

A ‘Glocalization’ Approach to the Korean Cultural Identity

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Purpose of the essay

Glocalization has become a prominent keyword in the studies of global culture and its circulations and value making processes. The uses of this concept encompass the multidisciplinary fields of sociocultural theory, human geography and urban studies, marketing and business, anthropology, social network analysis, cultural studies, and so forth (Giulianotti & Robertson 2012, 434-5). The purpose of suggestion of this concept is to provide the revised and novel perspectives of globalization.

In this sense, although Confucianism, transmitted from old Chinese empire to the Korean peninsula thousands years ago, can be observed as a globalization phenomenon in today’s view in term of the expansion of concrete institutional explicit ways of life and thoughts, there have been rare considerations of Korean Confucianism as the glocalization phenomenon.

Presumably, just as such notions of Britain or France as the ‘glocalized Christian territories’ is not pervasive, there may be many obstacles in this approaches including an intuitive doubt of the very utility of this approach to the grand narratives of the classical globalization of civilization called ‘Confucianism’. Furthermore, Confucianism or ‘something Confucian’ in Korea is widely regarded as an out of date, unpopular, even annoying and useless, and, finally, almost demolished value set.

Nevertheless, in ‘culture talk’ of Korea, the influence of Confucianism on the Korean cultural identity, both national and individual, should not be ignored that simple. In this perspective, this paper attempts to provide a framework to explain the relationship between Confucianism and the Korean cultural identity with the concept of glocalization. Firstly, the concept of glocalization is examined. Secondly, Confucianization in Korea and cultural identity is demonstrated. Thirdly and finally, models of glocalization and Roudometof’s four forms of religious glocalization and Robertson’s four-fold typology of glocalization is reviewed with some explanation of the Korean cultural identity.

Glocalization

‘Glocalization’ which is derived from the Japanese term ‘*dochakuka*’ (土着化) which means

‘global localization’ for the purpose of adequate “tailoring of global products and services to suit particular cultural tastes” (Giulianotti & Robertson 2007, 132) has been modified and re-introduced by Robertson, and widely accepted as a conciliatory concept of the ‘global-local’ and ‘local-global’ tensions in the social and cultural research.

Robertson argues that his notion of glocalization seeks to move beyond the problematic categorical oppositions in the established globalization debate.

These old binaries would, for example, require us to see the “local” as in a constant struggle against the “global”, the “universal” as opposing the “particular”, “homogenization” as fighting against “heterogenization”, or “sameness” seeking to obliterate “difference”. Instead, (...) the concept of glocalization registers the “mutually implicative” relationship between these terms, and requires us to examine their complex interplays (*Ibid*, 437).

In this perspective, Roudometof’s advocacy of “glocal turn in the religious problematic” (Roudometof 2014, 1018) is interesting. He admits that the contemporary globalization discourse is an extension of modernity debates which attempt to adopt new reflection of the old interpretations that “equated modernization with universalism, secularism and cross-cultural convergence” (*Ibid*). This paradigm has been criticized as a naive discourse that cannot explain the irregular phenomena such as Iranian revolution based on the revival of fundamentalism. So, he focuses on the argument which highlights the necessity of search for fundamentals to explain ‘anomalies’ in the modernization paradigm suggested by Roland Robertson (Robertson, 1992). Especially he advocates Robertson’s efforts of introducing the concept of the “global processes are not happening against or outside local forces; on the contrary, both global and local are mutually constituent concepts” (Roudometof 2014, 1019).

The central issue of the local-global problematic, for him, “involved and debated under the rubric of glocalization” (*Ibid*, 1020). He maintains:

The notion of glocalization captures a series of religious dynamics: the spread of religions across the world’s continents, their localizations, their de-territorialization and re-territorialization, and their subsequent hybridizations. At the heart of the glocal turn rests the acknowledgement that the world’s cultures are not isolated or ‘authentic’ but, rather, the result of continuous processes of hybridization and of incorporation of cultural items borrowed from elsewhere (*Ibid*, 1020).

In the case of the Korean cultural identity which is assumed to be influenced by Confucianism, Korean culture, along with Korean cultural identity, is not isolated or ‘authentic’ but the result

of continuous processes of hybridization and of incorporation of entities such as Chinese Confucianism which can be observed as that 'elsewhere'.

Confucianization in Korea and cultural identity

The studies on the Korean Confucianism have focused on several major issues. The analyses and interpretations of the classical Confucian texts of the prominent scholars in the era of Chosun dynasty several hundred years ago such as Yi Hwang and Yi Yi are the examples. This doctrine research has been conducted by the various scholars including the institutions funded by the government and universities.

Nevertheless its inseparable nature between the Confucian texts and their social and cultural practices, modern approach to the Confucianism tends to escape from the very content of the Confucian Classics. Various approaches have been made to explain the Korean cultural identity such as education¹ family, economic or politics² which highlighted the causal explanation of the emergence of the modern East Asian countries in respect of their rapid economic growth. In this perspective, Confucianism can be seen as a functional entity which conducted as the labor ethic in the era of rapid economic growth.

Religious approach is one of them. Notwithstanding some scholars assert that Confucianism should be defined as a setting of philosophical thought and taught, not religion, there may be a preponderance of opinion of Confucianism as a religious designation of Confucius' taught (Berthrong 1982, 246-8) considering its religious components such as rituals and ideas of the afterlife. If so, Roudometof's 'glocal turn' approach can be invited to the discussion of the Confucianization in Korea and cultural identity.

In any case, it is undoubted that Confucianism, as a philosophical, ethical, and aesthetical norm, has had an influence on the identities of Korean people for long time since its adoption from China some thousands years ago.

The process of Confucianization in Korea was long, enduring almost the full span of Korea's written history. The characteristics of Korean Confucianism in each era were closely related to the changing Korean perceptions of what Confucianism was and what role it should play (Haboush 1991, 85).

Forms of glocalization and Korean cultural identity

Roudometof provides four forms of religious glocalization which is "fusion between religious universalism and local particularism" (Roudometof, 1024). He argues that "each presents a specific form of blending universal religion along particular human configurations (e.g., empire, ethnicity, nation-state and transnational migration)" and "each of them offers a discrete analytical ordering or combination of the global and the local. To put it differently, each form

offers a distinct blueprint for negotiating and ordering the global-local binary relationship into cultural stable and concrete formats” (*Ibid*).

In this chapter, Roudimetof’s and Robertson’s proposals are scrutinized with some comments which adopt these concepts and ideas to Confucianism in terms of culture making process.

Roudimetof : Vernacularization — Indigenization — Nationalization — Transnationalization
 Robertson : Relativization — Accommodation — Hybridization — Transformation

For example, with Roudometof’s concept of vernacularization which means “blends religious universalism with specific vernacular language” (Roudometof, 1024) resonates Haboush’s explanation on the written culture of Korea which “began with the use of Chinese ideographic characters, which were mostly introduced through the Chinese Confucian classics” (Haboush, 85) and it was the almost only and the most important criterion of the social stratification: elite group who monopolized the intelligence versus the illiterates.

Discussion and Further Study

It is expected that the various forms of glocal culture discussed above can be a useful framework which enable us to interpret the Korean cultural identity more and deeper in respect of seeking the remnants of ‘authentic’ Confucianism. For example, ‘Vernacularization’ combined with ‘transformation’ in the four-fold typology of glocalization brings about the hypothetic explanation on the Korean people’s preferences of the foreign language especially English and French as the CI and BI character-image signs which can be witnessed in the urban street easily. Chinese Characters delivered Confucian texts in the past were the very symbol of authorization, civilization and they functioned as the ‘cultural cargo’. Thousands years’ cultural experiences in the process of vernacularization, the sacred ideographic characters carry the truth and civilization from foreign country, might influence on the Korean cultural identity. Instead of the established modernity approach or ‘old’ globalization approach which explain these phenomena as the influences of historical Westernization or recent neo-liberalism, one-way Disneyfication, masked Euro-centrism, and so forth, the cultural phenomena related to the pervasive uses of Alphabetic letters can be interpreted as a ‘transformation of Confucianization process in terms of vernacularization’.

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Notes

See Kiung Ryu & Ronald M. Cervero, "The Role of Confucian Cultural Value and Politics in Planning Educational Programs for Adults in Korea", *Adult Education Quarterly* 61(2), pp.139-160

See Andrew Eungi Kim, Gil-Sung Park, 'Nationalism, Confucianism, work ethic and industrialization in South Korea', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 33(1), 2003, pp.37-49.