

Under A Globalized World: What Should be Done?*

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*Globalization is not something we can hold off or turn off
it is economic equivalent of a force of nature – like winds
or water*

Bill Clinton

ABSTRACT

Globalization is an unstoppable phenomenon. It is hard to avoid it having the fact that under the existing open and interdependent world, no single country or even community can avoid it. As a consequence, indeed, under such circumstance any single actor is not free from any penetrating element of globalization. Normatively, this condition made countries and local community to be critically aware of any potential threat carried by globalization by identifying the features of globalization. However, sadly speaking, it is rare to be the case particularly in developing countries. Because globalization is an avoidable phenomenon it is arguably reasonable to say that any country or local community should be able to manipulate it for their sustainable existence, otherwise they become the loser which have no origin identities.

Globalization has been widely spreading out all over the world. As being a very contemporary phenomenon, it is unstoppable and even unavoidable. In terms of economy, for example, no single country or even person can escape from it, in which their daily needs at its all areas are penetrating by global products. Similarly, in terms of intangible aspects such as thoughts, ideologies and values, globalization has also been simply facilitating them to penetrating every single local community due to the availability of easy transportation and modern communication devices. State border thus seems to be significantly lessening to filter all those elements, both the tangible and intangible ones. In other words, globalization can no longer be said as something out there, but indeed, it presents surrounding us and even conditions our daily life.

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However, in order to knowing the derived impacts of globalization is relatively uneasy due to the fact that globalization is multi-facet the phenomenon. There are several meanings that are commonly used to represent empirical facts (Baylis and Smith, 2001:14-16). One of the definitions is internationalization referring the increasing cross-border transactions of various goods. The other connotation is liberalization, meanings the process of removal of any economic restriction in order to allowing free trade to be materialized globally. Globalization can also refer to the globalized items and human experiences in which any person could find similar or at least identical object or incident in different corners of the world. Furthermore, globalization is also often seen as a process which allows a homogeneous world culture, in which social life presumably leads to being intensively Westernized or Americanized.

Having such various meanings, diverse standings are thus attendance. They are different in viewing globalization with its own reasons dealing with the process and the consequences of it. Conceptually, there are at least two contrasting views on the globalization phenomenon (Jackson and Sorensen, 1999:176-190). The first is the Liberal perspective. This standpoint sees globalization is something unavoidable, positive and even economically valuable. This view optimistically assumes that globalization, with its various forms, is unprecedented phenomenon and it would bring significant prosperity for human beings involving individual, community and enterprises.

However, not all agree upon such a point of view. The second perspective, called the mercantilist one, quarrels with previous one. Unlike the Liberal standing, the latter outlook in contrast embraces a pessimistic view on the process of globalization. This perceives the process, such as economic globalization, is not a unique phenomenon as it basically has been occurring since a long time ago. The only difference between the past globalization and the contemporary one is only its gradation. Additionally, this standpoint is also critical on the widely spread assumption that is embarking from the Liberal viewpoint.

In terms of world economy, for example, the Liberal confidently assumes that the existing economy is on the right track in achieving world prosperity. The

increasing free trade area, which is based on the chance equality, is seen to be progressive in facilitating materialization of economic welfare. However, the mercantilist totally disagrees with it for a number of reasons. The adoption of equality principle, instead of equity, is not friendly to the majority of developing countries which generally are not ready to engage in economic competition, a key word in the currently economic globalization. It is not surprising, therefore, that the existing international economy remains to be imbalance, hierarchical and even exploitative; in which the main world economy limitedly only circulate in three largest economic blocks, comprising Europe, East Asia and North America, which at the same time could significantly regulate the global market. So far, there has thus been of a constantly economic status quo and completely no shift of capital at the global level.

The root of the problems seems to lie in the nature of globalization itself. The character of globalization is arguably only inclusive for economy, which has been the core of globalization, but not for the rest (Castells, 2006). In other words, while everything that has monetary value is well-included, other non-economic elements are unfortunately excluded. One critical basic question that can be suggested for this is that: why the free flow of capital and goods are being prioritized, while the free flow of people, for various reasons, is becoming strictly prohibited? This is certainly an unfair practice because it in turn allows an uneven globally economic growth as well as welfare between the developed and developing countries.

In that respect, in the current global economic mechanism the dominant world economies undoubtedly get most benefits. One of the empirical examples can be seen in the operation of what we called Multi-National Corporations (MNC). The corporations basically do not lose their national identities because they remain tied to their home countries. In other words, all of them essentially are the global players or empirically national companies which are trading globally (Baylis and Smith, 2001:10). Having this fact, it is fairly reasonable to say that that all their economic benefits unavoidably would go to their own countries. Even if there is an argument saying that the available Multi-National Corporations (MNC) also give

benefits to the developing countries where they operate, it can be argued here that their economic contribution, particularly to developing countries, is very likely to be very limited. The recently supporting data, among others, shows that the existing Multi-National Corporations (MNC) are only able to provide work for only 200 million workers, much lower compared to the total world workforce that reached 3000 million workers (Castells, 2006). As such, this fact that most of the labor force is not global strengthens the argument even further that globalization embraces only the ones which have monetary values.

In the non-economic aspect, the condition generally is also not good for developing countries. As previously indicated, globalization has also encouraged a globally homogeneous culture which leads to Westernization. Dealing with this, there is a number of reasons that can be raised here. The first, directly or indirectly, is likely related to the historical accident of development. We can trace it back to the fact that many countries have perceived the Western path of development is the *par-excellence* model to be adopted. Such a kind of process, at any rate, might contribute to eradicate local culture which has been part of communities' identities.

Yet, the elaboration above is not the only argument. At least since recently, Western countries have intentionally made great efforts to shape the rest of the world's culture. Through their various hegemonic media and its global networks they have intensively transmitted Western concepts, thoughts and values to rest the world. As a matter of fact, of the total of the world's news and audiovisual materials, 50% is being controlled by only seven communication groups (Castells, 2010). It is not surprising therefore that they all become penetrating agents of Western thoughts and values. This can be viewed as other from of colonialism. Contemporary 'modern' colonialism is no longer managed by territorial occupation, but by seizing people's frame of thinking. Once the latter was successful to be controlled, it is very likely that all their behaving, wearing, tasting, etc., would also be well-manipulated. As such, it can be fairly argued that Western's manipulation of global culture, at the final stage, might be part of their globally economic agenda.

Indeed, controlling all people's aspects of life would be good for consuming their various products.

Bearing all the elaborations above in mind, globalization is far-reaching in penetrating local communities, no exception for those which live at developing countries. Having this, one crucial question can be suggested here: what should be done by local communities living in developing countries? As has been indicated above, globalization is essentially predator in character, both economically and culturally. As a metaphor, if globalization is supposed to be a horse, we should ride on it to enabling us to steer, otherwise we would be the victim of it. Thus, although it seems a cliché to say it still needs to be emphasized, to be survived we should reinventing and strengthening our distinctive local identities. In this respect, identity should not merely interpreted referring to a name, but it can be defined as part of political, economic and cultural identities with their derived substantive working concepts enriched by local attributes, such as souls and values.

To make all of those happen, ideally, both communities should go hand in hand with government. At the level of community, public awareness of having 'own' identity seems to be the majority. The recent world survey shows that the majority of world population still prefers to hold their local identity rather than national or international ones. Of the total respondents, 49% put their local identity first, 38% prefer to show their national identity, and only 13% who see themselves as global citizen (Castells, 2006). Embarking from these figures, it is quite promising to start thinking of reconstruction of multiple local identities of any aspect of life, as part of our strategy to steer the menacing globalization stream.

Nevertheless, a more serious challenge is related to the position of the state. Through its capability of making national policies, nation state normatively has strategic role in managing the penetrating globalization, at least in filtering its negative impacts. However, sadly speaking, in spite of representing the nation and local identities, nation-states have been seen to be the main agents of globalization. As a matter of fact, the majority of national governments in developing countries unavoidably integrate themselves in the global economic

networks. They have been trapped in such position due to the general assumption saying that being excluded from the global economy institutions would be destructive for their national economic development. In this respect, nation-states are increasingly losing their traditional function to be “an institutional tool for managing societies and solving their problems”. (Castells, 2006)

The elaboration above indicates that there has been a strain between local communities and their governments. In one side, people continue to preserve their local identities, while, on other side, their governments tend to be deeply involved in global economic networks. These contrast positions is a sign of the fact that nation states are suffering from legitimacy crisis in the eye of their own people. Our main homework is how to overcome this problem by synergizing the two elements, otherwise all we become the losers in the globalized world.

References

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