

Book Review

Book Review on *Internationalizing “International Communication”*, edited by **Chin-Chuan Lee**, The University of Michigan Press, 2015, vi+332 pp.

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The term *international* and *global* are interchangeably used in international communication. *International* often refers to the exchange of information and ideas between and among nations, regardless of economic standing, whereas *global* is intrinsically hegemonic, implying a one-way flow of power from the powerful to the powerless. The book *Internationalizing “International Communication”* is believed to have opened up a different approach to studying communication in a cosmopolitan ecology across countries. Chin-Chuan Lee, the book’s editor, reflects critically on the field’s history and thoughtfully proposes, “scholars of international communication need the cultural confidence and epistemological autonomy to make their mark on global or cosmopolitan theory, which necessarily will entail borrowing, recasting, or reconceptualizing Western theories—the more the better, whatever help us elucidate and analyze rich local experiences and connect them to broader processes, whatever broaden our horizons and expand our repertoire, as long as we are not beholden to any purported final arbiter of universal truth” (p. 16).

In Chapter One, Lee challenges the implied universality of Americentric concepts and methodologies in communication research. Even in an increasingly globalized world where information moves freely across borders, these ideas retain the international designation as a method to signal that nation-states remain powerful actors in the production and distribution of media content. While Lee is careful not to dismiss any theory purely because of its origins, he does allow a broader range of intellectual traditions to participate in the discussion. This book is a bold step in that direction.

The subsequent fourteen chapters accept Lee’s invitation, resulting in a chorus of voices rarely heard in academic settings. Elihu Katz, for example, spends most of Chapter Two debating what it means to internationalize intercultural communication. He talks about his role in the launch of broadcast television in Israel, as well as the lessons he gained from the experience which he labelled as international communication research. He thinks that the international communication preceded national communication, rather than vice versa.

In Chapter Three, Tsan-Kuo Chang examines the theoretical implications of cultural imperialism, concluding that it “no longer fits the world of interconnected and interdependent nations in a global network society” (p. 61). According to the

author, at a time when the field of international communication studies has expanded significantly in recent decades, the production and accumulation of knowledge have been less impressive. In fact, without keeping up with the times, the field has been regurgitating old ideas and obsolete perspectives.

In Chapter Four, Jan Servaes presents Thailand as a counterexample of a democratic nation with a non-Western media system, offering historical context for Western bias in previous four theories of the press. He talks about the importance of “internationalization” in journalism and media education, mentioning that professional journalism education is based on local or national parameters. According to him, apart from creating appropriate political and economic environments for an independent media system, it is crucial to educate journalists to the highest ethical and professional standards.

In Chapter Five, Paolo Mancini revisits research he co-authored in 2004 to assess how professional journalism has altered in the wake of polarized politics and social media activism. Even though journalists perceive there is a dominant model of journalism whose practices and principles are spreading over the world, and even if they claim to adopt and apply this normative framework, they behave in a completely different way in their daily activities. At the very least, there is a mismatch between journalism theory and practice.

Michael Curtin in Chapter Six argues that film studies have become sufficiently internationalized, with media capitals such as Mumbai competing with Hollywood for a slice of global markets while their products are consumed locally in unexpected ways, noting the Chinese film industry’s recent move from Hong Kong to Beijing as an inward turn. In Chapter Seven, Jaap van Ginneken takes a somewhat different approach, utilizing data from IMDb (an online database of information related to films) to illustrate that major Hollywood studios continue to dominate the film industry, owing in part to their commercial character. Even with blockbuster films like *Avatar*, he agrees with Curtin that audiences can discover their meaning.

Colin Sparks returns to the concept of cultural imperialism in Chapter Eight. Before proposing a narrower scope that captures how modern nation-states exploit media in fights over intellectual property, airwave regulation, and internet control, he points out the challenges with presuming a united national culture or single reading of literature. Silvio Waisbord warns against adopting an area studies approach and separating dialogues along narrow geopolitical lines, as media studies shift away from their Western concentration (e.g., East Asian media studies). Instead, he promotes a cosmopolitan viewpoint that places “local research in the context of global debates and trends, and engaging in conversations that transcend local interests and phenomena” (p. 187).

In Chapter Ten, Chin-Chuan Lee revisits Lerner's (1958) and Rogers' (2003) seminal views that encouraged him to pursue a career in international communication. Lee evaluates their strengths and flaws and proposes a Weberian approach (Weber, 1930, 1951, 1978a, 1978b) as an alternative to imposing Western-based theories on the rest of the world, with the specific/local dialectical interaction with the general/global. He also mentions that international communication is a creative fusion of local perspectives and global visions and that applying theories to explain our experiences should gain over appropriating our experiences to fit the theories.

The final four chapters provide insights into how Weber's strategy would work in reality. Judy Polumbaum revisits her research in modern China in Chapter Eleven, looking at it through the lenses of Bourdieu and Johnson's (1993) "fields of cultural production" and Giddens' (1984) "theory of structuration". In what appears to be a tightly regulated media environment, she reveals increasing tensions between the state and capital. She offered two additional guiding concepts for international communication research: *circumstances* and *serendipity* and proposed a third optional but highly recommended principle: *whimsy*.

Longxi Zhang investigates the historic and complicated relationship between East and West in Chapter Twelve, going to Marco Polo. He concludes that translation can still be applicable to challenge ethnocentrism and bridge cultural divides. He opines that translation across languages can provide a model because it most clearly poses communication questions.

Rodney Benson emphasizes the limitations and biases of significant ideas in current media studies, such as Habermas' "public sphere" (1992), Bourdieu and Johnson's "fields" (1993), Castells' "network society" (1996), and Latour's "actor-network theory" (2005) in Chapter Thirteen. They do not exhaust the possibilities for internationalizing media studies, but simply propose a spectrum of possible solutions, on which or against which future theorizing—both Western and non-Western—might build fruitfully. Therefore, in the digital age, he also highlights their potential to create greater understanding and collaboration between Western and non-Western researchers.

In Chapter Fourteen, Peter Dahlgren criticizes media studies as an excessively complacent and self-absorbed field. He sees cosmopolitanism as the most promising road ahead, yet one that necessitates civic engagement and acceptance of various research techniques. For international communication research, Dahlgren highlights the importance of the normative and cultural frameworks of civic international communication actors and comments that these can be refracted at least in part through the prism of cosmopolitanism.

The book ends with Arvind Rajagopal's critical account of the meteoric rise of communication technology in India. He looks at how technology has exacerbated

societal divisions and made violence more obvious, casting doubt on the Cold War-era premise that more access to visual media will inevitably lead to a transparent, rational society.

I found “Local Experiences, Cosmopolitan Theories”, by Chin-Chuan Lee, as the most informative and provocative chapter in the book. In this wonderful chapter, Lee concisely reviews the attempts in recent decades to internationalize media studies, exposing the inadequacy of those models, with an appropriate critique of uber-enthusiastic unipolarists like Francis Fukuyama. He also argues for a new way not just to examine the works of media, but to understand how communication and media impact the lives of media consumers across countries characterized by evolving digital ecology: cosmopolitanism. Lee states that “If international communication scholars are truly serious about achieving the goals of mutual understanding through cultural dialogue, it is imperative that we listen humbly to symphonic music whose harmonious unity has themes and variations and is made of a cacophony of instrumental sounds” (p.218).

International communication can transcend national and cultural boundaries in the acquisition of knowledge about cultural values, behavioral patterns, and interaction rules that enable effective transcultural interaction. As a result, transcultural communication must take the context into account. Transcultural perspectives add a significant new dimension to research by transcending, transgressing, and transforming borders across languages, communities, and cultures, which reflects the spirit of international communication. As a result, I believe that transcultural communication is a step in the right direction toward strengthening international communication.

Overall, this volume covers a diverse spectrum of viewpoints on what it takes to internationalize media and communication studies. At the same time, each author emphasizes the critical significance of controlling information overload, encouraging visual literacy, and engaging in fruitful debates over global, national, and local issues. Unfortunately, after fifteen chapters, the messages start to sound the same. In addition, several chapters of the book focus on Asia, for the book grew out of a conference held in Hong Kong. Nonetheless, I would have loved to see additional research from the world’s other underrepresented regions.

Ultimately, *Internationalizing “International Communication”* is a good starting point for a long-overdue discourse in media studies and other social science and humanities departments. I strongly recommend this volume for graduate or advanced undergraduate international communication courses, genuinely hoping that future academics adopt the suggested modifications in how such research is performed and received.

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