

**Book Review****Stelling, O. (2023). *CommunicAsian: How Asia's Rise is Shaping the Future of Communications, and How to Plan for It***Anastasia Vishnevskaya Department of Public  
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**Disclosure Statement**No potential conflict of interest  
was reported by the author.**Received**

1 Jul 2025

**Revised**

15 Aug 2025

**Accepted**

18 Aug 2025

If the 21st century is the Asian century, then the future of communications is somewhat Asian too, don't you agree? (Oliver Stelling, n.d.)

As a contribution to scholarship and practice in international communication, public relations, and strategic communication, *CommunicAsian: How Asia's Rise Is Shaping the Future of Communications, and How to Plan for It* (2023) highlights the transformative role of Asia in shaping the future of global communication. Written by Oliver Stelling, an international communications advisor with more than 30 years of experience in corporate and government communications, including 25 years in Asia, the book reflects both deep professional expertise and regional insight. A native of Bonn, Germany, Stelling has held senior roles in major global PR firms, including Weber Shandwick, BCW (formerly Burson-Marsteller), and Hill+Knowlton Strategies, across Asia and the Middle East (Stelling, n.d.). He is also the founder of *FutureScore Communications* (Hong Kong) and has advised both think tanks and consulting firms on East-West relations and strategic communication. His career-long focus on communications and Asia culminates in this timely book, which positions the "Asian Century" as not only an economic or geopolitical reality but also a communication-driven transformation.

While Asia has been on the rise for a long time in terms of geopolitics, economics, and culture, this process has been consistently overlooked. However, the 21st century, or the Asian Century (Stelling, 2023), is no longer just an economic or geopolitical reality. The widespread use of technologies, such as the Internet, social media, and AI, is the foundation of a new, communication-driven environment. Now, as never before, it becomes obvious that Asia's increasing role in economic, technological, cultural, and diplomatic areas of the global affairs is also creating a transformative effect on international

communications (“the one with the ‘s’”), that Stelling (2023) defines as the process of “...how messages are delivered, including not just the use of technology but also the strategic or tactical approach to enable authentic, ongoing dialogues and express whatever we must in order to achieve our set goals and shape them in ways that resonate with the target audience” (p. 27). While this claim is persuasive, it is worth noting that other scholars have previously emphasized non-Western approaches to communication (e.g., Anani-Bossman & Tandoh, 2023; Thusuu, 2018). Thus, Stelling’s distinctive contribution lies less in identifying a blind spot and more in reframing Asia’s rise as a practical roadmap for communication professionals.

Stelling (2023) argues that with the fast-paced and growing influence of Asia globally, traditional Western-values-oriented models of public relations (PR), public diplomacy (PD), and other forms of communications are becoming less practical for Asian countries in effectively communicating their narratives, perceptions, and influence on the global stage. This new reality demands new approaches to strategic communications for Asian states to remain successful in the era of multipolar power, “hyper-connectivity” (Stelling, 2023, p. 4), and complex stakeholder expectations, opening the discussion of how Asian states can better leverage communications as a strategic asset.

Stelling (2023) unpacks this argument in ten chapters, employing an interdisciplinary approach that combines economic indicators and statistical trends, historical context, and real-life case studies. These chapters cover a wide variety of topics, including historical overview, innovation ecosystems, digital mis- and disinformation, public diplomacy and cultural soft power, the importance of human capital, artificial intelligence, and big data. Stelling (2023) thus presents a cohesive argument that, collectively, these elements represent a broader Asian influence that redefines not only regional but also

global communication frameworks.

The First Chapter, *Decoding the Asian Century...*, discusses the inevitable shift towards multipolarity in global governance and economics, especially intensified by such recent geopolitical events as the US-China trade war, COVID-19, and the Ukraine crisis. Stelling (2023) emphasizes the importance for communicators to understand and adapt to Asia’s heterogeneity and rising global influence. He supports his core argument with vivid examples, including Asia’s infrastructure investments and innovative economic models, which illustrate the future-oriented mindset and preparedness of the whole region for global leadership.

In Chapter Two, *Communication vs. Communications: ...*, Stelling (2023) emphasizes that the rise of Asia challenges existing communication paradigms, which have been predominantly shaped by Western perspectives. The author also engages in a philosophical discussion on truthfulness in communication, examining the nuances that distinguish lies from “real” communication, as well as exploring the distinction between “communication” and “communications.” While “communication” refers to the fundamental human act of making sense of information through verbal and nonverbal cues, “communications” is more associated with the strategic dissemination of messages through media channels and public relations. Drawing on philosophical traditions and Western communication theory, Stelling (2023) argues that authentic understanding between people, particularly across cultures, requires far more than just message delivery. To achieve mutual understanding and trust in cross-cultural communications, one needs to go “...the extra mile,” seeking that common ground and identifying “a greater purpose that will be acknowledged and supported by as many as possible” (Stelling, 2023, p. 30).

Chapter Three shows that *Purpose and Shared Values...* are among the most effective

and sustainable foundations for modern communications. Stelling (2023) critiques campaign-driven models of public relations that prioritize short-term visibility over long-term trust and alignment. The author also discusses the virtue of purpose as a strategic anchor. It is not a marketing slogan but deeply held beliefs that guide decision-making, storytelling, and stakeholder engagement. Stelling (2023) suggests that the true measure of effective communications lies not in what is said but in what is done. In other words, it is about how actions align with values. The search for “Higher Purpose” is thus a search for alignment between the transparency and shared values, and is not just a best practice but a survival imperative in the age of distrust and digital disruption.

This emphasis is strongly in line with existing research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), where scholars highlight how CSR initiatives shape employee engagement, organizational outcomes, as well as economic implications (e.g., Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Rupp et al., 2024; Siegel, 2020). While not broadly situating his argument within these CSR debates, Stelling’s (2023) practitioner-oriented examples further enrich this existing scholarship by demonstrating how Asian states and organizations operationalize purpose in the context of public relations and strategic communication to advance real change.

Chapter Four, *Whatever We Imagine...*, explores how aspiration can serve as a driver of internal and external communications, particularly during organizational transitions or national development efforts. Stelling (2023) emphasizes that effective communication strategies must begin internally, with authentic alignment between purpose, shared values, and desired outcomes, before they can credibly manifest externally. Additionally, through the examples of the UAE and China, Stelling (2023) demonstrates how innovation-led communications can be utilized to shape global reputations and influence

soft power dynamics. He contrasts China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its mixed international reception with the UAE’s strategic messaging, which successfully combines national vision with public service delivery and tech innovation.

In Chapter Five, *Looking for Polaris...*, Stelling (2023) addresses a timely and pressing issue of global disinformation, highlighting how new technologies, especially AI and generative tools, have made it easier to create and spread fake news, which in turn undermines public trust and complicates reputation management. It is easy to create fake content, but its impact can be devastating, especially when it affects digital users’ emotional biases or echo chambers. Some of the propaganda tactics and their effects are also discussed. Last, Stelling (2023) emphasizes the need for critical thinking and media literacy to detect bias, question narratives, and develop the ability to share verified truths.

While Stelling (2023) addresses an extremely timely and crucial topic in this chapter, its overall discussion remains broad. Given Asia’s diverse media systems, ranging from highly controlled state media to diverse and fragmented digital environments, a more contextualized analysis of how disinformation plays out across the countries in the region would have been particularly valuable. Even within a practitioner-oriented book, such case-specific illustrations could have deepened the practical relevance, helping communication professionals better understand how disinformation challenges manifest differently across regional contexts.

In Chapter Six, *Public Diplomacy...*, Stelling (2023) explores the evolution and significance of Public Diplomacy (PD) as a strategic communication tool in modern geopolitics. He emphasizes the virtue of PD as a contrasting element to traditional, coercive diplomacy. PD focuses on collaboration, cultural exchange, and soft power to shape international perceptions and relationships. The chapter also illustrates how PD

strategies have adapted to a digitally connected world where social media, brand ambassadors, and pop culture serve as influential platforms for nation branding. While PD (or soft power) is not meant to define the whole foreign policy, it helps to persuade other nations by winning their “hearts and minds” (Nye, 2008), which certainly gives one nation a higher level of influence in the global arena.

In Chapter Seven, *Human Capital...*, Stelling (2023) shifts focus to the role of human capital in PR and communications, especially in a rapidly changing global landscape. There is a growing need for attracting, retaining, and training new generations of workers, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, who value purpose, diversity, and flexibility. These employees contribute strong digital skills, social consciousness, and global outlooks to any working environment, and companies must learn fast how to appeal to their sense of purpose, provide transparent leadership, flexible work models, and career growth to remain competitive.

Chapter Eight, *AI and Big Data...*, addresses the hot topic of emerging technologies and the implications of these changes to the global communications practices. Stelling (2023) shows how Artificial Intelligence (AI), big data, and the broader digital transformation, often framed as part of the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” (4IR), are reshaping communication, especially in strategic and public diplomacy contexts. The author argues that to remain effective in this changing landscape, communications professionals must embrace a technocratic mindset, which means prioritizing data-driven insights, adaptability, and strategic integration of technology in their practices.

In Chapter Nine, *Shenzhen Speed and Dubai Spirit...*, Stelling (2023) shows how the future of global communications is being shaped by the distinctive qualities of “Shenzhen Speed” and “Dubai Spirit.” “Shenzhen Speed” symbolizes China’s dynamic and rapid, yet very coordinated

approach to economic transformation and brand building. “Dubai Spirit,” on the other hand, represents the UAE’s future-oriented approach to communications, combining narrative aspiration with strategy. The contrasts of these two strategic approaches help Stelling (2023) support his main argument. The “Asianization” of communications implies the ability to adapt fast and communicate effectively on a global stage. Rather than relying on Western-centric models of communications, the emerging Asian paradigm emphasizes rapid action, proactive crisis management, and tailored messaging that appeals to local aspirations and diverse cultural realities. Thus, it is a combination of “speed and strategy,” which, according to Stelling (2023), are compatible and needed in the Asian context.

Finally, Stelling (2023) concludes his book with Chapter Ten, *ACCESS and BEAT: Two Ways to Develop Future-Proof Strategies*, in which he provides two models for successful adaptation of lessons from Asia’s rapid modernization: ACCESS (the Inspirational Model) and BEAT (the Aspirational Approach). These two models complement each other and provide a framework for strategic communication planning and reputation management. The ACCESS model incorporates six core elements: *Agility, Can-do spirit, Creativity, Entrepreneurship, Strategy, and Staff*. These provide a roadmap for achieving successful communication results by showing the target audiences that “you’ve got your own house in order” (Stelling, 2023, p. 132). The BEAT, *Building and Earning Authority and Trust*, approach offers a step-by-step guide for a comprehensive analysis of the situation to foster long-term influence. These two complementary models allow communications leaders to develop “future-proof... strategies that work in all operating environments, both geographically and business-wise” (Stelling, 2023, p. 137).

Some aspects of this book could benefit from further elaboration. While existing internal contradictions within Asia (e.g., political, ethnic,

and ideological tensions) are not the primary focus of this book, these dynamics can certainly complicate the development and implementation of unified communications, especially in the long run. As a result, it would be helpful for readers to be exposed to this context. Stelling (2023), for instance, briefly addresses the geopolitical caveats and contradictions related to the BRI. However, a deeper exploration of how communications navigate ongoing regional politics, an analysis of their broader implications, and suggestions for addressing these challenges would further enrich the discussion. Additionally, while Stelling (2023) effectively covers digital diplomacy and branding, incorporating grassroots and community-level communication strategies would further strengthen the book. This area is particularly worth discussing, considering the growing influence of Millennials and Gen Z in the labor market and their role in shaping communications practices from the bottom up.

While *CommunicAsian: How Asia's Rise is Shaping the Future of Communications, and How to Plan for It* (2023) provides a sophisticated, timely, and multifaceted examination of Asia's expanding global footprint through the lens of strategic communication, its strengths are also its limitations. The book is written primarily from a practitioner's perspective, making it an essential read for communication, media, and journalism professionals, policymakers, and business leaders alike. However, such an approach can make reading less satisfying for scholars seeking deeper theoretical engagement. This limited attention to academic and theoretical debates is consistent across chapters, where complex issues are often presented in broad, practitioner-friendly terms rather than situated within established scholarly frameworks. Stelling's (2023) optimistic framework of purpose-driven strategies, AI, and innovation would have also benefited from a more explicit consideration of critical debates, especially on the ethical risks of technology and uneven regional capacities. These limitations, however,

do not diminish the book's relevance but rather highlight opportunities for future scholarship to build on Stelling's (2023) practitioner insights with more critical and comparative analysis.

Overall, *CommunicAsian: How Asia's Rise is Shaping the Future of Communications, and How to Plan for It* (2023) makes a strong contribution to the fields of international communication and public relations by providing in-depth practical insights and relevant case studies to help the readers grasp the current state of communications in the context of the growing influence of the Asian region. Stelling's (2023) rich experience as an international advisor and regional expert certainly adds credibility to his analysis. The book's clarity of argument and structured narrative facilitate the understanding of complex concepts, making it accessible not only to experienced professionals but also to those who are new to Asian communications.

Beyond its professional applications, the book's relevance to global power dynamics, public diplomacy, and narrative strategy makes it well-suited for use in upper-level undergraduate and graduate-level courses in international communication, strategic public relations, public diplomacy, political science, or international and Asian studies. By emphasizing the intersection of economic power and narrative competence, Stelling (2023) persuasively argues that the future of global influence in the 21st, Asian Century will increasingly depend on the speed and strategic mastery of storytelling, because "[i]f the future is Asian, the future of communications is Asian, too" (p.138).

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