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BYUH is perhaps the most international of all undergraduate universities in the world. Approximately 25% of its students come from Asia, another 25% from the Pacific Islands, 25% from the mainland United States, and finally 25% from the culturally diverse state of Hawaii. If ever there was a place to study the interaction between people of different cultures in a global information society, to use the apocryphal words of Brigham Young, "this is the place."

In this essay we are interested in the increasing interdependence of cultures and societies and how we are developing into a global village (Arendt, 1970; Hanson, 1994). A word for this is globalization. It is the idea that the world is shrinking and that people from all corners of the earth are more aware of each other and more likely to meet and talk to each other. BYUH is a microcosm of this phenomenon and thus a good place to discover how individuals are constructing the meaning of the massive changes that are encircling the earth.

Globalization is entering a new and accelerated stage, but it has occurred to a lesser degree and at a slower pace since early times. For example, there is evidence of ancient Sumeria and Egypt trading with one another. The Pacific Islands experienced connections with others when the early Polynesians traded between islands, using the stars and the waves as guides, and again when the Europeans came in their sailing ships, using sextons and compasses for their travels across the seas. This contact between Pacific Islanders and Europeans is part of a pattern of contact between peoples that began emerging in the 1500s and continued and accelerated thereafter. Early European explorers sailed their ships across the oceans of earth. As a result, many civilizations that had been self-sufficient and somewhat isolated from others became "integrated into the global market economy" (Stavrianos, p. 60). Eventually this new modern era (While we disagree with many of the connotations associated with modernization, we will use the term with reservations since it seems to be the best word to describe the intertwinnings of capitalism, industrialization, and imperialism that have emerged since 1500.) was further transformed and

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complicated by accelerating technological developments in production, transportation, and communication.

Early in the modern era many people were aware of change taking place, but both the "just plain folk" (JPF) and the elite had a difficult time articulating those changes and agreeing on the strategies that should be used to deal with them. Some willing embraced it, others were more selective, and others actively resisted it. Most attempts to understand and respond to changes imposed by modernization occurred on a large scale systems level. For example, Adam Smith observed the changes occurring throughout society at his time and set about to analyze them on a macroeconomic level. His ideological contributions were influential in channeling new economic forces surfacing due to modernization. However, as the modern era evolved there was little effort to understand how JPFs were socially constructing the meanings of modernization and the dramatic changes becoming pervasive in their world. This was unfortunate for two reasons. First, in order to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of people, it was necessary to understand the way they viewed the forces of modernization on their lives. Second, modernization provided a rare opportunity to observe the process of people constructing the new meanings about themselves and society while they were encountering significant changes.

This is the context in which we are studying life in a global information society. Connections are being made between nations and peoples now, as in the past; however, these forces are stronger and intensifying in ways never experienced before (Masuda, 1980). It is a topic that is being studied by scholars and examined by the popular press. As in the past, a vast majority of energy is now focused on institutions and how they should interpret and adapt to the realities of a global information society. The focus of this study is intrapersonal. We have sought to better understand the meaning our students are constructing about globalization and how they are making sense of the monumental changes resulting from these forces.

Research Process

We asked students at BYUH what globalization meant to them—how they interpreted it. First we developed a survey using Osgood's (1975) semantic differential technique (Snider & Osgood, 1977). Participants were asked to circle the number between 50 bipolar adjectives that best represented the value they assign to globalization (see examples below).

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In these examples the participant circled the number between these terms that best represented the degree of poverty/wealth or kindness/cruelty they associated with globalization. They did the same for an additional 48 bipolar adjectives.

The survey was administered to 4 general education classes at BYUH in an attempt to get a broad cross section of participants. Out of approximately 2,000 students, 131 completed surveys. After the surveys were completed we collected qualitative data generated from individual and group interviews with the participants. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity. In the interviews students were asked about their responses on the survey and asked to relate stories and incidents that reflected their thoughts about a particular item. In 2 of the classes, we also asked them to write a paragraph on the positive and negative aspects of globalization. The interviews were later content analyzed in an effort to identify prevalent themes. What we present today is both preliminary and tentative, and it is based only on our content analysis of the qualitative data.

Making Meaning Out Of Globalization

Most students in this study seemed to initially conceptualize globalization by considering the issue at a macro level; how it was affecting institutions in society rather than focusing on the individual. For example, when asked to discuss globalization, the participants in the study almost inevitably connected it to multinational corporations, international news, information super highways, international economics, international marketing, etc. One individual was asked about opportunities to learn about different parts of the world while attending BYUH and replied that "CNN was played almost continually in the library." He seemed surprised by the concept that going to school with students from around the world was an aspect of globalization at work. Ironically, in this place of so much cultural and linguistic diversity, most people interviewed seemed to think of globalization as phenomenon occurring somewhere "out there," not as a force affecting what is going on "in here." It was viewed as weaving patterns outside the normal warp and woof of their individual lives rather than global threads linking up directly with them. As long as people do not see the forces of globalization directly connected to their lives, they may fail to create explicit meanings that shed light on how it intertwines with their own experiences.

The process of asking questions about globalization became a catalyst that caused our the participants to focus, perhaps for the first time in a conscious way, on how globalization was a part of their
lives and what it meant to them. During these moments, our participants began to form and give birth to their interpretation of globalization as they reflected upon it. Their creations reflected the uncertainties and ambiguities that often emerge during a process of reflection when embryonic meanings develop into more mature thoughts about complex concepts and ideas.

Many of our interviewees expressed a significant degree of optimism about globalization but coupled it with considerable concerns. As we analyzed the data, it became evident that optimism stemmed from religious beliefs. Our interviewees often referred to the common bonds between all people, seeing others as their brothers and sisters in a gospel context. When referring to meeting people from various cultures, there was a sense of commonality and comfort that came from assurances provided by the gospel. In short it became clear that their belief in the restored gospel provides a major perspective from which they derive a common set of assumptions that when held, can build strong bridges between peoples of different cultures and language systems. This sort of implicit millenialism can be observed in the statement of one participant who wrote:

Globalization is good because it brings connections between countries and there will be no dominating nation. The value of a primary language, currency, and political establishment will allow countries to equally enjoy liberalism. If a strong foundation of governmental organization is established, there will be peace, equal satisfaction, and prosperity....Technological improvements can be shared and discovered globally to find cures for diseases, medicinal values, and chronic illnesses. This view seems to couch the social, political, and economic forces creating globalization as a necessary precursor to a coming millennial order.

However, in all the cultural groups we interviewed, optimism was eventually tempered by fears and concerns regarding globalization. They spoke positively of globalization because they initially connected it to the gospel and the internationalization of the Church; however, as the interview progressed, they often found themselves taking contradictory positions, sometimes in a single sentence. One student wrote: "I don't see any devastating effects of globalization. The only tragedy could arise from cultures becoming watered down." Is that "watering down" the effect of an exalting gospel culture or is it cultural minimization and homogenization due to the activities of international business? In what ways are the practical operation of the Church different from the operations of
other multinational organizations and businesses when it comes to "watering down" local culture? In what ways is it similar? Our participants seemed uncertain regarding these issues. These questions are central to the meaning one assigns to globalization and are the questions our participants struggled with. They highly valued the internationalization of the Church—they saw it as a very positive force in their lives. However, they also identified the Church as an international institution, in some ways not unlike other international institutions that seemed to be a focus of their concerns.

Although most critical theorists who consider globalization and culture may see the role of international religious organizations as similar to the role of other international organizations—business, education, etc.—making such a distinction seems to be essential to an LDS view of globalization. This distinction allows one to deal with the complexities of globalization and simultaneously value the gospel and the role of the Church. For example, the importance of such a distinction is even necessary and useful in writing this paper. We clearly embrace the international role of BYUH and the Church but have significant concerns about many other international forces of globalization that are likely to be less exalting and more disturbing to local culture.

Cultural Differences in the Meaning of Globalization

Mainland Students: Students of all cultures expressed contradictions about globalization, but with varying degrees of significance and emphases. Mainland students especially seemed to be optimistic about globalization. When they did express concern it was in regards to job competition and the U.S. losing its dominance as a world political and economic power. However, this was a minimal concern. Mainland students also expressed concern for smaller nations and the dangers they face, such as economic exploitation and the loss of their cultures. Even so, their views were generally positive and they regularly expressed faith in the power of technology to offset the hazards of growing globalization. One mainland student expressed the view of many when stating that "With globalization wealth will increase because countries that don't have technology will get technology...and more opportunities to get [wealth]."

The statements from mainland students also seemed filled with ambiguities. For example, many valued the meeting of different cultures here at BYUH and had few concerns about the loss of others cultures due to the rising tide of globalization. Nor were they concerned about an increase in homogeneity worldwide. Mainland students' perspectives may originate from several sources. First,
they came from a culture that has hegemonically celebrated the cultural "melting pot." If cultures are going to be lost due to globalization, it is unlikely to be theirs. Second, mainland students may be less concerned about the loss of their culture since it seems to be something they are less conscious of than other cultural groups. One mainland student had a difficult time identifying her culture's national costume. She said, "If I wore my national dress to Cultural Night [a night the students share their culture through song, dress, and dance], I would have to go wrapped in a dollar bill." Another mainland student later expressed his frustration that his peers had difficulty identifying their American culture because he felt such a strong sense of cultural identity. When asked, however, he had a very hard time articulating what his culture was. As was often the case, the description he and others did generate centered around a technologically advanced society. Is the future of a global information society one where, perhaps not unlike the mainland, the thickness and richness of cultural diversity can become muted?

Ironically, one of the pillars of mainland culture--individualism--may be a prime factor in the distance mainland students felt from their cultural heritage. Many of them came from suburbs where it is often difficult to identify as a community. Alexis De Tocqueville, early in the United States' history, argued that in America a person can "isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself" (p. 11). With advancing technology perhaps this observation of nearly 200 years ago has been magnified many times. Although people in the United States may have gained a breadth of exposure to immigrant cultures, they may lack the depth of exposure that comes from interpersonal interaction and strong local communities.

**Asian Students:** Asians participating in the study seemed to have primarily positive feelings about globalization. One Korean student expressed the view of many when she stated: "We are losing things. But [we are growing] more close to each other. We . . . care more for people. [It is] easy to become one...globalization brings together." This sense of loss is interesting in comparison to the mainland students who expressed few concerns about losing anything. Another student from Hong Kong said:

The most important thing is that we can communicate. English is the global language, so people are able to learn from each other and eliminate their bad traditions. I think globalization is a requirement because each culture can learn from each
other. For example, Japanese brought the Chinese characters back to their country, so they could have their communication tools. Also, Hawaii is a great place because people coming from all over the world respect their own cultures and love other cultures.

Asians expressed fewer reservations regarding globalization than any other group of students, including mainland students. This may not be surprising considering the importance of the collective good in Asian cultures. Also many of the BYUH Asian students come from places that have already industrialized a fair amount—Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, etc. These young university students may have already been distanced from many of the traditional ways of their people through the process of industrialization and, in fact, see great economic potential ahead for them. For example one student from Hong Kong said globalization was not as profound in Hong Kong because the culture there was simply to concentrate on making money in a highly industrialized society.

**Pacific Island Students:** Pacific Island students had the strongest reservations about globalization. While there was an acknowledgment that globalization brought new opportunities to improve the standard of living, there was an overriding and dominant concern for the loss of culture. A student from Tonga laid out in stark terms the prevailing meaning of global economic forces when stating simply: "Tonga will lose out because [economically] we won't be able to compete." Another student from Tonga saw the same economic forces but focused on cultural concerns. This individual feared that the economic materialism of the West would be too seductive and he didn't want to lose his culture, which "was not based on money, [instead it] was based on who can serve."

Another Pacific Island student related that:

One of my greatest fears where globalization is concerned comes from not knowing what is made available to the small entities that exist in the world. I mean what are the good things in globalization and will I as an individual and a representative of a minority be able to know what's good for me?

For many Pacific Islanders this fear was based in experience. One student noted in a class discussion that cable TV was introduced to her small island of 2,500 so people would want to stay; but when people saw what they could have, they left in even greater numbers. She wrote of this dilemma:

I come from a small island in the South Pacific and we may be small as a race but there is most definitely some good we could
offer to the world. But unfortunately, we would lose out in offering anything because somehow the education we receive orients us to be part of the Western world, so not receiving all the needs within our own island would then create an excuse for us to leave the Island in search of the better world. Thus our island would then be depleted of greater minds in the future, instead of these minds creating a better place in our island.

Most Pacific Islanders we spoke with expressed similar views. They seemed to be a generation caught in major transitions and see their traditions challenged. To them globalization is very real, very exciting, and very threatening. It is not a faraway or utopian idea; it is a face-it and grapple-with-it issue. For them the global tidal wave threatens the cultural coherence of their way of life and has the potential to leave little of their world the same. Is the value gained in globalization worth the loss of one of humankinds' cultures?

Local Pacific Island students seemed to identify with Polynesian and also expressed significant reservations regarding globalization. One wrote:

My greatest fear about globalization is the loss of my culture and traditions. The Hawaiian language is almost extinct and I feel the rest of my traditions are soon to follow. It is so easy for a minority culture to be lost in the wave of globalization, especially when the benefits and the outcome looks so good.

However, a different perspective also became evident in two extensive interviews with local students that identified themselves as Pacific Islanders. Both expressed positive views regarding globalization. When talking about the benefits of globalization, they felt that getting to know other cultures created harmony, particularly through sitting down and really getting to know other people as individuals. However, these intercultural experiences were selective. When asked to identify the cultures that they were getting to know, they identified only other Pacific Island cultures. They actively had sought out intercultural experiences that connected them with their heritage in a way that was not muted by Western culture. For these local Pacific Island students, globalization has allowed them to find commonalities that confirmed their own cultural heritage through discovering closely related cultures.

Concluding Thoughts

So what kind of meanings can be made from these differing viewpoints. People seem to have two often contradictory needs—the need for breadth and the need for depth in human relationships. Globalization gives us breadth of exposure to others. We celebrate
the richness that cultural diversity gives us. It is the part of BYUH that enchants and delights us. However, there are challenges associated with this. For example, we often tend to assume depth where there is only breadth. We think we know more than we do (in other words, we stereotype and label others with limited information). This seem to be an inevitable dimension of globalization. As one long-time faculty member put it: "We... skate along the surface of each others' cultures." Also when reaching for breadth, we sometimes lose the depth. When a Tongan student explained that her grandparents get angry when she speaks English, it is not just English that is the issue. It is that as she loses command of her Tongan, the relationship is no longer as deft at dealing with subtleties and ambiguities key to relationships between family members. Thus the demands of maintaining family relationships and the requirements of living in a global information society can be at odds. This challenge of maintaining vertical family relationships is not new. De Tocqueville despaired that liberal societies would not be up to the challenge of remembering the past, the connections with it, and the difficult task of passing that heritage on to future generations. He wrote:

Among [traditional] nations families maintain the same station for centuries and often live in the same place. So there is a sense in which all the generations are contemporaneous. A man almost always knows about his ancestors and respects them; his imagination extends to his great-grandchildren, and he loves them. He freely does his duty by both ancestors and descendants and often sacrifices personal pleasures for the sake of beings who are no longer alive or are not yet born. Moreover, [traditional] institutions have the effect of linking each man closely with several of his fellows (pp. 11-12).

So many of our students are facing conflicting demands. They feel the need to speak English and to be conversant in Western culture in order to be better prepared to face a globalizing world, but in terms of community and family, they want to preserve their language and their ways. Globalization can and does change these personal connections, and these are the heavy-laden changes they face.

What connects all of these students is the acknowledgment that some cultures and societies offer technology and a higher standard of materialism. Mainland and Asian students would like these benefits to be extended to all people and think that it will be welcomed by all peoples. Where a critical difference emerges is reflected by Pacific Island students who fear that the materialism of others will be too
enticing to their people. These sentiments are perhaps best expressed by a young woman from Samoa and serve as an eloquent conclusion to this essay:

I think personally, I feel that these foreigners are coming and they are trying to say "we are here to help you." I always think that there is something else behind that. Like when I went home two years ago there was this beautiful piece of land in front of my grandfather's store. It was like a playground for all of the people in the capital of Western Samoa and now they have a central bank there [at this point, she began to cry]. When I saw that, it made me realize that the Samoan people are starting to lose their culture. They wanted more materialistic things. My grandfather . . . used to tell us that when we grow up get as much education as we could and help preserve everything that we had. And when I saw that building it seemed like a monster to me. These people offering us all these worldly things and yet there is something else that they want. Maybe they want to take over, I'm not really sure. But that was the first thing that hit my mind. I said this is really sad. A lot of people are happy we're getting, you know, more recognition among the islands. But for me personally, we are losing something more than money can buy, and for me, I think, we are getting ahead of our times and our people don't really realize what exactly they are getting themselves into. For me personally, it's a sad loss that we are starting to get.
Bibliography


