

Korean Communication and Mass Media Research: Negotiating the West's Influence

JUKKA PEKKA JOUHKI
University of Jyväskylä

The purpose of this article is to introduce and discuss Korean communication with an emphasis on mass media research in the context of globalization. The American influence on this discipline will be focused on, and the current discussion between indigenization and globalization will be introduced. Lastly, some weak and strong signals for the future of the discipline will be proposed. The main sources are major Korean journals related to the theme in the last few years. References to journals and other publications are deliberately frequent to help the reader find more information on specific themes of research. Moreover, the introduction of the Korean media cultural context has been emphasized due to its unfamiliarity in the global forum. This article is a part of a research project (2006-2009) examining Korean media and new media culture, and it has been funded by the *Helsingin Sanomat Foundation*¹.

Korean Mediascape

Korea² is one of the greatest economic success stories of Asia. Throughout its geopolitical history, the Korean Peninsula has been affected by the Japanese, Chinese, and Americans, as well as, recently, by the accelerating forces of globalization — all of them giving great impetus and delicate nuance to Korean society and culture. The Chinese sociocultural effect on Korea has been most significant in terms of its temporality, but also the effect of the Japanese, especially during the Japanese occupation (1910-1945) has been immense, influencing, for example, the Korean education system and the work culture.

Modern Korean journalism began soon after Korea, the Hermit Kingdom, opened up during the latter part of the 19th century. The Korean enlightenment period from the 1880s to early 1920s influenced and reformed Korean national identity toward modernity. Public discourse was introduced by new media sources like newspapers and magazines, spreading a new awareness of ideas and behavior thought of as

Jukka Pekka Jouhki: jukjouh@campus.jyu.fi

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¹ www.hssaatio.fi

² Unless emphasis requires otherwise, Korea here means South Korea.

symbolizing a transition from archaic Korea to an era of modernity. Reception of, and resistance to, new standards of civilization emerged along with images of Westernity affiliated with those standards.³

The Japanese occupation brought with it strong censorship and the eventual banning of publishing in Korean⁴. When Korea was finally liberated from the Japanese, the country inherited the repressive ruling system of a colonial government. During the military government lead by the USA (1945-1948), the press freedom started to increase, although censorship was not eradicated as many leftist newspapers were forcefully closed, publishing houses shut down, and journalists arrested on political grounds. Later, the Korean military regime mobilized the media for national development, and thus the media became more industrialized in the 1960s.⁵ For decades, the top-down power structure had tight control of the media. The North/South divide strengthened the superior position of the state and dictatorial rule, and the enlarged military sector was justified by the possible threat of war. The media was a useful device run by governmental forces producing social integration, modernization, and economic growth. In Korea, the entwined relationship of political power and media has had a long tradition, with the media representing the interests of the government and contributing to uphold the existing political status quo.⁶

It was not until the 1980s that the Korean mediascape began to be freed from strong nationalism, political control, and explicit censorship. The political and cultural landscape started to change rapidly, and finally, in the beginning of 1990s, the civilian government contributed to relieving the nation from the authoritarian and militarist political culture, a change which allowed greater heterogeneity in self-expression and self-identity. New economic growth and general trends of globalization brought with them a consumer culture. This culture is especially affecting the youth at the expense of the ideology of class

³ Chung Y.-H., 2006, p. 11; Park J.-K., 2003. See also Shon, 2004 for a study on the emergence of modern journalism and its effect on the public. On Korean enlightenment, see also Youn, 2002. For the influence of foreign missionary publishing mission on the development of journalism in Korea in the 19th century, see Ahn, 2004. For a study of public opinion formation during the Chosun dynasty (1392-1910) see Kim Y.-J., 2002.

⁴ See Park Y.-G., 2006; Lee & Lee, 2006; Kim Y.-H., 2002a & 2002b; Kim Y.-G., 2002 for Korean journalism under Japanese rule. Although not very organized, there was some Korean communication research during Japanese rule, mainly concentrating on journalism (practice, theory and history). Lee & Yang, 2006.

⁵ For the early history of Korean broadcasting Lim, 2004 presents three significant periods. During the first period of Japanese colonial regime (1910-1945) and the U.S. military government (1945-1948) broadcasting was in the control of external forces and served as a medium of propaganda. The second period from the establishment of Republic of Korea to the 1960s introduced family- and entertainment-centered broadcasting. During the 1960s, television started to overpass radio as the main medium and introduced a more commercially oriented although strictly government controlled service. Rather than acting on behalf of public interest, Korean broadcasting was organized by "a development in domination" that negotiated political and commercial sphere. See also Chung 2003 for a study of local broadcasting in contemporary Korea and Lee M.-J., 2002 for an analysis of Korean broadcasting research in the 1990s.

⁶ Chung, 2000; Park et al., 2000, pp. 111-112; Lee, 1997; Lee J.-K., 2003.

politics and emphasizing micro-politics.⁷

Today, Korea has a vastly developed media culture which is connected to the rapid economic growth and the resolute construction of an information society, the “Dynamic Korea⁸.” Korean media consumption and production is abundant, colorful, and innovative, forming a unique and dynamic mediascape — an interesting and manifold field of study. For example, Korean mobile phone users (almost 40 million) receive films, news, and even a mobile karaoke game in their cell phones and create a stunning 300-million-euro mobile game market⁹. Moreover, Koreans hold the second place in the world in using the super-fast Internet which can be said to be a solid part of the sociocultural infrastructure of the nation¹⁰. The Internet and SMS campaigning even helped to decide the last (2002) presidential elections, and a third of the nation is practically living in the *Cyworld* community connecting Koreans virtually.¹¹

But traditional media has not been superseded in Korea. Although the circulation of daily newspapers has not grown and the number of employees has decreased, the number of newspapers has increased since the beginning of the millennium. In addition to the Internet, the popularity of traditional newspapers has been eaten into by the increasing number of the “light press” or free-of-charge newspapers offering short news reports which are usually read by Koreans on their way to work. Moreover, the time spent on reading newspapers has decreased steadily, although Koreans are still satisfied with traditional newspapers as a reliable news medium.¹² This is not to say that there are not considerable pressures for change.¹³ However, a regular Korean media consumer is not forced to choose between different kinds of media but is instead using numerous media simultaneously¹⁴.

⁷ Yoon Y., 2001; Kang, 2004, p. 255. For the Korean youth participating in politics through the Internet, see Ha, 2006.

⁸ See the Korean Overseas Information Service website www.korea.net

⁹ In 2004, the share of Korea-made cell phones in global markets was about one fourth. June, 2005, p. 30. See also Sung & Lim, 2006 on categorization of mobile media users.

¹⁰ See also Lee K.-S., 2005 for *Soribada* the Korean equivalent of Napster.

¹¹ Aman, 2004; Business Week Online, 26.10.2005. See also Kim K.-K., 2005 for interactive public communication in the Internet. For discussion of Korean cybercommunities see e.g., Yoon T., 2001; Ku, 2005.

¹² Moreover, the daily average time spent in watching television has decreased steadily in Korea during this millennium, whereas the trend concerning Internet is highly ascending. Ibid. See also Yoo, 2006; Lee K.-Y., 2004 for studies of the Korean old and new media environment. See Kim H., 2002 on how the new media replace, supplement, or reinforce the traditional media in interpersonal communication; and Kim B.-S., 2004 for functional comparison of domestic use of TV and Internet in Korea. For changes in the Korean people's use of time, including time spent on different media, see Choo, 2001.

¹³ Rhee & Choi, 2005 and *General Trends in the Korean Press in 2003-2004*, 2004. See Lee J., 2001 for ideological and technological changes in Korean newspaper industry. See also Park Sora, 2004; Choi K.-J., 2004 for discussion of local newspapers and their profitability in Korea.

¹⁴ See e.g., Park J.-M., 2003 for a comparative study of user motivation between TV, Internet, and mobile phones.

A good example of a news medium diverging from the authoritarian tradition is the Internet-based *OhmyNews*, run primarily by citizen reporters¹⁵. Especially popular among young adults, the *OhmyNews* is very critical of conservative politics and has become a sound option for people not satisfied with the conservative major dailies. The global phenomenon of increasing popularity of the online newspaper is challenging the conservative paper media in Korea as well. The Korean government has taken strong initiative to support the development of an information society. Companies are encouraged and supported to make long-range investments in that area, and numerous joint projects between the public and private sector have brought good results. By developing an information society, Korea is strengthening its national economy and advancing its position on the global scale as one of the leading nations of information technology and its applications.¹⁶

Research Influenced by the U.S.

In Korea, there are more than 100 universities, 21 of which are funded by the government, and two (Seoul and Incheon) have municipal funding. The rest, a majority, are private universities. The distinct top three universities of Korea are the so-called SKY universities, Seoul National University (SNU), Korea University (KU), and Yonsei University (YU), all located in Seoul¹⁷. Until the turn of the millennium, the leading position of Seoul National University remained unchallenged, whereas today, the other SKY universities have proved to be equal to SNU in various fields of research and teaching. Further, Ewha Women's University, the biggest women's university in the world, also located in Seoul, has a both extensive and strong communications department¹⁸.

Most universities in Korea teach communication or its subdisciplines through at least a Bachelor's degree. Of the subdisciplines taught in Korean universities, mass communication is the most popular and is often accompanied by journalism, public relations, and advertising¹⁹. Communication is taught under social sciences in almost all universities. Only a few universities have it under humanities or liberal arts.

¹⁵ Only one fifth of the reports by OhmyNews are written by permanent staff. The rest are produced by citizen reporters. See e.g., Asia Times Online, 25.11.2004.

¹⁶ Åman, 2004. See also Lee & Kim, 2006; Kim P.-H., 2005 for political economy in telecommunication and broadcasting convergence and Joo C.-M., 2003 for security implications of interactive digital media convergence.

¹⁷ The SKY universities have often been compared to three equivalents in Japan: Tokyo, Waseda, and Keio. Both Seoul National University and the University of Tokyo are publicly funded and considered the most prestigious in their respective countries. See the websites of the SKY universities: SNU - www.snu.ac.kr, KU - www.korea.ac.kr, YU - www.yonsei.ac.kr

¹⁸ See www.ewha.ac.kr

¹⁹ In Asian communication research in general, human communication theory does not have as rich a tradition as mass communication research does. Thus, there seems to be a call for balance and also for more synthesis of human and mass communication theory. See e.g., Bryant & Yang, 2004, p. 147; Jo, 2003.

Post-graduate programs are significantly rarer and special communication studies doctoral programs have been arranged in only a few universities. Virtually all professors at major Korean universities have received their Ph.D. abroad, mainly in the American universities²⁰. Although doctoral degrees can be achieved at many Korean universities, the prestige of a degree received in the U.S. is very high, undermining the value of Korean Ph.D.s. Many Korean researchers today call for more self-sufficient knowledge-production in their academic system and, thus, wish for greater interest in, and infrastructural development of, doctoral programs in Korea.

Due to the perceived Western-centrism of the Korean academic community, there is a sort of identity crisis in Korean communication research and social sciences in general. The history of American impact on the Korean academic community began soon after the Korean War ended, and American-sponsored Korean students and scholars migrated to the U.S. for education. According to Kang Jung-In, academic dependency is a part of "Korea's political, economical, social, and cultural dependency on the United States." Like many other Asian countries, Korea has also adopted the American university system.²¹ As most professors of communication studies have graduated in the U.S., the impacts of American theories and methods of communication research are very influential.²²

The American emphasis on empiricism and pragmatism can easily be seen in Korean communication studies as well. Key American themes like the media effect and agenda setting have traditionally been very influential. Likewise, quantitative research constitutes an overwhelming majority of communication research. However, contemporary Korean communication research has made some attempt to break away from American influence. Leading communication scholars have also suggested indigenization²³ of social sciences, as American methods and research problems can be seen as unfit to the Korean sociocultural communication context. In European and American communication research, as well as in Korean research, there is a certain tendency to accept a sort of global binary ontology when it comes to assessing research in the "West" or "East." This kind of orientalism and occidentalism might not have any solid ground in Korea, nor anywhere else in academics, but it seems that many scholars

²⁰ In 2004, the top five destination countries for tertiary level Korean students studying abroad (total 95,885) were U.S. (52,484), Japan (23,280), Germany (5,488), UK (3,482) and Australia (3,915). *Global Education Digest*, 2006, p. 133.

²¹ Kang J.-I., 2006, pp. 116-118.

²² Moreover, Korea is a net exporter of scholars, a fact that has lately received increasing coverage in Korean media. It seems like Korean universities are slowly beginning to value two-way academic exchange and set up visiting programs. For example, The Chosun Ilbo, 1.2.2007, demands more foreign professors to Korean universities, especially Seoul National University. According to The Chosun Ilbo, only 0.2 % of the academic staff of SNU are foreigners and only 3.8 % of the student body originates from abroad. Compared to American universities, the differences are glaring. For example, of MIT's student body, 27.3 % are foreign, and at Harvard, 18.9 %. Although SNU ranked 30th in the world measured by publications in the Science Citation Index, it ranked 63rd in a list compiled by the Times of London and measuring also a globalization index. However, at Yonsei and Korea University the figures are somewhat higher.

²³ See e.g., Kang, 2004; Park et al., 2000.

universally accept the dichotomy of "Eastern" and "Western" as reflecting two polar opposites with essential qualitative differences.²⁴ Since Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, this binary ontology has begun to be challenged, but it still has great influence on social sciences²⁵. However, there are many Korean studies in communication research that emphasize the hybridist instead of essentialist views on cultures and societies and, rather, question the hegemonic divide between the East and the West.²⁶

Kang Myung-Koo, one of the leading figures of Korean communication research, mentions that the "absence of present-day realities" is caused by "the internalized imperialist eye among South Korean intellectuals" due to "the colonial structure of knowledge production in South Korea"²⁷. Or, as Park, Kim, and Sohn claim, the "mistake seems to be in applying Western perspectives to Korean cases with wholly un-Western conditions." In their view, Korean media, education, and research have accepted Western models and theories about the media as the ideal with hardly any criticism since 1960s.²⁸ Or, as the editors of *De-Westernizing Media Studies* state, there is

a growing reaction against the self-absorption and parochialism of much Western media theory. It has become routine for universalistic observations about the media to be advanced in English-language books on the basis of evidence derived from a tiny handful of countries. [. . .] Yet, the universe is changing in a way that makes this narrowness transparently absurd.²⁹

Since the 1980s, within the Korean Academia, there has been questioning of Western concepts and theories and their adaptability in the Korean context. Many have tried creative application, complementation, or revision of Western theories, but there has not been a definite solution.³⁰ In Kang's view, South Korean theories, per se, are not needed, but researchers who construct their own original research questions in the interest of and within the local context are needed³¹. Many Korean scholars believe theories of post-colonialism should be used to provide disclosure of the power relations in Korean academic discourse. In their view, Korean culture has been ignored in Korean communication research as

²⁴ See e.g., Kim & Cha, 2002, p. 106 who describe how in the Korean society "[t]he traditional communication characteristics of the East have been mingled with individualistic perspectives of the West for more than a half century."

²⁵ See also Shin, 2004 for an examination of Western orientalism.

²⁶ See e.g., Lee D., 2001; Kim et al., 2006; Whang, 2004; Kim Y.-C., 2004. Moreover, there are insightful studies which reveal how the binary ontology created by orientalist discourse functions not only in speaking of an East/West dichotomy, but also in speaking of an urban/rural dichotomy. See also Im, 2002, who conducted a textual analysis of a Korean variety TV program and the discourse of regional identity in it. See also Cho, 2004, for a deconstructive analysis of, among other things, the hegemonic notion of "West" and the popular counter-discourse against it in Korea.

²⁷ Kang, 2004, p. 254.

²⁸ Park et al., 2000, p. 121.

²⁹ Curran & Park, 2000, p. 3.

³⁰ Park et al., 2000, p. 110.

³¹ Kang, 2004, p. 267.

researchers introduce foreign theories straight into the Korean sociocultural context. Thus, there is a need for serious self-reflection and autonomous theory production.³²

Indigenization or Globalization?

Im Yung-Ho demands that critical Korean communication studies indigenize by rejecting false dichotomies of the modern and postmodern and answering specific concerns of contemporary society³³. One rather interesting and radical but rare example of an attempt to indigenize Korean communication research is Choi Hyeon-Cheol's study where he analyzes the traditional Korean view of human types, *sasangchejil*, and patterns of media use. According to the study, different human types (classified by the strength-relations of a person's internal organs) define their interest in different types of media use.³⁴ Although speculating on human action and its causality in a refreshing way, one might consider Choi's study a rather metaphysical one, without the conventional requirements of scientific analysis. Whether this view of Choi's study is merely another example of the postcolonial hegemony of "Western" scientific discourse rejecting indigenization or de-Westernization is another matter, and it would require a lengthy discussion on the definitions of scientific knowledge per se. At any rate, studies like Choi's could function as heuristic devices, invoking discussion on the nature of the boundaries of science.³⁵

In contrast, European social sciences have gathered increasing interest in Korea. According to Kang Myung-Koo, postmodern theories filled the vacuum left by the cold war. For example, in 1992, Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition*, translated in Korean, became the national best-seller in Korea.³⁶ Obviously, attitudes of Korean scholars toward postmodernism vary, and the overall atmosphere of Korean communication studies seems to be rather positivistic. For example, Lee Sang-Gil criticizes radical relativism accompanied by postmodernism and calls for a new theoretical production which can "surpass the self-destructing radicalism of postmodernism."³⁷ All this might be due to the global tendency of

³² See e.g., Yoon 2003b.

³³ Im, 2006. Cf. Lee & Mha, 2006, with a Foucauldian approach to early modern body.

Implementation of Foucauldian approach is rather rare in Korean communication research. For another exception, see e.g., Choi, 2003, who uses Foucault's "discursive formation" in studying documentaries; and Bang & Choi 2003, for a Foucauldian analysis of regional, generational, and ideological conflicts in Korean newspapers.

³⁴ Choi H.-C., 2004.

³⁵ Perhaps an even more conscious attempt to break away from a perceived Western theoretical influence and to reorientate inquiry via East Asian philosophies is made by Jeon, who pursues a synthesis of Eastern and Western views and wants to emphasize the significance of ecology and nature in human studies. Jeon, 2005. See also Moon, 2002. For contrast, see Lee's analysis of Aristotle's rhetoric and its relation to modern communication studies. Lee S.-C., 2000.

³⁶ Kang, 2004, p. 255.

³⁷ Lee S.-G., 2005b. For a study of Korean visual media, visual culture, and postmodernism, see Hong, 2002. For a comparative study of postmodernism and communication in Marshall McLuhan's and Walter Benjamin's thought, see Auh, 2004. For another comparative study of McLuhan and Jacques

communication research to become more fragmented and eclectic in its approach, although, in the end, it seems the field of Korean communication theories has remained relatively intact³⁸.

Kang Myung-Koo cites the "indigenizers" of the last decade who have claimed that Korean intellectuals are too influenced by the authority of foreign scholars and their knowledge-production is separated from reality. Korea is not mainstream but marginal, and thus the researchers do not dare challenge Western theories³⁹. In 1996, Kim Young-Min even stated in his *Decolonization and Our Cultural Writing* that Korean scholars are "prostitute intellectuals in the U.S. military camp-side town"⁴⁰. Some scholars seek syncretism, the combination of East and West, in theory, to undermine the politics that have affected Korean scholarly culture. The phenomenon has even been called "reckless scientism" which has imported American behaviorist theories and antisocialism in the name of national security. Theories have been imported, implemented, and indigenized in the Korean context, but their implantation into Korean society has not been questioned, states Kang.⁴¹

Kang Myung-Koo also describes four ways of reacting to Western methods and theories in the Korean context. They are import, imposition, appropriation, and local/historical. In importing Western theories, little criticism is practiced and there are no concerns about the local context, the Korean realities. For example, youth consumption culture has been studied applying the grand Western theories of Baudrillard, Haug, Featherstone, and so forth, but local experiences have not been brought forth. Phenomena like hypercompetitive education, oppressive school culture, and authoritarian family culture have not been given due attention. For example, in the analyses of Korean youth culture, the Korean youth have been considered to be the same urban consumers as 'post-modern' consumers in the West.⁴²

Kang further describes how, in imposition, Western research questions are borrowed and applied to the local context, but without raising questions about why such questions were originally presented in the West. Theories and concepts can be copied because, if they are good, they are good regardless of their origin. However, Kang wants to question the straightforward borrowing of the research questions from the West because they should rise from the local situations.

Although I fear to say it, it seems most social science [. . .] research in South Korea can be classified within the imposition model. Master's theses and doctoral dissertations in particular often seem to borrow problematics directly from the West.⁴³

Derrida, see Auh, 2003. For an interesting suggestion to implement Gabriel Tarde's theories in today's Internet society, see Lee S.-G., 2003.

³⁸ See e.g., a network analysis of communication theories in Korean academic journals by Ahn 2006.

³⁹ Cho, 1992 in Kang, 2004, pp. 264-265.

⁴⁰ Kim, 1996 in Kang, 2004, pp. 265.

⁴¹ Kang, 2004, p. 265.

⁴² Kang, 2004, p. 258. See also Keum, 2006 for an analysis of the interrelationship of Korean media and consumer culture.

⁴³ Kang, 2004, p. 259.

In appropriation, Kang explains, Western concepts and theories are used to analyze Korean society, but the research questions that rise from local situations and are not simply borrowed from the West. Thus, the researchers are not merely importing or fitting their arguments into Western theories, but instead use them while taking into account their historical specifics. Thus, a sort of negotiation process acts between the borrowed concepts and local realities, aiming at a redefinition of the concepts within local realities.⁴⁴

In the last mode that Kang describes, the local/historical, the research subject is analyzed in the context of historical conditions. In this mode, Western theories have a heuristic function, and they are not simply "frames of reference for looking into social realities." The research starts from the local and historical reality and uses Western theories as a secondary reference. This type of research is highly particularistic and tries to elucidate problems in a South Korean context without automatically adopting Western theories, but instead using them as supplementary aids of research⁴⁵. In Kang's view, for example, the sex culture in Korea is different from the West because of the special features of army life and workplace cultures. Moreover, Confucianism and feminism are in a uniquely conflicting relationship in Korea.⁴⁶ Kang's insightful epistemological analysis brings forth important issues and raises questions that are bound to have intricate and multiple answers. In addition to this kind of meta-analytical discussion, it would be interesting to discuss the seemingly simple, but in the end complex, question of whether or not *all* empirical research in social sciences is about adopting and remodeling theories to fit unique situations, whether it be in "the East," "the West," or anywhere.

Accepting "the West"?

According to Kang Jung-In, the Western-centrism of Korean academics can be traced to a belief system equivalent to cultural evolution theory where Europeans and Americans are related to as having reached the most advanced stage of human history on a progressive timeline that is universally valid. Thus, the non-Western societies are lagging behind historical development and can only achieve significant progress by emulating the Western developmental model. This can be achieved either in civilization, by being colonized, or postcolonially, by Western-style modernization. Hence, in this ideology, "Western" is synonymous to "civilized" and "modern."

Non-Western people have internalized the belief that the Western worldview, values, institutions, and practices are superior and universal and have assimilated them. This has driven them to self-marginalization, self-abasement, and self-negation. In this state, they have not been able to form independent worldviews, a fact that eventually rendered them as self-alienated.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Kang, 2004, p. 261.

⁴⁵ Kang reminds that Korean scholars of this kind are few.

⁴⁶ Kang, 2004, pp. 256-264. Also, feminist approaches have often been imported without taking Korean patriarchal culture and gender relations into account. Kang also questions the use of Freudian theory (or Deleuze's and Guattari's theories, for that matter) in Korean society.

⁴⁷ Kang J.-I., 2006, pp. 118-119.

According to Chung, the ideological world-view of Koreans can be defined as self-orientalism. However, the prestige of Westernity is a relatively young phenomenon in Korean history. Koreans used to live within the sphere of Chinese civilization and the 19th century penetration by Americans and Europeans was first perceived as a threat to Korean society; Western people represented barbarianism. Civilization meant the countries of Confucian ethics, their center being China.⁴⁸

In Kang Jung-In's provocative view above, there is a fortunate tendency to revitalize Korean social sciences community. There are many (but not enough, it seems) scholars who have either studied abroad or in Korea, but nevertheless have self-consciously started to go through the painstaking "readjustment process," as Kang calls it. However, the prestige of Western knowledge persists as increasing numbers of Korean scholars travel to, and return from the West, seeking to aggrandize their command of Western academic knowledge, as Kang seems to suggest.⁴⁹

As general trends of globalization affect both Korea and its academics, there is increasing movement, especially among young scholars, toward publishing in international academic journals, although a considerably large proportion of Korean communication research is still published in domestic, Korean-language journals. As many Korean scholars study and make their career abroad,⁵⁰ mostly in American universities, it is not surprising that various studies have been made about Korean Americans and are being published in international journals. Moreover, many second-generation Koreans abroad often find it natural to return to their roots and conduct communication research in the Korean context.

In the inaugural article of *Asian Communication Research*, change in communication theory construction and the questioning of its Western origins are most strenuously demanded, because:

[w]ith this seeming wholesale adoption of theories from the West comes tacit acceptance of the sorts of epistemological and metatheoretical intellectual infrastructure that has been derived from philosophers and theorists with Western mindsets. [. . .] If you compare and contrast the essential philosophical and theological works, the arts and crafts, and the great literature of the East and the West, a substantial number of obtrusive differences routinely occur. This would seem to speak against wholesale adoption, without modification, of many communication theories.⁵¹

According to the writers, change should be attained by establishing a routine that would challenge the adoption of communication theories "derived from Western mindsets without reconciliation of any parts of the theory or model that are not concordant with Eastern ways of knowing, thinking,

⁴⁸ Chung, 2006, pp. 110-113.

⁴⁹ Kang J.-I., 2006, p. 131.

⁵⁰ See also Ha & Jin, 2002 for educational migration.

⁵¹ Bryant & Yang, 2004, p. 146.

symbol making, and action."⁵² It should be noted, though, that there are opposite views that demand restructuring of communication studies toward a more Western-like system⁵³.

According to Lee Sang-Gil's study of the implications of the "new history" paradigm, there could be an alternative to the so-called Rankean (objectivist) view of historiography in Western historiography, a paradigmatic vein also followed in the communication research in Korea. According to Lee and his analysis of major communication journals published between 1994-2004, communication research seems to be still highly influenced by the Rankean paradigm. Thus, Lee is calling for greater variety of sources (including oral testimonies, informal documents, images, etc.) in research, more constructivist critique, and more focus on the symbolic elements of communication and their interpretation.⁵⁴ This seems to concur with the view that Korean communication research is rather positivistic and objectivistic in its approach and not, at least extensively, preoccupied with postmodernist, relativist, and subjectivist views on scientific inquiry⁵⁵.

As early as 1985, Kim Hak Soo described the three paradigmatic trends of Korean communication research:

- (1) that communications research is devoted to introducing Western (especially American) perspectives on communications;
- (2) that communications researchers accept and use without any suspicion in the Korean context American communications-related concepts like socialization, delinquency, displacement, mass culture, image, and libel, exactly the same way as American researchers treat them in research;
- and (3) that communications research is mainly descriptive, not explanatory, not only in historical studies but also in empirical studies using content analyses or survey methods.⁵⁶

Twenty years after Kim's statement, Korean communication research could be said to face the same issues, although there are increasing demands for approaches and theories developed specifically for Korean sociocultural context. These demands seem to be most seriously taken within the realms of more historically, sociologically, and culturally inclined qualitative studies of communication.

Epilogue: Weak and Strong Signals

The aspects of "Cyber Korea" are clear elements of strong signals for the future research of Korean communication studies. The recent history of Korean society has led the nation from E-society via I-society to U-society. Discourses of electronic, information, and ubiquitous societies have been inseparable aspects of Korean communication on the national level. Many Koreans, scholars and non-

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ In the case of journalism as a discipline, see Lee J., 2005.

⁵⁴ Lee S.-G., 2005a. See also *ibid.*, 2005b.

⁵⁵ Cf. Lee D.-W., 2002b: 128 who sees communicology as an alternative movement inside positivist communication research.

⁵⁶ Kim, 1985. See also Kang, K.-H., 2005 for Korean communication phenomena and their theorization.

scholars alike, find the rapid change toward digitalization, globalization, and a ubiquitous information society in Korean society both threatening and promising at the same time. For example, Kim Hyun-Joo, professor at Kwangwoon University, calls the new digital era the age of confusion because "various perspectives on communication, Eastern and Western, ancient and contemporary, are in direct collision with each other." In his view, digital technology is essentially a Western product, coming from a civilization based on pragmatism. Kim seems to lament witnessing "communication tools invented in the 'low-context' culture shake the fundamentals of the communication values of the 'high-context' culture."⁵⁷

Media is often seen as the main cause of social change, and, in a wider, holistic view, the new human-media symbiosis is inevitably conditioning and restructuring people's experiences of space and time⁵⁸. Hence, communication research in Korea is bound to develop and expand further in the realm of new ubiquitous technologies. Communication Studies is becoming increasingly popular among students, and it is a field which is able to get a decent level of research funding. As ways of communication, and especially journalism (the main emphasis of the discipline), are rapidly changing in Korea, the discipline is most likely to be pressured to change its characteristics, which, for many, are currently too much focused on research about traditional journalism.

Korea is still one of the most ethnically homogeneous societies in the world, which adds a distinct nuance in the cultural, societal, political, and communicational elements revolving around the dual phenomenon of Korean localization/globalization. The information society has met with the Confucian society⁵⁹ and the Hermit Kingdom has turned into Dynamic Korea, producing a unique infra- and superstructure with a multitude of possible future scenarios for societal development and, further, for social science research. Obviously, much of the future research within the area of communication studies depends on the paradigmatic movement on the axis of indigenization and internationalization, which, fortunately, are not in a dichotomic or bipolar relationship and hence enable great variety inside the discipline. However, one might predict that the trends of globalization will affect Korean academics in a way that leads the fields of research toward more eclecticism. Whether this happens more under duress or electively depends on various factors like the consensus and hegemony of the Korean scientific community, the import and export of Korean and foreign scholars, university economics, and even the general political atmosphere of Korea.

There are also some topics of research which seem to have gathered relatively little research interest in Korean communication research. It is difficult to estimate whether this is due to the general topical orientation of the discipline, or if it is a matter of cultural sensitivity. At any rate, although the domestic political aspects within the Korean media have been studied rather extensively, it seems like there are considerably less studies on areas involving foreign politics of the nation. These areas seem to include relations with, and their representations of, politically significant countries like Japan, North Korea, and the United States. For example, textual, Foucauldian, or Gramscian discursive analyses of, how the

⁵⁷ Kim H., 2004: 30. See also Kang M.-S., 2002; Lee D. H., 2006.

⁵⁸ See e.g., an examination of media ecology by Kim S.-B., 2004.

⁵⁹ See e.g., Lee O., 2000.

press uses language on the aforementioned matters would reveal exceedingly interesting elements of Korean communication.

Women and gender in general, in that order, have become increasingly popular subjects of research in Korean communication studies. Korea is known for its patriarchal culture, which, in many explanations, stems from Confucian tradition. Thus, for example, women journalists are still a rare phenomenon in Korea and the traditional Korean female is still raised to be a wife and a mother, not one to pursue a career. For example, Kim Kyung-Hee has studied women in journalism and, although there is slight increase, the proportion of high-ranking women in news organizations is still very small, under 10%, even in the most gender-equal organizations. Kim sees the situation as due to the patriarchal system and, interestingly, to capitalism. Kim laments the fact that the number of female journalists has not increased "even though the demand for soft news (i.e., more casual content, such as culture, well-being, or family issues, compared to 'hard' news stories related to politics, national issues, or economics), which is generally considered as being appropriate for female journalists to write about, has increased."⁶⁰

According to Kim's data, women journalists have to imitate aggressive male behavior in order to survive in the business. Moreover, the questionable ethics of male journalists cause problems to women as they, for example, are not as prone to take bribes and are less likely to integrate socially with male colleagues in the after-work context.⁶¹ Obviously, journalism is still a man's world in Korea, as are many other sectors of work. Thus it is not surprising that critical gender issues have become more popular and, most likely, will be even more popular in the future of Korean communication research.

Mass media and patriarchal knowledge/power production in Korea has been analyzed from the Gramscian and Foucauldian views, and the gender-representations (female body, sex-roles, autonomy, sexuality, etc.) in the media have been studied with various methods, including psychoanalysis, postcolonial theories, and, obviously, feminist studies. The results have revealed that Korean popular culture still reverts to a patriarchal view of the role of women in society and denies women more masculine roles. Women are symbolically subdued by men, and they are objects of male desire; images of their guarded pureness can even be harnessed to support nationalism. Women in the role of men are portrayed either as comical or immoral.⁶² For example, according to a study on women represented in magazines, even female politicians are portrayed more as women than as politicians. In a male politician's life, two worlds, the private and public, are integrated whereas in that of a female politician, the worlds

⁶⁰ Kim K.-H., 2006, pp. 123-125. Perhaps the writer's view that women are more fluent in reporting "soft news" could also be interpreted as a patriarchal view on gender. See also Kim & Kim, 2005 on gender differences in news-production in Korea. See also Im et al., 2004; Jang, 2004; Im & Kim, 2006 on career paths in Korean journalism.

⁶¹ Kim K.-H., 2006, pp. 129-130.

⁶² See e.g., Kim U., 2003; Han, 2002; Lee & Park, 2004; Kim K., 2003; Yoon et al., 2002; Yoon, 2004; Yoon, 2005; Kim et al., 2004; Yang & Kang, 2005; Lee H., 2004; Kim S.-E., 2002; Lee D.-W., 2002a; Han & Hur, 2004; Cho, 2005; Yang & Kang, 2005.

are in conflict.⁶³ However, there are also studies that see women's position in the Korean society in a more positive light. These studies are often affiliated with the use of the new media technology by women.⁶⁴

Although women and gender in the Confucian/patriarchal context have been studied in Korean communication, sexuality — not to speak of sexual minorities — have not been studied very much, although some interesting studies exist.⁶⁵ One might predict that in the course of globalization, the strengthening of a women's movement, and the abating of dominant patriarchal value-structures, research concentrating on gender will proliferate, even dramatically.

Moreover, as the infiltration of gender-studies in communication research might be considered as a rather strong signal, one of the weak signals could involve more official facets of the society. Interestingly, in contemporary Korean social sciences, there seems to be a slight tendency to ignore the possibilities introduced by the national or governmental statements, speeches, reports, and definitions of policies. For example, the Dynamic Korea-discourse of the government has attracted surprisingly little interest. The official Korean discourse about the nation as the forerunner of ubiquitous society development and the significance of technological advances would offer a number of interesting aspects for communication study.

Although one cannot predict the future and count on either weak or strong signals, it is safe to say that although diversification is bound to increase in the future, meters, statistics, and quantity remain in the core of Korean communication research, defining and reinforcing its characteristics as a pragmatic, empirical, and problem-based field of study.

⁶³ See Yang, 2006, for the influence of news media on the behavior of female politicians. For symbolic gender-discrimination in Korean name-giving tradition, see Leejung, 2004.

⁶⁴ Kim & Park, 2004 studied Korean female-only Internet communities and found them rather successful in producing a motivational arena for Korean women to express themselves. See also Lee D.-H., 2005 for women's camera phone use.

⁶⁵ See e.g. Kim Y.-Y. & Kim, 2004; Ha, 2003; Joo, 2003; Kim G.-H., 2002.

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Journal abbreviations: Korean Journal of Journalism and Communication Studies (한국언론학보) = KJJCS, Speech & Communication (스피치와 커뮤니케이션) = SC, Korean Journal of Communication Studies (커뮤니케이션의 한국) = KJCS, Asian Communication Research = ACR, Korean Journal of Broadcasting (한국방송학보) = KJB, Korean Journal of Communication & Information (한국언론정보학보) = KJCI, Communication Theories (커뮤니케이션 이론) = CT, Korean Journal of Communication Science (언론과학연구) = KJCS.

* = article written in Korean.

Due to policies of individual writers, publications and issues, the transliteration of the first name of a Korean author varies (e.g., Kang, Myung-Koo; Kang Myungkoo; Kang Myung Koo or Kang MyungKoo). For the sake of clarity all Korean given names that have two parts have been transliterated here as hyphenated and with capital initials (e.g., Kang, Myung-Koo), except for the authors with only one English publication and with no Korean or other language publications referred to here.

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