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## GLOBALIZATION VS. AMERICANIZATION: IS THE WORLD BEING AMERICANIZED BY THE DOMINANCE OF AMERICAN CULTURE?

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### I. Introduction: Globalization and Americanization

It is quite possible that globalization has become the most important economic, political, and cultural phenomenon of our time. It now affects every aspect of our life and the world is experiencing a period of some of the most radical changes the human race has ever faced. As a consequence, there have emerged a number of heated arguments concerning the phenomenon and the effects of globalization. The arguments naturally cover quite a broad area, ranging from its political to economic and cultural effects.

Globalization, according to Albrow, "refers to all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society."<sup>1</sup> In this paper, however, instead of discussing all aspects of globalization, including its political and economic ramifications, I would like to focus attention on the area of globalization of culture. In other words, we are concerned here with how culture all over the world has been affected by the phenomenon of globalization and what sorts of transformation it has been undergoing. By discussing globalization vs. Americanization, globalization vs. localization, homogenization vs. heterogenization, I'd like to argue that the world, instead of being homogenized into a single global culture by Americanization as some people argue, is becoming more diversified, more complex, and more multicultural.

Those who argue against globalization criticize the alleged Americanization of world culture and the perils of the dominance of American culture throughout the world. They insist that the world is losing its heterogeneity and becoming more and more homogenized by the spread of American culture. Alan Warde explains it this way:

Much of the discussion about cultural effects of globalization has centered on the extent to which increased cultural communication tends to produce a homogeneous global culture. The perils of the diffusion of American culture throughout the world, and its potentially destructive effect on the local cultures of the periphery, remains a major concern, though few scholars currently envisage the imminent entrenchment of a homogeneous global culture.<sup>2</sup>

More radical critics of homogenization of world culture refers to it as "Cultural Imperialism" and argue that the American-led globalization is eroding local and regional cultures and spreading American consumer goods and the American way of life to every corner of the world. They complain that America is imposing American standards, that is, the American value system with its emphasis on human rights, democracy, and free competition. John Tomlinson, for example, argues:

...there is a wealth of evidence that Western cultural taste and practices are becoming global ones. Take any index, from clothes to food to music to film and television to architecture and there is no ignoring the sheer massive presence of Western (meaning here North American, Western European, possibly Australian) cultural goods, practices and styles, in every inhabited area of the world. And one could be more specific. Isn't global mass culture...actually predominantly American culture?<sup>3</sup>

To them, globalization is another name for world dominance by American capitalists and "the result is the effacement of local cultures, thanks to their homogenization by, and assimilation to, American capitalist ideology. This sorry state both follows from and helps further the integration of the Third World into the First World economy as the dependent, underdeveloped periphery of an American imperial center."<sup>4</sup>

But is the world really becoming homogenized and Americanized as some people argue? Are we really witnessing the emergence of a single homogeneous world culture led by America? Are our national and local cultures being eroded by the worldwide popularity of American culture, including Hollywood movies, McDonald hamburgers, Nike shoes, and GAP tee shirts?

## **II. Americanization of Japan: Americanizing Japanese Culture or Japanizing American Culture**

I would like to try to answer these questions by considering the Japanese case. Japan is, in my estimation, probably the most Americanized society in the world. America is by far the country most well-liked by the Japanese. In opinion polls conducted jointly by Yomiuri Newspaper and the Gallup Poll, America has always been ranked top by the Japanese as the most reliable country since this survey started in 1978. Edwin O. Reischauer, a noted authority on Japanese history and a former U.S. ambassador to Japan from 1961 to 1966, substantiates this "Japanese love for America" as follows:

They take for granted a huge continued flow of American cultural influences....They feel themselves familiar with American life from having seen so many American films and television programs... Americans are the foreigners Japanese know best and feel most at home with. When they go abroad, the United States is their most common target.... If the Japanese have achieved a sense of true fellow feeling with any other people in the world, it is with Americans.<sup>3</sup>

Another example of Japanese fondness for America is that in 2001 a total of more than 16 million Japanese went abroad, and their Number One destination was the United States; more than 4 million people visited America, about one-fourth of the total number.<sup>6</sup> Another example is McDonald's. McDonald's has more than 30,000 franchise restaurants in 121 countries and areas around the world.<sup>7</sup> Their Golden Arches can be found even in Tian'anmen Square in Beijing, Myong-dong in Seoul, and Red Square in Moscow. But McDonald's Japan with more than 3,000 restaurants is "the biggest McDonald's franchise outside of the United States."<sup>8</sup> Its sales volume has also been the largest among the restaurant chains in Japan since 1982. In fact, McDonald's Japan has been so successfully integrated into Japan that the story is told of a little Japanese child who arrives in Los Angeles, looks around, sees McDonald's Golden Arches and says, "Look, Mom, they have McDonald's in this country, too."<sup>9</sup>

We also have Tokyo Disneyland which is the most popular theme park in Japan, attracting nearly 18 million visitors a year, and in April, 2001, Universal Studios Japan, which is a replica of Universal Studios in Los Angeles, was opened in Osaka, the third largest city in western Japan. In little over a month, more than one million people visited the place and to everyone's surprise in less than a year it attracted more than 10 million people.<sup>10</sup>

If you walk around any major city in Japan, you'll soon realize that Japanese society is flooded with American cultural goods. Ever since Japan embarked on modernization after Commodore Perry forced Japan to open her doors to the outside world in 1853, ending Japan's 200 years of seclusion from the outside world, she has pursued a policy of catching up with the West. After World War II, Japan switched its role model from Europe to the United States and I think it would be safe to say that Japan's postwar history has been a constant process of Americanization. Japanese have adored and admired Americans and American culture. Again, according to Reischauer:

The postwar occupation involved the United States intimately in all aspects of Japanese life, making it Japan's model *par excellence*...there is a much stronger pro-American sentiment, not just on the part of the "establishment" but also at a grass-roots level. Insofar as Japanese still seek outside models, it is largely to the United States they look.<sup>11</sup>

Japan looks like America on the surface: there are McDonald's, Starbucks, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Tower Records everywhere, and people wear American jeans, American tee shirts, American shoes, listen to American pop music, and watch American movies and TV dramas. Young people these days even dye their hair blonde to look like Americans. However, although everything American is extremely popular in Japan, Japan is not America.

If you make a careful analysis of how Japan has absorbed and assimilated American culture and other foreign cultures into our land, you will see the inevitable process of foreign cultures being transformed to fit into our culture. As I mentioned earlier, the American cultural influence on postwar-Japan has been enormous, but in the process of adapting American culture into Japanese society, the dual process of Japanizing American culture and Americanizing Japanese culture has been working, leading to cultural fusion and hybridizing of the two cultures.

Japanese society has been certainly Americanized in many ways, but at the same time American culture in the process of being assimilated into such alien soil as Japan has to be Japanized. Otherwise, it would not be successfully accepted by the Japanese. Cultures are invariably transformed when they are incorporated into other cultures, as I will explain in the next section in detail.

### III. Globalization of Local Culture and Localization of Global Culture

Globalization involves both universalization of particularism and particularization of universalism. Ronald Robertson who coined the word "glocalization" maintains that "[i]n various areas of contemporary life there are ongoing, calculated attempts to combine homogeneity with heterogeneity and universalism with particularism."<sup>12</sup>

For example, as I just mentioned, Japan is surrounded by a number of American cultural products but they are almost always transformed to adjust to the Japanese cultural environment. As Thomas Friedman in his best-selling book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* points out,

"McDonald's Japan has been absorbed by Japanese culture and architecture."<sup>13</sup> For example, they offer a Japanese menu to suit the tastes of the Japanese: Teriyaki McBurger, Green Tea Shake, and Iced Coffee. And at McDonald's restaurants in Kyoto their Golden Arches are not yellow-colored but are a more modest brown color to fit into Kyoto's traditionally serene landscape.

The same things are true of McDonald's in other countries. They invariably add local flavor to both their menus and architecture. In fact the buildings of McDonald's vary from country to country and from culture to culture to incorporate the local architecture of the region. McDonald's, in order to succeed as a business, is bound to make some adjustment to fit into a particular local culture it wants to do business in. To take some examples of differing menus, in Canada they have "McLobster;" in France "Turkey Burger;" in Britain "Lamb McSpicy " and "McChicken Korma Nann;" in Italy "Pasta Plate" and Italian coffees such as "Espresso" and "Café Latte." In Australia they have the "McOz Burger;" in Finland a "McRye Burger;" in Sweden the "McGarden Burger;" and this goes on and on.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, what is called "McDonaldization of the world" is a mixture of universalism of McDonald's and particularism or localism of a local culture. The same thing can be applied to other American products as well. As Ronald Robertson explains:

...we have to realize that the major alleged producers of 'global culture' --such as those in Atlanta (CNN) and Los Angeles (Hollywood)--increasingly tailor their products to a differentiated global market (which they partly construct). For example, Hollywood attempts to employ mixed, 'multinational' casts of actors and a variety of 'local' settings when it is particularly concerned, as it increasingly is, to get a global audience.<sup>15</sup>

What has been taking place in the area of cultural globalization is that what is global and what is local are now being mixed and melded. In other words, globalization and localization or homogenization and heterogenization are occurring simultaneously. This may sound contradictory, but globalization requires localization. In other words, in order to make something global, in many cases it has to be localized to make it more suitable to the taste of local people. In fact, even within the United States: "In 1997, McDonald's split its approach to the United States into five regional divisions to reflect that different areas have different climates and different sets of competitors and customers."<sup>16</sup>

What has been happening to McDonald's has been happening to Japanese sushi--globalization and localization. Sushi can now be purchased and eaten in a number of major cities around the world. Actually it has become part of daily cuisine in many parts of the world, but in its process of globalization it has become de-Japanized. In the past, overseas sushi restaurants were mostly run by Japanese, catered to expatriate Japanese, and employed all-Japanese staff.

But this is no longer true. Many are now run by non-Japanese; most often they are Korean or Chinese, and customers are now mostly non-Japanese. In the process of globalization, just as with McDonald's, sushi restaurants have to be localized to meet the needs of local taste, ranging from building styles, seating arrangements and lighting to background music, and of course menus. A growing number of sushi restaurants outside Japan now carry sushi menus which originated in the local culture such as "California Roll" or "Victoria Roll."

At the same time, by encountering such "alien food" as sushi, traditional local diet and taste undergoes some radical change. In the United States, for example, this "development of the 'New American' cuisine ...helped overcome America's resistance to eating lightly cooked or uncooked food."<sup>17</sup> As a result, eating "raw fish" has become as common as eating meat for many Americans. Here again fusion and mixing of two different cuisine cultures are in progress, creating non-traditional American eating habits and taste.

#### IV. Where Does Global Culture Come From?

I have been referring to sushi, which originated in Japan but has become globalized. Indeed, Japan has a number of globalized cultural products. Some of those well-known artifacts besides sushi are *Walkman*, *Karaoke*, *Nintendo* games, and *Manga* or animated films including *Pokemon*, which has recently become a phenomenal success worldwide. Therefore, it wouldn't be too surprising to find an American wearing a *Seiko* watch, driving a *Toyota* car, and watching a *Sony* TV.

When we talk about global culture, we have to recognize that the U.S. is not the only country that produces global culture. In other words, American culture alone is not globalizing itself but parts of various cultures other than American culture are globalizing. Even in the United States, such cultural goods as "Rolex watches, Porsche cars, Luis Vuitton luggage, Chanel perfume, AGA kitchen stoves, Dom Perignon champagne and Perrier mineral water"<sup>18</sup> are very well-known and popular.



In the same vein, nowadays in many parts of Asia Japanese pop music, movies and TV dramas are enthusiastically accepted by many young people and at the same time, Asian music and movies from India and Korea enjoy an increasing popularity in Japan. In fact, there is an "Asian Boom" going on in Japan and Asian restaurants and Asian shops selling Asian goods from China, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines have popped up in major cities in Japan.

What needs to be emphasized here is that globalization is not just one-way traffic from the United States to the rest of the world but is a more complicated process of different cultures from different origins mixing and fusing in different countries. Therefore, it would be too simplistic and superficial to say that globalization is creating a monolithic and homogeneous world culture led by America and is destroying local and national cultures, thus depriving world culture of its diversity.

What we are witnessing today with regard to cultural globalization is the interaction among different cultures all over the world due to the rapid progress of information and transportation technologies. As a consequence, world culture is becoming more diverse and more complex and more fascinating by the mixing of diverse cultures. Roland Robertson refers to this phenomenon as "glocalization" and says that "globalization ...has involved and increasingly involves the creation and the incorporation of locality."<sup>19</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse calls it: "hybridization" and explains, "Cultural hybridization refers to the mixing of Asian, African, American, and European cultures: hybridization is the making of global culture as a global *mélange*."<sup>20</sup>

#### V. De-Americanizing America

Another significant point to be noted in connection with globalization surrounding the United States is that it would be rather naïve to assume that "American Culture" is monolithic. The truth of the matter is that it has become diverse and complex as the composition of the American population has recently increased its racial and ethnic diversity quite drastically. For example, Latinos, who currently account for 12.5 % of America's population, will constitute almost 20 % by the year 2040. And if the current trends continue, it is estimated that white people will constitute only 52.7 % of the total population by the middle of this century.<sup>21</sup> Miami, for example, with more than 60% of the population Hispanic, is almost a Latin-American city rather than an American city. In fact the "Latinization of America" has been progressing in many parts of the U.S.<sup>22</sup>



Likewise, the Asian population has been increasing at a very rapid rate in America, in fact, much faster than the increase in the number of Latinos. The Asian American population was only 0.3 % in 1900 and 0.7 % in 1970 of the total U.S. population, but due to the dramatic increase in Asian immigration it increased from 1.4 million in 1970 to 10.2 million in 2000, an impressive increase in just three decades. It is estimated that "the size of the Asian population will increase to 34 million in 2050, growing from 3 to 8 % of the total U.S. population."<sup>23</sup> In major cities in the United States, in addition to Chinatown, various Asian communities have popped up such as "Little Korea," "Little Saigon," and "Little Bombay."

As a result of these increases of non-European populations and infusion of various ethnic cultures, American culture based on Anglo-Saxon culture has become multicultural and "de-Americanized." One simple and visible example is the increasing number of various ethnic restaurants that have appeared in a number of major cities in the United States in recent years. As Richard Pillsbury argues:

Ethnic restaurants have been at the center of the most exciting cuisine innovations in the United States in recent years. Most large urban centers now have restaurants featuring thirty or more ethnic cuisines ranging from the obvious (Chinese, Mexican, and Italian) to the truly exotic (Guatemalan, Mongolian, and Nigerian). The most widespread emerging cuisines today include regional French and Italian, a selection of Mediterranean (including north African), and regional Chinese...The impact of this revolution is not restricted to dedicated ethnic restaurants, however, as their presence promotes the evolution of fusion cuisines--foods created from more than a single origin.<sup>24</sup>

These "fusion cuisines" have resulted from the changing American population and changing American diet, which certainly reflects multicultural and multiethnic America. And I must say that this "fusion" of various cultures is a significant feature of the contemporary cultural scene, not only in the United States, but also in the rest of the world.

Thus, American culture itself has become de-Americanized through contact with various ethnic cultures and is becoming multicultural within its own territory in the process of globalization. Therefore, to argue that America is unilaterally globalizing and homogenizing the world does not reflect the actual interaction of cultures on a global scale.

## VI. Conclusion: Emerging Global Multiculture/Global-Cultural Mosaic

In contemporary society cross-cultural contacts and cross-cultural flows have become a part of our daily life. This process is certain to produce a certain degree of cultural homogenization and common values and ethics around the world. In this sense, globalization promotes "universalism." But culture involves both a universal aspect and a particular aspect, and as cultural globalization tends to increase the homogenizing character of a particular culture, it also has an effect of distinguishing the particularization of each culture.

Culture is, after all, a historical, social, and geographical product of a particular area. Therefore, an American cultural system that originated from its unique historical, social and geographical conditions cannot be transplanted into another cultural system without being subject to cultural transformation. The world has not been and is not simply moving in the direction of cultural uniformity and standardization. The truth of the matter is that instead of American culture spreading American products and American values, thus homogenizing world culture by destroying local cultures, we are witnessing a variety of different cultures fusing and mixing on a global scale.

Thanks to globalization, different cultures have come to interact with each other and our local life has become increasingly globalized but global culture itself has become increasingly localized where it has settled on a particular local culture. In conclusion, I'd argue that globalization is actually promoting the cultural diversity of the world and we are going to live in a more and more "multicultural world" or "Global Cultural Mosaic" where "the melting pot of different cultures" is a reality.

### NOTES

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3. John Tomlinson, "Cultural Globalization and Cultural Imperialism," in Ali Mohammadi,(ed.), *International Communication and Globalization* (London: Sage, 1997), pp.175-176. See also Dorfman,A. and Mattelart, A. *How to Read Donald*

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  7. From the website of McDonald's: <http://mcdonalds.com>
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  14. Taken from the website of McDonald's Japan: <http://www.mcdonald.co.jp>
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  16. John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *A Future Perfect: The Essentials of Globalization* (New York: Crown Business, 2000), p.105.
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  19. Robertson, p.28.
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  21. Gregory Spencer, Bureau of the Census, *Projection of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex, and Race: 1988 to 2080* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1989),

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22. The percentage of Latino population in major cities is as follows: Los Angeles 46.5%, New York 27.0 %, Dallas 35.6 %, Houston 37.4 %, Phoenix 34.1 %, San Antonio 58.7 %. (Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 2000).
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