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**GLOBALIZATION TO GLOCALIZATION:  
EVOLUTION OF A SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPT**

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# Globalization to Glocalization: Evolution of a Sociological Concept

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the evolution and transformation of the concept of globalization, highlighting the tangled relationship between the discipline of sociology and globalization. The paper will also trace the history and the development of the concept of “glocalization”, which originated in Japan as a popular business strategy. Professor Roland Robertson, a sociologist at the University of Pittsburgh, introduced this concept to Western social scientific discourse. Robertson was well aware of the changes this concept has undergone in Japanese society. This paper will trace the roots of the Japanese concept and its use in sociological discussions. It will also examine in broad terms concepts, theories and paradigms in sociology. It will touch on the problems of the application of sociological concepts developed in Western sociological and social scientific discourses to local contexts, such as those of Singapore and Malaysia.*

## 1. Introduction

In the social sciences concepts in general lack the level of precision that one can find in the hard sciences. Sociological concepts are often contentious rather than unanimous. Even a discipline such as economics is beset with disagreements on seemingly straightforward concepts such as “inflation” “recession” etc. Concepts that are in the public domain, whether it is “development”,

“modernization” or “globalization”, become highly ideologically charged. In everyday discussion, globalization is often used to refer to the economic integration that is apparently taking place in the world through increasing flows of capital and trade. The economic definition of globalization has become dominant since both the proponents and the opponents of globalization tend to subscribe to it. The proponents of economic globalization extol its benefits. Such titles as *Why Globalization Works* by Martin Wolf (2004) or Jagdish Bhagwati’s *In Defense of Globalization* (2004) are indicative of the favorable effects of globalization, where the emphasis remains on the economic facet of the concept. The critics and opponents of globalization, on the other hand, whether on the streets of Seattle or in academia, tend to view globalization as an economic beast. In this paper, our focus remains on the sociological understanding of the phenomenon of globalization.

It is often difficult to trace the origin of concepts. Concepts, theories and ideas are often products of collective endeavors. It would be extremely difficult to identify who used the term “globalization” for the first time. According to Malcolm Waters (1995) whose book entitled *Globalization* is a fine primer, Roland Robertson was one of the early users of the term. More recently, the six-volume work edited by Roland Robertson and Kathleen White, *Globalization: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, is a tour de force

which presents some of the most important essays on this subject. Even in the 1980s when Robertson was explicating the concept of globalization, his stance was to emphasize the cultural dimension of globalization, *contra* writers such as Immanuel Wallerstein whose writings at that point were heavily biased towards economic determinism. Roland Robertson was a well-regarded sociologist of religion, who wanted to view globalization as taking place both at the level of human consciousness as well as in terms of cultural connectivity and complexity.

No matter who coined it first, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization as a concept, as a slogan, as a term, is used more frequently than any other terms. In Singapore, from the inflow of foreign capital, technology, workers or “foreign talents”, to music, movies, and popular culture, almost everything has resonance with globalization. Globalization is a heroic or a sinister process, depending on which side of the debate one stands. Some tend to see globalization as a brakeless train crushing everything in its path, others see benefit in getting on board the train in order to be carried towards economic growth and modernization.

## 2. Sociology and Globalization

Globalization as a concept in social science has a short history. Even in the revised version of Raymond Williams’ *Key Words* (1983) there is no entry on globalization. The Harper Collins *Dictionary of Sociology* (1991) has an entry on “globalization of production” but no entry on globalization as such. The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology* (1994) has an entry on globalization together with globalization theory. It says “Globalization theory examines the emergence of a global cultural system. It suggests that global culture is

brought about by a variety of social and cultural developments...”. The entry refers to the book edited by Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King (1990) *Globalization, Knowledge and Society*. The term globalization was probably first used as a book title in the Albrow and King edited book (1990) which was published drawing on the essays published in various issues of *International Sociology*, the journal of International Sociological Association (1986-1990). Some of the journal articles contained globalization as a phrase in the titles in the 1980s and even earlier (see Moore, 1966, Meyer, 1980; Robertson, 1983a, 1983b, 1985). One could even claim that the first social science text that dealt with the subject of globalization was *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). Or one could argue that Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), the author of *Prolegomenon to the Universal History*, was the real claimant of the credit. Globalization as a social process is old and has a much longer history. Many writers have traced the early globalizing processes in the dissemination of religion and culture, or the interactions of people, groups, and communities through trade and commerce from ancient times.

Sociology has been traditionally defined as the study of society. And as the boundaries of society have expanded from local community, through states to global society, sociology has become the study of the global society. This is a good illustration of how ideas, knowledge and (social) sciences expand with the changes and expansion of realities.

Sociology, it is often said, deals with social life. In fact, all social sciences deal with social life or its various aspects. It is difficult to conceptualize *social* as a category. In sociology, there are two meanings of the social. “Social”, as used in the sense of

Wallerstein or for that matter Marx, encompasses technology, economy, politics and culture. Sociology is interested in the understanding of these broad processes, especially of their interrelatedness.

There is, however, a narrow meaning of “social” which is often equated with social systems, or what some people refer to as societal. Here society is an abstract system of social relations, a web or network of social relations. Following Talcott Parsons, (and before him, Durkheim) some social scientists sought to view sociology as the *scientific* study of society. I put the stress on scientific because one of the goals of science is to define one’s field narrowly so that specialized and predictable knowledge can be produced and accumulated. Sociologists with a positivistic bent of mind were quite happy with the narrow definition of sociology, hence the delimited conceptualization of society in the sense of social system. In this formulation, the field of study of economics is the economic system; the field of political science is the political system and so on. All social sciences could live happily in a world of segregated systems of knowledge!

However, a large number of sociologists, having become dissatisfied with this narrow conceptualization of society, sought to view society and the scope of sociology broadly. They also found the earlier compartmentalization unnecessary, unproductive and overly abstract. All these so-called subsystems interact. Albert Hirschman declared the need to trespass into each other’s domains. The rise of macro-sociology is a clear response to the attempt to overcome a delimited view of sociology. Barrington Moore, Wallerstein, Tilly, Skocpol and others have looked at society in the broadest sense of the term, in that the

inspiration came from Marx, Weber and later Braudel and other social historians.

Globalization, though it means many things to many people, is one of the master processes of our time. Globalization as a field in sociology is a legatee of the macro-sociological interests and development. Globalization study addresses itself to the connectivity of broad processes of technological, economic, political, and cultural interrelationships. Whether one looks at the economic, cultural or media connectivity worldwide, one has to take a much broader understanding of society and social institutions. Sociology focuses its analytical lenses on the flows and processes in society whether at the local, national or global levels. In other words, sociology has a genuine claim over the field of globalization.

Some contemporary writers accuse sociology, an archetypical social science, of being a prisoner of the nation-state. Anthony Giddens and Immanuel Wallerstein have both lamented that sociology has been the study of modern nation-states. The definitions as well as the boundaries of “society”, which sociology seeks to study, have often been taken to overlap with those of the nation-state. Since the late 1970s, however, there has been a shift of focus by sociologists such as Roland Robertson of Pittsburgh and others, leading sociology to redefine its scope and field as the social scientific study of global processes. Ulrich Beck has explicitly called for the development of new concepts to capture the new realities of interconnectedness, plurality, multi-locality and multiplicity.

Sociology has established its claim over globalization as a field of study historically. A return to a focus on national society would be a major regressive step towards objectivist,

scientistic sociology and a return to what C. Wright Mills called “abstracted empiricism”. Or worse, sociology might become a residual discipline, busy picking up areas left unattended by other social sciences. Sociology is not the only branch of the social sciences that has a claim to study society, because other branches of the social sciences also study aspects of society. For example, institutional economists deal with social structure and cultural values to explain economic processes and market behaviors. Political scientists such as Robert Putnam have done important sociological studies of political processes. Such fields as political sociology illustrate the crossover of political science and sociology all the time. Social sciences are tasked to analyze society in all its various aspects and constellations.

The long-standing relationship between sociology and globalization gives sociology as a discipline a unique position to study all aspects of the field of globalization, a master process in human society. This does not preclude the claims of other disciplines to the subject of globalization, but it reminds us of the importance of each field’s autonomy to venture out and explore, using its own traditions and conceptual frameworks. While globalization as a framework is naturally biased in favor of macro-sociological issues, questions have been raised as to the viability of using this framework to study social realities on the ground. This led to a rethinking of the macro-micro relationship. Glocalization as a concept arose to help alleviate the conceptual difficulties of understanding this relationship.

It would be difficult to trace the first user of the term “glocalization” in its original Japanese usage. But the first use of the term in English can be attributed to Professor Roland Robertson, a British/American

sociologist, who migrated from the United Kingdom to the United States, where he spent most of his academic career at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Robertson’s original interests in sociology were in the areas of sociology of religion, sociological theories and cultural sociology. He also ventured into areas of comparative sociology and modernization studies. His interest and knowledge of Japanese society led him to discover the use of the term “glocalization” in Japan in Japanese language, a term the marketing experts were using by which they meant that products of Japanese origin should be localized – that is, they should be suited to local taste and interests – yet they are also global in application and reach. Hence a new term, “glocalization”, was coined. Robertson and other sociologists interested in the subject of global processes could not help noticing that many of the social categories and practices assume a local flavor or character despite the fact that these products were invented elsewhere. Dutch sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse has for some time used terms such as *mélange*, hybridity, and syncretism to capture similar processes with regard to culture. According to Nederveen Pieterse, (2004) there are three views on the issue of globalization of cultures. The first view is the “clash of cultures” view, expressed in terms of the “clash of civilizations” claimed by writers like Samuel Huntington. The second notion is best expressed in the phrase “McDonaldization” of the world (Ritzer, 2000). This view obviously suggests a homogenized world, a world dominated by a single culture that erases the differences between local cultures. The third view is that of hybridization or synthesis. Much of the evolution of human culture can be seen as a process of exchanges, diffusion, etc. where cross-breeding, borrowing and adjusting to the local needs were very common. I argue below that

although glocalization belongs to the same genre or has resonance with those categories there are some important differences as well.

### 3. Evolution of the Concept of Glocalization

According to the dictionary meaning, the term “glocal” and the process noun “glocalization” are “formed by telescoping global and local to make a blend” (*The Oxford Dictionary of New Words*, 1991:134 quoted in Robertson, 1995:28). The term was modeled on Japanese word *dochakuka*, which originally meant adapting farming technique to one’s own local condition. In the business world the idea was adopted to refer to global localization. The word as well as the idea came from Japan (Robertson, 1995:28). According to Wordspy, glocalization means “the creation of products or services intended for the global market, but customized to suit the local cultures.” (<http://www.wordspy.com/words/>). Although the term glocalization has come to frequent use since the late 1980s, there were several related terms that social scientists used and continue to use. One such related word, which has been in use in social sciences and related fields for quite some time is, indigenization.

Some social scientists claimed that social sciences such as sociology and political science, even psychology, were products of western social experiences; therefore when these fields of inquiry were transported and transplanted to non-European or non-western contexts such as Latin America, Asia or Africa, there was a need for indigenization of these subjects. The idea of indigenization has created quite a controversy among social scientists because it raises fundamental questions about the applicability of social scientific ideas and concepts. However, indigenization can be seen as similar to

localization. In both these concepts, there is an assumption of an original or authentic “locality” or “indigenous system”. One of the consequences of globalization is that it opens up doubts about the originality and authenticity of cultures. If one takes a long-term view of globalization, “locality” or “local” itself is a consequence of globalization. There are hardly any sites or cultures that can be seen as isolated or unconnected from the global processes.

Robertson, one of the pioneers in the study of globalization, did not view globalization as a recent phenomenon nor did he see it as a consequence of modernization. The theories of modernization came under serious attack in sociology because of such assumptions as unilinearity and convergence. As our knowledge of the world increased, many writers pointed out that the cultural differences are not all that superficial, and nonlinearity and multilinearity are better descriptions of global modernity. Besides, divergence rather than convergence seems to have been the consequence of modernization. Yet the divergent cultures and societies can be studied with the help of a globalized social science and there was no need for diverse, indigenized social sciences. In order to claim scientific status, the social sciences could not afford to forfeit their claim to universality and universal knowledge. The social sciences must be context-sensitive but not context-dependent. It is in this context that Robertson conceptualized globalization in the twentieth century as “*the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism*” (Robertson, 1992:100; emphasis in the original). Khondker (1994) building on Robertson’s framework, argued that globalization or glocalization should be seen as interdependent processes. The problem of the simultaneous globalization of the local, and the localization of globality, can be

expressed as the twin processes of *macro-localization* and *micro-globalization*. Macro-localization involves expanding the boundaries of locality as well as making some local ideas, practices, institutions global. The rise of world-wide religious or ethnic revivalist movements can be seen as examples of macro-localization. Micro-globalization involves incorporating certain global processes into the local setting. Consider social movements such as the feminist or ecological movements; or consider new production techniques or marketing strategies which emerge in a certain local context. Over a period, these practices spread far beyond that locality into a larger spatial and historical arena. Consider the publishing or computer industries, with their specific locations of emergence, which have now become global phenomena. The overcoming of spatial limitations is globalization. In this view of globalization, globalization is glocalization. This view is somewhat different from the way Giddens conceptualizes the relationship between the global and the local. Globalization, for Giddens, “is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world” (Giddens, 2000:31). While in this view the local is the provider of the response to forces that are global, we argue that the local itself is constituted globally. Ritzer, in discussing glocalization, has added another – should I say, redundant – convoluted term, “grobalization”, to refer to what he calls “growth imperatives [pushing] organizations and nations to expand globally and to impose themselves on the local” (2004:xiii). For Ritzer, globalization is the sum total of glocalization and “grobalization”.

Wong argues, following Wind (1998), that defining a company as global does not necessarily mean that it has gone global all the way. There are companies that are part

global, part regional or part local, involving different domains such as portfolio, supply chain, research and development and business processes. In terms of mode of business practices, there could be independent operations, joint ventures or alliances (Wong, 1998:156).

#### 4. Key Propositions

The main propositions of glocalization are not too different from the main arguments of a sophisticated version of globalization. 1. Diversity is the essence of social life; 2. Globalization does not erase *all* differences; 3. Autonomy of history and culture give a sense of uniqueness to the experiences of groups of people whether we define them as cultures, societies or nations; 4. Glocalization is the notion that removes the fear from many that globalization is like a tidal wave erasing all the differences. A number of books and articles on the subject of globalization give the impression that it is a force that creates a uniform world, a world where barriers disappear and cultures become amalgamated into a global whole. The tensions and conflicts between cultures are nothing but the problems of a transitory phase. Ironically, the phase of transition has been around for a long period of time. And as we have entered the third millennium of the Common Era, many of the age-old problems of differences of culture and religion remain. 5. Glocalization does not promise a world free from conflicts and tensions, but a more historically grounded understanding of a complicated, yet pragmatic, view of the world.

#### 5. Globalization is not Westernization

Some writers view globalization as the worldwide spread of “westernization”. This view is either erroneous or contains only partial truth. From a superficial point of view,

various processes outwardly make it seem that the world is, indeed, becoming westernized. One could see the popularity of western music, movies, and “McDonalds” as examples of westernization. More and more countries are seeing the opening of McDonalds. According to Ritzer (2000) McDonaldization “do[es] not represent something new but, rather, the culmination of a series of rationalization processes that had been occurring throughout the twentieth century” (Ritzer, 2000:37). Ritzer saw this as a continuation of Weber’s rationalization thesis and highlighted the following as the key features of rationalization: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. The last of the features is also related to increasing use of technology in the workplace, which replaces human labor as well as enhances monitoring and effective control of the workers. These features of McDonaldization have by now pervaded various other organizations in society and are not just confined to food outlets. At one level one can see the emergence of a variety of fast food outlets using, in varying degree, the principles of McDonalds; at another level one can see quick-banking via ATM and other service providers using the same principles. At the level of popular culture, more and more countries are playing the American top of the pops chart, while Hollywood movies and US-made television serials (such as *Friends* and *The Simpsons*) are becoming so ubiquitous that some writers even use the term “Americanization” to describe these processes of cultural transmission. However, a closer look will reveal that these cultural goods have different meanings in different societal and cultural contexts, with uneven impact on classes and age-groups. Some of the products are consumed without any modification, others are modified and indigenized to suit the local contexts, and

there are exceptional situations where the intentions are completely inverted.

In the past, many writers found it necessary to distinguish modernization from westernization. Modernization was believed to be a set of cultural practices and social institutional features that historically evolved in Europe and North America, commonly referred to as the West. The need to separate westernization from modernization (in the past) was motivated more by nationalism than purely intellectual reasons, because historically speaking, most of the modern cultural traits began in the West, a historical fact which was difficult to accommodate in a nationalistic political culture. Western scholars in the nineteenth century were also guilty of making exaggerated claims for Western superiority. The German sociologist Max Weber was correct to claim that Western rationality and science had become universal, but his denigration of non-Western cultures did not sit well with the larger intellectual community. Many Indian sociologists took pains to delineate the differences between modernization and westernization. Similar discussions exist with regard to the so-called westernization of the Ottoman Empire, the modernization of Japan since the Meiji restoration of 1868, or the struggle for modernization of China in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by movements such as the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement of 1919. In the modernization process, many of the late modernizing societies were borrowing ideas and knowledge and technology most of which had been generated in the early modernized societies of Europe. The geography of the West kept shifting. In the nineteenth century, when Germany was modernizing, the idea of the West was limited to Western Europe only (mainly Britain and France). In some post-colonial situations the demarcation was based more on political expedience than logical or



intellectual merits. Good westernization came to be regarded as modernization and bad modernization was designated as westernization. The distancing from westernization can also be understood as a reaction to centuries of domination and exploitation of the colonies by the western (mainly European) powers. However, over time a more objective consideration of history indicates that many of the traits that spread worldwide originated in certain geographical regions, yet as these traits were transplanted elsewhere, they became mutated and assumed different forms in different contexts. For example, parliamentary democracy evolved in England, with roots that go back to the *Magna Carta* of 1215. However, as Westminster-style parliamentary democracy was institutionalized in India, Malaysia, and other former British colonies, they mutated in light of the local milieu.

Westernization as a term is not equivalent to globalization. Nevertheless, westernization can be seen as an aspect of globalization. Certain institutional features and cultural traits that originated in the west were put in place in many other geographical regions lock, stock and barrel, under the framework of global interconnections and diffusion, or forced implantation in the colonial era. Yet, over time these institutions and practices mutated and assumed new meanings. Therefore, westernization can be seen as the beginning of the process. The cultural features borrowed or imitated themselves mutate in the source countries. Thus, westernization as a category has limited conceptual value. One can associate certain literary forms, genres, and traits as part of the cultural zone we vaguely call “the West”, yet these are mere influences as one can see in artistic, literary or architectural styles. For example the great Indian film maker, the late Satyajit Ray, was influenced by Hollywood

films and the art of film making, but he did not want to replicate Hollywood movies in Calcutta. His movies were modern, capturing local themes which he projected with a modern art form and technology. Hence his work was truly global, or more appropriately, glocal. Presently, Singapore is both establishing linkages with Bollywood and the Indian film industries, as well as seeking to play the role of an outsourced location for hi-tech Hollywood productions. Globalization, like modernization, is often a fusion. Westernization as a concept has some value if used only as a descriptive rather than analytic category. As an analytic category it is rather limited.

Writers such as John Meyer (1980) have used the idea of isomorphism (a term borrowed from the natural sciences, botany in particular) which means replication of the same form, yet separated from the main source. His research has shown that modern education – not Western education, though it was perhaps modified and institutionalized in the West – has spread worldwide, and a similar set of values and practices have emerged from it in diverse settings. For example, college graduates command more social prestige and respect almost regardless of cultural contexts. Some cultures can give more rewards than others. Globalization shows tendencies towards isomorphism, yet some people may continue to mistake this process for westernization.

In the context of Singapore, the first generation leaders always emphasized the fact that although Singapore’s economic development was dependent on Western technology and capital, and it was reliant on multinational corporations to foster economic growth, the state maintained a certain degree of autonomy and formulated its own broad social development strategy.

## 6. Glocalization and hybridization

In the discussion of glocalization some writers tend to conflate it with hybridization. This may be somewhat misleading. Glocalization involves blending, mixing or adapting of two or more processes, one of which must be local. But one can accept a hybrid version that does not involve the local. In the context of higher education in Singapore, a hybridized version comprising elements of the original British model and the US model has been devised. One could find many such examples in matters of technology and business practices, where two different systems or modes are combined for better results. Glocalization, to be meaningful, must include at least one component that addresses the local culture, system of values and practices and so on. One of the areas in Singapore where the evidence of glocalization is quite visible is the area of mass communication and especially in the area of television programming. In televised drama, sitcoms, and even “reality shows” one finds attempts at glocalization. Although some attempts are not always successful and there are instances when one can see unabashed imitation, by and large the idea of glocalization and fusion remains appealing to many Singaporeans.

## 7. Glocalization as fusion

Following Robertson’s notions of emulation and reference society as important features of globalization, it can be argued that glocalization involves fusion of ideas and not blind imitation. Robertson used the example of Japan’s strategy of socio-economic development since the Meiji restoration, pointing out that it has been a careful and strategic emulation of ideas and technologies from outside. In his opinion, the motivation

that led the Japanese elites to make Japan an international, or a global, society still remains to be explored (Robertson, 1992:90).

In contemporary development discourse the idea of best practices has attained a certain stature. From raising productivity in traditional manufacturing to high-end research and development centers, the idea of best practices has gained ground. Careful emulation today, as in the past, involves fusion. Blind grafting of ideas or policies in total disregard of contexts would not result in success. In the example of Singapore below, it can be stated that careful fusion of ideas and the never-ending search for best practices have produced good results.

## 8. Technology and glocalization

Singapore, located in Southeast Asia, has attained the status of a developed country or High Income Economy, according to the World Bank classification. Having experienced rapid state-led economic development under a favorable global economic climate, Singapore has been pursuing the goal of creating a knowledge-based economy since the 1990s. Singapore’s economic growth since her emergence in 1965 as an independent state entailed heavy investment in education and development of human resources in science and technology. Singapore’s advancement in areas of knowledge and high technology is dependent to a large extent on international collaboration. Two aspects of Singapore’s growth are striking: linkage with the global market, and a highly rational approach to governance which is often evidenced by a near-absence of corruption. These two aspects have a direct bearing on the issues of technological developments in Singapore. An additional factor that one has to take into account is the cultural diversity of

Singapore's population. Singapore is both a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, which provides an added dimension to the context of formulation of ethical standards. Its 4 million people (in 2004) comprise 76% Chinese, 14% Malay, 7% Indian, and 3% others. As many as one quarter of Singapore's population is made up of non-citizens, which indicates Singapore's reliance on foreign human resources, both those in working class jobs as well as high end knowledge workers. The multicultural population base and the varying sensitivity of various groups have influenced policies concerning biotechnology.

According to Stephen Haggard, "Singapore had already broken away from the typical policy pattern of a developing country as early as 1970. By the 1980s Singaporean policymakers were identifying the country with small European economies such as Switzerland" (Haggard, 1999:355). It has been noted by a number of writers (Rodan, 1989; Wade, 1990 and Haggard, 1999) that Singapore's economic development and social modernization did not take place following a pure free market model. The Singapore state was very much involved in guiding the market forces. On the one hand Singapore has relied heavily on multinational corporations to launch economic growth, but it also built a high rate of savings through the Central Provident Fund. Singapore's development model shows a certain mixed or hybrid quality.

Soon after Singapore's independence, policymakers began to focus attention on development in the sciences and technology. The striving for such development was aided in the process by close relationship with the Multinational Corporations who brought investments and employed technically qualified Singaporeans. Right from the early days of national development, Singapore was

well integrated with not only the international economic system but also with global knowledge systems. Singapore's export-oriented economic development in the 1980s was dominated by IT and computer peripherals. In the 1990s, an emphasis on biotechnology followed the earlier emphasis on IT.

Singapore's development since her independence in 1965 can be described as a transformation from a Third World society to a First World economy. Much of that development can be attributed to Singapore's adoption of modern technology. Choices of technology were not always preceded by controversies and debates. Both the government and the general public showed a great deal of pragmatism in the choice of technology. Although in most instances, technology was adopted without much modifications, in the mode of use there were imprints of adaptation and glocalization. One such area is the electronic road pricing system. The technology of monitoring cars from a scanner fitted in a gantry was not a Singaporean invention, but the way that technology was used was very Singaporean. Because of the drive to catch up, Singapore has always been ahead in adopting new technology. In recent years, having achieved developed status, some Singaporeans are showing concern with issues of privacy because some of the new technology is intrusive. Singapore's love affair with technology is evident in the fact that Singapore ranks among the top three countries in the world in terms usage of personal computers as well as hand phones. The only country ahead of Singapore in the number of Short Messaging Service (SMS) sent is Hong Kong. Whenever a new technology is invented, Singapore would be one of the first places where that technology would show up. Singaporeans have a

favorable attitude towards technology. Singapore International Airlines, as well as the Port Authority of Singapore (PSA), remain equipped with state of the art technology. ATM machines in Singapore were introduced in the early 1980s. Singapore's public transport system is another place where one would find a great many applications of new technology. However, not all cases of the adoption of technology may be seen as examples of glocalization. In many instances, for example, computer technology in Singapore was implemented without any modifications. However, as Singapore entered a new phase of research in the 1990s, namely in the area of biotechnology, we find evidence of glocalization. Biotechnological research calls for a careful consideration of and orientation towards local cultural and ethical contexts. A good deal of attention has been given to these areas in Singapore.

Another area where examples of glocalization can be found in both Malaysia and Singapore is the area of architectural designs. In the post-socialist world, Singapore remains a unique society where 90% of the population lives in the houses built by the government and then sold to the citizens. When Singapore embarked on its massive public housing program, it borrowed the so-called international style of very basic and practical designs, yet a new concept of public space – though limited to the residents of the housing blocs – evolved. These spaces, known as void-decks, were places for weddings, funerals or other such communal gatherings. New designs blending Western and local motifs emerged in Singapore.

Although the initial architectural thrust of Singapore can be viewed as “brutalism” driven by a sheer pragmatic consideration, over the years more attention has been given

to the notions of fusion and hybridity, or in other words glocalization.

## 9. Conclusions

Singapore's development experience, which was underpinned by appropriate science and technology policies, provides a convincing example of the effectiveness of glocalization as a conscious development strategy. Although the strategy was not always perfect and there were lapses from time to time, on the whole Singapore has shown that cultural fusion can be an asset if properly harnessed for the objective of attaining socioeconomic growth without creating gross inequality and social dislocation.

The sociological concepts of globalization in general and glocalization in particular can be of great value in understanding the dynamic social transformation in Southeast Asia, especially in Singapore and Malaysia. It is always possible to be carried away with “methodological nationalism”, a position that says each country or society should be examined in the light of its own context and through the devices of its own homegrown methodology. Such a position would lead to intellectual closure, foreclosing dialogue and understanding between societies. In the globalized world such discourses have limited value. Yet, it is important to take account of the local context and variables and not to fall into the trap of blind imitation or aping of western ideas and concepts. However, in the end what is needed is a set of globally valid concepts that will help us examine processes of social transformation that are inextricably connected with global transformation.

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