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Citation

Toward an historically informed Asian model of public relations

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A B S T R A C T

This paper undertakes a meta-analysis of the 51 historiographies of public relations in Asia-Pacific countries to identify common themes, threads and theoretical insights. The authors propose a set of necessary components for the study of Asia-Pacific public relations drawn from a historical perspective that differs from the paradigmatic underpinnings of the major Western models. They draw conclusions about epistemological and practice differences between public relations in the West and in the Asia-Pacific region in a globalizing world.

1. Introduction

It has been argued that PR-research can close the gap to organization, culture and the nonintended forms of communication that are distinctly distinguishable between societies (Wehmeier & Winkler, 2013). This has yet to happen. Over the last twenty years, the public relations academy has mostly put forward principles or models which seek to simultaneously theorize on the local as well as global practice of public relations. For example, van Ruler and Vercic (2002) and van Ruler, Vercic, Butschi, and Flodin (2004) articulated a European Model of public relations and Vercic, Grunig, and Grunig (1996) and Grunig (2009) proposed a set of generic principles and specific applications drawn largely from research focused on North America, but which, they proposed, had global utility. Few others have argued that these generalizations are Western in origin and orientation (Choi & Cameron, 2005; Gregory & Halff, 2013; Sriramesh, 2002). More fundamentally, Broadfoot and Munshi (2007) and Prichard (2006) have argued that generic principles (in public relations and elsewhere) lead to the reproduction of intellectual domination and the re-enactment of a particular form of (mostly managerial) logic at the expense of alternative voices and polyphony. Miike and Chen (2007) have collated over 230 publications by Asian communication scholars that react to the academy's universalism. Dissanayake (1988, 2009a) offers an alternative paradigmatic territory and calls for an epistemological response leading to the 'excavation' of specific Asian communication theories.

In public relations research, there have been published studies which seek to apply the generic principles to practice in Asia-Pacific countries – for example to Korea and Singapore (Lim, Goh, & Sriramesh, 2005; Rhee, 2002) – and a growing number of studies exists about public relations in countries such as India, Malaysia, Indonesia and China. However, there

has been no attempt to undertake an analysis of these in aggregate to determine whether it is possible to theorize about the common components which characterize an indigenous Asia-Pacific model of public relations with a possibly alternative logic.

In this conceptual paper the authors will do four things: first, identify the epistemological and practice principles which underpin the major Western models of public relations; second, undertake a meta-analysis of the 51 historiographies of public relations in Asia-Pacific countries published in English to identify common themes, threads and theoretical insights. Third, propose a set of necessary components for a model of Asia-Pacific public relations drawn from an alternative historical perspective. Finally, draw conclusions about epistemological and practice differences between public relations in the West and in the Asia-Pacific region in a globalizing world.

Christensen and Cornelissen (2011) posit that conceptualizing public relations would benefit from a reversal aimed at understanding "how communication organizes [. . .] rather than the traditional focus on the organization of communication" (2011, p. 384). Organizations, systems and societies should not only be considered–like in most research on public relations as a managerial function – as a given, since they emerge from and are recursively implicated by communication, including public relations. In this vein we suggest to study all extant models of public relations using the concept of 'expert systems'. As argued by Giddens (1991, p. 27) "systems of [. . .] professional expertise [. . .] organize large areas of the material and social environments". They are the structures that frame the actions of individuals and organizations. By the same token, individual behavior re-enacts and reproduces those structures. This connection between action and structure has been described as 'institutional logics', or sets 'of material practices and symbolic constructions (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248; Thornton & Ocasio, 2009): an overarching rationale that justifies the actions within a structure, organization or expert system. It engenders and constrains individual action, which in turn reproduces the logic. In their seminal paper on institutional logics, Friedland and Alford (1991) identify political democracy, capitalism and state bureaucracy as the three competing institutional orders in society. We similarly suggest that the three expert systems in which public relations takes place are the civic, the corporate and the governance expert systems whose institutional logic is participation, profitability and power, respectively.

The expert systems are not static. Instead, Giddens' concept of disembedding describes how expert systems are regenerated, restructured and adapted in unlimited spaces, particularly in the globalized age of 'late modernity' (Giddens, 2002). This means that the institutional logics of expert systems are extended into other, neighboring expert systems where they co-exist, compete or are reproduced alongside those expert systems' own institutional logics, e.g. when government agencies feel the need to become more 'customer oriented', or when corporations are 'nationalized' (Buurma, 2001; Cervera, Molla, & Sanchez, 2001). In this context of disembedding, public relations has been described (Falkheimer, 2007) as constitutive: on the one hand, it requires and reproduces an expert system's own logic, i.e. participation in the civic expert system, profitability in the corporate expert system and power in the governance expert system. On the other hand, PR enables adaptation and the shifting of relationships between the three expert systems (Hardy, 2011; Lammers, 2011; Patriotta, Gond, & Schultz, 2011). In each of the expert systems, public relations can therefore be understood as a distinguishable "institutional practice that is widely distributed and is based on a set of governing mechanisms, including taken-for-granted activities, rules, norms and ideas" (Fredriksson, Pallas, & Wehmeier, 2013, p. 194).

We propose that in Europe and the US in particular the corporate expert system has disembedded as its institutional logic with its attendant features of individualism and privatization has gained ascendancy across place and time. Consequently, Western models of public relations can also be said to be predominantly corporatist.

The meta-analysis of Asia-Pacific scholarship in public relations will show that the above expert systems are also present, but their relationships are different. It will be shown that the corporate expert system is less dominant, as it is historically held in check and framed by the governance expert system and by its disembedding into most parts of corporate and civic life in Asia-Pacific societies.

From this analysis, we will comment on the epistemological basis of studying public relations in Asia-Pacific and propose key components for the analysis of Asia-Pacific public relations which will be different from those which appear to have current currency.

2. Public relations in the United States and Europe

Western models in public relations make two epistemological implications for global public relations research. They firstly imply that public relations consists of a set of overarching principles varied only by local applications per market, country or culture. They secondly imply a teleological, unidirectional history in which over time countries aspire toward a generalization of that set of overarching principles which might be assumed to be 'best-practice'.

2.1. United States

The existence of generic principles in public relations was first assumed for the United States (US) by this study's authors James and Larissa Grunig in the 1990s (Grunig, 2006; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Their scholarly framework of the 'Excellence Study' can be argued as being etic in the implicit assumption that its principles are universal across diverse populations. It became the dominant paradigm for the field of public relations altogether (Curtin & Gaither, 2012; Gower, 2006; Holtzhausen, 2000; L'Etang & Pieczka, 2006; Motion & Weaver, 2005) with the communication academy mostly

theorizing from the viewpoint of a managerial rationality on the characteristics of public relations 'excellence' to produce a global model. Specific applications were developed mainly by James and Larissa Grunig, Vercic and Sriramesh (Grunig, Grunig, & Vercic, 1998; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009, 2012; Sriramesh, 2009; Vercic et al., 1996).

Generic principles and specific applications have been transferred to various locations and organizations beyond the US context. For example Rhee (2002) identified similar principles in the work of Korean practitioners. Hung and Chen (2004) and Chen (2004) observed several of the principles in multinational companies in China. Van Dyke (2005) found evidence that NATO had applied the principles in the public affairs work of its Bosnian mission and Yun (2006) found them in the literature of public diplomacy and the work of most embassies in Washington, D.C.

Taking a periodizing approach, it was James Grunig who also first developed a teleological understanding of US public relations history (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig & Hunt, 1984) by linking types of practice which over time progressively became 'excellent' (Raaz & Wehmeier, 2011). It later became the dominant historiography of public relations globally:

- the late 19th century is modeled as *press agentry/publicity* particularly linked with the showmanship that predominated the entertainment of the time as embodied by P.T. Barnum. The nature of the communication was one-way, with truth not being important and its purpose was propaganda. Most authors (for example Broom, 2009; Ewen, 1996; Olasky, 1987) refer to its beginnings as being recognizable in the slogans, symbols, events and media relations used by the American Revolutionaries and the presidential candidate Andrew Jackson. They describe how large corporations such as the Bank of the United States and the railway companies enlisted the help of public relations to promote an agenda of industrial growth and opposition to government regulation.
- the early 20th century, including World War I, Grunig (1992) modeled as *public information*. The nature of the communication was one-way, with truth being important and its purpose being dissemination of information. At the turn of the century muckraking journalists exposed the worst excesses of unbridled business practices and the government, using public relations support, pushed reforms. Ewen (1996) describes how business countered with defensive publicity and public relations became associated with the advocacy of business.
- the interwar years were characterized as having a *two-way asymmetrical* model of public relations. The nature of the communication was interactional, but with an unbalanced effect, i.e., to change the receiver, and its purpose was persuasion. Historiographers describe the period between the two World Wars with the rise of the consumer (Edwards, 2009). This was accompanied by the emergence of persuasion based on social science techniques, with Edward Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud, being arguably the leading proponent of public relations in marketing, largely for corporations (Ewen, 1996; Harrison, 2011).
- finally, the years since Bernays have been the era of *two-way symmetric* public relations, espoused by educators and professional leaders. The nature of the communication is dialogic, engaging situationally with publics and seeking to achieve a balanced effect on the parties involved. In 1947 the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) was formed to promote ethical professionalism and to advocate for public relations as the profession enabling dialog between corporations and their stakeholders. At the same time, large corporations such as General Motors and Westinghouse developed substantial public relations departments.

The corporate trend continues in the US today, and a constant refrain is that public relations earns its recognition foremost in dialog between corporations and their situational publics (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007; Institute for Public Relations, 2013). There remains a deep-rooted commitment to enterprise and a 'small state,' as opposed to 'big government' in the US. Government agencies have limitations imposed on them (often by Congress) around the use of opinion research and communication consulting (Waymer, 2013). These elements, along with individual freedom, form a recognizable part of the American identity. Hence there is a cultural marriage between the institutional logic of the market, a small polity and the 'American way of life' that has generated a "private good" ethos and we can conclude that 'excellent public relations' is, in the US, primarily associated with corporate activity and dialog (Fig. 1).

Looking at the interlinked model provided in the introduction, the balance in the US might be depicted as seen in Fig. 2 where the corporate sphere has come to disembed two other expert systems, who do not benefit from its size or resources and who look to corporations for best practice guidance.

2.2. Europe

In keeping with the epistemological paradigm of overarching principles and local applications, the academic search for a European model of public relations has often reproduced US principles and practices. Even though the European practice has never entirely embraced the US model of public relations "one can observe many common interests and structures in theory building and numerous adoptions of theories and approaches from the US" (Bentele, 2004, p. 487).

There being no recognized model of European public relations, a team of researchers from the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland undertook a Delphi Study of three rounds with practitioners and academics from 26 nations (van Ruler et al., 2004) at the beginning of the 21st century. Although the authors of the project admit themselves that it is impossible to embrace Europe's diversity in one model, they identified characteristics of European public relations that had
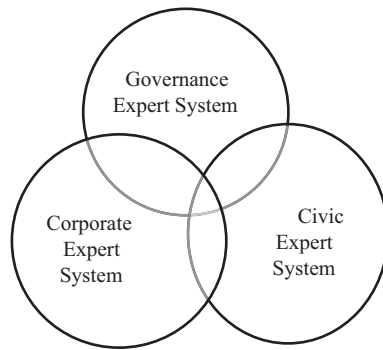
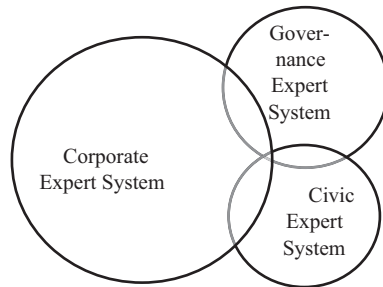**Fig. 1.** The three expert systems bounding public relations practice.

Fig. 2. Expert systems of public relations in the US.

much in common with the generic principles put forward in the 'Excellence' research. Other reflections by the researchers on elements of European practice also reiterate the normative implications of the 'Excellence Study' (van Ruler et al., 2004).

By extending overarching principles and local applications to Europe, significant differences are overlooked. Not adequately covered in the European model is the civic expert system with its own logic of participation. There is a vibrant and large civic public relations community in Europe (Gregory, 2012; Luoma-aho, 2005; Vos & Westerhoudt, 2008) that is not specifically referred to in the European model. Europeans see public relations as having a more comprehensive societal role and there is a different – more holistic, less situational – conceptualization than in the US of public or publics (Raupp, 2011). PR in the civic expert system is justified by and reproduces participation in society. As Bentele (2004, p. 488) puts it "public relations [is] not just an organizational activity, but a social phenomenon, that is a phenomenon which has societal functions and impacts on the society and its subsystems." This perspective is, for example, encapsulated in the German word for public relations, "öffentlichkeitsarbeit", meaning "public work," explained as "working in public, with the public and for the public" (Nessman, 2000).

The authors of the European Model were aware of the generic principles and specific applications, indeed Vercic, who was one of the originators of the principles, was also one of the researchers in the European project. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to assume that there was some cross-over in thinking. However, the search for a European model could have originated from a different locale: an indigenous historiography of European public relations, particularly concerning its original expert system and the institutional logic its growth is tied to. Unfortunately, the history of public relations in Europe is much less well documented than in the US. There are, because of issues with language and geography and the relative youth of the academy in many parts of Europe, problems with generating a comprehensive historiographical account. Indeed, there are several countries where histories of public relations are still being written (Falconi, 2010; Flodin, 2010), or where there is only a single narrative account. Even in the UK, host to the world's second largest professional body, there is still only one substantive account (L'Etang, 2004).

The status quo of European public relations can therefore be seen as dualistic. There is historically a strong reference toward to the civic expert system. However, the corporate expert system is disembedding into the civic expert system and the mode of corporate public relations is – just like in the US – lately seen to be vitally and equally important (Fig. 3).

3. The history of public relations in Asia-Pacific

The renaissance of Asia-Pacific as a dominant economic, cultural and political force now calls for the public relations academy to develop an Asian model of public relations (Curtin & Gaither, 2012). This paper takes a rather different approach to that in the US and Europe and seeks to avoid a search for overall principles and local applications. Instead, the authors propose that the development of an Asia-Pacific model should start with a meta-analysis of public relations histories written in or
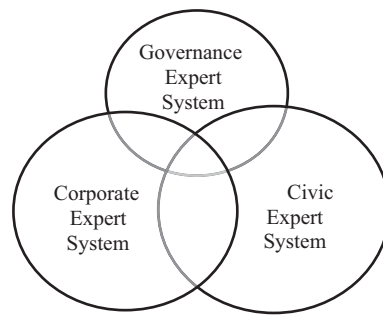
Fig. 3. Expert systems of public relations in Europe.

about Asian-Pacific countries. The evolutionary – as opposed to managerially strategic – dimension of public relations needs to be regarded just like the fact that organizations and expert systems are not just the agents, but also the results of communication processes (Wehmeier & Winkler, 2013). The common elements detected in a historiography–particularly related to the expert system in which PR originated and its institutional logics – can then inform the key conceptual components of an Asian model of public relations.

We identified 51 papers that establish partial or full historiographies in one or more Asian country. Practically all show that public relations developed first as part of post-colonial nation-building and later as a reaction by those nations to economic globalization.

3.1. Origins in nation-building

Quite unlike those of the US and Europe, the historiographies of public relations in Asia-Pacific and South Asia locate the origins of the profession at the emergence of the governance expert systems during nation building – either when hitherto separate peoples needed to be unified or when new nations gained independence from a larger prior entity.

Both were the case for India. Mahatma Ghandi, one of the forces behind a unified and newly independent subcontinent is also seen as the father of PR in India (Bardhan, 2003; Newsom & Carrell, 1994; Reddi, 1997; Singh, 2000). After Indian independence, the government became the earliest – and for a long time only – operator of public relations when it incorporated the information bureau that had been set up by the British. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting thus became the pioneer of public relations in post-independence India. It controlled information projects to unify "21 states, most formed along language lines, and its seven territories" and to contain disputes that were "centuries old, and involve deep-seated religious beliefs" (Newsom & Carrell, 1994, p. 184).

In China, public relations is mostly seen to have been created by the Chinese communist party to preserve the polity during fundamental socio-economical changes after the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1978 (Chen & Culbertson, 1992; Chen, 1994, 2004; He & Xie, 2009). Government administrations, like the municipal government of Tianjin (Chen & Culbertson, 1992), and state-owned enterprises, like the Guangzhou Baiyunshan Pharmaceutical Factory (He & Xie, 2009), started information campaigns to help the public cope with the transitions.

Meanwhile in Taiwan, the genesis of public relations is ascribed by historiographers to the Kuomintang party who in 1949 set out to develop an alternative polity to the communist mainland. Studies of PR in Taiwan show how the Taiwanese government established the first PR departments in the early 1950s in ministries and local administrations (Chang, 2004; Huang, 1994, 2000; Wu, 2004).

Nation-building and unification also generated public relations in Singapore, according to its few historiographers (Lim et al., 2005; Yeap, 1994). The new nation's main stakeholders were its fractured immigrant population so the first public relations department, founded when civilian rule was re-established 1947 after World War II, was tasked with nurturing the diverse population's loyalty. After Singapore gained self-governance in 1959, it developed countless public education campaigns to engender good citizenship and pro-social behavior.

The origins of public relations in Thailand are described as being introduced in conjunction with its current polity (Ekechai & Komolsevin, 1998, 2004; Ekechai, 1995; Tantivejakul & Manmin, 2011). As Thailand (while never colonized) changed from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy in 1932, the government recognized the necessity to keep its subjects informed and founded a Publicity Office, later renamed as a public relations department.

Historiographers also trace the origins of Japanese public relations back to its nation-building attempts in Manchuria where public relations was required for the Japanese-managed railroads (after 1923) and for ruling Manchukuo, the Japanese protectorate (after 1932). Meanwhile, the Japanese Cabinet Office was developing an information division in preparation of World War II (Ikari, Kenmochi, & Yamamura, 2012). Historiographers describe how after the war public relations was introduced to liberated Korea when the American General Headquarters needed a channel to announce their policies (Berkowitz & Lee, 2004; Jo & Kim, 2004; Kim, 2003; Rhee, 2002), just like they did in occupied Japan (Kelly, Masumoto, & Gibson, 2002) and the Philippines (Sarabia-Panol & Lorenzo-Molo, 2004; Sison, Sarabia-Panol, Lorenzo-Molo, & Villarico-Ronquillo, 2011). Public relations was introduced to Indonesia by the state oil company and the police office

Table 1
Components of a model of Asian public relations.

Agents: governments and administration	Agents: business enterprises
Structure: national polity	Structure: transnational economy
Institutional logic: power	Institutional logic: profitability
Material practice: public information	Material practice: situational dialog

(Ananto, 2004). Historians of public relations in Vietnam trace its origins to the political campaigns targeted at strengthening the new 'Democratic Republic of Vietnam' after 1945 and to government propaganda in the reunified 'Socialist Republic of Vietnam' after 1975 (Van, 2011).

3.2. Growth driven by the institutional logic of power

In all Asian-Pacific countries – albeit to varying degrees – industry and economy are traditionally strongly influenced by, if not part of, government and administration. Consequently, the growth and direction of public relations as an interlocutor has likewise been determined by the governance expert system. As pointed out elsewhere (Kent & Taylor, 1999), "in most Asian countries, government, rather than consumer publics will emerge as the key public". PR requires and reproduces the institutional logic of power. All historiographies of public relations in Asian-Pacific countries – except Japan (Kelly et al., 2002; Gregory & Halff, 2013) – show that governments and public administrations have either been the main agents of public relations or have created the structures in which public relations operates (Curtin & Gaither, 2012). Also, as described in the taxonomy developed by Sriramesh and Vercic (2009) shown in Table 1, the nature of media control, diffusion and access is distinct to Asian societies. Media remained more or less regulated in Asia-Pacific and India (Bardhan & Sriramesh, 2004; Newsom & Carrell, 1994, p. 187) and hence often became an integral part of public information activities. Lim et al. (2005) quote one public relations practitioner: "Local media tend to be more supportive and less aggressive [. . .] They are very nationalistic and they will try to support whatever you say in an article".

In polities as incomparable as India, China, Thailand and Singapore, the government therefore became the main public relations operator after the initial introduction of the craft during the birth of nations. The Indian public sector became the largest employer of public relations officers in the decades after independence (Sardana, 1999). "Public relations in India [. . .] went into semisocialism, and business was not the primary client" (Bardhan, 2003, p. 243). Prime Minister Indira Ghandi even expected public relations to raise the general morale (and hence productivity) of nationalized industries, like oil, gas and steel (Bardhan, 2003; Botan, 1992; Mehta, 1997; Newsom & Carrell, 1994; Singh, 2000).

In China, historiographers also attribute the growth of public relations to the need for its government to preserve 'harmony', in line with "The Decision [sic] of the CPC Central Committee on Improving its ability of to [sic] mobilize all positive factors on the broadest of scale and constantly enhance its ability of constructing a harmonious socialist society" (He & Xie, 2009, p. 5; Xue & Yu, 2009). Meanwhile, Taiwan was seen to undergo a 'dormant period' until the mid 1980s during which only the units of the authoritarian government practiced a limited form of public relations (Sha & Huang, 2004; Wu, 2012). It was Xinhua, the Chinese state news agency that set up China Global Public Relations Company, the first public relations agency in the mainland, in 1985 (Hung & Chen, 2004). Meanwhile in Hong Kong, public relations grew particularly in the public utility and government sectors (Cheng, 1999). The Chinese government was also seen to be driving the growth of its public relations sector by hosting the Asian Games, the China-France Culture Year, the Year of Russia in China, the 2008 Olympic Games and the 2010 World Expo (Chen & Culbertson, 1992; Tang, 2007).

Historiographers similarly attribute the further growth of public relations in Singapore, Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Taiwan to governments and government-linked organizations. Public relations in Malaysia grew because, according to its former prime minister, it could "play a crucial role in social engineering to bring about amity among the various groups in Malaysia" (Idid, 2004, p. 220). In Singapore, the "business of PR came under the Ministry of Culture" (Yeap, 1994, p. 373). It nudged the establishment of the Singaporean professional association of public relations and kept stakeholders in Western countries "informed of the health of the multinational corporations [. . .] operating in this city-state" (Lim et al., 2005, p.319). It asked the professional association in 1985 to "recommend specific government actions needed to enable the industry to attain growth targets" (IPRS, 1985).

Public relations in Indonesia expanded after 1962 when the government decided that all its offices should have an information department (Ananto, 2004). Thailand's government had the second-largest public relations budget (after the telecommunication industry) in the country, followed by other state agencies like the tourism and petroleum authorities. The Thai government even announced a national policy for the public relations industry in 1980 and a national public relations plan in 1988. (Ekechai & Komolsevin, 2004). In Korea of the 1960s and 1970s, the 'chaebols' (sprawling industry conglomerates with institutional ties to the authoritarian government) enjoyed special privileges in exchange for supporting the dominant agenda of national development. To counter the criticism and suspicions of these powerful links, the 'chaebols' developed 'hong-bo', public information, as a defence mechanism (Jo & Kim, 2004; Kim, 2003; Rhee, 2002; Sriramesh, Kim, & Takasaki, 1999).

The Philippines government created the 'Philippine Association' and the 'Business Writers Association of the Philippines' to nurture the public relations profession (Sarabia-Panol & Lorenzo-Molo, 2004).

3.3. Entrance of global public relations

The historiographies of public relations in an Asian-Pacific country (with the exception of Japan and Thailand) all describe a similar, but not simultaneous turning point: the opening of an indigenous market by its hitherto dominating governance expert system and the subsequent rapid entry of foreign corporations and of public relations originating in the corporate expert system and tied to its institutional logic of profitability. Industrial, financial, commercial and public relations conglomerates (for example WPP, Publicis, Interpublic, etc.) that already operated transnationally now accessed Asian-Pacific markets, at first turning them into their periphery while Western hubs like London, Paris and New York remained their centres (Sudhaman, 2013). Today, hubs like Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai have become centers in their own right, often serving corporate and financial networks in regional and global markets (UNCTAD, 2013).

These market liberalizations were not simply the disembedding of Western economies, but the outcome of political choices made at home in Asian-Pacific countries and often given iconic names, for example, Doi Moi (1986) in Vietnam, the end of martial law (1987) in Taiwan, democratization (1987) in Korea, liberalization (1990s) in India and the 'socialist market economy' (from the 1990s) in China. The entrance of corporations and corporate-style public relations did therefore not initially come at the expense of the governance expert system, but mostly at its behest and invitation. Japan and Thailand remained exceptions, because local businesses and agencies had already been practising corporate public relations earlier.

Unsurprisingly, given its status as an outpost of Western market liberalism, Hong Kong is said to have first made the corporate turn during the 1960s when global communication agencies entered its market (Chen, 2004). Similarly, historiographers describe how in Singapore of the late 1980s "there was a marked increase in the number of MNCs entering [. . .] Singapore's public relations industry burgeoned in tandem with a competitive economy" (Lim et al., 2005, p. 319). India saw the "re-entry of several multinational apparatuses in the early 1990" and a "'new school' of public relations (more akin to the western paradigm) started gaining momentum" (Bardhan, 2003, p. 238). Global corporations and their agencies entered the Indian market (Bardhan & Sriramesh, 2004) and together led to "unprecedented growth, consolidation and globalisation for the PR industry in India" (MSLGroup India, 2012).

The first global communication agency to enter mainland China was Hill & Knowlton in 1991 (Hung & Chen, 2004; Tang, 2007). Many other global agencies handling corporate foreign accounts followed from 1992 (He & Xie, 2009). This process gathered more speed when Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region in 1997 (Ritchey, 2000, p. 29) and when the People's Republic joined the World Trade Organization in 2001. Western corporations entered the newly opened Chinese market and set up public relations departments "to handle communication with this alien culture" (Hung & Chen, 2004, p. 31; Liu, 2005). In Taiwan – undergoing a deregulation of its media (Huang, 2000; Wu, 2012) – global agencies entered as local joint ventures (Sha & Huang, 2004). Meanwhile in Korea "multinational companies were trying to enter the [. . .] market. Consequently, the need for and interest in public relations grew extensively, and public relations firms flourished" (Rhee, 2002, p. 161). Equally in Vietnam, the surge of multinational corporations entering the market after 1986 is said to have introduced corporate public relations (Van, 2011).

The periodization outlined above provides us with a historical platform from which to analyze the modern practice of public relations in Asia-Pacific. This opens a perspective that is rather different from the overarching principles and local applications lens preferred by western scholarship and as exemplified in both the US and European models. It is this proposition that the authors now explore.

4. Discussion: toward a model of Asian public relations

When taking a historic perspective, the current state of public relations in Asian-Pacific countries is seen to be falsely described as a catching up with the 'West' on the teleological course of public relations history. The 'catching-up' version of events leads to numerous phenomena of public relations in Asia-Pacific being misinterpreted as anomalies, contradictions or 'delays', mostly when PR is not reproducing the institutional logic of the corporate expert system, but the logic of power linked to the governance expert system. Liu (2005, pp. 88–89) for example, detects an anomaly when her Chinese interviewees say that product PR is pivotal, but conversely "if we [. . .] have only one customer (in China) it is [. . .] government". Trade publications regularly advise corporations to maintain Asian government relations, but frame them as transitory anomalies on the way to mature Asian markets (Li, 2013; Chen, 2004, p 402). Public relations in Singapore is erroneously described as delayed and "not developed as much as one would have expected" (Lim et al., 2005, p. 315). Corporate professionals in India are warned about the chasm between them on the one hand and the 'cultural psyche' (Bardhan, 2003, p. 239; Bardhan & Sriramesh, 2004) on the other.

However, there is no such delay and Asian-Pacific practices are not anomalies. They are a product of a unique history and have their own characteristics. By looking at the historiographies of public relations in Asian-Pacific countries it can be discovered that no universal, let alone a teleological development of public relations exists. Admittedly, the emphasis that Asia-Pacific public relations historiographies place on government and administration might (at least in part) also reflect the context in which their authors are currently operating. In nations with a dominant governance expert system, there might be a tendency to ascribe many aspects of history to it in hindsight. Nevertheless we contend that public relations in Asia-Pacific today is characterized by a duality. Public relations requires and reproduces two institutional logics: one originating in the national governance expert system which disembeds into most parts of society, the other originating in the global corporate expert system which disembeds into the Asian nation-state (Fig. 4).
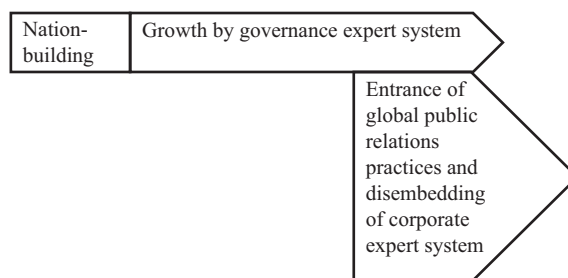
Fig. 4. Periodization of Asian–Pacific public relations.

Fig. 5. Expert systems of public relations in Asia.

They are coterminous and often competing, but this only appears anomalous when analyzed with an epistemology of generic principles. A current model that would help to explain more of the characteristics of public relations in Asian-Pacific countries should therefore capture this fundamental duality. It should firstly extend across both the governance as well as the corporate expert systems as two equally dominant spheres (see Fig. 5).

Future research should secondly specify the structures, agents and institutional logics contained in both expert systems. We propose that in the governance expert system, the main agents of public relations are government and administration, its structure is the national polity, its institutional logic is power and its material practice is public information. At the same time, the main agents of public relations in the corporate expert system are business enterprises, its structure is the transnational economy, its institutional logic is profitability and its material practice is situational dialog.

Thirdly, analysis of public relations in Asian-Pacific countries should conceptualize the role that public relations plays in dynamically connecting these expert systems and enabling them to adapt to each other and to avoid the many possible conflicts (both material as well as symbolic) caused by the mutual disembedding of their institutional logics in globalized Asian societies: On the one hand, the traditional powers and structures of the state are reproduced in business. On the other hand, and at the behest of government, foreign corporations are reproducing their own institutional logic in Asian societies. They are subject to restraints imposed by the governance expert system, which is in turn restrained by a global corporatist logic.

Lastly, but fundamentally, future research around an Asian-Pacific model of PR should benefit from the Asian intellectual territories around globalization and communication, each with its own epistemology, methodology and vocabulary. As much as expert systems and institutional logics conceptually underpin this exploratory paper, they too remain vulnerable to the charge of being universalist if applied indiscriminately. Alternative, Asian discourses have been identified for the theorizing on globalization (Gunaratne, 2009a, 2009b), as well as on communication (Dissanayake, 2009b) that help to "avoid the temptation of regarding the East as monolithic. The East consists of different countries with their own brand of cultures" (Dissanayake, 2009b, p. 457).

5. Outlook: globalization and public relations models

The foregoing discussion begs the question "what next for public relations practice and scholarship around the world?" Could it be that the corporate expert system in Asia-Pacific grows and gradually dominates both the civic and governance expert systems as it has in the West? Kent (2011, p. 557) criticizes this as the 'dysfunctional corporate worldview' in which there is a desire "by organizations to be able to speak as citizens and yet remain distinct from the consequences of their speech and symbolic actions". Critical scholars like Dutta (2012); (Pal & Dutta, 2008) call for alternative theorizing of public

relations to be based on the epistemologies of the 'global South'. Only indigenous representations of public relations can, he writes, halt the disembedding of global corporate practices and their dominance over other expert systems.

The corporate expert system (including its public relations resources) has to be recognized as well as the lauding of the western corporate model of practice in both the practitioner and academic literature. But Asian-Pacific research that captures a dynamic disembedding of the expert systems will better reflect current models of globalization that also call for hybrid phenomena to be sufficiently described (Nash, 2001). Globalization can no longer be understood as a linear development, nor as a structure simply overlaying the local. As proposed by Sassen (2006, p. 61), any complete understanding of globalization should therefore entail "a partial rejection of the notion that local scales are inevitably part of nested hierarchies of scale running from the local to the regional, the national and the international. Localities or local practices can constitute multiscalar systems, operating across scales and not merely scaling upward because of new communication capabilities." As Ghemawat's empirical study (2007) confirms, the globalizing process is not linear and at most deserves to be called semi-globalization. The increase in some – but not all – cross-border interactions makes differences not less important, but instead more vivid. Precisely because their markets are not fully corporatized (but retain, among other things, alternative institutional logics), Asia-Pacific countries are constantly exposed to the fact that, as Castells (1998, p. 9) describes, "globalization proceeds selectively, including and excluding segments of economies".

The duality, components and connections which form an Asia-Pacific model of public relations described above are necessary, but not yet sufficient for theorizing on public relations in Asia. They can't be deterritorially generic either, since they are, in turn, impacted by national infrastructures, cultures and media systems, just like the US-inspired models. The development of public relations models (in Asia-Pacific or elsewhere) will require thorough research of individual nations anchored in the relevant, rather than universalist intellectual and epistemological territories, generating indigenous data with a methodology that secures significant endorsement by the specific practitioner populations involved. The authors of this paper have attempted to lay the foundations for a different discussion on Asia-Pacific public relations: one where comparisons with western models do not set the backcloth, but where new thinking can be informed and inspired by the historiographic commonalities of public relations in the Asia-Pacific region outlined here.

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