NATIONAL MEDIA SYSTEMS AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE 21ST C. THE CASE OF SOUTH EAST ASIA IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOCOMMUNICATION

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Ivelyna Vatova. National Media Systems and Communication Strategies in the 21st c. The Case of South East Asia in the Context of Geocommunication.

Abstract: The geocommunication model is an innovative theoretical model in social science and relies on the perception and internalization of images in the flexible relationship between the World outside us and the World inside us in active persuasive communication in a dynamic, rapidly changing communication context. In this sense, geocommunication is a constant socialization-emancipating globally transformative process. The national media systems of the JIA countries are positioned in a wider and complex systemic context as a structural element of the relevant communication strategy for the participation of the state as a subject of international communication and, therefore, an integral part of the national doctrine of development in the cosmopolitan world of the 21st century. The proposed text is part of a complex multifaceted study of the media images of countries from East, South and Southeast Asia, unique to Bulgarian media studies, according to their national communication strategies, and was developed through an integral multidisciplinary methodology.

Keywords: geocommunication, regionalism, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, national media systems, global holistic change, globalized status quo.

Introduction

After the Cold War and its bipolar ideological model and the post-Cold War and its unipolar value model, global society enters a transition stage of holistic change when the world status quo should be transformed. The old dialogue direction from the relationWest-East into an East-West one, taking into account the paradigm If there is no Other, there would be no Self. The most appropriate synthesis of this current global situation is demonstrated by the principle Get to know the Other in order to understand the Other; understand the Other to communicate with the Other; communicate with the Other to reach a goodwill agreement with the Other". In this

global context international communication, as a dynamic process, is changing its face.

At the end of the 20th c. and the onset of the new 21st c., a new communication paradigm and a new information order are in progress. Geocommunication as human activity has been born.

Geocommunication[1]. The New International Communication. Theoretical Perspective

Geocommunication Model steps on three pillars: sociotechnological, sociocultural and image-making; and three fundamental notions: information (cultural product); culture (context creating this product); communication (change). The essentiality of international communication is either invasive, imported and culturally cosmopolitan, or defensive, resistant and culturally nationalist. and is encoded in two power concepts: nationalism, memorized Self (I)-identiy; and cosmopolitanism, actual Self (I)-interest; together, they are positioning the Self in the existing global context of the Other, and so, converting both via networking exchange of knowledge power in the information age whose economy is knowledge economy (socialization-emancipation process). In this process personal image means a synthesized image of a nation and state. It counts for holistic creativity. If so, geocommunication, per se, in the communication field (Self)I-Other creates a new subject: a holistic, nationally aware civilized cosmopolitan, flexible strategic communicator with a higher ability to register and quickly analyze the current state of the system environment and its deviations in order to build up the needed competence as a prognostic perspective thinker.

The Faces of the Other Asia

It is the image of the SouthEast Asia (SEA) as a collective Other: ancient history and culture, humiliating colonialism, political independence, confused post-colonial development and pro-Western elites, strong nationalism, many languages and ethnicities, great poverty and the happiest peoples in the world. Meanwhile, it opens a space for intensifying East-West dialogueness. The temporal stage, defined by the West as a Cold War, for the SEA peoples is a time of hot wars, conflicts, coups, military regimes and, all together, a vast economic development

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[1] See in: VATOVA, Ivelyna.Geocommunication: an innovative model of international communication in the 21st century. IN: *Young Researchers, Conference Proceedings,* 2018, Sofia. University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'. (Ed. by Assoc. Prof.DSc ZAMFIROV, Milen). Sofia, St Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2019, vol. 1.

due to the financial aid coming from the same West, the former colonizer; the SEA growth rates are unattainable for the West, per se, and, therefore, it calls them an economic miracle, a change consistent with the specifics of the regional historical continuity, as Daya Thussu[2] notes. The personal image of this historical continuity is extremely complex and developmentalist. Regional similarities exist despite different political systems. However, they do so on the surface; differences come out, if closely examined.

The SEA national media systems are among the most appreciated channels of international communication, either bilateral or multilateral at regional and global levels. Comparative analysis is focusing on mediated macro-level and is based on criteria as a political system, political culture, political parallelism, ownership, state control, media freedom and censorship.

There is an explicitly asymmetric communication between the politically independent SEA states and the West, respectively and mainly the USA.

De-Westernized and "Illiberal" Democracy[3]

Erosion of democratic freedoms, as perceived in the West, in countries such as Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, is a real fact: governments are assessed as enemies of democracy, human rights and, recently, of the Internet; civil society is weak and underdeveloped[4], promotion of models, not inherently compatible with the traditional local mentality and values, occurs to be inoperative and inefficient, national societies are depoliticized, the interest is to survive in a functional environment where institutions are tools for marginalizing the target ethnic communities (Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar). Most Indonesians, for example, perceive economic development and daily prosperity as dominant priorities and are ready to avoid their democratic rights because of economic security. This may explain why Indonesians do not pay attention to political parties, why military regimes are accepted as something relatively normal in almost the entire region. Currently, the SEA has the largest proportion of the young population, worldwide, which gives a chance to younger democratic leaders to call for new development reforms (Indonesia, Singapore, Taiwan). Regional communication

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[2] THUSSU, Daya K. International Communication: Continuity and Change. London: Sage Publications, 2019, p.11.
[3] FORD, Lindsey W. and Ryan HASS. Democracy in Asia. brookings.edu [online]. January 22, 2019. Available from: https://www.brookings.edu/archive/democracy-in-asia/
[4] PAGET, Karen M. Patriotic Betrayal. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, p. 45; and also at: BEST-NORTH, Emma. The Stolen History of the CIA and the Asian Foundation. muckrock.com [online]. November 2, 2017. [cited August 11, 2018]. Available from: https://www.muckrock.com/news/archives/2017/nov/02/.

networks and their media systems have been gradually built. This generates pressure on local national governments and creates communication links with the international community, globally by regional networking via NGOs as Asia Democracy Network (Cambodia, Taiwan, Hongkong) or East Asia Democracy Forum in Taiwan. Although slowly, it helps civil society to be developed (regionalization of international communication) and the SEA to be incorporated into the world (horizontal globalization). Political and conversational literacy of national societies, per se, increases.

Meanwhile, China is becoming more visible while offering its own version of solving regional and global social and economic problems. The perceptibility of some other states is also increasing; such is the case of Indonesia, for example. The creation of a new own, personal image is in progress. This reveals the face of the Other's Asia. And the face is a special value, deeply rooted in the ancient cultures of the SEA.

Challenges in front of the Regional Integration

Some of the communication deficits typical for the SEA are a lack of internal regional comprehensiveness, inter-state disagreements, a deficit of individual national capacity and collective competence to deal with the growing transnational regional issues as realistic and holistically communicative neighbours. The construction of a collective image is still a concern of political and economic national elites, only, and not of the peoples[5].

The environment is created that feeds up religious, Buddhist and Islamic, radicalism (Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia) and how to implement the vision of a caliphate of the SEA Muslim nations.

The US and China individual influences are in a clash; so, this crucial conflict of interests makes their relationship pivotal for the international communication, at large, and the regional community, as well. Convincingly the so-called 'world' mass media suggest contempt for the Chinese ascendency and fear among its neighbors; the old Monroe doctrine America for the Americans is metaphorically used to impose the perception that the PRC, viz, modifies it into Asia for the Asians. The pressure is systematically generated, but dyadicly manifested through state-to-state relationships and so it creates a proxy communication field Self (I)-Other. In the case of Indonesia, for example, the reaction to such systemic pressure is a reflection of the power level at which governing authorities are situationally positioned in this international communication field in respect to

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5 LINKLATER, Andrew. The Problem of Community in International Relations. *Alternatives*. 1990, 15, No.2, 135–153.

the power countries exerting the pressure; and, according to the pressure vigour demonstrated and in the concrete situationally composed correlation structure, Indonesia flexibly chooses strategically adequate behavior models but carefully selected in accordance to its national interest and security; however, this country is always consistent with the third key factor and demonstrates communicative interconnectivity, as well. Vietnam reacts in a different manner. The Economist directly defined the Vietnamese leaders as "fierce capitalist communists"[6].

In short, pro-capitalist economies in the SEA region gain access to the world's leading technologies, but each of them gets it at different degrees, depending on the individual support for the US initiatives in the region.

The ASEAN, being an institutionalized regional construct, deserves particular consideration as for the regional development in the 21st century. Its identity, in the post-Cold War time, approaches the SEA identity. However, it does not overlap with it. The emergence of the ASEAN+3 Initiative is a signal it will balance utterly carefully in the China-US conflictness. The message, sent to the rest of the world, is: the ASEAN countries strongly value sovereignty and are adaptable to the globalizing trends[7]; at the same time, they keep a very wary eye on China's behaviour because do not want any possible confrontation with the powerful neighbor because its initiatives offer public benefits for all. Their principle is in open regionalism as they consider also the rise of India, the other powerful Asian neighbor with a historically strong influence in the SEA that occurs to be the balancer in the PRC-USA relationship.

The ASEAN main communication tools are debate, consensus, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful conflict resolutions, and the target message is consensus, not loss of face. The meaning is encoded in the ASEAN motto – One vision, one identity, one community. The collective aspiration is to overcome the differences, respectively the distance, between individual countries in preparedness to converse on each specific issue. This mechanism is gaining popularity as the ASEAN Way, an instrument that uses three major communication techniques, the so-called 3C: compromise, consensus and consultation; i.e. non-confrontational way to deal with the problems, quiet diplomacy, a chance to communicate along the expert vertical, without constantly bringing it into the public attention. So,

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[6] A bit of everything: Vietnam's quest for role models. The Economist [online]. 24 April 2008. [cited June 23, 2019]. Available from: https://www.economist.com/special-report/2008/04/26/a-bit-of-everything

[7] ACHARYA, Amitav. Doomed by Dialogue? Will ASEAN Survive Great Power Rivalry in Asia. ASAN Forum [online]. June 29, 2015 [cited August 23, 2019]. Available from: http://www.theasanforum.org/doomed-by-dialogue-will-asean-survive-great-power-rivalry-in-asia

unnecessary communicative clashes are avoided and unnecessary media scandals are also put aside[8].

National Media Systems at the Entrance of the 21st c.

Some common characteristics and, simultaneously, some interesting distinctions frame the media face of this Asian subregion at the dawn of the 21st century.

For example, in the West paper circulations dropped down and in the SEA they went up: Hong Kong is reported (2000) as a "city of newspapers" and "media saturated" society[9]. However, paper circulations are only the peak, underneath are the readers; for example, The Thai Rath (Thailand) has a circulation of 1.2 million and its readers are six times more[10]; The Compass (Indonesia) – a circulation of 525,000 copies and readers – over two million; applicable is the "read and pass on" rule; reasons are demographic and social.

Besides, national or official language, printed editions are also published in regional and local languages but distributed throughout the entire sovereign territory, as well; languages of former colonizers are rarely used, but it seems compulsory every country to have mass media in the World English; these publishing houses and broadcasters are in the biggest cities, their targets are the middle class publics, in rural and more remote areas the audiences are more conservative, they prefer the vernacular media; in Indonesia and some provinces of Malaysia[11], in the Sultanate of Brunei they are also pro-Muslim and this develops a special kind of communication, Islamic communication, and a special type of mass media, Islamic media.

For decades on end, Chinese publications play an important role determined by the prestige and influence of the diaspora, per se, in the respective national community. In Indonesia, since the beginning of the 21st c., they have been internationalized: as investment capital, as personnel capital, as content capital, and on the other hand, the rise of China becomes a crutial factor for the development of the Chinese mediated visibility.

[8] MASILAMANI, Logan, Jimmy PETERSON. The ASEAN Way: The Structural Underpinnings of Constructive Engagement. Foreign Policy Journal, 15 October 2014, p.213.

[9] KUBISKE, Dan. Press Freedom in Hong Kong: No Easy Answers. Quill 88, April 2000, No. 3, 38-40

[10] EKACHAI, Daradirek. Thailand. IN: Handbook of the Media in Asia. (Ed. by GUNARATNE, Shelton A.) New Delhi: Sage, 2000, p. 400

[11] JOHNSON, Lloyd. Malaysia Press, Media, TV, Radio, Newspapers. pressreference.com [online]. 2002 [cited November 19, 2019]. Available from: http//: www.pressreference.com/ Ky-Ma/Malaysia. html.

Radio and television are of particular importance in countries as Indonesia, huge in territory and population. It, together with China and India, was among the first in this part of the world to create own national satellite communications systems.

Radio gets a specific function, especially in the rural areas, the larger portion of the SEA territory. On average, the audience literacy is rather unevenly distributed, higher literacy is for the urbanized areas, while the audience in the remote parts and the islands does not read, it listens; in Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia radio enjoys the highest public trust; however, not everywhere the households hold receivers, radio should be listened to in groups, at public places; so, the stereotype to collective listening is stabilized, such a behavior is closer to the traditional collective mentality of these societies; this helps people to create a selective collective mass media immunity. Digital media nowhere in the region does destroy radio. Internet gives it a chance to reach more and more audiences. The change, occurring in parallel to the advent of digitalization, is in making radio content with a higher dose of imagination.

Television is a strategic media of an essential role in formatting new national consciousness and the statehood image abroad; state gives up slowly its ownership and does it in a difficult manner, because to control television contents means to control public information and opinion, it is an important protective resource of national security.

The SEA has one of the most highly developed IT-systems and is a world leader in Internet coverage: Singapore has 100 percent of networking, this city–state is the first country in the world with a definitely complete national website[12]; Malaysia rivals it as a regional communications center[13].

In parallel with the major economic reform during the 1990s, a media reform also began in the SEA; the national media market was opened due to the communication strategy of every country, i.e. part of the respective national development doctrine.

In the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st c., Western media giants entered the regional market and international media conglomerates have been created which play an important role in the development of the media policies of each national government. The explosion of regional and transnational media[14] leads to media regionalization and is a step of the national media systems toward transformation into cosmopolitan global[15] media.

[12] KUO, Eddie, Peng Hwa ANG. Singapure. IN: Handbook of the Media in Asia. (Ed. by GUNARATNE, Shelton A.). New Delhi etc.: Sage. 2000, pp. 402–428
[13] THOMAS, Amos Owen. Imagi-Nations and Boderless Television: Media, Culture and Politics Across Asia. New Delhi, etc.: Sage Publications. 2005, 61-85
[14] THOMAS, Amos Owen. Ibidem, p. 67.
[15] Ibid. p. 76.

Although stability is a rather fluid concept, and domestic frictions, military coups and emergency regimes are a constant feature on the regional face, the leading focus is on the long-term economic development. Nor coincidence, that development journalism as a professional phenomenon emerged in the Philippines[16] and India.

Ownership everywhere is a major channel of vertical control; electronic mass media were and continue to be under a government supervision, direct or indirect; the legal regulation system is extremely strict, but frequently changed. The economic interest of the media staffs is consistent with the Asian principle "Do not challenge government as strongly as in the West". In Singapore, this means "soft self-assertiveness": on the surface is the media freedom and underneath – the controlling mechanism[17]. The Laos media system is least developed, all media are owned by the state. In Cambodia, the picture is similar: no finance, but authoritarian control; the main difference with Laos is in the political system – Cambodian is multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy. In Thailand, everyone is forbidden to write negatively about the royal family, international image of the country should be framed only and solely by positive news[18], almost all media outlets are connected to higher rank families in the state hierarchy. In Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan, television and radio are power tools in building national consciousness that consolidates society[19]. In some countries (Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines), e-mass media sector is created due to the active foreign aid (Australia, Japan, UNESCO, the UN, the US). Thailand is developing a unique radio and television management: government and army own the 500 radio stations in this country and give them on long-term lease to private entrepreneurs. The Philippines is considered one of the freest countries in terms of mass media freedom: radio and television are private, out of government control; however, programs are characterized by the so-called "colonial mentality"" and strong Americanization[20]. In Singapore local mass media are under direct government control, as was mentioned above, but the city-state is a regional communications hub for the international broadcasters and media companies producing audio-visual products for the whole East Asian region. In Malaysia, the communications development is

[16] BELLO, Walden Flores et. al. The Anti-Developmental State: The Political Economy of Permanent Crisis in the Philippines. London: Zed Books, 2004, 198-210

[17] UNNITHAN, Prabha N. Singapore Press, Media, TV, Radio, Newspapers. pressreference.com [online]. 2002 [cited July 12, 2019]. Available from: www.pressreference.com/Sa-Sw/Singapure.html

[18] PAQUETTE, William. A. Thailand Press, Media, TV, Radio, Newspapers. pressreference.com [online]. 2002 [cited November 14, 2019]. Available from: http://www.pressreference.com/Sw-Ur/Thailand.html

[19] THOMAS, Amos Owen. Transnational Media and Contoured Markets. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006, 81-102

[20] MASLOG, Crispin. Philippines. IN: Handbook of the Media in Asia. (Ed. by GUNARATNE, Shelton A.) New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000, 372-401

high, and the direct state intervention is also serious, the so-called "info-capsules" of national Bernama TA and the first 24-hour news radio, Radio24, (2007) are well-known. In Myanmar, electricity is available in only 10 percent of the territory, in 2005 there were only two television and two radio stations, government's Burma: Broadcasting Service is only for the urban population, broadcasts only carefully approved programs, no Western music is included, but the BBC and VOA can be heard; the state television broadcasts only on Saturdays and Sundays only in the evenings only show programs; the internet is rare.

In the constitutions of all countries press freedom is formulated as a human right; every government claims it respects this right; however, censorship, in its various forms, is necessarily included in the national communication strategies as a useful tool to implement national mass media policies, especially in the international communication because of the desire to create a positive state and nation image in the field Self (I) – Other (Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore). Its most effective controlling form is the economic one; self-censorship is strong everywhere, from Singapore to Malaysia and Thailand, through Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, the Philippines and Indonesia. Since the beginning of the 21st c., the cumulative interaction effect of media-state relationship has been changed into the so-called "second-hand reality"[21].

Duncan McCargo, a long-time SEA researcher, defines three media roles: conservative, as "agents of stability" and defenders of the status quo (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam); balancing, as "agents of deterrence", constantly monitoring the governance behavior through the "check-balance" tool (East Timor, Indonesia); and transformative, as "agents of change" in cases of political transformations and crisis (Thailand, Indonesia)[22].

Reporters Without Borders announced that in 2014[23] the SEA countries were ranked between 77 and 174 out of 180 countries in respect to press freedom. East Timor, the region's newest sovereign state, demonstrated the greatest freedom, the Philippines is "partly free", Malaysia is "unfree"; there are some positive developments in Indonesia and Myanmar; Thailand is said to be a "mystery" for analysts and some of them (McCargo) note some progress in speech and press freedom since the beginning of the 21st c.; however, all observers warn the cases related to the lèsé-majesté law have been increasing and this leads to increasement of journalist punishments, as well.

[21] DE ALWIS, Akshan. Breaking Freedom Press in South East Asia. Diplomatic Courier [online]. August 24, 2016 [cited August 12, 2019]. Avaialble at: https://www.diplomaticourier.com/posts/breaking-freedom-press-south-east-asia

[22] McCARGO, Duncan. Media and Politics in Pacific Asia. London, New York: Routledge. 2003, 187-203.

[23] WORLD Press Freedom Index 2014. rsf.org. [online]. 2014 [cited June 12, 2015]. Available from: https://rsf.org/en/world-press-freedom-index-2014

Conclusion

One of the globalization effects is precisely glocalization, visible through the reality of the other, "illiberal" democracy, characterized as a sociopolitical process by diversity in progress: developmentalist (Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore), military (Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, the Philippines). Asian values concept originates from the SEA (Singapore, Malaysia). Religion is one of the major identity forming factor in the realm of national politics, and it gives rise to separatist movements (Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar) and ethnic extremist violence (Indonesia, Malaysia, Phillippines, Myanmar).

Obviously, geocommunication is emerging, increasingly indisputably, as a worldwide practice of change in the context of status quo, as a holistic transformative irreversible process. The global periphery breaks previously geopolitical and geoeconomic behavior of the world, accepts globalization as a Western model and builds a new global center, changes the very paradigm of the existing international order, in general, and of the information system, in particular, and defines it as geocommunication.

In 2000, Amitav Acharya predicted that "the regional concept is about to happen and to become a sustainable reality". However, this depends, ever so much, on external processes: political (democratization), economic (globalization), strategic (geocommunication).

In the Internet era with its knowledge economy, geocommunication, being per se in a developing process, more and more intensively transforms the message into media.

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