

**The WEST: UNIQUE NOT UNIVERSAL** (summarized from an article by Samuel P. Huntington from Foreign Affairs, Nov/Dec 1996 <[www.foreignaffairs.org/19961101faessay4235/samuel-p-huntington](http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19961101faessay4235/samuel-p-huntington)>

Many in the West believe the world is moving towards a single global culture that is basically Western. For example the Coca-colonization theory which claims the West's (specifically American) popular culture is enveloping the world. American food, clothing, pop music and consumer goods are embraced by people on every continent. The West also claims to have led the world to the modern society (modernization). As people in other societies modernize they also westernize, abandoning their traditional values, institutions and customs, adopting those that prevail in the West.

Both of these theories present an image of an emerging homogeneous, universally Western World. These beliefs are arrogant, false and dangerous. The spread of Western consumer goods is not the spread of Western culture. Drinking Coca-Cola makes a Chinese citizen no more Western than eating sushi makes an American Japanese. Throughout human history, contact with other societies has resulted in the spread of goods and ideas from one society to another without significantly altering the basic culture of the recipient society. The West on occasion adopts food, fashion, artistic styles, business practices, etc. from Chinese, Hindu, Japanese and Arabic cultures, to name a few, not necessarily with discernible lasting impact. The argument that the spread of pop culture and consumer goods around the world representing the triumph of Western civilisation depreciates the strength of other cultures while trivializing Western culture by identifying it with fatty foods, fizzy drinks and fading fashion trends.

The essence of the West is the Magna Carta, not the Magna McDonalds. As countries modernize, they may westernize in superficial ways, but not in the most important measures of a culture-language, religion, values. Modernization involves industrialization, urbanization, increasing levels of literacy, education, wealth and social mobilization and many more complex and diverse structures. It is a revolutionary process comparable to the shift from primitive to civilized societies that began in Mesopotamia, the Nile and Indus around 5000 BCE. The attitudes, values, knowledge and culture of a people in a modern society differ greatly from those in a traditional society. As the first civilization to modernize, the West is the first to have fully acquired the culture of modernity.

But as countries modernize, they seek refuge from the modern world in their traditions: religion, culture, language. Around the globe, education and democracy are leading to "indigenization". The West has been a colonial power for centuries, but independence movements, new economies, the end of the Cold War and shared technologies, (especially computer and Internet), have created and aided other emerging powers. As the power of the West ebbs, the rest of the world will become more dominant and assertive. For the West to

survive as a vibrant and powerful civilization, it must abandon the pretence of universality and recognize the uniqueness of their own traditional roots and respect those of others while sharing the technological changes which will continue to impact our modern world. However these changes are, after all, only technology and not the core of our civilization.

**Answer the following questions:**

1. What does the author mean when he states (on p. 29): “The essence of Western culture is the *Magna Carta*, not *Magna Mac*”?
2. The author states that: “...Western civilization is precious not because it is universal but because it is unique”, so what makes the West ‘western’?
3. Do you think ‘the Rest’ can/should copy the West? Explain.