

The Effects of Globalization on Youth in Mongolia

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In the era of globalization, a general question facing Mongolia is not whether globalization is good or bad, but how we could benefit from it and how we should prioritize our personal choices to account for the realities of a new era. From a positive perspective, globalization has been a process of the social, political, legal and economic integration of all countries, resulting in policies, technologies and institutions that make our world a better place to live in. However, sometimes globalization seems to be a force shaped by the developed countries and beneficial only for those countries and individuals with money and power. This limitation is not only apparent in the political arena but also visible in the lives of youth. Therefore, as a young individual, it was interesting for me to try to distinguish what are the positive and negative effects of globalization in the lives of young people in Mongolia.

This paper will start off with some statistics about the youth population in Mongolia, and then will share some personal observations and thoughts about the positive and negative effects of globalization on the lives of young people in Mongolia. In particular, the paper will describe challenges that are keeping many young Mongols from succeeding and using globalization to their own advantage.

According to the Mongolian National Statistical Office, 22.4% of the total population is between the ages of 15-24.¹ In the World

¹ Mongolia, National Statistical Office. *Statistical Yearbook*. www.nso.mn. Accessed July 9, 2004.

Fact Book 2005, it is noted that the median age of the overall population in Mongolia is 24.28 years, where the male population median age was 23.93 and female population median age was 24.64. Fadzillah emphasizes that “when it comes to globalization or transnational connections youth cultures are in the forefront of theoretical interest; youth, their ideas and commodities move easily across national borders, shaping and being shaped by all kinds of structures and meanings.”² Based on the above population statistics, it is highly likely that more young people are experiencing the effects of globalization than Mongols in any other ten-year age group.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION

During the current period of democratization and modernization, young individuals in Mongolia are striving hard to master high-tech communication skills in order to keep themselves updated with what is happening around the world. Internet and other audio and visual techniques have become some of the basic skills that help them to succeed in a competitive job market. The letter “E” has become very important in doing business, banking, trading, studying and even finding a life partner.

I remember that in my childhood the list of “do’s” was considerably shorter than the one for “don’t’s”. A part of my culture kept me in a restrictive frame and never allowed me to ask questions of adults outside of that frame. As a reward, I was praised and grew up to be a good modest girl. Now, however, as one of the consequences of globalization, this cultural modesty seems to have become outdated. Young individuals are becoming more open-minded and assertive in their demands to know about global issues. For example, young Mongols started to celebrate Global Youth Service Day and to communicate online with different

² I. Fadzillah, “The Amway connection: How transnational ideas of beauty and money affect Northern Thai girls’ perceptions of their future options,” in *Youthscapes: The Popular, the National, the Global*, Sunaina Maira and Elisabeth Soep, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 86.

youth groups in other countries in order to exchange their ideas on critical issues such as children's rights. Within Mongolia, young people are routinely expressing their ideas and concerns to government officials through online communications systems.

At the same time, we should not overlook the negative effects that globalization has had on Mongolian youth. Young people in my country ignore their original cultural values, disregard the value of the family, oppress each other and dismiss their family heritage. Mongolian cultural values are becoming difficult to identify, especially among the youth, when they are heavily influenced by Western cultural norms. By the West I mean such things as American films which project positive images of the "American Dream" and of America as a great power, through which the most common images of the West by Mongolian youth are basically formed. Once a young mind is influenced by Western positivism, it is more likely that the traditional cultural values will be veiled and more and more youth will wish to live abroad.

Young Mongolian girls' perceptions of their female identity and expectations are shaped by the influence of globalization and they are filled with a desire to be fashion models. For teenage girls, models of globalization encourage them to take on more adult-like roles at an early age. For young female adults, this approach has caused an increase in the divorce rate and a lack of appreciation of male partners. For example, working as beauty product distributors for multinational companies like Oriflame has given girls more competence to participate in the labor force and, at the same time, gave them increased confidence to fulfill their wish to become a cosmopolitan model of attractiveness through even such means as cosmetic surgery. This attitude may possibly be one of the many sources of conflict that have led to family divorce because many men are not ready to support female empowerment due to deep-rooted concepts of patriarchal power in Mongolia. For instance, in 1989, the divorce rate was 1.6% but this percentage increased to 2.7% in 2004, which could possibly be linked to increased female capacities and expectations.³

³ Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, & UNFPA. *Current Situation of Families*. Ulaanbaatar, 2004.

Nowadays, the mass media in Mongolia bombard the young people with their Westernized broadcasts, which are mostly imitations of popular programs that attract youth interest in the West. Young people learn about diverse musical genres, trends in modern fashions and new products through the media and they feel connected to the rest of the world through popular programs and channels such as MTV. However, as mentioned above, the ideas of youth and their preferences move easily across national borders. It would be hard to find a common language to communicate with young people if you wanted to talk about traditional folk songs or games with them. Rather, the hot topic to discuss would be the latest hip-hop hits, Hollywood movie releases or how to tear my jeans in order to make them more fashionable.

This approach results in oppression and discrimination among the young population. For instance, those who listen to traditional music and who do not prefer funky clothing might be called awkward, old-fashioned or geeky. As a personal example, not long ago my nephew asked me to send him the most modern and coolest clothes, otherwise he would find it hard to be accepted into the circle of boys in his class. Teachers and parents seem unable to see the connection between oppression and low self-esteem in their children, assuming that low self-esteem is a natural characteristic of modest children. Some acute social problems that might occur due to this phenomenon are marginalization and even increased rates of suicide based on low self-esteem.

Traditionally, the parenting style in Mongolia has been more authoritarian than in the West. Children are taught to accept restrictive and limited opportunities and do what their parents want them to do. This tendency probably has led to increased arguments between parents and their children when the parents' wish to follow the traditional heritage collides with the preferences of modern youth. All too often the result has been that parents see their children as being disobedient and the children view their parents as misusing parental authority.⁴

⁴S.P. Robbins, P. Chatterjee, and R.E. Canda, *Contemporary Human Behavior Theory: Critical Perspective for Social Work* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1998).

This rising tension between parents and their children has in not a few cases been exacerbated by religion where parents and their children belong to different religions. It seems that our society is not ready to accept and respect the difference in individual religious beliefs, especially the youth's belief in Christianity, even though it is stated in the constitution that individuals have freedom of conscience and religion. For example, many young people claim that the main cause of family arguments was parental disrespect and disagreement towards their belief in Christianity.

CHALLENGES FACING YOUTH

There is a huge gap of income inequality in our country which creates a challenge for youth to experience the positive effects of globalization equally. Youth from wealthier family have a greater advantage in using of what globalization has to offer in the information and technology sectors, while youth from poor families are left behind. Some of us enjoy driving fancy cars and get the latest information online while others have never even touched a computer screen.

Inequality is closely related to another challenge, which is urban and rural disparity. Many young and talented individuals do not have equal opportunities to benefit from the globalization process, in particular in rural Mongolia, because of poor infrastructure and isolated places of residence. For those who live in urban areas, the world is a small place thanks to internet sites, news and calling cards, which help them keep connected to everything they want. But this is only one side of the coin. Young people living in rural areas lack the opportunities to know what is happening in the rest of the world, when there are only few channels of information open to them.

CONCLUSION

In summary, globalization has both positive and negative effects on youth life in Mongolia. Most of the effects seem to be as

inseparable as two sides of a coin and it is extremely difficult to judge today whether globalization offers mainly positive or negative effects. This is because Mongolia has still a long way to go in order to see the full effects of globalization. Positively, globalization provides accessibility to technological advancements and internet products. It also helps us to understand the importance of learning languages and it influences us to develop ourselves intellectually with a motivation of learning more. Therefore, it is crucial for our country to distinguish between the positive and negative effects of globalization and see to it that the positive impacts affect all young people equally.

Negatively, globalization has influenced youth to disregard the values of forming a family, ignore their traditional cultural values in favor of Western attractions that are offered through media, oppress each other and come into conflict with their family heritage. Youth living in rural areas, preserving our nomadic way of life, are a valuable segment of our cultural background and they have their own chances to make a decision about whether they would prefer to be “modernized” or continue their nomadic way of living. The question remaining, which has not been answered is “In which direction is the modern youth culture in Mongolia heading?”

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