

Buddhist Higher Education - Towards Globalization

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Globalization

Toward the close of the 20th century and at the outset of the 21st century, globalization is one of the hot topics which is most frequently been brought out for intensive discussions and debates in the intellectual circles of academia. However, it seems to be beyond question that it has been becoming a prominent trend which is global, as the bipolar economy of the Cold War has been replaced by the multi-polar one of today, and as the rapid advances of information technology have been giving the communications between and among the peoples a boost.

There are several definitions given by different scholars with regard to the different meanings of the umbrella term 'globalization'. Nevertheless, all are seemingly unanimous in a view that the term pertains to a globally macro tendency regarding the increased connectivity of economy, technology, ecology, culture, and education, etc., across the world. It can also be understood as "*the development of increasingly integrated systems and relations beyond the nation*" (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002, p. 288), or as "*an unitary process inclusive of many sub-processes (such as enhanced economic interdependence, increased cultural influence, rapid advances of information technology, and novel governance and geopolitical challenges) that are binding people and biosphere more tightly into one global system*" (Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia). In other words, the term "globalization", as Robertson puts it, "*refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole*" (Robertson, 1993, p.8).

Although globalization is recognized by many as a world trend which is inevitable, nonetheless it cannot by any means avoid criticisms. The academia as a whole, including politicians, economists, journalists, and social activists in the world, as we could know, has been divided into two groups: the pro-globalization and the anti-globalization. The former includes those who advocate the point of view that globalization would bring about much increased opportunities of economic and communicative promotion for almost everyone, while the latter comprises those who argue that certain groups of people who are not currently capable of coping with the increased competitive pressures that would be brought about by allowing their economies and cultures to be more connected to the rest of the world. For these reasons, intense

political and cultural disputes will certainly still continue over globalization's meaning and its future direction.

Higher Education and Globalization

In terms of globalization, as shown previously, the connectivity and interdependence between and among this nation and other nations are more than one. This implies that social-culture and education are not subsidiary factors to enhance and strengthen economic rationale as the economic or commercially-oriented tendency has disclosed so far, but they are of great importance because the identity of a nation which is characterized by its culture and education is considered as a core element in co-operation with other nations. Once the cultural identity of a nation is deprived or lost, globalization is then but a homogenization. Furthermore, if saying that the culture of a nation is what decides its identity, it is its education which makes up the source of its culture.

It goes without saying that globalization exerts substantial influences on education, especially on higher education. And of course, higher education institutions also play an important role in the process of globalization. They can at the best help the process of globalization in three aspects. These are:

- a. By means of education, they can at least prepare and provide people a new way of thinking with regard to the current situation of the globe to adapt to its newly international circumstances.
- b. They can by all means supply the process of globalization with the potential and competent forces who can cope with international competitiveness's and challenges, and meet global needs as well as develop co-operative working environments.
- c. They do play an essential role in keeping with the direction of globalization in such a way that helps to maintain and protect the cultural identity of a nation, at the same time with revolutionizing nation-state and national-systems in terms of globalization.

In order to meet such demands of globalization, educational institutions, especially higher education institutions, need definitely to have proper and significant adjustments in their academic structures and strategies. But how? This has obviously been a matter of debates among scholars. While some scholars such as Levin (2001), Slaughter and Leslie (1997) suggest that post-secondary institutions should adopt entrepreneurial structure, strategy, and culture, the

others like Marginson and Rhoades (2002) are in favor of a heuristic approach to universities, which puts a stress on the importance of studying the reciprocal interactions of global, national, and local phenomena.

However the debates of scholars will go, one noticeable thing is that globalization has been being a world trend, and that it has been demanding higher education institutions in all over the world an innovation or reformation of their academic structures and strategies to cope with rapid global changes. Going with this current of the world, Buddhism as a whole has also been requiring a serious restructuring of higher education in such a way that it can help Buddhist universities reach international standards as well as improve academic quality.

Buddhist Attitude towards Globalization

The conception of globalization is not a new thing for Buddhism, both in historical and philosophical sphere. The event of Asoka the Great's dispatching 9 Dhamma missionaries to different regions within Indian continent and the outside in order to spread the Buddha's message in the 3rd century BC is perhaps the most representative example of Buddhist globalization in historical aspect. Followed this event were the waves of Buddhist missionaries from India pouring into other countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Vietnam, etc., from time to time. Then, from these countries Buddhist monks of different generations pervaded to other regions and parts of the earth. As a result, Buddhism resides in every corner of the world and is one of the great global religions.

In spite of enjoying a status as a global religion, Buddhism never becomes regarded to be a dangerous force that uproots the people's traditional ways of life or threatening their livelihoods and cultures. A reason for this lies in the original nature and spirit of Lord Buddha's teaching itself. Firstly, it is with the doctrine of Dependent-Origination (Paticca-samuppada), which its general formula runs in the Majjhima Nikaya as follows: "*If this is, that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises. This is not, that does not come to be; from the stopping of this, that is stopped.*" Generated from this general formula is the Universal Principle of all existences which says that every existing thing is both conditioned and conditioning, and that nothing can exist independently and everything depends, in some way or other, conditionally on one another. Secondly, this Universal Principle too is further lifted up in philosophical realm by a Buddhist School, i.e., the Chinese Hua-Yen School, with the conception of "*All in One and One in All*". This teaching is commonly known as the *Totalism* which means that all the qualities of the whole

universe are fully present and completely activated within a dhamma or an existing thing itself, and vice-versa, all the attributes of an existing thing too are fully performed in the whole of universe. In terms of globalization, all of these teachings thus show the following three significant points:

- a. Buddhism realizes the essential and vital connectivity and interdependence of all existences regardless nation, religion, and race.
- b. However, it also recognizes the existing reality of a thing, a person, or of a nation, and even gives them a great deal importance.
- c. Therefore, though it always trends to building a greatly united world, in which all the people regardless nation, religion, culture, sex, or race co-exist and live interdependently and harmoniously, it never means to deprive what is characterized as the existing reality of an individual, a nation, or of a culture.

Such Buddhist attitudes towards globalization could, in the opinion of the writer, be a potential suggestion to establish a new meanings as well as a different future orientation for globalization. And above all, they could by all means play a role as good conceptual loadstars for the reconstructing of Buddhist higher education institutions in terms of globalization.

Buddhist Higher Education towards Globalization

Different Buddhist communities in all over the world have generally had a positive attitude toward globalization by annually organizing Buddhist workshops and conferences at international scale here and there in different Buddhist countries. In this vein, globalization of Buddhist higher education has also often become a key agenda item in the international Buddhist symposiums. However, the actual results gained from such attempts of the Buddhists seem to be not much as they have been expected. There are, in my opinion, at least three major causes for the failure:

- a. Buddhism as a whole does not have an international umbrella organization which is powerful enough to manage and monitor the academic works and educational activities of Buddhist higher education institutions in different countries.
- b. For various reasons, Buddhist leaders and leading educators from different Buddhist higher education institutions have not had many occasions to seat with each other in order

- to work out a general program with respect to working model and strategies such as educational purposes, academic structure, syllabus and curriculum.
- c. Different countries have different economic, political and cultural situations. So do different Buddhist higher education institutions in the world. In the countries where Buddhism is recognized as a national religion, or officially supported by national constitution, the academic activities of Buddhist education institutions are relatively in smooth water. On the contrary, in the countries where Buddhism is not officially supported by government or governmental organizations, Buddhist higher education institutions there have to manage themselves for their maintenance and development, and therefore, they have often to be faced by several hurdles such as social recognition, financial difficulties, or academic personnel.

In order to overcome such chronic problems which represent hurdles for the globalization of Buddhist higher education, some specific solutions should seriously be taken into consideration by world-wide Buddhist leaders. Here are some suggestions:

- a. Buddhist universities, colleges and faculties in all over the world need to join hands together to establish an umbrella organization of Buddhist education institutions, and to create a great Buddhist academic environment of global level which is open and advantageous for teacher and student exchange, and for academic interactions between and among the member institutions.
- b. Buddhist leaders of education from different countries often need to seat with each other to work out a specific set of educational purposes so that a general working-program for that umbrella organization and for all its members can go forward.
- c. In light of the globalizational knowledge of Buddhism, Buddhist higher education institutions should aim at working out a common syllabus, through which all their students can relatively get a common background of knowledge at least at a certain level.
- d. In view of the harmonious interactions and reciprocal relationships, Buddhist universities should also have a common international medium for teaching and communicating, such as English, through which the activities of teacher and student exchange can go forward in an advantageous and easy manner.
- e. In order to enhance international standards and improve academic quality together, the big and strong Buddhist higher education institutions which are from developed countries or from Buddhist countries should have practical helps and supports with respect to social recognition as well as academic activities and researches to other institutions which are

still weak and not capable of coping with the challenges put forward by the world trend of globalization.

Buddhist Higher Education in Vietnam Perspective

Vietnam Buddhist Sangha leaders in general, Vietnam Buddhist education leaders in particular, have deeply been aware of global demands for a long time. During 1975, the Vietnamese people were victorious and gained their independence back and the nation became united. Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in the South had a higher education institution named Van Hanh University, which gained an international fame by its close academic interactions and relationships with many other universities in the world. In 1980s, after a gap in the educational activities at higher educational level, two advanced schools of Buddhist studies, which trained monk and nun students at BA level, were established, one in Ha Noi and the other in Ho Chi Minh City. These two advanced schools were later on promoted and turned into the academies/universities which are allowed to train monk and nun students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. In 1997, another Buddhist university was also founded in Hue city, Central Vietnam. And in recent years, higher Buddhist education institutions of another kind, called as Buddhist colleges, which are only confined to BA level, have been given a birth here and there in all the parts of the country. In order to enhance academic quality as well as have enough personnel for teaching and working in these institutions, from the 1990s to now hundreds of Vietnamese monks and nuns who have graduated were sent abroad for higher study in different scholastic disciplines. These doctors and masters who have come back from different universities in India, China, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, United States, etc., have really been a significant and dynamic force for the process of Buddhist educational globalization in Vietnam.

Thus, the atmosphere of higher Buddhist education in Vietnam is at present rather dynamic and effervescent. In terms of globalization, the potentiality which can help Vietnam Buddhist higher education towards internationalization shows to relatively have. However, how to turn this potentiality into reality must be a long story. It demands not only a length of time but also a width of space along with positive efforts from Vietnam Buddhist education authorities and with real supports from Vietnam government and international organizations of education.

At any rate, the globalization of Vietnam Buddhist higher education is a must, and for Vietnamese Buddhists, although road to the future is still ahead, they are full of hopes.

References

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