Civil Society's Global Intervention in the Area of Mainstream, Public and Alternative Media, and Consequent Network Strengthening - Is This Possible?

- Development of the visual media movement and the WSIS : based on the Korean experience

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1. Historical background : Birth and development of the progressive media movement

The Korean media industry, which began to grow in earnest from the 1960s, is characterized by state monopoly of the broadcasting system and state censorship of films. In addition, the dictatorship that emerged with the bloody suppression of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising maintained state control over media while at the same time establishing the foundation of the media industry as basically an entertainment industry through its "3S" (Sports, Screen, Sex) policy.

As the progressive social movement in opposition to dictatorship grew in strength from the later half of the 1980s, efforts to overcome the existing media environment developed into three movements.

One of them is the movement to produce and distribute alternative visual contents, which earned itself the name "independent film movement" in the 1990s. The independent film movement, which has its roots in the early 1980s, became closely linked to the social movement, reenacting the Korean people's lives and struggles – ignored by mainstream media – through documentaries, newsreels, dramas and so on.

The second is the movement criticizing mainstream media, commonly manifested in the form of a viewers' movement. This movement, which began with the refusal to pay viewer fees for public broadcasting systems that distorted reality, later progressed into the monitoring of mainstream TV programs.

And the third movement is initiated by workers' unions in broadcasting companies demanding impartiality in broadcasting. This labor union movement started out in the early 1990s with a union strike and later took on an industry-wide structure.

These three movements contracted with the overall decline of the social movement in the early 1990s, but began to face a new situation in the late 1990s, influenced by the democratization of the South Korean regime, the Neo-Liberalist offensive, and the development of the social movement in the face of that offensive.

2.   Rapid growth of ICT and the development of progressive media activism

(1) From the mid-1990s, the explosive growth of the IT industry, especially the Internet, provided the social movement with new conditions for growth.

In the case of the visual industry, the rapid emergence of new media besides aerial broadcasting such as cable and satellite TV, and the nationwide establishment of broadband Internet, paved the way for the quantitative growth of exposure and access to visual media.

The Internet, in particular, has shown amazing growth and penetration rate in Korea. Out of a total population of 48 million, more than 25 million are Internet users, and out of the 14.5 million households with Internet connection, 10 million use broadband Internet. In terms of access rights, the Digital Divide still remains, but problems concerning basic access rights have generally been overcome.

(2) In the process, the social movement actively utilized the media.

Thanks to the distribution of digital video, access to the means of video production has grown, and training programs to utilize such means provided by independent groups have nurtured increasing numbers of independent activists. These activists in turn have diversified, forming workers' video collectives within trade unions, becoming video activists in civic groups, and so on.

The Internet has become a battle ground, where opinions that will shape the future of the Internet clash over a variety of issues including censorship, security, intellectual property rights, spam mail and governance.

At the same time, the social movement focusing on the labor movement continues to actively make use of the Internet. The Internet has become the new means and space for information sharing, communication and organization. Diverse new media – ranging from independent media such as Jinbonet to alternative journalism such as *Ohmynews* – continue to emerge. And as was witnessed through the candlelight march in front of the American Embassy condemning US Army atrocities in Korea, spontaneous organization and mobilization of the masses through the Internet poses a threat to mainstream media and forms a new political landscape. In addition, broadband Internet offers an alternative means of spreading visual contents, thereby accelerating the convergence and expansion process of the media movement.

(3) Changes in the political climate and media environment pose new challenges.

As the struggle against Neo-Liberalism went into full swing with the general strike in 1997, the people's movement reversed the decline that started in the early and mid-1990s to face new possibilities and new crises at the same time. The onslaught of capitalism, such as the increase of casual employment (irregular/contract workers), privatization and special economic zones, threaten the past achievements of the labor movement, and the threat of war on the Korean peninsula continues to grow. But at the same time, formal democracy makes advancements, and cracks in the conservative ruling regime that began with the Korean liberation continue to widen. In the midst of such political changes, and with changes in the media industry acting as a medium, the progressive media movement is facing a new situation. In other words, new practices and new challenges for independent media are emerging.

1) Weapons for the movement

 - Digital media and the rapid penetration of broadband Internet have provided the movement with more technological means.

2) New systems

  - The dissolution of media boundaries as a result of technological advancements calls for a new system of solidarity.

3) Opening up of the public sphere pose new challenges.

Institutional changes that took place partially in the past administration have become an official agenda under the new administration. Although the new administration still maintains a Neo-liberal policy stance, it offers relatively greater possibilities for the public sphere in the area of media and communications as follows.

　　1. Introduction of public access TV structure.

　　2. Establishment of the media center, with further expansion emerging as a new policy task.

　　3. Emergence of the agenda of institutionalizing media education.

　　4. Partial emergence of the possibility of the yet-untapped community radio movement.

4) Together with the spread of the anti-imperialism and anti-globalization movement, there will be a deeper exploration of a social reform movement on a global scale.

　　1. The Internet is a medium for driving such changes, as well as an important means of sharing international information without having to go through mainstream media.

　　2. Visual contents is an efficient means of mass communication within this international movement.

3. Reexamination of strategies: a different world is possible.

The experience of the past 20 years has been a process of strengthening the media movement under Korea's unique circumstances, as well as a process of becoming more closely linked to global changes in the media movement environment. The following strategic standpoints can be set based on the evaluation of these processes.

(1) It has been proven time and again that strengthening of the media movement is the basis for strengthening the social movement, as well as a prerequisite for the social movement.

(2) Strengthening the media movement is possible, from both the individual and global perspective, only through the inter-connection of movements in the following three areas.

First, by establishing alternative systems and capacities, we need to secure voice, contents, formats and contents producers that are independent of the political changes of mainstream media.

Second, we need to establish political tension within mainstream media, and set progressive agenda within mainstream media as much as possible.

Third, we need to secure a wider public domain, expand society-wide public service through this, and nurture the capacity for a democratic media movement in both independent and mainstream media.

　　1) The first movement encompasses both material and ideological independence. Through who's eyes you view the world is important, and if you cannot communicate independent messages, that is, if there is no independent and alternative media movement that is independent of power and capital and has a

relationship with the progressive social movement based on both solidarity and tension, then the other two movements would be impossible.

2) The second movement is a form of internal and external intervention aimed at bringing about maximum democratic changes in the massively influential mainstream media. Without an alternative media, efforts for progressive changes within mainstream media would be deprived of an alternative model and a yardstick to discern what's possible and what isn't. On a different level, the significance of progressive changes in mainstream media lies in making more acceptable and popular the achievements of the progressive media movement.

3) The third movement is a way of changing the commercial or bureaucratic media environment into a democratic and participatory structure. The movement will provide the space for experimenting with diverse policies and practices that alternative media could not adopt due to physical resource restraints and mainstream media failed to attempt due to structural limitations. In addition, the movement will provide a more formal system for supporting progressive media.

4) It is only through the tension, solidarity and organic whole of the three areas that the details of a blueprint for media in the future society will materialize, using radical sociopolitical changes as its medium.

4. Questions regarding WSIS and media activism

- Agenda, Issues, and Action plans, our way of globalization

<u>(1) How to view the WSIS?</u>
The WSIS is a step forward compared to other conventions based on UN resolutions. From the start, the WSIS is based on the UN, meaning that unlike the WTO, it is not reduced to being a mechanism for furthering the Neo-liberal agenda. At the same time, however, there are many limitations preventing the WSIS from becoming a democratic structure, since most of the governments involved are closer to corporate agendas. Furthermore, the global media movement has yet to form a comprehensive network of its own.

The problem, however, is that the capacity of the movement has yet to catch up with reality. (The APC, AMARC, IMC network does represent a partial framework for solidarity, but with the exception of specific issues such as anti-war demonstrations, it is unable to organize large-scale united action, and more importantly, it is unable to share a comprehensive outlook on the future media environment.) Rapidly advancing capitalism and globalization has established an imperialistic hegemony under the framework of an international policy-making body (ICANN is one example), while bringing about war and conflict among nations all over the world. Furthermore, policies regarding new media are being implemented even before the majority of humanity can enjoy its privileges or even recognize the issues involved.

Against this backdrop, the WSIS must be preceded by activism on a global level, or a stronger

networking of civil societies. Therefore, participation itself cannot be the objective in regarding the WSIS. The WSIS should be a medium for reaching an international consensus on democratic agendas, while at the same time building and strengthening an independent network for civil society or the progressive movement.

In this regard, there is a need to examine how we deal with the WSIS, from three aspects: areas, tactics and objectives.

1) In terms of areas

: setting agendas concerning mainstream media, strengthening the public domain, strengthening the democratic character of new ICTs

2) In terms of tactics

: intervention in the official processes of the WSIS, formation of an independent (alternative) discussion structure, and organization of action

3) In terms of objectives

: securing the greatest possible advantages for civil society and the progressive media movement while strengthening a global network of activists and building a common perspective on a different media environment

(2) The following questions need to be asked.

  1) How do we intervene? How do we organize internally for this intervention?

  How do we make possible intervention from the inside and independent organization from the outside?

  2) How far do we go? What are the minimum requirements?

  Which requirements, in detail, are possible to meet?

   - Definition of "requirements": What has been done (both positive and negative), and what and how
    things should be done

    E.g. 1 : Establishment of local media centers

    E.g. 2 : Supporting the public utilization of broadband Internet

    E.g. 3 : Democratic management of the domain name and procurement of public funds through this

    E.g. 4 : Institutionalizing critical media education

    E.g. 5 : Issues on the monopoly of media capital

  3) Are there any new concepts? If so, what are they?

  E.g. : Policies for public media culture – combination and convergence of conventionally separate areas

  4) What are the challenges in forming an international solidarity in the two areas of setting agendas and putting agendas into practice?

  E.g. 1 : System for sharing alternative media contents

  E.g. 2 : Preparing an independent declaration on media policies/agendas – preparations should encompass the extent of consensus possible as well as individual ideas

  5) How do we diversify the players in the movement?

  : radio, media movement (public access), telecommunications movement, civic and social groups, etc.

6) Organizing an alternative forum : to function as an internal network and pressure group

5. International solidarity is an urgent and immediate task

Is intervention regarding the WSIS the core task of the current international movement? Not necessarily. The WSIS is but an opportunity. One of the main agendas for us now is how we strengthen the dialogue between the various activist groups and individuals around the world and how to realize the possibility of progressive global media network, facing the threat from the ruling structure of power that has engendered the twins of war and Neo-liberalist globalization attack on the whole global society. WSIS should be incorporated into this task.