ISYMUN

Issue : Does globalisation contribute to the erasure of cultural identity ?

Committee : Action Assembly

Introduction:

The 20th and 21st centuries can be characterised by one of their major aspects: the sudden acceleration of globalisation. This change led to a global connection and dependence between countries through the means of social media, flows of goods, and tourism.

Though globalisation has led to the meeting and creation of different cultures and subcultures, acculturation remains a contemporary phenomenon of our time and is the core of many controversies. Indeed, there is around the globe an activism from acculturated populations engaged in the recognition and conservation of their culture and subculture as it is disappearing. Nonetheless, the perspective of cultural erasure concerns not only minorities but also groups of the majority concerned about the prospect of their culture being acculturated and then erased.

As a consequence of this activism, one common question can be raised: does globalization contribute to the erasure of cultural identity?

Globalisation : The process in which the development of the economic, cultural and political relations among the States of the world becomes increasingly interconnected and similar due to an increase in trade and cultural exchanges.

Erasure : The act of removing or destroying all signs of something.

Cultural identity : The theory according to which an individual or a group of people identifies themselves through their belonging to a culture or subcultural categories (including ethnicity, nationality, gender, language, and religion.)

Acculturation: The process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between cultural groups and their individual members.

Enculturation: The process by which an individual learns the traditional content of a culture and assimilates its practices and values.

Nutrition transition: a shift in dietary consumption that coincides with economic, demographic, and epidemiological changes.

Americanization, Sinicization, Westernization: The adoption of the practices, and cultures of the United-States of America, China, and Western Europe, by societies and countries in other parts of the world, whether through compulsion or influence.

Media: Organization or individual using tools to store and deliver information to the population such as news and art.

Sinicization of Xinjiang

a) **Tibet :**

Tibet, located in between, India, Nepal, and China is [considered both by the Chinese government and the United Nations] a province of China. The majority of the people living in Tibet are Tibetans sharing a religion : Buddhism, and the Tibetan language.

Before the 1950s, Tibet was isolated from the rest of the world and had a smaller economic growth compared to a majority of Western countries and decolonised countries.

Around 1950, China invaded Tibet and, according to their narrative, lived a "peaceful liberation" from their 'dark age' where the main society was seen as feudal and therefore as backward. After claiming Tibet as a part of China, the Chinese government tried to eliminate religious influences in Tibetans lives, thus destroying about 6 000 shrines and monasteries. These religious infrastructures were not only used as faith 'temples' but served to teach the Tibetan language to many.

Nowadays, Tibet is mostly used by the Chinese government as a place of great tourism for the Chinese people and have marketed it as a touristic place with unusual customs, beliefs, and clothes. As such, China made many investments in the country like building a high-speed railroad that connects China and Tibet as well as an international airport. Moreover, high profile international investors also started to build hotels and such in Tibet, thus participating in the establishment of Tibet as a touristic place.

But Tibetans scarcely benefit from those constructions and face many interdictions in their own province. Indeed, although these new constructions could

help the employment of the locals, a majority of the employees are actually Chinese workers.

Furthermore, many Tibetans are victim of discrimination and cannot travel outside and sometimes even within the country. To do so much as to travel to the capital, they must be authorised to pass by the many checkpoints present in the country. Similarly, Tibetans can rarely access those newly built hotels and require, to be accepted in one of them, the authorisation of the police unlike the Chinese tourists that come visit the country. Tibetans have no immediate right to the Chinese passport despite the land being recognised as belonging to China too.

Additionally, Chinese tourists visiting Tibet are, more often than not, unaware of Tibetans practises and belief, and in an attempt to show off the best picture of their trip, become disrespectful to both the customs and the people of Tibet. Chinese tourists, while on their trips were also seen disrupting Tibetans daily lives. Those who are known as the 'photographer friends' disturb the locals by taking close-up pictures of their face, hindering their ways. Another group called the 'Tibet Drifters', often travel to pilgrimage but show little care or respect for the religious practises performed. These behaviours disrupt local practises and impact the life of Tibetans.

However, a resistance from Tibetans rose against the government plans against the culture and the tourists' behaviours. Both face denunciation on social media by the Tibetan community comparing their lack of consideration to an occupation. The Tibetan voice on social media such as Weibo and WeChat has proven to be effective in giving representation and accessibility to the Tibetan community. Indeed, after the construction of the railway many posted about the absence of the Tibetan language on the train tickets, stating that the new construction could help the local farmers, the train tickets were therefore changed after its spread on the internet.

b) Uyghur and Muslim minorities

The Xinjiang region (also known as the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region) is the home of 12 million Uyghurs[1] (according to the Chinese government), the majority of which are Muslims. As of 2020, researchers such as Adrian Zenz estimate the number of Uyghurs detained as more than 1.5 million in more than 1000 're-education' camps[2]. Since the beginning of this operation (~2010), China has used Uyghurs in forced labours such as picking up cotton from fields or by working in factories built next to the camps. These 're-education' camps are often the stage of mass rape, sexual abuse and sterilization of women.

It all started after the mass immigration of Han Chinese in the region, the settlement of new people started a clash between the population already there and the new one moving in. This created anti-Han and separatists movements from the 1990s in the Uyghur community resulting in major confrontations and violences from both parties. One of the main clash happened in 2009 and ended with the death of more than 200 people and concluded with the blame of Uyghurs. This set the basis of Uyghurs persecution by the state.

The Chinese government then started a network of surveillance with cameras in infrastructures such as mosques, along with checkpoints in the region; monitoring heavily the population. They began to target Imams (religious guides of the faith/prayers) and fervent practitioners of the religion, sentencing them to long detention in prisons alledgely because they were performing extremism propaganda, inciting separatism and disturbing the social order with religious gatherings.

To damage Uyghurs' culture, China took the decision to ban religious practices like pilgrimage and target religious figures. They also closed, destroyed or desecrated mosques and *mazar* (shrines) and demolished cities, forcing the population to relocate in modern apartment buildings.

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[1] The Chinese government seems to undercount the Uyghurs' population as some exiled Uyghurs claim that their population varies between 20 and 30 million people. (source)
[2] https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/zenz-11122019161147.html

The Chinese government, now free to exploit the lands as they wished, built similar structures as *mazar*, in which they aim to educate the people of the Han history. The shrines not destroyed as well as old cities were turned into museum and touristic attractions which showcased the 'backward' and 'uncivilised' way of the lives of Uyghurs.

In order to disrupt local practises the Chinese government imposed on the people to change their home furnishings. China banned from these homes the *supa*, elevated platform heated underneath that they would use to sleep, eat.

Changes of furniture included sleeping in 'Western-style' beds that would force them to sleep individually, clashing with their lifestyles and therefore altering (on a small level) household interactions. Moreover, forced relocation altered the traditions of inheritance practices, solidarity (between neighbours, elder care), rituals and overall cohabitation and reciprocity.

Westernization and Americanisation in the Pacific

   a) **Hong Kong and a bicultural history**

Located in the south-east of China, Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China. Though its 7.4 millions inhabitants are now governed by the Hong Kongese and Chinese government, the region used to be under the British ruling from 1898 to 1997 according to a pact between China and the United-Kingdoms. During the succession of governments, the Hong Kongers created an identity influenced by both Chinese and British cultures; two countries with strong worldwide influence: Sinicization and Westernization. The unique status of Hong Kong often described as 'one country, two systems' has given the right to Hong Kongers to freedoms denied in the mainland and a status of autonomy. Nonetheless, in 2019 protesters demonstrated to express and fight for their independence from China.

The start of the movement happened to be the introduction of a bill by the Hong Kong government. Protesters feared the bill allowed for the Chinese Communist Party to exile them in the mainland thus making them vulnerable to China's judiciary system and its known transgressions of human rights. Though the government claimed to have withdrawn the bill, protests continued and criticised the police brutality against civilians and protesters. This phenomenon led Hong Kong to be assimilated as a 'police state'. The Hong Kong and Chinese governments continued to pass laws and apply censorship against the freedom of expression and political activism of Hong Kongese, thus contradicting the Sino-British Joint Declaration which guaranteed for the supervising of the region to be unchanged for fifty years after the handover of Hong Kong from UK to China.

The state of Hong Kong culture under this 'police state' faces important threats and damages. The ruling system of Hong Kong is embedded in the bicultural history of the region, however the current years have proven this system is about to be replaced by the Chinese system earlier than it was agreed on. This fast change towards Sinicization also manifests beyond political governmentship as censorship aims to prevent the expression of Hong Kong culture. In 2012, the history books of Hong Kong secondary school were changed and the implication Hong Kong was a British colony disappeared and banners of Chinese propaganda were put on: "Celebrate return to China, opening a new chapter". Critical thinking and civic engagement were removed from the new curriculum. Since 2020, books mentioning the manifestation of 2019 and the Chinese Tiananmen repression in 1898 have been removed from circulation. As a result, 7000 teachers and university professors

quitted their jobs. The major actors of the cultural scene of Hong Kong are challenged; intellectuals, artists, and activists of Hong Kong face threats from so-called 'middle men' serving the CCP and are often arrested. The constant repression forced a majority of these cultural figures to flee to safer countries. This governmental restriction of media and education puts Hong Kong culture at risk of erasure as its existence and the expression of any culture relies on enculturation.

Following the protests and the laws of censorship, reactions of the international scene were heard. On the diplomatic end, both the Chinese government and the United Kingdom have accused the other country of disrespecting the Sino-British Joint Pact by exercising an 'intrusive presence' in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, British scholars actively conserve elements of the Hong Kong culture through the transmission of dialects and the preservation of documents such as books documenting the Hong Kong resistance and audios from public TV – both would be illegal in Hong Kong.
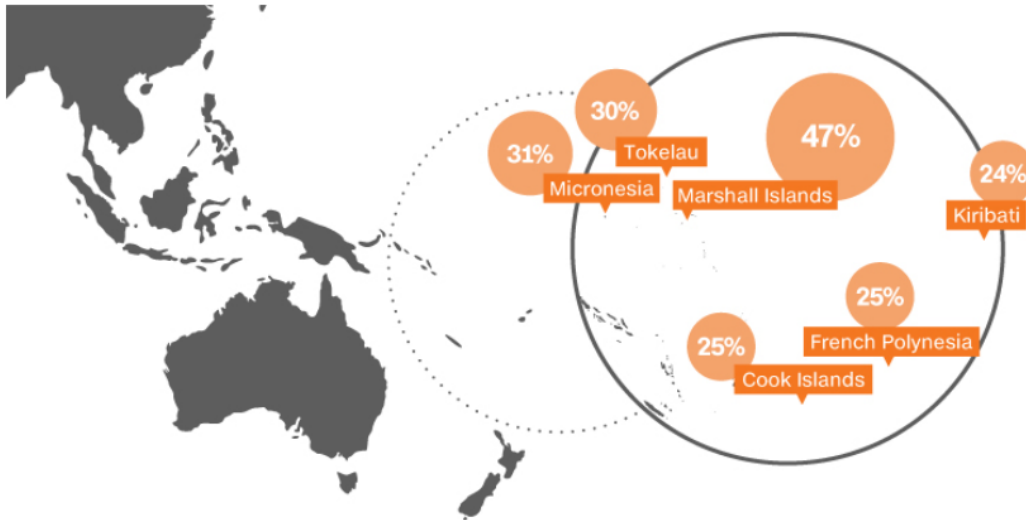
b) Pacific war and nutrition transition

The 'Pacific Islands' both designate the three major groups of islands of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia gathering a wide and rich variety of landscapes branded as 'idyllic' and praised by tourism. However, they are also the location of the ten most obese countries in the world, with deadly consequences on the lives of the Pacific Islanders for both children and adults.

Nonetheless, these islands weren't always the hotspots for tourism or health issues. Indeed, before it turned into the islands we know today, the Pacific Islands used to rely on fishing and agriculture creating a healthy diet made of fresh vegetable crops, and lean meat. The Pacific islanders' management of the environment was specific to their culture and allowed them to live in a demanding environment by maximizing resources. In the late 1800s, the Pacific Islands witnessed the arrival of colonizers with a diet of their own: the 'Western diet'. Full of sugars and fats, the new nutrients altered the culinary culture of the natives. These changes grew to be irreversible as the Pacific War of World War II accelerated the nutrition transition. Indeed, after and during the war, the native islanders faced drastic food shortages due to the destruction of their land, food rationing, and restrictions, making it impossible to live off local production. Western products brought by American troops such as spam became the only means of survival. From this point, processed foods and imported products effectively replaced the once healthy traditional diet of the Pacific islanders with an unhealthy cheap diet on the supermarket shelves. This dependence on imported foods became more important on the island of Nauru where the land was completely destroyed by pollution after the damages of colonization for profit. Thus, this diet became the standard of the Pacific Islander cultures as processed food made its way into the cultural recipes.

The consequences of this nutrition transition are felt throughout the Pacific Islands. From 30% to 50% of the island's population are obese, including children whom 20% are victims of obesity compared to 43% in adults. The numbers grow even higher when it concerns overweight with 77% of overweight adults in Nauru. This situation leads to a rise of non-communicable diseases, also known as NCDs, in these countries. NCDs are also the main cause of premature death in the islands. In 2014, there were 8 infants dead for one live birth in Nauru.

% DIABETES IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS (20-79 YEARS) 2014

SOURCE: International Diabetes Federation Diabetes Atlas

To overcome this issue, the native populations and an organization of farmers initiate programs to revive the interest in local products. They have taken actions to financially support the Farmers. On the other hand, the governments of twelve Pacific countries voted a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. Nonetheless, poverty and pollution prevent these programs from reaching all the populations of the Pacific Islands. On the government end, the USA being the main exporter of goods planned to extend the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to the US Pacific territories of American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands. However, this proposition never made it into the Law.

Major actors:

1- Actors of globalisation

China is primarily engaged in globalization due to its commercial omnipresence. The country owns many factories and harbors in its territory and worldwide thus making a

considerable income and playing a major role in the global trade scene a lot of countries depend on. The competitiveness of China reaches its limit when it comes to respecting human rights, especially those of non-Sinicized minorities within its governance.

The USA is the face of Western and American culture because of its technological and artistic innovation and influence. Recent American companies are quick to appear in European territory if not to be omnipresent on a global scale like social media, services of delivery, streaming platforms… Besides the economic influence, the USA's artistic scene has efficiently become a standard in Western culture for instance the scenes of fashion and music. However, the recognition of American culture isn't mutual. Territories that have been enculturated by the USA and have faced violence and deadly consequences for both the people and their culture rarely see support or reparation from the globally recognized nation.

Western countries involved in globalization happen to be the countries with a colonial past. These countries used to have occupied countries from all the other continents for motives of economic profit. During the occupations, crimes against humanity like slavery and genocide happened by the colonizers at the expense of the native populations. Today, most of the territories are governed by native nations. Nonetheless, these Western countries are still criticized for their industrial presence in past colonized countries, and it is said colonialism remains actual. Though western countries continue to profit from their 'occupation' of other territories, like the USA, western countries are praised for their modernism.

2- Subjects of Globalisation

Ethnic minorities – Due to being outnumbered or discriminated against, ethnic minorities have less representation than dominant ethnicities. Their culture is mostly known by those who were born in it, making it harder to preserve as ethnic minorities tend to forget their culture if not passed on. To make matters worse, some ethnic minorities are decreasing in number, thus putting their language and history on the verge of extinction. Ethnic minorities are mostly immigrants, from immigrant descent, or small isolated populations.

Other subcultural minorities – The specificity of belonging to subcultural minorities is that these subcultures are common to countries with more differences. Indeed, to belong to these minorities one doesn't have to be born with characteristics that would make them a minority in the country. Gender, religion, sexual orientation, and language are characteristics that either come from the choice of the individual or from birth without restriction based on

ancestry. These minorities face repression of dominant majorities because of their nonconformity to values shared by these majorities. It is in places where freedom and human rights are guaranteed that these subcultural minorities are the safest. Their culture can be borderless as they don't depend on the countries they are in but rather on the possibility to share their experience and access their culture. Thus, their strongest chance to resist the erasure are media and freedom of expression.

3- The role and ownership of the media

From the local to global scales, **media** play a role of distributor of culture through the publications of artistic craft or documentation of history. Medias are necessary means of connection between people and culture. Without it, the access and transmission of one's culture would be difficult and the existence and acceptation of that culture would then be at stake. However, the role of media in the context of globalization and culture erasure is more complex.

The simple existence of media isn't enough for culture to be preserved, for the content the media share are means of enculturation and acculturation. If misinformation happens to be shown through the media, this misinformation would become the image one has about one's culture; this phenomenon can be seen in the transmission and perpetuation of stereotypes. On the contrary, the publication of accurate cultural content improves the representation of one's culture on the scale the media operates. Thus, one's cultural identity would be preserved. Nonetheless, the cultural content available for access can vary depending on the control exercised on the media. For example, mainstream media tend to be part of a conglomerate owned by wealthy individuals or governments and can be subject to censorship to correspond either to the law or the beliefs of the individuals. Such restrictions would not be applied to independent media. However, the mainstream media have a broader influence on the global scene.

Being either motivated by money or dependent on approval from the state, these mainstream media broadcasting adjust their content (see Netflix and Disney). This choice contributes to a cultural normativity excluding the representation of other cultures, effectively erasing these cultures from media.

Questions to consider/reflect on:

Is colonialism over?
Are there remnants of colonialism?
Does culture belong to anyone? If it does, to whom?

Is culture being erased or evolving? What are the impacts of acculturation? Of cultural erasure?
Who is concerned by cultural identity erasure?
How does imperialism contribute to globalization and to the erasure of cultural identity?
What are solutions to preserve cultural property such as land, language, religions?
Who owns a culture: the individuals of said culture or the government?
Is culture a property of government, of people, or both?
Are the ones who have authority over a culture also the ones who identify with the culture?

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