Political Communication in East Asia

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Overview

Communication is at the heart of politics, and in a world of ubiquitous digital connectivity and media convergence, understanding how communicative practices shape societies is becoming ever more crucial, for scholars and practitioners alike. This course deals with the political dimension of communication in East Asia. Participants will be introduced to various theories concerning political communication practices, and they will practice analytical approaches for studying political communication across different media types (written and spoken language, images, physical space, and digital materials). Students will explore how various forces (social, political, economic) interact to create the various media contents and what political messages such media relay to their audiences. We will also ask what happens when politics go digital: how do technical design features, human psychology, economic dynamics, and political decisions shape political communication in digital East Asia? Throughout, students will engage with state-of-the-field debates about China, Japan, and Korea in the information age and will explore the theoretical implications of politics in networked societies.

In preparation for this course, please already read the following two introductory chapters, which deal with political and strategic communication, as well as with the media ecologies of East Asian societies:

- Schneider, Florian (forthcoming), *Studying Political Communication in East Asia* (Ch.1). Unpublished book manuscript. Leiden: Leiden University.
- Schneider, Florian (forthcoming), *Studying Political Communication in East Asia* (Ch.2). Unpublished book manuscript. Leiden: Leiden University.

Format

This mini-course will consist of a four daily online classes from Monday 27 to 30 June 2022. Each class will last two hours and will consist of a range of activities including mini-lectures, breakout discussions, and exercises. The course will conclude with an assignment, and it will be accompanied by daily readings (see below); the relevant textbook chapters will be provided to participants in the run-up to the summer school. Please note that these materials are draft versions of a book project that is still work-in-progress, so please do not share them outside of this seminar without the author's permission. You are welcome to email (see the contact details above) should you have questions.

Session 1: The Politics of Words: Analysing Political Discourse

During this first session, we will discuss how important communication is in society, and you will receive a first introduction to the realms of political communication and multi-modal discourse. We will experiment with methods for analyzing written communication such as newspaper articles, speeches, or government and corporate documents, and we will discuss how area studies scholars might want to think about communication and the construction of political knowledge while deploying these analytical strategies.

Readings:

In preparation for this session, please read the following chapter:

- Schneider, Florian (forthcoming), *Studying Political Communication in East Asia* (Ch.4). Unpublished book manuscript. Leiden: Leiden University.

Exercise:

For today's exercise, we will look at the following current affairs article that appeared in the Asian Times on 13 April 2020. Based on the readings, ask yourself how you would answer the following question:

- What discourse does the author construct about East Asia, and what communication strategies does he use in order to do so?

You do not need to prepare a written analysis; simply bring your notes and thoughts to the first session.

Session 2: Political Images: Analyzing Visual Politics

After our analysis of language, we will now expand our analytical toolbox to capture 'multi-modal' political communication, with a specific focus on visuality. To this end, we will examine how news magazine front pages combine image and text to make political statements, and we will ask: How do layout and design shape meaning, what role do visual elements play in conveying those meanings, and what tools and methods are appropriate for studying these visual mechanics?

Readings:

In preparation for this session, please read the following chapter:

- Schneider, Florian (forthcoming), *Studying Political Communication in East Asia* (Ch.5). Unpublished book manuscript. Leiden: Leiden University.

Exercise:

For today's session, we will compare the covers of three news magazines, each portraying the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020: The German magazine *Der Spiegel*, the UK magazine *The Economist*, and the Chinese magazine *Xinmin Weekly* (the file you will receive in preparation will contain relevant German and Chinese translations for those who do not speak these languages). Ask yourself:

- What are the characteristics of the three individual front page designs, how do the three papers differ in this regard, and why?

You do not need to prepare a written submission; simply bring your notes and thoughts to the session.

Session 3: The Politics of Space: Architecture and Urban Space as Political Communication

Today's session deals with the kind of political communication that is ingrained in our everyday lives: in architecture, monuments, public spaces, and urban planning. We will discuss how actors like governments, urban planners, exhibition designers, and museum curators use space and the affordances it offers to communicate certain messages. We will explore how space can be designed to make certain discursive statements, and we will ask what methodologies are appropriate to capture those political communication processes analytically.

Readings:

In preparation for this session, please read the following chapter:

- Schneider, Florian (forthcoming), *Studying Political Communication in East Asia* (Ch.7). Unpublished book manuscript. Leiden: Leiden University.

Exercise:

For today, we will examine the Shanghai Expo territory that the authorities in Shanghai built for the 2010 world fair. Please consult the following map of the expo territory; you are also welcome to peruse additional online information with materials e.g. from the archive on TravelChinaGuide, or any other material you find online, e.g. on Wikipedia. Based on the readings, ask yourself how you would answer the following question:

- How did the designers of the Expo territory envision the world in their miniature version of the international society?

Pay particular attention to the pavilions of East Asian societies and their placement; you can selectively prepare additional materials on e.g. the China Pavilion or the South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, or Hong Kong pavilions. You do not need to prepare a written submission; simply bring your notes and thoughts to the first session.

Session 4: Digital Politics: Platforms, Designs, and Media Convergence

This session turns to digital media, and it asks how digital affordances shape political communication. Picking up on some of the questions we encountered in our discussion about space and political design, we will explore how platforms and digital services use the affordances of the medium in ways that shape politics in digital 'space'.

Readings:

In preparation for this session, please read the following chapter:

- Schneider, Florian (forthcoming), *Studying Political Communication in East Asia* (Ch.9). Unpublished book manuscript. Leiden: Leiden University.

Exercise:

As an exercise, please pick a current affairs topic and explore how it 'behaves' when you search for it on two different search engines: one in a European/American context (e.g. Google.com) and one in an East Asian context (e.g. Google.co.jp, Google.co.kr, or Baidu.com, or some other local search engine). Check both the main search results and the image search functionalities, then ask yourself:

- How do the results differ, and what can these difference tell us about each specific society and about the politics of digital platforms?

You do not need to prepare a written submission; simply bring your notes and thoughts to the first session.

Final Assignment:

For your final assignment, you need to choose a topic on Wikipedia and provide a comparative analysis of two different language entries (e.g. one in an East Asian language and the other in a European language, though you are also free to compare two East Asian entries – should language skills be an issue, select a topic about East Asia in two European languages that you understand). You are free to choose any topic that suits your interests and your own research focus. In your analysis, pay particular attention to the dimensions of political communication we have explored throughout this course: language, images, and (digital) affordances of the medium. You may want to check the 'backend' of the Wikipedia pages to also examine the change logs and discussions that editors had as they worked on the entries.

Your analysis should be presented as a poster, so you need to ask yourself how to focus on specific issues and then present these on a <u>single page</u>, using words, images, and any other data that will support your case. Design the page to be informative and persuasive. Make sure to highlight the relevance and reserve space for a (short) conclusion that drives home your own assessment.

Should you wish to learn more about Wikipedia as an object of scholarly inquiry, you are welcome to consult the following sources (optional):

- O'Sullivan, Dan (2011), 'What is an Encyclopedia? A Brief historical overview from Pliny to Wikipedia'. In Lovink, Geert & Tkacz, Nathaniel (eds) (2011), *Critical Point of View: A Wikipedia Reader* (pp.34-49). INC Reader No.7, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, retrieved 23 August 2016.
- Liao, Han-Teng & Petzold, Thomas (2014), 'Geographic and Linguistic Normalization: Towards a Better Understanding of the Geolinguistic Dynamics of Knowledge'. *Opensym*, 14.