

Introduction

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[p.2] *Asian and Australasian Perspectives in the Development of Public Relations: Other Voices* is the first volume in this series on national histories of public relations. In the 11 chapters, it is immediately evident that there is no ‘Asian model’ of PR, although there are some shared cultural influences. Unlike other regions and continents, the development of public relations has been shaped in several countries (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam) by its application as publicity and propaganda in independence struggles and post-colonial adjustment. In Australia and New Zealand, which make up the Australasia chapter, PR began as governmental information dissemination, with some lobbying for independence in the late 19th century. Thailand, which was never colonized, created a unique form of PR which was closely related to the monarchy which led its modernization. Japan first used the term, *kouhou* (widely notify) in the 1870s. It has become synonymous with PR and thus identifies national practices as predominantly informational. In 2012, the most common form of practice was identified as media relations, which confirms this interpretation.

Two themes emerge from the chapters. The first is the role of personal networking within public relations practice and the second was the historiographic approaches of some authors who used periodization for their analysis and narrative.

Personal networks, referred to a *guanxi* in China and *quan hệ* in Vietnam, are also found in India, Taiwan and to a lesser extent in Japan. This relationship leads to collaborations between journalists and PR practitioners in ways not found in the West and, as Loan Van notes in the Vietnam chapter, ‘PR is thus different to the way PR is practiced in Anglo countries’. In countries which have close relations with China, the influence of Confucianism and related philosophies, which include notions of ‘the people’, reputation, interpersonal relationships and strategic behaviours, has shaped PR practices which have resulted in it being conceptualised as a two-way communication activity which Loan Van calls ‘a shared perspective’. This is different from Anglo-American ‘two-way symmetrical’ communication. India came to personal networking or a personal influence model from a different cultural basis and, as John Vil’anilam’s chapter shows, it is the ‘dominant historical model of PR’ which has been ‘fostered by cultural hierarchies’. Thailand has historically practiced a two-way approach, although governmental PR has been largely propagandist or informational since 1932.

Napawan Tantivejakul also comments [p.3] that ‘understanding Thai society’s personality alongside cultural aspects like monarchial institution respect, Buddhist orientation, and relationship orientation have been important issues involved in successful Thai PR practice’.

Periodization is a common organisational approach to historiography. In PR history, Bentele’s functional-integrative structural model (Bentele, 2010) which was developed for the evolution of German PR has found interest amongst other scholars. Chapter 10 (Thailand) chapter specifically refers to it when advancing four periods of recent PR history. Periodization in the form of a ‘period’, ‘phase’ or ‘stage’ approach is also used by China, India, Indonesia, Philippines and Taiwan, whereas other chapters have mostly used a timeline narrative. It is notable that there is not synchronous links of these periods that may indicate shared experience. The chapter on China (Chapter 2) takes the longest view by starting with a discussion of PR-like activity in ancient times, whereas others (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Vietnam) start from the eve of World War II or soon after 1945 when independence movements were in active contests with colonial powers. As the historiography of public relations develops, Asian variants of Bentele’s structural model or new theory may emerge to challenge the national histories or to offer a more explicitly post-colonial interpretation.

Each Asian chapter has strong emphasis on the link between the establishment and evolution of the nation-state and the development of PR, although in the past 30 years it has been economic growth rather than political and social changes that have supported exceptional growth. The post-colonial era has also shaped the formational of strong governmental informational approaches to PR, which sometimes verge on propaganda aided by controls over media. These are different to the Anglo-American experience, including Australasia, which works under many fewer controls over media and other communication channels. Perhaps these historical studies of public relations will support a more liberal approach to post-colonial analysis public relations.

Reference

Bentele, G. (2010) ‘PR-historiography, a functional-integrative strata model and periods of German PR history’ [Abstract], Proceedings of the First International History of Public Relations Conference, Bournemouth University, UK, 8-9 July, 2010.