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**The Need For The Study Of Asian
Approaches To Communication**

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ASIAN APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATION

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A preoccupation with metatheory is a clear sign that a given discipline has attained a certain level of maturity. This is certainly the case with communication. One has only to scan the various journals devoted to the academic study of communication to be confronted with the fact that meta-theory has become an important area of inquiry. So far, however, our attention has been confined to communication metatheory associated with industrially advanced Western countries. If we are to widen our field of inquiry productively and to secure greater insights we need to pay more attention to concepts of communication formulated by non-Western societies as well. A study of classical Indian, Chinese, and Japanese treatises as well as those of other Asian countries, folk dramas and other modes of traditional communication, and communication behavior characteristic of Asian countries can prove to be of inestimable value in this endeavor. Therefore, the need to pay attention to the conceptualizations of communication characteristic of these countries and to engage in sustained and comparative studies in this domain is a very real one.

Scholars of communication in Third World countries evince a great interest in communication theory. For example, in a survey of communication teaching in ASEAN countries, it was found that communication theory was placed second in rank-order among the type of communication courses which ASEAN communication scholars prefer to teach. The first was, predictably enough, development communication. This is, undoubtedly, a healthy sign. However, what is somewhat alarming is the type of communication theory that is being disseminated and discussed in many Third World universities -- it is essentially North American in origin and substance. This is, of course, not to minimize or underestimate the very significant, and in many ways, stimulating contributions to communication theory that have been made by scholars like Cooley, Mead, Lasswell,

Schramm, and Berlo. The point that I am seeking to emphasize is that at this stage in the development of the scholarly study of communication, it is indeed important for everybody concerned to seek to broaden the domain of inquiry by exploring the concepts of communication that have been formulated in non-Western societies as a means of promoting a greater degree of understanding of the nature of human interaction.

For example, in the AESEAN study, it was found that 71% of the material used in teaching courses in communication theory was of American origin. My study of communication teaching in South Asia revealed an even higher percentage — 78%. It is interesting to note in this regard that in the AESEAN study it was found that the five most commonly used communication books in the year of the study are, in rank order:

1. The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Schramm and Roberts. 1971.
2. Communication of Innovations. Rogers with Shoemaker. 1971.
3. The Process of Communication. Berlo. 1960.
4. Effective Public Relations. Cutlip and Center. 1971.
5. Television Production Handbook and Workbook. Zettl. 1968.

Other books on communication by American scholars that are frequently used by AESEAN communication scholars are, Mass Media and National Development (Schramm. 1964); Communication and Change in the Developing Countries (Lerner and Schramm. 1967); Four Theories of the Press (Siebert et.al.); Responsibility in Mass Communication (Rivers and Schramm, 1959); Mass Communication (Schramm 1960); and Modernization Among Peasants: The Impact of Communication (Rogers with Swenning. 1969).

It is interesting to compare this list with the most frequently used communication books in South Asia as revealed in my study. Their rank ordering

is as follows:

1. Mass Media and National Development. Schramm. 1964.
2. Communication and Change in the Developing Countries. Lerner and Schramm. 1967.
3. The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Schramm. 1954.
4. The Process of Communication. Berlo. 1960.
5. Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers. 1962)
6. Introduction to Mass Communication. Emery et. al. 1960.
7. Responsibility in Mass Communication. Rivers and Schramm. 1959.
8. Theories of Mass Communication. De Fleur. 1970.
9. The Effects of Mass Media. Klapper. 1960.
10. Four Theories of the Press. Siebert et. al.

This great interest in American communication studies is due to certain historical circumstances. In the Third World, many of the university departments of communication are built around journalism and many of the research programs both inside and outside universities are largely mass communication effect studies. The course content and nature of training in these institutes of learning bear an unmistakably close resemblance to what is found in the United States. This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that communication as a field of academic study first gained recognition in the United States and the majority of the teachers are trained in the United States.

In America, there were two main tributaries which fed the mainstream of communication studies. On the one hand, there was the study of speech communication and rhetoric. On the other hand, there was the study of mass communication -- press, radio, television, public relations, advertising, etc. As many of the university departments of communication in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were set up in response to the need to train students to fill posts in

the media, they paid greater attention to mass communication. Communication departments in many Third World universities are outgrowths of journalism departments, and whatever theory that was taught was largely inspired by American writings. However, with a greater interest in communication theory shown by communication scholars in both developed and developing countries, it is indeed opportune to rethink the nature of communication theory from a comparative perspective.

The study of comparative communication theory should be encouraged and promoted for two main reasons. First, it helps to widen the field of discourse and facilitate the emergence of new insights from various cultures that enable us to comprehend and conceptualize better the act of communication. Second, communication theory has a vital link with communication research. It is manifest that social research is largely guided by the social context in which it operates and is influenced by the cultural ethos which sustains it. Therefore, in order to promote more productive and relevant communication research in non-Western societies rather than to encourage a blindly servile adherence to Western research credos, it is vital that more and more explorations in indigenous communication theory be encouraged.

Much of the communications research carried out in Third World countries is less than satisfactory and largely irrelevant to the pressing concerns of the society at large. James Halloran, who, perhaps more than anyone else, has demonstrated the need to think afresh the role of communications research in developing countries, has drawn attention to the concept of critical research or policy research as opposed to administrative research — a distinction originally made by Paul Lazarsfeld in the 1940's². In his opinion, critical research is closely linked to values and is to a very great extent uninfluenced by the wishes of the media institutions. According to Halloran, this alterna-

tive form of social research seeks to examine social issues of importance to the generality of the people and not to the politicians and media managers. Moreover, this critical approach places a greater emphasis on communication as a process and on the need to study media institutions in relation to the other institutions of society and to conceptualize research in terms of structure, organization, professionalization, socialization, participation, etc. In order to promote critical communication research in the Third World, it is vitally necessary to re-examine the kind of communication theories, models, paradigms, and conceptualizations that are currently in vogue and seek to come up with alternate theories, models, and paradigms that are more in consonance with the cultural ethos and world-view of the people, and therefore more likely to contribute to a critical research stance.

The close and vital relationship between communication theory and communication research can be usefully illustrated by citing the American experience. The model of communication that is still in many ways dominant in America is one that has been characterized as communicator-based, unidirectional, manipulative. Lasswell, whose thinking has had a profound influence on the evolution of communication studies in the United States, visualized the act of communication in terms of the response to these five questions:

Who
Says what
In which channel
To whom
With what effect³

Shannon and Weaver, in their widely discussed model, talk about an information source - transmitter - channel - receiver - destination.⁴ It does not require great powers of perspicacity to observe that both these models can be accommodated in the same mould of thinking. Some of the most influential

descriptions of communication among Western scholars bear the imprint of this mode of thinking. For example, Osgood says, "In the most general sense, we have communication whenever one system, a source influences another, the destination, by manipulation of alternative signals which can be transferred over the channels connecting them."⁵ "Influence" and "manipulation" are the operative terms.

This line of thinking, which is quintessentially Western, can be termed Aristotelian. Aristotle was one of the earliest Western scholars to come up with a model of human communication. In his model, as delineated in his celebrated work, the "Rhetoric," there are three important elements associated with the act of communication — the communicator, the message and the receiver, and the objective of communication is to influence or persuade the receiver in a manner that is considered appropriate by the communicator. Despite the writings of a few theorists like Berlo,⁶ it is indeed justifiable to say that this is still the most pervasive model of communication found in the United States, and is closely linked to the mainstream of communication research in the United States. Halloran says:

In the United States, the main thrust of the mass communication research had developed, like other branches of social science, essentially as a response to the requirements of modern, industrial, urban society for empirical, quantitative, policy-related, information about its operations. On the whole, research was carried out with a view to improving the effectiveness of the media, often regarded simply as objects of study or as "neutral tools" in achieving stated aims and objectives often of a commercial nature.⁷

The thrust of this kind of communications research fits in admirably with the imperatives of the communicator-based model that was mentioned earlier. Its aim is to influence and manipulate the audience. Asian scholars, too, by

and large, seem to adhere to this model despite the fact that it is Western-oriented and is in no significant sense consonant with the cultural configurations and epistemological underpinnings that characterize Asian societies. If Asian communication scholars are to come up with models of communication which bear the imprint of their own cultures and which will enable them to comprehend better and conceptualize more clearly the complexity of human communication, it is indeed imperative that they shake off the influence of the mechanistic Aristotelian model. They need to address their mind to the task of finding out how best they can draw upon the cumulative wisdom of Asian human sciences as a means of formulating theories and models of communication that are reflective of the cultural ethos of the people, and for that very reason, more pertinent and heuristically useful.

In order for this to happen, a necessary first step is to move away from the functionalist perspective that characterizes much of communication research in the West, and which continues to exercise a powerful influence on the East. With the rise and development of interpretive approaches to the social sciences, and with the increasing dissemination of the ideas of such scholars as Foucault, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Habermas, Geertz etc., many fundamental questions have been raised concerning the positivistic and functionalist approaches. In addition to the questions raised by these scholars, those of us in the East have to be alertly sensitive to two other considerations, one pragmatic and the other theoretical. The first is the essentially conservative and status quo maintaining nature of functionalism and its inability to convincingly and productively handle social change. In Asian countries, where the preponderant majority of the people live in misery and poverty, the need for social change is inescapably paramount. Therefore, if we subscribe to the notion, as I certainly do, that social research should have a beneficial impact

on society, it is indeed imperative that we pay more and more attention to research philosophies that can profitably handle, and indeed stimulate, social change.

In recent times, the concept of participatory research has gained currency, particularly among European communication scholars. It is seen as a process of interrelationships and mutual education between the researcher and the other social actors who take part in the investigation as subjects of research. The advocates of this form of research see it as a process through which the critical perception of social reality generates a form of awareness and a stimulus for social action for all the actors involved. This, of course, requires that the researcher be inserted into the social reality generated by the actors in the process of communication. It is as a consequence of this shared experience of action for social change that theoretical hypotheses and methodology are generated. This participatory form of research necessitates the abandonment of a positivistic perspective.

The second problem associated with functionalism operates at the metaphysical level. Functionalism is modelled on positivistic natural sciences which believe in the notion of man controlling Nature for man's benefit. In other words, it postulates a duality between Man and Nature. On the contrary, Asian cultures emphatically uphold the creatively fecundating union between Man and Nature. Hence, there is an obvious disparity between the metaphysical and epistemological underpinnings of functionalism and the ethos that surrounds Asian cultures. It is precisely because of this discrepancy that I think Asian communication scholars should turn more towards philosophical approaches like phenomenology which do not accept the rigid division between appearance and reality and which, in addition, emphasize imagination, intuition and values. The fact that Western social scientists are increasingly beginning to question

the validity and usefulness of functionalism only underlines the need for Asian communication scholars to shake off this influence.

I have dwelt at length on this aspect of communication research because theory and research are inseparably linked. Theory guides research and research refines theory. If Asian communication scholars are to engage in more productive and relevant research, it is indeed imperative that they address their minds to the question of formulating alternative theories and models.

So far, we have been discussing the need to come up with Asian theories of communication that would enable Asian communication scholars to engage in more productive communication research and also to lend greater depth to discussions of human interaction. How can we accomplish this? First, we need to examine the classical treatises on philosophy, rhetoric, linguistics, poetics etc. with a view to extracting certain principles and postulates of communication. Second, we need to examine various rituals, folk dramas, etc. which have been handed down from generation to generation, and which deal with symbolic communication, with the intention of finding out what is uniquely culture-specific about them. Third, we need to explore the communicative behavior characteristic of different societies from an intercultural perspective so as to acquire a set of principles or axioms that guides communicative behavior. In this paper, I wish to concentrate on the first of these approaches.

Some exploratory work has been done in this direction, and the results are certainly encouraging. At this point, I wish to draw upon my own research in this domain, particularly in relation to classical India.⁸ Many scholars have pointed out the centrality of Bhartrhari's "The Vakyapadiya," a work composed somewhere in the 5th century A.D. to a proper understanding of Indian philosophical and linguistic thought.⁹ Although this treatise was composed some fifteen centuries ago, its essential communication message has almost a con-

temporary ring to it and a refreshing relevance to modern communication studies. Indeed, the basic thinking reflected in the Vakyapadiya is in perfect consonance with some of the modern conceptualizations in the field of communication.

As the title indicates, the Vakyapadiya is a book which deals with the concept of sentence (vakya) and word (pada). However, it needs to be noted that the author has sought to explore his subject in so comprehensive a manner that he has brought within his exploratory domain a plurality of other topics. His principal objective, though, is to clarify the intimate relationship that exists between word and meaning. In other words, it is with linguistic meaning and communication that Bhartrihari is primarily concerned.

For students of communication, the Vakyapadiya contains four vital strands of thought, which can prove to be extremely stimulating, and which invite deeper scrutiny. The strands of thoughts are, of course, interconnected and emanate from his deeply held worldview, which was a monism closely associated with the Vedas and the Upanishads. The first of these is Bhartrihari's contention pertaining to the role of language in human cognition. He categorically says that

There is no cognition in the world in which the word
does not figure. All knowledge is, as it were,
intertwined with language, the word. 10

Hence, it is quite evident that Bhartrihari is pointing out the very intimate connection that exists between language and human cognition. From the point of view of communication theory this notion has far-reaching implications.

In this regard, it is interesting to observe that what Bhartrihari asserted some fifteen centuries ago finds an echo in the widely discussed Sapir-Whorf theory of linguistic relativity. This theory was originally adumbrated in an article published in 1929 by Sapir. He says:

Language is a guide to social reality. Though language is not ordinarily thought of as of essential interest to the students of social science, it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social reality as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. "

Similarly, Whorf makes the point that the linguistic system of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather in itself the shaper of ideas.

That there is a remarkable correspondence between the thinking of Bhartrhari and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is quite potent. This line of thinking, to be sure, did not originate in the Western world with Sapir and Whorf. Some of the remarks of Plato can be interpreted in a way that supports such a view. It was Sapir and Whorf, however, who formulated this theory in unambiguous terms. Clearly, the theory of linguistic relativity in its extreme form has been justifiably rejected by many scholars as being over simplistic and one-sided. One cannot, though, controvert the fact that this theory contains an essential truth and that leading modern thinkers like Wittgenstein, Levi-Strauss and Piaget show an affinity to this line of thought.

From the point of view of communication theory, the second important concept embedded in the Vakyapadiya is concerned with the unit of meaning. While most other contemporary scholars stressed the need to regard the word as the unit of meaning in verbal communication, Bhartrhari maintained that the total sentence should be considered the unit of meaning. Indeed, Bhartrhari devotes

the second kanda of his treatise to establish this point. He first discusses the eight ways in which traditional scholars conceptualized language and meaning and then argues that the word has no separate existence apart from the sentence; the sentence is indeed the unit of meaning.

It is rather interesting to observe that this concept of Bhartrhari shows a great affinity to the view of language expressed by Chomsky. Chomsky and other Transformational Grammarians take the sentence as the unit of analysis.¹² This is not to suggest that other philosophers and linguists did not pay adequate attention to the sentence as the unit of meaning. The Positivistic philosophers, for example, were basically concerned with the analysis of sentences and their inference relations. Their main focus of interest, however, was the logical syntax of language.

From a communication point of view, Bhartrhari's inclination to take the sentence as the unit of meaning is indeed interesting. This conceptual thrust is central to modern communication theory. As Kincaid points out,

The semantic understanding of a word requires the application of a particular concept out of the possible set of concepts one has available to apply in a given situation. This is also a decision process which reduces uncertainty within some range of tolerance. As this level, however, uncertainty is created by recognition of the word pattern. Furthermore, there is no single concept which applies to the word, "rebellion," in the same way that there is only one word in the English language which applies to be particular combination of letters, r-e-b-e-l-l-i-o-n.

It is useful to think of the concept of a word as embedded within a relatively bound semantic space or domain of meaning. A word like, "rebellion" has no singular isolated conceptual meaning by itself, but rather is located or placed within an appropriate semantic space in relation to all of the other salient concepts with which it is commonly associated. Its specific meaning is a function of its relationship to other relevant concepts in a particular context. 13

The third important strand of thought contained in the Vakyapadiya is related to the contextualization of communication. The contextualization of utterances, as Bhartrhari very persuasively points out, facilitates in the circumscribing of the field of discourse, thereby eliminating ambiguities of meaning. In the view of Bhartrhari, the context of utterance consists of a multiplicity of variables. They can be broadly divided into two categories.

1. Intralinguistic variables
2. Extralinguistic variables

In the first category are included such variables as syntactic relations (vakya), semantic compatibility between the items in the sentence (artha), association implied by particular items which have the effect of restricting the meaning (samsarga), dissociation implied by particular items which have the effect of restricting the meaning (viprayoga), etc. In the second category are included such variables as context of situation (parkarana), spatial relations (dera) and temporal relations (kala).¹⁴

When analyzing intralinguistic variables, it becomes evident that Bhartrhari chose to place emphasis on both syntactic and semantic dimensions. A sentence can be syntactically impeccable, yet be wanting in meaning if it does not fulfill the needs of semantic compatibility. The extralinguistic variables consist of spatio-temporal as well as socio-cultural dimensions. Here, Bhartrhari's commentator, Panyanaya, gives us some illuminating examples.

saindhavam anaya

Bring the salt/horse¹⁵

"Saindhavam" in Sanskrit can mean both salt and horse. Therefore, in the command quoted above the meaning of "saindhavam" is ambiguous. Both readings seem permissible. Indeed, it is only the context in which the utterance is made that will facilitate the selection of the appropriate meaning. If the

context in which the utterance is made is related to eating, then, naturally "salt" is the more appropriate meaning. Conversely, if the situation is connected with a battle, "horse" is the more appropriate choice.

Let us consider another example furnished by Punyanaya. He says that when one says "the door," it would mean two entirely different things in winter and summer. In the winter it would mean that the door needs to be shut. In the summer it would mean that the door needs to be opened. All these examples, then, point to one important fact — that is that the contextualization of an utterance helps enormously in the disambiguation of meaning.

From the point of view of communication theory, this notion of the contextualization of an utterance is important on a number of counts. Firstly, in an intentional act of communication, the receiver always seeks to decode a symbiotic system of meaning so as to obtain information. The symbolic system of meaning may be visual or auditory or oral or a combination of them. What is important is that for communication to take place, the receiver must actively engage himself in an act of decoding. Therefore, to my mind, in endeavoring to construct more meaningful theories of human communication we must start from the receiver and the decoding process, and not from the communicator and the encoding process as communication scholars have done from Aristotle to Shannon and Weaver.

In order to enforce this point further, let us consider verbal communication. In verbal communication the receiver should be able, if indeed communication is to take place efficaciously, to decode the symbolic notation system constructed by the communicator. For effective communication to take place, the decoding process must constitute a mirror image of the encoding process. In other words, there should be a commonly shared schema of interpretation between the communicator and the receiver. Therefore, from the point of view

of communication theory an interesting question that naturally presents itself is, "What are the factors which promote and facilitate the emergence of a commonly shared schema of interpretation that would result in the disambiguation of communicative meaning?" In this regard, it is indeed interesting to note that Bhartrhari some fifteen centuries ago came up with a highly suggestive list of variables which enables us to disambiguate communicative meaning. This is, to the best of my understanding, the earliest known attempt to construct a schema of interpretation of communicative meaning from the receiver's point of view.

Secondly, Bhartrhari's notion of the contextualization of experience serves to illuminate the relationship that exists between contextualization and a systemic perspective. The notion of context of communication becomes important only in a world where everything is interconnected and does not exist in isolation from others. Bhartrhari was, of course, a Monist philosopher. It was his considered opinion that everything in the world constituted a concrete manifestation of the Brahman. Therefore, in the idiom of modern communication scholars, he adopted a holistic and systemic perspective. His inclination to emphasize the importance of context in communication springs from his Monistic vision. From the point of view of communication theory, what is interesting to observe is the idea that the contextualization of communication makes sense only in a holistic and systemic perspective.

The fourth key notion, and in many ways the most important, that is to be found from a communications viewpoint in Bhartrhari's treatise is related to the notion of *spota*. One of the fundamental questions that Bhartrhari raises in his work is, "How does a listener make sense of the stream of sounds uttered by a speaker? In other words, what does it mean to communicate by means of language? One need hardly add, of course, that this is pivotal to an under-

standing of human communication. The first thing that we need to observe about this is the perspective of the author. When we examine the evolution of communication theory in the West, we realize that with the emergence of such constructs as the "Uses and Gratifications Concept,"¹⁶ "Transactional Models of Communication,"¹⁷ etc. in the second half of the twentieth century, the process of communication was viewed from the communications viewpoint. This is certainly the case from the Aristotelian model up to the Shannon-Weaver model. Hence, the very attempt made to study the act of communication from the receiver's point of view, some thirteen centuries ago, is itself a matter of some significance. In Bhartrhari's framework of analysis, as crystallized in the concept of sphota, it is the receiver, and not the speaker, who occupies the place of eminence.

The word sphota means to break forth, burst open or disclose. Therefore, I would take the word "sphota" in the context of linguistic meaning to suggest that which discloses thought. Although the notion of sphota is present in a somewhat shadowy and embryonic form in earlier philosophical literature, it is indeed Bhartrhari who formulated it in a systematic fashion. Davis, after carefully examining the text to find out how the two words "sphota" and "sabda" have been used by Bhartrhari in the body of the text, argues that one can, with equal justification, call it the concept of the "sabda." However, as Davis himself points out, as this concept has been traditionally designated by the term "sphota" it is perhaps better to adhere to it. In addition, in my judgment, there is another point that needs to be taken into consideration. In traditional Sanskrit, the word "sabda" carries with it a wealth of religious associations which might have the effect of beclouding the issue.

According to Bhartrhari, when a listener hears a speaker's sentence, the sound pattern and the sense coalesce in his mind to form the thought content.

The unified thought content that is in the mind of the speaker is differentiated into the respective sound pattern and sense and is again reunited in the mind of the listener. In the *Vakyapadiya*, on a number of occasions, Bhartrhari expresses his conviction that a word possesses a dual potentiality: to convey a notion of the form of the word and to convey a notion of the sense of the word. From the point of view of communication theory, the important question that needs to be asked is, "What is the mechanism by which the hearer decodes the sound-sense union into a thought content?" Here, Bhartrhari comes up with the notion of "pratibha." He says:

When the meanings (of the individual words) have been understood separately, a flash of understanding takes place which they call the meaning of the sentence, brought about by the meanings of individual words.

It cannot be explained to others as such and such. It is experienced by everyone within himself and even the subject (of the experience) is not able to render an account of it to himself. ॥३॥

Therefore, we see that, according to Bhartrhari, the concept of "pratibha," which is crucial to an understanding of the decoding process, is something inexplicably personal. It is indeed a form of intuition. Although the phenomenon of pratibha is unexplainable, it is also, as Bhartrhari takes pains to point out, wholly natural and spontaneous; it signifies a built-in mechanism of the human mind. He employs a number of picturesque images to drive home this point. To a student of communication, what is most interesting about the concept of sphota is that it signifies one of the earliest known attempts to construct a paradigm of verbal communication from the receiver's viewpoint.

These, then, are the four strands of thought contained in Bhartrhari's *Vakyapadiya*, which can prove to be extremely stimulating to communicationists.

What is noteworthy about these four notions is not only their perfect correspondence with modern conceptualizations of communication associated with Western thinkers, but more importantly, the relationship that these concepts have to a systemic framework of thinking. As was stated earlier, Bhartrhari's concepts of language and meaning spring directly from his Monistic worldview. Although Western communication scholars in recent times have drawn attention to these concepts, they have not adequately pointed out the need to examine them in a systemic framework. In that respect, Bhartrhari's work is extremely illuminating.

At a time when Western communication scholars are engaged in the arduous task of constructing alternate theories of communication and widening the scope of the already existing ones, an intercivilizational and comparativist perspective is bound to present itself as an appropriate strategy. In this context Bhartrhari's the Vakyapadiya can be strongly recommended as an insightful treatise which repays very close attention indeed.

I have sought to discuss in fair detail the communication significance of Bhartrhari's the Vakyapadiya because it points out the value and importance of investigating classical treatises with the intention of finding out what light they might throw on problems of communication. In discussing Chinese philosophy and contemporary communication theory, Chung-ying Cheng makes the observation that in both Taoism and Ch'an Buddhism, the conceptualizations of communication that can be abstracted present a refreshing contrast to the mechanistic models of communication that still hold sway in the field of communication.¹⁹ He then goes on to identify six basic principles of Chinese philosophy that are extremely germane to the problems of contemporary communication theory. They are:

1. The Principle of the Embodiment of Reason in Experience

2. The Principle of Part-Whole Indetermination
3. The Principle of Epistemological-Pragmatic Unity
4. The Principle of Dialectical Completion of Relative Polarities
5. The Principle of Infinite Interpretation
6. The Principle of Symbolic Reference

On the basis of these principles, Chung-ying Cheng says that we need to study classical texts with a view to examining their significance for communication theory.

The concept of process figures prominently in both the Indian and Chinese traditions of thought, and offers us an interesting point of comparison. The current thinking on communication, which seeks to place great emphasis on the notion of process, signifies a radical departure from the Aristotelian framework. Shannon expresses the view that "the fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one point either exactly or appropriately a message selected at another point."²⁶ This is in perfect accord with the view prevalent in Western culture up to this point. Admittedly, thinkers like Heraclitus and Hegel and Bergson were concerned with the ever-changing processual nature of human existence. But their thinking on this score never formed a part of the mainstream of Western philosophical thinking. On the other hand, the Eastern worldview, particularly the Buddhist view of reality, strongly supports the contention regarding the processual nature of life.

The concept of process also figures very prominently in modern physics. This is, of course, not a new notion; it is found in the vocabulary of scientists from the seventeenth century onwards. However, it was then viewed merely as the change of matter from one state to another. With the overthrow of the Newtonian worldview and the emphasis on relativity, indeterminism, and probability, a newer concept of process emerged. In a sense, Whitehead's

exceedingly complex book, Process and Reality, addresses this problem.²¹ He says that "the how an actual entity becomes constitutes what that actual entity is so that the two descriptions of an actual entity are not independent. Its being is constituted by its becoming. This is the principle of process."

In many ways, the philosophical impetus for the newer concept of process was provided by Whitehead. Smith says that "Whitehead developed a concept of the term process as different from the nineteenth century as quantum physics was different from Newtonian physics,"²² and goes on to make the observation that although the general semantic movement had, for many years, insisted that the world was constantly changing while language remained static, the preoccupation with the Whitehead sense of the term "process" in the discussion of communication finds its landmark in David Berlo's The Process of Communication. Berlo says that he was, for the past several years, engaged in the struggle to translate the policy of Whitehead into practical suggestions for the conduct of inquiry. How are we to make sense of Whitehead's statement that how an actual entity becomes constitutes what the entity is? As I have said before,

It is indeed interesting to observe that Whitehead's conceptualisation of process is very close to the Buddhist conceptualisation. And the Buddhist conceptualisation is closely allied to the concept of dependent co-origination. Whitehead's notion of process, like the Buddhist view is extremely complex and multi-faced. The phenomenon of process is ubiquitous and universal. Nothing is self-contained, self-sufficient and static. The world is characterized by a sense of dynamism. It is constantly becoming and perishing. According to him, becoming can be split into units of process. Each event as it perishes gives rise to a new process. Whitehead coined the term 'actual entities' to designate these units of process. According to him, these actual entities which are microscopic and in perpetual state of motion are the 'drops of experience', the final real things which go to make up the world. This view is clearly reflected in Buddhism as is evidenced in the scriptures. It is instructive to note that Whitehead himself says that his "philosophy of organism seems to approximate

more to some strains of Indian or Chinese thought than to Western, Asiatic or European thought." 23

The point that I am trying to make here is that the classical intellectual traditions of Asia contain many useful concepts that can trigger exciting new thinking. As a matter of fact, the concept of dependent co-origination that we have been discussing has much to offer to the modern communication theorist. As I have pointed out elsewhere:

The distinction that the concept of dependent co-origination enforces between determining and conditioning is also an important one for human communication. Every communication event has a cause. But this does not mean that every communication event is pre-determined. The fact that a communication event can be explained does not mean that it has been determined. Let us take a concrete example. A invites B to go out on a picnic. But B turns it down, because on the last occasion that B went out on a picnic with A, B found it excruciatingly boring. Hence, looking back on the event, B would say to himself that the sense of boredom he experienced last time was the cause for his non-acceptance of the invitation. But it does not necessarily mean that B should have acted in that manner. He could well have accepted the invitation saying to himself that being colleagues in the same department in the University, it was indeed his obligation to accept the invitation. In other words, although there is a reason for B's rejection of A's invitation, it does not mean that his action was rigidly determined. Hence in human interaction, conditioning and not determining is the operative word.

This distinction really points to the transactional nature of human communication. In human communication, one is not ordering or commanding someone to act in a specific manner. One is only conditioning the other's potential behavior. He obviously has the freedom to behave and respond in a way unanticipated by the person who initiated the communication act. The idea of conditioning, as opposed to determining, is central to the Buddhist conceptualization of human communication. 24

All this, then, leads us to one compelling conclusion. That is, if we are to widen our field of inquiry into communication metatheory productively, we need to pay greater attention to Asian perspectives as well. This must be a carefully planned, step-by-step process and it is none too soon to begin this venture.

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