Winners and Losers in Globalization

Since Asia once was considered “Western’s colony”, it has grown up strongly in economic, political, military and technological fields recently. With thousands of articles mention about Asia, many scholars, journalists, businessman agree that globalization is the main source for Asia’s miracle (Berger & Huntington 2002). However, what is globalization in deep? And does it bring equal benefits for all countries that involves? If not, who is the loser and who is the winner? In this essay, I will try to answer these questions above on the wide term and then, I will focus on analyzing that whether China, the country that has just replaced Japan to be the second largest economy in the world, is the winner or loser in globalization.

The definition of globalization is controversial since there is no official or agreed definition for it. According to Guillermo de la Dehesa (2006), an expert in economic, democracy and justice term, ‘globalization is a dynamic process of liberalization, openness, and international integration across a wide range of markets, from labour to goods and from service to capital and technology’. Friedman (2000), a foreign-affairs columnist for The New York Time, wrote in his book “The Lexus and the Olive tree: Understanding Globalization” that ‘globalization involves the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before—in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before, and in a way that is also producing a powerful backlash from those brutalized or left behind by this new system.’ With these definitions, I can see that globalization has a huge impact not only on
economy and policies, but also on society, lifestyle and cultures. In this essay, I will focus on culture, which is also the most controversial aspect of globalization, but before that, I will provide a glimpse on the origin of globalization.

According to Williamson (2002), globalization started from the Voyages of Discovery of Columbus and de Gama more than 500 years ago. That adventure not only is a great journey for human kind but also boosted the transfer of goods between regions. However, globalization just has peaked its power since 1950s (Dehesa 2006) and changed the global economy structure. The fundamental core of globalization is ‘free-market capitalism’, it means that the more open the economy is, the more benefit and flourish the country will get (Friedman 2000). To support this idea, Tsai (2007) states that ‘globalization is an omnipresent power of ‘creative destruction’ in that global trade, cross-border investment and technological innovation enhance productive efficiency and generate extraordinary prosperity’.

As a consequence, many developing countries like India and China have a dramatic development in economy since they joined in the global trade (Dehesa 2006). In specific, after joining WTO, ‘China's foreign trade increased from about $500 billion in 2001 to more than $2 trillion in 2010’ (Zhenyu 2011). Not only that, globalization has brought a lot more for China as the middle class in China reached 80 million (Hodgson 2007) and the number of billionaires in China even reach to 600 (Hoogewerf 2011, cited in Zhenghua 2011).

It seems that globalization is a positive process for China’s development. However, many scholars have concerns that globalization also is a ‘double-edge sword’ for China (Deng and More 2004), and creates ‘double-bladed’ outcomes (Tsai 2007) but the most threatening consequence of globalization is the loss of cultural identity when the interactions between
different nations is increasing rapidly. Samuel P. Huntington 1993, the Eaton Professor of the Science of Government and Director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, states that there will be a clash of civilization between the West and other nations because of the West’s influences on military, economic power, political and religious values. As a result, the threat of losing cultural identity is the problem that China is facing in its modernizing process.

With the threats and opportunities that globalization bring, all nations that involve in become ‘competitors’ (Friedman 2000). However, in this competition, O’Brien and Leichenko (2003) claim that ‘globalization will produce winners and losers, similar to what Frank and Cook (1996) point in their book “The-Winner-Take-All Society”: globalization ‘has played an important role in the expansion of inequality” and creates unfair benefits for players. To continue with the essay, I will examine the term ‘winner’ and ‘loser’, and then look at the background of China’s culture today to identify who are the winners and losers in the aspect culture of globalization.

In the book “Winners and Losers in the Context of Global Change”, O’Brien and Leichenko (2003) define that, “winners succeed or gain something” whereas “losers experience disadvantages and deprivations”. They further explain that in the event, although all competitors can gain benefits, the nations that have more advantages become the winners and the nations that have less are considered to be the losers.

Before saying anything, I think it is necessary to identify what is culture first. Similar to globalization, culture is one of the most controversial terms to be defined. However, according to Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute (n.d.), culture can combine these terms:
Language: the oldest human institution and the most sophisticated medium of expression.

Arts & Sciences: the most advanced and refined forms of human expression.

Thought: the ways in which people perceive, interpret, and understand the world around them.

Spirituality: the value system transmitted through generations for the inner well-being of human beings, expressed through language and actions.

Social activity: the shared pursuits within a cultural community, demonstrated in a variety of festivities and life-celebrating events.

Interaction: the social aspects of human contact, including the give-and-take of socialization, negotiation, protocol, and conventions.

As these terms suggested above, culture is a dynamic concept that has unique characteristics to distinguish itself from the other and those characteristics are represented through actions, thoughts, beliefs and so on from its members. Therefore, firstly, I will analysis the cultural trend in China today to examine the actions of Chinese people and then, the thought will be taken into consideration.

China’s culture today: The rise of popular culture

Popular culture, or global culture, can be defined as ‘American culture’. The spread of technology along with entertainment from the US has become dominant mostly in the rest of the world. An example of popular culture from McLuhan 1967 is:‘speaking English with the American accent, wearing Levi jeans and drinking Coca-cola, eating McDonalds, and watches a mixture of MTV, CNN news broadcasts, Hollywood movies’ (cited in Storey, J 2008). Friedman
also points out in the last chapter of his book that globalization can be considered as Americanization with its great influences in many aspects such as media, language.

In general, the American culture becomes dominant and influential in China due to the famous of American brands (Hopper 2007) with more than 2,000 KFC restaurants; 1,000 McDonalds restaurants (Jie 2008), Coca-cola and Pepsi are two of the largest soft drink manufacture in China (Einhorn and byrnes 2009). In addition, even though Christmas is not an official holiday in China, the big cities like Shanghai, Beijing are overwhelming with Christmas decorations, Christmas songs and Christmas cakes every the end of the year. In the report “Wind of Christmas Sweeping Shanghai: Money Oriented” of the Reuters news report in 1996, a young salesman told the reporter that “we young people in Shanghai like to copy Western habits”.

Back to these terms about culture above, it seems that the Chinese people, especially the youth are so influenced by Western culture through their lifestyle, actions that Zakaria (2009) in his book “The Post-American world” says that ‘There is no such thing as Asia, which is really a Western construct’. Similar to this claim, Huntington (2006) points out that as the West becomes the most powerful and dominant, there are only three options for the non-Western countries to choose: isolation, joining the West or “become modern without becoming Western”.

However, Dehasa (2006) argues that the language you speak or the clothes does not shape who you are or the way you think. Giddens (1991) also supports that ‘A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going’. Therefore, I will choose “Raise the Red Lantern”, a movie that reflects the influence of Westerners but is made from the local perspective to examine the local people’s thoughts.
“Raise the Red Lantern” – The struggles for Chinese women or culture?

There are two reasons for choosing this movie to analyse on this essay. The first reason is that Raise the Red Lantern is an adaption from the novel “Wives and Concubines” of Su Tong, which is set up in 1920s, during the warlord era (before the Chinese Civil War). The second reason is that this movie is directed by Zhang Yimou (1991), one of the most famous and influential directors in China, also it also won many valuable prizes such as Best foreign language film of Academy Award in 1992 and Golden Lion for the Best film of Venice International Film Festival in 1991.

Summary:

The film is about a 19 year olds girl names Songlian, has to be the fourth wife of a rich man after her family is bankrupt. The main source of conflicts for the wives is the red lantern because if the master wants to sleep with someone, the red lantern will be raised in front of her room to announce. The wives, in order to maintain their position, have to fight every second to get the red lantern. Therefore, the red lantern symbolizes for power the owner and jealousy for the others and it also raises the conflicts higher. Losing the confidence about her knowledge and beauty, she struggles against other wives for the master’s love. After one year in the new house, from a beautiful, knowledgeable, enthusiastic girl, she has become mad and insane in her school uniform.

Although the film is set in 1920s, without the western uniform and items like suitcases, the audience could be misunderstood that it is in ancient time due to the traditions, behaviours and architecture.
Western clothes, education versus the traditional, Confucian struggles.

Figure 1

In the first part, Songlian is a fresh, modern, enthusiastic and confident girl through the ways she walks. She also strongly believes in her beauty, youth and intelligence, she can control her life even though she has to be the fourth wife. In here, the Western uniform and suitcases represents for modernity that the West brings to China. Modernity is not only about the technology but also ideology, belief that the woman can be active and control her own life, instead of being dependent on the man.
On the other hand, the red lantern symbolizes the traditional values that are old and ‘uncivilized’ and needs to be destroyed. Songlian after being shamed by having fake pregnancy, she reveals that her servant raises the torn lanterns in her own room, which represents the servant’s conspiracy on the master, she burns all of them and her servant is punished by kneeling in the snow. In here, the Confucian ideology is presented clearly through Songlian saying: “Servants are born to be servant” and the life of the servant is just as poor as the torn lanterns that she raises in her room. However, after punishing the servant, Songlian is watching the red lantern being raised in hopeless. The modern girl, now is struggling with the tradition, and becomes its victim. Since then, her life also falls into darkness like the ash of the lanterns that she once burned.
Figure 3

In the end of the film, all the red lanterns are raised to welcome the new bride. On the contrary, Songlian is insane, wearing her uniform, having plait hair like school girl and walking lonely through the red lanterns from day to dark night. The film ends with the two lines of red lanterns in the night, which are symbol for happiness, is announcing for the next tragedy.

Directed from Chinese perspective, Raise the Red lantern questions the ideology of Confucian:

Only when things are investigated is knowledge extended; only when knowledge is extended are thoughts sincere; only when thoughts are sincere are minds rectified; only when minds are rectified are the characters of persons cultivated; only when characters are cultivated are families regulated; only when families are regulated are states well governed; only when states are well governed is there peace in the world.

In Chinese culture, family is the center of society and the members should have responsibilities for their family, especially the women. However, through the director’s perspective, this idea seems to be wrong, cruel, old, unrealistic and uncivilized by the image of Songlian wearing her own uniform to remember her past. That image indicates the resistance of Songlian to be traditional and her desire toward modernity. Moreover, that also shows that being modern is right, good and the way for Chinese society at that time or else, Chinese people, especially women will have in the same situation like Songlian.

David Neo, a PhD candidate at La Trobe University, focuses on magic realism in the film, writes that:

The film highlights that Chinese traditions and rituals are in dire need of re-evaluation; there is no investigation of knowledge or cultivation of characters advocated by Confucius – merely an oppressive system of rules. The film focuses on a family, but its fate also extends to a country and civilisation gone awry. The women in Raise the Red Lantern represent the Chinese people who are oppressed by an authoritarian government that allows no freedom of expression – surely the film makes obvious but coded reference to the Tiananmen Square Massacre that occurred in 1989.

Moreover, this film is directed in 1991, the early age of mass globalization in China. In her book, which focuses on analysing the cultural trend in China in 1990s, Liu Kang (2004) states that ‘globalization constitutes a fundamental paradox in the sphere of culture – a tension between the trend toward culture homogenization through global cultural production and distribution (media, popular culture, and entertainment industry), and the opposite trend toward cultural diversification in terms of local, ethnic, and national cultural projects and agendas.’
film’s perspective creates a feeling of desiring to modernize and escape from the old values of the Chinese people at that time. Instead of scaring, the West and their influences are accepted and welcomed as the promises to change China to become better world for all people, who wants freedoms and happiness.

Another support for my argument is the discussion about the image of woman between the past and present of the tourism commercial: “China, forever”. In the article “China, Forever – Tourism Discourse and Self-Orientalism” (2009), Yan and Santos (2009) argue that the image of Chinese women “are presented as timeless, unchangeable and mythical” portrays the past China while the image “with free spirit and exuberant warmth, Chinese women are rendered normal, modernized and Westernized” presents the modern China.

**Self-Orientalism: self-construct or self-destruct?**

Said (1995), a prominent cultural critic and author of the book “Orientalism”, argues that “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident”.”, or in order words, the Orientalism is the concept set by the West. He further states that “the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony”. Therefore, by putting the West is the norm in both “Raise the Red Lantern” and “China, Forever”, the China reconstruct itself in a lower level, in comparison with the West. This concept, called Self-Orientalism, means that China accepts the framework that is set up by the West and also reinforces the post colonism, the remain power and influences in the states after colonism (Yan & Santos 2009).
In conclusion, through the examinations above, the Chinese culture seems to be weaker than the Western in the cultural trend today. This is because China is strong in economy and other fields but society itself is facing with many problems such as the unequal rights on gender, the big gap between rich and poor despite of the government efforts. As the result, while struggling with the problems, the residents look for another solution from foreign countries to overcome the problems by themselves. The loss of China’s culture is not due to the dominance of the West ideology and belief. On the contrary, the social problems in China today create anxiety, unstable mind for its citizens and make globalization’s challenges more difficult to be modernized, not Westernized. Perhaps, instead of focusing and expanding the economy, the government should try to solve the social problems first, or else, they are just self-destructing.
Reference:


Einhorn, B and Byrnes, N 2009, ‘In China, Coke Fights to Stay Ahead of Pepsi’, businessweek, Bloomberg, 2nd July, viewed 10th September 2011,

<http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/09_28/b4139070371312.htm>


Storey, J 2003, Inventing Popular Culture, 1st edn, Blackwell Publishing, USA.


Figure 1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyxLul5KPs&feature=related from 2:20 to 4:17
Figure 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiAGbtq2zoE&feature=related from 1:24 to 4:10

Figure 3: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dXJ3qXGcrI&feature=related from 10:00 to 12:26

