

# Empowerment as a Universal Ethic in Global Journalism

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## **Abstract**

Globalization has churned up in its wake a re-evaluation of standards in numerous enterprises, including journalism. The search for a universal journalism ethic, however, has often ended with the attempt to import traditional and underlying Western “free press” values, such as objectivity and an adversarial platform, forged in Enlightenment philosophy. This belief of the universal portability of Western values is often misplaced. Scholars admonish that modernization through globalization is not equal to Westernization, and warn of the futility of attempting to fit indigenous values into a Procrustean bed<sup>1</sup> of Western economic or political design.

Multiple models of citizen-press-government relationships grow legitimately out of indigenous value systems and are sustainable and enduring within the forces of globalization. This does not mean the search for a universal journalism ethic should be abandoned to the morass of cultural relativism, but rather that a new grounding should be established and new focal points enumerated.

Globalization has produced several major paradigm shifts in world societies, not the least of which is increasing degrees of autonomy of both the individual and the citizenry to encourage a wider participation in both the governing and economic process. This suggests that a new focal point of journalism ethics should be **empowerment** – the degree to which a society’s journalism is designed to empower the citizenry to increase its control of its own destiny for its own betterment, rather than the degree to which journalism creates a passive audience of consumerism.

An ethic of empowerment can both reflect the changes of globalization and respect indigenous value systems. A principal structural measurement of this global ethic should be the

degree of autonomy the journalist enjoys, within legal, cultural and professional limits. Of particular interest to this seminar will be whether the kisha kurabu (press club) structure of Japanese journalism empowers, or maintains a power balance at the expense of, the citizenry.

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<sup>1</sup> A **Procrustean bed**, from Greek mythology, is an arbitrary standard to which exact conformity is forced.