



Cheong and Mateship: The Socialization of Media Relations

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Abstract

Corporations, governments and other organizations can contribute to the growth in transparency in a society through the study and practice of balanced media relations. By adopting and blending successful social and cultural practices and applying theories of framing and relationship building, strong long-term media relationships with diffuse societal benefits can be constructed.

This paper draws on two cultural concepts in Korea and Australia - Cheong and Mateship - to support the case for building ethical media relationships and social transparency. It attempts to argue that elements of two very different sociocultural models can be effectively conflated to develop balanced media relationships. It uses examples of media coverage of Korean government policies to demonstrate the potential for the conflation of the models using theories of framing and relationship building as the basis for the development.

Keywords: Media relations, Government transparency, Cultural practices

Introduction

While this paper examines the case of South Korea, it is instructive to begin with images from another north Asian country that has similar difficulties to South Korea in its attempts to frame important issues and to form serious relationships with Western news media.

In the summer of 1971, after a protracted struggle, Taiwan lost its seat in the United Nations to the Republic of China. In such a position, as a country without statehood, Taiwan's image as a satellite of the People's Democratic Republic of China may have appeared hopeless. But since 1993 Taiwan has applied regularly, if unsuccessfully, for UN membership under the name 'Republic of China'. This continuing strategic attempt to overcome diplomatic isolation was reconstructed in July 2007 with a number of initiatives, one of which was described by the world's leading newspaper, the *Economist*, as being 'backed [] with a public relations campaign that will culminate in a mass rally on September 15th, three days before the annual session of the UN General Assembly' (*Economist* 8. 9. 2007: 35).

The *Economist*, along with other important Western news media is not shy about imagining government and global institutional issues and events in negative public relations terms, a position from which, I will argue, it is difficult to build strong media relations. In 2005 the *Economist* imagined the International Criminal Court (ICC) creating a 'public relations bungle' (*Economist*, 22. 10. 2005) because it announced it was issuing warrants for Joseph Kony, leader of a Ugandan rebel organization responsible for the torture and deaths of 20,000 children. In announcing the issue of the warrants, the ICC was presenting its credentials in the public sphere as this was its first public act since its establishment in 1998 as a permanent war crimes tribunal. For the *Economist*, the time between establishment and delivery of a practical application of the ICC's mandate was nothing more than a public relations mess.

The *Economist's* stories and the angles they take reveal a lot about the newspaper as a global news source and about the meaning it attributes to media and public relations. On one hand it suggests media and public relations ought to play a significant role in framing important global issues, yet at the same time there is an overt contempt for the actual practice of media relations. This raises some interesting questions. If national governments such as that in South Korea, and supranational institutions such as Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), or the World Trade Organization (WTO) attempt to act positively to achieve increased levels of well-being for citizens in a socio-economic context, can they expect positive support from the news media and other important stakeholders in attempting to reach their goals? Can they build relationships with global news media, particularly Western news media, in which important issues are framed so that they resonate with citizens? Can media relations, and hence public relations, ever be imagined by the news media as being of value in the pursuit and exercise of transparency?

1. A Brief Glimpse of Coverage of the Taiwan Case

In the West, the news media represent themselves as independent and objective, reporting issues and events as they observe them. They also represent themselves as stakeholders vital to the outcome of many complex and important social, political and cultural goals and objectives. The Taiwan case is instructive in that it demonstrates how media

relations can be used at government and supranational institutional level to attempt to achieve socio-economic or socio-political goals and objectives. The case was reported in different ways during the week before the United Nations decision on September 18, 2007. Singapore's *Straits Times* reported in advertising image terms that 'selling the "Taiwan" brand to the world [] was the theme of a rally [] in support of a controversial referendum advocated by the ruling Democratic Progressive Party' (*Straits Times* 17. 9. 2007).

Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* described the 500,000 rally participants as 'marching under green and white banners and shouting Taiwan my country (*South China Morning Post* 15. 9. 2007). The same story provided images of marchers unfurling banners which read 'ordering the UN to open its doors', lifting huge balloons in the shape of a globe, and the rally itself as having a 'carnival atmosphere'. A day later the same newspaper reported of threats emanating from Beijing in which it would 'not tolerate any moves to separate Taiwan from the mainland' (*South China Morning Post* 17. 9. 2007), referring to the marchers and supporters of the President of the previous day as 'demonstrators'.

Japan's *Kyodo News* reported that the mass rally in Taiwan's second largest city of Kaohsiung had been foreshadowed by a presidential press conference that was broadcast in New York. It reported that the rally, which was expected to draw more than 500,000 supporters to a 'parade' through the city, would 'culminate with a speech by [President] Chen that will be televised live in front of the United Nations' New York headquarters, where the DPP plans to hold a coinciding rally' (*Kyodo News* 15. 9. 2007).

The cynical observer of the Taiwanese government strategy – the mobilization and management of such a large gathering for the purpose of demonstrating collective will – might be tempted to argue that it was a pointless exercise as the Chinese veto power in the UN presented an impasse for any Taiwanese intervention. Such a position was imagined by the *Straits Times* which provided a five paragraph opinion on the matter two days after the rally, and a day before the UN vote. It stated that since 1971 Taiwan has repeatedly failed to rejoin the UN, and that like in past attempts it is 'certain' to be blocked by China (*Straits Times* 17. 9. 2007). To balance its cynical observation it provided a glimmer of hope by suggesting that the bid has 'attracted unprecedented attention this year because of the planned referendum' (*Straits Times* 17. 9. 2007).

2. Applying Media Relations Theory: The Social Model

Ihlen and Ruler (2007) argue that public relations has a social dimension that is inherently more important than others and that the quest for one great theory to encompass and embrace the field is an impossible dream. A literal translation of media relations is the relationships with and between media, media relations practitioners, and clients. Media relations can have broad implications, when attached to a globally sensitive conflict between Palestine and Israel, for example, but at the other end of the scale it can attract attention as the preparation of a popsy bubblehead event as banal as a television song contest.

Historically, media relations has attempted to define itself by what it is not: it is not propaganda, it is not lobbying, and it is not advertising. But defining something by saying what it is not, is an apologetic position. Along the scale, between the extremes of global conflict and popsy bubblehead, lie an array of differentiated activities that are ascribed to media relations. What they have in common is the aim that an issue or event shifts from one space to another. This can happen with the application of persuasion and influence upon the news media. Or it can happen as a communication with stakeholders that does not rely on the news media for its transfer.

The importance of an understanding of persuasion and influence as they are applied to all types of media is palpable. Less obvious is the need for media relations to implement other, less direct types of communication with non-media stakeholders. Media relations is therefore concerned with building relationships with media.

The field of media relations, as a relatively newly constituted arena, is one which is filled with agents and forces who are always operating on behalf of others (clients) that exist in fields other than media relations (Stanton 2007a). While the field of journalism is filled with agents and actors operating as journalists, much the same as the field of medicine is filled with medical practitioners and law filled with lawyers, media relations is filled with agents and actors theorizing and practicing about things outside the field. They are effectively, agents and actors operating overtly, competing on behalf of clients within other fields to maintain a position or to transform a position (Stanton 2007a). And the news media are the logical vehicles for media relations agents and actors to use to reach 'accessible' and 'inaccessible' stakeholders. The news media are acknowledged as being of primary importance to the campaign communication goals and objectives of all types of issues and events (Stanton 2007b). In this it is important to examine one of the West's leading newspapers; one that claims to act on a global scale. The *Economist* is one of the most influential news media in the world. In general, it reports issues and events in a balanced fashion relying upon sources that it values and trusts from a perspective that requires them to demonstrate the same level of symbolic capital as is demanded of the newspaper itself by its stakeholders. But how much of the material that appears around the globe each week in the pages of the *Economist* is sourced from media relations practitioners? Is every article about governments, sourced from governments? How much of the material sourced from governments can claim objectivity? If material appearing in the

Economist is sourced from governments, how did those governments build a strong relationship with the newspaper so that it was able to consider them sourceworthy?

3. Two Theories that support media relations: Framing and its application to relationship building

There are two theories that contribute to the development of media relations: framing and relationship building. Framing requires us to think about an issue or event in a particular way. It needs us to think about it as part of a wider ideology and to frame it within that ideological position. It also requires us to have some understanding of the ideological position of the media so that our frame matches the agenda embedded within the media ideology.

Media ideologies come in all shapes and sizes but most importantly in the West, they are linked to the central position of commercial ownership. Opinion writers and journalists working for News Corporation, for example, may hold different views to News Corporation's majority stakeholders Rupert Murdoch or John Malone (Liberty Media) and sometimes, their writing may reflect this position. But generally speaking, the ideological position of commercial ownership or majority shareholding will be paramount. (In this the Western news media is not very different to its non-Western counterparts that appear to construct news along government lines.) Framing an issue in ideological terms related to the news media implies a pragmatic position is a primary component of a media relations campaign. It also implies a non-ideological position for a client who is then seen to be willing to engage in any ideological position to suit the purpose of persuading the news media. This is not always the case and indeed, is diminishing as a strategy in global terms (Stanton 2007c). The need to understand the ideological position of the news media does not translate into a media relationship-building pragmatism devoid of its own ideology. The need to understand a news media ideology allows the media relationship builder to frame an issue in such a way that it reflects its own ideological position - not a compromised position because it adapts to a particular news media ideology.

It requires a corporation, government or other stakeholder to think like a news medium and thus to:

- Measure how much it knows about an issue
- Measure how much others know about an issue
- Evaluate where it got its information
- Evaluate the validity of the information
- Evaluate sources of information other than its own

4. The Importance of Framing Theory in Media Relations

A definition of framing theory that can be applied widely to South Korean, Australian and other governments or organizations with an interest in building relationships with Western news media is *the capacity of a media relationship builder to comprehend and interpret the agenda-setting policies and source selection processes employed by the media. It is the construction of a suitable ground onto which an issue or event can be projected as an elegant story (characterized by grace of form; simple and effective) relevant to specific media stakeholders (Stanton 2007a).*

Framing theory thus requires SGI:

- Strategy (design)
- Ground (foreground/background)
- Image (story)

Issue framing in media relations takes its lead from Goffman (1974) in which the idea of what an individual could actually be attuned to at any particular moment was defined by the framework that was built around a particular situation. Goffman began his investigation into framing and frame analysis by asking what it was that an individual did when confronted by any current situation. (For example, how did the journalist for the *Economist* reporting on the Taiwan strategy, imagine the issue? How did he or she see it as part of their particular view of the world?). For Goffman, the question itself required us to be alert to a number of possibilities, chief among them that the answer could be framed in any way that supported whatever needed supporting. (Some critics suggest this is the only reason that media relations exists: to shape and frame responses that match something other than reality.) Goffman argued that the width or narrowness of focus of an issue or event was determined by who answered the question ... 'what is it that's going on here'? If we consider the issue of Taiwan's attempt to gain entry to the United Nations, the answer will be framed as a different response by competing interests: it will be different for China, different again for the United States and different again for individuals or groups in Taiwan. Just as individuals must ask what it is that is going on before they can get an answer framed in a particular way, so too journalists seek answers to the same question before they can construct and write what they consider to be objective accounts of issues and events.

Journalists answer the question by investigating the 'frame' in which the issue or event has been presented. They try to make sense out of it by matching it to already known frames of reference. These known frames of reference may have

been established or entrenched in the mind of the individual journalist for some time, or they may be the product of some sharp occurrence that has had a profound effect on that individual's beliefs, or codes of ethical and moral conduct. For example, the journalist may have had a personally moving experience in childhood — family life shifting from stability to poverty — which sets up a frame around the issue of poverty as personal experience for the journalist.

In the social world the organization of issues and events governs the way in which we see them and the level of acceptance we apply to them. If, for example, we as citizens feel confident in the policies of our government and by extension, the principles upon which it plans our sociopolitical or economic place in the world, we are less likely to demonstrate distrust when government policies are reported in a negative fashion in the news media. We frame our personal response within our own view of what the government has done already. If we have less confidence in the government, we may be more likely to feel less trust in its policies. Both responses might be the result of how we frame the issue in our own minds.

The duty of the media relationship builder is to frame an issue or event in such a way that it resonates with the existing or known frames of reference used by the media itself so that it has meaning (Stanton 2007a). But the media relations builder must also be concerned that issues and events can be framed in a certain way or appear to be 'fabricated' or embedded in reality so that they take on the shape of reality to the extent that it becomes difficult to tell fake from real. This is the central argument put by the news media today about the role of media relations in the embedding process. And it is no co-incidence that this process reached a stage where the United States Defense Department referred to journalists working in war zones as being 'embedded' with its troops. They are effectively, to highlight Goffman's point, taking up space in the reality of the war, rather than reporting it from an objective sideline.

While the news media in the West thinks of itself as 'good', investigating fake from real, many journalists believe media relations practitioners to be inherently 'bad'; inventing fake and attempting to embed it in the real. Journalistic reality is organized around the principle of the binary opposite; if you're not with us you're against us. This frame allows news journalists to see media relations itself as fake, rather than as part of the real.

Goffman suggests that whatever it is about the real that makes us believe in it, those in the business of producing the fake will use the same ingredients, making it difficult to know fake from real. Just ask any Seoul street vendor with a trolley full of Louis Vuitton handbags selling for 300 Won each. But this assumes fabrication is the province of public relations and that the building of media and other stakeholder relationships relies on fake.

There is no question that media relations is exercised by all types of organizations to persuade and influence stakeholder publics in all spheres; political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental (PESTLE). The reverse is also true; media relations is used by stakeholder publics to exert persuasion and influence as a countervailing measure. In this it is neither a positive nor a negative tool of persuasion and influence.

5. Building Relationships: Some Korean Australian Comparisons

There are some interesting and important comparisons that can be made between the building of relationships in South Korea and in Australia. The presence of the spiritual notion of *Cheong* is an important factor in the development of relationships in Korea. In Australia, a similar relationship-building ritual exists and is known as *Mateship*. I argue that these sociocultural traditions can be conflated and framed to create a valuable media relations building strategy.

While *Cheong* has been given important status as a key to relationship-building between journalism and media relations in Korea (Berkowitz & Lee 2004), similar to the importance of *Guanxi* in Taiwan (Huang 2000), *Mateship* has been accorded less theoretical importance, despite the empirical evidence of its strong existence across traditional Australian and New Zealand media (Stanton 2007a). *Cheong* is a vital element in relationship building, I suggest, however, there is a fundamental difference between it and *Mateship* that provides a clue to its future expansion and to the interweaving of the two as a valuable media relations tools. By way of explanation, let me expand the Australian example and then provide some empirical evidence in support of my argument. Australians tend to view 'Mateship' as long-term. The long-term nature applies evenly to both the building of relationships outside immediate communities such as families and neighborhoods as it does to families and neighborhoods. If a social/business relationship is developed between an Australian and a Korean, for example, the Australian will more often wish to maintain regular contact and want the relationship to exist outside its business requirements. This continuity of contact also occurs in some other western countries such as Canada and America. I have heard it referred to as a 'need to keep connected' (Calderwood 2007). In the past few years Australian *Mateship* has become part of the political vernacular in which holders of high office such as Prime Minister, seek to present an image of their relationships with other global leaders as surpassing the ordinary business of government and international relations. The image of *Mateship* has been constructed specifically between the Australian Prime Minister John Howard, and the United States President George W Bush as one of mutual values that transcend politics. Similar images of *Mateship* have been constructed by previous Australian Prime Ministers, most notably R J L Hawke in the early 1980s (with US President Bill Clinton) and in the 1960s, Sir Robert Menzies, who cultivated a *Mateship* image with HRH Queen Elizabeth.

Interestingly, while the Mateship motif is as alive in New Zealand as it is in Australia, I suggest there has never been a conscious attempt by those in high office in either country to construct an image of Mateship between themselves.

So, while Mateship attempts to engage at community and family levels as well as at international levels, Cheong, appears to be more localized – it is not considered to be as relevant beyond Korean society as it is within. In this I would suggest there are two elements in Korean social relationship development that can be extrapolated into media relationship development.

(1) Cheong – that which exists between Koreans.

(2) No-Cheong – non-developmental contact with others – which appears to be closer in form when thinking about relationship building between Koreans and others to the notion of Guanxi. In this, as Huang (2000) has pointed out, business and personal relationships are fostered and developed for the period of time they are necessary. Afterwards, there is little or no contact until necessity again arises.

For the Western journalist, the idea of long-term relationship-building occurs for them at a personal level within their own sphere of news media. Global journalists frequently meet each other at news sites around the world. And because they are working in an environment in which sense-making and framing must be achieved quickly and accurately, they build relationships with each other that they consider long-term, in much the same way that Mateship is a long-term process. The Australian idea of Mateship derived from the vastness of the country itself and the relatively small population. Mateship – of which one element is mutual assistance – can also be applied to the circumstances in which journalists find themselves when reporting global news: they are often in unfamiliar places, so the idea of developing relationships with other journalists beyond business is a natural progression.

While Cheong can be used to keep connected between media relations practitioners and journalists, it appears to extend only to Koreans. It is important to develop Cheong beyond national boundaries between Koreans to other cultures and societies. The four key characteristics of Cheong applied by Berkowitz and Lee (2004) – historical, being together, warm-heartedness and absence of reserve – can be applied equally in the Australian context to Mateship.

6. Australian Media and Mateship

The nature of Mateship can be applied to the relationship between journalists and practitioners at a number of levels in Australia and can be extrapolated into the Korean case. The most noticeable is at the level of ‘trade and business’ publications - those magazines and journals devoted to editorializing and advertising specific industry sectors such as construction, mining, manufacturing or textiles, for example. At this level, it is not uncommon for journalists and editors to develop longstanding friendships (Mateship) with media relations practitioners who have the potential to supply large quantities of editorial copy (and, quite frequently who may have been themselves former journalists). This copy can take the form of product and service information, but it is equally likely to be issue-oriented or event-oriented. These relationships can be strengthened when editors and journalists are invited on field trips – national or international – so that they ‘live’ for short periods of time with practitioners. A ten day trip, for example, made by an earthmoving manufacturer might be made by twelve or more editors and journalists from Australia travelling across America to view and ‘test’ the manufacturers products on site. Under these circumstance, the application of Mateship is primary to the development of a relationship that will benefit both the editor and the practitioner. (It is worth noting that while the development of the relationship may begin with the client/media relations practitioner, in a large number of cases, the continuity of the relationship is sustained equally by the practitioner and the journalist (Stanton 2007c).

In the Australian context, the mateship metaphor extends further in the hard-working, hard-drinking industries such as construction and mining. It is not uncommon for (male) editors and journalists to feel a strong empathy for the industries they report. (My own observations indicate this is also the case in Korea.) A similar situation arises in more general news gathering and reporting with specialist rounds journalists such as police and emergency services. The deeply emotional nature of the work being done by those they are reporting allows journalists to develop a strong bond with the specialists and with the media relations practitioners who are also on these ‘front lines’ (Stanton 2007c).

7. News selection and the relationship building process

Kim & Bae (2006) point up an important three-factor model (developed by Jo and Kim 2004) that provides a good basis for examining media relations in Korea. The model argues that there are three primary factors influencing practitioner-journalist relationships:

- (1) The development of informal relationships
- (2) The provision of gifts
- (3) The development of formal responsibilities.

While media relations practitioners in Australia are less likely to invoke what Kim and Bae(2006) refer to as the second in a three phase model – providing monetary gifts – they are more likely to attempt to blend the other two elements –

informal relationships and formal responsibilities. The attempted blending of informal and formal elements sometimes leads to what Berkowitz and Lee (2004) describe as distrust and even 'contempt', as journalists perceive the development of the relationship as being weighted towards the practitioner. The actual level of distrust and contempt is much lower in Australia than reported, particularly when we take into account media other than 'mainstream' national and metropolitan news (Stanton 2007c).

Specialist publications, such as those mentioned above, combined with regional and rural newspapers, television and radio, account for the bulk of news media in Australia and it is these which are less inclined to look to confrontation with media relations practitioners. In this the characteristics of Mateship are similar to Cheong – the development of familiarity, trust and considerations [] for each other (Berkowitz and Lee 2004: 434) that are derived from working in the same industry. Further, if we consider the emphasis of the public relations profession to be on media routine factors such as news selection (Shin, Park and Cameron 2006) then the relationship may be strengthened due to the practitioners' honoring of the journalists' professional practices.

I would summarize this by arguing that media relations is a two-way process. Media needs sources and sources need media. Media relationships are built strategically around trust and reliability, usually over a long period of time. Media relations practitioners spend a lot of time thinking about how they can get the news media interested in their client's issues and events. But on the other side of the 'zone', the news media is thinking about how it can get information about issues and events from clients, or if they have them, the client's media relations people that can be transformed into news.

Within the primary factor model invoked by Jo and Kim lie two additional requirements if the relationship is going to be of value. These are:

- (1) Information that the media is interested in, and
- (2) The ability of a media relations practitioner to supply it.

From the perspective of the media relations practitioner, the supply of information that has the potential to become news is part of every campaign that involves the media. A practitioner, or agent, must investigate the angles on the issue or event to build a story that has news potential. But this raises some additional interesting questions:

- (1) What is news and how is it perceived by different media?
- (2) Is news the only element in a media relationship building process that interests a practitioner?
- (3) Is news something that exists between the media and those issues or events from which it emanates?
- (4) How is news imagined by the media?
- (5) How is news imagined by practitioners?

Journalists produce news on behalf of client stakeholders in the same way that coal is produced and generated as energy on behalf of clients. Coal is extracted from the Powder River Basin in the United States and generated as energy in steel mills in Korea. It is extracted from the Hunter Valley in Australia and generated as energy in power stations to electrify the state of New South Wales. Clients of the commodity owners in the Powder River Basin are Korean shipbuilders. There is no citizen involvement in the trade. The client of the commodity owners in Australia is the governments of NSW. Clients of commodity owners can be involved in private enterprise, state enterprise or be dual organizations with interests in both private and public sector activities. Clients of commodity owners of news are the same manufacturers, the same shipbuilders and the same traders, all of whom have an interest in the validity of the trade taking place in the competitive market in which they operate.

Thus journalists are producing news for the benefit of those with the capacity to act upon or to verify something in response. The citizen is not part of the action or verification in any important way. Citizens may act or verify in some marginal way - acquiring end products or services generated by the initial activity - but involvement is restricted to a peripheral role as observer of the main game. The mere act of consumption of news does not place a citizen in the main game other than in a minor role. There is no avenue for that citizen to become an important actor in either a political or economic sense. In this, business journalists and reporters are of special interest as they work in an environment where the citizen is even more marginalized. The news gathering and producing activity revolves around generation of interest by commodity owners for commodity owners in much the same way as English economist David Ricardo outlined the operations of earlier mercantilists in a competitive market. Business journalists gather and produce news specifically for business clients. The citizen has little or no interest in it. Business news is thus imagined in such a way as to fit the frame of business activity.

8. News as it is Imagined by the Media Relations Practitioner

For the Western news journalist, there are two important stakeholders: the media owner and the news source. Audiences, readers, viewers - stakeholders who absorb news as a commodity - are secondary to the ritual of news gathering and production.

For the media relations practitioner or agent, there are also two primary stakeholders: the client and the news media itself - reporters, journalists, editors and producers. For the media relations agent, the relationships are more complex. The client, like the media owner, is the primary stakeholder with financial control of the commodity. But importantly, the client is also the source. While the journalist is building two relationships that run parallel, the agent is building two separate and discrete relationships within one entity; the client as owner and source. For the agent, a third stakeholder relationship - the news media - is equally important. In this the relationship between agent and journalist is sometimes unbalanced.

A journalist may use a media relations agent as a source, but is also free to use other sources and to produce news that is un sourced - issues and events that are observed and reported without interpretation. The media relations agent, however, is usually obliged to interpret and find an angle from material sourced directly from the client. This has been the traditional method of building media relationships. The agent investigates client source material, interprets it, finds a suitable angle, then directs it to the news media. The strategic intent is to find a suitable angle that reflects a particular medium and then find an alternative angle for another medium. This does not always result in success. Thus a tactic that is in wide use is to find 'partnerships' in the story angle. This allows the agent to split the source and the client, and in doing so to create a more objective frame for the story, the same way a journalist seeks an alternative viewpoint for story balance. This tactic, however, requires the client's agreement to include an additional stakeholder in the frame and to have an understanding that the additional stakeholder may receive more or better news coverage than the client.

A good media relationship can be built by anyone, just the same as a good personal relationship can be built. The difficulty for media relations practitioners is two-fold. It begins when they believe they have a stronger claim to the relationship than non-public relations people. In this journalists will sometimes appear to have stronger relationships with citizens whom they perceive to have no active involvement in attempting to gain from influence and persuasion. Journalists sometimes view media relations clients in this way. But they do not usually view practitioners in the same constructive or positive way they view clients. And they do not view all practitioners through the same lens. If they did, there would be no space within the public or private spheres for relationship building or dialogic communication.

In building a media relationship a campaign issue or event is the central focus. The client and the media are attached to the campaign at either end. To achieve success, an agent must put together three elements

- (1) A coherent issue
- (2) An informed client
- (3) A receptive media.

It is the media relations agent's responsibility to shape the client's informed-ness just as much as it is to shape the news media's receptiveness. So the agent must be informed and receptive to the issue or event. When framing an issue in a certain way, an agent must think about the type of people they are framing it for. The agent must think about the type of event or activity that might support the issue and assist to frame it in a favorable way. Sending a picture of an event such as the launch of a new car to a radio program is not a good way to develop a relationship with a radio journalist. Similarly, sending a ten-page detailed back-story about the technical specifications of the car to a morning television entertainment program would be equally silly (Stanton 2007b).

9. Two Examples of News Frames

Louw (2004) describes the hegemony of Western journalism and how its values are represented in news of the rest of the world. Louw says journalists in the West are not equipped to 'read' foreign issues and events so that they resonate with home audiences. They are therefore most often imagined as 'conflict' or as victim and villain situations. Louw suggests that Western journalists covering foreign issues and events misread and misunderstand the context in which they have been located because they have preconceived images that are 'grounded' in their Western sociopolitical culture.

But Western news images of issues and events in some countries are not as binary as others. For Western news media, Africa and the Middle East fit a binary position described by Louw because they do not conform to Western sociopolitical values. They can be seen in terms of their opposition to Western sociopolitical and cultural positions. Some other countries, especially those formerly imagined in binary terms, present difficulties for Western news journalists because they no longer conform to conventional images of opposition (Stanton 2007b).

An example comes from the *Economist's* reporting of an issue in Korea. Unification of the two Koreas (and government initiatives towards re-unification) is an issue that receives attention in the Western news media, but it is rarely imagined within a positive frame. An additional important issue which has strong newsworthiness and value — sandstorms from Mongolia's Gobi Desert that blanket Korea with thousands of tons of topsoil each year — is ignored by the West (and will be ignored here for space reasons). Within the Republic of Korea, there appears to be a strong wish for re-unification with North Korea for economic, social and political reasons (Jonsson 2006). At the border, in an area known as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) two important events have taken place in the past few years, one of which was reported in mildly negative terms by the *Economist* and the other ignored generally by the Western news media.

The *Economist* reported the development of a trade zone that has been set up by South Korea inside the DMZ. Known as *Kaesong*, it houses South Korean manufacturing plants in which labor is supplied by the North. South Korea, its government and its citizens, see this as a positive move towards re-unification with the North. The *Economist* lead a twelve paragraph story of May 27 2006 (headlined *An Industrial Park Causes Tensions With America*) with

America's chief negotiator on North Korea, Christopher Hill, visited Seoul on May 25th, part of an effort to re-start talks over North Korea's illicit nuclear programs. Increasingly though America and its ally South Korea are at odds about the North (*Economist* 27. 5. 06: 27).

The story represented American interests, noting that the government of the United States sees South Korea as being 'soft' on its northern neighbor. The angle of the story supports my argument. The *Economist* was unable to frame the issue as it is seen in Asia at government and street level: as a north-south dialogue that had the potential to lead to a reduction in tensions between North Korea and the West. As a classic example of developing diplomacy, the issue could easily have been imagined thus by the *Economist*, but, it did not conform to Western news values of diplomacy and political communication because it did not include the United States. Additionally, and this becomes important when considering the angle chosen by the newspaper, the issue of re-unification had the potential to redirect US foreign policy on North Korea. In 2003, US President George W Bush used powerful rhetoric to describe North Korea as a third pillar in an 'axis of evil' that included Iraq and Iran. After first applying military force in Iraq, then in 2005 turning its attention to Iran's nuclear development program, the United States government would have been uninterested in having a friendly neighbor developing diplomacy when it had made clear and unambiguous statements about the confrontation it intended with North Korea. The news report in the *Economist* implied support for the US position by highlighting human rights issues of low wages and conditions in the Kaesong plants, and argued that while the factories might be seen by the South to encourage reform in the North, the development did not supply freedom of association for workers, nor the ability to take industrial action or become involved in wage negotiation. In highlighting these particular factors, the *Economist* is imagining the issue of manufacturing in Asia as it would like to believe it exists in the West. While freedom of association, industrial action, and wage negotiations are enshrined in industrial mythology in most Western countries, the reality is that individual contracts and enterprise agreements have become normative when manufacturing is still located in Western countries. As Bhagwati (2004) demonstrates, the real issue for Western labor unions is not the wages and conditions of Asian factory workers, but an unacceptable decline in Western labor standards when Asian workers accept relatively lower standards and conditions. I suggest this is the real issue behind the *Economist's* imaginative representation of dialogue and diplomacy between the two Koreas: human rights. United States foreign policy on North Korea is grounded and framed around that country's poor history of human rights; a position which Western news media such as the *Economist* adopt as it fits snugly into their image of Asian exploitation of citizens. (Note 1)

A second example, reported widely in the Korean press at the time that supported the argument that South Korea was employing a diplomatic strategy in its aim of re-unification, was the proposed train journey between the Korean capitals of Seoul and Pyongyang scheduled to take place on the reconnected inter-Korean railway line. For a variety of reasons, most notably the cancellation of the event by the North, which cited the absence of a military accord to guarantee safe passage, and unstable political conditions in the south (*Korea Times* 27. 5. 2006: p2), the event was reported widely in Asia. For the West, however, the idea of a test-run train journey between North and South adds tension to the issue of North Korea being imagined as a nuclear threat. Train journeys in the imagination of the West are gentle things taken by tourists and citizens traveling for pleasure and work. They cannot be reconciled with images of aberrant nations developing nuclear warfare programs. Train journeys do not fit the image of non-Western societal organization that has become what Louw (2004) describes as despicable and incomprehensible to the Western journalist. Additionally, Koreans traveling by train from Seoul to London via North Korea and Russia does not fit the nuclear war frame.

10. Towards Transparency

Botan and Hazleton (2006) demonstrate that the US has played a dominant role in the development of media relations and public relations theory, adding that evidence suggests the field is becoming more international in its focus with important contributions being made from Germany, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, with the possibility of large contributions in future coming from China and Brazil. The value of the theoretical contribution of China and Brazil, I would suggest, will be more circumscribed than the others by cultural, political and language issues. This is not to suggest they will not contribute, but the significance of the contribution will lie in the relationship that stakeholders have with governments as both countries have very different political and legal systems, making transparency and internationalization more problematic. This paper presents an argument that South Korea also has a large role to play in development.

Governments, corporations and other large organizations that have traditionally played a hegemonic role in defining media relations are re-assessing their relationships. Stakeholders who were once considered subversive, or at the very least irritating, are seen more often in partnership. The reason for the shift lies partly with the transformation of media

relations. Secondly, its transformation towards an ethical profession is the result of all types of alternative organizations and groups adopting and successfully using strategies and tactics that were once the secretive province of profit-based organizations. In the past, when corporations and governments used media relations campaigns to persuade and influence, they were perceived to be doing so asymmetrically. The adoption of campaign strategies and tactics, or more importantly, the overt acknowledgement that not-for-profit organizations and environmental groups such as the Red Cross, Oxfam and Medecins sans Frontieres employ full-time media relations experts, is aiding the image and reputation of media relations. It can no longer be decried as a persuasive tool of big business. As smaller and less well-funded organizations and individuals began understanding and using media relations strategies and tactics for all types of stakeholder communication, including local government election campaigns and environmental awareness campaigns, the demonization of the subfield of media relations by the news media can no longer be sustained. The result will be a more transparent society.

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Notes

Note 1. English language newspaper The Korea Times reported in late May 2006 that the Kaesong project had the support of Guido Westerwelle, chairman of the German Free Democratic Party (FDP) who stated during a visit to Korea that had Germany had a similar opportunity during the time of its division, it would have done the same thing.