

Cross-cultural Inquiries and the Process of Globalization

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One of the most prolific areas of inquiry today in the social sciences is probably cross-cultural studies. A scanning of the literature on cross-cultural or comparative studies would indicate the impressiveness of the field in terms of its development of increasingly more sophisticated methodologies and the burgeoning of many new conceptualizations. Nevertheless the relatively impressive development in the methodological area has not been accompanied by equally successful achievement in terms of creating the convergence of conceptual diversity (1). As a matter of fact, disagreement on definitions and concepts never ends. It might be argued that these problems have resulted from the nature of development in the field which is still in a state of maturing or developing. Hence, any augmentation or highlighting of such ontological debate may not be able to yield conclusions that can be scientifically proven or falsified. Therefore, a careful consideration of the nature of the discipline in social sciences might provide us with a relatively less abstractive and more tenable observation concerning the sources of our problems relating to issues in our contemporary epistemological perspectives in the area of cross-cultural studies. It has been quite well established that one of the major burdens in social studies is that inquirers usually are necessitated to venture on a very demanding task when they are studying the subjective elements in human life. In any such attempt to tackle problems in the area, social scientists have for decades or, further, back to traditions such as the psychoanalytic development, tried to objectify subjectivity and to quantify the normally unquantifiable. The evolvement of the process yields considerable impressive progress and contributions. Nevertheless, it has also caused sufficiently much frustration. Unlike in hard science or natural

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science, subjective elements in human existence prove to be much more difficult to examine and they are more dynamically fluid in the interactive processes among variables. Thus attempts to desubjectify subjective elements through attribution of definitions and conceptualization have resulted in endless debates and difficulties in converging on simple semantic differences and slight differences in conceptualization while the subject matter itself lies in the same or related nature. As a result, there have been many heated debates relating to this epistemological conflict. One of the most lively debates, especially among the anthropologists is with regard to the distinction between the "universal" approach and the "relativist" approach.

The universalistic approach is known variously as the nomothetic approach or the comparative approach. The relativistic approach, on the other hand, has been called among other terms, cultural relativism, contextualism, idiography or configurationism. (2) The essential objectives of the universal approach have been stated in many slightly different ways. For example, Monroe and Monroe state that "the comparative approach in anthropology is essentially nomothetic in purpose, focusing on universals, generalization, similarities across cultures, and is consonant with the major behavioral science goal of establishing general relationship." (3) To Lonner, the phrase "universalist approach" refers to an orientation toward behavioral science that has as its objective the establishment of scientifically derived generalizations about human behavior. (4) Generally, nearly all comparative scholars in the area of cross-cultural psychology believe that the establishment of universally valid psychological laws is a worthwhile, if not an essential, goal.

In the era of globalization today, with the pressing needs resulting from the seemingly ever increasing pressure and necessity for cross-cultural contacts, exchanges, and dealings of all kinds, the issue of needing to establish certain universally valid psychological laws concerning pure human nature and the resulting human behavior in the interactive cross-cultural context is not just worthwhile but crucial. Cultures today do not cross or interact merely through vicarious learning through printed matter and all other media. It is undeniable that the world today is housing great dynamism related to human migration, travel or exchanges in business stationing in forms such as the practice of expatriate employment through

company policy or even in internationalization of employment. The scale of dynamism in human interaction in various shapes and forms appears overwhelming. Hence, it is quite possible that many people today are living in the state of a technology-driven, necessitated knowledge-imposed and interculturally puzzling (if not confused) situation. Modernization or globalization is impressive while, at the same time, can be intimidating for less actively adjustive persons. Hence, the subject of crossing of culture and exchanges of cultural information is crucial and, if cross-cultural study can provide information that can facilitate the actual universalizing aspect of the modern world and/or minimize problems that may exist in inter cultural encounters and dealings, it will prove to be a most useful and timely contribution to the assistance of the softer side of human life vis-a-vis today's state-of-the-art high-tech world and its more mechanical side of life. Such is a crucial aspect that not only social scientists and psychologists should be aware of but it is a vital need that is inherently and inalienably present in human existence when it is viewed from a holistic perspective. Now we are witnessing a world in which people are not just touring. They work and live cross-culturally on a much greater scale. They study cross-culturally through actual physical mobility. They cross to other cultures for stationing related to employment. Educationally, more people are now crossing physically and there is also more learning through telecommunication technologies. Such an atmosphere may appear overwhelming to some, awesome to others or, perhaps, threatening to quite a few. Therefore, we can see the pressing needs for modern cross-cultural study to develop concepts and ideas that shall bridge the gap if not integrate the universal aspects and the ideographic perspectives of modern life amid multiple and larger scale international and intercultural encounters that require cooperation and exchange.

Now let us re-examine the concepts of universalism and relativism for further crystallization of these concepts. Unlike the relativist approach, which developed partly as a result of anti-ethnocentric sentiments among comparative anthropologists, the comparative approach makes assumptions about human nature which involve a fairly high degree of abstraction. The level of abstraction can range from the acceptance of underlying universals of human behavior (5) to the highest level of conceptual

abstraction which is termed by Lonner "the psychic unity of man" (6). Related to this issue, an assumption concerning the limitations of human variability, which has been supported by a great number of observed similarities among individuals and cultures, is made. It is said that the abovementioned similarities are ascribable to the biopsychological character of man and to the adaptiveness of behavior (7). Indeed, despite differences in skin colour, men do have similarities that result from the sharing of certain characteristics related to biopsychological constructs and the derivatives created by necessitated adaptations that channel human behaviors, modes of conduct and patterns of interaction that do create patterns of shared generality. The related logic is that if adaptive necessities related to the biopsychological character can create similarities in adaptive behaviors then crossing of culture and many things in the modern world are creating sharing of experiences, exposure to similar information and adaptation needs, etc. Hence, the process itself is becoming a socializing factor that can prompt proactive behavioral adaptive learning and possibly new patterns of enactment. In the reactive perspective, such a process in cross-cultural dynamism may well have stirred up more eagerness to learn or to be reactively adaptive when changes and demands for new modes of adaptation require the same biopsychological construct to be more evolutionarily adaptive. This is the point that should encourage people in the era of globalization to view the universalizing trends from the dynamic perspective with more open attitudes to possible development of better syntheses of new solutions to current living and its problems. In short, it has been observed that the world is changing rapidly even though the process is more evolutionistic and peaceful today with only the prevalence of some disruption on a minor scale. The success of today's overall economy, technology and in many other areas, seems to set today's dynamic global interactive process in a hopeful and positive perspective. Our urgent needs involve many areas but, most of all, the softer and more intricate side of human existence should not be neglected. If adaptation means there are needs to cope with the objective and subjective aspects of human life, cross-cultural study relating to cultures, patterns of behavior as well as processes related to adaptive and creative human activities, should receive serious attention.

Among comparative scholars, the emphasis on similarities does not mean that differences and the vertical dimension in human life are discarded. The sole conceptual distinction regarding cultural differences between the universal approach and the relativist approach is that while the former views differences and dynamism or change as being part of the macro-universal framework, the latter sees differences and uniqueness as the final goal of cross-cultural studies. While comparative scholars see differences as part of the whole and, methodologically, serving as means to the better understanding of the ultimate universality, the extreme relativists argue that the only universal that has ever existed is uniqueness in culture and the individual. In response to criticism from the relativists, comparative scholars such as Kaplan and Manners contend that one could never know whether a culture is unique or not unless it is compared to another culture (8).

The disagreements between the universal orientation and the relativistic approach are an example of the more classic divisions among scholars themselves. As a matter of fact, if life or general living encompasses both the horizontal perspective which normally involves the general survival needs of humans as a species and the vertical dimension which deals with the specificities related to the results of interactive dynamic processes that put human lives into diverse settings and various atmospheres, then interactions of variables from both dimensions should unavoidably involve specificities or deeper aspects as well as the general or adaptive patterns, since there may be to cultural specificity that which presents itself in a universal picture and such a phenomenon makes reading of a culture even more difficult. On the other hand, the interaction of multi-dimensional cultural aspects can create the kind of synthesis that appears unique and yet is part of the universal practice that serves the same function everywhere. In other words, we have to learn cross-cultural interaction from a multi-dimensional angle while we also need to be aware of the on-going homeostatic dynamic nature. Here lies our necessity to have a good hunch, if not full knowledge of, the potentials of certain cultural factors regarding adaptivity and resistance. It should be relatively lucid to many people that in response to survival or in order to serve functions, human beings can be very adaptive and pragmatic. However, the one-sided view of the classical conditioning theory can oftentimes stumble when it comes to the deeper

aspects of human psychology. Many people have encountered incredible resistance to interference and absolute recalcitrance when dealing with people from certain in-depth cross-cultural perspectives that particularly touch upon certain culturally resistant beliefs and attitudes. Perhaps, both the universalist and the relativist make equally valid points. For one reason, men do share many things in order to adaptively survive. At the same time, men also differ in their styles and choices for survival in various ways to the extent that they make war over such differences. The traditional cross-cultural approaches in both schools tend to deal with arguments based upon statically oriented conceptions. Perhaps the practice of capturing and dedynamizing interaction of factors in human life supports the foundations of the logic or premises being set. The danger in engaging in such debate is that in the process we can lose touch with the temporally and spatially interactive variables that usually can be the results and the the syntheses of interactive processes. These results, of course, can be the effects of interactions between the horizontal and the vertical cultural aspects that put many cultures in the present world in a highly dynamic state. In today's globalizing era, we may have not consciously acknowledged certain newly emerging factors such as the new norms of the international circle. At the same time, many cultures in the face of new encounters may have evolved long enough to create their own multidimensional structures that encompass both a truly international dealing pattern while at the same time, specific interaction may create different patterns or norms in a deeper sense and invariable manner. Perhaps we can view this very last group as the products of cross-cultural interaction which is related to the rather long term process of ever increasing internationalization, particularly in telecommunications, travel, foreign investment, expatriation of management people, exchanges of students and researchers etc. We may say that the world today is beginning to see the fruits of globalization. However, whether people are conscious of the evolution and its results or not is another matter. The present writer's suggestion here is that in order to be functioning effectively in the global context, people do need to know enough about the adaptive or general aspect of other cultures or of each other while, at the same time, the only way to avoid conflict is to be able to identify the culturally ingrained factors or the resisting aspect of a culture which usually involves more depth, can be quite powerful in effecting an adaptively unique style of society. What is unusual is many cultures

may appear modernized in the more superficial aspects or the physical aspects while they have culturally specific attitudes that are highly conservative. On the other hand, people in some cultures may appear very native in their outlook while their real adaptive style is very receptive and flexible. These account for the facts that there are possibilities and hopes for human intervention to improve interactive relations when one can more or less identify and understand crucial factors in each contextual fabrication. This particularly, is very important for people who need to interrelate longer and deeper socially with the goal of creating mutual achievement of projects or profits. Knowing the general and specific factors that make up a culture together with the knowledge of how variables such as rewards, satisfaction and motivation can be tailored and applied to a setting is the way to influence the synthesizing process of human reactions that again affect the whole picture of interactions and its outcome. While rewards, job security and many other objective factors deal more with the universal and adaptive needs, satisfaction and motivation call for more attention and knowledge in the subjective aspect of cultures. As a result, there may be needs to understand definitions of things in the culture specific, general and cross-culturally interactive perspective. The reason is to keep a good balance of subjective-objective and dynamic or evolving factors.

Classical cross-cultural scholars such as Lonner (9) were concerned about the main problem in the field, which he thought was the lack of consensus on definitions of universals as well as units, constructs, methods, etc. However, as previously mentioned, there can be crossing of the two dimensions of culture which can make the modern cultural synthesising process deceptive. Again, while there is a tricky aspect to cultural adaptation and synthesis, the technological crossing and the internalization of training and learning together with the simple fact of making a living or making profits in the higher level of a society enhance the role of the universal adaptive variable. It also increases the possibility of improvement through skillful intervention but, in order for the latter process to function effectively, the acknowledgement and understanding of the subjective and resisting aspects of a culture are crucial. Otherwise, they can become dangerous stumbling blocks to any program that comes into conflict with them. More importantly, they can come in the form of silent resistance or even protest. In this regard, unanimity of definition can court the danger of missing the fine points of variation even

in the synthesizing process of the adaptive modern way of life that has been brought about by an incredibly quick pace of globalization. However, amid this dynamism, there still are factors that are highly resistant to change. How to seep into these aspects and influence the outcome of their syntheses in the global perspective requires keen identificational ability and enough liberalism to accept the power of the resisting constants within a culture. In other words, knowledge, skill in selection and realistic acceptance of certain things may prove to be crucial. However, if one targets to influence the synthesis of interactions then the term acceptance is conditional and is based upon operational feasibility. Perhaps cross-cultural studies now should grow beyond debates on conceptions, definitions and methods when we are now facing changes and need to catch up with a new world that is so diverse in many things and yet sharing unprecedentedly numerous things in life. There seems to be a need for more than just definitions now. People are now living in a world that is crossing many things including real life co-existence aside from the massive technological transfer and connections. This essay is an attempt to deviate from the traditional debates which are mostly in the conceptual aspect of classical cross-cultural epistemology. The emphasis here is on the dynamic aspect of modern living. While both the universal aspect and the idiographic aspect are considered crucial points relating to the horizontal dimension or breadth and the vertical or indepth aspect of cultures, other dimensions that are highlighted and added are the dynamic and synthesizing aspects which usually are results of cross-cultural interactions. Today, in particular, intercultural interaction and exchanges in the new world setting with peace disruption occurring on a very minor scale, since the threat of communism is no longer in existence and the booming in trade, the pattern of exchanges and the prospect of peaceful co-existence now appear quite salient. Thus, we may expect more homeostatically evolving patterns in the globalization process. Therefore, if such a condition continues and can be sustained over time, we can expect more cultural syntheses and evolution being influenced by imposition of needs for adaptation and their culturally monitored traits to either conserve certain things or to be flexible. Realization of the needs and the ability to provide them is a most crucial power in the modern world or in any kind of setting but when the level of sophistication grows higher, the control through objective power seems not quite enough. Many organization,

especially, the ones that practice Maslowian theory may have realized it very well. The point to be added here is that beyond the Maslowian needs there is the need to understand more of the deeper aspect, VIZ. the diversity of subjective and constant aspects of cultures and their roles in cross-cultural interaction and the cultural synthesizing nature of each society regarding their styles and derivatives relating to adaptation and their ways of conservation of certain factors. Thus, this paper is trying to conceptualize the impacts of objective and massive changes that have created an appearance of globalization or universalization today while attempting to also indicate the significance of the role of certain subjective and/or resistant aspects of a culture. However, the concepts of dynamism and synthesis suggested have implicitly pointed out that changes are always inherent in life. We are now hoping for the prospect, which is based upon the current relatively peaceful global atmosphere, for having peaceful, evolutionistic, homeostatic changes in which there will be multiple cultural synthesies everywhere that result from the need to adapt to a globalizing world. In others words, we are viewing a world that is growing closer while we may also have societies that differ in degrees of adaptation to the modern or international standard of living and it might be quite difficult to measure the degree of adaptation and the extent of conservation. All we can feel now is the world is changing rapidly. We are now required not only to catch up but to understand and may be to act upon things as well. Most feasibly it is enough to influence the synthesizing process. If the deep rooted aspects of a culture cannot to touched then the outcomes of immediate interactions that can serve each contextual demand should be aimed at. This requires collaboration between cross-cultural scholars and policy implementors whenever an objective is targeted. While cross-cultural scholars can help identify the significant aspects of subjectivity and the resistive elements in a culture, policy implementors can benefit from the combination of employment of positive and available reinforcement methods and the knowledge of the intricacy of the culture involved in the interactive process. Such is the proposal that attempts to approach human interaction from the more holistic perspective through the combination of employment of universal and specific factors and the use of objective and subjective variables in order to support policy implementation and to facilitate cross-cultural interaction, cooperation, understanding, etc.

This essay is probably representative of the present writer's reflection in witnessing a highly dynamic atmosphere which is filled with interactions, exchanges and the driving demands for better or more fruitful interactional outcomes. It may also reflect a certain psychological reaction to a technology-driven world trend and the sense of need to master the imposing demands. What is conveyed is essentially a proposal to master human existence and coexistence amid the current globalization process through better understanding of the subjective elements in cultures and to be able to understand or even accept the intricate and indepth aspects of a culture while knowing how to use objective reinforcers and to realize needs in the law of adaptation in order to influence the outcomes of interactive synthesis in a cross-cultural context. While there is a sense of uneasiness in the face of multiple driving forces for modernization, there should also be a better feel of what one is dealing with and how to manage, if not master, such dynamic power in today's multimedia high technology globalization process. My guess is the power to change can meet as much power to resist and conserve if and when an important ethnic or native aspect of a culture is offended. Hence, shrewdness in making choices and ability to identify and make use of variables in order to facilitate dealings and interactions are crucial. Cross-cultural investigation that encompasses both vertical and horizontal dimensions of a culture, together with the observation of their interactive processes and the results can provide very significant information that can help facilitate many things in the contemporary intercultural and internationalized setting when used in combination with the facilitation of materialistic and other rewards that may make adaptation and adjustment to a dynamic and demanding present world easier.

Footnotes

(1) See Gustav Jahoda. "Theoretical and Systematic Approaches in Cross-Cultural Psychology," in H.C. Triandis & W.W. Lambert, (eds.), *The Handbook of Cross-cultural Psychology*, Vol. I, Boston Allyn and Bacon, 1979. (Quoted from mimeograph, p. 102).

(2) W. Lonner, "The Search for Psychological Universals," in H.C. Triandis and W.W.Lambert, (Eds.), *Ibid.*, (mimeograph p.7).

(3) Robert Munroe and Ruth Munroe, "Perspectives Suggested by Anthropological Data," in H.C. and W.W. Lambert, (Eds.), *Ibid.*, (mimiograph, p.7).

(4) Lonner, *op.cit.*, p.1.

(5) Lonner presented seven psychological universals, viz. first, simple universals such as human sexuality or communication. Second, variform universals which are some form of processes that are found in all cultures, such as aggression or ethnocentrism Third, functional universals which means behavioral configurations that have the same social consequences, such as child-rearing patterns that result in similar personality type. Fourth, diachronic universals, such as basic processes of learning, law remains invariant. Fifth, ethological oriented universals, such as the stages of development or the hierachical structure of intellect. Finally, cocktail universals, which permit communication among psychologists, though there is no empirical evidence to support them existence, such as the notion that guilt exists in some form in all cultures. See Lonner, *passim*.

(6) *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

(7) Robert A. Leine, *Culture and Personality*, Chicago: Aldine, 1973, George P. Murdock, "The Common Denominator of Cultures," in Ralph Linton, ed. *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1945, pp. 123-142.

(8) David Kaplan and Robert Manners, *Culture Theory*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972.

(9) Lonner, *op.cit.*, pp. 6-7.