

英米マスメディア研究 A

PAC O'CONNOR

Week 12 ANOTHER
POINT OF VIEW

Guest Speaker: Monzurul Huq

- **Pre-Lecture Reading: Global Media Ownership**
- **Mr. Monzurul Huq: Reporting Japan from a Developing World Perspective**
- **Japan and the Developing World: the Unequal Equals**

英米マスコミ論 GUEST SPEAKER: MONZURUL HUQ



We are indeed fortunate in having as this term's Guest Speaker, Mr. Monzurul Huq. Mr. Huq, who is from Bangladesh, has been a quiet but influential player in the journalism of South Asia for many years, and one of Tokyo's leading foreign correspondents since coming to Japan in the early 1990s, where he is currently serving as Secretary of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan [<http://www.fccj.or.jp/>].

With degrees in Journalism and Area Studies (Japan) from Moscow University and the University of London, School of Oriental

and African Studies (SOAS), administrative experience at the United Nations, and years of distinguished broadcasting at the BBC World Service in London and at NHK in Tokyo, Mr. Huq is well qualified to discuss Anglo-American Mass Communications, and to do so from a special perspective. His lecture, '**Reporting Japan from a Developing World Perspective**' is a most welcome contribution to Media Studies at Musashino University.



Reading 1: Overview of Global Media Ownership

Today's global media is dominated by a mere handful of interests – Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom, News Corporation, General Electric, Sony and Seagram – and a second tier of about 36 media firms. These interests work out of national or regional strongholds or occupy global niche markets. Most of the companies on these two tiers are from North America and Europe, with a few from Asia and Latin America.

- **All the first tier firms** are actively engaged in equity joint ventures or other form of partnership with their competitors. Each of the first-tier media giants has joint ventures with, on average, two-thirds of the other first-tier media giants.
- **Today, just six corporations control over 50%** of all US media enterprises: books, magazines, newspapers, music, motion pictures, radio and television. About 77% percent of US daily newspapers belong to publishing chains. Two firms control more than half the market for 11,000 magazines. Four firms control major broadcast TV networks. Similarly, just twenty-five radio interests control one quarter of the stations and generate 57% of the revenue.
- **An overwhelming majority** of the world's film production, TV show production, cable channel ownership, cable and satellite system ownership, book publishing, magazine publishing and music production is controlled by these 40-odd corporations, with the first tier firms thoroughly dominating most sectors.
- **The domination of the first tier companies** can be judged from the fact that Aol Time Warner's sales revenue is nearly 50 times that of the firms at the bottom of the second tier. Thus the global media industry has taken the form of a monopolistic oligopoly.
- **Driven by globalization and synergy**, an unremitting appetite for content, and the emergence and growth of a vast, 24/7 internet driven media stream, this concentration of media interests is essentially an Anglo-Euro-American phenomenon, with Asia (or rather Japan) up in the first tier, and South Asia barely a blip on the screen.

Reading 2: Monzurul Huq: REPORTING JAPAN FROM A DEVELOPING WORLD PERSPECTIVE [Lecture Summary]

- **1. Japan and the developing world - a relationship of dependence:** The last quarter of the twentieth century saw Japan's meteoric rise as an economic superpower that allowed the country to increase its ODA budget to an unprecedented amount. This, on the other hand, resulted in fostering Tokyo's relationship of dependence with the developing world, particularly those of the

Asian continent, countries for whom Japan, despite her recent economic downturn, continues to be a generous and important donor.

- **2. The developing world view of Japan and other advanced nations:** The media in the developing world depend heavily on Western sources for most of the information that they provide to their subscribers. Japan is also no exception. Foreign news in all developing countries are predominantly those supplied by the so called international news agencies, whose interpretation are what people regularly get. As a result, people of Bangladesh and many other developing countries look at Japan mostly through a hired prism where the reflection is predominantly that of Western.
- **3. A slowly changing scenario:** Economic constraint is the major stumbling block for the media of the developing world to address that unfair situation. But as some Asian economies show signs of durable economic progress and more Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese and South East Asian journalists relocate to Japan, the dynamics of the foreign media set-up in Japan are gradually shifting.
- **4. Difficulties faced by reporters from the developing world:** For much of the post-World War II period Japan got used to a set practice of media dominance where there was no place for journalists coming from the unknown world. This mould suits various interests well, and it is hard to break.
- **5. Bangladesh and Japan: historical background** of bilateral relations since 1971.
- **6. How I report Japan.**
- **7. Problems** that I encounter in reporting Japan.
- **8. Some conclusions**

Reading 3: Japan and the Developing World: the Unequal Equals

By Monzurul Huq: From *Glocom Platform: Japanese Institute of Global Communications* <http://www.glocom.org/>

Perceptions of People and Countries Our perceptions of people and territories of distant lands have gone through a process of radical transformation. The way we see the people of a country far from our own is heavily dependent on the means available at any given time to help our preconceived images approach reality.

Despite tremendous progress in science and technology, the world remains a highly unequal place where the gap between rich and poor seems to be widening, keeping the pace, paradoxically in a reverse way, with scientific progress. The modern media, which are essentially connected to the overall development process, as a result, is not uniform everywhere, resulting in the broadening or shrinkage of outlets of information sources according to economic footholds of nations.

Moreover, our concept of what we intend to see on others is also relative in the sense that the perception is subjected to social, ideological or moral position that we hold. Thus, the Orient in European perception had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes. People who for time eternity lived in that region had little influence in shaping the concept of Orient of the Europeans. Political position of individuals too plays a significant role in shaping our concept of a particular country or place.

The world has moved much forward since the days of Russo-Japanese war and it has become much easier these days to know about lands and people that were so distant to our predecessors. Modern means of communications are increasingly bringing people of different regions closer to each other. But those means are still predominantly favorable to the people of rich countries for whom the access to television programs and Internet is virtually becoming as much guaranteed as the right to learn or casting votes. The developing world, on the one hand, is continuing its struggle to solve the very basic of all problems – to provide food to each and every citizen so that nobody has to die of hunger or malnutrition.

But at the same time, recent studies on the spread of television throughout the world suggest that the existence of massive poverty seems to have little impact in rapid expansion of television viewers in the developing world. Ownership of television sets in the developing countries of Asia and the Middle East is growing surprisingly since the 1980s. While there are still millions of people – particularly in Africa – who have never seen a television set, TV viewers no doubt are growing in relation to other technologies, thus bringing the realities of life in advanced countries to the shattered homes of the poor around the globe.

It is difficult to establish precisely how many people in the poor world have access to television sets. But estimated figures suggest that the number of TV sets in the world has tripled since 1980, from 550 million to 1.4 billion in 1996, with Asia showing the highest growth from 100 million to 650 million. Moreover, as in parts of the developing world a large number of people often gather in one room or café to watch television, the real TV audience in such places are many times more than what official ownership of television sets might suggest.

Looking at Japan from the Developing World What poor people around the world watch on television also depend on their social position. During the 1980s the American soap “Dallas” became extremely popular in parts of the developing world. It might sound paradoxical that people of the poorest countries were attracted to the life style of the super rich families of one of the richest countries of the world. The phenomenon might be linked to that precise psychological aspect of human character, which we may call ‘chasing the dream’. People all over India, particularly the poorer segments, are the most devoted viewers of supernatural Hindi films that always end with the victory of good over evil. Here also we find clear evidence of that same phenomenon.

One of the few exceptions in such trend was a Japanese soap opera about a young girl called “Oshin” growing up amid great sufferings in postwar Japan. In Bangladesh the series all along attracted huge audience and in Iran the program became so hit that traffic stopped on Saturday nights when it was aired. But such exceptions also reflect the other side of the psychological phenomenon. In case of Oshin, sufferings of the girl probably reminded the audience of their own daily sufferings and they felt a close attachment to the main character of the drama who happened to represent a rich country.

For many in developing countries, the encounter with Japan, or rather the visual impact of what is happening in Japan, occurs through Western eyes. This is true not only for the illiterate and backward segment of the population of those countries, but for the educated, rich and influential too. The raw news that the media on a daily basis are providing to their clients, particularly the news of things happenings in

foreign lands, is the exclusive domain of a handful of news agencies all of which are based in the West. Thus, the news about serious friction about policymakers in Tokyo on issues related to Japan's economic reform program is like to reach readers, listeners or TV viewers in Bangladesh through American, British or French owned news agencies.

The high cost of living and maintaining offices in Tokyo means only a very few media companies of the developing world are in a position to keep their regular correspondents in Japan. But since the importance of Japan in international politics these days is growing significantly, it is not possible for media in any country to avoid publicizing news on Japan. This reality makes them dependent on international news agencies for collecting news from or about Japan. Since the media plays a significant role in shaping the outlook about things happening around us, we can easily presume that the perception of people of the developing world on affairs in distant lands is significantly influenced by Western ideas. Going through a newspaper in any developing country will make it clear as sources for news about Japan would most likely mention the names of such transnational agencies in media business as Reuters, AP or AFP. Of the total of almost 900 foreign correspondents that were accredited in Japan in 2002, only 33 came from the developing world and they represented merely 11 countries. The other countries of the developing world no doubt had to depend completely on western news agencies for news about Japan.

Bangladesh-Japan Relations Bangladesh's encounter with Japan has a long history of its own. A lady from Dhaka, Hariprabha Takeda, was one of the pioneers in British India to visit Japan and write a book based on that experience. Her four-month long trip in 1912 took her to Kobe, Osaka, Nikko, Nagoya and Tokyo and she presented Japan to her readers as she had seen the country, without adding any extra color or flavor. As a result, the book became the first of its kind to present Japan to the Bengali readership viewed not through the Western eyes.

But it was Asia's first Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, who had by far much more significant impact on portraying Japan to the people of British India. Tagore visited Japan as many as six times, but it was his first visit in 1916 that had the greatest impact on the poet. The visit resulted in Tagore's own travel account of Japan, where he beautifully reflected the uniqueness of Japanese culture and tradition and compared those with that of his own country. Although impressed by what he saw as the supreme expression of beauty and harmony in Japanese society, Tagore was also critical to the rising tide of nationalistic trend, which later drifted him further from many of his Japanese friends whom he came to know during his earlier visits.

The partition of India in 1947 paved the way for the emergence of a new country Pakistan, and the eastern part of Bengal, by virtue of being a Muslim majority region, became a part of Pakistan and came to be known as East Pakistan. As during the post-World War II period Japan took a back stage not only in world politics, but also on issues related to political developments in Asia, the early period of Tokyo's relationship with the region became not that significant. In 1952 Japan established an official relationship with India and forged diplomatic ties with Pakistan. From then on, as from around that time Japan started her slow recovery from the devastation of war, a new form of relationship gave way to the conventional one and the pattern of Tokyo's donor-recipient ties with most of the newly emerged nations gradually gained

its firm footing.

This economic recovery also coincided with the slow start of Japan becoming an important donor nation. Tokyo's economic assistance effort began on a small scale in 1954 with technical aid within the framework of the Colombo plan for economic development in South and Southeast Asia. Japan's official development assistance to Pakistan began in late 1950s when Tokyo offered yen loan to the country. Although the official level negotiations went ahead with the Pakistani leadership in Islamabad, the Japanese government did not fail to express the desire to see that the eastern part of the country received its due share of Japanese assistance. Japanese cooperation in building the Chittagong Steel Mill is one example that stands out as Tokyo's gesture of goodwill towards the people of East Pakistan.

In 1971, when Bangladesh became independent, Japan was one of the first countries among advanced industrialized nations to recognize Bangladesh and establish diplomatic ties with the newly independent South Asian state. On February 10, 1972, less than two months after the country was liberated, the government of Japan announced the decision to recognize Bangladesh and open its diplomatic mission in Dhaka. For people of Bangladesh this provided a new window to look at Japan, the country that soon became the foremost partner in her development efforts.

The last three decades of relationship between Bangladesh and Japan can easily be termed as one of predominantly one-sided dependency. Japan heads the list around 50 donors that are providing aid to Bangladesh. Based on cumulative disbursement of Japan's ODA up to fiscal 1996, Bangladesh was the sixth largest recipient of Japanese bilateral aid and till then received a net amount of \$4.2 billion from Tokyo as economic assistance. This massive Japanese involvement in the development initiatives of Bangladesh has created a popular image of Japan as being a country with enormous resources. Since in reality Japan is in fact a country with enormous resources, there is nothing wrong in such conception unless it hinders the other side of the broader picture. But the trend is unfortunately tilting towards that end.

Japan's Problems: Some Examples Too great a focus on the economy is portraying a partially distorted image of Japan not only in Bangladesh, but also in the developing world in general. The rich heritage of Japanese culture, its equally rich literature that so far produced two Nobel laureates, the vibrant world of Japanese art and music – all are somehow overshadowed by the domination of economic and business interest in bilateral ties. Even on the academic side there is a trend in some developing countries of reaping off the benefits of generous Japanese funding without going for real results. Japan's focus on quantitative expansion rather than qualitative excellence is partially to be blamed for that.

In Bangladesh students returning from Japan after obtaining higher academic qualification in medical science are recently facing the problem of their degrees not being recognized by country's scrutiny board. The core to the problem probably lies in the relatively easy admission system for foreign students in Japan. Is it said that even those who probably would not qualify for any branch of higher education back at home, can somehow manipulate their admission in Japan, even for higher studies in medical science. A majority of those returning with such higher degrees are simply helping the rumors to find their real grounds.

But this kind of distortion in academia is not only evident in backward nations. In

Japan too there are examples that clearly show a disregard in assessing academic excellence of people who are given responsibility to teach about developing countries. I am sure the episode of Muneo Suzuki is not yet forgotten in Japan and many should still remember the academic involvement of his dubious Congolese aide.

Another side of distortion in the image results from ill-conceived ideas that originate exclusively in Japan. Being one of the most important donors allows Japanese policymakers to initiate occasional PR initiatives that they think helpful in lifting the image of the country in the eyes of people of the region towards which such initiatives are directed.

One recent example that can be sighted here is Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) initiative to send the former tennis star Kimiko Date to Bangladesh to teach 'poor' children learning how to play tennis well. Those who initiated the idea no doubt thoroughly lacked the knowledge of the social situation in Bangladesh, where tennis courts are considered privileges reserved exclusively for the rich and politically powerful. Helping the children of super-rich in poor countries to refine their techniques of playing the game is a far cry from the noble idea of helping poor to overcome the situation of utter despair.

Any relationship based on dependency is prone to manipulation by the side that holds the balance power. In the sphere of Japan's diplomatic ties with the developing world too the trend is quite visible. One recent example that can be sighted in this connection is the controversy surrounding Japan's commercial whaling and country's standing at the conference of International Whaling Commission.

During the last annual conference of the Commission held in May 2002, a group of member states were openly critical of Japan for what they alleged as Tokyo's vote buying initiatives by using country's ODA policy. Mongolia, a landlocked developing country, was sighted as an example of playing the pawn in the process of such foul practice. Just before the start of the conference, Mongolia, which does not have access to the sea and not a single trawler of its own, suddenly decided to join the whaling commission and vote in favor of a resolution submitted by Japan.

Concluding Remarks Despite these drawbacks, the image of Japan in the developing world is that of a nation that could achieve tremendous success in a relatively short period of time. Moreover, Japan remains the only example of a nation that could graduate from the position of recipient of foreign aid to the status of a principal donor within a relatively short period of time. This makes the country an example that many in the developing world would definitely like to follow.

But copying the Japanese model is a task that for many is bound to remain an impossible one unless they recognize the need for public policy initiatives in creating social opportunities. Japan went comparatively early for massive expansion of education and other ways of broadening the entitlements that allow the bulk of the people to participate in economic transactions and social change.

As a result, what the Japanese experience did was to discredit a common belief that human development is a kind of luxury that a country can afford only when it grows rich. If today's developing countries can learn something from that particular experience of Japan, only then there can be any possibility of applying the Japanese model in reality. But so far there is little sign of that going to happen anytime soon.

As Japan's recent economic crisis is compelling the government to downsize Tokyo's aid budget, countries that are traditionally at the top of the list of Japan's aid

recipients are already feeling vulnerable that this might result in hardship on their part too. Many in the developing world are, therefore, keeping a watchful eye on Japan's current economic trend and nervously guessing where it might eventually take the country.