

Alternative Futures for Hawaii

By Tahir Sohail Inayatullah

HAWAII IS *not* the center of the Pacific except in distorted maps that flatten out a round Earth. This is true geographically as well as financially, politically and culturally. Until we understand this, we will continue to falsely believe that we can become a Geneva of the Pacific; or hope that Hong Kong capital will flood our gates; as well as assume that Pacific Rim nations need Hawaii for their expansion.

The time for integration into the rising economies of the Pacific was in the 1960s and early 1970s. However, instead of developing a diversified economy, Hawaii chose to concentrate on tourism and the military. While this has certainly benefited some residents, it has placed Hawaii in a precarious position of dependency on a sole industry and on foreign capital.

A global depression — highly possible given the international debt load, rising speculation in world markets and increasing concentration of capital — would very quickly wipe out Hawaii's living standard. In addition, dependency on foreign capital already has led to declining real wages in Hawaii.

HAWAII'S BUSINESS and political leaders have been evoking the image of "Hawaii as Pacific Center" for decades. But we have watched planes pass us by, capital pass us by, and cultural interchange as well, so that California and Asian Pacific Rim cities have become the true international thoroughfares.

Are there any positive futures for Hawaii in this emerging "Pacific century," as it is so often called? First, we must understand the magnitude and dimensions of this Pacific shift. It is a historical civilizational shift from Western-Atlantic intellectual and business culture to Pacific-Eastern culture. This shift from a New York-London-Paris triangle to a Los Angeles-Tokyo-Beijing triangle is primarily a shift in who runs the world economy.

The new centers will see their wealth rise, their universities attract the world's best and brightest, and their image of the good life spread throughout the planet.

These new centers have been able to do this partly because of structural conditions in the world economy and because rim nations have managed to transcend, at least temporarily, the conflicts between business and

government; between economic growth and distribution. They have managed to move up the ladder from commodity supplier to manufacturer, to high value added technology producer and distributor.

In addition, they are now on the leading edge in the new technologies: artificial intelligence and genetic engineering to mention two. The rise of the Pacific will lead to a decline in the United States, except for

The Pacific shift.

California. The United States, like England, must accept this decline and hope that it does not become an economic wasteland.

WHAT CAN HAWAII do, given the new world before us? First of all, instead of looking at the future through a rearview mirror, we must forecast the technologies — hardware and software — of the future, and develop excellence in them. These include alternative energy development, ecology, space, mediation, knowledge, and telecommunications. Second, Hawaii should also attempt to learn the language of the future.

It must, as Singapore already is doing, become a computer-video literate society. Islandwide community technology and information resource centers or a computer in every home might be appropriate planning goals. This educational emphasis could



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lead to the development of various software industries.

Third, Hawaii must transcend its dependence on Western linguistic and cultural traditions and become a truly multilingual and multicultural society instead of an appendage of Mainland America. Hawaii must not only look East but it must look to the globe for future directions.

Given the development of a transnational information or knowledge economy, Hawaii's leaders should attempt to bring various international organizations to the Islands. The United Nations, the World Court, the World Arbitration center, and other peace maintenance, conflict resolution and global management centers could relocate themselves or some of their branches to the Islands.

We should remember that anytime world centers shift, there is considerable conflicts between nations, regions, businesses and individuals that must be mediated or litigated. This idea may have more merit than Hawaii as a business center.

BUSINESS CENTERS develop where resources are plentiful, labor cheap, and regulations weak. Hawaii has some organizational and natural resources. Labor, however, is expensive. In addition, Hawaii has strong regulations so as to protect its citizens and its environment — as well as to protect multinational corporations and occasionally large local businesses from competition. Unlike it, Korea can ill afford to say, "Give Us Your Pollution." Finally, strict U.S. immigration laws make it nearly impossible for Hawaii to become a business center.

Besides new areas of growth, we must be concerned about the structure of growth. Billions of dollars already have been invested in Hawaii, yet very little of this money stays on the Islands. This is especially true for the tourist industry. While developing mom and pop hotels as in Europe may be prohibitive due to capital costs, profit sharing in tourism would be one way to aid the economy as well as gain allegiance from the local population.

The best way to increase aloha towards tourists is to give dignity in the form of cooperative ownership or other similar structures. In addition, tourism, to survive, must shift from escapism to life-long learning. Hawaii can then shed its image as only the place to rest; it can become

the place to rest and learn about languages, cultures, ecology, holistic health, medicine, Hawaiian history as well as forms of dance and musical worldviews, and emerging technologies.

These learning centers then become development centers to export new ideas to regions throughout the world. A Hawaii Peace Corps committed to encouraging local self-reliance throughout the world might be a real contribution.

WE ARE IN the midst of found historic changes: the shift from Atlantic to Pacific; from industrial to post-industrial; from materialistic world view to spiritual/universal perspective; and from Newtonian to quantum science.

We also have the responsibility of living at a time of enormous wealth and unprecedented poverty, oppression, and suffering. While Hawaii is the center of the Pacific, we must still participate in this historic shift. Hawaii must envision its future and create its destiny. This is not done, then Hawaii's economy and culture will certainly decline.

We will see the disenfranchisement of the Islands and the loss of what Ramsay Pedersen of the Honolulu Community Center calls the "Cruise Culture." The youths turned off from the community, polity and economic individuals who have "no person" to do anything. Hawaii then become the home of the Pacific's very rich and the poor who service them. I doubt it will be the type of place I will desire to live in.

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17/2/87