Emergence of Asian Communication Approaches: In search for East-West balanced Communication Theories

Sugath Mahinda Senarath, PhD

Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Abstract

Over the past five decades, communication studies and research have experienced steady growth. It is not an overstatement to suggest that communication studies in Asia have reached a significant level of maturity. However, most dominant communication theories remain Eurocentric and Anglo-American in orientation. Scholars from Asia, Africa, and Latin America have increasingly recognized the problem of Eurocentrism in the social sciences, although non-Western intellectual traditions have yet to achieve equal prominence in the development of original social theories. While the Western world is often credited with the "invention" of the social sciences, Eastern intellectual and philosophical traditions have been largely overlooked, whether intentionally or unintentionally. In this context, Asian approaches to communication are both intellectually rich and conceptually complex. There has been considerable debate on Eurocentrism, Anglo-American bias, and the de-westernization of communication theory. Within this discourse, it is increasingly important to develop theories grounded in Asian philosophical, cultural, and traditional foundations. The Asia-centric pursuit of communication theory, which emerged in the early 1980s, seeks to respond to this need. Mindful communication is one such emerging Asian communication theory, rooted in Asian philosophical, cultural, and traditional thought. This phenomenological approach offers

potential applications in contemporary communicative contexts across societies. However, de-westernizing communication theory does not imply rejecting Western theories entirely. Rather, a balanced integration of Eastern and Western perspectives is essential. A key challenge in this process is the required shift in mindset among some Eastern scholars who continue to regard Western theories as inherently superior or universally applicable.

Keywords: *Asia-centricity, Asian communication theories, communication research, de-westernization.*

Introduction

Over the past five decades, we have witnessed the steady growth of communication studies and research in Asia (Dissanayake, 2003). Asian pioneers in the field of communication pursued graduate training in the USA and the West, then returned to Asia to establish and propagate academic studies in the region (Chen & Miike, 2006). Although communication studies in Asia have achieved a certain level of maturity (Chen & Miike, 2006; Dissanayake,2003), most of them continue to apply Western theories and methods in their own contexts without adequately assessing their worth and compatibility with local conditions 'and yet, we do not seem to have a philosophy or a vision for the future of communication studies in Asia'(Chen &Miike, 2006, p. 1). Even though we believe we are gaining knowledge from the West, we have not actually received insights from all Western scholars (Chen & Miike,2006). “In point of fact, we are quite ignorant even of the works of Asian pioneers in the United States and Asian American communication scholars” (Chen &Miike, 2006, p. 1)

Scholars of the Global South have yet to succeed in building an endogenous intellectual movement.

'Groups of scholars and activists from various disciplines in the developing world have been influential in raising the issue of the state of the social sciences in their countries. However varied they are, we cannot speak of a unified intellectual movement-

their calls for endogenous intellectual movement'(Alatas, 2010, p. 171).

Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, delivering the keynote speech at the 7th Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement (1983), pointed out the importance of conducting scientific research in third-world countries on their own terms. "Meanwhile, technological change rushes on, giving further advantage to the already Affluent. No one has the time to think whether its consequences are benign or malign. To keep us, even societies that can ill afford some of these technical products feel they must acquire them. Non-alignment may shield us from war, but science is important for eradicating poverty. However, at present, 97 percent of the world's research is not relevant to us because it is earmarked for the priorities and the induced appetites of technological leaders. Science will serve our basic needs only if we direct our own scientific policies towards these problems, especially those of the smallest and poorest among us. Each of our countries must strengthen its domestic science and technology base, and we should collectively devise more effective mechanisms for pooling our experiences. Earlier non-aligned gatherings have considered this subject. At this Summit, can we move forward to make collective self-reliance a reality?"(Final Document of the 7th Conference of Heads of States or Governments of the Non-Aligned Movement, New Delhi, 1983, p. 146).

There is a need to develop Asian communication theories that take into account Asian-specific factors, including philosophical, cultural, social, traditional, and political factors. Even though Asian, as well as African and Latin American scholars, have clearly recognized the problem of Eurocentrism in social science, they have not become renowned for developing original non-Western social theories (Gunaratne,2010: pp 473-500). As Shelton Gunaratne (2010) noted, around 150 communication journals are published today. This publishing landscape is overwhelmingly dominated by two major publishers: Sage Publications, based in the United States, and the Taylor

& Francis Group, based in the United Kingdom (Gunaratne, 2010). According to Miike (2019), Asia-centric communication scholarship comprises five key aspects.

1. Constructing theoretical knowledge that corresponds to Asian communication discourse;2. Focusing on the multiplicity and complexity of Asian communicative experiences, 3. Reflexively constituting and critically transforming Asian communication discourse;4. Theorizing how common aspects of humanity are expressed and understood in Asian cultural particularities, and 5. Critiquing Eurocentric biases in theory and research, helping Asian researchers overcome academic dependency.

As Syed Hussein Alatas (2000:24) says,' in addition to political, social, and economic imperialism, we are also subjected to intellectual imperialism. 'Intellectual imperialism is the domination of one people by another in their world of thinking. Intellectual imperialism is usually an effect of actual direct imperialism or of indirect domination arising from imperialism (Alatas, 2000, p. 24)… As a result of being dominated by intellectual imperialism, scholars cannot become creative. They spend their time imitating'(Alatas, 2000, p. 24).

Background of this research.

This study focuses on the importance of developing research grounded in the Global South, particularly with reference to its cultural, philosophical, social, and traditional backgrounds. “While communication scholars both in Western countries and in Asia make use of Western models and paradigms of communication, minimal effort is made, except by a handful of scholars, to understand communication from an Asian perspective” (Dissanayake, 2003, p. 18)

In contemporary communication and social science scholarship, there has been increasing recognition that dominant theoretical frameworks have been largely shaped by Western

epistemologies. As a result, knowledge production has often reflected Eurocentric assumptions, which may not fully capture the diversity of lived experiences, values, and communicative practices found in non-Western societies.

However, the purpose of this study is not to reject Western theories. Rather, it emphasizes the importance of achieving a balanced and dialogical integration between Eastern and Western theoretical traditions. Such an approach allows for a more inclusive and context-sensitive understanding of communication phenomena, particularly within Global South contexts where indigenous knowledge systems remain highly relevant.

This research is based on an extensive review of literature related to de-westernization, Asia-centric communication theory, and Global South epistemologies. It seeks to explore how culturally grounded perspectives can contribute to the enrichment of communication theory while maintaining openness to established Western frameworks. In doing so, the study highlights the need for epistemological diversity and theoretical pluralism in communication research.

The importance of Asian research

Unearthing and re-describing Asian approaches to communication is as fascinating as it is complex (Dissanayake,2003).'Western knowledge is not perfectly compatible with the Asian context and does not fully resonate with the Asian experience'(Chen &Miike, 2006, p. 1). They are beginning to question the universal applicability of the meta theory and methodology of Eurocentric communication scholarship and to see the limitations of being dependent on the imported communicative knowledge generated by Westerners for the West'(Chen &Miike, 2006, p. 1). Even though many Asian scholars have pursued higher education in Western universities and subsequently returned to their home countries, there remains a tendency among some to continue relying heavily on Western

theoretical frameworks rather than engaging deeply with their own historical, traditional, and philosophical roots. Blindly applying Western theories within Asian contexts may not always produce meaningful or effective outcomes, as such approaches may overlook local cultural specificities and epistemological foundations.

Therefore, it is important to critically reflect on and evaluate both the past achievements and future directions of Asian communication research (Chen & Miike, 2006; Gunaratne, 2010). Such reflection encourages a more balanced and contextually grounded scholarly approach that integrates indigenous perspectives while maintaining constructive engagement with established global theories. “The essence of the de-Westernized communication path is the subversion and reshaping of the unbalanced communication rights” (Ang & Zhou,2023:6).

As Wimal Disssanayake (2003:18) pointed out, 'there is a real need to expand the field by studying communication from various non-Western viewpoints. It is here that Asian approaches to communication become extremely important. Asian countries such as China, India, Japan, and Korea have produced rich and complex civilizations that have developed over the centuries. No civilization is possible without a vigorous system of communication. Hence, it is of the utmost importance that we seek to explore Asian theories, concepts, perspectives, and presuppositions of communication.

When we first look at Asian approaches to communication, we need to open and free our minds to see the possibilities for our own. This does not mean that we are completely rejecting or closing our doors to the West but digging and unearthing our Asian deep roots. “It would be a mistake to assume that Western models cannot explain non-Western situations, and only indigenous models could” (Glück, 2015, p. 4). We are thinking about the importance of establishing a global knowledge system with equal access (Glück, 2015). In this regard, decolonizing our

minds is very important.

The colonization adversely affected the languages and communication in the colonial areas (Tsuda, 1993).There are three critical consequences can be seen as, 'first, the loss and disappearances of indigenous language; second effect is the emergence of pidgin and creoles among the colonized(Tsuda ,1993), and, the third effect is the "most adverse effect may be the most serious and deep rooted; colonization of the mind, the mental attitude of the people in the colonized areas. Because of the long-term colonial rule, feelings of inferiority, helplessness, incompetence, and dependency have been developed and impressed upon the minds of the colonized. As a result, they develop an inferiority complex and feelings of alienation and victimization, leading them to adopt self-denial, self-degradation, and a sense of 'anomie' (loss of self-identity and own culture (Tsuda, 1993, p. 72).

Asian communication scholar Wimal Dissanayake (2003), one of the leading figures in the field, emphasizes the importance of constructing Asian approaches, concepts, theories, and models of communication.

'While communication scholars both in Western countries and in Asia make use of Western models and paradigms of communication, minimal effort is made, except by a handful of scholars, to understand communication from an Asian perspective. This is primarily because there are no Asian theories and models in academic circulation that communication teachers and students can readily use. Moreover, communication scholars in Asia have, by and large, been trained in the West and have used books, journals, and research papers published under a Western scholarly dispensation. If communication is to become a more meaningful mode of inquiry in Asia —and, indeed, in the rest of the world —it has to connect with indigenous intellectual roots, situated knowledge, and local modes of thinking. Hence, the need to move along the path of constructing Asian approaches, concepts, theories, and models of communication is most

urgent'(Dissanayake, 2003, p. 18). Asiacentricity is one of the leading approaches for studying Asian-based communication. Yoshitaka Miike has been instrumental in the theoretical development of this communication approach.

The Asia-centric pursuit of communication theory is not new (Miike, 2016). The field of Asian communication theory emerged in the early 1980s (Miike,2016). Asiacentric communication scholarship is five-fold: (1) to construct theoretical knowledge that corresponds to Asian communication discourse, 2) to focus on the multiplicity and complexity of Asian communicative experience, (3) to reflexively constitute, and critically transform, Asian communication discourse, (4) to theorize how common aspects of humanity are expressed and understood in Asian cultural particularities, and (5) to critique Eurocentric biases in theory and research and help Asian researchers overcome academic dependency(Miike,2019, p. 66).

Some scholars have criticized Asiacentricity as a form of ethnocentrism that seeks to universalize Asian theories. However, Asiacentricity is not ethnocentric in nature (Miike, 2019), nor does it suggest that all theories should be developed with the intention of explaining universal phenomena.

As Yoshitaka Miike (2019) states, Asiacentricity "does not enforce an Asian perspective as the sole or superior way of understanding for non-Asians, nor does it use an Asian-centered viewpoint to examine non-Asian cultures and communication." Miike (2006) further emphasizes that Asiacentrists should keep three key principles in mind. First, they should give equal attention to formal concepts derived from religious and philosophical traditions as well as informal concepts rooted in folk cultures. Second, Asiacentrists should explore the interconnections among various concepts in order to holistically reveal the deeper structures of Asian cultural worldviews and values. Third, they should engage in Asiacentric comparisons of cultural concepts and their communicative implications (Chen & Miike, 2006).

The Asian perspective does not mean blindly neglecting

or rejecting Western theories, but instead paying close attention to Asian philosophical, cultural, social, political, economic, and traditional roots, and integrating this knowledge and experience with contemporary knowledge and experience. It is a balancing of the Eastern and Western theories.

It is important to expand the field of communication studies by engaging with diverse non-Western viewpoints (Dissanayake, 2003), while also drawing constructively from Western intellectual traditions. Such an approach encourages epistemological balance rather than exclusion, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of communication phenomena across different cultural contexts. Asia, which comprises more than half of the world's population, is still perceived as lagging behind the West in communication research (Ang & Zhou, 2023). This reflects deeper structural and historical imbalances in global knowledge production, where Western paradigms have long dominated theoretical development and academic legitimacy.In response to this imbalance, Asia-centric approach have emerged as critical intellectual movement. These perspectives do not advocate the rejection of Western theories but instead emphasize the necessity of developing contextually grounded frameworks that reflect Asian philosophical, cultural, and social realities. As such, the goal is not theoretical isolation but rather theoretical pluralism, where multiple epistemologies coexist and enrich one another in the global academic discourse.

Conclusion

The development of Asian communication is not merely a matter of following Western-based communication theories. Asian scholars need to see their ground and the digging of their roots of knowledge. In this regard, as Alatas (2000) described,' the emancipation of the mind from the shackles of intellectual imperialism is the major condition for the development of a creative and autonomous social science tradition in developing societies'(p.44). I think this is also important for developed Asian societies, including Japan and South Korea. 'Asian languages,

religious-philosophical traditions, and historical struggles are vast storehouses from which we can develop concepts, principles, propositions, and models for communication studies in Asia' (Chen &Miike, 2006, p. 4). However, it does not mean that Western models cannot explain non-Western situations.

'The call for alternative discourses in Asian social sciences does not imply any cultural homogeneity in Asia, or that there is anything like an Asian branch of social sciences. It does suggest, however, that the social sciences, like any form of knowledge, take place in a social and historical context, and must be relevant in this context'(Alataes, 2010, p. 172).

Wimal Dissanayake (2003) identifies four areas that could be productively explored in coming up with Asian approaches to communication. 'The first is the investigation of classical texts, which would yield valuable insights into communication. These are texts of a philosophical nature'(Dissanayake, 2003, p. 19).'A second area for exploration is the vast storehouse of concepts that could be recovered from classical traditions and current cultural practices. This is an area in which much valuable work has already been done'(Dissanayake, 2003, p. 19).'Third, the whole arena of rituals and performances (folk-plays, folk-dances, ballads, rituals, and ceremonies) could provide us with a valuable cultural space in which to examine traditional concepts of communication and communication practices. These can be religious, social, and communal activities (Dissanayake, 2003, p. 19), and 'fourth, it is important that we pay close attention to the day-to-day communication behaviors and see how they have been understood and discursively enflamed by traditional cultures'(Dissanayake, 2003, p. 19). One of the main problems in the development of Asian communication studies is that the remarkable potential of Asian scholars remains hindered by a colonial mindset.

Even Asian communication textbooks are also Western textbooks or their translations. Syllabuses are not given adequate attention for their traditional and philosophical knowledge

roots. Most countries are far from adequately funding research on their own grounds. Mostly, they take policy decisions based on research reports from the West across different fields. The critical problem is the lack of understanding of the importance of conducting communication research in their countries. It is also the case that opportunities for training in Communication research are not satisfactory. It can also be seen that, even though dissemination of new knowledge among relevant stake holders and general public is important, due to some barriers such as not enough translators, limited amount of experienced writers on research finding based articles for general public, attitudinal limitations on research based media contents, difficulties on publishing research reports, limited opportunities for publishing research reports in index journals and most of the indexed journals and published in the West and when publishing reports to be met publisher's requires /guidelines, financial difficulties when buying quality journals and publications in developing countries are among the main issues.

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