**Course Name:** Media Ethics and laws

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**East Asian Communalism and Western Media Ethics**

East is East and West is West but the twain is slowly beginning to meet. But not yet.

The soft, cooperative, non-competitive, group-oriented Eastern journalism has appeared at the doors to Western journalism. And Western ethical voices are beginning to stress many of the attributes of Eastern media morality. Without a doubt the Western press is standing on the fault line of change.

And, as the communitarians say, it is about time. The theoretical planks of Western media, instituted in the European Enlightenment-individualism, freedom, competition, and pluralism-are still endangering a concern for normative ethics and threatening the survival of remnants of communal concern. Profit-making, not public service, is increasingly the bottom line in Western journalism. Relativism, not absolutism, is the modern mantra. Subjectivism, not objectivism, is becoming the beating heart of Western journalism. Opinion, not facts. Spin, not evidence.

**The Two Basic Perspectives**

Eastern journalism is based on humility, group-concern, politeness, understatement, self-restraint, and a sense of merger with the world. Western journalism is based on self-pride, individualism, bluntness, aggressiveness, and a sense of isolation and alienation.

Eastern journalism is team-oriented, whereas Western journalism is predicated on competition and personal achievement. The ethical parameters of Eastern journalism are set by the journalistic "team," whereas in the West such limits are mainly undefined, except on occasion by a strong-willed executive. The Eastern journalist listens to his companions; the Western journalist talks but does not hear. The Eastern journalist is a team player; the Western journalist is a team star. The Eastern journalist wants to fit in, submerge self, and promote social harmony. The Western journalist wants to stand out, to promote self, and discount the importance of social harmony.

**Libertarian Theory as a Solution**

The libertarian theory postulates that the marketplace will solve the ethics problem. If the media of the West go too far afield morally, the market will bring them back in line. So much for theory. The people generally don't have the will, the effort, or the desire to drastically change the media. They are accustomed to their daily stimulant or soporific and feel at home with sensation and gloom-and-doom. Western media prompt them to retreat into themselves, isolate them from community behind their walls and fences, and just let the rest of the world go by. But this may be changing.

**Coming: Communal Concern?**

A more communal concern, a sense of democratic, citizen-involved journalism is evolving. The Eastern values are slowly affecting the West. The rhetoric of media ethics, unimpressive at the moment to be sure, has shifted away from freedom and individualism to a concern for social control and cooperation. Various voices in the recent past have spoken up generally endorsing some type of institutionalized community-determined ethics. The long-popular relative ethics is slowing fading.

Although heavy-handed government control in many countries discourages the development of alternate kinds of civic or communal normative ethics, global reality is beginning to insist that there be an end to individualistic ethics. For such an ethics has not worked. Uncontrolled ethics has not made the media more ethical. Personal ethics have not spread to the media institutions, and public respect for the media is at an all-time low.

This brings up the natural question: So if we need more control-some kind of ethical guru-ism-just what kind of control will it be? Providing the answer to this question is, without a doubt, the principal concern of this century. Coming together. Cooperating. Sharing. Thinking of the good of associates, neighbors, others. The community's interest, not just our personal interests. How do we go about getting such a situation in journalism? How do we in the West take on part of the culture of the East and become members of "teams" instead of individual players.

**Negating the Negative**

What is needed for the media is a blueprint for the future of the Western media systems, a kind of controlling mechanism that will ensure both freedom and responsibility. Pluralistic, highly competitive, ethics have simply not worked to produce this result. The negative is overpowering the media and needs to be itself negated. But first we should admit that the media-in all countries-are superficial, arrogant, propagandistic, irresponsible, and extremely negative and obviously in need of some kind of disciplined moral and quality control. If we don't accept this premise, then nothing really will change.

The literature of journalism is brimming over with examples of media irresponsibility. Articles and books spare no space in exposing the sins of the media, the arrogance of media bosses, the general loss of credibility found in mass communication around the world, and the danger to national security posed by some newspapers. Seminars, workshops, and lectures spew forth their indictments of a wayward press. Television, probably more than any other medium (with cyberspace running a close second), typifies the vast and dismal deserts of trash, dullness and superficiality that dominates the world's media scene. But no medium is immune.

**The Solution**

Let us now turn to the ethical views that tend to result from a new concern with globalization, with the spreading and sharing of ethical values that impinge on the world's moral thinking. This is not simply a media phenomenon, but it is one of building communities, of establishing some commonality in morality-in short, of improving global ethics and quality, including communication ethics. But such an emphasis affects the media and points ethics in a more monolithic direction. If the ideal goal for journalism worldwide is to have media systems that are both free and responsible, it would mean that the press would be free of outside control and at the same time held to high standards by somebody. Who would this "somebody" be?

***Answer: Change Western journalism into a true profession.***

Professionalizing journalism embraces the Eastern value of the group-of cooperation--but in the West it is a touchy subject. It is often seen as a tendency to shut out people from practicing journalism, an attempt to create an elite, exclusive body. And that, for the Western libertarian, is anathema. But, on the other hand a true profession of journalism would assure journalistic freedom and institutional autonomy and at the same time create a structure to insure high quality and morality among the professionals.

The profession would determine its own code of conduct and make its own decisions. Government or any other extra-media source would have no say in the editorial decisions of the professionals. The profession would have ethical principles that were accepted by members and should not be breached. If they were, then those guilty parties would be "de-pressed"-would lose their status as bona-fide journalists