

Nom del diàleg: Diàleg orient – occident
Data: 2 Juliol
Sessió: “Ètica i globalització: valors globals, valors locals”

Ponent: Ambrose King



In Quest of World Order in An Age of Globalization

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I. Globalization and New Phase of “Encounters between Civilizations”

Arnold Toynbee in the middle of 20th century wrote:-

“Future historians will say, I think, that the great event of the Twentieth Century was the impact of the western civilization upon all other living societies and the world today”,¹ Again in 1952, he wrote:

“The encounter between the world and the West may well prove, in retrospect, to be the most important event in modern history.”²

The explanation why the title of his book was *The World and West* instead of “The West and the World”, Toynbee said “It has not been the West that has been hit by the world; it is the world that has been hit – and hit hard – by the West, and that is why, in the title of this books, the world has been put first.”³

Indeed, in the case of China, the “hermit kingdom” was hit hard by the West, and China was compelled to open doors under the gunboat of the West. The “encounters between civilizations” China experienced in 19th century was nothing short of disaster and a national humiliation. Facing the unprecedent challenges from the West, China willingly or not, started her long revolution of modernization, strongly motivated by a desire to quest for wealth and power, to catch up with the West and to assert national autonomy and independence. True enough, China’s early modernization was inescapably being westernization since what China tried to achieve in modernization was to absorb substantial elements of western civilizations. Huntington observed:-

“initially, westernization and modernization are closely linked, with the non-western society absorbing substantial elements of western culture and making slow progress toward modernization. As the pace of modernization increases, however, the rate of westernization declines and the indigenous culture goes through revival.”⁴

Therefore, he writes, “modernization, instead, strengthens those cultures and reduces the relative power of the west in fundamental ways. The world is more modern and less

¹ Civilization on Trial, (N.Y. Meriden Books, 1945, p.189)

² The World and the West, (N.Y. Meriden Books, 1952), preface

³ Ibid, p.235.

⁴ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order* (N.Y. Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp.75-76.

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western”.⁵ What is truly phenomenal is that most, if not all, non-western societies which was “hard hit” by the West, have all willy-nilly engaged in modernization, one form or another, in the Twentieth Century. It is no exaggeration to say what has been happening before our eyes is a world revolution of modernization. And the global modernization is coincided with the emergence of globalization.

Globalization is not new, but thanks to informative technology and trade liberalization, the level of interdependence and scope of penetration in today’s globalization is unprecedented in human history: In the midst of globalization, traditional boundaries, mental and physical, have been constantly deconstructed and reconstructed, contested and recreated⁶, leading to a whole set of new problems and challenges. Globalization is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Not without reasons, economic globalization is the focal point of global attention and contention, and there is no shortage of advocates and critics.⁷ However, in deeper sense, what makes today’s globalization so contentious and problematic lies more in its globalizing trends in cultural realms of the world. According to Arjun Appadurai, the central problem of today’s global interactions is “the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenizations”.⁸ It is in the context of globalization and global modernization, the “encounters between civilizations”, to use Toynbee’s words, has entered into a new phase of world history.

II. Multiple Modernities and civilizational diversity

In the above, I have pointed out that globalization is coincided with the development of global modernization. Speaking on the relationship between modernity and globalization, a leading student of globalization notes, globality “is not so much a cause as a condition of modernization, and more specifically a condition of divergent modernizations⁹. Goran Therborn, a Swedish sociologist, wisely advises, Globalization “must not imply any great unifier of the globe”. He not only argues that there are multiple routes to and through modernity, but also that “there is another global challenge, a challenge to comparative studies, to a de-westernized, de-centred conception of the global, to grasp the diversity of the modern world”¹⁰. Indeed, in the globalizing process of modernity, what has emerged is not that a western modernity globalized, but a world of multiple modernities with civilizational diversity. Paradoxically, globalization has not generated a global cultural homogeneousness but

⁵ Ibid, p.78.

⁶ See Joseph Chan & Bryce McIntyre, eds, *In Search of Boundaries: Communicating Nation-States and Cultural Identities*, London: Ablex Publishing, 2002.

⁷ See “Globalization and Its Critics: A Survey of Globalization”, *The Economist*, Sept 29, 2004.

⁸ A. Appadurai, “Dis? And Difference in the Global Economy”, *Public Culture*, 1990, 2(2), p.5.

⁹ R. Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, London: Sage Publications, 1992.

¹⁰ G. Therborn, “Routes to/through modernity”, in *Global Modernities*, M. Featherstone, S. Lash & R. Robertson, eds, London: Sage Publications, 1995, p.137.

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instead a heightened consciousness of both the global and the local. Ronald Robertson has coined the concept of “glocalization” to make points about the global-local problematic.¹¹ In my view, the concept of “glocalization” illustrates well the dynamics of globalization and global modernization. On the one hand, various features of western modernity have spread to the non-western world, thus, a seemingly homogenous global culture is in the making. On the other hand, non-western societies at the same time have become increasingly conscious of searching for their own cultural identities and traditions and their own way to modernize. The wide spread of Enlightenment values, such as freedom, equality and justice, cannot be taken to mean that a single modern civilization is already in place. What we witness in the globalizing world is the emergence of multiple modernities and diverse civilizations. Ronald Inglehart and Wyane Baker, using data from three waves of world value surveys, which include 65 societies and 75 percent of the world’s populations, find evidence of both massive cultural changes and the persistence of distinctive cultural traditions. In the report on their study, Inglehart and Baker states:

What we witness with the development of a global economy is not increasing uniformity, in the form of a universalization of western culture, but rather the continuation of civilizational diversity through the active reinvention and reincorporation on non-western civilizational patterns [.....]. But values seem to be path dependent: a history of protestant or orthodox or Islamic or Confucian tradition gives rise to cultural zones with distinctive value systems that persist after controlling for the effects of economic development. Economic development tends to push societies in a common direction, but rather than converging, they seem to move on parallel trajectories shaped by their cultural heritage.¹²

Inglehart & Baker’s findings of historically anchored “cultural zones” provide good testimony to the emergence of multiple modernities and to the persistence of civilizational diversity as was expounded recently by Samuel Huntington’s book on the clash of civilizations. In a deep and broad sense, the defining feature of globalization is cultural pluralism, not cultural universalism.

III. Global Order and Global Ethics

Globalization has precipitated a growing world-wide interconnectedness of economies, cultures and societies, but it has not created a global society or a global civilization. In a significant way, globalization or global modernization has not made the world

¹¹ R. Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity - Heterogeneity”, in *Global Modernities*, M. Featherstone, S Lash & R Robertson eds., op cit., pp.25-44.

¹² Ronald Inglehart & Wayne E Baker, “Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values, *American Sociological Review* 2000, Vol.25 (Feb, 19-51), pp.22-49.

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culturally homogenizing; instead, it has created what is termed a “condition of post-modernity which thinks of globalization in terms of the “multiplicity and diversity” of global cultures.¹³ Indeed, the world is “becoming increasingly pluralistic, or polytheistic, a world with many competing gods.” The foundations and value complex of western modernity is increasingly relativized, Featherstone argues, “It is no longer as easy for western nations to maintain the superiority of adopting a “civilizational mission” toward the rest of the world”, instead, the rest of the world “are increasingly speaking back to the West and along with the relative decline of western power it has required that the west has increasingly been forced to listen”¹⁴. Indeed, for a long period, the voice of the “rest” has been suppressed by the western dominance. Jean-Francois Lyotard states that the grand narratives of philosophy and social theory do violence to non-western cultures. For him, all modern emancipatory narratives are distasteful precisely because they are implicated in the process whereby “other cultures” are dominated and then destroyed by the advance of the west. In particulars, they do so by means of their “cosmopolitan” nature, by which all localisms are dissolved into universalism¹⁵. It is now more and more a recognized fact that in the globalizing world, increasingly there is a need for inter-civilizational interactions, and increasingly there is a need for the west to recognize the existence of the “other” cultures. Gianni Vattimo, an Italian Philosopher, writes that:

“Today, when for better or for worse, these ‘other’ cultures have gained the right to speak – above all the Islamic culture with pressure, political and otherwise on the west – we can no longer ignore the problem of the relation between the ‘observer’ and the ‘observed’. The dialogue with difference cultures is finally become a true dialogueThe question today is rather truly exercise this dialogue beyond a purely descriptive position”¹⁶.

The importance of a true dialogue among cultures/civilizations cannot be over exaggerated. However, a true dialogue can occur only when there is genuine respect for other culture/civilizations. The Club of Rome argued well in its *First Global Revolution* that unless humankind is capable of tolerating and accommodating cultural differences and plurality, there is no possibility to have a global society¹⁷. What is badly needed in today’s globalizing world is a global ethic or what is called “cosmopolitan virtue”¹⁸. A global ethic which is the moral foundation for world order should be based upon the recognition that, “pluralism must be a constitutive features of

¹³ B Smart, *Facing Modernity*, London, Sage Publications, 1999, pp.19, 32-33.

¹⁴ M. Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity*, London: Sage Publications, 1995, p.13.

¹⁵ Lyotard’s views are cited in Joel S. Kahan, *Culture, Multiculture, Post-culture*, London: Sage Publications, 1995, p.8.

¹⁶ G. Vattimo, “Hermeneutics as Koine”, in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol.5, no.2-3, June, 1998, p.401.

¹⁷ Club of Rome, *The First Global Revolution*, A Next Book, 1992.

¹⁸ B.S. Turner & Chris Rejeck, *Society & Culture*, London, Sage Publications, 2001, p.213.

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the global system and has to be legitimized as such”¹⁹. Theodore Von Lane, in his important book *The World Revolution of Westernization*, argues against the blind conviction of a self-centered cultural superiority, and appeals to the virtue of humility by saying, “All must humbly strive to transcend their inherited cultural limitations and search for more inclusive human bonds,”²⁰ True enough, in order to be able to establish more inclusive human bonds, a good respect of the existence and value of the “others” is a compelling necessity. The basic canon of global ethic is nothing but “respect of others (or other cultures/civilizations)”. “Respect of others” is indeed a necessary condition for creating a true dialogue between different cultures/civilizations.

While maintaining and defending one’s cultural identity is something entirely understandable, an undue fetishization of one’s cultural values will certainly do no good for world peace. In a pluralistic global system, there is no room for ethno culturalism, whatever form it may be, and unilateralism in a dehomogenizing and dehegemonizing world is a sure course for global disaster. Speaking reflectively on the role of United States in Latin America in the twenties of last century, Franklin Roosevelt stated. “We are exceedingly jealous of our own sovereignty and it is only right we should respect a similar feeling among other nations.”²¹ Indeed, “respect of others”, as the basic canon of global ethic, is something that we cannot afford not to have, if we are determined to pursue a minimally-achievable world order in an age of globalization with civilizational pluralism.

¹⁹ R. Robertson, *Globalization*, op.cit., p.75.

²⁰ Theodore von Lane, *The World of Revolution of Westernization*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, pp.315-316.

²¹ Roosevelt’s words are cited in Karl E. Myer’s “The Perils of Interventionism”, *Newsweek*, April 12, 2004, p.23.