

Reflection on Cultural Diversity of Chinese Ethnic Minorities in an Era of Globalization

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to discuss cultural diversity of Chinese ethnic minorities in the era of globalization. The article tries to examine the relationships between globalization and cultural diversity. The author argues that permanent global cultures that are presented in the course of globalization don't only have universal cultural values related to common fate of mankind, but also reflect characteristics of powerful Western cultures and include diversified ethnic cultures. The article also discusses the opportunities and challenges faced by Chinese minority culture. Using relevant books, journals and a questionnaire, the present study investigated 120 minority people and 82 Han people and results show: cultural diversity of Chinese ethnic minorities faces a crisis of being weakened by powerful cultures, there are also opportunities for the minorities to revive and regenerate their ethnic cultures. Vulnerable cultures of Chinese ethnic minorities shall be modernized during their protected development, in order to find their position in the process of globalization.

Key Words: Globalization; The cultural diversity of Chinese ethnic minorities; Cultural Globalization

1. Introduction

Globalization is a basic characteristic of modern world. Its impacts on people are not merely limited to certain area of the world, but almost extend to all corners of it. With the acceleration of globalization, cultural contacts and collisions among countries, nations and areas are bound to influence and change people of different nations and cultural backgrounds on the earth. Then, is still necessary to preserve ethnic cultures? Will globalization necessarily lead to cultural globalization? Due to globalization, problems about cultures and cultural diversity have become more prominent.

2. Globalization and Cultural Diversity

As regards relationships between globalization and cultural diversity, there are two completely different views. On one hand, globalization is considered to be a process through which different nations gradually identify each other's cultures and values in exchanging and colliding with cultures abroad. Finally, regional characteristics of cultures will be definitely assimilated based on universal cultural identity, so that a category of general worldwide cultures come into being, namely cultures are globalized. For instance, Ervin Laszlo has mentioned in the preface of a book titled *The multi-cultural planet: The Report Of A Unesco International Expert Group* that "people are worried that some cultures would be diluted by the great information flow arising from globalization; in a long run, such a process will possibly contribute to incorporating cultures of different areas and nations into a single type of identical global cultures" (Ervin Laszlo, 1994, P. 9). Firstly defining "Global Culture", James. N. Rosenau considers that interdependent development of the world has made a kind of global cultures with universal value possible, and only an international community that shares a value system is an ideal society (Liu jie, 2000, P. 5). Views of above propositions are generally consistent. To be exact, economy will be inevitably globalized with the globalization of cultures, and diversified cultures will be necessarily replaced by universal ones, to ultimately form homogeneous global cultures that integrate various regional and ethnic cultures. In fact, cultural globalization is somewhat a process through which non-Western cultures are homogenized and integrated by Western ones. In the process of globalization, Western developed countries are powerful countries, where cultures are highly erosive and penetrative with the drive of economy. For instance, cultural erosion may be fully reflected from business cultures of McDonald, Coca-cola and Hollywood films which are popular on a worldwide basis. "Nowadays, all trends of cultural globalization are essentially impacted by Western ways of thinking" (Hoshino Akiyoshi, 2000, P. 192). David Rothkopf, a former senior official in the U.S Department of Commerce, says, "It is in the economic and political interests of the United States to ensure that if the world is moving toward a common language, it be English; that if the world is moving toward common telecommunications, safety, and quality standards, they be American; that if the world is becoming linked by television, radio, and music, the programming be American; and that if common values are being developed, they be values with which Americans are comfortable" (David Rothkopf, 1997, P. 45). Apparently, globalization is reckoned by David Rothkopf to be Americanization, which in essence, is a process for America to publicize its value standards and cultural concepts.

On the other hand, some people think that globalization will unnecessarily contribute to cultural globalization, but may further facilitate cultural diversity. John Naisbitt and P. Aburdene consider that, "even if our lifestyles become more and more similar, a great countertrend can't be ignored; a category of forces against uniformity expect to maintain unique features of their own cultures and languages, so they resist external impacts" (J. Naisbitt & P. Aburdene, 1991, P. 118). "People will be more desirous of preserving their traditions once they greatly impact each other" (1991, P. 20). As a professor of the Harvard University in America, Samuel P. Huntington believes, the fundamental source of conflict in the new world will be cultural, not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. And the clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. (Samuel P. Huntington, 1993, P. 22). He also points out, "For the relevant future, there will be no universal civilization, but instead a world of different civilizations, each of which will have to learn to coexist with the others". (Samuel P. Huntington, 1993, P. 49). Apparently, Huntington attaches great importance to uniqueness of cultures and cultural identity. He Xingliang, a Chinese scholar, reports that "according to current cultural patterns of the world, trend of economic globalization has strengthened social connections among all countries and areas, so that the countries and areas impact each other in terms of economy. Nevertheless, because of differences in cultures and economy, it is impossible for the formation of a kind of homogeneous cultures on a global basis, although all countries and nations may better

understand each other's cultures by relatively frequent cultural contacts. Before a country and its nations disappear, their ethnic cultures will be permanently unique. In other words, cultures tend to be diversified in a long term." (He Xingliang, 2002, P. 59). From above views, it may be known that some scholars consider interactions among various cultures are promoted by globalization, while such exchanges and clashes may create and strengthen distinct cultural characteristics and separate cultural identity. Cultures will be more diversified if the process of globalization is longer.

Obviously, arguments about globalization and cultural diversity are controversial. The key seems to consist in if cultures are globalized or not, but, in nature, lies in how to understand and deal with relationships between globalization and ethnic cultures. In fact, as globalization is intensified nowadays, cultural globalization and cultural diversity coexist. The permanent global cultures presented during globalization don't only involve universal cultural values related to common fate of human beings instead of non-Western cultural values, but also reflect characteristics of powerful Western cultures. In the mean time, they include diversified national and regional cultures. It has become a severe task for all countries and nations to reflect on how to draw lessons from excellent outcomes of human civilizations while keeping and promoting diversity of ethnic cultures by seeking advantages and avoiding disadvantages. All countries strive to preserve their own cultural characteristics and maintain their cultural roots. The international community has never stopped their efforts to promote cultural diversity. In November 2001, the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was passed on the 31st Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, pointing out that it is necessary for human beings to defend cultural diversity just like it is essential to keep biological balance for biodiversity. In 2005, the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions was reached on the 33rd General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and became the first milestone for protecting diversity of human cultures. This means that principles of cultural diversity have been transformed into morals and ethics that are supposed to be obeyed by the international community (Zhao Shaohua, 2012).

3. Opportunities and Challenges for Diversifying Cultures of Chinese Ethnic Minorities in an Era of Globalization

China is a unified multi-ethnic country, where diversified ethnic cultures is one major characteristic of this country. Chinese ethnic cultures have integrated cultures of Han people that are mainstream cultures with cultures of 55 ethnic minorities which have their separate cultural characteristics. Globalization has extremely complicated impacts upon cultures of Chinese ethnic minorities, including positive and negative impacts. It doesn't only offer opportunities for cultural construction of ethnic minorities, but also poses challenges to them.

3.1. Opportunities for Diversifying Cultures of Chinese Ethnic Minorities during Globalization

In a new open era of globalization, there are great unprecedented challenges for exchanging and spreading cultures of ethnic minorities. In other words, ethnic cultures may be activated by globalization to develop towards tourism and industries, so that it is possible to revive native ethnic cultures and traditions. In particular, it will be possible to inherit and develop ethnic cultures as long as pertinent subjects can protect their own cultures with capital, technologies and market from globalization, reflect upon themselves and logically reorganize cultures. For instance, in Lijiang of Yunnan Province, there are 10 minorities that have existed for generations. In the long course of their histories, "Lijiang traditional cultures, represented by Dongba cultures of Nakhi people, have come into being, harmoniously blended with diverse cultures of many other ethnic minorities" (Zhou Jingxiang & He Aijun, 2014, P. 138). A path has been explored for

interactions between cultures and tourism in Lijiang since 1990s through the wave of globalization with Chinese policies for reform and opening up. Besides, a range of ethnic cultural brands such as Ancient Naxi Music, LishuiJinsha, Impression Lijiang and Mufu have been developed and launched, to persistently incorporate diversified ethnic cultures into the whole process of tourism. Currently, cultural tourism has become a pillar industry in Lijiang (Zhou Jingxiang& He Aijun, 2014, P. 139). It may be known from development model of Lijiang that globalization has provided historical opportunities for diversifying cultures of ethnic minorities and made it possible to revive and increase value of national cultural traditions. According to recovered questionnaires on ethnic issues, 59.25% respondents consider that advantages of globalization outweigh its disadvantages for cultural diversity of ethnic minorities. It is thus clear that over a half of respondents acknowledge historical opportunities brought to cultural diversity of ethnic minorities in the course of globalization.

3.2. Challenges Posed to Cultural Diversity of Chinese Ethnic Minorities by Globalization

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that globalization may cause damages and losses of cultures in ethnic minorities to certain extent. As an external driving force that promotes social changes, globalization will inevitably impose great impacts on the traditional society and urge it to regulate cultural structure of the society. For all nations, it is a basic law that their cultures will enter a new period of being adjusted as they are involved in globalization. In their process of entering a nation, foreign cultures will inevitably clash with native ethnic cultures. These cultures coordinate, integrate with and adapt to each other during their clash, to promote the construction of new traditional ethnic cultures. In the mean time, it is normal for cultural information to flow from higher to lower level during cultural exchanges, so ethnic cultures may be active or passive when they are integrated. To be exact, it is always a historical fate for vulnerable cultures to be assimilated by powerful ones. This means that in the process of globalization, there are possibilities for all countries to lose their ethnic cultures, particularly vulnerable cultures of ethnic minorities (Yang Shunchuan, 2006, P.6). Lijiang of Yunnan Province is hereby exemplified over again. The author has been to Lijiang twice, went there for the first time before 2011 when dialects of ethnic minorities were heard everywhere, but were rarely heard the second time when the author traveled there in 2013. The boss of the tavern where the author lived, as a native of Nakhi people, could speak Chinese fluently too. "According to a survey, less than 30% of pupils of Nakhi people can speak mother tongue of Nakhi people in Old Town of Lijiang. The younger generations of Taliu and Yi people can rarely speak dialects of their ethnic groups. Ethnic languages are important carriers of ethnic identity and cultures, so ethnic characteristics and cultures will virtually disappear once these languages disappear" (Zhou Jingxiang& He Aijun, 2014, P. 140). Although Lijiang is essentially a world tourism city with outstanding ethnic cultural characteristics, tourist crafts from all parts of China are seen everywhere in the market of small tourist commodities. In the Old Town of Lijiang, there are numerous bars, as a result of which changes have happened to prominent elements of ethnic cultures. Ethnic costumes of Nakhi, Bai, Lisu and Pumi people and so on are only mostly worn by old people, whereas middle-aged and younger people just wear these clothes on festivals or holidays as dresses, but rarely get dressed so in their daily life. Thus, there have been changes to functions of costumes (Zhou Jingxiang& He Aijun, 2014, P. 140). It shall be noted that, Wang Xi'en, as a researcher of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, considers that diverse cultures of ethnic minorities aren't only impacted by cultures of Han people, and in fact, traditional cultures of Han people are affected by foreign cultures too. "To be exact, elements of today's universal cultures mostly originated from Western countries, which depends on powerful position of Western countries in world economy and cultures in contemporary and modern times" (Wang Xien, 2000, P.9).

4. Protection and Development of Cultural Diversity of Chinese Ethnic Minorities

From above analysis, it may be discovered that in the course of globalization, Chinese ethnic minorities don't only face a crisis of losing their diverse cultures for more powerful cultures, but also have opportunities to revive and regenerate their ethnic cultures. In this sense, globalization is just like a double-blade sword in the cultural field and its key consists in how to revive and regenerate cultures of Chinese ethnic minorities while maintaining their independence and diversity.

First of all, cultures of ethnic minorities must be protected. As people speak of protecting such cultures, there is actually an implied premise that cultures of ethnic minorities are comparatively vulnerable. It is just because they are vulnerable that they shall be protected, specially concerned and cared in terms of policies. Over the past 10 years, Chinese government has strengthened its protection and advocacy of ethnic cultures. On the one hand, excellent cultural heritages of ethnic minorities have been effectively protected, sorted out and examined. For example, Dongba script is the sole "living hieroglyph" that has been kept intact all over the world. Written in Dongba script, Dongba Dance Notation of Nakhi People was the first ethnic dance notation in China and the sole hieroglyphic dance notation in the world. Therefore, the Dongba Cultural Research Institute has been specially founded by the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. After years of efforts, An Annotated Collection of NaxiDongba Manuscripts, including more than 20, 000 volumes and 1, 000 types, have been completely translated into Chinese (Wang Xien, 2000, P.10). On the other hand, special policies and measures have been adopted and taken for cultures of ethnic minorities. In the "12th Five-year" Plan of the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, a special project known as "Project Spring" has been implemented for cultures of ethnic groups. Since the "12th Five-year Plan", the Ministry of Finance has specially appropriated over RMB 6 billion to fund cultural construction in ethnic minorities of the west mainly for constructing public cultural facilities, arranging equipment, making public cultural organizations open to the public for free, implementing public digital cultural construction and protecting intangible cultural heritages(Source 1, 2014). Pursuant to recovered questionnaires, 36.52% respondents consider that the country has abruptly strengthened its protection of traditional cultures in ethnic minorities over the past few years, 35.25% think it has been highlighting the protection of such cultures, and 28.23% have reported that they have rarely discovered it has made any efforts in cultural protection. It is thus clear that interviewees generally acknowledge the country's protection of cultures of ethnic minorities. In the future, it is necessary to enhance the protection of these cultures based on development. The country may protect ethnic minorities in two forms, including protection with and without development. Based on prospects of cultures of ethnic minorities, it may be judged that too much importance has been attached to preserve traditional cultures, whereas dynamic inheritance and development of traditional cultures have been negated. In other words, it is inadvisable to protect cultures with negative ideas.

Moreover, cultures of ethnic minorities shall be developed. For such development, it is necessary to actively get involved in interacting with global cultures on the premise of keeping independence of ethnic cultures, in order to modernize these cultures. In essence, independence of ethnic cultures can't be ignored. For the purpose of independence, a nation must maintain independent cultural forms of its ethnic cultures. Globalization has promoted cultures of ethnic minorities to develop on a global basis. In order not to protect their ethnic cultures from being assimilated by powerful cultures, nations shall find their own positions throughout cultural development in the process of globalization and modernize their traditional cultures. For this purpose, efforts shall be made to protect, explore and sort out cultural heritages of ethnic minorities. Besides, there is a need to inherit and spread cultural spirits, develop cultural market and accumulate cultural capital or power and so on. These major issues must be taken into account as general patterns of globalization, because it will be impossible for cultures of a nation to exist alone in the course of globalization. Instead, they shall exist and develop in interacting with global cultures. Hence, ethnic cultures

must actively exchange with others to get involved in cultural interactions on a global basis and boldly absorb the essence of foreign cultures, to enrich and develop their own cultures. In addition, Their nations shall greatly carry forward and cultivate ethnic cultural spirits under the impacts of foreign cultures, to inherit excellent cultures accommodating development of modern times from ethnic ones and consolidate their own cultural identity (JinMinqing, 2011, P. 110) , so as to have their cultures evolved into their ethnic and new modern cultures that are based on traditions and highlight innovation. In an era of globalization, cultural globalization and diversity coexist. They are neither necessarily opposite nor uncoordinated. Vulnerable cultures of Chinese ethnic minorities are supposed to be modernized in the process of their protected development, so as to find out their own positions throughout globalization.

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