

# PRESERVING ASIAN CULTURAL IDENTITIES IN THE FACE OF GLOBALIZATION

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## **Abstract**

*This paper tackles the issues of globalization, cultural identity, and safeguarding Asian cultural identities in face of globalization. It discusses the phenomenon of globalization and its effect on culture, the notion of culture and the multiplicity of the Asian cultural identities. While globalization is more of an economic and technological phenomenon, it has a great effect on culture, especially our Asian cultures. We have definitely gained something positive from globalization, but one possible consequence of globalization is the disintegration of our cultural identities. So one important question that this paper will try to address is: how do we preserve our Asian cultural identities in the face of the globalization? How do we integrate ourselves, without losing our identities in the bigger global society?*

## **I. THE NATURE OF GLOBALIZATION**

### **The Complexity of Globalization**

Globalization is a complex phenomenon, a phenomenon that has affected every aspect of our human life. It has changed our modes of living, modified our attitudes, preferences, values and thinking. In the academic and intellectual field, it has been the subject of spirited debates and discussions; scholarly studies have been conducted on its nature and impact in human life and society, in the various disciplines, most especially in economics, politics, philosophy, sociology, and ecology, among others. At the outset, we can say that it is a concept that transcends individual

disciplines.

But despite this attention, globalization is hardly a well defined concept. According to one author, it is "the most slippery, dangerous and important buzzword of the late twentieth century."<sup>1</sup>

It is slippery because it can have many meanings and be used in many ways. It is dangerous because too often it is used as a powerful and simplistic justification for the endless expansion of unregulated capitalist relations into every part of life in every corner of the globe. It is important because debates about globalization can illuminate a world in which time and space have been so dramatically compressed that distant action in one corner of the globe have rapid and significant repercussions on people and places far away.<sup>2</sup>

Each discipline offers its own views about globalization. For the economist, globalization is essentially the emergence of a global market. For the historian, it is an epoch dominated by global capitalism. For the sociologist, globalization at once underscores the celebration of diversity as well as the convergence of social preferences in matters of lifestyle and social values. For the political scientist, globalization is the gradual erosion of state sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> But while all studies of globalization in the different disciplines do advance a rich and nuanced understanding, each discipline merely explains a part of the phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

According to Martin Albrow<sup>5</sup> globalization refers to all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single and global society. The changes leading to this global society are long in the making and impact on different locations, countries and individuals in a highly uneven manner. But they have increased in scope and intensity, and recently in an accelerating rate.

Globalization can be better understood as a set of mutually reinforcing transformations in economics, politics, society and culture, that are taking place more or less simultaneously. It is quite difficult to really point to a single transformation as the essence of globalization. However, we can at least identify certain components of these transformations.<sup>6</sup>

**The changing concept of space and time.** In the past, peoples, societies and even cultures are contained within fixed borders and territories.

Against this background of fixed territories, maps could be drawn showing "states with clear-cut boundaries and nicely demarcated zones of authority and influence."<sup>7</sup> However, because of globalization, "culture and societies are being squeezed together and driven towards increased mutual interaction, resulting in the compression of the world."<sup>8</sup> As shared forces and exchanges in terms of technological advancement structure our lives, the world is becoming one place and one system. Through the advancement of technical knowledge linked to economic changes, we have come to pass from the exploration of the world through horse-drawn coaches and sail and steamships, to the rapidly shrinking distances and vastly accelerating movement of people, goods and equipment, through aircraft and super-freighters. It is now possible "to measure, divide and map the physical and temporal dimensions of the world into universal, standardized and predictable units."<sup>9</sup>

Time and distance have dwindled in significance as forces shaping human actions; both space and time have become freely available to us to manipulate and control. And with human interaction and communication becoming faster, distance is no longer a problem. With the television and satellite communication, we can experience a rush of images from different places almost simultaneously, collapsing the world events into series of images flashed on television screens.<sup>10</sup> The compression of time and space facilitated by electronic media has put many of the world's inhabitants on the same stage and brought their lives together, so that even people who do not see and know each other personally can interact meaningfully, especially through the Internet. Indeed, the world has not only contracted, it has shrunk!

**Increasing cultural interactions.** Electronic mass communication has propelled the increase in cultural flow around the world in an unprecedented quantities and at great speed and intensity. This increase in "contact between peoples have gradually exposed all humans to the growing flows of cultural meanings and knowledge coming from other sciences."<sup>11</sup> Social relations have been stretched and networks of interaction and interconnectedness have transcended the boundaries of nation-states.<sup>12</sup>

Through the electronic mass media, even those who lack formal

education are able to encounter new ideas and experiences from other cultures. People can obtain full pictures of other lifestyles, especially through the power of visual images conveyed in television and film. People are made conscious of the multicultural world and are given opportunities to participate through different modes in the cultural practices of other people.

**Increasing interconnections and interpenetration.** The fast-expanding interconnections and interdependencies bind localities, countries, social movements professional and other groups and individual citizens, into a dense network of transnational exchanges and affiliation.<sup>13</sup> These networks of transnational exchanges have crossed territorial borders, breaking the cultural and economic self-sufficiency once experienced by nations and as a result societies have extended toward each other. And as social relations are stretched, there is an increasing interpenetrations of economic and social practices, bringing distant cultures and societies face to face with each other both in the local and global levels.<sup>14</sup>

The emergence of transnational actors and organizations like the transnational corporations (TNCs), international non-governmental organization (INGOs), the global social movements (GSMs) and diasporas and stateless peoples, have extended and intensified the interconnections across national borders.<sup>15</sup>

**Synchronization of all dimensions.** All the dimensions of globalization- economic, technological, political, social and cultural, appear to be coming together at the same time, each reinforcing and magnifying the impact of the others.<sup>16</sup> All dimensions of human advancement are flowing like a common stream, intertwining with one another and integrating into one phenomenon.

## **Globalism: The Underlying Philosophy of Globalization**

The phenomenon of globalization is based on the philosophy of globalism which essentially describes the reality of being interconnected. Globalism holds the belief that the world is rapidly integrating in all spheres. It asserts the complex interconnectedness of peoples present and future.

This interconnectedness is becoming the dominant character of our political, cultural, economic - and natural environments; our economic, political and cultural expectations are headed toward convergence.<sup>17</sup>

Globalism brings all people together toward a collective action to solve common problems.

It points to the aspirations for a state of affairs where values are shared by or are pertinent to all the world's more than 5 billion people, their environment, and their role as citizens, consumers or producers with an interest in collective action to solve common problems.<sup>18</sup>

The simplest dimension of this interconnectedness is communication. Today nearly a billion of homes can talk to each other within few seconds. Global positioning technologies can track down with precision any position in the surface of the planet.<sup>19</sup>

However, globalization and globalism in a sense are different. Globalization refers to an underlying process, to the series of objective changes anchored on the interconnectedness of people. Globalism on the other hand refers to our consciousness of the world as a single space, it refers to a subjective feeling of being part of one world, of one humanity.

As a mental frame, globalism has certain major aspects: first, people are now thinking about themselves collectively while identifying with all humanity; the end to one way flows and the growth of multicultural awareness; the empowerment of self-aware social actors; and the broadening of identities.

According to the philosophy of globalism, men are now capable of thinking about themselves collectively as one entity. Our understanding of humanity is extended beyond our affiliation to people of the same ethnic, national and religious identities. Human qualities are now crossing the barriers of caste, class, ethnicity, nationality and religion. Furthermore, it asserts that the long era of one sided cultural and political flows is over, nations and culture are more willing to recognize and accept cultural diversity.<sup>21</sup>

Some writers<sup>22</sup> have also pointed to the growing number of social actors who are empowered to exercise reflexivity in their daily lives. All humans reflect on the consequences of their own and others' actions and

can alter their behavior in response to new information. And as a consequence, social life becomes subject to endless revisions in the face of constantly accumulating knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

And lastly, the consciousness of human interconnectedness is also changing the way we construct our identities and orient ourselves toward life in the world concern. Today, no people nor institutions can avoid contact or knowledge of some cultures. Whether people accept or reject or modify the concepts or values which they encounter from other societies and cultures, that will greatly affect their identities and how they look at their own identities. And sociologists assert that the response to this reality is either by selection, adaptation or resistance.<sup>24</sup>

It is not difficult to realize the extremely intricate interconnectedness of human life across the planet or the oneness of humanity. Its awareness and immediate implications are striking. For example, all of us on planet earth share the same environment. Our awareness of global warming and its causes make us realize that this shared environment link our present and future. While wars and famine may be far from us, we are certainly affected by the constant and never ending conflicts in the Middle East and some parts of Asia, we are greatly affected by the famine in some parts of Africa, a terrorist act in one part of the globe certainly affects everyone. The 9/11 incident affected not only the Americans but the whole world.

## **The Ambiguity of Globalization**

Globalization is not just a complex phenomenon, its effect on human life has been ambiguous. While it may be easy to understand that it is a complex phenomenon anchored on the interconnectedness of people and while we accept the fact that we are indeed interconnected, the effects of globalization on every aspect of human life has divided our thinking, preferences and prejudices. It has divided the opinions of intellectuals and thinkers in the different disciplines, especially as far as its consequences are concerned. There are those who hail and praise the inevitability of globalization, stressing that this will bring about progress and development, and there are also those who dismiss it as another dominant discourse of the powerful and colonizing nations, another form of colonization, signaling

the demise of the weaker societies and cultures.

But one thing is certain, whether we like it or not, it is an inevitable and irreversible process. And while those on the right favor the spread of free markets and investment flows, of the increasing interconnections and interdependence of societies and cultures, there are those on the left that support the emergence of a truly global culture based on the value of multiculturalism and genuine democracy.

It is in this respect, that we see the ambiguity of the character and consequences of globalization. And such ambiguity is better understood by trying to examine the effects of globalization both through the eyes of those who praise it and those who criticize it.

### **In Praise of Globalization**

Those who have faith and interest in globalization see it as a process that seeks to eliminate political and geographical distances between peoples. The two key engines of globalization are the revolution in technology and politico-economic liberalization.<sup>25</sup> By now, everybody recognizes the potential and the promise of the Internet and other forms of electronic mass communication. The World Wide Web has created a virtual reality that has made time and distance irrelevant. In many ways, the chat rooms of today are the factories and cultural hubs of the future.<sup>26</sup> They have virtually eliminated physical, temporal and cultural distances between peoples.

Globalization is also driven by "the integration of economies, the standardization of politics through the domination of international norms and laws over domestic regulation and liberalization."<sup>27</sup> The new environment of liberalization has made it easier, with the help of technologies, to quickly move people, ideas, capital and goods across borders. Globalization in that sense is basically the heightened mobility of ideas, peoples, goods and capital across borders.<sup>28</sup>

For those who favor globalization as a political and economic ideology, it connotes freedom and internationalism, it helps realize the benefits of free trade, like comparative advantage and the division of labor, and it also enhances efficiency and productivity.<sup>29</sup> Like free trade, globalization has an aura of virtue. And just as "freedom" must be good, the trumpeters of globalization favors internationalism and solidarity between

countries, as opposed to nationalism and protectionism, which for them have negative connotations.<sup>30</sup>

### **Globalization: A New Form of Colonization**

While the advocates of globalization welcome its inevitability and expound on its advantages, many consider it as another form of domination of the colonial powers. While its adherents preach the value of the integration of economies and the dissolution of borders among people and societies, this integration and cross-border interaction has taken the form of colonization wherein the stronger discourse and rule are imposed on the weaker ones.

Anthony Giddens takes this position into a more radical view by saying that globalization is another form of Americanization, he wrote:

To many living outside Europe and North America globalization... looks like Westernization - or, perhaps, Americanization, since the US is now the sole superpower, with a dominant economic, cultural and military position in the global order. Many of the most visible cultural expressions of globalization are American, Coca-Cola, McDonalds... a pessimistic view of globalization would consider it largely an affair of the industrial North, in which the developing societies of the South play little or no active part. It would see it as destroying local cultures, widening world inequalities and worsening the lot of the impoverished.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed the boundary-expanding dynamics of globalization, like liberalization and advancement in technology has threatened the less dominant peoples and cultures. The incursions of globalization have undermined their jobs, their national and ethnic interests, their belief systems and communities.

While it anchors itself on the philosophy of globalism, it goes beyond the ideals of globalism, for it does not only stress the interconnectedness of peoples, it pushes for the integration and cooperation of societies and cultures. While integration and cooperation have their own inherent advantages, in the case of globalization they have some negative underpinnings. And any form of integration and cooperation function through the balance of power among the components and participants. And in the case between Western and Eastern or North and South societies

and cultures, there is certainly an imbalance between them. And such imbalance caters to the interest of the dominant Western or Northern cultures and societies.

In the process of globalization the more dominant and powerful societies and cultures will have the tendency and the opportunity to impose themselves upon the less dominant societies and cultures. The process of interconnections and exchanges, in the form of cross-border trades and investment will certainly be economically damaging to the weaker party, or will erode the democratic controls especially in the weaker countries. Hence many consider globalization as an attack on the sovereignty of weaker countries and cultures. In itself, it is another form of colonialism.<sup>32</sup>

We need not look very far, we Asians have been the subjects of the colonizing powers in the past. Because of our colonial past, we lost our right to self-determination, our freedoms and our wealth. Our best lands were seized for colonial tillage. Indigenous communities lost their rights to their lands.

If we look back in our history we can see that colonizing powers, using superior military might forcibly imposed their rule over our peoples, at great cost to us in terms of human lives and suffering and natural ecology. Then they imposed new religions and cultures, which facilitated subjugation by softening our impulse to resist or diluting our desire to free ourselves from colonial clutches.<sup>33</sup>

The colonizing power then set up a colonial administration and brought with them the practices of plantation agriculture, large-scale logging, large-scale mining, and other powerfully destructive technologies, for maximizing exploitation and profits. These unsustainable practices replaced the sustainable indigenous practices our pre-colonial peoples had relied on for centuries.<sup>34</sup>

During this post-colonial period, the role of global capitalists expanded, partly due to internal developments in their home countries, and partly as a counter-response to independence movements and economic nationalism. Having lost direct control, global capitalists sought and became better at indirect control; military aggression was replaced by culture-aggression and economic control. They have lured other developing societies with such pretexts as: "we bring jobs"; "we bring technology"; "we will lend you money for development" and other catchy slogans.<sup>35</sup>

The globalization of recent decades in some societies was never a democratic choice of peoples. The process has been business driven by business strategies and tactics for business ends. Government decisions and actions have been made often in secret without national debate and discussions of where the entire process is taking the society as a whole. This undemocratic process, carried with a democratic façade, is consistent with the distribution of benefits and cost of globalization, and this has served the interest of the elite.<sup>36</sup>

## II. ON CULTURE AND GLOBALIZATION

Social scientists and anthropologists, including philosophers have offered a number of definitions of human culture, reflecting various schools of thought. Edward Burnett Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1871) provided what is considered a classic definition of culture, according to which it includes all capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.<sup>37</sup> It is the "integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behavior. It consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies and other related components."<sup>38</sup>

At the 1982 Mondiacult Conference in Mexico City as well as in the Universal Declaration on cultural diversity, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has tried to reconcile different conceptions of culture by defining it as follows:

in its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.<sup>39</sup>

It is culture that makes us specifically human, our attitudes, values, ideals and beliefs are influenced by our culture and at the same time it is through culture that we express ourselves. UNESCO declared:

It is culture that gives man the ability to reflect upon himself. It is culture that makes us specifically human, rational beings, endowed with a critical judgement and a sense of moral commitment. It is through culture that we discern values and make choices. It is through culture that man expresses himself, becomes aware of himself, recognizes his incompleteness, questions his own achievements, seeks untiringly for new meanings and creates works through which he transcends his limitations.<sup>40</sup>

Every human society has its own particular culture or socio-cultural system which overlaps with other systems. There are variations among cultures and this is attributable not only to physical habitats and resources, but more importantly, to the range of possibilities inherent in various areas of activities, such as language, rituals and customs and the manufacture and use of tools; and to the degree of social development.<sup>41</sup>

All cultures form part of the common heritage of mankind. The cultural heritage of a people includes the works of its artists, architects, musicians, writers and scientists and also the work of other artists, which express the people's spirituality, and the body of values which give meaning to life.<sup>42</sup> It includes both tangible and intangible works through which the creativity of that people finds expression like languages, rites, beliefs, historic places and monuments, literature, works of art, etc.

Culture is not an abstraction, it is a living, open totality that evolves through the constant integration of individual and collective choices that are taken in interaction with other similar wholes. It expresses itself in diverse concrete ways like the arts, literatures, religious practices, without being reducible to mere "works".

There is no such thing as a closed and finished culture. Culture is dynamic, it develops; it grows out of a systematically encouraged reverence for selected customs and habits. The development of culture depends upon human's capacity to learn and adopt new habits and practices and transmit these to succeeding generations. Cultures grow and change from constantly changing interactions, either with nature or with other cultures. Changes within and among cultures may take place not only by means of ecological and environmental changes, but by diffusion of certain advantageous cultural traits among societies at approximately equivalent stages of their cultural development, by acculturation or the acquisition of a foreign culture by a relatively subject people, or by the evolution of

cultural elements over a period of time.

## **Cultural Identity**

Every culture represents a unique and irreplaceable body of values since each people's traditions and forms of expression are its most effective means of demonstrating its presence in the world.<sup>43</sup> UNESCO declared:

Cultural identity is a treasure that vitalizes mankind's possibilities of self-fulfillment by moving every people and every group to seek nurture in its past, to welcome contributions from outside that are compatible with its own characteristics, and so to continue the process of its own creation.<sup>44</sup>

Hence, the assertion of cultural identity contributes to the liberation of peoples. Conversely, any form of domination constitutes a denial or an impairment of that identity.<sup>45</sup>

Many societies, particularly indigenous peoples, view culture as their richest heritage, without which they have no roots, history or soul.<sup>46</sup> Its value is more than monetary. Culture is not just another product like steel, computer parts or any other material merchandise. It cannot be commodified and commercialized, to commodify it is to destroy it. Today, many countries, through funding programs, content regulations and other public policies, have encouraged their own artists and other individuals involved in culture to maintain some space for their own intellectual creations and to protect their cultural heritage from commercialization and exploitation.

## **The Positive Effect of Globalization on Culture**

Depending on which side one is looking from, globalization can be viewed as having either a positive effect or negative effect on culture. For those who favor globalization, although it has economic roots and political consequences, it also has brought into focus the power of culture in this global environment - the power to bind and to divide in a time when the tensions between integration and separation tug at every issue that is relevant to international relations.<sup>47</sup>

According to those who favor globalization, the homogenizing influences of globalization that are most often condemned by the new nationalists and by cultural romanticists are actually positive; globalization promotes integration and the removal not only of cultural barriers but of many of the negative dimensions of culture. Therefore, globalization is a vital step toward both a more stable world and better lives for the people in it.<sup>48</sup> Globalization promotes inter-cultural exchanges, it expands cultures and allows them to introduce and promote themselves in the global stage. Through the different cultural exchanges, cultures can benefit from one another.

### **Negative Effect of Globalization on Culture**

On the other hand, there are those who stressed the negative effect of globalization on culture. Globalization commodifies culture and reduces it to pure economics and business.

Global cultural homogenization which is sweeping the world is threatening local cultures. Dominated by US and Western values and lifestyles, driven by a consumer-based, free-market ideology and carried through the massive US entertainment-industrial complex, the global monoculture has infiltrated every corner of the Earth.<sup>49</sup>

Artisans from minorities are complaining that together with each endangered craft are centuries of songs, expressions and lifestyles that are part of an artisan's creative environment. Economic globalization has threatened the cultural identities especially of less dominant cultures and the diversity of cultures in the world. Globalization is a serious challenge to cultural identity. The world has ceased to be spiritual, it has become commercial.

Culture has been transformed into a business. The entertainment-industrial complex, sees culture as a business - a very big business that should be fiercely advanced through international trade agreements.<sup>50</sup>

And for many countries which feel the deadening and harmonizing impacts of economic globalization, protecting cultural diversity has become as important a fight as preserving biodiversity.

### **III. ASIAN CULTURE**

Asia comprises nearly one-third of the world's land area and about three-fifths of its population. The continent includes the two most populous countries, China and India which together account for more than a third of all people. The Asians are the most diversified of all people and the cultural diversity of Asia is greater than that of any continent.

#### **Common Characteristics**

Despite the diversity in terms of ethnic origins, cultures, religions and languages Asians share some common characteristics. Asians are deeply spiritual people, they acknowledge their close relationship and affinity with the divine and spiritual being. They are more inclined towards the spiritual rather than the material. Life is understood, lived in relation to the spiritual, and human life is evaluated in terms of man's relationship with the Divine. The fullness of life is not realized here in this world but in the after life, so, while the world is important, it is more important to direct one's life toward the beyond, toward the after life.

Asians are deeply religious, every aspect of human life is given or acquires some religious meaning and roots. Religion becomes the outward expression of their deep spirituality; it is the manifestation of the Asians total surrender and obedience to the Divine.

These deep spirituality and religiosity are complemented by the Asian peoples inwardness, they are inward looking. Asians have the common tendency to look into their inner selves, through introspection and meditation. While material possessions are important, the purification of the inner self or the soul, is much more important. And lastly, Asians share a great affinity and respect for nature. Nature is the source of life and therefore must be preserved. Nature is something that should not be controlled or manipulated. Asians would rather commune and be one with nature.

But although Asians share the same values and outlook in life, they differ in expressions, they differ in terms of how they manifest these

values and outlook in life. Hence there is diversity and multiplicity of cultural expressions, in religious practices and rituals, in languages, in artistic expressions and works, in literatures, in music, and many others. These different expressions give rise to cultural diversity and the multiplicity of cultural identities of Asians.<sup>51</sup> The cultural diversity of Asians is manifested in the diversity of language and religion, in art and literature, in cuisine and music.

## **Language and Religion**

Asian cultural diversity is first manifested in the Asian languages which are divided into eight main language groups namely, Turkic, Slavic, Tungusic, Chinese, Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan, Iranian and Mongol. Aside from these major language groups, there are more than one hundred small-ethnic-group languages.<sup>52</sup>

Aside from linguistic diversity, Asians are also diverse in terms of religion. Asia is the birthplace of all major and some minor religions of the world. Like all disseminated cultural expressions, Asian religions may be considered geographically in terms of both their places of origin and distribution.

In South Asia, originated Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. Hinduism which is the oldest of the religions originating from this region, is a polytheistic and ritualistic system comprising of numerous cults and sects. It remains as the unifying force of Indian culture and the social-caste system. Jainism and Buddhism emerged in reaction to prevailing Hindu practices in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, respectively. Although Jainism never spread significantly beyond two present-day states of northwestern India, its principles of non-violence and asceticism have deeply influenced Indian thought. Buddhism arose in northeastern India as a universal alternative to hierarchical religion, offering nirvana or eternal bliss to individuals regardless of culture or social status. In the centuries following its foundation, it gave rise to two main divergent schools - Theravada, which claimed the most ancient traditions and Mahayana, which held its teachings to be the fullest account of Buddha's message. The monastically oriented Theravada predominates today in Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia,

while the more liberal Mahayana with its proliferation of philosophical schools and sects had an immeasurable impact on China, Japan and Korea. Tantrism an esoteric form of Buddhism predominates in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Mongolia. Another religion, Sikhism, a monotheistic Indian religion which was founded by Punjab in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century AD, has fueled the region's modern demand for independence.

Southwest Asia is the cradle of three great monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Judaism, founded in the eastern Mediterranean region some 4,000 years ago posits a covenant relationship with God and mankind. Most Asian Jews are now in Israel, although there are other small Jewish communities in other areas of the continent and other parts of the world. Christianity, which started as a movement within Judaism, was founded by Jesus Christ emphasizing salvation of the soul through the observance of the law and the teachings of Christ. In the course of 2,000 years it has become the most widespread of the world's religions, predominating in Europe and the European derived cultures. It is practiced by sizeable minorities in many Asian countries and by a Roman Catholic majority in the Philippines.

Islam dominates as the state religion of most Southwest Asian countries, and has by far the largest number of adherents in Asia. From the Arabian Peninsula where it was founded in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, Islam spread through the Middle East, into Central Asia and across the southern part of the continent to Indonesia. The majority of Asian Muslims belong to the orthodox Sunnite branch, except in Iran and Iraq where the majority are the more esoteric Shi'ite branch. Muslims constitute important minority populations in India and China. Among the other religions that developed in Southwest Asia is Zoroastrianism, an ancient religion founded in Persia and still survives in Iran and India.

In East Asia, ancient Chinese religious and philosophical traditions survive in the form of two main schools, Taoism and Confucianism, both of which originated in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The two schools differ in orientation - Taoism stressing mystical experience and the individual's harmony with nature and Confucianism emphasizing the duty of the individual in society and government. Both have profoundly influenced Chinese and Chinese derived cultures. Shinto encompasses the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Japanese people. Its principles linking

sacred power, ritual observance and imperial nationhood remain unique to Japanese culture, although some of its practices has absorbed the influences of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism.

#### **IV. PRESERVING ASIAN CULTURAL IDENTITIES**

While globalization, as we have shown have certain positive effects on our lives in general, and in particular to culture, we also have to be wary and cautious about its negative effects and implications on our cultures and societies. There is a need to preserve our Asian culture which is based on the multiplicity of Asian identities.

But the big question is, how do we preserve our Asian cultural identities in the face of the globalization? How do we integrate ourselves, without losing our identities in the bigger global society? I propose certain guiding principles and counter measures to preserve our cultural identities as we engage and integrate ourselves in the global society.

##### **Guiding Principles**

These principles serve as framework for our task of coping with globalization and preserving our cultural identities. The ambiguity of the effects of globalization on culture is such that it can on the one hand promote and revive some cultural practices, or on the other hand threaten these cultural practices (either their very existence or their meaning to the people). Through aggressive and skillful advertising, brochures and films, it is easy to attract tourists and promote local cultures.<sup>53</sup> But tourism, could either have a positive or a negative effect on local cultures.

The business of selling and promoting local cultures for economic gain, along with the influx of growing numbers of foreign tourists, could threaten to degrade the very cultural identities which attracted the visitors in the first place. The shared ancient meanings, religious beliefs and established social relations attached to these cultural practices, which enable the people to know who they are and take pride in where they belong, could disintegrate. And these local ethos could be replaced by a socially

divisive and materialist ethos. Hence exposure to commercial apparatuses may be damaging to local traditional cultures and may lead to further commercialization and cultural exploitation.

On the other hand, a tourism that is sensitive to culture may help to preserve the local culture. Instead of destroying local cultural meanings and social relationships, some local and international tourists are also sensitive to the cultural meanings of these practices. These types of tourists are proactive, reflexive, sensitive to the local needs and motivated primarily by the search for authentic traditions.

### **Cultural Security**

It is in this respect that any cultural exchange should be guided by the principle of cultural security. Cultural security is defined here as:

"the capacity of a society to conserve its specific character in spite of changing conditions and real or virtual threats: more precisely, it involves the permanence of traditional schemas of language, culture, associations, identity and national or religious practices, allowing for changes that are judged to be acceptable.<sup>54</sup>

Cultural security protects culture from commercialization and exploitation and helps preserve the meaning and values of local cultures in the face in the midst of global cultural exchanges.

### **Cultural Pluralism**

We Asians are a culturally diverse people, so is the rest of the world. Cultural pluralism is a principle that gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity. As we recognize the right of each people and cultural community to affirm and preserve its cultural identity and have it respected by others, we must also recognize the equality and dignity of all cultures. No culture should dominate and dictate to the other, no culture should regard the others as inferior to other cultures. No culture can claim that it is the universal culture and therefore must be followed by others. Cultural pluralism is the recognition and respect for the different cultures of the world.

Though cultures are embodied in particular identities that should not hinder the quest for common values, there are common values that are inherent in each culture, values that may be considered as universal. Universality however, is not synonymous with uniformity. Each culture is an effort to reach the universal, but no culture can claim that it has a monopoly on it. To some extent, every culture is represented in the others.<sup>55</sup>

The defining objective of the preservation of cultural identities and cultural pluralism is "the defense of individual and collective freedom to choose while respecting universal values, affirming rights to difference."<sup>56</sup>

### **Balanced Cultural Dialogue**

No culture has ever been isolated and none will ever be so. The cultural identity of a people is renewed and enriched through contact with the traditions and values of others. Culture is dialogue, the exchange of ideas and experience and the appreciation of other values and traditions; it withers and dies in isolation.<sup>57</sup>

But no cultural dialogue or interconnection can succeed when inequalities are too great or when it is controlled by the most powerful. While globalization has facilitated intercultural exchanges it has also created deeply unequal conditions for such exchanges.

Any meaningful cultural exchange should be based on a balanced cultural dialogue, wherein each culture is respected and treated as equal. The principle of cultural pluralism, we mentioned above involves, defending "the basic conditions for dialogue among cultures that accept each other as equal in dignity and are able to question themselves about their values, practices and adaptation to contemporary global conditions."<sup>58</sup> A balanced cultural dialogue denounces domination, control and manipulation of other cultures. It promotes respect and understanding among cultures. In a balanced cultural dialogue, every participant is heard and respected, and it allows cultures to question each other.

### **Democratic and Social Participation**

Social participation is essential to dialogue. Participation takes place both within the society, wherein the individuals are the participants and among societies, wherein individual societies comprise the global society. Whether within society or among societies, participation should

always be democratic.

Within the society, individuals should be given the opportunity to fully participate in the society especially in matters that affect his person and life. According to the UNESCO, cultural democracy is based on the broadest possible participation by the individual and society in the creation of cultural goods, in decision-making concerning cultural life and in the dissemination and enjoyment of culture.<sup>59</sup> The participation of all individuals in cultural life requires the elimination of inequalities based on social background and status, education, nationality, age, language, sex, religious beliefs, health or the fact of belonging to ethnic, minority or fringe groups.<sup>60</sup>

Applying this reasoning to the international or global level, or the global society, every individual society then within the global society must be given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making especially in those matters that affect its own integrity and dignity and its standing in the global society. Participation in international affairs must be based on respect for cultural identity, recognition of the dignity and value of all cultures and societies, national independence and sovereignty, and non-intervention.<sup>61</sup> Cultural exchanges then must be based on a climate of respect, confidence, dialogue and peace among societies.

## **Counter Measures**

What we have presented so far are general principles meant to provide us with a mental framework in our task of preserving our Asian cultural identities in the face of globalization. In a more concrete approach we need to institute certain counter measures in order to give these principles some flesh.

### **Strong National Consciousness**

Nationalism is one national anchor which people can use to preserve their sense of national community, which globalization seeks to eradicate. "Without a strong sense of national consciousness, we cannot confront the ideology of globalization."<sup>62</sup> With a strong sense of nationalism we can take pride of our own identities and culture, and be critical of the various ideas and prescriptions by other cultures by examining their impact

especially the negative ones on the local economic, social, political and cultural realities.

Because of our colonial past, we Asians are often burdened with the baggage of colonial thinking, which to some extent, has been translated into total dependence and uncritical acceptance of colonial ideas and prescriptions. We have to think in terms of our cultures and our identities.

We Asians have to discover and rediscover the products of the Asian minds, we need to build links with each other in a common effort of making our authentic Asian voices be heard in the global stage. We have a glorious past and there is certainly no lack of Asian genius in every field of human endeavor. All we need is a popularization and appreciation of our diverse cultural identities in our region where they are rooted, and then eventually in the whole world.<sup>63</sup>

### **Critical Awareness**

While we maintain a strong national consciousness, especially of our particular cultures, we need also to develop a critical awareness of what is going on around us. We cannot confine and lock up ourselves within the borders of our communities and societies, and reject everything that we encounter from the outside. We need to go out and cross borders and engage in dialogue with other cultures and societies.

But while we become aware of the many changing facets and aspects of our lives, we need to develop a critical awareness of our ever changing world. Not everything that we encounter and see in the other cultures or societies will be to our advantage or benefit. We need to evaluate and question the impact and consequences of those things, concepts and practices that we encounter in other cultures in our lives. While we try to preserve and store our cultural practices for posterity and for linkage with our past, we need to avoid those that can harm our identities and incorporate those things that can enhance our identities without compromising our dignity.

### **Appreciation and Preservation of Cultural Heritage**

Our Asian cultural heritage expresses our own identities, it expresses our inner spirituality and the body of values that give meaning to

our life. And it is usually our cultural heritage that suffers damage or destruction as a result of urbanization, industrialization and commercialization. Any form of colonialism, in the past or in the present imposes alien values which could obliterate our links with our past and erase our memory of our noble past. Everyday we are bombarded with different works of art, music, dances, and other literatures from other cultures. While we show appreciation and respect to them, we must also give preference to our own Asian arts, music, practices and literatures.

We Asians need to preserve and appreciate our cultural heritage, if there is someone who must appreciate and preserve the Asian cultural heritage, it is the Asian. Preserving our cultural heritage is one way of defending our sovereignty and independence, and affirming our cultural identities. We are recognized as Asians through our values, works, arts, beliefs, literature, practices and other forms of self expressions.

### **Promote National or Ethnic Language**

The use of national language is a way of asserting the unique Asian way of thinking and living. Language is the expression of culture and the embodiment of national power.<sup>64</sup> The first thing that dominant societies impose on the weaker ones to soften their resistance is to impose their own language and render the local language useless in the global stage. National language asserts a distinct identity and clear sense of nationhood, hence its value is not only the past, it is more important in contemporary times.

While globalization favors English, our own local languages "are more than adequate for purposes of communication and culture, and can be developed further for highly scientific and technical purposes. As expressions of our unique cultures, our local languages are invaluable for their continued vitality."<sup>65</sup> It is necessary to encourage the use of Asian languages to communicate knowledge and share ideas and insights, and to develop interpersonal relations.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

While globalization is understood more as an economic and

technological phenomenon, it is undeniable that it has a homogenizing effect on culture. Through ideological and technological apparatuses the more dominant discourse can take control of the consciousness of the less dominant peoples and races. And one of the first casualties of this hegemony is culture, and when culture is threatened, the cultural identity of peoples and races are also threatened.

We Asians have definitely benefited from the advancement of technology and knowledge brought about by globalization, but we also have to be alarmed of the onslaught of the hegemony of globalization against our culture. While we have been subjected to colonization in the past, we cannot allow ourselves to be swept by yet another wave of colonization in the name of globalization. We Asians are heirs to a glorious past and heritage, our history is inspired by our gallant ancestors who struggled for independence from the colonizers and preserved our identity and dignity.<sup>66</sup> There is a need to preserve our Asian culture which is based on the multiplicity of Asian identities.

We need to assert our Asian culture based on the multiplicity of Asian identities, this is a significant step in facing globalization and in meeting the other cultures on equal footing. And with the reflowering of Asian cultural and intellectual life, we Asians can rekindle our sense of dignity and our cultural identities.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> David Held. ed. *A Globalizing World? Culture, Economics, Politics*. London: Routledge & The Open University, 2000, p.12, quoting John Wiseman in *Global Nation? Australia and the Politics of Globalization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Wiseman quoted by Held. Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Muqtedar Khan. "Teaching Globalization." in *Globalist*, August 28, 2003. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/define/2003/0828teaching.htm>. accessed June 30, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Khan . Khan further adds that globalization must be approached from a multidisciplinary perspective.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Albrow, *Globalization, Knowledge and Society: an Introduction*, 1990. quoted by Cohen, Robin & Kennedy, Paul. *Global Sociology*. New York: Palgrave, 2000, p.24.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Cohen & Kennedy pp.24-34.

<sup>7</sup> Held., p.3.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen & Kennedy., p.24 quoting Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>10</sup> In fact we can go beyond the boundaries of the planet Earth and observe the outer space. One can imagine the voyage of the Cassini-Huygens to the planet Saturn which is 1.5 billion kilometers from the Earth, yet the voyager can transmit radio signal in 84 minutes. Source: Time Magazine.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen & Kennedy., p.27.

<sup>12</sup> Held. Ibid., p.16.

<sup>13</sup> Cohen & Kennedy p.29.

<sup>14</sup> Held, p.16.

<sup>15</sup> The TNCs are the most powerful economic agents of the globalization because of their global power and reach. The TNCs account for half of the largest economies in the world. The INGOs are autonomous organizations which are not accountable to governments nevertheless act as powerful forces in social world affairs and issues, like poverty, peace, labor, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Cohen & Kennedy., p.33.

<sup>17</sup> Khan. Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> James Rosenau. "The Complexities and Contradictions of Globalization." *Current History*. Vol 96 no. 613. Nov 1997. p.361.

<sup>19</sup> Geoff Mulgan. *Connexity: Responsibility, Freedom, Business and Power in the New Century*. London: Vintage, 1998, p.19.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Cohen & Kennedy, pp.35-39.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>22</sup> Anthony Giddens (1990), and Beck.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen & Kennedy, p.36.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Cohen & Kennedy. p.38. We may select from the global only that which pleases us and then alter it so that it becomes embedded in and accommodating to local conditions and needs (glocalization). Our growing knowledge of the global may heighten our awareness of the local and may intensify our feelings of loyalty to it, thus it allows the possibility of participating both in the global and local simultaneously. Some religious or ethnic groups may become antipathetic to other cultures and may resist incorporation in the global sphere.

<sup>25</sup> Khan

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Edward Herman. *The Threat of Globalization*. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/define/hermantk.htm>. May 5, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Anthony Giddens. "Runaway World, The BBC Reith Lectures," London:

BBC Radio4, BBC Education, 1999, quoted by David Held, *A Globalizing World? Culture, Economics, Politics*. London: Routledge & The Open University. 2000, p.12.

<sup>32</sup> Roberto Verzola. "Globalization: The Third Wave." <http://www.corpwatch.org/issues/PID.jsp?articleid=1569>. May 5, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. However, our people inspired by the desire to preserve their identity and dignity struggled for independence against this wave of colonization. Many of these independence struggles were eventually resolved through successful armed revolutions.

<sup>35</sup> Verzola.

<sup>36</sup> Herman.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted from the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Culture may also be viewed in terms of components patterns, like cultural traits, and in terms of institutional structures and functions, like social organization, economic systems, education, religion and belief, customs and laws. The study of culture may be subdivided into the study of non-urban culture as compared to modern urban culture and the study of tribal societies as compared to modern industrial society.

<sup>38</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica.

<sup>39</sup> UNESCO Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, World Conference on Cultural Policies Mexico City, 26 July - 6 August 1982. [http://www.unesco.org/culture/laws/mexico/html\\_eng/page1.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/culture/laws/mexico/html_eng/page1.shtml). June 30, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

<sup>42</sup> UNESCO Mexico Conference.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Maude Barlow. "The Global Monoculture: 'Free Trade' Versus Culture and Democracy." *Earth Island Journal*. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/cultural/2001/1001mono.htm>. May 5, 2004.

<sup>47</sup> David Rothkopf. "In Praise of Cultural Imperialism? Effects of Globalization on Culture." <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/cultural/globcult.htm>. May 5, 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Barlow. Barlow also added that in China, Latin America, the Pacific Region, South America, Africa and the industrialized world, young people want Nike sneakers, Gap clothes, Michael Jordan T-shirts, the latest CDs, Hollywood blockbuster movies, American television and mass-market books. Around the world, North American corporate culture is destroying local tradition, knowledge, skills, artisans and values.

<sup>50</sup> Like the World Trade Organization (WTO), combines giant telecommunications companies, cable companies and the Internet, working

together in a complex web.

<sup>51</sup> The whole of Asia represents ethnic types and linguistic systems that have evolved over long periods of time in separated regional homelands, as well as repeated patterns of modification and intermixture. These modifications are brought about either by ecological changes, or by peaceful and militant migration resulting to either diffusion or acculturation. Some Asian territories have become highly diversified ethnic and linguistic mosaics in which there are mixed and overlapping elements.

<sup>52</sup> In the Philippines for example, there are 172 listed languages, 169 are living, 3 are extinct.

<sup>53</sup> In the Philippines one of the tourism thrusts of the government is eco-tourism, which try to promote the tourist spots of the country especially in the countryside.

<sup>54</sup> Tardif, Jean. "Intercultural Dialogues and Cultural Security." *Planet Agora*. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/cultural/2002/09intercultural.htm>. May 5, 2004.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> UNESCO Mexico Conference.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> UNESCO Mexico Conference.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Renato Constantino, *The Invisible Enemy: Globalization and Maldevelopment*. Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1997. p.117.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.130.

<sup>64</sup> Constantino, p.133.

<sup>65</sup> Constantino, p.133.

<sup>66</sup> Constantino, p.129.

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