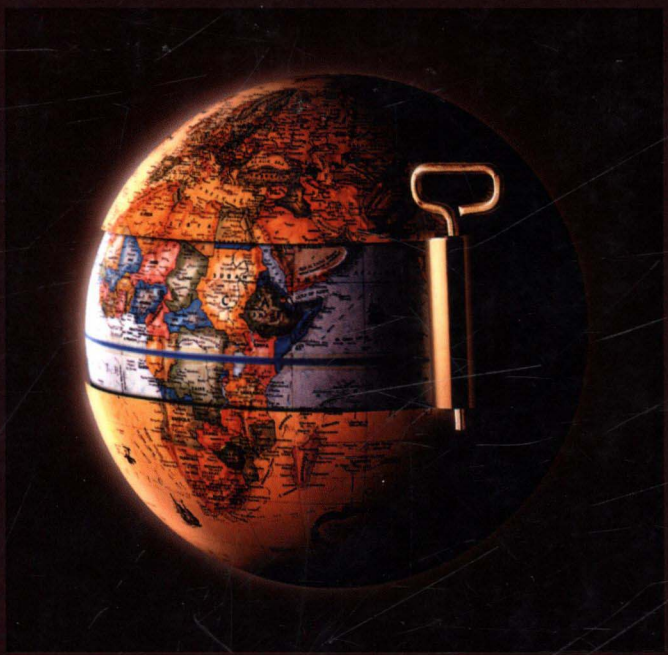
Internationalizing "International Communication"



Edited by Chin-Chuan Lee

International communication as a field of inquiry is, in fact, not very "internationalized." Rather, it has been taken as a conceptual extension or empirical application of U.S. communication, and much of the world outside the West has been socialized to adopt truncated versions of Pax Americana's notion of international communication. At stake is the "subject position" of academic and cultural inquirers: Who gets to ask what kind of questions? It is important to note that the quest to establish universally valid "laws" of human society with little regard for cultural values and variations seems to be running out of steam. Many lines of intellectual development are reckoning with the important dimensions of empathetic understanding and subjective consciousness.

In *Internationalizing "International Communication,"* Lee and others argue that we must reject both America-writ-large views of the world and self-defeating mirror images that reject anything American or Western on the grounds of cultural incompatibility or even cultural superiority. The point of departure for internationalizing "international communication" must be precisely the opposite of parochialism—namely, a spirit of cosmopolitanism. Scholars worldwide have a moral responsibility to foster global visions and mutual understanding, which forms, metaphorically, symphonic harmony made of cacophonic sounds.

"This collection brings together a star-studded list of scholars to reflect on major methodological and theoretical approaches in the field of International Communication, with particular emphasis on the issue, much discussed in the Communication field at large, of de-Westernizing the field, that is, taking advantage of the growing bodies of scholarship originating outside of the US and Western Europe to rethink major approaches in the field. It's fair to say that *Internationalizing "International Communication"* is a unique volume."

—Dan Hallin,
University of California, San Diego

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Lee

Internationalizing “International Communication”

BOOKS

Internationalizing "International Communication"

CHIN-CHUAN LEE, EDITOR

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Internationalizing "International Communication"

Joseph Turow
SERIES EDITOR

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Contents

ous treatment was given in what was legitimately claimed to be the most comprehensive anthology, *Handbook of Communication* (1973), which ran over 1,000 pages under the eminent editorship of Ithiel de sola Pool and Wilbur Schramm. Six out of 31 chapters (approximately one-fifth), all written by political scientists, addressed in whole or in part selected issues of international communication. All the topics nonetheless concentrated on vital Cold War concerns of the United States: international propaganda, Third World modernization, communication systems in primitive societies, and Communist/totalitarian communication systems. There was a sequel after a lapse of 14 years, the *Handbook of Communication Science*, edited by Charles Berger and Steven Chaffee (1987). Amid its self-congratulatory claim to the self-sufficient status of "communication science," this volume turned cripplingly inward-looking. Showing little welcoming gesture to social scientists from other sister disciplines, it devoted only one chapter to cross-cultural comparisons, and none to substantive issues of international communication. An updated *Handbook of Communication Science*, edited by Berger, Roloff, and Roskos-Ewaldsen (2010), devoted only one token chapter out of 29 to "intercultural communication." What comes to mind is local TV news practice in the United States of covering "the world in a minute."

Surely international matters deserve more time, space, and concerted attention. Why have they been so neglected in our field? Asserting the hard-nosed presumption that "science" is of universal applicability, those defining the field through these influential anthologies did not seem to believe that cross-cultural, national, or systemic differences should matter. The world amounted, ontologically and epistemologically, to America writ large. This prevailing stream of (un)consciousness was widely shared among most members of the U.S. social science community for decades, following on Lerner's conviction (1958) that the entire developing world was emulating the American model in a linear progression to modernization. Moreover, well into the 1980s, even as scholars of communication sought to define their realm as one of overweening importance, the field's vision seemed to be narrowing. Even a cursory glance at the table of contents of the three defining volumes shows an inexorable move toward the process of what Geertz (1963) calls "involution," characterized by greater self-absorption, isolationism, internal development, and parochialism—and this in spite of the vast and rapid march of globalizing processes "out there." Under the pretense of science (more aptly, scientism), the succeeding generations of editors have embraced a far narrower horizon of global landscape than their mentors.

At long last, however, the critique of Cold War perspectives that accompanied political ferment of the 1960s and 1970s, the progress of critical cultural approaches to inquiry in the 1980s and 1990s, and above all the growing participation of international scholars in international communication inquiry have generated a search for new directions. We hope this book can contribute to this movement.

Why Internationalizing "International Communication"?

In this introductory chapter I shall refer to the "West" as a generic term to make first-stroke comparisons with the "non-West," bearing in mind that the West is larger than the United States and both "the West" and "the non-West" are internally full of notable variations and conflicts.[1] In other words, we are at this point more interested in understanding the "between variances" than the "within variances." Yet media studies remain, to borrow from Jeremy Tunstall (1977), largely "American" or Anglo-American, and the erosion of this dominance has been glacial. As a field of inquiry born out of the U.S. context of the 1950s, international communication still addresses the world largely through the prism of middle-class America, and the narrow agenda that prevailed for so long—focusing on Cold War propaganda, Third World development, political campaigns, and consumer persuasion—continues to exert its influence through the topics, methods, questions, and very vocabularies of our studies. As Colin Sparks sums up in his chapter, "Lasswell, Lippmann and Bernays in the first generation, and Lerner and Schramm in the second, were all deeply concerned with the ways in which states used the resources of propaganda both to secure internal consent and to undermine the support available to their enemies."

If we were to follow C. Wright Mills's (1959) call for the "sociological imagination," we should stand firm to reject any attempts to balkanize media studies into domestic and international turfs, because in principle all significant questions should be situated in the cross-nexus of comparative (world) and temporal (historical) contexts. But that is not how the academic division of labor or the bureaucratic ethos usually operate. In reality, international communication has been taken as a conceptual extension or empirical application of U.S. communication. Furthermore, it has provided territory for scholarly colonization: as early as six decades ago, Lazarsfeld (1952–53) foresaw that "the domestic area will not have many opportunities" in the years to come and postulated that international research could be a fertile land to "open up new and exciting subjects for investigation."

Rather than taking advantage of the widened window of opportunity to produce "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1983) of general relevance and also in a comparative light, international communication more often than not has acted as an overseas testing station of U.S. or, secondarily, European worldviews.

Moreover, aside from fixating on a narrow range of conceptual problems, mainstream scholarship in our field has long promoted a positivistic methodology that in its extreme form has especially detrimental implications for international communication studies. Hard-core positivists assume that specificities can and should be subsumed into generality, but they seem comfortable with the fact that the supposed "generality" tends to be grounded in a specific U.S. cultural soil or European setting. The "West" is being generalized if not universalized, while the "exceptions" and outliers are explained away and cross-cultural meanings homogenized to the extent of defying the rigor of comparative logic. For many, systemic differences do not seem to be pertinent in the way of impinging on conceptualization or, for that matter, on the relationships between concepts and their empirical referents (Smelser, 1976). Nor is there room for any serious discourse about the crossing of cultural boundaries.

Worse yet, much of the non-West has been socialized to adopt truncated versions of Pax Americana's notion of international communication. U.S.-cum-international communication is taken for granted by way of the hegemonic process, with an army of non-Western disciples eagerly promoting, embracing, and reproducing the generalized model and wisdom from their Western tutors. The popularity of "diffusion of innovation" (Rogers, 2003), which comprised streams of overseas projects trying to copy or replicate models born in the specific settings of Iowa, Ohio, or New York, was celebrated as a seminal cross-cultural achievement.

How much has the situation been improved? Invited just recently to offer comments on papers presented by Asian PhD students at a research symposium, I asked the audience to judge whether we were witnessing a colored, colonized, Asian map of U.S. research trajectories. "Where is, for example, Korea—or Singapore—in scripting the scholarly agendas?" I asked. "Is there a real place to account for cultural flow and interaction?" Stunned to hear my remarks, most students did not seem to possess the kind of cultural awareness needed to feel anything was wrong with lifting a page from the U.S. research directory, asking the same set of technical (even trivial) questions, adopting the same conceptual frameworks, and imitating the same research techniques down to minute details. What could

be faulted, they must have wondered, given that their vaunted display of sophisticated skills was, after all, coached by advanced Western authorities? And this is hardly an isolated encounter.

There is no reason to reject a concept or theory out of hand simply on account of its cultural origin, but it surely is unwise to buy into any theory without reflecting on its built-in premises and limitations. It is one thing to import or apply certain Western models as a critical choice because some problems are appropriate for more generalized lenses. It is quite another to unquestioningly accept a whole set of specific worldviews, problematics, and core agendas to serve a field boldly called "*international* communication." At stake is the "subject position" of academic and cultural inquirers: Who get to ask what kind of questions? Why shouldn't we treasure the right to ask original questions that are most important to us instead of submitting indigenous data or evidence only to further fuel the Western-cum-universal theories? This is a case of academic hegemony par excellence that naturalizes the process of ideological transfer and practical emulation. Hegemony in the Gramscian sense is never equal or simply coerced, but based in part on acts of mutual consent and willing collaboration between the intellectual patron and client, resulting in ideological conditioning in such a way that the fact of domination is unrecognized, accepted, or taken for granted. Hegemony rules unabated unless its fundamental and often hidden assumptions are openly exposed and questioned.

If the trajectory is depressing, the past also yields lessons that can further our attempts to promote wiser, more enlightened, and more cosmopolitan approaches to scholarship. We believe that the imperative of academic autonomy must be founded on active, open, and mutually respectful interaction with cultural currents of thought and interests from other traditions. Symbolizing a critical moment of cultural awakening, this volume intends to do just that and, further, to present alternative and critical discourses about the study of international communication. It is time to develop a more complex and integrated framework of multiculturalism and globalism as a new point of departure. All our contributors have long been immersed in rich intercultural or diasporic experiences, which Stuart Hall depicts as being "familiar strangers" between cultures who "know both places intimately" but are "not wholly of either place" (Chen, 1996, p. 490). Represented in this volume are a group of distinguished scholars from different generations and from an array of diverse cultural backgrounds—Argentinian, Italian, Dutch, American, British, Swedish, Belgian, Israeli, Indian, and Chinese—who have either received advanced training in the

West or affiliated with major Western universities during various periods of their careers. Such "in-between" cross-cultural experiences form an essential part of intellectual biography and capital for them to traverse multiple borders and to dialectically negotiate and synthesize the insider's perspectives with the outsider's perspectives (Merton, 1972), thereby enabling them to emerge from critical reflections with refreshing views on where the field has come from and whither it goes.

Origin and Paradigm Shift

From the outset, international communication research has been affiliated with power and the nation-state, and most particularly with U.S. foreign policy interests and objectives. Setting the tone was Harold Lasswell (1927) in an early work on propaganda technique during World War I. Some 15 years later, social scientists were called on to advise the Office of War Information of the U.S. government in fighting Nazi propaganda during World War II, a war that paved the way for the rise of the United States to world hegemony. No sooner had the world war ended than the Cold War ensued, lasting for half a century. In this ideologically polarized world, in which the United States perceived itself as "a righter of wrongs around the world, in pursuit of tyranny, in defense of freedom no matter the place or cost" (Said, 1993, p. 5), propaganda concerns loomed ever larger.

In retrospect, however, the neo-imperial impetus driving U.S. communication studies was not the only dynamic. The field actually was developing in different institutional settings for different purposes, taking two parallel yet rather separate trajectories. One stream of academic pedigree could be traced back to the University of Chicago in the 1930s and 1940s, where urban sociologists (such as Robert Park and Herbert Blumer) under the influence of pragmatism (John Dewey) and symbolic interactionism (George Herbert Mead) pursued their fascination with the integrative role of the media in the building of community amid large-scale social transformation produced by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. The preeminence of Chicago sociology in U.S. studies of mass communication was replaced in the 1950s by the structural-functionalist school of sociology and social psychology led by Robert K. Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld at Columbia University. At this juncture, domestic communication research came to acquire another character, tenet, and direction as the Columbia researchers turned their primary attention to investigating how the media instrumentally altered voter intention or consumer behavior. Overall they

were collectively frustrated to discover, time and again, that the media did not live up to the theorized expectation of swaying the public's attitudes and behaviors, but only served to reinforce their existing predispositions. As a result, Bernard Berelson (1959), a member of the Columbia group, was on the verge of announcing a funeral for communication research. The transition from Chicago's to Columbia's emphasis (Czitrom, 1982, pp. 91–146; Hardt, 1992, pp. 31–122) has far-reaching implications that provide a domestic counterpoint to the international focus of this essay.

In contrast, coming from a different set of political and intellectual concerns, post–World War II international communication research came to revolve around a circle of MIT political sociologists who were decidedly cold warriors: Ithiel de sola Pool, Daniel Lerner, and Lucian W. Pye. When Columbia researchers lamented, on the *domestic* front, the media's "null effects" in the 1960s, the MIT scholars did just the opposite: they enthusiastically promoted, albeit abroad, an image of omnipotent media capable of shaping *international* propaganda and stimulating Third World development. As an interesting chapter in the sociology of knowledge, how do we account for these diametrically opposing views of media power between the Columbia and MIT schools of thought? Was the discrepancy caused by different ecological conditions of propaganda—for example, what Lazarsfeld and Merton (1971) referred to as monopolization, canalization, and supplementation of mass communication—at home and abroad? To what extent did this gap arise from differing notions of media power? The Columbia group was intent on capturing the manifest, micro-level attitude and behavior change exerted by the media on individuals or groups in the *short* run. Conversely, the MIT group displayed supreme confidence in advocating the cumulative role of the media in cultivating macro-level ideological consciousness and triggering social transformation in the *long* haul. Still, how can Columbia's narrowly conceived empirical findings in the U.S. setting be reconciled with MIT's broadly speculative advocacy in the thick of the Cold War?

The MIT-based international communication research was primarily informed by modernization theory, as conceived by American social scientists with the active encouragement of the U.S. government. Such an approach gained popularity alongside the post-war ascendancy of American political, military, and commercial expansion in the world (Tipps, 1973). Initiated at Columbia and finished at MIT, Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958) was generally considered the key baseline work in the area of international development communication. Lerner insisted that

Western countries were simply holding up a mirror for what the developing world aspired to become on the road to modernization, setting out the vision of the universal relevance of Western experiences. Pye (1963) followed suit, editing an important volume on the role of communication in facilitating political development, while Pool (1973) and his students invested enormous energy in the study of the Communist media systems of China and the Soviet Union. For want of quality empirical studies in the international realm, Wilbur Schramm (1964) started with Lerner's thesis and extrapolated from the Columbia group's hodge-podge findings to offer policy advice to an international audience; his UNESCO-sponsored *Mass Media and National Development* was greeted by many Third World planners as something of a development "bible."

Through the 1960s and 1970s, from Stanford and later the East-West Center, Schramm fostered cross-institutional collaboration between two coasts across the continent, working closely with MIT's Lerner, Pye, and Pool on "development communication" (Pye, 1963; Lerner & Schramm, 1967; Pool & Schramm, 1973; Schramm & Lerner, 1976). As the next generation of scholars began to elaborate on modernization theory, one variant that emerged preeminent was diffusion of innovations. Synthesizing the tradition of news diffusion studies with their origin in New York and that of agricultural diffusion studies from the farm belt of Iowa, Rogers (2003) elevated the diffusion model to international status by transplanting it to various overseas outposts. In the field of international communication, this thesis provoked by far the largest number of empirical studies abroad in replication of its U.S. origins. Looking back, it may be said that modernization theory (especially the versions of Lerner, Schramm, and Rogers) owed its popularity during the heyday of East-West conflict in part to the illusory charm it offered the elite in poor Third World countries—the promise of simplistic solutions to tough problems. In his chapter Jan Servaes, among others, has criticized modernization theory for (a) a lack of empirical support; (b) behavioristic and positivistic biases; (c) conceptual inadequacy; (d) insensitivity to social context; (e) Western centrism; and (f) being ahistorical. All these flaws, so glaringly evident with the benefit of hindsight, went overlooked at the time.

As the East-West conflict mixed uneasily with emerging South-North tensions in the 1970s, Latin Americanists proposed various strains of "dependency" perspectives as a formidable challenge to the modernization formula. In a thoughtful review essay, Palma (1978) summarizes and compares three main perspectives from this movement: (a) the theory of

"development of underdevelopment" (A. G. Frank); (b) "growth without development" (O. Sunkel); and (c) "dependent development" (F. H. Cardoso). With the East-West conflict unabated, the United States continued to spread the gospel of modernization to the Third World as a main strategy to deter Communism. Meanwhile, on the South-North dimension, the United States found itself blamed and held responsible by poor nations for the unequal control and distribution of the world's economic and information resources. The resulting antagonism was in large part what prompted the United States to withdraw from UNESCO in 1984 (an absence lasting until 2003); President Ronald Reagan had no stomach or patience for the heated "new international information and communication order" debate in which the United States was chief villain.

Of the three perspectives, "growth without development" proved of minor importance, but the implications of theoretical and methodological divergences between "development of underdevelopment" and "dependent development" were most profound. Methodologically, Frank as a political economist proposed a formal *theory* of underdevelopment, which was almost a mirror image of modernization theory it sought to debunk. Cardoso, a Weberian historical sociologist who years later became president of Brazil, rejected formalized theory and instead preferred to use dependency as a *methodology* to account historically for the open-ended and concrete situations of underdevelopment—indeed, Cardoso (1977) criticized U.S. scholars for consuming dependency as a formal theory in Frank's positivistic terms.

Frank theorized that Latin America was incorporated into the international capitalist system, in which the world center through *external* conditioning of local economies created entrenched conditions of underdevelopment for the periphery. Rejecting Frank's exclusive attention on external conditions, Cardoso argued that it was important to grasp "the political alliances, the ideologies, and the movement of structures within the dependent countries" and to analyze how these forces "internalized" the external. He concluded that at least some countries (such as Brazil) in the semiperiphery were able to develop their economies concurrent with continued dependence on the international capitalist structure.

The implications surely are worth revisiting in the age of globalization; yet the influence of dependency perspectives on international communication research has been sparse and uneven. Herbert I. Schiller (1976) was perhaps the best-known critic of cultural imperialism to have drawn, albeit rather cursorily, on Frank's theory of underdevelopment as well as