

CULTURAL CORNERS AND ASIAN CONTEXTS

Cristal Huang

Soochow University, Taiwan

Abstract

Globalization in the way it has often been conceived, is one-sided. It is often thought of as the influence of the West upon the rest of the world. But in the very early exchanges – the Silk Road – this was a two-way relationship. How can we conceive of globalization, not as domination, but as exchange between local cultures? In this paper I propose to investigate idea of the “corners” as a new model of globalization.

Global or Local

Recently, the term globalization has become an important concept in Asia. But we can ask: why do we need such a concept, and how can we interpret the term appropriately? And from these questions, we will somehow get to know more about the necessity of globalization, and if the term has any legitimacy in Asia.

If globalization means to run societies in Asia from a global perspective, then globalization is nothing new. Trade and cultural exchange has taken place with the West since the time of the Silk Road. In globalization today, Western societies often influence our human needs and social practices. These are products which are not necessary to own, but in our contemporary globalized world, nobody seems to mind.

Asia during the time of the Silk Road also exported culture to the West. If we did transfer goods and ways of living into Western life-world before, then why not now? This points to the fact that Asia needs to awaken to the possibilities of globalization. It should no longer be content with being passive receiver of culture, but should work harder on the *creation* of culture. Otherwise, our great influence on Western culture during the Silk Road will only be something of interest for tourists. So our next question

is how to create and export our culture into the West?

The Integration of Cultural Differences in Asia

How does globalization influence the relationship of cultural differences in Asia? Now we will try to reflect on the relation between the inescapability of globalization and the possibility of preserving *cultural corners* under an Asian context.

Our argument is: if we must continue to globalize Asian societies in the future centuries, what principles should we should pay attention to if we still want to preserve cultural identities in Asia? We identify the necessity of globalization, but we also want to preserve the *local* as the entrance to the *global*. And by globalizing locally, we need to interpret texts of every Asian social activity according to Asian contexts.

In Asia, there are many different cultural regions. We can consider each region as a *corner*. The idea of corner is to avoid thinking that our own cultural region is the central part of the world. The historic Silk Road is now just a tourist spot. Yet the current import of technology is really an invisible Silk Road extending into Asia for hundreds years. But is this new Road a two-way street? Can we use the diversity of Asian corners as a strength rather than a weakness?

Among the many contemporary theories of interpretation, the so-called Hermeneutic circle may provide us an important tool. Re-defining the meaning of a corner, it is a place that links two margins. A corner is not anymore just a corner, it is the essential part for moving toward differences.

In Asia, the possibility of facing global totality comes from the corner. When people in Asia learn how to identify our cultural phenomenon as a passage between differences, then we will revitalize Asian commercial and economic power once again. We may see cities in Asia as stops, when people from outside need to do business here, they need to work on our cultural commonness, too. It means that Asia works together for Asian benefits. For example, we provide local materials, local manpower, but we also negotiate with companies to respect reasonable salaries for these natural sources. By combining both globalization and Economic learning, Asian people will earn good life-world together. Our point is that globalization is not only for external marketing, it means to use global

standards to earn a decent living.

Asian people will respect cultural differences. It means that we must also remove some of the blind fantasies of the Western social life-world. And then people will try to move on to other corners. The principle of facing one's own self as a corner under the whole context may provide Asian studies multiple dimensions of signifying what Asia means. By this principle, every cultural region in Asia is a corner from which we can go toward different directions. Every corner is the beginning of a journey. By detouring from corner to corner, we continue the journey of globalizing Asia. Here let us use a very concrete example to describe clearly what we mean about the philosophy of corners. The corner has two walls that cross and encounter, by the old way of thinking, we think that Asia must keep the dying traditions, but by the philosophy of corner, we go to another direction-but it is not a anti- or opposite direction neither-it is only a possible direction from this corner. Asia can create new traditions with modern validity of social values in present time. Then by globalizing the new way of thinking, in many years, they become traditions.

To say this in another way: if we cannot keep the old tradition we can continue to create good ways of thinking, and it will develop into a tradition in the future.

Contemporary French philosopher Gilles Deleuze uses French term "devenir" on the philosophizing, now let us use this to reflect Asian corners. Asian corners are both global and local: let us use temporarily the term *glocal* to describe the situation.

Global or Local? Toward a "Glocal" Society

The term global is relevant to worldwide scope or application¹. If we use semiological approach to explain what global and *glocal* mean, we may try the following analysis. First, to Saussure, a sign has always two sides: to be spoken, and to be signified. Global is a term. But the term *glocal* does not yet have an official and legal sense and meaning. But it comes from the signifying of the real operation of globalization. There is actually not a globe as a place from which to run business. When a society wants to be globally established, it still needs to start from the base of being local. The way of operating globally involves interpreting this local

place as one unit of the whole globe. Without the corner, there is no room. When people ignore one corner, immediately the wholeness of the room disappears. Under the context of being global, each corner needs to be movable. When we keep to the two sides of one corner, we are local. But when we move in a different direction, then the space is open to the outside. Under the contexts of being with others, the space is both: local and global, and we temporarily use *glocal* to describe the situation.

The totality of speaking (le langage) has two major parts: the speech (la parole) and the language system (la langue)². To Saussure, the place of language system exists inside the wholeness of the function of language³. So if a society is global, it means that it maintains every social activity by a global perspective. But here we use the term global from a particular perspective. Yet we can be deceived. For example when one Japanese bank uses its royal family identity in its advertisements, yet its services are similar to any other foreign bank, then it is only a false use of cultural identity. It is already a global bank. The cultural advertisement is only a means. We should only accept this bank if it is a safe and good bank, we must try to overlook the cultural allusions when we make decisions about whether to choose this bank, or a bank from abroad.

We usually conceive of globalization in the form of a globe or spherical surface. The focus of this paper is to analyze whether it is possible to use cultural corners to understand the scope of globalization in Asian societies. Practically, Asian societies need to promote its Asian identity first. The principle of our interpretation is to face both sides, and the contexts turn to be clear when we find paths.

Cultural Corners: the Entrance to Contexts

So the philosophy of corner may perhaps provide a new idea for thinking about contexts. The problems of globalization need to be discussed by local people in societies. And if they decide to pursue and promote globalization, they still need to start from local regions. *Glocal* is only an example of a term that we can use to emphasize the relation between global and local. By thinking practically concerning local issues, we move from the global positions. By thinking practically concerning global issues, we also move from the local languages and needs. In Asia, our languages and needs provide our true characters. From the *glocal* perspective, we

move through cultural corners. The cultural corners are also the entrance to Asian contexts. From local corners, we move toward the contexts. And in these contexts, we are Asia.

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.yourdictionary.com/ahd/g/g0152400.html>.

² Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Éditions Payot, 1972), pp.23-35.

³ *Ibid.* p.27.