

## **Xystems, Communications, and a Framework of Xystematics\***

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In this paper the author endeavors to present a xystemic framework employed to illuminate an important aspect of the cultural connectedness among the forces of communication, the economy, and the polity. This framework involves the operational spheres of balance and conflict/creative dominance, mutuality, and centrality/collectivity in the low-level practical T world. It is shown that the commonality forming the core cultural xystems, corresponding to the economy, the communication system, and the polity on one side and to these forces of operational spheres on the other side, is composed of the cultural systems of  $X^*$ ,  $D^*$ , and  $\Delta^*$ .

In this paper, the author endeavors to construct a set of xystemic frameworks in explicating the structural interconnectedness among the forces of communication, the economy, and the polity. This direction is closely associated with the long-held conviction that communication contains “some phlogistonelike quality” in manifesting various (or nearly all) aspects of social life (Fisher, 1978, p. 6).

This new framework is essential. One old xystemic framework that might be constructed must rely on the conventional wisdom inspired by the mathematic model of general equilibrium (for example, see Wickens 2008). And yet this general equilibrium approach is applicable only to the world of conflicting or equilibrating activities (or the world of private market activities in its original form). The xystemic base of this world of conflicting activities is the operational sphere of balance and conflict/creative dominance (to be shown later as OSB&C/CD in its macro-form and *osb&c/cd* in its micro-form). To study human activities in a mutually beneficial manner, the world of mutuality must be constructed, and the xystemic base of this world of mutuality is the operational sphere of mutuality (to be shown later as OSM and *osm*). In addition, one more sphere of operation to account for the activities of hierarchical command and control (as is in the case of the most essential functions of the government), called the operational sphere of centrality/collectivity (to be shown later as OSC and *osc*), must also be constructed.

This new framework is highly desirable. In the past decades, the Asia-centric movement of theoretical development has been an emerging force rising in the field of communication studies (for example, see Chen, 2004a; Ishii, 2001, 2004; Miike, 2004). To construct a xystemic framework for this Asia-centric approach, the forces of mutuality and centrality/collectivity must be accounted for. Otherwise, this Asia-centric movement may constitute largely a field of observations with some in-depth theoretical foundations being still lacking. As regard to the so-called West-centric approach to communication studies, in order to build a deeper theoretical foundation, the force of balance and conflict with creative dominance must be accounted for.

In light of xystematics, the author presents the project of this study by articulating four layers of xystemic frameworks pertaining to the studying of the position and structures of communication. These layers will be probed one after the other. Here the term *xystematics* (or systematic) essentially means a reasonably rigorous and well-integrated theory embracing

qualitative, relational, and structural studies of human and social issues and events (Tonn, 2006, 2009a).<sup>1</sup>

### First Layer Framework of Positioning the Communication Xystem

In this first layer framework, the communication system is designated as a *xystem* (or system) existing in the *grand xystem of the society* comprising three systems: economic system, communication system, and political system. Here, these systems are actually subsystems (or subsystems) in the grand *xystem* (or grand system), and by *xystem* (or system) is meant an organic and structured collection of a group of human beings with specific objectives, cultural backgrounds, and life-worlds (Tonn, 2007a, 2007b).

It is conceived that communication entails a system of creating, transforming, and passing on interesting information among groups of people. That is, the purpose and functions of communication in any group (i.e., system) are the creation, transformation, and transmission of meaningful and useful information related closely to human well-being. The acts of feedbacks and interactions are naturally parts of the structures of the communication system. For a more complete model of communication, at least with the added structures and features of sender, receiver, channel, encoding and decoding, one may see Chen and Chen (2005), Fisher (1978), Hawes (1975), Severin and Tankard (1997), and Tonn (2009b).

In the era of modernity, for the economy in the form of capitalism and the polity in the form of democracy, one would expect the economic well-being of the people not to be jeopardized and the political freedom of the citizens not to be compromised.

The “media is essential to any healthy democracy” (Ferguson, 2004, p. 188), and “globalization furthers the spread of democracy in the world” (Steger, 2002, p. 73). Here in this spread of political ideology, the role of communication cannot be overlooked. Accordingly, “the libertarian press measures its social utility by how well the public is kept abreast of government activities” (Merill, 1983, p. 25).

Following the above reasoning, it is necessary to study the communication system from a perspective of treating activities of communications, the economy, and the polity in a unified manner. According to McQuail (2000, pp. 12-13), this may be viewed as either a “socio-centric” or “culture-media centric” approach to the study of communication. For the latter, this is the case since we are engaging in an in-depth exploration of the cultural foundations of the communication system. From the foundations of socio-cultural approach, Durham and Kellner (2006), Dyson and Humphreys (1986), McChesney (2005), and Zhao (2004) discussed the related economic and political issues from the perspective of media communication.

In Hawes (1975), Duncan is quoted as arguing for a study of “social science” inclusive of, among others, the forces of the economy and the polity. Here we go further by investigating the cultural factors (or factors of commonality) underlying these forces, rather than just taking these forces as given.

Thus we shall study the issue of communication (or communication *xystem*, communication system) by treating it as an institutionalization of the group efforts of the



Figure 1: Grand system of the society

citizens in creating and transmitting the vital information back and forth about the economic activities, issues of social well-being, and political decisions and operations.

In the West, “the modern media have always stood at the intersection between two grand distributive systems, politics and the marketplace” (Nerone, 2003). Thus, by disseminating the information about the knowledge of political decision-making, and by supervising the operations of the business community, the communication system performs a vital role in terms of promoting economic welfare and political freedom of the citizens in any modern society. Here, what is created from the so-called modern society, through a process of abstraction and formation in systematics, is designated as the grand system of the society in our discussion.

In symbols, let  $X$  be the grand system of the society in which **E** is the economy (or economic system) as a constituting system, **Comm** is communication (or communication system) as the other constituting system, and **P** is the polity (or political system) as the third constituting system. Then, we have:  $X = \{\mathbf{E}, \mathbf{Comm}, \mathbf{P}\}$ .

What we have presented in the above is the grand system of the society comprising three systems: the economy, communication, and the polity. In this grand system of the society, communication positions itself as the central system (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

#### Second Layer Framework of Studying the Communication System

From the first layer framework and as the first lever approximation in our project of study, first we assume that essentially the economic system depicts a system existing in an operational sphere of balance and conflict/creative dominance (denoted by Section A) in Figure 2.

As the first lever approximation in our project of study, secondly we assume that essentially the communication system performs as a system existing in an operational sphere of mutuality (denoted by Section BB) in Figure 2. Thirdly, as the first lever approximation in our project of study, we assume that the political system pertains to a system existing in an operational sphere of centrality and/or collectivity (denoted by Section C) in Figure 2. Here the way we position the communication system in the middle of the grand system of the society (see Figure 1) represents the crystallization of the idea of *social domain* (in which the communication system is critical). Note that communication by itself is a system, and at the same time, it is also a subsystem of the grand system of the society. Here, a grand system is a system. That is, a grand system (actually grand system) is a “big system” comprising several “small systems.” Similarly, a system (actually system) is a “system” comprising several “mini-systems” (actually subsystems), with each mini-system being a system by itself.

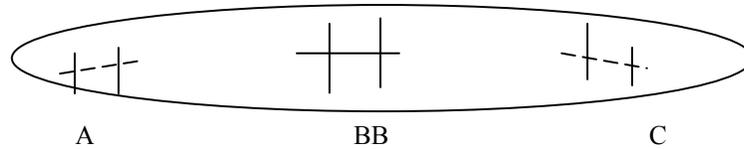


Figure 2: Sections A, BB, and C of the general sphere of operations

In the above, the meaning of Figure 2 is that one could decompose the general forces operating in the grand system into three constituting forces. In the context of the grand system of the society to be seen later, at the first level of approximation, we decompose it into three forces: force of balance and conflict/creative dominance, force of mutuality, force of centrality/collectivity. The sphere of operations underlying the first system, for example the economy, is designated as Section A (to be called OSB&C/CD later). The sphere of operations underlying the second system, for example the communication system, is designated as Section BB (to be called OSM later). The sphere of operations underlying the third system, for example the political system, is designated as Section C (to be called OSC later).

It is believed that communication serves an essential and indispensable role in mediating between the economic domain and the political domain of the grand system of the society. This idea of *social domain* confers essentially the concept of safeguarding the dignity and freedom of the citizens against the commanding and controlling powers of the businesses and the government in the modern society.

In the operational sphere of balance and conflict/creative dominance, there exist forces of self-operations, magnifying efforts of the original self-forces, acts of competing again all other agents or players, and forces of expansions or destructions.

Mutuality is defined as the state with forces of mutually beneficial activities. In the *operational sphere of mutuality* (OSM or that of cooperation and coordination), the ideal world is the one of mutual reinforcement of all involved (see Section BB of Figure 2). But the real world is the sphere of non-mutuality, by this is meant the state in which the mechanisms of smooth and efficient operations of mutuality break down. That is, there is no efficiency of mutuality. Here, the “efficiency of mutuality” is a non-rigorous term, describing a state in which all members working enthusiastically for the benefits of the group as a whole.

In the operational sphere of mutuality, there exist the forces of mutual operations, the consequent expansions of mutual forces, and the inter-connecting forces of different agents/actors. This operational process of mutuality is a voluntary process, and is one of interactions for each member standing on the equal footing. This is also a process of searching for freedom and individual dignity.

Centrality is defined as the state with a unifying force pulling the energies of all other entities together in creating and operating a system. Collectivity is defined as the state in which the individuality of all elements (or constituting systems) being suppressed by the force of centrality. In the *operational sphere of centrality/collectivity* (OSC, that of centrality and/or top-down collective forces), the ideal world is the one of central, collective, smooth, and

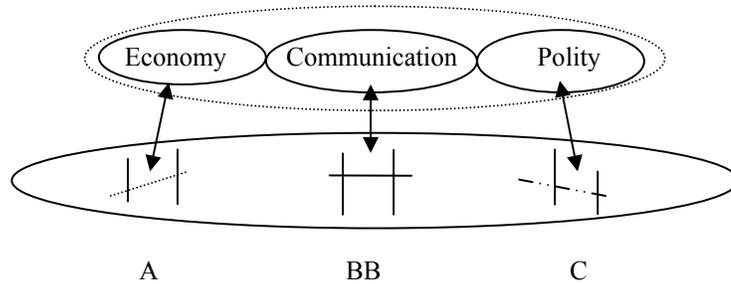


Figure 3: Correspondence between OS's and constituting systems of the grand xystem of the society

efficient operations of all involved (see Section C of Figure 2). But the real world is naturally the sphere of non-centrality and non-collectivity.

In the operational sphere of centrality/collectivity, there exist forces of collectivization, transformational acts of what have been collectivized, expansions, and creations. At times, this process of central and collective operations definitely involves acts of coercion and the top-down chain of command and control.

Hence we assume (as a hypothesis), as the first level of approximation to our study, there exists a natural correspondence between the (forces of the) operational sphere of balance and conflict/creative dominance and the (forces of the) economic system (Figure 3).

It is conceived that the operational sphere of balance and equilibrium displays the forces of the self-creation of the individual actors and the forces of conflict and competition among them.

One key essential to the forces of the economic system is the firms' seeking of profits in striving for creating advantages over their rival firms. By promoting the quality of commodities through employing better technology (say, with R&D and patents), better labor, and better capital, and by reducing prices while holding on to the quality of commodities, any firm in an incessant process of striving for supremacy in the market-place is definitely moving on a trajectory of destructive creation.

Similarly, we assume there is a natural correspondence between the (forces of the) operational sphere of mutuality and the (forces of the) communication system (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 is derived by integrating Figures 1 and 2. The meaning of Figure 3 is that the grand system of the society can be decomposed into three systems: the economy, communication, and the polity. But then, what underlie the economy are represented by the forces existing in the OSC&C/CD, what underlie the communication system are represented by the forces existing in the OSM, and what underlie the polity are represented by the forces existing in the OSC. Note that the symbols " || ," " || ," and " || " are employed to show that these forces of operations are fundamentally different.

The forces of the operational sphere of mutuality are conceived as the forces of connecting people in achieving some common goals. In this sphere of operation, people care for each other, and people work together in a voluntary, structural, and mutually beneficial manner.

The forces of the communication system involve the process of how the sender supply and pass on the information to the receiver in an effective manner (communication competence). This is a process of interactions and feedbacks.

Similar to the above two cases, we further assume that there is a natural correspondence between the (forces of the) operational sphere of centrality/collectivity and the (forces of the) political system (see Figure 3).

The forces of the operational sphere of collectivity are set to strengthen the collective will. In the case of democracy, the forces of the political system are derived from the positional and charismatic powers of politicians (through the endorsement of voters). These in turn induce the centralized acts of command and control.

In the above, we presented a few sets of correspondences (as the first level approximation). That is, (i) the correspondence between the economy and the OSC&C/CD (the “first level” operational sphere of balance and conflict/creative dominance), (ii) the correspondence between the communication system and the OSM (the “first level” operational sphere of mutuality), and (iii) the correspondence between the polity and the OSC (the “first level” operational sphere of centrality/collectivity).

In xystematics, the correspondence is defined as an iso-xystemism. This term “iso-xystemism” is developed to unfold the “commonality” (or “sameness”) in the structures of two or more systems by eliminating the non-essentials of the structures. In other words, system A is *iso-xystemic* to system B if and only if they are essentially the same in terms of their structures, with the idea of “*essentials*” being measured in the sense of xystematics. That is to say, by ignoring non-essential aspects (or what are deemed unimportant), the structures of A are exactly the same as the structures of B. Here, the definitions of essential or non-essential aspects of entities must depend on the scope and purpose of the study in question and the degree of abstraction.

### Third Layer Framework of Positioning the Communication Xystem

For the second level approximation to our project of study, in order to be more accurate and more sophisticated than the first level approximation, below we shall present the third layer framework of the project of our study by breaking down each of Sections A, BB, and C (seen in Figures 2 and 3) into three subsystems: operational sphere of balance and conflict/creative dominance (Sub-section “a” in Figure 4), operational sphere of mutuality (Sub-section “bb”), and operational sphere of centrality/collectivity (Sub-section “c”). Note that a sphere of operation is a system.

Below we turn to the third framework of the project of our study by further employing the concept of iso-xystemism. From Figure 3, Figure 4 is constructed to explicate several sets of correspondences between the subsystems of the operational spheres (i.e., “a,” “bb,” “c”) and the subsystems of each of the economic system, communication system, and political system.

Here, Sub-sections “a,” “bb,” “c” are subsystems of the operational sphere of balance and conflict/creative dominance (OSB&C/CD). Similarly, they are subsystems of the operational sphere of mutuality (OSM) and also subsystems of the operational sphere of centrality/collectivity (OSC).

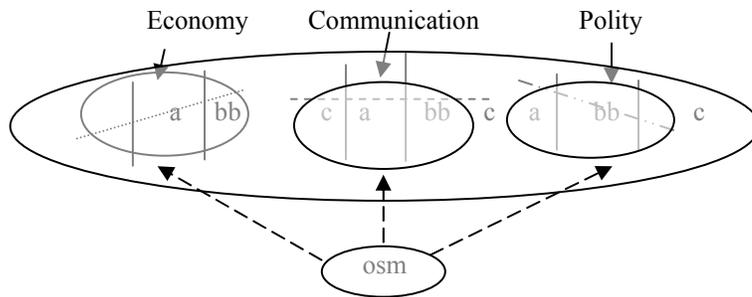


Figure 4: Sets of correspondences between the operational Spheres and the systems  
 osm = “bb” = the lower-level operational sphere of mutuality  
 existing in each of the higher-level OSB&C/CD, OSM, OSC

These correspondences are sets of iso-systemism. We have the following sets of correspondences:

(I) The correspondence between the first subsystem of the economy and osc&c/cd (the second level operational sphere of balance and conflict/creative dominance, denoted by the symbol “a”), the correspondence between the second subsystem of the economy and osm (the second level operational sphere of mutuality, denoted by the symbol “bb”), and the correspondence between the third subsystem of the economy and osc (the third level operational sphere of centrality/collectivity, denoted by the symbol “c”).

(II) Similar to the case of (I), these correspondences exist within the communication system.

(III) Similar to the case of (II), these correspondences exist within the political system.

Note that all these sub-operational spheres denoted by “bb” represent the same sub-operating sphere of mutuality.

In the above, the grand system of the society is set to possess three systems: the economy, communication, and the polity. For the subsystems of the communication system, there are business-like (or business-oriented) subsystems, hierarchy-oriented (or politics-like) subsystems, and the non-commercial and non-governmental units (or institutions, subsystems). Note that these non-commercial and non-governmental subsystems operate in a world resembling closely the so-called public sphere (Habermas, 2006; Mao et al., 2005). The symbol employed to depict the operational sphere underlying this last set of the communication subsystems is “bb” (also corresponding to the symbol “osm”) presented in the middle small circle of Figure 4.

To proceed, let each of the economic system, communication system, and political system be further divided into three subsystems: subsystem of balance and conflict/creative dominance (a, osb&c/cd), subsystem of mutuality (bb, osm), and subsystem of centrality/collectivity (c, osc) (see Figure 4.)

While we turn back to the first layer framework of investigation, in Figure 1, it is seen that we essentially meant the economy is somehow connected to the communication system. By the second and third ways or frameworks of investigation, this vague connection turns out to be caused by the commonality (i.e., iso-systemism) existing in the structures of the subsystem of mutuality of the economy and in those of the communication system. Similarly

we have the commonality existing in the structures of the subsystem of mutuality of the communication system and in those of the political system.

Note that in the above, we set the communication system as the center of the grand system of the society (see Figure 1). That is, this center is the central system (actually subsystem) of the grand system of the society.

#### Low-level Practical T World

What we have established in the above is guided by the more general framework of the low-level practical T world (llpTW). This llpTW is defined as the world of meeting five conditions: independence and individual creativity, balance and equilibrium, mutuality, centrality (or collectivity, for some practical reason), and holistic advancement (Tonn, 2007c). Nevertheless, for a more operational llpTW framework (or simple llpTW), we shall replace the above five conditions by three conditions: balance and conflict/creative dominance, mutuality, and centrality/collectivity.

#### Fourth Layer Framework of Studying the Structures of Communication

From Figure 4, we construct Figure 5 which shows that the cultures of the subsystem of balance and conflict/creative dominance “a” (or “osb&c/cd”) is represented by Xsystem X\*, the cultures of the subsystem of mutuality “bb” (or “osm”) is represented by Xsystem D\*, and the cultures of the subsystem of centrality/collectivity “c” (or “osc”) is represented by Xsystem  $\Delta^*$ .

Following the above flow of reasoning, for the communication system, we may be able to concisely identify the cultures of its subsystem of balance and conflict/creative dominance as the cultural system of sciences and conflict (denoted by Xsystem X\*, as an extension of Xsystem X), the cultures of its subsystem of mutuality as the cultural system of symbolic rationality and mutuality (denoted by Xsystem D\*, as an extension of Xsystem D), and the cultures of its subsystem of centrality/collectivity as the cultural system of collectivity (denoted by Xsystem  $\Delta^*$ , as an extension of Xsystem  $\Delta$ ).<sup>3</sup> What is presented in Figure 5 is the fourth layer framework of studying the structures of communication.

Here, by Xsystem X is meant a system with cultures of scientific rationality and will of conquest, by Xsystem D is meant a system with cultures of symbolic rationality and will of tranquility, and by Xsystem  $\Delta$  is meant a system with cultures of dialectic rationality and will of outward conquest.

The matter of extension is definitely not simple. Here, the direction of extension is not predetermined. Rather, it depends on the particular actions consummated in the reality and the specific contexts of humanity, space, and time. This conforms to the idea of *changes* in The I Ching implying that every entity in the universe is in a constant state of flux (Chen, 2008).

For Xsystem X, one way to extend it is in the direction of incorporating the forces of the self-creation of the individual actor, the interactions of the individuals (implying the acts of conflict and competition among one actor and all others), the magnifying forces of the original self-forces, and the forces of expansions and destructions. To illustrate this point

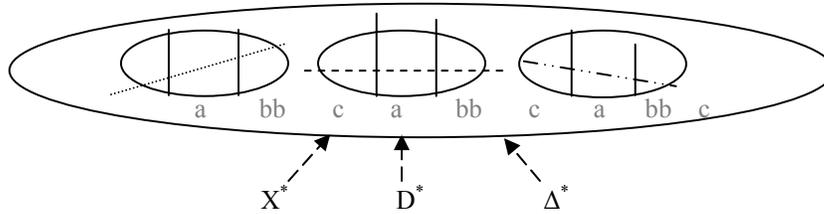


Figure 5: Subsystems X\*, D\*, Δ\* of the communication system

further, one could define Xsystem X\* as the one including the ideas of individualism, “a belief in progress as defined by technological sophistication and material well-being,” “a world view on the twin notions of prediction and control” (Kim, 2008, p. 3), “the tradition of individualism, self-reliance, uniqueness, autonomy, and the freedom of individuals” (Kim, 2008, p. 9), and “a cultural view that the individual is, a priori, separate and self-contained and must resist the collective” (Kim, 2008, p. 12).

Theoretically speaking, for Xsystem D\*, one way is to extend it from Xsystem D in the direction of embracing the forces connecting different agents/actors in some mutually beneficial manners. This is related to the direction and efforts of searching for a common goal and incorporating the forces of consequent expansions of the original mutual forces in a state of voluntary, structural, and orderly activities. Note that these extensions are consistent with the direction of internalizing the spirit of freedom and the personal dignity of the individual.

Practically, one approach to extend from Xsystem D to Xsystem D\* is to define the latter as one comprising Xsystem D and the cultures of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism.

In this approach, one may define Taoism as a cultural system in which the spirit of detachment is achieved by avoiding conventional social obligations and living a simple and inactive life in tune with nature. Similarly, Confucianism may be defined as a cultural system comprising the spirits of loyalty, filial piety, chastity, heroism, selfless friendship, and serving one’s family and country. In the same line of reasoning, Buddhism may be defined as one with the goal of attaining “Nirvana,” a state of blissful afterlife, through ideals of good work, philanthropy, and enlightenment (Wodaski, 1992). Note that, in this approach, Confucianism is conceived as a system of rigid social order.

Naturally, one may favor other approaches in searching for appropriate definitions of these cultural systems. This question of extension is in actuality completely open.

To illustrate Xsystem Δ, one may define it by incorporating the forces of the collective will and strengths, the process of transforming and expanding the original collective forces, and the forces underlying the exercises of the collective will in a coercive and top-down command-and-control chain complex.

Correspondences between Systems, Subsystems, and OS’s: Examples

In Figures 5 and 6, for the first subsystem of the communication system, as an example, the business activities of a TV network operate in the operational sphere of b&c/cd (“a”). Here this osb&c/cd is a subsystem of the operational sphere of B&C/CD, and its core value is represented by Xsystem X\*.

For the second subsystem of the communication system, as an example, the mutually beneficial activities among the sister TV stations within a large broadcasting company, such as the mutual supporting of TV programs, operate in the operational sphere of “m” (i.e., “osm,” “bb”). Here this “osm” is a subsystem of the operational sphere of mutuality (OSM), and its core value is represented by Xsystem D\*. Note that one other example of the “element” of this second subsystem of the communication system is the interpersonal network existing in the communication system. Here, a subsystem is actually a “system” and an “element” could also be a system (i.e., “mini-system”). The famous “face mechanism” and “fengshui” in the Chinese society (e.g., see Chen, 2004b; and Huang, 1989, 2004) are two good examples as the subsystems of the aforementioned interpersonal network.

For the third subsystem of the communication system, as an example, the command and control chain of a large broadcasting company performs its functions in the operational sphere of “c” (i.e., “osc”). Here this “osc” is a subsystem of the operational sphere of centrality/collectivity (OSC), and its core value is represented by Xsystem Δ\*. This command and control chain possesses a force of centrality and/or collectivity. Within a large institution, between headquarters and the subsidiaries, there exists a force of centrality and/or collectivity as well; and the structure of this relationship exists in the operational sphere of centrality/collectivity (osc).

Below, let the first subsystem of the economy be the private market constituting one of three sectors of the economy. Here, the economy is a system that exists in the grand system of the society. Let the second subsystem of the economy be the collection of all non-profit organizations operating in the economy. An example of the non-profit organization is the workers compensation insurance company, supervised by the state government in the United States.

In addition, let the second subsystem of the polity be the collection of all political groups sharing the same interests in pushing for their mutually beneficial agenda. One example of these political groups is the interest group that works for the passing of comprehensive national healthcare coverage. One other example is the interest group that pushes for the passing of complete national gun control. Note that, these groups are subsystems of the polity in terms of xsystematics.

In Figure 4, the correspondence between the “bb” of the economy and the “bb” of the communication system is established by assuming that the force of “osm” representing the first “bb” and the force of “osm” representing the second “bb” are “essentially the same.” Furthermore, in Figure 4, the correspondence between the “bb” of the polity and the “bb” of the communication system is also established by assuming that the force of “osm” representing the third “b” and the force of “osm” representing the second “bb” are “essentially the same.” Here to state that “two subsystems are essentially the same” is to mean that these two systems are iso-xsystemic.

#### Brief Summary

In the above explanation, two level approximations and four layer frameworks to study the structures of communication were presented in light of the qualitative, relational, structural approach of xsystematics. The forces of communication, the economy, and the polity

were shown to be connected through the cultural complex ( $X^*, D^*, \Delta^*$ ) by the mechanism of iso-systemism.

The general guiding principle of this study is provided by employing the framework of the simplified low-level practical T world (simple llpTW), in which the ideas of balance and equilibrium, mutuality, and centrality/collectivity are essential. The last message provided in this paper is that one could treat the communication system as a system of cultures comprising three subsystems: extended Xsystem  $X^*$ , extended Xsystem  $D^*$ , and extended Xsystem  $\Delta^*$ .

#### Acknowledgement

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#### Notes

1. In essence, systematics (or systematics) is the study of xsystems (or systems), see Tonn (2006, 2007a, 2009a).
2. For this framework of the grand xsystem of the society with three subsystems, one may also see Tonn (2007b).
3. For more elaborate definitions of Xsystems  $X^*$ ,  $D^*$ , and  $\Delta^*$ , see Tonn (2009b). These definitions are related to the practical concepts of cultures presented in Hooker (2003). Along with these concepts of operational spheres, there are models of communication being further developed, see Tonn (2009b, 2009c).

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