

GLOBALIZATION AND DISPARITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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I must congratulate Professor Crocker for his paper, which provides a comprehensive examination of the different perspectives on globalization that have emerged through the years. Because globalization is a fairly new concept and its literature is fast growing, I benefited immensely from his presentation of the responses of the different schools of development ethics to globalization.

I would like to react to his paper from the perspective of one who comes from a developing Southeast Asian country that is grappling with the effects of globalization.

In ethically assessing the potential impact of globalization on Southeast Asia, we must remember that it is a region which has extreme economic disparities. We find countries like Brunei and Singapore whose small populations enjoy some of the highest per capita incomes in the world. Then there are Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia that were on their way to economic recovery but were badly hit by the financial crisis. Finally, we have the transitional economies. Of the four, Vietnam is fast adapting to the ways of the market economy. The laggards are Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

Western colonialism had a deep impact on all the countries of the region, including Thailand which was never directly colonized. The Cold War era, which has ended in most parts of the world, continues to exact a toll on many of them, deepening divisions even among ethnic and religious communities.

In Southeast Asia, therefore, globalization will have to contend with two phenomena: a new surge of nationalism and the cynicism generated by the Asian financial crisis (de Dios 1998; Lim 1998). In Thailand, the new leadership is speaking of returning to protectionism. In Indonesia,

both the government leaders and political activists blame the country's troubles on the dictates of the IMF. Malaysia's Mahathir extols the merits of regulating the financial market. The Philippines is reconsidering some of its commitments in regional organizations such as the APEC. The transitional economies are wary about going all out in embracing the market economy because of the risks and hazards that they perceive in the experience of their neighbors afflicted by the financial crisis.

Indeed, for the developing states of Southeast Asia, national development has not ceased to be relevant. While we agree that globalization is indeed a sweeping force that countries would have to accommodate, it does not necessarily render development as obsolete. As a matter of fact, development becomes a greater necessity because it is the best way for one to be a winner in the global contest.

But it is not development for its own sake nor for the single objective of winning the competition. One of Professor Crocker's most significant propositions is that development ethics repudiate the maximization of economic growth without converting opulence into better human conditions, as well as 'an authoritarian egalitarianism in which physical needs are satisfied at the expense of political liberties'.

But the fact is that globalization does impinge on contemporary approaches to social development. Dennis Goulet raises the question, 'What kind of development does globalization, on the present model, generate: elitist, dependency-inducing, culturally destructive, socially disruptive, personally alienating, environmentally damaging development? Or, conversely, is it development which is participatory, emancipating and liberating for the many, serving as a dynamic catalyst of regenerated cultural vitalities, conducive to social cooperation if not placid harmony, and environmentally sound for the long-term (Goulet, 2000: 43)?'

After reading though the comprehensive paper of Professor Crocker, I am more convinced about the need for globalization ethics. As he said, 'regardless of how globalization is understood, development ethics must evaluate it ethically'. And toward this end, he offers the prescription that 'the long-term goal of good national and global development must be to secure an adequate level of morally basic capabilities for everyone in the world ...'. He calls for humanizing and democratizing globalization. This is best achieved, he said, by encouraging everyone to own responsibilities for all people. Like development ethics, globalization ethics must benefit all human beings.

Once more, I would like to congratulate Professor Crocker for his incisive presentation. I hope that he would continue to play a prominent role

in generating a network of intellectuals who are committed to critically assess the ethics of globalization.

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