

Retrospect and Prospect of Communication Research as a Social Science in Japan

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Communication is a basic social process of human society and plays a very important function in various fields. Every kind of human society, from a small homogeneous primitive societies to a huge heterogeneous contemporary society, can not exist without communication. It plays a basic function at every level of human interaction from small group interrelations to international relations. Therefore, the research of process and function of communication in various aspects of human society shall be a basic field of social science. It is not only valuable by itself but also effective tool to be used when analyzing other social processes and problems. Communication research as a social science has been established and the so-called communication approach has been developed as an effective method to study the other social phenomena, as Lucian Pye pointed out.

It was not so long ago, that the significance of communication was first recognized and a systematic research of communication started. They say that the origin of communication theory was the model of rhetoric by Aristotle and after that communication was applied to various fields. But this application was fragmentary and not systematic. As human society modernized the mass media developed gradually along with an increased interest in communication. It was not until after the world war II, however, that communication research became a systematic research field as a social science.

This year is the "World Communication Year" and problems of communication, especially the development of communication infrastructure as a indispensable means of social and economic development of societies, are being discussed all over the world.

I would like to say that there are two main reasons behind the "World Communications Year". The first is the resistance of the developing countries against the imbalance of international communication as reflected by their request to establish a new world information order. The second is the emergence of the information society and the rapid change in the function of communication in developed countries.

The rapid increase of the roles of communication in contemporary society has necessitated the recognition of communication research all over the world. Thus, I will review the process of communication research development. And also take a look at the prospects of communication research as a social science in near the future in Japan.

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As mentioned above, communication research as a social science has developed mainly after the World War II. This is also true in Japan. Before the war the studies on communication in Japan followed Zeitungswissenschaft in Germany, but it was a very minor field. There were also some studies on the history of the press and similar subjects. They were, however, not systematic and cannot be considered part of social science. Communication research as a systematic and scientific field has developed mainly after the war in Japan through the influence of the rapid progress of research on mass communication in the United States.

There were many areas of research in the United States such as studies on propaganda, psychological war, etc. before, during and after the war, but the situation in Japan was rather different. The appearance of "Mass Communication" as a new term rather than "Journalism" or "The press" has come about because research on mass communication has become a systematic social science.

In this sense, I believe that the introduction of the term "Mass Communication" was the beginning of scientific research on communication in Japan.

Of course, the radical diffusion of the mass media themselves after the war especially from 1950's on has promoted mass communication research in Japan.

Mass communication kept pace with the remarkable social and economic recovery and development at that time. In 1950, three laws on broadcasting were enacted and the two systems of public and commercial broadcasting were initiated. From that point, broadcasting has changed and developed very rapidly. Particularly, television began to spread at an amazing pace at that time. It is quite natural that such a rapid development of mass communication influenced on various fields of Japanese society and many social scientists became interested in the various problems of mass communication. Thus, communication research became recognized as a social science, as problems on mass communication were included in the study of sociology, social psychology, psychology, political science and so on.

I would like to point out that there were two main trends of communication research in Japan this time. One was the shift of emphasis of research from the press to radio and television. As radio and television rapidly diffused, they became important objects of study. Second, many researchers had become interested in the process, function and effects of mass communication rather than its institutional analysis. As mentioned above, communication is a basic social process which is related to various aspects of human society and therefore an interdisciplinary approach using many of the social sciences is necessary. Thus, communication has been studied in various fields of social science in Japan.

Recently the experimental studies and field researches on communication has developed. In particular, experimental studies on communication and attitude change in psychology, the studies on public opinion in social psychology, field research on the communication process of local communities in sociology, and studies on voting behavior in political science have been conducted. However, all the results of individual research accumulated in various fields of social science are not enough to construct a general theoretical framework in which they may be integrated. In Japan the construction of a general theoretical framework on communication is being attempted, but it is not necessarily successful yet. Moreover, almost all of the research undertaken has concerned the short term problems, whereas there is not yet a sufficient number of long term systematic studies of communication. I think that these two aspects of research should be pursued in the future.

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Communication research is at a crucial turning point as conditions which will cause future change are now emerging in Japan. I would like to point out two especially important factors. The first one is the rapid change of Japanese society and the second is the remarkable progress of communication technology in recent years.

In Japan, various discussions concerning the emergence and influence of "information society" has been held. So far, however, there is no general consensus on a strict definition of the "information society". It seems to me that, fundamentally it is a society in which information has as much value as or more value than goods or labor. When we examine the development in human society, it becomes obvious that at a certain stage human labor was a principal object of value and at another stage capital and goods played more important roles.

Recently, however, the value of information has drastically increased and is replacing

the traditional roles of capital and labor. That is the "information society" which we call JOHOKA SHAKAI in Japanese. The above process is now evolving in Japan and other developed countries.

In such a society, the importance of information and communication systems are rapidly increasing at every level of society and have a strong influence on every aspect of our social life. In "information societies" the gathering, transmission processing of information become an important concern of every member of society as they are vitally relevant to every segment of society.

Another important trend in Japanese society is the diversification of values and social needs. The more highly advanced a society is, the more specialized and complicated its structure becomes, and such a society generates within itself various conflicts and contradictions. As a result, the societal values become more diverse, thus making social needs, including the need for information, more specialized, varied and complex. Together with such changes in needs, people's perceptions of value also become more diversified, which, in turn, reinforces and intensifies various conflicts in modern society.

Moreover, attention must be paid to the fact that contemporary people have "higher needs" as defined in Maslow's development stage theory of human needs. That is to say, as human needs become more sophisticated, interests tend to shift from basic material satisfaction to greater mental satisfaction. It is quite natural that more information is necessary for mental satisfaction than for material satisfaction. Furthermore, the methods of achieving mental satisfaction are more complicated and varied than those for finding satisfaction in material things.

In such a social condition, information systems and communication systems have to change to cope with those human and information needs. The mass media as means for the transmission of mass produced information, have already fully developed in many contemporary societies. Therefore, the communication problems we now face are more of a qualitative nature than quantitative.

The question is, how to cope with diversified and complicated social needs. I would like to suggest that we can cope with such diversified social needs and complicated segmentation through information and a proper information system. Just as the abundance of foods, material and energy have raised the level of people's happiness and satisfaction, the abundance of diverse information and proper communication system to ensure it will raise up the level of people's happiness and satisfaction. Thus, it is natural that such a rapid

social change must increase the importance of communication research as a social science and promote a shift in the direction of research, and that is what is now taking place in Japan.

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The second condition which has pressed a new turn of communication research in Japan is the remarkable development of communication technology in recent years. The technological development of the past thirty years is particularly noteworthy in the field of communication; furthermore, technological possibilities have expanded immensely. This rapid progress continues and we are now in the midst of a "communication revolution".

As Professor Inose pointed out, as far as communication technology is concerned, almost anything is possible if enough specialists with sufficient funds for development are available; therefore, limited technology was no longer mainly responsible for restraining communication development. The main future restraints would concern social demands and policies rather than technology.

This is an extremely important situation. When the history of human communication is examined, it becomes clear that progress in communication received its impetus mainly from two factors; availability of technology and social interests or needs. It is not always easy to separate the two because they interact with each other, however, at a certain stage of the development of human communication, technology played the most important roles, while at another stage social needs were the main factor in the progress of communication. It may be said that we are now certainly in the former stage.

Recently there have been so many new means of communication developed such as optical fiber communication systems, direct satellite communication, multiple broadcasting, cable media, package media, facsimile, computer network, data base etc., each of which is contributing to the technological expansion of communication. Some of these technological wonders have already reached the stage of actual use. This technological progress has expanded the capacity of existing media and produced various new media of communication. I would especially like to point out that these new communication systems all tend to blur the traditional distinction between the various media. As Professor Pool mentioned, the normal situation in the past has been one in which the technology of each mode was sufficiently inflexible and sufficiently different, so that each mode settled down to being used in a distinctive way for purpose which it had a competitive advantage.

The neat divisions between different modes that existed for the past three-quarters of a century no longer hold. Thus a fusion of various kinds of media is taking place. We may call this tendency the "convergence of modes of communication".

Thus, the integration and reorganization of various traditional and new communication services is becoming a necessity of our time in Japan. The predicted direction of change in communication and information services is as follows: from none-electronic to electronic, from transmission of information to supply of information, from hardware-oriented to software-oriented, from independent, individual services to total, integrated services, from domestic to international.

Furthermore, I would like to point out the distinction of concepts between mass communication and traditional personal communication in relation to technological progress and the change of communication services. These two systems of communication have been dealt with separately, rather than integratively so far, even though they interact with each other in modern society. The distinctions between these systems are becoming ambiguous and the necessity to consider these systems as a whole is increasing. It is the reason why I proposed a hypothesis of total communication theory.

There are many communication problems in the situation mentioned above. How the new communication systems based on the development of technology shall be harmonized with the changing state of society is not known well. What kinds of social needs will be to the expansion of communication services is also not studied yet. On the other hand, the progress of communication technology and expansion of communication services has not only increased the capability of communication to promote the welfare and happiness of people but also created various new problems which might prove to be obstructions. These are problems of freedom of information, overflow of information, individual freedom, privacy and so on.

What kind of influence the adoption of various new communication and information services based on the emerging new communication technology will have on such issues is not yet known. These are the problems that we must now start exploring. And the investigation of these problems is mainly the responsibility of communication research as a social science.

munication research as a social science and tried to discuss its future prospects in Japan. I mentioned the two major factors which are changing the direction of communication research. Of course these factors are not only particular to Japan but are also found in other contemporary societies. In any case, I would like to point out that the process of "informationalization" is now developing all over the world, particularly in the developed countries. Accordingly the value of communication research as a social science has also been drastically increasing and the role of communication research in exploring those problems as mentioned above is becoming important. Finally, I hope that my report will stimulate discussion in this conference and contribute to our better understanding of the development of communication research as a social science.