

RUNNING HEAD: DICHOTOMY

Dialogues on Dichotomy:  
The East/West Dilemma in Communication Theory

Mary Anna Kidd

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## Abstract

Since Edward T. Hall first stated that "culture is communication", academics have explored the cultural dimensions of communication. However, not all Western theorizing and research techniques work well in Asian contexts. The dialogue between West and East on applicable theories began in the 1980's and continues today. This review of literature examines the beginnings of intercultural communication in the United States, then expands to explore the discussion of the weaknesses of Western communication theories as applied to aspects of Eastern communication foundations and practices. The article discusses how this interplay of philosophies and concepts expands and deepens communication theory. The article concludes with directions for future research.

## Dialogues on Dichotomy

For over a decade, a debate has been conducted in the United States about what should constitute Communication Theory (Chaffee & Berger, 1987; Craig, 1999; Motley, 1990). The debate has centered around certain key issues. Should Communication Theory be theory developed by communication scholars or simply theory about the act of communication? Should Communication Theory be based on the physical science models of developing and testing a ‘provable’ hypothesis (Stewart, 1991)? There is another aspect that needs consideration: Is there a Western, or American, bias to communication theory? If so, should Communication Theory be based on Western models? What can Asian theorization add to continuing development of communication theory?

This paper will explore these issues by conducting a literature review beginning from some of the early theorists in intercultural communication, looking at texts discussing the East/West theoretical issues, and finally at articles drawn from Asian conferences and Asian publications concerning the development of an Asian Theory of Communication.

### Introduction

Historical summaries have placed the beginnings of intercultural research during the 1950s and 1960s (Rogers & Hart, 2002; Rogers, Hart & Miike, 2002). Several important concepts came out of that period. One of those germinal ideas was Edward T. Hall’s statement, “Culture is communication (Hall, 1959, p. 119).” Hall was the first one to place intercultural studies directly into the communication realm. He theorized that a communication system has three aspects: its overall structure, its components, and the message itself. The message was then broken down into sets (words), isolates (sounds), and patterns (grammar or syntax). “A breakdown of messages into these components, sets, isolates and patterns is basic to

understanding culture as communication (pp. 122-123).” Hall stressed the silent language, or the language of behavior, as central to cultural communication and that it should be added to the study of language, history, government and customs. Edward T. Hall wanted to discover the order behind the apparent confusion and disorganization of life.

Another early intercultural scholar was Robert T. Oliver (1962). In his book, *Culture and Communication: The Problem of Penetrating National and Cultural Boundaries*, one central idea was, “Mankind is separated less by language barriers... than it is by cultural differences (p. xi).” We do not all think alike, so we need to discover our common understandings and insights to lessen the inevitable intercultural misunderstandings. Much of Oliver’s book was concerned with practical, rhetorical methods of intercultural communication, and with developing an understanding of the different rhetorics present in each nation.

Alfred G. Smith (1966) went beyond the cultural comparison to state that living is largely a matter of communicating, and that communication and culture are inseparable. His text on culture and communication focused on three types of investigators -- mathematicians, social psychologists, and linguistic anthropologists -- coupled with three principle parts of investigation – syntactics, semantics and pragmatics. Mathematicians study the transmission of messages stemming from research into technical telecommunication developments and the concept of electronic feedback. Social Psychologists approach communication as the means by which people control one another’s behavior and unite into groups. Linguistic Anthropologists study cross-cultural similarities and differences of people groups particularly through codes of human interaction, both verbal and non-verbal. The three principle parts fall into the study of signs: how signs relate to each other (syntactics); how these signs are related to things (semantics); and how signs are related to people, either face to face or mediated (pragmatics). Smith’s primary

aim was to build a theoretical frame for empirical research into the acts of human communication with culture as an unavoidable factor.

These three authors place intercultural communication studies into two main camps: interpersonal and mass media. Hall (1959) was focused on communication between individuals from different cultures, or interpersonal communication. Oliver (1962) presented government representatives, and expanded the context. Smith (1966) clearly built on media, as he positioned all the theories as stemming from the mathematical examination of telecommunication technology. These two foci are the first dichotomous influences on the communication theory debate. Another dichotomy is the Eastern / Western separation. It is important to look at how this factor entered the existing academic dialogue.

#### History

There are three basic communication ‘colleges’ that study ‘heterophilus’ communication, or communication between unlike individuals, and deal directly with cross-cultural communication difficulties. These groups are Intercultural Communication, International Communication and Development Communication (Rogers & Hart, 2002). These disciplines divide into an interpersonal/mass media dichotomy with Intercultural following the heritage of Hall’s interpersonal focus, and International and Development following work by mass communication scholars. These three strands all grow from work following World War II when the United States reached out to help rebuild the world through the Marshall Plan. Intercultural communication grew out of Hall’s work with the Foreign Services Institute. International studies developed from ideas about propaganda, social evolution aided by media (radio, television and film), and the interplay of the dominant ideologies of free market capitalism and state-controlled socialism during the cold war. In turn, Development Communication grew out of the efforts to

improve the socio-economic conditions in Asia, Africa, the Middle-East and, ultimately, Latin America. All three developed academic degree programs, professional organizations and conferences which often overlapped and intermingled – especially international and development with their focus on media effects (Rogers & Hart, 2002). Students from countries around the globe studied in the United States, then carried these Western-oriented paradigms back into their own countries (Dissanayake, 1988c). The Western methods and theories often did not fit.

While North American scholars were studying how to effectively communicate the advantages of capitalism and modernization, there was another trend following the end of colonization after World War II. This was the growing political reality of multiculturalism due to the existence of multi-ethnic populations in countries around the world, and studies addressing the effects of political independence in former European and American colonies (Wang & Shen, 2000). The Asian academics who studied in the United States began to join in a growing trend of criticism of ethnocentric, Western communication theories and research methods. In 1980, the East-West Communication Institute in Hawaii hosted the first International Symposium on ‘Communication Theory: Eastern and Western Perspectives’ (Yoshikawa, 1988). That was only one of a growing number of conferences and symposiums trying to define ‘Asian’ communication, and examine the interplay between the dominant Western, or American, theories and the growing academic communication programs in other countries<sup>1</sup>.

Xiaoge (2001) assessed the search for unique Asian perspectives on communication. He divided the search into two parts: the search for theoretical perspectives, and the dialogue about journalistic values. Once again, the dichotomy follows the interpersonal and media division, with the dialogues focusing on the need to avoid unquestioning, and often ineffective, acceptance of the Western models and explanations. Xiaoge reviewed eight major conferences starting with

the 1985 Bangkok Symposium on Asian Perspectives in Communication held at Thammasat University, and ending with the 1996 Singapore conference on Trends and Strategies in Asian Communication. The review concludes with the belief that the search for Asian communication perspectives will grow after Asia recovers from the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis.

These various conferences, and a continuing dialogue among international communication scholars, have led to distinct critiques of traditional, in this case Western, Communication Theory. These critiques directly relate to the issue of theoretical universality, or generalizability that is a central issue in effective theory development.

### Critiques

The driving forces behind the Asian Communication conferences were economic success, political independence, cultural reassurance, and the incompatibilities of Western theories with Asian contexts (Xiaoge, 2001). Jayawardena noted in 1986 that Western theories don't fit in all situations:

The current tendency to make extensive use of Buddhist rites, rituals, occasions and sacred days, as a means of communicating non-traditional messages, symbolizes a recognition, though slightly belatedly, that the Western concepts and theories of communication cannot be bodily transferred to Sri Lankan contexts (p. 30).

Citing Kincaid (1979), Gordon (1998/1999) lists seven epistemological biases that hinder Western communication theories: 1) seeing communication as linear rather than cyclical; 2) focusing on the message-source rather than relatedness and interdependence; 3) analyzing communicative objects in isolation from their larger contexts; 4) concentrating on discrete messages and neglecting silence, rhythm and timing; 5) concentrating on persuasion rather than human understanding, agreement and collective action; 6) focusing on individuals instead of

relationships; and 7) using one-way mechanistic causation models instead of mutual causation models. These mechanistic, linear views of communication stem from rational, mathematical formulas and Aristotelian models of persuasion and rhetorical analysis. Dissanayake (1988c) agrees as he highlights the tendency of American models to be unidirectional, communicator based, and manipulative. He also notes the Aristotelian concentration on the three elements of the communicator, the message and the receiver, and the communication objective to persuade or influence. This Western oriented model is not compatible with either the cultural configurations or the epistemological foundations characterizing Asian societies. They simply do not fit.

Another point of criticism is the tendency to underestimate or ignore the societal factors influencing communication. Hasnain (1988) adds that it ignores the role of social structure and culture. The emphasis is placed on individuals, as is evidenced by Lasswell's 'Five W's': *who* says *what* to *whom* through *what* channel and with *what* effect (p. 184)?" The need for a stress on social context is reinforced by American theorists (Sarbaugh and Asuncian-Lande, 1983). Woelfel (1987) points out that much of the criticisms center on the categorical, mechanical measurements in communication theories. There is a tendency to look at communicative acts as if they are discreet, independent variables separate from the complex, intricate situations that created them. Chu (1986) also points out the tendency to ignore the social structure. Ishii (2001) summarizes Chu's analysis of the critical points of American research methodology:

- 1) An almost faddish emphasis on empirical research.
- 2) Reliance on quantitative methodology, allowing it to determine research topics.
- 3) Repetition of similar topics that lack a clear focus and seem trivial.
- 4) Neglecting the social structure, and paying little attention to the social functions of communication.

5) Neglecting cultural factors – not regarding culture as a variable (p. 3).

One conclusion is that while some of the Western-generated categories and theories can be applied, there are unique factors that must be considered for each culture (Rogers, Hart & Miike, 2002). A beginning would be to recognize researcher bias (Blackman, 1983). Another step would be to examine the spiritual, philosophical and intellectual resources in the various rich native heritages (Menon, 1988). The following article summaries explore communication from a variety of different national and religious perspectives.

#### Different Cultural Perspectives

The study of linguistics has been central to Intercultural Communication theories. Asuncion-Lande (1983) demonstrated the influence of “theoretical assumptions about language from the ancient and remote past (p. 253).” These assumptions came from Chinese studies of linguistic change, Indian efforts to preserve the Vedic hymns intact, and Arabic linguistic methods to enhance the study of the Quran. The contrastive emphasis of these efforts to preserve language is the study of vernacular – language as it is actually spoken. This is the type of heritage that can grow from the following studies.

#### Chinese Perspectives

Chinese communication practices are greatly influenced by centuries of interactions between different philosophies such as Confucianism, Taoism, and I Ching. Cheng (1987, 1988) posited that philosophy encompasses communication in three ways: 1) philosophy can be the content of communication; 2) philosophy can be the context for communication; and 3) philosophy can be the method of communication providing both models and structures to define the communication process. He stressed the ability of Chinese philosophy to place communication in context and provide a new framework and focus that goes beyond the

mechanistic model. A good example is the system of I Ching. Cheng equates I Ching to hermeneutics as an integrative model of understanding. It stresses the unity of reason and experience to bring understanding of an ever-changing reality. There is no separation between reason and experience; they are intimately related. Reality is viewed as ever changing through the interplay of yin and yang, which though opposing never exist apart from each other. The focus is on the unity, the whole – not the parts – of existence and understanding. Thus, while reason, knowledge and categorical interpretations can provide limited, yet creative, understandings, it is experience that leads to the knowledge of reality.

Joining with the concept of the unity of all things, and the inability of reason to encompass reality, is the distrust of language's ability to effectively convey meaning. This distrust is evident in literature and poetry. Fu (1987) demonstrates how the story of Ah Q, a Chinese peasant, explicates the concept of 'coordinative' thinking, where an internal harmony coordinates parts to maintain the coherence of the whole. It is the communication and communion between the author and the reader that leads to understanding. This could be compared to Tam's (1988) stress on intuition in his study of the influence of Taoism on Chinese poetry. "The highest state of poetry is to be able to convey an 'ulterior meaning', that is, not to be limited to language (Tam, 1988, p. 117)." The goal is to express a meaning beyond what words can carry. A Taoist philosopher, Lao Tzu, offers a poetic explanation:

He who knows does not speak.

He who speaks does not know (Tam, 1988, p. 111).

This is a reflection of the belief in the limits of human perception, and the subsequent boundaries of language as a reflection of human mental characteristics. These philosophies centered on unity and intuition are modified by the Confucian emphasis on social structure. The

Confucian 'Five Codes of Ethics' define the five basic social relationships: between sovereign (eventually state) and subject; father and son; elder and younger brother; husband and wife; and friend and friend. Since friends are considered relative to family, these are all family relationships (Huang & Jia, 2001). The legacy of Chinese kinship terms reflects this traditional relational respect, and the terms are linguistically and culturally embedded in Chinese society.

I Ching, Taoism and Confucianism are focused on interpersonal relationships through their influence on communication patterns and societal norms. Stress on the richness of the Chinese Ideograph as a means of communication, as well as the failure of traditional Maoism to incorporate the basic public interests, wishes and philosophies into communication campaigns, address the mass media focus of Communication Theory. Some of the Communist principles directly reflected traditional Chinese philosophies (Cushman, 1987). These principles include the tendency to privilege practice over theory and the acceptance of the law of contradiction, or the unity of opposites. However, mass communication efforts reflected the same weaknesses of many other Development Communication efforts across the globe: the inability to implement a policy due to inadequate adaptation to local circumstances. Thus, while the birth control campaign where masses communicated to masses worked very well, the attempt to impose control of nepotism and corruption failed. L. L. Chu (1986) specifically addressed the ways Chineseness could be incorporated into Communication Research, also with a focus on media, specifically journalism. One example is to study the rich meaning and easy comprehension of Chinese Ideographs as opposed to phonetic scripts. Another example is the study of traditional Chinese public persuasive acts through the use of tools such as 'ambivalent speeches' to effectively persuade while avoiding confrontation. Chu summarizes his message by stating that where Marxist criticism has recognized the consequences of communication, the Chinese

approach's traditional humanistic concerns could well contribute to neutralizing the impact of media on society. Therefore, the study of both historical and modern Chinese philosophies and practices could enrich Communication Research in a variety of ways including placing communication in context and mitigating some of the negative impact of media.

### Korean Perspectives

Korea also has a rich heritage of philosophical interaction. The three strands are: Korean indigenous belief systems or Shamanism; Chinese Confucianism; and Mahayana Buddhism which came from India via China. Yum (1987a) stressed that these three philosophies influenced social, behavioral and thought patterns in China and Japan as well as Korea. Each had its own area of influence in Korea: Buddhism ruled the mind; Taoism ruled the body; and Confucianism ruled the political system. All of these also had an impact on communication. Confucianism's influence ranged from the idea that public communication was to form public opinion and effectively maintain the benevolent rule *for* the people to the restrictions on non-verbal communication to prevent improper revelation of and indulgence in human passions. Buddhism purveyed a general distrust of communication, since true communication occurs when you speak without the mouth and hear without the ears. This is similar to Fu's (1987) focus on Ah Q's need of love for understanding. Silence then becomes an important part of communication.

The practical applications of this are seen in the concept of *uye-ri* (Yum, 1987b) as an interpersonal practice and the philosophical influence of Confucian Democracy on the need for open channels of communication (Lee, 1987). Interpersonally, *uye-ri* values the human conscience as opposed to self-interest or material profit. *Uye-ri* presents a reciprocal obligation system in three relational areas: blood relations; regional relations; and school relations.

Therefore, communication patterns are often determined by the social relationships of the people involved. The specific use of language as an instrument of inclusion and exclusion is one clear example of the influence on communication practices.

Traditionally, Korea had public communication officials responsible for maintaining the relationship between the king and the people. Popular opinion was the foundation for effective government (Cushman, 1987). The government was expected to maintain an open attitude and was obligated not only to publish information but to encourage public discussion. These philosophical ideas stemming from Confucianism have direct applications to media studies and practices. Through the two concepts of *uye-ri* and Confucian democracy there are many topics for future interpersonal and media research.

#### Japanese Perspectives

Tsujimura (1987) continues the philosophical focus through showing the influences of Shintoism, Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism. Shintoism stresses simplicity and is reflected in tea ceremonies and architecture. Confucianism regulated human relations, especially in regards to authority. Finally, Zen Buddhism focused on the freedom of selflessness which led to the concept of *Inshin-Denshin*, or communication without language. This is the idea that communication can occur through cumulative experience and the observation of casual, seemingly trivial, actions. This is similar to the Chinese emphasis on experience in I Ching (Cheng, 1988).

Other authors stressed the need to study Japanese communication in context because of its unique social environment due to such factors as the unusual amount of ethnic, racial and linguistic homogeneity (Miyahara, 2001; Okabe, 1987; Tsujimura, 1987). These intricate, unique norms influence complex interpersonal interactions including the importance of indirect

speech acts (Okabe, 1987) and the art of silence in communication (Ehrlich & Tonooka, 1988).

The importance of these factors highlights the need for Western researchers to incorporate intuition and silence more directly into their communication models and theories.

Yum (1987b) points out that while Korean relational obligations beyond family are focused on region and school, the Japanese feel obligations toward their business associates. That highlights the importance of examining Japanese business relationships, which have actually been subjected to quite a bit of study. Hirokawa (1987) shows the importance of a common concern for the success of the organization and its relationship to everything from harmonious relations to ambiguous, face-saving communication. Yoshikawa (1988) positions Japanese business practices as a right-brain function centering on holistic, affective, non-verbal, intuitive and aesthetic characteristics. Yoshikawa continues the emphasis on the basic distrust of verbal language in societies directed by Confucian and Buddhist philosophies.

There are some interesting similarities and differences among China, Korea and Japan, although they are often grouped together for convenience sake. However, there are other Asian cultures that need to be examined, so the focus will now shift to South Asia and the Middle East.

#### Indian Perspectives

There are some definite similarities between India and East Asia due to their common Buddhist heritage. However, there are also some obvious differences because of the great amount of heterogeneity to be found in India. India works to find 'unity through diversity' (Reddi, 1988). In addition, theory is considered a necessary prerequisite for practice, instead of the other way around (Cha, 2001). The focus of communication is on the receiver (Rahim, 1987), and the goal is self-awareness (Dissanayake, 1987). The similarities with East Asia include a distrust of the effectiveness of language for understanding since it separates things into

categories and inhibit the understanding that ultimate reality is one and indivisible (Dissanayake, 1988). There is value in diversity and acceptance of difference, but ultimate knowledge cannot be classified or codified. Jayaweera (1988) presented the argument that the West is being driven 'by the logic of its epistemology' to acknowledge that ultimately all knowledge is self-knowledge. Since there are no individual selves, this self-knowledge encompasses knowledge of the world because it is included in the individual experience. Jayaweera believed that modern communication is based on a false understanding of reality and reinforces isolation and separation, thus leading to misunderstanding and oppression.

One practical example of the application of Indian philosophy to communication is Rahim's (1987) application of the Law of Karma to rural development in India. Instead of relying on mass media or the ability of the extension agent to teach the farmers new methods, this method focuses on the agent communicating the need for the richer community members to help the poorer ones for the benefit of everyone. This is related to the Law of Karma because deeds and actions ultimately decide a person's Karmic destiny. This method works much better than the traditional mediated approach. Reddi (1988) also places importance on using traditional communication methods for Development Communication. His statement is very clear:

The *gurukul* tradition of education, existent for centuries, and the traditional and folk media of communication have also been equally ignored in the scramble to exploit sophisticated communication hardware such as satellite-base television (p. 76).

The importance of incorporating local philosophies and practices into mediated communication is demonstrated by these two examples as well as the problem with the Maoist struggle against corruption and nepotism. Ignoring these factors has harmed many worthwhile

development efforts, and more and more research is being focused on participatory projects to help mitigate this problem (Rogers & Hart, 2002).

### Islamic Perspectives

Since Islam is a missionary religion, it has a persuasive focus that can be compared to Aristotle's view (Hussain, 1986). However, the emphasis is more on values and participatory research than the mechanical structure found in the West (Hasnain, 1988; Hussain, 1986). "Islamic communication theories are more normative than empirical in orientation. They address the problems of 'ought to' rather than of objective realities (Tehrani, 1988, p. 192)." Communication is at the very center of Islam, and is reflected through traditional methods of writing and speaking following the examples set by the prophet Mohammed (Hasnain, 1988). Rhetoric is considered essential to the maintenance of a just social order. Since Islam is practiced in many different cultures, there are diverse perspectives on communication. There is also a strong emphasis on examining Western theories to find what is applicable to Muslim communication contexts (Hasnain, 1988; Hussain, 1986). Ultimately, to a follower of Islam eloquence is the foundation of human culture (Hasnain, 1988).

### Related Philosophical Perspectives

Before addressing the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western perspectives, it would be beneficial to examine some articles that are not focused on one particular country or region. Ishii (2001), Jayawardena (1986), and Williams (1998) all posit that communication theory can be effectively enriched by including religious and indigenous perspectives. Ishii and Williams both present communication models that include aspects of communication beyond the human-to-human paradigm accepted in the West. Jayawardena stresses using 'religio-cultural' resources for effective Development Communication. Once

again, there is the divide between areas of interpersonal, or perhaps ‘interbeings’, and mass communication. However, religious factors are positioned as central to both areas. Perhaps there are greater depths to the world than we can easily perceive.

### Similarities and Differences

Burt (1968) is quick to point out that there is no sharp and simple contrast between East and West. There are great variations in both these categories (Wang & Shen, 2000), and various dichotomous terms are used only for purposes of simplification and ease of comparison. This paper also applies the terms for simplicity’s sake, trusting that the reader will understand.

Burt (1968) places the question of whether reason is sufficient to guide us to knowledge at the heart of the contrast between East and West. Tam (1988) presents the idea of ‘Western Knowledge and Eastern Wisdom’ as the dichotomous division. Other authors have focused on the Western distrust of intuition and silence as compared to the Eastern distrust of language and reason (Davis, 1988; Rahim, 1987; Yoshikawa, 1988). These differences are epistemological variations concerning what it means to know.

Wang and Shen (2000) describe the influences of the origins of Eastern and Western epistemologies. The West began with the idea of ‘wonder’ based on the Greek notion of ‘theoria’, or intellectual curiosity leading to the disinterested pursuit of truth. On the other hand, Eastern philosophers began with the idea of ‘concern’ leading to a practical wisdom guiding personal and collective destiny. Thus the essential difference is in meaning and the construction of knowledge directed from the contrasting foci of theoretical or pragmatic interests. Knowledge is acquired differently with Westerner knowledge relying on sensory and empirical data, and Eastern wisdom centering on intuition and observation.

Other comparisons focus on the differences between what Easterners and Westerners do when they communicate. Okabe (1983) positions America as a communication-active society where nothing remains undiscussed, then places Japan as a communication-passive society where modesty, humility and suppression of self are moral imperatives and silence is an essential part of communication. Yoshikawa (1988) presents the differences as right-brain/left-brain distinctions. American business behavior is right-brained, verbal and analytic, whereas Japanese business behavior is left-brained, non-verbal and holistic. Another way of expressing this would be to say that Americans tend to privilege words while Japanese privilege context (Miyahara, 2001).

Kincaid (1987) found five points of departure between Eastern and Western perspectives: 1) the unit of analysis – the US focuses on the individual, while Confucian theories look at the mutual causality between the part and the whole; 2) the consequence or purpose of communication – persuasion as compared to mutual understanding; 3) the limits of language and cognition; 4) the differing foci on emotion or rationality; and 5) human relationships – Eastern philosophers tend to focus on the relationships themselves, while Westerners considered their instrumental, or deterministic, nature. Philipsen (1987) departed some from the strict dichotomous view when he addressed the sources for different types of societies: 1) a personal society with the individual self as the source; 2) a positional society where the group is the sacred object; and 3) a traditional society where traditions are the unspoken forces that regulate public conduct and affirm a shared identity. The main theme here appears to be whether the focus is on the parts or the whole – division or unity.

Wang and Shen (2000) point out that there are some commonalities present within the obvious differences. One example is the Indian tradition of logic. Other examples are the

development of phenomenology and hermeneutics and their relationship to traditional Eastern philosophies and methodologies (Dissanayake, 1988b; Wang & Shen, 2000). Burt (1968) emphasized another area of similarity:

Both Western and Eastern thinkers share a fundamental common conviction: that of the essential dignity of man and the high worth of his distinctive potentialities in relation to the vast universe that encompasses him (p. 177).

There is hope for common understanding in spite of the differences between the two hemispheres.

#### The Interpersonal / Mass Media Dichotomy

As mentioned earlier, Intercultural Communication tends to be focused on interpersonal dyads, while International and Development Communication study mediated messages and interpretations, with modern studies incorporating the Internet and the idea of the digital divide (Rogers & Hart, 2002). G.C. Chu (1986) reinforces this division by noting three main areas of concentration in Asia: developmental studies; the concept of cultural imperialism; and a new Eastern orientation on the study of Asian/Western intercultural communication to complement the numerous Western studies. In his overview of Asian Communication Conferences, Xiaoge (2001) divides the issues into theory development and journalistic practices. As this dichotomy is reflective of the great variety found in Communication Studies in general, it is not surprising that it exists in the Asian theoretical dialogues as well.

L. L. Chu (1986) points out that newspapers were introduced to China by foreign missionaries complete with the assumptions concerning what news was and how to report it. Hussain (1986) positioned understanding of Western communication theories as vital to provide a better understanding of how to use modern media. McQuail (2000) adds that the study of

media is inherently western, because the media themselves are not culture free. An aspect of hope for media studies, however, is the potential for rewriting normative theory to account for non-Western values. Whether it is incorporating rural Indian ‘Gossip Groups’ (Yadava, 1987), or traditional Chinese theories of persuasion (L.L. Chu, 1986), media studies are greatly enriched by the addition of an Asian perspective.

Yadava (1987) said that the study of communication was the study of the structure, function and evaluation of Indian social systems. Other authors discuss the importance of developing relevant theories that would improve interpersonal communication within a culture, and would also apply to cross-cultural understanding (Miyahara, 2001; Rogers, Hart & Miike, 2002). The study of communication needs to take into account the local differences and norms inherent in every individual communication context (Dissanayake, 1988b).

Where does that leave us in regard to the development of an Asian theory of communication, or its relation to universal communication theories? How should we now approach theory development?

#### Asian Theory Development

Several theorists emphasize the fact that the center for communication research remains in the West, so there is a need to make the theories understandable in a Western context. The goal is not a rejection of the West, but a creative addition to existing theory (G.C. Chu, 1986). There is a desire to explore existing theories to see what can be applied (Hussain, 1986, McQuail, 2000; Reddi, 1988)<sup>2</sup>. The discussion is concerned with increasing knowledge, not trying to start everything over again.

Theories, by their nature, must be generalizable (Wang & Shen, 2000). Therefore, simply adding ‘Asian’ to ‘communication theory’ clouds the issue. If a theory developed in the

U.S. does not work in Asia, it probably will not work in other areas of the world. G.C. Chu (1986) proposes the criterion of 'observability' as a viable alternative to the western norm of 'testability'.

All I suggest is that behavioral implications of the theoretical propositions must be observable in real life, so that we can tell whether the propositions are true or not (G.C. Chu, 1986, p. 5).

Chu adds other insights about research methods that are applicable to any viable program of theory development.

My impression is that some of us have been eloquent in criticizing Western quantitative methods, but have not been productive in proposing alternative[s] .... An Asian perspective of communication theory will have only limited credibility unless it is accepted and used by other scholars in our field. Unless our perspective is backed by research, conducted by clearly understandable methods, its acceptance beyond a small circle would be difficult (p. 5).

Hussain (1986) and Dissanayake (1988c) stress the value of locally applied, non-universal theories, but not to the exclusion of universal theories. In the study of human communication, redundancy may be impossible, but there is a need for theoretical integration (Smith, 1968). Without a plan or a map, it is impossible to identify and interpret the contributions of old research, or orient theory in new research. The consistent theme of applying inclusive philosophies and examining units of communication in context provides a coherent plan for future directions in theory development, and parallels many of the concepts inherent in interpretive Western research philosophies and methods.

### Future Directions

There are some excellent studies that have begun to develop Asian theories, test the applicability of Western ones, and look for universal communicative motivations. These studies include Ishii, et. al.'s (2000) comparative investigation of the reasons for engaging in interpersonal communication among Japanese, Koreans and Americans which found that pleasure provided a common motivation among the three groups. Xu and Burleson (2001) studied the strengths and weaknesses of the support gap hypothesis as it applied to Chinese and American married couples. Miyahara (2001) tested the applicability of *amae* (the dependence on another's benevolence) as a theoretical construct to determine Japanese interpersonal communication competence. The rich contributions of these and other studies to theory construction would reinforce McQuail's (2000) position that the problem of Western bias in communication theory is no longer a contemporary issue. However, there are still many changes that need to be made in communication studies before researchers consider the bias overcome.

Researchers still need 'sensitive flexibility' to get past their predispositions (Burt, 1968). McQuail (2000) agrees that conservative research tendencies are reinforced by the need to publish in existing journals. He adds:

It is easier to escape from the confines of old problem definitions than it is to escape from existing methodologies and this freedom could be more widely used. With problems chosen from non-Western contexts, the way is open for new hypotheses, new concepts and ultimately the possibility of new theory (p. 12).

For theory to have actual universal application, it must have universal input. Bilingual, bi-cultural Asian researchers can make a unique contribution (L.L. Chu, 1986). Dissanayake (1988c) came to the compelling conclusion that for productive inquiry into

communication metatheory, we must have the input of Asian perspectives. Therefore, the international, theoretical dialogue must continue. Biases must be recognized and accounted for, or balanced by research from other perspectives. Existing models must be examined and expanded where necessary (Ishii, 2001; Williams, 1998). Theories must be verified, and commonalities and differences defined in an attempt to develop a specific, accurate definition of communication (Applegate & Sypher, 1983). However, that is not the immediate goal. That is something different:

The task for the future is not to achieve a body of ‘unbiased’ theory, since this is not humanly possible or even desirable. But we need theory that is not vitiated by its (inevitable) cultural and value bias and not simply a brand of ideology. We need especially a diversity of (better) theory to cope with the increasingly complex interactions between the seeming imperatives of communication technology and the many different cultural situations and value systems (McQuail, 2000, p. 13).

### Conclusion

Simply put – theorists need to work together. With the emergence of Internet technology, satellite connections, and high-speed international travel, the opportunities for joint research projects are increasing daily. The need to get beyond the barriers that inhibit understanding are just as real now as they were in the 1950’s and 60’s (Hall, 1959; Oliver, 1962; Smith, 1966). While much progress has been made, Smith’s 1966 summary is still applicable today:

The East needs to acquire a fuller sympathy with the West’s conviction that through man’s rational powers he can aspire to become equal to the creative opportunities that reality constantly provides. The West needs a fuller appreciation of the high value found by the East in a super-rational self-understanding, with its promise not only of

inner freedom from conflict but also of a more perfect realization of the goals at which reason in its systematizing function aims (p. 689).

The idea that communication behavior can be understood and improved upon through systematic study (Chaffee & Berger, 1987) appears to be consistent across cultural boundaries. The difference is in what system of research is applied. The future interplays of East and West, observation and measurement, and reason and intuition will enable communication researchers to develop an effective metatheory of communication. It will also contribute to the final definition of communication studies. The dialogue needs to extend beyond the existing dichotomies to commonalities before Communication Theory can truly become universal.

Notes:

1. Not all alternate views come from Asia. Latin American, for example, has a rich tradition growing out of the work by Mattelart in critical cultural studies (Rogers & Hart, 2002). That information is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it would be beneficial to closely examine the influences of Latin American and other regions on the development of communication theory and practices.
2. For an idea of what theories could be applied see: Gudykunst, 1983; Gudykunst & Mody, 2002; Hussain, 1986; and Smith, 1968. Hussain presents a list of theories which have potential application within an Islamic context. Gudykunst, Gudykunst & Mody, and Smith all present in-depth articles of extant theories as they can be applied to communication and culture, with some examples of practical research applications.

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