

# Globalization and Community Education in Asia

Yasushi Maehira  
Kyoto University, Japan

## Introduction

Recently, the accelerating globalization process is compressing our time and space, as well as homogenizing the whole world. This globalized society not merely abolishes (or diminishes) the domestic legal restrictions but also dismantles community values or norms, and affects all people that live within different communities in different societies (e.g. adults, children, the elderly, people with different ethnicities, gender and so on).

Historically, as fictional as it appears to be, Asia has been regarded as the “alien” by many Europeans. Presently, as the world is becoming an increasingly globalized place, the question has been raised as to whether or not Asia still holds its unique values and lifestyles. Within this globalizing process, not only commodity, labor force and trade have infiltrated deep into Asia but also many cultures and customs. The multimedia makes it possible for people in different parts of the whole world to experience the same thing simultaneously. This can be witnessed from the homogeneous food culture in convenience stores and fast-food restaurants as well as well known youth sub-cultures in comic books, magazines and other goods. These phenomena are reducing our existing culture differences. Meanwhile, movements that are going against the globalizing process can not be ignored. In this paper, I will critically look at the globalization phenomenon from the Asian perspective.

### 1. What is Asia?

When Europeans spoke about “oriental despotism,” “Asian community,” they used to describe “Asia (or the Orient)” as a place that has been left behind in the single track of historical development. In other words, Asia had been regarded as being inferior to Europe, a late comer, and barbarity. There have been many comments made toward the Asians by the Europeans: “There is no civilized society in Asia so we need to teach them democracy.” “No Asian has modern self; no Asian is self-independent.” The purpose of education for Asians is for them to create independence. Unfortunately, it was not merely the general European publics that hold such thoughts, the intellectuals with progressive ideas in Asia, most of who have internalized with European ideas were also caught in the same trap. It is not true that Asia is made up of the societies left in the course of history.

As Hegel, Marx and Mao Zedong insisted, Asia was made up of the societies left in the economic development stage of history. These statements are false, as history has proven so. In the stage of economic depression, Japan still maintains the second-largest economy in the world. As well, the so-called Asia NIES (countries such as Korea, Taiwan and Singapore) and China have been showing high economic growth.

However, there are many countries in the Asia region that are being listed as “least developed countries (LDCs),” and according to the World Bank, many people in these regions do not receive “basic human needs”. Asia should not be portrayed as one Union. There are diversities of cultures, languages and ethnicities that made it into a complex society. We can draw different maps of Asia coming from different perspective. A map of Asia being drawn from the economic perspective finds it to include countries ranging from highly capitalistic countries to LDCs. A religious map of Asia portrays people’s different faiths and believes. Finally, the “Asia” can also be seen from different political regimes.

It is not the purpose of this paper to review these diversities in details. Rather, I would like to discuss how Asia, which has these diversities, is being changed under the influence of unifying market-movement of globalization and what kind of movements exist against this process. Asia has many valuable wisdom and resources which the whole world should learn in the age of globalization. Meanwhile, countries including Japan need to learn from the negative experiences these Asian countries once have experienced.

## **2. The impact of globalization on Asia.**

According to Makoto Nishibe, a Japanese economist, the word globalization has been defined as below<sup>1)</sup>,

1. The whole world is based on the market economy.
2. No hindrance to the capitalist market.
3. Development of transportation and telecommunication technology; as the consequence, the distance between different parties on earth has reduced.
4. A trend that the development of the market economy and its globalizing process are being interwoven.

Eastern Europe has also adopted the market economy. When we see China take the capitalistic approach, and Vietnam’s economy as it adopted the “Doi Moi” (innovation) policy, the question has been raised as to the where about of the socialistic society. The economic systems of other socialist nations such as Laos and Cambodia have much in common with the capitalist nations. Even North Korea began to introduce the market economy. Thus, presently, the world has revolved into a “single world system”, within which almost all countries are dependent of each other. These trends, coupled with the deregulation of the market, have had a crushing impact on Asian countries and societies which made them call

for the open market. Meanwhile, based on principles of the WTO, the come about of intellectual property rights, agricultural liberalization, and financial deregulation place tremendous influences on the local communities.

Domestic agriculture is suffering irrecoverable damage as the deregulation of agribusiness allows the import of low price American foods. According to Atsushi Makino<sup>2)</sup>, China's entrance into WTO dose not only symbolizes the decrease of the unemployment rate, declination of small companies and increased social problems. This is a serious problem of food safety. It is also a problem that all agricultural producers and consumers face both at the domestic and international levels.

At first glance, it seems preferable for consumers to purchase lower price agricultural products under the slogan of deregulation or anti-trade protectionism. However, these products are often being produced without consideration towards human health and environmental issues. In addition, it is legally possible for some countries to export and import products with toxic substances because of lack of safety standards and policies. As long as agricultural goods are being marketed around the countries, toxic substance related problems will continue to occur. These problems should be shared between all parties, both consumers and producers of agricultural foods as their decisions influence the regulation toward agricultural products. However, under the influence of globalization, such decisions have gone beyond people's control as their rights have been deprived from deciding what to buy for their living (food, clothing and shelter). Furthermore, these vital issues are not restricted to the context of our present society; problems such as the genetically-modified foods' safety issues do not merely affect our lives but also lives of our future generations.

### **3. Globalization and transnational movement of people.**

Globalization facilitates the transnational movement of more people. These include groups such as the migrant workers, seasonal workers, immigrant workers and so on. With the past of time, more workers are flowing out from farming villages to metropolitan areas or across the boundaries to seek employment. In addition, an outstanding phenomenon in Asia is the growing number of refugees that are persecuted for political or ethnic reasons. This became an emergent phenomenon since the term "boat people" has been introduced to the public. However, most of these problems are being discussed from the perspectives of the hosting countries (countries that accommodate refugees) and perspectives of the sending countries, homelands or their families tend to be ignored. In most cases, emigrant or immigrant workers are often young and physically workable. Whether they travel alone or in some cases taking their families with them, only elderly people are left behind in the villages. In such communities, questions have been raised as to whether or not there are still possibilities of further development.

It is not merely employment or political reasons that encourage people's transnational movements. The municipal governments in Japan are promoting international marriages and increasingly, more Japanese citizens are marrying foreigners. In 2000, a high record of 36,263 international marriages between Japanese and foreigners has been reported. This accounts for 4.5 % of the total marriages in Japan in that year within which 1 out of 22 marriages was an international marriage<sub>s</sub>,

Since 1980s, the so-called Japanese "Asian brides" have been reflecting this trend. Globally, many countries are heterogeneous in nature and international marriages may occur commonly. Yet, for a long time in the past, most of the people in Japan gripped onto the idea that Japan is a racially homogeneous nation, it has one single race and uses one identical language. This concept strongly intertwined with the illusion of ever lasting "family" and when it became necessary to promote international marriages in Japan, this illusion seems to be falling apart.

It is outrageous that the Japanese municipal governments are arranging international marriages without prior cross-cultural understanding between people and their individual consents. Behind this outrageous phenomenon, many other problems have also been spotted and they are: the Northern-Southern problem (Japan has been portrayed as a rich country where other Asian countries are poor), gender disparities between Asian women and men, shortage of young workers in rural area and most of all, Japan's unique view toward the "family". In most of the traditional Japanese families, nothing is more important than perpetuating their family lines and future offspring.

In the cases of "Asia brides," it was those girls that choose to cross the international water. However, little consideration has been given to babies that are adopted from abroad; it was not her/his wish in doing so. Many may be unaware that a large number of Korean babies are being taken abroad for adoption every year. Even though this process is being prohibited by the "Convention on Rights of the Child" policy, international adoptions are affected by many factors such as population problem, gender discrimination, which are in term closely linked with the country's political regimes.

#### **4. Influence on the communities**

Globalization has a function of obscuring differences between countries, and tends to rank countries according to their stage of development, unidimensionally and unidirectionally. Raking should be measurable, operational and visualizable. In doing so, the UN and World Bank has begun to grade different nations with a GNP figure. While more sophisticated measures are being constantly devised, GNP is considered to be the most basic measure among many countries. By using GNP, people can "control" the distinction between "rich countries" and "poor countries". As well, in the same process, the "narrative of development" begins to be woven.

However, there are still doubts as to whether or not the “poor country” can really be distinguished by using such measures. Bhutan, a small country in Asia has been listed as one of the “poorest country” in the world according to the UN reports. Yet, on reverse, there are no homeless people and beggary can not be seen on streets. In Bhutan, no one starves and die with hunger. The king of Bhutan calls for the pursuit of the “Gross National Happiness (GNH)” instead of GNP for his people. After a close examination of the Bhutan society, it can be found that the concept of “poverty” did not exist before the penetration of market economy into the country.

As the whole world has been turned into a big “market”, the Bhutanese too could not save themselves from this process. Each level of the Bhutanese communities, starting from the family, region up the national level, all are being buffeted by the swirl of globalization. In the past, these communities did not operate on the concept of economic exchange; they operated on the basis of sharing, mutual aid or redistribution. However, at present, in order to obtain the everyday goods and necessities, money is needed. In doing so, People in Bhutan have to cultivate commercial crops. On the same time, the Bhutanese have fallen into the “monoculture” process and it is within this process that the problem of “poverty” has been posed.

These newly arising economic situations are changing the traditions, customs, and ethics in the local communities. Globalization breaks down the community and isolated people from each other where each individual is being recognized according to the market principle. “Every act of human being will be reduced to the issues of making ‘choices’ on merchandised service or products.” Apart from its negative side, globalization also has its positive effects. From the movement of globalization, Westernized ideas such as ‘liberalism’, ‘individualism’, as equality between the sexes, and breakdown of patriarchy have been introduced and taken root.

## **5. Proposals from Asia**

Up until now, the spot light has been placed on the negative effects of globalization. Problems such as poverty within disadvantaged groups, racial and gender discriminations, the forest erosions, greenhouse effects and other environmental pollutions have become well known by the public. The serious question has been raised as to how the globalization process will continue under these effects. According to Jun Nishikawa<sup>4)</sup>, 5 points in making a better Asia have been suggested and they are : 1 Peace making , 2 Promotion of democracy and citizen’s participation, 3 Respect toward multiculturalism, 4 Development of cooperative society, and 5 Caring and “co-living” with our surrounding environment. In making a brighter future, this lesson should be learned not merely by the Asians but by each single participant of our global world.

The concept of "peace" has been privileged to Asia. Starting from Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism, Asian religions have tried to portray "peace" from one's calm mental state. Dalai Lama and Gandhi Mahatma's lessons have been used by India and other countries as their spiritual foundation toward environmental and peace movements.

In particular, I would like to focus on the developments and movements of non-profit cooperative welfare organizations. This is because there is a new trend where the community that was once broken apart into small individuals are coming together as one and individuals are helping one another to achieve their common goal. As mentioned by Nishikawa, the "Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA)" is an NPO that helps more than 32,000 Indian women stepping out from the lowest class of their society. It provides them with education, legal information, money and other assistances which encourage them to be self-independent. In Thailand, Buddhist monks initiated a new movement that plans to boost the development of the deprived farming areas. These monks criticize village developmental regimes by the central government's and suggest the need to base development measures on the voices of the "insiders". By utilizing the resources of nature, they grow organic rice, medical herbs and other products. Following on, by selling the goods they have planted, they have introduced community money and regional currency into their community.

The idea of community money, (community currency, local money, local currency) was not first invented in Asia; its history can be traced back to the age of Robert Owen in Britain back in 19th century. Presently, it is possible to discover many kinds of community money in Europe. However, the community money witnessed in Thailand or Japan can be said to be unique to the Asia region, in that it is based on the wisdom of the agricultural society where villagers cooperated and exchanged goods. Back in the history, unique associations so called "Yui" or "Kou", a type of mutual help group has thrived in Japan before the modern period. They facilitate the exchange of labor or service, limit household expenses and only purchase goods from outside when necessary. In those cases, all villagers would cooperate and put their money together to make the purchase.

From the effects of globalization, there have been more communications between different organizations in different regions and more attempts for developments and improvements. While many are undergoing the threat of dismantlement, it is no doubt that Asia, Japan and the entire world are becoming stronger and more prosperous from this process.

---

This paper was presented on the 24th of March, 2003 in Firenze University's International Conference, "Ettore Gelpi:mondializzazione e lotte educative": Italy.

Referenece

- 1) Tadashi Nishibe, "Local Currency LETS – Media beyond Money and Trust" in Yukihiro Karatani,(ed.) "Possibilities of Communism" Tokyo: Ota shuppan, 2000.
- 2) Atushi Makino, "Globalization and Community Education" Nagoya (unpublished), 2003.
- 3) O Bin, "Intercultural Clash of Intermarriage – On Revolution of Life and Culture" in Asia "Asia New Era Vol. 4. "Happiness", Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003 , pp. 235-242
- 4) Jun Nihikawa, "Development and Happiness – Learning 'Richness of Mind' in Asia" Asia New Era Vol. 4. "Happiness", Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003, pp. 83-112.