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**Raiding the World Pantry to Cook in the Local Kitchen:  
A Case Study of Kyoto’s Global Connectivity**

INTRODUCTION

Kyoto is a globally connected city. The city maintains 10 friendship, partner, and sister city relationships with eminent far-flung cities such as Florence, Boston, Xi’an, Guadalajara, and Paris. It has served as a stage for international negotiations and functions as the headquarters for groups of transnational influence, from the Soto Zen sect and the main branches of Japanese tea ceremony traditions to the Nintendo and Kyocera corporations. Kyoto is also a city whose present is very much informed by its past, particularly as the long-time imperial capital of Japan. Due to its associations with “traditional” Japanese culture, Kyoto inhabits a special place in the global imaginary. Perhaps the best manifestation of this is the best-selling *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Kyoto drew nearly 50 million tourists in 2007, a record number for the 7<sup>th</sup> year in a row (Kyoto City Budget Section 2008). These tourists visited its 17 UNESCO sites, including temples, shrines and imperial gardens, spending a total of about 650 billion yen (ibid). Some of the foreigners to be found in Kyoto, however, are not simply passing through; more than 40 thousand foreigners live in the city (Kyoto City Public Relations Section 2010) and over 5 thousand enroll in study abroad programs of some kind there (Kyoto City Public Relations Section 2009). Kyoto’s populace is aware of these transnational linkages and cultivates them. The League of Historical Cities is one example. Its origins date back to a conference held in 1987 largely due to the efforts of Kyoto’s mayor at the

time. Today the association consists of 88 member cities from 56 countries (League of Historical Cities 2004). Kyoto remains active in the organization and houses the secretariat. Kyoto's citizens—not only its politicians—are welcoming and accommodating to foreigners. The Japanese even have a saying that describes the people of Kyoto as friendly to students and tourists (the implication being that they are less kind to other Japanese).

This paper investigates Kyoto's global connectedness through its food culture. My approach is one that is situated at the intersection of anthropology and food studies. "Food studies" has emerged as a field (albeit a yet "undisciplined" one) of serious inquiry in the past few decades (Belasco 2008, Nestle and McIntosh 2010), yielding cross-disciplinary research on topics that include commodity chains, food safety and security, and also the cultural significance of food. Food can serve as a useful lens through which to approach globalization because it is material, incorporated into the everyday lives of all human beings, and can be followed as it circulates from sites of production, transformation, consumption, and even waste disposal. Food, as a flexible vehicle used to express identity, negotiate risk, and establish and reinforce social relations, may be used to shed light on the social and cultural lives of the groups that produce, distribute, market, prepare, and consume it.

An analysis of a city's food culture and the degree to which it exhibits an openness to outside influences can reveal how the city articulates with other places at multiple scalar levels. Based on participant observation in Kyoto, as well as interviews with local farmers, chefs, government officials, and agricultural experts, I argue that in Kyoto's case, the efforts of local actors to revivify place-based agricultural and culinary

traditions are not a rejection of globalization but are instead creative attempts to manage globalization in ways that filter and modify influences from outside while bolstering the local economy and reinvigorating local traditions and identities. Kyoto's case study, I argue, thereby challenges the common assumption that "the local" and "the global" are in inevitable opposition to each other. In 21<sup>st</sup> century cities, even what appears to be local and localism may, upon close inspection, be characterized by cosmopolitanism and openness to outside influences.

#### BACKGROUND: KYOTO'S "TRADITIONAL" FOOD CULTURE

When residents of contemporary Kyoto talk of Kyoto cuisine, Kyoto's food culture, or Kyoto vegetables, they invoke Kyoto's long history. In this section, I will briefly summarize the mytho-history of Kyoto's agricultural and culinary traditions and the rapid changes to local food culture that occurred after World War II. This background will provide the context necessary for understanding the recent interest in revivifying and refashioning Kyoto's "traditional" food culture.

Emperor Kammu established Kyoto—called Heian-kyō at the time, or Capital of Peace—as his political capital at the beginning of the Heian era (794-1185 CE), and it became the state's cultural and religious center as well. One of the reasons that Kammu chose Kyoto as his new capital was because of its fertile soil, abundant water, and a climate that is very conducive to farming. High quality vegetables were first associated with the city during this period (Takashima 2003:10). According to a local agricultural expert I spoke with, beginning with the Heian era the best foreign vegetables were

brought to the Japanese capital to be presented to and grown for the emperor. Kyoto's favorable agricultural conditions allowed farmers to grow these vegetables successfully around the capital. Over time, the vegetables adapted to their environment and developed into distinctive varieties.

Kyoto's history has not been characterized by the peace and tranquility its founder had wished upon it, yet it remained the Japanese capital and the seat of the imperial household for over a thousand years (Ponsonby-Fane 1956). There was a great demand for quality produce in the capital, in particular to feed the aristocracy (Takashima 2003). These vegetables became the focus of Kyoto cuisine or *Kyō ryōri*. It is difficult to speak of a "Kyoto" diet (much less a "Japanese" one) in and after the Heian era, considering varied patterns of consumption based on class, gender, and community (Cwiertka 1998:118). In Richard Hosking's *A Dictionary of Japanese Food*, however, we find the following in the entry for *Kyō ryōri*: "Kyoto was not only the capital of Japan for many centuries, but was (and still is) the home of Buddhism. This meant that not only did high-class, elegant cookery such as *cha kaiseki* flourish, but so also did *shōjin ryōri*, the Buddhist vegetarian cuisine. In fact, vegetables, especially pickles are a notable feature of Kyoto's food culture..." (Hosking 1996:88, italics mine) To this I add Kyoto's *banzai ryōri*, a sophisticated home cooking that has received increasing national attention in recent years (Ozeki 2008). Just as Kyoto has become known as *Nihon no kokoro no furusato* or the nostalgic hometown for the Japanese heart / mind (Brumann 2009: 278) because of its associations with many of Japan's most important historical events and "traditional" culture, Kyoto vegetables have acquired an "aura" of elegance, mystique, and refinement for contemporary Japanese because they are linked with

esteemed traditional cuisines.

The continued existence of local vegetable varieties, however, was threatened by a number of changes that occurred after World War II.<sup>1</sup> By 1950, in large part for reasons of convenience, a greater number of local farmers were using hybrid F1 seeds and fewer and fewer farmers continued to grow and harvest seeds from the varieties that their families had been growing for centuries. Consumer habits and tastes were also changing; diets were becoming ever more diverse, incorporating ingredients from abroad, and creating newer, “creolized” dishes. Those traditional vegetable varieties that involved a fair amount of preparation or that had a strong, distinctive taste were particularly threatened (see, for instance, Cwiertka 2006:168). Nakamura Takeshi of Kyoto Prefectural University, for instance, argues that the various types of daikon (Japanese radish) grown in Kyoto have become less flavorful for this very reason.<sup>2</sup> The *kōri* daikon and the *Tōji* turnip became extinct at this time. It is easy to guess why the *kōri* daikon never became a popular variety of Japanese radish; though it is said to have had a “unique flavor” (Kyoto Green Farm 2011), this variety had thin, twisted roots. Peeling them required greater effort and the average housewife no doubt preferred standard varieties for practical reasons. The *Tōji* turnip, meanwhile, is said to have become extinct because it was primarily eaten as a *senmaizuke* pickle, but as dietary patterns changed and people ate fewer pickles, the turnip of choice for *senmaizuke* became the *Shōgoin* turnip (Kyoto Green Farm 2011).

In the early post-war period, one might say that the ideologies of modernization

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<sup>1</sup> Various local prefectural officials graciously shared much of the following historical background information with me.

<sup>2</sup> Presentation given on August 25, 2007.

and progress held sway rather than those of local tradition and history. As Nishiyama and Kimura put it, “During this period, many [policy-makers] believed that the localism of the Japanese food system prevented the modernization of agriculture” (Nishiyama and Kimura 2005: 86). Japan came to import a larger share of its food, the national self-sufficiency rate for food falling from 73% (calculated in calories) in 1965 to about 40% in recent years, the lowest of any developed country (Statistics Bureau 2010: 62-64). Most, if not all, of the Japanese people I have spoken to about the globalization of food have expressed a great deal of anxiety about Japan’s dependence on foreign imports.

By the late 1980s, various local actors in Kyoto had become concerned about the fate of indigenous vegetables and local food culture more broadly. In 1960 the prefectural government gathered seeds from 105 different traditional varieties and create a seed bank where these “foundation seeds” could be regularly harvested and stored. It took twenty more years, however, before programs with more widely felt impact were created. The first of these was a symposium series held by local chefs from 1986 to 1988 with the goal of “reviving” traditional vegetable varieties by spreading awareness of their existence and catalyzing interest in Kyoto’s food culture.<sup>3</sup> In 1988, the prefectural government officially defined the term “Kyoto traditional vegetables” (Kyō no dentō yasai). In contradistinction with the vague term “Kyoto vegetable” (kyōyasai), the applicability of this term was strictly delimited, rooting local heirloom vegetable varieties within current prefectural boundaries and including locally cultivated young bamboo but excluding mushroom varieties.

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<sup>3</sup> “Reviving” is distinct from “preserving,” and is indicative of the flexibility at hand, as Christoph Brumann has demonstrated in his analysis of traditional Kyoto-style houses (see Brumann 2009).

In 1987, the Kyō Brand for vegetables was established due to the efforts of various prefectural actors and sales began in 1989. Less than a decade later, after the brand had strengthened, daily shipments to Tokyo began. The Kyō Brand has been well received. Mizuna, a leafy green vegetable that makes up about half of the brand's sales, sells for almost twice the price of that from Ibaraki prefecture, which produces 80 percent of the mizuna available at the Tokyo Central Wholesale Market. The price difference, though not the proportion, appears to be true for brand vegetables and many non-brand vegetables, implying that branding has benefited Kyoto's vegetable industry in general (Kyoto Prefectural Agricultural Research Institute, 2007:21). The modern capitalist techniques included in branding—namely standardization, certification, and marketing—along with the appeal of Kyoto's historical allure, have been deployed to revitalize the prefectural agricultural economy at a time when Japan's agricultural sector faces many challenges. Indeed, with an aging farming population, a high cost of labor, and farmland that is both limited and consists of relatively small plots, some agricultural economists have urged Japan to give up agriculture altogether.

Concerns about food security and food safety, as well as threats to local food culture, have emerged from the globalization of food. Yet, as I will argue, Kyoto's farmers, chefs, and government officials are not rejecting globalization wholesale. Instead they are choosing to engage with globalization and take advantage of new resources and opportunities so that they may strengthen the local economy and bolster local traditions and identities.

THE GLOBAL IN THE LOCAL

Contributors to Kyoto's contemporary food culture may be focused on reviving the "local," but while they do, Kyoto's bureaucrats, farmers and chefs are also unabashedly tapping into the "global." An examination of 1) who is invited to participate in local food culture 2) which ingredients from the "global pantry" are incorporated into local dishes and cuisines 3) which techniques and processes are adapted for local purposes, and 4) which objects are used to display and serve local cuisine sheds light on the ways that the global is implicated in Kyoto's food culture.

### *People*

If Kyoto is preparing and serving a meal, then tourists are invited to the table. Kyoto's economy benefits from large numbers of tourists and both Kyoto Prefecture and City go to great lengths to welcome tourists, including those from overseas. Those officials whose positions bring them in line with the tourism or agricultural sectors try to connect the two as much as they can. Along these lines, Kyoto's governor has appealed to the culture ministry to endeavor to have Japanese cuisine inscribed on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage (Japan Today 2011). France, Mexico, and an amalgam of Mediterranean countries have already submitted successful applications centered around their culinary traditions. Kyoto, taken to be the birthplace of "Japanese" foodways (see Rath 2010: 21), has an obvious interest in seeing "traditional" Japanese cuisine recognized as part of humanity's intangible cultural heritage, promoted internationally, and strengthened locally.

Kyoto's chefs are also active in promoting local cuisine to foreigners. The locally based Japanese Culinary Academy has explained its mission in the following way:



“We... aim to give priority to Kyoto as an international city, recognizing its role in the world's culinary culture. As the heartland of Japanese culture it is the city from which Japan's culinary culture is diffused--indeed, from where Japanese culture itself is spread. We will be satisfied if, through the activities of the Academy, people from all parts of the world will gain the chance to enjoy the superb culinary culture--the cuisine--that is our inheritance” (Japanese Culinary Academy 2010). To this end, the JCA has sent lecturers to speak about Kyoto's food culture to international audiences in Sao Paolo, Paris, and domestically.

Kyoto's restaurants are not only eager to draw foreigners into their dining areas. They also welcome cooks from abroad into their kitchens as interns. One restaurant renowned for its kaiseki cuisine has recently drawn interns from the US, Korea, and Denmark. Another establishment took on an American historian doing his research on Kyoto cuisine as kitchen help (Rath 2010). And I myself have been offered a position in a small family-run restaurant serving traditional-style cuisine, though it is unclear exactly how I would be of use to the friendly couple that runs it. The Japanese Culinary Academy organizes the Japan Culinary Fellowship, which in 2010—its 7<sup>th</sup> year—accepted 5 chefs from the US and Brazil to experience 9 days of workshops behind the counter of famed Kyoto kitchens (Umami Information Center 2010).

Foreigners are thus encouraged to participate in local food culture but with the understanding that to truly appreciate it or master it requires a fair amount of exposure and training. Consequently, while the chefs I spoke with welcomed the presence of Michelin Guide reviewers, they had serious reservations about whether or not the reviewers were appropriate judges of what was fine Kyoto cuisine. As evidence of the

reviewers' lack of understanding of *kyō ryōri*, the chefs pointed out that the guide to Kyoto was included in a volume that also reviewed Osaka and Kobe, which, though they may have excellent restaurants, do not lay claim to distinctive cuisines with a prestigious history. Kyoto's restaurateurs share their wealth of knowledge with foreign chefs and invite them to participate in local food culture based on the precondition that they come with a respect for Kyoto cuisines. These restaurateurs thus enable Kyoto to benefit from globalization, as an appreciation for its cuisines spreads across the world.

### *Ingredients*

The cosmopolitanism and openness that characterize the individuals and groups who contribute to Kyoto's food culture applies to more than their attitude towards tourists and other foreigners. Indeed, local cuisine readily incorporates ingredients, techniques, and objects from overseas. Kyoto City's Seasonal Vegetable Program, for example, designates vegetables that include sweet potatoes, tomatoes and broccoli among the 50 seasonal vegetables that it endeavors to assist city farmers to grow (Takashima 2003). Kyoto's farmers themselves may plant *kamo* eggplant, *karami daikon*, and *kintoki* carrots, but next to these they often grow strawberries, corn, and lettuce.

Similarly, a miso maker I interviewed explained that to make traditional Kyoto-style miso in old wooden barrels, only 2/3 of the soybeans he uses are grown domestically. The other 1/3 consists of non-GMO soybeans from Canada that although less ideal than Japanese soybeans nevertheless meet his standards. For this miso maker, the foreign origin of some of his ingredients does not clash with the proclamations on his signs "The fragrance of Kyoto," "Kyoto's white miso," and "Kyoto's red dashi." He

believes that it is entirely possible to make a traditional local product that incorporates imported items.

Kyoto cooking is itself replete with examples of interesting innovations. One historic restaurant serves a clear tomato soup with a pairing of *kamo* eggplant and eel. This incorporation of foreign ingredients into cooking that is viewed as “traditional” is true of household chefs as well. A group of Kyoto ladies whose website is dedicated to sharing advice on traditional living in Kyoto have one especially surprising recipe in their collection of obanzai recipes. The dish? Yogurt with raisins soaked in wine (Kyō no machiya kurashi no ishō kaigi 2010a). These women readily admit that the ingredients involved are not “traditional” in and of themselves. Why, then, is this recipe posted in the section for obanzai cuisine? For these ladies what is “traditional” is the way of thinking about everyday cooking, combining readily available ingredients in a manner that results in a practical, healthy, and yes, delicious dish (Kyō no machiya kurashi no ishō kaigi 2010b).<sup>4</sup> For them, it is perfectly feasible to create a “traditional” and “local” dish from ingredients that are modern additions to the Japanese diet.

Invoking the past and finding precedents for culinary innovations is also evident in the case of the Kyoto Habanero Village Company. Last year I interviewed the founder, Takada Makoto, who explained that about 10 years ago when he first began to grow habaneros in Japan, they were the hottest peppers on record and many people expressed doubts about Japanese people ever incorporating such spicy ingredients into their diets. In response, he

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<sup>4</sup> Personal communication with Kinoshita Yuka, webmaster for the Kyō no machiya group.

pointed out that 400 years earlier the same had been said of chili peppers yet they found their way into such ubiquitous Japanese condiments as *shichimi tōgarashi*, a seven-spice blend, or *yuzukoshō*, a Japanese paste made of hot peppers and the *yuzu* citrus fruit. Takada references this history to explain his rationale in making soy sauce, sake, cookies, salad dressing and other items flavored with locally grown habaneros. Inasmuch as he perceives his pioneering move to grow habaneros in Japan and find ways of making a variety of tasty foods with them to be in synch with Japanese tradition, every one of the Kyoto Habanero Village' s products names is preceded by that of the company, directly conjuring associations with Kyoto and its culinary traditions. This exemplifies the ease with which Kyoto' s residents raid the global pantry for ingredients they think complement local food culture.

### *Techniques*

Today, Kyoto's farmers find that local produce, and in particular heirloom vegetables, can fetch a higher market price than was true even thirty years ago. Although they find personal, cultural, and economic value in growing traditional varieties, Kyoto's farmers are not straight-jacketed to farming the way that their foreparents did at a certain point in time. In fact, farmers in Kyoto City and Kyoto Prefecture have both adapted to new circumstances and done so in divergent ways.

Prefectural farmers, especially those who sell their produce through the Kyō

Brand, are often farming heirloom varieties that their ancestors did not grow. They buy their seeds from seed companies and are likely to use chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Kyoto City's smallholders may seem more traditional when compared to prefectural farmers; after all, they have often continued to cultivate the same land as their ancestors, gathering seeds themselves, and using distribution systems that have been handed down to them like the land and the seeds themselves. City farmers, though, also employ techniques and materials from overseas. They use greenhouses, pollinating bees, organic and chemical fertilizers and insecticides from overseas, and inform themselves about foreign developments in farming.

Cooks, be they chefs in traditional style restaurants or the housewives and mothers who create Kyoto's daily dishes, have also taken advantage of certain newly available resources, techniques, and concepts in order to reposition the local within its globalizing context. It is thus not only about incorporating foreign ingredients and treating them as though they were native ingredients, by substituting cabbage for mizuna, for example. In addition to this, foreign cooking techniques are used on traditional vegetables. Hence *kamo* eggplant jam; *Shōgoin* turnip "steak;" and the dish that has truly become trendy, mizuna salad. Each of these dishes is at once exotic and familiar. Far from being impromptu dishes concocted by inspired amateurs, these dishes have recipes that have been gathered for publication in Kyoto prefecture's monthly newsletter. Chefs of all kinds are using traditional ingredients in new and innovative ways. In one local French restaurant, for example, one may find a potage featuring *suguki*, the vegetable that is made into what is arguably the most "traditional" Kyoto pickle of them all.

Food preparation thus offers up examples of how a self-described local cuisine

can consciously tap into a global repertoire of cooking techniques. Rather than portray Kyoto's food culture, or even Japanese food culture more generally, as a set of culinary traditions that have been rigidly followed until modern times, I would like to note that even its very origins, Japanese cuisine (like any modern cuisine, for that matter) has absorbed foreign elements. As Katarzyna Cwiertka writes, "Like the concept of the Japanese nation itself, Japanese cuisine was built on two pillars—1) a variety of local consumption practices, customs and attitudes; and 2) elements imported from abroad" (Cwiertka 2006: 176). In other words, one can both recognize the existence of distinctive practices that are ascribed with Japaneseness and also acknowledge that "tradition" and "authenticity" are products of social discourse.

### *Objects*

Even when dishes are served--and presented as local seasonal cooking--an array of global influences can be discerned. Kyoto's well-known Kikunoi restaurant furnishes a clear example of this. In addition to its traditional Japanese-style rooms, in which guests sit on *tatami* mats and eat at low tables, Kikunoi has two Western-style rooms in which its guests may savor their consecutive kaiseki courses. The room I was allowed to see was decorated with stained glass windows, had a wooden floor, and customers would sit in upholstered chairs to eat at a round wooden table.

During my first period of fieldwork in Kyoto, I wished to understand how farmers, local bureaucrats, and non-profit organizations were resisting the globalization of agriculture and food. One of the ways I chose to do this was by joining a local non-profit that brought together farmers, chefs, city officials, and other local citizens with the aim of

protecting and promoting Kyoto's traditional food culture. One of the first events I attended made me reconsider my preconceived ideas of what was occurring in Kyoto and elsewhere. This event was dedicated to teaching participants about seasonal cooking in Kyoto and took place in late fall. Like numerous other events hosted by this organization, it took place in a traditional Kyoto-style house, of which few remain, as upkeep is difficult and the houses themselves are impractical for many aspects of modern life. Freshly picked local produce was featured, including red *manganji* peppers, *shōgoin* turnips, red turnips, *kintoki* red carrots, *horikawa* burdock root (and its leaves), mizuna, and *kujō* green onions. What took me by surprise was when S-san, the teacher, began to talk about the foreign elements she used for the occasion. She had proudly pointed to the tablecloths that came from Bali and India, and she spoke passionately about the inspiration she derived from French presentation aesthetics. The dishes in which she served her seasonal creations included both traditional-style lacquer ware and Western-style crystal bowls. Even the food itself was a type of fusion: S-san used indigenous vegetables to create a salad which she accompanied with a dressing made using Dijon mustard, consommé, and *yuzukoshō*. To explain her attitude toward outside influences on local seasonal cooking, S-san said, "Things from foreign countries can also fit perfectly." S-san and her colleagues' vision of promoting local food culture is one that celebrates local traditions but does not close itself off to outside influences.

Globalization has opened up access to resources and opportunities that they believe they can use to complement and reinvigorate local food culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have examined how various actors in one East Asian city, Kyoto, revivify local food culture while negotiating the processes of globalization. One of my main points is that the “local” and the “global” are not in opposition to each other, though in public discourse and scholarly debate they are often posited as such. To be a globally connected city does not require expunging what is deemed “traditional.” Indeed, global connections can serve to support local traditions and foster a sense of localism as well (Caldwell and Lozada 2007). This is not to say that the processes of globalization do not often lead to a loss of local traditions and local affiliation. I would like to emphasize, however, that globalization does not necessarily entail homogenization and a weakening of the local. Rather, as the case study of Kyoto’s food culture demonstrates, globalization may provide resources and opportunities that individuals and groups may use to strengthen local traditions and senses of community and place.

I also argue that one could usefully distinguish between different varieties of localism (see Hinrichs 2007). On the one hand, there exists a “provincial” or “defensive” kind of localism that creates relatively rigid barriers to separate the local from what is deemed foreign. “Locavores,” those individuals and communities that choose to eat only those foods grown within the area they live in or up to a predetermined distance from their residence, are one example of this type of localism. The localism that I have observed in Kyoto, on the other hand, is a more cosmopolitan, inclusive variety of localism.

In this paper I have not mentioned Kyoto’s abundant foreign restaurants, its atmospheric coffeeshops, or the presence of the large fast food chains. These demonstrate that the everyday lives of Kyoto’s residents (more than simply their eating



habits) have very much been influenced by the globalization of food. I have focused on the “traditional” and the “local” because it is often assumed that these are devoid of international influences (at least in the present) and frequently opposed to the “global.” In Kyoto, I have shown that this is, in fact, not the case. The processes of globalization have made it possible for people, ingredients, techniques, and objects from overseas to be incorporated into what is still deemed “Kyoto’s food culture” and local farmers, chefs, and local officials have taken advantage of this opportunity.

My choice to place an emphasis in this paper on the roles that Kyoto’s farmers, bureaucrats, and professional and home chefs play is a conscious one. Too often, globalization is anthropomorphized, treated as an inevitable process that leaves very little room, if any, for individual or group agency. I have tried to show that although globalization is a topic worthy of discussion for academics, policy-makers, and those who are impacted by the complex processes of circulation and interdependence that characterize the world today, this does not mean that individuals and groups are presented with the simple choice of acceptance or resistance. Instead, I believe that individuals may engage with globalization in manifold ways. It is the responsibility of anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and others to shed light on the different strategies that groups are adopting to better situate themselves within the context of globalization. Such studies will offer correctives to assumptions that the processes of globalization are unstoppable homogenizing forces that one can easily separate at an analytical level from the everyday choices made by people all over the world.



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