Cultural Impact of Technology Transfer (Summary)

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Technology transfer between cultures, which refers to the acquisition and utilization of certain technologies from outside sources by one culture, happens frequently with the increase of human communications. Two scenarios, the European’s introduction of guns into Inuit culture and the bringing of horses to the Native Americans by the Spaniards, are displayed in order to substantiate the author’s assertion that transferred technologies can have harmful influences to the acquirer, especially when there is no initial technological void to be filled in.

Guns, invented in Europe and primarily used for military purposes, became seal hunting instruments after transferred to the Inuit culture. Before the acquisition of guns, harpoons were ingeniously designed for efficient recovery of seal bodies. However, the introduction of guns pulled down the efficiency of marine hunting, causing serious problems to the Inuit people as well as a sharp loss of the seal populations.

Left in North America by Spanish conquistadors, horses significantly increased the hunting mobility of the Plains Indians, who previously adopted mustang, an original species that were smaller than horse. Although the Plains Indians gained efficiency as well as the capacity of hunting larger animals with the implement of the new hunting method, they soon caused bison to become seriously over-hunted and then nearly extinct.

While not all scenarios of sharing technologies end up with damaging consequences, the examples of the Inuit and the Plains Indians still depict that, risk emerges when the progression of domestic technologies is stagnated by the introduction of foreign ones.