Toward an Alternative Metatheory of Human Communication:
An Asiacentric Vision*

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A metatheory or paradigm is a conception that includes a multiplicity of theories; as such, it allows us to develop better interpretations, fuller understandings, and more effective articulations of the meaning of human goals and interactions. A metatheory suggests the character and content of theories by prescribing what a theory should explain… and what analytical tools are required for revealing and establishing concepts… A metatheory, then, is the product of decision rather than discovery, and it is justified by the theories that are consonant to it.

—Molefi Kete Asante (1998, p. 45)

Abstract

The communication metatheory of Asiacentricity insists on placing Asian cultural values and ideals at the center of inquiry in order to view Asian communication phenomena from the standpoint of Asians as subjects rather than objects. This alternative metatheory, which strives to guide human com-munication scholarship to highlight the agency of Asians in cultural context, deems Asian everyday languages, religious-philosophical traditions, and historical experiences as vital resources in generating theories and conducting research. The present essay further advances the Asiacentic metatheory of communication by stipulating its research objectives, content dimensions, and methodological considerations. These components of the metatheory, taken together with its theoretical assumptions outlined elsewhere, envision the contours of an Asiacentric communication paradigm.

To theorize about Asia is not the same as to theorize from the Asian perspective. One can address and appraise Asian people and phenomena without reference to Asian languages, religions/philosophies, and histories. Such an intellectual orientation is, however, fundamentally unsound if one wishes to see the Asian world through Asian eyes because Asians think and speak in Asian languages, believe in Asian religions/philosophies, and struggle to live in Asian historical experiences. In order to truly understand and appreciate Asian thought and action, therefore, one must successfully explore and examine the cultural agency of Asians in the linguistic, religious/philosophical, and historical

contexts of Asia. To theorize from the vantage point of Asians as centered is thus to theorize from Asian everyday languages, religious-philosophical traditions, and historical experiences as vital resources.

European intellectual imperialism, which results in the intellectual dislocation of non-Europeans, has been increasingly problematized and challenged across disciplines in recent years (Asante, 1992, 1998, 2002, 2003). The field of communication cannot escape from this interdisciplinary intellectual movement. Many researchers, Asian and non-Asian alike, in the field have assumed the universal applicability of the metatheory and methodology of Eurocentric communication scholarship. In the case of knowledge production about Asian communication practices, they have done extensive research through analytical tools grounded in European intellectual traditions. Although some of their findings are insightful and useful, such Eurocentric studies of Asian communication have often dislocated Asians out of their cultural context and have thereby denied the centrality of Asians in the communication process.

One of the urgent tasks of Asian communication scholars at this critical juncture is to conduct Asiacentric studies of Asian communication. They are now prodded to engage in human communication scholarship whose concepts, models, and principles are derived from Asian cultures as resources for theory building. In an attempt to propound an alternative metatheory that guides such Asiacentric inquiries into Asian communication, the present essay stipulates its research objectives, content dimensions, and methodological considerations. These three components of the metatheory specify why, how, and what kind of communicative knowledge from Asia ought to be pursued. Along with the theoretical assumptions outlined elsewhere (Miike, 2002, 2003ab), they envision the contours of an Asiacentric communication paradigm.[1]

Asiacentric Research Objectives

In this first section, I wish to address *why* (or *for what purpose*) knowledge should be produced in Asiacentric communication scholarship. There are five Asiacentric research objectives that I would like to discuss herein: (1) to critique misleading Eurocentric studies of Asian communication behaviors; (2) to preserve Asian cultural values and modes of communication; (3) to explore spiritual liberation through communication; (4) to depict multiple visions of harmony among complex relationships; and (5) to examine (inter)cultural communication needs and problems seen through Asian eyes. These interrelated research goals are designed to systematically advance the Asiacentric knowledge of human communication.

The first Asiacentric research objective is to critique misleading Eurocentric studies of Asian communication behaviors. Asiacentric critics need to

evaluate Eurocentric representations of Asian cultures and communication from at least two angles: (1) questions of consequence; and (2) questions of foundation. Theoretical perspectives and research findings, whether intended or unintended, often have negative impacts on the researched community. They are also knowingly and unknowingly misapplied to misrepresent the theorized people. It is the role of Asiacentric communication critics to elaborate on how certain Eurocentric representations have come to do harm to Asians. If such representations foster stereotyping, for example, they ought to elucidate what kind of representation becomes a stereotype and why.

When Eurocentric social scientists use such constructs as interdependent self-construal, collectivism, and high-context to characterize Asian individuals and cultures, do these characterizations promote the complex understanding and deep appreciation of Asian selves and cultures? When Eurocentric interpretive observers describe Asian modesty simply as an interaction tactic for a relational concern, does such an observation encourage non-Asians to practice Asian communication styles? When Eurocentric critical interrogators scorn Confucianism as a cult of oppression, do they really acknowledge the cultural agency of Asians and empower them? These are questions of scholarly consequence.

Asiacentric communication critics must also address questions of scholarly foundation. If Eurocentric theoretical frameworks and research methods are comprehensive and inclusive, Asiacentric communicologists should be able to answer how elements of Thai or Filipino culture substantially contributed to the conceptualization of the individualism-collectivism dimension, how the observation criteria of the ethnography of speaking took the unique cultural context and condition of Tibet into account, and how critical theorists learned from Hinduism in the process of theory building. These questions should be posed not to completely dismiss the usefulness or applicability of Eurocentric theory and research but to be aware of their limitations and culture-boundness.

Asiacentric communication researchers ought to reflect on what kind of inherent bias may exist in Eurocentric theoretical origins, how inappropriate Eurocentric data collection and analysis procedures may be to the conditions of doing research in Asia, and even how differently Eurocentric research findings can be interpreted from Asiacentric perspectives. They need to carefully reconsider who theorists are, how they develop theories for whom, and how they standardize research processes and evaluations in Eurocentric communication scholarship, and why their applications are possible or impossible in Asia.

The second Asiacentric research objective is to preserve Asian cultural values and modes of communication. There have been debates and controversies over "Asian values" in political discourse since Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Yuan Yew challenged the Eurocentric universalistic position that the Western version of democracy is ideal for the rest of the world (Zakaria, 1994; Kim,

1994; McCarthy, 1998). Asianness, however defined, has been condemned by many Westerners without careful considerations. There is also a growing concern in Asia that positive aspects of Asian cultures are being lost. Given these circumstances, the question of Asian values is worthy of pursuit among Asiacentric communication professionals especially in light of cultural preservation and protection.

Koh (1999) states that there is no agreement among Asian intellectuals as to whether or not there is such a thing as "Asian values." There is probably no absolute Asianness that can represent the cultural values of all Asians. But it is not necessary to answer such an either-or question because, in any case, the searching process for Asian values itself is of immense value. Whether Asian values are partially similar to, or different from, Western values is a secondary question. The most important question is what are the cultural values that have shaped Asian communicative life.

In seeking answers to this question, Asiacentric scholars also ought to examine their positive and negative impacts on human communication. If Asian cultural values and communicative modes are changing, they must try to under-stand why they are changing and evaluate such changes. If they believe that those changes are not desirable, they have to argue convincingly why certain cultural values and communicative modes should be preserved in the future. Furthermore, it is possible for Asiacentrists to estimate what are the costs and compensations of Asian values and modes of communication rather than to absolutely determine which are good and which are bad.

For example, Chen and Chung (2000) lay out communication costs and compensations in Confucianism-influenced organizations. They isolate six costs: (1) rule-learning cost; (2) long-term interaction cost; (3) out-group exclusion cost; (4) intermediary cost; (5) personal contact cost; and (6) education cost. According to Chen and Chung (2000), these communication costs are respectively paid off by the following six compensations: (1) reduced guesswork and uncertainty; (2) reduced apprehension and increased liking and mutual respect; (3) easier motivation; (4) reduced conflict; (5) loyalty and commitment; and (6) reduced misunderstanding and clarification efforts. This type of assessment merits increasing scholarly attention.

The third Asiacentric research objective is to explore spiritual liberation through communication. Asante (1980) characterizes Afrocentric personalism, Asiacentric spiritualism, and Eurocentric materialism as three "broad" views of reality. According to him, the Afrocentric viewpoint holds that "all modalities and realities are united and move in one grand manner. There can be no separation of material and spiritual" (p. 405). The Asiacentric viewpoint holds that "the material is an illusion; that the real only comes from the spiritual. Therefore Asian philosophical concepts are enamored with spirit-over-matter

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notions" (p. 405). The Eurocentric viewpoint holds that "the material, the experiential, is real and that the spiritual is an illusion. Everything that is not within sense experiences becomes nonsense" (p. 405). Although they are gross characterizations that border on overgeneralizations, these worldviews are manifested in Afrocentric, Asiacentric, and Eurocentric scholarship.

Whether social scientific, interpretive, or critical, Eurocentric scholarship has largely neglected spiritual dimensions of human communication due to its material emphasis. Asiacentric communication professionals should compensate for this neglect by consciously focusing on spirituality. Kincaid (1987a) points out that Western materialism and Eastern spiritualism may lead to different philosophical conceptions of self, freedom, and the role of communication:

> The meaning of liberation in traditional Indian philosophy is intertwined with the related concepts of oneness, nonindividuality, and material nonattachment. Freedom is something attached when one gives up his/her individuality, renounces material things, and spiritually becomes one with something greater than oneself. Freedom, at least in the American sense, is associated with the independence to pursue one's own—often material—interests in fair competition with other individuals. In the West you *do* something to achieve whatever ends make you happy. In the East you *become one* with something greater than yourself for no other conscious purpose. Both speak of freedom. (p. 335)

Kincaid's insightful observation implies that the Asiacentric ultimate meaning of communication is to become connected with, rather than isolated from, everyone and everything in the universe, which does not contradict the ontological assumption for an Asiacentric paradigm—everyone and everything are interrelated across space and time (Miike, 2002, 2003ab). The role of communication is then to facilitate egolessness and connection toward Asiacentric spiritual enlightenment—the oneness of the universe. Seen from this perspective, "the realization that the self is imbedded in the whole and becomes complete only when one becomes egoless becomes the basis of communication competence" (Yum, 1993, p. 6). Therefore, for example, "One of the final aims of Zen training is to get rid of ego or self and to reach the spiritual freedom of selflessness" (Tsujimura, 1987, p. 115).

Dissanayake (1990) cautions that "as we seek ways and means of cultural integration in a global age, we should not ignore the spiritual realm. As technology begins to dominate lives and secularization becomes the cherished goal, there emerges a sense of spiritual void" (p. 93). Dissanayake (1990) predicts that "as a reaction to the pervasive impersonality generated in the postindustrial society, a quest for fundamental meaning in life is likely to surface" (p. 93). It is against this background that Asiacentric scholars can

warrant their theoretical contributions to spiritual aspects of human communication in an age of modernization and urbanization (see also Dissanayake, 1989).

If there are Eurocentric ego-centered theories of communication that encourage unique individuality and material freedom, should not there be Asiacentric ego-decentered theories of communication that encourage connectedness and spiritual liberation? If there are Eurocentric conceptualizations of power and privilege in view of material freedom, should not there be Asiacentric conceptualizations of them in view of spiritual liberation? If there is Eurocentric "material" development communication and the diffusion of material innovations, should not there be Asiacentric "spiritual" development communication and the diffusion of spiritual innovations?

The fourth Asiacentric research objective is to depict multiple visions of harmony among complex relationships. Harmony is one of the cardinal themes in the Asian worldview (Chen, 1993, 2002b; Dissanayake, 1983, 1989; Yum, 1993, 1987). It is the ultimate Asiacentric goal of communication. Although this prominent value has been extensively discussed in culture and communication studies, most of the past discussions are limited in the sense that they only address social harmony among humans in interpersonal, group, and organizational interactions. The axiological assumption for an Asiacentric paradigm is that harmony is vital to the survival of everyone and everything (Miike, 2002, 2003ab). Harmony in this sense is a more broad and holistic concept and refers to harmony on every level in the whole universe.

Harmony always exists in relationships. The higher level of harmony one attempts to achieve, the more complex relationships she or he needs to consider. It is therefore a challenging task for Asiacentric communication specialists to holistically theorize ideal versions of harmony on many levels among many relationships. Ishii (2001, 2003a) stresses harmonious triworld communication among the worlds of supernatural beings, natural beings, and human beings. It is imperative that Asiacentric communication experts reconsider complex relationships among these three worlds and indicate what should be their ideal relationships. Such an attempt is a formidable yet important mission of Asiacentrists in the present age of "money-oriented values, rich-poor discrepancies, wasteful lifestyles, environmental devastation, shortage of natural resources, and mass destruction" (Ishii, 2003b, pp. 1-2).

Asiacentric depictions of harmony among complex relationships should be based on the Asiacentric communicative assumption that mutual adaptation is of central importance in harmonious communication processes (Miike, 2002, 2003ab). Harmony, particularly on its higher levels, cannot be ideally achieved by control (Miike, 2003b). Controlling other human beings, natural beings, or even spiritual beings for self-interest from the progressive view of science and

technology has not proved to be *the* successful strategy toward harmony in the universe. Asiacentric visions of harmony must lead one to see the importance of making herself or himself change toward a higher degree of harmony through mutual adaptation. This fourth Asiacentric research goal of depicting multiple visions of harmony among complex relationships will go hand in hand with the third Asiacentric research goal of exploring spiritual liberation through communication.

The fifth Asiacentric research objective is to examine (inter)cultural communication needs and problems seen through Asian eyes. The soil of Asia, due to its cultural diversity, has been "needed" by Western principal investigators whose primary goal is to test Western theories for establishing their universal generalizability (Sinha, 1996). It is their needs (or sometimes curiosities) that have determined the directions of investigation. As a result, the needs of Asian societies have been ignored. Such cross-cultural research, no matter how theoretically refined and methodologically sophisticated, has been irrelevant to the problems of Asia and, hence, has little utility value for local residents in Asian communities.

Asia is not free from its own unique communication needs, issues, and problems in its sociocultural milieu, which require socioculturally sensitive care, considerations, and solutions also in local contexts. If Asiacentric communication researchers strive to thoroughly identify the local needs and problems and systematically address their causes and solutions, they will pursue new research programs. Such investigations will have local relevance and consequences because they start from the researched community's needs and problems. Asiacentric communication investigators have not yet engaged in these community-based projects, especially in relation to geographical conditions, philosophical underpinnings, historical influences, political systems, economic situations, and educational practices.

Intercultural communication studies in global contexts, as well as intracultural communication studies in local contexts, can benefit greatly from this scholarly priority of Asian needs and problems. Chu (1986) points out that "Although much insight has been gained, one wonders whether the conception of intercultural communication problems might have been biased by the Western perception" (p. 4). Chu (1986) speculates that "[because] Intercultural communication involves two sides, it would be most useful if Asian communication researchers can bring their insight and cultural perception into the research problems" (p. 4). Seen through Asian eyes, then, what would be the needs and problems in intercultural communication both within and outside Asia?

Future investigations of Asian communication needs and problems in both local and global contexts can lead to an enhanced understanding of communication competence and ethics because meeting needs and solving problems

are matters of effectiveness and appropriateness and matters of right and wrong. Recent literature in the intercultural field pinpoints Eurocentric biases in theorizing communication competence and ethics (Chen, 1993, 1994; Shuter, 2003; Yum, 1993, 1994). From a Korean perspective, for instance, Yum (1994) makes a sharp observation that "mutual" (in)competence instead of "individual" (in)competence should be duly emphasized. Asiacentric need/problem-centered conceptualizations of human communication competence and ethics will provide rich insights into such an important theoretical issue.

Asiacentric Content Dimensions

The communication metatheory of Asiacentricity insists on viewing Asian cultures as central sources in theorizing, not as peripheral targets in researching (see Misra and Gergen [1993] and Sinha [1996] for discussions on the place or role of culture in knowledge production). The content of theoretical knowledge in and from Asia ought to reflect the diverse and distinct cultural traditions of Asia. In this second section, I will expound on *what kind of* knowledge should be explored and theorized in Asiacentric communication scholarship. Three content dimensions that I find essential in search of the Asiacentric knowledge of human communication are (1) concepts in Asian everyday languages; (2) principles from Asian religious-philosophical traditions; and (3) struggles in Asian historical experiences.

First, *Asiacentric communication theorists should explore and establish Asian concepts in Asian everyday languages in order to reconsider and reconceptualize the nature of human communication*. Concepts are vital to any theory because "The most basic element of a theory is its concepts" (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 20). In order to construct Asiacentric theories of communication, it behooves Asiacentrists to define, delimit, and develop Asian concepts in Asian languages (Dissanayake, 1988; Miike, 2002, 2003ab; Okabe, 1991). Diffused concepts used in communication research about Asia originate in European languages, mostly in English, and hence reflect the linguistic worlds of Europeans or U.S. European Americans. Those Eurocentric imported concepts, even though they are translated into Asian languages, remain quite foreign to Asians who live in completely different linguistic worlds.

Three fundamental tasks must be undertaken to valorize Asian indigenous concepts in Asian languages as legitimate analytical tools for human communication research. The first task is to describe both synchronically and diachronically Asian words and phrases, particularly in everyday use, whose meanings are directly and indirectly related to communication. Chen (2002a), for instance, examines language expressions that were used to represent communication activities in traditional China. Such a linguistic examination has

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not been made to date in most Asian languages to investigate how Asians have conceptualized the nature of human interaction. It would be commendable for Asiacentric semanticists to further compare and contrast those communication-related words and phrases across time with a view to assessing their semantic continuities and changes and to speculate on the reasons behind them. Asian words and phrases also can be analyzed from the perspective of etymological origins.

As for Asian words and phrases whose meanings are indirectly linked with human communication, Asiacentrists need to make clear what kind of bearing they have on the communication process in which the creation, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning take place. They sometimes dwell on what such words and phrases signify but do not explore their implications specifically for communication inquiries. In that case, those words and phrases, no matter how conceptually rich, cannot serve as useful concepts for communication studies. Miike (2003c), for example, defines *amae* as message-expanding and message-accepting needs and discusses it in *enryo-sasshi* and assertion-acceptance communication among the Japanese.

The second task is to identify and analyze relationships among Asian concepts so as to explore cultural worldviews and values manifested in these concepts. Asiacentric theorists in communication studies have thus far focused exclusively on *one* Asian concept and detailed it in depth as it relates to cultural communication. They are prone to see that concept as *the* most important and fail to locate it in a larger picture of the culture and communication landscape.[2] They need to take another step forward to consider the connections among the concepts so that they can holistically reveal the deep structure of cultural world-views and values manifested in the surface structure of language expressions. This line of exploration will eventually help Asiacentrists answer the question of Asian values and why certain aspects of culture and communication are difficult or slow to change.

The third task is to compare and contrast Asian concepts in different Asian languages in order to understand their culture-general and culture-specific implications for communication. Asian communication specialists have been so eager to compare Asian concepts with Western concepts but have paid little attention to how Asian concepts in Asian languages differ among Asian cultures. This is a serious mistake if Asiacentric communication experts wish to meaningfully discuss the what and why of Asian values and to attempt to collectively preserve some, though not all, aspects of Asianness. Such Asia-centric comparisons also preclude them from touching on Asian concepts simply in consistency with established Eurocentric pseudo-etic concepts. Chung et al.'s (2003) ground-breaking attempt represents this line of investigation. They compare and contrast the East Asian concept of *qi/ki/ch'i* (energy flow) in China,

Japan, Korea, and Taiwan and its historical development in each country for communicative implications.

As Kincaid (1987b) articulates, "Good concepts allow us to see new things or to see old things in a new light. At the same time they divert our attention or blind us from seeing other things. Escaping from this paradoxical situation is no easy task" (p. xiv). Admittedly, Asian concepts may also create blindness to the complexities of Asianness, but at least they open up new intellectual dialogues and encourage non-Asians, especially Westerners, to learn Asian languages in which Asians construct their social realities. This seems to be a right direction to go given that "Eastern concepts are yet unknown to the vast majority of Western communication scholars, particularly those in the United States, whose pseudo-scientific prolificity has been unashamedly ethnocentric" (Gunaratne, 1991, p. 53).

Second, *Asiacentric communication thinkers should draw out fundamental principles of human interaction from Asian religious-philosophical traditions and propose new theoretical models of communication.* As Yum (1987) aptly notes, religious-philosophical traditions that have permeated Asian societies for hundreds of years are "the proper starting points to discover the fundamental patterns which influence the communication behavior of the diverse cultures of Asia, and they allow us to make cross-cultural comparisons that go beyond mere description" (p. 86). Most culture and communication studies have concentrated on *how* people behave and have overlooked *why* they do (Starosta & Chen, 2003). In-depth inquiries into Asian religious-philosophical traditions, which shape the core beliefs and values of Asian cultures, will also demystify why Asians communicate as they do and, more importantly, why they *should*.

It is extremely beneficial for Asiacentric students of communication to take advantage of religious-philosophical perspectives on human interaction (see Sitaram, 1995). By so doing, they can render even a very mundane topic refreshing. For example, the value and role of silence in Asian cultures have been extensively documented in the intercultural communication literature (e.g., Ishii, 1984; Jain & Matukumalli, 1996). Nonetheless, they have not yet been theorized rigorously in terms of Asian religious-philosophical traditions. What does Hinduism say about the forms and functions of silent communication? How and why have its teachings historically influenced contemporary Hindu speech and silence behavior? Bruneau and Ishii (1988) undertake a pioneering task of discussing commucative silences from several Asian religious-philosophical perspectives. But they shed light only on the tip of the iceberg.

Lessons have not been learned from Asian religious-philosophical traditions even about basic communication activities, namely, speaking, listening, writing, and reading. It is often said that listening is more valued than speaking in many Asian cultures. Nevertheless, no attempt has been made so far to theorize about

listening, say, from Buddhist perspectives. Such Buddhist theories on listening must have a great deal to do with the vital role of communication in spiritual liberation and with harmony and peace in the universe. Except in Ishii's work (1992), Buddhist preaching has not been tapped for theorizing about rhetorical communication practices from non-Western perspectives. Asian religious-philosophical traditions also offer wisdom about what kind of channel people should use when, where, for whom, and why.

Drawing out communicative principles from Asian religious-philosophical teachings, Asiacentric scholars can reexamine Eurocentric theories of communication on every level (from intrapersonal to public) and propound Asiacentric alternatives. As a case in point, Ishii (2003b) constructs an Asiacentric model of intrapersonal communication grounded on the consciousness-only epistemology of *Mahanaya* Buddhism. He reconsiders the components and structure of Western intrapersonal communication and reconceptualizes Eastern intrapersonal communication by locating eight consciousnesses (i.e., *indriya-vijnana*, *mano-vijnana*, *manas-vijnana*, and *alaya-vijnana*). He not only systematically explicates the mechanism of mental activities but also suggests the inherent causes of mental sufferings and afflictions. Here, again, egolessness is the central theme for spiritual liberation.

Human-made Asian religious-philosophical traditions are not free from imperfections. They have positive and negative consequences on Asian contemporary lives. Thus, Asiacentrists must carefully ponder what we should (not) learn and how we should (not) apply their teachings in future lives, which is expected to fulfill the Asiacentric research goal toward the preservation of Asian cultural values and communicative modes. The preservation of traditional cultures is not the same as the uncritical acceptance of them (Nakamura, 1964). It is the discovery of the "newness" of old ideas based on the Asian circular worldview. As Sitaram (1998) remarks, "What began today as a 'brand new idea' has its origin in something that ended yesterday, and today's idea will begin a new one tomorrow" (p. 4).

Third, *Asiacentric communication historians should pay due attention to struggles in Asian historical experiences in their attempts to enrich the theoretical underpinnings of human communication problems, ethics, and competence*. Traditional researchers, either social scientific or interpretive, in Eurocentric communication scholarship have generally neglected Asian histories. Critical scholars are prone to look at Asian histories only as targets of deconstruction through their Eurocentric theoretical lenses. Consequently, there are few Asia-centric inquires in communication research that utilize the rich histories of Asia as resources for theory building. This is unfortunate because Asian historical struggles have much to offer in theorizing about communication problems, ethics, and competence through Asian eyes.

Throughout their long histories, Asians have had intercultural contacts with different people, ideas, and products from different societies that must have initially caused confusion and friction in their communities. It is highly rewarding for Asiacentric communication historians to investigate how each Asian society has historically coped with these intercultural encounters. In particular, as Lee (2001) observes, the coexistence of indigenous and foreign religions, which indicates some openness and tolerance for heterogeneous elements in Asia, can be a very important area of inquiry to theorize about how to solve intercultural problems and conflicts in human communication. In this connection, Lee (2001) goes so far as to say that "The song of the East is a song of tolerance, which can inject a new harmony into the music of the West" (p. 28). Insights also can be obtained into allocentric and integrative ways of adapting mutually toward harmonious communication (Miike, 2002, 2003a).

From an ethnohistorical perspective, for example, Toyama (1994) models what he calls "communication archetypes" of Japanese people. He theorizes about the mechanism and process of how the Japanese have eventually integrated something foreign into their indigenous culture by analyzing the 1450-year intercultural history of Japan. He directs special attention to the long-standing coexistence of the indigenous superbeings (*kami*) and the imported Buddhist deities (*hotoke*). He then applies his theoretical model to his own lifetime experiences of intercultural encounters and other short-term cases of Japanese cross-cultural adjustment.

It goes without saying that Asia has not been always successful in resolving conflicts peacefully or in respecting differences harmoniously. Indeed, as Funabashi (1993) writes, "Whenever unity seemed ascendant in the Asian world, history intervened" (p. 76). Different versions of Asian histories reveal that harmony was, and is, oftentimes a mask of oppression or a means of survival within and between Asian nations. All Asian countries have extensively experienced the aggression and dominance of Western empires. Furthermore, Japan made the fatal mistake to invade other Asian nations under the false ideology of the "Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere." Asiacentrists should not waste many historical pains in Asia that can serve as valuable assets in theorizing about the Asiacentric ethics and competence of global/local harmonious communication.

As brutal wars, unethical invasions, and ethnic conflicts around the globe still continue, what would be the messages of Asian histories about what is right and what is wrong in human communication in order not to repeat past mistakes? From the Tibetan experience, The 14th Dalai Lama advances two fundamental propositions toward peace communication: (1) Human problems can be solved through human understanding; and (2) All human beings seek happiness and avoid suffering (Miike, 2001). One of the possible Asiacentric historical

contributions in communication studies is to envision peace communication by conceptualizing "imagination competence" (Miike, 2003b) that allows us to see the past of *human* suffering and pain. In so doing, Asian religious-philosophical perspectives can also be profitably incorporated.

Theorizing from many narratives of historical oppression in Asia will disclose our inability to understand human suffering and pain. As victims we have often been passionate in telling what has been done to us, but as oppressors we are not aware of what we have done to others. Many of us, in one way or another, are both victims and oppressors and are thus capable of sharing the suffering   and pain of all the human beings. Yet as oppressors we keep creating the same human suffering and pain of others by our ignorance and disinterest.

It is lamentable, for instance, that many Japanese do not want others to forget about the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki whereas they show little interest in what their ancestors did to other Asian nations. Both are, after all, stories of human suffering and pain. Tezuka (2002) analyzes the Japan-U.S. perception gap on the atomic bombing from the perspective of silence and silencing and concludes that "both countries have ended up being equally unbalanced and less comprehensive in their respective perceptions" (p. 79). More cooperative efforts can be made among Asiacentric communication historians to know more about human suffering and healing in intercultural interactions within Asia and with the West.

Asiacentric Methodological Considerations

It is impossible to theorize truly from Asiacentric perspectives without challenging Eurocentric methodological assumptions. Some Asian scholars harangue the cultural biases of Eurocentric theoretical assumptions and yet completely fail to question Eurocentric methodological assumptions. Nevertheless, it is not so meaningful to seek to construct Asiacentric theories of communication if they need to be ultimately tested against Eurocentric research worldview in order to become legitimate theories. For Eurocentric methodologists can dismiss Asiacentric theories, no matter how insightful and useful, simply because they do not fit their way of theoretical validation. Thus, the methods used for building Asiacentric theories also must be Asiacentric.

It is a daunting task to challenge Eurocentric methodological assumptions, formulate Asiacentric methodological assumptions, and propose specific Asiacentric methods. In this last section, therefore, I will discuss three methodological issues as to *how* knowledge should be pursued in Asiacentric communication scholarship: (1) the issue of data and evidence; (2) the issue of validity and utility; and (3) the issue of visibility and invisibility. These issues are Asiacentric "initial" considerations and respectively concern themselves

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with Eurocentric methodological objectivism, empiricism, and materialism.

The first Asiacentric methodological issue is the issue of data and evidence. What is considered as "hard" data or "solid" evidence is socially constructed in the academic world. In Eurocentric scholarship, certain data and evidence have more credibility than others. There seems to be the hierarchical consciousness of data and evidence. Findings from questionnaire surveys, narratives collected through ethnographic interviews, and recorded notes in participant observations are conceived of as highly appropriate particularly by U.S. Eurocentric researchers. Many U.S. Eurocentric scholars assume that obtaining and analyzing these "first-hand" data and evidence guarantees the originality and advancement of scholarship, whether or not topics are repetitive, theories are mundane, and methods are ethical. As "second-hand" data and evidence, articles and advertisements from newspapers and magazines and, most recently, movies are popular texts especially in U.S. Eurocentric research.

With some exceptions (e.g., Sun & Starosta, 2002), little attention and credibility have been given to allegories, autobiographies, calligraphy, corporate histories, diaries, etymological origins, fables, idiomatic expressions, imageries, legends, metaphors, myths, novels, poems, preaches, proverbs, paradoxes, and songs as data and evidence despite the fact that some of them have survived for centuries. The Eurocentric hierarchical view of data and evidence appears to be based on the degree of "presumed" objectivity and publicity. But the question here is who determines what is more objective and public and what is more subjective and private. What is highly objective or private in one group can be what is highly subjective or public in another. Asiacentrists must reconsider this hierarchical view of data and evidence because Asia has rich "subjective" data and evidence that are "public" to Asians.

Another prevailing assumption regarding the issue of data and evidence in Eurocentric communication scholarship is that data and evidence should be "objectively" collected and analyzed. Even some Eurocentric interpretive and critical scholars do not accept subjectivity in the methodological worldview, although they acknowledge subjectivity (e.g., social constructivism) in the theoretical worldview. This pervasive tendency often deprives theory building of flexibility. Experienced researchers do and should know that sudden, un-intentional, unplanned, and unrecorded "conversations" are sometimes much more insightful, valuable, and revealing than rigidly intentional, planned, and recorded "data and evidence." This is especially the case in Asia where people are not used to formal research and are likely to mark the researcher as an outsider and the researched as an insider.

The ability to holistically and diachronically utilize a variety of resources may be one of the sought-after qualities of a good Asiacentric communication researcher. Tsujimura's (1987) work demonstrates that, no matter how

subjectively selective it is, a collection of data and evidence from multiple sources across time lines can be extremely rigorous for theory building and illustration. In order to elucidate *ishin-denshin* (meeting of the minds) in Japanese communication, he makes elegant use of *Zen mondo* (questions and answers between a master and a disciple in Zen monk training), Ryunosuke Akutagawa's 1954 short story, Yasunari Kawabata's 1952 novel, Dogen's 1004 Buddhist bio-graphy, and Eugen Herrigel's 1924-1930 personal experience of Zen in *kyudo* (Japanese archery) in Japan.

For his elaboration on social causes of taciturnity, indirectness, respect for reverberation, and *kuuki* (atmospheric constraints), Tsujimura (1987) skillfully touches on Japanese proverbs, a Japanese children's game called *nirameko* (staring contest), *ki* (energy flow)-related idiomatic expressions, and Jisaburoo Ozawa's statement at the end of World War II. Especially impressive is his content analysis of *Hyakunin Isshu* (*100 Poems by 100 Poets*), which is the 1235 anthology of *waka* (Japanese five-line poems) collected for over 600 years. His concise analysis illuminates such predominant communicative themes as life, love, human relationship, and nature among the noble Japanese from the 7th century to the 13th century (see also Tsujimura, 1988).

The second Asiacentric methodological issue is the issue of validity and utility. The above-discussed Eurocentric methodological objectivism is heavily grounded in Eurocentric methodological empiricism, which assumes that theories need to be *externally* validated, whether quantitatively or qualitatively, *outside* theorists and those who can resonate with their theories. Eurocentric empirical researchers presume that every theory should be statistically testable or directly observable. It comes as no surprise, then, that Asiacentric innovative theorists are often reminded by Eurocentric empirical researchers that their theories are no more than "just ideas" and asked to demonstrate how to measure or observe them.

Nevertheless, what has been neglected in this Eurocentric empirical worldview is that external validity is not necessarily parallel to internal utility. Things objectively testable and observable are not always subjectively useful and heuristic. In other words, even if the external validity of a theory is high, its internal utility can be low. Furthermore, *experiential* knowledge can be much more advanced than *experimental* knowledge. In Eurocentric methodological empiricism, however, ideas cannot become theories unless they are measurable or observable, no matter how internally useful they are to consumers of theories in everyday life. To put it in another way, theories are deemed as "just ideas" unless they are "*experimentally* verifiable," no matter how "*experientially* verifiable" they are (Sinha & Sinha, 1997).

It is high time for Asiacentric communication specialists to call this taken-for-granted Eurocentric methodological empiricism into question. Although

external validity is of great value in other disciplines for legitimate reasons, Asiacentrists should rethink to what extent it is necessary and appropriate for the study of human communication—the ever-changing and dynamic process of human interaction in context. A number of U.S. Eurocentric communication scientists, Asian and non-Asian alike, are so obsessed with their validation research that they spend scores of years to validate what has been experientially known for decades. However, they forget to question to what extent and how validated theories can be useful to, and resonate with, people in real life and, more importantly, why external validity is essential to such usefulness and resonance. What obligates communication theorists to commit themselves to a true-or-false dichotomy rather than to insight? In any case, just as "the cultural is the incompletely understood" (Starosta, 1984, p. 203), so is the communicative.

Furthermore, Asiacentrists must ask themselves whether or not Eurocentric methodological empiricism fits the Asian worldview and is truly beneficial to Asiacentric communication scholarship. The epistemological assumption for an Asiacentric paradigm is that everyone and everything become meaningful in relation to others (Miike, 2002, 2003ab). This assumption is based on the Asian emphasis on the relativity of truth. According to Hindu culture, for example, "when no beliefs can be said absolutely true, no beliefs can be declared absolutely false" (Jain & Kussman, 2000, p. 89). Such a relativistic view of truth leads to the importance of "resonance" in Asian cultures and communication (St. Clair, 1998/1999). Seen from this angle, ideas without external validity can become theories as long as internal utility is expressed.

Additionally, Eurocentric methodological empiricism prevents Asiacentric theorists from fully utilizing Asian religious-philosophical traditions. Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Shintoism, and Taoism have low external validity but high internal utility. They may be mere ideas in the Eurocentric sense but insightful theories in the Asiacentric sense. In fact, they have historically shaped Asian cultural selves and values for ages. Nevertheless, the Eurocentric validity-based methodological worldview has little tolerance toward Asiacentric theorizing and researching emanating from these traditions and allows researchers to ignore them without taking them seriously. Asiacentrists must search for methodological assumptions that encourage them to be Asiacentric.

The third Asiacentric methodological issue is the issue of visibility and invisibility. The aforementioned Eurocentric methodological empiricism is further nurtured by Eurocentric methodological materialism. There is a tendency, especially among U.S. Eurocentric communication scholars, to exclude invisible and unobservable matters from targets of theorizing and researching. The idea that theorizing about what is visible ought be conducted through what can be seen characterizes much of U.S. Eurocentric communication research. Heavy reliance on material texts in rhetorical analyses, strong faith in ethnographic

notes, and literal interpretations of narrative stories represent such a materialistic methodological worldview. Behind this methodological practice, two underlying assumptions exist: (1) what is visible is what is important in human communication; and (2) much can be told from what is visible.

It is questionable, however, whether or not visible phenomena are always important in human communication. What is invisible is oftentimes far more important in communication than what is visible. Indeed, what can be seen are very limited parts of communication activities. While it is true that much can be told from visible phenomena, it is equally true that much cannot be told from them. Eurocentric methodological experts can be sometimes seriously mistaken if they start from the visible to infer about the invisible. There is the possibility that they will see completely different realities if they start from the invisible. It must not be forgotten that "Some research truths will always remain intuitable more than observable, and felt more than directly observable" (Starosta & Chen, 2003, p. 20).

Asiacentric communicologists need to radically challenge this Eurocentric deep-seated trust in visibility. Miike (2002) speculates that "Whereas Westerners have a general propensity to be more outwardly and behaviorally active in communicative interactions, Easterners are, by and large, predisposed to be more inwardly and perceptually active in communicative interactions" (pp. 10-11). If such is the case, Eurocentric methodological materialism cannot gauge the activeness of Asians in the communication process and ends up describing how passive they are. It is also not certain that dynamic mutual adaptation and its related mental activities of Asians can be conceptualized through this materialistically-oriented methodological worldview. Sensitivity, empathy, contemplation, enlightenment, and spiritual liberation particularly in the Asian sense are largely invisible because they take place *within* the communicator. Direct experience, which many Asian cultural teachings value, might be a *sine qua non* for Asiacentric researchers in theorizing about invisible aspects of human communication.

One of the consequences of methodological objectivism, empiricism, and materialism in Eurocentric communication scholarship is the highly analytical mode of inquiry, which in turn has made Eurocentric researchers confine themselves to complex models of communication. These analytical models, featuring detailed categories and components, rely heavily on logic and reasoning, not on feeling and imagination. Howell (1979), who believes that alternative metaphoric models of communication are more useful to students and practitioners, contends:

> An inevitable result of our being analytical in the study of communication is the increasing complexity of paradigms and models. Extended analysis identifies more variables, and since the parts are

presumed to add up to the whole, none can be left out of a diagrammatic representation. Thus modern models of the communication process are not quickly and easily memorized and used.

A holistic approach to model design authorizes the designer to cluster groups of unspecified variables in ways that dramatize the point [she or] he wishes to make. This makes it possible to create simple models that say a great deal, because the model is metaphor rather than realistic or literal symbolization. Instead of supplying all the details, the metaphorical model guides the reader into a sequence of [her or] his own thoughts, opinions, and experiences. Nonwestern cultures are, incidentally, much more comfortable with the metaphoric model than with detailed, analytical representations. (p. 28)

There are not many attempts to propose metaphoric models of communication from Eastern perspectives. Yoshikawa's (1980, 1984, 1987) double-swing model of intercultural communication is one of the few exceptions. Asiacentric communication theorists have thus far adhered to analytical, complex theoretical models partly because of their strategy to make their Eastern modes of communication understandable to the Western audience (e.g., Ishii, 1984; Hara, 2001, 2002; Miike, 2003c). But they can explore the possibility of constructing metaphoric, simple theoretical models that may appeal more to the ethos of Asian peoples. Asian religious-philosophical traditions are full of suggestive metaphorical symbols that can serve as models of communication. Asian linguistic forms such as Chinese characters also can be profitably utilized owing to their ideographic nature. Allowing many theoretical ideas to be presented without rigid methodological regimens may be one Asiacentric step toward more democratic scholarship.

Concluding Comments

"Vision is the art of seeing things invisible," Jonathan Swift elegantly opines.[3] Engaging in this art is not easy precisely because things are invisible. The present essay has undertaken such a difficult task of seeing what is possible in Asiacentric communication scholarship. Much thinking remains to be done for a more comprehensive and complete Asiacentric vision. The intellectual mission of the Asiacentric project is to generate theory and research that can resonate thoroughly with Asian experiences and to enrich human ways of being, knowing, and valuing in the universe. This unaccomplished mission parallels the promotion of universal humanity and the preservation of cultural diversity in an age of glocalization. For Asiacentric approaches can delve more deeply into, and reflect more earnestly on, both universal humanity in cultural communication and cultural diversity in human communication.

Asiacentricity is neither a hegemonic Asiacentrism nor an Asian version of ethnocentric Eurocentrism. Asiacentricity does not present the Asian worldview as the only universal frame of reference and impose it on non-Asians. The Asiacentric metatheory, which demands the placement of Asian ideals and interests at the center of inquiry, simply argues that the best conceptual system of analysis for comprehending or even criticizing the agency of Asians in cultural context is Asiacentric. In so doing, this alternative metatheory does not deny the value of other non-Asiacentric perspectives on Asians but rejects the hegemonic idea that non-Asiacentric theoretical standpoints are superior to Asiacentric ones and therefore can grossly neglect the latter in the discussion and discourse surrounding Asian people and phenomena.

At the dawn of the new century, Lee (2001) passionately suggests that Asians create a different kind of music. He observes that Asians "have gained confidence by winning world acclaim for our performance of Western music on Western instruments" (p. 26). Yet Lee (2001) finds it difficult to predict how Asians can "make a major contribution to the 21st century world, with its new cultural paradigm, simply by virtue of our ability to perform Western music better than Westerners" (p. 26). His suggestion is indeed timely. Asians ought to compose Asian music on Asian instruments in the new millennium. This alternative idea of cultural agency is the focal contention of the Asiacentric metatheory. With their firm belief in the East-West cultural equality (Ishii, 1995), Asian communication scholars as well must produce their own melody in the exciting opening of the new concert. With the Gandhian spirit of "I can wait 40 or 400 years" (Starosta & Chaudhary, 1993), let us dream of Asian harmonious music in full flourish.

Notes

1. In accordance with my previous works (Miike, 2002, 2003ab), *Asia* in the present essay is geographically confined to China, India, Japan, and Korea

(see Miike [2003b] for my operational definition of *Asia*). Nevertheless, the proposed Asiacentric research objectives, content dimensions, and methodological considerations might be applicable to human communication scholarship in other Asian nations and regions. As I acknowledge elsewhere (Miike, 2003b), my vision of Asiacentricity owes its intellectual debt to Dr. Molefi Kete Asante's (1992, 1998, 2003) legacy of Afrocentricity.

2. This point was made by Dr. Guo-Ming Chen in his responses to the papers presented in the panel, "East Asian Perspectives on Culture and Communication," at the 6th Asian Studies Conference Japan (sponsored by the Institute of Asian Cultural Studies at International Christian University) on the Ichigaya Campus of Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan on June 22-23, 2002.

3. This quote is printed in a picture frame given to me by my German colleague, Dr. Britta H. Limary as a sign of her encouragement of my Asiacentric critiques and contributions. I wish to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to her for her friendship and support at the best and worst times of our doctoral training. Dr. Limary is one of the most hard-working persons that I have met, and I know that she has never taken advantage of others.

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