

Cultural dimensions, changing life courses and the meaning of well-being

Lecture for the Faculty Study Meeting May 12, 2004, School of Sociology, Kwansai Gakuin University, Nishinomiya, Japan

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Note for the translator of this lecture: Much of the lecture follows the first chapter of the book ‘Comparing Cultures’, Vinken et al., 2004, Leiden & Boston: Brill. The following highlights the main line of arguments as can be found in this chapter and which is also outlined in the first 8 Power Point slides that accompany this lecture. The slides 9-11 do not refer to any existing text. At the end of this document a brief outline of the text of the lecture will be provided. In a later stage this document will be used to make an article for the Kwansai Gakuin Journal of Sociology. For now the text will be presented following the numbers of the Power Point slides.

Slide # 1 Title

Personal introduction: sociologist; my speciality is comparing cultures, value change (especially political values, work values, and values towards civil society), changes in people’s life courses and the role of young generations in cultural change. I have been involved in European Values Studies and numerous other international studies. Functions: director of IRIC (short introduction of IRIC: Research Institute at Tilburg University specialized in comparing cultures from different social science disciplinary angles, once founded by Hofstede [in 1981]), and senior fellow at Globus, also at Tilburg University, which is a interdepartmental institute serving as a platform for comparative globalization studies (with colleagues I concentrate on generations and civil society when studying globalization) of our university and of external organizations. Also vice-president Europe of ISA RC34 Sociology of Youth. Also chair of CCGS, Consortium for Culture and Generation Studies, a 20 nations wide network of universities interested in together studying cultural change and the role of young generations.

First of all, very thankful to be here and to be allowed to learn from you and your department that has set high ambitions, e.g. in the CoE-program, to contribute to (I think highly necessary) better understanding in social science worldwide of Asian social science perspectives. Today: concentrate on overlap in three themes that I think are relevant when aiming for these ambitions: cultural dimensions, changing life courses

and the meaning of well-being. In short: 1) what does existing social science literature on comparing cultures tell us about the dimensions with which to conceptualize what an Asian perspective might entail, 2) do these dimensions have sufficient validity when we take into account that the world and with it publics and cultures are changing (changing, as some would say, in ever faster tempo), especially when we take into account that younger generations grow up in a different world (a more individualized world) and are faced with different expectations which they have to fulfill during their life course, 3) what do we expect when we look at cultural dimensions and changing life courses with respect to the meaning of well-being among younger generations, both in Asia and in other parts of the world: is the well-being we conceptualize in the 1970s still the well-being of today? These are big themes and I will not exhaustively tackle all details of these themes. My talk will be hypothetical, certainly in the latter parts, and I will end with some relevant (at least to my opinion) research questions that might help boost debate and discussion today.

Slide # 2 Outline

[Outline: I will only shortly summarize this slide's content]

Slide # 3 Separate worlds

Social science studies that addressed issues of either persisting cultural differentiations, of increasing cultural disparities, or of declining cultural distinctions worldwide could and can count on a wide audience. Of course, these social science studies each derive from today's broad range of social science disciplines, each with its own tradition of theoretical perspectives, paradigmatic assumptions, intellectual roots, particular set of methods of analysis, and styles of framing and prioritizing specific subjects related to culture. The social science reading of cultural diversity and cultural change seems almost as rich as the number of social scientists involved. In this talk I aim to provide some insight in the existing social science models of comparing cultures. We start with reviewing the basic alignments in cross-cultural studies and will address the main differences in perspectives that govern these cultural studies today. We will focus on the four key concepts of comparing cultures represented by the seminal works of Geert Hofstede, Harry Triandis, Shalom Schwartz, and Ronald Inglehart.

Cultural studies are gaining front positions in contemporary social science. The resurgence of the interest in culture in social science is, however, both remarkable and discomfiting. After a long period of emphases on understanding social life from the perspective of structures, systems, life chances, social stratification, socio-economic factors, and the like, there now seems to be a growing recognition and appreciation of

the role of the cultural factor as well as an increasing sense for cultural diversity (Featherstone and Lash, 1999). In the continuing battle of paradigms it now seems the 'structuralists', to whom culture is but epiphenomenal, lag a serious number of game points behind on the 'culturalists' who see culture as ultimately constraining. The discomfort with the pro-culturalist result of this struggle lies in the ambiguity of the concept of culture that has gained popularity particularly among postmodern culturalists. Culture is conceptualized as a phenomenon lacking coherence, full of complexities, something that is dynamic, continuously changeable, fundamentally fluid, and endlessly multiplicit. Culture has become everything in this perspective, defining culture as "the complex everyday world we all encounter and through which we all move" (Edgar and Sedgwick, 2002: 102). Social scientists seem to agree that culture on the conceptual level includes almost everything and excludes almost nothing known to human life (see Hannertz, 1996). Perceived this way culture lacks ground. It freely floats in isolation in a non-human space without relevant linkages to social structure or people's actions.

In this respect, at least three dominant perspectives are to be distinguished in cross-cultural studies: a postmodernist perspective, a 'particularist' one, and a 'dimensionalist' one.

The postmodernist view stresses the role and importance of the productive, playful individual, an individual who is producing, instead of reproducing, culture in his or her won particular way and for his or her own means (if at all for any means). Of course, there is much sense in emphasizing the role of the individual if this leads to an analysis addressing patterns of regularity and continuity and does not stop at claiming that culture today has entered an 'everyone can be anyone' phase of hyper-individualization. In this type of analysis we are witnessing a cultural 'Big Bang' on a truly global scale in which culture loses both its traditional bedrocks and basic guiding capacities and in which individuals become solipsists devoted to a continuous personal re-invention of culture. This is also the stream that even goes as far as stating that 'cultures do not exist' (Van Binsbergen, 1999). Still, the awareness that individuals play with culture and stretch cultural concepts, and hence create hybrid and ambivalent instead of one-dimensional entities, is important because it prevents theoretical oversimplifications. That is the main contribution of this postmodernist perspective. Considering this, for postmodernists the whole idea of culture as a well-defined unifying pattern with a strong internal homogeneity and as a uniformly shared entity that has an uni-interpretable, direct power to shape people's identities is most likely to be a somewhat grotesque overestimation if not a fiction (see e.g. Rosaldo, 1993;

Soeters, 2000). In this perspective 'culture' is a reification and a too deterministic concept that might lead to an overstatement of cultural differences, and hence to academically based stereotypes and moral judgments (Moss Kanter & Cron, 1994; see Soeters, 2000).

A 'particularist' view upholds the belief in structures and patterns, but is associated to cultural studies in which particular subjects of analysis are stressed, either work being values, religious beliefs, political convictions or other types of domain specific cultural values, beliefs and attitudes (e.g. Ester, et al., 1994; Arts et al., 2003). Emphases in theory and empirical work are not put on addressing an overarching system, a cultural canopy, which connects the various cultural domains. The core business of this type of analyses is focused on the assessment of states of and developments in particular, seemingly mutually unrelated issues. In this perspective, the individual, or better still, social groups of individuals, is not playing an important constitutive role in culture, but it neither emphasizes culture as a unifying pattern.

This latter emphasis is more likely to be found among the 'dimensionalists' of cultural studies. They, by contrast, are on a quest for a systemic whole that crosses life domains and groups of individuals. The dimensionalist study aims at finding the ultimate, most frugal, and yet most meaningful basic set of axes with which to explain the broad range of attitudes, beliefs, life styles and the diversity of practices among large populations and/or organizations across societies. The very focus is on empirically validating the existence of a unifying, universal (etic; see also Triandis in this volume) pattern, that regardless of social differentiation, displays homogeneity, is broadly shared, and has the power to shape people's identities, attitudes, and all other aspects of their culture. The individual playing a directing role in producing culture is, almost by definition, least present in the dimensionalist view. Says, for instance, Triandis (1995: 6): "Culture is superorganic (does not depend on the presence of particular individuals)...". The importance of behavior by groups of individuals for the production of culture seems underestimated. Culture in this respect is a mindset, a mental software that is only but weakly dependent on culturally productive social behavior.

Still, the dimensionalist perspective is widely used when in social science organizations and people from different countries or cultures are compared. An important question is whether or not this most widely adopted type of analysis allows us to frame how individuals, or better still, groups of individuals, play a productive role in cultural diversity and cultural change. Before looking more closely to this theme, we will depict the core elements of thought of the four leading figures among the 'dimensionalists', being Geert Hofstede, Harry Triandis, Shalom Schwartz, and Ronald Inglehart.

Slide # 4 Hofstede

Culture is multi-layered in the perspective of Geert Hofstede (1980, 2001), a Dutch scholar active in a broad range of social science disciplines. For Hofstede (2001: 9-10) the core elements of culture are values. Values, Hofstede explains following classic anthropological thought on the matter, are fundamental tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others, and are held by individuals and collectivities. Culture always presupposes a collectivity and culture, in Hofstede's view, determines the very uniqueness of a group, be it groups within the framework of nation-states, regions or ethnicities within or across nations (Hofstede, 2001: 5, 10). Cultures consist of values, rituals, heroes and symbols, according to Hofstede. Values are seen as relatively fundamental compared to rituals, heroes and symbols. Hofstede places the latter three in the world of practices to separate them from the basics of culture.

Hofstede is, of course, highly associated with the tradition of cross-cultural research at the nation-state level, comparing the values of numerous nations. Hofstede's fame in this tradition is, at the same time, his vulnerability. Though he leaves room for cultural distinctions at other levels, he is seen and stays seen as an old-school, i.e. modernist scholar who still believes in the supremacy of *national* culture, culture which is well-defined and relatively stable across nations and on which nations take up distinct positions. Much of Hofstede's later efforts (e.g. Hofstede, 2001) have been put in searching for meaningful correlations between contemporary national-level indicators and his famous five dimensions of national culture. These five dimensions are (Hofstede, 2001: 98, 161, 225, 297, 359):

1. *Power distance*: the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.
2. *Uncertainty avoidance*: the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.
3. *Individualism*: Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and her/his immediate family only. Collectivism stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.
4. *Masculinity*: Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. Femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.

5. *Long-term orientation*: Long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular, perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, short-term orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present, in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of 'face' and fulfilling social obligations.

Hofstede demonstrated the existence of these dimensions empirically by analyzing large-scale survey data gathered in the late 1960's and early 1970's among more than 115,000 IBM-employees across more than 50 countries in the world. Hofstede's work received worldwide attention, among others from Harry Triandis, another influential 'dimensionalist'.

Slide # 5 Triandis

Harry Triandis, an American cross-cultural psychologist, has devoted much work to develop an alternative view on comparing cultures by emphasizing the individualism/collectivism construct (e.g. Triandis, 1988, 1994b, 1995). The contrast of individualism versus collectivism dwells on the basic issue in social sciences of independent versus interdependent selves, a theme that is at the very core of both classic (modernization) sociology (e.g. with Durkheim's distinction between organic and mechanics solidarity, with Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft*, or with Weber's modern forms of rationality) and contemporary (cross-cultural) psychology. Collectivism for Triandis (1995: 6) includes an emphasis on views, needs, and goals of the in-group (rather than on the self), on behavior determined by social norms and duties (rather than pleasure or personal advantage), on common beliefs shared with the in-group, and a willingness to cooperate with in-group members. Individualism taps the mirror image of these views, needs, goals, beliefs, and behaviors. Whether or not cultures are more individualistic or more collectivistic depends on two specific cultural syndromes, according to Triandis (1995: 52), being: cultural tightness versus looseness, and cultural complexity versus simplicity. The tighter and simpler a culture, the more collectivist it is.

In tight cultures people tend to have consensus about what correct action is, to behave according to cultural norms, and to be confronted with severe countermeasures if they deviate from these norms. Japan is the most commonly cited example of a tight culture, as are more Eastern countries. Immigrant cultures in Western societies are other much provided examples. Complex cultures are cultures where functional differentiation in various life domains is large. These heterogeneous societies have a higher openness of group membership with a shorter time perspective (and an accelerated rate of change of membership) and less reciprocity, are high-density and

thus have high number of in-groups as well as many behavioral rules (and institutions to control and sanction rules) aimed at avoiding conflict, and have a large number of choices for action leading to higher number of different decisions. These decisions are seen as individually motivated, deriving from purely personal motives. Complex cultures are to be found all around the globe, especially in the developed world and more so in the larger city areas in the developed societies. The examples of simple culture that Triandis provide (e.g. 1995: 59-61) include classic hunter and gatherer societies and intentionally isolated and sect-like groups within developed societies such as the Mennonites and Amish in the US.

In more tight and simple cultures, collectivism is maximal. In loose and complex ones, individualism is. Collectivism and individualism, however, are not uni-dimensional with Triandis. Based on the mutual dependency of individuals he distinguishes between horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. Horizontal individualism, found in Sweden for instance, signifies that people are independent but stress sameness and de-emphasize inequality. In horizontal, collectivist cultures people are interdependent but also emphasize social cohesion and oneness with in-group members. One example of a horizontal collectivist culture is traditional Confucian China. In vertical individualist cultures – Triandis (1995: 45) mentions France and Germany among others as exemplary societies – independent individuals value distinction, being conspicuous, reflecting their ‘different self’, on ‘being the best’ and having particular privileges. In vertical collectivist countries people expect and accept difference, have a strong sense of duty, a tendency to serve their in-group, even of sacrifice for group benefit. Again, Japan is the prime example of a society with a vertical collectivist culture.

Of course, combinations of individualism-collectivism and horizontal versus vertical traits clearly remind us of Hofstede’s dimensions. It seems to combine his collectivism-individualism and his power distance dimension, suggesting that individualism aligns with horizontalism (low power distance) and collectivist countries with verticalism (high power distance). For instance, in highly individualist and low power distance societies, such as Sweden and also the Netherlands, people do value individualism (independency, autonomy, etc.) highly, but do not like to ‘stick out’, to be unique or distinctive. Although Triandis does not suggest a one-on-one relationship between collectivism-individualism and horizontalism-verticalism, he argues that individualist cultures, relative to collectivists, are more probable to be horizontal. Much more, the combinations of individualism-collectivism and horizontalism-verticalism are regarded ‘situation’- specific, depending on the domain at hand, either being work relationships,

family life, community life, etc. In every society, Triandis hypothesizes, there will be proportions of people ‘sampling’ all four-combination types, depending on their self-perception, being a achievement oriented (vertical individualist), cooperative (horizontal collectivism), dutiful (vertical collectivism) or unique self (horizontal individualism). Before going into more similarities and dissimilarities of Hofstede’s and Triandis’ set of basic cultural dimensions, we first introduce yet another classic-status author in the field of ‘dimensionalist’ cross-cultural studies: Shalom Schwartz.

Slide # 6 Schwartz

Shalom Schwartz is an Israeli social and cross-cultural psychologist who gained his fame with an international value study among various samples of students and teachers in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s in around 40 nations around the world, including samples of respondents from specific cultural groups (Christian, Jewish, Druze, and Arab respondents from Israel e.g.) within these nations. Culture with Schwartz is a complex, multidimensional structure that can be arrayed along a limited set of dimensions, both at the individual level and at the culture- or ‘ecological’ level (Schwartz, 1992, 1994a+b). The latter level is referring to a society’s mean or average cultural characteristics, the level at which Hofstede’s work can be located as well. Both Hofstede and Schwartz place values at the core of culture, being in Schwartz’ terms: “criteria people use to select and justify actions and to evaluate people (including the self) and events” (Schwartz, 1992: 1). Like Hofstede, Schwartz discerns culture-level value emphases prevailing in societies. Before doing so, Schwartz starts with identifying distinct types of value constructs at the individual level, being value constructs that, according to Schwartz, *all* individuals across cultures recognize (Schwartz, 1994b: 88-89):

Power: social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources;

Achievement: personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards;

Hedonism: pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself;

Stimulation: excitement, novelty, and challenge in life;

Self-direction: independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring;

Universalism: understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and nature;

Benevolence: preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact;

Tradition: respect for, commitment to, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion impose on the self;

Conformity: restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and to violate social expectations or norms;

Security: safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.

Schwartz regards these ten value types as being universal and exhaustive. With specific types of analyses (smallest space analyses) Schwartz places all values both adjacent and opposite to one another. The values form a circle with closely related values at adjoining positions in the circle and with incompatible values at the opposing side in the circle. Within that circle one can draw two axes, one from top to bottom and one from left to right, partitioning the circle into four quadrants. The axes represent two dimensions, each with two different poles, being

1. *Openness to change* versus *conservation*: Openness to change includes the value types of self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism; Conservation includes conformity, tradition, and security.

2. *Self-enhancement* versus *self-transcendence*: Self-enhancement includes hedonism (as well), achievement, and power; Self-transcendence taps into universalism and benevolence.

Doing the same analyses with the ten values at the level of the different societies and regions included in his study, Schwartz identified seven higher order or culture-level value types:

Conservatism: values emphasizing the status quo, propriety, avoidance of actions or inclinations of individuals that might disturb the order (see security, conformity, and tradition);

Intellectual and *affective autonomy*: the opposite of conservatism, viewing the person as an autonomous whole pursuing his or her own goals; the intellectual variant emphasizes self-direction; the affective one stimulation and hedonism;

Hierarchy: Adjacent to conservatism, opposing intellectual autonomy, this value type stresses the legitimacy of hierarchical roles and resource allocations; it refers to the self-enhancement pole with emphases on achievement and power, together with;

Mastery: the emphasis is on active mastery of the social environment through self-assertion (mastery is related to active social behavior, intellectual autonomy, by contrast, stresses flexibility of thought regardless of action)

Egalitarian commitment: a value type exhorting voluntary commitment to promoting welfare to other people, opposing hierarchy and mastery and referring to the individual level benevolence and universalism types.

Harmony: from the broad self-transcendent region of value this value type emphasizes harmony with nature and social harmony (helping others, social justice), thus placed between conservatism and egalitarian commitment.

These seven culture-level value types are the result of positions on four basic societal issues:

1. The independent versus interdependent individual: an individual entering relationships voluntarily versus he or she who lacks autonomy and feels part of a collectivity (i.e. the two types of Autonomy and Egalitarian Commitment versus Conservatism)
2. Equality versus inequality: treatment of people and resources in an equal or hierarchical way (Egalitarian Commitment versus Hierarchy and Mastery)
3. Change versus preservation and fitting in: change or holding on to the social and material environment (Mastery, Affective Autonomy versus Harmony and Conservatism)
4. Self- or generalized-other-directedness: acceptance of selfish pursuits of individuals or groups versus favoring goals that transcend the self or in-group interests.

The Openness to change versus Conservatism dimension at the individual level, according to Schwartz (1994b: 98) is closest to the idea of individualism-collectivism, as formulated by Hofstede and Triandis. The dimension tapped in the above mentioned first core societal issue (the independent or interdependent individual) seems to do so too. Of course, looking at the other dimension of Self-enhancement and Self-transcendence – or Hierarchy and Mastery versus Egalitarian Commitment and Harmony – and at the other three issues mentioned above one can conceive many other, more or less overlapping relationships with the constructs of Hofstede and Triandis. The equality versus inequality issue, for instance, seems compatible with Hofstede's power distance and the vertical versus horizontal types of individualism and collectivism of Triandis. In this volume Shalom Schwartz will fortunately go extensively into the relationships between his work and that of Hofstede and others. We will address only a few similarities and dissimilarities among the 'dimensionalists' in the next paragraph. Before doing that, we introduce the last of the four influential the 'dimensionalists': Ronald Inglehart.

Slide # 7 Inglehart

Political scientist Ronald Inglehart is a fourth key author in empirical cross-cultural analysis. Inglehart's culture shift studies (1997, 1990, 1997) have received massive response in the social sciences, including criticism, particularly from outside the US. He has induced a true tradition of political values studies working with his instruments, especially the materialism-postmaterialism index. Inglehart forecasting a 'silent revolution' in Western democracies hardly needs any further elucidation. An abundance of studies, articles, papers and even media debates have followed in response to Inglehart's assumption of the growing hegemony of postmaterialist over materialist outlooks. The contrast between young and older generations in this case is seen as a major antecedent for the assumed reshaping of political culture in Western societies. Two key hypotheses underlie the presence of materialist and postmaterialist values: 1 the *scarcity hypothesis* stating that one's priorities reflect one's socio-economic environment and that one places greatest subjective value on those things that are in relatively short supply, and; 2 a *socialization hypothesis* posing that one's basic values reflect the conditions that prevailed during one's pre-adult years (Inglehart, 1990: 56). Together the hypotheses imply that during times of prosperity and absence of insecurities accompanying war or other severe political turmoil, younger cohorts place less interest on economic and physical security than do older groups who did experience these events. Conversely, young people give higher priority to nonmaterial goals. Inglehart's theory in fact predicts that postwar historical events in western society, which can be characterized by unprecedented stability in socioeconomic and political terms, have generated a gradual but pervasive shift towards postmaterialism. The socialization thesis is supposed to complement simplistic views on how scarcity, in line with the need hierarchy thinking of Maslow (1954) and the principle of diminishing marginal utility in economic theory, affects overt behavior and covert value orientations. Inglehart (1990: 69) acknowledges that after the preadult years people may undergo behavioral and attitudinal shifts, but in his perception pre-adulthood is the period in which change is most rapid and most lasting. This generates a silent revolution in western democracies; revolutionary because changes are so pervasive and silent because changes take place via replacement of generations. The values of individuals hardly change, Inglehart suggests, after the pre-adult years and the gradual process of generational replacement, in which older cohorts with materialist views die and young cohorts with postmaterialist take their place, changes the average value pattern of society as a whole, in this case towards more postmaterialism. This implies that life cycle effects or influences of growing older, attaining a partner, having children, gaining more wealth, etc., are limited and that socialization or cohort effects are more important for the

change from materialism to postmaterialism. In his 1997-book Inglehart has broadened the analyses of his large-scale international value data by discerning two main dimensions according to which cultures, in his view, differentiate worldwide: survival versus well-being values and traditional versus secular-rational authority values. In the *survival/well-being* dimension the key dichotomy materialism-postmaterialism is prominently present, but the dimension now also includes attitudes such as life satisfaction and generalized social trust (Inglehart & Baker, 2000: 24). The global modernization project, however, is two-dimensional according to Inglehart. There is not only a shift from survival to well-being values but also a transformation from *traditional* to *secular-rational orientations* toward *authority*. Societies in which social and political life is dominated by religious or hierarchical bureaucratic institutions, where male dominance and parental authority is defended, and where authoritarian attitudes prevail are regarded traditional; societies in which opposite characteristics are found and where individual freedom is going hand in hand with the rejection of the previously mentioned institutions and with opposition to centralization and 'bigness' of government are typified as secular-rational (Inglehart, 1997: 78-81).

In the dimensionalist tradition of cross-cultural studies at least five (Hofstede), one (Triandis), seven (Schwartz), or two (Inglehart) basic culture-level dimensions to compare cultures come to the fore. At first glance, these different sets of axes to compare cultures seem to have a lot in common. For instance, Hofstede's power distance values in Triandis' view might well be a part of his overarching individualism-collectivism dimension, might seem to overlap with Schwartz' hierarchy values and to have a relationship with Inglehart's dimension of traditional versus secular-rational authority values.

Slide # 8 Cultural change

A key issue in cross-cultural studies is, however, that most of them pay little attention to the issue of cultural change. The four authors seem to suggest that the structure of the different dimensions is independent of historical developments. The pattern with which to compare culture seems – referring to already mentioned quote of Triandis – itself 'superorganic' and independent of the presence of particular individuals. Still, the cultural change debate, at least at the macro level of comparing cultures, is frequently dealing with the question of growing global uniformity of values or persisting diversity of values. Cross-cultural research of one kind shows that value priorities of different segments of the globe's population rank highest or lowest on the order of self-actualization, self-expression. Cultural change in this perspective is the adoption of

these values in an ever-growing circle of populations. Another line of cross-cultural research aims to show that a population's cultural heritage, despite for example the increasing worldwide spread of single origin cultural artifacts (ranging from jeans to McDonald's restaurants), is extremely enduring and will continue to shape a society's 'turnover' on its basic social, political and economic parameters. Continuation of cultural diversity is the stability of value differences. Let us shortly take a look at the four authors' position on cultural change.

Hofstede's divisions of national culture are regarded and, more so, worked with as if they are stable across time. Especially in times of strong debates on the effects of globalization, including the cultural effects, this claim is confronting (see Vinken et al., 2002). Globalists and anti-globalists alike, either welcoming or opposing the process of globalization, are troubled by a message that despite the massive acceleration in the worldwide exchange of capital, products and people and thus of ideas, beliefs and modes of action, global culture remains in an equilibrium without the basic structure of cultural variety being affected. Hofstede himself has contributed to the stability-change debate by showing how correlations between his divisions of national cultures and an almost endless range of other contemporary macro characteristics of nations (economic, political, social, etc.) remain stable over time (see esp. Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede (2001: 36) suggests that national cultures, if at all affected by globalization or other forces of change, all transform in the same direction leaving the relative cultural distances between nations as good as untouched. This theoretical claim might be called the 'relative cultural stability' hypothesis and is in urgent need of a forceful and convincing empirical test, especially by re-addressing the Hofstede concepts of cultural dimensions in a large-scale multi-country empirical study of similar magnitude as his monumental IBM-study.

Triandis (e.g. 1995, 2001) assumes that individuals can take up their own particular position within collectivist or individualist culture and even that seemingly homogeneous collectivist cultures include traditions (symbols, sayings, etc.) that dwell not only on collectivist, but also on individualist themes. Still, he argues that humans in the different types of cultures 'sample' themes that, overall, are in line with the broad characteristic of that culture (e.g. Triandis, 1995: 61). More precisely: in collectivist cultures, humans are more probable to 'pick up', cultivate and thus reproduce collectivist themes. For instance, collectivist sayings in collectivist cultures outnumber individualist ones. In individualist cultures it is the same for individualist themes: these themes are much more emphasized. Cultural change as a concept is not included in this 'modal pattern' perception of culture. In the fit between individuals and cultures, the emphasis seems to be put on *adaptation* and assimilation of individuals in cultures

varying in tightness, complexity and mutual dependency of individuals ('horizontalism' and 'verticalism'). In this volume (see next chapter) Triandis does reflect further on ways to perceive cultural change and the role of individuals within the framework of his cultural theory.

In his quest for a universal structure and content of worldwide cultures, Schwartz (e.g. 1992, 1994a+b) is, almost by definition, less sensitive for the possibilities, correlates and consequences of cultural change. The universals identified by Schwartz at the individual and cultural level seem to influence people on a profoundly durable way. The issue of interacting people reshaping culture and/or producing new forms of culture is not a part of his theory. The assumption is prominent that individuals in their socialization process internalize the existing values that are set by institutional priorities in a society in order to function effectively in such a society, which, in turn, leads them to promote the interests and conform to the requirements of cultural institutions (Schwartz, 1994b: 93). Given this line of reasoning, Schwartz, much more than Hofstede, expects individual level value pursuits to overlap with culture-level value emphases. Pursuits and social actions that are psychologically and socially compatible with overall culture are those that are reinforced, and vice versa, societies fostering specific values are likely to "run more smoothly if citizens give high priority..." to the same values (Schwartz, 1994b: 93). In other words, the relationship between individuals and cultures is perceived from a classic functionalist perspective.

Inglehart (1990, 1997) is the only 'dimensionalist' most explicitly incorporating the issue of cultural change in his work. However, how cultural change shapes and is shaped by individuals is less vivid also in his studies. People themselves are, however, usually not included in the explanation of cultural change. Explanations fall back on processes – the boost in information technology, the growth of economic affluence, the rise of educational levels – that coincide with the depicted shifts at hand. The very vehicle of change, the individual – or better still groups of individuals, is hardly ever included in the analyses.

Slide # 9 Changing life courses

As I aim to show, including especially groups of individuals that not only are shaped by culture but also actively shape culture (and in doing so change culture) is crucial if comparative social science aims to gain impetus and if with it we aim to understand how contemporary people make sense of a world that is increasingly open to simultaneous impacts from different cultures. I argue that especially young generations are experiencing another world today. Especially young generations, I would say, undergo influences of cultural change that aligns with a modernization process that is

taking place in many advanced societies: change in which individualization has a prominent place. This change is especially strong surveyed with respect to the theme of contemporary people's life course.

In 1997 KU Mayer, one of the key authors in life course sociology, argues that by now we have a clear, well-described history of the developments of the life course. Since the early 1980s several life course sociologists (e.g., Fuchs, Kohli, Held, Du Bois-Reymond, and Mayer himself), claim that the life course in modern or, according to some authors, post- or late-modern societies has undergone a process of de-standardization. There is considerable debate on the exact meanings and forms of this de-standardized life course, but I would define a de-standardized life course as a life course in which, at the individual and at more macro levels, transitions are heterogeneous in terms of timing, order and structure. For some the timing of some transitions is postponed (e.g., into parenthood) and other transitions are taking place earlier and earlier (e.g., having intimate relationships), the sequential order of transitions is mixed and follows a less predictable path (e.g., not having a job after education, but having a job – considered a real job by many - while at school), the structure changes away from linearity/accumulation of transitions (e.g., short-lived in stead of life-long commitments to jobs; moving away from the upwardly directed career). The traditional triade in the life course of first years of preparation/education, then the time of work/family life, and finally a period of rest/dysassociation from society has become a mere nostalgic memory of yesteryears.

The destandardization of the life course results in an individualization process in at least two ways. First, in short: traditional institutions and social categorisation (church, family, school, class, gender) are believed to exert less power of determining what to value (which state of affairs to prefer over others) and which path thru life to follow; the individual consequently has increased autonomy to determine his/her own values and his/her own future. Mind you: the value of having that autonomy, of having self-control, is what gained stronger popularity. The first individualisation indication therefore is the highly valued idea that you are or at least should be in control of your own future. The idea of self-direction. The second is that the focus of the life course is increasingly concentrated on self-fulfilment. With individualization more attention is directed to one's own development as a person, to becoming someone if not becoming a unique person in the midst of the mass of others. Already with Fuchs in 1983 it can be read that people in their individualized biography are pre-occupied with their own development. The life course is not only self-directed, the aim of the life course, of socialization itself, is increasingly focused at realizing one's self, at reaching self-fulfilment, to attain self-enhancement. A key competence, now, for the individual is

reflexivity. The aim of socialization shifted from developing individuality by taking part in society (the key individuation-integration debate in socialization and life course sociology) to developing individual competence that allows one to project and plan personal choices from the wide range of options to participate in society. As a consequence, it is claimed that the life course undergoes a certain 'reflexive biographization'. The ability to project one's own life course, to plan one's future, to evaluate different options, to think about the consequences of choices, has become a central theme in the life course, more so than realizing the different transitions in the life course itself.

As argued the life course and the reflexivity competence is self-directed, but is not build in a complete social void. The self today is co-figurative: embedded especially in intimate social circles and a media-related world. With age contemporaries (if not generation members), real or virtual, people, over the life course, develop a common consciousness of a shared history and destiny, a history and destiny in which autonomously, but with the help of close relatives, directing one's biography is central. This might result in the rise of a 'reflexive generation', not only having formative experiences regarding their relationship with their life course that are fundamentally different from the experiences of the previous generations, but also – and necessarily so, given the rise of the reflexive biographization of their life course – being aware of the distinctiveness of their formative experiences.

Still, we might argue that sociologists do seem to agree on a few things: that the life course today is de-standardized, although sociologists disagree on what this exactly means, and that a de-standardized life course is caused by many societal trends, and again sociologists disagree on which ones in particular. It is however agreed upon that people have the idea that they are more free, more autonomous to construct their own future life course and that people think having that idea is crucially important. Especially from young people society demands that they are in control and develop competences with which they can gain control over their own life. In other words society itself – compare the popularity of a buzzword such as the knowledge-based society – wants people to value highly that they themselves construct their own life course and to learn the key competences to do so. Reflexive biographisation or the increasing focus on theme of projecting one's own life, is what society is promoting in many different ways.

Slide # 10

What does this mean for well-being? I think it means very much. We do have some clues that especially young people aim for investments in transitional life course competences and are more involved in evaluating choices on than in participating in key

domains of life. A series of Dutch studies on future, career and life course orientations that we conducted, shows that Dutch young people are well aware of the wide range of life course options, possible transitions, and accompanying life course cultures (orientations and aspirations related to particular choices). They seem to realize that they can consider different futures and should be flexible, work on their 'employability', to develop – in short - transitional life course competences, such as the reflexivity competence: the competence to continuously imagine, plan and evaluate possible life course transitions. Interestingly, they choose for a dynamic life course model directed not at progress (getting ahead) or self-development (broadening one's capabilities) per se, but directed at variation, change, and continuous experimentation (Vinken et al., 2002, 2003). This might increasingly apply to other age groups as well. It undermines the idea that socialization and the life course are directed at self-fulfilment or self-enhancement in the typical 1968-ers sense. The idea of the reflexive biographization of the life course means that people are eager to imagine and plan transitions, but less interested in realizing those transitions, in committing one's self to transitions, in going a certain way in the life course; all that 'going a certain way' does is excluding other possible ways in the life course, impairing other transitions one could make as well. From the individual's perspective self-fulfilment means developing competences to explore and sample new and exciting personal experiences, to be able to transit from one to the other fulfilling experience. Life long learning, for instance, from this perspective, is learning to keep options open and having new and exciting experiences, much more than realizing material or immaterial growth. Life long learning seems less relevant when serving the purpose of a career with a steep line upward in terms of income. of making promotion, or a career in which one is gradually but steadily growing as a person, is stacking/accumulating power/capacities of one's self. A rewarding job in such a life course model, to name another example, is a challenging job, with a daily dosis of new experiences, lots of changes and variation, not a guaranteed well-paid or self-growth gratifying job.

Mind you, empirical research shows that individual choice and highly individualized routes thru the life course are overestimated phenomena. Institutions and social categorisations, such as the work place, school, the family, even the class or status groups one originates from, still exert considerable power. Contrary to postmodern beliefs (the 'everyone can be anyone' ideology) many of these institutional powers have such impacts that life courses have not lost full predictability. As Furlong and Cartmel, two British researchers put it examining theses of 'individualisation' "the paradox of late modernity is that although the collective foundations of social life have become

more obscure, they continue to provide powerful frameworks which constrain people's experiences and life chances."

The case is that individualisation is likely to affect different social groups in different ways. The work of Furlong and Cartmel and other researchers cautions against focussing too heavily on the individualising aspects of contemporary societies at the expense of recognising the continuing role of collective group identifications and of institutional powers. The balance between choice and compulsion is the key issue in life course sociology. Speaking of a choice biography, some even speak of a 'free-choice' biography is misleading. It suggests that people no longer make traditional life course choices, no longer follow structured paths thru life, take their own route to their own liking. I believe we should focus on the biographization of the life course, meaning that increasing numbers of people are engaged in the projection, planning, and evaluation of their life course. This, of course, still allows people to make traditional choices; choices social scientists might not place in the much-applauded modern choice biography but in a pre-modern standard biography model.

That people make traditional choices (want to have a good education, want to get married, to have children, etc.) is only a paradox if one believes that institutional and contextual impacts have completely subsided. I would, by contrast, argue that institutions have a strong impact on people's choices. Today there are many signals that institutions, at least in some countries than in others, are responding to the ideal of an individual who is competent to secure his/her own future and who will be unique in his/her choice. They respond slowly, and the response is still more part of debate than of reality, but still, the response in some countries already is and in others most probably will be pervasive. A good example is the recently debated flexibility-security nexus in the labor market. The call for a policy directed at **'flexicurity'**: a policy strategy in which flexibility and security are integrated and balanced manner. A policy strategy that attempts to synchronically and deliberately aims to enhance flexibility of labor markets, work organizations and relations and aims to enhance security, employment security and social security, notably for weak groups inside and outside of the labor market. Institutions in other words are responding to the ideal of self-directedness of the life course. The competent individual seems the basis of transformation. The question is of course if these institutions refer to the same type of competences of individuals in control of their life course and aimed at gaining new and exciting experiences instead of material and immaterial growth. The question is whether the required competences from an institutional and individual biography perspective are matching.

But how about the key concept of well-being? The two-faceted perception of realizing the personal self (doing it your self, and being focused on self-development) is highly relevant when taking well-being, the core focus of the CoE-program, into consideration. As is well-known to cross-cultural researchers the concept of 'well-being' is central in modernization theory and in cross-cultural value research. 'Well-being' is one of the two key poles (the other being 'security') of one of the two dimensions with which US political scientist and leader of WVS Ron Inglehart has delineated cultures worldwide (though he later rephrased the pole 'well-being' into 'self-expression'; see, e.g., Inglehart's contribution in Vinken et al., 2004. *Comparing Cultures*. Leiden: Brill). Central in the well-being pole are postmaterialism values focused directly at personal growth, at being able to realize one's self in the above depicted more linear way. The above depicted youth and life course sociological theories yet predict that a less linear variant of investments in the personal self, one directed not at growing as a person but at attaining competences to maintain individual flexibility, are, in the West, pursued by the youngest generations, born after 1970 or perhaps even a decade later. The linear 'personal growth' life course strategy in that theory would be typical for the baby boomers, protest or 1968-generation (with core cohorts born between 1940 and 1955 in the West), the generation as well as that much more than the very young persistently scores high on Inglehart's well-being values. Still, this might all be an accurate theory for the West, but is it also accurate for Asia and for Japan in particular?

Slide # 11

This is why I came up with the following research questions that I hope to bring a little further while being here in the midst of you who are involved in the CoE-program

(I will read out the slide here)

I hope to have made sense and thank you very much for your attention.