Chapter 16
Culture and Heritage Preservation in an Era of Globalization and Modernism:
A Comparative Study of China and Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

According to a number of myths, the cultural effects of globalization and modernization have not really impeded East Asian countries' efforts towards cultural heritage preservation. In tandem with this, many "fascinated" members of the African intelligentsia view Eastern Asian nations such as China, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand among others as true models to be emulated by their nations in the realm of cultural heritage preservation. This chapter examines the extent to which this thesis is plausible, through a critical study of the impact of globalization and modernization on cultural heritage preservation in China and Nigeria. The chapter begins by exploring the question of cultural preservation in an era of modernization and cultural globalization and ends up assessing the degree to which China and Nigeria's efforts towards cultural heritage preservation have been affected by cultural globalization and a West-dominated model of modernization.

INTRODUCTION

Modernization and cultural globalization have constituted a serious problematic and a dilemma for both Asian and African countries, particularly in the socio-cultural realm (Ekpang, 2008; Endong 2015; Hirai, 2014; Keping, 2012). This observation is connected to the fact that the two paradigms are mostly associated with a number of socio-cultural and political forces that are visibly inimical to the preservation of cultural diversity particularly in Third World countries. Modernization for instance, is arguably equated to a pro-westernization force, and is therefore viewed as one of the phenomena responsible for cultural erosion in Third World countries. In tandem with this, a good number of imaginations stipulate

that the modernization paradigm has facilitated Asian and African countries' systematic adoption of western patterns of development (Endong 2015; Matunhu 2011; Odinye & Odinye 2012; Tunde, 2005). Such an adoption of western patterns has been in almost all realms of human endeavors including the cultural domain. This position visibly hinges on the maxim that, the modernization paradigm entails that developed countries (mostly the US-led West) serve as infallible models and pathfinders to all developing countries. As Giddens (1982) succinctly observes, the modernization paradigm assumes that industrialism and modernism constitute a liberalizing and progressive force; and hence, western societies provide a model to be followed by developing nations, even in the cultural realm. Furthermore, the modernization paradigm stipulates that developing nations are not just *under*developed, but they are in real sense, *un*developed as they await the impact of industrial transformation. To safely reach the shore of socio-cultural and political development, they must follow the route designed and followed by the western developed countries. Following similar pattern of socio-cultural development with Europe and America has, in essence, meant westernization, Europeanization or Americanization and serious challenges in the domain of culture and heritage preservation in both Asia and African countries.

Similarly to the modernist paradigm, cultural globalization has, for some critics, entailed unavoidable cultural erosion and for others, culture mutations. Scholars such as Griesbrecht (2011) pertinently note that cultural globalization actually presents visible paradoxes. On one hand, the phenomenon enables the cultural empowerment of people and facilitates the construction of a collective identity, meanwhile, on the other hand, it is susceptible to dis-empower people as it enables misrepresentation; facilitates neo-colonization and subtly propels the loss of individualism and group identity. Quoting a large number of culture theorists, Griesbretch (2011) adds that cultural globalization has given rise to two competing visions, one of which is unfriendly to cultural diversity. This vision – which, to him, is inimical to cultural diversity – specifically envisages a corporate-dominated monoculture where nations and cultural groups alike are deprived of autonomy and identity.

Despite the quasi-indomitable nature and the relative "rigidity" of the westernizing effects of globalization and modernism on world cultures, critics have observed that East Asian countries have made some formidable efforts to resist westernization. This has been to the extent that many "fascinated" African scholars and intelligentsia even view Eastern Asian nations such as China, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand among others as true models of cultural preservation. As Elsje (2011) insightfully puts it, "from Kenya to Ethiopia, policymakers are looking east in the search for an adaptable development blueprint" not only in the sphere of politics and economics but equally in the realm of cultural development (particularly culture and heritage preservation). In the same line of argument, Afro-centric scholars such as Idowu (1999), Ekpang (2008), Odinye and Odinye (2012) and Endong and Essoh (2015) have enjoined African countries to emulate the singular efforts of Asian countries, particularly those of the Chinese government towards a phenomenal preservation of their respective cultures and heritage.

This position or imagination however foregrounds a number of questionings, some of which include the followings: to what extent have China's efforts towards culture and heritage preservation been exemplary and different from those of the Black African countries? To what extent have the Chinese cultural values or models of cultural preservation been immune to the phenomena of pro-west modernization and cultural globalization? Is it possible to achieve real cultural preservation in an era of cultural globalization and modernization (which have been synonymous with westernization or Americanization)? What are similarities (if ever they exist) and differences in Asian and African countries' patterns of heritage and culture preservation?

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