

**THE CULTURAL IMPERATIVE -  
GLOBAL TRENDS IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

This conference is being held at a time when cross-culturalists are engaged in lively debate about the future course of humankind in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In an age of developing globalisation, questions are being raised about the importance and impact of cultural differences that in all likelihood will impede rapid progress towards standardisation of rules and behaviour and uniform acceptance of mutual goals.

With the increasing internationalisation of trade and the ubiquitous presence of the Internet, are cultural differences on the decline? Or are the roots of culture so varied that worldwide convergence of ideals can never succeed? Will the currently detectable examples of rising nationalism continue to increase? Will considerations of gender, growing in importance, outweigh those of national characteristics? Will shifts and alliances among nations occur along civilizational fault lines, as Samuel Huntington prophesied, or will national traits continue to dominate? Did history really end in 1989, as Francis Fukuyama suggested? Are cross-cultural universals, programmed into us by evolution, in danger of being eliminated by genetic engineering?

When positivism took over the social sciences in American universities in the 1950s, cultural diversity was depicted as a “soft” subject based on uncertain knowledge, itself culture-bound. It became fashionable in the closed world of academia to seek an explanation of human behaviour in two “reliable” theories: genetic determinism and economic determinism. On February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2001, (Darwin’s birthday, incidentally) genetic determinism received a deadly blow. Two groups of researchers released the formal report of data for the human genome, revealing that all humans, with all their evident diversity, were found to share 99.9% of their genes. According

to this finding, all human beings should be extraordinarily alike, if genetic code determines behaviours. But, of course, we are not alike.

A study of economic determinism proved it to be equally irrelevant. This leads us to a third recourse: **cultural determinism**. Laurence Harrison and Samuel Huntington in “Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress” (2001) reiterate assertions made by Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede, and myself in my earlier work “When Cultures Collide” (1996) namely *culture counts most in economic development* (not the other way round). Can one not point to a cultural development emerging from Classical Greece and Rome, the Christian religion and the European Renaissance? Can this momentum of 2000 years be stopped that easily? Unbroken cultures have strongly defined modern humanity in China, India, France, Spain, Japan and elsewhere. Culture is passed on from a number of sources – parents, peers, social institutions – but *governments* have a vested interest in their citizens sharing cultural values in order to reduce the potential for cultural or regional conflicts. Education systems transmit and reinforce national culture; history is taught “thoughtfully”, often being “remodelled” in a concern for the consolidation of shared values, even myths. Figures such as Napoleon, Peter the Great, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Queen Elizabeth I are depicted frequently in a favourable light, as part of the cultural heritage.

A nation’s culture is its *blueprint for survival* and hopefully, success. It is worthy of note that the current trends of rising nationalism are most evident in countries or peoples that have a traditional *obsession with survival* – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Korea, Austria, Catalonia and the Kurds. Poland and Korea are vulnerably sandwiched between powerful neighbours; the Hungarians, Czechs and Austrians mourn loss of territory; Catalonia is bullied by Madrid, the Kurds by Turkey. Nationalism, or populism is also showing its teeth in the English-speaking world. BREXIT, which made no sense politically, and even less economically, was purely a cultural decision, reflecting British insularity and uneasiness with “foreigners”.

American working-class culture, with its growing feeling of insecurity and loss of agency, enabled Trump to champion nationalism (“America First”).

One realises that if liberalism was a clear legacy of the Enlightenment, so was nationalism, successfully embedded more securely in global politics than ideological systems, such as communism, capitalism, even liberalism. The most energetic attempt at minimising nationalism was the foundation of the European Union, which, though eliminating war between its members, now lives with restlessness and criticism in the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Hungary and other Eastern European countries, not to mention Italy’s problems with the Eurozone and, of course, the Brexit body blow. A union seemingly on course for effective economic and political cohesion by mid-century may struggle to survive that long if popular parties continue to gain ascendancy (even in founder states such as France and Germany!)

### **Driving Forces of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Which forces, cultural, civilizational or otherwise, are likely to mold the contours of human activity during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? History would seem to indicate that peaks of civilisation have proceeded with some consistency, in the direction of East to West. Cultures have flourished successively through Ancient China and India to the Middle East (Mesopotamia, Egypt), Greece, Rome and the European Renaissance, Britain, (in her Empire days), motoring on to 20<sup>th</sup> Century America. In the light of this momentum, it would seem that now it is the turn of China again! In view of recent economic developments in China, this prediction no longer appears so naïve.

The merits of globalisation notwithstanding, there is some evidence to suggest that the driving forces guiding human destiny will be limited in number (four, five or six) and will be linked to SIZE (population, land area, wealth of resources or military power). The 21<sup>st</sup> Century stage will have a cast of Big Actors, with leading or

dominating roles. Smaller, stand-alone nations will have lessened influence and be swept along with the major players (in possible alignment).

The engines of power and progress in the present century have to be China, India, Russia and the West (Europe plus N. America). China and India pick themselves by dint of their staggering populations and longevity of culture. Russia, if she holds on to her mind-boggling landmass, has the Eurasian breadth of vision and military prowess to lead; the West, though seemingly in decline, must not be underestimated. This is because of its belief in linear-active superiority.

### **The Three Cultural Categories**

The Lewis Model (Dimensions of Behaviour) proposes a tripartite division of cultural categories, namely: linear active, multi-active and reactive.

Linear-actives (e.g Germans) are task-oriented, highly-organised planners, who complete action chains by doing one thing at a time, in accordance with a linear agenda.

Multi-actives (e.g Latins) are emotional, loquacious and impulsive people who attach great importance to family, feelings, relationships. They like to do any things at the same time and are poor followers of agendas.

Reactives (e.g Asians) are good listeners, who rarely initiate action or discussion, preferring to listen to and establish the other's position then react to it.

### **Linear-active sense of superiority**

Linear-active behaviour is an Anglo-Germanic phenomenon originating in North-Western Europe and rolling out through colonisation to North America, South Africa,

Australia and New Zealand. Among non-Germanic peoples only Finns have joined this category and even they are partly reactive. Two continents – North America (minus Mexico) and Australia – are completely linear-active. The strikingly different destinies of North and South America (the latter colonized by multi-active Spaniards and Portuguese) are an indication of the yawning behavioural gap between the two categories. How history would have been different if Columbus had continued on a north-westerly course to Florida or if the Pilgrim Fathers had been blown off course (like Cabral) and settled in North-eastern Brazil!

It is important to note that, through a quirk of fate or historical accident, the Anglo-Germanic bloc from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards began to regard itself as **superior** in efficiency, both in commerce and ability to rule, than other cultural categories. This conviction of superiority, with its accompanying drive, may have had its roots in cold climate competence and energy, Protestant reforming zeal or German thoroughness. It certainly blossomed subsequent to the English Industrial Revolution, the rapid development of British and American manufacturing (fuelled by the abundance of coal) and the continuous existence of democratic institutions in the Anglo and Nordic communities. This belief was, bolstered by the fact that the linear-active “powers”, though numbering only 700 million, leading up to and after two World wars, emerged with *de facto* world leadership based on military might and, even more significantly, over 50% of global GDP.

This sense of pre-eminence, particularly in the English-speaking world, but also shared in no small measure by the Germans, Dutch, Swiss and Nordics, **has not yet subsided**. Western complacency has not yet been eroded. There is still a lingering notion among the linear-active countries that their systems of governance, their concepts of justice, their attitude to human rights, their intellectually vibrant societies, cocktail of work and leisure, their right to lead and advise others, their business methods and ability to maintain levels of production and high living standards are viable for the future.

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However, there are other points of view. Around 2011 – 2012 statistics indicated that the GDP of the non-linear peoples of the world (multi-active and reactivities combined) overtook that of the linear-actives. After all, there are more than 6 billion who are non-linear and the rapid development of the Chinese economy would suggest that the ratio of the West's contribution to world production will decline indefinitely. Predictions indicate that the Chinese economy will overtake that of the United States and that hungry India will become the world's biggest market (forecasted population by 2030 is 1,500 million). Other burgeoning populations will create demanding markets in Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Brazil, Bangladesh, Mexico and Ethiopia, in that order.

### **Whither the West?**

The demographics cited above are somewhat gloomy seen from a western perspective and Robert Samuelson in his article "The Grand Illusion" questions the dominance of the West in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. He cites the dangers of nuclear proliferation, anti-Western terrorism, recessions, swings in financial markets and technological sabotage.

But it can be a mistake to write off the West. We must remember what happened in two World Wars when Western civilisation was threatened. Next time, it is likely that Germany will be on the team. The durability of a balanced West resides not only in its military and economic strengths, formidable though these still are, but in the matured resilience of Western values. These values were forged in the crucible of the Greek city-states and were tempered through the centuries by the Reformation and the Renaissance, by embracing democracy, by vanquishing the bogeys of Nazism and Communism. An advantage of the West, in addition to these core values, is a plethora of social and semi-political institutions. They number in the thousands –

between the bedrock of the family and the authority of the state. In many societies there is a social vacuum between home and job. In Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries in particular, but also in Europe, clubs, societies, associations, activities, sports, courses and hobbies of all types keep people busy. This is the dense fabric of Western society – active, throbbing, inventive, in every sense self-perpetuating and indomitable, with a momentum all of its own. If such social vibrancy is Western in essence, it is epitomised in the United States; as Hamish McRae wrote as he watched Americans rise phoenix-like from the ashes and rubble of Ground Zero, *the future starts here*.

## Asianisation

The overwhelming victory of the Allies in 1945 led to main European (and other) nations accepting a strong dose of Americanisation, imitating US business techniques in production, accounting, marketing and sales. It did not kill their cultures, and the material benefits outweighed the misgivings and disadvantages. Later, however, the negative effects of Americanisation began to be experienced in the gradual erosion or dilution of (European) values, as impressionable youth embraced many aspects of American lifestyle.

American business and management techniques began to lose ground in the 1970s and 1980s, as the Asian Tigers adopted the successful Japanese model. In the 1990s, significantly, the West frequently demonstrated that it was ill-equipped to deal with Asian sensitivity.

Westerners need to establish a new *modus operandi* for the new century if they wish to be successful in globalizing their business and exports. Linear-active (Western) societies have everything to gain by developing empathy with reactive and multi-active ones. Technology has now made East and West intensely aware of each other; some synthesis of progress and cooperative coexistence will eventually emerge. The

size of Asian populations and markets suggests their eventual dominance. Just as there were obvious benefits to be obtained from Americanisation in 1945, there are now advantages to be gained from an *Asianisation* policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Both Europeans and Americans would do well to consider this. Acceptance of a certain degree of *Asianisation* would facilitate better understanding of Asian mentalities, and perhaps pre-empt future Chinese hegemony in the commercial and political spheres.

The West should study Asian values, as well as patterns of communication and organisation, and learn from these. There are visible benefits in Asian systems. They should also study the “Asian mind” and how it perceives concepts such as leadership, status, decision-making, negotiating, face, views of morality, confucian tenets and so forth.

Fortunately, the rise of *feminine* values in the West at cross-century smooths the way for a degree of *Asianisation*, as many of these values coincide with Asian values. Just as the Americanisation (of Europe) progressed from influencing business practice to permeating the social scene, a similar phenomenon may well occur with *Asianisation*. That is to say, Westerners can be influenced by and adopt aspects of Asian lifestyles that will have a lasting effect on their own behaviour.

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The implication of such a shift in Western thinking and comportment are mind-boggling, if not cataclysmic. Societies, such as the French, American, Swedish, and possibly the British and German, are successful in their own right and may be less inclined to modify their cultures in an Asian direction than are less powerful nations. The Americans currently find little wrong with their economic model, nor do the French, with their cultural one. Nevertheless, a degree of feminisation has already taken place in most Western countries, and the growing distaste of the younger generation for the hard-nosed exploitation of people and natural resources will make



*Asianisation* an attractive policy. After all, business is business, and there are billions of customers out there.

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No description or assessment of the contours of political, economic or world cultural development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century would be complete without a mention of two countries alongside the major players of China, India, Russia and the West. These are Japan and Canada. Japan's influence on world events has been underestimated in the past and her record of economic stagnation over the last 20 years has cast a shadow over her current profile. However, in 2018 she ranks an easy third in world GDP. Her world role in the future is likely to be linked to her manner of alignment. Will she balance the scales, siding with East or West?

Canada is more of a dark-horse. With a land area of 10 million square kilometres, her territory is second only to Russia. While much of this consists of frozen wastes, the rapid warming of the Arctic Ocean in the second half of the century will transform Canadian agriculture and resource exploitation, not least the vast reserves of Arctic oil fields which she will share with Russia and Norway. Canada is already tenth in world GDP and with a rapidly-growing population aided by a wise immigration policy is poised to become more active in world affairs. Her easy access to the huge US market is a unique advantage.

## **Finally, Religion**

The four largest religious groups in the world, ranked in order of adherents (2015), are Christianity (2.38 billion), Islam (1.8 billion), Hinduism (1.1 billion), and Buddhism (0.5 billion). Historically, conflicts and confrontation between religions have led to numerous wars throughout the centuries from the times of the Crusades,

the Muslim “occupation” of Spain from the 8<sup>th</sup> Century to 1492 and the dominance of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled large parts of Europe and the Middle East for 650 years.

Religious disputes have waxed and waned in different ages, and though Hindus and Buddhists have figured in prolonged struggles with Islam for centuries, the modern era has been characterized by the fiercely intensified confrontation between **Christianity and Islam** culminating in the 9/11 disaster, the subsequent American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the rise of ISIS (Daesh), affecting the lives of millions of people in Syria and elsewhere. The present-day antagonism of the two major religions contrasts sharply with the idyllic coexistence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism when Al-Andalus society enjoyed its “golden age” of religious tolerance. Can we hope for reconciliation again between Muslims and Christians?

As Jerzy Wiatr points out in his paper “Towards a New World Order in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, ideological conflicts are harder to resolve than those of opposing national interests. While skilful diplomacy can create acceptable compromise over a border issue or a trade war, it is extremely difficult or even impossible, for zealots to abandon an entire philosophy or cherished creed.

If I may allow myself one final note of optimism with regard to religious or ideological altercation, I will take the liberty of referring to a factor I deem important, but seemingly overlooked, by political commentators and futureologists. Of the much-discussed, almost two-billion-strong multitude of Muslims in the world, about *one billion of them are women*. There are strong indications to suggest that the twenty-first century will witness a period of rapidly-rising female influence and empowerment, from which Muslim women cannot be indefinitely excluded.

I am of the opinion that gender-liberation issues will be higher on these women’s agenda than lending continuing support to the supposed destruction of the West,

whose way of life embodies the social qualities and advantages they must ultimately seek.

## References

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