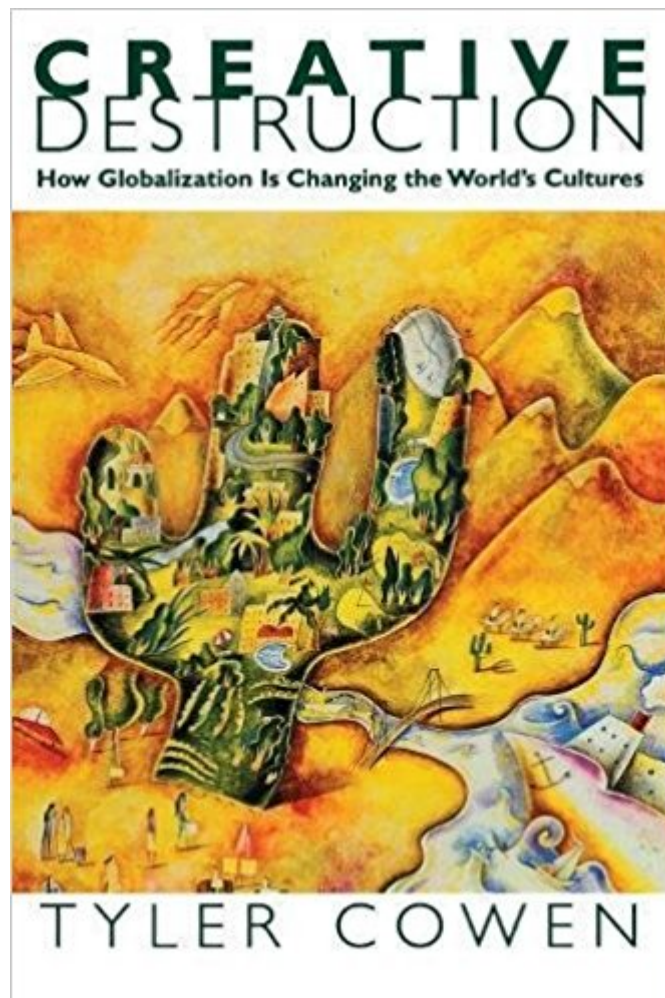




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# Creative Destruction: How Globalization Is Changing The World's Cultures



## Synopsis

A Frenchman rents a Hollywood movie. A Thai schoolgirl mimics Madonna. Saddam Hussein chooses Frank Sinatra's "My Way" as the theme song for his fifty-fourth birthday. It is a commonplace that globalization is subverting local culture. But is it helping as much as it hurts? In this strikingly original treatment of a fiercely debated issue, Tyler Cowen makes a bold new case for a more sympathetic understanding of cross-cultural trade. *Creative Destruction* brings not stale suppositions but an economist's eye to bear on an age-old question: Are market exchange and aesthetic quality friends or foes? On the whole, argues Cowen in clear and vigorous prose, they are friends. Cultural "destruction" breeds not artistic demise but diversity. Through an array of colorful examples from the areas where globalization's critics have been most vocal, Cowen asks what happens when cultures collide through trade, whether technology destroys native arts, why (and whether) Hollywood movies rule the world, whether "globalized" culture is dumbing down societies everywhere, and if national cultures matter at all. Scrutinizing such manifestations of "indigenous" culture as the steel band ensembles of Trinidad, Indian handweaving, and music from Zaire, Cowen finds that they are more vibrant than ever--thanks largely to cross-cultural trade. For all the pressures that market forces exert on individual cultures, diversity typically increases within society, even when cultures become more like each other. Trade enhances the range of individual choice, yielding forms of expression within cultures that flower as never before. While some see cultural decline as a half-empty glass, Cowen sees it as a glass half-full with the stirrings of cultural brilliance. Not all readers will agree, but all will want a say in the debate this exceptional book will stir.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Mr. Cowen's point, argued neatly in *Creative Destruction*, is that the invasion works both ways. Indeed, it has for such a long time that it is hard to say exactly where one culture begins and another ends. Wherever people are, almost all the cultural products that they think of as indigenous owe their existence to the cultural exchange brought about by trade."--David R. Henderson, *Wall Street Journal*"A short but rich study. . . . The book's basic point is that cultural globalization can increase the diversity of choices for the individual while reducing the diversity between societies across the globe. . . . Mr. Cowen underscores that cultural globalization is and always has been a dynamic process. . . . It can be an unsettling, disruptive process, but Mr. Cowen's book argues persuasively that it is a more creative way to go than the misguided cultural nostalgia peddled by the anti-globalization crowd."--David R. Sands, *The Washington Times*"Cowen has created a text at once impressively academic and thoroughly accessible."--*Library Journal*"Cowen's thesis is that diversity within society is heightened by globalization, at the same time that diversity across societies, as he puts it, is diminished. . . . His book is an attempt to take a realistic look at the changes wrought by today's market-driven, free trade-oriented world."--Philip Marchand, *The Toronto Star*"Cowen argues that global trade and communication are enriching all the world's cultures and that there's no such thing as cultural authenticity. . . . In fact, Cowen believes that commerce and art are allies. And he contends that because commerce is driving technology, ideas, goods, services and people across borders more freely than ever before, we are in the midst of an unprecedented boom in creativity all over the world. The quality, quantity and variety of cultural output is greater than ever; if there is more dreck, there is also more genius. And more people have more access to it than ever, at lower prices, regardless of where they live."--Daniel Akst, *Los Angeles Times*

"*Creative Destruction* is a brilliant book--by far the most original and sophisticated analysis of the place of art in the global market economy that I have seen. It is also extraordinarily readable. In clear and energetic prose, Tyler Cowen provides an economic analysis of a breathtaking variety of artistic cultures--from the restaurants of Paris to the soapstone carvings of the Inuit, from Nbebele bead art of South Africa to Tuvan throat singers in Mongolia."--John Tomasi, Brown University, author of *Liberalism Beyond Justice*"Reading this book was a joy. The number of new books on

globalization is large. But Creative Destruction adds a unique perspective. It constructs a largely economic case for optimism, the idea that globalization is not necessarily in conflict with cultural diversity but might instead promote, revive, and broaden traditional cultures. Many readers will find this argument both original and provocative. And the examples make for very entertaining reading."--Timur Kuran, University of Southern California, author of *Private Truths, Public Lies*"Tyler Cowen is an economist who knows which rap artists are the best, what kind of Persian rug from which period is the best, which period of French cinema is the best, and what kind of Afropop is best. But he also has explanations for why they are the best, explanations that draw upon concepts from economics and other social sciences. Cowen, perhaps more thoroughly than anyone before, celebrates and details the changes in world culture which result from world trade and contact, in a word, "globalization." He is well aware of globalization's homogenizing dangers but convincingly argues that its unexpected benefits, in increasing "hybridity" as well as "authenticity," are not fully appreciated."--Michael Suk-Young Chwe, University of California, Los Angeles, author of *Rational Ritual, Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book could have been written in a week. It is shallow. Let me provide one example of its shallowness: The author sees value in cultures becoming more cosmopolitan. He makes a cute argument that diversity adds to cosmopolitanism (e.g. he can collect Japanese prints, eat Mexican food, and listen to East European music). Then he moves on to talking about loss of national cultures. He acknowledges that different national cultures can add to cosmopolitanism. So I would have expected some discussion about this source of diversity in the future. If cosmopolitanism takes over there will be less diversity for cosmopolitanism to thrive on. So does national culture need some kind of protection? I have no problem with the author taking a libertarian viewpoint, but I cannot stand the shallow reasoning. I am angry having spent time on the book. Having said that, the author is clearly not stupid. There are interesting points in the book, if you really want to read more about the subject. Just don't expect this book to provide much in terms of useful references.

HATE IT

This book is about how globalization is \*changing\* world cultures, for better or for worse. One of Cowen's central arguments is that globalization creates less diversity between cultures but more between individuals. So should we be pro individualism or pro collectivism? His last three chapters

on Hollywood, Dumbing Down, and National Culture are the most memorable, and persuasive. I especially enjoyed the chapter on Hollywood. His explanation of how modern cinema is what it is was enlightening. Overall Cowen does what he set out to do; explained how globalization has changed world cultures. More often than not Cowen thinks this has had a net positive effect, but he does argue the other side of the coin. In my opinion Cowen contributes to the globalization vs. anti-globalization debate arguing that it's really one of collectivist culture vs. individual culture.

best product. An absolutely great product! I was able to thin cut a baguette that usually I struggle with. Perfectly smooth cutting! very comfortable and very fine . my parents need it, fast and in time..

If you're at all interested in this book, ignore Hoan Chau's review. How does Cowen know Mexicans enjoy the choices available at Wal-Mart? Simple, they shop there and keep it in business. You don't have to like Wal-Mart (I sure don't) to recognize that it doesn't coerce anyone into its store. In an impoverished country like Mexico, it brings in more goods at lower prices than were previously available, thus improving people's standard of living. On creativity: Cowen isn't writing a philosophical treatise on creativity, so if he ignores the "external influences" on it, that's not a just criticism. But it's surprising that someone could read this book and miss the point: Cowen is arguing that the creativity of others is an external influence on an individual's creativity, so the value of global exchange is that our creativity is stimulated by contact with other country's cultural goods. Consider the U.S. without Chinese or Mexican food (or, in my case, the nightmare of not having Thai food). Consider the U.S. without the influence of African music. No spirituals, no jazz or blues, no "Graceland" by Paul Simon. Consider how popular Jackie Chan is, not to mention the more respectable Chinese films such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." If you're more highbrow, consider the absence of Mozart or Paganini. Imagine no access to Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" or the Tao Te Ching, or the Boddhisatva. In short, Cowen's point is that the global exchange of cultural goods enriches our lives. Efforts to restrict globalization will restrict the flow of these goods, impoverishing us all in ways that are hard to measure in dollar terms, but are easily understood in terms of cultural vivacity and creativity. And, importantly, contrary to popular wisdom, America isn't exerting cultural hegemony--the Disneyfication of the world is overstated (easy to do when we have such jarring sights as a McDonalds jammed next to Beijing's Forbidden City. But other countries, including developing countries, export their cultural goods to the U.S. This increases the value of their cultural traditions, making it beneficial for people to hang onto them. Remember, it's individual people (you and me) making these choices. We don't choose them unless we believe we're

benefitting. And while we will make mistakes, it's a bit hard to believe that almost all our decisions almost all the time are actually harmful to us. It's even harder to believe that a small group of elites--whether in government or the self-appointed protectors of culture--will be able to make better choices for us. In short, this book is also an argument for preserving individual liberty.

Tyler Cowen very adeptly reminds the reader that the world's regional cultures have never been static. What we think of as "native" art is really a product of global influence on a local population. So of course it seems silly to decry globalization as homogenizing cultures, when we understand that cultures have always interacted with each other. Indeed, what we are seeing with globalization is the increasing heterogenizing of cultures. Sure you see McDonalds almost everywhere, but you also see indigenous art from Central America, music from the Congo, movies from France, and food from India. Tyler Cowen does not dismiss the degradation of certain cultural aspects, but he matter-of-factly points out that the alternative, protectionism, is more destructive in the long run, since creativity is stifled.

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