Toward a Social Psychology of Globalization

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In most parts of the world, globalization has become an unstoppable and potent force that impacts everyday life and international relations. The articles in this issue draw on theoretical insights from diverse perspectives (clinical psychology, consumer research, organizational behavior, political psychology, and cultural psychology) to offer nuanced understanding of individuals’ psychological reactions to globalization in different parts of the world (Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, Mainland China, Singapore, Switzerland, United States, Taiwan). These articles address the questions of how people make sense of and respond to globalization and its sociocultural ramifications; how people defend the integrity of their heritage cultural identities against the “culturally erosive” effects of globalization, and how individuals harness creative insights from their interactions with global cultures. The new theoretical insights and revealing empirical analyses presented in this issue set the stage for an emergent interdisciplinary inquiry into the psychology of globalization.

At the turn of the century, Albert Bandura (2001) noted that societies today are undergoing drastic social, informational, and technological changes, and that

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“revolutionary advances in electronic technologies and globalization are transforming the nature, reach, speed, and loci of human influence.” (p. 12) He invited psychologists to examine the psychological processes that shape personal destinies and the national life of societies in rapidly globalized environments.

However, this important message has not received much attention, and the discipline seems to have remained impassive toward globalization as a topic of psychological inquiry. In June 2011, we found only 32 articles in the PsycARTICLES database that are indexed with the keyword globalization. Among them, only four (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001; Alter & Kwan, 2009; de Oliveria, Braun, Carlson, & de Oliveria, 2009; Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2008) are empirical papers. The seeming apathy over globalization in psychology is unfortunate given that the discipline is well positioned to offer new conceptual and empirical perspectives on issues concerning the social and cultural implications of globalization (Arnett, 2002; Chiu & Cheng, 2007; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007).

Nonetheless, exciting developments are being made. For instance, theoretical and empirical analyses have been advanced to understand lay people’s understanding of the meanings of globalization and social change (Kashima et al., 2009), reactions to the experiential compression of space and time in globalized cultural environments (Chiu, Mallorie, Keh, & Law, 2009), and the impacts of global contacts on international and intercultural relations (Gries, Crowson, & Sandel, 2010).

The objective of this issue is to leverage and promote these developments for the purpose of advancing a psychological science of globalization. The authors in this issue have illustrated with their latest research how social psychology can deepen psychological understanding of several important aspects of globalization. Their conceptual and empirical analyses have offered deep insights into the following issues:

1. How do lay people understand globalization and what are the social and psychological implications of such understanding?
2. What are the negative psychological effects of globalization?
3. What are the social psychological factors that can enlarge or reduce these negative effects?
4. What are the potential psychological benefits of globalization?
5. What are the social psychological factors that can enhance these positive effects and what are the boundaries of such effects?

**Lay Perceptions of Globalization**

Broadly defined, globalization refers to a process of interaction and integration among the peoples, companies, and governments of different nations. This
process is driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007). Globalization has led to rapid diffusion of economic, political and cultural practices across national borders, creating optimism in global acceptance of the finest universal values of humanity as well as fear of erosion of local cultural traditions. Globalization has fueled economic developments in both developed and developing countries, but has also intensified both positive and negative interdependence among national and religious cultures.

Although globalization has transformed the cultures and life practices in all countries, the flow of resources, wealth and sociocultural practices between countries is asymmetrical. For instance, the United States has been a major exporter of pop culture, and China has been a main beneficiary of global trade. A productive way to begin the scientific study of the relationship between globalization and psychology is to examine the similarities and differences in the lay perceptions and appraisals of globalization and social change across nations. In this issue, Yang et al. (2011) applied multidimensional scaling to reveal the structure of lay perceptions of 24 objects that are strongly associated with globalization (e.g., McDonald’s, global warming) in the United States and three cities in Greater China (Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Taipei). Their results showed that people in these four regions agree that globalization has five major facets: (a) global business enterprises (e.g., Starbucks), (b) information technology (e.g., the Internet), (c) migration of people (e.g., air travel), (d) global disasters (e.g., HIV), and (e) international regulators (e.g., the United Nations). Yang and his colleagues also measured their participants’ evaluations of the impacts of these five facets of globalization on the levels of competence and interpersonal warmth in their societies. These evaluations reveal that people in the four regions generally believe that globalization has more positive effects on people’s competence than on their warmth. Despite the striking similarity in the perceptions of globalization among Americans and the Chinese, there are regional differences in the perceptions of the cultural impacts of global business. For instance, whereas the Chinese perceived global businesses to have positive impacts on people’s warmth and competence, Americans had more varied evaluations of the cultural impacts of global businesses, believing that some global businesses (Hollywood) have more negative impacts than do others (e.g., Disneyland).

Yang et al.’s results are consistent with Kashima et al.’s (2009) observation that people typically believe that a society undergoes a natural course of evolution from a traditional community with relatively low levels of competence and high levels of morality, to a modern society with relatively high levels of competence and low levels of morality. To probe how this folk theory of globalization varies with a country’s recent economic experiences, in this issue, Kashima et al. (2011) compared the lay theory of globalization in the People’s Republic of China (an Asian country that has experienced an explosive growth in the past two decades due to
global trade), Japan (an Asian country that has experienced a slide in its economic status in the global economy) and Australia (a Western-European based economy that has experienced relative steady economic growth). These investigators found that people in all three countries regard their societies to have evolved from more moral but less competent communities to less moral but more competent societies. Despite this similarity in the appraisal of past trends, there are marked country differences in people’s future imagination of their societies. Whereas Australians and the Japanese expect the trend described above to continue into the future, the Chinese, encouraged by their recent explosive economic growth, predict their society to be equally moral as now while continuing to become more competent into the future. This result is consistent with Cheng et al.’s (2010) observation that China’s unprecedented economic growth has led the Mainland Chinese to expect a more competent China in the future (vs. now; the “better tomorrow effect”) and a perception of a more moral China in the past (vs. now; the “good old days effect”). Cheng et al. (2010) also tracked the change of these expectations during the 2008 Beijing Olympics and found that as the Olympics proceeded, the perceived compatibility of competence and warmth/morality increased and the good old days effect diminished. Taken together, the results reviewed above suggest that rapid economic growth and enhanced international status through success in global mega-events (e.g., the Olympics) could promote more optimistic lay theories of social change.

**Cultural and Intercultural Implications of Globalization**

As Robertson (1992) noted, globalization involves “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.” (p. 8) With the advancement of globalization, many people have experienced an increase in the frequency and intensity of exposure to other cultures. Giddens (1985) also points out that globalization has resulted in experiential compression of time and space; people in global cities frequently experience traditional and modern cultures (and their symbols) at the same time and cultures (and their symbols) from different geographical regions in the same space. A global culture is often characterized as one “of virtuality in the global flows which transcend time and space” (Castells, 1998, p. 350).

Social scientists have different views on the possible cultural impacts of globalization. Some writers believe that exposure to foreign cultures is a profoundly enriching process that opens minds to new experiences, removes cultural barriers, strengthens the cultural diffusion of human rights and democracy, and accelerates cultural change. These writers envision the emergence a multicultural global village, where people from different nation-states and cultural backgrounds can freely exchange their ideas and practices and appreciate those of others. The enthusiasts also envision the rise of cultural cosmopolitanism marked by a zest for
wide international experience and acknowledgments of the otherness of those who are culturally different (Appiah, 2006).

In contrast, some scholars believe that increased cultural exposure may incite parochial and exclusionary resistance against foreign cultures (Barber, 1996), as well as collective movements that aim at reaffirming local cultures. These reactions, according to some, could lead to clashes of civilizations (Huntington, 1996). For example, there are concerns in France that American restaurant chains may crowd out French cuisines (a source of national pride for the French) with fast food. There are also concerns over the massive emigration of U.S.-dominated popular culture (e.g., Hollywood movies) to the world. In some countries, the spread of U.S. popular culture and its attendant American values and beliefs has evoked xenophobic anxieties over and incited nationalistic reactions toward the Americanization of world cultures (Chiu & Hong, 2006).

**Exclusionary and Integrative Reactions Toward Foreign Cultures**

Based on a review of the theoretical discourses in the social sciences, Chiu and Cheng (2007, 2010) propose that when the iconic symbols of the local and global cultures are seen together in a globalized environment, “culture” will become a salient mental category for organizing perceptions; people will attend to the differences between local and foreign cultures, become sensitive to the cultural implications of the inflow of foreign cultures (Chiu et al., 2009). This psychological state can promote both exclusionary and integrative reactions to foreign cultures.

Table 1 summarizes the major differences between exclusionary and integrative reactions to foreign cultures. Exclusionary reactions are emotional, reflexive responses evoked by perceived threats to the integrity and vitality of one’s heritage culture. These reactions could lead to xenophobic, exclusionary behaviors or constructive effort directed to preserve the integrity and vitality of heritage cultures.

People on the receiving end of the global culture are often concerned that globalization will ultimately lead to homogenization of cultures, a seemingly an inevitable trend at first glance. Western nations, representatives of global culture, are generally perceived to be more economically advanced than non-Western ones. Developing countries that aspire to become an industrialized nation may treat Western economic powers as reference nations not only in the domain of economic development, but also in the realm of cultural restructuring. Global culture has been characterized as new, modern, scientific and results-oriented. It privileges consumerism, individualism, competition, and efficiency (Pilkington & Johnson, 2003). These values may be seen as the ones separating advanced societies from economically backward traditional economies. Thus, global culture may become the reference culture for some developing countries that seek to emulate
Table 1. Exclusionary and Integrative Reactions to Global Culture

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<th>Exclusionary Reactions</th>
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<td>Perceptions of global/foreign cultures:</td>
<td>Perceptions of global/foreign cultures:</td>
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<td>Accentuated by the need to defend the</td>
<td>Accentuated by a cultural learning mindset</td>
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<td>integrity and vitality of the heritage culture</td>
<td>Attenuated by the need for cognition</td>
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<td>Attenuated by the need for cognition</td>
<td>Attenuated by the need for firm answers and cultural consensus</td>
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Western economic powers by embracing global values. Consequently, global culture exerts its hegemonic influence on some local cultures via voluntary submission to global culture (van Strien, 1997). Furthermore, globalization has brought rapid changes in consumption patterns and the spread of global “brand-name” goods. An expanding consumerist culture with its attending global marketing strategies such as global advertising tends to exploit similar basic material desires and create similar lifestyles (Parameswaran, 2002).

Fear of global culture’s hegemonic influence on the local culture often takes the form of contamination anxiety—the worry that the global culture will contaminate the local culture (Pickowicz, 1991). Such contamination fear was responsible for the closedown of the Starbucks coffee shop in the Imperial Palace Museum in Beijing in 2007. In January 2007, Chenggang Rui, Director and Anchor of BizChina, the prime-time daily business show on CCTV International, led an online campaign to have Starbucks removed from Beijing’s Forbidden City (the Palace Museum). Rui (2007) made the following remarks in his online article:

> The Forbidden City is a symbol of China’s cultural heritage. Starbucks is a symbol of lower middle class culture in the west. We need to embrace the world, but we also need to preserve our cultural identity. There is a fine line between globalization and contamination. . . . But please don’t interpret this as an act of nationalism. It is just about we Chinese people respecting ourselves. I actually like drinking Starbucks coffee. I am just against having one in the Forbidden City.

This article has attracted more than half a million readers and inspired more than 2700 commentaries, mostly of which are written in Chinese and are
sympathetic to Rui’s cause. In July 2007, Starbucks closed its shop in the Forbidden City.

Attacking the contaminants is not the only exclusionary response to contamination anxiety; another exclusionary response is to quarantine or isolate the erosive effects of global culture to selected life domains so that these effects can be prevented from spreading to other life domains, particularly those domains that are tied to the identity of local culture. For example, although modernization and Westernization often arrive in one package, Hong Kong Chinese distinguish between modernization and Westernization, with modernization involving acquisition of specific skills and competencies that have fueled the economic development in the West, and Westernization involving adoption of the Western social-moral values. Hong Kong Chinese welcome modernization and its attendant instrumental values (e.g., power and creativity) more than they do Western moral values (e.g., individuality and uniqueness; Fu & Chiu, 2007). This strategy shelters the core moral values in Chinese culture from the erosive effects of globalization, resulting in the differential rates of cultural change in different life domains (Cheung et al., 2006).

In contrast to exclusionary responses, integrative responses are reflective mental processes that facilitate the use of ideas from foreign cultures as means or resources to further one’s valued goals. Individuals view the newly arrived foreign cultures as intellectual resources that complement their heritage culture for achieving valued goals. Individuals with multicultural experiences can flexibly switch their cultural frames in response to the changing cultural demands in the environment—they retrieve culturally appropriate interpretive frames and behavioral scripts depending on whether they interact with a member of the ingroup or outgroup culture (Chiu & Hong, 2005). They are willing to appropriate ideas from foreign cultures to generate creative solutions to a problem (Leung & Chiu, 2010; Leung Maddux, Galinsky & Chiu, 2008; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). Creative synthesis of ideas from diverse cultures has led to product innovations in local and global markets. One example is Starbucks Coffee Singapore’s introduction of a range of handcrafted snow-skin mooncakes—Caramel Macchiato, Cranberry Hibiscus and Orange Citron—to the market. In the company’s news release, Belinda Wong, Managing Director of Starbucks Coffee Singapore, states that these new, innovative mooncakes will make a delicious complement to their customers’ favorite coffee, as well as great gift for friends and family in the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival. To her, Starbucks mooncakes is a business innovation created by combining a sip of the American Starbucks Coffee culture with a bite of the Chinese custom of celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival with a traditional sweet delight.

Evocation of Exclusionary Reactions

A major theme in this issue concerns the contextual and psychological factors that activate exclusionary and integrative reactions to foreign culture. In this issue,
Torelli, Chiu, Tam, Au, and Keh (2011) proposed that simultaneous activation of two cultures (e.g., Starbucks Coffee in China’s Imperial Palace Museum) makes culture a central organizing category for processing information (see also Chiu et al., 2009). As a result, the perceivers become sensitive to the cultural significance of the stimuli (e.g., the presence of a Starbucks Coffee Shop) in the environment. Torelli et al. also showed that simultaneous activation of two cultures could increase defensive, exclusionary reactions when the perceiver experiences globalization as a threat to their heritage culture (see also Chen & Chiu, 2010; Cheng, Leung, & Wu, 2011).

Nonetheless, it is possible to cool down these exclusionary reactions. In this issue, Morris, Mok, and Mok (2011) showed that although individuals tend to close their mind to new ideas following exposure to foreign culture mixing with one’s heritage culture, this reaction is less pronounced among those with strong foreign cultural identification, possibly because these individuals do not experience culture mixing as an impending cultural threat. Relatedly, in this issue, Tong, Hui, Kwan, and Peng (2011) collected data from both Singapore (Study 1) and the United States (Study 2) to examine exclusionary reactions to foreign culture in the context of cross-border acquisitions. Their results show that when a company that is widely known to be a symbol of the local culture (e.g., Ya Kun in Singapore or General Motors in the United States) faces an acquisition attempt by a foreign enterprise, citizens in the local economy may perceive the attempted acquisition to be a threat to their local culture. These citizens may then exhibit culturally motivated exclusionary reactions to the acquisition, particularly when these citizens identify strongly with local culture and perceive the culture of the acquirer to be dissimilar to local culture. Nonetheless, local citizens can be led to consider the cross-border acquisition as a profit-driven business transaction. Under the influence of an economic transaction mindset, people will evaluate the acquisition primarily on the basis of its potential economic gains or losses.

Focusing on the psychological adaptation of individuals Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEETS)—a marginal subculture in Japan that has emerged in response to globalization, Norasakkunkit and Uchida (2011) discussed in this issue a maladaptive response to globalization. They observed that a sizable number of Japanese youth (estimated to be around one million) cannot adjust to the rapid changes in occupational life (characterized by increased competitiveness and decreased job security) that globalization has brought to Japan. Although these individuals do not suffer from any clinically diagnosable psychological disorder, they lack persistence in pursuing achievement goals and choose to move from the center to the periphery of society, displaying low identification with the core values of interdependence and self-improvement in Japanese society.

In short, exclusionary reactions to foreign cultures are particularly likely to emerge when cross-border interactions and transactions are perceived through a cultural lens and the vitality of the local culture is threatened. In addition,
the increased lifestyle changes that accompany globalization might also lead to passive resistance to the new lifestyle and in some extreme cases withdrawal from society.

**Activation of Integrative Reactions**

Although intercultural contacts might increase the likelihood of exclusionary reactions to foreign culture and a globalized lifestyle, they also afford opportunities for intercultural understanding and learning (Leung et al., 2008). For instance, in this issue, Gries, Crowson and Cai (2011) contend that globalization compresses time and space through modern transportation and media technologies and increases opportunities for intercultural understanding. These investigators examined how interpersonal contacts with Chinese and exposure to media coverage about China differentially impact American attitudes and policy preferences toward a rapidly rising China. Their results showed that while both interpersonal contact and media exposure were associated with prejudice reduction, media exposure was associated with more negative attitudes toward the Chinese government. Interestingly, these effects were mediated by knowledge about China. As contact theory suggests, increased knowledge about China was associated with decreased prejudice, but increased knowledge about China was also associated with more negative attitudes toward the Chinese government. Knowledge, therefore, is not a panacea for the problems that beset United States–China relations.

Experiences with foreign cultures also afford opportunities for intercultural learning. With more multicultural experiences individuals are more creative (Leung et al., 2008; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). Experimental evidence also shows that people become more creative after viewing symbols from their own culture and a foreign culture (mixed cultural priming). However, viewing symbols of one’s own culture or a foreign culture alone (monocultural priming) has no creative benefits (Leung & Chiu, 2010). This result suggests that experiences with culturally mixed environment can enrich an otherwise mundane local environment, sparking creative combinations of ideas from diverse cultural sources.

Nonetheless, living in a culturally mixed environment can engender anxiety and discomfort. At the cognitive level, culturally mixed experiences expose individuals to seemingly incompatible ideas and invite investment of cognitive resources to reconcile and integrate the apparent contradictions. Accordingly, mixed cultural priming may have momentary negative impact on emotional experiences. However, investment in such cognitive effort may also enhance creative performance. Consistent with this idea, in this issue, Cheng et al. (2011) reported that mixed cultural priming can temporarily reduce pleasant affect or induce unpleasant affect, and that these emotional changes are accompanied by increased creative performance.
The need for cultural competence is particularly pronounced in high stake trans-cultural encounters, such as cross-border military assignments. In this issue, Rockstuhl, Seiler, Ang, Dyne, and Anne (2011) analyzed the core competencies that predict accomplishment of domestic military assignments and cross-border military assignments among a sample of Swiss military officers. These investigators found that cultural intelligence, which refers to an individual’s capability to function effectively in culturally mixed situations, is an important predictor of leader effectiveness in cross-border military assignments.

In summary, cultural mixing in a global society confers intercultural learning opportunities that invite integrative response, while at the same time presents potential identity threats that evoke exclusionary reactions. A major challenge in the social psychology of globalization is to explain and predict when people would display exclusionary or integrative responses to the cultural effects of globalization. Previous research has provided some answers to this question. For example, the need for firm answers has been shown to increase the tendency to rely on one’s heritage cultural perspective (and to exclude other cultural perspectives) as behavior guides (Chao, Zhang, & Chiu, 2010; Chiu, Morris, Hong, & Menon, 2000; Fu et al., 2007). Such culturocentric tendency fuels exclusionary reactions and inhibits integrative reactions. There is also evidence that cultural adaptation and open-mindedness facilitate intercultural learning in intercultural contacts (Leung et al., 2008; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). The articles in this issue add to these growing insights and suggest that experience of existential anxiety (Torelli et al., 2011, this issue) and identification with heritage culture (Tong et al., 2011; this issue) can increase the likelihood of exclusionary reactions, whereas need for cognition (Torelli et al., 2011; this issue) and foreign cultural identification (Morris, 2011; this issue) can attenuate exclusionary reactions.

Conclusions

People’s diverse reactions to the cultural impacts of globalization have given rise to the birth of a new “civil-society politics” pounding on the doors of major world forums demanding attention from both the public and the academia. In public discourse, opinions on the cultural effects of globalization are divided. Some writers have focused on the bright side of globalization; they discussed how globalization can enhance creativity and promote a global mindset or new ethics (e.g., cosmopolitanism). Meanwhile, others have written on the dark side of globalization, focusing on negative reactions ranging from fear of cultural erosion to culturocentric xenophobia and terrorism.

We believe that arguments from both sides are valid. On the one hand, as globalization proceeds, individuals are exposed to many novel ideas from other cultures. Thus, globalization can be a profoundly enriching process if people are open to new experiences and willing to learn from other cultures.
(Appiah, 2006). On the other hand, increased cultural contacts can evoke fear of cultural contamination and erosion. If individuals manage their cultural fears by resorting to exclusionary practices, intercultural contacts can lead to clashes of civilizations, resulting in violent conflicts between cultures, wars, and terrorism.

Thus, how individuals manage their reactions to the cultural impacts of globalization is a topic that requires urgent research attention. It is important to identify the controlling stimuli of exclusionary responses, to know their downstream cognitive and motivational consequences, and to understand how the individual’s self-regulatory competence moderates these responses. Furthermore, exclusionary responses seem to be highly contagious. In the Starbucks coffee shop incident, a provocative message in the Internet can incite widespread protestation against the coffee chain within a short period of time. It is important to know how exclusionary responses become contagious in a human group, and what can be done to stop the spread of the infection.

It is equally important to identify the controlling factors of integrative responses. Although globalization can be an enriching process, mere exposure to foreign cultures does not always lead to creative benefits. Thus, research should inform policy makers what is needed to make multicultural experience an empowering and constructive self-transformational experience.

Despite this, scholarly works on the social psychology of people’s reactions to cultural exposure are scarce. We hope that the collection of articles in this issue will convince the readers that globalization is a timely and viable area of investigation in psychology. The research reported in this issue represents scholarships from different disciplines (social psychology, clinical psychology, cultural psychology, management studies, marketing, political science). We believe that a trans-disciplinary perspective is required to deepen the inquiry into the psychology of globalization. For example, to understand how the self-regulatory system works in multicultural contexts, we need inputs from personality psychology, cultural psychology and social cognitive neuroscience. To situate cultural contacts in their historical contexts and the power relations between the cultures in contact, we need contributions from humanists, sociologists and political scientists. We are optimistic that concerted effort from a multidisciplinary research team will deliver holistic answers to our global problems.

References


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