

BEYOND ORIENTALIST DISCOURSES: MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY IN ASIA

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Abstract

This editorial introduction provides a framework for the later articles. It is concerned to address critically a number of the ways in which the issue of media and democracy in Asia is currently discussed. The sheer variety of the experience of Asia is emphasised, and explanations that seek to account for the past and present shortcomings of democratisation in some Asian countries in terms of general categories are found to be wanting. For example, the use of idea of the influence Confucianism to explain important social phenomena is shown to be insensitive the complexity of the ideas that are lumped together under the single term "Confucianism" and to the evidence both of differences in media behaviour observable in societies undoubtedly influenced by it and to similarities across countries with different backgrounds. The introduction goes on to consider some of the problems about the relationship between state, media, market, globalisation and democracy that remain to be explored in detail. It is pointed out that none of these categories is self-evident, and that one and the same phenomenon can have a different meaning in different social circumstances.

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What Samuel Huntington (1991) calls the “third wave” of democratic change started in Portugal and Spain in the 1970s and then spread to Latin America during the first half of the 1980s and to Asia during the second half of the 1980s. Most dramatic was the collapse of Communist regimes, all in rapid succession during the first years of the 1990s, sweeping across the former Soviet Union as well as Eastern and Central Europe. The cold war was declared over. Good social science work being mature analyses of what is happening or what has happened, given the elapse of at least a decade, how much do we know about the role of the media in this highly complex, contingent, and precarious project called democracy?

The relationship between the media and democratisation is an important but difficult topic. Different social theories offer diverse cognitive maps of democracy, conceptual work on the role of the media in macro-societal transformation is underdeveloped, and the thick description of the media-democracy nexus is uneven and only slowly emerging. Political scientists (O'Donnell et al., 1986; Przeworski, 1991; Friedman, 1994) have characteristically treated the media as epiphenomenal in the process of democratic change. As a notable exception to the general neglect of media dynamics, Gunther and Mughan (2000), however, casts Japan as the sole (and dubious) representative of Asia,¹ to compare with five other stable democracies (the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands) and four “third-wave” cases (Spain, Chile, Russia, Hungary). From the corpus of media studies, Curran and Park (2000) offers an initial yet incomplete attempt to assess the generality of insights and perspectives derived from stable democracies to other societies caught in the current wave of democratic flux. English-language literature on the media and democratisation tends to be more consistent and sophisticated with reference to Eastern and Central Europe (Sparks 1997; Downing 1996; Splichal 1994 among others) than to Latin America or Asia. Among Asian countries, China has undoubtedly garnered the most focused and sustained scholarly attention (for example, Zhao 1998; Lee 2000), in contrast to our general ignorance about the situation in North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma.

Given its immense historical and geographical heterogeneity, Asia can roughly be categorised into East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia; any effort to “generalise from Asian experiences,” however worthy and necessary, must therefore be received with a dose of healthy scepticism. This special issue samples the experiences of five rather diverse countries: China, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. This essay is developed at the generous invitation of the editors to foreground these five outstanding case studies. In the first part, I opt to discuss some of the cliché, stereotypical explanations — akin to what Edward Said (1993; 1994) has called “Orientalist discourses” — which tend to reduce the dynamic and complex interplay of media and democratisation in Asia into sterile and unfruitful conceptual fundamentalism. Such fundamentalist concepts include “the end of history,” liberal democracy, “Asian values,” “Confucian culture,” and “clash of civilisations.” Without going beyond these Orientalist discourses, I am afraid that our understanding won't advance very much. In the second part of the essay, I shall discuss three problematics needed for building a comparative and comprehensive horizon of vision across the Asian mediascape. My attention will be given specifically to the interaction between Asian countries and the United States during and after the cold war era. The immensity of the problem, coupled with my regrettable lack of competence, requires admitting to the tentative “food for thought” nature of this essay.

Debunking

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The end of the cold war has prompted Fukuyama (1992) to argue that liberal democracy constitutes “the end of history.” Not only is there a remarkable consensus on the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government, according to him; it is also “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and “the final form of government” (p. xi). This essentialist and mythologised construction of Western liberal democracy is historically oblivious to the authoritarian roots of that democracy.² Tilly (1975) shows that the Western European experience was not a continuous rationalisation of government, broadening of political participation, and pacification of the masses. Instead, it was extractive, repressive, and coercive (p. 663); the Western European model could have been a lucky shot rather than an inevitable development. It should be reminded that American democracy was not meant for women and black slaves, John Stuart Mills did not write *On Liberty* to include British colonial subjects, and the rise of liberal democracy was coterminous with racism and imperial expansion. Even Marx, an ultimate radical humanist, was said to believe in the relative inferiority of the Negro race and in the existence of intrinsic racial differences between the Slavs and Lithuanians (Feuer 1969, 25). Of course, the logic does not follow that because of the authoritarian roots of liberal democracy, contemporary states in the Third World do not want or deserve democracy.

More important, Fukuyama’s linear formulation in which liberal democracy, as the end point of history, has defeated Fascism and Communism in the twentieth century fails to acknowledge the contingent and open-ended character — full of conflicts, struggles, and change — of democracy. In many Asian countries, periodic electoral contests between elite candidates have been allowed, and overt government censorship has been abolished, but by no means is democracy assured. In Thailand, the state-controlled media were ferociously contested by three popular uprisings in 1973, 1979, and 1992; the angry protesters burned the state radio station down not once, but twice! And the struggle is still being fought hard there. Likewise, in the Philippines, the very “people power” that toppled the corrupt Marcos regime in 1986, following more than a decade of shaky democratic interlude, was again mobilised (astonishingly, with the help of short message services and websites) to bring down another corrupt Estrada regime in 2001. Malaysia’s self-righteous rulers have always exploited the race and ethnicity issues to their advantages. The authorities ranging from the ousted Estrada to President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea, who had been a lifetime dissident, have continued to harass critical media outlets with threats of tax audits, advertising, and fair business investigations. Different groups, classes, individuals, and institutions always subject democracy to contestation. On the other hand, the abolition of government censorship and economic liberalisation may have also given rise to potential “market censorship” as a result of growing domestic or transnational media conglomeration, symbolised by Rupert Murdoch’s marching order into what is supposed to be a more “nationalist” market in Korea. Fighting for democracy is an ongoing and never-ending process, not a finished product or a settled terrain (as Fukuyama seems to suggest), for it can be won and then lost, if not guarded with vigilance.

Democracy and the Cold War

The supposed triumph of liberal democracy in Asia or elsewhere should be

understood in the larger context of the cold war itself. The hierarchy of foreign policy aims of the United States included anti-Communism and the diffusion of capitalist democracy in the name of modernisation, with democracy subordinated to the overarching anti-Communist objectives. A self-designated “guardian of Western civilisations,” the United States views itself as “a righter of wrongs around the world, in pursuit of tyranny, in defence of freedom no matter the place or cost” (Said 1993, 5). Washington was at the forefront of the East-West conflicts battling fiercely against the Communists, but was hostile to the South-North confrontations in which the United States found itself held responsible by the majority of poor countries for the unequal distribution of economic and information resources in the world. The United States, with Britain and Singapore following suit, withdrew from the Unesco in 1984 on account of the “new international information and communication order” debate, for which the Reagan Administration had no stomach and patience. Western application of democracy as an ideological instrument against Communism was at best selective and often a double standard. China’s human rights abuse receded in the background as its strategic alliance with the United States against the Soviet Union developed in the 1970s and 1980s, but has again loomed large as a centre of dispute in the bilateral relationship since the end of the cold war.

Putting anti-Communism above democracy, Washington found itself frequently supporting the right-wing dictatorships during the cold war. This yielding of democratic principles was sometimes justified by Jean Kirpatrick’s contention (1982) that authoritarian regimes would have greater propensities for democratic transformation than totalitarian regimes. Empirical appraisal of this contention is far from conclusive. Within its own orbit of influence, the United States nonetheless has tried to champion the ideology of liberal democracy as a secondary agenda, the model cases for emulation being Japan and West Germany, upon which the Allied Forces imposed the American-style democratic system and a free press after the Second World War. Washington tended to provide oppositional dissidents (like Kim and Aquino) with a protective umbrella and also to encourage media pluralism within its authoritarian client states, partly keeping faith with America’s democratic values and partly striking a precarious balance of political factions within such countries. While sympathetic to political opposition that aspired to play within the system, the United States was antagonistic to radical popular movements against its client authorities.

Marching hand in hand with its overwhelming political and economic forces has been the export of cultural and media images of modernisation and the American “way of life” to the majority of Asian countries. This cultural hegemony was accomplished through official U.S. information apparatuses’ dissemination of publications as well as sponsored visits and training of journalists and officials, but above all through its all-pervasive networks of Hollywood film and other media flows. The United States, in other words, wanted to change these countries in the light of its own image. The Philippines owes a good deal of its liberal press tradition (in terms of the statutes and norms) to the United States, its erstwhile colonial sovereign. The ideology of media professionalism characterised by objectivity, impartiality, and balance in news reporting was imported into Asian countries against the backdrop of stern decrees and restrictions issued by their state agen-

cies. Notwithstanding the gaps between ideal and reality, liberal ideologies or myths (such as the “fourth estate,” the public’s right to know, checks and balances), as certified by the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights, eventually seem to have been important empowering and liberating forces that emboldened democracy movements in South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Taiwan. But the overall and specific contributions of the U.S. neoimperialist-cum-democratic pressure on their authoritarian clients in Asia to open up political and media spaces await systematic inquiries.

While these positive liberal influences seem undeniable, the process and causes of change were much more complex, non-linear, and contradictory than usually assumed. The classical modernisation theory (such as Lerner 1958) claims that economic development is a necessary but insufficient condition for political democracy, a process in which the media play a key role in creating a favourable social or psychological climate for change. It is assumed that the capitalist market provides a “social zone relatively independent of state control” (Berger 1986, 79-81). For decades, however, political and media repression in Korea and Taiwan (as still is true of Singapore) had been undertaken in the name of modernisation and anti-Communism, thus seemingly in support of O’Donnell’s (1978) theme of “bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes.” In several countries, the final triumph of the liberal order has also ushered in a momentum for media conglomeration that produces market censorship. Moreover, the Asian economic meltdown that started in Thailand and extended to Malaysia, Indonesia, and Korea in 1998 has raised more troubling issues about “crony capitalism” and the critical failure of the media to act as watchdogs. Whether improved conditions of democracy and press freedom have a better theoretical fit with the interpretations of modernisation or “dependent development” (see Evans 1987; Gold 1986) appears to be quite contestable.

In a strange roundabout way, it took two decades of incubation for Huntington’s (1968) stress on the importance of political order to reach China, giving rise to the promulgated “neo-authoritarianism” by the reform bureaucracy in the second half of the 1980s. Citing the dubious examples of Korea and Singapore, the reformist-elitist leadership claimed that political stability (with implied justification for suppression of media freedom) was a prerequisite for economic development. Many democracy activists in China were in the first instance inspired by Marxist visions of radical humanism, while others were drawn to images of liberalism even though their understanding of American democracy was abstracted and truncated. Their tendency to glorify the United States was matched only by the extent of their disillusionment with the Communist system. The reform bureaucracy was purged in the wake of the Tiananmen tragedy. Since 1992, China has been articulating itself more and more closely into the global capitalist structure, creating coarse consumerism and huge benefits gaps that turned some of liberalism’s early admirers into its harsh critics (Lee 2000a). Moreover, capitalist development appears to have diverted intellectual and social energies away from democratic ferment, throwing media outlets into the “ocean of commercialisation.” Commercialisation of the media has produced considerable “negative freedom” in non-political reportage, but democratisation is nowhere to be seen (Lee 2000). Many coastal media have amassed huge wealth, and their middle-class professional workers have acquired a privileged status, invariably to the neglect of the marginalised peasants and workers (Zhao 1998).

Asian Values, Confucian Culture

No regime can afford to rhetorically renounce the norms of democracy and free press today, although it may attempt to twist it out of shape. Sukarno's "guided democracy," the Indonesian style, was as laughable as Mao's "dictatorship of people's democracy." Authoritarian leaders in Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Thailand have had to reckon, strategically or tactically, with popular clarion calls to democracy and press freedom. In this regard, Lee Kuan Yew stands out as the most eloquent and unrepentant proponent of the Singaporean-cum-Asian values, which are said to accentuate collective identity over individual sovereignty, harmony over conflict, and discipline over freedom. He is also a formidable critic of the Western media. But how Asian are these proclaimed values? To the extent that Asia can be regarded as a coherent historical, geographical and cultural entity, it might make sense to speak of "Asian values" in relation to "non-Asian values," but such values do not have much meaning without further contextualisation. The coherence of Asian reality, given its heterogeneity and diversity, may be dubious and contingent. How are Thailand and the Philippines identified with Asian values differently from Korea, Malaysia, or Singapore? Why is Singapore entitled to speak for the whole of Asia?

Then, who has the interpretative power? It is the power holders like Lee who monopolise the dominant interpretation to the exclusion of alternative and oppositional interpretations. This dominant interpretation suppresses historical variations, while freezing regional, national, subcultural diversity, not to speak of the perspectives of the weak, the oppressed, and the marginalised. Chris Patten, the last British governor in Hong Kong, once got a lot of media mileage out of lashing at Lee Kuan Yew, his critic, as an "eloquent advocate of authoritarian government" not necessarily Asian or Confucian. Patten argued: "Why do we assume that Lee Kuan Yew is the embodiment of Asian values rather than Aung San Suu Kyi or Martin Lee?" (*Washington Post*, June 25, 1997). Lee became a de facto defender of Beijing's authoritarian attitude toward Hong Kong, but Britain's late conversion to the cause of democracy, on the eve of sovereignty transfer and almost after 150 years of colonial rule, was also patently hypocritical. As such, "Asian values" typify the Orientalist discourses that reduce the varied, concrete, intertwined, and paradoxical historical and cultural realities into a monolithic whole that highlights the us-against-them dimension often in service of authoritarian rule.

Heavy-handed repression was greeted with relentless popular revolts in Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Thailand; and the struggle quite often revolved around press freedom. But in Singapore, Lee's charismatic leadership has managed to transform his ruling ideology into public consciousness and media consensus in everyday life practice, such that submission to authority is taken for granted. His taming of the media has been accepted without challenge. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia (and other candidates) have failed to wrestle ideological leadership away from Lee, but not for want of trying. This self-righteous, arrogant, and anti-liberal backlash against democracy, announced in the name of "Asian values," mirrors the old mindset of some leading China specialists in the United States, who proclaimed that democracy was either unsuitable for China or incompatible with Chinese culture. Both apologetics do not acknowledge that democratic ideals, despite their Western origins or different institutional expres-

sions, have constituted common aspirations of all peoples.

No matter whether “Asian values” will survive after Lee in Singapore, other essentialised explanations of similar genre, albeit in various guises, will always be advanced. Let us turn to “Confucian culture.” Max Weber (1964) was the first person to hypothesise that while the Protestant ethic was associated with the rise of capitalism in Europe, Confucianism was not conducive to capitalist development in China. At the Bellagio conference, a vigorous debate took place over whether the Confucian culture should be blamed for preventing Korea or other countries from achieving democracy and media freedom in the fullest sense. It should be immediately emphasised that any body of thought and ethos like Confucianism that has been practised by peoples of East Asia for thousands of years is bound to be multifaceted, complex, flexible, localised, and irreducible to a litany of isolated or static attributes. Confucianism cannot be fruitfully spoken of as an unvarying historical and cultural totality; it should be appropriately deconstructed into various dimensions, and be tied causally to the explained factors. The Weberian sociologist Peter Berger (1987) differentiates “secular Confucianism” from state Confucianism. He gives credit to secular Confucianism (which emphasises such values as respect for education, family, and hard work) for fostering a dynamic East Asian capitalism — a second case of development emphatically different from that of the West. If Fairbank (1979) considers Chinese communism as Confucianism in Leninist garbs, DeBary (1983) and Tu (1991) have rediscovered the liberal tradition in Confucianism. Of course, the culturalist explanation has long been challenged by the institutionalist explanation (Friedman 1994). East Asian capitalism should be viewed as a product of dynamic interplay between the imported capitalist institutions and the broadly defined (yet carefully dissected) Confucian culture.

The end of the cold war has stripped the United States and China of strategic alliance against their common enemy: the Soviet Union. Now many media depictions and some intellectual discourses have regarded China’s rising economic and political power as a threat. China has stepped in as the US’s potential enemy in place of the Soviet Union. Policy alternatives of the United States range from containment to constructive engagement. Of various formulations, Huntington (1993) proposes that the cold-war bipolarism has been superseded by a clash between Western, Confucian, and Islamic civilisations, among several others. China’s export of military weapons to “rogue states” in the Middle East was, to him, a nightmarish and anti-liberal alliance between Confucian and Islamic civilisations. Obvious questions are in order: How Confucian is the anti-Confucian regime in China? How anti-liberal is Confucian civilisation? Why is the US’s global proliferation of military weapons not attributed to certain inherent characteristics of Western civilisations? Huntington seems to identify Confucianism with the political centre in Beijing, whereas the neo-Confucian scholar Tu (1991) maintains that the real innovations in media and popular culture have originated from the political periphery of Taiwan and Hong Kong, which has further exerted influences on the mainland. Finally, Said (1994, 347) argues most persuasively that cultures and civilisations are hybrid, heterogeneous, and “so interrelated and interdependent as to beggar any unitary or simply delineated description of their individuality.”

In sum, if “Confucian culture” is to be of analytical validity, it should at least be able to explain what central attributes are missing from non-Confucian cultures. If

the hierarchical order is said to be a feature of Confucian culture, is this rigidity absent or weaker in a non-Confucian culture? More important, such a concept should be able to explain causality: If X, then Y. If Confucian culture (of which kind?) is said to explain the widespread corruption among journalists or “pack journalism,” then what are the causal mechanisms through which Confucian culture exerts its influence? How different is taking *Chonji* by handsomely paid journalists in Confucian Korea from engaging in “envelopmental journalism” by impoverished journalists in the non-Confucian Philippines? Why are bribe taking and “pack journalism” (by way of the notoriously tight-knit reporters’ clubs) more deeply institutionalised in Korea and Japan than in the Chinese societies of Hong Kong and Taiwan? (I would hypothesise that such unprofessional practices in Korea were imported from Japan.) How similar or different is the authoritarian media practice in Malaysia and Singapore, where sizeable ethnic Chinese populations reside? Raising these simple questions deters invoking any essentialist and reductive concepts for pat explanations.

Refocusing

In this second half of the essay, I shall highlight three problematics that I feel should form the building blocks for a comparative understanding of Asian media and democratisation. The choice of problematics reflects my preferred readings, and in part expands on the pre-Bellagio discussion,³ to serve as a preliminary point of departure for future comparative projects.

The Nature of Democracy

In Western stable democracies, people tend to take the macropolitics of representation for granted, or feel frustrated with it, and are said to be channelling more and more of their energies into the micropolitics of life style issues (Dahlgren 2000). Most Asian countries do not have that luxury. They have just got their emergent institutions of representative democracy off the ground, often at considerable sacrifice of lives and freedom during decades of intermittent popular uprisings against dictatorial domination. During the course of this hard-won struggle, in some countries (like Taiwan) social movements led the way with the media being the benefactors of the protests; in other countries (like Korea or the Philippines) media professionals were at the forefront of protest activities. The region, after the overthrow of authoritarian regimes and the installation of elected governments, has seen an expansion of media outlets, greater freedom from government control, and a growing sense of professional autonomy. Popular uprisings would subside or weaken if the government proves capable of resolving public grievances within the institutionalised framework; otherwise, the new power structure will continue to face challenges from below.

Inasmuch as representative democracy and its mainstream media are oriented toward middle-class liberalism, we may raise questions about the extent to which marginalised groups are represented in the media and the degree to which they have access to public expression in the media. Only when a country has acquired large and stable middle class constituencies may “representative” politics and media become viable. In a country like China, the newly emerging middle class is small, distorted, and privileged at the expense of the less unfortunate. The political

and media voices of the affluent middle-class Chinese in Malaysia are very weak. Theories of populist-participatory democracy, whether following John Dewey or Jürgen Habermas, have maintained that citizens — not just the rich and powerful, the middle classes, but also the weak and marginal — must participate actively in public discourses rather than act as passive spectators to the sport of elite politics. This participation should range from the production, distribution, to consumption of media content. Idealism may not jibe with practicality. As democratic processes erode authoritarian rule, it is quite likely that the broad masses begin to lose their political passion and devote their attention to consumerist desires. What role do the media play in negotiating the dialectic of citizens and consumers?

The Maoist mass-line model came closest to being most radical and romantic of all participatory democracies, to the extreme point that it was thoroughly anti-organisational, anti-legal, and anti-professional, both in politics and in media. But the Maoist policy has resulted in a discredited dictatorship: how could a country as gigantic as China be expected to achieve democratisation without liberal political and media foundations? The end of Maoism, however, does not spell the demise of participant democracy. Other less radical, but by no means less instructive, cases can be found in Thailand where people struggled to gain public control of community media, and in the Philippines where protestors employed little media (small messaging devices and the Internet) to organise their movements. New media can aid domination; they can aid anti-domination as well.

As Asian “democracies” are not yet fully consolidated, further research should examine how the mainstream media interact with representative institutions on the one hand and popular movements on the other. In many cases, the media have an interventionist (and a potentially more democratic) role to play in situations where elite consensus collapses or where the protesting voices are too strong to be ignored. As soon as the power structure is resettled, the media tend to gravitate back to the reconstituted official consensus. Research attention should be paid to critical moments of elite integration, disintegration, and reintegration to determine the widening and narrowing of popular voices; the site of contestation in the media and other public spheres; and the marginalised voices. Similarly it would be fruitful to explore the interplay between the mainstream media and the radical or alternative media (such as small-scale radio stations, low-cost political magazines, and the Internet) with regard to their competition, co-operation, interpenetration, and marginalisation. The proliferation of cable channels and the expansion of editorial freedom in Taiwan have deprived guerrilla-like political magazines, which had served as ideological and organisational apparatuses of the outlawed opposition movement, of their *raison d’être* for existence (Lee 1994). In contrast, in Korea, an influential radical newspaper, *Hangarae Shinbum*, was founded by dissident journalists in the wake of democratic change and has continued to monitor the government, the business, and the mainstream media with vigilance.

The Role of the Market

In most Asian countries, state-corporatist regimes had struck a patron-client relationship with the media to dispense rewards and punishments. They opened media resources to a small circle of favoured clients through formal declarations of policy restrictions and through an array of behind-the-scene manoeuvres that ce-

mented their ideological solidarity and promoted their interest integration. Those who willingly acceded to state inducements relished vast economic benefits and political status while those who contested the power structure were suppressed.

The market forces provide an enabling mechanism for other voices than those of the government or state to gain a hearing. Market competition promotes media diversity and professionalism that empower journalists to create an ideological space for fighting against naked authoritarian power. Commenting on the Chilean experience, Tironi and Sunkel (2000, 191) note, "The contradiction between the expansion of economic freedom inherent in the Pinochet Regime's free market philosophy on the one hand, and restrictions in the political sphere, on the other, became unsustainable." This account, while requiring further empirical thick description in historical contexts, seems to fit the experiences of many but not all of the cases being examined that subscribed to the capitalist market philosophy. Singapore is a notable exception. Even China, despite its rhetoric, has also been embracing the capitalistic logic, with profound and paradoxical consequences on the media practice (Zhao 1998; Lee 2000). To further illuminate the complex role of marketization, comparisons can be made of China versus Russia, East Asia versus Eastern and Central Europe, East Asia versus Southeast Asia, as well as between-nation differences within Asia or within Europe.

The interaction between different forms of ownership was important. As the state organs generally lost their credibility, the state tended to co-opt the most successful commercial media. Even though these commercial media were subservient to the state, their business goals sometimes ran counter to party interests and necessitated them to deviate from the official position and criticise government policies. Despite their hostility toward protest movements, they were the most persistent and influential advocates of abstract democratic values. Other fringe commercial outlets in the niche market could offer different accounts of social movements to contest the record of major commercial outlets. But it was always the radical media that, despite their small audience reach, openly mobilised the opposition forces, kept the coopted major commercial outlets honest, and in many ways reconstituted the political culture (see Lee 1994). The radical media may, however, likely be the first victims of democratisation. Mainstream voices will be geared toward the new power structure, while the majority of people may become more apathetic to partisan politics and find constant challenges to the democratically constituted power upsetting to their more mundane pursuits.

It is clear that a developed market also acts as a disabling mechanism that restricts the number of voices that can be heard to those authorised by large media corporations. In the democratising Asian countries, the state is weakened but still dominant. The state must negotiate with, seek to coopt, and struggle against the market forces in a newly emerging relationship that is intermeshed, fluid, dialectical, and even blurred — with profound implications to media ownership and autonomy.⁴ Further research is called for to examine how restructuring of the state-market relationship affects the democratising potential of the media. Who are the new winners and losers? To what extent profit motives and cutthroat competition have driven the media to become anti-democratic? Is the commercialised language apoliticised, depoliticised, or tabloidized? Do the marginalised sectors get further marginalised? Finally, the globalisation of political economy in the post-cold war era may have made this problematic an issue beyond the control of the nation-state.

A neo-liberal global trade regime has been installed to replace the cold war framework, with momentum to push for a single global market through deregulation, free trade, and the spread of new communication technologies. It is now said that trade is politics. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Union (EU) are prime examples of this development. The role of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in dealing with the Asian financial crisis vividly demonstrates how national governments have to negotiate with the global structures. New communication technologies and recent economic weakness have exposed the Korean cable and telecommunication market to acquisitions by multinational media corporations as part of their global strategy. Prime Minister Mahathir denounced George Soros and the like for exploiting new communication technologies to attack the Malaysian financial market. From Hong Kong, Murdoch's Star satellite television has provided a steady stream of "globalised" images to China and India.

Communist ideology is bankrupt in China. If the myths of state-engineered capitalist prosperity cannot be sustained, the regime's legitimacy would be severely undermined; thus the authorities have taken advantage of the media to promote statist nationalism as an alternative ideology. The media emphasise national pride by contrasting China's economic achievement with the Soviet break-up, while drumming up a sense of national crisis that "enemies are out there" to destroy China. Mindful of historical precedents, however, the regime sees to it that media manipulation of nationalist sentiments be brought within its tight control, lest the expression of popular discontent turn against the system itself.

China's media are touting national eagerness to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and to host the Olympic Games as "entering the world," thus seeking to satisfy its hunger for an elevated international status that is commensurate with its rising economic and military power. Played down is the prospect of mass unemployment for peasants and urban workers as a consequence of the WTO membership. As an interesting parallel, Washington official policy seems to have shifted from cold-war containment of Communism to promoting the U.S.-dominated neo-liberal international order in the post-cold war era. The elite media discourses have endorsed China's participation in the WTO in the hope of subjecting Beijing to international rule of law and market discipline. As part of the concession for membership in WTO, China will have to open up its telecommunication market to foreign investment. In anticipation of foreign media competition, China has been trying to organise its own media conglomerates around the core and profitable party-controlled outlets (Zhao 2000). The rapid diffusion of the Internet in China (Hao et al. 1996) would be a strong test case of how technology interacts with business and ideology.

To what extent is national sovereignty a pertinent concern in the shadow of increasing globalisation? What are the new challenges in the post-cold war era? How does the globalising process impinge on the telecommunications sector and, in turn, on the traditional mass media sector? Will globalisation of information and commerce via new technologies chip away at the Chinese regime's ability to control the flow of news? Are large countries like China and India better equipped to negotiate with (or more vulnerable to) the global structures than small countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka?

Or, alternatively, is media culture so hybridised that global ownership of media and global circulation of media images do not necessarily engender cultural homogeneity? But in what ways are innovations and cultural diversity being expressed by the globalisation of the media? To what extent can countries import the norms and techniques of Western media to develop indigenous expressions, as is the case of Russian film industry in its effort to return to its aesthetics of the golden 1930s? What are the limits to global-national connections and to the modernity-tradition mix? Personally, I have my own doubts about celebrating the glory of globalisation. Meanwhile, let research flourish and contend.

Notes:

1. Japan has an identity problem: according to a survey (Fukuda, 1998: 105), only 38 % of the Japanese acknowledged that Japan belongs to Asia, and 39 % thought of Japan more as a member of the industrialized West.
2. It should be pointed out that, as the collapse of Communist regimes show, unstable undercurrents are embedded in authoritarian countries, and may erupt all of a sudden.
3. Professor Colin Spark and Professor Slavko Spilchal organized a preliminary discussion in London on October 28, 2000 in order to provide some guidelines for participants in the Bellagio conference.
4. See Lee (2000: 26-36) for an exposition of the liberal-pluralist and radical-Marxist approaches to the political economy of communication.

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