

# THE ROLE OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS IN A MODERN SOCIETY

*by Charles C. Clayton*

"For tens of millions of years, man-like primates lived upon the earth. Their life was not unchanging, and they were not without the ability to learn. But from the time the first of them used a stone to strike a blow until his distant descendant learned to shape a hand-ax, there dragged past endless ages that would have sufficed to re-enact dozens of times over the whole cycle of history from the pyramids to the atom bomb. Somewhere in this timeless past, some of these naked stone-using animals rose apart from their fellows and became men. Though we cannot date that event by radio-active carbon nor by the strata of fossils, in a sense we can say exactly when it was. It was when they began to talk. With that event, timelessness was ended. Once a man could symbolize reality, he could subdue it to his own mind. When the first word was spoken, the universe in a quite literal sense, took on meaning, and the long course of history opened ahead."

This quotation is from one of the Windsor Lectures given at the University of Illinois in 1959 by Dan Lacy, a distinguished American librarian and critic. His words give emphasis to an historic fact we tend to overlook in the Twentieth Century. Mass Communications is a phrase symbolic of our time. It has come into general use only in recent years, though it is a new concept only in the sense that modern man has developed the means to expand the audience and speed up the dissemination of communication.

Wilbur Schramm, director of the Institute for Communication Research at Stanford University, points out in the foreword of his book "Mass Communications" that while the Western World usually dates mass communications from the beginning of printing from movable type in Western Europe in the Fifteenth Century, "the roots are much earlier and the flowering much later." Some of the earliest roots were in China. At the Academia Sinica in Taipei can be seen today some of the first written communication in the world, crude idioforms carved by man on the backs of turtles.

By 105 A.D. China had discovered how to make paper and ink. By 450 A.D. the Chinese were using block printing. In the period between 900 and 1450 the Chinese had learned to make movable type from clay and in Korea the first movable type was cast from metal. China and Asia had a significant headstart over the

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Western World in mass communications. It is worthwhile to speculate why that advantage was lost. At the beginning of the Ming Dynasty in 1368, China and Western Europe were on equal terms in technical and mechanical skill. At the end of that dynasty in 1644, Europe was in possession of modern science and China was still in the Middle Ages.

One reason often cited is the complexity of the Chinese language which made mass communication more difficult. Closer to the truth perhaps, is that China turned its back on the rest of the world and communications broke down. What happened in the centuries that followed, and what is happening today emphasize a fact scholars everywhere were slow to recognize—that mass communications is directly and closely related to all of the social sciences. As Dr. Schramm points out, “the new tool of print was caught up in social use” as soon as the first books and documents came off the press.”

It became a weapon for the men in power and later a weapon of revolution. It was the spark that ignited all the scientific discoveries since that time. Books became the tools of education and the need to know how to read and write prompted our educational systems. The first news letters became the tools of commerce. Dr. Schramm sums it up:

“The British, the American and the French revolutions would have been unlikely, if not impossible, without mass communication. When political freedom had been won for the common man, mass communications were able to reach over the heads of the specially privileged and the specially educated, to the great masses of men who had need of information in order to play their proper parts in democracy and to take advantage of the opportunities they were being offered. Political democracy, economic opportunity, free public education, the Industrial Revolution, and mass communications were woven together in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries to make a great change in human life and national relations.”

Serious study of mass communications as an academic discipline, however, has come only recently. Most of this development has taken place since the end of World War II. Even more recent is the recognition of its significance by other disciplines. The study of sociology is incomplete without the acceptance of the impact of mass communications. Schools of business were among the first to take advantage of the research being done in the field of mass communications. Readership studies, consumer habits and advertising surveys are examples of the relationship with business and industry. Political science is coming to realize more and more the role of communication in government. Any study of modern history must take

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into account the impact of propaganda and psychological warfare. Psychology makes use of the findings and the research methods developed by the studies in modern communications.

While the accomplishments in mass communications research in the last two decades have been impressive, and the usefulness of the findings clearly demonstrated, it is equally obvious that we have merely scratched the surface. We know much too little about the impact of the newer mediums of communication: the electronic media, radio, television and facsimile. To put it another way, the scientific and technological maturity the world has achieved in our century is in disturbing contrast to our social immaturity. This time-lag is the most serious threat to the future of mankind.

Nuclear fission has made possible the literal destruction of the world, and at the same time has opened the way to peaceful uses of atomic energy that can transform the world. To use it wisely and to avert world destruction depends in a very real sense on the effectiveness of our use of mass communications.

Electronic media both complicate the problem and present the challenge of great opportunities. They have shrunk the physical dimensions of the world beyond the comprehension of our forefathers. Today all news is local and people everywhere in the world are informed of what happens 10,000 miles away as quickly as they learn of what happens in their own community. Television cameras have sent back to earth close up pictures of the moon and may soon be photographing other planets.

While radio and television have brought the world closer together, they have also greatly expanded the number of people who can be reached quickly. There is still a time gap in the speed the printed word can reach remote areas of the world: in mainland China, for example, or in India or Africa. But there are few areas left which are cut off from radio. In Taiwan, as in other parts of the Free World, we know that radio can penetrate the barriers of Communism. The Republic of China is making effective use of this weapon.

But there are many problems created by the electronic media which demand attention. One is the fact that the electronic media have made news instantaneous. What happens, say in Vietnam, is known within a matter of minutes, or at the most a few hours, everywhere in the world. There is no time for the people to reflect or to reach a sober judgment. If there is another world war, it well may be sparked by this lack of time for sober judgment.

To cite another example of the impact of the electronic media, one of the significant techniques of recent years is the use of mass demonstration. Few of

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them are spontaneous. Most are deliberately planned and can be turned off and on by order from those who direct them. We need only to look at what has happened in Indonesia and on the mainland of China in recent months to realize the threat of this technique. What is not as readily recognized is that such demonstrations would not be effective if the mass media, and particularly radio and television did not give them a mass audience, and all too frequently a distorted importance. Radio and television are significant here, not only because they reach a much wider audience much faster, but also because they make it possible for the people to see and hear what is happening.

In both instances great responsibility is placed on those who serve in the mass media. Those who gather and report the news must not only be accurate, they must also present and interpret the events in their true perspective. The Department of Journalism and the Graduate School of Journalism at National Chengchi University must be commended for the emphasis they place on these responsibilities and the training their students receive.

In 1962 the American public relations firm of Bozell & Jacobs, Inc. took inventory of the accomplishments—and the shortcomings—of communications in the United States. The findings were published in a book "The Communications Challenges in the Decade of the 60's". Since much of the report applies to all nations, the forecasts and the challenges the book presents are worth noting here. "The winds of change", the report points out, "are sweeping the world at an unprecedented velocity. In communications, as in other fields, it is no longer adequate to plan only six months or a year ahead. The pace of change is accelerating, and the changes may well invalidate many of the premises of the past in mass communications."

Some of the challenges listed are:

To find new and better avenues of communication to meet the massive need.

To expand and refine the techniques for probing public opinion.

To make full use of the findings of the social sciences.

To overcome the two-way, progressive and dangerous failure of communication between science and technology and the people.

To build bridges of understanding between business and education.

To keep abreast of, and make full use of, the revolutionary new techniques in handling information.

There are other challenges, but this abridged list indicates how much remains to be done in assuring the development of communications to keep pace with the

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needs of a modern society,

It is the writer's conviction that mass communications can make two valuable contributions to all of the social sciences. It has been the research into the problem of readability and comprehension, with the cooperation of the psychologists, that has not only given valuable insight into how to communicate effectively, but also has pointed up one of the shortcomings of most of our social disciplines. Put bluntly, one of the major obstacles to good teaching exists today for the simple reason that too many of the textbooks are so poorly written, especially in the humanities, that students are baffled, or bored, or both. Each discipline seems obsessed with the development of a professional vocabulary which cannot be understood except by another professional in the same field. We tend to confuse erudition with polysyllabic words and ignore the basic consideration that the function of all language, oral or written, is to communicate.

The second contribution mass communications can, and certainly should make is to provide the tools modern man must have in order to distinguish between truth and half truth, to recognize propaganda, and to interpret and comprehend the news. Ideally, every institution should include in its required curriculum, courses which can train students, the future leaders of society, to distinguish between truth and lies and half lies, to recognize motives and objectives as well as the event or the clever propaganda trick and to know when the facts are being twisted or withheld.

One aspect of modern mass communications deserves special attention today in Taiwan. The Republic of China has set an impressive example to all of Asia and especially to the newly developing nations in the phenomenal progress that has been achieved in Taiwan since 1949. No other nation can match Free China's land reform. In less than two decades, Taiwan has not only achieved economic independence and developed a modern industrial base, but it can match Japan in the living standard of its people. It has done all this, despite the fact that the Republic of China is still at war with the Communist regime on the mainland, a handicap with which Japan has not had to contend. It has done so in spite of another handicap. Japan has moved much faster in the development of advertising and in making use of all the services advertising can offer in the whole field of marketing and production.

The reasons why Taiwan has lagged behind can be readily discerned. First of all it must be recognized that the concept of advertising is in direct conflict with Chinese tradition. Chinese culture has always emphasized the commendable virtue of modesty. In the minds of many it is still deemed immoral to praise one's own possessions or skills or products. While this attitude is changing, it remains

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a strong deterrent. Advertising, which is a key factor in the development of modern industry and mass production, also is affected by the fact that the change-over in Asia from a home industry economy to a factory economy is still going on. The same comment applies to retailing. Taiwan in the last few years has developed some large department stores and retail outlets, but the small family shops remain the backbone of retailing.

In the first decade after 1949 most of the industry was by necessity owned and operated by the government under monopoly conditions. In 1952, for example, private enterprise provided only 39.5 per cent of Taiwan's gross national product, while ten years later private enterprise contributed 66 per cent. The lack of competition encouraged the neglect of advertising. For a time the shortage of newsprint, which restricted the size of newspapers, was a factor, and while there is no longer a shortage of newsprint, some restrictions remain for other reasons.

Another, and certainly an important factor, is that education in advertising in Taiwan and throughout Asia, has lagged far behind the rest of the Free World. National Chengchi University has done as much, and probably much more, than any other university in Asia in this field—but it is not enough. The need for education in advertising in Taiwan can be divided into several areas:

First, and for the future, the most important is to develop a program which will provide graduates trained in advertising and teachers competent to expand advertising curricula in other institutions, both in Taiwan and throughout Southeast Asia. One of the important contributions of National Chengchi University is that it trains graduates who return to the other nations of Southeast Asia.

Second, there is the urgent need to educate and convince industry and business leaders in Taiwan concerning the need for advertising and to give them the knowledge of how to use efficiently the tools advertising provides.

Third, there is the need to develop research in marketing, consumer habits, and potential markets, both at home and abroad. In Taiwan, as elsewhere there is the need for more research into how to use the various media most effectively.

These needs are not a matter of concern to business and industry alone. In a literal sense it can be said that they are significant for the nation as a whole. Taiwan products properly advertised and marketed overseas can help make Taiwan economically strong and add to the prestige of the Republic of China. In turn these achievements strengthen the influence of Taiwan in Asia and in world affairs.

A good example of how advertising is related to national prestige is Japan. In the United States, as in Europe, Japanese advertising has identified Japan with the

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Honda motorcycle, Japanese cameras and tape recorders. The acceptance of such products by foreign purchasers helps shape the concept of the buyer's idea of Japan as a nation. Inevitably the goodwill thus engendered carries over into governmental relations.

While the growth in Taiwan's export trade has been impressive, it seems clear that the potential overseas markets have only been tapped. In 1966 Taiwan exports were valued at US\$580 million. This figure represents an increase of 430 per cent over 1956. In that year industrial products made up only 12 per cent of the exports. Ten years later industrial products account for more than half of the total exports.

Of greater significance for the future is the fact that more nations are now good customers of Taiwan. In 1964, there were eight countries which purchased more than US\$10 million worth of goods. Last year the number of countries rose to nine. In this area, it is estimated that Australia, Holland, the Philippines and Iran will become major markets in the next three years. To win and hold these markets, there must be better use of advertising and that tool should be used and directed by Taiwan advertising firms.

There exists a large and potential market in Taiwan itself. Its population now exceeds 12 million. More important, this figure represents a market with purchasing power. When I visited Taiwan last year I was impressed by the tremendous change that had taken place since I had left four years before. New buildings were being constructed, civic improvements were underway and there was a general air of prosperity. Today no nation in Asia has a higher per capita income than Taiwan, and per capita income is still rising. Last year it increased 4.5 per cent and the economic growth rate rose 7.5 per cent.

To understand the relation of advertising to continued economic growth, we need to keep in mind what are the contributions of advertising to a modern society. Most important of all, advertising is essential in achieving and maintaining mass production. Second, advertising assists in lowering prices because of the economies of mass production, thereby expanding markets. Third, advertising educates the public to new products and their uses.

Neil H. Borden, professor of advertising in the Graduate School of Business Administration at Harvard University, summed up advertising's role in his book "The Economic Effects of Advertising". He wrote:

"Advertising's outstanding contribution to consumer welfare comes from its part in promoting a dynamic, expanding economy... In a static economy, there is little need of advertising."

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Then he added, "So long as individual enterprise flourishes and a dynamic economy continues, advertising and aggressive selling will play a significant social role".

The use of advertising as an essential tool of modern mass communications is still new in Taiwan. Before 1960, there were no advertising agencies in the full sense of the term, in Taiwan. Today, I am told there are some 130 advertising agencies, of which only twenty are fullfledged agencies. Addressing the Fifth Asian Advertising Congress in Taipei last November, Economic Minister K. T. Li said:

"I am sorry to say that advertising, whether for private or for public interest, is miserably inadequate in Taiwan". He pointed out that in the United States the average annual per capita expenditure for advertising is about US\$80. In Japan it amounts to US\$10. In Taiwan it is only about US\$1.

In 1960, the total amount spent for advertising in the United States was approximately US\$12 billion. By 1970 it is estimated the total advertising expenditure in the United States will rise to an annual figure of from US\$22 to US\$25 billion. In 1960 American business firms spent another US\$2 billion on non-advertising public relations. A conservative estimate is that this total will double by 1970.

Undoubtedly the Fifth Asian Advertising Congress, which attracted more than 500 guests from Asian countries, did focus attention on the increasingly important role played by advertising in the economic development of all the Asian countries, as was pointed out by Mrs. Nancy Yu Huang, publisher of the China Post and chairman of the Congress.

President Chiang Kai-shek put it this way in his message of welcome to the Congress: "As a booming advertising business can promote the development of industry and trade and accelerate economic prosperity, I hope that this Congress will help to raise the living standards of Asian peoples, increase the cultural interflow of the Asian region and lead to still better understanding among the peoples of Asia and still closer cooperation among the Asian nation."

There is another area of research in which National Chengchi University can make a significant contribution to mass communications in Asia. Probably the most serious problem of all printed media in Asia is the lack of a practical and efficient method of setting type mechanically. The use of handset type is not only more expensive, but it restricts the size of the papers. It is significant that the first encouraging steps toward solving this problem have been taken in Taiwan, but much more remains to be done.



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Research can provide the time and motion studies which can be used in redesigning type cases for more efficient use. Research is also needed to determine the frequency of use of Chinese characters in terms of their modern usage. Some studies are available, but none is related directly to modern usage.

Last year the United Daily News and the Central Daily News installed typesetting machines, making use of perforated tape and the principle of the monotype machine. These machines can use 2,376 characters. It is estimated that at least 7,000 characters are in use on the average newspaper. At present Y. P. Huang, a member of the faculty of National Chengchi University, and board chairman of the China Post, is experimenting with photo typesetting, with encouraging results. Photo typesetting and off-set printing may ultimately be the answer to the problem. The proper research can speed up the solution. Such research should also include studies on how to reduce the cost of these mechanical typesetters. There is no reason why research cannot find the way to manufacture them in Taiwan much cheaper than they can now be purchased abroad, just as Taiwan now is able to manufacture rotary presses at a lower cost than any overseas competitor.

Success in this field can lead to another significant development in Taiwan—the development of a provincial press. Taiwan can take pride in its national press, but there is now a need for local newspapers to serve the people living in the villages and the Hsiens. It is estimated that more than half of the population of Taiwan lives in villages. They need their own local newspapers to quicken the development of the democratic process, to provide leadership in community affairs and to expand their cultural lives.

In an article written several years ago for an American magazine, Professor Milton Shieh, former chairman of the Department of Journalism at Chengchi and now chairman of the Department of Journalism at the Chinese Cultural College, wrote:

“The people need to learn the dignity of their own lives and community affairs in relation to the greater events with which their present newspapers are for the most part preoccupied. They need to have the news of the world, and from the capital of their own country interpreted in terms significant to local problems and local issues. Above all, the people of each local community require a vehicle which will permit them to exchange ideas with each other and which will serve to reflect their viewpoints to the world outside.”

Development of the community press in Taiwan has not been possible heretofore for two reasons: Lack of advertising revenue and the high cost of printing. The

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expansion of advertising in Taiwan can not only help finance community newspapers, but would also open new markets for Taiwan industry. When typesetting costs can be drastically reduced through mechanical typesetting, it will become feasible to publish community newspapers.

With Taiwan's modern transportation facilities it would be possible for a central printing plant in Taipei to print at a reasonable cost a great number of community newspapers which would require only an editorial and business office in the local community.

National Chengchi University, with its long and outstanding leadership in journalism education in Asia, has the opportunity to expand its leadership in the mass communications field by building a strong program in advertising. It is my sincere hope that the university can have the full cooperation of American advertising educators in such a program.

I am proud that I have been honored by National Chengchi University by being named an honorary professor of this distinguished institution of learning. I am happy that a close relationship exists between Southern Illinois University and National Chengchi University, and it is my hope that the way can be found to assist in the development of the study of mass communications in Taiwan.