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A New Challenge To Law And Policy Of Korea
In Satellite Broadcasting And Communication

By

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Paper No.23
CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION:
Suggestions for the Building of Bridges

Wilbur Schramm

In ancient Greece a certain academy gave a three-year course. Students in the first year of that course were called Wise Men. In the second year they were called Philosophers, meaning persons who wanted to be wise men. In the third year they were called simply Students, meaning that they had been in school long enough to know how much they needed to learn. This seems to me a very reasonable arrangement, and I have suggested such a curriculum to a few schools but have not found it a very popular idea, particularly with the senior class.

Nevertheless, it may be the way we shall have to study cross-cultural communication. Our knowledge of that process is deceptive: when we dip into it, we feel relatively wise, but the more we learn the more we discover we need to learn. Please bear with me today as I try, certainly not as a Wise Man, not as a Philosopher, but perhaps as a concerned student, to make a few suggestions, at the beginning of this meeting, on the building of cultural bridges.

The other day I saw a newspaper headline that reminded me all over again how deeply our history and culture are imprinted on our language. The headline spoke of "The Pontiff." I guessed, correctly, that it referred to the Pope of Rome, the chief primate of the Roman Catholic Church. But my memory carried me over a longer road, back to the Roman title Pontifex, meaning Builder of Bridges. Julius Caesar took that title when he became Emperor. The high priests of Rome became known as Pontiffs. As the two branches of the Christian church vied for primacy, the Pontiff of Rome predominated, and was called Pontifex Maximus. "Listen to a man's language," said Benjamin Whorf, "and you will hear his history and his culture." And so it has come about that an inseparable part of the title of Pontiff today is the concept of builder of bridges.

This week we too are trying to be builders of bridges, and therefore need to take stock of the situation around us. I am going to set down a few notes concerning that situation, for you to reject or correct during the remainder of the meeting.

First, we know more about international than about intercultural communication.

That is to say, we have a considerable amount of data on the flow of information in the world—where it comes from; where it goes; the channels through which it travels; the foreign circulation of individual books, journals, films, programs, and so forth; and the economics and regulation of this flow. We have
rudimentary information on the content of the flow that reaches a given place or society. But concerning the rather more important questions of how a culture communicates its meanings, understands and gets itself understood by another, and has an effect on values and behaviors, on peace and war—about that we know really very little.

The difficulty, if I may quote my friend Edward Hall, the anthropologist who wrote one of the great books in our field, _The Silent Language_, is that culture is mostly oriented toward the past rather than the future. Its task has always been to provide models, growing out of experience, so that members of a given culture would have clearcut ways of relating to each other. So far as I know, no culture has developed any special skills in relating to outsiders in terms other than its own. This is especially important because so much of a culture is communicated by largely nonverbal, covert, silent languages. In our own cultures we develop great skills in using and understanding these silent languages without even being consciously aware of them. In dealing with another culture we can interpret what it communicates only in terms of our own culture and we often miss its silent languages entirely. And so we tend to huddle together with members of our own culture, even in a foreign country, and to be suspicious of the unfamiliar culture behavior and cultural communication surrounding our own little group. This is a double pity. It deprives the cultural anthropologist of some of his best evidence, inasmuch as a principal source of understanding the silent languages of a given culture is to observe how members of that culture respond to other cultures. And to the rest of us it means that the task is harder, the task of overcoming suspicion and hostility, the task of trying to find the algorithm by which to relate an event in a strange culture to an event in our own. That is why the degree of Wise Man in Intercultural Communication has been conferred on so few.

On the other hand, there is more interest than ever before in intercultural bridges.

This is hard to prove directly but to observers of the international scene it has an impressive face validity. More interest in travel, in far places, in news and ideas and art from faraway. A growing sense that interdependence is essential. We realize that it no longer does any good to say to each other, "Your end of the boat is sinking," because we are all in the same boat. We have to talk to each other. Therefore, cultural bridges are seen as a good thing, an essential thing. Perhaps the most hopeful sign, as we look toward a world communication policy and healthful intercultural communication, is that people today as never before seem to yearn toward the global village where everyone knows his neighbor, talks with him, works together with him toward a happier situation in the world.

Furthermore, we have never had so many bridges available, and so much flow over them.

Within our own lifetimes we have seen travel time reduced from days to hours, news delivery time from hours to minutes, and the limits of regular
information coverage extended from cities to the farthest village. In the past ten years, the number of radios in Asia has more than quadrupled. The transistor and the satellite are winning the battle with remoteness, the former because of its ability to overcome the lack of power lines, the latter because of its ability to deliver a signal over an enormous part of the earth at a cost independent of distance.

In one recent week, 25,000 Japanese tourists came to these small islands, a tiny spot in a world full of travelers. But when we talk about the flow of intercultural communication today we are talking mostly about media, rather than travel. It is just coincidence, I am sure, but an interesting one, that this conference is taking place almost exactly on the hundredth anniversary of the telephone, the instrument that made it possible for man to speak to man regardless of distance. It was on March 7, 1876 that Bell received his first patent, and on March 10 that he used it for the first time to send a message farther than a voice would carry unaided. He said, as you remember, something less than a memorable sentence: "Come here, Mr. Watson. I want to see you." One hundred years ago, Bell was working hard to get his new instrument ready to show at the U. S. Centennial Exposition.

The media are the chief users of the bridges. In the last year for which we have solid figures, 3 million people came to the United States from other countries, and about 7 million Americans traveled abroad—a total of 10 million cultural exchanges. But in that same year the Reader's Digest circulated about 12 million copies every month outside the United States. A crime and police television drama set in peaceful Hawaii was seen in 56 countries. A television "western" made in California was seen every week by an overseas audience of a quarter of a billion persons. The Associated Press was serving about 10,000 foreign clients. The New York Times was sending out 45,000 words of news and commentary to 136 foreign journals and broadcasting systems. The news magazine Time circulated weekly to about one-and-one-half-million foreign readers, including a large number of intellectuals and policy makers.

These are impressive figures indeed, but there are great inequalities in the use of these bridges.

The figures I have just cited were for the flow of information from the United States to the rest of the world. This is more than accident, because the flow of information in the world is predominantly one way: West to East, North to South, economically advanced countries to developing countries. The great transnational media are owned, for the most part, by private organizations or governments in the Western capitalist nations. And despite the great increase in numbers of media, there are still 800 million people in the world unable to read, and a wide disparity in the availability of information at different places. Thus, for example, at one end of the scale of change is a scene I saw recently in a mountain village: a new window on the world opening for an excited family. For the first time a member of that family was learning to read and write, and his parents and grandparents and brothers and sisters were gathered around, beaming proudly, and encouraging
him: "Write your name, José. Show the man you can write your name." That is one end of the scale. We are sitting here at the other end: several millions of books within walking distance of this room, a satellite terminal a quarter of a mile away, dial telephones to Europe and Asia, five television stations including one in Japanese and one for public television, 30 radio stations including one 24-hour news station, and so on. Once again, it is no accident that the least well served end of the scale is in the Third World and the high end is in the West, and this circumstance by no means escapes the attention of the developing countries.

These inequalities have invited political nationalism and cultural sensibilities into the growing controversy.

Echoing the Romans two thousand years ago, the question has been raised and reiterated: Who is Pontifex? Who builds and owns the bridges? Spokesmen for the countries that do not particularly like privately owned media refer to the circulation of *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *Paris Herald Tribune*, Associated Press, and UPI—in the words of Georgi Arbatov of the Soviet Union—as "organized foreign propaganda." Many leaders of the Third World and especially of the newer countries see the transnational media as threats both to cultural autonomy and political security. Most of the independent Third World journalists and broadcasters know too much about these media to view them as an "organized" threat, but do see them as unfair domination of the channels, often with undesirable material. For example, a group of Third World journalists, convened in 1975 by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, called, among other things, for:

- an end to the "near monopoly" over control of transnational media;
- an end to "market orientation" of transnational news and entertainment;
- protection of the cultures of developing countries from the transnational media of the rich countries;
- replacement of direct service from international news agencies by cooperative arrangements with national agencies.

All these complaints of the journalists are grounded in truth. There is a near monopoly of international channels. There is a market orientation in the transnational media, and national media are especially galled to realize that foreign media are providing what users want but cannot get from their own media. The flow of entertainment and information from outside may very well be speeding change in traditional cultures. If transnational agencies would work with national news agencies it might both strengthen the national ones and add more national news to the international circuit. And there is another problem, too—that some countries are much more concerned than others with controlling what information comes into and goes out of their territory. All these things are true, but what to do about them is a deeply complicated question, which I shall leave to you to answer.

A great deal of resentment of one-way transnational communication
coalesced in the attitudes toward possible direct-broadcasting satellites, in the first half of the 1970s, throughout the socialist and Third World countries. This kind of satellite, able to deliver television directly to unaugmented home receivers, is not imminent. There is still time to plan and work together to ensure that such an instrument will be used for the good of all people. But the Third World governments were understandably worried about the effect of cheap entertainment and beguiling advertisements to be showered on their people by the big capitalist powers who would own the satellites. It was an ideal time to make a political issue of the problem and to twist the tail of the big powers, especially the biggest of them. Therefore a confrontation moved into UNESCO and the UN, with rigid positions on both sides—one side against any television broadcast into a country without pre-censorship and consent; the other, holding to a somewhat abstract insistence on free speech, free flow, and unrestricted broadcasting. There was no doubt who would win that vote.

The confrontation did no one any special good, except emotionally, but it has cast a shadow over all thinking and planning for international communication. For one thing, it called the whole concept of Free Flow into question: does it mean free flow only for the nations that own the international media? More important, it focussed attention on the delicate relationship of communication to culture. Anthropologists sometimes say that "culture is communication, communication is culture." But to the developing countries on the receiving end of international communication, it is cause and effect; communication maintains or changes a culture, and therefore control over communication is control over what happens to a culture.

Consequently, we are seeing the twilight of Free Flow.

That was an idealistic concept that grew out of the liberalism of John Stuart Mill and his vision of a free marketplace of ideas. There should be no restriction on free speech and communication; ideas anywhere in the world should be heard freely so that people could decide upon them. By the end of the 1960s, this sounded oddly old-fashioned. The change was mirrored by UNESCO—that sometimes irritating, sometimes disappointing agency, in which, nevertheless, most of us here have invested our hopes and efforts. Throughout the 1950s and much of the 1960s, a great communication goal of UNESCO was Free Flow of Information. Many of the Agency's programs, like the copyright convention and the convention on exchange of educational and cultural materials, were designed to further it. Other programs were designed to make it practicable—for example, the early studies of communication needs, the interest in developing news agencies, and the pioneering efforts to help countries and regions use communication satellites. But UNESCO has had to take a different direction. I have no competence to say why it did so, and it has a competent representative here to speak for it. However, moved by the rising tide of nationalism and demands for equal access, it turned away from the perhaps too easy idealism of a free market place of ideas. Look for something beyond mere protectionism to replace Free Flow, it has taken up the question of what acceptable international policy should control the use of
communication bridges. It has been trying, with the aid of its consultants, to define a Right to Communicate as one of the Rights of Man. This is still a skeleton without flesh, a name looking for a doctrine, but nevertheless something that deserves our most serious thought.

You may have gathered that I am not very hopeful about the situation. This may be due to my own background, for I have too grown up in the ideas of Milton and Mill, worked on the media and thought and written about intercultural communication in that spirit. I have dreamed of a day in the future when the voices of the people would be heard above the voices of aggressive nationalistic governments, and make the world a better, safer, happier place to live. Some of my good friends in Western and Eastern Europe and in developing countries told me that in my earlier books I was being "too liberal." In retrospect I have to admit that they were probably right, for we have moved into a period of strong nationalism and a new authoritarianism, which are not good for the kind of communication I want to see happening.

Yet there are favorable elements in the situation along with the less favorable. Against the new political developments we have the extraordinary technical developments I mentioned earlier, and the striking increase in the flow of information. We are building up a small group of scholars who are concerned, as scientists, not only with individual cultures but with understanding the relationships between cultures. It is encouraging that we an have a meeting like this one, at which men of good will from many countries come together to talk about the world's present problems of communicating.

Let me leave you with a few suggestions that may not be new to you but may resonate in some way with what you know better than I do.

For one thing, I should guess that the most promising roads toward improving world communication in the next two decades may well be through regional arrangements and people changes, rather than through dependence on the present nationalism or on any new world communication doctrine that can be translated quickly into national and international behavior.

The chief barriers to international communication, it seems to me, are the barriers of nationalism and the threats and irritations of unequal access to the media. The solution to these will probably come from nations and peoples learning truly to share communication and communication facilities, as a substitute for one-way communication. It will be easier for a few countries to do that with each other and for the pattern to spread, than to negotiate it at once world-wide. To take one example, I feel that my country was unwise, in the satellite controversy, to make such an issue of world-wide freedom of information. When a few countries in one region learn how to cooperate in the use of media for their common good, then we can think about direct broadcasting from satellites. Not before.

The chief barrier to intercultural communication, by which I mean the human rather than the technical mastery of communication, is the age-old difficulty
of one culture trying to relate to another. It seems to me that this can be solved fundamentally only through an emphasis in education at all levels on respect for other cultures. What do I mean by that? It deserves a paper by itself, but we have no time for that today. I mean respect for another culture in terms of what it is, not what we think it should be -- not something strange, but a way of life that some other people have worked out so they can live as they want to. And consequently, a respect for the right of a member of another culture to act differently than we think he should act. First guesses are usually wrong, anyway. I have many times been taken aback by first contacts with Indians who seem to come at me bristling and apparently hostile. On the other hand, the native hospitality of a Chinese has often misled me on first contact to believe that he agrees fully with me. Only on longer acquaintance have the same bristling Indians become my good friends, and I have come to realize there is more disagreement than I thought with the Chinese. This is easier if we can learn to respect the members of another culture as human beings -- to think of them not primarily as persons of another nationality but rather as humans who have many qualities in common with us, with names and life histories, hopes and fears, and some people who love them. And finally I mean sufficient respect for another culture to be willing to learn enough about it to be able to live fairly comfortably in it for a while. I realize this is a tall order, but yet we are talking today about a fundamental social change, and this requires, and will not come without, a change in people.

In the second place, whether we are talking about governments or individuals, I suspect that they will be more likely to communicate and relate effectively if they feel equal and confident. When one country has communication personnel and facilities not greatly inferior to those of another, both countries will be less worried about information exchange. When people can come together to work as equals on a common problem, as we have discovered over and over again here at the East-West Center, they will be less likely to feel suspicious or dominated or threatened.

Finally, I think we must expect to make haste slowly. Let me say again that we are talking, not about some minor technical adjustment, but about fundamental culture change. Harry Stack Sullivan, the psychiatrist whose ideas have become so important in our time, advanced a three-step model for developing satisfactory human relations, which was intended to apply to adolescent development but has implications for intercultural development also. He sees this kind of development as passing through three stages: a protaxic mode, in which persons develop a certain amount of empathy; then a parataxic mode, in which persons try to manipulate or gain control of each other; and finally a communicative mode, in which they recognize that they are equals and develop a mature give and take. Not until this last stage is interpersonal communication truly rewarding. And I suspect that truly rewarding intercultural communication must grow in much the same way.

It will not happen swiftly. The outlook, therefore, depends somewhat on the time scale. If we have ten years in which to help to substitute cross-cultural communication and understanding for national suspicions and personal misunder-
standings, in order to combat the threat of aggressive nationalism and 10,000 nuclear bombs, there is very little chance. If we have a century, there is reason for a great deal of hope.

Do you remember a remarkable paragraph that Adlai Stevenson put into his last speech, in Geneva in 1965, just before he died?

We travel together, passengers on a little spaceship, dependent on our vulnerable resources of air and soil; all committed for our safety to its security and peace; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and I will say the love we give our fragile craft.

I had my last talk with him some weeks before that, and he was already talking about some of the same ideas—the world's fragile balance, and the need for care, work, understanding, and love. Care, work, understanding, love: that seems to me a good blueprint for building cultural bridges, and I leave it with you, as the contribution of a man far wiser than I to this first hour of our conference.