Questioning the Uneven Terrains of Economic Globalization

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Abstract

The issue of economic globalization and global economic change has been a subject of immense academic research in the past two decades. The Janus face of economic globalization, however, continues to obfuscate our understanding of its complex processes and alleged geographical outcomes. In this paper, I aim to re-present the indispensable role of geography in conceptualizing economic globalization. I argue that economic globalization is an inherently geographical phenomenon in relation to (1) spatial differentiation as preconditions, (2) the transcendence and switchability of geographical scales, and (3) discursive practices as socio-spatial constructions. The paper next focuses on a relational methodology for doing globalization research by examining its measurements, trails, analyses, and assessments. In order to appreciate the direct and indirect outcomes of economic globalization, I analyze the complex interrelationships between globalization processes and the recent Asian economic crisis. Some future research agenda in relation to the coordination of research and the choice of analytical units in globalization research will also be offered.

Introduction

"Geography is still important. Globalization has not diminished the economic significance of location" - John Kay proudly declares in his fortnightly column in the world's famous pinkish newspaper, *The Financial Times* (10 January 2001: 14). The fact that business gurus like Kay write about globalization is absolutely nothing new; indeed, some geographers have associated the dreaming up of "globalization" as a key word in the new century with such business gurus (Taylor et al., 2001). What is particularly interesting in Kay's FT column, however, is his unreserved defense for the importance of place and location in globalization. Coming from outside Geography as an intellectual discipline, his views on globalization therefore provide significant legitimacy for the claim that geographers might have some very useful things to say about globalization. In their laudable efforts to relate geography to globalization, Taylor et al. (2001: 1) note that "[w]hatever your own opinion may be, any intellectual engagement with social change in the twenty first century has to address this concept [globalization] seriously, and assess its capacity to explain the world we currently inhabit".

The definitions of globalization in the literature, however, remain largely elusive, vague, and, in Jessop's (1999) view, "chaotic". It is now generally agreed among human geographers that globalization should be defined as a set of mutually constitutive tendencies comprising both *material processes* of transformation and counter movements, and *contested ideologies and discourses* that operate across a variety of spatial scales. Globalization is certainly not akin to a mega-trend "out there" to be grappled objectively by social scientists. Rather, globalization comprises an uneasy amalgamation of related and yet distinct material processes shaping our discursive practices, *and* yet contested discourses having material consequences. In other words, we cannot define globalization as concrete processes of socio-economic and political restructuring on a global scale without underscoring the ideological foundations on the basis of which these processes operate. Similarly, globalization is more than what political elites and business gurus would like us to believe in – the emergence of the global village. This discursive construction of globalization has material and geographical consequences. As argued by Brenner (1999: 68), globalization involves a multi-scalar restructuring and reconfiguration of capitalist territorial organization.

The above definitional problem makes it incumbent upon us to present very specific and precise definition of globalization that hopefully avoids the problem of "chaotic concepts". In this paper, I focus more specifically on *economic globalization* and take a more precise definition of economic globalization as *the rapid proliferation of cross-border production, trade, and investments spearheaded by global corporations and international financial institutions that leads to an increasingly integrated and interdependent global economy today* (see also Dicken, 1998). There are three specificities to this definition of economic globalization. First, this definition includes only material processes of *economic transactions* across borders. It does not directly include other globalization imperatives that may have economic consequences (e.g. migrations and civil society networks). Second, the

definition encapsulates an *actor-oriented approach* to understanding economic globalization by focusing specifically on the transformative role of global corporations and international financial institutions. This specificity avoids the flawed view of economic globalization as some sort of mega trends "out-there". Third, it explicitly refers to *the global scale* as essential in defining economic *global*ization. Whatever its constituents, contests, and consequences at different spatial scales, economic globalization is necessarily an integrating force that operates on a global scale and intensifies connections and flows across borders and regions. This narrower definition of economic globalization avoids the tendency to use "globalization" as a catch-all phrase for describing all kinds of contemporary processes of change. It is certainly not just about the latest phase of uneven geographical development, de/reterritorialization, or crisis-induced capitalist restructuring.

The transformative capacity of globalization processes has been associated with both material outcomes in such specific spatial units as localities, regions and nation states, and peculiar discursive practices by social actors. This Janus face of economic globalization has continued to frustrate social scientific research into its *causes* and *outcomes*. Very often, we are told by the popular literature and politicized groups that economic globalization is responsible for virtually every good/bad thing/event that is happening in the global economy today. Instead of being driven and explained by a multitude of interrelated processes and conditions, economic globalization has become conceptualized in mainstream economic thinking and political debates as a universal explanation; it has been naturalized as the inevitable pathway to economic prosperity and success. In other words, if a national economy is not performing well, it must be because this economy is not having "enough" of economic globalization, and vice versa. Economic globalization has therefore been conceived as a political "fix" to resolve problems of economic stagnation and technological backwardness. This "globalization fix" clearly has both material and discursive consequences for all its

participants – people, firms, state authorities and non-state institutions, international organizations, and so on.

To a critical economic geographer, this obfuscation of our understanding of the complex processes, discursive representations, and geographical outcomes of economic globalization necessarily begs questions worthy of further examination. In this framing paper, I aim to focus on what economic geographers might contribute to the study of economic globalization and its geographical outcomes. Cognizant of the enormous amount of globalization studies, the paper is not intended to be a literature review; it is not even a critical assessment of the globalization literature which is extremely diverse and, perhaps, chaotic. Instead, I aim to provide a spatial framework for geographical debates on economic globalization and to argue for the indispensable role of geography in conceptualizing economic globalization. My argument is that economic globalization is an inherently geographical phenomenon, and therefore its causality and outcomes can be much better understood and accurately assessed from a geographical perspective. This is obviously a strong statement for reasserting the importance of Geography as a discipline contributing to mainstream debates on the causes, effects, and future of economic globalization. But then, as the above quotation from John Kay shows, if place and location remain important in globalization processes, why should geographers take a back seat in social scientific investigations into globalization (cf. Amin and Thrift, 1994; Cox, 1997; Dicken, 1998; Herod et al., 1998; Olds et al., 1999; Kelly, 2000; Coe and Yeung, 2001; Olds, 2001)? Being aware of this paper's tendency to slip into some kind of self-indulgence and "geocentrism" or spatial fetishism, however, I believe we need reflexivity and immanent critique in our analysis of the geographical contributions to globalization studies.

Organized into three main sections, this paper starts its interrogation of popular understanding of economic globalization by asking a fundamentally geographical question:

whether it is economic globalization *per se* or the *spatiality* of economic globalization that serves as the causal mechanism contributing to all kinds of socio-economic malaises? This theoretical question forms the main focus of the next section that examines the geographical foundations of economic globalization. It is, however, one thing to theorize and reassert the role of space as both the causes and outcomes of globalization, it is quite another thing to study it empirically. The second section of the paper outlines some contributions from a relational methodology in economic geography for examining the processes and outcomes of economic globalization. This section focuses on how economic geographers can go beyond stylized facts and models to question the uneven terrains of economic globalization. The final section of the paper aims to situate my theoretical and methodological discussions within the empirical context of understanding the 1997/1998 Asian economic crisis. Here, I show that the Asian economic crisis is *not* an outcome of economic globalization *per se*, but rather an integral process within the broader tendencies of economic globalization. While the Asian economic crisis has been represented as a crisis *of* economic globalization, it is neither logical nor empirically correct to explain the crisis by labeling it as merely an outcome of economic globalization. The concluding section of the paper discusses how we – economic geographers – can collectively put Geography on the globalization agenda.

The Geographical Foundations of Economic Globalization

My conceptual framework begins by questioning the common assumption of economic globalization as a "thing" that has certain structural coherence and properties to cause empirically observable outcomes. This assumption is evident in such statements as "economic globalization leads to deepening income inequality and unemployment". For such a thing as economic globalization to be causally efficacious, it must contain some inherent constituents that exist in necessary relations with economic globalization, and collectively give rise to its causal properties and allow it to be the cause of all evils and good things.

Following Amin (2001), I will argue for the intrinsic *spatiality* of economic globalization that sets the necessary preconditions for globalization to effect empirical changes and outcomes. Indeed, Amin (2001: 2; emphasis omitted) argues that "globalization so centrally evokes geography: the rise of world-scale processes and phenomena, the intensification of linkage between distant places and cultures, and the associated unmaking and remaking of territorial boundaries and identities". But unlike Amin (2001), I believe all three elements of the proposed spatiality of globalization are geographical *outcomes* of globalization, not its inherently spatial constitution. These phenomena of *rising* world-scale processes, *intensified* linkages between places, and *(re)shaping* of territoriality are defined by actors in economic globalization, e.g. cross-border activities of global corporations and international organizations. They are empirically observable spatial manifestations of globalization tendencies, not their spatial *pre*conditions. To define the spatiality of economic globalization, we have to look into different kinds of geographical foundations that presuppose and are subsequently shaped by economic globalization: (1) spatial differentiation, (2) the transcendence and switchability of geographical scales, and (3) discursive practices as socio-spatial constructions. My argument is that these spatial preconditions allow economic globalization to occur in the first place and, subsequently, its consequences and outcomes. Economic globalization *per se* is therefore not sufficient in explaining these consequences and outcomes. The following sub-sections seek to explore critically the nature and properties of these geographical foundations of economic globalization.

Economic globalization as spatial exploitation

In a global economy characterized by a homogenous and isotropic surface, economic globalization is neither necessary nor possible. If costs and demand for goods and services are identical wherever we are, simple economics will tell us that firms and other economic institutions will not exist and, if so, no economic globalization will occur as there are no

institutional vehicles to carry it through and there are no spatial advantages to be exploited. Historically, however, we know that the global economy was not, and will never be, an isotropic surface. The existence of spatial differentiation in costs, demands and, later on, technologies has given rise to specific forms of nation states and capitalist space-economy since the 16th century (see Held et al., 1999; Schwartz, 2000). This is a crucial point for understanding economic globalization because spatial differences – vertical (scales) or horizontal (distance) – provide the preconditions for economic globalization to be both necessary and possible. The necessary relation between spatial differences (a set of preconditions) and economic globalization (a set of processes) exists because without spatial differences in economic terms (e.g. profitability and resource availability), economic globalization would have lost its *raison d'être* of capital accumulation through global connectivity. The ubiquity of resources and demand would put an end to processes of capital accumulation. Dialectically, spatial flows and processes (including particularly economic globalization) are capable of reinforcing or even increasing preexisting spatial differences for a certain period of time. In other words, the inherently uneven terrains of the global economy are both the necessary cause and, of course, a contingent outcome of economic globalization. Spatial configuration is a constitutive force in explaining the nature of economic globalization.

To put this point about the spatiality of economic globalization in perspective, we may consider one of the key vehicles of economic globalization – transnational corporations. There is now an enormous amount of academic literature on the emergence of transnational corporations. In international economics and business studies, a transnational corporation exists because of geographical differences in transaction costs that create opportunities for vertical and horizontal integration of firm-specific activities in different locations. It is this uneven spatiality in transaction costs that explains the rise of the transnational corporation and

its foreign investment activities (Dunning, 1993; Caves, 1996; Shatz and Venables, 2000). In turn, the functional integration of cross-border activities by these TNCs becomes a central element in defining contemporary economic globalization.

A critic, however, may counter-argue that if economic globalization is about the exploitation of spatial differences, the former should be seen as an active force impinging on the latter. And if so, why is economic globalization not the causal factor? There are clearly many ways to respond to this critique of the view that spatial differences can explain economic globalization. In the first place, if we take a Humean positivist view of causality, the occurrence of spatial differentiation not only takes place historically before the arrival of economic globalization, but also is not predicated on economic globalization *per se*. Spatial differentiation in agricultural productivity in pre-modern societies, for example, can be explained by climatic conditions and other local factors. A second line of response is to follow the realist interpretation of causality on the basis of necessary relations between subjects and objects (see Sayer, 1992; 2000). In this case, spatial differentiation is necessary for economic globalization to occur for reasons explained earlier. A final mode of response is simply common sense – if spatial differentiation does not enable economic globalization, what precondition will do so? Since economic globalization is really about spatial connectivity and geographical restructuring on a global scale, what else factors can be plausible? This leads me to the second geographical element of economic globalization – the switchability of geographical scales as a necessary precondition of economic globalization.

Economic globalization as the transcendence of geographical scales

Since economic globalization is a set of processes and practices that transcend our commonly accepted nesting of geographical scales from the local and the urban to the regional and the global, another necessary precondition to allow for economic globalization to take place is the “switchability” of geographical scales. The issue of geographies of scales has

received a very significant amount of attention in the recent geographic literature (see Brenner, 1999; 2001; Kelly, 1999; Marston, 2000; Amin, 2001). While many of these geographical interpretations have clarified the status of overlapping scalar geographies and reconfiguring of territorial units in understanding globalization, few have ventured into the ontological status of geographical scales and, therefore, fundamentally questioned the spatiality of globalization. On the one hand, the socio-political construction of scales is critical in our understanding of globalization tendencies. Certain geographical scales are no doubt socially constructed and historically produced under the aegis of capitalism. They can be seen as "a relational element in a complex mix that also includes space, place and environment – all of which interactively make the geographies we live in and study" (Marston, 2000: 221). One can think of homes, cities, and regions as socially (re)produced in association with the advent of different rounds of modernity and capitalism. These geographical scales have mixed fortunes in their political acceptance and social influence during different periods of capitalist regimes of accumulation. This relational definition of geographical scales, however, is insufficient in understanding economic globalization as it does not relate to the scalar restructuring effects of economic globalization. As Brenner (2001: 14; original italics) argues, we have to pay attention to the specific properties of geographical scales as "the *hierarchization* of spaces in relation to one another which is the very essence of their scalar ordering/differentiation or 'rescaling'". In this sense, economic globalization (re)presents a significant "scalar problem" because its very processes are constituted by the rescaling of multiple and overlapping geographical scales that fundamentally challenges preexisting hierarchization of geographic spaces and territoriality.

On the other hand, however, I would argue that certain geographical scales that have so far been downplayed in the geographic literature have somewhat mixed ontological status. In particular, the *global* scale has been paradoxically undertheorized in theoretical work on

the (local and national) politics of scale and the rescaling of (urban and supranational) politics. As Kelly (1999: 386) argues, ignoring the global scale effectively places one in an awkward position that defers to "the orthodox way in which it is represented and the neoliberal policy conclusions that are drawn". While it can be discursively constructed as well precisely through political-economic projects oriented towards other scales (see below), I argue that the global scale has an independent material existence beyond merely social construction. Such natural phenomena as climatic change and sea-level fluctuations, for example, are global in their scale of occurrence and impact (cf. Demeritt, 2001). In other words, the planetary earth as the global scale exists irrespective of human activities and spatial formations of such territorial units as localities, agglomerations, and regions. This global space is what Lefebrve (1991: 422) refers to in his conclusion to *The Production of Space* as "the furthest edge of the possible", "the space of the human species", and "the social foundation of a transformed everyday life open to myriad possibilities". It is the *ultimate* space in which all possibilities for human emancipation lie. Insofar as we use the term "*global*ization", its ontological existence will be linked to the global scale as the ultimate space, even though technological change can push the physical-geographical limits of human reach to the outer space. But then, this reach beyond the global scale exceeds the definitional limits of the term "globalization"; it may in fact be better described as "extra-terrestrialization". The ontological existence of the global scale therefore implies that economic globalization does not necessarily take precedence over other preexisting social processes in the pre-globalization period. The global routes of slavery, for example, can be considered as preceding contemporary globalization. It also means that, unlike the pro- and anti-globalization rhetoric, economic globalization is not inherently more progressive or repressive because it is a necessary tendency towards an ontological pre-given. The outcomes

and consequences of economic globalization therefore cannot be determined *a priori*, but rather *only* empirically and contingently.

How then does the ontological existence of the global scale matter and how does it relate to the switchability of geographical scales? Without a satisfactory answer to these two related questions, transcending and relativizing geographical scales (or scalar restructuring) can only be seen as an outcome, rather than a precondition, of economic globalization. In this paper, geographical scales are theorized as having a significant influence on the processes of economic globalization *if* these scales possess properties of *switchability* – defined as the ease in which particular material processes and discursive practices can be (re)constituted at different and multiple geographical scales. Scalar switchability is different from spatial switching in that the latter refers only to the substitutability of processes within *same* spatial scales (e.g. from one location to another) rather than between *different* spatial scales. Scalar switchability implies that such economic processes as global production networks can be switched from the global scale in its strategic conceptualization to the regional or local scales in its operationalization. There is continuous tension in these global production networks between capital's mobility on a global scale and its necessary spatial fixity at the local or other scales. Different degrees of scalar switchability can be attributed to human imperatives (e.g. technological changes and political movements) and social constructions (e.g. geographical imaginations and discursive practices). Scalar switchability, however, varies contingently depending on specific globalization processes such that geographical scales may be much more switchable in some processes (e.g. global capital flows) and less in other processes (e.g. political activities and urban development).

This capacity for geographical scales to be switchable in interrelated globalization processes explains the propensity for economic globalization to occur in two ways. First, the lack of fixed ontological status among such geographical scales as homes, localities, and

regions indicates that these scales can be (re)constituted, (re)structured, and (re)combined through various globalization processes. These same processes of, say, investment flows and cultural diffusion can "switch" across these different geographical scales in search of profits and other benefits for actors in economic globalization (e.g. business and political elites). In this sense, the switchability of such socially constructed geographical scales influences globalization processes because it allows globalization processes to transcend nested territories and overlapping scales, and to reorganize them into perhaps different scalar geographies. Second, economic globalization, at least in the version defined in this paper, is both constrained and enabled by the fixed and non-switchable ontological existence of the global scale. Economic globalization has its scalar limits because the planetary earth places an upper limit on the spatial reach of economic globalization that should be understood as a spatial-temporal tendency of becoming, not an end-state being or a finality (see Yeung, 1998: 295-296). By effectively delimiting the spatiality of economic globalization, the global scale sets the precondition on how far economic globalization can go – as far as the earth can be stretched. Quite literally, economic globalization cannot proceed beyond the global scale, or if so, it is no longer deemed as *global*ization.

There are, however, other possible contingent scenarios that may limit scalar switchability. For example, a national government (e.g. Malaysia since September 1998) may decide to impose control on capital flows and thereby effectively disenable the scalar switchability of that country at different sub-national scales (local, regional, and national). If many more national governments join force with Malaysia, the scalar switchability of financial globalization may be significantly reduced at the national scale, and the advancement of financial globalization may be disrupted. Put in another way, financial globalization owes much to the efforts by national governments to grant freedom to market actors through liberalization initiatives and not to implement more effective controls on

financial movements (Helleiner, 1995). Martin (1994: 263) observes that "[f]rom the late 1950s to the early 1970s financial globalization was stimulated by the uneven geography of market regulation, and competition between the world's major financial centres was largely shaped by the regulatory contours between them". In short, financial globalization is certainly not like a severe gale whipping out a place full of shaky houses; it is rather engineered and monitored by specific actors and institutions with the view to free capital from its spatial limits as much as possible. How then do these actors and institutions create conditions conductive for economic globalization to take place? What kind of discursive practices do they engage in order to ensure successfully socio-spatial constructions of economic globalization?

Economic globalization as discursive spatial practices

From the above analysis, it is evident that the spatiality of economic globalization is more than just about exploiting preexisting spatial differences (and, in the process, creating new spatial differences and uneven terrains) and switching across different, but overlapping, geographical scales (and, in the process, restructuring and reorganizing these scales). Economic globalization has a very significant discursive dimension as well; and this dimension is also spatially construed. In short, economic globalization entails mutually constitutive material processes operating on a global scale, and social-spatial constructions, or what Lefebvre (1991: 33) calls "representations of space, which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations". Globalization discourses, as we have now come to know, are highly motivated by economic gains and political legitimacy, without which economic globalization would have lost its appeal to different groups of social actors. These discourses are therefore fundamental in improving the political and social acceptance of economic globalization. One good example is Ohmae's (1990) representation of the "borderless world"

that has been used as if it were reality. Protagonists of the metaphor would like to see the negation of all territorial boundaries in order to enhance capital's global reach. But they have also obviously forgotten its representational nature and the underlying socio-spatial relations that underscore its (re)production (cf. Miyoshi, 1993; Yeung, 1998).

In principle, there are several popular ways to represent economic globalization in socio-spatial terms. First, all sorts of champions and opponents have constructed economic globalization discursively as an *external force* impinging on specific scalar geographies (e.g. localities). This ontological separation of economic globalization as "out there" and places as "in here" is problematical. As Amin (2001: 8) argues, this kind of representation of economic globalization implies that "relations within localities are cast as good, and meaningful, and contrasted to bad, and totalizing, external relations [at the global scale]". What is missing in this problematical ontological separation between local (internal) and global (external) geographies are the necessary and integral relations between the local scale and the global scale (and other scales in between these two). In other words, economic globalization is not an external force crushing self-contained localities and territories. Instead, these localities have always been socially constructed in relation to the global scale. Economic globalization is as internal to these localities as they are integral in the development and evolution of globalization processes. This ontological inquiry into the discursive representation of economic globalization as an external force has important implications for our understanding of its spatiality. It allows us to understand better the discursive strategies deployed by proponents of economic globalization who would argue that we should accept economic globalization wholeheartedly simply because everyone "out there" has been involved in and benefited from economic globalization. We can also appreciate the false representation of economic globalization by its dissents who would argue that without economic globalization, the good life in localities will return or remain intact. In either cases, economic globalization

is discursively constructed as a spatially external force that *causes* all kinds of prosperity and/or misery.

Second, economic globalization has been put forward in political campaigns and official speeches as *natural* and *inevitable*. This is typically a TINA argument ("There Is No Alternative"), as evident in earlier debates about market liberalization in the 1980s. For example, Leyshon (1997: 143) reviews critically that "[m]ost of the globalization discourses which emerge from within political communities tend to be far more simplistic in their general tenor, if not evangelical in tone, and display a burning faith in the 'natural' benevolence and 'obvious' utility of markets". In this metaphorical construction, economic globalization is "naturalized" as a historical inevitability, which clearly is far from being true. As argued earlier, economic globalization is only inevitable if spatial differentiation persists *and* scalar switchability is possible. In other words, the inevitability of economic globalization remains contingent on its own spatial preconditions. If we accept this argument that it is the spatiality of economic globalization that determines its advent, not the other way round, then we should not think of economic globalization as a natural and an inevitable force. It is possible that economic globalization does not take place if we can minimize uneven development and disenable scalar switchability – two necessary geographical foundations of economic globalization. Of course, a critic may argue that it is impossible to achieve both even development and non-scalar switchability. But since both geographical foundations are socially produced (uneven development due to capitalism and scalar switchability due to technological and organizational changes), economic globalization is thus reversible and can be stopped.

Third, economic globalization has been championed in the popular media and business literature as *universal* and, by its implications, beneficial to humankind globally. Again, this socio-spatial construction of the universality of economic globalization overlooks its equally

possible spatial logic of exploitation and uncertainty. Although economic globalization, as a set of tendencies, has potential for planetary reach, its universality cannot be guaranteed on two counts. Economic globalization requires exploitation of spatial differences in different parameters that range from wages and labor productivity to availability of venture capital and state regulation. While beneficial to the drivers of economic globalization (e.g. transnational corporations), this spatial exploitation may outstrip the short-term advantages that economic globalization brings to specific places (as in the "footloose capital" argument). Furthermore, the precondition of scalar switchability, whilst allowing different localities/regions to be "plugged" into the global economy in Castells' (1996) sense, can significantly increase the vulnerability of these localities/regions to switching processes that may be more harmful than beneficial (e.g. sudden valorization of domestic productive capital into other forms of financial capital at different geographical scales, as in the case of the Asian economic crisis below). Put in this perspective, economic globalization is neither always universal nor necessarily beneficial. It all depends on preexisting geographical foundations of particular globalization process.

To sum up this section so far, I argue that the spatiality of economic globalization clearly matters more in our explanation of the perils of economic globalization than simply globalization tendencies themselves (e.g. capital flows). The inherent geographical foundations that enable economic globalization to take place have more explanatory power than what economic globalization exactly entails. For example, preexisting spatial inequalities (and power relations that underpin them) are much more useful in helping us understand why certain places are more vulnerable to the perils of economic globalization than others (e.g. South Africa vs. Singapore). A similar observation can be applied to the issues of scalar switchability and socio-spatial constructions of economic globalization. Proponents and opponents of economic globalization have clearly shortchanged our intellectual capacity by

specifying economic globalization as *the cause* of many empirically observable phenomena today. While pointing out the importance of a geographical perspective on economic globalization and the potential contributions of geographers to globalization studies, this inquiry into the nature and processes of economic globalization should not be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy. For as long as economic globalization has its peculiar spatiality of elevating the global scale above all other scales and reconfiguring these scales into multi-scalar mosaics, geography and geographers matter. It remains to be shown, however, how Geography, as an academic discipline, can enlighten our understanding of economic globalization beyond just abstract theorization and conceptualization. The following two sections are devoted to illustrating how Geography matters in globalization studies in methodological and empirical terms.

Geographers Doing Globalization Research: Towards a Relational Methodology

One of the most important recent contributions of Geography to the methodology of studying economic globalization is the development of a *relational methodology* for researching into the global economy (see also Amin, 1998; Dicken et al., 2001; Dicken and Malmberg, 2001). Methodology is defined as the entire *process* of practicing research (e.g. positivistic and interpretive methodology) and methods as specific technique and/or instruments for research (e.g. sample surveys and in-depth interviews). This section focuses mainly on how the relational methodology can be usefully applied to globalization research. To begin, a relational methodology has several core elements. First, it requires us to focus our research on *actors*, their intentionality, and heterogeneous power relations. Political, social, and economic actors are important in the relational methodology because they not only construct and constitute those power relations, but also drive them and make things happen. In this sense, the methodology goes beyond a structural analysis of globalization processes that

merely concentrates on (capitalist) structures of unequal power relations without paying attention to the role of actors in constructing relations in these structures. It expands upon a structural understanding by conceiving of power as being diffused in a Foucauldian (capillary-like) sense whereby it is always present in all social and economic interactions (Bridge, 1997).

Second, a relational methodology takes *networks* as its central analytical unit. The existence of differential power relations orchestrated by actors within these networks allows us to understand the global economy as a set of interlocking and multi-scalar networks of economic activity. The choice of networks as an analytical unit precisely frees geographers from the trap of "scale-centrism", i.e. privileging certain geographical scales at the expense of other scales, and enables us to appreciate better the scalar switchability of globalization processes. For example, Brenner (1999) and Dicken et al. (2001) have argued strongly against the common preoccupation of globalization studies with a state-centric and hierarchical view of the global economy. By analyzing the ways through which actor-oriented networks switching across different geographical scales in their concrete operations, the relational methodology "transcends these various scales and does not fall into the conceptual trap of privileging any one of them" (Dicken et al., 2001: 95). Instead of looking at how economic globalization operates at each geographical scale from the local and the regional to the national and the global, economic geographers are increasingly interested in seeing different scales of economic processes as links of various strengths in different networks. We are encouraged to think of networks of agents acting across various distances and through diverse intermediaries. As shown later, this reorientation of our research methodology towards relational networks has important implications for understanding the inherent spatiality of economic globalization and assessing its outcomes in specific concrete circumstances (see also empirical work on world-city networks in Beaverstock et al., 2000).

Last but certainly not least, the relational methodology directs us to the core issue of *governance* in networks that comprises not only the flows of power and authority throughout networks, but also the exercise and realization of that power and authority. Without understanding the organizational/geographical sources and direction of governance, we cannot possibly appreciate how globalization processes might contribute to, or simply *cause*, specific empirical outcomes. The advantage of the relational methodology is that governance is seen as relational in the sense that it results from the complex and socially embedded interaction between the governing authority and the governed subject. As explained earlier, governing globalization processes involves specific discursive practices by different social actors and political elites. The methodological challenge of understanding governance is to identify its concrete basis and to show how its realization impacts differently on specific localities and territories.

How then does this relational methodology inform our study of economic globalization and its outcomes. In the first place, most existing studies of globalization are confronted with the problem of *measurement*. How do we know globalization has taken place, unless we are able to measure it – the kind of question similar to "How do I know it when I see it" (see Markusen, 1999; Plummer, 2001)? Most empirical studies rely on conventional statistical data on capital flows, international trade, and foreign direct investment to measure the nature and extent of economic globalization. One major problem with these data is their collection on the basis of our conventional ontological separation of the global economy into hierarchical geographical scales of countries and regions – the state-centrism problem in measuring economic globalization. Does it mean, then, that economic globalization is deemed to have taken place if we find empirical patterns of greater flows of capital, goods, and people across different countries and/or regions? How do we measure the growing interdependence of territorial units in the global economy?

The relational methodology proposed by economic geographers offers us more depth and richness in our analysis of the global economy than state-centric statistical studies of globalization. In particular, researchers in the tradition of the relational methodology should take into account mainly *relational data* that are not necessarily collected on the basis of a state-centric ontology. In other words, these data do not adhere to rigid hierarchical separation of the global economy into different countries and/or regions. Instead, relational data measure economic activities on the basis of their flows across different geographical scales. Some examples of these relational data include actor-specific financial networks, firm-specific production networks, and industry-specific commodity chains. There is no doubt that these data are very hard to collect and few national statistical agencies are capable of collecting them. In fact, the state-centric bias of most official statistics tends to err economic analyses of globalization. Through their field-based case studies and multi-locational research interviews, however, economic geographers are able to construct significant databases of these sorts that allow the *processes* of economic globalization, not just its outcomes, to be more transparent.

This fieldwork-oriented research method in economic geography allows for better *tracing* of globalization processes as actor-specific networks relations stretched across different geographical scales. In methodological terms, these networks are simply opaque to existing analysis in mainstream economics because their heterogeneous relations and association may not be empirically observable and distinguishable from other social and economic patterns. Even quantitative network analysis (e.g. in sociology) does not go beyond mathematical modeling and/or statistical manipulations of empirically measurable variables of actor points and locations. Economic geographers, however, afford much more validity and reflexivity to tracing networks as a method for understanding the territorial constitution and outcomes of economic globalization via their engagement with an array of actor networks. This stance reflects a social constructionist approach, and the “reconstruction of power

without refiguring it as an inhuman force leading to foregone conclusions" (Thrift et al., 1995: 1). It also necessitates intimate knowledge of these social actors and their intermediaries through close dialogue and other ethnographic methods (Clark, 1998). A fundamental methodological requirement of tracing actor networks should therefore be to acknowledge three critical dimensions of these networks: the autonomous power of actors; the role of intermediaries, and the interconnections of nodes (see more in Yeung, 2001). For example, one method to track economic globalization is to conceive the global economy as a territorial unit constituted by major crosscutting production and financial networks. To understand how globalization processes operate, we have to identify these production and financial networks, to examine their main constituents and actors, and their discursive strategies, and to connect concrete outcomes in specific locations to the relational structures and processes in these networks. In doing so, we can understand both abstract globalization processes and their concrete outcomes as relational in nature.

If we are able to unpack what economic globalization is really about, we will be in a good position to begin *analyzing* and *assessing* economic globalization in terms of its causes and outcomes. Since economic globalization is such a diverse and multi-scalar phenomenon, it is not possible to identify in a comprehensive manner its many causes and outcomes. Analysis and assessment of economic globalization must therefore be grounded in specific issues at hand, e.g. technological change or industrial hollowing-out. Assuming relational data are collected and field-based case studies are conducted concomitantly, it is possible to analyze the necessary relations between particular globalization processes (e.g. global financial integration) and concrete empirical events (e.g. the Asian economic crisis; see the next section). We can also assess whether these necessary relations are contingent upon specific spatiality of economic globalization in such a way that spatial preconditions (e.g. scalar switchability) explain the concrete realization of those necessary relations. The next

penultimate section will attempt to draw upon the above theoretical and methodological insights in order to assess the complex interrelationships between economic globalization and the Asian economic crisis.

Assessing the Outcomes of Economic Globalization: Geographers and the Asian Economic Crisis

The 1997/1998 Asian economic crisis (henceforth "the crisis") represents a highly relevant concrete setting to discuss the theoretical and methodological issues raised in the earlier sections of this paper for several reasons. First, the overwhelming amount of contesting literature published on the crisis demonstrates a plethora of different ways of interpreting the crisis as an outcome of economic globalization. In other words, the crisis is one of the rare large-scale phenomena of global economic change in recent decades that has been associated so closely in the literature with economic globalization *per se*. It also signifies the breakdown of "the last bastion of successful development in the world economy, following the 'lost decade for development' which has befallen a major part of the underdeveloped world since the 1980s" (Lo, 1999: 18). Second, economic geographers have yet to make a significant contribution to this literature on the crisis. The visible lack of geographical interpretations of the crisis further enhances the domination of the already economics-biased analysis of the crisis (see Kelly et al., 2001). The sheer financial size and multiple geographical scales of the crisis provide an excellent experimental ground for geographers to test our ideas on economic globalization's spatiality and scalar switchability. Third, the crisis has been highly politicized to the extent that it is at least partially responsible for the downfall of several presidents in Asian countries (e.g. Suharto in Indonesia and Kim Young-Sam in South Korea). The discursive constructions of the crisis by different actors/elites with very different motivations and their related strategies of negotiation potentially offer important insights into the socio-spatial construction of economic globalization.

In the following two sub-sections, I first problematize the Asian economic crisis as a crisis of economic globalization by linking concrete outcomes to what some observers allude to as globalization tendencies. In this way, I aim to show how economic globalization has been conceived as the *cause* and the crisis as the *outcome*. In the second sub-section, I question the logic and evidence of explaining the crisis as the outcome of economic globalization. Instead of subscribing to this dominant logic of using economic globalization to explain every concrete outcome, I offer an alternative perspective that examines the spatiality of economic globalization and the crisis. Here, I argue that the crisis cannot be explained by economic globalization; it is not an outcome of economic globalization *per se*. But rather the crisis results from the inherent spatiality of economic globalization, the impact of which is contingent on preexisting spatial structures of Asia and the global economy. While my account of the crisis may not be fundamentally very different from those in the mass literature, I offer at least a more nuanced analysis of the complex interrelationships between economic globalization and the crisis that have escaped the attention of most analysts of the crisis.

A crisis of globalization? Problematizing the Asian economic crisis

There is now no shortage of explanations of why the 1997/1998 Asian economic crisis occurred. As an expectedly dominant discourse, the leitmotiv of the *neoliberal* literature is that the crisis can be largely explained by such internal factors as crony capitalism and excessive state intervention ("moral hazard") in Asian countries severely hit by the crisis. Associated with prominent economists from the U.S. (e.g. Krugman, 1998), neoliberal thinkers maintain that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with economic globalization *per se*; in fact, economic globalization continues to be seen as a positive influence on economic development. Instead, it is individual Asian economies that did not put their houses in order. The falling exports from Asia, the pegging of domestic currencies to the US Dollar, and the

moral hazard of the state's bailing out of crony businesses during the pre-crisis period are all relevant variables for explaining the crisis. Once the crisis began – particularly when massive outflows of capital happened in late 1996 and early 1997, these neoliberals note that it had a strong contagious effect that spread the financial crisis from a few countries to the real economy in the entire Asia (Radelet and Sachs, 1998; Kaminsky et al., 2000). Productive activities were disrupted due to liquidity problems, and social contracts of secured employment were broken. Both effects occurred in combination in some Asian countries to lead to dramatic political instability and other related outcomes. The intervention by the IMF from a distance in late 1997 and early 1998 did not help much either. In fact, Radelet and Sachs (1998) have strongly argued that the IMF intervention worsened the crisis by increasing financial panics and scarring away potential investors and depositors of domestic banks.

On the other hand, critics of the neoliberal explanation of the crisis question why the crisis did not occur earlier when the problem of "moral hazard" and state intervention in the economic development of Asian economies was even more pronounced. They argue that this timing issue shows that the crisis has more to do with the advent of economic globalization associated with the so-called "Washington consensus" and financial liberalization (Wade and Veneroso, 1998; Hamilton, 1999; Henderson, 1999; Chang, 2000). Put in another way, the Asian economic crisis represents a crisis of economic globalization that serves as a convenient platform for Anglo-American capitalism to takeover – some might even say "colonize" – the burgeoning Asian economies. Domestic elites in many Asian economies have also been quick in jumping into this "globalization-bashing" bandwagon to denounce the crisis as reflections of internal governance problems and to sidestep the crisis as an *outcome* of ruthless economic globalization (see Higgott, 1998; Mathews, 1998; Yeung, 2000a; 2000b; Kelly, 2001).

Amidst these conflicting perspectives on the origin of the Asian economic crisis – just like the earlier contestation in explaining the "East Asian miracle" (see World Bank, 1993;

Wade, 1992; 1996), there is a third explanation of the crisis that takes on a much more radical *Marxist perspective* (see Glassman, 2001; Webber, 2001). Some economic geographers argue that the crisis is not simply a financial crisis, but rather it reflects conditions in the real economy. Drawing upon Marxist theory of uneven development and capitalist crises, these geographers identify the crisis as an *economic* crisis that involves all circuits of the economy, linking domestic and international capitalist accumulation processes, and stemming in part from contradictions and struggles over appropriation of the surplus and valorization of (financial) capital. The crisis is therefore due to neither internal governance problems nor economic globalization as an external shock. It is an outcome of much deeper capitalist logic and contradictions in accumulation strategies. In short, it reflects a serious breakdown in the capitalist regime of accumulation (Lo, 1999; Sum, 2001).

Confronted with these contradictory and seemingly more-or-less convincing explanations of the Asian economic crisis, does it necessarily mean that one has to make an ideological choice of neoliberalism or anti-globalism, or even radical Marxism? My position on the issue seems to slide towards a geographical interpretation of the crisis. To a varying degree, all three explanations have deployed geographical scales in their explanatory foci – local and national scales in the neoliberal explanation, global scale in the anti-globalism argument, and a mixture of global-local scales in the Marxist interpretation. Put together, all three explanations point to the importance of particular mix of geographical scales in determining the validity of their arguments. In other words, it really depends on what geographical scale one takes to explain the Asian economic crisis. As will be argued later, the problem of scalar switchability further complicates the validity of these explanations because its contingent nature dissolves much of their explanatory power.

Towards a geographical perspective on the Asian economic crisis

How then does a geographical perspective inform us about the causes of the Asian economic crisis? How does economic geography explain the crisis in relation to globalization processes? It should be clear by now that appreciating the inherent spatiality of economic globalization as both material processes and discursive practices simultaneously occurring in multi-scalar manner can contribute to a less dogmatic and more useful explanation of the crisis as an *integral process* within the broader framework of economic globalization. As we have argued elsewhere, this contribution of the geographical perspective is essential "not because geographers bring any specific technical or analytical skills to the debate, but rather because a geographical sensitivity to space and scale is needed to capture the complexity of events that are too easily explained through dogma" (Kelly et al., 2001: viii-ix). In particular, a geographical perspective on the crisis views it not as an outcome of globalization, but rather as a necessary development *within* the spatial logic of economic globalization itself. Two interrelated points support this argument: the uneven terrains of East and Southeast Asia, and the spatiality of crisis and its representations.

In the first place, economic geographers familiar with the East and Southeast Asian region will not see the region as a homogenous block of undifferentiated economies. Through their grounded empirical research in the region using the relational methodology explained earlier, these geographers recognize the highly uneven terrains of the region in terms of differentiated levels of economic development, social formations, political systems, and cultural diversity among respective Asian economies (e.g. China vs. Indonesia). The processes in which these Asian economies are articulated into the global economy are also highly complex and differentiated (e.g. Japan vs. Singapore). This recognition of *geographical differentiation and diversity* in East and Southeast Asia in turn allows geographers to explain why inflows of financial capital and cross-border investments –

presumably one set of key processes of economic globalization – are attracted to the region *because* of this differentiation and diversity. In fact, how globalization processes take place in the region is also highly geographical differentiated so that some locations (e.g. southern China) receive significantly more flows from the global economy than other places (e.g. Seoul).

There are at least two implications from this empirical observation of geographical differentiation in Asia that can be related to my earlier theoretical arguments on the spatiality of economic globalization. First, economic globalization can only take place if there is geographical differentiation. The pre-crisis Asia, as a highly differentiated group of countries and economies, is an important contributing factor to the successful round of contemporary economic globalization. Inflows of capital and technology, embodied in transnational corporations and global financial institutions, seek to exploit spatial differentiation in wage levels, market access, and host government incentives. These spatial differences become preconditions for economic globalization to take place in Asia. Second, any crisis of capital accumulation is a necessary moment in economic globalization for spatial differentiation to be (re)produced. Different rounds of economic globalization taking place in Asia have enabled crisis tendencies to be more prevalent in economies that are more vulnerable to the perils of economic globalization in terms of their institutional capacity and domestic competitiveness.

Moreover, a geographical perspective that emphasizes the social construction of geographical scales and scalar switchability offers useful theoretical lenses to examine the *spatiality of the crisis* and *its discursive representations*. Prior to the crisis, the political elites in several Asian economies discursively constructed their *national* economies as significant players in the *global* economy in order to justify their political legitimacy and power. Take South Korea as an example (see Glassman, 2001 for the case of Thailand). In fact, some scholars have argued that the real cause of the crisis in South Korea is its untimely adoption of

financial liberalization and capital account convertibility in the early 1990s. Under the Kim Young-Sam regime, South Korea was admitted into the OECD in 1996 and, to qualify for this entrance, it had to embrace the principle of free capital flows. To justify this liberalization exercise, the Kim administration discursively constructed the need for South Korea to globalize itself in order to be qualified as having reached the status of a developed country. In his second year in office in 1994, Kim announced *segyehwa* or globalization as his administration's main priority (see Ungson et al., 1997; Kim, 2000). Haggard and Mo (2000: 204) argue that "[i]n the name of globalization, the Korean government eliminated many restrictions on the movement of capital, allowing Korean banks and firms to borrow from abroad and international investors to invest in Korean assets". Its major business conglomerates, known as *chaebol*, were encouraged to globalize their operations into Europe and North America. Through their access to the global financial markets, these conglomerates borrowed excessively short-term loans denominated in foreign currencies to finance their long-term investment projects. The rest of the story is well known now and will not be repeated here (see Chang, 1998; 2000; Kim and Suh, 1998; Haggard and Mo, 2000). Political elites and business actors in some Asian economies discursively constructed the embracing of economic globalization as a seemingly positive pathway to development prior to the crisis. To the extent that some political elites were more capable of doing so in Asia, the outcome of the crisis became highly differentiated over space. This spatiality of the crisis therefore owes less to economic globalization *per se* than to the ways in which geographical scales are socially constructed in the developmental and political discourses of individual Asian countries.

During the crisis, the social construction of "Asia" in the media and other public domains has a significant impact on material flows. The tendency for the global media to speak of an "Asian" economic crisis has delimited the spatial extent of the events and their causes in a fundamentally "space-blind" manner. The representation of the crisis as pan-Asia

implies that the problem really lies within Asia and not in the wider *global* financial system. This biased construction of the crisis as a *regional* crisis, whereby indeed it has only seriously affected three Asian *national* economies (Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand; see Henderson, 1999; Sum, 2001), has led to significant capital outflows from virtually *all* Asian economies. With few exceptions (e.g. Hong Kong and China), all Asian currencies were dragged down in late 1997 by the massive selling behavior of fund managers and financial institutions. Through a relational methodology, economic geographers have investigated into the hidden dimension of global financial networks and unraveled the complex interrelationships between financial market fluctuations and the peculiar agenda of individual columnists and media reporters (e.g. see Clark and Wojcik, 2001).

Another dimension to this discursive construction of geographical scales during the crisis is related to the ways in which domestic elites represented the crisis in specific spatial metaphors that were linked to discourses of political power and the construction of economic policy. Based on discourse analysis, Kelly (2001) has recently examined and compared the cases of Singapore and Malaysia. He finds that in Malaysia, metaphors of colonial domination and militaristic aggression dominated in such a way that economic globalization, in particular financial globalization, was seen as the main culprit of Malaysia's fate in the crisis. This representational strategy was adopted by Prime Minister Mahathir to justify his capital control measures imposed in September 1998 to counteract the destructive effects of financial globalization. In Singapore, political elites actively represented the crisis as such "natural" phenomena as typhoons and tectonic shifts. This strategy allowed the political blame to be shifted from the responsibility of the *national* government to the unpredictable *external global* economy, and the policy credits to be accrued to the national government should its economic policies work. In other words, the crisis was discursively represented in Singapore as akin to "acts of God" and therefore a disembodied force. If this "natural" and "external" crisis could

be contained by the *national* government's efforts, the political elites would gain all the credits. Otherwise, the government could not be expected to be accountable for such an externally imposed disaster.

In both cases of Malaysia and Singapore, economic globalization was discursively constructed as the *cause* of the Asian economic crisis, irrespective of whether the crisis was really explained by something else. Economic globalization became the convenient shorthand for political elites to shift their domestic accountability to citizens in favor of naturalized events on a global scale. Instead of being the real *cause* of the crisis, economic globalization was "victimized" by these discursive constructions as necessarily negative and uncontrollable. The social construction of geographical scales, however, cannot explain all dimensions of the crisis that clearly has a material basis. The scalar switchability of global capital (and hence, financial globalization), for example, provides a material basis for explaining the occurrence of the crisis. This argument can be illustrated by the development of complex financial instruments in the global capital markets such that financial capital has a global reach. The global nature of capital, however, can be "switched" into productive activities at the *local* and the *national* scales (e.g. the construction of production facilities and infrastructural development).

For example, the excessive borrowing of the Korean *chaebol* from global capital markets has effectively linked their own production activities in specific locations of South Korea and elsewhere to the rise and fall of global financial markets. This "scalar switching" would be much less possible if the Korean government retains its tight control over monetary regimes and state-monitored banking and financing policies. In other words, financial liberalization and discursive embracing of economic globalization in South Korea has allowed for global capital to "infiltrate" into the Korean economy, thereby significantly increases its vulnerability and crisis tendencies. When the crisis broke out and the *chaebol* were burdened

by massive short-term loans denominated in the US Dollar, the real economy of South Korea and other Asia localities in which the Korean *chaebol* had large investments in production facilities also suffered from massive disruption of production activities. Consequently, their exports were halted and the crisis was deepened further. A similar example of "scalar switchability" can also be observed in the transformation of *global* capital in the financial circuit to *local* real estate activities in the economy of Hong Kong and Thailand. In his analysis of the unfolding of the crisis in Thailand, Glassman (2001: 143) concludes that "it is the state-mediated accumulation processes fought out by capital and labor within and across international boundaries which generate crises, not simply national versus international or financial versus 'real' activities". To this conclusion, we might add that the crisis is not simply an outcome of economic globalization versus localities, but a consequence of the spatiality of economic globalization mediated through locally contingent conditions.

Conclusion: Putting Geography and Geographers on the Globalization Agenda?

Economic geographers can make a significant contribution to the study of economic globalization through our recognition of the inherent spatiality of economic globalization and our relational methodology for investigating empirical events cross-cutting different geographical scales. Instead of brushing aside the term "globalization" as too vague and useless in understanding contemporary global economic change, I believe there are some significant reasons why globalization – as both material processes and ideological discourses – will stay on for a long time to come, not least for the fact that the term has gained so much currency in the political and business world. This framing paper has investigated into the geographical foundations of economic globalization and argued that economic globalization is very much shaped by its own spatial peculiarities. Economic globalization does not have a life in its own right because there are some stringent geographical preconditions for its existence.

Economic globalization is therefore not capable of producing and causing empirically observable outcomes, unless there are preexisting spatial inequalities and scalar switchability in both material and discursive senses. If this ontological status of economic globalization is difficult to be understood, it may be even more difficult to research into economic globalization empirically. There are some methodological constraints that must be overcome for globalization research to generate meaningful observations and explanations. Drawing from a relational methodology, I have argued that one such constraint is the lack of relational data for us to identify different relational networks that crosscut multiple geographical scales and connect social actors from diverse locations.

These theoretical and methodological difficulties are particularly pronounced when it comes to assessing the outcomes of economic globalization. Using the recent Asian economic crisis as an empirical context, I have shown how the crisis has been misconstrued by different actors (academic researchers, political elites, and media professionals) in all kinds of manner as an outcome of economic globalization. To them, the crisis happened in 1997/1998 *because of* economic globalization. This historically- and geographically-insensitive explanation of the crisis is clearly biased and plainly problematical. Introducing a geographical perspective on the crisis, I examine how the inherent spatiality of economic globalization that searches for spatial differentiation and scalar switchability can explain why the crisis happened in a particular historical moment in some Asian economies (e.g. South Korea's untimely embracing of *segyehwa* or globalization). It also helps us understand how economic globalization has been discursively appropriated by elites in some Asian countries to reproduce their political legitimacy and power. In conclusion, economic globalization cannot be the singular determinant of the crisis. Its empirical outcomes must be grounded in deep geographical understanding, for the very phenomenon of economic globalization represents the imperative of geography (or space) as the final frontier for capitalism.

How does this geographical analysis of the uneven terrains of economic globalization inform us about the future importance of Geography and geographers in globalization studies? I believe we need to globalize geographical studies of economic globalization in such a way that we can ensure a certain degree of global coordination and local/national execution of the research process. Few social scientific disciplines have the spatial reach in their intellectual vision as Geography, which is deeply rooted in the belief of understanding the world in which we live. In the context of contemporary globalization, this disciplinary heritage of global reach in research activities should be further strengthened. In this case, we need to build stronger research networks that span different continents and regions in order to build theoretical and empirical insights from grounded research. We also need this globalization of our research efforts and research networks to "operationalize" our relational methodology in different geographical settings. Through the collection of relational data and case studies as well as analyses of global actor networks, we may be better able to provide solid empirical support to our assertion that geography and space matter in understanding economic globalization. As an economic geographer, I simply fail to see how this collective endeavor can be better materialized by researchers in other disciplines (e.g. economics) who are much less likely to view the socio-spatial world as a multi-dimensional platform for understanding economic globalization. As argued passionately by Schoenberger (2001: 379), we have to defend our disciplinary culture *not* by being defensive, but rather by "trying to chart a path towards productive interdisciplinary engagements". In this spirit, we have to create and lead the interdisciplinary project of globalization studies.

Another possible initiative to put Geography on the globalization agenda is related to an agency-focused approach to globalization research that places more significance on actor transformation and resistance. Much of the existing globalization literature takes on an abstract macro and structural view of the global economy. What is missing in this

globalization agenda is the attention to actors who are not only actively constructing globalization in their various capacities, but also experience significant transformations in their own everyday social life. By focusing on these actors in globalization processes, we can make a much better connection between the apparently non-human processes of economic globalization and their manifestations in all sorts of human activities, practices, and struggles. In other words, we have to pay attention to economic globalization as a *living* experience, which entails both transformations of social practices and resistance from social actors (see also Mittelman, 2000; Yeung, 2000c). The empirical orientation of Geography as an intellectual discipline allows us to bridge the overwhelmingly stylized abstractions in most globalization studies and the contradictory experiences of most people who are living with economic globalization as an everyday fact.

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