

propositions while exercising caution. It also is in this spirit that questions are asked, and solutions are proposed in this volume.

What the above discussion of de-Westernization and the pitfalls in indigenizing communication research indicates is that there is, in fact, a whole range of inter-related issues underlying the seemingly simplistic “how-to” question, and each of them needs to be properly addressed.

The collection of chapters in this volume seeks to respond to the above questions from a multi-subdisciplinary perspective, reflecting different theoretical and philosophical orientations. The objective of the endeavor, as described earlier, is not to provide the solution to the problem and bring closure to the issue. On the contrary, the aim is to stimulate further debate by way of proposing, sharing, challenging, and debating.

### **The problem and its contributing factors**

The arguments in this book unfold in four different parts. The first part gives an overview of the problem by tackling the “what” and the “why” issue regarding Eurocentrism and indigenization in communication research. It describes the scale and scope of the problem and teases out the contributing factors to this imbalance in knowledge production in the field.

In Chapter 2, Molefi Kete Asante argues that there is a need to examine the myths and stereotypes often held by the Western world of African and Asian cultures, as the Western construct of communication deeply embeds such myths that necessarily undermine common humanity. It is believed that the dominant myth and ideological framework of the Western imposition as universal, and the European hierarchy under which Africa and Asia were subsumed, must be neutralized to effectively open up interactions of philosophical systems. Myths, including individualism as the highest form of human expression, equating the mastery over nature with progress, and philosophy as the contribution of strictly the Europeans either contradict Asian and African experiences or are highly questionable. The real danger for Asian and African communication researchers, Asante warns, lies in adopting the distortions of the West as reality about their own cultures.

In the next chapter, Shelton Gunaratne describes how global divides in media and communication studies have emerged as organized groups of scholars began to question such stereotypes and the presumption of European universalism, and efforts were made to go back to the teachings and philosophies of Buddha, Laozi, Confucius, Nagarjuna, and others to derive relevant theoretical frameworks. The chapter explicates the fundamental philosophical East–West differences that have given rise to these contemporary divides in terms of the principle of the dialectical completion of relative polarities (i.e., the yin-yang principle of diversity within unity) and responds to the critics of non-Western communication theories and models. Gunaratne argues that these differences cannot be resolved within the structural constraints of the current world-system. Using the theoretical framework of world-system analysis and complexity science, he showed that the global

academic/scholarship structure, along with the modern world-system, is heading toward evolutionary bifurcation and self-organization into a more complex structure of universal universalism.

Despite significant headway made in communication research to move away from Eurocentrism, Marwan Kraidy, in Chapter 4, notes the primacy accorded to the global in theory and research focused on the global–local interaction. The global, latently identified with the Western-modern, is installed as a central node through which, and only through which, different locals can relate to one another. To explore theoretical building blocks that may move us into a South-to-South framework, which is best elaborated within a multiple-modernities framework, creative methodological approaches are called for. These include the arduous task of multi-sited research, counterposing two local settings with common characteristics but many more uncommon features, advanced language skills and the availability of research materials, databases and search engines in non-European languages. Kraidy argues that trans-local empirical research which appropriates theories from various sources and compares social dynamics in various contexts would prevent us from falling into the trap of culturalism, and would keep us alert to the impurity and dynamism of social actions, intellectual traditions, and approaches to communication studies.

Despite the necessity of building local-to-local knowledge, Kraidy warns that it ought to be construed as a long-term incremental strategy, and not a fully and immediately executable blueprint. On this point, Georgette Wang (in Chapter 5) offers at least part of the explanation by focusing her study on communication researchers outside the mainstream West, and the infrastructural conditions they work under. By revisiting the historical moments when East first encountered the West in the eighteenth century, she argues that Occidentalism – the way the East looked at the West and itself – was fundamentally different from the way the West looked at the East and itself, and that this had contextualized and characterized the Occidental discourse. Traces of Occidentalism can still be observed in academic research today in two areas: (1) the subaltern mentality that often blinds researchers to the presence of Eurocentrism and the significance of other cultural heritages to those that they study, and (2) government policies and institutional structures that reproduce the Eurocentric knowledge structure. “Occidentalism” is not the binary opposition to Orientalism, but a symbiotic force that interacts with, interpenetrates and intertwines with it in the construction of the “Other.” Wang calls for a change in policy direction and a “cultural reconnaissance movement” for researchers in the academic periphery to strengthen the linkage between their life and their research.

### **Tackling the “how-to” issue: the promises of focusing on the particular**

Chapters in the second part of the book take the challenge a step further and propose ways to arrive at a solution to the Eurocentrism problem by focusing on the particular and reconsidering the analytic strategy.

Confucian and Western cultures are fundamentally different, Paul Lee suggests in Chapter 6; as people's interpretation of social actions are situational and changeable over time, the positivist search for universal laws will be futile. Lee does not, however, see the need for a total and all-inclusive effort to de-Westernize communication research. In comparison with the positivist-scientific paradigm, the interpretive paradigm that sees human beings as "subjects" interpreting actions and reacting to situations is more closely in line with the Confucian emphasis on human existence and moral social order. Lee argues that the interpretive paradigm's focus on human actions and understanding of everyday life helps to broaden the scope of inquiries, encourages researchers to go deeper into the unique social and cultural formation of different societies, and facilitates the adaptation of context-free concepts to local realities. De-Westernization, therefore, needs to be selective, depending on the needs and aspirations of the researchers.

Wei-wen Chung also sees positivists' obsession with universality as a real problem: it narrows our perspective on social reality and consequently throws into prominence the Western influence. Put differently, social research has been haunted by a longstanding epistemological myth that rules, concepts and theory are approximations to reality, yet they cannot fully account for the dynamics of social practice. Chapter 7 proposes an alternative approach to reality by laying out a framework for the analysis of social practice. In this framework context is represented as a set of concentric circles representing different levels of contexts, e.g., practice, local contexts, political social milieu, and history. The boundaries between task and its context are not ambiguous and dynamic, while the relationships between context and person may also take a variety of forms. According to this framework, the cultural context does play a significant role in our daily practice and therefore practices tend to vary across cultural contexts. However, the choice between Westernization and de-Westernization may hinge on what set of rules to follow. What matters is not whether we should find our own rules in consideration of our local contexts but whether we should go beyond the search for rules.

While communication researchers are laboring over a solution to move beyond Eurocentrism, for those in film studies the twenty-year debate on cross-cultural reading was a *fait accompli*. As Emilie Yeh points out, in the past decade there has been a significant adjustment in re-constituting the East-West relationship to reverse the order of object-subject position. In parallel to young Western scholars' effort in re-orienting, re-turning and assimilating themselves with the native enunciation, the hostilities toward "Western theories" were marginalized, and charges against the systematic exclusion of the East as text and history, and the West as decipher and theory subsided. With the popularization of "multiculturalism," "postmodernity," and "postcolonialism," theory in the West might have appeared to be stalling, Yeh argues, but in cross-cultural studies it has "embedded itself into creation of an engrossing historiography . . . to eclipse earlier polemics." *Wenyi* (letters-and-arts pictures) as a suitable genre to clarify, map and discuss key issues in Chinese film history and criticism is used in Chapter 8 as a vivid example of how this process may unfold.

**Tackling the “how to” issue: problems with cultural specificity and the universal universality alternative**

In recent years globalization has sharpened the debate on the culture-specific and culture-general approaches to communication studies, as Chen Guo-Ming notes in Chapter 11. As the demand for culture-specific approaches in scholarly research is increasing, there is also a trend towards universalizing representations based on a culture-general paradigm. The two, however, should not be regarded as dualistically opposing each other. The collection of chapters in the third part of the book points out the conceptual flaws in dichotomizing cultures and makes various attempts to minimize barriers in developing generality on the basis of specificity, or moving from the local, the indigenous, and the contextual to the universal.

David Morley warns against a clear divide between the West and the Rest, as the Rest is now scattered throughout the Western world, while traces of the West are found everywhere. Also problematic is to dichotomize the modern centres and backward peripheries; such hegemonic relationship is both spatial and temporal, and does not leave any room for ideas such as multiple modernities. It is necessary for us to go beyond the “fictive ethnicity” of the West, Morley suggests, and to bring an anthropological perspective into the discussions of media. What is needed is not a “supplementary strategy” of simply adding more Oriental examples to an Occidental list, but rather a re-examination of the conventional Western concept itself. Cultural context needs to be recognized as more than a secondary issue; we should, however, make use of whatever theoretical resources will serve us best, “whatever their geographical point of origin.”

From a different perspective, Graham Murdock arrives at a similar conclusion in Chapter 10: essentialism is not the answer to the question, as it does not allow us to analyse the intensive, large-scale transcultural adaptations we have experienced in the past few hundred years. Using Asian modernities as a case, Murdock demonstrates that unlike many approaches to Westernization that work with versions of a binary opposition between West and East, it is possible to explore their relations as an unfolding story of proliferating encounters characterized by complex mixtures of compulsion and seduction, imposition, and refusal.

The chapter traces these processes from the 1850s, when China was defeated in the Second Opium War and American ships reached the coast of Japan, to the present, paying particular attention to the role of communications systems as key infrastructural elements, central sites of cultural production, and a ubiquitous presence in everyday life. Four major moments are distinguished in the making of contemporary Asian modernities dominated respectively by the logics of empire, nation, markets, and crises. Through the observant eyes of literary writers commenting on developments in Shanghai and Tokyo, the cultural centers of the region’s two major powers, Murdock traces the intersecting currents of admiration, imitation, adaptation and resistance that characterized Asian encounters with capitalist modernity in the crucial formative years of the 1920s and 1930s. We need to locate the present within the long history of becoming modern, he urges, and take up the challenge of building conceptual frameworks that tease out the unnoticed

connections and concealed dynamics, and develop research strategies that unpick their empirical complexities.

In Chapter 11, Chen Guo-Ming also points out that treating East and West as dichotomies leads to conceptual problems in tackling different ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. The tendencies to polarize these differences in an either-or fashion often lead to indiscriminate treatment of cultural values and insider's privileges, and blind acceptance or rejection of foreign elements. Chen argues that the dissolution of the boundary should and could be pursued if the distance between East-West paradigmatic assumptions are perceived as a continuum. Cultures, in this perspective, are seen as orienting towards a point on this continuum as all value orientations do exist in the same society; it is essentially a matter of degree. With this reconceptualization of cultures it will be possible to sustain local identities while seeking the interpenetration and interfusion between the culture-specific and culture-general approaches of communication studies.

Eddie C. Y. Kuo and Han Ei Chew, also in view of the culture-specific vs. culture-general dichotomy, propose the alternative of a culture-centric approach – a non-polarizing meta-theory that puts culture at the center of an inquiry. Based on the double-swing model and the humancentric model, this approach transcends the clash of cultural imperatives and harmonizes the work of communication theory building for the field, and allows cultural perspectives to remain distinct while sharing commonalities and overlapping space. Meaningful and constructive meetings of Eastern and Western perspectives are therefore possible without either political or ideological biases. This model of Chinese knot does not contradict Asiatic approaches, but goes beyond it, Kuo and Chew argue; and it is especially useful in three areas: synthesizing communication theories studied from ethnocentric perspectives, studying phenomena that occur at the confluence of cultures, and investigating new communication landscapes.

Rather than incorporating culture specificity with culture generality in a framework of analysis, Yaly Chao adopts a more aggressive approach in Chapter 12 and proposes to build a science of meaning as a platform for comparing, interconnecting and integrating concepts, theories and paradigms of different cultural origins and knowledge domains. As a methodology to establish an analytical framework to examine contextualized meaning, compare varying levels of meaning and the constancy and changes of meaning, the science of meaning seeks to expand the analysis of meaning systems to include cultural systems, knowledge systems, and other complex meaning systems on the basis of semiotics and semantics.

In communication studies, research in meaning analysis proposes that a meaning system be broken down into four levels that progress in terms of complexity: perception, symbol, narrative, and discourse. Chao argues that universality in the context of a meaning system can be analysed in terms of synchronic universality, diachronic universality, and domain universality. Through these types of universality, the science of meaning clarifies the various objective realities and the variations in time, space, and context involved in the sharing of meaning, thereby helping to shape the patterns of meaning sharing, to provide practice in their use, and to establish both the identity and practicality of communication studies.