GAZETTE VOL. 61(3–4): 197–223 COPYRIGHT © 1999 SAGE PUBLICATIONS,
LONDON, THOUSAND OAKS & NEW DELHI
[0016-5492(199906/08)61:3–4;197–223;008745]

THE MEDIA IN ASIA
An Overview

Shelton A. Gunaratne

Abstract / This overview article operationally defines Asia as the three subregions constituting the South, the Southeast and the East. It discusses the Occidental and the Oriental (i.e. Asian values) views of press freedom and argues the case for placing this debate within the framework of Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Moreover, it looks at the relevance of old media, as well as old media theory, in the context of the new media that have become essential for global competition. It provides the rudiments of a structural theory suitable for communication analysis in the era of globalization.

Keywords / Asia / Asian values / competition / globalization / human rights / new media / press freedom / structural theory

What is Asia?

The call for papers for this special *Gazette* issue on Asia sought to limit the focus on this vast continent to its principal components: the South, the South-east and the East. We excluded Central and West Asia and the Oceania – Central Asia because it is associated with the former Soviet Union, a vast Euro-Asian entity; West Asia because of its separate identity as the Middle East; and the Oceania because the Pacific Islands too have their own distinct identity.

Asia proper is the South, the Southeast and the East. These three components cover an area inhabited by 3.2 billion people or 56 percent of the world's population. They live in 23 countries, two autonomous economies – Hong Kong, which Britain reverted to China in July 1997, and Macau, which Portugal will revert to China in December 1999 – and an independent economy – Taiwan, a breakaway province of China.

The seven countries in South Asia – excluding Afghanistan, which is more akin to the Middle East – belong to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). They have set up plans to liberalize trade within the region by 2001 through the creation of a South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement. Within SAARC, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka have formed the Bay of Bengal Club. Another offshoot group comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal was also in the offing. Excepting the Maldives, SAARC belongs to the world's *low-income* countries, which the World Bank has defined as those

TABLE 1
Human Development Index (UNDP Ratings), South Asia

	Life expectancy at birth 1995	Adult literacy rate (%) 1995	Combined 1st, 2nd & 3rd-level gross enrollment ratio (%) 1995	Real GDP per capita PPP$ (purchasing power parity) 1995	HDI value 1995	HDI rank
Sri Lanka	72.5	90.2	67	3408	0.716	90
Maldives	63.3	93.2	71	3540	0.683	95
Pakistan	62.8	37.8	41	2209	0.453	138
India	61.6	52.0	55	1422	0.451	139
Bangladesh	56.9	38.1	37	1382	0.371	147
Nepal	55.9	27.5	56	1145	0.351	152
Bhutan	52.0	42.2	31	1382	0.347	155

with a gross national product (GNP) per capita of US$785 or less. In terms of the Human Development Index (HDI), the Maldives and Sri Lanka are in the *medium* category, while the others are in the *low* category (see Table 1). South Asia accounts for 1.3 billion inhabitants or 39 percent of Asia's total population.

Of the 10 countries in Southeast Asia, nine belong to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). They fall into all four income categories as defined by the World Bank. Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar, comprising a total population of 141 million, are *low-income* countries. Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, with a total population of 337 million, are in the *lower middle-income* category – countries with a GNP per capita of US$786–3115. Malaysia is the only country in the *upper middle-income* category – countries with a GNP per capita of US$3116–9635. Brunei Darussalam and Singapore, comprising a total population of 3.4 million, belong to the *upper-income* category – economies with a GNP per capita of US$9636 or more. In terms of the HDI, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are in the *high* human development category; Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam in the *medium* category; and Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar in the *low* category (see Table 2). Southeast Asia as a whole has 500 million people or almost 16 percent of Asia's total population. (The currency crisis that afflicted the region in late 1997 may have shifted some countries to a lower level.)

East Asia has four of the richest economies in Asia. However, the vast majority of the people are in China, which belongs to the *low-income* category, together with sparsely populated Mongolia. The populations in these two countries exceed 1.2 billion. North Korea is the only country that falls into the *lower middle-income* category. The other economies fall into the *upper-income* category. In terms of the HDI, China, Mongolia and North Korea are in the *medium* human development category while the others are in the *high* category (see

TABLE 2

Human Development Index (UNDP Ratings), Southeast Asia

	Life expectancy at birth 1995	Adult literacy rate (%) 1995	Combined 1st, 2nd & 3rd-level gross enrollment ratio (%) 1995	Real GDP per capita PPP$ (purchasing power parity) 1995	HDI value 1995	HDI rank
Singapore	77.1	91.1	68	22,604	0.896	28
Brunei	75.1	88.2	74	31,165	0.889	35
Thailand	69.5	93.8	55	7742	0.838	59
Malaysia	71.4	83.5	61	9572	0.834	60
Indonesia	64.0	83.8	62	3971	0.679	96
Philippines	67.4	94.6	80	2762	0.677	98
Vietnam	66.4	93.7	55	1236	0.560	122
Myanmar	58.9	83.1	48	1130	0.481	131
Laos	52.2	56.6	50	2571	0.465	136
Cambodia	52.9	65.0	62	1110	0.422	140

Table 3). The region as a whole has almost 1.5 billion people or about 45 percent of Asia's total population.

In Asia, press freedom – as defined by Freedom House – is not significantly correlated with the economic standing of a country.[1] Press freedom is higher in the low-income countries of South Asia (bar the Maldives and Bhutan) than in the middle-income countries of Southeast Asia (bar Thailand and the Philippines). However, the upper-income economies of East Asia have greater press

TABLE 3

Human Development Index (UNDP Ratings), East Asia

	Life expectancy at birth 1995	Adult literacy rate (%) 1995	Combined 1st, 2nd & 3rd-level gross enrollment ratio (%) 1995	Real GDP per capita PPP$ (purchasing power parity) 1995	HDI value 1995	HDI rank
Japan	79.9	99.0	91	19,876	0.940	8
Hong Kong	79.0	92.2	67	22,950	0.909	25
South Korea	71.7	98.0	83	11,594	0.894	30
North Korea	71.6	95.0	75	4058	0.766	75
Mongolia	64.8	82.9	53	3916	0.669	101
China	69.2	81.5	64	2935	0.650	106

freedom than all other Asian countries. South Korea transformed itself into a free and open media system following the overturn of Chun Doo-Hwan's regime in 1987; and Taiwan transformed itself similarly with the lifting of martial law in 1988 (Heuvel and Dennis, 1993).

Press Freedom in Asia: An Occidental View

Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts: '*Everyone* has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.' However, more than half a century after the adoption of the declaration, its practical application leaves much to be desired. Mehra (1986), a South Asian scholar, says, 'Publicly, all societies profess to be free. In practice, no society permits absolute freedom; restraints only come in varying degrees. The issue becomes even more complex during interaction among societies with different levels of freedom' (Mehra, 1986: xii).

Only two countries in Asia, the Philippines and South Korea, have ratified all eight of the international human rights instruments highlighted by the UN (Table 4). Four South Asian countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Pakistan – and six Southeast Asian countries – Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore – have failed to ratify both of the1966 international covenants: one on civil and political rights; the other on economic, social and cultural rights. Brunei has ratified only one instrument, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The annual Freedom House surveys of press freedom worldwide make Mehra's (1986) point clear. The 1998 survey rated Norway as the freest. Yet it had a restriction score of 5 on a scale of 1 through 100. Nauru and New Zealand came second with a score of 6. Bahamas came next with 7. Marshall Islands and Switzerland followed with 8. Australia, Belgium, Luxembourg and Sweden came next with 10, followed by Canada, Germany and Jamaica with 11. Only then came the USA, with a score of 12 in the company of Austria and Iceland. Thus the land of the First Amendment was not the freest in press freedom on the Freedom House criteria. Significantly, not a single Asian country came within the first tier of free press countries scoring 15 or less. Japan, the freest in Asia, had a restriction score of 19. Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines were the only other Asian nations that qualified as free with scores not exceeding 30 (see Tables 5–7).

Sussman (1998) asserts that Freedom House measures press freedom worldwide on a set of criteria founded on Article 19 placing emphasis on the singular indefinite pronoun 'everyone'. Freedom House measures the level of press freedom using four criteria: A = laws and regulations that influence media *content*; B = political pressures and controls on media *content*; C = economic influences over media *content*; D = repressive actions. The first three criteria are judged on a scale of 0–15 and the fourth on a scale of 0–5 for both broadcast and print media. 'Not free' are those countries with scores of 61–100; 'partly free', those with 31–60; and 'free', those with 0–30.

On the basis of these criteria, South Asia has no nation within the 'free'

TABLE 4

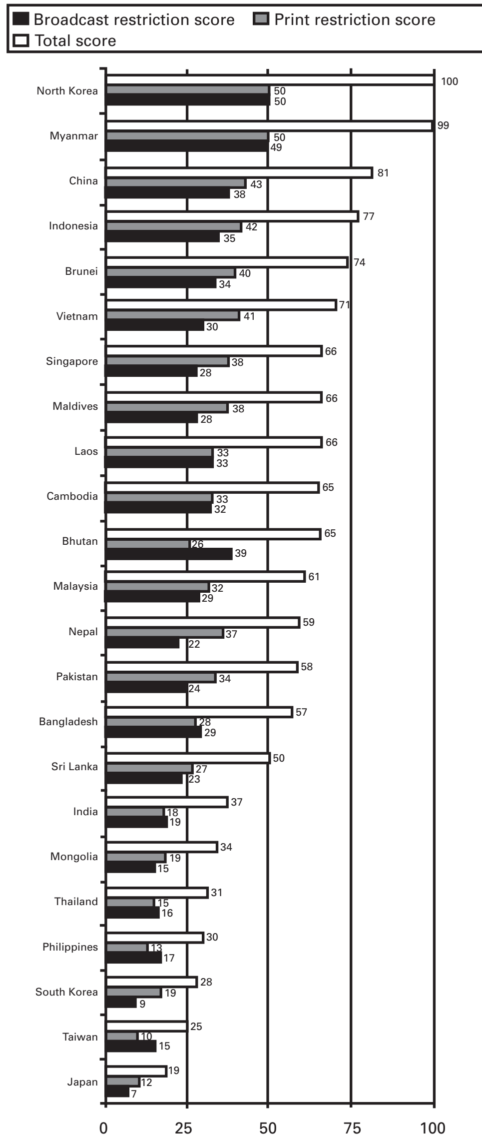
Asia's Commitment to International Human Rights Instruments

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
South Asia								
Bangladesh			•		•	•		
Bhutan			*		•	•		
India	•	•	•	•	•	•	*	
Maldives			•	•	•	•		
Nepal	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Pakistan			•	•	•	•		
Sri Lanka	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Southeast Asia								
Brunei					•			
Cambodia	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
Indonesia					•	•	*	
Laos			•	•	•	•		
Malaysia				•	•	•		
Myanmar			•	•	•	•		
Philippines	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Singapore				•	•	•		•
Thailand		•			•	•		
Vietnam	•	•	•	•	•	•		
East Asia								
China	*		•	•	•	•	•	•
Japan	•	•			•	•		•
North Korea	•	•		•	•			
South Korea	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Mongolia	•	•	•	•	•	•		

A = International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966.
B = International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966.
C = International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1969.
D = Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948.
E = Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.
F = Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979.
G = Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984.
H = Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951.
• = Ratification, accession, approval, notification of succession, acceptance or definitive signature.
* = Signature not yet followed by ratification as of 1 February 1998.
Source: UNDP (1998).

category; Southeast Asia has one – the Philippines; and East Asia has three – Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. (Freedom House has not rated Hong Kong and Macau, which will both belong to China.) Five countries in South Asia – India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal – fall into the 'partly free'

FIGURE 1
Press Freedom in Asia, 1998



category, together with one country – Thailand – in Southeast Asia and another – Mongolia – in East Asia. 'Not free' are two countries in South Asia – Bhutan and the Maldives; eight in Southeast Asia – Malaysia, Cambodia, Singapore, Laos, Vietnam, Brunei, Indonesia and Myanmar; and two in East Asia – China and North Korea (see Figure 1).

The Freedom House survey paints a grim picture of Asia: only 7.1 percent of Asians (228 million people) enjoy a 'free' press while 41.8 percent (1.3

billion) have access to a 'partly free' press. More than one-half (51.1 percent or 1.6 billion) of Asians are 'not free' in terms of press freedom.

Sussman (1998) draws a connection between the authoritarian tendencies and the economic misfortunes that befell Asia in 1997. In his view, 'pervasive and institutionalized' press controls had disabled transparency in two Asian nations in particular – Malaysia and Indonesia – and people remained ignorant of corruption, cronyism and bad economic policy. In Malaysia, individuals and companies close to the ruling coalition own the broadcast media and the major newspapers. 'Conflicts with Malaysian values' can be sufficient reason for the government to withdraw a broadcast license. In Indonesia, the radio network of the government, comprising 49 broadcasting and 309 transmitting stations, provides official news reports that all 'private' stations must also carry. The official journalists' association issues licenses to all journalists thereby ensuring 'consensual journalism' or self-censorship (Sussman, 1998: 1).[2]

In South Asia, as Table 5 shows, laws and regulations affecting media content are at a high point in the Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan. Political pressures and controls on broadcast media are high in all the countries, but reach the zenith in Bangladesh and Bhutan. Economic influences on the print media are highest in Bangladesh. Pakistan stands out on repressive action. AMIC, the Asian mass media documentation center in Singapore, has published comprehensive compilations of mass media laws and regulations in India (Venkateswaran, 1993), Sri

TABLE 5

Press Freedom in Asia, January 1998 (Freedom House Ratings), South Asia

		A	B	C	D	Total	Rating on political rights and civil liberties
India	Bdcst	2	12	3	2	37	
	Print	2	5	8	3	PF	PF 3.0
Sri Lanka	Bdcst	6	12	5	0	50	
	Print	6	11	7	3	PF	PF 3.5
Bangladesh	Bdcst	5	15	8	1	57	
	Print	3	11	13	1	PF	PF 3.0
Pakistan	Bdcst	6	13	0	5	58	
	Print	9	11	9	5	PF	PF 4.5
Nepal	Bdcst	12	10	0	0	59	
	Print	14	12	8	3	PF	PF 3.5
Bhutan	Bdcst	12	15	10	0	63	
	Print	10	8	8	0	NF	NF 7.0
Maldives	Bdcst	15	13	0	0	66	
	Print	15	14	8	1	NF	NF 6.0

Bdcst = broadcast.
PF = 'partly free'.
NF = 'not free'.

Lanka (Selvakumaran and Edrisinha, 1995), Bangladesh (Gaziul Hoque, 1992), Pakistan (Jabbar and Isa, 1997) and Nepal (Pokhrel and Koirala, 1995).

In Southeast Asia, as Table 6 shows, Myanmar scores almost the maximum on all four criteria of press restrictions. Indonesia and Brunei are ahead of Communist Vietnam in overall press restrictions. Laws and regulations affecting media content have reached the zenith in Myanmar and Vietnam, closely followed by Brunei, Singapore and Laos. Political pressures on both broadcast and print media have reached the maximum in Myanmar, Indonesia, Brunei, Vietnam and Cambodia, closely followed by Malaysia. Economic influences on both broadcast and print media are highest in Myanmar and on print media in Singapore. Repressive actions are at their maximum in Myanmar, Indonesia and Cambodia. Teodoro and Kabatay (1998) and Muntarbhorn (1998) have documented the laws and regulations affecting the mass media in the Philippines and Thailand – the two countries with high

TABLE 6

Press Freedom in Asia, January 1998 (Freedom House Ratings), Southeast Asia

		A	B	C	D	Total	Rating on political rights and civil liberties
Philippines	Bdcst	5	7	4	1	30	
	Print	5	3	5	0	F	F 2.5
Thailand	Bdcst	7	7	2	0	31	
	Print	5	5	5	0	PF	PF 3.0
Malaysia	Bdcst	10	14	5	0	61	
	Print	11	13	7	1	NF	PF 4.5
Cambodia	Bdcst	7	15	5	5	65	
	Print	8	15	5	5	NF	NF 6.5
Laos	Bdcst	13	10	10	0	66	
	Print	13	10	10	0	NF	NF 6.5
Singapore	Bdcst	13	8	7	0	66	
	Print	13	10	15	0	NF	PF 5.0
Vietnam	Bdcst	15	15	0	0	71	
	Print	15	15	10	1	NF	NF 7.0
Brunei	Bdcst	14	15	5	0	74	
	Print	14	15	11	0	NF	NF 6.0
Indonesia	Bdcst	12	15	3	5	77	
	Print	10	15	12	5	NF	NF 6.0
Myanmar	Bdcst	15	15	15	4	99	
	Print	15	15	15	5	NF	NF 7.0

Bdcst = broadcast.
F = 'free'.
PF = 'partly free'.
NF = 'not free'.

TABLE 7

Press Freedom in Asia, January 1998 (Freedom House Ratings), East Asia

		A	B	C	D	Total	Rating on political rights and civil liberties
Japan	Bdcst	1	6	0	0	19	
	Print	1	6	5	0	F	F 1.5
Taiwan	Bdcst	5	6	4	0	25	
	Print	2	4	4	0	F	F 2.0
South Korea	Bdcst	2	7	0	0	28	
	Print	4	10	5	0	F	F 2.0
Mongolia	Bdcst	7	8	0	0	34	
	Print	6	5	8	0	PF	F 2.5
China	Bdcst	15	15	7	1	81	
	Print	15	15	8	5	NF	NF 7.0
North Korea	Bdcst	15	15	15	5	100	
	Print	15	15	15	5	NF	NF 7.0

Bdcst = broadcast.
F = ‘free’.
PF = ‘partly free’.
NF = ‘not free’.

press freedom in Southeast Asia – while Ang and Yeo (1998) have done the same for Singapore.

In East Asia, as Table 7 shows, laws and regulations affecting media content, as well as political pressures, have reached high points in North Korea and China, the two Communist countries in the region. Economic influences over content, as well as repressive actions, have also reached the maximum points in North Korea. China is also at the maximum in repressive actions on print media. South Korea scores high on political pressures on print media.

Asian Values: An Oriental View

Does the dearth of press freedom in Asia reflect what some identify as ‘Asian values’? If so, do such values run counter to Article 19 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights? Hsiung (1985) says that human rights in East Asia do not have the same individualistic connotation as in the west – ’the individual’s flight to freedom and emancipation’ (Hsiung, 1985: 7). He points out that ‘the Western concept of human rights conceived in the Western *adversarial* democratic tradition has no exact equivalent in East Asia’, which inherited a *consensual*, group-oriented tradition (Hsiung, 1985: 12). Mehra (see Hamelink and Mehra, 1990: viii) states that the holistic, consensual and communal values of the Orient have expanded the scope of human rights to include an affirmative obligation on the state ‘to advance the economic, social and cultural well-being

of their peoples'. The 'Asian values' school has used this line of reasoning to equate press freedom with press–government harmony. Menon (cited in AMIC, 1994: xi–xii) says:

> *It is obvious that indigenous philosophies have a greater bearing on press systems in [South Asia] than any scale of values based on Western communication theories, and there is a real need to re-examine Western theories and practices in the light of Asian cultures and traditions. However, the search for an Asian perspective does not imply rejection of the Western perspective. It should take whatever is useful and put this in the context of that society's social structure, cultural values and religious beliefs.*

Heuvel and Dennis (1993) point out that the media in much of East and Southeast Asia 'stand in harmony with Confucian philosophy, which stresses consensus and cooperation' unlike the Western media's 'dedication to individual freedom and rights' (Heuvel and Dennis, 1993: iii). They say that Asians complain about the 'forward, adversarial style of the Western media' and 'the sex and violence of some Western entertainment programming' while western journalists complain about excessive restrictions and inadequate access to information (Heuvel and Dennis, 1993: 2).

Is the Occidental view of pluralism at variance with the Asian perspective of press freedom? Some ASEAN journalists have proposed an Asian model of journalism in which the press works with the government to build a national consensus. They contend that the national press, as an instrument of nation building, should support the state's development efforts. They say that the media need scrutiny because journalism is too important to be left to journalists (Masterton, 1996). Latif (1998: 14) says that an Asian journalist 'must respect, embrace and voice the authenticity of Asia'; and that an Asian journalist cannot be free until he or she repudiates 'colonial textuality' (Latif, 1998: 11). Chua Lee Hoong (cited in Latif, 1998: 147) contends that Singapore editors have bluntly rejected 'the 19th century notion of the press as the "Fourth Estate" '.

The notion of press–government harmony is implicit in some definitions of developmental journalism as well. But Hartmann et al. (1989), in their study of Indian villages, hardly found evidence to support Schramm's (1964) view of the 'miraculous' potential of the mass media as 'information multipliers'. They contended that 'mass communications play little part' in the success of government-initiated developmental activities without the involvement of 'the people concerned as participants' (Hartmann et al., 1989: 266).

Thus the press–government harmony model might merely relegate the press to be the public relations arm of the government as in the case of the Communist model, thereby causing a media credibility gap. People, whether Asian or not, tend to distrust the mass media being too closely associated with the government. Most Asian countries have in place an adversarial political party system inherited from colonial rule. Within such a structure, press freedom must reflect an adversarial press as well.

Locke (1998: A4) says western culture 'is objectively the best' because it values reason, individual rights and science and technology. He draws attention to John Locke's contention that individuals do not exist to serve governments,

but rather that governments exist to protect individuals, who have the unalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Thus the Occident emphasizes individual rights, as when Sussman (1998: 14) asserts that the starting point of press freedom 'is the smallest, most universal unit of concern: the individual'. He says the operative word of Article19 is *everyone* – meaning the individual. As Mehra (1989: 1) elucidates, the Occident views the human being as 'a rational animal with an inherent dignity' and 'sovereignty to determine his [*sic*] acts and destiny'. This viewpoint has produced 'the individualistic, democratic, egalitarian and liberal tradition of Western political theory' (Mehra, 1989: 3). The Orient, on the other hand, does not necessarily accept 'the notion of man [*sic*] as purely a rational animal or as an end in himself'. The Asians 'value their consensual and communal traditions with their emphasis on duties and obligations to the collective and social harmony' (Mehra, 1989: 3).

This 'epistemological distinction', however, is insufficient to explain the dearth of press freedom in Asia. Press freedom is an abstract concept that the Asian values school may denigrate in the absence of a clear operational definition. Freedom House has operationalized the obstacles to press freedom within the context of Article 19. The question to resolve is whether the four strands of obstacles – legal, political and economic obstacles and repressive actions – are pertinent criteria to measure press freedom, even if one were to construe press freedom as a collective right.

The MacBride Commission asserted:

> *Freedom of speech, of the press, of information and of assembly [is] vital for the realization of human rights. Extension of these communication freedoms to a broader individual and collective right to communicate is an evolving principle in the democratization process. (Cited in Traber and Nordenstreng, 1992: 60)*

Such a collective right to communicate is in harmony with Oriental philosophy – Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian or Islamic. However, individualism has an Oriental foundation as well. For instance, the Theravada or Hinayana school of Buddhism places heavy emphasis on individual action and responsibility in relation to the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddhist approach is consistent with the idea of the rational human being so often associated only with Locke and the Enlightenment. Press freedom is an essential ingredient of the right to communicate, both in a collective and individual sense. Chua (see Latif, 1998: 148), however, contends that 'press freedom remains distinct from freedom of speech' in Singapore.

Are political and economic pressures and repressive actions consistent with maintaining social harmony or the collective right to communicate? A South Asian seminar on communication ethics emphasized the indispensability of 'commitment to truth, respect for human dignity and concern for the vulnerable, disadvantaged and oppressed' (AMIC, 1997: v). This Asian perspective, in fact, is consistent with the call to remove the four strands of obstacles implicit in the annual Freedom House assessment of press freedom.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad equates Asian values with 'not-so-liberal democracies' that provide 'political stability, long-range vision, and consistency' (Mahathir and Ishihara, 1995: 84). He says that from an Asian

perspective 'democracy does not confer a license for citizens to go wild' (Mahathir and Ishihara, 1995: 83). Mahathir, however, rejects the authoritarian and Communist models of the press because within such models wisdom becomes the monopoly of a few, and power becomes the determinant of truth. He also rejects the libertarian model because there are not too many ultra-stable countries 'where full, free and utter license can be allowed to run riot' (cited in Mehra, 1989: 114). He opts for a socially responsible press that must compete in the economic marketplace 'within the bounds of decency and responsibility' (Mehra, 1989: 116). Mahathir advocates the greatest media freedom consonant with the vital interests of society. Freedom House assessment shows a very high degree of political pressure on media content in Malaysia. The press has to follow the *Rukunegara*, the Malaysian national ideology that stresses national unity, democracy, social equity, progressive thought and traditional culture. The distinctions among authoritarian, Communist and social responsibility press models become unclear within Mahathir's Asian perspective.

In a 1984 address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Singapore leader Lee Kuan Yew said the theory of the press as the Fourth Estate did not fit Singapore, which had to build one nation out of four racial groups that had 'co-existed in separate segments of the island demarcated by the British for disparate immigrant groups' (cited in Mehra, 1989: 119). He cited India, the Philippines and Sri Lanka where the practice of 'the marketplace contest of ideas' had 'ended in less than happy results' (Mehra, 1989: 118). In his view, media in these countries had produced 'confusion and dissension' instead of building 'enlightenment and consensus' (Mehra, 1989: 6).[3] These remarks, however, reflect the absence of a consensus on a collective Asian perspective of a free press. Within ASEAN itself, the Philippines and Thailand have opted for the so-called western model. In East Asia, Mongolia, Taiwan and South Korea have joined Japan and Hong Kong in practicing the free press model.

Pancasila – the five principles – embodied in the preamble of the1945 Indonesian Constitution determine the limits of media freedom in the archipelago. Article 1 of the code of ethics of the Indonesian Journalists Association requires its members to be faithful to *Pancasila*: belief in one and supreme god; a just and civilized humanity; national unity; democracy, led by the wisdom of consensus among representatives; and social justice for the people. Within this national ideology, the government closely monitors the mass media for tendentious or sensational writing relating to SARA – *Suku* (ethnic groups), *Agama* (religion), *Ras* (race) and *Antar-golongan* (intergroup relations). The Indonesian government claims that the *Pancasila* press philosophy is different from the authoritarian or the Communist models because it interweaves freedom with responsibility.

The Indonesia/Malaysia/Singapore media model or the China/North Korea/Vietnam media model or the Cambodia/Laos/Myanmar media model represents various degrees of authoritarianism rather than a value system common to all Asians. What is more important is to make the media system of a country more consistent with universal human values. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its covenants, as well as the New World Information and

Communication Order (NWICO) vision of the MacBride Commission, provide the framework for promoting a socially responsible press in Asia and elsewhere. *Pancasila*, *Rukunegara* and similar national ideologies also can provide guidance for journalists within the declaration framework. Debasing the watchdog function of the mass media as a Western-liberal value will not necessarily bring stability to nations in the long run. Case in point: Indonesia 1998. Masterton (1996) points out the lack of a general agreement on Asian values; and he observes, 'News values . . . are the same everywhere because human curiosity is the same everywhere' (Masterton, 1996: 3).

Hamelink (Hamelink and Mehra, 1990) points out that the universality of human rights could also mean the recognition of the concurrent existence of at least three concepts of those rights – the bourgeois/capitalist, the Marxist and the Islamic. But, he says, both the universalist and the relativist positions are fraught with risks. He argues: 'Universalism may obscure a "human rights colonialism" [that] abuses human rights as an instrument of foreign policy while relativism may imply an ethical relativism that amounts to moral indifference' (Hamelink and Mehra, 1990: xvi). While the declaration states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) not only attaches special duties and responsibilities to it but also subjects it to legal restrictions related to areas such as defamation, national security, public health or morals, and public order. Are Asian values equivalent to conceding greater restrictions?

Gunaratne (1976) contended that the media-subservience protagonists, who vehemently criticized the libertarian concepts as irrelevant Western norms, conveniently overlooked the Western contribution to authoritarian concepts, which they found so relevant to the Third World. In the contemporary context, one may well ask: did 'Asian values' originate in medieval Europe? Gunaratne (1978: 6) argued that 'the democratic Third World governments could promote developmental journalism better through fostering a socially responsible *independent* press rather than through media subservience'. Gunaratne (1993: 180) wrote: 'Democracy requires the press to point fingers and hurl accusations through thorough investigation. In the process, errors will inevitably occur'. The solution, he suggested, was to promote ethics to hold down partisanship and sensationalism. In this sense, the proposal to standardize press ethics on a global scale (Venkateswaran, 1996: 10) is more pertinent to promote socially responsible journalism than the forced imposition of so-called 'Asian values', which rulers in medieval Europe also practiced.

Xu (1998), on the other hand, has argued that one should interpret Asian values as an idea rather than as a literal term – the idea 'to safeguard national identity and cultural distinctiveness in the face of domination or monopoly by Western media, cultures and values' (Xu, 1998: 38). French and Richards (1996) have drawn attention to the greater potential of such domination with the creation of the World Trade Organization to dismantle the barriers to free trade and to extend that concept to services covering the audiovisual sector as well. Xu's interpretation of Asian values will provide powerful resistance to global forces that could impose Occidental values through 'invasion from the skies' (i.e. television) or from cyberspace.

The Old and the New Media

Lerner's (1958) semi-theory postulated that urbanization and literacy, followed by media participation and political participation, produced the critical mass of 'modernity' that propelled countries to the take-off point of self-sustaining economic and social growth. Lerner (1958: 66) hypothesized that 'in populous societies, urbanization is the intervening variable [that] is crucial for the take-off toward increasing literacy'. He said the 'critical minimum' of urbanization was about 10 percent and the 'critical optimum' 25 percent, beyond which 'literacy continues to rise independently of the growth of cities' (Lerner, 1958: 59).

The correlation between *urbanization* and *literacy* for all three regions of Asia, presuming the reliability of data in Table 8, was a statistically significant .55 (p = .005). Within each of the three subregions, however, the correlation was not significant: for South Asia, the least economically developed region, the correlation was .36 (p = .43); for Southeast Asia, .43 (p = .21); and for East Asia, the most advanced region, .25 (p = .59). In South Asia, urbanization ranged from 6.2 percent in Bhutan to 34.1 percent in Pakistan, while literacy ranged from 25.6 percent in Nepal to 93.2 percent in the Maldives. The Lerner paradigm failed to hold for Pakistan, which had the region's highest degree of urbanization but a low literacy rate of 38 percent – on a par with Bangladesh and the least urbanized Bhutan. On the other hand, Maldives and Sri Lanka stood out as havens of literacy (exceeding 90 percent) at the 'critical optimum' of urbanization.

No country in South Asia had reached the daily newspaper circulation of 10 copies per 100 people that UNESCO recommended in 1962 as a minimum goal. Only two countries in Southeast Asia – Singapore and Malaysia – had reached that goal. All countries in East Asia, except China and Mongolia, had exceeded that target. The 'old paradigm' saw literacy as the prerequisite for mass media participation. The data in Table 8 produced an overall correlation of .4 (p = .07) between *literacy* and *newspaper penetration* (i.e. circulation per 100 people) with South Asia showing a correlation of .31 (p = .55); Southeast Asia, .4 (p = .25); and East Asia, .27 (p = .61). This provides clear evidence of the existence of intervening variables, such as per capita income in relation to price, between literacy and newspaper penetration. On the other hand, an overall statistically significant correlation of .82 (p = .00) exists between tertiary enrollment and newspaper penetration: .72 (p = .10) for East Asia; .74 (p = .02) for Southeast Asia; but an almost negligible .06 (p = .92) for South Asia.

UNESCO had also set a basic standard of five radio receivers per 100 people in 1962. Every country in Asia, except Bhutan and Nepal, has achieved this target. Radio penetration was highest in Sri Lanka in South Asia, Singapore in Southeast Asia and South Korea in East Asia. The overall correlation between literacy and radio penetration for Asia was a statistically significant .57 (p = .00) – with .83 (p = .02) for South Asia, .34 (p = .34) for Southeast Asia and .87 (p = .01) for East Asia. Thus literacy has a higher and significant correlation with radio penetration than with newspaper penetration.

Literacy has even a higher significant correlation with television penetration: .62 (p = .00) overall for Asia – with .58 (p = .17) for South Asia, .55 (p = .10) for Southeast Asia and .81 (p = .03) for East Asia. Sri Lanka has the highest television penetration in South Asia, Brunei in Southeast Asia and Japan in East Asia. All Asian countries, except Bangladesh, Nepal and Cambodia, have exceeded the UNESCO minimum standard of two television receivers per 100 people.

The new electronic media are supplementing or are in the process of replacing the old media as the world heads on toward the Third Communication Revolution. An efficient computer network connected to a digitized telecommunication infrastructure is vital for the proliferation of the new media encompassing the World Wide Web, electronic mail and so on (Gunaratne et al., 1997). Table 8 provides the data for mainline telephone penetration and Internet host penetration to determine where the three regions of Asia stand in the process of informatization.

Telephone penetration, namely mainline telephones per 100 people, exceeds 40 in Japan and the three Tigers in East Asia, where only North Korea, China and Mongolia are behind with a low penetration of four to six. However, even that low is much better than the telephone penetration of the whole of South Asia, except the Maldives, which has reached seven. The telephone penetration of fewer than two per 100 people reflects South Asia's unsatisfactory economic development. In Southeast Asia, Singapore stands far ahead in telephone density, followed by Malaysia and Brunei. Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia are in the same category as South Asia. (The 1998 *APT Yearbook* provides greater details on telecommunication in Asia [APT, 1998].)

East Asia is well ahead in Internet penetration (that is hosts per 10,000 people), with Hong Kong (103) leading the way with Japan (93) and Taiwan (82) slightly trailing (see Figure 2). However, China, Mongolia and North Korea – with fewer than one host per 10,000 – have a long way to go just as much as all of South Asia and most of Southeast Asia. Singapore (153) stands way ahead of the rest of Asia in Internet penetration. Malaysia (15) and Brunei (11) are ahead of most other countries in Southeast Asia.

Freedom and Competition

Although Naisbitt (1996) extols the economic success of East Asia, Frank (1993), the father of dependency theory, points out that the 'successes' of the Four Tigers – Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan – and Japan were 'not associated with much electoral democracy' (Frank, 1993: 19). Three of the Tigers had 'prospered' under 'completely authoritarian regimes, which are only now beginning to yield in response to economic success' (Frank, 1993: 20). Frank explains that these economies were not models of free market capitalism. He says that 'in Korea and Taiwan, growth was heavily dependent, and in Singapore less so, on national state intervention and Japanese foreign investment' (Frank, 1993: 8). They 'owe their present economic position either to political beginnings born of the Cold War . . . or to racial/communal problems' (Frank, 1993: 8). As bastions of anti-Communism, they benefited enormously from Western economic and political support.

TABLE 8

Asia: Demographic and Media Indicators

Country	Demographic indicators					Media indicators per 100 people				
	GNP per capita in US$[c] 1996	Population[d] (in millions) 1997	Adult literacy rate[b] 1995	Urban population[e] % 1995	Tertiary enrollment as % of age group[b] 1995	Daily newspaper circulation[b] 1995	Radio receivers[b] 1995	TV receivers[d] 1995	Main telephone lines[d] 1997	Internet hosts per 10,000[a] 1998
South Asia										
Maldives	1080	0.27	93.2	26.6	–	1.2	11.8	4.0	6.58	1.93
Sri Lanka	740	18.55	90.2	22.1	5.1	2.5	20.6	6.6	1.70	0.37
Pakistan	480	138.15	37.8	34.1	3.4	2.1	9.2	2.2	1.77	0.09
Bhutan	390	0.62	38.4	6.2	0.2	–	1.7	5.7	1.01	0.03
India	380	955.22	52.0	26.5	6.4	3.1	8.1	6.1	1.86	0.07
Bangladesh	260	122.01	38.1	17.7	6.1	0.6	4.7	0.7	0.26	–
Nepal	210	20.80	25.6	13.1	4.8	0.7	3.6	0.3	0.77	0.07
Southeast Asia										
Singapore	30,550	3.76	91.0	100	33.7	30.1	60.1	36.2	44.77	153.20
Brunei	17,556[d]	0.31	87.8	57.7	6.6	6.8	27.3	60.9	25.83	10.93
Malaysia	4370	21.67	83.5	54.0	11.0	13.9	43.2	23.1	33.71	14.89
Thailand	2960	60.60	93.8	19.7	20.1	4.6	18.9	22.7	7.95	2.37
Philippines	1160	73.53	94.6	53.1	27.9	6.2	14.7	12.6	2.49	0.59
Indonesia	1080	201.39	83.8	34.4	11.3	2.4	14.9	14.7	2.47	0.48
Myanmar	765[d]	46.40	80.6	25.8	5.7	2.2	8.9	7.6	0.46	–
Laos	400	5.20	56.6	21.1	1.6	0.3	12.9	0.7	0.47	–

TABLE 8
Continued

Country	Demographic indicators					Media indicators per 100 people				
	GNP per capita in US$[c] 1996	Population[d] (in millions) 1997	Adult literacy rate[b] 1995	Urban population[e] % 1995	Tertiary enrollment as % of age group[b] 1995	Daily newspaper circulation[b] 1995	Radio receivers[b] 1995	TV receivers[d] 1995	Main telephone lines[d] 1997	Internet hosts per 10,000[a] 1998
Cambodia	300	10.52	35.2	20.1	1.6	0.1	11.2	0.8	0.12	0.05
Vietnam	290	76.55	87.6	20.5	4.1	0.8	10.6	16.3	2.07	–
East Asia										
Japan	40,940	126.27	99.0	77.5	41.4	57.6	91.6	61.9	48.88	92.57
Hong Kong	24,290	6.50	92.0	95.0	25.7	30.1	60.1	35.9	56.08	102.48
Macau	17,542[d]	0.42	74.8	94.0	27.8	58.1	33.7	11.3	40.48	3.60
Taiwan	12,240[d]	21.68	86.0	58.2	46.0	–	40.1	31.7	46.62	81.56
South Korea	10,610	46.00	98.0	81.0	52.0	39.4	102.4	32.1	44.40	26.51
North Korea	900[f]	22.84	–	60.9	–	22.6	13.6	11.5	4.90	–
China	750	1260.57	81.5	29.4	5.7	4.2	40.9	24.7	5.57	0.13
Mongolia	360	2.56	82.9	60.3	17.0	8.1	13.4	5.9	3.68	0.06

Sources:

[a] Network Wizards at http: //www.nw.com/zone/WWW/dist-bynum.html

[b] Unesco Statistics at http: //unescostat.unesco.org/Index.asp

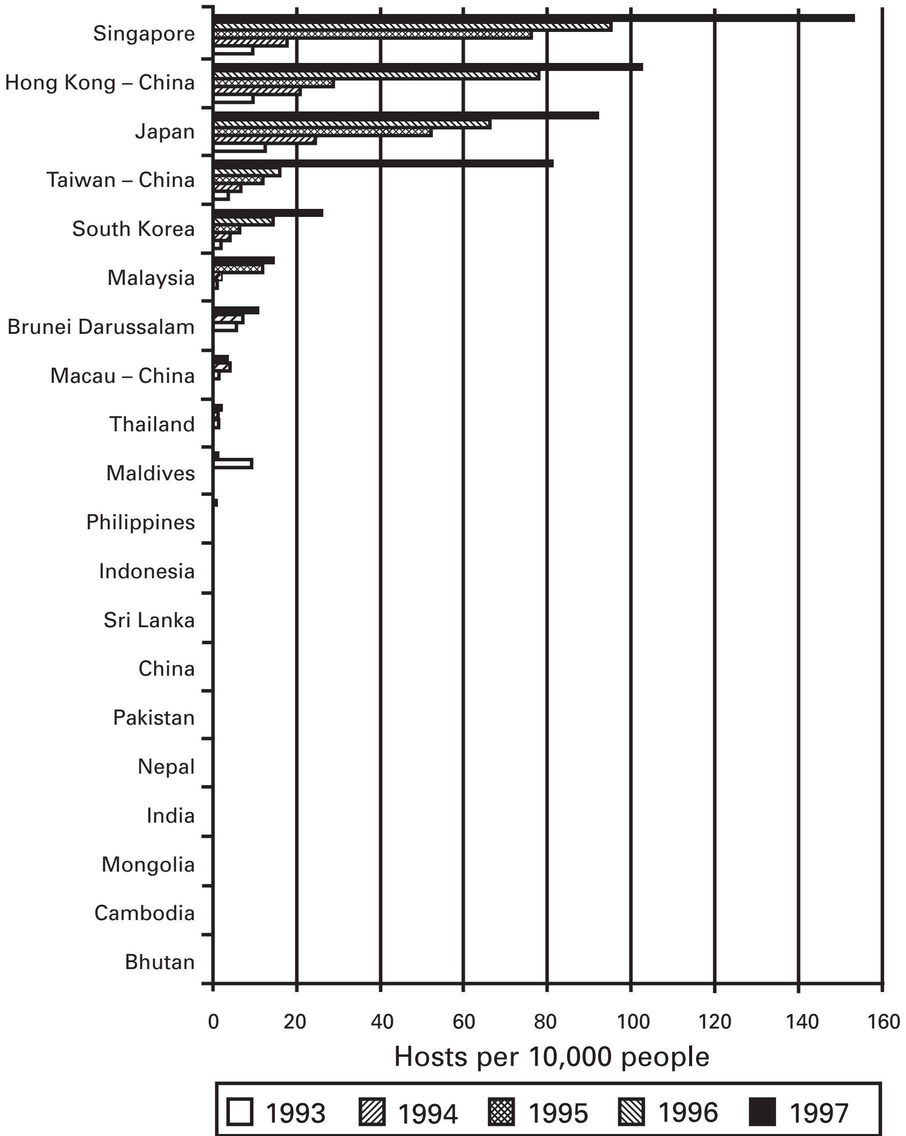
[c] World Bank Indicators at http: //www.worldbank.org/wdi/wdi/pdf/tab1_1.pdf

[d] ITU Telecommunication Indicators at http: //www.itu.int/ti/industryoverview/index.htm

[e] *World Media Handbook* (1995).

[f] *APT YearBook* (1998).

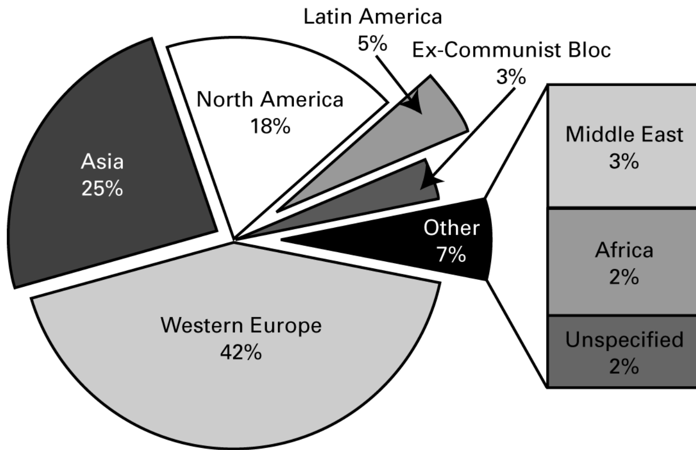
FIGURE 2
Asia: Internet Host Density



This interpretation of the success of the Tigers gives a different twist to the argument that 'Asian values' propelled them to economic heights and that political and media freedom associated with the Western or neo-liberal model are not vital prerequisites. The exceptional conditions under which the Tigers prospered do not provide an Asian values model for the rest of Asia to emulate. However, the developing countries worldwide can learn much from the Tiger economies' ability to be exceptionally competitive in the world material economy.

FIGURE 3

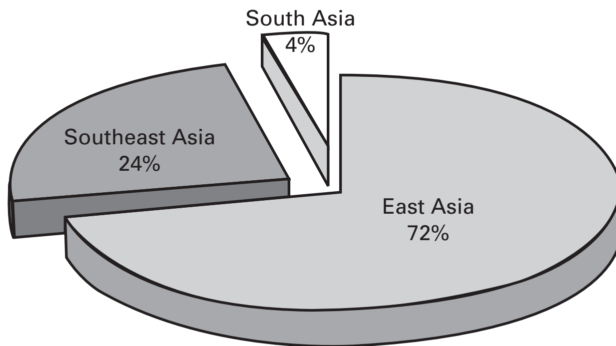
World Trade: Regional Share of 1996 Exports (Total Value = US$5115 Billion)



Source: WTO (1997).

FIGURE 4

Asia: Subregional Share of 1996 Exports (Total Value = US$1375.8 Billion, Including Re-Exports)



Source: WTO (1996).

If one were to judge global competitiveness on the basis of the share of the world trade, South Asia scores very poorly. Although Asia's share of world trade in 1996 was 25 percent or almost US$1.4 trillion (Figure 3), the SAARC countries' exports accounted for less than US$50.2 billion (Figure 4). Thus their contribution to Asia's share of world trade was a mere 4 percent – a clear indication of the need for an accelerated program for the education and training of their large population to become more globally competitive. India, the Goliath in the SAARC, exported merchandise valued at US$33 billion. Pakistan's exports totaled US$9.3 billion, Sri Lanka's US$4.1 billion and Bangladesh's US$3.3 billion. Others failed to reach the billion mark.

Southeast Asia accounted for 24 percent of Asia's share of the world trade – far better than South Asia (see Figure 4). Tiny Singapore was the economic Goliath of the subregion. Singapore, unquestionably the most competitive in world trade, led the others in world trade with exports valued at US$125 billion compared to Malaysia's US$78.4 billion, Thailand's US$53.7 billion, Indonesia's US$49.8 billion, the Philippines' US$20.4 billion and Vietnam's US$7.1 billion. The ASEAN countries altogether exported merchandise valued at US$335 billion.

East Asia is the most competitive subregion of Asia. It accounted for 72 percent of Asia's share of the world trade, which translated into US$990.5 billion in 1996 (see Figure 4). Japan led the way with exports of merchandise valued at US$411 billion. Hong Kong came second with exports of US$181 billion, China third with US$151 billion, South Korea fourth with US$130 billion, Taiwan fifth with US$116 billion and Macau sixth with US$2 billion.

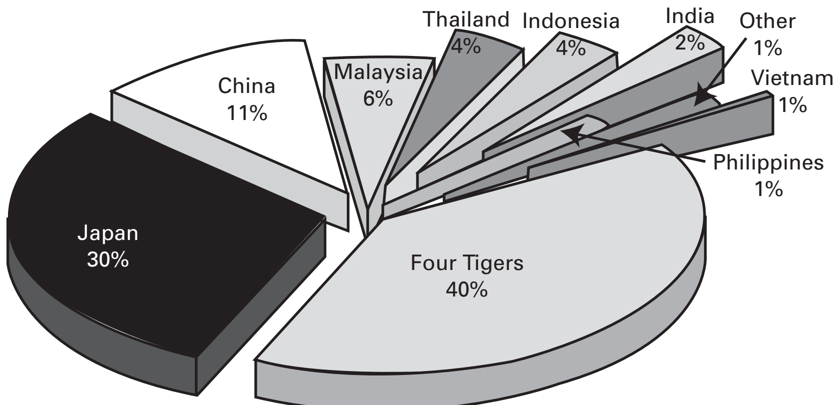
The competitive superiority of the Four Tigers becomes apparent from their share of Asia's total world merchandise exports. That share is 40 percent compared to Japan's 30 percent (Figure 5)

The World Economic Forum (WEF, 1997, 1998) ranked Singapore (first) and Hong Kong (second) at the top of global competitiveness both in 1997 and 1998. It used an analytical framework of eight factors to determine the ranking of 53 countries that produced more than 95 percent of world output, trade and investment flows: openness, government, finance, technology, infrastructure, management, labor and institutions. Within that framework, five other Asian economies earned positive scores in 1998: Taiwan (6th), Japan (12th), Malaysia (17th), South Korea (19th) and Thailand (21st), while five economies – China (28th), Indonesia (31st), the Philippines (33rd), Vietnam (39th) and India (50th) – earned negative scores.

Two other organizations – the Heritage Foundation and the Fraser Institute

FIGURE 5

Asia: Share of 1996 Exports by the Goliaths (Total Value = US$1375.8 Billion, Including Re-Exports)



Source: WTO (1997).

– ranked Singapore quite high. The Heritage Foundation rated Singapore the second freest nation (for investment) among the 140 it surveyed in 1995. Singapore's low tax rate, the small share of gross domestic product consumed by government and its foreign investment laws explained these high ratings.

However, Freedom House (1998) rated Singapore 'partly free' in its annual evaluation of political rights and civil liberties worldwide. (This is different from its 'not free' assessment of Singapore vis-a-vis press freedom.) On political rights and civil liberties each, Singapore's score was 5 out of 7. Singapore's political rights rating changed from 4 to 5 because of 'the ruling party's election manipulation and harassment of the opposition' (Freedom House, 1998: 453). The government had 'chilled free expression and political dissent through civil defamation suits, its use of security laws against peaceful oppositionists and other harassment of political opponents and journalists; its tight control over the press; and its use of patronage' (Freedom House, 1998: 454). Moreover, the judiciary was not independent.

Six Asian economies – China, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Malaysia – topped the ranks in the WEF's 1998 Growth Index with scores ranging from 4.69 points to 5.87 points. Five other Asian economies showed positive but slower growth – Thailand (4.67), Taiwan (4.24), India (3.61), South Korea (3.34) and Japan (2.60). WEF's 1998 Market Growth Index ranked Japan second, outdone by only the USA. China occupied the third rank followed by India (9th), Taiwan (13th), Hong Kong (15th), South Korea (16th), Indonesia (17th), Singapore (20th), Thailand (21st), Malaysia (29th) and the Philippines (32nd).

In terms of political rights and civil liberties, Freedom House (1998) ranked Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia and the Philippines as 'free' in Asia. It ranked Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Pakistan and Singapore as 'partly free'. It gave the 'not free' rank to Brunei, Indonesia, Maldives, Cambodia, Laos, Bhutan, Myanmar, China, North Korea and Vietnam.

A Structural View

One can apply the elements of the dependency–world system theory to analyze the center–periphery structure emerging in Asia based on world merchandise exports. Barnett et al. (1996) used this theoretical framework to examine and evaluate the structure of the global telecommunication network. Their findings supported the basic premise of the theory that the 'position in the world telecommunication system affects a country's economic and social development' (Barnett et al., 1996: 40).

The early dependency models (e.g. Frank, 1969; Galtung, 1971) attributed a country's internal class structure to external domination, but the subsequent modifications of the model (e.g. Cardoso and Faletto, 1979) recognized the potential for internal class struggle and reform in the periphery without a radical break with the center. The world system theory (e.g. Wallerstein, 1979) explained the long-term cycles associated with shifts in the international system. This theory, which used the world system as the basic unit of analysis, incorporated the core–periphery concepts of the dependency model and added

another level of development, the semi-periphery, that allowed 'for the possibility of upward and downward mobility in the world system' (Barnett et al., 1996: 22). Both theories, which focus on distribution and exchange rather than production, share a basic premise: that a country's position in the world system affects its development and well-being.

The structure of the countries in Asia in the world system, as well as within the region, emerges when we assign the countries to the three levels conceptualized in the dependency–world system theory on the basis of their ability to compete in the global economy. If exports of commercial merchandise and services are a reasonable measure of competitiveness, the following picture emerges:

- In terms of subregions, East Asia is the center; Southeast Asia, the semi-periphery; and South Asia, the periphery.
- Within East Asia, Japan is the center. The semi-periphery is Hong Kong, South Korea, China and Taiwan. The periphery is Macau, Mongolia and North Korea.
- Within Southeast Asia, Singapore is the center. The semi-periphery comprises Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. The periphery is Vietnam, Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos.
- South Asia has no center as such. India may, however, fit into that position by default. All other countries – Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan – occupy the periphery.

Japan is the overall center of Asia (as evident from its 29 percent share of Asia's world exports in goods and services in 1996). The overall semi-periphery is Hong Kong (14 percent), China (10 percent), South Korea (10 percent), Singapore (9 percent) and Taiwan (8 percent). A second-tier semi-periphery comprises Malaysia (5 percent), Thailand (4 percent), Indonesia (3 percent), India (2 percent) and the Philippines (2 percent), the periphery is the rest of Asia (see Table 9).

The World Trade Organization (WTO, 1997) data documented that in 1996 Asia accounted for 25.6 percent of the world merchandise exports, next to Western Europe's 44.6 percent. The same pattern held true for world exports of commercial services: Asia's share was 22.7 percent, next to Western Europe's 48 percent.

Although Asia – as defined for this publication – represents 56 percent of the world's 5.8 billion people (Table 8), its share of world trade falls far behind its potential in human resources. Asia's competitiveness in the world material economy must more than double in the next millennium to overtake Western Europe, which has established itself on the foundation of a long colonial history. The trade data show that the large majority of Asian economies have little to do with Asia's success in the global economy. That success reflects the enterprise of Japan and the semi-periphery economies.

A less satisfactory way to look at the center–periphery structure is to arrange the world economies on the basis of per capita GNP. We may confer the status of the *center* on those that the World Bank has categorized as *high-income* economies. These economies are Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Brunei

TABLE 9
Structural View of Asia

	Share of Asia's portion of world trade 1996 (%)	Per capita GNP (US$) 1996	Press restriction score 1997
Center			
Japan	29.3	40,940	19
Semi-periphery 1			
Hong Kong	13.5	24,290	N/A
China	10.4	750	81
South Korea	9.5	10,610	28
Singapore	9.5	30,550	66
Taiwan	8.1	[12,240]	25
Semi-periphery 2			
Malaysia	5.5	4370	61
Thailand	4.3	2960	31
Indonesia	3.4	1080	77
India	2.4	380	37
Philippines	1.8	1160	30
Periphery			
Pakistan	0.7	480	58
Vietnam	0.4	290	71
Sri Lanka	0.3	740	50
Bangladesh	0.2	260	57
Brunei	0.2	[17,556]	74
Macau	0.1	[17,542]	N/A
Nepal	0.1	210	59
Myanmar	0.0	[765]	99
Mongolia	0.0	590	34
Cambodia	0.0	300	65
Laos	0.0	400	66
Maldives	0.0	1080	66
Bhutan	0.0	390	65
North Korea	[0.0]	[900]	100
Total	100		

Sources: WTO (1997); World Bank (1998); Sussman (1998).

Darussalam, Macau, Taiwan and South Korea. Japan is the supreme leader in this center group.

The *semi-periphery* will then consist of what the World Bank calls *upper middle-income* economies. Malaysia is the only economy in Asia that falls into

this category. Then come the *second-tier semi-periphery* economies – Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Maldives and North Korea. The *low-income* economies comprise the *periphery*. The world's two Goliaths – China and India – and all other Asian economies fall into this category. This analysis is less satisfactory because it fails to take into account the ability to compete in the global economy. Moreover, the range of income within each category is relatively arbitrary.

This less satisfactory method of determining the center–periphery structure places 82 percent of Asia's population is in the *periphery*. It places 11 percent in the *second-tier semi-periphery* and a mere 7 percent in the *center* and the *first-tier semi-periphery*. It is this last category that is responsible for more than three-quarters of the 26 percent share of Asia's world merchandise exports, and for more than three-quarters of the 20 percent share of world exports of services. The periphery lags way behind in the world exports of merchandise and services. It contributes slightly more than one-sixth to Asia's share of merchandise exports, and a mere one-ninth to Asia's share of exports of services.

As Roach (1998: A21) puts it: 'Asian countries other than Japan account for just 7 percent of global trade – or just 1.5 percent of the world's gross domestic product. Even if Asia collapsed completely, it would hardly bring the global economy to its knees.' This structural analysis based on trade and economic data indicates that economic progress in Asia is tremendously lopsided, with 93 percent of the population yet to learn how to compete successfully in the world material economy.

The center–periphery structure of Asia based on trade flow is important because information flow among countries tends to follow the trade flow. Mowlana (1997: 218) says:

> *Interestingly, the nature, pattern, and direction of the world economy are more or less parallel and depict the directionality of world information flow. In almost all kinds of information flow, whether it is news or data, educational, scientific, or human flow, the pattern is the same.*

About this Issue of *Gazette*

The long periods of colonialism – marked by a bewildering mix of liberalism and democracy – as well as ethnic, religious and other forms of civil strife, have clearly had an impact on the current state of the media in Asia. T.J.S. George (see Latif, 1998: 21) argues that 'in Asian countries, historical factors have brought about different realities in different societies' and that it 'is neither prudent nor necessary to apply Western yardsticks to this scenario and praise one country or decry another'. This school of thought also tends to place greater emphasis on the vitality and importance of grassroots and traditional forms of communication as evidenced in studies of the information flow in rural communities (e.g. Hartmann et al., 1989). B.G. Verghese (see Latif, 1998: 32), however, adamantly states that 'freedom of expression is properly a human right' and argues the need for a free flow of information. S.K. Datta-Ray (see Latif, 1998: 27) points out the lack of a common Asian identity and claims that 'the state of the Asian press is not far removed from the state of Asian politics'.

This special issue of *Gazette* attempts to draw the attention of scholars and practitioners to several contemporary issues relating to media and communication in and about Asia. In this overview, I have attempted to look at Asian problems objectively as an Asian living outside Asia with no obligation to the power structure of the two Asian countries where I have lived and worked – Sri Lanka and Malaysia. The Documentation Section of this issue carries the 1998 Colombo Declaration on Media Freedom and Social Responsibility – a document whose ideals based on Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights deserves the attention of not only Sri Lanka but also of Asia and the whole developing world. The 13 November 1998 decision of the special session of Indonesia's People's Consultative Assembly to uphold the spirit of Article 19 of the declaration augurs well for those who crave freedom of expression. One should not be surprised if Singapore were to follow Taiwan and South Korea in the direction of greater media freedom in the not too distant future. Muzzling the media in the age of globalization is not a winning proposition – even in the name of Asian values.

The articles we have selected for this special issue present useful insights into and about the region we have defined as Asia. The editors selected them because the analyses they present go well beyond a single country.

Notes

1. The correlation between the per capita GNP and Freedom House press freedom (PF) scores was a negative .32 (p = .135). Lower scores denoted higher press freedom while higher GDPs denoted higher income. Hence the negative correlation.
2. On 13 November 1998, a special session of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) adopted a freedom of information declaration (No. 17/MPR/1998) that should create a less stringent environment for the mass media in Indonesia. Earlier, the Habibie government dropped the requirement that all journalists must be members of the government-backed Indonesian Journalists Association.
3. Lee expressed a revised viewpoint in a speech at the Asian Media Conference in Los Angeles in October 1998. Because the new information technology had made it impossible for governments to suppress inconvenient news, he said, the best governments could do was 'to require the official view to be carried in the media, along with other views over which they have no control' (*The Straits Times*, 31 October and 2 November 1998).

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Shelton A. Gunaratne is professor of mass communications at Moorhead State University. He is editor of *The Media in Asia* which Sage Publications, New Delhi, is scheduled to publish early next year. His recent publications have appeared in *Communication Yearbook* and *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator.*

Address *Department of Mass Communications, Moorhead State University, 267B MacLean Hall, 1104 7th Avenue South, Moorhead, MN 56563, USA. [email: gunarat@mhd1.moorhead.msus.edu]*