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The Interaction of “Globalization” and Persian “Handicrafts”: An Analytical Investigation

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Abstract

Here is the dawn of a century in which Globalization has affected all aspects of human’s activities, including society, government, production, knowledge, culture, art, security, peace, justice and environment. Globalization has caused changes in public consideration of social relationships and everyday life. These social changes have led to significant and profound effects on popular “handicrafts” which is one of the vivid indicators of a nation’s culture. Globalization offers novel opportunities to handicrafts, yet it has presented some challenges to these crafts as well. The current study is aimed to investigate the interaction of globalization and Persian handicrafts, by a theoretical approach and analytical method. By studying the elements of globalization and Persian handicrafts, this research concludes handicrafts should not be a passive phenomenon towards this widespread process, but by taking advantages of the opportunities created by globalization and also by eliminating threats, Persian handicrafts could expose their multiple abilities to make a positive interaction with globalization.

Keywords: Globalization, Culture, Handicrafts, Persian handicrafts, Iranian art.

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Introduction

Persian handicrafts, as one of the principal manifestations of Iranian art and culture, due to their potential and active capabilities, have wide effects on society, economy and culture. But analyzing the position of Persian handicrafts in contemporary world is not possible unless by considering the indicators of globalization. Globalization has had positive consequences on the revival of cultures, decentralization of power, communication and efficiency of economy. Globalization causes fundamental changes in the cultural system of a society and its artistic system as a consequence. That way, arts and handicrafts of a traditional society will confront different challenges and encounter serious evolutions. By forming modern and developed societies and by the transition of developing societies, like Iran, from a position to the other one and also by cultural and artistic changes arising from these transition, a different form of handicrafts is coming to existence. But globalization has always had opponents who are worried about transformation or destruction of authenticities or indigenous elements of cutlers by facing globalization. Ethnic arts of a nation are of the most important parts of their identity, so the effects of globalization on local cultures and traditional arts of a society, has always been of the most challenging topics in this subject.

The main reason of such confrontations is the fact that, most of the reviewers of culture mistake the term “globalization” for “western cultural imperialism” or as a precise phrase “Americanization”. This critical encounter is understandable because, though by a superficial meaning, the clearest outcome of cultural globalization was growing diffusions of western and especially American cultural products and formats (Held & McGrew, 2009: 212). However, merging the wide phenomenon of cultural globalization with cultural imperialism has been inaccurate and still is (Tomlinson, 1999).

Due the importance and complexity of this topic, it seems that adequate researches has not been accomplished on the context, so this research is trying to access to a comprehensive framework on the subject. The main questions of the present study are: 1- How Persian handicrafts react to the process of globalization? 2- What are the approaches for a better interaction of these two phenomena?

This research has a theoretical approach and by analyzing data and reviewing concepts is aimed to answer the mentioned questions. By this hypothesis that globalization is an inevitable subject in contemporary world and its consequences effect on all aspects of human life unwantedly, this research is trying to review the opportunities and threats of the phenomenon, and as the result suggests some approaches for Iranian artists to avoid challenges of this process.

Methodology

In this study, to achieve comprehensive information and efficient results, descriptive-analytical method is used. From this perspective, the indicators of globalization and handicrafts are selected and then analyzed. For purpose of data collection, library method is used.

Theoretical Foundations

In current study two main subjects exist; “globalization” and “handicrafts”. But there is another challenging concept that matters in this research which is so negotiable. “Culture” as connector between these two main concepts, needs to be surveyed as well in order to understand the accurate relation of globalization and handicrafts.

1- Globalization

Today is the time of unexpected accelerating changes for all societies and their futures. Now, transnational processes, such as “globalization” have significant influences on all aspects of human life including culture, economy, politics and society. To study any national process, it seems inevitable to face the theoretical challenges presented by these new and modern concepts. Studying the phenomenon of “globalization”, as a process which is not only limited to global institutions but also interacts with national frameworks, is a wide case of research. Up to now, it has been explored by too many theoreticians and researchers, but still contains hidden and not-discovered dimensions that need permanent experimental studies. This phenomenon is a dynamic subject and through ages, its definition and domain have changed and interacted with other issues.

1-1- The Origins of Globalization

The word “global” is over 400 years old. “Globalize” and “globalizing” appeared around 1960 (Waters, 1995: 4). In the 1970s, business and management writers invented the word “globalization” in order to describe new strategies for worldwide production and distribution (Ibid: 2). By theoretical point of view, the origins of globalization could be traced in theories of Marshall McLuhan about global village in 1960s (Nademi & Lotfi, 2006: 123). Also in the 1980s, the word became prominent in academia and entered the social sciences through geography and sociology, and the humanities through anthropology and cultural studies. At some point thereafter, the media adopted the term and, by the every means it defines, it spread around the world (Jones, 2012: 20). Oxford dictionary presented the term “globalization” as its new words in 1990s (Nademi & Lotfi, 2006: 122).

1-2- Theories of Globalization

At the beginning, it should be mentioned again that globalization is a negotiable topic, but although “there is no globally accepted definition for the term” (Held & McGrew, 2003: 2), to achieve conceptual and theoretical basics, the main theories of globalization are analyzed here.

Globalization means compressing the world and increasing the awareness that the world is a total (Robertson, 1992:8). Globalization is sometimes interpreted as “universalization”, “liberalization”, “internationalization”, “westernization”, “Americanization” and “deterritorialization”. Jan Aart Scholte believes only the last concept gives a novel and specific meaning to this phenomenon. Due to this interpretation, globalization is a renewal of geographical formation in a way that social regions no more are measured by borders, lands and territorial distances (Scholte, 2011: 8). One of the principal criticism the opponents of globalization pose, is taking globalization equivalent to “Americanization” and “westernization”. But universalists reject this theory that globalization is synonymous to “Imperialism” or “Americanization”. While they approve that globalization’s conversations might be more at the service of the social and economic profits of the west, they emphasize that globalization expresses deeper structural changes on the modern social organization’s scale. These changes in addition to other evolutions, cause the growth of multinational companies, global financial markets, broadening of the folk culture and giving priority to prevention of environmental degradation (Held & McGrew, 2002: 7).

2- Culture

Etymologically speaking, the word “culture” was first used to talk about cultivating a field and only later transferred to “cultura animi”, the cultivation of minds or souls (Wardrep, 2009: 29). By idiomatic view, this word is used to describe the distinct lifestyles, values and beliefs of an ethnically or geographically

integrated group of people, and runs from a generation to the next one (Sharifi & Fazeli, 2013: 65). In fact, culture is a collection of structures which Durkheim calls them “collective representation” (Durkheim, 1961: 30). These representations set a symbolic world of concepts in which a cultural group is living (Bocock, 2007: 51).

Handicrafts as tangible part of a society’s culture interacts by other phenomena such as “globalization”.

3- Handicrafts

“Traditional arts” are the collection of ancient arts of a society which have roots in their old beliefs and thoughts, and contain dramatic arts, music, visual arts, architecture, applied arts and handicrafts. So handicraft is a subset to traditional arts.

3-1- Definition of Handicrafts

Handicrafts are sets of arts which are mainly created by hands or in some cases by the help of simple machines. The main difference between handicrafts and visual arts is that their applied character is prior to the decorative dimension. Handcrafting has its roots in ethnical and local beliefs and they are formed along with normal lives of a society over time. Handicrafts are described in contrast with mechanical crafts and mass production (www.lchto.ir). Handcrafting also has its roots in the rural crafts (the material, good, necessities) of ancient civilizations, and many specific crafts have been practiced for centuries, while others are modern inventions, or popularizations of crafts which were originally practiced in a limited geographic area.

Many handcrafters use natural, even entirely indigenous, materials while others may prefer modern, non-traditional materials, and even upcycled industrial materials. The individual artisanship of a handcrafted item is the paramount criterion; those made by mass production or machines are not handicraft goods.

Seen as developing the skills and creative interests of students, generally and sometimes towards a particular craft or trade, handicrafts are often integrated into educational systems, both informally and formally. Most crafts require the development of skill and the application of patience, but can be learned by virtually anyone.

Like folk art, handicraft output often has cultural and religious significance, and increasingly may have a political message as well. Many crafts become very popular for brief periods of time (a few months, or a few years), spreading rapidly among the crafting population as everyone emulates the first examples, then their popularity wanes until a later resurgence.

Culture; the Connector between Globalization and Handicrafts

The opponents of globalization believe that the growing extension of communicational systems has resulted in more availability of faraway cultures, which has effected on national cultures unwittingly. For instance, fashion styles of an eastern country have been changed by the indicators of globalization, and aesthetical patterns in traditional societies are under the influence of western tastes. These changes effected the public artistic tastes as well. Due to this view, globalization is a kind of “generalization” which is aimed to destroy national and local cultures.

These criticisms are due to an incorrect understanding of the relation between globalization and culture. One of the wrong fundamental formation on this topic is this phrase: “the effects of globalization on culture” or “cultural consequences of globalization”. Undoubtedly, this phrase is in the form of “cause” and “effect” that suggests the domination of globalization on culture. But the problem of such phrase is that

they imply globalization is a process which has its own specific sources, and its operational area is beyond culture (Held & McGrew, 2009: 215). In a case that culture is one of the inseparable aspects of globalization and is connected with political and economic discussions. The other theoretical dispute is on the concept of culture: because globalization has disassembled the rooted intuitive percept about culture that connects it to geographical positions. As one of the primitive assertion of globalization is “deterritorialization” (Ibid: 215- 217). Deterritorialization means the conjunction of the places in where normal lives are leading. Places that despite keeping their specific cultural ambiances, have accepted globalization and reinforced their transnational connections. So deterritorialization mainly refers to the decrease of local authorities on culture, along with the increase of the importance of processes and events happening faraway (Ibid: 219). So it is incorrect to mistake globalization for “Placelessness” which anticipates the closure of local cultures being replaced by a global culture. In fact, by affiliating places (not in geographical view), a kind of global supervision is formed to control local cultures and if the members cooperate, the culture of that society is not only protected but will be reinforced. This never means denying the changes of manners and productions and changes of consuming styles (prevalence of consumerism) around the world. “Change” is one of the inevitable consequences of globalization. In fact, no society is safe toward “change”. But change necessarily dose not lead to a critical condition to a principal structure (Noraei, 2013: 113). But the level and the depth of changes of culture completely depend on the capacity of that culture towards accepting changes. Michael Decoster, the French socialist, says that developing countries are not usually successful in achieving the mentality of western technology, because they do not gain the invisible part of this technology. In his estimation, developed countries, due to their slow passage through this transition from tradition to modernity, could adapt themselves with the changes (Ibid: 114; for other discussions see Yilmaz, 2013: 23-24; 2014: 33). This has happened to Iran as well, and ethnical cultures of this land and its traditional habits, unwantedly have lost some parts of their authenticities because of the short term and hasty encounter with modernity and globalization and its global manifestations such as communicative devices and social network. This is due to the cultural policies of societies like Iran, which is so idealistic and has special cultural values. Experiences through last decades indicate the fact that domination of a socialistic look and performing closed-door policies based on the acceptance no change and reformation, could not preserve the foundations of traditional Persian arts and even it could be a destroying element for these arts. “Doubtlessly, governments who lead rigorous closed-doors policies towards global events, are threatened by communication and information technologies (Held & McGrew, 2003: 40).

By a macro-regard, it is evident despite the strengths and valuable opportunities in the field of cultural policies, peculiar Persian culture has not been developed and progressed, and some of its cultural heritages are declining (Sharifi, 2013: 58). Unfortunately, Persian handicrafts which are of the main cultural aspects of this country, are becoming worthless and are losing their identity. These defections are just due to some inland decisions and are not related to globalization.

In all societies, cultural policies should confront the problems caused by a cultural duality. Prompt measures for culture should be taken by developing countries in order to preserve local culture and expand it and simultaneously provide situations to match it with global culture. The power or weakness of any culture depend more on the communicative devices that distributes it. Cultures by fundamental and powerful valuable structures, might be corrupted by connecting to other cultures which have potent communicative capabilities (Jirard, 1993: 9, 15).

The Interaction of Globalization and Handicrafts

Globalization is one of the direct consequences of industrial revolution, so it expanded the industrial productions and this caused transformation in traditional production systems. Therefore, these changes led to a fundamental evolution in handmade production techniques, and as some critics believe, these changes

destroy the traditional authenticity and essence of the product and transforms it to an anonymous stuff. But this is not completely true. Today handicrafts have a different meaning than it had before. Handicrafts created at the contemporary world, structurally and conceptually are too far from what our ancestors called them “crafts”. Ancient handicrafts had not only aesthetical and decorative features, but also had applied aspects as well. Due to mass industrial production, today handicrafts are mainly for decorative use. By a semiotic look, hand-woven carpets, pottery, textiles and other crafts are more considered as symbols of culture rather than being applied. This fact has effected the theoretical basics of these arts. On the other hand, modern technologies and expansion of communication were effective on the changes of handicrafts production techniques. So, today the theoretical fundamentals and the definition presented for these arts need a revision in the framework of globalization. Economy, culture, communications and sustainability are some of the main indicators of globalization, and here their interactions with handicrafts are analyzed.

a. Handicrafts and Economy

In a case that the rate of globalization’s success on its primitive claims about “total welfare” is negotiable, all theoreticians agree that contemporary financial markets and trades had impressive developments (Held & McGrew, 2008: 157). This economic development unwantedly was effective on local arts of the societies interacted by this process. In traditional societies, handicrafts, as a folklore aspect of a region, has always been of the main sources to support livelihood economy. When a country has economic development, then export will develop, domestic production would grow and the people’s afford will increase, so the artistic products’ markets will be reinforced. Therefore, interaction with globalization results in reinforcement of traditional economy of a society. Economy, due to its direct relation to human living, has always been considered as a main aspect of any activity. This is also true about artistic activities. Although the aesthetical, social and cultural dimensions of handicrafts are so crucial to these arts, it could be said that economic aspect as a fundamental framework, encompasses other parts. If a craftsman who makes a living by creating artistic objects, could not sell his products, then he could not continue his job.

Developing countries usually have their own specific economic methods. Following the model of economic policies of developed countries and a sudden industrialization without considering necessary foundations, would not be a successful approach to solve the economic problems. Some of the developing countries felt, their gap between them and developed countries, is deepening day by day, so they tried their best to use some of their capacities to fill at least some parts of this gap. Countries such as India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Mexico that have rich and ancient handicrafts, used these arts as a complementary field to their economy and supplied and reinforced them. Through this approach, accepted results were achieved. Handicrafts have noticeable effects on eliminating, or at least balancing, social and economic problems and this is due to the capacity of handicrafts to raise the rate of employment, to increase national productions’ rate, to develop tourism industry and to develop trades.

b. Handicrafts and Culture

Today, due to globalization and establishment of variety of institutions and organizations by the aim of preserving and supporting authenticities and local cultures, a kind of global supervision on all human activities has been formed, any attitude or action against these new rules will be condemned. Because of the close relation between handicrafts and cultural traditions from one side, and its relation to economic structures on the other side, their concepts and territories are not the same in all countries. As some theoreticians like John Tomlinson, we should not think any cultural diversity, confronted with global imperialistic culture, will lose its roots, because people in react to this comprehensive invasion, would reinforce their ethnic culture and other traditional customs and rituals (Tomlinson, 1999).

According to critiques on Globalization, it means Americanization. Critics believe all the benefits of globalization goes to America, and this supreme power is trying to dominate on the whole world by such planning. It is acknowledged that America presents developing global culture excessively, but the idea that American culture is exported excessively, is not true. Most of the global culture is made in the USA, but more than half of its components are imported from other countries. In fact, America imports cultures, change them and exports them again as a global culture. The aim of other countries should not be avoiding this American global culture, instead they have to be more active in producing their share in this novel global culture (Thurow, 2001: 289).

c. Handicrafts and Communication

Globalization was not possible without vast innovations on the field of transportation and communication and technology. This does not mean that the determinism of technology was the main factor of contemporary evolutions, but technological changes were only a motivation for globalization (Scholte, 2011: 120). At present time, social networks are one of the few opportunities artists own to introduce their productions through them. By these advanced communicative networks, it is possible to present one object from a distant part of a country to other parts of the world. What that matters in this context, is the correct and systematic use of these communicative facilities and this could only be achieved by governmental planning and legislations. In case of ignoring these considerations, due to the fast expansion of communications and social networks, corruption of handicrafts' authenticities is inevitable.

d. Handicrafts and Sustainability

"Sustainability" is an aspect which is in common between globalization and handicrafts. Environmental sustainability is of the principal foundations of globalization. Handicrafts have no harm to environment and usually are recyclable, so these arts are in line with that foundations and could reinforce them.

Findings

By studying different aspects of the interaction of globalization and handicrafts, it is resulted that globalization has created precious opportunities for handicrafts, but also had some treats in some dimensions.

Opportunities

- Novel economic arrangements, made by globalization, has led to more public welfare for people. Economic growth has had positive effects on all aspects of social life including culture and handicrafts.
- From political point of view, globalization has ended bureaucratic authorization, and instead, expanded the dominance of law. This is a unique unprecedented step to form a democratic authority on the whole world. Under a democratic authority every human actions will find their innate values again.
- Technology has abolished natural discriminator obstacles of national markets by excessive expansion of communication around the world and also by considerable reduction of communication's costs. Now, communications are globalized, and globalized communication has had political, social, economic and cultural consequences for nations, and this had favorable effects on handicrafts markets.
- Although the interaction of globalization and culture has always been negotiable, it is undeniable that globalization has made a kind of cultural support for societies and by establishing supervising

organizations and institutions many declining cultures are saved and reviving situations are provided for them.

- In the field of environmental concerns and protection of natural resources, the interaction of globalization and handicrafts definitely will contain suitable and beneficial results.

Treats and Challenges

- Globalization, somehow has led to a homogenized culture. Today, a kind of global and homogenized culture is seen around the world. Although the elites and the advocates of cultural independence would never accept this fact, but it is undeniable that the advent of a unit global culture is a historical truth of the world. In contemporary world, independence of culture is meaningless.

- Global economy has deeply changed lifestyles and work habits of the people around the world. National economies have no way but adapting themselves with global economic challenges and this would happen only by vast evolutions and movements in these countries.

- By political view, globalization is considered as a fundamental challenge toward the traditional idea of a national sovereignty. This would be a treat in some traditional societies such as Iran. But it is noticeable that inappropriate choice of cultural policies will result in converting opportunities to treats, in a case that by adapting novel cultural policies matching requirements and situations of contemporary life, it would be possible to reach to a comprehensive framework for a positive interaction of globalization and handicrafts.

- But, in fact, the main challenge of globalization, is how to utilize the undeniable opportunities presented by this phenomenon in order to upgrade the civilization level all around the world.

Conclusion

The process of globalization leads to a reconsideration of the current paradigms and this way, the whole society and its problems are analyzed in a new prospect. In contemporary world, culture and its related issues, including handicrafts, are not solely limited to the inland and national conditions and are considered as global matters. Due to global relations and interactions, traditional concepts dominating on handicrafts should be redefined to be globally accepted. But also this redefinition must emphasize on preserving cultural heritages and national identity. Values admitted and accepted by different societies, in the era of globalization, have the chance for improvement. To reply our research question “how Persian handicrafts react to the process of globalization?”, it could be said surveying handicrafts and their innate capacities prove that these arts contain so many potentials to go on living in the age of globalization. Features such as their effective role on the growth of economy, considering the environmental concerns and “sustainability” and protection of national cultures, could stabilize the position of handicrafts in the process of globalization.

While the theoretical foundations of the most of art majors and also handicrafts are based on western aesthetics and thoughts, separating these arts from global processes would be irrational and also damaging. These arts are rooted in Persian thoughts, but in today world, to systemize and theorize them, in addition to recognition their ethnic and traditional foundations and thoughts, matching these doctrines to current global artistic and cultural events is needed as well. Because some changes are occurring, without managerial planning and predictions, by the influence of social networks and information technology, so what should be done is synchronizing national cultural policies with global cultural policies.

Our culture is not threatened by globalization, and it is possible to preserve, expand and export it to the world by suitable policies and approaches. To answer the second question the research “what are the approaches for a better interaction of these two phenomena?”, it could be said that, adopting incorrect

and closed policies will lead to the deterioration of traditions. Persian handicrafts as a cultural indicator could reach to a decisive position in the process of globalization, by reliance to its natural values.

This research, by studying handicrafts interacting with indicators of globalization, comes to the point that expansion of communication upgrades the sales markets and marketing of handicrafts from one side, but on the other side it may cause some destructions for authenticity and identity of handicrafts due to some incorrect policies. What could help the recovery of handicrafts' inappropriate situation in contemporary world, is an active presence in cultural export processes. That means, before globalization could have unwanted effects on Persian arts and culture, there must be suitable planning to present the culture of this land to the whole world. Due to the abundant potential values of Persian handicrafts, it could be said that these arts should never be passive and indifferent towards globalization. Globalization is not always a dominant structure, but it acts as a framework that interacts with other processes such as art trends, and Persian handicrafts are capable to reach to an appropriate position in the process of globalization.

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