

In the Name of God

Some Observations about Cultural Interactions in a Global Age¹

Abdolrahim GAVAH

Introduction

To start with, let me thank the kind invitation and warm reception of our dear hosts at the International Research Center for Philosophy of Toyo university, especially my dear friends professor Miyamoto, Professor Nagai and Dr. Horiuchi, and last, but not the least, Bahman Zakipour.

I sincerely hope that our this round of dialogue, like the previous ones held alternately in Tehran and Tokyo, will submit fruitful results and would further enhance our mutual cultural understanding and cooperation.

Before addressing our main topic of “Cultural interaction in the age of globalization”, since the meaning of “culture” is somehow clear, let us start by giving some clarifications on the definition and process of “globalism” and “globalization”.

As the distinguished scholars present in our meeting know, the concepts of “globalism” and/or “globalization”, which we will later on address the difference between the two, are rather “new” terms (concepts) designed to address the “new” world order or situation. Nevertheless, these concepts, by being somehow “new”, are not yet well defined or formulized. That is why we have to give at least some preliminary definition of the concept, in order not to leave our audience quite empty-minded.

Following are some definitions of the concept of globalization.

1. Globalization is man’s collective self-consciousness of interconnectedness of human societies and increasing convergency

between all kinds of international political and cultural processes and the mutual connection of the world together (M.R.Dehshiri, Religion and Globalization, 2014, p.12).

2. Globalization means the emergence of a new era and a new world order in which local minor or partial affairs are redefined and reproduced in the form of global major or universal issues.

Also, in the age of globalization, local distinctions somehow disappear and hence the whole world follows a unified pattern (ibid., page 83).

3. Talinson holds that globalization makes sense in the process of rapid expansion of complex interconnections between various societies, cultures, institutions and individuals all over the world (ibid).

4. Harvey is of the opinion that globalization includes two elements of contraction in time and space and reduction of distances (ibid., 99).

5. Others have defined globalization as unification and integration of the whole world with the aim of establishing a sustainable peace all over the globe (ibid, 145) or creation of a trans-national civil society (ibid., p.194).

Our next introductory comment concerns the distinction between the natural process of “globalization” and the intended or designed project of “globalism”, the former being a natural and inevitable positive process very much to the benefit of mankind, while the latter being an un-natural and premeditated project of big powers in order to preempt the resources of small societies, thus being undesirable and to a large extent harmful. Those opposing “globalism” consider it as a new kind of imperialism and hegemony (ibid., 70).

2. Globalization and global cultural interactions

As the esteemed scholars present in the meeting very well know, there are a vast number of good books and articles on globalization in digital form (for example just now there are more than 9,500,000 entries about Globalization on Google, which is beyond any meaningful categorization

and or reference). Therefore, we will only give some of our own preliminary observations on the subject-matter and leave the rest to our scholarly audience.

1. In a globalized age, in the same way that in the globalized economy of the present world you can participate in an economic transaction from any corner of the world, as if the whole world has turned into a very large global corporation and each of the 7,000 million population of the world being a member or share-holder of this big company, the global culture too follows the same trend and so, different local or national cultures are no more like separate independent islands but are acting more and more like interconnected parts of a global culture or a rather huge cultural corporation.

2. In this huge “public cultural corporation” each country, nation or community, be it small or large, plays its share based on its own cultural heritage and vitality.

3. In the light of the fast and rapid globalization process, taking over all people all parts of the globe, nowadays a Japanese person living in a far corner of Japan, or an Iranian individual living in a distant village, is no more a purely Japanese or Iranian person per se, but is one who is rarely thinking and acting globally. Just as, nowadays, all the sciences and technologies belonging to different races and or nations have become “global” or “international” too, transpassing all the national boundaries.

Along the same line, in our age of globalization, even different schools of thoughts and ideological doctrines have surpassed the boundaries of being Iranian, Japanese, or even regional, communal, Western, Eastern, and other particular denominations, and are being qualified by such global attributes as secular, plural, material, and else, which are all trans-national (international) qualifications.

4. In the globalization age of the man’s culture and civilization, not only individual cultural differences and oppositions, but even cultural distinctions and privileges are fastly fading away, being largely replaced by cultural commonalities and interferences which is a new phenomenon and deserves new attention.

5. Nowadays, issues such as population growth, poverty,

environment protection, global warming, economic development, unemployment, class differences, water shortage, carbonic emissions, ozone layer, world trade, AIDS, Ebola, drugs, addiction, human rights, moral disorder, family bonds, and the most important of all, war and blood-shedding and religious, racial, political and other sorts of conflicts, are all global problems demanding global attention and solutions.

Let us recall the famous Iranian poet's verses which is also adored at the entrance of United Nation's building:

- The whole mankind are members of the same society, since they are all born from the same germ.
- That is why when a single member of this whole society feels pain, all other members feel uneasiness too.

6. There is no doubt that both religions and cultures, doing with nations and communities, as well as traditions and customs, have different inherent capabilities and capacities for "globalization" or continued survival and even further development and growth in a globalized age. Furthermore, the level of economic growth of different societies, along with their level of socio-political development, is a determining factor in their potential capacity to adapt globalization.

7. Also, it seems that nowadays concepts such as religion, ethics, spirituality, mysticism, tradition, modernity, conscience, obligation, and else should all be considered more at a global/universal level than a local/national or even regional one.

8. In the capacity of a religionist and specialist in comparative religious studies and phenomenology of religion, and also a lecturer in foreign (non-Islamic) religions and history of religion, I am of the opinion that some religions, like Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, have a more trans-national or global capacity than some other religions such as Judaism, Shintoism, Hinduism, and else. Therefore, in globalized age, the religions belonging to the first group have a better chance of survival than those belonging to the second group. Although religions like Hinduism and Shintoism have demonstrated very good sustainability at national level.

9. Also, in the capacity of a modern Muslim scholar and

intellectual, I firmly believe, on one side, in the global capacity of Islam as a truly international religion (for details see Dehshiri, Religion and Globalization, chaps. 1-4) and, on the other side, in the rich wealth of the Persian language and the Iranian culture and civilization once spreading from China's borders to the Mediterania and part of Europe (for details see Motahhari, Mutual Contributions of Islam and Iran; Velayati, the Role of Iranians in Islamic Culture and Civilization), thus concluding that in the past centuries and ages the combination of Iran and Islam have been able to play an outstanding role in the man's culture and civilization, a capacity which can be well utilized in the present world situation.

10. As a last comment in this short list of preliminary observations on cultural interaction in the globalization age, one should also notice that most of the important books written on this subject in recent times deal with global issues such as Michael Foucault's End of the World, Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations, Rene Guenon's La regne de la quantite et les signes de temps, Jean Guiton's Dieu et la science, Konrad Lorenz's Eight Great Sins of Civilized Man, Anthony Arblaster's the Rise and Fall of Liberalism, Lester Thurow's the Future of Capitalism, and hundreds of other good relevant books.

3. Summary and Conclusion

1. Previously, I have talked about Japan's unique privilege to be in a position to act as a cultural model for Iran and rather all other Asian countries, a model of industrial progress while maintaining its useful and valuable cultural traditions.

In other words, we Iranians and other Asian countries can learn many lesson from Japan and that is why we are here today, lessons on how to integrate tradition with modernity, attain material progress and welfare while keeping national ethical values, achieve development while preserving the environment, etc.

2. There is no need that we try to lay new foundations in our bilateral cultural relations, rather we have to revive our old legacies and

transactions, a sample of which we can find in the Nara Imperial Museum or in so many literary valuable pieces as the works of Hashim Rajabzadeh, Kamyar Abedi, the memories of many Japanese tourists & diplomats, scholarly works on Iranology in Japan, Morio Ono's Khairobad-Nameh, Masih Mohajeri's Islam in Japan, and finally my own book on Shintoism.

3. Finally, since in my opinion religion still is the foundation of every nation's cultural heritage, be it Islam in Iran or Shintoism or Buddhism and other religions in Japan, so it can play an important role in promoting ethical and spiritual values and virtues in different societies, though we are not at all ignorant of the also negative and destructive role of religious misunderstanding and religious fanaticism, narrow mindedness, and shortsightedness in promoting violence and antagonism within and / or between human societies.

That is why we recommend that by removing the dust of such misunderstandings and misrepresentations from otherwise the genuine face of any religion, we should all join hands to better utilize this beneficial tool in promoting sustainable peace in our motherlands and outside world.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Notes

¹ Paper presented by Dr. Abdolrahim Gavahi, president of the World Religions Research Center in the Conference "Towards the Philosophy of Coexistence: Dialogue with Islamic Iran", International Center for Philosophy, Toyo University, Tokyo, Japan, Dec. 11-14, 2014.