

Glocalization and Cultural Regeneration: A Visual Culture Approach to Place-Based Art Education

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Summary

Globalization is a complex, multilevel, interactive, multidimensional and constantly changing contemporary phenomenon worldwide. It impacts people and their ways of life. Today, most societies move back and forth between global and local thinking in the changing international, sociocultural, political, and economic world.

Scholarship in social sciences investigates how the patterns of global hybridization are multifaceted and discursive. This allows for developments of both cultural universalism and cultural particularism in diverse societies. There is no predictable center or periphery within the complex global systems. Rather, the format and degree of glocalization is determined by the dynamics of the synchronic and diachronic interactions between and among the four powerful sociocultural factors: societies, individuals, international relations, and human civilizations.

The current efforts at globalization have focused on economic interest. They have been criticized for intensifying glocal injustice and for ignoring cultural diversity. However, there are exemplars showing that the penetration of Others' culture(s) derived from the global economy can contribute productively to the reassertions of self-cultural identity, the resurgence of local cultural protection, and the nascence of cultural revitalization. The underlying transformative force lies in the dynamics of the binary top-down and bottom-up

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reflexive cultural critiques. Through such strategies of juxtaposition, comparison and contrast, evaluation and selection, the exposed characteristics of Others' culture(s) are not only contested within the frames of one's own value, but the strengths of the self-culture are also concurrently challenged and reexamined. It is on this subjective basis that the excellence of the self-culture is reaffirmed and maintained, while selective aspects of Others' culture(s) are absorbed and transformed to overcome the shortcomings of, and enrich and revitalize the original self-culture. This is the developmental nature of culture: an open process of consistent material and/or spiritual self-perfection.

Based on Bakhtin's thesis of hybridization, this paper argues that cultural globalization is a highly intentional, conscious, selective, and dialogistic activity in absorbing and incorporating Others' culture(s) within one's own cultural frames. Such hybridization is characterized by an enhanced "awareness of awareness" throughout its transformative process of cultural regeneration. The merging or fusion of two cultures is not a bricolage or a simple cross-bred synthesis. Nor is it the localized marketing strategy in enabling the globalization of products more likely to succeed, but a subjective, concrete, situational and place-conscious integration.

Scholars caution that cultural clashes resulting from the sociocultural, political, economic, and environmental inequalities of the rapid, complex development of global economy both locally and internationally are already undeniable realities. These will be one of the extreme forces shaping human future. Scholars comment that the objective of globalization should be the holistic benefits for the world: its inhabitants and the Earth itself, and education should redefine its focus to nurturing global intelligence, i.e., the ability to understand, respond to, and work toward the total welfare of humankind and our planet.

Caring begins at home, and places are pedagogically significant. A place-based education promoting peace and environmental sensitivity is pivotal for the future of human development, specifically in the contemporary visual society where millions of sophisticatedly, intergraphically and intertextually related objects and imagery designed for consumption are imbued with complicated sociocultural and political ideologies.

The paper applies this argument to the case of Macao. Since the penetration of the American style casino-entertainment culture in 2004, the city has undergone a drastic urban transformation. The results of the rapid growth of the local gaming industry economy

coupled with the government's promotion of the so-called cultural tourism industry are the Disneyfication of imitative American/European style architecture, the burgeoning of casinos amid schools and apartments, the severe light pollution by the casinos' neon advertisements, the plethoric exploitation of public spaces and natural environment, as well as the increasing duplication of Portuguese style urban design for the appeal to the tourists' nostalgic desires. Since 2005, the local architectural World Heritage site has been used more likely for the promotion of the gaming industry rather than culture. As a result, the number of local young gamblers has increased, and social and environmental injustice has been intensified.

Due to the lack of both local history and civic education in school, young Chinese in Macao are said to have a weak sense of identity with the city. The forged cultural ambience and the official efforts in promoting the Macao World Heritage site, mostly Portuguese buildings, further disorient the local young Chinese in their recognition of own cultural roots. Research shows that their knowledge of both local Chinese and Portuguese historic architecture is superficial, and their relevant artistic knowledge is scant. Their perceptions of the local architectural imitations parrot the slogan of the government and commercial media in the tourism and casino industries.

In response to the ambiguous local visual culture environment, self-reflective urban citizens and young artists have recently developed an enhanced cultural consciousness. The work of the latter often embraces cultural reflection and critique. As art learning in Macao is generally only up to eighth grade, and formalist knowledge organizes the curriculum, the young Chinese adolescents' skills of decoding sophisticated images in daily life are undeveloped.

The paper suggests a visual culture approach to placed-based art education addressing holistically the present-day peace and environmental issues both in curriculum and pedagogy. Such an approach focuses on the diverse meanings and functions generated by the interactive dynamics between and among the six key dimensions of culture, the visual message and code, source and destination, channel and context within specific sociocultural settings and times. In the study of visual culture, vision is conceived as critique; knowledge as a subjective, on-going, discursive process of information manipulation and interpretation; and curriculum as a consistent accumulation of autobiographical experience.

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Education needs realism and vision to meet the new demands of the contemporary, complex, rapidly changing world. The nurturance of students' place-consciousness and global intelligence relies on the art teacher's potential as a cultural observer, as well as a responsible, critical citizen dedicated to the cultural regeneration of Macao.

Keywords: cultural regeneration, glocalization, place-based art education, self cultural consciousness, visual culture approach