

[Article Title](#)

How American Culture Correlates the Process of Globalization

[Author](#)

Chi-yu Chang

[Bio Data](#)

Chi-yu Chang, Ph.D. is Associate Professor in the Department of Applied English, Ming Chuan University Taiwan

[Abstract](#)

It is arguable that every culture may be deemed a potential but imperfect model that other cultures can consult. Although many regard it as an incarnation of democracy and a crystallized or epitomized model of human civilization, the United States as a cultural entity is definitely an imperfect one, which does not necessarily “direct” the process of globalization to the right track. As such, what this paper mainly concerns includes, first, why America has long been considered an easy target criticized as cultural imperialism/hegemony; second, whether the correlation between the process of globalization and American culture has decisively perpetuated the gap that distinguishes winners/dominators from losers/the oppressed or gradually ensured the realization of a global utopia; and third, what lessons are worth learning in a view that American culture

has been imagined as culturally imperialistic no matter how acceptable or convincing it appears. In a world that is getting “smaller”, American culture is nothing less than one that has been equally influenced by globalization, whether regarded as a “bandwagon” or “juggernaut”, as others have. Hence it is not cultural homogenization, which proves unacceptable because of undermining the present globality that exists and serves as a pillar of globalization, but competitive co-existence among cultures with an approach to human friendliness that facilitates the process of globalization. In that sense, a positive and constructive attitude towards American culture, which closely refers to American value, language and technology, will help give a profound understanding of the relationships between globalization and the U.S. in terms of cultural factors.

Key Words: cultural imperialism, American culture, globalization, globality

Introduction

We are the world. So to speak, the world is much more like a community in comparison with that of several centuries ago. We are the world. That is *it* – a state of globality, in which trade and technology function as propellers that boost globalization while values and beliefs, polemic provokers that cast doubts on it. Culture is always controversial; rather, it is relatively true to those who believe it and embed their values in it. The term can be better interpreted when understood as a countable noun. Suggesting that “culture” be something “to think with”, Ulf Hannerz adds:

As a reflective stance, everyday cultural analysis would involve a sense of how we know what we know about other people: a sense of our sources of ignorance and misunderstandings as well as knowledge. It may suggest that differences between people are neither absolute nor eternal. Culture can be viewed in no small part as a matter of cumulative experience, and exchanges about that experience. It is a matter of doing as well as being, [sic] it is fluid rather than frozen. (2001: 69-70)

However, globalization, in some sense, is widely believed to be a pronoun of Westernization or modernization. Since cultures are not “frozen” but correlating one another, which becomes more prominent with the minimized cost of time and space, given overwhelming influences of the U.S. on the rest of the world in various aspects for the past decades, the hypothesis of America as a cultural hegemony becomes highly controversial. Francis Fukuyama, a Japanese scholar famous for *The End of History and the Last Man*, with his explanation that “America is the most advanced capitalist society in the world today . . . [so] if market forces are what drives [sic] globalization, it is inevitable that Americanization will accompany globalization,” asserts that globalization in some sense “has to be Americanization” and that this is why it has been resented by many people (2001).¹ Why does America become an easy target that has long been criticized as cultural imperialism, hegemony, or the like? And what does American culture mean in general to non-English speaking countries in a sense that “[e]arly globalisation involves the self-conscious cultural project of universality, whilst late globalisation – globality – is mere ubiquity” (Tomlinson, 1999a: 28)? Has the correlation between the process of globalization and American culture decisively perpetuated the gap that distinguishes winners/dominators from losers/the oppressed or gradually ensured the realization of a global utopia?

Non-Americans who enjoy what the United States has brought to them through high techs and media seem prone to acquiesce to such components representative of American culture as its beliefs, values, ideologies, ways of life, lifestyles, etc., which are felt and seen in a sense of being “unseen” and “unfelt”. This has come vague with standoffs, not merely among nations but also inside the U.S., provoked by the issue of human rights, religious freedom, the freedom of the press, and all those highly associated with American democracy that has been arbitrarily acclaimed universal but culturally controversial, let alone fast-food and Hollywood *junk*. It has to be made clear that cultural globalization cannot be made possible without the background of global capitalization, based on which the fast and frequent flow of capital, commodities, information, and personnel does

¹ This quote, from an interview with Fukuyama in 1998, was not publicized on the website of *The Merrill Lynch Forum* until 2001.

facilitate, if not energizing, the globalization process. However, after the Cold War era, the image of the most political-economically powerful country, although not most globalized,² is widely regarded as a hegemony that not simply possesses overwhelming military and economic power but launches cultural invasion on *the other*, including non-English-speaking Western countries, in spite of the fact that there is no causal pertinence between the process, in which capitalists looking for markets and profits overseas have reinforced cultural homogenization that helps eliminate cultures of otherness on a global scale (Beynon and Dunkerley, 2000: 22-23), and the so-called Americanization or misinterpreted Pax Americana.

On one hand, people feel disgusted against globalization because its possible association with American culture; on the other hand, they cannot help being involved in or embracing it because of many facets of convenience it renders. Thus to explore what roles American culture has been playing will help understand why and how it has undermined what it seems to promise in a sense of globalization that obviously “is differentially and unequally experienced in the world today” (Kiely, 1998: 17).

Can Knowledge-Based Economy, Multi-Identities and the Prevalence of English Be Seen as Americanized Globalization?

Since the late 19th century or even earlier times, the “soft” part of American cultural components that were value-based and carried by mediators such as soldiers, traders, missionaries and journalists have failed to be made widespread or deeply rooted in other nations. The “hard” part obviously along with the soft ones does not assure the further acceptance of the latter by non-Americans. The clash, partly originating from the debate of modernization, follows and becomes relevant. To be modernized may mean both “to be civilized” and “to be capitalized.”³ In a sense, modernization can be seen as a

² According to A.T. Kearney/Foreign Policy Magazine Globalization Index of 2003, the U.S. ranks as the 7th most globalized country, up from the 11th place last year, just before New Zealand and behind Ireland, Singapore, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Finland, and Canada. Among the 20th most globalized nations, there are seven using English officially.

³ Culture and civilization are two terms once referred to as each other; the latter in English, in the late 18th century, was regarded as human progress from barbarism. See John B. Thompson (1990: 124- 125).

process in which people are getting facilitated with regard to food, clothing, housing, communications, traveling, and other aspects of everyday life. This has become much clearer with widespread capitalization that promotes the application of capital, technologies, manpower, to *better* how people live. As Wallerstein argues, “Modernity as a central universalizing theme gives priority to newness, change, progress” (1990: 47). When modernization is viewed as something ethical or metaphysical, the notion sounds more controversial. In the era of globalization,⁴ modernization serves as the basis that helps build up globality, but it also leads to misunderstandings among people of different cultural identities or nations whose economies develop unequally. Wallerstein adds,

We have noted that the historic expansion of a capitalist world-economy originally located primarily in Europe to incorporate other zones of the globe created the contradiction of modernization versus Westernization. The simple way to resolve this dilemma has been to assert that they are identical. In so far as Asia or Africa ‘Westernizes,’ it ‘modernizes’. That is to say, the simplest solution was to argue that Western culture is in fact universal culture. For a long time the ideology remained at this simple level. . . . (1990: 44-45)

As mentioned, the *culture* that Americans have brought to the world, the “hard” part, is plausible but does not necessarily justify the profound pertinence to the “soft” part. Do American values, including other spheres like political ideologies, religious beliefs, manners and lifestyles, deserve a dominant position that intertwines and supports their “hard” counterpart that is apparently pertinent to global capitalization? Let’s think this over in light of how American culture correlates to the process of globalization through the following assertion made by Wallerstein: “Universalism can become a motivation for harder work in so far as the work ethic is preached as a defining centerpiece of modernity. Those who are efficient, who devote themselves to their work, exemplify a value which is of universal merit and is said to be socially beneficial to all” (1990: 46). Are such work ethics definitely desirable to all humans or merely to the American people? Aren’t they

⁴ Globalization has occurred in history in different faces. The definite article is used to imply that the globalization I am discussing is that which started around the early 20th century.

making people held in bondage? As Wallerstien puts it, “the universal work ethic justifies all existing inequalities, since the explanation of their origin is in the historically unequal adoption by different groups of this motivation. . . . Those who are worse off, therefore those who are paid less, are in this position because they merit it” (46). If freedom is a core value of American culture, how come it is seen by many as American universalism?

American Values as the Controversial

With unhappy memories of what the ex-colonizers imposed on them, non-Americans, especially people of the Third World nations, are more prone to distrust modernization or feel reluctant to accept it, which is treated as the synonym of Americanization, whether it is under the name of globalization or whatever else. No matter how it is called, it is something reminding them of military, political, economic, and cultural (if defined as “soft”) invasion. Although the U.S. has relatively little to do with what used to make them colonially suffered, its powerfulness has made the term—American cultural imperialism—taken for granted when it comes to cultural shocks or cultural conflicts with non-American ethnic groups. What aggravates such prejudice is the following myth that prevails:

[if] some states have developed earlier and faster than others, it is because they have done something, behaved in some way that is . . . more individualist, . . . entrepreneurial, . . . rational, or . . . ‘modern’. If other states have developed more slowly, it is because there is something in their culture . . . which prevents them . . . from becoming as ‘modern’ as other states. (49)

The military and political elements from America that affected these “peripheral” nations have ostensibly dwindled. They have become an implied undercurrent flowing throughout the world since the end of the Cold War. What seems left can be generally induced to various forms of cultural invasion. It sounds reasonable that the “central problem of today’s global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization.” (Appadurai 1990: 295) For the ex-colonized, it is credibly apocalyptic

that cultural homogenization is tantamount to an incarnation of invasion or a malicious tendency that may absorb their cultures and thus diminish their cultural identities. The Western countries initiated modernization, which, however, was also fallaciously considered a twin or inborn nature of Western Culture. Ironically, modernization is really what the ex-colonized and the underdeveloped desperately need, but the “modernization” through Western pride and Western lenses can only turn disgusting to them--“the rest”. As Wallerstein puts it:

The West had emerged into modernity; the others had not. Inevitably, therefore, if one wanted to be ‘modern’ one had in some way to be ‘Western’ culturally. If not Western religions, one had to adopt Western languages. And if not Western languages, one had at the very minimum to accept Western technology, which was said to be based on the universal principles of science.
(1990: 45)

First, to say that science, technology, language, and all those culturally “hard” are universal will simplify the problems thus caused. Technology is technology. What makes Western technologies “Western” or “dominant” is not technology per se but the power and dominance resulting from the misuse of it. Second, believed to be able to carry/convey soft part of culture, languages, likewise, serve as tools that can be abused and misused. Hence there is no need to emphasize distrust or hatred of Western languages, especially the most “universal” one—English. Second, to mix up the culturally “soft” with the “hard” only proves the fallacy of cultural chauvinism and may lead to a tension between homogenization and heterogenization. As mentioned, the desirability of Western technology is “based on the universal principles of science”; then, to base oneself on such universal principles doesn’t have to be “Western”. Rather, this has little to do with “Westernization”.

Since the modernization/Westernization/Americanization/globalization myth is hard to unravel because of national interests or colonial memories, non-Americans including those living in such core English-speaking countries as South Africa, Canada,

New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom, “regularly express worries in their national presses about the onslaught of ‘Americanization’” (Crystal 1997: 117). The concern about or the fear of cultural expansion of the U.S. is showing up as a worldwide syndrome shared among nations that are unavoidably under its influence. As Appadurai remarks, “Thus the central feature of global today is the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another and thus to proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular.” (1990: 307-308) It is interesting that even the U.S. has its own problems due to the clashes between its mainstream cultural identity and its *other* within the country. As Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean puts it:

In America this has been a more heightened mix, coming together over a brief span of history and under constant scrutiny with some still asserting that the reassertion of group identity and ‘difference’ threatens the national project of *e pluribus unum* as a source of national stability and progress. (1997: 68)

Will there be no way out? Here is what Wallerstein suggests, “[unless] we ‘open up’ some of our most cherished cultural premises, we shall never be able to diagnose clearly the extent of the cancerous growths and shall therefore be unable to come up with appropriate remedies.” (1990: 54) Too much humiliation may turn out to be too much arrogance or hesitation, and vice versa. This, equally applicable to Americans and non-Americans, is absolutely not a benign circle in terms of culture. What people are really in need of to be *on the right track* in the era of globalization, in a word, is open-mindedness, which can be reflected by confidence, respect, and mutual understandings. As Robert Hoton, an Australian sociologist, concludes, the globalization process “has always depended on intercultural borrowing and exchange” (2000: 151). Cultural exchange will seem to be a mission impossible without an attitude towards open-mindedness and the awareness that people are getting closer due to the compression of time and space. John Tomlinson also approves that “cultural practices” with such “complex connectivity” background play a central role in the process of globalization, and this is a feature of modern culture (1999b: 1-2). Concerned with the “hard” part of American culture, what are

those cultural practices that have deeply influenced other nations and the country where it is exported?

English as a Channel

Because “[the] fact that certain languages – English, French, Russian, Arabic, . . . and Chinese – have achieved regional or even global coverage and recognition, would not in itself lead us to predict a convergence of cultures, let alone a transcendence of nationalism,” (Smith 1990: 185-186) for those who believe in a single language shared in the era of globalization—which is believed to be English, what follows is a statement of vision: “. . . the language will become open to the winds of linguistic change in totally unpredictable ways. The spread of English around the world has already demonstrated this, in the emergence of new varieties of English in the different territories where the language has taken root.”⁵ That is, English (and probably all languages in the world) will be able to adapt themselves quite well to its counterparts if it is flexible and applicable enough. In this respect, the languages of otherness, if kept flexible and adaptive, will be able to sustain the challenge of English. There is no reason why this can hardly refer to a win-win situation. As Anthony D. Smith argues, “A world of competing cultures, seeking to improve their comparative status rankings and enlarge their cultural resources, affords little basis for global projects, despite the technical and linguistic infrastructural possibilities” (1990: 188). In short, English seems overwhelmingly important because it has dominated and facilitated various aspects of life, but if the need to make the best of local/regional languages and the cultures lying behind is kept ignored, the positive effects that globalization has led to or the “hard” components exported from American culture may turn out to be scapegoats suffering backlashes based on discontent and hatred.

Besides, English seems not intentionally plotted to be spoken worldwide, but it has developed this way. Like Latin in the past, the de facto dominance of the English language,

⁵ A remarkable case is that New Englishes, whether spoken in the U.S. or countries else, have become an appealing phenomenon since the 1960s. See David Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, p. 130.

established and assured by military force and economic power, is causally relevant to how influential the U.K. and the U.S. have been. According to David Crystal's research:

The present-day world status of English is primarily the result of two factors: the expansion of British colonial power, which peaked towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the emergence of the United States as the leading economic power of the twentieth century. It is the latter which continues to explain the world position of the English language today. . . . (1997: 53)

English as the official language of the U.S., "with its political and economic underpinnings, currently gives the Americans a controlling interest in the way the language is likely to develop" (53). Whether non-Americans like it or not, English has *naturally* served as "the medium of a great deal of the world's knowledge, especially in such areas as science and technology," and there are more and more countries getting ready to adopt or have adopted English as their official language or "chief foreign language" in different aspects; for them, the application of English to education means "access to knowledge" (101). As Nobleza Asuncion-Lande concludes, "English has developed its own momentum, aided by developments in information technology and growing interactions in world economy" (1998: 80). The moves that are being or to be taken by those treating English as a key to knowledge will irreversibly strengthen the indispensability of the English language and justify the use of it.

Robert Phillipson has a finding that, for the "periphery-English" African and Asian countries,⁶ the English language never simply exists internally dominant, "occupying space that other languages could possibly fill," but also plays a central role that helps link "almost all spheres of life" (30). He calls such a phenomenon "English linguistic hegemony . . . referring to the explicit and implicit values, beliefs, purposes, and activities which . . . contribute to the maintenance of English as a dominant language" (73). In Southern Asian countries like Bangladesh and Malaysia, the crucial factors that decide whether people have enough exposure to English as a foreign or second language are still

⁶ What's mentioned here is meant to focus on those colonized by Americans or the British.

deeply related to the distinction between regions concerning how much economic development or modernization has been achieved (24). In Scandinavian countries, English, although considered a foreign language, “has a social stratificational function” and functions as “a necessary professional skill”, while mass media, cyber communication, and their users are expected to be involved in an environment where English permeates as a must (25). The ex-colonized such as India and West African countries have been trying to establish their own way to use English, and the issue of world Englishes becomes nothing unusual. By illustrating cases concerning ESL/EFL in China and South Korea, Peter Dash (2003) also points out that cultural variables seem not that crucial when applied to SLA (Second Language Acquisition) processes; he suggests that one’s “higher socioeconomic and educational status”, more chances to be “exposed to western ideas and values”, and “a growing common global consciousness” can interact in a benign circle. In short, for many periphery-English countries, to be proficient in English is synonymous to “access to power and resources”, “life chances”, “social gain and advantage”, or even “a prestige symbol” (Phillipson, 1992: 27).

Nowadays, it is obviously debatable whether English is “an international asset” or a tool that influential cultural entities like America have been utilizing for the promotion of Western values, ideologies, and the like (35-36). But Crystal reminds us so:

. . . when even the largest English-speaking nation, the USA, turns out to have only about 20 per cent of the world’s English speakers . . . , it is plain that no one can now claim sole ownership. This is probably the best way of defining a genuinely global language, in fact: that its usage is not restricted by countries. . . . (130)

It sounds self-evident that native English-speaking countries, not bothering to learn non-English languages if unnecessary, have the ostensible advantage of possessing the current “lingual correctness” that facilitates the exportation not simply of commodities—whether tangible or intangible, including products, personnel, information, etc.—but of what they culturally mean. This can partly explain how English has been made worldwide, but that won’t necessarily mean it is destined to remain economically or

culturally dominant. What underpins the credibility of English more is how incentive the language is than how culturally imperialistic it appears. No matter how much knowledge or cultural stuff the English language may “bring about”, after how and why English has been used at a global scale is historically scrutinized, the point will be made convincing that English today is systemically for practical use, not solely for serving the best interest of the U.S. or any other native English speakers. To be specific, English serves the best interest of those able to make the best of it with a positive attitude. The point sounds plausible especially when concerned with trading, idea exchanges, and the effort to be modernized.

Notwithstanding, should the core English-speaking countries, the U.S. above all, become less competitive in knowledge (including technologies and humanities), the advantageous position English has taken might not be the same as now any more. It is true that the widespread use of English was assured by the U.K. and, then, by the U.S., but this does not guarantee a perpetual “dominance” of the English language. As such, despite its paradoxical association between cultural imperialism and the process of globalization, English, if not among international “public goods”, has served as an indispensable market-oriented channel through which people trade, develop, and communicate, though how much prosperity could be achieved due to the use of it won’t be assured.

Cultural Interpretations and American Commodities

American culture has long been felt to be a commodity for consumption. For example, every day many people spend plenty of time watching TV programs and enjoy it very much. The rise of such term as “couch potatoes” explains a way of life that sounds awful but popular, which may result in an alienating undercurrent in the order of global capitalism. For a society in which mass culture and consumerism permeates, a way of life, according to David C. Chaney’s definition, may mean “shared norms, rituals, patterns of social order, and probably a distinctive dialect or speech community,” but lifestyles, on the contrary, are “based in consumer choices and leisure patterns . . . [and] therefore integral to a sense of identity but not as a stable or uni-dimensional characterization” (2001: 82). If

watching TV every day for a long time may be viewed as a way of life, then choosing what kinds of programs to watch is related to one's lifestyle. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of watching TV as a hard habit to break demonstrates cultural flows from three perspectives. First, as Chaney puts it:

Ways of life and lifestyles are not mutually exclusive, as they clearly to some extent co-exist in contemporary experience. However, as people increasingly treat their lifestyle as a project articulating who they are, then they will invest it with more significance than ascribed structural expectations associated with gender, age, ethnicity, or religion, for example. (2001: 83)

Different individuals of audience, when making a decision in front of a variety of programs among channels, implicitly identify themselves in a way reflected by the decision. The programs people choose to watch or not to watch are mirrors that project their preferences, values, ideologies, beliefs, tastes, dislikes, fears, etc.; rather, they *are* who they are. They are *not* who/what Americans *want* them to be. Second, those “potatoes” who might otherwise do something else to pluralize their way of life – not just watching TV all day long – are likely to be or have become a failure in such a highly competitive society based on the logic of capitalism. The reason is simple. Watching is a behavior of consumption, while TV programs are produced as commodities – the cultural ones. Thus third, however culturally influential TV programs are, the audiences have a right to choose, because the choice made by consumers “is merely the mundane version of [a] broader notion of private, individual freedom” (Slater 1997: 28), which responds to individualism, a “soft” representative of American culture. A TV series like *Sex and the City* may appear immorally promiscuous in the eyes of Muslims but amorally romantic in the eyes of the new and well-educated generation of non-American youngsters living in modernized cities like Tokyo and Taipei. It is also widely known that for American conservationists the expansion of the Starbuck joints can be seen as a threat to the environment, while for average residents of Beijing it exists as more opportunities than risks.⁷ Related analytical

⁷ This was mentioned by an online article written by Xiao-hui Su. The website will be listed below in the references.

types of cultural interpretation can also be applied to other examples such as those from movie industries, pop music fields, cyberspace, reading activities, arts appreciation, etc.

In short, as John Storey argues, “cultural consumption is the practice of culture” (1999: xi). Culture as commodities have played a significant role in the era of globalization, while American culture through diverse media onto the rest of the world is sure to arouse diverse responses, which depend on how it will be defined or interpreted among people. This has been much more decided by specific national policies than the so-called unhappy historical memories about colonial powers. As such, for those involved in the globalization situation, the problem is not how desirable or influential American culture is but “unequal access to the means of production, distribution, ownership, control and consumption [, and] its connections to a global system of consumer capitalism” (Hesmondhalgh, 1998: 180).

Knowledge Matters? High Techs Matter? Business is Business!

Culture as a commodity cannot be made possible without media, which serve as conveyors or carriers that facilitate the circulation of cultural products. As Chaney argues, “The distinctiveness of modernity is that access to consumption and leisure is more widely spread in post-industrial societies, both in terms of economic resources and in terms of far-flung distributive networks of communication and entertainment” (2001: 83). The media bolstered by high technologies help speed up such circulation. For example, Smith refers to the “emerging global culture” as “tied to no place or period,” which appears “context-less, a true melange of disparate components drawn from everywhere and nowhere, borne upon the modern chariots of global telecommunications systems” (1990: 177). The speedy circulation of commodities, whether defined as cultural or not, will also maximize the profits that the capitalists concerned expect to earn, so that should this be defined as cultural imperialism?

The postmodernist Jean-François Lyotard, indicating how desirable knowledge has become and so only when applied and judged in a sense of survival or market competition,

puts it, “knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its ‘use-value’” (1984: 4-6). This explains why the clashes of “two cultures” – humanities and sciences – have remained unresolved. As Lester C. Thurow, Professor of management and economics at MIT, points out, “Everyone, Americans included, is painfully adjusting to a new knowledge-based global economy” (2000: 27). Knowledge doesn’t matter unless it works to cost less or profit more. However, this proves true only when the knowledge mentioned is the “hard knowledge”, something closely related to instrumental reason and consumerism. Globalization from the aspect of culture can be seen as a phenomenon imbued with consumer culture that has been widespread throughout the Western countries and is getting boundlessly influential with the help of “time-space compression” (Beynon and Dunkerley 2000: 17). Nowadays, a variety of ethnic groups within or without the U.S. have closer bilateral interactions supported by “low-cost and high-speed systems of communication and transport” (Gold, 2000: 78). For example, first, with the help of skilled Jewish immigrants and the global division of labor, Israel, which well-established transnational corporations like IBM, Intel, and Microsoft regard as an appealing hub for building their plants, has played a significant role in devising PC design specifications; second, the trip back to homeland turns affordable to Mexicans and Dominicans, who have been able to deliver funds “raised by expatriates for the maintenance of their village’s infrastructure”; American Hispanics’ celebration of religious holidays are often made conspicuous by “vehicles bearing the licence plates of California, Illinois or Texas”; major American telecommunications companies provide “special benefits” to Salvadorian and Arabian customers in the U.S. in order to expand their services overseas (78-79). What has changed due to such interactions appears starting from commerce and communication and then continuing with cultural exchanges, which exist more like two-way cultural “give-and-take” activities, although the U.S. is overwhelmingly influential in its phase of modernity and its part of values and beliefs, than a one-way cultural exportation from America. Cultural imperialism thus becomes irrelevant because of the essence of supply and demand, which accounts for the prevalence of global capitalization. In brief, the globalization values are “neither national nor international” (Albrow and King 1990: 7); rather, there are shared values such as those supporting science and rational choice that make globalization acceptable (11).

High techs operating as both cultural and capitalistic catalysts for the process of globalization are not what the U.S. possesses alone. For example, as a new way/space/platform facilitating dialogues between those who own different cultural perceptions, electronic technologies are believed to be free from ethnocentrism or any form of centralization. Campbell and Kean indicate, for example, “‘cyborg world’ throughout America does not necessarily mean its people turning ‘towards a one-voiced control’ but more likely ‘centrifugal, diverse and multi-voiced’” (1997: 295-295). It is not less powerful than what such transnational media as American films, CNN and the Time magazine have brought to us. It is, rather, more selective, democratic, and grass-rooted. Non-Americans who have been worried that the prevalence of the Internet is blurring their cultural identities and decreasing the use of mother tongues may be apt to ignore the “centrifugal, diverse and multi-voiced” hypothesis concerning uprising cyberculture, which makes possible the realization of glocalization.

Although American movies definitely spread specific viewpoints of Americans; the news dispatched from American journalistic media is reported through lenses of American values more or less; Microsoft, having standardized and kept *upgrading* its products, makes great effort to have them *standardized* also in other countries no matter how uncomfortable or inconvenient such standardization may turn out to be for the rest of the world; the crisis in this era of globalization has turned out to be the flashback caused by “capitalism’s unrestricted ability to create more money which is constantly owed to itself” and “the most devastating and exploitative form of social power the world has ever seen” (Grossberg, 1996: 184-185);⁸ Crystal sheds some light on the dark side of what American high techs may bring about. For him, cyber technologies should be thought of as a pal or pet, not a pest. “On the Net,” he argues, “all languages are as equal as their users wish to make them, and English emerges as an alternative rather than a threat” (110). As Thurow adds:

⁸ Lawrence Grossberg considers the order of globalization an “ecumenical abstract machine” leading to differences that are “commodified”.

Globalization is just one of the impacts of the new technologies (microelectronics, computers, robotics, telecommunication, new materials, and biotechnology) that are reshaping the economies of the third millennium. Collectively, these technologies and their interactions are producing a knowledge-based economy that is systematically changing how all people conduct their economic and social lives. (2000: 20)

But he also points out that “Americans see the new costs of globalization that they have to bear more clearly than they see the costs that others have to bear,” and that in the U.S. there are more and more people worrying about their younger generations that have been affected by its “electronic culture” (2000: 27) because such culture “is a culture of economics (profits) rather than a culture of values (morals)” (27). It not only “frightens many in the rest of the world” but “also frightens many Americans and has brought forth a religious-fundamentalist backlash in the United States that rivals that found anywhere else” (28).⁹ However, it is quite clear that American conservatives’ worries and warnings as mentioned, which matter to different degrees to non-Americans, sound less threatening than imagined American cultural imperialism that is believed to be underpinned by American “values/morals”.

Globalization: A Cultural Imagination Associated with Modernization/Americanization

Johan Galtung theorizes a magnificent phase of American fundamentalism, which suggests an American-oriented world view that seems paramount and evangelical to those who believe it but not that convincing to others who have shared little in common, as Reaganism, which represents a Trinity based on “Market, God, and Democracy, and exactly in that order” (248-249). His assertion sounds true when we retrospect what the Bush administration has been doing towards the Islamic region and its people since the

⁹ Here Thurow concluded that there have been two waves of globalization. The first, in some sense “created as a matter of public choice,” was initiated and strengthened by the Cold War; the second, a tendency that governments can hardly manipulate, emerged as “a tsunami wave created by a seismic shift in technology” in the 1980s.

September 11 attack. Such American crusading beliefs “to a large extent carried by [President Reagan’s] successor . . . will remain as latent cosmology and will probably manifest itself again, in periods of crisis” (251). For Galtung, “peace by peaceful means” is desirable and needs to be facilitated by “the ability to admit mistakes . . . [and] the ability to listen to the verdict of the empirical world rather than to the ‘self-evident’, apodictic, truths in our minds” (274). Violence, whether direct or cultural, can only bring more violence. All these appear even more applicable when it comes to the process of globalization per se and how a leading actor like the U.S. is supposed to do. As suggested above, it is paradoxical that the U.S. can be an influential leader in culture, economics and politics, that it is absolutely not the most globalized country, and that it may also undermine the process of a real market-oriented, peaceful, and democratic globalization.

For every country, every cultural entity, every transnational corporation, or every individual that views globalization as a desirable trend, the mechanism of globalization, including its cultural momentum like glocalization, is nothing less than a “bandwagon”, which is free for one to choose to jump onto. Once a person chooses to “enjoy” what globalization brings, “the juggernaut,” he/she will undergo “an ambivalent experience of exhilaration, the realization of potential, and a certain precarious control combined with risk, insecurity, powerlessness, and existential anxiety” (quoted in Tomlinson 1996: 63). Therefore, given a global field model that treats relativization as axes between individuals and societies respectively in terms of the national level and the global level and “indicates overall processes of differentiation in so far as global complexity is concerned” (Robertson 1992: 27, 29), it can be argued that globalization is based on relativity primarily among the fields of identity, language, and knowledge.

Ronald Inglehart (2004) is a little too arbitrary when asserting people “are not moving towards a global village”. He argues that no matter how globalized the world is in regard to “the communication and information mass media,” cultural diversity still “persists”. This is quite upset for those convinced of a utopia that was supposed to result from McLuhanian technological determination and thus render a Confucian harmonious

world without cultural or ethnic boundaries. How such a utopia should be shaped, however, is not the way globalization has been proceeding in. As Hannerz puts it:

Yet if . . . we take ‘globalization’ to refer most generally to a process in which people get increasingly interconnected, in a variety of ways, across national borders and between continents, and in which their awareness of the world and of distant places and regions probably also grows, then it becomes a more multifaceted notion, and one involving a greater historical time depth. It has gone through different phases, with different intensities; it does not process inevitably, irreversibly, in one direction, but may sometimes indeed move backwards in the direction of deglobalization. And it can involve different areas of the world in different ways at different times. (2001: 57)

When we recall how modernization, westernization, Americanization, and globalization have been ambiguously amalgamated, Inglehart is half right by mentioning “how easy it is to incite hatred because of cultural differences.”

Relative Identity of Individuals

In Steven J. Gold’s view, political factors such as colonialism in the past centuries explain the transnational flow of personnel to former colonial powers like France, Holland, and core English-speaking countries (75), of which the ethnic proportion of the population was influenced by a causal relationship between metropolises and colonies. During the Cold War years, the economic and political role of the U.S. as a semi-global power against the Communist realms led by the Soviet Union, from which a large amount of exiles with professions and “a strong interest in their communities of origin” immigrated and turned nationalized as Americans, became more prominent (75-76). Such prominence, thus, does not account for how American culture has been conspiringly “globalized” to facilitate a hegemonic attempt, if any, of the U.S. At present, in a world based on interdependence, all nations, if not self-made or self-secluded among others, can influence one another and live

the way they want to. Nevertheless, the monolithic tendency that seems to help people thrive under the name of globalization may be profoundly frustrating, because

[to] believe that ‘culture follows structure’, that the techno-economic sphere will provide the conditions and therefore the impetus and content of a global culture, is to be misled once again by the same economic determinism that dogged the debate about ‘industrial convergence’, and to overlook the vital role of common historical experiences and memories in shaping identity and culture. (Smith 1990: 180)

M. Featherstone mentions a global culture based on “sets of practices, bodies of knowledge, conventions and lifestyles that have developed in ways which have become increasingly independent of nation states” but may also result in cultural clashes that motivate the rediscovery of “particularity, localism and difference” as reactions to “culturally unifying, ordering and integrating projects associated with Western modernity” (2000: 121-122).¹⁰ Modernization, supposed to be the “greatest common divisor” between local identities, which are usually meant to revive faded traditions and recall colonial memories in a dialectical way, and global identities, which are synonymous to essential access not only to more life chances and more interdependence but also to Westernization and Americanization as they appear, has been stigmatized. Anthony D. Smith points out why:

. . . a global and cosmopolitan culture fails to relate to any . . . historic identity. Unlike national cultures, a global culture is essentially memoryless. Where the ‘nation’ can be constructed so as to draw upon and revive latent popular experiences and needs, a ‘global culture’ answers to no living needs, no identity-in-the-making. It has to be painfully put together, artificially, out of the many existing folk and national identities into which humanity has been so long divided. There are no ‘world memories’ that can be used to *unite* humanity; the

¹⁰ For him, thus, that globalization may help explain how postmodernism is produced can be argued.

most global experiences to date – colonialism and the World Wars – can only serve to remind us of our historic cleavages. (179-180)

A. Cvetkovich and D. Kellner also presume a contradictory or crisis of cultural identity:

Today, under the pressure of the dialectics of the global and the local, identity has global, national, regional and local components, as well as the specificities of gender, race, class and sexuality. . . . This situation is highly contradictory with reassertions of traditional modes of identity in response to globalization and a contradictory *mélange* of hybrid identities – and no doubt significant identity crises – all over the world. (2000: 135)

However, in the U.S., non-American immigrants can have multi-identities, which are used to suit different situations or meet different needs (79-81). An inveterate identity such as ethnic identity does not mean an exclusion of other identities. Non-immigrant reasons like traveling and working abroad can also lead to cross-cultural effects concerned with “tastes, consumption styles, values and political expectations,” (81) some of which are inveterate, some others not. Whether deep-rooted or not, an identity is more or less idealistic. When involved in an exotic situation where flexible measures are desirable, identity problems are embarrassing and challenging at first sight, but they may not be the priorities to deal with. The identities that are not much related to kinship, values or beliefs are relatively selective. The so-called identity crises, however, will “create the need for new choices and commitments, and produce new possibilities for the creation of identities that could be empowering” (135). The outcome must be “unpredictable” because those inspired to “wear Adidas, drink Coke and move overseas . . . may also subsidize and popularize local economic development, religious fundamentalism, reform movements or nation building programmes in a manner that challenges” the cultural empire in their eyes (Gold, 2000: 85-86).

As J. Lull indicates, “[t]ransculturation produces cultural hybrids – the fusing of cultural forms” and that “imported cultural forms take on local features” (2000: 115). Take

something American as examples. Rap music in Indonesia “is sung by local languages with lyrics that refer to local personalities, conditions, and situations,” and McDonald’s in Brazil “promotes meal specials with titles such as ‘McCarnaval’ . . . [and] has been indigenized” (115-116). B. Axford asserts that the interactions “between local and global, the West and the rest, produce ambivalent identities”; as a result, what he interprets by quotes as “a de-contextualization of the borrowed culture” may be often realized (2000: 127-128). Besides, there are scholars emphasizing the necessity of “rethinking politics and democracy” to face the challenges lying ahead in a world that is getting more globalized. The recent political-economical integration of Europe under the framework of the European Union is a positive case that is admirably hopeful to those having lost in a series of vain debates on how possible the realization of glocalization as the basis of globalization might be.

**To Jump on the Bandwagon or To Fight against the Juggernaut:
Is That a Question?**

In the era of globalization, how influential the use of English is and will be is unimaginably overwhelming. All nations, if not being able to stay self-made or intact from external influences, once dabbled with the tide of modernization, will have to be living in a world of increasing competition.¹¹ The allegory that everybody is supposed to learn English and thus absorb cultures of America (or other core English-speaking countries) seems convincing to those wishing to climb on the bandwagon--the globalization trend; hence what essentially matters is not whether one masters English or American culture but how creatively one can apply it to one’s own profession(s) and serve the best interest of one’s life. No beliefs, values, ideologies, tastes, ways of life, lifestyles, and whatever, can assure an individual’s happiness however “globalized” or “American” one may feel as a cultural imagination or a scapegoat that makes one miserable. In this era, American culture matters to non-Americans only when they are really aware of the profound relevance between it and its *other* to which they belong. As Appadurai argues,

¹¹ The Ching Dynasty of China during the late 19th century and those ex-colonized independent after World War II are prominent examples.

The critical point is that both sides of the coin of global cultural process today are products of the infinitely varied mutual contest of sameness and difference on a stage characterized by radical disjunctures between different sorts of global flows and the uncertain landscapes created in and through these disjunctures. (1990: 308)

American culture, despite being *a* globalization propeller, has its own dilemmas and limits. Even its “hard” components may not necessarily mean those positive that help shape globality and justify globalization unless they are dealt with in a more peaceful and democratic way based on pluralism, mutual tolerance, idea exchanges, and interdependence. Aixa L. Rodriguez-Rodriguez presents a classical thinking about globalization, which “is nothing but part of the dominant ideology which pretends to disguise traditional capitalist interests” (1998: 89), but Tomlinson argues that

we need to think of globalization modernity not as a finely engineered, effortlessly controllable machine, but as ‘juggernaut’, something which no one – not the West, America, nor multinational capitalism – can fully control. It is this which definitively separates it from the idea of cultural imperialism. (1997: 189)

As such, why can’t the process of globalization, despite being controversially plural and contradictory as defined by different viewpoints, be meant to interpret one beyond capitalization, modernization, Westernization, Americanization and whatever appears globally and overwhelmingly influential, which is supposed, intentionally or unconsciously, to smash or at least smooth natural/non-artificial and man/made artificial barrier?¹² Therefore, what we desperately need is not only a critical scrutiny of the role that American culture plays but also a positive/constructive attitude towards a world that is turning globalized in that sense.

¹² The point includes rethinking what roles a state or a governmental institution should play to meet the need for human-friendliness under the premise of mutual tolerance and mutual understanding.

Footnotes:

¹ This quote, from an interview with Fukuyama in 1998, was not publicized on the website of *The Merrill Lynch Forum* until 2001.

² According to A.T. Kearney/Foreign Policy Magazine Globalization Index of 2003, the U.S. ranks as the 7th most globalized country, up from the 11th place last year, just before New Zealand and behind Ireland, Singapore, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Finland, and Canada. Among the 20th most globalized nations, there are seven using English officially.

³ Culture and civilization are two terms once referred to as each other; the latter in English, in the late 18th century, was regarded as human progress from barbarism. See John B. Thompson (1990: 124- 125).

⁴ Globalization has occurred in history in different faces. The definite article is used to imply that the globalization I am discussing is that which started around the early 20th century.

⁵ A remarkable case is that New Englishes, whether spoken in the U.S. or countries else, have become an appealing phenomenon since the 1960s. See David Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, p. 130.

⁶ What's mentioned here is meant to focus on those colonized by Americans or the British.

⁷ This was mentioned by an online article written by Xiao-hui Su. The website will be listed below in the references.

⁸ Lawrence Grossberg considers the order of globalization an "ecumenical abstract machine" leading to differences that are "commodified".

⁹ Here Thurow concluded that there have been two waves of globalization. The first, in some sense "created as a matter of public choice," was initiated and strengthened by the Cold War; the second, a tendency that governments can hardly manipulate, emerged as "a tsunami wave created by a seismic shift in technology" in the 1980s.

¹⁰ For him, thus, that globalization may help explain how postmodernism is produced can be argued.

¹¹ The Ching Dynasty of China during the late 19th century and those ex-colonized independent after World War II are prominent examples.

¹² The point includes rethinking what roles a state or a governmental institution should play to meet the need for human-friendliness under the premise of mutual tolerance and mutual understanding.

References

Albrow, Martin and King, Elizabeth. (1990). "Introduction." *Globalization, Knowledge and Society*. Ed. Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King, 1-13.

Appadurai, Arjun. (1990). "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. Ed. Mike Featherstone. London: SAGE, 295-310.

Asuncion-Lande, Nobleza. (1998). "English as the Dominant Language for Intercultural Communication: Prospects for the Next Century." *Civic Discourse: Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity, and Global Communication*. Ed. K. S. Sitaram and Michael H. Prosser. Stamford, Connecticut: Ablex, 67-81.

Axford, B. (2000). "Global-Local Interactions." *Globalization: The Reader*. Ed. John Beynon and David Dunkerley. London: Athlone, 127-128.

- Beynon, John and Dunkerley, David. (eds) (2000). *Globalization: The Reader*. London: Athlone.
- Campbell, Neil and Kean, Alasdair. (1997). *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Chaney, David C. (2001). "From Ways of Life to Lifestyle: Rethinking Culture as Ideology and Sensibility." *Culture in the communication Age*. Ed. James Lull. London: Routledge, 75-87.
- Crystal, David. (1997). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cvetkovich, A. and Kellner, D. (2000). "The Intersection of the Local and the Global." *Globalization: The Reader*. Ed. John Beynon and David Dunkerley. London: Athlone, 134-135.
- Dash, Peter. (2003). "Culture & the SLA Process." *Asian EFL Journal*. (<http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/june03.dash.pdf>).
- Featherstone, M. (2000). "Globalization and Cultural Identity." *Globalization: The Reader*. Ed. John Beynon and David Dunkerley. London: Athlone, 121-122.
- Fukuyama, Francis. (2001). "Economic Globalization and Culture: A Discussion with Francis Fukuyama." *The Merrill Lynch Forum*. (<http://www.ml.com/woml/forum/global2.htm>).
- Galtung, Johan. (1996). *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*. London: Sage.
- Gold, Steven J. (2000). "Transnational Communities: Examining Migration in a Globally Integrated World." *Rethinking Globalization(s): From Corporate Transnationalism to Local Interventions*. Ed. Preet S. Aulakh and Michael G. Schechter. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 73-90.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. (1996). "The Space of Culture, the Power of Space." *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*. Ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti. London: Routledge, 169-188.
- Hannerz, Ulf. (2001). "Thinking about Culture in a Global Ecumene." *Culture in the communication Age*. Ed. James Lull. London: Routledge, 54-71.
- Holton, Robert. (2000). "Globalization's Cultural Consequences." *The Annals* 570: 140-152.

- Hesmondhalgh, David. (1998). "Globalisation and Cultural Imperialism: A Case Study of the Music Industry." *Globalisation and the Third World*. Ed. Ray Kiely and Phil Marfleet. London: Routledge, 163-183.
- Inglehart, Ronald. (2004). "We Are Not Moving towards a Global Village." *Forum Barcelona* 2004. (<http://www.barcelona2004.org/eng/actualidad/noticias/html/f043945.htm>).
- Kiely, Ray. (1998). "Globalization, (Post-)Modernity and the Third World." *Globalisation and the Third World*. Ed. Ray Kiely and Phil Marfleet. London: Routledge, 1-20.
- Lull, J. (2000). "Cultural De-Territorialization." *Globalization: The Reader*. Ed. John Beynon and David Dunkerley. London: Athlone, 114-116.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Phillipson, Robert. (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Robertson, Roland. (1992). *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: SAGE.
- Rodriguez-Rodriguez, Aixa L. (1998). "How Global Is Global? A Critical Look at the Language and Ideology of Globalization." *Civic Discourse: Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity, and Global Communication*. Ed. K. S. Sitaram and Michael H. Prosser. Stamford, Connecticut: Ablex, 83-93.
- Slater, Don. (1997). *Consumer, Culture & Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. (1990). "Towards a Global Culture?" *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. Ed. Mike Featherstone. London: SAGE, 171-191.
- Story, John. (1999). *Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life*. London: Arnold.
- Su, Xiao-hui. "Why American Mass Culture Appears Unique in Chinese Mind." *Er Xien Tang* (<http://www.edubridge.com/erxiantang/library/hamburg.htm>).
- Thompson, John B. (1990). *Ideology and Modern Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Thurow, Lester C. (2000). "Globalization: The Product of a Knowledge-Based Economy." *The Annals* 570: 19-31.
- Tomlinson, John (1996). "Global Experience as a Consequence of Modernity." *Globalization, Communication, and Transnational Civil Society*. Ed. Sandra

- Braman and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 63-87.
- . (1997). "Cultural Globalization and Cultural Imperialism." *International Communication and Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. Ed. Ali Mohammadi. London: SAGE, 170-190.
- . (1999a). "Globalised Culture: The Triumph of the West?" *Culture and Global Change*. Ed. Tracey Skelton and Tim Allen. London: Routledge, 22-29.
- . (1999b). *Globalization and Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. (1990). "Culture as the Ideological Battleground of the Modern World-System." *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. Ed. Mike Featherstone. London: SAGE, 31-55