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Culture

Culture is a general term that includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, and ceremonies practiced in an area. The classic definition of culture was provided by the 19th-century English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor as "... that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society".

Culture is based on the uniquely human capacity to classify experiences, encode such classifications symbolically, and teach such abstractions to others. It is usually acquired through enculturation, the process through which an older generation makes a younger generation reproduce the customary lifestyle.

It is believed that there are three layers or levels of culture that are part of one's learned behavior patterns and perceptions. Most obviously is the body of cultural traditions that distinguish each individual's specific society. When people speak of Italian, Iranian, or Japanese culture, they are referring to the shared language, traditions, and beliefs that set each of these peoples apart from others.

The second layer of culture that may be part of one's identity is a subculture. In complex, diverse societies in which people have come from many different parts of the world, they often retain much of their original cultural traditions. As a result, they are likely to be part of an identifiable subculture in their new society. The shared cultural traits of subcultures set them apart from the rest of their society.

The third layer of culture consists of cultural universals. These are learned behavior patterns that are shared by all of humanity collectively. No matter where people live in the world, they share these universal traits. Examples of such human cultural traits include communicating with a verbal language consisting of a limited set of sounds and grammatical rules for constructing sentences, using age and gender to classify people (e.g., teenager, woman, man), classifying people based on marriage and family relationships and having kinship terms to refer to them (e.g., wife, mother, uncle, cousin), making jokes and playing games; etc.

Culture is related to all branches of humanities as well as some other branches of science including sociology, politics, and economics. However, the main field of study

that deals with culture is anthropology. Anthropologists study the formation and development of cultures. They employ fieldwork and comparative methods to study various cultures. These studies have helped anthropologists to formulate different theories related to the origin and development of culture.

Many early anthropologists conceived of culture as a collection of traits and studied the diffusion, or spread of these traits from one society to another. They said customs, values, beliefs, and so on transmit from one generation to the next and make their culture. The main cultural traits of a community are inherited from ancestors, and are followed by descendants. Critics of diffusionism, however, pointed out that the theory failed to explain why certain traits spread and others do not.

Cultural evolution theorists hold that traits have a certain meaning in the context of evolutionary stages, and they look for relationships between material culture and social institutions and beliefs. These theorists classify cultures according to their relative degree of social complexity and employ several economic distinctions (hunting, farming, and industrial societies) or political distinctions (autonomous villages, towns, and states) for this purpose. Critics of this theory, however, argue that using evolution to explain culture is defective, because it assumes a certain direction of development, with an implicit peak at modern, industrial society.

Ecological approaches explain the different ways that people live around the world not in terms of their degree of evolution but rather as distinct adaptations to the variety of environments in which they live. They also demonstrate how ecological factors may lead to cultural change, such as the development of technological means to exploit the environment.

Yet, structuralists analyze the relationships among cultural constructs of different societies, deriving universal mental patterns and processes from the abstract models of these relationships. They theorize that such patterns exist independent of, and often at odds with, practical behavior.

And finally postmodernists hold that culture does not exist as shared, strong values which are represented clearly in the lifestyle of people. They believe it rather refers to quite disordered situational characteristics with no special form and identity.

Culture Change

Culture is said to be a dynamic rather than static phenomenon and something that changes continually over time while absorbing external influences and adjusting to changing environments and technologies. Therefore, culture is a function of communication and it is observed that local cultures are changing rapidly in recent times with rapid developments in communication and transportation technologies and greater movement of people and ideas between cultures. Most cultures have absorbed foreign influences over time due to trade, migration, or colonization. In recent years, mass media and large-scale migration of populations across continents have created new cultural influences at a rapid pace. This trend may undoubtedly lead to a loss of cultural identity and consequently create cultural insecurity if the host culture isn't strong enough and doesn't take the necessary protection measures.

Cultural insecurity is characterized by the loss or undermining of local and national cultural manifestations, identity, and/or value systems that preserve social and cultural capital.

At the national level, cultural insecurity may occur due to development policies that result in marginalization of indigenous populations or through conscious national efforts for homogenization of diverse populations to maintain political stability. Some countries are experiencing ethnic conflicts at the subnational levels where groups of different ethnicity or religions different from the dominant majority have been sidelined in the political debate or have had to sacrifice their native languages for that of the dominant group. When such groups experience the repression of their culture and/or exclusion from political scene, they may resort to violence in the form of subnational conflict, terrorism, and increasing crime. For example, the Chinese policy to encourage movement of some Chinese into Tibet in order to develop the area's economy is being perceived by some as a potential threat to the preservation of Tibetan culture in its homeland. In Northeast Indian states, the control of the local economies by persons from other states in the country belonging to different lingual and ethnic groups has led to violent dissent.

At the international level, it is observed that globalization is threatening some traditional cultures. Some countries see the influence of mass media in the form of

foreign news broadcasts with a specific bias, the entertainment industry, and even the Internet as a threat to local culture and identity. Western entertainment is seen to influence the youth into adopting certain undesirable elements of western culture. Discussions on human rights have also been subject to debate where different cultures value different things. For example, freedom of speech and democracy may be in sharp contrast to the way in which a specific culture functions after centuries of evolution and may be seen as an imposition of alien values. Reversion to violence and ethno-centeredness may arise when people are unable to absorb and adapt foreign values that are in sharp contrast to their local values.

Cultural Planning

Culture planning is a public process in which representatives of a community carry out a comprehensive community assessment and create a plan of implementation for future cultural programs. Successful cultural plans address the needs, opportunities, and cultural resources of the community. In some communities, cultural planning is narrowly focused on the needs of artists, arts organizations, and audiences; however, cultural planners need to consider the role of culture in resolving broader community issues.

As a professional field, culture is necessarily associated with many other fields, including politics, economics, history, literature, art, and religion. It follows that the activity of planning is understood and practiced according to many elements involved in a particular community culture. It must be performed differently in different institutional settings that vary significantly across countries and even cities. Moreover, within any given setting, planning must be continuously reformed as circumstances change. In contemporary societies, politics, institutions, economies, technologies, social values are all subject to continuous, often radical, change, so that planners often find themselves under pressure.

There are many forms of planning cultures throughout the world, each more or less successfully adapted to and reflecting local conditions. That doesn't mean, however, that they are perfect. To make planning more perfect requires taking note of the existing realities.

Certain requirements for planning suggest that there are cultural elements influence on planning. First, the problem situation must be reasonably clear. This requires a certain degree of stability of the environment to enable us to make reasonably accurate forecasts. Second, we need at least a general idea of the desired goals. Third, we need special cultural knowledge to develop ways and means of reaching the goals. Finally, the planner should be a mastermind to feel confident in carrying through the plans.

The important requirement for planning is its likeliness of being successfully practiced. Accordingly, planners must have the power, get the power, or obtain the support of those who hold power. Power can be achieved on various levels, and is by no means a simple notion in relation to culture producers. Various studies show that power-holders and planners may both acquire, through successful performance, the domination, or control of a given entity.

Planning culture or indeed planning culture changes must be carried out so intellectually that the community never feels to be losing its cultural identity. It requires a safe process. It is by no means a simple accomplishment. It involves people's values and beliefs, guiding their behavior, and developing and maintaining healthy and effective safety management systems. As such, it's a major challenge that takes a great deal of time and hard work from everyone involved.

Cultural Security

According to Ole Weaver security can be defined as "the capacity of a society to conserve its specific character in the face of changing conditions and real or virtual threats". More precisely, it involves the permanence of traditional foundations of language, culture, associations, identity and national or religious practices. In this way, it allows those changes which are judged to be acceptable. This notion of security is rightly seen as a fundamental concern for every society, including for cultural matters, as well as a central question of international relations that must be addressed in present conditions.

The connection between security and culture, however, does not seem to be precisely apparent. Most people understand it simply in the sense that culture is worthwhile or valuable and, therefore, needs to be protected. Others recognize cultural achievement as the highest flowering of national genius or a manifestation of ideological or religious

implications. They seem to believe that culture might be seen as a symbolic target. In some parts of the world, there is a perception that an effective approach to security in certain contexts requires a degree of cultural sensitivity.

As security denotes the defensive power of a nation, it is necessary to explain how it is related to culture. The fact is that culture has now become so important for security strategists and defense academies that we can hardly take it apart from defense issues. There is a growing recognition that cultural issues are intimately connected with modern security problems of all countries. This relationship is quite apparent in countries like Iran which possess a very rich cultural heritage. In these countries cultural values are regarded as one of the main resources of the dignity. So, it seems quite natural for them to consider how their cultures can be saved, who are threatening their cultures, and to see how secure their cultures are.

The connection between culture and security, however, can be explicated in other ways as well. While security might be defined as invulnerability to danger or attack, culture, at least in its anthropological sense, it encompasses and shapes our existence, involving the use of elements and ideas to preserve and promote human life. It seems that the concept of cultural security involves almost everything relating to human life. For this reason, the concept of security has been broadened from its traditional military sense or 'hard security' to include other forms such as environmental and economic issues under the heading of 'soft' or 'comprehensive' security. Cultural security is perhaps at the softest end of the security spectrum.

An important concern in the discussion of security of culture is the relationship between different cultures. The question which arises here is whether cultures of different communities help one another develop or, vice versa, they compete to gain the upper hand. This issue has generally drawn the attention of scholars to two contradictory viewpoints. One approach proposes that different cultures are involved in a constant struggle. According to this point of view, cultures are fighting against one another, i.e. there is ongoing culture war in the world. The culture which can resist more will remain, and others will disappear. According to this view, the culture of any nation can be a threat for any other one. The security of a culture, in fact, depends on how powerfully it can fight the others and preserve itself against their attacks.

Others, however, believe that cultures follow a complementary path through which they complete each other. Scholars have found evidence supporting the idea that it is not the culture of a nation which can be against the culture of the others; rather, it is the political approaches which put cultures in contradictory positions. Cultures are intermingled. Sometimes, people speak about a universal culture. Cultures, they say, grow together. It seems quite clear that there is no such thing as a closed culture. Cultures grow and change due to constant interactions.

Cultural globalization which intends to seek ways of bringing all local and national cultures under the umbrella of one international culture is another phenomenon discussed in the field of cultural security. Some researchers consider it a threat to the security of cultures. They say once established, it will make the people of the whole world think, behave, and live in the same way. This, they believe, can lead to the annihilation of the cultural identity of economically and technologically weak nations. Some others are more optimistic about the outcome of cultural globalization. They say this can lead to some kind of cross-cultural dialog between world nations, which, in turn, can help them develop a common understanding about the world and its problems.

Still another important issue in the discussion of cultural security, according to anthropologists, is the relationship between language and culture. Since cultural concepts are communicated through language and language, in fact, is the mirror of culture, many threats against culture can be traced in the changes in language.

Globalization and Culture

Globalization in its literal sense is the process of transformation of local or regional phenomena into global ones. The modern concept of 'globalization' has only been in general currency since the 1970s although as a general process it has been going on for a much longer period of time. It can be described as a process of blending or homogenization by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and function together. This process is a combination of economic, technological, sociocultural and political forces. Globalization is often used to refer to economic globalization, that is, integration of national economies into the international economy

through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration, and the spread of technology.

Globalization has had two powerful drivers: technological change, on the one hand, especially in communications and information technologies, and, on the other, economic liberalization. First of all, and most obviously, the origins of globalization are to be found in the technological advances that have made it easier, cheaper and quicker to carry out international transactions. These include the air transport, the fax, satellite communication, the computer, and especially the Internet. These innovations have reduced the costs of time and distance to such an extent that they have become essentially irrelevant in many commercial transactions. As a result, the market space for most goods and services has become global space. But technology alone cannot completely explain the current experience with globalization. Economic liberalization has been the other indispensable factor. Over the past half-century there have been several decisive developments that have directed the international economy towards the globalized world of today: establishment of the beginnings of a global economic regulatory framework, the decision by the United States to abandon the fixed exchange rate system and establish a system of floating exchange rates, the two oil crises of the 1970s, the end of the Cold War, and the establishment of the World Trade Organization in 1994.

The afore-mentioned elements have helped economic globalization be fulfilled to some extent during the last few decades. Economic globalization has promoted some developing countries to accelerate their modernization, and as newly industrialized countries they have set an example of catching up with, and even in some cases surpassing some Western countries. However, a lot of people see this trend as a cover for Westernizing world economy. Many people who see economic globalization as undesirable see it as a process in which Western capitalism is dominating the world. Many believe that as globalization extends, so extends the power of the Western corporate giants and the nations which harbor them. Together, they keep the Western world rich at the expense of the poverty of many other parts of the world. They dictate the trading terms, the interest rates, and the dominance of highly-mechanized production. They point to the ways in which great agri-businesses are re-working the genetic make-up of seeds so that farmers cannot collect seed from one season to the next but are dependent in purchasing their seeds from the multi-national companies.

Although globalization has economic roots, it has had a lot of cultural consequences. Cultural globalization, driven by communication technology and the worldwide marketing of Western cultural industries, is seen as a process of homogenization and the global domination of the Western culture at the expense of traditional cultures of the world nations. This trend has already imposed some Western values on the people of other countries, and it has brought about outcomes such as violation of moral norms, the break-up of the family, and severe crimes.

It is of universal significance for the world nations to stop the undesirable trend of cultural globalization. Western nations have undoubtedly made a lot of progress in the fields of science and technology. Their culture, however, isn't perfect and has a lot of serious shortcomings. They suffer from problems such as unlimited individual freedom which has led to various social abnormalities, over-competition which has caused contradictions in interpersonal relations, and moral degradation which has loosened the foundations of the family. It is obvious that the outcome of accepting the Western culture as it is and letting it dominate the traditional cultures of other nations is nothing but embracing the abnormalities that the Western community is suffering from at present.

The second reason for preventing the cultural monopoly of the West is rooted in the fact that only cultural diversification can ensure that humankind is not destroyed. At the turn of the century, humankind made unprecedented progress, but also met unprecedented problems such as the population explosion, ecological deterioration, environmental pollution, frequent wars, ignorance and backwardness, and the wide gap between the rich and the poor. Various national cultures are extremely rich and are a vast storehouse of experience and wisdom. Only by drawing on this experience humankind can overcome his present and future problems. If culture is "globalized" or "Westernized," as some people have said, it will be a very sad future for humankind.

As the third reason, it can be said that the aggressive trend of cultural globalization is aimed at universalizing the Western culture, spreading its cultural values, and realizing its hegemonic strategy of "leading the world". This dangerous trend is an organized cultural invasion plan. Accompanied with the richness of the West's material base and its absolute superiority in the cultural industry, products and market, it can easily swallow other weak nations' cultures especially the newly emerging ones. Thus, world nations have to say no to this trend in order to preserve their culture and thereby maintain their identity.

