

The Communication Studies as a Discipline of Social Science In Korea—Review and Prospect

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It was in the latter half of the 1950s that the interest in the communication studies as a social science was first introduced to this country. Until the early 1960s, however, this interest had been confined to the historical reviews of journalism, a normative approach to the relationship between journalism and political power, and identification of the professional journalistic problems.

This period may well be described as a stage in which emphasis was laid on the study of media's communication process and its social role. In an evolutionary history of communication, this phase of development falls under what was called by Raymond Nixon as a stage of conceptional formation and exploration.

In 1960, the Communication Research Institute was founded at the Seoul National University. From the following year, this institute began to turn out research papers dealing with content analyses and social surveys, creating an environment for positive and empirical research methods.

In retrospect, in this early years of the communication studies in the early 1960s, the primary task was to establish a synthetic and inter-disciplinary research method, by borrowing as much knowledge as possible from adjacent science. Another task was the theoretical formulation of mass communication study through empirical research methods.

In 1968, when the Seoul National University Graduate School of Mass Communications was born as an offspring of the SNU Communication Research Institute, the Communication studies in this country was uplifted from its fledgling stage toward further growth, and went into full swing.

Following this, mass communication research gained new momentum and beginning in 1970s a good many number of master's thesis papers were presented, thus establishing empirical approach in the communication research in this country.

The Korean Society for journalism and Mass Communication studies which had remained relatively idle since 1959 resumed its activities in 1968. It was at this time that the

communication studies in this country entered into a new period of development, and then it entered into a period of full-fledged growth in the 1970s.

By this time, communication educator, who returned from America with an empirical American scholarly tradition, began to stand before the classes, transplanting sophisticated and refined empirical research methodologies.

While refinement of methodology proceeded, the research areas were also expanded noticeably. The research projects of the Seoul National University Communication Research Institute focused on content analyses, but in the 1970s, greater attention was turned to surveys on the communication receiver, and the research was extended to interactions between the communicator and the communication receiver.

While the research continued to concentrate on journalism's functions of interpreting or recording what is happening, there had been efforts to establish the communication as an independent discipline through development of theories and methodology.

On that sense, the first half of the 1970s can be described as a theory-developing period during which the attitude change theory of Hovland L. Festinger and others were introduced. Along with the sociological theory of Lazarsfeld, this theory had become one of the two mainstays of the communication theories.

As research methods, the employment of content analysis and social survey became dominant and additionally laboratory studies were introduced. By then, the communication studies in Korea was no longer merely a "knowledge about mass media" but it tended to become a behavioral social science which empirically analyse the social communication process.

Currently, the Korean Society for Journalism and Communication has a membership of 110 researchers, 70 of them are active professors and the rest are those engaged in the mass media and public relations field.

In the opinion of this writer, several groups seem to be existing in the research area of mass communication studies in a broader sense.

One of them is a group that may be called as a normative school, who are concerned with the freedom of press and legal and ethical norms, dealing with the people's right to know, the media's right of access to information (or news), right to protect the secrecy of news sources and right to communicate. More recently, they have been concerned with the question how to strike a balance among national development, communication and international flow of information.

The second group is a historical school, who from the outset have undertaken the work of chronologically editing the history of mass media, writing them into histories of the press, broadcasting and other media. Recently, they are working on a general history of the mass communications evolution.

The third group is an empirical school. They are again divided into macro communication theorists employing social communication approach and micro communication theorists using psychological approach. The former group use social survey research methods, focusing on the surveys of opinions, attitudes contacts and receptions of the communicators in the mass media and the communication receivers (or audience).

The latter group concentrate on the research of communication effects as affected by the controls of variables such as source, message, media and audience through laboratory experiments. To take a perspective view of the current mass communication studies in Korea, we can discover the following trends and problems.

In Korea, the mass communication studies have moved on toward constant expansion of research interest areas and refinement of methodology. The research interests have been extended from the research of various small media and a research centered on message in the early days to the research into the interpersonal interactions.

The research methods have reached a new level of sophistication, while shifting from the normative and evaluative approach to a trend of greater emphasis on verification and observation; from a content analysis method to a social survey method or laboratory experiments; from qualitative analysis to quantitative analysis; and from research into single variable to research of multi-variables.

While the normative and historical studies of journalism is emphasizing empirical demonstrations and factual background, the empirical approach is turning more attention to the "human interests" and "situation" factors, thus achieving cross exchanges and mutual complements between research fields and methods.

Therefore, when a researcher discuss the right to communicate, for example, he tries to avoid saying "what must be done", and instead takes an approach of surveying opinions and facts latent in the public consciousness and trying to formulize them.

The mass communications study in the 1980s has entered a "third phase," in which cross exchanges and mutual complementing were taking place between micro and macro approaches, and between normative and empirical approaches. In the meantime, new theories such as attribution theory and coorientation theory were being introduced com-

manding wide attention.

Greater efforts have been made on the study of cultivation effects and agenda-setting effects, which can be viewed as an attempt to achieve a synthetic formularization of the mass communication effects. While the development communication arguments were losing interests, there have been lively debate on the arguments for New World Information Order (NWIO).

These relatively new theories are now in the concept-evolving pilot study stage, but when they are developed more fully, they are expected to bring greater fruition in the mass communications study field of the 1980s.

Despite its brilliant progress in the past two decades, the communication studies in Korea still has many things to solve. Now, let me discuss these things in the order of the theoretical and methodological issue; the problems of research and practical application; and the relationship between journalism and education.

First, this writer should like to point out that the communication studies are like something little short of a mosaic made by pieces of model concepts from the adjacent sciences without being able to establish its own theoretical system, though it has endeavored to become a separate discipline of social science.

This is not to say, however, that we have to insist on preserving the independence of the communication studies as a branch of social science and neglect its connections with other adjacent sciences, but that along with its independence, we have to endeavor to build up a synthetic inter-disciplinary approach in a true sense.

As communication is a matter of "human beings" and "society", cooperation with (participation of) other allied sciences as well as the specialization of the communication theories in each professional field is needed to solve communication problems as they arise.

Next, because of the scholarly demands of the communication studies, it is essential to adopt an empirical approach, and yet it would be a mistaken assumption that this approach alone is sufficient to solve any communication problems. What is important is how to overcome the limits of that empirical approach.

Recently, empirical researchers often talk about "human interests" and about the need for a "philosophy". As equally important as the employment of the empirical methods is an organic system of methodology that accommodates the multiplicity of the human truths, and relativity of the social values.

In connection with this problems inherent in the mass communications study, this writer

think it necessary to further diversify the researches; introduce methods for more accurate and precise surveys (or develop more sophisticated and refined methodologies); and above anything else, to make researchers develop deeper insights and perceptions into the core of problems.

It is the reality of mass communication studies in this country that the results of the American research are applied in this country without revision. Finally, there is a question of industry education cooperation. It involves a question how the communication studies can contribute to the training of the professional journalists and how to strike a balance between this training needs and the academic studies.

The tasks lying ahead of us is how to improve the methods and curriculums of the basic education at the university departments and how to expand and increase the efficiency of the reeducation programs for the journalists at the graduate school and research institutes.

Looking back on the past 20 years of the communication study in Korea, we can say this much, this writer thinks, that although as a fledgling science it has experienced many tests and difficulties through its infancy and growth, and still has many things to solve, the communication studies in Korea now is on the threshold of take-off toward fuller maturity and holds a bright prospect.