

**“So, we are gonna have a real ‘global city!’”**

**Contesting The Recent Debate On Global City  
Formation And Its Reformulation In Taipei**

**DRAFT**

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## **Constructing Phenomenon**

Since the 1980s, nationalism has been the dominant rhetoric in public sphere in Taiwan while in the 1990s, the idea of globalism gradually becomes prevailing, especially in terms of urban planning and policy making. Unquestionably, for many planners and policy makers, the issues such as "how to participate in global society?" become their mentality and priority in setting political agenda and mapping the future. I am curious about what lies beneath the transformation of public discourse? Especially for the historical specificity of Taiwan, in terms of its uncertainty of sovereignty nation-state, does the emergence of city has its political significance? If yes, what would that be? Furthermore, due to the competition among other quanzi "global cities" such as Hong Kong and Shanghai, Taipei not only has to claim itself as a "globalized city" but also has to be a "real" one, a real one which can the representative city for sovereignty nation state. I am also curious about if that transformation and competition among cities affect the local democracy and politics for the local.

Globalization, especially for the recent three decades, would probably be the tremendously crucial forces in restructuring and reshaping the contemporary world and our living experiences. As sociologist Roland Robertson stated (1996) in his prevailingly influential book, "[g]lobalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole"(Robertson, 1996: 8) Such awareness of global flows indeed resonated with the earlier depiction made by Anthony Giddens that "the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa." (Giddens, 1990:64) In other words, our lives in different locals are more and more influenced mutually in a global scale.

## **Problematic**

In addition to the unprecedented experiences above, the contemporary globalization also brings challenges and brainstorming to our conventional disciplines such as humanities and social science. Some social theories and concepts, such as state, government, civil society, city, culture, community and locality, etc., now all become somehow ambiguous and definitely need further reconstruction in the global context. In terms of this, my problematic first is that what would be the best framework to explain not only the global process emphasizing its homogeneity but also the local impact and its politics? Or, let me ask it in other way, if those traditional concepts and frameworks doesn't work well in constructing the local/global complexity, then what will be the possible way to see the process and politics?

Secondly, since the city often use by scholars as the "strategic site" for observing the transformation of world capitalism and tackling its politics (Saskia Sassen for

example), I want to know why we put city first in grasping the new trends and politics? And what is the political and cultural consequence for the global city formation?

### **Writing Framework**

Therefore, in this paper, I would like to contest the recent theories and debate on “global city formation” which mainly extracted from those metropolitan cities from old empires such as London and New York and see what we could learn from there. Furthermore, I want to know what would be their weakness and limitation when we use the global city hypothesis to see the globalization process and its impact on cities in the semi-peripheral such as Taipei (Taiwan). At the end, I would like to take Taipei City as an example, in terms of place formation and identity politics in global city, to figure out if there’s new formulation on global city formation.

My writing for answering the questions I raise up here and would try to focus on three lines: 1) searching for a better framework to look at the process of contemporary globalization and its impact on the city; 2) introduce and contest the recent debate on global city formation, to see its weakness and strength, limitation and possibilities. Also, would like to know if there’s alternative way to see the similar but actually different process in East Asia; 3) Interpretation on the case study in the Globalizing Taipei City.

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### **I Searching for Perspectives: Articulating the global and the local**

Globalization theories such as world system theory or modernization theory overemphasize their systemness and homogeneity but neglect to look at the complexity that globalization bring up, i.e. to look at the two-way processes together. In order not to focus just one side, *Glocalization*, as Eade suggested, may be a more accurate term to describe the global/local relationship and dynamics. It used to be a term which was developed in particular reference to marketing issues by Japanese entrepreneur, i.e. “global localization”, meaning how to make global commodities work into the local context (Robertson, 1996 173-4). It refers, in Eade’s words, in the subjective and personal sphere, to the construction and invention of diverse localities through global flows of ideas and information. (Eade, 1997)

Cvetkovich and Kellner who are interested in how identity politics transform in the global age also echoed this two-way perspective. “Dichonemies, such as those between the global and the local, express contradictions and tensions between crucial constitutive forces of the present time; consequently, it is a mistake to overlook focus on one side in favor of exclusive concern with the other (Cvetkovich and Kellner, 1997: 1-2) Therefore, “our challenge is to think through

the relationship between the global and the local by observing how global forces influence and even structure ever more local situations and ever more strikingly. One should also see how local forces and situations mediate the global, inflecting global forces to diverse ends and conditions and producing unique configurations for thought and action in the contemporary world.” (Ibid)

In order to search a space for politics, Eade suggested, rather than treat globalization as a unitary and homogenization process, we attempt to understand how it articulates with distinctive ensembles of class and culture, power constellations and patterns of state/ society relations specific to each locality. He emphasized that “hence our focus is upon process of localization, ” (Eade, 1997) In my word, it's even more important to see how the local represent globality that globalization brought in and actively reformulate the process.

To sum up, I have three analytical frameworks to look at the global impact— localization, “locality” and local politics. They are:

### **1) Localization is part of globalization : translocal connection**

Continuing his reassertion of process of localization, Robertson, argued that globalization entails the reconstruction and “the production of ‘home’, ‘community’, and ‘locality’”(Robertson, 1995:30). Therefore, “‘locality’ can be regarded, with certain reservation, as an *aspect* of globalization”(ibid. emphasis in the original). Through global compression localities are both brought together and invented (Ibid, 35; quoted from Eade 1997)

Anthropologist, Arjun Appadurai (1996) also mentioned that the global-wide localization movements and the global-wide production of locality today can't be understood without articulating with the process of nation-state building. Therefore, we need a new framework to articulate the global, the national and the local.

Cvetkovich and Kellner (1997) suggested to link different localities together and see how the translocal connection make sense of the process and how they “translate” their meaning. They said, “exploring disjunctions and distances between locations, differences that are a function of both geography and power, they seek new models for articulating a system of global relations that cannot be subsumed under a single explanation framework. The challenge of understanding different locations from what must, inevitably, be a located position gives rise to questions of translation.” (p.24) “Translocal analysis finds its object not just in national political struggles or economic relations but individual experiences of crossing the boarder or teaching a class—in other words, in the spaces of everyday life.” (P.25)

### **2) The reassertion of agency, subjective interpretation and invention in globalization process**

Many scholars argued that globalization is such a structural or structuring process but seriously neglect who is going to conduct the process and who is going to be benefited. We should put cultural autonomy and interpretation at the first place when we are talking about system-driven globalization.

### **3) City as the strategic site for rethinking politics in global age**

Many scholars take city as the strategic site for them to observe how capitalism expands and embeds within a city. Saskia Sassen argued that she sees city as an important site for global politics because it is exactly the frontier of global economy where new class conflicts associated with race and gender, etc. took place. Ed Soja (2000) echoed that assertion and put even more emphasis by saying “putting city first”, i.e. city as a political space has been always associated with the definition of democracy and the center for human life. In addition, in the chapter titled as “globalization of cityspace”, he tried to assert the spatial dimension of globalization.

## **II. Contesting the recent debate on Global City formation**

Since the importance of the city becomes more visible in global age, I would like to do some critical review on global city formation and see the limitation and the possibilities.

### **1) From World City to Global City: city and the restructuring of world capitalism**

In its contemporary manifestation, the emphasis on a system of world-cities can be traced back to Peter Hall. According to Hall (1984:1), the idea of world cities as “those in which quite a disproportionate part of the world’s most important business is conducted”. The concept was updated by Friedmann and Wolff to emphasize the emergence of a relatively few centers of command and control in a world economy<sup>1</sup>. Later, Friedmann goes further to explore some cities in semi-peripheral or peripheral area such as Asia and Australia and tried fitting them to modifying world city system and build up the city system of hierarchy. Anthony King (1990, 1997) tried to prove that western colonialism actually expands with the expansion of modern capitalism by articulating the world cities in the first world with those in the third world.

With the similar assumption and hypothesis, in her landmark book, *The Global City* (1990), Saskia Sassen focused more on centrality of space and the politics of the city. In addition, she shifted the studies from manufacturing industries to urban service industries, which has been the main transformation in

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<sup>1</sup> Extensions and appraisals of the concept have been offered in, for example, Knox and Taylor eds. *World Cities and a World System*, and a special issues of *Urban Geography*, Vol. 17, No.1, Columbia: Bellwether Publishing, Ltd.; and the *Annuals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1997: *Globalization and the Changing US city*, (May), Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.

contemporary global economy. Different from the above, she's more focus on labor instead of city system per say.

Nevertheless, all these theorists are all inherited from Wallerstein's world- system hypothesis that regard globalization as a direct extension of the "western project of modernity".

Like Robertson criticized, however, those approaches fail to identify the actual, changing form of globalization and underestimate both the relative autonomy of culture and the political interoperation of modernization and globalization. (See Robertson, 1996)

My critiques for either world-city hypothesis or global city hypothesis are summed up as following:

- 1) World-system approach toward globalization are too systematic and homogenous to see how agency, except capital, participate in the whole process. In addition, the neo-classical economic model and economic determinism behind analysis actually neglect other dimensions of globalization, such as the political, the cultural and even the spatial. For example, the analytical opposition between capital and labor made other agency impossible and invisible.
- 2) Assuming western project of modernity as the expansion of western colonialism to other third world cities would reinforce the process of self-centering. For example, Friedmann's herarchitization of world-cities and their modification as semi-peripheral and peripheral cities unconsciously assume that the uneven development and power dynamics among different cities would never change. Those theories are colonized by predominant cold war rhetoric by taking the opposition between first world and third world for granted.
- 3) Global city as strategic site either for being new command center or a new political space for democracy, they are definitely not only passive container but also a dynamic and active factor participating in influencing people's experience, the sense of place and identity formation.

## **2) Globality in the city: representation of inequality and heterogeneity**

In addition to theorizing world-city system among cities, many scholars also tried to represent the globality within cities. Take Sassen for example. After depicting the whole transformation of global economy and its impact on pulling in huge amount of immigrants, she tried to focus on the "new inequality" between high-tech elitists and low-skilled immigrant labors in the city. Anthony King's project focused on the representation of unevenness by way of mapping out colonial landscape and identity politics among cities. As to Ed. Soja's theorization on

diversity and difference are more postmodern. On the one hand, he sees how the social injustice become more spatialized, on the other hand, he would like to let the “social mosaic” open to different ways of interpretation.

In addition, there are some scholars who take difference not as an outcome but an on going process in order to grasp its dynamics. Therefore, instead of patternizing the existing cities or prioritize any kind of city models, they use the rough term, “globalizing cities” to name for those cities which may still under the tremendous influence by different kinds of global forces. (See Oncu and Weyland eds. 1997 and Marcuse et. al. eds. 2000). Echoing on this, I am going to take globalization as a kind of process-oriented concept and try to tell about the story in still-globalizing Taipei.

### **III. Globalizing Taipei Place and Identity formation in global age**

#### **1) Localization movement and the nation-state building project as parts of globalization process**

##### ***Historical background***

Since the 1960's, Taiwan has participated in the world production and served as one of the main sites for providing cheap labors. Since the 1980's, with the wave of new international division of labor, Taiwan started to participate in the new mode of global production and upgraded as a semi-peripheral area. However, due to the negative response from China PRC and thus got excluded from the United Nation community in 1972, the question with regards to returning back to the UN and being a member of global community have been always the most crucial issue in public sphere. Until the late 1980s, along with the new industrial restructuring, including the process of deindustrialization and regionalization (toward Southeast Asia and Southern China), the nation-state building project mainly led by ethnic Taiwanese elitists and entrepreneurs began to conduct the new wave of “localization movement” (, KII). In the 1990's, along with the development of mass consumerism and pouring of transnational corporations, the so-called “internationalization movement” or “globalization movement” ( KII η KII ) began to take up the main public sphere. In other words, the nation-state building project in the local always has to negotiate with global forces from outside which include mainly negative response from China PRC with the rhetoric of Chinese nationalism and unstable support from the United States with the cold war-like rhetoric of anti-China discourse.

##### ***Negation logic and self-claiming logic of nation-state building***

Linguistically, it seems that there are two kinds of logics going on with entrepreneurs-led nation-state building project. One is the logic of negation (& /), which is conducted by declaring “Taiwan is NOT part of China” domestically, while the other is to claim legitimacy from outside world (≤: /), i.e. claiming Taiwan's national sovereignty by showing their economic achievements

to the global community that Taiwan is materially an independent sovereignty nation-state. *The new new nation* (“新新國家”), a book written by Hsu Hsin-Liang (1990) and those who are main policy makers for Progressive Democratic Party (DPP, 2000, the old oppositional party at that time but now is the governing party), could be the best example to employ such negation logic and new Taiwanese transnationalism.

### ***Resource of legitimacy in public sphere***

Due to the negation logic of nation building in the local and global society, it profoundly formulated the dynamics and rhetoric of public sphere in Taiwan, especially for the last two decades in twenty century. Compared to the welfare state building in the US or Europe, the practices of public sphere and the obtain of political legitimacy symbolically, whether political or cultural, extremely depend more on the ability to catch up with the global trends or articulate the idea of globalism. Therefore, there's no problem to understand the logic behind the prevailing political propaganda in the early 80s: "The world is changing, the trend is changing, so we have to change!" (“世界在變，趨勢在變，我們也要變!”), which would be made by the former president, Chiang Ching-Guo, who is also well known for initiating localization movement in Taiwan. Another example would be “*Regional Operations Center*” (ROC, 1990s), the dominant political, economic and spatial project led by central government in the 1990s. “It is the “way-out” strategy that government figure out to not only participate in the global economy but also as a main national policy with its abbreviation of ‘ROC’” (Hsia, 1995:67-9) From the global/local context, the *Community Building Project* (1990s), the spatially bottom-up participation project for nation-building, could be re-read as a final fight for state elitists to sustain the almost-gone national territory under the threaten of the overwhelming consumerism.

### ***The Rise of the City***

Another frontier is the space of local government and its governing space: the city. The rise of the city politics in Taiwan not only attribute to economic development and fast urbanization but also associate with the political strategy of DPP in the early 1990s. “The short cut to take over the state: from city governance to national governance” my own translation, 1990s as main project for DPP to conduct their political struggle for governing. Later, when they first won the mayorship in Taipei in 1994. it entails the two following policies, *Making City Diplomacy* (1990s), taking city as a way out to breakthrough the obstacle for not being sovereign nation-state, and *Global City Forum* (1990s) as a way to appropriate the current globalism. For almost one decade, the city and local government as agency have been playing a pivotal role in articulating the local and the global.

## **2) Multi-layered globalization conducted by local government and civil groups**

If we look closely at how globalization goes on by way of local agency who

actively participate in articulating globalism, among central government, local government and civil groups etc., we would find that actually the ways they formulate and translate are so differently.

***A) appropriation of globalism and urban symbolism by state elitists***

For central governments, as mentioned earlier on, localization movement is definitely activated by general global movement of nation-state building. Therefore, the way they respond to the global force would have to associate with national rhetoric. However, for local government, especially for municipal government-elect, the way of appropriating and translating globalism are somehow more mixed and flexible. They don't have to always stick to national position but open to different hybrid national cultures and politics.

Let's take "Globalizing Taipei Project" (全球台北) and its related urban restructuring for example. With the slogan of "Hope and Happiness" (希望與幸福), this is the most important political and historical spatial project conducted by oppositional party when they won the presidency in the city. Although the mentality for oppositional party, this will be a good way to show how they govern the city as the way they will govern the nation in the future, the ways that state elitists translate are vividly and flexibly strategic. "We are gonna have a 'real' global city!" a gorgeous official planner told me in a sarcastic tone when I asked him about the details regarding Globalizing Taipei *Project*. And then, he said "however, that doesn't mean we really want a real one like the one in Manhattan, we are actually gonna do global city propaganda with our left hands but do the urban renewal project with our right hands." (Refer to interview)

**Urban Restructuring: still-on-going modernization, and hybridized identity formation**

***Bourgeois's city***

As the state elitists told, the actual practices of "globalizing" project led by local government go into two different ways. On the one hand, municipal government tried to conduct large-scale urban renewal projects in the city in order to please emerging high-income bourgeois class and yield spaces for transnational corporations and mass consumption by way of adjusting the urban functions and symbols. For example, in late 1980s, government began inexorably to tear down many urban slums where used to live many earlier rural urban migrants and urban minorities<sup>2</sup> into city parks. Those urban protests, such as "Park # 7 Urban Protest" and "Park # 14 and # 15 Urban Protest", are such tragic events which are known as the parody of "green bulldozer" (see Huang, 1997).

**Hybridized place and identity formation**

There are two kinds of globality in Taipei. One is American globality with the

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<sup>2</sup> Most of them are actually old soldiers or military servers retreated from Mainland China with KMT 50 years ago.

spatial articulation with New York City while the other is Japanese globality with connection to Tokyo City. They reconstructed the east side of Taipei and make it into a brand-new landmark for global financial capitals, called “*Taipei Manhattan Project*” ( 台北曼哈頓 ), and build up large scale shopping mall complex for transnational corporation such as Disney Complex and the big sign of Mickey Mouse. As to the Westside of the city, it used to be the site for nurturing Taiwanese National Independent Movement but now it becomes a new space for the urban youth, called “*Ci-Men-Ding Promenade Project*” ( 西門町 ), which is also recognized as the symbolic place for “Japanophil people” ( 日本ophile )

On the other hand, municipal government still tried very hard to rescue and maintains its own national territory by way of setting up memorial sites and symbolic landmark for national identity. For example, they renamed the Taipei New Park to 228 memorial Park in memory of those victims for Taiwanese nation building; Also, they rename the main boulevard right in front of president hall to “Katagalan Boulevard” ( 凱道 ) which is entitled in the name of one of indigenous people in Taiwan. In addition, they choose fifteen middle class urban communities in the city to be the model communities for citizen participation design ( 社區營造 ) and host a annual writing contest, photo exhibition ( 城市寫真 ) for citizens to inscribe their everyday life experiences in the city ( 城市生活 ).

Along with the negation logic, I mentioned earlier on, within local/global dynamics, and in order to avoid the greater china ideology, the identity formation projects led by municipal government in Taiwan become very open for global identities stimulated and activated by mass media and consumption. Therefore, after articulating the two dominant cultural hegemonies such as Americanization and Japanization, The Taiwanese Identity formation would turn out to be and have to be relatively hybridized.

## **B) The emergence of transnational public space and new global citizen?**

With the push from governmental policy and promotion by transnational forces like mass consumerism, the networking of civil society and identity formation of civil groups become more and more transnational. There are two kinds of developments within civil movements in the globalizing city. One is traditional urban social movements such as urban slum protests, community participation projects, etc. which are based on request of redistribution of collective consumption and usually need the local state to moderate the redistribution process. The other are those that are based on the identity politics such as gay and lesbian movements, Japanophil cultural movements ( 日本ophile ), etc. They all try to form a brand-new transnational public sphere and become quasi-global citizens which is based on universal and international human rights regime. However, it seems that those grouping based on identity formation are more powerful and obtain more legitimacy in the public sphere than the others do because they can easily get access to globalism and global support. Like gay

movements in Taiwan are more global and so more visible among others.

Compared to the restructuring projects led by governments, those ways that such global citizens practice their rights by way of “performancing” and caliming their identity and make their own space by way of “occupying” parts of the city. Take gay movements for example. Without coming out movements on the individual basis, gay community could gain their political and cultural legitimacy from catching up with their global community and still go on their movements.

Therefore, it become ironic that on gay and lesbian rights day this year, both city major and president came to give talks and their support without any hesitation. Instead of gay rights claiming, Major Ma said: “We have to let the world all know that Taiwan ROC is one of the countries who can really support gays!”

### **3) Some reflection**

Those transnational communities could get their global risibility without state’s moderation while those traditional urban social movements decline. The new rhetoric in public sphere release crisis and opportunity at the same time. It seems that in global age, the gaining of public legitimacy for civil groups depends on the ability to get access to global visibility. Therefore, we can see the possible result in the future that those traditional urban protests and those urban minorities and underclass such as sex workers would become so “hopeless and unhappy” while those new cultural groups become so globally visible and successful.

Such developments give rise to two different kinds of political consequence with regards to global governance and citizenship transformation. First of all, when those global citizens have superb political and cultural legitimacy but just in fact they can’t have real social benefits. Who can get global connection, who get more legitimacy. It creates new inequality in terms of grouping and rights defining. Secondly, due to the retreat or decline of municipal government, the privatization of public sphere gives rise to the difficulty of rights claims, especially there’s still lack of global governing regime. I have to say that it would be a little pessimistic to see the fast shrinking of the public space while we are optimistically celebrate the “liberation” with the veil of privatization that globalization brought to us.

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[to be continued...]