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**THE
BICULTURAL
EDGE**
HOW TO
USE IT

STEVE OKAZAKI
LIVING ON TOKYO TIME

**THE LURE OF
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FASHION
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The Bicultural Edge

As the U.S. looks across the Pacific for economic, cultural and spiritual fortune, Asian Americans may find themselves a hot commodity.

By Sohail Inayatullah

The Bicultural Edge

"The Pacific could become the economic and cultural battleground for various economies and cultures."

We are in the midst of a monumental shift of power, wealth and culture from a world dominated by Atlantic civilization to a world shaped largely by an emerging Pacific Rim culture. The center of this new world will be firstly a Los Angeles-Tokyo-Beijing triangle and secondly the entire globe itself. This new culture and economy will be international in nature, yet grounded in the vision of the Pacific Rim.

To many, the above assertions, given the historical dominance of Atlantic culture may appear ludicrous. How can innovation come from anywhere but U.S. East coast and British universities? How can anything but Atlantic intellectual history, sports, fashions, models and food be considered the norm? In fact, design, architecture, technology and material progress are considered European in nature. Yet we are in the midst of a historic transference of wealth from the Atlantic to Japan and other Pacific Rim countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Korea. These nations have moved from low-end manufacturers to high-technology, information economy innovators. Japan now has the largest stockmarket and has begun to dominate world banking as well. In addition, China awaits to not only unleash a billion consumers, but also a cultural and intellectual renaissance.

Yet this shift of power is not easy to see, especially to those who live in the confines of Atlantic civilization. They do not see that new technological innovations, new management perspectives and new health paradigms are now more often a product of Pacific than Atlantic civilization. Atlantic civilization, especially Europe, may soon become a land to behold in museums remembered only for its pre-twentieth century contributions to Western culture. In its place, for reasons such as abundant and inexpensive capital, labor and resources, political will and social-religious ethos and positioning in the world economy, the Pacific Rim will emerge as the next global center.

However when we think of this transition, this emerging economy and the ideas and individuals that

will create this new world, we must be careful to be drawn into the short term. We must see the future with a historical mind: we must think of the rise and fall of civilizations. We must remember that although centers of power illumine the night for centuries, from a historical viewpoint, their rise and fall is but for moments.

Thus, to talk about the Pacific only in terms of questions of trade disputes, or of the use of Japanese and Chinese models of management and of complementary and collective government-business relations, or about the emerging space-electronic technologies, misses the larger nearly mythic unfolding of what is to be. We must not look for specific events, but larger civilizational trends that encompass and transform each and everyone of us.

Civilizational Trends

These trends are part of the emerging Pacific era and have the possibility of creating a world wherein most of us will be strangers in a mysterious land. They include *first* the shift from short range economic thinking to long term ecological thinking. This emerging ecological perspective based on Taoist and Tantric philosophy argues that for every material progress there is a cost which must be born: whether it is pollution, desertification, the destruction of the ozone layer or other similar outcomes. Paradoxically—but not surprisingly from a dialectical Eastern perspective—pollution now transcends national boundaries and forces us to acknowledge that humans, plants and the entire living planet are inextricably bound together.

Second, through the science and technology revolution it may be possible for certain groups of people, most likely in the Pacific Rim, to create a society where scarcity is no longer an issue. The problem then in this future society will be leisure. This future will especially cause crises among groups who value hard work above play. Asian Americans, in particular, will be forced to rethink their cultural learning and move from work to play or to a larger project that transcends the ego, whether it be family, spiritual development or

concern for the health of the planet itself.

Third, is the shift from earth to space. In the emerging Pacific economy, space and the economic benefits from space developments will be central. Already Japan and China have begun research in space exploration and other Rim nations will soon follow. We can expect numerous joint ventures between California firms and Asian Rim businesses to develop.

Again, paradoxically, the move to space, although presently constituted in competitive nationalistic language, may lead to a decreased fascination and identification with the nation-state. For from space, the fragility of the earth and the unity of humans cannot be escaped nor denied.

Fourth is the trend from nation to globe. The move to space, the lessons from pollution, the ability of global capital to move swiftly from nation to nation searching for the highest profits all point to the decline of the nation as a functional unit of organization. In addition, telecommunications technology used for entertainment, banking, investment, research and other sorts of information create the possibility of an intimate global village, although the present is more like a fragmented, anonymous electronic city.

Finally we are in the midst of an incredible cosmological exchange similar to the European Renaissance. However, now it is the values of Eastern civilization that are shaping the new world. They are providing the ethos, the context, for the development of a Pacific culture. This emerging Pacific view argues for the integration of mind and body, self and family, science and religion, and politics and economics. This view is leading to the return of the mystical, of the *idea* in civilizational discourses. That is, a world where matter, the physical, is no longer seen as solid and primary; it no longer binds and encapsulates us. The body is simply seen as a layer of the larger and deeper mind.

Also central to this new perspective is the necessity of a vision and purpose to human development. This destiny can be uncovered through entering the deeper layers of the

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mind and through transcending the boundedness of the individual ego.

Concretely, however, in terms of the present, while some Japanese corporations have special meditation rooms and airports in Moslem countries have prayer areas, it will take a while for practices such as meditation to be considered as normal and for individuals to constitute the world not as solid things but as permeable ideas and relationships.

In addition, within this trend are conflicts and contradictions as the mystical may lead to irrationality and escapism, not the unity of intellect and spirit. Also, while the Pacific Era promises a larger identification with space and globe as well as the unification of mind, self, family and humanity, we continue to identify with each other through consumer items, through the world of matter. And although Disneyland reminds us that "it is a small world after all," we also know that this small world remains in the minds of just a few; that for many the world remains full of fear and meaninglessness.

However, among the groups of people who do have a sense of purpose and vision and who are global in their thinking are Asian Americans. This group, whether students from Pacific Rim countries or third generation Asians in search of their "Chineseness," travel extensively from place to place, culture to culture and from past to future. They can see many worlds as they are fluent in numerous languages and thus have a greater likelihood of mediating cross-cultural exchange. They also can more easily understand the contradictions and benefits, the extremes of both Eastern and Western culture, and may be able to play a key role in the development of the Pacific-Global civilization. To do this, however, they will have to exist in the cultural contradictions of the present and yearn for the creation of a new future.

The Story Of The Future

The above long term trends notwithstanding, in this shift to be there are not blueprints. For blueprints force us into the present; they do not allow the unknown to reveal itself.

Blueprints are simply efforts of the personal and collective ego to solidify a world in flux. Thus, we should look to the storyteller, not the engineer for clues to understanding this new world and those that will bring it about. Nor should we be surprised if the vehicle of this storyteller is some future medium of video, music, thoughts and sensations; similar, yet utterly different from the medium of the village storyteller speaking underneath the *bodhi* tree.

If such a storyteller existed today, she or he would dream up scenarios of the last days of Atlantic civilization, of the decline of the British Empire, of the decline of the U.S.A. and of the rise of Japan and China. We would hear of a new type of individual: one who spoke Mandarin and Japanese, English and "computerese." This new person would be at home in Shanghai or Los Angeles. His or her cultural heritage would consist of Zen enlightenment stories and Confucian practices of honor and respect. But this person would also understand advertising and Hollywood: Mao and Ho Chi Min. Our storyteller would tell us about computers, videos, robotics and would weave vignettes of how these technologies will change what we do and how we do it—work, play, love and politics. He or she would, as the movies *Chan is Missing* and *Dim Sum* do, show the cultural conflicts of those caught in-between Atlantic and Pacific civilization, and like *Blade Runner*, he or she would describe a world of sushi, androids and space.

The Pacific world would be one that had conquered the problem of scarcity through new technologies and through redistribution programs such as employee ownership; that is, through ways of constituting business that transcend the structural conflict between worker and manager. Says Won Lim, personnel director at Goldstar Electronics International about consensus management styles, "The person who knows the factory process best should not be left out." We can add that in the emerging Pacific era, the person who knows the factory will also be included in the profits. Finally, it would

be a world where "reading" and "writing" in video would be as important as reading and writing in print.

In this new world, the storyteller would remind us that the U.S.A. and Europe will not totally decline; they, too, will have a role. Cultural historian William Irwin Thompson has written that the USA, specifically California, has a key role in the Pacific because of the high energy, creativity and entrepreneurship that exist there. This high energy is evidenced, for instance, by the shift of advertising revenues from East to West coast. Advertising, the business of portraying illusion from our unconscious reality, is often a leading indicator of where we, as a society, are moving. Some people speculate that the success of one California agency Chiat/Day, comes from the egalitarian structure of its organization. According to one agency executive, computer corporations and advertising agencies, "are not burdened by rules and don't need to check with anyone for approval." These and other similar new agencies have realized a large part of their sales from nations such as Japan. And as Asian currencies increase in value against the dollar, these companies will continue to reap the benefits of Pacific growth. Although, this new type of entrepreneurial business is among the keys of this Pacific shift, it will not find its apex until the influence of Chinese civilization and its economic innovations such as cooperatives are felt.

New And Ancient East

For Thompson, the key interchange among cultures will be between California and China. As China follows its cyclical pattern of opening and closing, California will play the role of "impregnating" China with its ideas. But it will be China which will develop them into programs and models. These new Chinese systems will be based on dialectics—the complementary relationship of opposites—such that when the Chinese create new forms of electronic and robotic technology, they will develop a new philosophy and language that is beyond Western thought. These new

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patterns, as the monks of the East have done in the last 20 years through meditation, martial arts, Yoga, Zen and holistic health, will then continue the transformation of American thought.

However, if the U.S.A. cannot transform, if it insists on holding to its role as world manager, then it will find itself in the same predicament as the British. People like Henry Tang of Peninsula Knitters, for example, will then comment about the U.S.A. the way that they comment about England, "the English are trainable, but it takes a long time." Instead of the emergence of a Pacific community, an intimate inland sea joined by video, telephone and supersonic jet, the Pacific could become the economic and cultural battle ground for various economies and cultures vying to dominate and shape the world in their images. What will result may then not be a new Pacific community, but global depression and ethnocide.

Asian Americans And The Future

By definition, the future is not yet written. The possibility of a telecommunity still exists. There are many individuals, Asian Americans especially, who are traveling across these new avenues of cultural exchange and attempting to create a new Pacific economy. To create a new community, these Asian Americans will have to be committed to internationalism, to pluralism and to a world that is beyond the nation-state. For the Pacific shift is more than simply a concept defined by physical space, it is about a transformation of consciousness.

I met one such woman who may be part of the emerging Pacific culture on a Honolulu bound flight over Malaysian air. Her father was Saudi Arabian and her mother was Chinese from Penang, Malaysia. She spoke Cantonese, Arabic, English, Malay and some French. She was at the time finishing her graduate work in theoretical mathematics at Terra Haute, Indiana. She spends her time traveling back and forth between the U.S.A. Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. With each trip, she carries cross-cultural messages across space and time. As such

she has developed her own brand of feminism, her own spiritual worldview that is comfortable in any environment, yet challenges all environments.

There are others, also, more famous, than my chance encounter over the air. *Newsweek* has coined the word "Oriental Rothschilds" to categorize a new elite group of investment bankers, land developers and managers of multinationals who are central in the emerging Pacific economy. These "Rothschilds" are fluent in a variety of Eastern and Western languages and have the ability to converse in American, Japanese and Chinese business worlds. They have an incredible advantage in winning contracts and in providing legal and advertising services as Pacific businesses are largely informal and family oriented such that a name like Tang or Tanaka can stand for defacto multinational enterprise. For these new "Rothschilds" the Pacific is an ocean of unbounded opportunity, of massive trade surpluses that must be invested throughout the world. They also have family connections and understand the importance of trust, face to face communication, friendship and other cultural values necessary in successful Pacific joint ventures. For them, thinking globally is natural; dealing in many currencies as well as exports and imports of ideas, goods and raw materials across all barriers is equally natural. They can understand and absorb the contradictions of both cultures, yet have the potential of creating an entirely new culture. Many of these "Rothschilds" are brilliant Asian students and immigrants coming to the U.S.A., and are happy to be freed from the bureaucratic constraints of their home countries, yet they remain committed to many traditional ways.

Hari Bedi of *Asiaweek*, for example, writes about the importance of family for the Asian manager. It is the Asian manager who proudly brings his mother to the office; and again, it is the Asian manager who thinks of the long term, of the well being of generations ahead; and finally, it is the Asian manager who may not accept a promotion if it leads to being dislocated physically and culturally

from the family. Yet as the Pacific decreases in distance through new technologies, whether telecommunications or jets, physical dislocation will be less of a problem, though cultural dislocation remains a quandary.

One Californian, Russel Young, on the verge of his marriage to a local Taiwan woman, heard her father say that the moon is no different from a Taiwanese village or an American city. For him and his wife, the Pacific ocean is the arena of the world where they discover their Chinese and American nature. He studies cross-cultural counseling and has the ability to heal the conflicts that will emerge in the birthing pains of a new culture, of a new Pacific civilization. Individuals like him will work in the informal and formal global organizations that will be established in the Pacific. We should not be surprised to see international conflict resolving agencies such as the World Court and branches of the United Nations move from Europe to places such as Hawaii.

Japanese executives, now aware of the vast differences between cultures, take anti-shock courses so as to better understand foreigners. As Japanese multinationals increasingly become global, they will need individuals who can speak many languages, who can understand conflicts and consensus, and who understand the "other." If they do not realize that the world is greater than their nation, then they will see their dreams evaporate just as they have for British and American leaders.

But the individuals who are forging the Pacific era are not all rich business. The Pacific era is also about the transformation of the present world. It is about a world beyond the nation-state. For we know that neither pollution nor capital care for boundaries. At present only labor requires passports. It is a world where there is an understanding of ecology, of the fragility of the environment, and of the planet earth as mother.

One person who understands the concept of life in all "things" is a Japanese monk called Krsnananda. He works as a meditation teacher for Ananda Marga, a group which although Tantric Indian in tradition is

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not bound by cultural dogmas. It attempts to be universal. And although Krsnananda was raised in Japan, he wears the saffron of an India yogi. Yet he is not the typical monk. He has perfected Michael Jackson's moon walk and plays captivating spiritual music with his *koto*. And he lives neither in a monastery nor a cave. Rather he is committed to his discipline and to healing the world through social service. He too, like the "Oriental Rothschilds" can move more fluidly in the world of the Pacific Rim. But while the "Rothschilds" attempt to create a new vision of business, Krsnananda creates a new vision of spirituality and music—one that includes yet transcends all cultures.

For him, the Pacific shift is about a larger project that transcends the ego, that allows in the Zen tradition for "natural mind" to emerge.

Another person who sees the Pacific economy differently is Anna Yue. Raised in Hong Kong, she now lives in Hawaii. Her sister and brother live on the West Coast. Unlike her sister who is a computer programmer, Anna Yue is more concerned with the search for the good and magical in all things. Unlike her many relatives and friends from Hong Kong, she finds herself unconcerned with material accumulation and committed to neither Chinese nor American values. For her, the emerging Pacific culture is not an ethnic category, like "Asian American," but an attitude, a new way of thinking about self, family and planet.

When we contemplate the rise of the Pacific, we realize that the story of the Pacific is still being created; it is emerging in the diverse views of many individuals who in their own unique efforts are creating bridges between the Asian Rim nations and the U.S. West coast. But these bridges have only become possible through the rapid economic expansion of the Rim. Through this expansion we are witnessing the development of a new culture.

The economic data to support the argument of the Pacific shift is obvious. We need only to look at the growth rates of Japan, China and other Rim countries. Even the Philip-

pinos hopes to achieve five to six percent growth in GNP this year, while Korea continues at a remarkable 10 to 12 percent rate. In addition, these nations now are envisioning their alternative futures. Singapore intends to create a culture that is computer literate so that it can gain a comparative advantage in the growing multi-billion dollar software industry. Japan, recognizing that the other Rim nations are taking away its automotive and electronic businesses, has embarked on what Sheridan Tatsuno calls "the Technopolis Strategy." It is a strategy committed to research and development, strategic international alliances, the encouragement of small start-up companies and the move to outer space, as well as the penetration of global financial markets. It is also beginning to revamp its educational system in the hope of increasing individual initiative and thus truly becoming the center of global cultural and technological innovation.

Finally, a key part of the Pacific shift is the development of technologies and methods that anticipate the future. The future is no longer a field of haphazard randomness; rather it is an arena to be predicted and created. It is not simply 12 hours from now; it is the next hundred years. The emerging transpacific economy, too, is not about the next two years; rather it is about a longer trend, transition, in who runs the world economy and the structure and leadership of this new world.

Taoist Leadership

We can only hope that the leadership of this new era will be one that is Taoist in nature, one that understands that all things contain their opposites, or concretely, a leadership that understands the tendency of good institutions to become evil. The leaders of the Pacific, we can hope, will know that only an empty tea cup can listen, that humility and service are far more important than conquest and control. Perhaps Jesuit trained Corazon Aquino is a model for other future Pacific leaders. She is trained in many cultures, is committed to universal spiritual ideals, to her family and leads to serve, to fulfill a higher vision. To her, the

leader inspires and bends low, not stands proud.

We can then hope that our future storyteller will describe the emerging world of the Pacific as an era where the heart controls the mind, where the rational is grounded in the mystical; where maleness and femaleness are balanced, where politics is governed by long term ecological policies; and where the parts are seen in the context of the larger whole.

Thus, this new era that our storyteller would create for us is not about greed and power, it is about fundamental societal change and the possibility of the emergence of a new planetary civilization; one that will have as its creators individuals who are neither here nor there, East nor West. This new civilization will be shaped by the miniaturization of technology, the development of artificial intelligence, the return of the mystical, and the emergence of a telecommunications-information economy where there is less structural exploitation of individuals and nature.

What lies ahead is a new vision, a new world created in the culture and history of the Pacific, and brought about by individuals who are cross-cultural, comfortable in any culture and world.

Finally, in many ways, it does not matter if one sees the Pacific era simply in terms of the massive accumulation of wealth and power, for the shift itself may change the structure of the conscious mind. The American businessman desirous of trade with China may suddenly find himself doing *Tai Chi* in the morning and mysteriously awake to a calmer, deeper life. In that moment of *satori*, the ego may find the transcendent: individuality and collectivity may then become balanced and inner and outer conflicts resolved.

In that instant one may see that centers of power illumine the night for centuries, but for the historical mind, empires last but for seconds.

Only change remains.

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