

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of globalization in the 1990s brought about various unprecedented changes in world politics. To start with, the world has been altered due to widening, deepening and speeding up of interconnectedness based on global communication infrastructures—satellite, cable, computer, and the Internet—which have served as driving forces. As a result, human activities in economical, political, and cultural contexts, regardless of proximity or distance, have been integrated (communities, transnational NGOs, civil society, activists, TNCs, IOs) and been diffused (an incident which occurred in one place can be witnessed by people throughout the world), despite the fact that heterogeneity and asymmetry exist. Besides, this infrastructure facilitates direct communicative channels for newly-emerging non-state players, and, at the same time, transnationalizes media. Thus, it has been claimed that state sovereignty has declined, since its traditional power based on the notion of sovereignty and security has become less and less effective. Besides, the so-called ‘Information Age’ and ‘Information Society’, when human activities rely more and more on information and knowledge, is evident. As Zbigniew Brzezinski said, “Knowledge, more than ever before, is power.” The country that can best lead the information revolution will be more powerful than any other (Mattelart, 2003, p. 130).

In order to establish an information society, freedom of expression—permission of the expression of any opinion without restraint—is one of the important

components. Freedom of expression matters, since the more sources of information are available, the more the people can be equipped with power and knowledge for self-development and independence. Given the importance of these issues, international conferences, where state governments and non-state actors can meet and share their concerns, are necessary to establish shared understanding on global media governance and manage the utilization of media to enhance freedom of expression. To this end, many international conferences have been conducted, for instance the G7/Developing World Information Society and Development, the (ISAD) Conference, the World Economic Forum (WEF), and the Global Information Infrastructure Commission (GIIC). In addition to these, there was the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), a UN-organized international conference based on Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹ Organized twice, once in Geneva (2003) and then in Tunis (2005), the summit aimed at the reduction of the digital divide and the building of an information and knowledge society with coordination from involved stakeholders. Further, it reaffirmed the freedom of expression and freedom of the press under internet governance:

We reaffirm our commitment to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of media, which are essential to the Information Society. Freedom to seek, receive, impart and use of information for the creation, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge are important to the

¹ Everyone has the rights to freedom of opinion and expression and the rights include freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (Declaration of Principles, World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva 2003-Tunis 2005, Document WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/4-E)

Information Society....Traditional media in all their forms have an important role in the Information Society and ICTs should play a supportive role in this regard. (UNESCO, Declaration of Principles, Document WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/4-E, 8)”

UNESCO, whose task is to build a knowledge society based on the sharing of knowledge and the incorporation of all the socio-cultural and ethical dimensions of sustainable development (UNESCO, 1969, p. 45), was mandated to implement the media area. Its activities are under the theme “Toward Knowledge Societies” with four underlying principles; one of them is freedom of expression. To elaborate more, it implies freedom of opinion, freedom of speech and of the written word, freedom of the press, free access to information, and the free flow of data and information (UNESCO, 2003, p. 38). Freedom of expression is essential in the sense that “it safeguards against the global misinformation or disinformation society” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 38) and guarantees that individuals throughout the world will not be submerged by the mass of confused data produced by the information revolution. In this sense, freedom of expression is not only the guarantee of the real possibility of genuine knowledge societies, but also a guarantee of their longevity (UNESCO, 2003, p. 38).

Freedom of expression concerns practical acts of public communication, of which the work of the mass communication media is a prime example. What distinguished press freedom from freedom of expression at large is that it is in large measure defined by ethical, moral and economic criteria established by media professionals and the media industry. It is, essentially, the freedom to publish and to gather, prepare and disseminate information

without restraint, save that imposed by the voluntary application of ethical standards which are established by professional consent (UNESCO, Status of Research on the information society, 2003, p. 50).

Yet, freedom of expression is not adopted or enforced fully as a fundamental principle in all societies due to diverse political ideologies, social norms and practices. It is, in practice, limited by regulatory frameworks in national and international law. States, who establish any means to protect their sovereignty and security on behalf of their citizens, try to censor any state-perceived violent information or hate statement, both in democratic and communist states. For instance, North Korea imposes total control on news content. Similarly, Laos, Vietnam, and China use the press to communicate the message of the sole party, and in Thailand, hundreds of local radio stations were closed by the military junta which overthrew former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (Reporters Without Borders, 2007, p. 68). In these situations, how can the goal of global media governance be fulfilled? This means that diversity of the implementation processes in real circumstances is needed in order to reach the minimum of desired goals. This implies that the process of glocalization is crucial.

1.1 Objective and Research Questions

This paper aims to research how UNESCO applies and glocalizes the concept of freedom of expression and freedom of the press endorsed in WSIS to advocate an information and knowledge society, and to promote a standard in national legislations or policies in three Asian countries, namely Thailand, Singapore and China. This research is based on two research questions as follows.

- 1) How can the notion of freedom of expression and the press and existing social values constitute each other?
- 2) How, and to what extent, does UNESCO define global governance?
- 3) How does UNESCO apply its governance policy to Asian countries, based on their internal circumstances?
- 4) In UNESCO's implementation, in coordination with other civil society and local communities and governments, what are the new different forms of glocalized media freedoms in Asian countries? Do they fulfill existing global governance criteria?

1.2 Significant of Study

The significance of this research is that it highlights the relationship between global media governance, states and existing values through the process of glocalization, which, in many aspects, has been ignored. The focus will be on the implementation process of governance, because it concretizes global media policies and is the most vital step showing how effective global governance is. Moreover, it shows the constitutive relation between global governance, states' and domestic players' values in the sense that the governance is not the sole driving force, and states should not be perceived as passive receivers. On the contrary, negotiation between two sides is being conducted, as a result a two-sided transformation takes place. This implies that the governance is being transformed differently to be able to situate in its new hosts. Likewise, the new hosts have to adjust themselves in

accordance with new regulations or standards as well so as to integrate into the international community.