Summary

*Communication for Life in Cyberspace: a Christian Ethical Quest in Reference to the Korean Situation*

This study is an interdisciplinary study of communication and theology, and at the same time an integrated study of the West and Asia. This study is based on an Asian mode of thinking to explore answers to the research question: ‘What is the meaning of communication for life in Cyberspace? - A Christian ethical quest in reference to the Korean situation.’

The term ‘life’ is a key concept of this study. What is the meaning of life? It is not merely a biological notion. We cannot simply define what life is and the boundary between life and non-life. In Korean it is *SaengMyong*, which means the whole life of all living entities.

What, then, is the ecumenical discussion on life?

As a subject of theology, ‘Life’ was initiated in the World Council of Churches’ Sixth Assembly in Vancouver, 1983. The theme for Vancouver was ‘Jesus Christ – the Life of the World’.

Since the Vancouver Assembly, the theology of life has been a concern within ecumenical discussions. The main contribution of theology of life is extending the theological focus beyond human beings to include all living beings.

As a theological answer to the question of ‘What is life?’, life is a gift of God. This was the first sub-theme of the Vancouver Assembly. In addition, from an African perspective, social, economic, political and family life are closely interconnected.

This discussion on theology of life continued to the WCC’s World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) in Seoul in 1990 and the WCC’s
Seventh Assembly in Canberra in 1991. The theme for Canberra was ‘Come Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation’ which linked the two themes ‘Holy Spirit’ and ‘creation’. Just as was done at the Canberra Assembly, Moltmann also has developed pneumatological creation theology. Moltmann’s creation theology is a form of panentheism which means God is transcendent and immanent in the world at the same time through the Spirit.

When we consider life, we have to recognize the threats to life. In fact, we live in a world where all life is threatened by the power of death. The Accra Confession of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declares that the signs of the times challenge us to recognize that the life of human beings and the rest of creatures and the earth are under serious crisis. Moreover, it states the cause of crisis is related to the development of neoliberal economic globalization.

According to analysis of this study on the Asian context with regard to neoliberal globalization, all life on earth, not only human beings but also nature, is under crisis in the economic, ecological and cultural dimensions.

Then, what are Asian traditional perspectives on life? This study examines East Asian traditional perspectives on life and its relationship with communication, such as Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Tonghak.

The Eastern traditional worldview is organic holism while the Western one is largely anthropocentric and dualistic. It looks at the universe as an organism. Thus human beings are organically connected with other living beings as an integral part of the cosmos. This organic holism provides a basis for reciprocity and relationship between humans and all forms of life. Compared with the Western worldview, this shows the different ideas of value and the different cultural backgrounds to understand the
meaning of life.

How, then, does the Eastern traditional worldview affect the communication perspective?

In Asia, communication thought has developed since ancient times because communication itself was considered to be the philosophical subject. For instance, according to Taoism, *Tao* is the ultimate beginning of all forms of life and cosmic substance. In other words, human beings and all other beings are produced by *Tao*. Thus, it cannot be understood by human media such as language but it can be understood through our mind beyond language. This means Eastern traditional perspectives on communication have a negative response to language. They consider that language, which is based on human senses, cannot express the world completely.

Then, what is the relationship between life and communication?

Communication is the essence of life. Without communication, no living being can exist. Thus, it can be said that communication is a synonym for life.

Since all living beings are communicating subjects, not objects to be communicated to, we have to overcome the anthropocentric perspective on communication. In this way, we human beings may build a community with all living beings and develop harmonious relationships with them to live together on the earth.

For this reason, I suggest a communication value named ‘communication for life’. The notion of ‘communication for life’ cannot be simply defined. Just as the notion of life is integral and holistic, communication for life is not fragmented communication but holistic, integral communication among humans and other living beings.

In this study, I suggest three basic dimensions of communication for life. Firstly, communication for life is to overcome anthropocentrism in communication because all
living beings are communicating entities. Secondly, communication for life is a value-based communication. The core value of communication for life is to overcome communication for death and to bring mutual living to the human society and the entire cosmos. Lastly, communication for life is converging Eastern and Western ways of communication. It is not an issue of which one is superior, between them. They have to complement each other to create new ways of communicating. Communication for life is not fragmentary. In linking up human beings and other living beings, as well as the East and the West, it is holistic, integral communication.

This study applies this value of communication for life to analyze the ethical problematics in Cyberspace communication with the economic, political and cultural dimensions.

Cyberspace communication is a key driving force of neoliberal globalization which causes the crisis of all life on earth. Although there are positive perspectives on Cyberspace communication and globalization, Cyberspace communication has played a crucial role in the domination of global markets by transnational corporations. In addition, it raises the critical issues of the digital divide and cultural homogenization.

The ethical foundation of the problematics of Cyberspace communication is Social Darwinism. Social Darwinist ethics creates ruthless competition and confrontation based on an egoistic morality. For instance, Social Darwinist ethics give justification to neoliberal globalization in which poor countries, poor people and information have-nots are considered as weaker and more unfit to survive in the ruthless world.

The notion of Christian love, the supreme principle of Christian ethics, is an alternative ethics to overcome Social Darwinist ethics.

According to the theory of Christian love by Paul Ramsey, Christian love means an
entirely unselfish love for others. Similarly, East Asian traditions on love, such as Buddhist compassion, Confucian Jen, and Korean jung, also focus on unselfish love. That is, all these concepts of love are altruistic, not egoistic, love.

Compared with Ramsey’s ethical theory of Christian love, East Asian traditions on love go beyond humans to include all living beings, building up an inclusive, cosmic framework of love.

In short, through the ethic of unselfish love, we can overcome the egoistic behavior of humans and the greedy structure of human society based on Social Darwinist ethics. In other words, what we really need is to cultivate love for others so that we become capable of understanding people and nature with compassion.

Thus, communication for life in Cyberspace means to bring mutual living to the human society and the entire cosmos in love through Cyberspace communication.

In addition, this study analyzes the positive role of Cyberspace communication through close examination of two prominent cases in South Korea.

The first case ‘OhmyNews’ is one of the most successful online news sites in the world in the field of citizen journalism. The second case ‘Cyworld’ is the largest online social network site in Korea. These case studies support the value of communication for life which promotes people’s life together through Cyberspace communication.

In conclusion, this study can make three possible contributions: first, this is one of the few integrated studies on theology, communication and Asian traditions. Thus, this study could encourage further exploration by theological studies on communication; second, this study has attempted to extend communication subjects beyond human beings to include all living beings. It has raised awareness that all living beings are the communicating subjects, not objects to be communicated to; and third, this study has
attempted to establish a communication value named ‘communication for life’. It can provide a new perspective on communication for study.