

Mass Media in Asia

— A social perspective —

Kim Kyu-whan*

1. Societies in Transition

In 1776 Adam Smith with his classic "The Wealth of Nations" provided a rationale for capitalist society. In the ensuing two centuries human society has grown into a predominantly industrial society. Indeed, the speed with which a nation can apply science and technology to production has become a primary determinant of her political destiny.

Industrialization, starting in the West, resulted in the rest of the world's becoming subordinate to the West. Gunnar Myrdal, precisely expressed the nature of his "Asian Drama" by giving it the subtitle of "Poverty of Nations."

Western industrialization by accentuating the relative poverty of Asia eventually engendered Asian awareness that Asian problems had to be solved by Asians themselves. However, it has not been easy for a by-stander of history to assume the role of the hero. For much depended upon such things as the social potentiality of the Asian countries as well as a sense of purpose among their leaders to develop modern industrial societies.

Generalizing about Asian characteristics, traditional religions in Asia had been closely inter-related with national ideologies. Economy based on petty farming was dominant. The social universe of the farmers never extended beyond the limit of clan villages,

The double shock of western capitalism and Japanese militaristic capitalism broke up the Asian stagnation. However, following World War II, and the widespread attainment of political independence, political subordination began to yield to a division based on development and underdevelopment. Since the outbreak of the Cold War between East and West, the problem of under-developed areas has emerged as a major issue in the political competition of the two blocs which have offered competing strategies of social and economic development.

* Dean of Graduate School of Mass Communication, Seoul National University

Colin Clark, as early as in 1950s set a dividing line between the developed and under-developed areas. According to his definition, Asian countries together with many areas in the rest of the world belonged to the under-developed areas. Today, 20 years later, even though per capita incomes in Asian countries have risen, the relative position of the Asian countries, excepting only Japan, remains unchanged due to the rise in per capita incomes in the other parts of the world.

What, then, are the social causes of this backwardness in Asia a quarter of century after World War II? Experience has shown that increased production is not a sovereign cure and that modernization is an aggregate of the ability of the whole society.

The first step toward Asian modernization must be a highly sophisticated acknowledgement of the fact that modernization cannot be achieved by merely transplanting industrial machines of the West on pre-modern soil. Through trial and error we came to realize that modernization involves integrated social change with the system of production organically related to this integrated change.

A United Nations annual report for 1951 pointed out that the agricultural productivity per farmer in the United States was 2.5 tons, in Europe a little over 1 ton and in Asia 0.22 ton. If we look at productivity figures alone, the Asian farmers appear one tenth as efficient American farmers. However, what the figures really indicate is not so much the lower ability of Asian farmers as the anti-productive structures of Asian societies.

Then, what factors underline these anti-productive structures? First, the agricultural structure in Asia was dominated by landlords, who were concerned only with the maximum utilization of the land and labor while entirely ignoring the importance of agricultural technology and the social status of agricultural labourers. Consequently, traditional social relationships remained unchanged. Landlords saw no immediate incentive to improve agricultural productivity or to develop modernized way of human relationships.

Land reform, which became a favorite administrative device in many countries following independence, has failed to prevent the fruits of the farmers' work from falling into the hands of the landlords or usurers because it was not conceived as a basic condition for fundamentally modernizing the industrial structure of society but merely as a part of the government investment for economic development. Land reform, in a word, neglected the

political aspect of modernization for narrowly conceived economic ends.

Furthermore, population growth and landlordism accelerated the fragmentation of farms, impoverishing the farmers and the land through erosion. In a case like Korea, where wood is used for fuel, deforestation became an additional impediment to modernization.

Second, we may cite difficulty in capital accumulation under such agricultural conditions. Understandably, such conditions tended to limit the investment of national capital to secondary industries. Foreign capital or financial assistances brought in by the governments as a remedy to this difficulty often encouraged wide-spread irresponsibility among the key industries, causing what Max Weber had termed "political capitalism" or "pariah capitalism" to prevail to which the rest of social spheres were forced to adjust.

Third, although economic development program in the LDCs swelled the number of industrial workers, most of them, being former agricultural workers who had left farms as a result of the general breakdown in the agricultural economy, lacked social awareness, occupational consciousness, and the mechanical aptitudes which are the pre-conditions to the formation of a labor class. The military experiences that Asians in increasing numbers have undergone in anti-communist struggles or for national security might have contributed to the creation of a sort of industrial reserve corps. However, the limited length of service and the lack of cohesion of such people as a social group hinder their consolidation into such an industrial reserve corps. We can hardly expect that a positive attitude toward work and ready adoptability can be generated in industrial workers who have had to be content with very poor working and living conditions. Moreover, while there was no general political recognition of the laborers, they did not possess the self-consciousness to integrate themselves into a social group or class.

Fourth, Along with such regressive traits among industrial workers, Asian entrepreneurs in Asian countries tended to become political rather than rational in the earlier stages of capital accumulation. The propensity for emphasizing quick profits and dependence on political support necessarily led to an unreasonable rise in the cost of production, which inevitably drove prices of domestic products to the level of foreign products, hampering the development of secondary industries. In spite of domestic labor available at lower wages, the excessively high cost of production caused by international manipulation of

prices of imported raw materials as well as domestic political manipulation made the economic systems much more dependent upon foreign countries.

In short, what I call the anti-productive structures in Asia derive mostly from non-economic factors. Furthermore their solution must be pursued on a broad front, not just with economic programs.

2. The Asian Mentality

Secondary industries could not develop in countries where Asian stagnation had persisted through the traditional tie between wealth (land) and political powers. Even after independence, the situation remained essentially unchanged. This continuity, as Myron Weiner pointed out, inevitably strengthened traditionalism, which "by virtue of its hostility to social innovation, is necessarily antithetical to the development of modernization." The proprietary class in developing countries inevitably had to play the role of the political class. That is why "modernization" or "industrialization" in Asia has been limited to social changes within this framework.

Just as Joseph Schumpeter had called Western imperialism the atavism of the feudal age of absolutism, we might as well call various phenomena in the new Asian states forms of atavism of the imperialistic-militaristic colonial rules. We can see one of the most remarkable manifestations of this atavism in the way boundaries were drawn for the new independent countries. In the cases of Indonesia, the separation of India and Pakistan, the independence of Ceylon, the division of Korea, and the establishment of the 17th parallel in Vietnam, new territorial boundaries were determined by the relationships among the colonial powers which entirely ignored the historical and cultural backgrounds of the countries involved. Only defeated Japan was fortunate enough to be restored to her original historic and cultural borders. These contrasting facts shaped the future courses of Japan and the rest of the Asian countries. While Japan could concentrate on re-integration, other Asian countries were driven into wars or civil struggles for the re-adjustment of the borderlines.

Now, what about the atavism of the colonial age in our way of thinking?

If we accept national income as a measure for underdeveloped countries, that is, if the

per capita income in a under-developed country A is \$100 while that in a post-industrial country B is \$4000, the material life in the country A would be one-fortieth that in the country B. In other words, the degree of the people's discontent in the country A would be 40 times greater than in country B.

The masses in the Asian countries neither demonstrated xenophobia as a group nor fomented revolution despite the unfair distribution of wealth, which, to the eyes of the westerners, looked like revolutionary tinder. Why, Because the force of traditionalism was at work.

Even though the masses became aware, partly through mass communication, of better conditions in advanced countries as well as the irrationality in their own economic life, in the function of the governments, and in their rights and responsibilities as citizens, they continued fatalistically to tolerate their positions. The lower classes, although unhappy about their own status, which was as bad as that in colonial days, never considered themselves as the victims of social injustice.

In short, traditional values have not entirely lost influence in Asian countries.

Japan and China were the first Asian countries to import modern factories. Although both countries did so for military reasons, the difference in their purposes eventually affected the destiny of these two countries even after World War II. Japanese industrialization was started in order to strengthen her military power to resist the pressures of the western powers. National consensus quickly formed behind her growing militarism, which led to Japan's later invasion of the Continent and the Pacific War. While Japanese industrialization did develop transportation and communication as well as a pool of industrial workers, it, being other-oriented, did not radically change the social structure inherited from the Meiji era.

In contrast, China's motive for industrialization was protection of the Ching dynasty against the Taiping rebellion. Thus industrialization in China, from the beginning, was inner-oriented-toward resolving internal conflict which developed into the conflict between the Kuomintang and the Communist parties.

Here, I am using "other-orientedness" or "inner-orientedness" merely to give sociological perspective to my examination of Asian societies in 1970s. Although David Riesman's

three types of personality were worked out of his study of American society in particular, I think they have certain aspects that can be applied in general to the examination of the developmental process of any capitalistic society. For in the earlier stage of capitalistic development, the personality type tends to be inner-oriented because people lean upon their own rationality as their frame of references while the traditional framework is in the process of breaking down and new standards are yet to be established. On the other hand, in the age of mass production, or under highly developed developed capitalism, the dominant personality type can not be but other-oriented. What happened in Asia was no exception in this aspect. At the first stage of industrialization, when the agrarian societies began to collapse under the challenge of western capitalism, intellectuals played the major role in attacking the traditional values. Kang Yu-wei and Sun Yat-sen of China were examples.

Natural science instead of religion or superstition and law instead of custom gradually became the standards of the people in the readjustment of their attitudes and ways of life. While modernization in the West took nearly 200 years, the readjustment in Asia had to be achieved only within several decades.

Before land capital could be transformed into industrial capital, Asian countries had been thrown into the vortex of the international competition of capitalism. In many cases, the leaders or the intellectuals of newly-born independent countries had been forced to carry out their economic development programs without well-thought-out strategies.

Excessive trials and errors not only resulted in enormous waste but also caused many political and business leaders to lose perspective and judgment, mistaking the means for the end. They suddenly changed their tradition-oriented personalities into other-oriented personalities, indiscriminately imitating the models of the advanced countries.

To justify their other-oriented personalities, they often referred to the example of the United States which after her independence from England achieved faster development than the mother country itself, or that of Japan which technologically excelled the West from which she had originally imported technology. Their way of thinking is almost exclusively economy-centered, slighting other social conditions essential to the real economic development. It can be said that such thinking is characteristic of industrialization in the conser-

vative framework.

I do not mean that such "other-orientatedness" of Asian leaders has completely banished their nationalist traits. These impulses now express themselves in commercial competition or sports instead of the proto-nationalism exemplified in the March I Independence Movement of Korea or the May 4 Culture Movement in China.

3. Common Features and Differences

The first common feature of Asian countries is that all, except Thailand, have experienced foreign domination. However, the experiences differed according to whether the countries were ruled by western countries or by Japan; in the former, domination was indirect while in the latter, direct.

In a country of indirect foreign domination such as India, the development of a civil service system with native participation was possible because British colonial policy emphasized exploitation through a company system, which acted as the agent of the home government without changing the traditional social structure of India.

The Japanese administrator of Korea and Manchuria was different in that it was direct administration which sought to Japanize the social and cultural structures of the colonies. Japan termed its colonial domination "annexation." The difference in the two kinds of colonialism created a great difference in the after-images of their former colonial powers. In Japanese colonies, the Japanese and the native people were in direct contact. Therefore, the people's image of the post-war Japanese in such countries, being formed out of direct contact, tended to be a mixture of political calculation and humanistic emotion. To Asians, therefore, Japanese can become the object of both love or hatred.

On the other hand, in the former western colonies, the contacts were indirect. Because the colonial rulers contacted only a part of the upper class people or those who had been raised in the western culture, the masses of the colonies could form their images of the westerners only through their limited contacts with their leaders. Thus, their image was idealized rather than empirical. Sociologically speaking, it was an image fashioned from a distance. Therefore it could be easily forgotten.

All Asians, however, had come to share one idea: that westerners were superior to yellow

people.

Since 1900 Japan has made two significant contributions to the Asian cause: namely, victory in the Russo-Japanese in 1904 War and its rise to the world's third ranking economic power in 1970. However, in the thirties Japan itself became a new object of Asian xenophobia. It was only after the end of the World War II that Japan could exorcise the inferiority complex from Asian minds out stripping almost every country, not in military but in industrial competition. Japan had aroused in Asian minds a sense of their own capabilities.

Before 1960, Asian countries in the process of modernization were all in the habit of importing industrial models from Detroit, cultural models from Hollywood, and social models from the New Deal, the Era of Franklin D. Roosevelt. But in 1970s, to Asians, Japan surely will supplant Detroit. However, whether Asian will seek for cultural models in Hong Kong or social models in New Delhi remains uncertain. An Asian consensus has not been materialized on these matters. It could be implied that Japan, in spite of her productivity, has been unsuccessful in establishing her identity as an Asian country acceptable to the rest of the Asian countries.

The realization of Asian identity will be the pre-requisite for the integration of the Asian countries into a regional community. It is not a matter that can be solved by Japan's production power alone but rather settled through cooperation among the Asian countries. If a clue to this problem is found, then it will certainly be the first step toward regional democracy in Asia, definitely a new historical stage, which will provide a sturdier foundation fundamental for collective Asian security than collective defense by arms. Such a development would be a recreation, in a modern industrial society, of the spiritual unity of Asia several thousand years ago.

4. A Prospect

Despite of different historical backgrounds and cultural traits, the Asian countries share the common aspiration for modernized societies. But, many of them cherish different moral philosophy and values toward life and death, wealth and poverty, and justice and injustice from those of the West and America which are rooted in the Christianity. Particularly,

the peculiar view of those Asian people toward rationalism and materialism has been a cause of the Asian backwardness.

It is true that the Asian societies are undergoing rapid changes. As traditional Japanese culture is vanishing out of sight in Tokyo, similar phenomena are happening in other big cities of Asian countries. But, a perfect westernization is not our ideal goal. It would be desirable if Asia could achieve economic prosperity and technological innovation on the soil of the Asian identity, paradoxical as it might sound.

It is widely argued that in 10 years, the U.S. and European countries may develop post-industrial societies or so-called information societies. Japan also may be thoroughly computerized by the same time. It is envisaged that in such societies more than half of the population will be concentrated in urban areas, the per capita income will exceed \$3,000, and more than half of the population will be attending colleges. To the Asian countries, except Japan, however, this is still a wonderland in dream.

Although the average growth rate in GNP of the Asian countries shows not much difference from that of the advanced countries, the higher population growth rate in the former might result in a new form of polarization of the world. The technological gap between urban population in advanced countries and rural population in Asia will aggravate in a few decades. There are still many areas in Asia where traditional values prevail and the people enjoy almost no benefit of industrial society. This polarization of the world society can pose a serious problem and, at the same time, may aggravate the existing polarization within Asian societies themselves.

The Asian people hopefully anticipate in the transitional period of their modernization process:

1. That industrialization will bring about such social effects of modernization as rapid population movement and urbanization, social mobility, and changes in the way of life and values. It does not follow, however, that because similar social effects had occurred in the earlier stage of the western industrialization, Asia should follow in the footsteps of the West. Particularly, we should strive for the establishment of democratic Asian regional cooperation instead of the national egotism of the western countries in the past.

2. That the absence of democracy can hinder the Asian development. The forced disci-

discipline and enforcement of controlling mechanism in all aspects of social activities will curtail the voluntary participation of the people in the national development. Maldistribution of the wealth might help strengthen the power for industrial investment, but it has the danger of aggravating people's frustration and social disorder. Establishment of social justice will be the primary factor for successful modernization in Asia.

3. That the advanced countries will readjust their economic and technical assistance programs to the underdeveloped countries in Asia and other parts of the world so as to contribute toward balanced development of a Global family. If the Asian population should suffer from the relative poverty in 30 years to come, the future of mankind looks very dark. That is why some argue that certain percentage of the expenses invested for the arms race by the U.S. and other world powers should be earmarked for the development of the underdeveloped countries.

4. That mass media should be utilized with higher intelligence and sense of moral responsibility as an institution for mass education, demonstrating leadership in social development by providing wisdom and visions to their leaders. The function of media as watchman, as Wilbur Schramm has put, should not be confined to the environmental changes alone, but be extended into the economic and social systems and the leaders wherein.