CHINA WATCH

Standing Firm in the Struggle between Locality and Globality

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Today, with the rapid development of human information technology and the enhancement of global "mobility," "globality" has increasingly become an unavoidable topic. The "global village" concept is a vivid description of globality.

As a scholar mainly engaged in folk culture research, I often face concepts that come from different origins but are similar to each other in their connotations, for example: the English word "folklore" and the Chinese *minsu* 民俗 or *minjian chuanshuo* 民间传说; the English word "vernacular" and the Chinese *fangyan tuyu* 方言土语 or *tufengde* 土风的; the English "local" and the Chinese *difang de* 地方的 or *zaidi de* 在地的; English "indigenous" and Chinese *bentu de* 本土的 and *tuzhu de* 土著的; English "aboriginal" and Chinese *yuanzhumin* 原住民 and *tuzhu de* 土著的; English "native" and Chinese *tuzhu de* 土著的 and *dangdi de* 当地的.

Clifford Geertz's famous "local knowledge" generally refers to the knowledge system created, used, and developed by people to adapt to their local natural and cultural environment. In this way, local knowledge has both temporal and spatial dimensions. The emergence of the concept of locality is probably due to the emergence of fields of view beyond locality, just as the concept of aboriginal people comes from outsiders—people from elsewhere. Today, the more globalization expands, the more local values are valued. Technological progress and the trend of culture toward "standardization" have a positive correlation with globalization. However, everything has a limit. The rapid expansion of globalization will also stimulate local development as well as people's pursuit of locality.

China is a country with a very long history of writing local culture. The *Yue jueshu* (*Lost Records of the State of Yue*) of the Han Dynasty and the *Huayang guozhi* (*Chronicles of Huayang*) of the Jin Dynasty are early representatives. In our long-term

historical development, there have been countless books of all kinds containing written content on local culture. However, the concept of locality has a spatial attribute, when in fact, the forms and inner content of branch cultures are much more complex: belief systems, dialect circles, dietary characteristics, means of livelihood, ethnic scope, and so on, can all fall within the scope of branch culture research. Larger natural or cultural ecosystems are also the reasonable limits of this type of cultural research, such as the Yellow River Basin Culture or Canal Basin Culture, the Tibetan-Yi Corridor, etc.

In our long historical process, culture has not only been divided into many circles according to different standards and concepts, but also within a cultural circle, there are often hierarchies. Lenin once said that there are two national cultures in every national culture, which was a conclusion based on a class theory standpoint. In foreign cultural studies, we can also see the distinction between high culture and low culture, besides which are popular culture, subculture, counterculture (against the mainstream culture), and so on, though the more glaring division is that between the high and low levels. In this binary, oppositional relationship, divisions such as elite/grassroots, official/folk, upper-class/lower-class, refined/vulgar, written/oral transmission, etc., are formed. Entering modern times, the dichotomies have increased: rational/irrational, logical/pre-logical, modern/pre-modern, etc. What should not be avoided, however, is that in quite common perceptions, concepts such as indigenous, local, vernacular, and aboriginal (not long ago, "primitive" was still often used) are often associated with concepts such as underdevelopment and earlier forms of human civilization. Some people use slightly more conciliatory ways of speaking, saying that aborigines and others are regarded as "vulnerable groups," and that their cultures are "non-mainstream cultures."

Once a culture is included in this framework, it is essentially labeled with a horrible automatically generated label. One of the main functions of this label is to use it as a high-sounding excuse to invade other people's homes and deprive them of their rights when necessary—to bring civilization to the barbarians.

This opposing bipolar framework takes away goodness and justice, leaving beind the law of the jungle, the logic of the bandit, and the arrogance of the "winner." It is true that in the twentieth century, the vast majority of colonized countries got rid of the

direct control of their colonizers, restored their national sovereignty, and gained independent status. Along with this, people want to see those who have committed crimes repent. However, to borrow a famous line, we have all "thought too well of you"!

The 61st United Nations General Assembly (September 13, 2007) overwhelmingly adopted the "UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," which calls on the international community to protect the various rights and interests of the approximately 370 million indigenous people around the world. At that time, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States voted against it! Please remember this: after breaking into other people's homes to slaughter and plunder, the colonizing countries and plunderers became rich, but the living conditions of those indigenous peoples worsened in unprecedented ways. However, the plunderers did not offer any compensation, or even bother to make an apologetic gesture.

Too many things continue to teach us lessons that cut deep. Thus, I do not have much confidence that any "common good" (in the ethical sense) will develop as the economy and society progress. Australia, finally, after a long period of back-and-forth, saw the conscientious forces demanding justice gain the upper hand: a National Sorry Day to apologize to indigenous Australians was established. This is a step forward, but far from a "victory" for the indigenous Australians—this is simply a formal recognition of a historical debt.

Finally, increasing "mobility" around the world has made globality feel ubiquitous. We use social media and digital technology to communicate instantly with people around the world, and enjoy the information flow and cultural diversity brought about by globalization, but at the same time we also want to reunite with our families, worship ancestors, and set off firecrackers during the New Year holiday. Everyone belongs to a certain cultural tradition from birth to growth, and therefore has a certain locality. On the other hand, everyone lives in today's global village and is therefore planted in the global present. How can we stand firm in the struggle between these two forces of locality and globality?

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