

Mindful Communication For A Re-Emerging Asia: Building A New Asian Journalism Curriculum

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The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has come into force at the beginning of this year (2016) that would transform ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labour and freer flow of capital. The AEC envisages a single market and production base, a highly competitive economic region, a region of equitable economic development, and a region fully integrated into the global economy.

Meanwhile, a re-emerging China is investing heavily in building new connectivity across the Asian and Eurasian regions to rekindle the great trade and cultural routes of the past. The building of the Silk Route Economic Belt and 21st century Maritime Silk Route, a multi-trillion dollar project which China calls 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR) is bound to change the world and transfer the center of gravity of the world economic system back to Asia.

To achieve these goals the media in Asia needs to play an important role in facilitating and promoting regional integration, and not promote conflict and war games. It needs to look at the region not as a collection of economic entities but as societies with a great cultural heritage and a long history of cultural and economic interaction. Thus, it needs to be mindful of peoples' need for social harmony and their longing for heritage protection after centuries of European cultural repression. This may also need a new look at aspects of training journalists to look at issues from a regional perspective with less emphasis on conflicts and greater efforts to build community harmony. In doing so, there may need to be new thinking on how to report on economic, business, environment and development issues, where Asia's needs, its priorities and its historical experiences are taken into account.

Mass Communication courses taught in universities across Asia are usually based on Euro-centric concepts of communication with a heavy focus on individual rights, freedom of expression and dissent - the so-called "fourth estate" principle. In the Asian region where the protection and promotion of community and social harmony plays an important role in political and social discourse, media practitioners' focusing on individual rights over community harmony sometimes creates unnecessary conflicts that could be avoided by more sensitive and mindful communication strategies, that would have the same result of opening up public and community space for more freedom of expression.

Focusing on an UNESCO-IPDC funded project at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University titled "Mindful Communication for ASEAN Integration" this paper will discuss curriculum we have developed for training journalists from an Asia focused perspective and its practical aspects, not only to Asia, but to other parts of

the world including the West.

The project incorporates Asian philosophical ideas and communication theories emanating from Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist and Confucius teachings that cover areas such as social harmony, protecting nature and environment, respecting cultural diversity and encouraging sufficiency economic models.

Asia's Historic Contributions to Mass Communication

People across the globe believe that democracy and the mass media were European innovations. It is supposed to be common knowledge that democracy originated in ancient Greece in the 5th century BCE, but, we are kept in ignorance of the peoples' assemblies that existed in Vedic societies in India much before that, known as 'samitis' and 'sabhas' (Misra, 2000).

The Vedic period (1500-500 BCE) were the earliest period where Hindu scriptures the 'Vedas' were composed. It was the time Indo-Aryans settled into northern India and societies (tribes) were formed along with the formation of Hindu religious traditions. The societies formed had a chief called 'rajan' whose powers were restricted by peoples' councils called 'sabha' and 'samiti', which were responsible for the governance of the societies. The 'rajan' was actually elected or approved by these bodies. The 'sabha' are believed to be meetings of the community leaders/elders while the 'samiti' was more like a peoples' village council. Singh (1998) notes that the two assemblies formed an essential feature of the government in the ancient Vedic societies as described in ancient Hindu texts the Vedas.

Although it is difficult to distinguish between a 'sabha' and 'samiti' it appears that 'samiti' was the august assembly of a larger group of people for the discharge of tribal (ie. political) business and was presided over by the king, while the 'sabha', a more select body, was less popular and political in character than a 'samiti'. Although the functions and the powers of 'sabha' and 'samiti' cannot be exactly defined, numerous passages referring to them clearly indicates that both these Assemblies exercised considerable authority and must have acted as healthy checks on the power of the king (Singh, 1998:8)

Isn't it what we today assign as the role of National Assemblies, City Halls and Village Councils in modern democracies?

And when it comes to mass media, we teach in universities across the world – including Asia - that it originated with the Gutenberg Bibles printed in movable type in the 15th century in Germany. Again, we ignore the fact that 6 centuries earlier the Chinese have printed the Buddhist Diamond Sutra on the block type (Morgon, 2012). In fact, it was the Chinese who invented paper and printing, and

after the Tripitaka¹ was written at Aluvihare in Sri Lanka in the 1st century BC, it was the printed word that spread Buddhism across Asia.

Buddhist role in the development of print technology across Asia, especially in China and Korea between 1st and 7th century CE is well documented. As Mair (1994) notes Buddhism was probably the most important factor in the development of printing in China as the demand for its texts increased. Not only Buddhism influenced the spread of printing, but also, as a result the printed word helped to influence the society at large in adopting the norms of Buddhist thought. In the last two decades of the 11th century CE more Korean Tripitaka woodblocks have been carved than for Chinese texts, and Korea's zealous attempt to acquire Buddhist texts has inspired a printing boom.

If the origins of the mass media are about spreading knowledge via the printed text, shouldn't this be the beginning of the mass media? Why is Asia's role in these developments not acknowledged in our mass communication textbooks?

Balancing of Communication Theory

In the past two decades, as mass communication departments and schools across Asia grew there has been an increasing debate about de-westernizing communication theory - at least that taught in Asian institutions. We would prefer to call this "balancing" rather than "de-westernization". Accompanying this has also been a debate on "Asian Values" in journalism.

What makes a theory 'Asian'? As Dissanayaka (1988:6) noted:

If Asian scholars are to come up with models of communication which bear the imprint of their own cultures and which will enable them to comprehend better and conceptualize more clearly the complexity of human communication, it is indeed imperative that they shake off the influence of the mechanistic Aristotelian model. They need to address their mind to the task of finding out how best they can draw upon the cumulative wisdom of Asian human sciences as a means of formulating theories and models of communication that reflect the cultural ethos of the people, and for that very reason, are more pertinent and heuristically useful.

Asian human sciences are predominantly based on Hindu, Buddhist, Confucius and Daoist philosophical teachings and ideas. The question here is whether contemporary Asian communication scholars are well versed in these philosophies?

Wang and Shen (2000) notes that even though there is a growing community of Asian communication scholars and journals dedicated to the study of

¹ Tripitaka are three categories of Buddhist texts what are called the Buddhist cannon. It consists of Buddha's sermons (sutra), codes of conduct for monks (vinaya) and Buddhist psychology (abidhamma).

communications in Asia, Asian communication researchers are yet to accomplish its mission to come up with Asian communication theories. While Dissanayake's 1998 book on Asian Communication Theory helped to shed some light on Asian philosophical thinking and traditions of communication to guide the researchers, there is a need of conducting authentic research and theory construction, which is still lacking.

Until today there have been few communication theories that can be labeled undoubtedly 'Asian'. This is serious because theories have a specific role to play in social scientific research: they are not just demonstration of original thinking, but determine the direction and the structure of inquiry. Every time 'Western' theories were shown to be inadequate in explaining changes in Asia, and every time Asian values and traditions were mentioned to suggest theoretical development, those in the Asian academic community are confronted with the question "where is 'Asian' communication theory? The inability to come up with a satisfactory answer indicates 'mission unaccomplished', thus a lack of substantial contribution to the field of communication from the part of the Asian researcher (Wang and Shen, 2000:15)

Though this observation was done 15 years ago, nothing much has changed. One major impediment may be to change the mindset of Asian communication researchers who look up to Western researchers and institutions for guidance and recognition. Changing mindsets does not imply outright rejection of western theories, but examining these critically with a good understanding of your own socio-cultural context and its application to such circumstances. The age of globalization and ranking system for both journals and mass communication programs has been extensively skewed towards North America in particular, and this does not provide scholars the freedom and the encouragement to challenge the Western "norms" because their promotions and recognition depends on fitting into the western norms to get their papers published in so-called "first-tier" journals. If Asian scholars are to de-westernize communication theory they will also have to challenge this ranking system and proceed to set up one of their own as well.

Most of the contemporary media theory were first developed in Europe in the 19th and early 20th century, and later further developed and amplified in the United States. Despite its claims to be universal, these theories were marked by their own cultural context and circumstances of time and place. As McQuail (2000) observes these theories had a Christian bias, particularly towards the Protestant forms of Christianity, which was associated with capitalism and modernity. Thus, with its predominant attitude of superiority that justified the wonders of industrialism, power of capitalism, benefits of bureaucracy and the rule of law, they were able to communicate the idea that the Western world global project of colonialism was legitimate.

Even today, what we call the "global media" which is basically the Anglo-American media, reflects such communication systems of invoking legitimacy on Western dominated systems and ideas/ideologies.

For example, the Bretton Wood systems consisting of the World Bank (WB) and the IMF was always seen as working for the good of the world by regulating, monitoring and guiding the world financial system, even though it was heavily slanted to serve western economic interest and their domination. Thus, when China announced plans to launch the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2015 western media focus was on how the new bank may dilute good governance and anti-corruption criteria practiced by the WB and the Japan-West controlled Asian Development Bank, even though the latter has had accusation of corruption leveled against it for years. McChesney and Herman (1998) describe the Anglo-American global media as “missionaries of global capitalism” for promoting a neo-liberal economic agenda.

Another area of obvious bias is in reporting human rights and global conflicts. Today this global media acts in unison in promoting a gospel of human rights with international human rights organisations that are mainly funded by western “donor” agencies. They accuse non-western governments of war crimes, especially in Africa and Asia, but turn a blind eye to worse war crimes in the Middle East and in Afghanistan / Pakistan by the West, often using the term “collateral damage” to describe these acts. There is that psychology that the West always acts in the common good of humanity. This is also the reason why when President Obama visited Hiroshima in May 2016 there were no questions asked on why he did not apologize to the Japanese for the horrendous war crime of dropping the atomic bomb over 50 years ago. The same media often harps on the need for the Japanese to apologize to Asian countries for war crimes they were involved during the second world war, even though the Japanese have done so indirectly many times.

Recently when the Islamic terror group ISIS started using sophisticated social media digital technology to reach western youth, attempts by western governments to block their websites and pressure Facebook and other new media technology providers to take off their postings were hailed as measures to fight terrorism and protect social harmony. However, when the Chinese (or any other non-western government) do the same to block youth groups using social media to bring social chaos (which is also a form of terrorism) to the country it is condemned as infringing on the freedom of expression.

Asian scholars need to come up with theories to explain the psychology of such thinking by the western media. It is also imperative that Asian scholars take a fresh look at the freedom of expression theories in the context of recent developments globally where the West fund and use non-governmental organization (NGOs) to create chaos in countries whose government is not subservient to western interests, using human rights as a cover. Communication theories need to be formulated using Asian philosophical principles of communicating mindfully to promote harmony.

McQuail (2000) argues that to expose Eurocentric bias in western media communication researchers need to come up with a set of sub-questions, such as, tracing the sources of western media bias and forms and levels of expression and

solutions to solving such bias. "It is hard to ignore the fact that most media theorizing has been done by 'Western' scholars, living in and observing the media of their own countries and inevitably influenced by their own familiar social cultural context and its typical values" (McQuail, 2000:6).

Ever since the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debates of the 1970s there have been much material produced about the bias of western media news reports, but, hardly much theory to explain or dissect the practice, especially coming from an Asian perspective. Is the "fourth estate" theory of journalism to blame for this negative reporting? If so can Asia offer a better theory of journalistic practices that could promote cooperation and harmony rather than focus on conflict?

Gunaratne (2015:5) espouses a 'mindful journalism' path based on Buddhist principles to overcome this negativity and bias. "The aim of mindful journalism is not profit making," he argues, "but truthful reporting without institutional restraints that might defile the clarity of the trained journalist's mind."

In their book 'Mindful Journalism and News Ethics in the Digital Age' Gunaratne, Pearson and Senarath (2015:18) described the theory of mindful journalism based on the Buddhist Four Noble Truths thus:

Mindful Journalism requires the journalist to understand the reasons for sorrow/unhappiness, and to desist from using his/her craft to increase desire(tanha) and clinging(upadana). We extracted this principle from the first and the second truths. The mindful journalist must distinguish between pleasure and happiness to understand the reality that cyclic existence (samsara) means suffering (dukkha) that one can avoid only by attaining Nibbana or enlightenment. Pleasure is physical and short-lived whereas happiness is mental and long-lasting. The mindful journalist must not mislead the people that lasting happiness is attainable without purifying their minds from defilements. Enlightenment means eradication of all fetters – the mental state of supreme bliss or Nibbana. S/he should understand the reasons for the existence of unhappiness (dukkha), and desist from using journalism to knowingly promote attachment (upadana) and desire (tanha).

Gunaratne makes the point that a Western approach to journalism is more concerned with a negative rather than a positive approach, and generally means the immunity of the communication outlets from government control or censorship either directly through laws and regulation or indirectly through economics and political pressures.

Park (2015) expresses a similar view and argues that we should change the adversary style of journalism to a more cooperative and active problem-solving style of journalism. In order to do this, a journalist should enhance their views broadly and deeply. He quotes Taoist philosopher Chuangtzu parable of a well-frog: "you cannot speak of ocean to a well-frog, which is limited by his abode". Thus, if we cling to a narrow sphere such as a well-frog, we will not be able to see the

great ocean. In the same way, it is necessary for a journalist to keep a non-biased view when reporting on social issues as well as actively solving problems. A journalist need not be hostile to government, the role of the journalists could extend to reporting on social problems in our communities in cooperation with government officials and non-government specialists based upon clear and concise analyses of contemporary social issues.

'Four Theories of the Press' (Seibert et al, 1956 cited in Nordenstreng1997) has for more than half a century defined the role of journalism and the media across the world with its all-encompassing media function theories of Libertarian, Authoritarian, Social Responsibility and Communist models. The Libertarian theory has underpinned the western "free" media model of the privately owned media being the "watchdog" of governments' abuse of power. What is known as the "fourth estate" principle. But, lately, with the mainstream media across the world becoming excessively commercial Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's Propaganda Model and Manufacturing Consent of the news media theories have been gathering traction. They argue:

The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfill this role requires systematic propaganda. In countries where the levers of power are in the hands of a state bureaucracy, the monopolistic control over the media, often supplemented by official censorship, makes it clear that the media serve the ends of a dominant elite. It is much more difficult to see a propaganda system at work where the media are private and formal censorship is absent. This is especially true where the media actively compete, periodically attack and expose corporate and governmental malfeasance, and aggressively portray themselves as spokesmen for free speech and the general community interest. What is not evident (and remains undiscussed in the media) is the limited nature of such critiques, as well as the huge inequality in command of resources, and its effect both on access to a private media system and on its behavior and performance. A propaganda model focuses on this inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public. The elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news "objectively" and on the basis of professional news values. Within the limits of the filter constraints they often are objective; the constraints are so powerful, and are built into the system

in such a fundamental way, that alternative bases of news choices are hardly imaginable².

There are two principles based on Asian traditional thinking that an Asian theory of media function could offer an alternative. That is taking into account the idea that things are impermanent and subject to change, thus being mindful of this change and been able to understand, acknowledge and analyze it to assist people and society to adjust to these changes. The other, which naturally leads from the first, is that social harmony is paramount and journalism should play a more positive role rather than an adversarial role.

A harmonious interdependent relationship is the cardinal idea of Chinese culture and Confucianism could give some guidance in formulating an alternative media function theory. Confucianism, which is at the heart of traditional Chinese culture, the cosmology of *yang/yin*, originally used to explain the origin of the universe in Daoism, is the metaphysical basis of the philosophy as Liu (2008) explains:

Yang and yin are considered as the two forces that regulate the universe. Yang represents masculinity, power, warmth, light, dryness and hardness; while yin represents femininity, passivity, cold, darkness, moisture and softness. Everything in the world carries yang and embraces yin and achieves harmony by balancing these two forces. Following this cosmology of yang/yin, Confucianism emphasizes a harmonious society and the appropriate arrangement of social relationships (Hwang, 1999). In contrast to the western individualistic ideology of individual rights, equality and independence, in Confucian ideology, the harmony of society is based on hierarchical and asymmetrical relations between superior and subordinate; and social life is marked by a fundamental relatedness between the self and others, and between the individual and society. Such opposite but complementary forces as superior/subordinate, self/others and individual/society are dialogically interdependent in the process of communication and persuasion. The process of communication and persuasion, in turn, is the key to achieving harmony and to resolving conflicts in everyday interaction.

Referring to Confucius's advice to his students, Dan (2006:22) quotes: "Everybody hopes to live a happy life, but, happiness is only a feeling, which has nothing to do with wealth or poverty, but with inner heart". Thus, the essence of Confucius thinking she argues is that you have to be yourself, but at the same time you have to think about others.

Ranade (2015) argues that Rasa is central to Indian communication. It is the nature of how an Indian interprets what is communicated to you. It invokes emotions to which you react and hopefully make life better for you. Information or news is like a performance, you absorbs and react to it. An understanding and application of Indian communication design can bring about a change in an individual's ability to live a good life.

² http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Herman%20/Manufac_Consent_Prop_Model.html

Adhikari (2008) in a comparative study of Aristotelian model that underlies the western communication theory and *Sadharanikarn* model which she presents as a Hindu communication model argues that the former is linear while the latter is non-linear. The mechanistic linear views of communication stem from rational, mathematical formulas, and Aristotelian models of persuasion and rhetorical analysis. The linear model seeks to represent communication in oversimplified way. In Aristotle's model the communicator is actively transmitting messages to a passive audience, who are not communicators, at least at present. The *Sadharanikarn* model, being a non-linear model, incorporates the notion of two-way communication process resulting in mutual understanding of the *Sahridayas*. Thus the interrelationship between those communicating becomes unique. Its non-linear structure and inclusion of elements such as context has profound consequences.

Although the purpose of Sadharanikarn is to achieve commonness or oneness the process itself is an asymmetrical one. There is unequal sharing between communicator and receiver; there is a greater flow of communication from the former to the later. ... they are not equal. The source is viewed as 'higher' and the receiver as 'lower'. The relationship is hierarchical and that of 'dominance' and 'subordination'. However, the source is held in high esteem by the receiver of communication, a relationship, idealized and romanticized in guru-chela relationship. Although the source and the receiver are unequal but they are Sahridayas, which makes even unequal relationship/communication satisfying and pleasurable to both the parties involved (Adhikari, 2008:281).

With the advent of social media and community broadcasting across Asia, especially in the Indian sub-continent, it would be the best time to theorize the new communication models that are developing in very localized, rather than national, setting. Perhaps the traditional communication models what Adhikari and Ranade describes could be what is called Participatory Communication today.

Asia's philosophies are very much focused on how you guide the mind in the communication process, to be mindful of what you are doing. UNESCO's own preamble can give us some food for thought. It declares that **"since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed"**.

Mindful Communication

Developing mindfulness is at the very heart of Buddhist teachings. Known as 'Vipassana', which means to see things as they really are, it is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation. It was rediscovered by Gautama Buddha more than 2500 years ago and was taught by him as a universal remedy for universal ills (art of living). Vipassana (Mindfulness) is a way of self-transformation through self-observation.

Developing mindfulness has become a global movement today. This is a practice that could be cultivated to train our minds to practice Mindful Journalism in a

secular setting. However, we need to be careful about this secularizing of mindfulness. As Venerable Phuwadol Piyasilo, a Thai forest monk and a graduate of mass communications from Chulalongkorn University warned in a keynote address to a seminar organized as part of this project:

Mindfulness practices in the West usually are found to be secular. They try to practice it without adding any religious value into it. This has become problematic because it could manifest itself with the wrong intentions. When you apply Buddhist teachings it is accompanied by panna - wisdom. Without this moral framework the practice itself would not be enough to fast-track us into the right direction. We need to bundle up panna into the practice itself. In the path itself, you need to develop this by accompanying this to make it successful (Piyasilo, 2015).

Indian-Burmese meditation master S.N Goenka, who introduced Vipassana Meditation to the West in the 1980s also warned about the same attitude:

A life without wisdom is a life of illusion Being sensitive to the suffering of others does not mean that you must become sad yourself. Instead you should remain calm and balanced, so that you could act to alleviate their suffering (Hart, 2012:19).

It is this principle we have applied throughout the process of developing our curricula – how to bring the practice of gathering panna (wisdom) into the practice while we try to focus our minds through the learning of skills and techniques to be mindful of what we are doing.

As discussed earlier, role of journalism can be defined today not as an adversarial model but a communication model that helps people to achieve harmony and happiness in life. Mindfulness training for journalists should be seen in the context of training oneself to gather knowledge and wisdom to gain a deeper understanding of the issues you are reporting about and how to communicate with (rather than to) the society/community to improve their lives. One may argue that investigative journalism does that. Yes, but, can we offer a more philosophical and ethical guide for that practice?

Let me now focus on the project we are involved at Chulalongkorn University. I would like to emphasize that this is still a work in progress, though we have compiled 6 pilot curricula under the UNESCO-IPDC project. In coming years we will dialogue, consult, cooperate and network among Asian journalism scholars and practitioners to develop an Asian approach to teaching and practicing of journalism, which we hope would become globalized in the future. We are also aware that de-colonizing the minds of Asian scholars is our biggest challenge.

We have composed 6 curricula, one of which is a research and workshop oriented module, while the others are for semester-long adaptation at university undergraduate level. The modules are,

- Media and Society
- Human-Centred Journalism

- Climatic Change and Sustainable Development
- Development Journalism
- People-Focused Story Telling
- Communication Theory (seminar/research module)

I will now discuss briefly each of the curricula.

Media and Society

The Media and Society curriculum was basically modelled on the curriculum that was designed for UNESCO's 'Model Curricula for Journalism Education for Developing Countries and Emerging Democracies' (in 2007), but, challenging some of the Euro-centric concepts in it. Also whereas UNESCO has recommended it for adoption in the second or third year of a journalism course we are recommending it for the first year because it is important for mass communication students to understand the role of the media in the society before they embark on learning the technical skills to produce news and information to serve that society.

The course is designed for a 12-week semester with 1 hour of lectures and 3 hours of tutorial each week.

In the very first week we will be introducing the Asian philosophical approach to interaction and governance, drawing heavily from Buddhist and Confucius ideas, and comparing them with contemporary Euro-centric ideas of good governance. In the second week we will explore the development of mass communication from Asia and the West, challenging the Gutenberg theory of the origins of mass media. We will look at how the printed word played a great role in the development of Asian societies from around the 1st century CE onwards. Third week will examine communication theories from the East and West and its application to different societies.

Week 4 will focus on democracy and human rights and examine closely the western-centric notion of individual rights and the Asian version of social, economic and development rights. This will be examined in the context of the role freedom of expression (in the media) should play in the development of human society as a harmonious entity. In week 5 looking at the economy of the media, we will examine media function theories in the context of media ownership structures including public service broadcasting and community broadcasting. In week 6 we will zoom in on the issues dealt in the previous 2 weeks and explore the idea of the freedom of the press with Asian philosophical approaches to social responsibility and the art of living harmoniously. What role media could play in achieving such a balance and where does human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs) fit in.

Weeks 7, 8 and 9 will take a critical look at the news production process, its propaganda role and shaping of mindsets. Week 7 using communication theories such as agenda setting, hegemony theory, propaganda model, manufacturing consent, media framing and spiral of silence, we will examine how news could

colonize your mind (both from an international and domestic context) and shape your perspectives and values. We will draw extensively from material on the subject written by Asian communication scholars. Week 8 will focus on arts and entertainment looking at reporting of cultural diversity and defining concepts of modernity and contemporary cultural tastes and expressions. Week 9 will explore the process and role the media plays in promoting and developing certain economic models such as the heavy emphasis on neo-liberal economic model. Compare this with alternative models such as sufficiency economics, gross national happiness, micro-credit and social business.

Week 10 examine the role media could play in making the society more aware about the environmental crisis the world is facing and how to promote sustainable economic models in harmony with nature. What are the different philosophical ideas that the media could utilize in this task? Week 11 focus on internet and new media impact on society, while in the final week we look at reporting conflicts with special emphasize in examining socio-economic issues in Asia that lead to ethnic and religious conflicts.

As this course is designed to be used predominantly in Asia, there is an extensive list of resource material including research papers, articles, you tube and other audio-visual resources drawn from Asian sources. Yet, western perspectives are not ignored in this course design. We are trying to arrive at a balance between eastern and western ways of thinking, and how modern societies could benefit with exposure to both.

Human-Centred Journalism

Human-Centred Journalism course is recommended for offering in the 1st year of a 3-year Bachelor Course in mass communication / journalism. This course takes a humanistic approach to train students in investigative journalism. The main objective is to help them to develop thinking and skills in mindful conceptualizing, researching and writing human-centred journalistic stories. The course will focus on the roles of humanity in the analysis and the practice of complex storytelling. Students will be familiarized with the framework of deep listening and dialogical interviewing techniques, mindful investigative research methods and humanistic interpretation of surveys, as well as different forms of narrative techniques for human-centred journalism.

This is a 12-week course with 4 hours (two 2-hour classes per week) of a combination of lectures, contemplative workshops and dialogues, seminars, extensive fieldworks, individual assignments and tutorial.

In the first week of the course students will be trained to listen to one's inner voice and engaging with the mind and body based on mindful meditation techniques. In week 2 students will be introduced to traditional Asian and Western philosophical approaches to humanity, and they will also be introduced to the art of listening to others with contradicting points of view, with compassion. In week 3 students will be guided to interpret data from a humanistic perspective as a journalistic exercise.

Week 4 will include a practical exercise with a series of field trips to a site of potential final assignment reporting. Students will be advised to observe the situation and human interaction on site, as well as to talk to as many people as possible. In week 5, students will view a movie and followed by a discussion of their emotions, insights and experience after seeing the movie. Then, they will be guided to discuss different ways in which human-centred storytelling can be combined with data journalism.

Weeks 6 to 8 will focus on anatomy of human-centred story telling with a lecture followed by class exercises of read and critique of stories, as well as pitching a story idea to the lecturer for approval for final exercise. Weeks 9 to 11 will include fieldwork, writing of first and final draft. In week 12 final copy will be presented to class in seminar style with discussion of the exercise. The grading for the final assignment will include submitting a reflective essay on the exercise as well.

Climatic Change and Sustainable Development

Offered as a final year elective, this course is designed to develop deep and broad understanding of sustainable development and climate change as well as its interconnection with institutions especially media. On top of the understanding, the students will be able to cover a story about sustainable development and climate change in compelling and educational fashion. It will consist of weekly sessions of 1 hour lecture and 2 hour tutorial. Ideas from Asian philosophy on nature, environment and mental well-being will be incorporated to the curriculum.

This 12-weeks course will begin with the first 3 weeks devoted to understanding concepts of development, climate change, environmentalism and an examination of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN. In week 4 we look at specific issues in terms of SDGs that are applicable to Asian countries in both Southeast Asia and South Asia. Next week will be devoted to understanding the scientific basis of climate change followed in week 6 with a specific look at its impact in Asia, particularly ASEAN countries.

In weeks 7 and 8 students will examine specific issues in respect to climatic change and sustainable development that is applicable to their region, and draft story ideas for specific stories from their own country. This would be a major term assignment to be done individually or as a group.

Week 9 will explore and make a critical assessment of the role of international organization, governments and NGOS in dealing with sustainable development and climate change issues. In weeks 10 and 11 we will look at how the craft of journalism could assist communities and individuals to deal with the impact of climatic change and promote sustainable development. And in the final week the students will present their feature stories to class in a seminar style exercise.

Development Journalism

To be offered as a final year elective, this course is designed to develop specialized reporting skills of a journalism student in reporting issues dealing with various aspects of development. The traditional concept of development itself would be challenged in this course and new ideas examined and explored that are specific to the Asian environment. Traditional Asian wisdom will be considered in the context of developing new paradigms of development reporting. Lecturers are encouraged to source sample story ideas for each week from their own country or the immediate neighbourhood. The semester long 12-week course will be presented in 3 hour weekly blocks of workshop style lectures and class exercises.

The week 1 lecture will examine contemporary news values in reporting development issues and give an overview of the construction of news values, function of news agencies and the global flow of news and its role in shaping development news. In weeks 2 and 3 we will look at the definitions and philosophies of development, its historical context and what is development journalism and how it should be structured.

In week 4 we will explore the challenges development journalism faces due to commercialization and globalization of the media, which makes sensationalism and dramatization important aspects of news reporting, and why development journalism should be about reporting a process. Reporting of the 2004 Asian Tsunami will be closely examined as a case study. Week 5 will be devoted to looking at the craft of doing development features both for print and broadcast.

Weeks 6 to 8 will cover different genres of development reporting. In week 6 we will look at economic reporting and examine Asian concepts such as sufficiency economics and gross national happiness, while in week 7 we look at arts and entertainment as a development issues especially in the Asian context where cultural identity and protecting cultural heritage have socio-economic connotations. In week 8 we examine the role of the Development Journalist in covering environmental issues and supporting sustainable development goals.

In week 10 we look at the issue of cross-border development reporting in the age of globalization such as labour migration, human trafficking, asylum seeking and money laundering. In the final two weeks students will also examine new paradigms of development reporting using new media technology, social media and community media avenues, as well as the role of the citizen journalist in development reporting with examples drawn from across Asia.

People-Focused Story Telling

This is a curriculum, which will incorporate both Human-Centred Journalism and Development Journalism, but, offered as a final year elective to specialize in telling stories that are focused on peoples' wellbeing.

It would be offered more as a seminar styles teaching module with a lot of practical work in the field to develop the students' skills in listening intensely to peoples' perspective as well as methodology to canvass and encourage people to speak out. Knowledge of the concepts of loving kindness and compassion to

humans as well as animals will be imparted to students in order to develop empathy with the people and other living beings in gathering and composing stories.

Communication Theory

This curriculum is somewhat different to the other 5 in that it is designed not for a 12 week course but seminar style presentations to be offered as either a final year special project for a Bachelor Level mass communications student or to be offered at Master level in mass communication / journalism courses.

As explained earlier, mass communication theories we use in tertiary institutions across Asia is heavily, if not exclusively, drawn from western sources, especially American. Most Asian scholars believe that they need to master these theories to be considered as experts in the field. Thus, to breed a new generation of Asian communication scholars who are willing to challenge this notion, they need to be gradually weaned away from that mindset.

It is for this reason that we need to present an advanced level communication theory curriculum that will critique the existing communication theories and examine and explore traditional Asian philosophical thinking to develop new communication theories. To do this, it is necessary to encourage field research rather than mere literacy surveys and philosophical discussions.

There may not be weekly sessions, but the course will extend through the semester with regular seminars and fieldwork. The seminars would be of 3-4 hours duration and may consist of a panel of speakers or the lecture presenting a short lecture and followed by screening of videos such as 'Ted Talks'. First two weeks will be a critique of existing communication theories followed by two more weeks of examining Asian philosophical ideas and traditional methods of communication. Two more weeks will be devoted to discuss, compose and present ideas for research to develop possible Asia-focused communication theories. Second half of the semester will be spent in researching and compiling a research report on Asian communication theory to be presented to a seminar in the final week of semester. This module will have no exam and the student will be graded on this final presentation of a research paper to given specifications.

What is Different – East vs West Battle?

One is entitled to ask what would differentiate these curricula from the existing ones. Is this an exercise in East versus the West battle? It is certainly not and challenging the West is not trying to create conflict. Using an eastern metaphor – this is an exercise in developing panna (wisdom) to gain insights and be enlightened to the diversity of perspectives available for communicating in today's information rich society.

Today, we are at an age where the West is going gaga in adopting mindfulness to improving its health services and stressful lifestyles. Mindfulness is at the root of

the ancient Asian philosophical approach to a healthy enlightened lifestyle, which the Buddha taught over 2500 years ago. But, the Asians have forgotten it, perhaps as a result of 500 years of European colonization and indoctrination that makes them feel inferior in the face of panna (wisdom) from the West.

Petras (1993) said over 2 decades ago, that western “cultural imperialism plays a major role in disassociating people from their cultural roots and traditions of solidarity, replacing them with media created ‘needs’ which change with every public campaign”. He went on to discuss the role CNN, Hollywood, Disney, etc play in shaping peoples’ perspectives and tastes.

Be it Asian communication scholars uncritically adopting theories of communication that have been framed and developed in a western social context; or Thai media reporting uncritically in their front page how local football fans turned up in their thousands to welcome the British football champions Leicester City to Bangkok because it is owned by a Thai tycoon; or Asian media carrying pictures and reports from western media sources of President Obama being mobbed by Vietnamese youth in Hi Chi Minh City without asking the question “why couldn’t Obama apologise for American war crimes in Vietnam such as using napalm bombs” dropped not that far from the city; all these point to what one may call the impact of cultural imperialism on the Asian mindset.

What Asia needs today is a new journalism for an emerging Asia that is able to rid Asians of this hangover of cultural imperialism and critically examine and assess itself as well as the outside world, especially the news and information coming from the West.

New Journalism for an Emerging Asia

What this curriculum aim to do is to develop journalism training programs in the region where Asians draw inspiration from their own traditional wisdom and feel proud and confident to adopt these to craft a model of journalism, which while not been overly adversarial, yet, will not be overtly uncritically supporting the status-quo in order to protect social harmony. The Buddha proposed a Middle Way to guide your lives, and that is what we hope we will be able to achieve in developing a system of news journalism for an emerging Asia. He attributed peoples’ unhappiness (dukkha) to three defilements – desire (tanha) and clinging (upadana) fostered by ignorance (avijja). If you take any topic for reporting, these three elements are there, especially so in economic or developmental reporting.

One must also note that the emerging Asia we talk about has many crucial issues that journalism must tackle and report critically with mindfulness, insight and wisdom to create just and harmonious societies. Let us look at some of these issues.

Reporting Economics – GNP or GNH?: When journalists report about economics it is often tempered with data or statistics on economic growth, stock market fluctuations and the like. Rarely do they talk about how this data filter down to the people to impact on their lives. On May 9th 2016 Rodrigo Duterte a mayor

from the southernmost island of the Philippines won a landslide victory at the presidential elections where the incumbent President Benigno Aquino's own candidate was a distant second. Aquino, who cannot stand for re-election under the Philippines constitution, has presided over an economy that has recorded the most sustained economic growth in recent history and he has been praised by both the local and international media for economic management. But, the "booming" economy has only benefited at most 1 percent of the population, most of the other 99 percent were living in dukkha and they expressed their feelings at the ballot box, even though Duterte during his campaign threatened to kill criminals without going through the due legal process – which alarmed human rights activists - but not a large segment of the population. For them, the reason for their dukkha was rampant criminality and corruption. Mindful journalism should have picked up on it by investigating the reason for peoples' dukkha.

After the 2008 global financial crisis and its mounting social costs, economists in the West are warming to the Buddhist concept of the "Gross National Happiness" (GNH). Since 1971 the tiny Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan in the Himalayas, has rejected the GDP based method to measure development and championed the GNH approach to development. In 2015, at the UN Climatic Change conference, the world body adopted Bhutan's call for a holistic approach to development, a move endorsed by 68 countries. A UN panel is now considering ways on how Bhutan's GNH model can be replicated across the globe.

Meanwhile, Thailand's military government is promoting its King's "Sufficiency Economics" model that was mooted at the peak of the 1997 financial meltdown in the kingdom. To this day, his idea has fallen into deaf ears in Asia. But, after taking over the chairmanship of the G77 grouping of developing countries at the UN this year, Thailand organized a "Roundtable on Sufficiency Economics" in Bangkok in February (2016) for G77 members. Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha in an address to the delegates explained that this economic model focus on 3 components – reasonableness, moderation and self-immunity – along with two other conditions – knowledge and morality. "The concept emphasizes community development that strengthens the community to the self-supporting level," he was quoted by Thailand's MCOT News as telling the delegates³.

It is a lack of mindfulness and insights resulting in a lack of panna that makes the media report about "progress" through data and statistics and not by judging the happiness levels of the people – which is people-centred journalism. This trend is evident also in Europe and the US, and you don't need to be a Buddhist to gain insights into it. It is there in the Catholic Church's teachings on 'Liberation Theology' and Pope Francis has vehemently drawn attention to such economic injustices in the past couple of years.

China's Silk Routes and South China Sea: As pointed out earlier, there is ample evidence of blatant ideological and cultural bias, in the way developments in Asia are reported by the western global media. For example, they focus on the so-called dispute over sparsely-populated islands in the South China Sea and projects

³ http://thailand.prd.go.th/ewt_news.php?nid=2801&filename=index

a rising China as a threat to its neighbours, ignoring conveniently China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative to revive the old Silk Routes on land and sea, where China is pouring trillions of dollars into improving road, port, railway and other infrastructure across Southeast, South and Central Asia, and most countries in the region are eagerly cooperating with China to build these infrastructure. On the other hand, when President Obama visits China's neighbours and talks about the South China Sea conflict and offers military "aid" to countries like Philippines and Vietnam, the western media does not raise the issue of whether the US is fanning conflict in the region and if their 'Pivot to Asia' policy is a convenient excuse for Obama to be a salesman for the ailing US arms industry. Sadly the Asian media is also not asking these questions and uncritically reproduce news copy from the western media sources.

Socio-Economics of Religion and Identity Conflicts: Another area where journalists need to thread with mindfulness and insights to develop panna is in reporting conflicts – the so-called ethnic or religious wars. Asia with its multi-religious and multi-ethnic populations and colonial histories of divide and rule, with minorities given educational and economic privileges while the cultural rights of the majorities were repressed, socio-economic issues underlie many of these conflicts like in Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and the Philippines. Buddhist communities in Myanmar, Cambodia and Sri Lanka, Hindus in India and Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia, even though they constitute a majority within those countries, they are worried about threats to their cultural identity and economic well-being from minorities groups that are international well-connected and funded.

In Asia, the need to protect the rich Hindu-Buddhist cultural heritage from aggressive proselytization by Pentecostal Evangelical Christian and Wahhabi Islam is creating many new religious conflicts across Asia such as in parts of India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand. These also have a socio-economic context because both these groups have superior financial resources from overseas to target poor members of Hindu and Buddhist communities for conversions exploiting their poverty. Reporting these conflicts without being mindful and gaining insights into these socio-economic issues help to fan conflicts and not promote social harmony.

Climate Change and SDGs: Today with increasing frequency of changing weather patterns creating havoc across Asia and the Pacific, there is a lot of reporting about the devastation and the relief and rebuilding processes. While the media does a good job in drawing the attention of the international community to the suffering of the people, there is very little, if any at all, of reporting on how to rebuild resilient communities. Just reporting about the rebuilding of devastated homes, schools, hospitals, bridges and roads is not enough, journalists need to gain insights into the necessary technology and be mindful of the process of obtaining such technology and hardware to rebuilt. They should also be mindful of the unfair trade regimes, which make such technology unaffordable to poor communities or corruption in the disaster relief industry that provides "Band-Aid" relief and also unethical practices of "faith-based" (religious) relief aid groups.

Modern Day Slave Trade: We need to be mindful of the fact that much of our global media networks - as well as local ones - are owned and/or controlled by arms manufacturers, oil companies, and those who benefit from the branding label culture that is promoted by the media. It is in their interest to have a large reservoir of poor living under poverty to be exploited. Thai Buddhist social activist Sulak Sivaraksa (2015) calls this “structural violence” of our economic systems. We rightly condemn slavery practiced by Europeans 300 years ago, but today we have a system of modern day slavery that is practiced mainly by Asians and Arabs. That is called ‘labour migration’ and we see it all over Asia with some countries supplying the cheap labour while the others benefit by employing them without any labour rights or even not been paid at all for their labour.

An extreme case of this was the slavery exposed recently in the Thai fishing industry where many of the boys working in the fishing trawlers have been kidnapped from neighbouring Myanmar. But much worse are the activities of recruitment agencies that operate as legitimate businesses, which treat migrant labourers as commodities to be traded and not human beings. Then there is also the human trafficking for the sex industry, which is rampant in many parts of Asia.

Asian journalists have to be not only mindful of these migrant flows and injustices built into the system, but also develop insights into reporting such issues using non-traditional systems of communication such as social and community media, because the traditional media may not be accessible for such investigative people-centric reporting.

These are few of many challenges a journalist face in the modern world – be they in the East or the West. As Gunaratne (2015) hinted in the concluding chapter in his book on Buddhist Journalism, we may need to develop new media function theory to practice a Buddhist – or for that matter an Asian – model of journalism that would need a different economic setting:

A Buddhist-oriented journalism cannot depend on revenue from advertising, which is instrumental in creating tanha (craving) and other nidanas (motivations), which are linked to dukkha (suffering/sorrow). Therefore it cannot thrive as a competitive private enterprise. It can succeed only as a community enterprise supported by ordinary people, global civil society, and foundations committed to Buddhist values. In short, Buddhist-oriented journalism must move onto situate itself within the framework of interdependence (or no-self), a vital aspect of Oriental cosmology (in Gunaratne, Pearson, Senarath 2015:221).

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