

# PROS AND CONS OF GLOBALIZATION FROM ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

**Wook Chang**

Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea

## **Abstract**

*I would like to discuss what the Asian nations should accept and what they should reject from the Western nations.*

*As we all know, the common ultimate end of man is the self-perfection and self-achievement as a rational being, as a person. Therefore, the primary task of all nations should be the promotion of the common human values, which transcend all racial, ethnic and cultural differences, in view of that common human end. The ultimate purpose of globalization also cannot be other than the promotion of such common human values.*

*As is known, Western culture is founded upon the two pillars of the Judeo-Christian culture and Greco-Roman culture. The Western nations should retain these original inspirations of their culture and should promote such spiritual values as freedom and human rights, which are of Christian inspiration.*

*While it is true that the Asian nations have much to learn, and accept, from the Western culture in the areas of human and empirical sciences and in technology, they should, however, resist as much as possible the infiltration of the more decadent aspects of present-day Western culture, which manifest themselves in the concrete forms of secularism, materialism, utilitarianism, hedonism, neo-liberalism, and militarism.*

## **Concept of Globalization**

We know that many things are rapidly coming together on earth. But we do not always know what comes together, in what ways, and for what reasons. To initiate the search for the *what*, the *how* and the *why* in

globalization, we can adopt a working definition. For example, we can take the definition given by Roland Robertson. According to him, “Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole”.<sup>1</sup>

We can start with examining this definition. We notice that it is a nominal definition lacking a concrete content. It contains two components: the compression of the world and the accompanying growing consciousness thereof. The words, “compression” and “intensification” convey the ideas of shrinking, accelerating, fortifying, strengthening, and so forth.

One might question if such a subjective moment as “the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” should be included in the definition itself. The insertion of such a subjective element, however, at least brings to light the fact that globalization is not a mechanical process but a historical one. But then, the insertion of consciousness is not sufficient. What is required here is the human subjectivity which would include human voluntary action. I think that globalization as the shrinking of the world itself should be understood both in the objective sense as a historical fact or process and in the subjective sense as a historical human action. The former refers to the aspect of globalization as a factual inexorable historical process. The latter refers to its aspect as a human making - as a human endeavor, task and challenge. These two aspects are not contradictory so they do not exclude each other. They are coexistent and inclusive of each other.

Numerous words have been used by sociologists to characterize globalization and, perhaps, not always with sufficient control or due reflection. I think, however, that the choice of words, is very important because they contribute to the models or concepts of globalization. These models and concepts are not exactly the same thing but they are very akin to one another.

Globalization has so many facets that it has been a subject of interdisciplinary research. As we know, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, ecologists, social philosophers and others have treated this problem at different times and from different perspectives. A survey of terms and expressions the scholars use not only reveal their general orientations but also their concepts and models of globalization.<sup>2</sup> I can divide the terms used into five groups: 1. Globalization as unification or

compression of the world; 2. Globalization as monism; 3. Globalization as Westernism; 4. Globalism as pluralism 5. Globalism as humanism.

### **1. Globalization as Unification**

The general terms used to characterize globalization are unification, integration, compression, universalization, etc. They have in common that they understand globalization as a kind of unification. Unification expresses simply “coming together” and only implicitly expresses “coming together closely” or “coming closer”. I think that “the compression of the world” is a more exact definition of globalization than “the unification of the world”.<sup>3</sup>

### **2. Globalism as Monism**

The terms used for characterizing globalization as a monistic process are: totalization, homogenization, uniformity, continuity, convergence, etc. Monistic globalization has two main characteristics: 1) In contrast to pluralistic globalization which has a number of centers or no centers at all, it has one center from which globalization originates, or to which its entirety is referred to, or around which it takes place. 2) It seeks homogeneity and uniformity in contrast to heterogeneity and diversity and also continuity and convergence in contrast to discontinuity and divergence. Whereas the use of the terms, homogeneity and uniformity, signify monism, the use of the terms, continuity and convergence do not always do so.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Globalism as Westernism**

Westernism, which is the West-centered globalism, is but a sample of monistic globalism. Eurocentrism and occidentalism are synonyms for it.<sup>5</sup>

### **4. Globalization as Pluralism**

The terms used for characterization of pluralistic globalization include all the terms of Group 1 which convey the general meaning of globalization and some of group 2, except for those words which refer to the idea of centralized globalization. Basic terms characterizing this type of globalization are: multiculturalism, interdependency, collaboration, conflicts, resistance, dialogue, flexibility of oneness, relativization of uniqueness, and the word-pairs, universalization - particularization,

continuity - discontinuity, convergence - divergence.<sup>6</sup>

## **5. Globalization as Humanism**

The terms that are used, or are apt to be used, to designate globalization as humanism are: for example, supra-national, supra-nation-states, supra-cultural, universal, humanity, humanism, humankindness, personalism, human values, human rights, etc.

These five understandings of globalization, however, do not necessarily contradict and exclude one another; some of them are closely related and partly overlap one another. These different understandings do not exclusively represent either theoretically pure concepts or observations on the historical process of globalization. They represent mixtures of both; and as such, they contain ambivalences .

We now have before us the task of evaluating the five understandings. But we must first justify our right to evaluate them and also must justify the norms we use to evaluate them. I think we can say that philosophers have the right to evaluate any and all things. Philosophers consider its object *totum et totaliter*, that is, as a whole and from all aspects or from the absolute aspect. Therefore, we can evaluate them in a way different from sociologists, psychologists, historians or anthropologists. In my opinion, to evaluate something philosophically means to evaluate its meaning according to the very principles of reason or to evaluate its meaning in absolute sense or in ultimate terms - which I believe are the same.

If we disregard the first understanding, which is a general characterization of globalization, the rest differ from one another fundamentally. The second understanding, namely, globalization as monism and the fourth understanding, that is, globalization as pluralism are contradictory to each other and exclude each other. The third understanding of globalization, namely, as Westernism, is a kind of monism so that its evaluation is included in that of monism. Therefore, it does not need to be evaluated separately unless monism would be proven to be acceptable. And finally, the fifth understanding, globalization as humanism, differs from all others by way of transcendence with respect to them.

## **Multiculturalism and Universal Humanism**

## 1. Multiculturalism

It is well to have in mind that globalization can take place on many levels or in many areas of life, such as economic, social, military, religious, cultural, etc., and for each level or area, globalization has a different meaning. Accordingly, monism or pluralism also have different meanings for each of them.

Monism understands global unification as an integration which creates homogeneity and uniformity. Integrating unification may or may not have a center. In the former case, monism becomes a centralizing unification. A center presupposes the superiority of one system, nation, or culture, etc. But as long as such a superiority is disputable, this kind of unification will remain problematic. In the case that superiority is not rationally founded, a centralized unification would be disrespectful to the principle of equality. Integrating unification without a center also is based on homogeneity and uniformity which it creates.

As a unification, globalization demands an integration of some sort but not necessarily integration based on homogenization and uniformization. It is true that integration by way of homogenization and uniformization is, even when it is centralized, of and by itself value-neutral. It can be justified, and it is even necessary or unavoidable in some areas of globalization. We all know that in areas of mass media and communications, trades, defence systems, sciences and ecology, etc., some uniformization, if not homogenization, is always necessary.

Unrestricted, total homogenization or uniformization is not possible at all. But were it possible, it would not be necessary nor desirable. Proponents of this kind of globalization seem to overlook the difficulties involved in this process in face of the existence of many diverse particular cultures and their possible resistance against it. Total homogenization and uniformization in all areas of life cannot succeed. This is due to the fact that particular cultures have long traditions. They are firmly rooted. Their contents cannot be readily de-naturalized and homogenized within a short period of time. In other words, these cultures do not lend themselves to be easily de-cultured. They can only be synthesized with one another gradually and step by step. As said above, confronted with the danger of

homogenization and uniformization, these cultures will not remain passive recipients but will stage resistance for their survival and, at the same time, they will, for their identity, take measures to invigorate themselves, and accentuate and sharpen their uniqueness and particularity. The meeting of the particular cultures is bound to create not only the process of mutual acceptance, assimilation and peaceful interactions but also that of clashes, conflicts and rivalries.

Furthermore, totalistic homogenization or uniformization is indeed not necessary. As we know, globalization as integrating and unifying process of the world brings about gradual annihilation of spatio-temporal distances in many areas of our life. And through the spatial immediacy and simultaneity, peoples on earth increasingly participate in the common civilized life. We all know, all peoples on earth share more and more in their daily life common sports and leisure, news and communication media, foods, attires, scientific knowledge, languages, arts, religions, etc. - and this is globalization which ordinary people experience in their daily life. But we notice that, in taking part in this process, they do not abandon their own culture entirely nor do they feel the need to do so.

But how long can a person of a minority culture sustain to preserve his or her own culture? Is it a matter of time that he or she would abandon the indigenous culture entirely? It seems to me that it all depends on what efforts a person makes to preserve his own culture. The question, therefore, is about a person's persistence, and not sustenance, to preserve his or her own culture. Culture in the large sense includes all that man creates for his living the life, including all what he experiences, does and makes for his life. It is something man spontaneously creates by living his life. Homogenization and uniformization of cultures mean acts of coactive exertion of external force upon them. In other words, they mean acts of violence against them. They are in fact acts of violence against the very nature of culture as the product of spontaneous creation. They constitute acts of deculturation, acts of denaturation of culture as such. Imposition of one uniform, universal culture on all other cultures, that is, centralized homogenization of cultures, would constitute equally an act of violence against the nature of culture as such.

Basing on the discussion above, I think that the desirable globalization is pluralistic globalization in the form of multiculturalism This

type of globalization would bear the following characteristics.

1. There is not one central culture to which all cultures are expected to converge or into which they are expected to be integrated and homogenized. There is not an abstract ideal model of global uniform culture

2. All cultures are, in principle, equal as cultures. They all are expected to remain what they are, keeping their identity and particularity and to grow and flourish

3. All cultures spontaneously meet together, enter into dialogue with one another and exchange values with one another, material and spiritual.

4. Diverse cultures should consider other cultures as possible partners of dialogue and of cooperation and not simply as rivals or enemies and thus should not merely strive for hegemony and dominance.

In this multicultural globalization, the cultures can enrich themselves externally and simultaneously strengthen themselves and reinforce their uniqueness internally.

## **2. Universal Humanism**

Humanism or humanity, human values or human rights - however we may express it - is something which transcends cultural differences. It is global in the sense that it is universal but it is trans-global in the sense that it is absolute. Everyone understands something immediately under humanism but not everyone knows what is right humanism. I think that the right humanism in philosophy is the Thomistic personalism. According to Aristotle and St. Thomas, there is a common ultimate human end of man, namely, the self-perfection and self-fulfillment as a rational being, as a person. Humanism cannot mean anything other than the cultivation and promotion of spiritual values which are necessary for attaining that ultimate end. Now, what conforms to the human reason conforms to the human nature and also to the ultimate end of man. And the inverse is also true: that which conforms to the human nature and the human ultimate end constitutes what is rational. The respect for humanism is most rational. It transcends the differences of Western and Eastern rationalities. In my opinion, only Western philosophy has the clear notions of rational being

and person and of rationality founded on them. The ultimate end of globalization must correspond to that of man himself, the self-fulfillment. This means that the ultimate end of globalization consists in nothing other than in promoting humanism.

## **Present Globalization Process**

### **1. Globalization as a Historical Process**

Globalization process which goes on today is something which no one can arrest or reverse but only decelerate or modify. Globalization, however, is not a natural or a mechanical process but a historical process. And as such it can be considered a human action. Man does not only have a share in it; man can have a share in its very making. In order to examine and evaluate the present-day globalization process, characterizing globalization as human action is necessary. But for the latter, I think that some principles of traditional ethics can be very helpful.

Traditionally, a human act is evaluated as to its volition as well as to the act in itself, intention, circumstance and foreseeable effects, etc. According to these norms, present-day globalization exhibits some serious defects. As to volition: The more powerful nations often conceal their self-serving intentions as they impose globalization on other nations. In that context, the less powerful nations are often led to act without sufficient knowledge and sufficient spontaneity. As to the act in itself: Globalization is value-neutral so there is no problem in this respect. As to intention: As has been implied, the more powerful nations seek to expand political, military and economic powers for greater gains. The less powerful nations are forced to struggle to protect their interests and to resist exploitation. As to circumstances: Globalization creates conditions for an unfair competition due to the existing political, military and economic inequality. As to foreseeable effects: Intensifying demands for globalization on the part of the more powerful nations and increasing resistance on the part of the rest cause severe conflicts. And it is often the case that the former also play the role of arbitrator of conflicts. The important question which remains is: To what extent Western nations' supremacy in the economic, military and political areas can represent a threat to the integrity of minority cultures.

## **2. Essence of Western Culture**

What is Western culture? Western culture is founded on the two pillars of Greco-Roman culture and Judeo-Christian culture. As we know, Christianity is much indebted to Greco-Roman culture and civilization for becoming a world religion. But Greco-Roman culture is in turn also much indebted to Christianity for its maturity and perfection as well as for its fundamental tenets and values. Those tenets and values may be summed up as the Christian message of salvation itself and the freedom and human rights. Democracy, science and technology of Western nations are also fruits of spiritual commerce of Greco-Roman culture Christianity.

Western culture, however, betrayed its spiritual vocation. Western culture as we know it today has fallen into a kind of decadence. It has become highly secularized, materialistic, utilitarian-positivistic and hedonistic. Western nations at times make appeal to Christian principles and ideals to camouflage their covert immoral intentions or to justify their misdeeds.

Except for the freedom and human rights, Western nations abandoned much of spiritual values, Christian and other, and promote materialism and hedonism in various forms. They promote unilaterally the material well-being of man, generally understood as maximal satisfaction of any and all desires within the limits of positive legality. They also practise the barbaric ethics of power in various forms in economic, military, international-political and cultural areas.

## **3. Intentions of Western Nations**

The Western understanding of globalization as first and foremost in the economic sense (market globalization) overshadows the more important values of globalization, especially the cultural values. The “free trade” based on Western ideology of “new liberalism” is but a means of exploitation of the less developed nations in the name of “fair competition”.

Freedom and democracy are valuable in the politics of globalization. But Western nations at times misuse it as an ideological slogan for justifying domination and exploitation. And in doing so, they often do

not sufficiently render into account the cultural and political traditions of other nations. Generally speaking, the superpower, the U.S.A., and other military powers, in their self-deceiving but unfounded self-righteousness, wield their military might as means of domination and exploitation in political, economic spheres and even in cultural sphere as well.<sup>7</sup>

### **Conclusion: Globalization from Asian Perspective**

As concluding remarks, I would like to give my opinions on the two problems: what we, as Asians, should accept, and not accept in globalization, and what we should preserve within our own cultures. We first of all realize that everything is caught within the process of globalization. Everything is either globalizing or is being globalized. Perhaps, as Asians, we are being globalized more than we are globalizing others.

As for the question of what we, Asians, should accept and what we should not, we notice that, this question applies both to globalization and Westernization because for us they mean practically the same thing. Now, it is easy to determine what we should, in principle, accept and what we should not. We should accept what is absolute such as, absolute truths and absolute values. As we know, what is absolute is valid everywhere, at all times and under all circumstances. For that reason, it is universal. It is easy to understand that what is universal is trans-cultural or supra-cultural. It transcends even globalization understood as an inter-cultural process.

We, Asian Christians, should have no difficulty in accepting some absolute and universal truths and values. In the context of globalization they are, for example, the Christian teaching itself, the theological notion of God, the philosophical and anthropological concepts of human personhood and related human rights. These truths aside, I think that we are not obliged to accept much else from Westernization and globalization.

As for the question of what we, Asians, should do about our culture or cultures in globalization, I think that we should not abandon them but persist in keeping them. I think that we should preserve, protect and further develop them. Culture is our life as a whole. Our life is deeply rooted and embedded in our culture in such a manner that it does not only reflect who we are and what we are, but it is a portion of ourselves.

All of us are aware that the elements, such as mass media and communication systems, travels, foods, attires, sports and leisure, etc. globalize our daily life. In so far as these elements are constitutive parts and parcels of culture, one must admit that globalization of them means a partial globalization of culture. And, by the same token, one cannot deny that globalization of these elements, in their own ways and to different degrees, exert influence, if not directly at least indirectly, on our culture or cultures as a whole. But I think that I can consider these elements as external elements of culture. As we know, there are internal elements of culture such as, ethos and social sanction, art and literature, philosophy and religion, and, last but not least, education.

The question which awaits our answer is: To what extent globalization of the former affect the latter. My answer is that globalization of the former does not automatically cause that of the latter and how much one influences the other depends on the will, attitude or disposition of the members of the culture and the actions they undertake in face of globalization.

Globalization is not simply the compression of the world but it includes as its component the consciousness of the world as a whole and actions taken based on that consciousness. Globalization is a historical process not only in the sense that it is an irreversible, inexorable process in history but also in the sense that it is a historical process as human voluntary action. I am not in the position to predict how much in the future the flood of Western cultural goods will in fact erode away the internal elements or inner layers of Asian cultures. But I can still say that it all depends on the attitudes and actions Asian nations will take with respect to it.

In the course of Westernization and globalization, dialogues, interactions, mutual assimilations and fusions take place in diverse areas and on different levels. In the area of religion, however, I think that we should be on guard against any attempts to fuse the tenets and practices of Christian religion with those of other religions. As a revealed religion, Christian religion is sufficient of and by itself. Its doctrines do not need to be implemented or revised with the aid of elements of other religions.

Apart from Christianity, what is absolute and thus universal is the human personhood and related human rights. As we know the core of human personhood consists in self-purposiveness. In other words, the person is an end in himself. The personhood of man has been clearly

established in the Christian Western tradition, which has not been the case in other cultural traditions.

In areas other than religion and philosophical anthropology, some forms of interactions, mutual assimilations and fusions are possible. They are unavoidable, necessary or even desirable depending on the circumstances of particular areas of life. In some areas of life, strict uniformity of regulations and norms are necessary but in other areas it is not and is often impossible. For example, capitalism or democracy can take various forms in different cultures and traditions. Whenever a culture borrows or imports something from another culture, the recipient culture should indigenize it, wring it out of itself, re-create it as its own. The final product then, bearing its characteristics and tailored to it, would have stability and permanence. A simple imposition of one element of a culture and tradition on another without taking sufficient account of their differences amounts to an act of unilateral integration and homogenization. Such an act would not be meaningful because it would provoke more defiance and resistance than acceptance and cooperation on the part of the recipient culture.

Finally, it is my opinion that we, Asians, should cherish and develop to the utmost the cultural goods which our ancestors handed down to us; and, at the same time, we should practice the wisdom of distinguishing what is useful, meaningful and necessary and what is idle and unnecessary in imitating and importing foreign cultural elements.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Roland Robertson, “Globalization as a Problem” in: Linda Martin Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta(ed.), *Identities. Race, Class, Gender and Nationality*, Blackwell Publ. Co., 2003, p. 284.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mike Featherston, “Localism, Globalism and Cultural Identity”, pp. 343-59; Roland Robertson, “Globalization as a Problem”, pp. 284-311, in: Linda Martin Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta(ed.), *Op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> We can place also other words in this group such as: shrinking, blending, fusing, interaction, interdependency, internalization, cosmopolitanism, etc.

<sup>4</sup> The words we can also place in this group are: centralization, world unicity, world systemicity, worldism, hegemony, etc.

<sup>5</sup> The expressions frequently used in this context are: hegemony, domination, Western rationality, the third world, colonization, exploitation, neo-

imperialism, neo-liberalism, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Many other words appear in the context of pluralistic globalization, such as, for example, power balance, power struggle, rivalry, clashes, coordination, cooperation, internally homogeneous and externally distinctive and bounded, plurality of national responses, boundaries between the self and others, (monoculturalism) - multiculturalism, (globalization) - deglobalization, indigenization, (wholeness and continuity) - uniqueness, (homogenization) - heterogenization, (integration or homogenization) - fragmentation, localization, (wholeness and continuity) or uniqueness, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of abuse of military power by the more powerful nations are as follows: 1. One-sided claim on the part of the so-called democratic nations for the right of monopolizing nuclear arms for promoting peace and world order. 2. Claim of the right to use military power or to declare war (pre-emptive) without international sanction in the name of self-defence, for combatting terrorism and for world peace, freedom and democracy, etc., discarding any diplomatic measures and solutions (hard power policy instead of soft power policy) 3. Monopoly of arms trade of the

more powerful nations, etc.