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## Internationalizing "International Communication"

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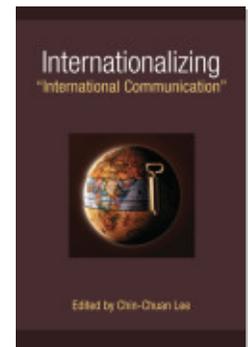
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CHAPTER THREE

## Beyond Lazarsfeld

### *International Communication Research and Its Production of Knowledge*

Tsan-Kuo Chang

A good theory should be seen as one perspective among others rather than as a catch-all explanation.

—Johan Galtung (1990)

In a *Public Opinion Quarterly* article, Paul Lazarsfeld (1952–53, p. 483) argued that “since the domestic area will not have many opportunities in the years to come, the *new ideas* in communications research . . . will have to be picked up and developed in the international field if they are not to be neglected altogether” (emphasis added). He went on to say that “there are certain comparative possibilities in the sphere of international communications research which will open up *new and rather exciting subjects* for investigation.” What Lazarsfeld suggested is that the new ideas might be better developed contextually, sociologically, historically, and methodologically outside U.S. research settings. Although he did not elaborate, the new and exciting ideas certainly should include new concepts, new theories or new perspectives, and new ways of doing research as well as new knowledge and new insights. This has not been the case, however. While the body of studies of international communication has grown significantly over the past decades, the production and accumulation of knowledge have been

less impressive. In fact, the field has been regurgitating old ideas and stale perspectives without keeping abreast with the changes of the times.

Since Lazarsfeld's prognosis there has been little reflection on the state of the field of international communication research, which picks up where he had left off. With the growth of the literature in international communication that had by the early 1980s reached “almost landslide proportions” (Hur, 1982, p. 531), the Lazarsfeld article appears to have been forgotten and mostly vanished from many ensuing studies on the structure and processes of international communication. Stevenson sought to define international communication as a field in 1992, but made no reference to Lazarsfeld even though the latter's insights and projection of the future direction of international communication research had more or less anticipated what was to come 40 years later. This study has no intention to accord the Lazarsfeld article status as a milestone or a canonical text in international communication research. Nevertheless, the article serves as a useful departure point to tackle the production of knowledge in international communication research.

Against the backdrop of the sociology of knowledge, this study is informed by three perspectives to assess the extant literature in international communication research: Johan Galtung's life cycle of theories (1971), Erving Goffman's keying in frame analysis (1974), and Thomas Kuhn's “paradigm testing” (1970). The assessment is not intended to be either a quantitative meta-analysis (Wolf, 1986) or a critical bibliographic or citation analysis of existing studies on international communication. As indicators of the state of mind in research, the data reported are used mainly to externalize the arguments made within the context of the three perspectives. They help provide empirical answers to the conceptual questions, but by no means offer statistical tests of any hypothesis implied by the individual perspective or their combination.

The purpose of this study is threefold: first, to examine how the key concepts or theories in international communication research emerge and fluctuate over time; second, to determine the relationship between the modes of thinking in international communication research as manifested in the literature and the historical-social setting in which they occur; and third, to explore the group mind of international communication researchers as knowledge producers through their scholarly outputs as recorded in journal articles and books. As bearers of intellectual activities, international communication scholars and researchers constitute a professional group that carries certain epistemological interests in the world of cross-national

communication and occupies a specific position in knowledge production regarding what that world is, how it is to be observed, and why it turns out the way it does.

### Sociology of Knowledge and International Communication Research

To determine the trajectory of international communication research that Lazarsfeld had charted for his successors over the past 60 years is to examine the mode of thought or the group mind of scholars who have come “to find expression in certain theories, doctrines, and intellectual movements” (Wirth, in Mannheim, 1936, p. xxviii) since his prognosis. Although he was among the few towering figures who have established communications research as a discipline and whose legacy continues to inspire or invoke debates in the community of scholars,<sup>1</sup> Lazarsfeld was not alone in his thinking. To paraphrase Mannheim (1936, p. 3), it is, strictly speaking, incorrect to say that the single scholar thinks and does research; rather, it is more correct to insist that he or she participates in thinking and doing further what other researchers have thought and done before. The sociology of knowledge perspective therefore provides a useful framework to comprehend the particular style of thought among international communication scholars in the historical-social setting.

Because of “its concern with the role of knowledge and ideas in the maintenance or change of the social order,” as Wirth (1936, in Mannheim, 1936, p. xxix, emphasis added) put it, the sociology of knowledge “is bound to devote considerable attention to the *agencies or devices through which ideas are diffused* and the degree of freedom of inquiry and expression that prevails.” In social sciences research, the devices through which ideas are diffused include predominantly books and journal articles that are published throughout the years, especially those that have been frequently cited in the literature. Quoting Merton (1967, pp. 36–37), Simonson (2006, p. 6) wrote, in the introduction to the November 2006 volume of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, that “any classic text worth reading is worth rereading periodically, for ‘what is communicated by the printed page’ changes as a result of changes in the readers and the worlds they inhabit.” The frame of reading and the interpretation of its content have been altered in ways that Goffman called “breaking frame” (1974).

To some extent, the prognosis article is such a text. In discussing com-

parative research opportunities, Lazarsfeld had anticipated what Katz and his colleague reported in *The Export of Meaning* (1990), indicating that there “can be little doubt that the meaning of news will be very different from one culture to another, and that we cannot know in advance what these variations will be” (Lazarsfeld 1952–53, p. 486). Substituting the TV show *Dallas* for the word “news,” this statement summarized succinctly what turns out to be the reception theory in cross-national research. Re-reading the article in the contemporary context adds a new perspective to Lazarsfeld’s excitement that we “should be grateful for the sudden upsurge of interest in international communications” when radio—the new medium at that time—changed the media landscape.

Since the mid-1990s, the proliferation of nation-state-based 24/7 TV news channels has reconfigured the world of global media terrain beyond recognition or imagination. Along with such well-established traditional channels as BBC and CNN, the rise of Al Jazeera as a formidable voice from the Middle East has been followed by a rush of countries to establish global channels through satellites to present the news from their own national perspectives: China’s CCTV-9 (2000), Russia Today (2005), France 24 (2006), Iran’s Press TV (2007), Japan’s NHK World TV (2009), Venezuela’s TeleSur (2010), and the CNC World (2010) of China’s Xinhua News Agency. Ranging from the democratic to authoritarian countries, these channels compete at the global level to serve as the voice of the host country and to report the world from its own vantage point. Arguably, the emergence of these various brands of satellite TV outlets represents a form of media nationalism that seeks to claim a legitimate space in the global marketplace of ideas, not a form of media imperialism as was conceived in the old order when the U.S. brand roamed the world. As such, the playing field of international communication has been leveled, changing not only the ways audiences may be exposed to the flow of news and other cultural products across national borders but also the rule of the game for the global media. The shift prompted Tunstall (2008, p. 10) to declare that national and regional media are stronger than international media in his book *The Media Were American: U.S. Mass Media in Decline*.

If “what is communicated . . . changes as a result of changes in the readers and the worlds they inhabit” (Simonson, 2006, p. 6) and if “changes in communications alter cultures—expanding, changing, and destroying them” (Greig, 2002, p. 225), then it is theoretically imperative to scrutinize how the changes in the global media environment have been reflected in the life cycle of existing concepts or theories central to the field of interna-

tional communication inquiry. Thanks to the penetration of the Internet into every corner of the world, it is difficult to imagine that cultures everywhere are not affected by it in one way or another. For one thing, the intellectual context of thinking and doing research has changed. When there is a conceptual shift, will the questions to be asked, the observation of facts, or the method of investigation remain unchanged? If the empirical has been transformed from one state of being to another, will the theoretical derived from the past observation continue to be relevant? Like cars and fashions, as Galtung (1971, p. 93) argued in the early 1970s, theories “have their life-cycle, and whether the obsolescence is planned or not there will always be a time-lag in a structure with a pronounced difference between center and periphery. Thus the tram workers in Rio de Janeiro may carry banners supporting Auguste Comte one hundred years after the center of the Center forgot who he was.” A compelling question is, why would Comte become known in a place several thousand miles away from his home base in the first place?

#### Life Cycle of Theories in International Communication Research

The life cycle of a theory is the autobiography of an idea through time and space. Galtung’s comment on Rio de Janeiro centered on the diffusion of theories between developed and developing/underdeveloped countries in academic research. Explicitly, the hegemonic structure in international social science research has created an unequal setting in which peripheral countries suffer from the theories and methods imported from the core nations. Part of the reason is the deficiency of theories and methods developed in the Western countries that fail to take into account local knowledge and experiences, not to mention the lack of awareness among the community of scholars of the intellectual need to understand the objects of their investigation (Curran & Park, 2000). In international communication research, the tendency to view “the rest of the world as a forgotten understudy,” as Curran and Park (2000, p. 3) reckoned, has reached a plateau where “US- and UK-based media academics are beginning to feel embarrassed.” Embarrassed they should be, because there is always a danger when groupthink or the absence of alternative perspectives crowds out competing explanations. In the context of group decision, one of the theoretical and epistemological issues involved in groupthink is the shift of conceptual cohesiveness from a multidimensional to a unitary construct and its power to affect the views of others (Street, 1997). Groupthink oc-

curs not only because of individual attributes of members but also because of circumstances of their deliberations (Neck & Moorhead, 1995). In social science inquiries, the body of literature certainly counts as part of the deliberative circumstances among researchers. In the case of international communication research, groupthink appears in the fact that, some 40 years after its inception, the banner of cultural imperialism as a theory continues to be carried by scholars in many parts of the world, including Latin America (e.g., Vilas, 2002) where the dependency theory was first formulated to challenge the knowledge claim of the modernization perspective, even though the global media landscape has been greatly transformed.

In the 1980s, the thesis of cultural imperialism was considered by both its proponents and critics as a “dominant paradigm” in the field of international communication. Whether it has achieved a theoretical status as a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense of the notion is debatable.<sup>2</sup> For the lack of a better term, this study will use *paradigm* testing to address the issue of theoretical juxtaposition as explications in international communication research. As will be discussed later, the proposition of paradigm testing as an analytical design does not necessarily imply the existence of competing paradigms in international communication inquiry. Nor does it attempt to provide a critical test of the validity of different theories involved in the historical and empirical context. A number of scholars and researchers have offered insightful critiques and challenges to the conceptual inadequacy and epistemological weakness of cultural imperialism in various texts (Chadha & Kavoori, 2000; Curran & Park, 2000; Curtin, 2007; Fejes, 1981; Fortner, 1993; Golding & Harris, 1997; Hamm & Smandych, 2005; Lee, 1980; Lee, 1988; McPhail, 2002, 2010; Roach, 1997; Salwen, 1991; Thussu, 2006; Tomlinson, 1991; Wang, Servaes, & Goonasekera, 2000).

In this study, the concept of cultural imperialism is taken as is, not what it may refer to. It is the concept itself that is being historically examined, not its content. The thesis is used as a case to exemplify the life cycle of theories in international communication research. The survey of its genesis and application as a key concept and theory in international communication is meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive, of its general footprint in the literature. Although the exact origin of the idea of *cultural imperialism*<sup>3</sup> is difficult to pinpoint, it is commonly accepted that it was first proposed in the late 1960s as a theoretical articulation to address the structure and processes of the domination of U.S. media at the expense of other countries’ indigenous media industry in the international arena. From Africa to Latin America, there has been no shortage of theoretical and empirical studies

that seek to uncover the structural factors underlying such an imperialistic configuration and its implications for international relations.

Since the 1960s, the world's media setting has evolved dramatically both within and between countries. The Internet and its surrounding digital communication technologies have particularly created new opportunities and challenges to the traditional media in areas of content production, distribution, and consumption. Over the past decades, countries around the world have witnessed the end of the Cold War between the two superpowers, the collapse of communism in eastern Europe, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the demise of the New World Information and Communication Order, and the widespread of the Internet as a powerful democratic platform for civil society and global communication. In light of these sociopolitical and technological transformations, the thesis of cultural imperialism<sup>4</sup> apparently exhibits a remarkable shelf life with no sign of abating (see table 1). Facts come and go. Any theory that has endured for more than four decades in a field of intellectual inquiry does not exist by itself in a philosophical vacuum. It must be perpetuated by those who continue to see its relevance and centrality to the contemporary world.

Theories have power (Alford & Friedland, 1985). Take modernization in international communication research in the 1950s and the 1960s. The power of modernization theory can be characterized, according to Alford and Friedland (1985), as follows: policy impact (a driving force of national development); interpretation of actions (internal, as opposed to external, solutions to underdevelopment); arousing consciousness of social groups (creating empathy in peasants); hegemony over categories of language (modern vs. traditional as frames); and demarcation of boundaries between the public and the private (ownership and regulation of media systems). As will be shown later, displacing modernization, the thesis of cultural imperialism has shaped the way journalists come to perceive the international reality.

Table 1 offers a snapshot of the enduring power of the thesis of cultural imperialism over time. In international communication, the year 1969 is a milestone, both conceptual and technological. Conceptually, Herbert Schiller published an influential book entitled *Mass Communications and American Empire*. His central argument is that “[t]he *emerging imperial network* of American economics and finance utilizes the communications media for its defense and entrenchment wherever it exists already and for its expansion to locale where it hopes to become active” (1969, p. 3, emphasis added). The linkage between the U.S. economic and finance system and

its media system at the international level sets the stage for the notion of cultural imperialism to emerge as it soon began to spread in the literature.

If Schiller broke the ground, then Wells (1972) plowed the field. Eventually, Tunstall (1977) paved the way for the expansion of cultural imperialism thesis in international communication research. Although critical of the original ideas of Schiller and Wells and their evidence, Tunstall nevertheless helped accentuate the thesis. While he questioned the claim of the cultural imperialism thesis “that authentic, traditional and local culture in many parts of the world is being battered out of existence by the indiscriminate dumping of large quantities of slick commercial and media products, mainly from the United States” (Tunstall, 1977, p. 57), he accepted

TABLE 1. The Life-Cycle of Cultural Imperialism in International Communication Research

| Citing Text                                  | Cited Text <sup>a</sup>   |
|--|---|
| McPhail (2010)                               | Schiller (1969), Tunstall (1977)  |
| Chakravartty & Zhao (2008)                   | Tunstall (1977)   |
| Kamalipour (2007)                            | Dorfman & Mattelart (1975), Schiller (1969), Tunstall (1977), Wells (1972)                                      |
| Thussu (2006)                                | Boyd-Barrett (1977), Dorfman & Mattelart (1975), Galtung (1971), Schiller (1969), Tunstall (1977), Wells (1972) |
| Hamm & Smandych (2005)                       | Galtung (1971), Schiller (1969)   |
| McPhail (2002)                               | Tunstall (1977)   |
| Thussu (2000)                                | Boyd-Barrett (1977), Dorfman & Mattelart (1975), Galtung (1971), Schiller (1969), Tunstall (1977), Wells (1972) |
| Fortner (1993)                               |   |
| Lee (1980), Schiller (1971), Tunstall (1977) |   |
| Frederick (1993)                             | Boyd-Barrett (1977), Lee (1980), Schiller (1971)  |
| Tomlinson (1991)                             | Fejes (1981), Lee (1980), Dorfman & Mattelart (1975), Tunstall (1977)   |
| Fejes (1986)                                 | Lee (1980), Schiller (1971), Tunstall (1977)  |
| Lee (1980)                                   | Boyd-Barrett (1977), Schiller (1969), Tunstall (1977), Wells (1972)   |
| Tunstall (1977)                              | Schiller (1969), Wells (1972)   |

<sup>a</sup>Both the citing and cited texts are chosen for the purpose of illustration only. They are not meant to suggest they are the most cited texts in the field. The citing texts are selected to show the life-cycle or timeframe. The cited texts include only those published in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that are considered central to the knowledge production of cultural imperialism as a thesis. The entries do not imply that the citing texts include no recent publications, especially those published during the past three decades; nor do they suggest that other books published between 1960s and 1980s were not consulted by various authors and editors. Some of the cited texts were used by the authors in the edited volumes, not necessarily by the editors.

that “the Anglo-American media are connected with imperialism, British imperialism” (p. 63). With a question mark after the words “Media Imperialism?” in chapter 2, Tunstall challenged the broad stroke of cultural imperialism by offering his own conceptualization. As will be discussed later, it is a matter of conceptual abstraction or rekeying, with the concept involved being located at different levels and implying different units of analysis.

Since its publication, Tunstall’s 1977 book began to take on a life of its own. From the late 1970s to 2010, as shown in table 1, the book has been obligingly cited, often in connection with the works by Schiller (1969), Wells (1972), and Dorfman and Mattelart (1975). I don’t intend to engage in any deliberation over which work is more influential in the field of international communication research. A compelling question is how the concept of cultural imperialism has persisted over time in academic research and journalistic practices. If we agree that the thesis of cultural imperialism was specifically presented by Schiller in 1969, its shelf life has been extended consistently in many journal articles and books during the past four decades, suggesting that it is still very much alive today. What is most intriguing is that by 2008, Tunstall apparently had abandoned the thesis of cultural imperialism in favor of what he called new nationalism in his book *The Media Were American: U.S. Mass Media in Decline* (Tunstall, 2008, p. 344). Yet, citing Tunstall in 2010, McPhail opted for the 1977 book, not the 2008 one, as if nothing had happened, when Tunstall had couched the 2008 book out of his earlier conceptual frame and into another.

The year 1969 was also significant in international communication not because of Schiller’s book but because of a major milestone that was mostly overshadowed by the landing of the first man on the moon. ARPANET, the world’s first packet switching network created by BBN (Bolt, Beranek and Newman), went online in October 1969, connecting four computers at UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, Stanford, and University of Utah in the United States. It was the predecessor of today’s Internet although the scale was much smaller and its use was restricted to the United States only. Since then, the number of computers connected to the Internet has grown from four to hundreds of thousands worldwide at a speed and pace unimaginable, as shown by the mind-boggling tangled web mapped by the U.S. Company Lumeta in 2004. By April 2008, the Internet had expanded to over 450,000 nodes, with many more top-level domains and nodes added on a regular basis. It means countries around the world are now highly interconnected and interdependent. In light of this structural transformation, as Chang (2010, p. 12) argued, the field of international communica-

tion research requires new perspectives that go “beyond extant theories that were developed some 40 years ago.” He singled out cultural imperialism as one such theory “that seems to be largely rooted in the territorial and physical relevance of an old media landscape” (p. 12).

When Schiller published his 1969 book, the international media landscape was indeed dominated by American multinational corporations. In Tunstall’s view, “a non-American way out of the media box is difficult to discover because it is an American, or Anglo-American, built box. *The only way out is to construct a new box*, and this, with the possible exception of the Chinese, no nation seems keen to do” (1977, p. 63, emphasis added). He was both right and wrong. He was right because a new media box has actually been built that is non-American (e.g., Al Jazeera or CNC World); he was wrong because other than China many countries are now capable of building their own media boxes (e.g., Russia, Iran, Japan, and Venezuela). This is probably why, in *The Media Were American*, Tunstall spent a significant amount of space tracing the emerging national media centers and their challenges to U.S. media domination, hence setting up the basis for the proposition that the U.S. mass media have been in decline since 1950. Throughout the book, however, what is not spoken tends to speak louder than what is said. In the genealogy of knowledge production, it is telling that in *The Media Are American*, Tunstall went to great lengths defining media imperialism and tackling its consequences; three decades later, the word imperialism is not even indexed in *The Media Were American*. Not until the last part is it mentioned in passing in the context of nationalism vs. imperialism (p. 344).

Similar to his earlier declaration of *The Media Are American*, Tunstall’s proclamation of *The Media Were American* explicitly announces the demise of an old order that has been replaced by a new one with a fresh set of national media systems and international arrangements of market relations. Given the growth of nation-state-based satellite TV channels, the U.S. media indeed no longer take the high command in the global media marketplace, let alone exercising their supreme authority in content production and dissemination. Tunstall discussed this new pecking order mostly against the backdrop of cultural and media nationalism. He failed to explain why, leaving a pressing question unanswered: What happens to media imperialism if media nationalism has been on the rise? The latter appears to have superseded the former largely because much of the historical evidence and key issues Tunstall used to buttress the thesis of media

nationalism took place before the 1970s. From the 1977 *The Media Are American* to the 2008 *The Media Were American*, Tunstall made an interesting conceptual turn, but missed a great opportunity to explicate its theoretical significance. It should be illuminating to see whether the central concept and thesis in international communication research that Tunstall helped spread, but discarded some 30 years later, continues to be codified in the literature. If the life cycle in table 1 is any indication, the 1977 book may have a shelf life for yet many years to come unless scholars and researchers seek outside the frame (Goffman, 1974) of what is contained in the book for opposing versions of reality in international communication, as Tunstall did himself.

The notion of cultural imperialism appears not only in scholarly works, but also in journalistic reports. It has become part of the vocabularies in the mainstream media as *fait accompli* of some sort. In 1992, when Euro Disneyland opened its theme park in the suburb of Paris, the *New York Times* (9 April 1992, p. C1, emphasis added) reported this way: “The French intelligentsia have been taking potshots at the 4,800-acre Euro Disneyland . . . , dubbing it a ‘cultural Chernobyl’ and denouncing the ‘imperialism of Mickey.’” Nearly two decades later, the *Economist* (31 May 2008, p. 89, emphasis added) carried a story with very much the same theme: “The French film industry is more often given to introspective agonising about *American cultural imperialism* or the tyranny of the market than to self-congratulation.” These two stories demonstrated the extent to which the received knowledge of cultural imperialism has somehow taken root in the news.

From the 2008 report in the *Economist* to McPhail’s 2010 book, it is striking that the idea of cultural imperialism has persisted in academic and journalistic circles for more than 40 years after it was first proposed in the 1960s. This intriguing phenomenon deserves to be closely interrogated, especially when the Internet has fundamentally altered the global media environment. Quantitatively, expansion of daily audiences in units of millions takes place at a speed and pace previously unthinkable. Qualitatively, convergence of a single platform for all forms of media has become a reality. Economically, the decline of traditional media, particularly newspapers and commercial TV in terms of audience size and advertising revenues, has led to a reconfiguration of the markets that affects the flow of various media content.

How does the Internet affect the global media landscape and the form

of international communication? First, with the global network made possible by the Internet, countries around the world are densely connected. Access points to this global network, however, still remain local. They are bounded by the political and social interests of territorial governments. Who controls the Internet is therefore of significant importance to international communication “to determine what is to be delivered and how” (Chang, 2010, p. 13). Second, although globalization implies a weakened nation-state, the new form of state in today’s information age is the network state (Carnoy & Castells, 2001, p. 14), in which each node—the nation-state—is linked to other nodes “that are equally necessary for the performance of the state’s functions.” Given this networked structure at the global level where the flows move in many directions, how does cultural imperialism take place?

This study contends that the theory has lagged far behind the new reality. In international communication research, the state of theory is either underdeveloped in the first place or misguided by the traditional ways of thinking and conceiving the world, or both. Simply put, there is a lack of alternative perspectives. Groupthink still permeates in the intellectual enterprise in the field of international communication. For one thing, theorists of cultural imperialism have failed to take note of the technological innovations and the shift of content production and distribution from corporate interests to user-generated concerns (e.g., Web 2.0) that have largely reshaped the form and content of global media.

Technologically, the new global media environment defies traditional conceptions, requiring theoretical rethinking of what is to be seen and how to see it. Why would a theory formulated at a time when countries were not as connected as they are today continue to be relevant to the network society created by the ubiquitous Internet? When the object of observation has changed, would the focus of conceptual lens capture the same image as it appeared before? Implied in these questions are layers of conceptual focus and their different theoretical formulation. This has implications for international communication research. As Alford and Friedland (1985) argued, “theories themselves must be analyzed at different levels, which cannot be reduced to each other” (p. 392). Epistemologically, Thomas Kuhn (1970) reasoned convincingly that no existing theory should be tested in isolation by itself. Goffman’s (1974) notion of “keying” in frame analysis is relevant. A theory provides a frame that is keyed to see the reality in some way.

### Keying of Concepts in International Communication Research

In his seminal book *Frame Analysis*, Goffman (1974, p. 11) argued that “once a term is introduced . . . it begins to have too much bearing, not merely applying to what comes later, but reapplying in each chapter to what it has already applied to.” The essence of his arguments—that there is a linear presentation in conceptual formulation and articulation embedded “in some sort of logical sequence” (p. 11)—is central to this study’s contention. Introducing a term is very much like keying. Keying of concepts concerns how an idea might be called by different researchers over time. Concepts are ingredients of theories, but they are not theories per se. As Alford and Friedland (1985, p. 394) put it, “Concepts always contain a theory of the causes and consequences of the essential attributes of the phenomena located and defined by the concept.” Moreover, in a historical view “concepts are properties of the social relations of production of knowledge” (Alford & Friedland, 1985, p. 27).

In international communication, imperialism is certainly a concept. As a theory, it is more complex, involving a set of interrelated statements that seek to describe and explain in a systemic manner how and why international relations may function the way they do. In this study, cultural imperialism is used as an encompassing concept to include all types of communication-related forms of imperialism, which have been coined in the literature. Technically, the choice of which adjective (*media*, *cultural*, *communication*, or *informatic*) to precede the word imperialism appears to be largely wordplay or what Goffman (1974) called “keying” that frames what is to follow or to be expected. In the cognitive orientation of the world, Goffman (1974, p. 443, emphasis added) argued, “Wordplay seems to celebrate the power of the context to *disqualify all but one reading*, more than it disconfirms the workings of this force.” In the ladder of abstraction, the four concepts are located at different levels. Below the most abstract concept, *culture*, they slide up or down as a key with a slight different tone.

A theory can be considered as a frame that sets specific boundaries with its key concepts to look at the reality, a form of theoretical bracketing. The insistence on a specific word or the priority of one particular word over other words misses the most fundamental question: How does cultural imperialism stack up against other competing theories such as dependency, reception (Liebes & Katz, 1990), or globalization? In fact, these terms (media imperialism, cultural imperialism, communication imperial-

ism, and informatic imperialism)<sup>5</sup> consist of two kinds of concept: primary and secondary. The primary concept is imperialism whereas the secondary concepts are media, cultural, communication, and informatic. What the secondary concepts bracket out is largely methodological categories as to the type of data and the unit of analysis that might be required, not necessarily the underlying process. To paraphrase Alford and Friedland (1985), an imperialistic state of international relations has to exist in some form before the concept of imperialism could become accepted. In international communication research, scholars of cultural imperialism insist on defining, and thus changing, the secondary term, when it is the primary concept that should be reexamined. If they already see “imperialism” in international communication, what lies beyond the rim of an “imperialistic” frame tends to be unattended. Absence of other concepts therefore precludes alternative perspectives from being discussed because they are considered to be irrelevant or insignificant. Addition of a secondary concept does not break the primary framework.

This inquiry will address four different primary concepts—imperialism, modernization, dependency, and globalization—and their interrelationships that have emerged in international communication research before and after Lazarsfeld’s prognosis to determine their conceptual genealogy in the historical context. The source of data came from JSTOR, “one of the world’s most trusted sources for academic content” with “over one thousand leading academic journals across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences” (<http://about.jstor.org/content-collections>; retrieved 20 October 2010). The database includes 2,832 journals in 53 disciplines, varying from African American Studies to Zoology.<sup>6</sup>

Using “international communication” as the keyword in the full text, a search of articles and book reviews published in all eight languages (English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, and Spanish) returned, as of 8 October 2010, a total of 2,415 listings. Almost all the publications (99.2%) were in English, with the remaining items in three other languages: Spanish (9), French (8), and German (3). Because of the concentration of English publications, there might be a “historical bias” that Anglo-American researchers in North America and Europe have “towards citing each other” (*Economist*, 13 November 2010, p. 82). If the plea can only be heard in English, deWesternizing media studies (Curran & Park, 2000) would be an exercise in futility.

Through the keyword search *in the full text*, this study treats each listing in the database as an equal unit of analysis regardless of its length. As

opposed to the search *in the item title*, a full text search has the advantage of retrieving all entries involving the central concepts under investigation. A random check of 10 percent of articles over time found that the full text search captured items that were largely relevant to the theories of international communication. These keywords indeed index what was theoretically discussed in the texts.

Table 3 reports the genealogy of the four central concepts identified in the literature from the 1920s to the 2000s: imperialism, modernization, dependency, and globalization. Each concept is assumed to underline an implicit theory of knowledge. The order of sequence (from imperialism to globalization) is arranged roughly according to their appearance in the literature, not necessarily their exact genesis. Overall, a given concept does not appear to have any significant bearing on what other concepts might be used in different lines of thought. Within each realm of investigation, however, there is some consistency in that the use of later concepts does not replace the prior ones or diminish their usage in research.

The concept of imperialism clearly has a long history in international

TABLE 2. Articles and Book Reviews of International Communication Research, 1929–2009<sup>a</sup>

| Year      | “International Communication” in Full Text <sup>b</sup> |                      |                    |
|-----------|---|----------------------|--------------------|
|           | Articles  | Reviews <sup>c</sup> | Total <sup>d</sup> |
| <1929     | 4.6%  | 2.5%                 | 4.1%               |
| 1930–1939 | 1.7   | 2.1                  | 1.8                |
| 1940–1949 | 3.7   | 4.5                  | 3.6                |
| 1950–59   | 7.0   | 9.7                  | 7.6                |
| 1960–1969 | 9.2   | 14.1                 | 10.2               |
| 1970–1979 | 14.8  | 13.0                 | 14.4               |
| 1980–1989 | 21.3  | 20.5                 | 21.1               |
| 1990–1999 | 22.7  | 23.8                 | 22.6               |
| 2000–2009 | 15.1  | 11.6                 | 14.3               |
| Total     | 1,899   | 516                  | 2,415              |

<sup>a</sup>As of October 27, 2010 when the database was accessed, there were a total of 2,832 journals in 53 disciplines. Although JSTOR has been comprehensive, the database does not necessarily include all journals that are published in the eight languages.

<sup>b</sup>“International communication” was used as the exact phrase in the *full text* in the JSTOR search.

<sup>c</sup>Entries are book reviews and are used a proxy of the number of books published during the decade. It should be noted that a few reviews looked at the same book, but were published in different journals.

<sup>d</sup>Based on the JSTOR search results, entries represent the number of articles and reviews published in eight languages: English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, and Spanish. In fact, almost all the publications were in English (99.2%). A breakdown of the number of articles and reviews published in different languages is: English, 2,395; Dutch, 0; French, 8; German, 3; Italian, 0; Latin, 0; Portuguese, 0; and Spanish, 9.

communication research, but did not appear frequently in the literature until the 1970s. Over the last four decades, it has remained prevalent in various social science disciplines, suggesting a common intellectual concern over the potential impacts of cross-national communication. As a concept, modernization emerged most visibly in the 1960s, while during the previous three decades it was fairly obscure. This pattern evidently supports the campaign of modernization as the goal of national developments in many parts of the world since then and through the 2000s. The dependency concept offers some clue as to how a theory might rise to challenge the existing one that purports to explain the same phenomenon. In the 1960s and the 1970s, modernization projects in Africa and other places were found to be a failure and the theory was largely discredited in social science research; dependency as an alternative perspective surged significantly in the literature in the following decades. Like that of imperialism, its current usage probably reflects contemporary concerns over the real intention of the spread of globalization around the world. Such scholarly concern is best expressed by Vilas (2002) in an article that was simply entitled “Globalization as Imperialism.” While the notion of globalization might be traced to Marx’s ideas in the nineteenth century, the concept itself only appeared in the JSTOR database in the 1980s, signaling an increasing intellectual attention to this particular phenomenon.

The above discussion of keying in international communication research does not directly address the relationship between the concepts that underscore different theories in the field, especially in the era of network

TABLE 3. Genealogy of Theories in International Communication Research, 1929–2009<sup>a</sup>

| Year      | Imperialism | Modernization | Dependency | Globalization |
|-----------|-------------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| <1929     | 0.5%        | —             | 1.3%       | —             |
| 1930–1939 | 1.2         | 0.5           | —          | —             |
| 1940–1949 | 3.5         | 0.5           | 0.6        | —             |
| 1950–1959 | 6.3         | 3.3           | —          | —             |
| 1960–1969 | 6.3         | 11.9          | 2.5        | —             |
| 1970–1979 | 15.3        | 17.6          | 15.9       | —             |
| 1980– 989 | 23.5        | 26.7          | 33.1       | 3.6%          |
| 1990–1999 | 21.6        | 21.0          | 29.3       | 34.9          |
| 2000–2009 | 21.6        | 18.6          | 17.2       | 61.4          |
| Total     | 255         | 210           | 157        | 166           |

<sup>a</sup>Each of four key words—*imperialism*, *modernization*, *dependency*, and *globalization*—was used in combination with the exact phrase “international communication” in the *full text* in the JSTOR search. Because of the small number of book reviews published over time (imperialism, 38; modernization, 27; dependency, 14; and globalization, 17), the two categories were combined.

society. As documented (Chang et al., 2009; Himelboim, Chang, & McCreery, 2010), although the global network is open, the flow of news is very much closed within the network itself. Whether the media outlets are state-owned or privately owned, for example, the number of outgoing links in foreign news is almost nonexistent, particularly so under the state-dominated system. Considering the advent of sophisticated software that automatically creates linkages between websites, apparently it is not the technological considerations that lead to the absence of hyperlinks. Explanations for the missing links have to be sought beyond the hyperlinks themselves. The thesis of cultural imperialism obviously cannot offer convincing explanation for this structural deficiency. What are the alternative perspectives? The question can be best answered by paradigm testing.

#### Paradigm Testing in International Communication Research

The notion of paradigm is borrowed from Thomas Kuhn's classic work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1970). The term *paradigm* refers to "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by members of a given community" and "the concrete puzzle-solutions, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal sciences" (Kuhn, 1970, p. 175). Because Kuhn restricted the use of paradigm to the normal sciences, the field of international communication research apparently would not fall within the range of his conception. As such, the application of the concept to the explanation of international communication phenomenon does not necessarily suggest there are *competing paradigms* in the field. In fact, whether international communication research could even be considered pre-paradigmatic in the Kuhnian sense is open to debate. To claim cultural imperialism as a paradigm is therefore to stretch its status as *the* dominating theoretical perspective in the field. Nevertheless, his discussion of comparing competing theories to determine which theory best explains the facts is germane to gauging the production of knowledge in international communication research.

Although Kuhn did not call it as such, for lack of a better word the notion of "paradigm testing" is used here to capture the tension between two competing theories within the same field of inquiry, which seek to account for the facts. If Kuhn's paradigm shift or scientific revolution is any hint, the challenge of competing theories apparently comes from outside, not necessarily from inside, the dominant paradigm itself, which, if successful,

may eventually lead to the collapse of the existing paradigm. When enough members of the “in-group” abandon the old paradigm, a new one from the “out-group” may replace it and the world is seen anew. Again, “paradigm testing” in international communication research implies the existence of competing theories, not the presence of rival paradigms, if any. It is useful to quote Kuhn’s idea in its entirety:

All historically significant theories have agreed with the facts, but only more or less. There is no more precise answer to the question whether or how well an individual theory fits the facts. But questions much like that can be asked when theories are taken collectively or even in pairs. It makes a great deal of sense to ask which of two actual and competing theories fits the facts *better*. (Kuhn, 1970, p. 147, emphasis in original)

In international communication, if the facts are examined against the thesis of cultural imperialism, the U.S. domination in the global cultural market would indeed be supported by the historical data of unequal flows in many countries around the world. According to Kuhn, however, this is not good enough as evidence to lend convincing support to the theory. As used in this study, paradigm testing requires that a theory be pitted against a theoretical “other” or another competing theory. Several theories can be used to explain the form of international communication flows of cultural products: cultural discount, cultural proximity, cultural imperialism, cultural diffusion, and globalization. The empirical data have to be carefully analyzed and the theory of cultural imperialism has to be pitted against other alternative perspectives to determine how it stacks up in comparison. In other words, it is not adequate to examine a theory in isolation as a valid explanation of a given phenomenon when other theories may become viable candidates.

Although the design is not ideal, the JSTOR database offers some proxy means to compare whether opposing theories in international communication research might be juxtaposed in pairs. It is assumed that when two different concepts appear in the same text, they are brought together presumably because of their relevance to each other. On the other hand, if different concepts that describe the phenomenon of international communication do not even turn up in the same space, they would literally be outside the conceptual domain (Goffman, 1970), hidden from view. Chances are therefore low for the rival theories to be considered collectively or for

one theory to be evaluated against the other. Table 4 shows the results of paired concepts in the literature as recorded in JSTOR.

One observation becomes immediately visible. In most cases, the four key concepts do not have much co-appearance in the same texts, indicating that a significant number of studies (almost 90%) in international communication research concentrated on a single perspective. The high degree of mutual exclusion suggests a lack of comparison of potential contending accounts. It also highlights a form of groupthink in that alternative perspectives are often excluded in the literature. Of the small number of studies that cover concepts in pairs, the evidence nonetheless points to increasing awareness of challenging ideas. This is particularly evident when globalization is paired with either modernization or imperialism, an equation that largely echoes recent debates as to whether globalization is an extension of modernization or a form of imperialism in disguise. The same can be said of the pairing of dependency with imperialism and modernization in the decades between 1970s and 1990s.

### Conclusion and Discussion

Because of the rapid changes in the media landscape and the loss of media jobs as well as the growth of personal communication devices, some scholars and researchers have argued that there is a crisis in international communication (e.g., Sparks, 2000). Although I do not share such an alarmist

TABLE 4. "Paradigm Testing" in International Communication Research, 1929–2009\*

| Year                   | Imperialism/<br>Dependency | Modernization/<br>Dependency | Modernization/<br>Globalization | Imperialism/<br>Globalization |
|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <1929                  | 2.2%                       | —                            | —                               | —                             |
| 1930–1939              | —                          | —                            | —                               | —                             |
| 1940–1949              | 2.2                        | —                            | —                               | —                             |
| 1950–1959              | —                          | —                            | —                               | —                             |
| 1960–1969              | 2.2                        | 2.8%                         | —                               | —                             |
| 1970–1979              | 13.0                       | 13.9                         | —                               | —                             |
| 1980–1989              | 32.6                       | 33.3                         | 2.6%                            | 2.3%                          |
| 1990–1999              | 34.8                       | 41.7                         | 41.0                            | 25.6                          |
| 2000–2009              | 13.0                       | 8.3                          | 56.4                            | 72.1                          |
| Total                  | 46                         | 36                           | 39                              | 43                            |
| % of Combined<br>Total | 11.2                       | 9.8                          | 10.4                            | 10.2                          |

\*The pair of key words was used in combination with the exact phrase "international communication" in the *full text* in the JSTOR search.

view, I have increasingly come to believe that most international communication studies have produced little knowledge that is both solid in the ways it has been produced and sound in its claim of validity across national borders, especially comparative research in news and advertising (Chang et al., 2001; Chang et al., 2009).

The key question this study seeks to answer is: Why and how does international communication research as a field of intellectual inquiry produce a body of knowledge through empirical studies that have mostly followed the same school of thought? Two general conceptual frameworks guided the present study: the sociology of knowledge and the powers of theory. The former concerns ontological and epistemological issues in international communication research; the latter addresses theoretical, ideological, and practical matters of theory in this field. If the findings in this study are any indication, the field of international communication research has exhibited a groupthink mentality in its conceptual approach. Scholars and researchers have yet to think outside the box of international communication inquiry, or, more specifically, the body of literature that has been established in this field.

Groupthink often leads to stagnation or failure. At the abstract level, the mind-set of groupthink excludes alternative perspectives that should be relevant to international communication scholars and researchers who are engaged in the production of knowledge, especially when the received knowledge is delimited within certain geographical territories and defined by a specific perspective. Any empirical research is always bound by the particular context of space and time, within which ideas and ways of seeing and doing things are formulated. But knowledge does not necessarily recognize any national borders although there are historical conditions under which knowledge is generally being produced. The form of international communication is complex. Its determinants vary from country to country. Many competing explanations therefore can be applied to the same facts, depending on how they are theoretically conceived and methodologically analyzed.

For any theory to be valid in its knowledge claim about the reality of the social world, it has to be tested comparatively. Examining how a theory in international communication may fit the historical facts is neither adequate nor convincing. The world is as diverse as the number of countries in it. Perspectives of the reality are bound to be different when it is viewed from different locales. The relationship between theory and the facts is therefore changeable. As Galtung (1990) argued, “a good theory should

never leave us with the idea that the world is made once and for all” and “will always have some empty boxes for the reality not yet there, for potential as opposed to empirical reality” (p. 102). A good theory “should be seen as one perspective among others rather than as a catch-all explanation” (p. 100). In international communication, this is especially true because its attributes are more multidimensional than a national one for experimenting different permutations and combinations, as Lazarsfeld had long recognized.

Lazarsfeld’s prognosis is worth rereading in the contemporary setting, particularly against the backdrop of the debate over “Washington Consensus” vs. “Beijing Consensus.” In discussing the importance of comparative research, he had offered in the early 1950s a recipe for inquiry about what was to come in today’s world as a result of the tension between the free market and democracy. In the United States, he said (1952–53, p. 487) that social scientists “tend to assume that economic laissez-faire and political liberty go together. So let us study the formation of opinion and attitudes in countries where the two principles have developed independently and where economic state control has apparently not interfered with political freedom.” This proposal to investigate the connection or the lack of it between marketization and democratization has yet to be fully addressed in social sciences research.

In international communication inquiry, comparative research has generated more heat than light. Part of the reason is that, over the past four decades, the field as a whole has engaged in research activities that are stuck in an outdated mode of replaying past experience without serious intellectual attempt to go beyond the conceptual boundaries of existing frameworks in knowledge production. The “dominant” model of cultural imperialism no longer fits the world of nations that are interconnected and interdependent in a global network society. For any theory of international communication to find the goodness of fit, it will have to clear the frame that contains scholars and researchers in a groupthink mind-set.

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## NOTES

1. See “Politics, Social Networks, and the History of Mass Communications Research: Rereading Personal Influence,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2006).

2. Kuhn (1970) used the term *paradigm* in two different senses. “On the one hand, it stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on *shared by* the members of a given community. On the other, it denotes one sort of element in that constellation, the *concrete puzzle-solutions* which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal sciences” (p. 175, emphasis added). It should be evident that cultural imperialism as a theory has not been shared by the members of international communication research community; nor has it offered any concrete puzzle-solutions to the problems of international communication.

3. In this study, the term *cultural imperialism* is used as an encompassing concept to include all types of communication-related forms of imperialism that have been coined in the literature. As will be discussed later, the addition of an adjective word (e.g., *media, cultural, communication, or informatic*) to precede *imperialism* appears to be merely a form of keying to frame the thesis in a particular way.

4. There are, of course, other major concepts in international communication that can be addressed. But no other concepts appear to come closer to the impacts of cultural imperialism as received knowledge in both academic and journalistic communities.

5. Using the exact phrase in the full text search, 65 items in the JSTOR database include “cultural imperialism” in the text, with the earliest one published in the *Yale Law Journal* in 1946 and the majority of them (81.5%) appearing in the last three decades (1980–2009). For the concept “media imperialism,” 15 items were published in the 1980s and 1990s. Only two items referred to the concepts “communication imperialism” and “informatic imperialism”: one in a footnote and the other in the text.

6. The JSTOR database does not include any of the journals related to communication research, except for *Public Opinion Quarterly*. This means that journals that are most likely to publish international communication studies have been excluded, making the analysis incomplete.