

« The Clash of Civilizations »: Perception in the Context of Globalization.

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Résumé :

La Mondialisation (globalisation) est un phénomène caractérisé par l'interdépendance des régions géographiques, ainsi que tout les aspects de la vie sociale. Ce processus est facilité par le rapide développement de la technologie de la communication, et plus précisément l'internet. On ne peut pas nier que ce processus dynamique est accompagné par une tendance vers une uniformité culturelle, sur le plan de la langue aussi bien que sur le plan du "style de vie", ou des habitudes sociales en générale. Cependant, nous devrions d'abord clarifier la différence entre "culture" et "civilisation", avant de se poser une question essentielle : devons nous assumer l'existence de multiples cultures locales dans l'univers d'une civilisation globale émergente (Americanisation) ?

Culture or Civilization?

The word culture has many different meanings. For biologists, it is likely to be a colony of bacteria or other microorganisms growing in a medium, for some it refers to an appreciation of good literature, music, art, food, and for anthropologists, culture is the full range of learnt human behavior patterns.

The term was first used in this way by the pioneer English anthropologist Edward B. Tylor in his book "Primitive Culture" (1871). He said that "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Thus, our written languages, governments, buildings, and other man-made things are merely the products of culture.

According to The Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary, culture is "the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group". On the other hand, civilization is defined by this dictionary as a "state of human society that is very developed and organized", and "all people in the world and societies live in as a whole". Thus, civilization is a social order promoting cultural creation and four elements constitute it: economic provisions, political organizations, moral traditions, and the pursuit of knowledge and art.

Therefore, culture emphasizes spirit compared with civilization that is related to technique and substances. Moreover, culture is what people pass down from generation to generation and what people do in their daily life. On the other hand, civilization is what people create by advancement of human's wisdom.

We can also add that culture is a generic term of lifestyle, religion, the way of thinking, whereas civilization is a general term of development of technology and economy in order to make more convenient life. Therefore, culture maintains forever, or for a long time unless other cultures force it to change. However, civilization may vanish or stop developing and new civilizations occur.

The way of measuring is also different between culture and civilization. Actually, we can not say which culture is superior or inferior, and the number or sorts of cultures is much more than that of civilizations. Culture, on the other hand can be divided into

smaller cultures. Civilization is sometimes compared with other civilizations, and people use some expressions like "more civilized".

It goes without saying that the writers of dictionaries where the term civilization is defined as "a society in an advanced state of social development" or "the quality of excellence in thought and manners and taste"...are "civilized" people. It certainly helps explain why they define themselves in such glorying terms.

In contrast, the antonyms of "civilization" include: barbarism, savagery, wilderness, wildness...These are the words that "civilized" people use to refer to those they view as being outside of "civilization" in particular indigenous people. Let us take one of the most famous examples of "contact" between "civilized" and "indigenous" peoples. When Christopher Columbus first arrived in the Americas he noted that he was impressed by the indigenous peoples, writing in his journal that they had "a naked innocence...they are very gentle without knowing what evil is..." and that "they will make excellent servants..."

Christopher Columbus appointed himself, with the approval of the Spanish crown, Viceroy and Governor of the Caribbean. More than 10 000 indigenous people were killed during Columbus's time as Governor. They were even considered as extinct after 1542. This example makes us wonder about what is really to be civilized, and who is really civilized and who is not?

Along history, the world has witnessed great civilizations such as the Mesopotamian civilization that was taking place around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and the Roman Empire that was controlling the Mediterranean and Silk Road, and so many others. Yet, neither of these big civilizations nor others were able to connect all parts of the world to each other, in contrast to what we are experiencing today embodied in the term "globalization".

Globalization describes a process by which regional economies, societies, and cultures have become integrated through a globe-spanning network of communication and trade. The term is sometimes used to refer specially to "economic globalization", that is the integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration, and the spread of technology.

Indeed techno-science became the driving force of civilization in the 20th century. The internet provides a crucial piece of evidence for a "global civilization". It has a growing user base worldwide, it is potentially everywhere, it transcends the frontiers and becomes the shared context of all cultures. In 2009, approximately one billion 67 thousand people worldwide used the Internet⁴.

Globalization refers also to the transnational circulation of ideas, languages, and popular culture mainly thanks to the internet and the media. Globalization is expressed in the fact that so many groups of people belonging to different cultural traditions, strive to interact with others at the global stage, while at the same time trying to preserve their national, ethnic, cultural, and civilization identity.

Globalization or Americanization?

⁴ "Internet World Stats". Miniwatts Marketing Group. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>.

One of the principal concerns about globalization is that it largely represents the “Americanization” of world “cultures” through the spread of American corporations abroad. For example, the American food restaurant chains influence the habits in the different societies; the most famous one is the Mac Donald’s restaurant chains. In France ,for example, some French people say that U.S restaurant chains crowd out their own products, and argue that fast food doesn’t belong to French society and is of lower quality than their own. Moreover, statistics show that within the last 40 years Mac Donald’s has expanded to over 31 000 restaurants worldwide⁵.

Another example of American world influence is the spread of American popular culture including music and movies. It is interesting to note that foreign media groups also contribute to the spread of American popular culture. For example, the French Vivendi company and the Japanese Sony company distribute American popular musicians around the world. It is also inevitable to mention the great influence of the Americans through great and worldwide companies such as Microsoft and Google.

Thus, globalization tends to make worldwide all aspects of human live including culture, and language is the core of people’s cultures which differs from one people to another. It is a matter of fact that English has become the language of globalization. English is now the official language for aerial and maritime communications, as well as one of the official languages of the European Union, the United Nations, and most international athletic organizations, including the international Olympic committee.

Moreover, English is the prevalent language for communication on the Internet with 29.4% of Web visitors⁶. It is also reported that there are now more non-native English speakers than native English speakers, and by 2010 there are about 514 000 000 people who speak English. Thus, English has the second position among the most spoken languages in the world after Chinese⁷.

Therefore, the consequence of globalization may be the fact that the largest and most dominant cultures which are the Western cultures, and mainly the American culture, are becoming larger and more dominant at the expenses of many others. Those Western cultures have the advantage of controlling world economy and technology.

By the 1990’s, a new vision of the relation between world civilizations emerged, proposed by an American political scientist Samuel.P.Huntington⁸, which he called “the clash of civilizations”. S.Huntington’s article “The Clash of Civilizations?” that

⁵ “Culture and Civilization», The LEVIN Institute, <http://www.globalization101.org>

⁶ [Internet World Stats](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm), updated June 30, 2009. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>

⁷ [Uk.encyclopedia.msn.com. "English definition - Dictionaries - MSN Encarta".](http://uk.encyclopedia.msn.com/English_definition_-_Dictionaries_-_MSN_Encarta)
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⁸ Professor Huntington provoked great debate among international relations theorists with the interrogatively-titled “The Clash of Civilizations?” in 1993, an extremely influential, oft-cited article published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. Its description of post-Cold War geopolitics contrasted with the influential End of History thesis advocated by Francis Fukuyama. Huntington expanded “The Clash of Civilizations?” to book length and published it as *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* in 1996.

⁸ S.Huntington quoted in : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_P._Huntington

appeared in 1993, announced his view of a central aspect of what global politics is likely to be in the coming years .He wrote:

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*"It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great division among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural...the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."*⁹

Huntington believed that while the age of ideology, which is about the cold war era (1946- 1989),confronting the capitalist and the communist ideologies, had ended, the world will be characterized by cultural conflicts, based on cultural and religious lines ,and he also divided the world into six major civilizations: the western ,the Latin American ,the Orthodox world (former USSR) ,the Eastern world (hindu,budhist,chineese,Japanese...) ,and the Muslim world civilization (the middle east,Pakistan,and northern and western Africa).Huntington thesis states that the clash of civilizations should be the principle issue in world politics after the end of the cold war ,and it should especially shape the relationship between the WEST and ISLAM, and that the challenge for Western policy-makers is to make sure that the West gets stronger and fends off all the others, in particular Islam.

Yet, since the tragic events of September 11th, 2001, Huntington notion of "clash of civilizations",and the basic paradigm of "the West versus the Rest", is sometimes used as an interpretation of the legitimating of events and military actions such as "the war on terror". On the other hand, there is also a reassertion by some countries and/or communities of their identity vis a vis the dominant culture or civilization. For many people, western civilization means the end of their cultural systems.

Western civilization addressed not only the people of Western Europe and America where this civilization was created, but the whole planet as well. globalization which means that peoples of all the world are incorporated in a global society, tends to create a "global culture".Thus,a new globally shared culture is emerging.Architecture,fashion,music,and way of life are commonly shared by all, despite the fact that their origins rest in this or that nation. Locality of cultural values is challenged by the emerging market economy that forces all people to have similar preferences or tastes. Yet, we can say that local cultures that represent the identity of people and groups will certainly not disappear. While civilization is getting a singular character through globalization, culture is still keeping its plurality.

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