies?
  - Leisure activities?
  - Volunteerism?
    - *On which professional organizations such as our own depend?*



*Is the “chronologically challenged” society being exported elsewhere?*

## Asia – “West” Contrasts

- Time horizon – incremental, and/or quarterly earnings statement vs. long-term
  - Concepts of time
  - Implications to foresight thinking and education
- Individuality and self-reliance vs. family and group-oriented cultures?
- Sacrifice and long-range planning vs. instant gratification?
  - Impacts on business and politics
  - *Note: a spirit of sacrifice and gratification deferment characterized the early days of the US also*

*Your culture influences your thinking patterns,  
which shape how YOU experience the world!*

## More Asia – “West” Contrasts

- Thinking patterns – holistic vs. reductionist, extending to diverse areas: healthcare, philosophy, religion, warfare, politics
  - Example: health and wellness – underlying cause mitigation vs. “silver bullet” approach
  - Example: binary, “either-or” thinking that is prevalent in some parts of the world
- Basis of identity – group vs. individual

*The comparator “vs.” itself represents either-or thinking!*

## *Basis of Identity – Implications*

- Which “neotribes” will prevail in your part of the world?
  - Extended family, ethnicity?
  - Community, country?
  - Profession?
    - Common question when people meet: *“What do you do?”*
    - Collegiate equivalent, *“What are you majoring in?”*
  - Socioeconomic class?
  - Religion?
  - Political affiliation or cause?
  - Social network?
- Will there be more of a tendency to identify with smaller groups (“fission”) or with larger groups (“fusion”)?

*Counterpoint-based identity: you know who you are in terms of people who are dissimilar to you!*

## *Perspectives of Native Peoples*

- Concepts of time – *and of the future!*
  - Cyclic, “eternal now,” vs. linear
    - Some Native languages do not conjugate verbs by time
      - *Imagine translating your everyday conversations to one of these languages!*
    - Languages influence thinking patterns; which languages face extinction?
  - “Natural clocks,” vs. alarm clock – commute culture
- Relationship with nature
  - Coexistence with, vs. dominion over
  - More holistic
- Pace of life – traditionally slower



*There is a resurgence of interest in various traditions of times past.*

## Cultural “Exports” and “Imports”

- From Asia to US
  - Religion, philosophy – supporting individual enrichment
  - Health and wellness philosophies and concepts – leading to complementary therapies
  - Martial arts and some other sports
- From US to other regions
  - Business culture, in general
  - Diversion and entertainment (e.g., TV game shows)
  - US sports
  - Fast food infrastructure (to support fast-paced life?)
    - Including baseball stadium food to Japan!



*Other factors also influence how people will live, work, and think; however, cultural factors can have a substantial impact.*

## *Deculturation ...*

- Loss of ways of life
  - Native and Aboriginal peoples (worldwide)
  - Occupations – manufacturing, family farming, customer service, etc.
    - Obsolescence, outsourcing, automation
      - Not entirely culture-driven, but can impact value systems
    - Demise of a career for life – *not exactly new*
      - Early industrial US, contemporary Japan – more common to spend entire career at a single company

## *... and Assimilation*

- Impact of cross-cultural interactions, plus other factors
  - “Salad bowl”?
    - Demise of controlling majorities?
    - Plurality of minorities (cultures, religions, values, etc.) interacting compatibly?
    - Choice of “operating systems” under which to live?
  - Cultural clashes?
  - “Melting pot” leading to a new monolithic culture – e.g., working and business culture?
    - “No place to hide” for those who cannot adapt?



## Overarching Questions

- Which present-day lifestyle options will continue to be possible, and what new ones will emerge?
  - Which lifestyle options will become extinct?
- And, what is the future of cultural diversity itself?
  - Choice of “operating systems” under which to live?
  - OR, monolithic world with “no place to hide” for those who cannot adapt?

*For example, how will people accustomed to a slower paced life adapt to a faster paced one?*

## *Other Key Questions*

- Who will be the “MVPs” – the most valued professions and personality types, in your part of the world?
- What new countercultures may arise in your part of the world, or elsewhere, and what will they value?
- In what ways do different peoples view “the future”?

*There are many more questions that cannot be addressed in a single session.*

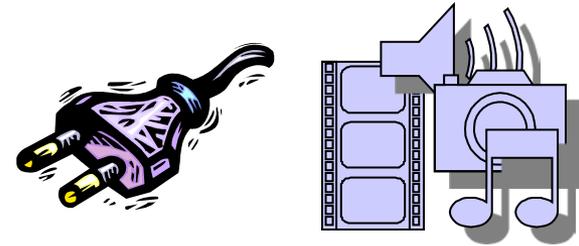
## Example 1: Business Culture Contrasts

- Downtime aversion, workaholic ways vs. balanced lifestyles
- Disposable workers and worker mobility, vs. mutual loyalty and social contract
- Risk-taking vs. risk aversion
  - Or the “S-curve” business model, risk-taking followed by risk aversion
- Quick-turn results and lowest bidder vs. relationship-based business
- Incrementalism vs. long-term thinking
  - Quarterly earnings statement mindset
  - Relationship with typical tenures of CEOs and political officeholders
- Ways in which leaders emerge
  - In parts of Asia, *“The nail that stands above the rest is the first to be hammered down”* – in contrast with some Western cultures

*“Salad bowl,” “melting pot,” or something else?*

## Example 2: “Plug and Play” Aid Packages

- Well intended
- Favorable results
  - Empowering people, lifting them from poverty, alleviating misery, offering hope
- BUT, who defines prosperity?
  - Level of prosperity?
    - Satisfaction of basic needs?
    - Comfortable lifestyles?
    - Consumerist economy based on cycle of creating and satiating discontent?
  - Type of economy – growth vs. steady-state?
  - Relationship between economy and nature?



## *Panelists*

Stephen Aguilar-Millan, United Kingdom

Alphan Manas, Turkey

Tony Au, Hong Kong, China

Mohan Tikku, India

Dave Stein, USA

**FUTURE** *takes*

International Futurist Magazine

ISSN 1554-7744

# panelist presentations

**FUTURE** *takes*

International Futurist Magazine

ISSN 1554-7744

**WRAPUP**

## *Additional Information*

- <http://www.futuretakes.org/ThematicIssue.htm>
- <http://www.futuretakes.org/CulturalDescriptors.htm>
- <http://www.futuretakes.org/ThematicIssueTopics.htm>

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- This year ... five FUTURE*takes* editors

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- This year ... five FUTURE*takes* editors
- Next year ... *YOU!*
  - To participate, write to [info@futuretakes.org](mailto:info@futuretakes.org).

# *Thoughts for 2011*

*“To best prepare for the future, we must arm ourselves with the wisdom from diverse nations, peoples, and cultures of the present and past.”*

– FUTURE*takes*

*“One should challenge present assumptions and ask the questions that no one had thought to ask.”*

– *Tim Mack, President, World Future Society*

**FUTURE***takes*

International Futurist Magazine

ISSN 1554-7744

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