

Introduction on Special Topic

Special Topic on Globalization, Vietnam and ASEAN

Victor T. King*

This is a fascinating combination of papers on situating Vietnam and ASEAN in the processes and consequences of globalization. The special topic brings together a diversity of interests and issues which embraces the ways in which particular countries, regions and peoples negotiate globalization. What is of special importance in these four papers is the proposition that we have to address a range of globalizations, and to do so in a framework of theory, practice, representation and identity. Publications on globalization are legion. Open any internet reference to globalization and you have to address a veritable inundation of publications, so numerous that you cannot possibly read and absorb them all. On some internet sites we are now directed by publishers and pundits to globalization materials with such titles as “49 books directly related to globalization,” “Best sellers in globalization,” “Shop globalization book author,” “The top 10 books on globalization,” “Globalization books—Five Books Expert,” “Globalization (list)—Best business books.” Journals on globalization also abound: *Globalizations*; *The Journal of Globalization and Development*; *Journal of Globalization*; *Journal of Globalization Studies, Competitiveness and Governability*; *Journal of Global History*; *Global Society*; *Research in Globalization*; *Globalization and Health* and so it goes on. We tend to lose count

* Professor, Unuversiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam, victor.king@ubd.edu.bn.

of the number of journals on globalization.

The editorial introduction to the papers proposes that we should be turning our attention more decisively to agency and the negotiation of globalization. In doing this the editors cast doubt on the thesis that globalization is a Western-dominated, homogenizing force and that global integration in such arenas as the transformations in production, labor markets and trade, the internet and global communication, technology and its rapid diffusion, climate change, political and military interventions, and the cross-border movement of refugees and asylum seekers produce a world that has become increasingly connected, integrated, copied and replicated. Instead, as these special topics demonstrate, globalization is generating different responses and actions among different populations in different places. But we have to recognize that it is a long-established process (Frank and Gills 1993).

When I examine what is happening in my own country, the United Kingdom, I am sometimes amazed, indeed intrigued, that major sections of the population are domestic-oriented and parochial, preoccupied with local or regional activities, on occasion, national ones. This is rather different from the alacrity with which academics address the subject. Of course, the lives of the populace are affected by globalizing processes, but they either do not realize or articulate how, in detail, these are impacting on them or, quite simply, they choose to ignore their importance and they find their own local ways of addressing and coping with globalization. They are concerned with the daily round, with shopping, feeding their families, working from home or commuting (or not working at all and depending on the largesse of government and charitable organizations), taking their children to and fetching them from school and nursery (and then taking them to sports training, music and dancing lessons and so on), watching television, gazing into their smart phones and engaging in social media, contemplating how they spend their leisure time at weekends, bemoaning the quality of their local environment and public services, where they will go on holiday and whether or not they can afford it, and engaging in the usual cycle of life (births, marriages, divorces, and deaths) and the move from marriage to co-habitation and serial

relationships.

This is not necessarily “thinking beyond” globalization; it is either that they are only vaguely aware of it, or deliberately ignore it, or blame their national government for their woes. They experience a degree of freedom but also feel themselves to be trapped, sometimes without consciously articulating this experience. Their range of choices expand, their consumer tastes are all-consuming, generating confusion and increasing non-confidence; they are immersed in social media but want to be part of others’ lives, though they are unable to realize these other lives themselves.

Nevertheless, in the academic arena it has become necessary to conceptualize and contextualize what is happening to us. How do we respond to the expansion of world markets, and the insecurity, instability, uncertainty, and individualism which this generates, the economic hegemony in world markets exercised by multinational corporations, capital market flows and international trade, the movement of people, the de-localization of political decision-making, the loss of communities, the increasing importance of cross-border networks, the compression of time and space, the convergence of work and consumption, the gulf between the rich and the marginalized poor? Globalization divides as much as it unites within and beyond nation-states as seen in the territorial aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine; and the People’s Republic of China and its ambitions in the South China Sea area and in relation to those countries with which it shares its land borders.

Among the major contributions which paved the way for studies of globalization were the early pioneers, among them John Maynard Keynes (1920), Karl Polanyi (1944, 2001), Fernand Braudel (1973 [1967], 1977, 1982-1984 [1979]), and Roland Robertson (1990, 1992). Of particular note is Robertson’s concept of “glocalization” and the simultaneous tendencies and processes of “universalizing” and “particularizing.” Surely our concerns with globalization did not commence with Jean-François Lyotard (1979, 1984; and see Scholte 2005).

In the political-economy arena, some of us in the more radical

wing of sociology and anthropology turned to theories of development and underdevelopment and dependency, global inequality, and that of the division of the world into “core, semi-periphery, and periphery” We were captivated by the writings of key figures in these debates: in particular, Andre Gunder Frank (1978a, 1978b; Frank and Gills 1993; and also see Sing C. Chew and Denmark 1996; Manning and Gills 2011) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1980, 1989, 2000, 2004).

Other important works on globalization, agency and responses were provided by such luminaries as Eric Hobsbawm, obsessed, as he was, with “ages,” of “revolution” (1962), “capital” (1975), “empire” (1987), and his ultimate triumph, the “age of extremes” (1994); Richard Baldwin on information technology and the “new globalization” (2016); Zygmunt Bauman where everything that happens in an increasingly globalized world is “liquid” (1999, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2013); Joseph Stiglitz (2002), one of the most renowned international observers of economic globalization; and Martin Wolf, who proposes that globalization “works” (2004). In capturing the Asian context and experience, we also have to return to Gunder Frank (1998; and see Frank and Denmark 2014), an interesting collection by Yamashita and Eades (2003; and see Hainsworth 2004) and Coclanis and Doshi (2000).

In my view, Zygmunt Bauman captures one of the concerns of this “special topic.” How do we, as social scientists and historians, understand globalization and what is happening to us? Bauman addressed this issue over twenty years ago in *Liquid Modernity*. “Do humans—the makers and the made, the heroes and the victims of history—indeed carry forever the same volume of possibilities waiting for the right time to be disclosed? Or is it rather that, as human history goes, the opposition between discovery and creation is null and void and makes no sense. Since history is the endless process of human creation, is not history for the same reason..... the unending process of human discovery?” (2000: 203; and see Campbell et al. 2018).

Then I must end my introduction with Richard Sennett and his analysis of urbanization, “disorder” and the “new capitalism,” which

also gives expression to the post-modern condition, and how it is affecting humans “as makers, users of tools and creators of common life” and as workers. Along with the special topic in this issue, Sennett explored the responses to globalization and its everyday consequences; the middle classes retreat to the “secure cocoons” of the suburbs in that suburbanites are fearful of living in a world over which they are unable to exert control and influence. What is more they decide, perhaps without thinking too much about their future lives, to reside in “a morally and psychologically impoverished environment” (1998). Sennett asks “What values and practices can hold people together as the institutions in which they live fragment?” And, we have to pose the question, “Is it happening in Asia with a rapidly developing middle class and the process of suburbanization?” But then there is a further question: “Can they or will they respond differently from those in the West to a globalizing world?” Finally, a question Ulrich Beck raised some decades ago “Are we all not living in an increasingly globalized “risk society?” (1992 [1986]).

There is something more. To cement these concerns into the Vietnamese-oriented papers in this issue, we should refer to a publication written some 20 years ago by Nguyen Phuong Binh, who addressed both an ASEAN and a Vietnamese perspective (2001). And very finally there is also more general work going back over two decades on globalization and its impacts in Southeast Asia and the local and regional responses to these far-reaching processes of economic, political, environmental, and socio-cultural change (see, for example, Apodacha 2002; Coclanis 2006; Coclanis and Doshi 2000; Hill and Menon 2016; Loh Kok Wah and Öjendal; Mallet 1999; Pangestu 2001).

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