

CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL CULTURES AND THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

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1. Cultural Globalization as New Cultural Centre and Social Conflict

General opinion argued that one important cause of social conflict in the present day is globalization, in which there is cultural globalization.

This opinion has origin in existence of the risk of cultural imperialism, risen as a cultural centre in the new era. That is, a strong culture usually had the trend to impose hegemony to other peripheral national cultures. Nevertheless, the cultural imperialism always bears the economic and political motives. This is the very cause which leads to politico-cultural conflict. Therefore, in essence, *cultural hegemony is also the very economic hegemony and it serves the economy.*

Thus in fact, social conflicts often are the *contradictions*, but these contradictions could lead to conflicts only when they are pushed to *political and economic interests level*, and then they are the truly economic and political conflicts and not cultural ones. Therefore, *in essence, there are not purely cultural conflicts, but culture is only the medium for politico-economic conflict.*

The cultural hegemony is leading to a very characteristic phenomenon of the present-day epoch of globalization, namely the phenomenon of *cultural exclusion*. It is nowadays becoming one of the most characteristic and acute phenomena, and it is in the close relation with cultural globalization. Being exploited is less awesome than being excluded and marginalized from development wave. The exploited could have opportunity to organize the legal struggle forms against the exploiter, but the marginalized could not know which institutions to rely on in order to make struggle. This is the fact about which in the past centuries no one could think.

To overcome the exclusion, besides the efforts of every country, the international community has to have reasonable solutions in order to make the globalization process being realized fairly, taking account of common interests of mankind and in the same time not harming the particular cultures. As the common wealth of mankind,

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global culture is made to serve common cultural interests of mankind, it can not satisfy the specific cultural demands of every nation-state.

That's why, to avoid the trend of imposing hegemony of certain culture and the conflict between cultures, the globalization process has yet to respect particular identity of every culture, and thus cultural diversity necessarily exists along with globalization. The more the world is diverse, the more the creativity of man is rich; and the more the culture is diverse, the more the world could avoid the danger of being imposed the hegemony by one culture. And thus the diversity also contributes to reducing the risk of conflict. That's why UNESCO saw "cultural diversity in dialogue" as common wealth of mankind, and I want to add that it is a precious wealth of nations worldwide.

2. Cultural solutions for the problem of conflict

There may be various kinds of solutions for the problem of conflict: the economic solutions, the political solutions, the social solutions and the cultural ones. Here we refer to cultural solutions to show how important the culture is for the problem of conflict and for the social development.

2.a. Cultural liberty – a basic condition for preventing conflict

The cultural liberty right is one of important aspects of human development. The Vietnam Communist Party stated that culture is the driving force and in the same time is the goal of development. In this spirit, cultural

liberty is also one of the driving forces and goals of development, because, liberty is one of the most important values of human development. This fact corresponds exactly with Marx and Engels' opinion when they stated in *Manifesto of Communist Party* that the communist society is the one in which "the free development of one man is the condition of everyone's free development."

Thus, the cultural liberty right was ranged among the most important human rights. Respecting the human rights is seen as a most important condition to ensure the sustainable peace. That's why from the 1948 year, UN had passed *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which constituted the legal basis for peace, stability and security. But why the identification of cultural right fell behind the identification of civil, economic, social and political ones? UNDP remarked that among these five rights, the cultural rights have received the least attention. From the time when the UN passed *The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, it was not until 1966 that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognized that people belonging to ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities "shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their culture, to profess and practice their religion, or to use their own language".¹ And it was not until 2002 that the UN

¹ See: UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004* (Chapter 2, box 2.2), p. 28, <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004>.

had the first ever resolution on cultural rights adopted by the Commission on Human Rights on “promotion of the enjoyment of the cultural rights of everyone and respect for different cultural identities”.¹

Here after all, the cultural rights could be reduced to only cultural liberty right. Cultural liberty is embodied in the rights of: “freedom from interference in the enjoyment of cultural life and the freedom to create and contribute to it, freedom to choose which culture and which cultural life to participate in, freedom to cooperate internationally and freedom to participate in the definition and implementation of policies on culture.”²

So, cultural liberty is obviously one of the paramount values of mankind. It became one of the meaning aspects of culture notion. According to the authors of UNDP’s *Human Development Report 2004*, *cultural liberty means that all people have the right to be themselves, have the right to choose the cultural identity for themselves, to be respected and to live one’s own true values. Every has the right to choose cultures without being punished, without being excluded from other choices, to choose several identities and not only one. That’s why, with the present massive migration, there are two situations in the world: + a situation of people without nationality, and + a situation of people with several nationalities. That is, among immigrants,*

because of many objective and subjective reasons, there are the ones who have not any nationalities; but there also are the ones who have two or three nationalities. In the present day, many countries widened the right of civil participation of people with non-citizenship – this non-citizenship is called as “denizenship” (like in Belgium and Netherlands). And now there are more than 30 countries which have recognized the double citizenship (a citizen having two nationalities).

Recognizing cultural liberty of people means widening their possibilities of choice. In the present day globalization era, people also say about “cosmopolitan citizenship”. National citizenship and cosmopolitan citizenship are closing up to each other.

Now people are paying attention to cultural diversity as a result of everybody’s right to difference, of cultural liberty. But the closing to each other of cosmopolitan citizens also led to a conception of a new right which is not less important, or even more important, than the right to difference, namely the *right to resemblance*. Although people have various choices, but they have the trend to choose the similar things. This is a centripetal orientation, a participation in centre to develop.

Obviously, if we recognize the right to freely choose differently from each other, we must recognize the right to choose similarly to each other. *If there exists the right to difference, then there also exists the right to resemblance*, and

¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004* (Chapter 2, box 2.2), p. 28.

² UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004* (Chapter 2, box 2.2), p. 28.

we must not to make absolute any right. Now, in the face of strong impacts of cultural globalization and of the risk of assimilation, the minority cultures have the trend to claim the right to be different. This is the legitimate and reasonable centrifugal trend towards asserting new centres. But if we thence make absolute the right to difference, only see the need to differ and neglect the right and need to resemble, then this will be the dangerous mistake for mankind and society in both national and global levels. In the Chapter 2 of *Human Development Report 2004*, UNDP wrote clearly: “Cultural liberty and human development require that individuals be as free to maintain their identities as they are to change them.”¹ Thus, how to apply the right to free cultural choices is not a simple problem at all. That’s why the UNDP put that “Cultural liberty [is] an uncharted dimension of human development”.²

2.b. Multiculturalism – a feasible solution for avoiding the risk of conflict

To avoid the risk of conflict, besides the proper conception of cultural liberty in national and international levels as we put it above, countries in the world must put forward and implement the very concrete cultural policies. Scientists have remarked that before now, the cultural planning makers very often paid attention rather to artistic promotion and protection of cultural heritage than to promotion of cultural liberty. Even in

nowadays, the major debates essentially yet focus on protection of cultural heritage. So, while the problem of heritage received much importance, the problem of cultural liberty was almost neglected.

To ensure cultural liberty, scientists argued that countries have to promulgate the multiculturalism in strategy of human and social development. This also is a policy showing interest in the peripheries. In making that, we can avoid the risk of domestic and international conflicts. In this spirit, now countries in the world are facing the great challenge of having to elaborate the specific policies allowing to widen the choices and not to narrow them. To achieve this goal, they have to protect and develop national identity while wide opening the frontiers. The multiculturalism has the goal as to protect the identities of people and cultural diversity, promote cultural liberty and international integration, in order to achieve the final end of human development in ensuring the full virtues of everybody. Moreover, multiculturalism could not be effective unless it is associated with the economic and social policies in order to ensure the people, including the immigrants, opportunities to participate in economic, political and social activities, to have democratic rights, to be treated equitably and equally.

Among the proposals of UNDP for multiculturalism, there are remarkably two types of policies: + policies on religion and religious practice; and + policies on the use of multiple languages

¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004*, (Chapter 2), p. 37.

² UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004*, (Chapter 2), p. 28.

[or plural language policies]. Here we will introduce these two types of policies as the *illustrations* for multiculturalism.

2.b.1. Policies on religion and religious practice

Now in the world, there are many minority religious communities which are suffering the exclusions of various kinds. Because the religion has a great importance for the identities of people, so we are not surprised at the fact that the minority religious communities often mobilized the forces against these exclusions. Unless being controlled properly, these mobilization campaigns could become violences. Thus, the critical problem for the countries in the world is to learn how to control the religious activities.

According to UNDP, the state is responsible for ensuring policies and mechanisms that protect individual choice. This is best achieved when public institutions do not discriminate between believers and non-believers, not just among followers of different religions. The state has responsibility to protect rights and secure freedoms for all their members and not discriminate on grounds of religion. States should protect three dimensions of religious freedom and individual choice that are as follows:

+ Every individual or sect within a religious group should have the right to criticize or revise a particular interpretation of core beliefs.

+ States must give space to all religions for interfaith discussion and, within limits, for critiques.

+ Individuals must be free not only to criticize the religion into which they are born, but to reject it for another or to remain without one.

Thus, this just third dimension embodies the principle of *cultural liberty to choice, to changing choice and to making no choice*. This principle is seriously respected by Vietnamese state: State allows everybody to have both the belief freedom and the non-belief freedom. In Vietnam, all religions are allowed to be freely practised in the framework of laws. We really have freedom of religion. That's why in 13th November 2006, the US Department of State decided to withdraw "Vietnam from the list of countries who need to be concerned on grounds of religion."

2.b.2. Policies on the use of multiple languages

In the matter of policies on the use of multiple languages, UNDP had the accurate analyses and suggestions. We know that language is a field which is most easily susceptible to raise divergence. Because while it is possible and even desirable for a state to remain "neutral" on ethnicity and religion, this is impractical for language. The citizenry needs a common language to promote mutual understanding and effective communication. And no state can afford to provide services and official documents in every language spoken on its territory. This is a very big difficulty, because most states are

multilingual. Once again, in the matter of languages, multicultural policies are needed.

Experience around the world shows that plural language policies can expand opportunities for people in many ways, if there is a deliberate effort to teach all citizens some of the country's major languages. Very often, what multilingual countries need is a three-language formula (as UNESCO recommends) that gives public recognition to the use of three languages:

- + One international language. In this era of globalization all countries need to be proficient in an international language to participate in the global economy and networks.
- + One lingua franca - a link language for a locality or region.
- + Mother tongue.¹

In our country, this formula is concretized in three kinds of languages which are as follows:

- + The international language that is English (or French, Russian, Chinese).
- + The lingua franca that is Vietnamese – an official language of all citizenry.
- + The mother tongue that is the language of each ethnic minority.

There are many ethnic minorities in our country which had no alphabet in the past, but now they have their own writing. Our radio and television also have broadcasting programmes that speak some major minority languages. One can say we are acting according exactly to multiculturalism direction of UNDP. This is a direction of establishing the proper relationship between cultural centre and periphery in order to avoid the risk of social conflict.

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Thus, a true global culture can not lead to conflict and can not annul cultural diversity, it also can not lead to the imposition of centre on periphery. It only can lead to contradictions in diversity, but these are the dialectic contradictions between centre and periphery, that is the contradictions which lead to development. And *these contradictions could lead to conflict only when they were manipulated by political speculations and profit-seeking spirits*. And thus, global culture is a culture which has the more important and deep meaning than it is conceived now in many countries only as the mass culture.

¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004*, (Chapter 3), p. 60.