

**CULTURAL CONFRONTATION AND COMPROMISE:
THE RESPONSE OF NON-WESTERN SOCIETIES
TO WESTERN POLITICAL IDEAS**

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Abstract

This essay proposes a new method of understanding non-Western societies' responses to Western political ideas and religions. While the two main existing explanations of non-Western responses to the West can account for why non-Western societies accept or refuse Western cultures, both fail to address how Western and non-Western cultures interact with each other. This failure keeps the two dominant approaches from facilitating powerful and realistic understandings of non-Western societies' responses to Western cultures. This article proposes an alternative approach rooted in Gadamer's hermeneutical theory. This proposed alternative view directly addresses the interaction between Western and non-Western cultures, and holds that such interactions can be effectively explained by looking into the ways non-Western societies' intellectuals perceive and receive Western cultures. This new Gadamerian perspective leads to a better model of non-Western societies' attraction to, repulsion from, and incorporation of Western cultural elements.

Introduction

In this modern age most non-Western societies have acted as receivers and rejecters of cultural elements transmitted by the West. To date, research into these vital processes has been dominated by two theoretically distinct approaches. One approach might be termed "power reductionism" and the other a "quest for cultural compatibility." Both of these approaches suffer from serious methodological and theoretical problems stemming from their exponents' weak theoretical or methodological self-reflection. In what follows I critique the methodological premises and consequent theoretical implications of the two dominant approaches, with an eye to enriching the study of international cultural diffusion.

Power reductionism is represented by the late Joseph Levenson (1958) and Samuel Huntington (1996), among others. In the 1950s Levenson (1958, pp. 156-163) concluded his study of modern Chinese intellectual life with the following thesis. When one society

impinges on another society and disrupts its social order, the former's ideas displace the latter's and become the cultural "language" of the victimized society. In contrast, when the contact between two societies is predominantly intellectual, it may lead to the enrichment of each other's "vocabulary." Because China had been subject to imperialist aggression from the West and experienced consequent social turmoil, he holds, it had to accept Western culture as its cultural "language."

Almost four decades later, Huntington tried to answer the following question: Why do non-Western societies reject Western culture while at the same time increasingly asserting their own culture? The answer he provides is strikingly similar to Levenson's thesis. The diffusion of Western culture throughout much of the contemporary world and its subsequent retreat should be understood as being caused by the change in the relative power of the West. When a society or a civilization is building up its power, its culture acquires attractiveness. Furthermore, this society uses its power to impose its culture on other societies. Thus the spread of Western culture throughout the world is due to the upsurge of Western power in modern times. On the other hand, the rejection of Western culture is engendered by the decline of the West's relative power brought about by non-Western societies' accumulation of power through modernization (Huntington, 1996, pp. 91-92).

It is evident that both Levenson's and Huntington's analyses are fundamentally reductionist, for they view whether a society receives or refuses alien culture to be a function of the rise and fall of its national power. Thus, according to them, when a society is, or is becoming, weaker than other societies, it absorbs the more dominant societies' culture. Likewise, when its power is increasing, it throws out foreign culture and recovers confidence in its own culture.¹

The second approach, the quest for cultural compatibility, is represented by a number of studies that attempt to explain the spread of Western institutions in cultural terms. The typical research process of these studies is first to identify similar as well as dissimilar elements that might exist between Western and non-Western cultures, and then to determine whether these two sets of cultures are compatible in terms of, say, political values. The result is finally invoked in order to explain why Western institutions, such as liberal democracy, face difficulty (or not) in taking root on non-Western soil. A quintessence of this approach

¹ In fact, Huntington also offers an individual level analysis of non-Western societies' response to Western culture, in addition to the societal level analysis. In his theorization, however, these two levels of analysis are not integrated into a coherent whole; therefore, they need to be dealt with separately. The loyalty of individuals of non-Western societies to their indigenous culture intensifies as these societies undergo modernization. Put simply, the process of modernization destroys traditional social bonds. As a result, the individuals of non-Western societies experience an increasingly deep sense of alienation and identity crisis, to which traditional culture provides an answer (Huntington, 1996, p. 76 and *passim*). These individuals are subject to such an experience from the beginning of modernization and as long as it continues. Therefore, they are not receptive to Western culture throughout the entire process of modernization. At the societal level, however, Huntington presents quite a different picture: non-Western societies' response to Western culture changes radically from accommodation to expulsion as the process of modernization continues.

is provided by Shaohua Hu (1997). Hu's primary interest is in whether Western democratic institutions can be integrated into Chinese society or not. To address this issue he compares Chinese Confucian culture, China's major traditional culture, with Western democratic cultures. From this comparison he derives a number of similarities and differences between these two sets of cultures (1997, pp. 351-359). His overall assessment is that these two sets of cultures are not compatible with each other. Next, he identifies a few elements in Chinese Confucian culture that are significantly at variance with Western democratic values (1997, pp.359-363). Finally, he concludes that because of these elements Chinese Confucian culture presents obstacles to the democratization of Chinese society (1997, p. 363). In addition to the studies exclusively devoted to this line of cultural analysis (see, for example, Goldberg, 1991; Kim, 1988), there are other cultural analyses that take into account political, social, economic, and other factors as well (see, for example, Hawthorn, 1993; Huntington, 1991 and 1984; Whitehead, 1993).

Each of these two sets of studies delineates, in its own way, a broad contour of the background for non-Western societies' accommodation and/or expulsion of Western cultures. Nevertheless, neither of them really addresses itself to what should be a central issue in the analysis of international cultural diffusion. It is the interaction between Western and non-Western cultures. In the reductionist studies, the substitute for this interaction is the international balance of power. Similarly, the studies searching for cultural compatibility present little more than a contrast between Western and non-Western cultures, as Hu's study illustrates. All in all, the accounts of non-Western societies' responses to Western cultures provided by the two sets of studies are not very cogent.

The interaction between Western and non-Western cultures can be examined by focusing upon the response of members of non-Western societies to Western cultures. To analyze this response adequately, one needs to raise and answer the following theoretical questions. First, with what cultural resources do members of a recipient society respond to foreign culture? Second, are the cultural resources subject to change? Third, how do cultural resources and alien culture affect each other? Finally, what is the end result of this interaction?

The analysis that follows is an attempt to answer these questions, although it would not be entirely possible for this paper to cover all the nuts and bolts of the issues presented by the questions. The scope of the analysis will be limited to non-Western societies' responses to Western political ideas and religions, which are normally imported by the intellectual elite. Thus I will focus upon how the intellectuals of non-Western societies respond to Western political ideas and religions. Of course, intellectuals' responses to Western political ideas and religions do not represent the entire responses these elements of Western cultures evoke in non-Western societies. As will be discussed later, however, the former constitute not only the initial stage but part and parcel of the latter. Thus an examination of intellectuals' responses to Western political ideas and religions will provide a vantage point overlooking the overall responses non-Western societies make to Western political ideas and religions.

The intellectuals of non-Western societies can be seen as playing the role of a receiver (or rejecter) of messages transmitted by the West. Some studies on the cultural diffusion within a given territory have generated quite useful explanations of how receivers respond to transmitted messages. In order to obtain a basic perspective on the relationship between receiver and delivered message, I will briefly review some of these studies. I will then move on to an examination of Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1989; 1980) hermeneutical theory.

Gadamer brings to light what the receiver's cultural resources are, what influence these resources and offered messages have upon each other, and what is the outcome of this interaction. From a critical analysis of Gadamer's theory, I will then derive a model of non-Western societies' responses to Western political ideas and religions. My thesis is that indigenous and foreign cultures are brought into contact with each other concretely in the process of understanding foreign cultures on the part of recipient societies' intellectuals. The model further proposes that an analysis of this process allows one to unravel why and how Western cultures are embraced or denied by non-Western societies. The contact of indigenous culture with foreign cultures, however, gives rise to cultural tension and conflict. How this tension and conflict are dealt with depends upon whether indigenous culture can be objectified or not.² Finally, I will discuss theoretical implications and limitations of the model.

Message and Receiver

Of the various existing theories of the social diffusion of culture, the most prevalent one might be the "dominant ideology thesis," proposed by Antonio Gramsci (1971), Louis Althusser (1971), and Nicos Poulantzas (1973), among others. A critical review of this thesis will generate clues as to the native response to foreign culture.

These authors' attention is primarily devoted to the political quiescence of the working class in Western industrialized societies. They attribute this phenomenon chiefly to the spread of dominant ideologies. That is, they argue, dominant ideologies penetrate into and mold the consciousness of the working class and thereby successfully incorporate it into the established social order. In addition, they frequently appeal to the metaphor of a dominant ideology as "social cement." What they mean by this metaphor is that dominant ideologies ultimately take control of the consciousness of all social strata and bind them to the established social order.

² For the definition of objectification, I draw on Peter Berger (1967). According to him, objectification, or objectivation in his parlance, refers to the attainment by the product of human beings' mental and physical activity of "a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves" (1967, p. 4). As the following analysis will specify, to objectify one's indigenous culture means, in this paper, to objectify one's "prejudices" imparted by the indigenous culture. To objectify one's prejudices refers to separating them from oneself and thereby making them encounter oneself as an objective reality.

In the dominant ideology thesis the general public is treated as playing the role of passive receiver absorbing whatever messages are delivered to them by the elite. Herein lies a serious weakness of this thesis. That is, this view is not based upon an empirical observation of the responses of the popular masses to the messages transmitted by the elite. According to John Thompson (1990, p. 91), the notion of social cement is nothing but a conceptual convenience which obscures this issue that instead must be examined.³ A careful analysis of how social actors respond to the messages carrying dominant ideology casts serious doubt upon this view of the role of the general public.

The fact that a particular set of ideas and values is widely diffused throughout society does not necessarily mean that it has the power to bring the mind and behavior of the general public under control. A few examples would help bring this point into focus. A middle class value that puts a great emphasis upon individual achievement is commonly recognized as an element of the dominant ideology prevalent in American society. A slum youth who expresses his/her acceptance of this value, when interviewed, actually pursues ends that give priority to group loyalty over individual achievement (Swidler, 1986, p. 277). According to Michel de Certeau (1984, p. 172), when the authority of the medieval Catholic Church began to decline laymen's "arbitrary" interpretations of the Bible came to the fore and disturbed the pastors. When the Church maintained strict authority, the interpretation of the Scriptures was an exclusive right of the clergy. Accordingly, an open expression of such "arbitrary" interpretations was firmly prohibited. The interpretation of the clergy can certainly be regarded as a dominant ideology of medieval European society.

In these cases dominant ideologies do have a hold on the "official" public discourse. However, their power is confined to this sphere. Here an important function of the cultural hegemony exercised by the elite is to defend this sphere against the invasion of "unofficial" popular discourse. These examples strongly suggest that the popular masses do not passively absorb the messages transmitted by the elite. For a more productive discussion, it may be desirable to see the general public as active appropriators instead of passive receivers of messages addressed to them.

This new perspective draws attention to the cultural resources of the popular masses (the ideas and values they have previously internalized). It is because they are equipped with such resources that they are not overwhelmed by the messages delivered by the elite. The cultural resources enable them to respond to the messages. In this respect, many studies argue or demonstrate that the social effectiveness of messages offered by the elite depends primarily upon whether they are resonant with the meanings the popular masses bring to bear upon them (see Mosse, 1971; Plamenatz, 1970, p. 123; Swidler, 1986, pp. 279-280; Thompson, 1990, p. 105).

³ For a detailed critique of the dominant ideology thesis, see Abercrombie et al. (1980), Scott (1990, pp. 70-107), and Thompson (1990, pp. 85-121). In addition, the essays contained in Abercrombie et al. (1990) put this thesis to an empirical test.

However, this resonance is not the sole factor determining the social effectiveness of dominant ideologies. To explain this effectiveness properly, it is necessary to reckon with the relation of force between dominant ideology and the popular masses' cultural resources as well. A dominant ideology is by no means a system of meaning passively waiting to be accepted. The elite attempts to colonize the consciousness of the popular masses by disseminating dominant ideologies through, for instance, mass media that are under its control. In contrast, the popular masses normally do not have such powerful means to spread their own culture. Unless they possess cultural resources powerful enough to withstand the elite's attempt, the populous cannot but be vulnerable to the messages conveyed by the elite.

In this regard, David Morley's (1980) study of the reception of a BBC program by diverse social groups in England is highly revealing. He examines how social groups respond to the preferred meaning inscribed in the program. The result indicates that two types of social groups show a vastly different response to the preferred meaning from each other. The first type consists of those social groups who are able to detect the "ideological problematic"—the way certain issues are selected, conceived, and organized—underlying the program and agree to it or can present alternative perspectives in its place. For them, the preferred meaning is taken as something natural, negotiated, or resisted (Morley, 1980, pp. 145-147). The second type comprises those social groups who are unable to articulate this "ideological problematic." They accept the preferred meaning at face value, even though they express their dislike of it (Morley, 1980, p. 138).

Do the popular masses really have no choice but to passively accept the elite's messages, unless they are endowed with powerful cultural resources? The reality suggests that even in such a case they still have means to respond to the messages. Again, de Certeau's (1984) study sheds valuable light on this point. According to him, the popular masses always outwit the elite in subtle ways when they cannot openly defy the elite's cultural hegemony. That is, they inject into the elite's messages other meanings than the elite wishes to convey or put the messages into use differently from that which was intended. For example, the American Indians could not resist the Spanish colonizers' attempt to impose Spanish rituals, representations, and laws upon them. However, they frustrated the Spanish colonizers' wishes to dominate them culturally by resorting to the means mentioned above (de Certeau, 1984, pp. xii-xiv).

I have so far attempted to bring the diffusion of culture within a society to light through a critique of the dominant ideology thesis. My discussion may be summarized as follows. First, if the popular masses are equipped with powerful cultural resources, they play an active role when they come in contact with the elite's messages. Second, if their cultural resources are not strong enough, the popular masses play an active role in the process of assimilating and making use of the messages.

Such being the case, it can certainly be expected that the intellectuals of a society would also play an active role in dealing with messages conveyed by other societies.⁴ Before embarking on an analysis of this response, I will examine Gadamer's theory in order to identify the nature of the cultural resources possessed by social actors and to explore the function of the cultural resources.

A Review of Gadamer's Hermeneutical Theory

Gadamer analyzes problems involved in the interpretation of texts.⁵ It is necessary to make it clear at the outset what the term "text" means in Gadamer's study. He observes that only those artificial creations that have proven their value by being historically reinterpreted deserve to be interpreted at the present moment (1989, p. 373 and 397). Thus, for Gadamer, texts refer to a cultural heritage that is a part of the "living" cultural tradition. The historical reinterpretations of texts constitute in themselves a part of the cultural tradition. At the same time, they fill the temporal distance that exists between text and interpreter (Gadamer, 1989, p. 284). These facts are of crucial significance in Gadamer's theory.

According to Gadamer, human beings inevitably belong to cultural tradition because of their historical finitude (1989, pp. 280-282). Put another way, cultural tradition determines their attitudes and behavior. This is because cultural tradition is the source of human beings' "prejudices." A prejudice refers to "a judgement that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 270). Gadamer flatly asserts that human beings are all *possessed* by their prejudices: prejudices not only constitute their historical identity but are the very thing that enables them to experience the world (1980, p. 133). It is now evident that prejudices are the cultural resources with which social actors respond to the text. The text is the social actors' own cultural heritage and can be

⁴ Following T. B. Bottomore (1964, p. 64), Robert Brym (1980, p. 12), and Eva Etzioni-Halevy (1985, pp. 9-12), intellectuals are defined here as the cultural elite whose occupational activity consists primarily of the creation, dissemination and critique of ideas. They include scholars, scientists, writers, artists, religious thinkers, and so on. The analysis that follows shows that in a certain situation intellectuals accept transmitted messages and respond actively to them afterwards. At a glance this response appears to be the same as the response that a portion of the general populous give to the elite's messages. However, the reason for these two social groups to make such a response is entirely different from each other. As the above analysis evidently implies, a segment of the general populous cannot refuse (or welcome) the elite's messages mainly because of their low level of cultural achievement and consequent lack of critical thinking. In contrast, intellectuals certainly can see through delivered messages and criticize them. Yet, as will be specified below, under certain circumstances intellectuals come to regard their own culture as inferior to some foreign cultures and thereby feel a strong need to import foreign culture. As a result, they virtually have no choice but to accept certain foreign messages.

⁵ According to Gadamer, interpretation and understanding refer basically to the same phenomenon. The only difference between these two is that "interpretation is the explicit form of understanding" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 307). In this review of Gadamer's theory the two terms are used interchangeably.

regarded as a message transmitted by the past. How do prejudices empower them to respond to this message?

As noted above, a cultural tradition includes historically accumulated reinterpretations of texts. This part of tradition also becomes a part of human beings' prejudices and functions as the link and common ground between text and interpreter. It is because of this common ground that an interpreter can attempt to understand a text. That is, the reinterpretations of a text play the role of a guide in approaching the text, allowing the interpreter to pass a prejudgment on the meaning of the text (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 300-301). This prejudgment is the precondition of the understanding of text; without it, therefore, it is impossible to understand a text (see Bernstein, 1983, p.142).

For Gadamer, to understand a text is to project the interpreter's prejudgment or pre-understanding into the text and then to let it be revised by the text. Through a repetition of this interaction the meaning of the text emerges (Gadamer, 1989, p. 267). This does not mean that to understand a text is nothing but to "polish" the interpreter's prejudgment and its source—i.e., his prejudices. Gadamer firmly points out that a text contains unfamiliar as well as familiar contents to the interpreter. Accordingly, the interpreter feels a tension between these two (Gadamer, 1989, p. 295). When the interpreter accepts the unfamiliar elements, his prejudices are modified and enlarged. At this moment, a "fusion of horizons" occurs. What is the horizon and how does the fusion of horizons come about?

According to Gadamer (1989, p. 302), "the horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point". Both the interpreter and the text have their own horizon. The interpreter's horizon consists of his prejudices. The text's horizon seems to be composed of its explicit and implicit contents.

The two horizons are fused together, Gadamer holds, as a result of a proper understanding of text. A proper understanding of text can be achieved only when the interpreter recognizes that the text conveys something true directly to himself and keeps himself open to the truth claim. This means that the interpreter let his prejudices and judgments be called into question by the text and is ready to accept something from the text that is against himself (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 360-362). Thus the interpreter's relationship with the text is similar, in its structure, to the dialogue between two persons based upon a genuine human bond.

In this connection, Gadamer (1989, p. 368) proclaims that the task of hermeneutics is to enter into a dialogue with the text. How does this dialogue take place? At first, the text puts a question to the interpreter. This means that the interpreter is perplexed by its unfamiliar contents. To answer this question, the interpreter has to ask the text diverse questions. In this process, the interpreter comes to reconstruct the question to which the text itself is believed to be the answer. This question is regarded, in turn, as a question put to the interpreter himself. In order to answer this question, the interpreter cannot help asking the text questions again (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 373-374).

This dialogical process results in a fusion of horizons. To understand why and how this result is brought about, it is necessary to take note of the fact that the dialogue between

interpreter and text is fundamentally different from that between two persons on the following point. The text never addresses itself to the interpreter of its own accord. The text is nothing but “enduringly fixed expressions of life”; therefore, it has to be “awakened” to speak by the interpreter (Gadamer, 1989, p. 387). In order to make the text speak, the interpreter must find, on behalf of it, the right language that he can understand. This is made possible only by the intervention of the interpreter’s prejudices (Gadamer, 1989, p. 397).

Viewed in this way, the questions the text addresses to the interpreter are already “contaminated” by the interpreter’s prejudices. The whole contents of the text cannot escape from such a misfortune when they are retrieved through the dialogical process. Therefore, when a genuine understanding of text occurs, “we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 374). This is what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons. When it transpires, the particularity of both the text’s and the interpreter’s horizons is overcome; the two horizons fuse together into a higher universality (Gadamer, 1989, p. 305). At this moment, the interpreter’s prejudices are amended and enriched. Again, the fusion of horizons can be achieved only by a special effort, on the part of the interpreter, to enter into and maintain dialogue with the text. This special effort is the interpreter’s self-reflection.

Since human beings’ consciousness is dominated by their own prejudices, they normally have no doubt about the validity of their prejudices and judgments derived from them. This implies that the interpreter “cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 295). As a consequence, the interpreter tends to expect that what a text says will fit perfectly with his own judgments on the text’s meaning (Gadamer, 1989, p. 268). Following this expectation, he over hastily assimilates what the text conveys to his own judgments (Gadamer, 1989, p. 305). This is a misunderstanding of a text. When it happens, the validity of the interpreter’s prejudices is confirmed or reinforced.

Such being the case, in order to arrive at a proper understanding of the text, the interpreter has to undermine the power of his prejudices over his consciousness. For Gadamer, what enables this is the interpreter’s self-reflection. That is, relying upon the power of reason, the interpreter can bring his own prejudices into the open, tame them, and thereby destroy their spell (Gadamer, 1989, p. 269 and 299). As a result of this effort, the interpreter can secure a distance between himself and his prejudices, and the prejudices become objectified. At this moment, the interpreter is fully open to unfamiliar contents of the text.

Nevertheless, the interpreter’s self-reflection is not the sole factor leading to the objectification of his prejudices. According to Gadamer, “it is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is . . . provoked. The encounter with a traditional text can provide this provocation” (1989, p. 299). This means that the interpreter receives an impact from the text when its unfamiliar contents reveal the error of his judgments. This impact in turn induces the interpreter to reflect upon his prejudices, which have generated the judgments. Thus the impact

conveyed by the text is what triggers the interpreter's self-reflection. Gadamer (1989, p. 302) holds that it is impossible to illuminate all of human beings' prejudices because of their historical finitude. It should only be those prejudices exposed to an impact from the text that can be objectified. In what follows, I will subject Gadamer's theory to a critical analysis. I will begin with an examination of his discussion on the different types of "understanding."

Types of Understanding

Gadamer presents two types of understanding of a text: a proper understanding and a misunderstanding. A proper understanding of a text is what brings about a fusion of horizons. (Gadamer's discussion about this type of understanding will be analyzed in detail later.) A misunderstanding of a text is any reading that does not generate a fusion of horizons. Gadamer, however, does not discuss misunderstanding at length, dismissing it as a miscarried attempt. This is unfortunate.

As noted above, in Gadamer's theory, a misunderstanding of a text is engendered by the interpreter's failure to objectify his prejudices. Of the two factors leading to this objectification—the impact conveyed by the text and the interpreter's self-reflection—the first can be taken as a constant and the second, a variable. As long as the interpreter intends to understand a text, he cannot ignore its unfamiliar contents. Therefore, he is always exposed to the impact of the text. Yet this impact does not lead directly to the objectification of his prejudices. Between this impact and the objectification there is a medium—i.e., the interpreter's self-reflection. Although the self-reflection is set in motion by the impact from the text, what ultimately determines its success or failure is the interpreter's autonomous will to reflect upon his prejudices. After all, what really decides whether an understanding of a text results in a fusion of horizons or not is the will of the interpreter.

If a misunderstanding of a text truly and solely results from the interpreter's lack of will, this phenomenon does not deserve further discussion. Yet of the interpreter's prejudices there might be such ones as are virtually immune from objectification. It is necessary here to consider what the prejudices consist of. What Gadamer refers to by the term prejudice is the comprehensive contents of a human being's inner world, ranging from abstract notions on the surface of human consciousness to fundamental presuppositions lying deep in it (see Habermas, 1977, p. 362). Such being the case, there could be some prejudices that are almost impossible to bring into the open. When such prejudices function as the basis for an understanding of a text, it would result in a misunderstanding, regardless of the interpreter's will to reflect upon his prejudices. Such a misunderstanding should not be treated as an abortive understanding and its inevitability must be recognized.

What Pierre Bourdieu refers to by the term "habitus" is to be taken as such a prejudice. Habitus refers to "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72, italics in original). It is produced by objective conditions, such as material conditions unique to a class. As social actors' wishes are realized or frustrated over time by the

objective conditions in which they are situated, they come to acquire “a virtue made of necessity.” That is, through this experience they learn “to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54). This “virtue” is then fixed and becomes a durable internal disposition, which is the habitus. The habitus is the matrix of all thoughts, perceptions, and actions taking place in the same or similar objective conditions of its production (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 55-56).

As such, habitus can be characterized not only as the “basic grammar of everyday life” but as a basis for self-reflection. Thus it would be virtually impossible to bring the habitus to the surface of consciousness and reflect upon it. Bourdieu certainly has this point in mind when he observes as follows: real mastery of the habitus “is only possible for someone who is completely mastered by it . . . And this is because there can only be practical learning of the schemes of perception, appreciation and action which . . . *are excluded from the universe of objects of thought*” (1990, p. 14, italics added). Now the relationship between habitus and prejudice is clear. Habitus constitutes a part of human beings’ prejudices. Yet habitus is a special kind of prejudice in that it lies so deep in human consciousness and thereby keeps such a firm grip on the consciousness that it is beyond the reach of human beings’ attempts to objectify their prejudices.

When the habitus functions as the cultural resource with which social actors respond to transmitted messages, Bourdieu holds, their response is highly conservative. It is because the habitus “tends to ensure its own constancy and its defense against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information, if exposed to it accidentally or by force, and especially by avoiding exposure to such information” (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 60-61). Conversely speaking, the habitus tends to protect itself by favoring such information as is likely to reinforce it, and by “providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 61). A concrete example of this strategy which Bourdieu adduces is the tendency for people to have a conversation on politics only with those whose opinions are the same as, or similar to, theirs.

To be sure, Gadamer would regard a response to delivered messages that is based upon habitus as an obvious example of misunderstanding of text. Bourdieu’s study demonstrates that there are cases in which a misunderstanding of text is inevitable because of the nature of the interpreter’s prejudices involved in its understanding. In the following pages I will examine the response to messages delivered from other societies. As a first step I will derive some variables useful for this examination from Gadamer’s theory.

Understanding of Text and Tension

It may be a good idea to begin with a clarification of what it implies to understand a “text” or a “message” in Gadamer’s study and in my analysis. As discussed above, Gadamer explores an understanding of such texts as having been historically reinterpreted and

confronts the interpreter with truth claims. The object of understanding in Gadamer's study, therefore, is none other than classics. Thus a text has a unique meaning in his study. Classics contain insights into human life and it is for this reason that they are treated as classics. Through a proper understanding of classics, therefore, one obtains wisdom of life as well as knowledge. Otherwise he is doing scant justice to them. Put another way, classics do not merely deliver knowledge to their interpreter but ask him to reflect upon his attitudes toward life and to change them. Hence the interpreter experiences a deep inner conflict as he understands classics: he is faced with a decision as to whether he will accept classics' truth claims as guiding principles in his life or not.

In the analysis that follows, the term text or message conveyed by other societies refers primarily to foreign political ideas and religions. An understanding of such foreign messages also arouses a significant conflict in the mind of the interpreter. Any political idea or religion is based upon a certain conception of the self. When a person commits himself to a political idea or a religion, therefore, he acknowledges simultaneously the validity of the conception of the self contained within it. This conception should eventually constitute a part of his self-identity. Thus when a person already committed to a political idea or religion comes to understand a foreign political idea or religion, he cannot but experience a deep inner conflict. That is, he is confronted with a choice between admitting the validity of a new conception of the self, which calls his self-identity in question, and denying it.

In short, to understand a text or a message has a unique implication in this paper. It is not just a matter of grasping the text's contents correctly but also a matter of making a decision as to the acceptance of its contents. This means that an understanding of a text is inevitably accompanied by an internal conflict and tension. What is the source of the conflict and tension? How are they created and dealt with?

As Gadamer points out, a text contains both familiar and unfamiliar contents to its interpreter. It is the unfamiliar contents that generate a conflict in the inner world of the interpreter. That is, the interpreter has to acknowledge or repudiate the validity of the unfamiliar contents. Without doubt this experience would create serious strains on the interpreter's mind. Gadamer himself is well aware of such a tension. As noted above, he observes that the interpreter senses a tension between the familiar and unfamiliar contents. He also says that the interpreter is bewildered by the unfamiliar contents as he enters into a dialogue with the text. How do the unfamiliar contents provoke the conflict and tension?

At this juncture, it may be useful to pay attention to the following fact. When a person makes a statement about a concept, he cannot avoid referring to other concepts at the same time. For example, he "cannot give a *liberal* definition of 'liberty' without reference to the liberal conceptions of equality and the individual" (Hall, 1986, p. 38, italics in original). Here, the concepts of equality and the individual are indispensable for giving definition to the concept of liberty. From this fact it can be logically inferred that concepts are not self-contained entities and that, instead, they tend to cling together. That is, concepts "mutually define and modify one another; they entail each other—they are inter-dependent" (Hall, 1986, p. 38).

It is beyond doubt that human prejudices have such a relationship with one another. In fact, the concepts mentioned in the above example are themselves part of many people's prejudices. Therefore, one may characterize the nature of prejudice as follows: far from being self-contained entities, prejudices are related to one another; it is only through this relationship that their meaning emerges. This is not to claim that all the prejudices of a person are caught in a tight-knit network. It is necessary to point out that, since prejudices are interrelated, a certain prejudice cannot have meaning unless it is accompanied by a group of other prejudices. This means that a prejudice cannot function as a prejudice without the aid of some other prejudices.

Yet this observation is subject to a caveat. The prejudices that enable a particular prejudice to function as a prejudice are not all equally necessary for this purpose. When a person attempts to present a liberal definition of the concept of liberty, to continue the above example, it is unavoidable for him to refer to the concepts of equality and the individual. If his view is challenged by others after that, he may refer to, say, the historical background of these concepts or the difference between political and religious freedom. But these added explanations and concepts are not normally necessary for an informed everyday discourse. If this person and his interlocutors continue to dwell on the added explanations, they are now engaged in an academic discussion, not in everyday discourse. This example certainly suggests that in making a certain prejudice acquire its meaning and thereby function as a prejudice, some prejudices play an essential role and some other prejudices play only a subsidiary role.

The fact that prejudices are related to one another implies that there is an order in human beings' inner world, which maintains its stability. An understanding of text destabilizes the inner world. That is, the unfamiliar contents of a text come in conflict with the interpreter's prejudices, posing a threat to the order. Because of this conflict and threat, the interpreter comes to experience an inner tension. Depending upon the nature of the relationship between interpreter and text, the magnitude of this tension varies. The tension generated by an understanding of a foreign text would be, for instance, much greater than that caused by an understanding of a text with which the interpreter is familiar.

There are basically two paths leading to the resolution of the inner conflict. First, the two sides—the interpreter's prejudices and the unfamiliar contents of text—may make a compromise with each other. This compromise ends in a fusion of horizons. This result is effected, of course, when the interpreter's prejudices are objectified. How the two sides come to terms with each other and thereby a fusion of horizons is achieved will be analyzed in detail later. Second, one of the two sides—i.e., the unfamiliar contents of text—may be banished from the battlefield. As a consequence, the conflict vanishes. This occurs when the interpreter adheres to his prejudices.

Which one of these two paths is taken hinges on the magnitude of the inner tension the interpreter experiences. If the tension is of a manageable size, the interpreter can endure it while the impact from a text is brought to bear on his prejudices. In contrast, if the tension were too great to endure, the interpreter would be tempted to escape from it in haste. The

most convenient way to do this is to ignore the unfamiliar contents. When this happens, the understanding of a text results in a misunderstanding and the interpreter's prejudices remain unchanged.

These two variables—the inner tension and the conflict resolution—will serve as a useful tool in analyzing the response to foreign messages. Yet there is one more variable to be taken into account before this analysis begins. It is the fate of the interpreter's indigenous culture. In principle, the indigenous culture gives the interpreter the only cultural resources that he can draw upon to respond to foreign messages.⁶ Therefore, whether the indigenous culture maintains its vitality or not should have a crucial bearing on the interpreter's attitudes toward foreign messages. When the indigenous culture provides the interpreter with a stable cultural milieu, he does not have much reason to welcome foreign messages, particularly if they call his cultural identity into question. He can accept or reject them, therefore, depending upon whether they are resonant with the indigenous culture or not. When the indigenous culture is on the decline, in contrast, some foreign messages may attract the interpreter's attention. In this case the interpreter cannot (or more correctly, is not willing to) refuse such foreign messages, regardless of their resonance with the indigenous culture.⁷

Viewed in this way, the interpreter's situation is similar to that of the popular masses faced with messages offered by the elite. That is, the interpreter is, as it were, furnished with either powerful or weak cultural resources when he deals with foreign messages. It may be expected, then, that the interpreter responds actively to foreign messages either when he is brought into contact with them or after he has received them.

Stable Cultural Tradition and Foreign Messages

A cultural tradition consists of a world-view, comprehensive ideas of order, and ethos which refers to a moral and aesthetic life-style (Geertz, 1973, pp. 126-127). Thus when a cultural tradition retains its vitality, it provides its carriers, particularly the intellectuals, with both a persuasive world-view and solid ethical norms. Part of the world-view and ethical

⁶ In Gadamer's theory both text and interpreter belong to the same cultural tradition. As noted above, the temporal distance between these two is filled with reinterpretations of text. These reinterpretations enable the interpreter to approach the text. Between the foreign messages and interpreter there lies a cultural distance. This cultural distance is in principle vacant. In order to get access to foreign messages, therefore, the interpreter cannot but rely on similar elements that might exist between his indigenous culture and foreign messages.

⁷ This is not the place to examine how a cultural tradition rises and declines. My discussion in this paragraph is built on Huntington's thesis, mentioned earlier, that the fate of a society's culture is a function of the vicissitudes of its national power. This thesis is useful especially when the fate of non-Western cultures at large is at issue. In this modern era most non-Western cultures virtually declined during the same period, as non-Western societies lost faith in their own cultures and tried to import Western culture. This fact strongly suggests that the non-Western cultures' downturn be attributed primarily to foreign, instead of domestic, factors. The most salient external factor facing non-Western societies as a whole must have been, in the last analysis, the domination of the Western powers over the rest of the world in terms of military capabilities.

norms become internalized by the intellectuals as their prejudices, in Gadamer's parlance. At this time the intellectuals certainly would not see their own culture as having a relative value. This means that they are neither ready nor willing to objectify their prejudices imparted by the indigenous culture. What will happen when foreign messages are delivered to them? Above all, what is the magnitude of the tension the intellectuals experience when they attempt to understand foreign messages and how can the inner conflict caused by this attempt be resolved?

Apart from exceptional cases in which the contents of foreign messages are somehow compatible with the intellectuals' prejudices, an understanding of foreign messages would be highly traumatic. The unfamiliar contents contained in foreign messages threaten the stability of intellectuals' prejudices. This means that the validity of the world-view and ethical norms—that the intellectuals have internalized and thus have a deep faith in—is being questioned by the unfamiliar contents. Put another way, the unfamiliar contents call the intellectuals' cultural identity into question. In this situation, if the intellectuals want to accept the unfamiliar contents, therefore, they have to allow a fundamental change in their world-view and ethical norms. The inner tension accompanying such a change would be of an enormous magnitude. The intellectuals, moreover, would hardly wish to endure such a tension.

The magnitude of this tension can be further brought into relief by comparing it, in sociological terms, with that of the tension the intellectuals go through when they understand messages delivered by the past, instead of by other societies. (Such messages are what Gadamer calls "texts" and they constitute a part of the intellectuals' own cultural heritage.) When the intellectuals understand these messages they are in fact adding another reinterpretation of the messages to the historically accumulated reinterpretations of them. Since such an act has historically occurred innumerable times and is taking place here and there at the present moment, the intellectuals would not be subject to a serious social reproach because of this act. On the other hand, when it is socially known that some intellectuals have accepted foreign messages that deny the legitimacy of indigenous culture, what would happen to them? They would undoubtedly be branded as traitors to the cause of the purity of indigenous culture. An anticipation of such a result would add greatly to the already unbearable tension.

All in all, one may reasonably conclude that the intellectuals would not be willing to endure such a tension until their prejudices are objectified. As a consequence, their prejudices are not objectified. These prejudices dominate the intellectuals' consciousness nearly as powerfully as the habitus. Of course, in their nature the prejudices of the intellectuals are not all habitus. Yet, as with habitus, it is extremely difficult to objectify such prejudices. This is because of the following two reasons. First, the prejudices function as the intellectuals' internalized world-view and ethical norms, thereby satisfying their intellectual, emotional, and social needs. Second, there is social pressure working against the objectification of the prejudices. These two factors deprive the intellectuals of the motivation

to lead the impact from the message, through self-reflection, to the objectification of their prejudices.

How can the inner conflict be resolved? All things considered, the disturbance caused by the unfamiliar contents of foreign messages may be compared to a human body attacked by a virus. As the human body tries to recover its health by killing or driving out the virus so would the intellectuals attempt to retrieve the original order of their inner world by ignoring the unfamiliar contents. The intellectuals would then appropriate only those contents of foreign messages that confirm or reinforce their prejudices. The outcome is, of course, a misunderstanding of message. This result is occasioned by the intellectuals' lack of motivation to reflect upon their prejudices. Such being the case, when the intellectuals are given such a motivation, they will be able to accept unfamiliar contents from foreign messages.

Declining Cultural Tradition and Foreign Messages

When an indigenous culture is in decay, the two factors working against the objectification of intellectuals' prejudices lose their force. That is, the indigenous culture meets the intellectual, emotional, and social needs of the intellectuals less and less satisfactorily over time. Concurrently, the intellectuals are increasingly attracted by foreign culture. Therefore, those intellectuals who attempt to import foreign culture would find supporters as well as critics. In short, they could now secure the motivation necessary for self-reflection. Thus their understanding of foreign messages can end in a fusion of horizons. What is the basis for this understanding?

Even though the indigenous culture is on the decline, it still has influence over the consciousness of the intellectuals to a considerable degree. The world-view of a cultural tradition is an abstract ideational system. Thus it is likely to be subject to critical reflection when this cultural tradition is on the wane. Yet the ethos is not easily brought under reflection even in such a case, for it has already taken deep root in everyday life. When an indigenous culture is declining, therefore, its world-view loses strength at first. In contrast, its ethos tends to linger on for a substantial amount of time afterwards. In sum, even when it falls into decay, the indigenous culture still provides the intellectuals with cultural resources with which they respond to foreign messages. These cultural resources constitute their "prejudices." The prejudices interact with the alien contents of foreign messages and as a result an internal tension and conflict are generated.

As the domination of indigenous culture over their consciousness is being weakened, the intellectuals would undoubtedly undergo less serious inner tension. Furthermore, the intellectuals' chief objective in understanding foreign messages may be to import a new world-view that would substitute for the old one. In such a case they would be willing to endure the tension until they assimilate unfamiliar contents of foreign messages. In a word, the internal tension may not be high enough to have the intellectuals turn away from the

unfamiliar contents of foreign messages. In addition, as discussed above, the intellectuals are likely to be given a motivation to objectify their prejudices. Therefore, there is a strong probability that an understanding of foreign messages would result in a fusion of horizons.

What needs to be unraveled here is the concrete process through which the fusion of horizons is effected. For this, it would be useful to explore Gadamer's theory once again. For Gadamer, the interpreter is induced to reflect upon his prejudices by the impact from the text. Thus the prejudices that can be reflected upon and thereby objectified at a moment are only those ones that are involved in the understanding of a given text and therefore have received an impact from it. Those prejudices that are not exposed to such an impact cannot be objectified. From these facts one may logically deduce the following possibility. If some of the prejudices necessary for the understanding of a certain text are subject to less of an impact from it than the rest of these prejudices, the former will be less fully reflected upon and objectified than the latter. Would there then really be a difference among the prejudices involved in the understanding of a text, in the degree of the impact they receive from the text? This question is of critical importance. By giving an answer to this question one will be able to reveal the process through which the fusion of horizons is brought about. This will enable one to throw light on how foreign culture is received.

In order to answer this question it is necessary to take note of the relationship among prejudices once again. First of all, in the understanding of a given text there must be some prejudices that play central roles. From the earlier discussion of the relationship among prejudices, it can be inferred that to obtain meaning and thereby function as prejudices these central prejudices have to be accompanied by a group of other prejudices. Of these other prejudices, some play a primary role and the rest play a secondary role in having the central prejudices function as prejudices. This observation may be summarized as follows: in the understanding of a text, some prejudices play a major role and some other prejudices play a minor role. Playing a minor role, the latter prejudices would be involved only indirectly in the understanding of the text. Therefore, they cannot but be subject to less of an impact from the text than the former prejudices. As a result, the latter will be reflected upon, and thereby objectified, less completely than the former.

In addition, among the prejudices necessary for the understanding of a text, there should be some prejudices without which the interpreter cannot have any idea at all of the subject the text deals with. Such prejudices are probably part of the fundamental assumptions of the interpreter's own culture. As such, they must have already penetrated deeply into the interpreter's inner world. These prejudices would therefore have a firm control over the interpreter's consciousness. Consequently, it would be extremely difficult to objectify them. In short, these prejudices should be seen as the interpreter's habitus.

Such being the case, it would be unavoidable that some prejudices that have been incompletely objectified or have not been objectified at all become involved in the understanding of a text. These prejudices come into conflict with the unfamiliar contents of the text. How could this conflict be resolved? It should be the prejudices that win the struggle, for they are superior to the unfamiliar contents in taking hold of the interpreter's

consciousness. The interpreter can pass judgment on the unfamiliar contents; thus, they can be dealt with on a discursive level. In contrast, the prejudices still dominate the interpreter's consciousness either less powerfully than they did before they were objectified, or as powerfully as before. Therefore, it is difficult or even impossible to handle them on a discursive level. After all, the unfamiliar contents cannot but be adapted in such a manner as to be compatible with the prejudices. This means that the "strangeness" of the unfamiliar contents has to be attenuated so that they avoid a clash with the prejudices.

This article has attempted to throw new light on the process through which a fusion of horizons takes place, building on Gadamer's theory. My analysis suggests that when a fusion of horizons occurs the meaning of a text is "contaminated" by the interpreter's own culture, particularly its fundamental assumptions. This implies that when foreign messages are delivered to intellectuals of a society, these messages have to come to terms with the indigenous culture in order to be accepted. More specifically, it is inevitable that the meaning of foreign messages be tamed by some elements of the intellectuals' indigenous culture, especially its core values.

Depending upon whether a text and its interpreter belong to the same cultural tradition or not, the meaning of the text retrieved through a fusion of horizons could vary greatly. It is because the text needs to "travel" a temporal distance in order to "address itself" to the interpreter when it is a part of the interpreter's cultural heritage. In contrast, it has to travel a cultural distance to "speak" to the interpreter when it is from other societies or civilizations. To use another metaphor, the text has to resonate with a culture that is partly shaped by itself, in the former case; it has to resonate with a totally alien culture, in the latter case. Yet the meaning of a text could be assimilated into an alien cultural tradition and thereby become an integral part of it, once it is regained through the process leading to a fusion of horizons as described above.

Conclusion

If the indigenous culture of a non-Western society were incompatible in its overall tenor with Western cultures, this society's attempt to adopt Western institutions would be traumatic. Thus an examination of similarities and dissimilarities between Western and non-Western cultures is indispensable for the study of non-Western societies' responses to Western cultures. In this sense the studies searching for cultural compatibility are of considerable merit.

The crux of the matter, however, is that international diffusion of culture has been characterized for the past century or so by a massive flow of culture from the West to the rest of the world. Western cultures have had such a great appeal to many non-Western societies that these societies have tried to import Western cultures, whether Western cultures are compatible with their own cultures or not. This fact alerts one to the danger of focusing exclusively upon similarities and dissimilarities between Western and non-Western cultures.

Furthermore, this fact suggests that to arrive at a better understanding of non-Western societies' responses to Western cultures, it is necessary to take into account the relation of force between Western and non-Western cultures.

The reductionist studies deal with power relations between Western and non-Western cultures, and put forward a convincing account of the reason why the former came to dominate the latter. Their view—that the vicissitudes of a society's culture are ultimately related to those of this society's national power—explains effectively how this cultural asymmetry has historically come about. This view also sensitizes us to the link between cultural and material domains. Nevertheless, these studies do not address the interaction between Western and non-Western cultures. As a result they tend to offer an overly simplified picture of non-Western societies' responses to Western cultures.

I have attempted to pay due attention to the interaction between Western and non-Western cultures, without losing sight of the relations of force. From an analysis of this interaction, I have derived a model of non-Western societies' responses to Western cultures. The picture emerging from this model is similar in its basic composition to the one presented by the reductionist studies: when the indigenous cultures of non-Western societies maintain their vitality, Western cultures are likely to be rejected by non-Western societies, and vice versa. Yet this picture has much richer colors and shades than the established one.

First of all, the model suggests that Western cultures are not refused by non-Western societies in a wholesale manner. Non-Western societies can appropriate those elements of Western cultures that are compatible with their indigenous cultures. Second, the model also suggests that Western cultures are never accepted by non-Western societies without modification. Some elements of indigenous cultures, particularly their fundamental assumptions, resist the invasion of Western cultures with great resilience. Thus Western cultures have to come to terms with, and thereby be modified by, these elements, when Western traditions are accommodated by non-Western societies.

Nevertheless, the model presented herein does not provide a complete explanation of non-Western societies' responses to Western cultures. Above all, it is because the model does not reckon with the popular masses' responses to messages from the West. One may conjecture that these responses would be the same as, or similar to, the popular masses' responses to the elite's messages analyzed above. Yet such conjecture is simplistic. Foreign messages are usually relayed to the general populous by intellectuals. The problem is that intellectuals might intend to use foreign messages either to sustain the existing sociopolitical order or to undermine it. This possibility makes the popular masses' reception (or rejection) of foreign messages extremely difficult to analyze. All in all, the popular masses' responses to Western cultures are too complicated an issue to be dealt with in this paper.

Despite this weakness, however, the model helps to a considerable extent explain non-Western societies' responses to Western cultures. First of all, it is normally intellectuals who make contact with foreign messages for the first time in a society. Furthermore, intellectuals are more capable than other social groups of articulating their understandings of foreign messages. Consequently, intellectuals' interpretations of foreign messages have the best

chance of spreading throughout society. This means that the general populous cannot but deal with such foreign messages as intellectuals have already interpreted. In short, intellectuals' understandings of foreign messages represent the first responses a society makes to foreign messages. In addition, the intellectuals' understandings set the terms of popular responses to foreign messages. Therefore, an analysis of non-Western intellectuals' understandings of Western cultures is of crucial importance in the study of non-Western societies' responses to Western cultures.

Finally, it is necessary to call attention to the range of applications of the model. It is designed to account mainly for non-Western societies' responses to Western political ideas and religions. As discussed above, the introduction of these elements of Western cultures into non-Western societies is highly likely to arouse a deep cultural strain and conflict in these societies at both societal and individual levels. Therefore, the model does not explain non-Western societies' responses to other elements of Western cultures, such as popular music, that do not give rise to such a cultural distress.

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