

The Role of Mass Media in Shaping Contemporary Worldviews among Koreans amid globalization – A Christian Perspective

Introduction

It has been said that mass media reflect the cultural values of any given society (Fore, 1987). Korean mass media production and consumption has been described as plentiful, super-fast, colorful, and innovative (Shin Dong Kim, 2008). The media have fashioned a unique and dynamic milieu amid diverse media channels including internet and mobile phone communication (with over 40 million users), receiving films, news, and mobile karaoke games. The high speed internet connection available for businesses and social interests among Koreans is near ubiquitous. Mass media development in Korea, unlike many countries where freedom of the press was a contentious subject, have somewhat enjoyed sturdy government support. There has been notable government interest toward development of ICT to reinforce its national economy and position the country as one of the leading nations in information communication technology in the era of globalization.

But this is just one way of looking at it. Beneath this façade lie conflicting worldviews; a pro-stability Confucianism which has upheld Korean society for centuries, and an ever-changing Western Capitalism, seemingly the launch pad for globalization. As structures of Confucianism fade away, mass media has been instrumental in fronting globalization ideology in modern Korea. Mass media are a powerful tool in shaping people's way of "seeing and being in the world" - worldview (Edlin, 2009). This paper examines the role of Korean mass media in passing down values that are influencing the Korean way of perceiving economic growth and globalization and suggests a way Christians may understand and respond to the contemporary mass media influence.

Korea at the crossroads

Originally thought to be part cultural exchange from China, Korean Confucianism is the form of Confucianism developed in Korea and with the most significant influences in Korean scholarly history. Contemporary Korean society remains fundamentally shaped by the legacy of Confucianism worldview perspective in its structure; moral system, the way of life, social relations between old and young, high culture, and is the basis for much of its legal system (Jeong-Kyu Lee, 2001). Confucianism is culture of stability, maintaining the status quo of harmony and can be considered a pragmatic way of holding a nation together without the civil wars and internal dissent as was applicable in the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392), and before.

As recent as 2005, the great impact of other religions especially the growth of Christianity, saw a decline of Confucian schools, temples, places of ancestral worship, and scholarship. Most of them become historical artifacts and tourist attraction sites. Despite this, Confucian values still greatly influence the consciousness of Korean people, even when one considers himself or herself as

Taoist, Christian, Muslim, Shintoist or Buddhist. As structures Confucianism are easing out, the question of whether or not Korea undergo an ideological no vacuum is unlike. Perhaps one can say, "Out goes Confucianism, in comes Globalization!"

Culture of stability verses culture of change

As stated earlier, Korean Confucianism has had cultural structure that enhances stability, maintaining a harmonious society. It is a lifestyle that emphasizes awareness of the community as being more important than an individual. In fact, individual know themselves in regard of the entire community. On the other hand, globalization is a phenomenon of change. Technological change and productivity are the driving force of globalization. It is a lifestyle of self actualization in an individual as opposed to Confucianism's community.

Korea today finds itself at the worldviews cross roads. Confucianism and Globalization are in conflicts. The nation is confronting a continuous globalization; a mega-trend in which the boundaries of a nation-state no longer a significant barrier to the free flow of information, technology, industrial goods, capital assets and culture. Globalization is a wave whose direct and indirect influences everyone, and in which multilateral relationships between nations and their increasing networking become more dominant than ever (Lewis and Sesay, 2002). Given that it is an across-the-board process affecting the entire globe, globalization embraces diverse scope whose elements are shaped by multiple factors, some unique to each country and others extending across regions.

Whether Korea is successfully opening up to the outside world by her own design or by the pressure of globalization, the impact of this change will be of great interest. Technological advancement in Korea is speeding up this development as more young Koreans look to the West, America in particular. This is evident in music, dressing and eating habits. Already, as a result of capitalism, Korean social inequality is increasing and the class divisions appear to becoming solidified. Individualism, an obvious characteristic of Western thought, is setting in as population is put on the acquisition treadmill by consumerism – a consequence of economic rationalism. The role of mass media in indoctrinating these Western worldviews and hence globalization cannot be underestimated.

The nature of the contemporary mass media

Traditionally, mass media has been defined as any medium used to transmit mass communication. This definitions regarded media as comprising of the eight mass media industries; Books, newspapers, magazines, radio, movies, television and the internet. But owing to speedy technological transformation, defining mass media is no longer clear cut. The continuing explosion of digital communication technology appears to provide more than a little confusion on the subject. The question of whether cell phones, video and computer games, or "World of Warcraft" are included in a definition of mass media is rather mind boggling.

In the recent days, the rise of social media like *Cyworld*, *Facebook* and *Twitter* have significantly changed the traditional view of mass media. Social media, citizen

journalism and new communication technologies are redefining conceptions of media and influence. Media are no longer limited to conservative channels. Their influence is no longer only attributed to journalists, analysts, industry experts and pundits as it were but conversations and community are taking over. Even the mainstream international media companies like CNN and BBC are now sharing the social media forums on *Facebook* and *Twitter* among others. Such phenomenon as *Youtube's "Broadcast Yourself"* has seen a similar means adopted by CNN's *ireporter* where ordinary people can upload news video from any part of the world. Simply put, anyone can now be a CNN journalist! Some of the most active and effective channels for today's technologically charged century include: blogs, online video, social networks, newsgroups/forums, podcasting, wikis, photosharing, social bookmarking, music sharing multiplayer games.

Traditionally, Korean media have been useful tools for social integration, modernization, and economic growth. The entwined relationship of political power and media has had a long tradition, with the media representing the interests of the government and contributing to upholding the existing political status quo. According to Chung (2006), political transition in the 1980s freed Koreans from strong nationalism, political control, ushering in a greater heterogeneity in self-expression and self-identity in the 1990s. This was followed by a new wave of rapid economic growth along with increased consumer culture. This culture is especially affecting the youth at the expense of the existing ideologies (Chung, 2006).

Mass media as a worldview shaper

The media has been in the forefront in shaping the way people see and live in the world - their worldview. This is mainly because there is no neutrality in the mass media contents. Any claimed neutrality in mass media content can only be a reflection of an incorrect understanding for media frame (Harris and Taylor, 2008). Couldry (2000) observed that, "The media process does not merely interact with the rest of society; it has a major impact on how the rest of society understands and imagines itself"(p. 54). The society therefore finds itself in a hollow core resulting from the superficially neutral, but in reality profoundly ideological nature of media content -the reality of economic rationalism (Taylor and Harris, 2008).

But, most people are unaware of the liturgical role of mass media in passing on values that form, manipulate and blurs one's worldview. Critics of media programming are silent, and when they try to critique, they rarely question the essential foundations of mass media and philosophies behind its programming either out of ignorance or their perception of media content as "neutral". But media is a teacher; a powerful teacher as Jerome Bruner (1996) acknowledged in a rather ecclesiastical language, "the teacher is the vicar of the culture at large" (p. 84). Media

education is a reflection of set beliefs of those who designed or present them, and sometimes the media owners. The most powerful message in mass media today is economic rationalism and commodification. Owing to practical pressure of constantly working against the clock (Korean concept of *palipali*) and the professional demand for impartiality and objectivity, the media especially the television is in a rush to satisfy a speedy generation in a pop- culture of consumerism.

Media as a liturgical tool for economic rationalism

i) Economic rationalism at the heart of media message

Economic enlightenment has become a totalitarian concept for including all particularity within what Taylor and Harris (2008) refer to as "rubric of identity" inventing against and developing into a "panoptic system" (p.69) that gets the human being of autonomy, and the culture of their freedom of expression and consumer choices. The influential motivation that exemplifies this enlightenment is corresponding with the consolidation of capitalistic ideology that both commodification and utilitarian, influential rationale engage in a de-contextualization of the specific and its reduction to interchangeable. Here, the media acts as a technological tool underpinning such commodity values, and only that which pre-exists inside the media is noticed (Taylor and Harris, 2008).

Commercial television channels are try to create homogeneity. They are largely supported by advertising and thrive in popularity and popular shows aimed at producing a passive and uncritical audience. Brian Grant noted that, "this state of affairs tallies with the pervasiveness of the capitalist ideology."It is reasonable that depictions of pop culture are popular with audiences and advertisers alike especially when society's culture represented are familiar interpretations either of reality or of real issues in programmes such as soap operas, sitcoms, talk shows, certain films, game-shows, sports events, TV films or dramas, comedies and children's shows.

ii. Economic rationalism in education

To say that education is being "commodified" is to claim that it is constituted as value in the form of a range of commodities that are bought and sold in markets implying the creation of education 'markets' in which education commodities (products) are traded (Alexiadou,1999). To understand the commodification of education is to think about the business agenda for and in education the production of labor power as human capital for businesses (Hill, 2004). Glenn Rikowski refers to it as 'Capitalisation' making schools and universities into value or commodity-producing enterprises (Rikowski, 2003). Learning institutions are institutionally reorganized on capitalist model of accumulation (Shumar 1997 p.31).

But seeing education as a thing leads to its commodification. The concept of education as a complex network of relationships, intent, motivations, cognitions and expectation has been commodified in the recent past. The resulting 'package' can then be sold, exchanged, traded -actually delivered, like any other commodity in the marketplace. This form of commodification leads to the economy of student worth. That is, seeing success of a student through the lens of 'performative culture' as it is with a product in the market. This changes the social relations between providers and clients, the school and the parents. Education is increasingly becoming subject to 'the normative assumptions and prescriptions' of 'economism'(Lingard, Ladwig et al., 1998, p. 84). This economism comes in different means for instance within institutions end logic, education for economic competitiveness, changes the social process and perception of teaching, learning and research into a set of standardized and quantifiable products.

Michael Fielding (2003) suggests that educational institutions have become places where personal is discarded for the sake of the functional, and community is valued mainly for the purposes the 'market place'. Education is therefore commodified, subjected to the logic of economic rationality and forms of social relations are endangered by the imposition of economic rationalism. Commodification of education tends to view students as "customers", and the degree they earn is a commodity that can be exchanged for a job rather than equipping students for life (Willmott, 1995). Education then is reduced to one more "fee for service" activity.

In Korea, this is reflected in the existing cut-throat competition to enter the top-notch universities like Seoul National, Korea National and Yonsei National commonly abbreviated as SKY. There is also fierce competition among parents taking their children to *Hagwons* (special academies or cram schools). This competition especially the college entrance-oriented race has been criticized as crippling school education (Sah Dong-seok, 2009). Parents are known to be spending a large portion of their income on sending their children to cram schools and hiring private tutors for them in preparation for college entrance exams. "Education experts often liken private education to an arms race —parents engage in never-ending competition to let their children get ahead of others, staking all resources, and this vicious cycle goes on." (Kang Hyun-kyung, 2009). Academic and social success has been defined on the basis of the university one enrolls in. Big companies have sort to employ the alumni of top universities seeing them as a quality cogs to their profit-making engines.

iii. Economic rationalism in relationships

Pre-marriage relationships in Korea are also suffering from the impact of economic rationalism. Though marriage has been viewed from different perspectives (religious, Cultural or civil), most young people are likely to consider financial status of the fiancées before they decide to marry them. In Korea for example, young people working with the prestigious conglomerates like Samsung, LG and Hyundai Motor would be considered attractive marriage partners.

Contemporary worldview shaped by economic rationalism also has an impact on how young people view marriage and a successful family. Mass media, especially the television has become a significant tool in portraying an ideal relationship of marriage and family as a wealthy couple with a decent job, latest car and big house. Borrowing heavily from mass media's definition of beauty, romance, courting and marriage have been disillusioned and shun traditional Korean values. While the standard of beauty differs from culture to culture, Korean society has heavily adopted a western view of beauty, especially for women.

In the recent decades Korean traditional standards of what it means to be beautiful has been altered and tempered. Mass media and economic rationalism characteristics now reflect a Western view of beauty. As a result, there have been a rising number of cosmetic surgeries performed each year for example changing eyelid appearance to be more western. One may ask whether it is a price worth paying for globalisation. The Korean market is flooded with cosmetic products, slim medications and diet foods.

Last year, *Time Magazine* reported the increase in demand in plastic and cosmetic surgery among Korean university students. And from Korea, the wave of plastic surgery is spreading to other Asian nations mainly blephroplasty (eye-lid surgery), lips, breast enhancement facial bone contouring and rhinoplasty (nose reshaping). There is also another critical issue of sexual identity among young people and the role of the media in promoting 'de-genderization'. Some Korean male actors and singers, who greatly shape the perception of young people through the media, are deliberately adopting female characteristics in their dressing, hairstyles, facial looks and sometime behavior. This trend is currently trickling down among male students in the universities. Unfortunately, this trend is likely to continue because young people are unaware of the manipulation by the media in product and idea placements aimed for profit making (Balswick & Balswick, 2008). Korea has numerous cases of commodification of relationships especially among its celebrities (Actors and Actress) who happen to dominate the television programs and thus the agents that shape perceptions. For instance, *The Korea Times* (June 11, 2009)

published news story titled Women's Groups Up in Arms Over Ruling on Late Actress. The story partly read,

"On June 4, the court reversed a high court ruling that decided in favor of Choi in a compensation suit filed by Shinhan Engineering and Construction in 2004 against the actress, who was the model for its apartments. The advertiser claims she did not keep her contractual obligation to "maintain dignity," because she disclosed to the public her bruised and swollen face which was caused by the violence of her then husband, former baseball player Cho Sung-min. They divorced soon afterward. The top court ruled that she caused damage to the company by "failing to keep her social and moral honor" and thus depreciating the brand image. Following Choi's suicide last October, her two children — one preschooler and the other primary schooler — are now the parties against whom the suit was filed. Their grandmother is their legal representative. The firm demanded 3 billion won (\$2.3 million) in compensation." *The Korean Times*, Retrieved on October 22, 2009 from: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2009/06/117_46676.html

On the following day, June 12, 2009, the same newspaper published a critique, Violence against Women, by Jason Lim, the managing editor of the Korea Policy Review.

The Supreme Court judgment, which was arrived at by a team consisting of four male judges, declared that, "Since the reason that an advertiser hires an athlete or celebrity for advertisement is to create demand for its products by building off the athlete or celebrity's positive image, if they failed to maintain their dignity even despite having contractually stipulated to do so, they cannot avoid responsibility for compensation and punitive damages." In short, Choi failed to maintain her dignity because she got herself beat up by her husband and talked about it publicly. Which begs the question: Would Choi still be held liable for being undignified if she had revealed that she had been a victim of a violent crime by a stranger? Probably not. It was only because this was a domestic violence case in which her husband was the perpetrator that Choi was considered undignified. There are several messages that this judgment sends to victims of domestic violence, all of them devastating: One, domestic violence is a shameful topic that should be kept in the home; two, even if you are beaten, shut up and suffer in silence; three, it's not dignified to reveal that you are a victim of domestic violence; four, you are partly to blame in any case. *The Korean Times*, Retrieved on October 22, 2009 from: <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/include/print.asp?newsIdx=48002>

Another recent example of commodification in Korea ties up celebrity culture to economic rationalism. Last month this story made a front-page headline in *The Korea Times* (, October 20, 2009):

Figure skating sensation Kim Yu-na has been the biggest hit item in the local ad market, even raising concern that excessive exposure in various campaigns could write off her value in the end. The star athlete signed contracts up to over 3 billion won (\$2.6 million) this year, with local companies rushing to put the skater in their ads. Hyundai Motor's determined move paid off when she won the Trophee Eric Bompard Championship last weekend. ...Another major supporter, Samsung Electronics, expects its recent mobile phone model named "Yu-na's Haptic" to hit the 1-million sales mark this year. Launched in May, the number of the products sold exceeded 500,000 in a record-short 80 days. ...Advertising experts say Kim's sponsors do not need to worry that her value in the market might wane any time soon."Companies using sports stars in ad campaigns usually take risks if their results fall below expectations," an official of an advertising agency said on condition of anonymity. "But as for Yu-na, they don't need to worry about it as long as she remains as invincible as she is now." (*The Korea Times, October 20, 2009*)

What is the message here? Is productivity - profit making, all that matters? The above kind of 'economic pragmatism' has turned human value into a market "item" (note that Kim Yu-na was referred to in the excerpt above). That as long as she is still winning, the companies can use her to boost sales. What happens if she doesn't win?

Other companies reported as using Kim Yu na as model for sales campaigns include: Maeil Dairy, Tous Les Jours, CJ Group (its bread brand has been named Yu-na), and Jewelry maker J.Estina (also named a collection after Yu-na). The newspaper added that many other firms are devising tactics to associate Yu-na in its sales promotion.

Challenges of globalization

Korea must be prepared to shape up to the demands of globalization for there might be no alternative to this at the moment. First, Korea will have to change its economic act as the primary driving force toward globalization. More economic restructuring of the Korean economy will definitely affect the state-led, export-oriented, and protectionist policies of its current policies. More so, from the experience of the consequences of the financial crisis in 1997 and the recent worldwide financial crisis, Korea economic policy may opt for more restructuring policies to protect the conglomerates that act as the economic backbone.

Secondly, diplomatic relationships with the US, Japan, China and North Korea itself will have to take a new phase. In the recent days, after regime changes in US and Japan, there have been signs of renewed closer relationships politically and economically as was witnessed in recent the US-Korea and Korea-Japan summits. Third, Korean domestic politics will have to be ready to confront the realities of its new economic adventures in Free Trade Agreements (FTA) and the newly economic agreement with the European Union. Korea therefore is faced with daunting circumstances in which it has to successfully realize both political democratization and open-minded economic restructuring. The degree to which democratization and restructuring are consolidated will be fundamental building blocks toward a steady globalization.

There are also observable correlation between rich globalised nations and social tragedies such as suicide and abortions. Korea's suicide rate is among the highest in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) members. Abortion is also an issue. In 2007 Bishop of Seoul John Chang Yik told a press conference that according to media, an average of about 1.5 million abortions had taken place every year since 1973. The sum of this figure exceeds the total population of South Korea - a country with one-sixth the population of the United States but with more abortions per year. Interestingly, abortion is illegal in the country. Korea must critically be aware, prepare and tackle the impact of globalization.

Christians and mass media in the age globalization

How then should a Christian living in a pluralistic society, like Korea respond to this issue? Postmodernism makes it even more a challenging task to work in a highly technological society where the presence of mass media is near ubiquitous. In the wake of postmodernism where relativity of belief is acknowledged, Christians are called to detect, critique, expose, and reject, lies of the postmodern views in the cultures they are in. They should stand out and act in faith and bring awareness of untrue, misleading contemporary views in mass media that easily entangles the society. Productivity, whether economic or otherwise, is noble and expected. However, it should not be the primary fulcrum of an individual or the society at expense of human integrity. Christians are encouraged to learn to wrestle with the issues of economic rationalism as the fuel of globalization and remain faithful to the truth of the gospel. This is no easy task but Christians have been called to faithfulness, not necessarily triumphalism.

From a Christian perspective, mass media is part of culture affected by the fall and hence in need of redemption. It is important to understand how mass media operates in order to use it in a way that glorifies God. Bernd H. Schmitt in *Experiential Marketing: How to get Customers to sense, Feel, Think, Act, Relate* (New York:

Free Press, 1999, pp. 64-65) warned saying, "Be aware of your environment, if you don't want to be manipulated by it." This is because media institution is formative and of liturgical nature which should be understood and undesirable formations resisted (Smith, 2009). Visual and visceral media operate on our imagination more than our intellect -because they seep into our imagination - "they are slowly and often surreptitiously absorbed into our *kardia* (heart), into the very nerve centre of how we orient ourselves to the world" (Smith, 2009. p.96).

Seeing communication as part of God's intelligent design is the starting point for understanding communication since every theory of communication is "a theology of communication [and] every theory either starts with God or leaves him out of the equation" (Fortner, 2006. p.281). Mass media and their influence must therefore be critiqued in the light of God's Word. This understanding helps the audience to avoid being submissive dupes of what has become of the mass media culture today, but rather be skilled interpreters and celebrators of media (Harris & Taylor, 2008). Particularly Christian media should understand that the essential role of mass media is to communicate, and communication is a fundamental process by which human relationships occur, given of existence and maintained. The mandate of mass media, also include engaging culture in which they serve to expose the falsehood and dangers of the contemporary life views masquerading as a message of fulfillment in wealth.

There is no neutrality. Mass media educates the audience and all forms of educational content constitute a "liturgy"- a fundamentally pedagogical conduit for forming of human heart and desires. To critique the foundational make up of mass media's didactic role of Korean media, then calls for a basic understanding of the true character of technical media and the contemporary life views of those working in the media institution. A Christian worldview rejects the myth of neutrality because all of life is a reflection of a faith commitment. The myth of neutrality has been the reason for excessively optimistic indulgence of mass media new technologies.

What then is Korea's role at the global stage?

As an advanced nation in the global society, Korea can play a pivotal role in influencing positive outcomes in a number of ways. This should begin with an awareness and understanding among the citizens, of what it means to be an advanced nation heading towards globalization. And since Korea is already at the global stage with its leaders engaging with other top economic powers, there lies a responsibility with such status. As an advanced nation, Korea can take lead in addressing issues that threaten humanity in various parts of the aside from primarily focusing on economic development. Media will have a key role to play in fostering these developments. Some of the issues that Korea may address include:

i. Foreign aid: Korea may choose to share its material blessings with south Asian nations where it has a big market for its products or in Africa where it siphons some of its oil. This includes infrastructure developments in terms of road network, school and water projects among others. Korea can also help opening up education opportunities for students from these countries. According to the 2009 Commitment to Development Index (CDI), released in October, South Korea appear to be doing little among the rich nations in helping developing countries. As Korea seeks to join the aid committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation (OECD) next year, it is expected that through Development Assistance Committee, Korea will need to increase international assistance in keeping with its economic power. Discouragingly, even the G7 major industrialized countries comparatively fared lower, with none in the top ten in helping other countries. Perhaps this is an opportunity for Korea to show the world the same generosity its citizens display domestically. Remember that Korean development stimulated by overseas aid in 1960s to 70s. Now is the chance to show this generosity to others.

ii. North Korea diplomacy: Korea has a vital responsibility in addressing the North Korean issue. Korea should continue pressing for not only a nuclear resolution but the welfare of many North Korean people suffering as a results of iron fist regime as well. While there is a notable change in Korea's foreign policy in regard to North Korea, there is need for diplomacy based on humility rather than coercive diplomacy. Victor D. Cha, a former staff in National Security Council in the Bush administration noted that the encouraging diplomatic approach "smile diplomacy" now as opposed to nuclear diplomacy and ballistic missile diplomacy a few months ago, is likely to bear fruits amid UN sanctions. How South Korea handles the North Korea diplomatic row is central to her status as advanced nation.

iii. Environmental stewardship: Korea can use its influence to address the issue of climate change and be on a centre stage along other advanced nations in negotiations new global treaty aimed at addressing the causes and consequences of greenhouse-gas emissions. The 2009 Commitment to Development Index (CDI), report also indicated that Korea performed poorly among rich nations as far as environmental stewardship is concerned. Korea is known for its high imports of tropical wood and its high per-capita use of chemicals that deplete the ozone layer. This calls for a more responsible Korea at the global stage.

Conclusion

Fore (1987) defined communication as a dynamic, symbolic process by which people in dialogue construct the meanings and share the emotions through which they understand, value, and live in society, and by which they both behave and justify

their behavior. And with the advent of technology especially in Korean context, mass media have been made even more effective and information easily accessible. The integration of local and international economies into a globally unified political, economic and cultural order, otherwise referred to as globalization is where Korea is heading to as an advanced nation. Korean mass media has played a significant role in shaping up the attitudes and perceptions of the forces that transform an economy into one characterized by freer movement of capital, labor, technology, and financial flows. These characteristics are however based on foreign worldviews that are pitting a Korean Confucianism perspective against a Western capitalism and elements of globalization.

Mass media has become a liturgical instrument, forming the mind-sets of people into economic rationalism. As Korean internalized the western belief system, mass media continually help them to perceive Western worldview, values, institutions, and practices as superior and universal and therefore to be assimilated. Mass media content are not neutral and must therefore be critiqued from an authentic point of view. To critique the fundamental media system, requires a basic understanding of the reality of technical media and the contemporary life views that inform them. A Christian worldview views contemporary mass media as God's gift to humanity, which is redeemable to serve the culture faithfully, rather than just as a tool for powerful forces to use to manipulate public opinion.

Korea has a responsibility as an advanced nation. It can use this status to see its development as a blessing and share its prosperity with poorer countries.

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