



# Eva Rohrhofer

## Media Systems in East Asia

### Politics and Media in Japan, South Korea and China (PRC)

#### Topic and Research Question

In every part of the world, media systems strongly depend on their political, economic and legal environments. However, it is more and more often argued that media systems will assimilate in the course of globalization, making a comparison based on nation states redundant (see Blum 2005: 5). Comparisons of European media systems showed that they similarly develop in the same region (see Hallin/Mancini 2004). Based on a comparison between Japan, the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China one goal of my master thesis was to find out whether this also applies to the region East Asia and which similarities and differences exist; assuming that due to the strong dependence of media systems on their political environment, a nation state based comparison is still reasonable in this region. In order to compare the media systems of East Asia, I used Roger Blum's "Extended Comparison Approach" which can be applied to diverse countries and allows to establish a connection between political systems and media systems. A second goal of this thesis is to find out whether this is the case or not. Also, I point out problems that may arise while applying the model.

#### State of the Art

Since the 1950s, media scientists have tried to show the connections between media and politics using models (Blum 2005: 5). Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm were the first ones to develop models for four different media systems and showed that media systems can be distinguished by their relationship to the political system, the type of control they underlie and their property situation (Siebert/ Peterson/Schramm 1956; Blum 2005: 5). This approach was later criticized for being normative and characterized by Western pluralist standards (Weischenberg 1992: 86). The 1980s brought forth more models for international comparisons of media systems, for example by comparing systems of the Western, Communist and Third World. Today these models are believed to be too schematic (Blum 2005: 5). In 1975 and 1995, Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch linked political and media categories of comparison, trying to make the connection between media and politics measurable for the first time (Blumler/Gurevitch 1995; see Blum 2005: 6). Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini also combined political and media criteria to create an approach for comparing the media systems of

Western democracies in 2004 and developed three regional models (Hallin/Mancini 2004: 67ff., Blum 2005: 6). However, this concept cannot directly be applied to other regions of the world. This problem was tried to be solved in 2005 by Swiss media scientist Roger Blum, who uses Hallin's and Mancini's model as a basis for his macro theory for the comparison of media systems. The resulting approach aims at creating a connection between political and media systems and to enable an international comparison.

#### Methodology and Approach

In order to answer my research questions, I did a scientific-methodical comparison of multiple states based on a comprehensive analysis of relevant literature. For this purpose, mostly German and English textbooks as well as country-, media- and politics-specific monographies were used, supplemented by papers and articles of specialist journals. As media systems are products of state decisions (Kleinstaub 2002: 31, in Haas/Jarren), the media systems within single state borders are used as a starting point for analysis. The complexity of a comparison between various states inevitably requires a limitation on selected categories of comparison. Here, Roger Blum's extended comparison approach was used. According to this, the nine categories political system, political culture, freedom of media, ownership of media, funding of media, political parallelism, state control over media, media culture and media orientation were compared along three lines, namely the liberal, middle and regulated line. Blum suggests six models to classify countries: The liberalism or Atlantic-Pacific model, the clientel or South European model, the service public or North European model, the shock or East European model, the patriot or Arabian-Asian model and the command or Asian-Caribbean model. His approach served as a base for a deductive approach. The comparison was made on macro-level, which allows to analyze groups, structures, systems, processes and interactions (Thomaß 2007: 30).

#### Main Facts

In my master thesis two democratic systems (Japan, South Korea) were compared with one authoritarian system (PRC). While Japan and South Korea show ambivalent political cultures, China's political culture is classified as concordant. The analysis of various

media-dimensions showed some interesting facts. First of all, Japan's media system is shaped by the press club system, which not only leads to prevalent self-censorship among journalists but also to uniform media content, strong organizational links between media and politics and the media's loyalty towards the political system. Smaller media that is not included in the press clubs works more investigative serves as a watchdog and shows more diversity. The media is mostly in private ownership and financed by the market – one exception is the public broadcaster NHK, over which the state has relatively strong control.

South Korean media developed under the strong guidance of the state. When a democratic order was established in the 1980s, the media sector grew rapidly and became more and more market-oriented. Today, the freedom of media is mainly constrained when it comes to topics concerning North Korea. Apart from that, the media operates relatively freely. Nevertheless, political parallelism is strong. The media openly favors and supports certain political parties, journalists do not tend to be neutral and are often active in politics. The strong political journalism leads to a media culture in which media supports certain parties and criticizes others. Media is in private and public ownership. It is mostly market-financed; but public funding plays an important role especially in the area of broadcasting.

The Chinese media system is shaped by a tension between rapid commercialization and continuing ideological control (Ma 2001: 21, in Curran/Park). The principles of the Chinese model of a socialist market economy are mirrored in the media system. In theory, the Chinese media underlies strict pre- and post-censorship. Considering the size and complexity of the Chinese media sector, permanent censorship is not possible in practice; some media is more controlled than other. All media companies are publicly owned, but financed by both the state and the market. Media serves as a mouthpiece for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and is thus in close relations with political organizations. It has to meet the "party principle" and thus has to publish mostly positive and value-oriented content. However, some smaller media tries to work investigatively and to control and criticize the government on a small scale.

#### Results

The following table shows the classification of Japan, South Korea and the PRC in Blum's model; it also

indicates that Blum's approach could be applied to Japan, South Korea and the PRC. Still, a clear classification of the countries along the three lines was not always possible.

Dimension	Japan	South Korea	PRC
1 Political System	A - democratic	A - democratic	B - authoritarian
2 Political Culture	B - ambivalent	B - ambivalent	C - concordant
3 Freedom of Media	A/B - No/occasional censorship	B - Occasional censorship	B/C - Occasional/permanent censors.
4 Media Ownership	B - private and public	B - private and public	C - public
5 Financing of Media	B - market and state	B - market and state	B - market and state
6 Political Parallelism	B - middle	C - strong	C - strong
7 State Control over Media	B - middle	B - middle	C - strong
8 Media Culture	B - ambivalent	B - ambivalent	B - ambivalent
9 Media Orientation	A - commercial	B - divergent	B - divergent

The media system of the PRC is mostly shaped by political influences and can be clearly distinguished from the two democratic countries. South Korea, which was governed by authoritarian regimes for a long time, shows results that can often be situated between Japan and China. This points to the strong dependence of East Asia's media systems on the political systems they are embedded in. However, regional similarities despite different political systems (e.g. financing and media culture); but they do so only on the surface and are based on highly diverse grounds. On closer examination, differences prevail.

#### References

All references can be found in the full version of the MA thesis available at <http://www.file-upload.net/download-8213041/Masterarbeit.pdf.html>

#### About the Author

Eva Rohrhofer, born in 1987, studied Sinology and East Asian Economy and Society at the University of Vienna and currently works as a freelance journalist.

Contact information:  
[evrohrhofer@gmx.at](mailto:evrohrhofer@gmx.at)