

# GLOBALIZATION AND EVOLVING CULTURAL SPACE AND STRUCTURE

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## ABSTRACT

*Globalization is an epochal change that entails restructuring of human society, and this paper aims at elucidating the present and future shapes of human society and its sustainability. This issue is approached by placing globalization in historical perspective and visualizing it as an evolutionary process of human society. This theoretical approach is based on the conceptual framework with two references. One reference characterizes globalization as the unprecedented geographical expansion of human interaction. The other describes the evolution of human interaction in terms of its facility and control mechanism. These theories lead to elucidation of the inherent tendency of today's globalization, which not only aggravates economic disparity within and without a society, but also enervates existing societal fabric and traditional culture that have sustained the society's congruity. At the same time, the approach identifies the two-pronged effort to realize sustainable society, and it reveals the importance of cultivating communal culture that circumvent traditional societal borders.*

**KEYWORDS:** Globalization, societal fabric, culture, civilization, sustainability

## 1. GLOBALIZATION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The word, *globalization*, became a buzz word in the business world in the late 1980's. It was perceived as the global trend of promoting international trade with tariff reduction and globalized financial market. However, the populace recognized globalization more with the epochal change in the global polity; namely, the collapse of the Cold War regime. This change was epitomized by the fall of Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Indeed, these events were widely regarded as the ultimate proof of the superiority of market economy over planned economy and also of democracy over communism. The celebratory

atmosphere of that time was best reflected in such books as *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy* [Ohmae, 1992] and *The End of History and the Last Man* [Fukuyama, 1992].

While these books readily found many eager readers when they first appeared, their popularity declined in the subsequent years, as globalization progressed and the populace began to take notice of its wider societal implications beyond the economic or political changes. The most notable implication was its uneven impact in different parts of the world. Accordingly, people began to be more circumspect on its societal impact. This new realization was again well reflected in the popularity of the two books that appeared in the late 1990's, namely, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* [Huntington, 1996] and *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* [Friedman, 1999]. These books not only described globalization as the epochal change, but they also helped the populace to understand that human society is too complex to react similarly or homogeneously to any epochal or global changes.

It has been difficult for the populace to attribute any change in their daily life to globalization *per se*, and the above books were very useful for them to grasp the possible relationships between their livelihood and the epochal change. However, when any individual wishes to find or make appropriate adaptations in his or her livelihood, the theories described in these books have offered little practical help. For example, Friedman advises on the need to strike a balance between the efforts for pursuing human desire for better living and for maintaining traditional humanitarian bond [ditto, 1999]. While this is an insightful advice, how individuals can strike such a balance in their livelihood is not clear. In fact, all these books have one common shortcoming: each book has a focus on a particular aspect of contemporary globalization. Such focusing may be effective for good story telling, and that may have helped these books receive popular acclaim. However, emphasis on one aspect, and oversight of other aspects, inevitably engenders distorted appreciation of the complex reality of globalization and its societal impact. That in turn hinders people from finding or making appropriate adaptations in their livelihood. It is, therefore, worthwhile to elucidate this complex reality and to help people enhance their livelihood.

The complexity may explain the current situation that no apparent consensus yet exists in the definition of globalization. At the same time, the above arguments strongly indicate that globalization is an epochal trend, and that its societal impact is dynamic and evolving. This may also explain the lack of consensual definition of globalization. However, it is still possible to identify globalization's major thrusts for societal change, or to characterize

globalization. Furthermore, such characterization is very useful for a society or individuals to appreciate its dynamism. Tanahashi offers such characterization, by the following three features [Tanahashi, 2006].

- (a) Global espousal of free-market economy;
- (b) Democratization of information, finance and technology; and
- (c) Unprecedented geographical expansion of human interaction.

The first feature has widely been acknowledged as the most essential feature of globalization. The second feature was first introduced by Friedman [ditto, 1999]. He further explains that such democratization promotes not only emancipation of individuals, but also democratization of decision-making and decentralization of political power. On-going political upheavals in the Middle East strongly suggest that his analysis of globalization and prognosis of its societal impact have proven correct. While that may be the case, this feature offers no prospect for sustainable society. In fact, if combined with the first feature, this feature seems to suggest the fractured human society with dichotomous development of *have's* and *have not's* [Tanahashi, 2005]. Hence, the third feature holds the key to the realization of sustainable society.

It is worth noting that the removal of the adjective, *unprecedented*, from this characterization reveals its real significance. Geographical expansion of human interaction is almost synonymous with the evolutionary history of human society itself. As a “social animal” humans have always interacted with one another, to enhance their safety or sustenance. Of course, not every interaction is constructive or socially productive. Instead, interaction can be aggressive or destructive, with aims to achieve gains at the expense of others. Human wisdom has, however, helped us learn that such vitiating interaction is unstable and often counterproductive in the long run, and that it is possible to foster constructive or productive interaction for mutual benefit, by developing suitable *social compact*. In doing so, mankind has formed communities and societies, or even nation states, while developing various means to improve productivity of their interaction. In short, the importance of the third feature stems from the fact that this characterization helps provide the historical perspective and due emphasis to the evolutionary nature of globalization.

## 2. DYNAMISM OF HUMAN SOCIETY

History shows that mankind started to invent or develop tools to augment its physical ability. Likewise, over time human interaction expanded both in scale and scope, with attendant

development of sophisticated instruments. Their production and usage were, more often than not, designed not for individuals, but for a group of people. Hence, the term *facility* nowadays sounds more appropriate than *instrument*, as the latter carries the connotation for personal use. This process also indicates the progressive evolution of human society. In particular, mankind started to organize itself and formed a group to facilitate interaction for enhancement of its collective livelihood. Such a group may have been a tribal group in the Stone Age, but over time it has also grown in scale and scope, leading to the emergence of communities, townships, and nations.

Implicit in this evolution of human society is the attendant sophistication in control or governance. It is easy to imagine that, the larger the membership of a group or society, the higher the chance of competition or conflict engendered among its members. In short, human society cannot help but beget occasional competitions and conflicts among its members. Therefore, the presence of some institutional system is necessary for exercising *control* or *governance* over the stakeholders in such competition or conflicts, and for channeling their energies to productive cooperation. This symbiotic relationship between facility development and effective governance system has been well demonstrated by such great civilizations of the past as the Egyptian, Roman and Mongol civilizations.

It is now in order to explicate socio-economic dynamism of globalization, as the understanding of such dynamism holds the key to make effective adaptations for realizing sustainable society. Indeed the above arguments naturally lead to the illustration in *Figure 1*. At the center of this figure is placed *Human Society*, which embodies the dynamic world of human interaction. The driving force for such dynamism stems in “*Human desire for better livelihood*,” and it is indicated in the oval and placed at the top of human society. Such a force is nowadays globalization, but in the 19th century, it was probably the Industrial Revolution. Advance and sophistication in human interaction come hand-in-hand with the advance and sophistication in the two other change agents; namely, instrument and control, or in more familiar terms, *facilities* and *governance*. The former is defined as a collective term for physical and metaphysical facilities for human interaction, while the latter is defined as a collective term for formal and informal measures for controlling or governing human interaction and the use of its facilities.

Next in order is how to express the inherent dynamism in human society, and *Figure 2* is such an expression. The essence of this picture is two-fold. Firstly, it represents the fact that the facility and control factors complement each other for promotion of productive human interaction. Secondly, their complementary relationship is closely interwoven to form

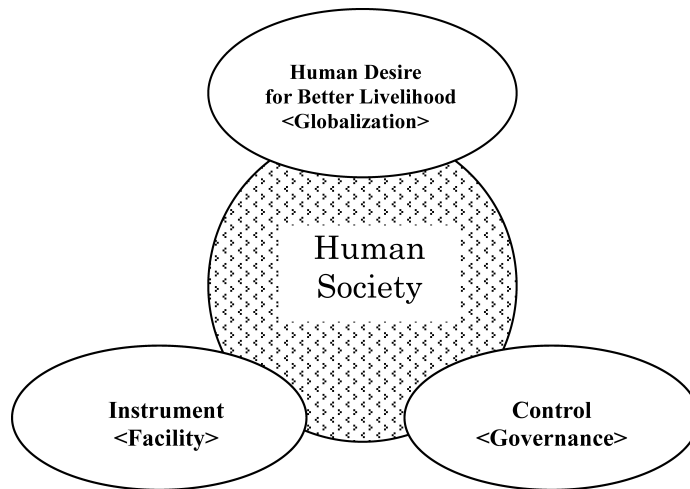


Figure 1 Dynamic Structural Image of Human Society

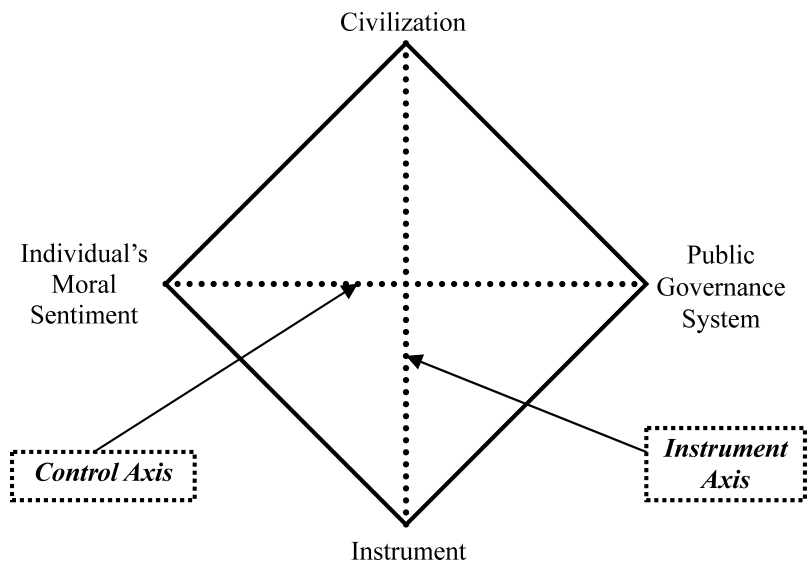


Figure 2 Structural illustration of societal fabric

*societal fabric*. This is illustrated as the two dimensional expanse in the figure. One dimension is the *control axis*, which stretches from the *individual's moral sentiment* at one end to the *public governance system* at the other. The other dimension is the *facility axis*, which stretches from *instrument* to *civilization*. These stretches represent the individuals at one end and the entire society at the other, and they reflect the scale of human society.

Crudely speaking, society represents an aggregation of individual people, with different abilities as well as different material needs and demands for their livelihood. People interact

in order to satisfy such needs and demands within the existing societal fabric. In other words, societal fabric functions as the framework of human interaction in the society and its congruity. Nonetheless, any sizable society includes individuals with diverse characteristics, with which they form distinctive groups or cohorts. Some such characteristics may be profession, creed, cultivation, and the like on one hand, and age, gender, ethnicity, etc. on the other. The critical difference between these two sets of characteristics is that in the former set belong those characteristics that can be acquired by individuals, while in the latter set belong those inherent in individuals.

In a primeval tribal society, such characterization has little significance, because of its simple and stable social order and relationships between its members. In contrast, group formation is common in a modern society, because of its size and complexity in its membership. Furthermore, diversity and sophistication in group formation make the generic societal fabric inadequate for realizing the efficiency or productivity desired by individual groups and their intra-group interactions. In such a society, people find it more suitable to form a separate group for promotion of intra-group interaction or enrichment of their shared livelihood. Thus, such a group develops its distinctive *facilities* and *social compact* for its intra-group interaction. This combination of group-specific facilities and social compact is called *culture* or *social fabric*. In other words, any sizable society finds many groups, each with distinctive *culture* or *social fabric*.

While these terms essentially mean the same, they do have nuances that reflect group's nature. One discerning factor is the predominant characteristic of grouping. Earlier such characteristics are broadly divided between acquired ones and inherent ones. Culture is more appropriate for the group with the former kind of characteristic, while social fabric may be more suitable for the group with the latter kind of characteristic.

### 3. PROFILES OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETAL ISSUES

The above argument assumes that groups and their *cultures* or *social fabrics* function within the societal fabric in place. If this assumption holds, then the society maintains its congruity, and *vice versa*. Nowadays, globalization has increased the mobility of people, and societal congruity has become harder to maintain. Indeed, few societies are free from some societal problems and issues, with or without globalization. The above illustration of societal fabric is also useful in elucidating the nature of such problems and issues. They typically arise when some group or its culture detaches or distances itself from some elements of the societal

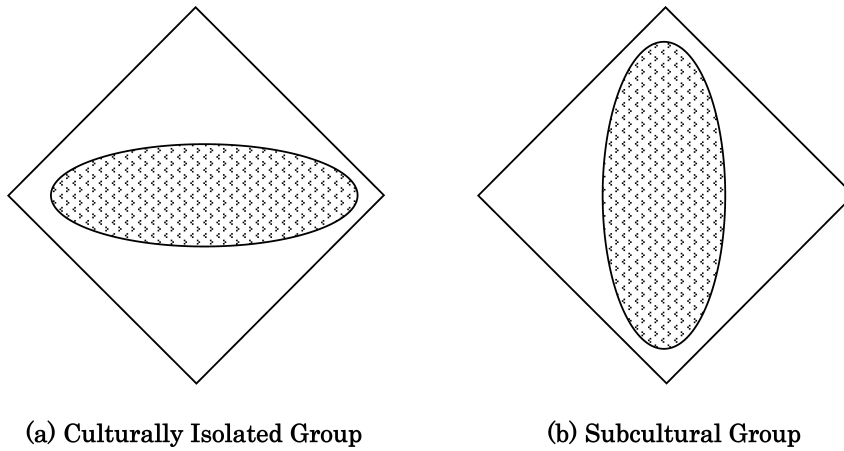


Figure 3 Distinctive social groups and their cultural features

fabric in place. Two typical cases are illustrated in *Figure 3*.

The one on the left, *Figure 3(a)*, shows the community group or its culture that follows the prevailing morale sentiments and public governance system in the society, and yet distances itself from the civilization or other facilities available in the society. Such situation may be forced upon the group, like old Jewish ghettos of the past. It may also have developed by its own choosing, like the Amish communities in Pennsylvania of today. The one on the right, *Figure 3(b)*, has culture that stretches along the facility axis. Its notable feature is the detachment from the morale sentiments and the public governance system. This implies that the group makes full use of the facilities available in the society, while heeding little to the prevailing control mechanism or social compact in the society where it operates.

There exists two likely situations when such a group is formed. One such situation is when a group of people wants to act or interact without any constraints from the existing societal order. Extremist groups of various kinds belong to this type. Although the tenet of such group formation may not be malign to start with, the group's collective interaction with the society at large tends to have negative impact. In some extreme cases, groups may start with malign intents, such as crime syndicates and terrorism organizations. The other likely situation is when a group of people wants to interact beyond the existing societal context or constrains, in order to pursue its objective. Although the objective could still be malign, it is more common to have benign intent, such as aiming at enhanced cooperation with the people who belong to other societies. Nongovernmental organizations that aim at realizing some common good in human society are such examples. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which was formed in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, is a good case in point.

Geographical expansion of a society normally leads to the inclusion of groups with distinctive cultures or different social fabrics. In fact, such a group culture may very well function as its societal fabric, as far as the group at issue is concerned, and the group may feel little affinity to the genetic societal fabric in place. Not surprisingly, this kind of situation is rather common. One such case is a nation-state of which the national border is delineated, not on the basis of cultural affinities of the people within, but on the basis of colonial history. Such nation-states are found in many parts of the world. Some such states have succeeded in their nation building, and in developing a functional societal fabric and congruity. Those others, which are not so successful, are inevitably more vulnerable to serious societal disorders.

The empire building of the past and the present is another case of substantial geographical expansion of human interaction. Roman empire, Tang Dynasty China, and Mongol empire are good examples of the past, and their governance systems lasted for more than a century. One common attribute of their successful empire building was the great tolerance in accepting cultural diversity within the empire on the one hand and, on the other, the development of civilization or public facilities that helped enhancement of people's livelihood, or geographical expansion of economic activities. The comparable empire building in the modern times may be the formation of the Eastern Bloc under the Cold Regime, and the hegemonic exercise of the United States during and after this regime. Neither has managed much success, and the reasons are not difficult to fathom. Such empire building is essentially the imposition of suzerain relationships between the central state and the satellite states. As such, it has fostered no systemic development of civilization that is aimed at benefiting its "subjects" equally or well.

#### 4. SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Now an interesting question arises: "How is globalization different from the modern day empire building?" One immediate answer is that globalization has no central authority which acts as the custodian of societal fabric and its development, while the presence of a powerful central governing authority is a *sin qua non* of any empire. It is possible to characterize globalization as global integration of economic facilities into a system. The prominent feature of this system is the consistency of its *modus operandi* in the global scale. As such, it may be termed *global civilization*, the core of which is global economic system. Another feature is that it extends beyond any present societal fabric. This anomalous position is illustrated in *Figure 4(a)*.

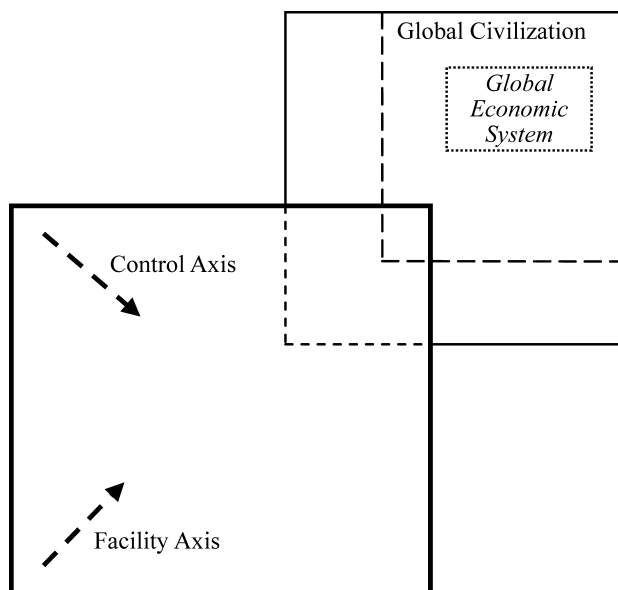


It is worth noting in this illustration that *global civilization* is positioned adjacent to the *civilization* section in the societal fabric, to suggest its detachment from the *public governance system* section of the societal fabric. Also notable in this illustration is the presence of overlap between the global civilization and the societal fabric. However, such overlap, or functional linkage, is not inherently present. It is concomitant with appropriate adaptation of the societal fabric to the global civilization. This is what Friedman termed “*golden straightjacket*” [ditto, 1999]. This refers to the reality that any national economic system has to accept and adhere to certain rules imposed by the global system, in order for the nation concerned to gain access and to make use of the economic opportunities that the system can offer.

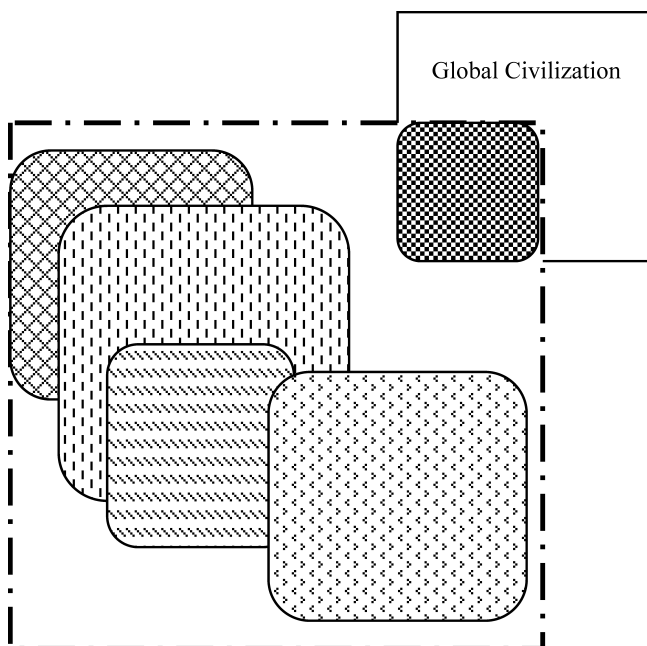
The unfortunate reality is that this global system is no altruistic system. On the contrary, it acts like the social fabric of an independent group of entities with financial wherewithal in the global market. As such, it is designed and operated for the benefit of these entities, and it takes no heed to problems or difficulties that it may engender outside. Serious economic crisis may, therefore, result if and when the global system decides to sever the linkage it has maintained with some national systems. In the 1990's, such crises occurred in several East-Asian nations. However, that was not an isolated case either, as it was preceded by one in Mexico and followed by another in Russia.

The illustration also implies that any effort to adapt to *global civilization* will inevitably affect the societal fabric and its *modus operandi*. At least, the national or indigenous civilization has to concede some of its roles to the global civilization. Global civilization may further encroach on the other basic components of the societal fabric. Such a change will inevitably transform the societal fabric, and that in turn destabilizes the society at issue. This tendency is inherent, because the encroachment leads to increased compromises being made in the extant cultures, moral sentiments and governance system that has sustained the society. This systemic change typically manifests itself as aggravating economic disparities within a society. This has been observed in many parts of the world and it has engendered and spread strong anti-globalization sentiments and movements in the world.

If such an impact is inevitable and serious enough in a congruous society, the impact on a society that lacks such congruity can be much worse. The most likely impact will be the exacerbation of inherent social or economic divides in the society. Such a possibility is illustrated in *Figure 4(b)*. This illustration explicitly shows, using blocks with different patterns, the presence of different social groups with their respective cultures or social fabrics. Naturally, such groups will react or respond differently to globalization. Some will



**(a) Case of Congruous Society**



**(b) Case of Incongruous Society**

Figure 4 Likely relations between societal fabric and global civilization

make good use of the economic facilities and opportunities that it offers, while others fail or are excluded. In short, increased economic disparities may aggravate contentious relationships between such groups. Such a situation may lead to hostilities and strife between rival groups, as has been observed in some African nations.

Another possibility is the formation of a new group by those with talents or wherewithal to take advantage of the economic opportunities that globalization can offer. The formation of such a group is shown by the shaded block in the upper right-hand corner of the illustration. These individuals are more likely the ones who could otherwise have contributed to the viability of their respective groups or communities. As such, the deprived groups or communities will suffer from reduced economic or social viability, and they may eventually become marginalized in the society. Again the overall impact is further fragmentation of the society.

As earlier mentioned, some nations are more vulnerable to such impact than others. Such nations are often found in the African Continent, where many nations gained their independence from their respective colonial powers at that time. Therefore, their national borders were delineated with little regard to natural geographical characteristics. Such a nation may still manage to have developed a nationwide governance system and societal fabric, and it may present the semblance of a single society. However, such nation-building is an arduous process, to say the least, if it contains several groups with distinctive geographical backgrounds or cultures. For such a group and the livelihood of its members, their traditional culture or social fabric is often more important than the nation's artificial societal fabric. As long as inter-tribal interaction remains at an immaterial level for their livelihood, this situation may be tolerable. However, such a state and stability could easily be broken by intrusion of global civilization. Furthermore, such intrusion has become increasingly common and significant nowadays because of the intensified global competition for exploitation of untapped economic resources.

## 5. DESIGNS FOR SUSTAINABLE GLOBALIZATION

The above discussion has explained that global civilization is an exogenous factor for any society, and that adaptation of the indigenous societal fabric to this exogenous factor cannot be stress-free for the society. If such adaptation entails material change in some cultural traditions or practice in the society, it is likely to engender opposition sentiments and movements. One obvious solution for the society is, therefore, to keep distance from global

civilization and to avoid its influence. However, people's desire for better livelihood is inherent and strong. As such, those individuals, who can make use of gainful opportunities that globalization offers, are likely to do so by any means possible. They may even form a group in a society and monopolize such opportunities, as illustrated in *Figure 4(b)*. If that proves difficult, then they may leave for another society where they can realize better livelihood. In other words, the society as a whole cannot avoid this negative impact of globalization, even if it tries to keep distance from its influence.

The above discussion has also explained the importance of functional societal fabric and societal congruity for enhancing the sustainability of a society. This indicates another possible solution, which is to divide a society into congruous groups or communities, and to enhance their respective societal fabrics. This is not a novel approach. It has been adopted in the successful empire building, and also in the governance of geographically diverse nations. The contemporary name for this practice is *federalism*. The United States is a good case in point, but it is far from being unique. In fact, every one of the so-called BRIC's nations exercises federalism of one kind or another. Even Japan, which is hardly a nation of geographical diversity, is toying with the idea of federalism, in order to revitalize its economy.

The practice that Japan is contemplating is usually called *decentralization*. Its tenet is to ameliorate the inherent rigidity of the centralized governance system. The increasing need to make appropriate adaptation to globalization has no doubt contributed to this change of mind by some national governments. The practice is most effective if it successfully combines the economic resources and geographical conditions of a locality and some economic opportunities that globalization offers. This attractive developmental strategy may be called *glocalism*, but its implementation usually faces various obstacles inherent in the centralized governance system [Tanahashi, 2010b]. Nonetheless, examples of success exist, such as Shenzhen SEP in China and the SIJORI *growth triangle* around Singapore, to name just a couple. It is worth noting, however, that these successes are achieved not within the respective nations, but in cooperation with the adjacent areas under different sovereignty. This indirectly corroborates the difficulty that practice of *glocalism* still faces.

Realization of sustainable society may also be possible with a more holistic approach. This approach stems from the idea that sustainable globalization should have consistent societal fabric. Thus, the essence of this approach is to integrate global civilization into a complete societal fabric, by complementing the existing shortcomings. This approach is illustrated in *Figure 5*, where the present shortcomings are indicated by the two blocks

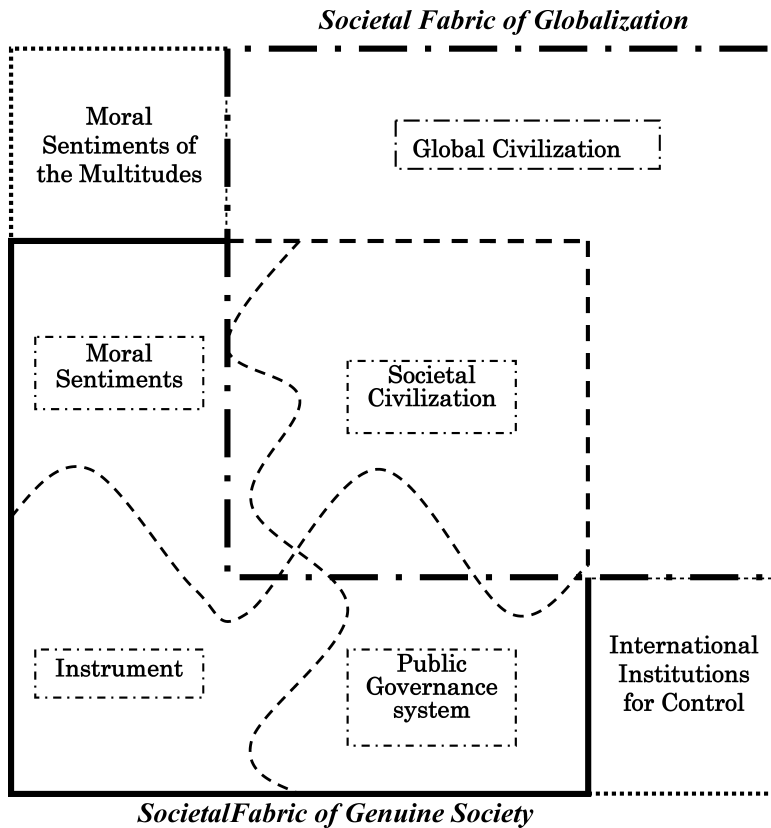


Figure 5 Prognosis of advanced globalization

which are labeled as *international institutions for control* and *moral sentiments of the multitudes*, respectively. The illustration thus points out that sustainable globalization entails the two-pronged effort; i. e., the development of various international or inter-governmental institutions as integral part of governance mechanism for global civilization on the one hand and, on the other, the empowerment of the multitude in designing social compact for the world community.

The approach is not totally new, and some relevant efforts for fulfilling the two blocks have already been taken. With regard to development of *international institutions for control*, the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 and evolution of the United Nations system in the subsequent years is exemplary. With regard to institutionalization of *moral sentiments of the multitudes*, the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, by acronym) in 1863 and its organizational and functional expansion in the subsequent years is exemplary. As these examples indicate, these two components have

different initiators or implementers. Namely, such roles are played, respectively, by national governments or inter-governmental organizations, and visionary individuals or non-governmental social groups.

Many organizations already exist within the United Nations system, but *realpolitik* has kept them more as the arenas for promoting national interests, than as controlling instruments of global civilization. Even the United Nations' Security Council, which is said to be the most powerful decision-making body within the system, is sometimes ineffectual in preventing crimes against humanity. This institutional shortcoming stems from the veto power that the five permanent members can exercise. As this example suggests, such kind of undemocratic decision-making practice is the bane of sustainable globalization.

In contrast, the multitude's efforts in developing appropriate social compact that complements the existing societal fabric for citizens at large, and their recent successes, are notable. Hardt and Negri first elucidated the potential role of the *multitudes* in globalization [Hardt and Negri, 2000]. The word, *multitude*, implies that its essential composition is motivated individuals. They typically form a group and operate nationally or internationally, with the aim of promoting new culture to alleviate some specific societal problems that are engendered by globalization. If their objective and collective action are globally accepted, the culture concerned will become a part of global civilization. One notable success in such effort that started in 1997 and led to the enactment of Ottawa Treaty that bans the production and use of anti-personal mines. This is a remarkable outcome from its humble origin of an international campaign that started in 1997 and collected 885,000 signatures, to ban landmines. This success led to the formation of Cluster Munition Coalition in 2003, to ban cluster bombs, and it culminated in the Oslo Convention in 2008, to ban this kind of munitions.

Such successes by the *multitudes* stem from the moral sentiments of individuals to develop control mechanisms for enhancing communal well being, in its broadest sense. Their efforts typically aim at facilitating human interaction, or at reducing negative interventions of existing governance systems. In that sense, these efforts contribute in promoting truly global civilization. The importance of their efforts lies in the fact that sustainable globalizations entails alleviation of the threats and damages that globalization and its attendant civilization have brought onto human society. In this society, people may belong to geographically different societies or nations, but they share similar fates in their livelihood under globalization. If a few powerful individuals or organizational entities are allowed to take full advantage of global civilization, with little regard to the welfare of others, its likely consequence is the modern day *tragedy of the commons*. This is by no means an imaginary

concern. In fact, such tragedy is happening in the oceanic sphere in the form of unsustainable exploitation of marine resources, as well as in the atmospheric sphere in the form of unabated emission of greenhouse gases.

The avoidance of such a tragedy calls for development of pertinent social compact or culture that extends beyond parochial interests and embodies communal considerations for human society. Thus the multitudes can contribute effectively in such development. In this regard, it is worth recapitulating the earlier characterization of globalization, as “democratization of information, finance and technology.” This trend certainly facilitates the formation and collaboration of the multitudes, and it could lead to democratization of decision-making and decentralization of political power [Friedman, 1999]. However, for this process to progress, one critical ingredient is missing. That is communal mind or culture that fosters well being of people within, as well as beyond, a delineated society.

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