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### The NWICO Movement : A Balance Sheet

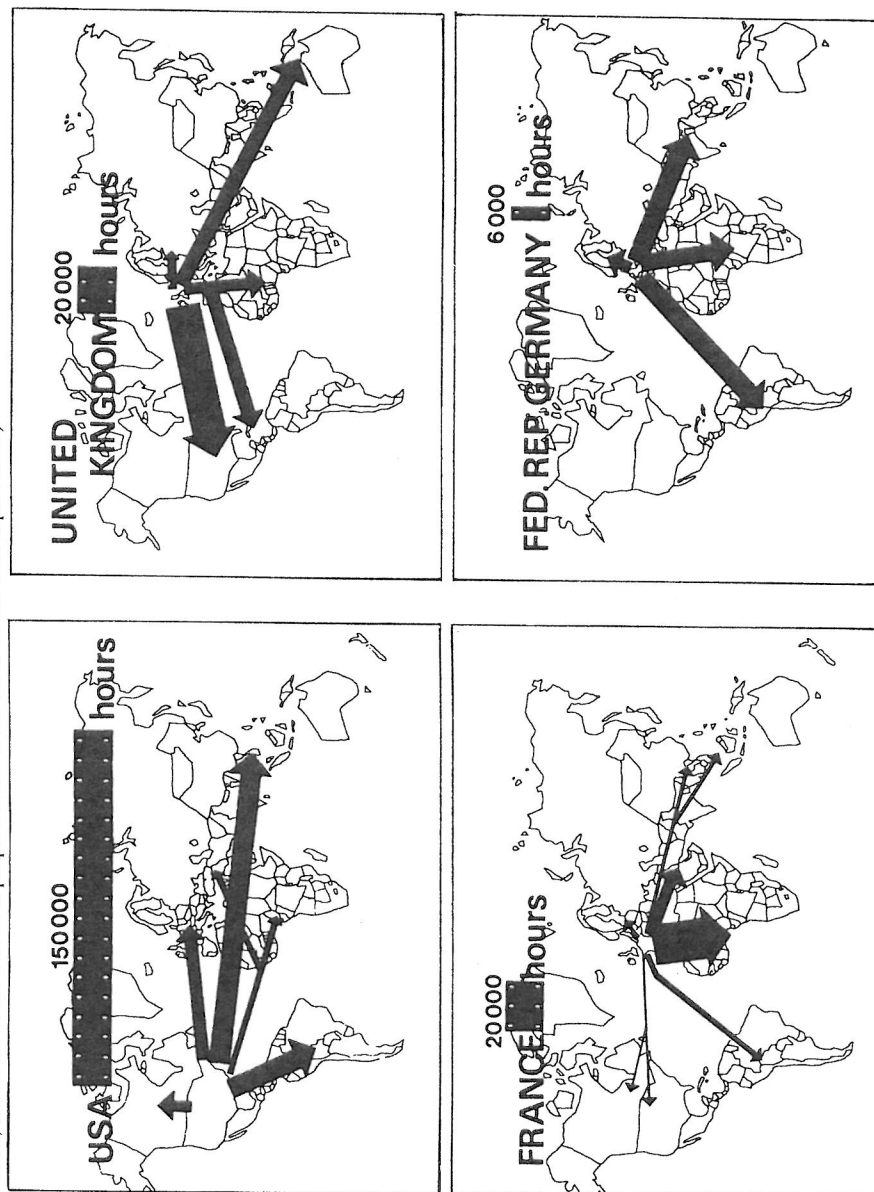
*Kaarle Nordenstreng*

The figure at next page was made twenty years ago out of data gathered by two colleagues at the University of Tampere for a UNESCO-sponsored study, published in 1974 under the title "Television Traffic—A One-Way Street?"<sup>1)</sup> The world map of television programme flows proved out to be extremely imbalanced, both quantitatively and qualitatively. That was hardly new to anybody involved in international television business ; especially the American exports of cheap trash to the Third World were widely known and referred to by many as "cultural imperialism." But here the state of affairs was for the first time substantiated with a fairly representative empirical evidence. Moreover, the study was complemented by an international symposium at my University in May 1973, attended by distinguished scholars such as Elihu Katz, Herbert Schiller and Dallas Smythe and even used by the President of Finland, the late Dr. Urho Kekkonen, to make a major statement of national and international communication policies questioning the classic free flow doctrine and advocating social justice and balance in the world of mass communication. No wonder, then, that the UNESCO report on the study and the symposium became a bestseller in several languages.

Let us not, however, romanticize this classic. If we had not done it, someone else would have gathered and reported such data soon. In fact, several studies of similar nature, typically focusing on news

1) K. Nordenstreng & T. Varis, *Television Traffic—A One-Way Street? A Survey and Analysis of the International Flow of Television Programme Material*, Paris : UNESCO (Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 70), 1974.

Figure. The Distribution Patterns of the Major Programme Exporting Countries in the Early 1970's  
(For each country an estimation of the total annual exports, indicated in the Figure, has been given a standard 'volume index' of 100%, the width of the arrows is proportionate to the share of the total export flow.)



Reproduced from UNESCO Report and Papers on Mass Communication, No. 70/1974, p. 30.

coverage, began to appear at the time. Also, UNESCO began to refine its methods of compiling worldwide media statistics, including radio and television statistics. In short, the media question had become a global issue. There was a quest for descriptive data on international communication, and there was a need for conceptual tools with global reach. The idea of a new international information order was an adequate response to the conceptual call of the time—just as our television flow study was a fitting response to the empirical call. Viewed in a historical context—as it always should be—we can trace two parallel trends behind the emergence of the new order idea at the time.

First there was the *political trend* of decolonization, with the Non-Aligned Movement as its increasingly authoritative advocate—and the self-described “Socialist World” as a more or less consistent supporter of the latter, or as some put it, a “natural ally” of the Third World. This political trend reached its culmination in the early 1970s with such developments as the UN declaration of the New International Economic Order, the oil crisis as well as the East-West détente which paved the way to the Helsinki Accords.

Secondly, we can trace an *intellectual trend*, in social sciences in general and media studies in particular, and that is the emergence of critical scholarship which challenged hegemonic political and cultural patterns, including the modernization theories of development, and which brought about new paradigms with an emphasis on social structures both within and between nations. This was a tide in the history of scholarly ideas when logical positivism and empiricism were over-shadowed by various kinds of critical schools, including old and new Marxists. The intellectual trend was boosted during the 1960s, and in 1969 it had reached already a semi-official status in the media field as shown by the critical approach of a UNESCO meeting of experts on the mass media and society held in Montreal.<sup>2)</sup>

The two trends—political and intellectual—had surprisingly few points of contact before the late 1970s. They were indeed two separate tracks of the movement, as shown elsewhere.<sup>3)</sup> Yet we cannot say that

2) *Mass Media in society ; The Need of Research*, Paris : UNESCO (Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 59), 1970.

3) “New Information Order and Communication Scholarship : Reflections on a Delicate Relationship,” in V. Mosco & J. Wasko & M. Pendakur (eds.), *Illuminating Blindspots ; Essays in Honor of Dallas W. Smythe*, Norwood : Ablex (forthcoming) ; “The UNESCO Expert Panel with the Benefit of Hindsight,” in C. Hamelink & O. Linne (eds.), *Mass Communication Research ; In Honor of James*

the two parallel trends had nothing in common; they did share a paradigm with such features as a holistic view of the world, a normative approach to reality, equality as a social value and objective truth as a journalistic ideal.

So the new information order, or "New World Information and Communication Order", in brief NWICO, as it has become to be called at the UN and UNESCO, can be seen as a logical articulation of an idea which had grown in various circles already for a long time—an idea whose time had come. To be precise, the phrase was born as late as March 1976 in Tunis where the Non-Aligned Movement held its Symposium on Information. It was then confirmed by the Non-Aligned Summit in Colombo in August 1976 by these classic words: "A new international order in the fields of information and mass communications is as vital as a new international economic order." Thus the concept was introduced along the political track, but the parallel intellectual track soon picked it up as a conceptual vehicle in studies of international communication.

We shall not try to trace here what was done under NWICO—both in political and in scholarly circles—from 1976 until this day. There exists a host of literature on the topic, including some with the participation of the present author.<sup>4)</sup> Let us just note that the first four years (until 1980) were quite dynamic and productive, with the establishment of the Non-Aligned News Agencies' Pool (NANAP), the consensus adoption of the Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO, the issuing of the MacBride Report ("Many Voices, One World") and the establishment of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) at UNESCO. Thereafter—roughly from the time when Ronald Reagan began his Presidency in the USA—there is little progress to report. The 1980s was a lost decade, at least for the NWICO idea. And we know that it was even more devastating period for the new economic order idea; that simply got buried under the Third World debt and the harsh realities of the GATT negotiations.

D. Halloran, Norwood: Ablex (forthcoming).

4) See e.g. Chapter 1 in K. Nordenstreng, *The Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO*, Norwood: Ablex, 1984; A comprehensive sourcebook with a lot of relevant documents reproduced is the *New International Information and Communication Order*, Prague: International Organization of Journalists, 1986; An update of recent developments until 1991, with central documents reproduced, is included in M. Traber & K. Nordenstreng (eds.), *Few Voices, Many Worlds*, London: World Association for Christian Communication, 1992.

Today the concept of NWICO as a political entity is still alive, diplomatically sanctioned even by the UN General Assembly.<sup>5)</sup> Structures such as NWICO and IPDC do still exist and operate. However, both political and practical life of NWICO is quite miserable. In NWICO this concept—as any conceptual approach to the mass media—is more or less frozen due to a traumatic past.<sup>6)</sup> And the operative side suffers from lack of funding, with the IPDC remaining as a chamber of unfulfilled requests—more and more so now that European countries are rechanneling part of their development assistance from the faraway South to their neighbors in the East.

Indeed, what about Perestroika and NWICO?

First, NWICO like decolonization as a whole, was strategically based on a balance of forces in the world arena where the former Socialist World rendered support to the developing Third World—politically, financially and militarily. With Perestroika, at least its later stages of disintegrating USSR, this strategic support was withdrawn and a respective gain was given to those Western powers that traditionally were seen as opponents of the Third World. The delicate balance was obviously shaken, since much of the Western accommodation in front of the Third World demands was simply caused by rivalry with the Socialist East. Now there is no longer a need to tactically show off as a friend of the Third World, with token assistance programmes such as the IPDC. In post-Perestroika world Western powers can afford being more honest—selfish without camouflage. From this angle we may say

5) United Nations General Assembly resolution 46/73, adopted without a vote on 11 December 1991. In this resolution the UN among other things:

"Urges that all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, recognizing the call in this context what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed 'a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process'..."

6) See e.g. G. Gerbner & H. Mowlana & K. Nordenstreng (eds.), *The Global Media Debate: Its Rise, Fall and Renewal*. Norwood: Ablex, 1992.

that only Cuba left alone ; the whole Third World is deprived of an earlier ally—however erratic.

Second, the Non-Aligned Movement as a mobilizer of the Third World interests and the main base of NWICO is in disarray. This is not only or even primarily due to what is going on in Yugoslavia—one of the pillars of the movement—but because of the very concept of non-alignment based on a division between East and West. When East is gone, we may ask : Whom are you non-aligned against? This identity crisis will certainly reduce the fuel for NWICO and should therefore be listed among those consequences of Perestroika that are harmful to the idea and practical mechanisms of NWICO.

But Perestroika has also positive consequences for NWICO. First of all, the Cold War division—in Europe as well as elsewhere—nurtured a dogmatic ideology on both sides. Thus the Socialist countries viewed media freedom typically as a Western trick to exercise subversion whereas media control was understood as self-protection of society. The stereotype Western view, on the other hand, was a simple division between good freedom (among us) and bad censorship (among them). Similarly, human rights could not be discussed in an objective manner as they were widely viewed and used—on both sides—as tactical instruments in an ideological struggle. Such an ideological polarization created a kind of intellectual repression into all East-West dialogues—not least those related to the sensitive area of journalism and mass media.

Thus Perestroika, by helping to abolish the Cold War, has liberated international communication research and policies from such an ideological baggage that has severely hindered creative thinking and real dialogue. And let us be careful to note that what has happened is not that those who had advocated freedom and capitalism now definitely won against those who had sympathized Socialism. The whole set-up with parties based on the East-West division is outdated. If there are losers in this post-Perestroika new shake-up, they are those—not least in the West—whose strength was not based on intellectual argumentation but on ideological power positions. It is these circles that have lost their weapons with the end of the Cold War, whereas those inspired by true intellect have been emancipated after being held hostage of the Cold War.

This post-Cold War intellectual emancipation may lead, incidentally, to a revival of Marxist thought, because there are no longer good reasons to stigmatize Marxists as supporters of “the communist system”

and also the Marxists have no longer any reason to exercise self-restraint, or place loyalty before frankness, when dealing with Socialist countries. In media questions we are liberated from the obsessive dichotomy between freedom and censorship, associated with the two political systems, and instead there will be new emphasis on the division between media owners and media workers in the international media market. In other words, the classic division between capital and labor, instead of being buried with the Cold War, will only rise on the agenda. Paradoxically, Perestroika will bring us back to basics. In general, one may predict that social sciences will get a big boost out of the post-Perestroika world, with new emphasis on class, economy and other structural aspects of human existence instead of the recent fashionable trends of post-modernism. In such an intellectual climate NWICO will no doubt get new stimulation.

Another positive aspect of Perestroika for NWICO is its twin concept Glasnost. Actually this concept of openness or transparency and the related call for a free marketplace of ideas is in full accordance with the old libertarian doctrines—like NWICO has been all the time, although Western campaigns have perpetuated the big lie that NWICO equals to governmental control of the media. Both NWICO and Glasnost stand for liberation, by no means repression. In this respect, Perestroika has given a significant push to NWICO.

As a footnote, let us observe that the current situation in former Socialist countries including the USSR is quite problematic from the point of view of Glasnost. There is little respect for truth and other values of journalistic ethics. Instead, there are well-known features of excessive nationalism and a mentality of reprisals, especially towards those perceived as collaborators of the old regime. Whereas the former party dictatorship—in Russian “diktatura”—is condemned by (almost) all, a new form of control has emerged with the present holders of power, named by many disillusioned people in these countries as “demokratura”. There are bitter phenomena of a socio-political turmoil, often unbelievable for outsiders but still understandable if taken as a case of collective psychopathology in getting through a decades-long historical process.

All and all, Perestroika and NWICO have a contradictory relationship. Intellectually, NWICO has gained from Perestroika and Glasnost, but in terms of power politics and related transfer of resources NWICO is a great loser. The overall balance of NWICO is today thus fairly poor, at least in material and political terms.



The picture turns even more gloomy if we look around the media world itself, instead of just focusing on the concept of NWICO and its mechanism. This is how a group of media scholars from various regions of the world summarized the situation at the so-called MacBride Round Table on Communication in Istanbul last summer<sup>7)</sup> :

"We observe with growing concern the rapidly increasing concentration, homogenization, commercialization, and militarization of national and world cultures. The principles of the MacBride Report, 'Many Voices, One World', have been countered :

- \*by the virtual monopoly of global conglomerates over the selection, production and marketing of information and entertainment products, including crucial scientific and technical data and informational rights ;
- \*by the transnational industrial-media complex under its American military protectorate ;
- \*and by the weakening of multilateral relations and international organizations."

What to do? The MacBride Round Table itself is an example of the new response at the time when governments and intergovernmental agencies such as UNESCO are paralyzed—one needs to proceed at the nongovernmental level. The Istanbul statement put it as follows :

"The challenge before us is to build new peoples' coalitions and constituencies that can help regain a significant measure of participation in cultural policy-making nationally and internationally. The coalitions should include a broad range of public groups, social movements, and organizations. They should enlist media professionals, citizen activists, consumer groups, women's minorities, religious, labour, environmental and other organizations in the new cultural struggle."

In general terms, NWICO should be seen not just as high politics by governments but first and foremost as a project of what is called the civil society. And in fact the movement is shifting from official circles to citizens' organizations. Media scholars and professionals have their natural place among these constituents of civil society—more natural than among politicians and government bureaucrats.

Parallel to a shift from governments to citizens there is a new emphasis in looking at NWICO as a matter of national rather than

international concern. In the beginning—in the 1970s—the causes and remedies were mostly spotted outside the Third World, typically among the Western imperialists. This global view, while still valid to a point, tends to overlook the role of national collaborators in maintaining the undesired structures. As a matter of fact, blaming imperialists is often a politically convenient way to preserve the status quo—not to do anything at home even if a lot could be done, and thus actually to work against NWICO.

The MacBride Round Table—with meetings in Harare (1989), Prague (1990) and Istanbul (1991)—also stands as a reminder of the fact that despite all the changes in the world, the basic issues of NWICO remain valid. Valid is still today most of the research which documented imbalance—such as the original Tampere study—although constant updating is needed. For instance, a contemporary world map of television flows would still show the basic pattern of a one-way street, but there are now more imperial centres than the four discovered 20 years ago. Today Third World has its own dominant sub centres and dependent peripheries.

Actually, one vision of tomorrow's world is such where there are three basic regions, each composed of both industrialized and developing countries. One would be America, constituted around the free-trade zone of the USA, Canada and Mexico and pooling the rest of Latin America into the same "World". Another would be Europe, with Germany as the economic locomotive and Eastern Europe until the Urals or even beyond as its developing part. The third major constellation in this vision is Asia, where Japan and other industrialized pockets lead the way for other layers of economic zones in this region of huge population and potentials. Africa remains a marginalized Third World backyard partly linked with South Africa, partly with the Arab world which for its part trades between Europe and Asia without clearly entering any of the major "worlds".

Such a vision is naturally just speculative, but all the same it wishes to mark two serious points. First, there is no return to a simple dichotomy or trichotomy in this world ; regions and subregions are the new reality. Second, economy—not ideology—determines the basic rules of the game, but ideology is by no means irrelevant.

Since there will no longer be a simple order in the world, order itself becomes a more burning issue. No doubt we shall have in the years to come a lot of conferences in various parts of the world on all kinds of new orders, and special research institutes and brain trusts will be

7) *Few Voices, Many Worlds*, p31.

established to analyze them and to generate respective policies. In another decade or two the '92 Symposium in Seoul will be listed as one of the first serious steps in examining the new order issue in a post-Cold War world.

Consequently, if NWICO has been marginalized over the last few years, there is good reason to believe that it may again enter a dynamic period—not as the old concept born two decades ago, but as a creative initiative towards a media reform movement as outlined by the MacBride Round Table. The recent publication of this movement paraphrases the title of the original MacBride Report (“Many Voices, One World”) in a way that well makes the point : “Few Voices, Many Worlds.”

CHANGING  
INTERNATIONAL ORDER  
IN NORTH-EAST ASIA  
AND  
COMMUNICATIONS POLICIES

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## WELCOMING ADDRESS

I Would like to take this opportunity to extend my hearty welcome to all of you who have come to attend this symposium 'Changing International Order In North-East Asia and Communication Policies'. This symposium bears a particular significance in that it is the first multidisciplinary approach to the theme, jointly sponsored by Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation which celebrated its 30th anniversary and the prestigious Institute of Communication Research of the Seoul National University.

Due to a breakneck pace of development of information and communication industries, the world has undergone drastic changes and international order is rapidly being restructured as well. As far as frequencies are concerned, there exist no national border any longer.

Amidst growing trend of internationalization together with spreading regionalism in broadcasting activities, it is quite natural for us to be concerned about how to develop, particularly in terms of broadcast order of the North-East Asia created by a number of transfrontier satellite television services including new comers.

We are now standing on the threshold to the 21st century. The 21st century, which will no doubt usher in openness with a demise of the cold war, will require reciprocity and cooperation rather than confrontation and/or conflicts.

I hope that this symposium will be a forum of pooling wisdom for better life of the peoples living in the information-oriented society, thus contributing to the promotion of welfare of the mankind and the world peace.

*Chang Bong, Choi*

Chang-Bong Choi  
President of Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation

# CHANGING INTERNATIONAL ORDER IN NORTH-EAST ASIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICIES

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Hyeon-Dew Kang

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