

Cultural Diversity and Convergence in a Global Communication Era

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Abstract: The Concentration of capital and application of new technologies lay a foundation for global communication. The paper analyses the impacts of global communication on the local culture. Global communication has brought about new media forms and it changes the traditional concept of time-space and geography. The significance of a local culture lies in its distinction and uniqueness. Culture is relatively stable and it changes and develops in a dynamic process in a global communication era. Cultural inclusiveness and openness contribute to its development and vitality in the global-local nexus. The interaction between culture and communication inevitably brings about cultural changes, offers more opportunities to get access to other culture. Confronted with the common global issues, more people with diverse cultural backgrounds increasingly realize the significance of cooperation and coordination. In a community with a shared future for mankind, there is an emerging trend of the coexistence of cultural diversity and convergence on the basis of understanding and selection.

Keywords: global communication; culture; cultural diversity; cultural convergence.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization is the integration of capital, technology and information which transcends national borders. Economic globalization has become an indisputable fact and an inevitable trend of world economic development. Just as the globalization of the economy has triggered the cross-border movement of capital, goods and labor, the globalization of communication has also brought about the spread of diverse cultures and changes in local cultures.

Under the tremendous impact of global communication, the optimists believe that a new "global culture" is emerging, and the further mixed development of regional culture enables people to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers and ultimately bring about the collapse of the "Tower of Babel"—a story in *The Old Testament of the Bible* explaining why there are so many different languages. The pessimists believe that globalization is an aggressive process of cultural imperialism. Dominant countries with advanced technology and great economic power export their culture to the world, and the local culture is weakened and marginalized under the impact. The global village where everyone is equal is just an unreachable fantasy. The views don't build up a complete picture. Actually the global communication brings about a combined trend of cultural diversity and convergence.

The collapse of the Tower of Babel does not mean the extinction of cultural distinction and uniqueness, and the global village will not forge a global culture with the same cultural identity. The revelation brought by the Tower of Babel is that communication is of great significance to human civilization: human beings speaking the same language can create miracles that even God also fears, and language barrier is an obstacle to communication and becomes one of the reasons of human division and misunderstanding. It can also be said that communication is an overarching way to bridge human divisions and eliminate misunderstandings. The pessimists equate globalization with westernization or Americanization. Concerns about cultural imperialism assume that there exists of a pure and internally homogeneous native culture, but practically almost each cultural community assimilates other cultural elements in the process of development and evolution.

It is usually the top priority of a country to preserve its culture. General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) reached a number of agreements, but the GATT Uruguay Round (1993-1994) failed in the negotiations on the provisions of trade in cultural goods. The European Union intended to add exceptions to cultural products and goods, while the United States opposed the limits on new technologies such as video-on-demand. Modern society is a relatively free trading environment, but there has been little progress in official negotiations to improve the freedom of trade in cultural products and goods. This is mainly because most countries outside the United States regard their own cultural products and goods as a guarantee to preserve the unique culture of the country and resolve to safeguard the culture of the nation. The European Union, Canada and other countries also believe that the cultural industry is as significant as defense, education and justice and it is a key factor in safeguarding national identity. Among them, France is especially concerned about the issue and has always been committed to defending the homogeneity of national culture.

In the global communication era, culture is bound to be influenced by the diverse cultures. From the perspective of the relationship between culture and communication, there is a trend of coexistence of cultural diversity and convergence in global communication. Cultural convergence does not simply refer to similar clothing, commercial music and international advertising and so on, but to the active acceptance of the diverse concepts and values concerned to the human community. It is based on the contact and exchange with various cultures.

II. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

The word culture comes from the Latin *cultura*, meaning cultivation, agriculture, and it took on its modern meaning later. Culture has numerous definitions. The definition of culture proposed by American cultural anthropologist, Alfred Louis Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn in *Culture: An Evaluation of a Conceptual Definition*, is widely accepted by modern scholars. In short, culture exists in various implicit and explicit patterns, and it can be learned and transmitted to succeeding generations by means of symbols. It is composed of the particular achievements of the human community. Culture is based on the traditional ideas and values, among which values are the most important.

The word communication comes from the Latin *communis*, which means to impart, participate, or to convey knowledge or information, to cause to pass from one to another. That is to say, communication is the process of sharing information, ideas and opinions with people. Communication is one of the driving forces of cultural changes. Culture is influenced by some factors, such as history, traditions, geographical environment, and especially technology. Technological innovation has changed the modes of communication and brought new media forms. It is obviously proved that printing and computers have brought great changes to culture and produce new media forms.

Historically speaking, the contact, exchange and assimilation of different cultures have promoted the development of human civilization. Greece learned from Egypt, Rome borrowed from Greece, and Renaissance Europe was influenced by the Byzantine Empire. The external stimulation increases a better understanding of its own culture and the others, which promotes the assimilation of foreign cultures.

The communication process is influenced by cultural factors. What are essentially involved in the communication process at least includes the sender, the recipient and the coded information, which are all influenced by culture. The sender and the recipient are active in understanding and interpreting the received information in their cultural context. In communication, if information involves culture, it is not necessarily imparted completely from the sender to the recipient, but partly changed through coding and decoding during the process. Culture is learned and transmitted through symbolic coding and decoding.

The influence is difficult to detect because culture is often internalized into a way of thinking and a behavior pattern. Thus it is often regarded as a natural thing. The broadcast of the popular TV series will cause different reactions around the world, because audience with various cultural backgrounds tend to interpret and reflect media information differently. American cultural industry used to be dominant in export of entertainment programs, but in recent years, some countries have more influence on entertainment in the world. For example, Bollywood, the Hollywood in India, produces more and more influential programs.

Global streamers like Netflix have offered audience a wider range of choices. On the streaming platforms, programs of some countries are more popular than American ones. South Korea's *Squid Game* and France's *Lupin* got hits in Netflix, which brought back the streamer's fortunes and on the other hand have shown that Americans will be attracted by the foreign programs with English subtitles. *Three Body* by Chinese studios, adaptation of the famous Chinese Sci-Fi *Three Body* has been watched and applauded by international fans on YouTube. Netflix plans to produce the Netflix Version, *The Three-*

Body Problem, which is expected to be on streaming in 2023. Some hold a natively produced version has a better understanding of the intricacies of the concepts. While it is the communication and exchange of different concepts that enrich diverse cultures. The advancement of technology is bringing a plenty of opportunities for cultural communication on the global streaming platforms. From the perspective of the interaction between culture and communication, global communication brings more exchanges of cultures, giving the diverse cultures more chances of learning from each other.

III. INTEGRATION OF MEDIA COMPANIES, TECHNOLOGIES AND NATIONS

Globalization is based on the integration of finance and production among nations. In essence, a market economy is supposed to be a world market that transcends regional and national boundaries. One of the characteristics of globalization is the increasing concentration of capital in transnational corporations, including in the media industry. In the 1990s, there were large-scale vertical and horizontal mergers and acquisitions around the world. For example, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation acquired Fox Radio and Television and Sky Channel. Multinational companies provide abundant information resources for the world. Meanwhile, they cause people to be concerned about the erosion and marginalization of the local culture. In fact, it is not necessarily that the local culture is eroded due to the localization of the company's marketing strategy and the active selectivity of the local people.

In marketing, consumers sharing the same information tend to have the similar demand in the age of globalization. Multinational companies develop the standardized cultural products throughout the world to meet the similar demands of consumers. Meanwhile in order to gain more foreign market share in the actual management process, they usually turn to localization to cater for the demand of local people. For example, CNN set up centers in London and Hong Kong to produce local news programs to meet the demands of local people. Localization is a mix of global opportunities and local interests. It requires the transnational company consider the cultural features and differences around the world to adjust to the local market.

The concentration of capital and the application of media technology eliminate barriers to communication and enhance the selectivity of the audience due to more media choices. Language is not only the carrier of culture, but also the barrier of cultural communication. Even with the help of translation, translation limitations also affect the understanding. New media technologies bring more audio and video programs which can effectively reduce the limitations of language barriers in some degree. Image language especially contributes to overcoming the limitations of languages. People have more choices and initiatives with the increasing two-way interaction of communication and have more chances to understand and be understood through various channels. The Internet has become the largest information center with rich resources. Anyone who surfs the Internet can get access to information available on the Internet, and the local culture also has a place to give fringe voice in public. By means of these new media technologies and platforms, cross-cultural exchanges are increasingly frequent and the opportunities for contacting different values greatly arise on the Internet. Sharing information, people are likely to form consensus on the global issues facing in common. Global communication provides incentives and basis for people to understand the differences between cultures and values in the community with a shared future.

IV. GLOBAL COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND CONVERGENCE

A. *Socialized Environment*

Culture exists and is formed on the basis of race, gender, class, community, region, country or world. The socialization process of human beings is always completed in a certain cultural environment. Nowadays, the cultural environment in which people grow up has partly transcended the traditional boundaries. It becomes a process of global socialization. When a man is socialized, he not only forges his national identity, but also contacts and assimilates other cultures.

People from different cultural backgrounds always tend to learn more human experience. Vision is determined by some factors, such as the educational background, social norms and especially language, so personal vision is limited in this sense. Each culture is only a small part of human experience and limited by its own vocabulary and concepts. People are inclined to understand others, broaden their horizons, and gain deeper insights into the nature of reality. In the global socialization, a man has more chances to learn from others and widen his horizon.

B. *a Dynamic Process of Cultural Development*

In global communication, people are usually concerned that the dominant culture will erode the marginalized local culture. But in fact, the cultural inheritance is based on continuous assimilation of other cultures and abandonment of outdated part. Thus a culture with openness, inclusiveness and vitality can develop and be inherited from generation to generation.

Culture is not only a product of a certain society and age, but also a continuous assimilation and mix process in history. European and American culture are often regarded as the dominant culture in global communication. From a historical perspective, European and American culture evolved from the assimilation of various sources such as classical Judaism and Christianity. American culture is a culture, having the Anglo-Saxon heritage. During more than 200 years, it has assimilated many different cultures into its own culture. The assimilated culture was made an integral part but it kept its own distinctive characteristics. That explains why America used to be called a “melting pot” while it is now regarded as a “salad bowl”. The vital and vigorous cultures develop in history with a driving force of continuous assimilation, evolution and self-adjustment.

Global communication facilitates the exchange of information and contact of the diverse cultures, which causes the changes in culture and the society. The core part of culture is values, which are formed in the process of socialization. Once formed, they are held onto and acted on. The stability of values enables individuals to maintain in consistence with society as a whole. However, the stability is relative and it changes due to the experiences, way of thinking and other factors. To keep up with the times, the inheritance of traditional culture is a process of continuous interpretation, selection and development from generation to generation.

In the context of globalization, society is an open and dynamic system. Human beings are confronted with some global problems such as the wealth gap, climate changes and terrorist attacks which directly threaten the survival and development of mankind as a whole. The cooperation of all multi stakeholders is needed to cope with the problems. Cooperation will cause more concern for the common issues and raise a global consciousness. The global issues require people cooperate and have an agreement. During the process, people attach more importance to the exchange of ideas and values when they handle global issues and face societal division and disruption.

C. Cultural Diversity and Convergence

A man may have different cultural identities. Human society is maintained by different mechanisms, which are based on territories, markets, culture or kinship and so on. The society is a network in which the differentiated self-image of a man is formed through the relationship with others. Culture is constructed through its uniqueness compared with other cultures. In other words, the differences constitute the distinction of culture. In global communication, the concept of space-time and social relations are constantly reconstructed and integrated, so the identity of a man tends to change based on its connection to the local and global network.

Global communication brings about a cultural diversity and convergence. More and more people come to consensus about universal morality, international systems, international norms, a market economy and so on. Nevertheless, cultural convergence is not the result of a passive reception, but an active selection. Due to the differences in the core part of the culture, meanwhile, cultural diversity remains because of different interpretations of the same values in view of different ethnic groups and countries.

Under the trend of coexistence of cultural diversity and convergence, even if many countries accept and abide by international practice, standards and norms, they often interpret from different perspectives. Cultural convergence does not simply mean the same values. For example, in terms of environmental protection, each country has its own different interpretation and corresponding policies. Under the concept of a market economy, there are different economic patterns and systems. In the case of climate change, say, the European Commission classified nuclear power and natural gas as green energy in December 2021. Having the common climate goals, European countries and NGOs had different opinions about the EU's green taxonomy which included nuclear power and natural gas. Nature gas also leads to global warming, while some hold it emits less carbon dioxide than coal. Nuclear power doesn't emit green gases but it carries some risks to environment. The debate helps achieve a short-term transition and long-term sustainable energy to reach the ultimate climate goal.

Global communication provides channels to build the global awareness and a need for cooperation. After people make an active selection and have a better understanding, they spread and internalize as part of self-identity. Global communication leads to the cultural exchange and convergence throughout the world. On the other hand, diverse cultural groups understand and interpret the messages sent from global media channels according to their sociocultural environment. Cultural diversity and convergence coexist in the process.

V. CONCLUSION

Global communication promotes the contact, exchange and understanding of different cultures. The process of globalization is the coexistence of national diversity and global unity. In the process, a country needs to coordinate all parties in the economic, political and cultural fields to adapt to the development and changes of globalization. Just as globalization itself is a complex unity, the cultural diversity and convergence are also based on multi-dimensional discussions. Under discussion and debate, a man has a better understanding of the global society and diverse culture. Inclusiveness and openness are a driving force shaping a sustainable collective future, facilitate negotiations and cooperation and prioritize the common good in the global context.

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