

Commentary

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Imagining the New Global Village

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To imagine a “New Global Village” at a time of rising nationalism and isolationism appears anachronistic. However, as Laozi’s philosophy reveals, reversion is the action of Dao, the repetitive cycle is the law that governs the movement of things. Capitalist globalization, as we know, is confronting a structural crisis. However, it is from this crisis that a more inclusive and equitable type of globalization emerges. Likewise, although the erosion of the existing “Global Village” beneath the unequal and unsustainable forces of modernization and urbanization is deeply unfortunate and destructive, it is also through this suffering where the hope for a “New Global Village” – one that bridges the centre and periphery gap and eliminates the urban and rural divide – is being engendered.

In 2013, China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative. The most hopeful aspect of this initiative will be the promotion of the development of the global “countryside”, i.e., regions that have been marginalized by the current globalization process. In 2017, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China elevated “rural revitalization” to the level of a national strategy, thereby issuing the marching calls for the convergence of urban and rural development and the revitalization of rural China. The outward-oriented Belt and Road Initiative and the internal-driven strategy of rural revitalization not only constitute the phoenix wings of a rejuvenating Chinese nation, but also serve as the two wings that carry the imagination of a “New Global Village”.

Marshall McLuhan’s concept of the “Global Village” evokes people’s imagination about village communities and inspires a technological utopian reverie. He

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is not concerned, however, about the development of the “Third World”, let alone the fate of tens of thousands of concrete villages in the world. Today, even though the Internet brings the “Global Village” closer to reality, inequalities created by the existing process of globalization has deepened the gaps between states, classes, nations, regions, between urban and rural areas. From the Middle East to the United States, disappointment and despair of the lower reaches of the population in rural, inland, and urban slums has provided a cultural and political ground for right-wing populism, ultra-nationalism, and even terrorism. Against this background, it is more important and urgent than ever to focus on villages and to open up the imagination for a “New Global Village” that can bring substantive development to the rural and urban poor.

China furnishes the following important conditions for the imagination of a “New Global Village”. First, in the transformation from an earth-bound society to a modern country, China has preserved the cultural and historical continuity of the world’s longest agrarian civilization. The classical notion of “when the great way prevails, all under the heaven is for the public” resonates with the modern idea of communism, while the daily life of the countryside still has a rich community ethos; meanwhile, commercial and cultural praxis based upon the ancient Silk Road contained a rich heritage of historically non-capitalist and non-imperialist alternative “globalizations”. Second, the Chinese Communist Revolution is an important achievement of the international Communist movement as the antithesis of capitalist globalization, and it is also a genuine social revolution that brings dignity to the lower classes. The Chinese socialist path set forth by this revolution possesses a historically grounded societal and popular foundation. From the efforts to explore a new type of collective economy in the context of rural revitalization, we can see that socialism still has a strong transformative vitality in rural China.

We urgently need to imagine new dimensions of globalization in the context of “counter-globalization” as a means to transcend internationally the unequal, political and economic order and overcome looming ecological crises. Whether the Belt and Road Initiative will bring peace and development to the countries along the route is closely related to the developmental direction of China’s rural revitalization strategy. The Belt and Road Initiative’s success is also indicative of the unfolding of a path of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” that avoids the fate of the market-devouring-society and the the-urban-eradicating-the-rural outcomes. A path of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” will also help the establishment of more equality among classes, and foster more equitable regional and ethnic relations within the relevant countries.

The concept of the “Global Village” and the attention paid from the outset to technological diffusion and rural development is central to communication studies. Taking this into account, I take an urban-rural relationship perspective to

consider whether a society can avoid the capitalistic logic of the urban-eradicating-the-rural in its inner development as a starting point for this kind of thinking. Meanwhile, my notion of a “New Global Village” is premised upon a more equitable, pluralistic, and multipolar international relations as the core of an alternative imagination of a globalization model. The “New Global Village” referred to herein is therefore a “Global Village” that overcomes the metabolic rift between human and nature that Karl Marx discussed. It is a “Global Village” that transcends the inevitable eradication of the rural by the urban, and it is a “Global Village” that contains substantive democratic connotations such as equality and participation in domestic and international relations. In this sense, the “New Global Village” is a community with a shared future for mankind.

The imagination of the “New Global Village” is rooted in the social practice of different social subjects in all corners of the globe beyond exploitation and oppression. It maintains equality and reciprocity between humanity, whilst sustaining a harmonious and symbiotic relationship between human and nature. These practices are the “resources of hope” of the “New Global Village”.

Just as Communism is not a utopia, but rather “the real movement which abolishes the present state of things”, the “New Global Village” is not a mirage. When Evo Morales – the aboriginal former President of the small South American nation of Bolivia – was furious at the United Nations about U.S. foreign policy, when a Canadian PhD student of mine tried to understand a Chinese form of development and popular participation outside political models of liberalism; and when my African Master’s students visited the Chinese countryside and realized that modernization did not have to mean urbanization, and that the countryside was not destined for poverty, I saw the contours of the “New Global Village” being bred within the “Old Global Village”.