

International Communication Theories: Main Development Stages and Reflections

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Abstract: From the Persian Empire in the 5th Century BC to the age of globalization, the significance of international communication to international studies and related problems has been repeatedly testified by history. The theory of international communication originated in the West. In the new era, many of its theoretical perspectives need to be reviewed and re-evaluated. Compared with other communication patterns such as mass communication, international communication is highlighted by notable characteristics such as its concern for core national interests, distinctive strategic objectives and effective changes. It offers a new approach to showcasing comprehensive strength among countries and regions. The development of international communication theory can be divided into three main stages. One prominent contribution of the established theoretical achievements lies in its refining of multiple important general laws of international communication based on the actual needs and its forming of a theoretical system. The major limitation is that these theoretical achievements, under the influence of Western centralism, place excessive emphasis on competition while paying scant attention to accommodation and mutual learning. In the face of new characteristics and practical requirements in the new era, international communication theory should be equipped with a broader vision for more breakthroughs and innovations.

Keywords: international communication; concept; theory; stage; reflection

In the context of globalization, international communication becomes increasingly important to the construction of international relations. Countries worldwide, particularly developing countries keen to improve their strength of international communication, need to have a more comprehensive and profound

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understanding of its historical process and laws of change, and be able to analyze the factors shaping the existing landscape of international communication to identify the priorities of future development as accurately as possible.

From a historical perspective, this paper critically studies the core ideas, practice effects and resulting impacts of major international communication theories, and thereby ponders on future developments.

1. The concept of international communication

According to historical records, the origin of international communication can be traced back to the reign of Darius I (also called Darius the Great) (558 BC-486 BC) of the Persian Empire.^① Since its coming into being, international communication has had a profound impact on the image of a country or a society. Regarding this, Harold Innis held that the reason why ancient Persia, Rome and Greece grew into powerful empires was their communication philosophy, which prioritized “going-out.” Driven by such a philosophy, they used all means to expand their information coverage, for which their communication fell into the category of space-dependence.^② When it comes to the philosophy of communication, ancient civilizations such as China attached more importance to “passing information down” and therefore preferred the communication category of time-dependence. Different communication philosophies gave rise to distinct social landscapes. More specifically, a country taking a “space-dependent” communication approach had a higher chance than one taking a “time-dependent” approach to become an empire. The latter was

unlikely to expand into a vast territory even when it reached a high level of civilization.

In the next thousand years that followed, there emerged numerous classic practices of international communication worldwide, which highlighted the distinctions among different philosophies of international communication. Western international communication tended to serve for the purpose of conquering, while Oriental communications attached more importance to contact establishment. In 47 BC, Julius Caesar, a prominent politician and military general of the Roman Empire claimed, “Veni! Vidi! Vici!” (I came! I saw! I conquered!) after he had achieved a quick victory in his short war against Pharnaces II of Pontus at the Battle of Zela. The Western philosophy of international communication behind Caesar’s conquest was in stark contrast with the Oriental behind typical cases in ancient times, such as the emergence of the ancient Silk Road (202 BC-9), Xuanzang’s pilgrimage to India (628-645), Monk Jianzhen’s Journey to Japan (751), and Zheng He’s seven epic voyages across the Indian Ocean in 1405, 1407, 1409, 1413, 1417, 1421 and 1431.

The invention of telegraph in 1837 marked the beginning of modern international communication, which was no longer restricted to cross-border/transnational information dissemination. Instead, it could trigger worldwide debate over the domestic issues of a particular country, and could even result in foreign interference or interventions. In this regard, the American Civil War (1861-1865) was arguably the first classic example. With the help of telegraphy, the following European media were able to cover this war: The Times and Reuters (UK); Havas (France), as well as Wolff (Germany). The Times actively helped the “pro-Southern States group” in the UK

① Thussu, 2000

② Innis, 1950.

by publishing a large number of articles attacking the Northern States, and in 1864, its effort nearly resulted in the UK Parliament passing a motion (proposed by Hamilton Lindsay) of involvement in the American Civil War. Still, international communication during that period remained at a stage of exploration and experience seeking and accumulation, and no specialized study was carried out.

In the 20th Century, radio, movies, television, the Internet and other electronic media were successively introduced and constantly improved, increasing the influence of international communication in the areas of world politics, economy, and culture. Thus, international communication was faced with even more complicated internal and external factors. Accordingly, more in-depth theoretical studies were done. In fact, "it was not until the 1940s-1960s that communication studies developed into basic academic schools of their own and began to take shape."^① By contrast, international communication lagged in theoretical system building.

In the 1970s, Heiz-Dietrich Fischer and John C. Merrill redefined international communication, holding that international communication was inter-governmental exchange of information, not just cross-border information flow and that the communication order was under the control of a few major powers.^② This explanation preliminarily specified the three core features of international communication. First, it is a type of cross-border communication. Second, international communication mostly takes place between governments, as opposed to

mass communication, which mainly targets the general public and markets. Third, international communication is a crucial tool to help handle inter-state and international relations.

Until the 1990s, the definition of international communication was still under debate. Fischer and Merrill's conclusion of the above mentioned core features were extensively accepted among scholars, who in turn gradually extended the definition of international communication to cover more areas such as politics, economy, society, culture and military affairs.^③ Robert S. Fortner, an American scholar in communication identified six characteristics of international communication, i.e. internationality (which pertains to the purpose of transmission as propaganda), channels, distribution technologies, content forms, cultural consequences and political nature.^④ This framework could be of reference value to the defining of international communication.

Based on relevant theories of international politics, international economics, sociology and communication studies,^⑤ this paper attempts to define international communication in the context of globalization. Compared with other communication patterns (mass communication, etc.), international communication is particularly highlighted by the fact that it concerns a country's development landscape and core interests. International communication is designed to battle for public opinion and build a favorable environment of public opinion both at home and abroad. Currently, it has become a primary channel for a country or region to demonstrate its

① Hu, 1998, p.13

② Fischer & Merrill, 1976

③ From the 1970s to the 1990s, a range of international communication definitions were proposed and related works were written by many scholars in this field, including: Robert S. Fortner. (1993). *International communication: History, conflict and control of the global metropolis*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company; Cees J. Hamelink. (1994). *The politics of world communication: A human rights perspective*. London: Sage. Hamid Mowlana. (1997). *Global information and world communication: New frontiers in international relations (2nd Edition)*. London: Sage.

④ Fortner, 2000, p.6-11

⑤ Representative scholars in this regard include Daniel Lerner, Bernard Cohen, Joseph Nye, etc. in the area of international politics; Rafael La Porta, Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnston, James Robinson, etc. in the area of development economics; Anthony Giddens, etc. in the area of sociology.

power of influence. Overall, the connotation and denotation of international communication can be analyzed from four dimensions.

First, international communication is a pattern of distinctive purposeful communication. Right from the beginning, international communication has been utilized in competitions among countries and the even more intense ideological confrontations that followed. Gradually, its influence covered almost all aspects of international relations, and were increasingly capable of determining the topics and operations of those aspects. Thus, international communication has become a defining factor for a whether a country can expand its development space.

Second, international communication is a pattern of communication that concerns more than information release and exchange. When it comes to richness and complexity, international communication far exceeds mass communication in a general sense. Its selection of communication content mainly depends on how much the content can influence the mainstream values, value standards and behavioral paradigms of a target country, or even the international community. It is fair to say that compared with mass communication, international communication has more distinctive sociological indications.

Third, international communication is done through multiple channels, of which government is the primary channel. Judging from the current situation, non-governmental and semi-governmental institutions (relevant think tanks, enterprises, media, international organizations) are increasingly active in this area.

Fourth, international communication is about showcasing comprehensive strength and competitions among countries and regions. The fact that international communication can exert strong political, economic and cultural influences distinguishes itself from mass communication. In terms of political influence, Robert S. Fortner used to argue that international communication is of a political nature, which can be either explicit or implicit.^① In terms of economic influence, Simon Anholt, the proposer of nation branding and a British policy adviser, referred to a range of theories concerning the country of origin and other aspects of economics^② and gave an in-depth analysis of the possible enormous economic influence that international communication could bring. According to Simon Anholt, “National image – whether positive or negative, true or untrue – fundamentally affect our behavior towards other countries, and their people, products and services; It may seem unfair, but there is nothing anybody can do to change this.”^③ Its cultural influence has been thoroughly debated by Neo-imperialism and other schools. It has been proved by substantial empirical studies that international communication inevitably brings about profound cultural influence.

It can be concluded from the four dimensions that the effects of international communication are hierarchical. First, international communication concerns information communication and transfer. Its primary effect comes from information transfer. Second, international communication showcases the image of the initiator and at the same time shapes the image of otherness. In this sense, interpretive

① Fortner, 2000, pp.8–9

② In 1965, American scholar Robert D. Schooler proposed the theory of country-of-origin, holding that the country of origin can influence consumers' choice of and comment on a product brand. In the 1980s, positive analyses on consumers in the Netherlands, Italy and the USA further acknowledged that the country of origin did influence consumers' purchase intent.

③ Anholt, 2007, p.1

effects are the second-tier outcomes that international communication aims to achieve. The ultimate purpose of international communication is to change the target audience, for which the effect of change is at the highest tier.

In short, international communication carries constitutive and developmental features. Its developmental feature refers to strength and outstanding adaptability and applicability.

Since the late 1980s, with the rapid emergence of new media such as the Internet, international communication has seen its effects of transfer, interpretation and change constantly enhanced, becoming a serious issue that must be prudently approached in state and global governance. This is exemplified by Edwin Diamond's empirical study on previous US presidents' relationships with the media. According to his study, President Carter, having realized that the media were not responsible for providing information, but for screening information, often appeared hesitant in making decisions concerning foreign relations. By contrast, President Reagan and President George H. W. Bush were adept in utilizing international communication to pave the way for the US foreign policies to be recognized by the international community.^① A more recent case was the Kosovo War in 1999. More and more disclosed information suggested that one major reason for the USA's intervention in the Kosovo War was to suppress the newly introduced Euro, and prevented it from forming any threat to the US dollar. However, through the systematic deployment of international communication, the USA's intervention in the war was presented as a righteous move to defend peace and protect human rights, effectively leading public opinions both inside and outside the USA.

Thus, it can be seen that international

communication, due to its characteristics, is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it is an important booster of international exchanges and cooperation. On the other hand, it also creates and significantly influences public opinions. Today, the profoundly changing international environment further increases the development uncertainty of international communication. The co-existence of positive and negative impacts of international communication has thus highlighted the following issue: improving the existing order of international communication and building a fairer and more scientific environment of communication to fit the actual level of globalization and to satisfy the demands of developing countries. By achieving such effects, international communication is expected to witness healthy and benign development.

To realize international communication's effects on change, and according to relevant representative theories and previous events of historical significance, this paper divides the development of international communication theories into three stages; the post-WWI era, the Cold War era, and the globalization era.

2. Theories of international communication in the post-WWI era

World War I (WWI) made people aware of the importance of international communication in harsh times of tension, confrontation and war. This stage was marked by pseudo-environment theory, a representative research result of Walter Lippmann, a US journalist and scholar of international politics.

During WWI, Lippmann was responsible for propaganda work. Such an experience was of great importance to his later discovery of communication

① Diamond, 1983, Spitzer, 1993.

functions. He compared the media to the “Bible of democracy,” the book out of which a people determine their conduct. The general law of international communication concluded by Lippmann was in stark contrast with then dominant theories of politics, according to which, it was systems or institutions, rather than people engaged in political activities that determine the results.^① Quite the opposite Lippmann argued, “(with some exceptions) the only method recognized in the Constitution or in the theory of representative government, by which Congress can inform itself, is to exchange opinions from the districts; there is no systematic, adequate, and authorized way for Congress to know what is going on in the world.”^②

The October Revolution in 1917 marked the end of the Vienna System (1815-1914). The strength of Europe as the center for international politics was on the decline. Burdened with the consequences of war, major European countries such as the UK, France and Germany were struggling to continue dominating international affairs, as opposed to the USA’s substantial increase in national strength and influence. Against such a backdrop, the international landscape entered the era of the Versailles-Washington system (1918-1939). In the wake of this shift of power, the USA was increasingly active in international affairs, which significantly increased the demand for international communication. Lippmann thus began to follow events that featured complicated issues with important significance and were prone to trigger strong feelings.^③ He studied how those events

were interpreted and constructed via international communication. In collaboration with Charles Merz, then Associate Editor of the *New York World*, Lippmann attempted to summarize the law of public opinion formation & change based on 1,000 sample reports selected from all the reports on Russia’s October Revolution published in the *New York Times*. When it came to journalist selection, Lippmann’s standard concerned whether a journalist’s report was in anyway conflicted with those of other media. According to Lippmann, reports conflicting with others could not be deemed news, but propaganda. Their co-authored essay “A Test of the News” was published in 1920. In the same year, *Liberty and the News* was published. Through relevant studies, Lippmann held that media could easily manipulate public opinion, especially when they provided false information for the general public. Judging from conception, methodology and research conclusions, Lippmann’s study on the October Revolution was arguably the first and most comprehensive study of international journalism and included the earliest academic analysis of how media influenced public opinion. Although a significant milestone in the study of international communication, Lippmann’s research failed to attract due attention in academic circles.^④

Lippmann’s study on how international communication influenced public opinion under special circumstances ran through the entire WWII era (1939-1945). His study assumed that without any channels for the public to access information,

① Steel, 1980, p.172

② Lippmann, 1922, p.172.

③ Hanno, 2002

④ Lippmann’s study should be the first one involving critical discourse analysis. Yet, it is Norman Fairclough’s *Language and Power* (Pearson ESL, 1989) that has been deemed the beginning of critical discourse analysis by the linguistic community. More references are Gunther R. Kress (1990). *Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Gunther R. Kress (1990). *Reading Images*. Victoria: Deakin University Press. Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl & Karin Liebhart. (2010). *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Veronika Koller & Ruth Wodak. (2010). *Handbook of Communication in the Public Sphere*. New York: De Gruyter Mouton. Ye Qingqing. (2012). *On the Origin of the Anti-democracy in Lippmann’s Thought of Journalism*. *Journalism Lover*, 24.

people would eventually become incompetent, blind, pedantic, disloyal, and panicked which would eventually lead to a public opinion disaster. His study concluded that sensible public opinions can hardly be formed without news and information.^① Lippmann had his *Public Opinion* and the *Phantom Public* successively published in 1922 and 1925. These studies focused on whether public opinion exists and (if so,) how it takes shape and changes. Lippmann's studies eventually yielded pseudo-environment theory, according to which modern communication technology (telegraph, radio, etc.) enabled international communication and, more importantly, was shaping a virtual reality; the world of information was a "phantom" built by the media, not a true reflection of the outside world. In Chapter I of *Public Opinion*, *The World Outside* and the *Pictures in Our Heads*, Lippmann turned from these more or less external limitations to the question of how this trickle of messages from the outside was affected by stored images, preconceptions, and prejudices which completed gaps in information then interpreted available data which in turn powerfully directed the play for our attention. Lippmann then argued that the media were indeed capable of shaping a "national will" or a "social purpose."

From a historic point of view, Lippmann's view was in stark contrast with those of other scholars in international politics and sociology. His analyses mainly focused on whether communication could exercise the highest duty of providing information for fostering public opinion.^② In this sense Lippmann's study formed a school of its own. Filling an academic void with his research findings, Lippmann became the first to argue that an event, or even the overall image of a country could be designed. The research

findings, represented by Lippmann's works, enabled major powers to realize the strategic significance of international communication.

During this period, the USA made notable progress in international communication while European powers failed to conduct relevant research in a systematic way. It is worth mentioning that the newly established Soviet regime endeavored to build a communication system different from the existing capitalist system. Their new system was the Communist press theory determined and introduced by Wilbur Schramm and other scholars.^③ However, it was not until the Cold War era (1947-1991) that the main ideas of the Communist press theory truly came into being. Back then, most countries and regions in Asia were still under colonial rule and therefore had no say in international communication. The so-called media of international communication mainly included foreign-language newspapers and magazines run by western missionaries, businessmen and scholars, as well as some publications in local languages. No related empirical studies were conducted. However, Japan, then the most developed capitalist country in Asia, already practiced international communication in WWI. During the Washington Conference (also called Washington Naval Conference) (1921-1922), the Japanese delegation noticed the extensive response to the view of then US Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, which, they believed, should be attributed to "Hughes' reiteration of American objectives in the media day after day"... "Hughes met some 100 journalists from all over the world every day, specifying the position of the USA. In this regard, Hughes' tactic was 'gaining victory with unstained swords'. By contrast, we (Japan) suffered the pain of zero media support.

① Lippmann, 1920, p.1

② Lippmann, 1920, p.12

③ Schramm, Siebert & Peterson, 1956

During the meeting, what was most frustrating was our lack of media support, for which we (Japan) went nowhere in international negotiations.”^①

Lippmann's studies marked the beginning of international communication theories and subsequently gave rise to a series of crucial research findings. It is noteworthy that Western centralism has had a profound influence on the studies of international communication theories in the West.

3. Theories of international communication in the Cold War era

The Cold War era (1947-1991) is a historic stage that witnessed the rapid development of international communication theories. The so-called ideological confrontation between the capitalist and socialist camps became a forceful booster of that development.

According to Shawn Parry-Giles' theory, international communication (particularly in the USA) in the Cold War era can be divided into the following three periods:^②

First, the Naivete Period (1947-1950) during which the Americans optimistically believed that their American model would naturally surpass and triumph over Communism. The outcome of such a belief was the launch of Voice of America (VOA). According to the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (commonly known as the Smith-Mundt Act), “information produced by VOA for audiences outside the United States shall not be disseminated within the United States.”^③

Second, the Hysteria Period (1950-1953) during which the US strategy of international

communication shifted its focus to the relentless shaping of socialist countries (the Soviet Union in particular) as dangerous powers that threatened world freedom and peace.

Third, the Psychological Strategy Period which started in the mid-1950s. One representative event is the establishment of the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) by President Dwight Eisenhower and the introduction of the Point Four Program by President Harry S. Truman. Those strategies mainly targeted the Third World countries and aimed to realize the export of American culture through a “butter over guns” model.

Historical evidence indicated that international communication in the Psychological Strategy Period shifted from the previous direct, vicious antagonism to a more tactical, coordinated and strategic approach. In such a context, international communication began to integrated into the overall diplomatic framework of a country, receiving unprecedentedly high attention and significantly promoting the construction of relevant theoretical systems.

In terms of defining communication theories, Chinese scholars used to divide international communication into several categories from the perspective of mass communication. Internationally, Daya Kishan Thussu, a British communication scholar summarized major international communication theories but failed to carry out any critical analysis of those theories' conceptions and roles in practice. Based on the theories concluded by Thussu, this paper places representative international communication theories in this period into three categories; development communication study, neo-imperialism study, and critical study. Their main research methods were system analysis,

① Yamamoto Fumio, 2007, p.109

② Shawn, 1994, pp. 448-467

③ Umaru, 2008, p.185

international comparative analysis, positive analysis, empirical analysis, case analysis, historical analysis, psychological analysis, and behavioral analysis. It was during the Cold War era that the methodological framework of international communication was built and enriched.

Development communication study is most represented by Daniel Lerner, a professor of politics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the USA. From 1950 to 1951 he extensively conducted positive research in the Middle Eastern countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iran, and others). In his *Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, Lerner proposed the modernization theory. According to Lerner, through international communication, Western political and economic models could be exported to the Third World to bring quantitative cultural change and eventually trigger qualitative changes. In this way, the so-called traditional societies, which were different from Western societies, would disappear. Lerner argued that “whether from East or West, modernization poses the same basic challenge—the infusion of a rationalist and positivist spirit against which Islam is absolutely defenseless.”^①

His modernization theory recognized the unique role of international communication in cultural reform and paved an implementation path for President Truman’s new “butter over guns” diplomatic strategy, i.e. increasing political participation by increasing media participation. Regarding this, Lerner specified the USA’s major international communication task in the Third World, namely, maintaining two good relationships. One was the relationship between the actual and expected degree of media contact and the other was the relationship between mass media’s capacity of international communication and political awareness.

Wilbur Schramm was another prominent scholar of development communication study after Lerner. In the 1960s, funded by UNESCO, he completed his research into the link between developing countries’ national development and international communication. Like Lerner, Schramm continued to follow the influence of international communication on the change of individual behavior. For example, his concerns included how to change the Third World people’s conception of success and happiness and what elements were essential to facilitate attitude change. Schramm was especially influential for his book *Mass Media and National Development* published in 1964, which took development communication into a more practical and operative stage.

Both Lerner and Schramm firmly held that the development of international communication could effectively influence the Third World and that it could enable social transformation through transference.

Neo-imperialism study featured a diversity of forms whose common ground lay in their attention to how relevant factors (including international communication) replaced the traditional colonial model (“guns over butter” model). In this regard, representative research areas included cultural imperialism, information gap theory and development economics. Moreover, there were also research areas based on the constituent elements of international communication, such as Johan Galtung’s structural imperialism and Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci’s hegemony theory.

By contrast, structural imperialism study extended development communication theory which emerged in the 1960s. Structural imperialism primarily revolved around two types of state models. Galtung attempted to answer the question, “How could—for example—a small foggy island (Britain) in the North Sea rule over one quarter of the world?”^②

① Lerner, 1958, p.120

He concluded that imperialism was not always unchanged and that, quite to the contrary, it could be divided into the historical periods of past, present and future, each of which bore distinctive characteristics. From a perspective of neo-imperialism, the structuralization of international communication resulted in the division of the “Center countries” and the “Periphery countries” and subsequently shaped an international communication order most conducive to the “Center countries.” The division of the “Center countries” and the “Periphery countries” in international communication could create harmony among the “Center countries”, but not between the “Center countries” and the “Periphery countries,” or among the “Periphery countries.” That was why such an international communication landscape benefited “Center countries” the most.

The critical study of international communication, with its core issue being international communication’s influence on civic consciousness, was under the strong influence of the Frankfurt School. In particular, scholars in cultural industry researches, represented by Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and others analyzed how the media giants turned culture into a general commodity made in an assembly line which subsequently changed the public’s understanding of “uses and gratification” in a profound way and popularized Western culture worldwide, and eventually squeezing and seizing the cultural space of Peripheral countries.

Jurgen Habermas, a German sociologist focusing on the public sphere, analyzed how capitalism in the 20th Century carved up the business of international communication worldwide. According to Habermas, due to capital manipulation, the public sphere, a

concept originated in the UK, France and other countries in the 18th Century and offering citizens equal opportunities to engage in and discuss major social issues, did not expand, but shrank. Such analyses unveiled multiple major issues in the international communication order.

In practice, however, their criticism had little impact. For example, both the “new order of international information” and the well-known McBride Report (also known as Many Voices One World) in the 1970s-1980s called for breaking the boundary of “Center” and “Periphery,” only to get the cold shoulder by developed countries and ended up with nothing definite. Likewise, Jurgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere was originally mentioned in his *German work* (1962), whose English version was published in 1989.^② It was not until then that his research began to attract international attention, which mirrored his concern that the refeudalization of international communication was gradually squeezing the development space of world civilization.

The fierce ideological struggle during the Cold War era triggered an urgent demand for innovating diplomatic strategy and thus enabled breakthroughs in the theory and practice of international communication. During that period, power theory became the central theme of international studies. In the face of pressing issues on how to display, maintain and expand power, the study of international communication offered an important approach. Also, this historical factor closely related international communication theories to power struggles and even shaped a primary model for a country or region to enhance its power. Accordingly, many leading scholars in international communication were close

① Galtung, 1971

② *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

to government authorities. This could be exemplified by the case of Daniel Lerner who worked at the Center for International Studies, an organization founded by the US government in 1952. Schramm, one of the founding fathers of US communication research was an informer for the FBI and an advisor and consultant to the “intelligence agencies of the US military, the OSS, and the CIA from 1942 on.”^① Moreover, some major research institutes of international communication such as the East-West Center at Hawaii were “education and research organization(s) established by the U.S. Congress.”^②

4. Theories of international communication in the context of globalization

In 1991, the Cold War, lasting almost half a century, eventually came to an end, with globalization emerging to be the main trend in the following decades. Against such a backdrop international communication theories ushered in a new stage of historical development exhibiting the increasingly distinctive feature of cross-border integration.

From the perspective of general international communication, the critical study of the political economy communications emerged in the 1990s and was a theoretical achievement of marked significance. Just like other critical studies, it was under the influence of Marxism. In terms of the research target the critical study of political economy communications mainly focused on media convergence and the roles of multinational media groups and international organizations. The critical

study in this area followed the huge influence of the USA-controlled global electronic economy on international communication and held that the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and the upheavals in the Central and Eastern European countries, as well as the economic restructuring of China, were all manifestations of challenges facing Marxism.

Over the past two decades, international communication theories have increasingly permeated or integrated into theories in other academic areas. Such permeation is particularly highlighted in three areas; soft power study, image study, and cosmopolitan communications theory.

The concept of “soft power” was first proposed in 1990 by the American scholar of international politics Joseph Nye. At a time when the USA was faced with various development challenges, Nye argued that the USA remains unmatched in terms of its economic and military hard power, and also the third dimension—soft power.^③ According to Nye, “A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it.” Thus, when a country has sufficient soft power, it should be capable of transforming such power into justified and legal hard power in fields such as international politics, economy and military affairs by consolidating its basis of public support. A country’s soft power, according to Nye, rested on three resources; “its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when others see them as legitimate and having

① The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a predecessor of the modern Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), was a wartime US intelligence agency organizing and coordinating anti-Nazi resistance groups in Europe and providing military training for anti-Japanese guerrilla movements in Asia during WWII.

② Umaru, 2008

③ Nye, 2004, p.5

moral authority).”^① The soft power theory offered new understanding for international communication in the context of globalization. Soon, more and more countries began to carry out in-depth research into soft power-building formats suitable for themselves. During this process, the importance of international communication was very much highlighted and a number of imperative research topics in this regard have been introduced.

Yet, for international communication study from the perspective of soft power, one outstanding problem lies in the varied basic stances. Some scholars, based on the Western philosophy of zero-sum game, hold that soft power-driven international communication is by its nature a competition. The common features of relevant studies are mainly reflected in three aspects. The first concerns the research design which gives more consideration to the differences in culture, political values and foreign policy among countries/ regions. The second concerns the research standpoint. Generally, in line with development communication studies, they raise the Western model, or rather the US model, to the height of universal value and criticize any culture, political system or diplomacy different from theirs’. The third aspect concerns solutions, which can sometimes be aggressive, disregarding the independence and rationality of others and questioning the concepts of mutual learning and win-win cooperation.

Simon Anholt introduced the hexagon model of national branding in his *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions* in 2007. Supported by his own theoretical model, Anholt took charge of the release of the first Nation

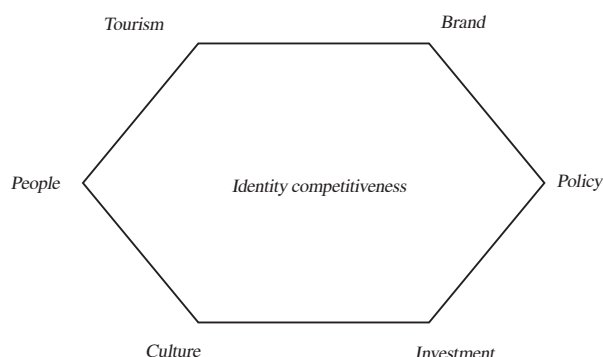


Fig.1 Hexagon Model of National Brand

Brands Index in the international arena.

The concept of national brand, first proposed by Anholt, had an extensive impact on international communication studies and also fostered some developing theoretical models.^② For example, there was one model that focused on how international communication, as a variable, could influence the development space of a country.

However, this area is like the soft power studies in the fact that most Western scholars, including Anholt, considered the building and showcasing of national images to be a competition. As pointed out by Anholt, “Today, the world is one market. The rapid advance of globalization means that every country, every city and every region must compete with every other (for its share of the world’s consumers, tourists, investors, students, entrepreneurs, international sporting and cultural events) for the attention and respect of the international media, of other governments, and the people of other countries.”^③

From a global point of view, such a limitation extensively exists in Western-dominated evaluations of national images. An analysis of image-related

① Nye, 2008, p.96.

② Representative scholars and their works are as follows: Wally Olins. (2002). Branding the nation: The historical context. *Journal of Brand Management*, 4, 241–248; Simon Anholt. (2003). *Brand new justice: The upside of global branding*. Amsterdam: Butterworth–Heinemann; Simon Anholt. (2007). *Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Keith Dinnie. (2008). *Nation branding: concepts, issues, practice*. Oxford: Butterworth–Heinemann, et al.

③ Simon Anholt, 2007, p.1

ranking reports of international influence (*World Happiness Report*, *Global Retail Development Index*, *A Summary of the Liveability Ranking and Overview*, *Kearney Global Ranking*, *OECD Territorial Reviews Competitive Cities in the Global Economy*) indicated an absence of indexes concerning linkage, exchange and development cooperation. It is fair to say that Western-dominated image-related rankings prefer indexes and tools more conforming to the cultural concepts and characteristics of Western countries. When applied to many developing countries, such models exhibit obvious limitations.

In 2009, Pippa Norris (the Paul F. McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University) and Ronald Inglehart (a political scientist and professor emeritus at the University of Michigan) co-hosted the World Values Survey. Based on the empirical data collected through this survey, they introduced a theoretical model of cosmopolitan communication which comprised four elements; production, distribution, content, and influence on the audience. More specifically, international landscape, along with technological and economic reform, transformed the traditional communication model and gave rise to cosmopolitan communication. Given that Western countries (the USA in particular) dominated global cultural trade, cosmopolitan communication was more likely to generate three changes; the integration of other cultures into Western culture, the confrontation of other cultures against Western culture, and the fading of other cultures.^①

The tide of globalization has formed an enormous impetus for international communication studies, prompting integration with other disciplines. Such a context required researchers to extend their analytic vision, improve their communication ideas, take a more objective stance, and avoid Cold War mentality. However, the long-existing problems in international

communication studies remain unsolved. It is thus imperative for international communication studies to be better aligned with the social form in the era of globalization; to guide the development of international communication in a constructive way; and to contribute positively to the maintenance of the increasingly complicated relationships among countries/ regions.

During this period, developing countries, represented by China, are gradually improving their qualifications for international communication and are eager to eliminate doubts and misunderstandings and explore relationship patterns apart from “zero-sum.” An analysis of relevant documents issued by the CPC Central Committee since the 18th CPC National Congress reveals that “telling China’s story” to the rest of the world has been a priority of China’s foreign communication.

In the face of various structural and periodical challenges China proposed “a community with a shared future for mankind,” “peace & development,” “mutual learning,” etc., as opposed to Western centralism. These new ideas are well represented in the Belt and Road Initiative, which was first introduced in 2013. Seen from a historical and global point of view, these theories and practices are expected to make up for the deficiency of previous international communication studies and guide international communication to better safeguard peace, increase mutual understanding and seek cooperation under new situations.

5. Conclusion

Historically speaking, studies on international communication, initiated in the West, has been under the strong influence of Western centralism which has been strongly influenced by Western philosophies. The influence of Western centralism has always been there, from the multiculturalism proposed by



Globalization has reached a new height.

Giambattista Vico, Baron Montesquieu and Johann Herder in the 17th Century to the democratic ideal which emerged in the French Revolution at the end of the 18th Century. For example, according to Giambattista Vico, every nation has its paradigm of thought and life ideals unique to itself, which can hardly be integrated into another society. The values and ideals of a society cannot be easily applied to another. Often, the virtues, literature, arts and heroism defined by a society can hardly be accepted by another. Homer and Achilles belonged only to Greece and there is no chance for them to re-appear in another society.^① Montesquieu put forward the argument of elite-created culture, holding that culture was created by geniuses. A society needs such elites with sufficient knowledge and leadership to perceive

the essence of culture and drive the society to accept and observe the order of law. Herder, outperforming Vico and Montesquieu in many aspects, recognized “people” as the creator of culture. Yet, his theory of “cultural garden” remained an overall evaluation of the cultural law of human society based on the cultural environment of Western society. Accordingly, he believed that each of the “flowers” in the “cultural garden” was unique to others and grew independently, for which exchange and mutual-learning in a cultural sense was impossible.^②

In the era of globalization, parts of such concepts remain unchanged. Driven by the tide of globalization over the past three to four decades, emerging economies, represented by China, have made impressive progress, forging a multi-polarized world

① Berlin, 1991, p.123

② Parekh, 2006.

and triggering extensive concerns of some established powers. Out of such a context have emerged new theoretical perspectives, such as the Thucydides Trap, which prophesies an inevitable war between established and emerging powers. Now developed countries continually enhance their dominance over international communication content and control of resource distribution, attempting to further subvert other countries' cultural identity and values. Some developed countries, attempting to place Western cultural values and practices at the core of global culture, formulate different foreign policies targeting specific countries based on the "closeness" of their cultural values. For example, in 2011 the eruption of violence in Egypt resulted in domestic turmoil. In response to this, James Baker, ex-US Secretary of

State (1989-1992), argued that the US government, when making diplomatic decision, must adhere to its own principles and values, safeguard US interests, and give consideration to whether the contacts are of one mind with the USA.^①

Thanks to the joint efforts of all countries, globalization has reached a new height, yet at the same time it is faced with new challenges and dilemmas. Reacting to such challenges, countries have introduced various solutions. China hopes to shoulder the responsibilities of the times with others and promote joint development of the entire world. In the face of new conditions, environments and tasks, innovations and breakthroughs must be made within the theory and practice of international communication to fulfill the missions of the times.

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① The Charhar Institute. A review of the US think tanks: the 11 major changes worth our attention in 2011. Retrieved from <http://blog.ifeng.com/article/16355684.html>.

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