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Mapping the Landscape of Communication  
Research around the World:  
A Structural Theory of Academic Dependency  
傳播學研究的世界版圖：學術依賴的結構化  
理論

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## Abstract

The inequality of academic development around the world calls for theoretical and empirical studies in this aspect. Based on dependency theory, academic dependency theory, and globalization theory, this study develops a structural theory of academic dependency. By adding the adjective “structural” to the academic theory, this study argues that international interaction is a key to understanding inequality between nations. Specifically, it elaborates on the asymmetric international interaction implied by academic dependency theory, and predicts an unparalleled development and inequalization process of national productivity. It proposes a hegemonic landscape of interaction as a mechanism to maintain the asymmetric interaction. It also argues that the economy is the power that shapes this hegemonic landscape.

Using the field of communication as an empirical example, the study tests the theory and compares the findings with previous studies. In the communication field, the reliance on international collaboration, i.e., dependency, has different influences in academia in developed nations and academia in developing nations. For the former, the more a nation relies on international collaboration, the higher its academic productivity is. For the latter, the more a nation relies on international collaboration, the lower its academic productivity is. As a result, global communication research is undergoing a divergence of national research productivity. The gap between these two types of nations is becoming increasingly large; thus, an inequalization process is present.

Using network analysis techniques, this study identifies a longitudinal hegemonic globalization landscape in communication research. From 2000 to 2012, the network is becoming increasingly centralized, i.e., hegemonic, and integrated, i.e., globalized. The

findings indicate that global integration occurs in the field of communication, and the integration is achieved through a small group of core nations.

The landscape is mainly shaped by economic mechanisms. From 2000 to 2012, the influence of international trade in collaboration is constantly significantly positive. The more import/export relations that two nations have, the more likely scholars from the two nations are to collaborate with each other. Compared to language, culture, and geography, it is the most dominant mechanism, and its dominance is stable across 13 years.

By examining the national power distribution in share of articles, the findings confirm with previous studies in that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is a decreasing dominance of the U.S. and the U.K. in the proportion of articles in communication research. The decreasing share of the U.S. and the U.K. is caused by the increasing number of countries joining the field. In fact, according to the inequalization process that the study has identified, the gap between developing nations and developed nations is enlarging. Moreover, according to the reinforcing hegemonic globalization typology of communication research in which the West is the center, the West is also gaining power by occupying the central position. Although more and more countries are joining the field of communication, and their contribution is increasing, the influence of the U.S. is not diminished.

The communication field is expanding following the “volcano” metaphor, in which while the base is becoming wider, the summit at the center is being pushed higher. Although Asian countries are rising in the communication field, they are rising in a

dependent way, in which the research agenda and evaluation standards are set by Western powers.

The study theoretically improves and empirically tests the academic dependency theory. It enables further empirical development of the theory. It is also a reflexive investigation of the communication field; thus, it offers important implications for future development strategies for the field.