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The effects of cultural variance on communication of the SARS crisis

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THE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL VARIANCE
ON COMMUNICATION OF THE SARS CRISIS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

By

Joongho Shin

August 2004

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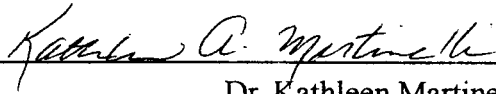
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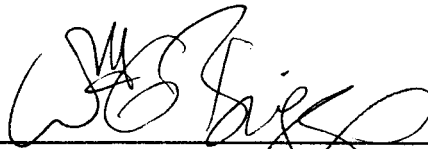
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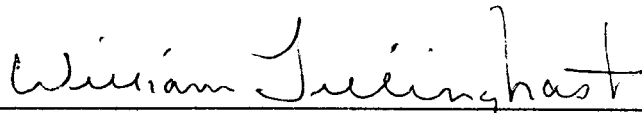
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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL VARIANCE ON COMMUNICATION OF THE SARS CRISIS

by Joongho Shin

This thesis was a content analysis of the four Asian newspapers from March 12, 2003, to May 17, 2003, during the SARS crisis. Newspapers included Singapore's *The Straits Times*, Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, Taiwan's *The China Post*, and South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo*.

This study measured whether the four Asian newspapers portrayed conflict or harmony between the powerful and powerless groups, and compared these with Hofstede's (2001) power distance and uncertainty avoidance index scores of the four Asian nations to illustrate how cultural differences affected media coverage during the SARS crisis.

This study found that there was a tendency to report negative or positive stories on the powerful and the powerless among the four Asian newspapers according to the extent of power distance and uncertainty avoidance dimension. These findings supported the significant relationship between cultural variables and crisis communication.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) was the first severe and readily infectious new disease to emerge in the 21st century. First appearing in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong in November 2002, SARS spread around the world along international air travel routes and soon became a global dilemma. This mysterious, fatal disease hit hardest in densely populated areas and transportation hubs. The World Health Organization (WHO) regarded every country with an international airport, or bordering on an area that had had local transmission such as Hong Kong, Vietnam, Singapore as being potentially at risk of a deadly outbreak.

SARS illustrated the wide-ranging impacts that a contagious disease can have on economic, social, and political sectors, and presented a major challenge to public health organizations worldwide. Although the number of SARS cases in Asia was initially small, the disease soon spread to North America and Europe. More than 8,000 people worldwide became sick and almost 800 people died (WHO, 2003).

Western countries, such as the United States, were able to detect and isolate SARS cases rather quickly, resulting in a relatively small number of casualties. WHO (2003) reported that “The comparatively mild and well-contained SARS situation in countries such as the U.S.A is [in part due to] the high level of nationwide planning and preparedness that followed the deliberate distribution of anthrax-tainted mail in the U.S. postal system in October 2001” (p. 6). In contrast, the Asian countries remained hardest hit by the crisis, and sustained over 93% of the deaths, 739 of the global total of 770 deaths cases by June 3, 2003 (WHO, 2003). However, within Asia itself, SARS impacted

the four countries of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea in quite different ways.

First of all, the extent of the damage was different among the four Asian nations. Although both Singapore and Hong Kong were among the first nations to be hit by SARS, Hong Kong recorded 1,746 SARS cases compared to 206 cases in Singapore. Taiwan, which was not hit by SARS until the middle of April, 2003, finally reported more than 650 cases. In contrast, in South Korea, there were no officially known SARS cases or deaths.

Because SARS was a public health crisis, good communications should have been a key part of each country's ability to cope with the threat. In a crisis situation, organizations need to communicate accurate, complete information as quickly as possible to relieve people's anxiety. Each of the four Asian nations tried to communicate effectively to help control the SARS crisis; but each nation used different communication strategies to do so. Thus, this study investigated how these four Asian nations reacted differently to the SARS crisis. More specifically, it tried to discover the cultural factors that led to key differences in communication among the four nations.

Although the cultures of all these nations are rooted in Confucian traditions, it seemed that there were cultural differences in crisis communication among the Asian countries. This discovery is not entirely without precedent; after all, various Asian countries experienced serious financial crises during the 1990s, and devised different solutions and strategies to overcome them, reflecting an underlying cultural diversity at work. Similarly, cultural diversity is expected to affect different countries' responses to

the SARS crisis. Thus, this study explored the effects of culture on crisis communications, using Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions as the factors that could influence interpersonal and organizational communication in a society. In particular, Hofstede's two cultural dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance have been identified as the most applicable variables for studying cultural effects on crisis communication.

The power distance index (PDI) indicates the extent to which more powerful members can determine the behaviors of less powerful members and the extent to which less powerful members can determine their own behavior. The uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) indicates the extent to which people are threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and attempt to avoid these situations (Hofstede, 2001). According to Hofstede's index scores, Singapore scored 74, Hong Kong 68, South Korea 60, and Taiwan 58; all were included in high power distance nations. Regarding uncertainty avoidance, Singapore scored 8 and Hong Kong 29, which were considered to be low uncertainty avoidance nations, whereas Taiwan and South Korea scored 69 and 85, respectively, and were included in high uncertainty avoidance nations (Table 3).

Considering these two index scores, the researcher examined newspaper coverage of SARS in the four Asian nations. During the SARS crisis, the four Asian nations produced an extraordinary volume of news coverage about SARS. The media were a key tool used by various groups to advance their agendas in responding to the crisis. In any crisis, access to the media is critical, and different groups compete for voice and media presence.

Therefore, the method used in this study was a content analysis of news coverage in each Asian nation. Content analysis was used because this method is “a tool for observing and analyzing the overt communication behavior of selected communicators” (Budd, Thorp, & Donohew, 1967, p. 2). In other words, the content analysis method enabled the researcher to analyze how the four Asian nations communicated differently during the SARS crisis.

The key variable in this study was the tone of the coverage in each paper. Tone is important in a crisis because it points toward the allocation of blame. This study coded the tone of coverage to explore criticism or praise directed at six groups in the SARS crisis. These six groups were the Government, Public Health Authorities, the World Health Organization, Health Care Workers, Citizens, and Business Communities in the four Asian nations. Specifically, this study divided these six groups into two groups, namely “the powerful” and “the powerless.” In the SARS crisis, the powerless groups were Health Care Workers, Citizens, and Business Communities in the four Asian nations, and were under the control of powerful groups. The powerful groups were the Government, Public Health Authorities, and the World Health Organization, which both ordered and supported the powerless in their attempt to escape the crisis as soon as possible. The powerless responded to the powerful, showing cooperation with or resistance against the powerful in overcoming the crisis situation. This study measured whether the four Asian newspapers portrayed conflict or harmony between the powerful and powerless groups, and compared these with the two index scores of the four Asian nations to illustrate how cultural differences affected media coverage.

The sample selected included one leading daily newspaper from each of the four East Asian nations. Newspapers included Singapore's *The Straits Times*, Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, Taiwan's *The China Post*, and South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo*. The researcher analyzed these four papers to examine how public responses to the SARS crises differed among the four nations. The researcher examined a composite two-week sample from the time period March 12, 2003, the date WHO issued a global alert about SARS cases through May 17, 2003, the date the first global consultation on SARS epidemiology concluded its work (WHO, 2003). The sample dates were randomly chosen.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Crisis

SARS was the first severe and readily infectious new disease to emerge in the 21st century. By the end of July 2003, 8,098 people were known to be infected with the SARS virus in 28 countries, of when at least 774 died (World Health Organization, 2003). When the crisis hit, most cases of SARS involved health care workers, family members and anyone else in close proximity with a SARS victim. Because SARS appeared to spread primarily through close person-to-person contact, public panic was widespread and social stability was jeopardized in some of the hardest hit areas. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), in Singapore and Taiwan, there were reports of people shunning neighbors who were suspected of being SARS-infected (2003). In China, there were reports of witch-hunts for suspected SARS infected people, and neighborhood watches were mounted in Beijing and Taipei, and even in Hong Kong and Singapore (CSIS, 2003). These SARS-hit areas showed a climate of suspicion and fear. In fact, there was such discrimination against health care workers because of the infection issue in Singapore that the public health authorities had to launch an official campaign to encourage its citizens to acknowledge health care workers' contributions. Similarly, Taiwan and Hong Kong have officially honored health workers who died because of SARS.

In addition, SARS affected people's confidence to consume, invest, trade, service, and interact. Domestic demand and consumption, and consequently investments and employment, especially in the services sector, plunged in the SARS-hit areas. For

example, consumers in Hong Kong and Taiwan refused to venture out to shops or restaurants in order to avoid face-to-face contact and densely populated places, choking the economy. Also, after the World Health Organization (WHO) issued the emergency travel advisory as a global alert to international travelers, thousands of people stopped traveling, crippling the tourism industry in many Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, and China. According to WHO (2003), economists and market analysts were simultaneously scrambling to calculate the present and future costs, initially estimated at U.S. \$30 billion in the Far East alone.

Moreover, although the numbers of SARS cases was initially small, a significant percentage of patients (25 of 26 hospital staff in Hanoi, and 24 of 39 hospital staff in Hong Kong) rapidly progressed to respiratory failure, requiring intensive care and causing some deaths in previously healthy persons. In time, the disease moved out of its initial focus in Asia and spread to North American and Europe. According to the WHO (2003), 8,098 people worldwide became sick with SARS during the course of this outbreak (November 2002 – July 2003). Of those people who were ill, 774 died. In particular, seven Asian countries—mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia—were among the top ten on the list. Mainland China and Hong Kong accounted for 84% of all 774 deaths. In western countries, there were few numbers of cases officially known except in Canada. Toronto, a city with a metropolitan area of more than four million, was the first North American city hit hard by the SARS virus, likely imported by travelers from Asia (of 251 people who were ill in Canada, 43 died). The United States recorded 29 SARS cases but no deaths. Each of the

European countries such as Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, and France showed fewer than 10 SARS cases, and among these cases, only one person died in France. In Africa, only South Africa recorded one death from one SARS case.

WHO's most recent analysis estimates overall case fatality in the range of 14 to 15% (2003). In persons over the age of 65, the case fatality ratio could exceed 50%, and in those in their 20s fatalities could be as low as 4 %. But even this is very high compared to other infectious diseases including avian influenza, Nipah virus, Hendra virus, and Hanta virus. The WHO report (2003) noted that "SARS needs to be regarded as a particularly serious threat for several reasons. The disease has no vaccine and no treatment, forcing health authorities to resort to control tools dating back to the earliest days of empirical microbiology: isolation and quarantine" (p. 2).

Chronology of the SARS crisis

The first cases of SARS are now known to have emerged in mid-November 2002 in the Guangdong Province of China. It seemed that other SARS cases followed but there were no reports permitted in the Chinese press despite growing number of deaths. As a result, the first official report described an outbreak of atypical pneumonia, said to have affected 305 persons and caused 5 deaths, and was received by the WHO on February 11, 2003.

According to the WHO report (2003), SARS was carried out of Guangdong Province on February 21, 2003, by an infected medical doctor, traveling to Hong Kong, who had treated patients in his home town. He brought the virus to the ninth floor of a four-star hotel in Hong Kong. Days later, guests and visitors who stayed on same floor as

the doctor had caused outbreaks of cases in the hospital systems of Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Singapore.

SARS was also identified in Vietnam on February 28, when Dr. Carlo Urbani, an epidemiologist from the World Health Organization (WHO)'s office in Hanoi, examined a patient with a severe form of pneumonia with no known cause (WHO, 2003). By March 11, at least 20 hospital workers in Hanoi's private French Hospital, and 23 at a hospital in Hong Kong, were ill with a similar acute respiratory syndrome.

SARS occurred at a time of heightened surveillance for atypical respiratory disease. Starting on February 11, the WHO office in Beijing reinforced its staff with two epidemiologists, who were working with the government of China to learn more about the outbreak of atypical pneumonia in Guangdong. Surveillance was further increased when a 33-year-old man who had traveled with his family to Fujian Province in China died of unknown causes in Hong Kong on February 17. The next day, Hong Kong authorities announced that avian influenza A (H5N1) virus, the cause of "bird flu," had been isolated in both the man and his nine-year-old hospitalized son. In 1998, Hong Kong experienced a severe outbreak of bird flu which killed several people and only subsided after over 1.3 million chickens were slaughtered. Another member of the family, an eight-year-old daughter, died while in Fujian and was buried there (WHO, 2003).

On March 12, after an assessment of the situation in Asia by WHO teams in Hanoi, Hong Kong, and Beijing, a global alert was issued about cases of severe atypical pneumonia with unknown etiology that appeared to place health workers at high risk.

The disease began spreading around the world along international air travel routes, as guests from the hotel flew home to Toronto and elsewhere, and as medical doctors who had treated the earliest cases in Vietnam and Singapore traveled internationally for medical or other reasons (WHO, 2003).

By March 15, 2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) had received reports of more than 150 cases of a new disease, which it named *Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome* (SARS). During the last week of April, 2003, the outbreaks in Hanoi, Hong Kong, and Singapore showed some signs of peaking. However, the first cases in new areas continued to be reported from several countries such as South Africa, India and New Zealand. WHO (2003) reported that “Also of concern is a rapidly growing outbreak in Taiwan, China with a cumulative total, on 18 May, of 344 cases, including many in hospital staff, and 40 deaths” (p. 2). WHO thus decided, on March, 15, to issue a rare emergency travel advisory as a global alert to international travelers, health care professionals, and health authorities.

The global alert achieved its purpose. After the recommendations, all countries with imported cases, with the exception of provinces in China, were able, through prompt detection of cases, immediate isolation, strict infection control, and vigorous contact tracing, to either prevent further transmission or keep the number of additional cases very low.

During the last week of April, the outbreaks in Hanoi, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Toronto showed some signs of peaking. On April 28, Vietnam became the first country to stop local transmission of SARS. Finally, the last case of SARS worldwide

was reported in China with onset of illness on June 25, 2003. On July 5, 2003, WHO announced that the last person-to-person chain of transmission had been broken. This new disease had been successfully contained in less than four months.

SARS crisis in the four Asian nations

As already mentioned, even though SARS spread all over the world, seven Asian countries' cumulative numbers of SARS cases were among the top ten on the WHO list. Comparatively, the SARS cases in western countries such as United States, Germany, and United Kingdom were quickly detected and isolated, so that further transmission was either avoided entirely or kept to a very small number of cases.

However, the anatomy of the SARS crisis varied among Asian countries. Among these nations, Singapore was much more successful at suppressing SARS than Hong Kong, even though both Hong Kong and Singapore were among the first nations to be hit by the disease. The first case of SARS in Singapore was detected on March 14, 2003; the country was declared SARS-free on May 31, 2003. Over two hundred cases of SARS were reported in Singapore and 31 people died; the country imposed some of the world's most stringent measures to contain the outbreak. The government's enforcement of public health policies was strict; at one point, the government threatened to jail people who broke their quarantine. People who left their homes in violation of a quarantine order were subject to fines of around \$5,600, or six months in jail. Even military forces were deployed to assist in contact tracing and to enforce quarantines that halted the normal lives of thousands of people. But as already mentioned, SARS needed the traditional control tools such as isolation and quarantine because of the lack of vaccine

and treatment. The strict measures in Singapore provided a good example to other SARS infected nations. Medical officials praised Singapore's prompt and open reporting of cases. WHO news quoted the Executive Director for Communicable Diseases at WHO, Dr. David Heymann, as saying that Singapore's handling of its SARS break "is an inspiring victory that should make all of us optimistic that SARS can be contained everywhere" (WHO, 2003).

Comparatively, the SARS situation in Hong Kong was different. Hong Kong was the first place to be directly impacted by the SARS infection from China. The Guangdong Province, where SARS appeared first, is only two hours from Hong Kong by car. Many people commute back and forth to work between China and Hong Kong, thus SARS could spread rapidly to Hong Kong. In addition, the first probable case was reported in Hong Kong with onset of illness on February 15, 2003, but Hong Kong issued the first alert for SARS on March 13, 2003. Hong Kong became the initial hot zone of SARS, characterized by rapid increases in the number of cases. In late March, Hong Kong suffered a major setback when a large cluster, eventually numbering more than 300, of almost simultaneous new cases was traced to a single building in the Amoy Gardens housing estate. As a result, over 1,500 cases of SARS were reported in Hong Kong and over 250 people died (WHO, 2003). Finally, on June 23, 2003, the WHO removed Hong Kong from its lists of areas with local transmission of SARS.

Unlike Hong Kong, SARS did not spread to Taiwan until the middle of April 2003. Taiwan was proud of successfully preventing SARS; with triple zero-rates such as zero infection, zero community infection, and zero deaths; as of the beginning of April, it

seemed to be the safest place in East Asia. Unfortunately, there was a serious SARS outbreak in Taipei's Hoping Hospital on April 24, and SARS was immediately spread by people and patients who had been in the hospital. Over 650 cases of SARS were reported in Taiwan and 81 people died. Taiwan was at last taken off the WHO's list of areas affected by SARS on July 5, 2003.

Because most of the SARS patients were from Asia, many people thought South Korea could never escape the impact of SARS. South Korea is located next to mainland China, which reported 5,325 cases and 327 deaths on May 29, 2003 (WHO, 2003). Despite the worries, however, there have been only 3 probable cases of SARS in South Korea. There have been no officially reported cases or deaths.

In a crisis situation, the communication process is severely tested when a high degree of uncertainty exists. Communication is an exchange of information, and its purpose is to establish a common understanding or meaning between people. When a crisis happens, verifiable information about what is happening or has happened may be lacking (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, & Agee, 2000). This causes people to more actively seek information in order to satisfy the human desire for closure. Wilcox, et al. (2000) stated that "a crisis situation puts a great deal of pressure on organization to respond with accurate, complete information as quickly as possible" (p. 180). In the SARS crisis, the open and prompt reporting of the cases was also essential to control the crisis situation. Knowing this, how did each Asian nation communicate about the SARS crisis in order to settle and solve the difficult situation?

SARS crisis communication in the four Asian nations

When the country was hard hit by the crisis, Singapore reinforced the importance of close cooperation between government agencies and the public, as well as the need for timely, clear and open communications when dealing with the public. For example, the joint Health and Education ministries decided to close nearly all the schools on March 25, 2003, not only because it was advisable on medical grounds, but also because principals and general practitioners reported that parents continued to be concerned about the risk to their children in schools. As previously mentioned, the strategy of isolation and containment followed by various legislative and enforcement measures created the feeling that Government was on top on the SARS situation, infusing the public with confidence and reducing their fear. *The Straits Times* (2003) reported that Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's efforts including penning an open letter to Singaporeans urging cooperation and explaining why tough action was necessary, which earned him the label the 'Rudy Giuliani of SARS' from American observers. Even Fung (2003) stated that "Hong Kong has much to learn from tiny Singapore about crisis communication management."

Hong Kong has been a part of China since July 1997, but it still has its own government management system. Consequently, Hong Kong's government developed its own crisis management strategy to deal with SARS. But when the SARS crisis hit, the information from the government did not satisfy the curiosity of the media. The SARS Expert Committee (2003) reported that "A standardized format for media briefings led by the Director of Health did not begin until 19 April" (p. 143). Some journalists also complained about the selective dissemination of information by Health Administration,

and about insufficient direct communication from the hospitals to media rather than Health Administration head office. As a result, communication with the public through media in the early stages of the outbreak was not very satisfactory. Thereafter, the Department of Health made efforts to make information and advice available to the public through a variety of channels such as a highly informative website. In addition, to communicate with health care workers, the Health Administration made daily “Battling SARS Update” bulletins available on the Health Administration intranet for access by hospital staff starting at the end of March, but the level of staff anxiety suggested that more needed to be done. The SARS Expert Committee’s report (2003) stated that the “mechanism for disseminating information and advice to staff do not appear to have kept pace with the rapid development of the epidemic. Over-reliance on posting information on the intranet may exclude some groups of staff” (p. 146).

In Taiwan, initial communications by hospital authorities were flawed. The president of Heping Hospital may have already known that SARS was spreading within the hospital, but he did not report it to the government or the disease control center at first. He tried to cover up the reality that the hospital was not able to successfully prevent the virus, until it was out of control and spreading out of the hospital. Taipei’s city government decided to close the entire hospital once it learned that SARS was spreading. But it was too late to trace all those people or patients potentially carrying the virus out of the hospital. On April 24, Heping Hospital was sealed off to contain the outbreak, and the city government sacked the hospital’s president. The president and at least one other doctor were accused of misdiagnosing SARS cases and not reporting infection to the

government. In addition, because Taiwan is not a member of WHO, it was not able to have full prevention and help from WHO. Taiwan was not only isolated in political position, but also stuck with the SARS crisis situation.

As people stopped over or visited from SARS-affected countries like China and Hong Kong, the fear of SARS started to take hold in South Korea. At the first time, when forty SARS cases were suspected WHO criticized the way that South Korean health organizations were diagnosing SARS cases. South Korea tightened protective health measures such as mandatory detention of suspected SARS patients and instituted mobile SARS detection at its main international airport at Incheon. However, even though there were no official patients in South Korea, many journalists complained about the selective dissemination of information by the Department of Health. Even reporters of *Chosun Ilbo* were denied admission to the National Institute of Health (NIH). In addition, the government also faced some criticism from medical experts over what they regarded as overly lax standards by which authorities declared SARS patients. The situation raised conflicts among public health authorities, hospitals, and the general public. Most hospitals were reluctant to handle the emergency situation, and even the people who lived near the authorized Seoul Metropolitan Dongbu Hospital demonstrated against the NIH's decision to appoint the hospital as the primary care facility for SARS.

In sum, among the four Asian nations each Asian nation communicated somewhat differently about the SARS crisis in order to settle and solve the situation. Although the governments or public health authorities of all the four Asian nations gave their voices to order or support from citizens or health care workers, Singapore

cooperated and communicated with the public well, whereas Hong Kong did not communicate satisfactorily with them. The interrupted communications between the government and hospitals in Taiwan caused the virus to spread out of the hospital and out of control, in addition to creating conflict with WHO. In South Korea, which recorded no official patients, the government was criticized by various groups whenever executing its policy.

Why did the various groups among the four Asian nations react differently to the same crisis? Why did the public of each country react differently to the response of its government? More specifically, what factors caused the differences in communication among the four Asian nations during the SARS crisis?

Culture and Crisis Communication in Asia

Culture in Asia

The cultures of Asian countries are rooted in the teachings of Confucius. In a Confucian society, culture emphasizes harmony and individual responsibility to groups. Kim and Markus (1999) stated that Asian people are “taught to be true to their traditions and to be responsive to standards of proper behavior without emphasizing a private self that is separate from the social context” (p. 786). In other words, because people are afraid of being separated or disconnected from the group, following norms is a core cultural goal that fosters group harmony and follows the collectivistic cultural tradition (Kim & Markus, 1999).

For example, according to Kim (2003), “challenging traditions and breaking the rules among social members have been considered inappropriate communication

behaviors” in Korea (p. 213). Taiwan, a country with a majority of ethnic Chinese, has similar social norms. In Taiwan, face is vital, and in order to save the face of others, the Taiwanese rarely express their emotions or speak frankly. Smiles and politeness all-round are the norm. Gift-giving, flattery, self-deprecation, and flowery rhetoric are an everyday part of Taiwanese interactions. As well as saving face, this rigmarole creates ‘*Guanxi*’, a relationship of two-way obligations which allows participants to ask the most outrageous favors of one another. ‘*Guanxi*’ literally meaning “relationships,” stands for any type of relationship. In the Chinese business world, however, it is also understood as the network of relationships among various parties that cooperate together and support one another. The Chinese businessmen mentality is very much one of “You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.” In essence, this boils down to exchanging favors, which are expected to be done regularly and voluntarily. Therefore, it is an important concept to understand if one is to function effectively in Chinese society. Similarly, the cultures of Hong Kong and Singapore are also rooted in the long tradition of Chinese culture. However, although cultural similarities exist across Asia, substantial cultural differences are nevertheless present in crisis communication among the Asian countries.

Culture and crisis communication in Asia

Some observe that crisis communication in Asia has matured over the past 20 years (Fienberg, 1999). Many organizations in Asia are now demonstrating that they have benefited from the difficult lessons of the past. Today, more people who hold power are inclined to involve communications consultants and public relations officers in the early stages of crisis. Even privately held concerns are beginning to incorporate crisis

communications planning into their restructuring processes. Still, many observers view Asian countries as being generally not well-prepared for crisis. Asian businesses were described as being complacent in crisis communication and displaying a false sense of security because of their own cultural values. For example, the cultural values Asian countries share include communitarianism and a neutral orientation. Prud'homme (1998) stated that these Asian values “translate into a need for maintaining harmony, controlling emotions and avoiding losing face” (p. 27). Therefore, problems such as financial losses are often hidden, until the crisis situation explodes. Retired U.S. diplomat David Hitchcock (1998) claimed bluntly about the Asian financial crisis, “Asia’s crisis is not only economic, but cultural” (p. 19).

Before the 1997-98 financial crisis in Asia, investment funds and analysts predicted only the brightest prospects for the global economy, especially for the nations of Asia. Many articles attributed the region’s economic success to the unique cultural values of that region. Hofstede and Bond (1998) stated that “not only was the success of the Five Dragons (Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan) unpredicted, but even after the fact economists have no explanations of why these particular countries were so successful” (p. 6). Hofstede and Bond (1998) suggested two reasons for the economic rise of Asian countries. “First, the quality of management depends on the qualities of the people to be managed; second the quality-of-management explanation begs the question of how an entire nation can collectively produce better management than another nation” (Hofstede & Bond, 1988, p. 6). Ironically, today, some analysts point to those same cultural values to explain reactions to the current financial crisis.

However, large cultural differences exist not only between the Western world and Asia, but also within Asia itself. Prud'homme (1998) stated that “cultural similarities resulted in the crisis being felt similarly all over Asia, but the differences enabled some nations to deal with it more successfully than others” (p. 27). The cultural diversity is causing each country to experience other crises and devise different solutions in crisis situations. In other words, cultural factors can help to explain why some Asian nations were more successful than others in dealing with the economic crisis.

For example, the financial crisis in South Korea seems to be linked to the country's high internal control orientation. The Korean approach is based on a belief in its own strength, marked by attempts to dominate markets, and boundless ambition, which leads to taking enormous risks (Prud'homme, 1998). The financial crisis seems to be the consequence of the cultural inner control orientation that distinguishes South Korea from the rest of Asia. On the contrary, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan have emerged as relatively the best survivors of the financial crisis. Prud'homme (1998) stated that Hong Kong and Singapore have reasonably stable and robust systems because they “integrate Western values with Asian values” (p. 28).

Thus, as previously mentioned, although the Asian countries are rooted in the teachings of Confucius and this cultural similarity resulted in the crisis being felt similarly all over Asia, the cultural diversity among Asian nations caused each country to experience crises uniquely and to devise different solutions in economic crisis situations. If the cultural variety affected each country's different communication in the crisis situation, what were the specific cultural elements that were at work?

Culture

Defining culture

There are numerous definitions of culture in specific areas. It is said that there are more than 160 scholars' definitions of culture (Negandhi, 1983). The term has a wide range of meanings, from the expression of culture to civilization (Mooij, 1997). Culture can be seen as including everything that is human made, or as a system of shared meanings, to name only two possible conceptualizations (Gudykunst, 1997). Hofstede (1984), who created one of the most popular definitions of culture, defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another. Culture in this sense, includes systems of values; and values are among the building blocks of culture" (p. 21). Nagakura (1999) explained the stabilizing of cultural patterns of Hofstede in the following way:

"Outside influence" imposes on "origins." "Origins form societal norms."
Finally, "societal norms" lead to "consequence" (p. 11).

Above all, Hofstede (1984) stated that the center of culture is a system of societal norms consisting of the value systems shared by major groups in population. The societal norms lead to the "development and pattern maintenance of institutions in society with a particular structure and way of functioning" (Hofstede, 1984, p. 22).

Cultural dimensions

To compare culture in different groups, many authors have speculated about the nature of the basic problems of societies that present distinct dimensions of culture (Hofstede, 2001). Aberle, Cohen, Davis, Levy, and Sutton (1950) listed nine functional prerequisites of a society (p. 29): (1) adequate physical and social relationships with the

environment; (2) role differentiation according to age, gender, and hierarchy; (3) communication; (4) shared knowledge, beliefs, and rules of logical thinking; (5) shared goals; (6) normative regulation of means toward these goals; (7) regulation of affective expression; (8) socialization of new members; and (9) effective control of disruptive forms of behavior. Mooji (1997) also suggested that dimensions of culture “can be used as an instrument to make comparisons between cultures and to cluster according to behavioral characteristics” (p. 65). Inkeles and Levinson (1969) found that there are three analytical issues necessary to discriminate between cultures: (1) Relations to authority; (2) Conception of self, including the individual’s concepts of masculinity and femininity; and (3) Primary dilemmas or conflicts and the ways of dealing with them, including the control of aggression and the expression or inhibition of affect. These analytical issues were very similar to the cultural dimensions found by Hofstede (2001).

Hofstede's dimensions of cultural variability

Hofstede (2001) analyzed 53 countries through factor analysis using the means and answer percentages of nations’ work-values questions as variables. The individuals surveyed were the employees of a large multinational corporation, IBM, with facilities located in the countries studied. The initial analysis was limited to 40 countries with more than 50 respondents each, and in a later stage, data from 10 more countries and three multicountry regions were added. As a result, a total of about 60,000 respondents from 53 countries answered questionnaires. In this study, Hofstede (2001) argued that societies differ along five major cultural dimensions, namely power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and long-

term versus short-term orientation.

Regarding public relations, Hofstede's variables affect the assumptions of interpersonal and organizational communication in a society. Although Hofstede did not apply his dimensions to public relations, their applicability is clearly established through a variety of studies that showed that the five dimensions offer insight into culture and public relations. To better understand the link between public relations and culture, Vasquez and Taylor (2000) explored the quantitative relationship of Hofstede's dimensions of culture to the four models of public relations. In a pilot test of American public relations practitioners, Vasquez and Taylor (2000) found that Hofstede's cultural dimensions showed that there are links between the American practice of public relations and societal culture. They stated that "First, there appears to be a strong relationship between power distance and the one-way models of public relations. Second, there appears to be a strong relationship between collectivism and femininity with the two-way models" (p. 443). In addition, among the five cultural dimensions, Taylor (2000) suggested that the power distance and uncertainty avoidance are the most applicable for studying public response to crisis (p. 280).

Power distance

Power distance points to the basic differences of inequality across cultures. Taylor and Kent (1999) stated that "power distance is based on human inequality" (p. 139). Power distance is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, p. 419). Hofstede also (1984) stated that "Power distance is a measure of the

interpersonal power or influence between B [boss] and S [subordinate] as perceived by the less powerful of the two” (p. 70-71). Thus, power distance dimensions examine communication attitudes and roles as perceived by the subordinate in organizational relationships (Taylor, 2000).

Hofstede (2001) used a formula to scale power distance from 0 (small power distance) to 100 (high power distance). The power distance measure was based on the subordinate’s perception of the superior. Survey questions asked whether the subordinate was afraid of the superior. They also asked about the subordinate’s perception of the boss as autocratic or persuasive/paternalistic, and about the subordinate’s preference for a type of supervisor who uses autocratic or persuasive/paternalistic management techniques. The power distance index was derived from country mean scores or percentages on those three survey questions. Although high and low power distance exists in all cultures, this study showed that one tends to dominate.

The power distance index scores by nation are as follows:

Table 1. *Power Distance Index (PDI) Scores for 18 Countries*

| Country | PDI | Country | PDI |
|-------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Guatemala | 95 | United States | 40 |
| Philippines | 94 | Canada | 39 |
| Mexico | 81 | Germany | 35 |
| Indonesia | 78 | Switzerland | 34 |
| India | 77 | Sweden | 31 |
| Singapore | 74 | Ireland | 28 |
| Hong Kong | 68 | New Zealand | 22 |
| South Korea | 60 | Israel | 13 |
| Taiwan | 58 | Austria | 11 |

Note. From *Culture’s consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (p. 87), by Geert H. Hofstede, 2001, CA: Sage Thousand Oaks. Copyright 2001 by Geert H. Hofstede. Reprinted with permission.

Mooij (1997) applied the power distance dimension to people’s acceptance of

hierarchy. In relatively high power distance nations, people tend to view a hierarchical structure as natural. Mooij (1997) also suggested that dependence is a key element in the relationships between people in a hierarchically structured society. In high power distance countries, networks of corporations can be seen as a sign of dependence. Conversely, in low power distance nations, authority has negative connotations and people stress equality in their rights and opportunities.

Sriramesh (1992) also studied power distance as a factor in Indian public relations and explained how the social power distance affects public relations. Sriramesh (1992) noted that there are internal and external dimensions to the impact of power distance on public relations. Because “managers dominate their subordinates within the organization as well as masses external to the organization,” according to Sriramesh (1992), “power distance and elitism affect the public relations practices of organizations directly” (p. 206). In high power distance countries like India, when senior executives in public relations company espouse elitist philosophies, they tend to believe that they know what is best for the society (Sriramesh, 1992). This has a direct effect on the extent of their communication to the public as well as the nature of such communication. Sriramesh (1992) stated that when executive seniors communicate, “they do so only to inform; not to engage in a dialogue or to learn from the publics” (p. 206).

In addition, power distance is also essential to understanding how societies accept the inequity between “haves” and “have-nots” (Taylor, 2000). Organizations such as government offices, multinationals, and family-owned business are perceived to be very powerful, and in high power distance nations people may distrust these

organizations. Therefore, the powerful use stronger means of influence with disliked rather than liked publics (Kipnis, Castell, Gergen, & Mauch, 1976). That is, distrust causes the powerful to use coercion and also that coercion will cause the powerful to distrust the publics. Therefore, in high power distance nations, latent conflicts exist between the powerful and the powerless. On the contrary, in low power distance countries, there is latent harmony between the powerful and the powerless.

However, Hofstede's (1984) work not only identified the power distance nations, but also linked the dimension of uncertainty avoidance to power distance.

Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the ability to cope with ambiguity, and is "related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 29). Uncertainty avoidance is most often understood to be "the extent to which individuals within a culture are made nervous by situations that are unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable, and the extent to which these individuals attempt to avoid such situations by adopting strict codes of behavior and a belief in absolute truth" (Vitell, Nwachukwu, & Barnes, 1993, p. 754).

In Hofstede's (1984) study, the uncertainty avoidance was developed in a similar way to the power distance. He developed an uncertainty avoidance index on the basis of a country's mean scores for three questions. The survey questions asked respondents to indicate their attitudes toward rule orientation, their intention to stay in their present job for five years or less, and their feelings of stress (Armstrong, 1996). Just like power distance, although low and high uncertainty avoidance exists in all cultures, one tends to

predominate.

The uncertainty avoidance index scores in nations are as follows:

Table 2. *Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) Scores for 18 Countries*

| Country | UAI | Country | UAI |
|-------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Belgium | 94 | New Zealand | 49 |
| Japan | 92 | Canada | 48 |
| Yugoslavia | 88 | United States | 46 |
| France | 86 | India | 40 |
| South Korea | 85 | Malaysia | 36 |
| Israel | 81 | Hong Kong | 29 |
| Taiwan | 69 | Denmark | 23 |
| Thailand | 64 | Jamaica | 13 |
| Switzerland | 58 | Singapore | 8 |

Note. From *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (p. 151), by Geert H. Hofstede, 2001, CA: Sage Thousand Oaks. Copyright 2001 by Geert H. Hofstede. Reprinted with permission.

Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance are active, aggressive, emotional, security-seeking, and intolerant. On the other hand, cultures with low avoidance are contemplative, less aggressive, unemotional, accepting of personal risk, and relatively tolerant (Vitell, Nwachukwu, & Barnes, 1993).

Gudykunst (1997) explored this uncertainty avoidance in cross-cultural research. Gudykunst (1997) said that “people in high uncertainty avoidance cultures try to avoid ambiguity and therefore develop rules and rituals for virtually every possible situation... Interaction with outgroup members in these cultures tends to be highly ritualistic and/or very polite” (p. 333). On the other hand, low uncertainty avoidance countries “accept dissent and taking risks more than members of high uncertainty avoidance cultures” (p. 332). Armstrong (1996) also stated that people in weak uncertainty avoidance countries are “willing to take more risks” (p. 1201).

In addition, in low uncertainty avoidance countries, people tend to be accepting of foreigners as managers and optimistic about the skills of leaders. In high uncertainty avoidance nations, on the other hand, there is suspicion toward foreigners as managers and pessimism about the skills of leaders in general.

Gudykunst (1997) warned, however, that no single dimension is sufficient to fully understand the dynamics of a culture. Combinations of dimensions are often necessary to explain similarities and differences in communication across cultures.

The interaction of power distance and uncertainty avoidance in crisis

According to Hofstede (2001), power distance and uncertainty avoidance together impact the structure and functioning of organizations. He examined the correlations between power distance and uncertainty avoidance dimensions, and showed that these two dimensions can interact. Hofstede (1984) found that in cultures where power distance index is high, “power is the leading principle which keeps the organization together and which protects it against uncertainty” (p. 215). He also suggested two possibilities in cultures where the power distance index is low. First, in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, “the leading principle which keeps the organization together can be formal rules.” In low uncertainty avoidance cultures, “the organization has to be kept together by more ad hoc negotiation, a situation which calls for a larger tolerance for uncertainty from everyone” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 215).

In an uncertainty against power distance plot, France, Guatemala, Mexico, South Korea, Belgium, Taiwan, and Argentina were included in high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance nations. Great Britain, United States, Sweden, Canada, and New

Zealand were included in low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance. In addition, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, and the Philippines were included in high power distance and low uncertainty avoidance nations. Germany, Finland, Israel, and Austria were classified as low power distance and high uncertainty avoidance nations (Hofstede, 2001).

Hofstede (1984) also applied Pugh's fourfold typology for describing organizations with high and low concentrations of authority and high and low structuring activities. Power distance is associated with "concentration of authority" and uncertainty avoidance is associated with "structuring of activities" (p. 215). He applied the typology to indicate the type of organization that fits best in a certain group of countries. For example, countries with high power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance would tend more toward creating "personnel bureaucracy." Countries with low power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance would tend to create more "work-flow bureaucracy." In addition, countries with high power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance would tend more toward creating "full bureaucracy," while countries with low power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance would tend more toward "implicitly structured" organizations (Hofstede, 1984, p. 216).

Taylor (2000) noted that there are two ways in which these dimensions affect an organization's communication and public response to crisis. He stated that power distance and uncertainty avoidance not only "affect how the organization acts during a crisis" but also influence "how the public responds to a crisis" (p. 282).

First, organizations from low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance

cultures may not see a need to communicate to the publics about the situation. On the other hand, organizations from high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance cultures may directly communicate with governments during a crisis to secure their support. For instance, in the study of Coca-Cola crisis in Europe, Taylor (2000) found that three high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance nations in Western Europe, namely Belgium, France, and Spain, banned the sale of Coca-Cola and its related products. But Coca-Cola failed to communicate each government during the crisis in spite of the fact that the government was a key public to lift the ban of its sales. As a result, the governments of these countries were displeased with Coca-Cola and Coca-Cola's claims that its products were safe angered those national governments by challenging their authority.

Second, as mentioned, the fact that power distance and uncertainty avoidance interact seriously affects how the public responds to the crisis. People who live in high uncertainty avoidance nations seek rules, rituals, and laws to guide behaviors, and in high power distance nations, people respect those who hold power. However, when the two cultural variables interact, if people or organizations that hold power break the social norms, less powerful people are quick to blame the powerful people for their troubles. For example, the Coca-Cola tainting crisis included Belgium, a high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance nation where people tend not to trust those in power. Even if Coke was not to blame for the illness, according to Taylor (2000), the high uncertainty avoidance and power distance publics were already predisposed to mistrust foreign organizations.

Taylor's study suggested that societal culture plays an important part in the public relations communication of an organization to a crisis situation. In addition, it investigated what cultural variables influenced the public response to the Coca-Cola tainting scare in Western Europe. Thus, it found that the two cultural variables, power distance and uncertainty avoidance, not only affect how the organization acts during a crisis, but also influence how the public responds to a crisis. That is, cultural variables may influence how well organization communicates with the publics during a crisis.

Culture and Excellent Crisis Communication

These days, it seems that any number of crisis situations can occur. Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, and Agee (2000) quoted *PR Week* saying that "Imagine one of these scenarios happening to your company: a product recall; a plane crash; a very public sexual harassment suit; a gunman holding hostages in your office; an *E. coli* bacteria contamination scare; a market crash, along with the worth of your company stock; a labor union strike; a hospital malpractice suit..." (p. 181).

Naturally, it seems somewhat difficult for public relations personnel to deal with such a wide variety of possible circumstances. But good communication might be one of the keys to settling and solving difficult situations. In fact, it should be the key goal of any company before, during, or after a crisis. Communication is an exchange of information, and its purpose is to establish a common understanding or meaning between people.

Failure to communicate is one of the biggest mistakes one can make in a crisis situation. Organizations or individuals that communicate poorly during crises often make

bad situations worse. The Three Mile Island nuclear power accident, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and the Challenger space shuttle explosion are three well-known examples that demonstrate how inadequate communication strategies can hinder an organization's ability to manage a crisis.

However, in crisis situations, communication and culture equally influence each other. Not only does culture influence the way people communicate, but the way that people communicate can change the culture (Gudykunst, 1997). People sometimes ignore this relationship and try to communicate in a cultural vacuum.

Similarly, although the concept of culture has been investigated in many disciplines, few researchers and practitioners have recognized the significance of culture as a variable that affects public relations.

Vasques and Taylor (1999) stated that "research into the role and influence of culture reflects a growing concern for ethnocentrism" (p. 434). Ethnocentrism has been defined as an "exaggerated tendency to think the characteristics of one's group or race superior to those of other groups or races" (Drever, 1952, p. 86). Ethnocentrism assumes that a single theory is appropriate for all societies; in public relations, it is a belief that what is known about public relations in one country is applicable across all countries (Botan, 1992). Ethnocentrism is clearly not an appropriate strategy for studying crisis communications across various cultures.

As mentioned, the ways in which an organization can effectively communicate with the publics depends upon a variety of cultural and societal forces. Sriramesh, Grunig, and Dozier (1996) noted that "in our view, the linkage between corporate culture

and communication is important for public relations scholars” (p. 239). More recently, Sriramesh, Kim, and Takasaki (1999) suggested that societal culture influences the practice of public relations in every nation and region of the world. Marra (1998) examined organizational culture as an area for crisis public relations and suggested that it is important to understand the relationship between organizational and societal culture in crisis communication.

In the past, researchers frequently stressed the relationship between the presence and use of a comprehensive crisis communications plan and successful crisis communication. The crisis communications plan is the primary tool of preparedness; it is a manual telling each key person on the crisis team what his or her role is, whom to notify, how to reach people, what to say, and so on. A well-practiced crisis communications plan provides the means by which information can be gathered and released as quickly as possible during a crisis. Fearn-Banks (1996) stated that “The crisis communications plan provides a functioning collective brain for all persons involved in a crisis, persons who may not operate at normal capacity due to the shock or emotions of the crisis event” (p. 7). Fink (1986) also noted that “If the media can communicate the news the instant it happens, crisis communications dictate that a company must be prepared to respond almost as fast,” and “The inability to communicate your message skillfully during a crisis can prove fatal” (p. 92).

However, is excellent crisis communication solely the result of preplanning for crises? Although crisis communications plans usually help to successfully manage crises, Marra (1998) indicated that their values are overrated.

Crisis communications plans are only a part of what determines excellent crisis public relations practice. After all, organizations with crisis plans do not always manage crises well. Marra (1998) suggested Exxon's example. Exxon, the role model for poor crisis communication, was the most profitable company in the United States and second in the world in 1996. Exxon's lack of an appropriate crisis plan to manage the 1989 *Valdez* oil spill certainly did not affect its net profit rising from an annual \$3.5 billion in 1989 to \$7.5 billion in 1996. On the contrary, Johnson & Johnson (Tylenol), which has no crisis plan, has managed crises well. Fink suggested that although Johnson & Johnson did not have a crisis communications plan in place at the time of the first tampering incident in 1982, the company's culture more than made up for this deficiency:

There are many in the company, however, who feel that J&J had a crisis management plan of sorts all along—and followed it—but never knew it because they don't call it a crisis management plan. They are referring to the Johnson & Johnson Credo, which carries a lot of weight with J&J managers. Written more than 40 years ago by the late Robert Wood Johnson (son of the company founder), the Credo has changed slightly over the years, but its basic message hasn't. It says the company has four responsibilities, and, in order, they are: (1) to the consumers, (2) to the employees, (3) to the communities they serve, [and] (4) to the stockholders. There are many in the company who say with sincere conviction that when they were faced with stressful, crisis-induced decisions during the Tylenol crisis they looked to the Credo for guidance and, specifically, to see if the decision they were about to make (such as whether or not to withdraw the product) was in keeping with the first line of the Credo ... To the extent that crisis management plan is a blueprint that tells you where to go and how to get there, yes, the J&J credo is a crisis management plan (p. 217).

Indeed, crisis communication is influenced and constrained by larger social forces (Vasquez & Taylor, 1999). Vasques and Taylor (1999) stated that "larger social forces include economic, political, development structures and societal culture" (Sic, p. 435). Societal culture plays an important part in the public relations communication of an

organization. The communication cultures in organizations strongly influence how effectively they can communicate with the publics to mitigate the crisis situation.

Hypotheses

Although these four Asian countries are rooted in Chinese Confucian traditions, substantial cultural differences still exist between Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. This paper assumes that cultural differences are present in crisis communication among the four Asian nations, and the cultural varieties affected how they communicated with the public during the SARS crisis. The societal culture was recognized as having an important effect on crisis communication, and above all, Hofstede's (2001) two cultural variables of power distance and uncertainty avoidance were identified as the most applicable variables for studying the effects of culture on crisis communication.

According to Hofstede's (2001) index scores of cultural variables, the four East Asian nations were all included in high power distance nations. Regarding the uncertainty avoidance dimension, Singapore and Hong Kong were considered to be low uncertainty avoidance nations, whereas Taiwan and South Korea were high uncertainty avoidance nations. The power distance and uncertainty avoidance index scores in the four Asian nations are as follows:

Table 3: Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance Index Scores in four Asian Nations

| Cultural Dimensions | Singapore | Hong Kong | Taiwan | South Korea |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|--------|-------------|
| Power Distance | 74 | 68 | 58 | 60 |
| Uncertainty Avoidance | 8 | 29 | 69 | 85 |

Note. From Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations (p. 500), by Geert H. Hofstede, 2001, CA: Sage Thousand Oaks. Copyright 2001 by Geert H. Hofstede. Reprinted with permission.

This study hypothesized that these two cultural variances based on the index scores affected the communication of the four Asian nations to the SARS crisis. During the crisis, an extraordinary volume of news coverage was produced. The media was a key tool used by various groups to advance their agendas in responding to the crisis. In any crisis, access to the media is critical, and different groups compete for voice and media presence. Competing groups vie for the sympathy and attention of the media in order to push their own agendas. While it is empirically difficult to measure the impact of media coverage on popular perception, news coverage gives the public important clues as to the scope and size of an issue. Therefore, the media coverage among the four Asian countries regarding the SARS crisis was analyzed in this study, and all hypotheses were set in terms of the media content.

In the SARS crisis, the success of communication between the government, public health authorities, hospitals and the general public was a key issue in dealing with the situation. Regarding the power distance, latent conflict was expected between the powerful and the powerless in high power distance nations. Therefore, it was expected that there would be more negative stories than positive stories on the powerful and the powerless in high power distance nations. However, even though Singapore and Hong Kong are included in high power distance nations, they are also included in low uncertainty avoidance nations. As already mentioned, power distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organization accept that

power is distributed unequally, and people in high power distance nations tend to view a hierarchical structure as natural. In addition, people in low uncertainty avoidance nations such as Singapore and Hong Kong tend to show greater tolerance of other opinions, less fear for future, and less fear of the unknown. In contrast, people in the high uncertainty avoidance nations, Taiwan and South Korea, “appeal of hierarchical control role” because of the lack of confidence in uncertain situations (Hofstede, 2001, p. 170). Therefore, it was expected, that:

Hypothesis 1: The percentage of positive stories on each of the powerful and the powerless in the newspapers of Singapore and Hong Kong is greater than the percentage of negative stories.

Hypothesis 1-1: The percentage of negative stories on each of the powerful and the powerless in the newspapers of Taiwan and South Korea is greater than the percentage of positive stories.

Regarding uncertainty avoidance, low uncertainty avoidance nations tend to accept dissent and take more risks than members of high uncertainty avoidance cultures. In this dimension there is some distance between Singapore and Hong Kong as well as Taiwan and South Korea:

Hypothesis 2: The percentage of positive stories on the powerful and the powerless in the newspapers of Singapore and Hong Kong is greater than the percentage of positive stories in the newspapers of Taiwan and South Korea.

Hypothesis 2-1: The percentage of positive stories on the powerful and the powerless in Singapore’s newspaper is greater than the percentage of positive stories in Hong Kong’s newspaper.

Hypothesis 2-2: The percentage of positive stories on the powerful and the powerless in Taiwan’s newspaper is greater than the percentage of positive stories in South Korea’s newspaper.

This hypothesis was chosen because the public’s cooperation with the powerful,

such as government and health authorities, was essential to controlling the SARS crisis. When the SARS crisis happened, verifiable information about what was happening or had happened was sometimes lacking. But in low uncertainty avoidance nations, people have higher tolerance for ambiguity in perceiving leaders than in high uncertainty nations. Thus, the publics in low uncertainty nations are more optimistic about the skills of their leaders than are the publics in high uncertainty nations.

Also it was expected that people tend to be accepting of foreigners as managers and optimistic about the skills of leaders in low uncertainty avoidance countries. On the contrary, there is suspicion toward foreigners as managers and pessimism about the skills of leaders in general in high uncertainty avoidance nations. In the SARS crisis, the World Health Organization (WHO) worked as a global leader to prevent SARS from becoming a widely established threat. The WHO worked to implement its aggressive containment activities based on global cooperation. Therefore, this study expected that:

Hypothesis 3: The percentage of negative stories on the World Health Organization (WHO) in the newspapers of Taiwan and South Korea is greater than the percentage of negative stories in the newspapers of Singapore and Hong Kong.

In addition, Singapore and Hong Kong have some distance in uncertainty avoidance despite of the fact that both are low. Similarly, although Taiwan and South Korea show high uncertainty avoidance dimension, there is some distance between them:

Hypothesis 3-1: The percentage of negative stories on WHO in Hong Kong's newspaper is greater than the percentage of negative stories in Singapore's newspaper.

Hypothesis 3-2: The percentage of negative stories on WHO in South Korea's newspaper is greater than the percentage of negative stories in Taiwan's newspaper.

As already mentioned, when power distance and uncertainty avoidance interact,

in high power distance and uncertainty avoidance nations, less powerful people blame the powerful people for their troubles if people or organizations that hold power break the social norms. In the SARS crisis, if governments or health authorities did not act or report quickly when SARS broke out, the powerless strongly criticized the way that the powerful dealt with the SARS crisis. This study expected, therefore, that:

Hypothesis 4: The percentage of negative stories on the powerless in the newspapers of Taiwan and South Korea is greater than the percentage of negative stories in the newspapers of Singapore and Hong Kong.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study used content analysis to explore how cultural variances affected each Asian country to communicate differently in the SARS crisis. Content analysis is defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data” (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 21). In the words of Bernard Berelson (1954), it is “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p. 18). The content analysis method usually describes observation in numerical terms, through which precision can be gained.

According to Babbie (1998), content analysis is “well suited to the study of communication and to answering the classic question of communications research: ‘Who says what, to whom, why, how, and with what effect?’” (p. 309).

Therefore, content analysis was chosen because this study tried to answer a “how” question, namely, how cultural variances influenced different communication to the SARS crisis among the four Asian nations.

Sample Selection

Sampling Media

The sample selected included one daily newspaper from each of the four Asian nations, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. Newspapers included Singapore’s *The Straits Times*, Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post*, Taiwan’s *The China Post*, and South Korea’s *Chosun Ilbo*.

First, *The Straits Times* was chosen because it is the most widely read newspaper in Singapore with a circulation of 338,000. It is also one of the region’s oldest English-

language daily newspapers. First published on July 15, 1845, *The Straits Times* has strived to be an authoritative provider of news and views, with a special focus on Singapore and the Asian region.

Second, the *South China Morning Post* was chosen because it was one of the most influential daily English newspapers in Hong Kong, with a circulation of 120,000. First published in 1903, the *South China Morning Post* is by far the largest English language newspaper in Hong Kong. It has successfully targeted and developed a large and loyal readership based on its truthful, modern, and lively news coverage on a wide variety of issues. In addition to the largest coverage of local, regional, and world news, *South China Morning Post* also publishes articles of general interest including business, property, court cases, lifestyles, sports, and medicine.

Next, *The China Post* was chosen because it is Taiwan's leading English-language newspaper in daily readership and editorial content. It reaches over 250,000 readers every day, providing comprehensive news coverage of the latest events in Taiwan and around the world. *The China Post* is known for its comprehensive news coverage, objective judgment, unbiased commentary, and responsive service.

Lastly, the *Chosun Ilbo* was chosen because it has retained the number one position in both household subscription rates and readership in South Korea since 1989. In September 2001, three polling agencies: Korea Gallup, AC Nielsen Korea and TN Sofres, confirmed the *Chosun Ilbo* as the people's preferred newspaper, far ahead of its rivals. It is also known to the public for its accuracy and fairness of reporting.

Sampling Period

The researcher analyzed a composite two-week sample from the time period March 12, 2003 through May 18, 2003. The same time period was selected for the four Asian newspapers because the four Asian nations are geographically close to each other so they could receive the important news about the SARS outbreak at the same time. Also because this study measured the conflict or harmony between the powerful and powerless among the four Asian nations, the researcher decided to compare them at the same time.

The random sample included March 14, 21, 28, April 21-25, April 28-30, and May 14-16. These days were chosen because the date WHO issued a global alert about SARS cases was March 12, 2003, and the media actively covered it for the next few months. In addition, during the last week of April, the SARS crisis in the four Asian nations showed signs of peaking. New probable cases, including cases in hospital staff, additional deaths, and first cases imported to new areas continued to be reported from several countries including the four Asian nations. Thus, the media produced an extraordinary volume of news coverage about SARS at that time. Lastly, during the middle week of May, the crisis showed signs of coming under control in the four Asian nations, indicating that SARS could be controlled (WHO, 2003).

According to the random dates, the researcher only evaluated stories (not photos) related to the SARS crisis. Articles which carried the explicit expressions such as “SARS” and “Severe acute respiratory syndrome” during these dates were selected for analysis. The expressions such as “unidentified epidemic,” “contagious respiratory

illness,” “flu virus,” “Vietnam flu,” “mystery pneumonia disease,” “mystery illness,” “atypical pneumonia,” and “pneumonia outbreak” that appeared in the title, subtitle, or story paragraphs were also included in the SARS stories examined. This resulted in 908 articles and an average of 64.9 stories per day in the four Asian newspapers. Singapore’s *The Straits Times* reported 362 articles, Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* 317 articles, Taiwan’s *The China Post* 153 articles, and South Korea’s *Chosun Ilbo* 76 articles.

Coding Categories

This study classified all articles about the SARS crisis in the four Asian newspapers. The classification was based on a brief description of the content of each item in the respective newspaper indexes. The following category resulted—news stories. The category, news stories, was then divided into three categories according to content. The categories and subcategories were follows:

News stories

1. Political: News stories about the role of public authority, regulatory preparedness, diplomatic relations, citizens’ activities, and the political reaction to SARS.
2. Health: Medical information about SARS including number of patients and its management.
3. Economic: Stories principally concerned with the economic fallout of the SARS.

The classification of the articles provided an overview of what types of SARS stories the four Asian newspapers carried during the research period. Specifically, these

items included content that was likely to deal with the dispute between the powerful and powerless concerning the SARS crisis.

A coding sheet was designed for use with every article evaluated. For the purpose of describing the sample, all the articles were coded for their newspaper identity, day and date of publishing, size (number of columns), page number, and type of news stories (political, health, or economic). The size refers to how many columns on the page a story covered. Other variables coded were voices of stakeholder and tone.

Unit of Analysis and Operationalization of Variables

The unit of analysis for all news stories was the entire article. This study was designed to reveal and track the relative numbers of the conflict news stories among the four Asian newspapers. After categorizing news stories by three types of articles, this study coded six different stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Voices

As already mentioned, in any crisis, access to the media is critical, and different groups use the media to advance their agendas in responding to the crisis. In the SARS crisis, different groups competed for voice and presence in the media. Specifically, six different types of people in each country tried to give voice in the media for assenting with or opposing other groups in the SARS crisis. This study divided these six stakeholders into two groups, namely “the powerful” and “the powerless.” In the SARS crisis, the powerless were under the control of powerful groups. The powerful gave their voices to order or support the powerless for escaping the crisis situation as soon as

possible. The powerless responded to the powerful more actively for showing the cooperation with or resistance against the powerful in order to overcome the crisis situation more rapidly. Each article was coded to identify which stakeholders were given voice.

The powerful

In this study, three different types of people were classified as the powerful. The categories are follows:

1. **Governments:** As SARS was a national threat, the government communication to reach out to the public was essential. The government gave its voice to get the public's understanding and support in the SARS crisis. First, the highest ranking representatives such as president or minister of each nation were coded in this group. Government and cabinet members including government spokesmen were included in this group. Lastly, federal and state officials such as department officials, members of parliaments, embassy officials, and other heads of federal agencies were also included in this group.

2. **Public Health Authorities:** The state or local health department was primarily accountable to the public at large for supporting public health during the SARS crisis. For example, Ministry of Health in Singapore, Department of Health in Hong Kong, Department of Health in Taiwan, and Ministry of Health and Welfare and National Institute of Health in South Korea were considered the health departments. Representatives or officials of these departments were coded as this group.

3. **World Health Organization officials and representatives:** As mentioned, the World Health Organization (WHO) worked as a global leader to prevent SARS from

becoming a widely established threat. The WHO worked to continue its aggressive containment activities based on global cooperation. Thus, people representing the WHO were coded as this group.

The powerless

The powerless groups were divided into following three categories:

4. **Health Care Workers:** Since the SARS crisis, hospitals and public health authorities cooperated in issues such as wearing masks in appropriate conditions, controlling hospital entry, and creating screening questionnaires for all public events. Some health care workers protested against or refused to follow public health authorities' decision to appoint their hospitals as the primary care facility for SARS. Health care workers such as doctors, nurses, employees of hospitals were coded as this group.

5. **Citizens:** This group included people who only represented themselves. Some examples included students, parents, tourists, members of labor unions, employees and customers of restaurants, patients, and relatives of patients in each country were all classified as citizens. Public surveys were also considered to represent citizens and were classified as such in this study.

6. **Business Communities:** When SARS hit, the confidence to consume, invest, trade, service, and interact appeared to be at risk. Domestic demand and consumption, and consequently investments and employment, especially in the services sector, plunged affecting growth and even social stability. Therefore, various business communities tried to communicate the severity of their economic plight. They asked the cooperation and

support of the government or public health authorities to overcome the outbreak, and criticized or agreed with their policies in the SARS crisis. Numerous business communities such as tourist or air transportation associations, investment or hotel communities, and chambers of commerce were included in this group.

Tone

A key variable in this study was the tone of the coverage in each paper. Tone is important in a crisis because it contributes to the allocation of blame. The researcher coded the criticism and praise directed at six groups in the SARS crisis. For each group, it was noted whether the article was critical or congratulatory, and whether those comments related to the political, health, or economic aspects of the SARS crisis. The tone of coverage was evaluated as positive, negative, neutral as follows:

1. Positive: Positive stories were those reflecting social cohesion and cooperation with the stakeholder; the stability, assurance, and strength of the stakeholder, and stories that de-emphasized conflict with and criticism of the stakeholder.

2. Neutral: Neutral stories reflected neither positive nor negative conditions when the report did not contain explicit evaluative references; and included those articles that addressed both the positive and negative direction.

3. Negative: Negative stories were those reflecting conflicts with the stakeholder; reflecting disorganization, instability, anxiety, and weakness of the stakeholder; and stories that generally emphasized the stakeholder's shortcomings.

After coding the tone of each stakeholder, this study explored the differences in the tone among six stakeholders within each nation, and compared the four Asian nations

with total number of positive or negative stories on six stakeholders.

Intercoder Reliability

To test the reliability of the coding, a pretest was conducted with the researcher and one coder. Taiwanese and Korean students who fluently speak and read English in the master's program in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at San Jose State University served as second coders. To determine percentage of agreement, both coded the same 50 articles for stakeholder voices and tone. Articles used in this reliability test were from the random time period April 21- 25 and represented 11 % of the total content analyzed; there were 24 articles from *The Straits Times*, 10 articles from *South China Morning Post*, 12 articles from *The China Post*, and 4 articles from *Chosun Ilbo*. Intercoder reliability of .80 was determined by computing the percentage of the number of articles agreed on, for both stakeholder voices and tone. Holsti's formula, discussed in Budd, Thorp, and Donohew (1967), was used to determine reliability:

$$R = \frac{2(C_{1,2})}{C_1 + C_2}$$

$C_{1,2}$ is the number of category assignments both coders agree on, and $C_1 + C_2$ is the total of category assignments made by both coders (p. 68). The intercoder reliability for both stakeholder voices and tone was .92 and .89.

Regarding statistics, Chi-Square was used to test the hypotheses in this study.

Chapter 4: Results

A total of 473 news stories were analyzed. Of these, 145 articles were from Singapore's *The Straits Times*, 176 articles from Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, 113 articles from Taiwan's *The China Post*, and 39 articles from South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo*. There were comparatively fewer stories from *Chosun Ilbo* than from the other three newspapers (Table 4).

Most stories about SARS crisis were three-or four-column in the four Asian newspapers. In Singapore's *The Straits Times*, 3.7% were seven-column; 2.3% were six-column; 10.1% were five-column; 36.7% were four-column; 25.4% were three-column; 12.2 % were two-column; 9.6% were one-column. Each page of *The Straits Times* consisted of seven columns. Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reported 7.1% seven-column SARS stories; 6.9% were six-column; 16.2% were five-column; 25.3% were four-column; 24.8% were three-column; 10.5% were two-column; 9.2% were one-column.

In Taiwan's *The China Post*, 4.9 % of SARS stories were seven- column; 2.6% were six-column; 2.5% were five-column; 32.5% were four-column; 27.3% were three-column; 19.5% were two-column; 9.7% were one-column. Each page of *The China Post* consisted of seven columns. In South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo*, 45.4% of the stories were four-column; 39.2% were three-column; 11.3% were two-column; 4.1% were one-column. Each page of *Chosun Ilbo* usually consisted of seven or eight columns.

Categorized by three types of news stories, as shown in Table 4, the four Asian newspapers usually focused on the political issues about SARS. Of the total articles

about SARS among the four Asian newspapers, more than 50% of the news stories were political, 22.2% were health-related, and 26.8% were economic news stories. Except Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, the other three Asian newspapers dealt with more political news stories than health and economic coverage about SARS. *South China Morning Post* had the same number of political and economic stories.

Table 4. The percentage of articles on the three categories in the four Asian newspapers

| New Stories | <i>The Straits Times</i> n=145 | <i>South China Morning Post</i> n=176 | <i>The China Post</i> n=113 | <i>Chosun Ilbo</i> n=39 | Total N=473 |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| Political | 55.9 | 37.5 | 63.7 | 56.4 | 51.0 |
| Health | 22.7 | 25.0 | 15.9 | 25.6 | 22.2 |
| Economic | 21.4 | 37.5 | 20.4 | 18.0 | 26.8 |

$\chi^2 (6, n=473) = 25.608, P < .001$.

Overall, the four Asian newspapers produced fairly neutral and positive coverage of the SARS crisis. Of total 473 articles on political, health, and economic issues, neutral stories were 46.5% and positive stories 33.2%, compared with 20.3% for negative stories. In addition, there were significant differences between the direction of treatment about SARS stories among the four Asian newspapers. The SARS stories in Singapore's *The Straits Times* were reported as more positive direction than negative direction, whereas the stories of South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* were reported as more negative than positive. Similarly, Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* also tended to report more positive and neutral stories than negative stories, while Taiwan's *The China Post* reported more negative and neutral stories than positive stories (Table 5).

In sum, the newspapers of the high power distance and low uncertainty

avoidance nations such as Singapore and Hong Kong tended to report more positive stories than negative stories, whereas the newspapers of the high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance nations such as Taiwan and South Korea tended to report more positive stories than negative stories.

Table 5. The percentage of positive, neutral, negative stories in the four Asian newspapers

| Tone | <i>The Straits Times</i> n=145 | <i>South China Morning Post</i> n=176 | <i>The China Post</i> n=113 | <i>Chosun Ilbo</i> n=39 | Total N=473 |
|----------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| Positive | 47.6 | 35.2 | 16.8 | 18.0 | 33.2 |
| Neutral | 45.5 | 46.6 | 49.6 | 41.0 | 46.5 |
| Negative | 6.9 | 18.2 | 33.6 | 41.0 | 20.3 |

$\chi^2 (6, n=473) = 53.010, P < .001.$

Tone on each of the stakeholder voices among the four Asian newspapers

The total number of articles in each of Asian newspaper was categorized by six stakeholders, and these six stakeholders were divided into two groups, “the powerful” and the “powerless.” Table 6-9 was made by categorizing six stakeholders into three connotative values (positive, neutral, negative) in the four Asian newspapers respectively.

As mentioned above, the total 145 articles in Singapore’s *The Straits Times* were read and coded as being positive, neutral or negative in tone according to the six stakeholders. Table 6 showed that 47.6% of the stakeholder articles were positive; 6.9% were negative. In terms of types of stakeholder, the *Straits Times* reported all articles on the powerful and the powerless with more positive or neutral direction than negative direction. Specifically, most of the stories on World Health Organization and Health Care Workers were positive (Table 6).

Table 6. The percentage of positive, neutral, and negative stories on each of the six stakeholders in Singapore’s The Straits Times Coverage of the SARS crisis

| Tone (Number of Articles) | Powerful (77) | | | Powerless (68) | | | Total (145) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------|----------------|
| | Governments (45) | *PHA (25) | *WHO (7) | *HCW (14) | Citizens (24) | *BC (30) | |
| Positive | 44.4 | 24.0 | 71.4 | 71.4 | 58.3 | 46.7 | 47.6 |
| Neutral | 55.6 | 72.0 | 28.6 | 28.6 | 29.2 | 33.3 | 45.5 |
| Negative | 0 | 4.0 | 0 | 0 | 12.5 | 20.0 | 6.9 |

$\chi^2 (10, n=145) = 28.091, P < 0.01$. Chi-Square was computed on the basis of three tone of the coverage, positive, neutral, and negative. (*PHA: Public Health Authorities; *WHO: World Health Organization; *HCW: Health Care Workers; *BC: Business Communities)

Considering that Singapore is included among low uncertainty avoidance nations, the finding that positive stories were dominant in the newspaper of Singapore

seems to substantiate the expectation that people in Singapore tend to be optimistic in the uncertain situations.

Similarly, Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reported 35.2% as positive and 18.2% negative of total 145 articles. But the percentage of positive stories on each of the Public Health Authorities and World Health Organization (WHO) was same with the percentage of negative stories. The stories on these two stakeholders were mostly reported by neutral direction. Except these two powerful groups, other four stakeholders were reported by more positive direction (Table 7). Particularly, the percentage of positive stories on Citizens was the greatest among the six stakeholders.

Table 7. The percentage of positive, neutral, and negative stories on each of the six stakeholders in Hong Kong's South China Morning Post Coverage of the SARS crisis

| Tone (Number of Articles) | Powerful (77) | | | Powerless (99) | | | Total (176) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|------------------|------------|----------------|
| | Governments (35) | PHA (32) | WHO (10) | HCW (12) | Citizens (23) | BC (64) | |
| Positive | 40.0 | 9.4 | 10.0 | 50.0 | 65.2 | 36.0 | 35.2 |
| Neutral | 42.9 | 81.2 | 80.0 | 33.3 | 13.1 | 40.6 | 46.6 |
| Negative | 17.1 | 9.4 | 10.0 | 16.7 | 21.7 | 23.4 | 18.2 |

$\chi^2 (10, n=176) = 34.879, P < .001.$

As a result, the first hypothesis that the percentage of positive stories on each of the powerful and the powerless in the newspapers of Singapore and Hong Kong is greater than the percentage of negative stories was supported in Singapore's newspaper, but it was not supported by all stakeholders in Hong Kong's newspaper (Table 6,7).

A total of 113 articles in Taiwan's *The China Post* were analyzed. 16.8% of all articles were positive tone; 33.6% were negative tone. Except for Health Care Workers,

Hypothesis 1-1 that the percentage of negative stories on each of the powerful and the powerless is greater than the percentage of positive stories was supported. Overall, the articles on three stakeholders of the powerful were neutral tone, and the articles on three of the powerless were negative. Among the six stakeholders, the percentage of negative stories on Citizens was the greatest and on Public Health Authorities was the smallest (Table 8).

Considering that Taiwan is included among the high power distance nations, the finding that the percentage of negative stories on each of the powerful and the powerless were more than positive stories in the newspaper seems to support the expectation that powerless might distrust the powerful, and vice versa.

Table 8. The percentage of positive, neutral, and negative stories on each of the six stakeholders in Taiwan's The China Post Coverage of the SARS crisis

| Tone (Number of Articles) | Powerful (78) | | | Powerless (35) | | | Total (113) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------|----------------|
| | Governments (39) | PHA (30) | WHO (9) | HCW (6) | Citizens (8) | BC (21) | |
| Positive | 20.5 | 13.3 | 11.1 | 33.3 | 12.5 | 14.3 | 16.8 |
| Neutral | 56.4 | 70.0 | 66.7 | 33.3 | 12.5 | 19.0 | 49.6 |
| Negative | 23.1 | 16.7 | 22.2 | 33.3 | 75.0 | 66.7 | 33.6 |

$\chi^2 (10, n=113) = 26.855, P < .01.$

Also regarding the stakeholder stories of South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo*, 18% were positive and 41.0% were negative of total 39 stakeholder stories. But WHO and Business Communities were reported more positive tone than negative tone. Concerning WHO, 16.7% were positive and 0% were negative; concerning Business Communities, 57.1% were positive and 28.6% were negative. Except these two stakeholders,

Hypothesis 1-1, as mentioned above, was supported in South Korea's newspaper (Table 9).

Overall, as mentioned already, it might be said that in high power distance and low uncertainty avoidance nations such as Singapore and Hong Kong, the newspapers tended to report more positive stories on each of the powerful and the powerless than negative stories. Also, in high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance nations such as Taiwan and South Korea, the newspapers tended to report more negative stories on the powerful and the powerless than positive stories.

Table 9. The percentage of positive, neutral, and negative stories on each of the six stakeholders in South Korea's Chosun Ilbo Coverage of the SARS crisis

| Tone (Number of Articles) | Powerful (23) | | | Powerless (16) | | | Total (39) |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------|---------------|
| | Governments (5) | PHA (12) | WHO (6) | HCW (1) | Citizens (8) | BC (7) | |
| Positive | 0 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 0 | 0 | 57.1 | 18.0 |
| Neutral | 40.0 | 50.0 | 83.3 | 0 | 25.0 | 14.3 | 41.0 |
| Negative | 60.0 | 33.3 | 0 | 100 | 75.0 | 28.6 | 41.0 |

$\chi^2 (10, n=39) = 19.942, P < .05.$

Positive stories on the powerful and the powerless in the four Asian newspapers

Considering the uncertainty avoidance dimension, this study found that there was a difference in reporting positive stories on the powerful and powerless between the low uncertainty avoidance and high uncertainty avoidance nations.

Of total 473 articles on six stakeholders, the four Asian newspapers reported 33.2% positive stories. Among the four Asian newspapers, Singapore's *The Straits Times* reported the greatest percentage (47.6%) of positive stories, compared with the smallest percentage (16.8%) of positive stories in Taiwan's *The China Post* (Table 10). Also Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reported a greater percentage of positive stories than South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* (Table 10). In terms of the tone on the powerful and the powerless, Table 10 also showed that the newspapers of Singapore and Hong Kong reported more positive stories on the powerful and the powerless compared to the newspapers of Taiwan and South Korea. Therefore, the second hypothesis that the percentage of positive stories on the powerful and the powerless in the newspapers of Singapore and Hong Kong is greater than the percentage of positive stories in the newspapers of Taiwan and South Korea was supported.

Also Hypothesis 2-1, that the percentage of positive stories on the powerful and the powerless in the newspaper of Singapore is greater than the percentage of positive stories in the newspaper of Hong Kong was supported. Specifically, the percentage of positive stories on the powerful in Singapore's newspaper was much greater than in Hong Kong's newspaper.

However, Hypothesis 2-2, that the percentage of positive stories on the powerful and powerless in Taiwan's newspaper is greater than the percentage of positive stories in South Korea's newspaper, was not supported. Even though Taiwan's newspaper reported a greater percentage of positive stories on the powerful, South Korea's newspaper reported a greater percentage of positive stories on the powerless comparing with Taiwan.

Overall, it might be said that more positive stories were reported on the powerful and the powerless in the low uncertainty avoidance nations than in the high uncertainty avoidance nations.

Table 10. The percentage of positive, neutral and negative stories on the powerful and powerless in the four Asian newspapers

| Tone Type of groups | <i>The Straits Times</i> (n=145) | <i>South China Morning Post</i> (n=176) | <i>The China Post</i> (n=113) | <i>Chosun Ilbo</i> (n=39) | Total (N=473) |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Positive | 47.6 | 35.2 | 16.8 | 18.0 | 33.2 |
| The powerful | 21.4 | 12.2 | 11.5 | 7.7 | 13.7 |
| The powerless | 26.2 | 23.0 | 5.3 | 10.3 | 19.5 |
| Neutral | 45.5 | 46.6 | 49.6 | 41.0 | 46.5 |
| The powerful | 31.0 | 27.8 | 43.4 | 33.3 | 33.0 |
| The powerless | 14.5 | 18.8 | 6.2 | 7.7 | 13.5 |
| Negative | 6.9 | 18.2 | 33.7 | 41.0 | 20.3 |
| The powerful | 0.7 | 5.7 | 14.2 | 17.9 | 7.2 |
| The powerless | 6.2 | 12.5 | 19.5 | 23.1 | 13.1 |

$\chi^2 (15, n=473) = 77.836, P < .001.$

The positive attitudes of some stakeholders were often shown in Singapore's newspaper. The government's strict rule in Singapore was usually respected by citizens. When four out of six public hospitals were letting only one and the same person visit an adult patient throughout his stay in Singapore, the patient who had a 15-month-old daughter and gave birth to son in one of the public hospitals said that "I miss my girl terribly. But this is necessary because there are irresponsible people out there" (April 24, 2003, p. S3).

In Hong Kong's newspaper, citizens even considered SARS as the part of life at that time, and expressed tolerant feelings. A businessman who enjoyed a day in the remote countryside with his girlfriend said that "You can't let this SARS outbreak rule your life. Rather than sitting at home, you have to get out and enjoy what Hong Kong has to offer." A 38-year-old woman also stated that "We are seeing politicians out on the streets sweeping up rubbish with the masses, even though some looked like they had never picked up a broom before. This is a good thing for Hong Kong, and the upside is everything is cleaner. You need to keep a sense of humour and optimism about these things. Maybe dengue fever and SARS are just part of life in Hong Kong" (April 21, 2003, p. 1).

In contrast, in some of Taiwan's newspaper, the anxieties of citizens were covered negatively. Some citizens complained strongly against the government's quarantine at Ho Ping Hospital. A visitor to Taipei Municipal Ho Ping Hospital voiced his complaints, saying, "I came to visit a sick friend, and I was here for just 10 minutes, but they quarantined me for two weeks." Another visitor also stated that "It's a violation

of our human rights” (April 25, 2003, p. 1). Similarly, the citizens who lived near the authorized hospital for SARS patients in South Korea strongly protested against the government’s decision. One resident near the hospital said that “I cannot understand the government decision to quarantine the SARS patients in this heavily populated area.” Many parents of students who attend the school near the hospital were also saying, “Who are going to have the responsibility for our children’s life” (April 25, 2003, A12).

Negative stories on World Health Organization in the four Asian newspapers

Of total 473 news stories, the four Asian newspapers reported 32 stories about the World Health Organization (WHO).

Table 11 showed that Taiwan's *The China Post* reported more negative stories on WHO than other three Asian newspapers. *The China Post* and Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reported 22.2% and 10.0% negative stories respectively, whereas Singapore's *The Straits Times* and South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* reported zero negative articles about WHO (Table9). As a result, the third hypothesis that the percentage of negative stories on World Health Organization in the newspapers of Taiwan and South Korea is greater than the percentage of negative stories in the newspapers of Singapore and Hong Kong was not always supported. Even though Hong Kong's newspaper was expected to report less negative stories on WHO than South Korea's newspaper, because Hong Kong is low uncertainty avoidance whereas South Korea is high uncertainty avoidance, it in fact reported more negative stories than South Korea. But Hypothesis 3-1, that the percentage of negative stories on WHO in Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* is greater than the percentage of negative stories in Singapore's *The Straits Times*, was supported. Hypothesis 3-2, that the percentage of negative stories on WHO in South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* is greater than the percentage of negative stories in Taiwan's *The China Post*, was not supported. Overall, it might be said that the uncertainty avoidance index scores seem not to affect the negative reporting on a foreign organization such as WHO among the four Asian newspapers.

Table 11. The percentage of positive, neutral, and negative stories on the World Health Organization (WHO) in the four Asian newspapers

| Tone | <i>The Straits Times</i> n=7 | <i>South China Morning Post</i> n=10 | <i>The China Post</i> n=9 | <i>Chosun Ilbo</i> n=6 | Total N=32 |
|----------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| Positive | 71.4 | 10.0 | 11.1 | 16.7 | 24.3 |
| Neutral | 28.6 | 80.0 | 66.7 | 83.3 | 63.6 |
| Negative | 0 | 10.0 | 22.2 | 0 | 12.1 |

$\chi^2 (6, n=32) = 11.671, P < .05.$

In fact, as previously mentioned, Taiwan could not have full prevention and help from WHO during the SARS outbreak because it was not a member of WHO. Thus, there was a tendency to blame WHO for failing to help with SARS in Taiwan's newspaper. The director of Taiwan's Center for Disease Control said that "If we could have support from the WHO we would not lose so many lives and we wouldn't need to quarantine so many people" (May 16, 2003, p. 15).

Negative stories on the powerless in the four Asian newspapers

Regarding the interaction between power distance and uncertainty avoidance, this study found that there were more negative stories on the powerless in the high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance nations than in the low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance nations.

Overall, the percentage of negative stories on the powerful and the powerless in the newspapers of Taiwan and South Korea was greater than in the newspapers of Singapore and Hong Kong. South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* reported 41.0% of negative stories; Taiwan's *The China Post* reported 18.2%; Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reported 18.2%; Singapore's *The Straits Times* reported 6.9% (Table 10).

Considering the powerless group, Table 10 showed that South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* reported the greatest percentage (23.1%) of negative stories, and Taiwan's *The China Post* followed it (19.5%). Therefore, Hypothesis 4, that the percentage of negative stories on the powerless in the newspapers of Taiwan and South Korea is greater than the percentage of negative stories in the newspapers of Singapore and Hong Kong, was supported.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion

This study examined and compared the content of the four Asian newspapers; Singapore's *The Straits Times*, Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, Taiwan's *The China Post*, and South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo*. It investigated the reporting of the SARS outbreak by examining the conflict or harmony among the six stakeholders in the four Asian newspapers qualitatively and comparing these with the two index scores of the four Asian nations with a basic assumption that cultural differences might affect media coverage.

This study was based on the Hofstede's two cultural dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance to study cultural effects on crisis communication. The cultural approach to crisis communication provided this study with a basic assumption that power distance and uncertainty avoidance not only affect how organizations act during a crisis, but also influence how the public responds to a crisis, and the effects of two cultural dimensions on crisis communication were the theoretical framework on which the hypotheses were set.

In the qualitative analysis of the four Asian newspapers in terms of the six stakeholders, each stakeholder was reported differently according to the extent of power distance and uncertainty avoidance dimensions in the four Asian nations. In this study, most of stakeholders in each newspaper were reported as positive direction in high power distance and low uncertainty nations or negative direction in high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance nations. All articles on the six stakeholders in *The Straits Times*, the newspaper of Singapore, which is a high power distance and low uncertainty

avoidance nation, were reported more positive than negative. The articles of the Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* on each of the stakeholders were mostly more positive than negative except the articles on Public Health Authorities and World Health Organization, both of which were included in the powerful group. On the contrary, the newspapers of high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance nations such as Taiwan and South Korea mostly reported more negative stories on each of the stakeholders. These differences among the four Asian newspapers seemed to reflect effects of the two cultural dimensions among the four Asian nations during the SARS crisis. While the powerful and the powerless of Taiwan and South Korea made their conflict and instability more apparent, stakeholders of Singapore and Hong Kong made their cooperation and stability distinct.

As previously mentioned, although the publics of all four nations tend to accept natural hierarchies, latent conflicts exist between the powerful and the powerless in high power distance nations. But when the high power distance and low uncertainty avoidance interact, the powerless in this type of nation (such as Singapore and Hong Kong) might be much more optimistic about the skills of their leaders in crisis situation, and as a result, the powerful pursue the harmony with the powerless to get over the crisis.

In addition, when the high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance interact, there was significant difference of negative stories on the powerless comparing the high power distance and low uncertainty avoidance nations. Expectedly, the newspapers of Taiwan and South Korea reported greater percentages of negative stories on the powerless than the newspapers of Singapore and Taiwan. These differences seem

to support the idea that the interaction between the dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance influence how the public responds to the crisis.

Next, the fairly positive coverage of Singapore's newspaper might show the optimistic social identities of the stakeholders in the low uncertainty avoidance nations. First of all, the newspapers of the low uncertainty avoidance nations such as Singapore and Hong Kong reported a much greater percentage of positive stories on the powerful and the powerless than the high uncertainty avoidance nations such as Taiwan and South Korea. Also, positive differences between Singapore and Hong Kong existed. Although Singapore and Hong Kong are both included in the low uncertainty avoidance nations, the dimension scores of Singapore are lower than Hong Kong. This study showed that the newspaper of Singapore reported a greater percentage of positive stories on the powerful and the powerless than Hong Kong. But the newspaper of Taiwan, which is positioned as a lower uncertainty avoidance nation than South Korea, reported a greater percentage of positive stories on the powerful than South Korea, but not on the powerless.

Considering the effects of uncertainty avoidance, this study also examined the differences between the percentages of negative stories on World Health Organization (WHO) among the four Asian newspapers. In terms of uncertainty avoidance dimensions, people in low uncertainty avoidance countries tend to be accepting of foreigners as managers and vice versa. However, this study found that there were no negative stories on the WHO in the newspaper of South Korea, the highest uncertainty avoidance nation among the four Asian nations; while the newspaper of Taiwan, the

second high uncertainty avoidance nation, reported the highest percentage of negative stories on WHO. In addition, the newspaper of Hong Kong, which is included in low uncertainty avoidance nation, reported negative stories on WHO. These results might be because of the fact that Taiwan was not a member of WHO during the outbreak, and Hong Kong was the first place WHO issued a global alert about cases of SARS following the reports of cases in Hong Kong hospital. Taiwan blamed the lack of support from WHO and Hong Kong criticized the strict policies, such as the standards by which WHO declared SARS patients.

In sum, there was a tendency to report negative or positive stories on the powerful and the powerless among the four Asian newspapers according to the extent of power distance and uncertainty avoidance dimension. But this tendency did not apply to all the powerful and the powerless groups.

At this point, a consideration in terms of cultural influence on crisis communication among the four Asian nations should be noted. We must consider the relationship between the two cultural dimensions, power distance and uncertainty avoidance, and differences in communication regarding the SARS crisis among the four Asian nations.

The powerful and the powerless in the high power distance and low uncertainty avoidance nations such as Singapore and Hong Kong were more positive during the SARS crisis. The government and public health authorities were optimistic about controlling the outbreak, and the citizens were positive about the leadership of the powerful in Singapore. Although Singapore and Hong Kong are included in high power

distance nations, in which latent conflict might exist between the powerful and the powerless, in cultures where power distance is high, power could be the “leading principle which keeps the organization together and which protects it against uncertainty” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 215). Among the four nations, Singapore was most effective at communicating information to help deal with the SARS crisis. However, even though the newspaper of Hong Kong showed optimism about the responses of the stakeholders during the SARS crisis, Hong Kong was not effective in preventing SARS from spreading. First, as already mentioned, Hong Kong is very close to the Guangdong province where the SARS originated. Hong Kong was somewhat handicapped from the outset by a lack of information from China regarding the disease. But rather than releasing clear and candid information at the beginning of the crisis, Hong Kong’s communications were initially secretive and misleading. This poor communication may be the influence of high power distance in Hong Kong. Hofstede (1984) stated that countries with high power distance and low uncertainty avoidance tend more toward creating “personnel bureaucracy” (p. 216). He also said that the personnel bureaucracy means that “relationships among people are strictly determined by the hierarchical framework” (p. 216). Thus, it seems that the dissemination of information from the powerful to the powerless in Hong Kong was strictly ruled by the authorities.

In high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance nations such as Taiwan and South Korea, various groups were pessimistic during the SARS crisis. Citizens worried and criticized the decision of government or public health authorities to institute quarantines and authorized hospitals. Even conflicts between the government and the

public health authorities existed. In high power distance nations, people tend to distrust the organizations which are perceived to be very powerful. In addition, people in high uncertainty avoidance nations are “low risk taking and concerning for security, safety, and explicit rules” (Taylor, 2000, p. 286). Therefore, it might be said that more conflicts on the communication existed among various stakeholders in Taiwan and South Korea during the SARS crisis. In fact, Taiwan could not effectively prevent SARS from spreading, in part because of poor communication between the public health authorities and government. The government in Taiwan also responded negatively to the policy of foreign managers, namely the WHO, about the SARS crisis. South Korea, even though it had no SARS patients, was also ineffective in its crisis communications. The public did not believe in or cooperate with the policy of the government.

Indeed, in addition to finding differences in crisis communication among the four Asian nations, this study forged the significant relationship between cultural variables and crisis communication during the SARS outbreak. By focusing on the relationships between culture and communication, the researcher clearly showed how some Asian nations were more successful than others in dealing with the SARS crisis. Singapore exhibited excellent communications, while Hong Kong, which is similarly positioned with Singapore as the cultural integration of East and West, could not effectively cope with the spread of SARS because of the lack or failure of communication among various groups. Although Taiwan was able to prevent the SARS crisis from spreading at first, the failure of communication between the government and health authorities resulted in more confusion in addition to political isolation. Lastly, although there were no SARS patients

in South Korea, communication among public health agencies, hospitals, and the general public was not effective. Therefore, this study showed that cultural effects contribute to the understanding of communication among the four Asian nations when a crisis hits.

However, the limits of this study should be also noted to provide some ideas on further issues to work on. In this study, only two cultural variables among the five cultural dimensions of Hofstede were used to analyze and compare the different communication among the four Asian nations. However, many studies such as the cultural influence on American public relations practitioners (Vasquez & Taylor, 1999) or Taiwanese public relations (Wu, Taylor, & Chen, 2001) explored the correlation between Hofstede's five dimensions and the one-way or two-way communication with the publics in America or Taiwan. Thus, the comparison was limited because this study examined only two cultural dimensions. But based on the results of this study, further research using all five dimensions can be conducted to examine and compare the cultural effects on crisis communication not only within Asia but also Africa or South America.

In conclusion, power distance and uncertainty avoidance not only affected how the powerful organizations acted during a crisis, but also influenced how the powerless groups responded to the SARS crisis in the four Asian nations. That is, cultural variables have a two-way effect, influencing not only how well organizations communicate with publics, but also how well publics respond to the communications.

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