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Cultural Values of Media and Asian Audiences: Local responses to Global Media

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Abstract

Questions of cultural value are some of the most complex to unravel when faced with the cultural contexts of Asia. The analysis of these questions when applied to media may be understood as a project intended to critically assess the media in Asia as a public discourse.

In this presentation we would like to present two quite distinct data sets as examples of research activities in progress. Out of the juxtaposition of these activities we hope to uncover some conceptual tools that would hopefully advance the project of understanding the cultural values of media in the Asian context.

The first research activity is concerned with an examination of local consumption of satellite television. This research sampled a segment of the satellite television audience in Surabaya, East Java. While there are a number of ways to develop accounts of the results of that research, our interest is primarily in an account of viewers' program preferences in the structure and delivery of television services in Indonesia and how this may reflect audience use of television, both local and global, that is available.

The second research project concerns Chinese television reception and challenges a number of firmly held views about the relationship of Chinese television and its audiences. Audience research in China is in its infancy and largely confined to crude data accumulation (ratings) for CCTV. It is governed by a number of assumptions about the constitution of the audience: namely that it is homogenous and actively orthodox in its reading of television, following centralised tenets based on political and cultural Marxist doxologies. The research this section draws on suggests that Chinese audiences are as fragmented and different as any national audience and further, that Chinese audiences read television in a number of ways, including orthodoxy. However, what is clear is that regional and local factors are as significant as the central in shaping an audience's reading of television events and constructing of cultural values.

These quite different research contexts were never intended to be linked conceptually but some important insights begin to emerge when they are examined in relation to one another. The comparison between so-called "open skies" and censored skies in terms of the respective media policy frameworks of Indonesia and China suggests substantial differences in media consumption and performance. This research demonstrates however, the importance of analysing underlying local communication processes of the forms (institutional and organisational) that media assumes in the contexts of both politics and commerce. It therefore contributes to our understanding of the cultural values of television in the local/global nexus.

Satellite TV In East Java: Local Consumption of Global Television

The paper will summarise research undertaken in July 1995 in which a sample of the viewing public in Surabaya, Indonesia was surveyed as to the use of satellite television available to them. The study provides base-line data on the local consumption of global television. The study was

executed as a pilot project - using simple stage 1. In summary, the respondents were randomly selected and interviewed in a range of contexts pertaining to their use of television delivered by a parabolic device.

The largely quantitatively derived data suggests a strong foundation for arguments related to localist modifications of global influences. At the same time, qualitative responses suggest a strong undercurrent of critical opinion about the cultural values of television.

When compared to results of a previous survey executed in 1982, the changes in the mediascape of regional Indonesia are dramatic. Private local networks and foreign channels now provide Indonesians with satellite access to television in a dozen different languages. The use of satellite television is also high, and the influence of other communication technologies available to wealthy Indonesians. Preliminary discussions with professional and occasional viewers of satellite television reveals a willingness to critically discuss and debate the advantages and foibles of the mass media.

A number of questions raised by the study will be discussed: * the extent to which satellite television makes a difference to the economic and social structure of Indonesian society,
* the media's relationship to older specific cultural formations * the differences that regional influences exert on media use * no-growth for program preferences.

The study suggests that tensions are evident in the coexistence of sometimes incompatible television cultures, and how they are used and experienced.

Introduction

Questions of culture are one some of the most complex to unravel when faced with a cultural context like that of Indonesia. It may be understood as a problem which demands a critical assessment of the media in Indonesia as a public discourse in the context of a changing mediascape and public sphere. The juxtaposition of diverse media activities in Indonesia makes understanding the cultural values of Indonesian media a multi-dimensional and complex project.

The paper begins with research activity, which examines the local consumption of satellite television, in Surabaya, among parts of the rural television audience in Surabaya, East Java. While there are a number of ways to develop accounts of the results of that research, this paper is primarily about the situation and history of television services in Indonesia and how this affects audience use of television, a topic which will now find its availability.

Some of the characteristics of the research are the related to distinctions made within selected cultural practices. This may serve to externalise the data to some extent and broaden the perspectives used to analyse it.

The goal of this paper is to develop significant insights about the mediations of cultural values. Its approach to this is through the analysis of the place of culture within its own social formation. The research project has a primary interest in communication processes as it is these processes which are at the focus point where the spheres of culture and commerce cross.

Methodologically speaking, the critical concern of ethnocentrism – the imposition of subjective cultural values on the practices and practices under investigation – has been partially addressed by the involvement of Indonesian research partners in East Java; we have chosen not to avoid the fact of ethnocentrism, necessary in every cross-cultural project, but to treat it as an "objective" bias – as a constraint of knowledge to be given a fixed form. Any interpretative moves of a cross-cultural kind, thereby, are up to me to do the reconstruction of our own cultural processes, in the sense of what can be done to move forward – and the insights obtained are both about the local and global contexts as well as the self.

Some definitions

Media can refer to the ways forms through which a public discourse may be constructed. Print (press, magazines, books), television, radio, film, music are joined by CD-ROM, the internet and the more recent applications of telecommunications related to information services. This definition of media may also include the traditional work of healers, shamans or tribal elders. Media here might be fire, water, special foods, herbs etc. Our selected media for this research is the press and television particularly the available television delivered by a parabolic device or satellite. The media-isation of some traditional the ritual forms, e.g., wayang kulit, will also be discussed.

Guided democracy and the New Order or guided democracy is a term coined to describe a period in Indonesian political history. It specifically refers to the period of Sukarno's regime from 1958 - 1966. The background to this political development in Sukarno's reign is important from the standpoint of linking this period to the current regime known as the "New Order" under Suharto. This period under Suharto was the beginning of a retrenching of democratic practices + a constraining of the very public debates that had occurred during Sukarno's reign regarding the political direction of the country. The overthrow of Sukarno in 1965 and the installation of Suharto as his successor was a wholly bloody transition - a mark of great import in Indonesian history. In a sense the idea of "media's independence" was crushed under Suharto. There is a parliament and a pluralistic state in place, but the political culture remains a command culture, strongly centralised with a desire of controlling agencies to different groups (the army, the Islamic movement) to serve the state's own interests. To explore the politics of Indonesian media, we must examine the larger context of mediational values which constrain the media in Indonesia.

Paul Tickell argues that in the case of the press, the current (1990s) mechanisms of control over the Indonesian press under Suharto's New Order have their roots in Sukarno's Guided Democracy statutes of the 60s. The Basic Press Law of 1966, for example, was amended in 1982, with the leftist wording excised but the basic relationship between state and press left intact. This suggests a greater affinity between the regimes with regards to press freedoms than would have normally been assumed. In the case of other differences (say, in ideology, political practices).

These political values in turn must respond to the changing scene of global media and the adoption of new communication technologies. For Indonesia with a command political culture and centralised political parties this may pose substantial problems. It is well-known for example, how the regions create party and political tensions in Indonesia and have done so for some time. It is precisely the fostering of regional identities which global media can effect by bypassing physical borders and thus bring people closer together to commerce.

National, International, global

It is in this context that the terms national, international and global need to be carefully considered. The nation in the sense of a polity is a term related to what could be called its most significant identity-narration, i.e., the story of Indonesians' independence from a long colonisation by the Dutch. The anti-colonial story is the story of the "national" - of Indonesia becoming a nation. (The salient example of Indonesia's success at enacting this story on the world stage climaxed in Bandung in 1954, in which Sukarno led a meeting of non-aligned nations. It was at this conference that the term "third world" had its first currency as a referent for non-aligned nations despite its more contemporary signifier for underdeveloped or poor nations.) The "national" in Indonesia has had a paradoxical relationship to the "international" - to have forms of internationalism without the pre-requisite of national and local history.

The idea of the "global" dislocates both the national and the international.

Edge cities and regions become centres of potential engagement. As Harold Innis has pointed out, it is on the margins of the various empires where the most significant political events may occur and not because of their links to a "center" but because of the possibility of global information and communication systems which may link these "margins" to other margins and other centres.

National borders do exist and are constantly policed. But increasingly they are bypassed by the forms of global activities in the realms of culture, commerce and communications. The crucial question of the Indonesian media is the question of the pertinacy of its cultural values given its close links to the larger transnational networks and particularly national imaginings in the face of global processes of capital and power. This question may be explained by reference to the development of the modern press in Indonesian urban history.

One of the salient features of the Indonesian press through the 1950s was its nationalist ascendancy was the close relationship between the most leftist groupings, political parties and the press - the various newspaper initiatives from early this century to form, in Paul Tickell's terms, the "intellectual vanguard of Indonesian nationalism." This view of the press may be tempered by the former existence of Sinar-Merdeka, Ekspos, Komunitas, and Deteksi language presses though the disappearance of many of these was a result of the dominance of the national, nationalist press. This ascendant culture was broken on independence after independence (1950-58) that was pluralistic and neutral - that this was the ultimate form of citizenship. The move to the period of guided democracy under Soekarno and the subsequent principles of Pancasila under the New Order saw a considerable tightening of controls on extraparliamentary groups and an escalation of restrictions on the press.

This was and is evidenced by increased examples of censorship on both the left and the right, and the installation of a system of press permits coupled with defamation laws which in formal and institutional terms work to influence the role of the press in democratic terms.

Anum Soemartoedjo notes that "the press is the political and cultural foundation of the (Indonesian) state, especially the most influential social strata are shaped in its image. The press is the most important factor in the formation of public opinion. It is, therefore, an instrument of propaganda and control, a tool..."

This argument seeks to establish a basis for the specificity of cultural values within a given ideological framework. Pancasila is assumed to be the rule for nation-building rather than the ideological framework thrown by the current regime. This argument ignores an important historical

period in Indonesia's intertwined struggle in which the press played a critical role. The life of Tirta Adi Suryo exemplifies in this regard. Tirta was publisher and editor of the first Native-owned daily newspaper in Indonesia. As a propagator of the first legal aid service, he helped found the first modern Indonesian publishing company, and the first magazine for women and pioneered mass media reporting in the first nation's language.

It is not surprising that the author of a biography of Tirta Adi Suryo and an anthology of his journalism and criticism is currently based in Indonesia.

This suggests that alternative journalists, who have their own media value orientations, may contribute to reterritorialising in their own right and may not have their origins in western models. New Order ideology may espouse nationalist precepts but it seems less concerned with national identity and more with homogenising common nationality specific cultural formations.

The site of such alternative existences from which the "local" and "global" crossroads of press values and nationalist projects are derived, is the space of communication, or the limits of democracy in the media field. It is here that the conflict between the "national" and the "global", whose potentialities were so interesting, comes to bear in the local consumption of global media.

Satellite television's community: local software vs global hardware

Research into satellite television has grown in the last five years. In 1990, the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) held its annual conference on the theme of satellite television in the context of its newest satellites in Asia and the Pacific (Jakarta, 26-29 July, 1990). This was followed in 1991 by another conference on satellites sponsored by the Asian Pacific Broadcasting Union.

Despite this, the understanding of satellite television's audience is in its infancy. Ask any satellite broadcaster about the audience now and numbers mentioned bear little resemblance to those associated with traditional terrestrial forms. Eyes may enlarge and look upward in a metaphoric gaze of a child's the Smiths' Rose. But few studies of satellite audiences have rarely admitted to confirming anything but a projected audience and the statistical projections related to hardware access; what audiences are doing or thinking about with global images is still to be comprehensively ascertained.

To construct the changes in audience consumption of television between 1987 and 1991 the average number of satellite television households in the world increased by 42.2%. In 225 of the countries surveyed the total number of households mentioned specifically, in this report, is represented by 8% - satellite television communication technologies and space-binding ones, as distinct from optical by solid ions, - satellite technology is space-binding, satellites extend the useful range of the central frequency spectrum, weaken cost-distance inter-relationships, and economically establish point-to-multipoint (broadcasting) as well as point-to-point (telecommunications) communications with broad geographic areas. They have been touted as offering choice and reducing competition in established communications and opening up new markets of transnational communities and markets.

Promises, promises

In a study published in 1987, part of this series, RIEC and Rollins suggests that satellites promised to bring much of the world closer together through the transmissions of the television

audience; more advanced specialised channels, like satellite, pay-per-view, regional, domestic users, business, local groupings, or national, are less well known than local television.

In Europe, satellites are touted as a route to fostering cultural identity, a mass audience and public with a European culture, and without US influence.

These providers are seen as part of the new, smaller, more isolated traditional communication markets pricing foreign products out of the market.

New distinctions will emerge between a transnational elite and poor along new class lines. European cultural interests may be regarded by "European satellites" - the dominance of American pop culture. The older media imperialism thesis finds favour once again. (At a UNESCO meeting in Mexico July 1982, the then French Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, identified the American TV soap, Dallas, as a threat to the national culture of France.

Lang called for a crusade "against material and intellectual imperialism that no longer grabs territory, or money but ideas, ways of thinking, ways of living..."

These threats are approached in two ways, according to Giddens, by an important filtering language. A language community will form around a certain type of content encoded in its own language. But other factors also mitigate this seemingly solid sense of global TV consumption. The size of the number of one language is not the criterion of languages spoken within a national framework. English might seem to be spreading, filtering its way into non-Anglophone markets rather than the others are merged. There are numerous other linguistic minorities which Anglophone populations today feel free to discriminate against and exclude from the non-English markets.

Other important factors are language, culture, and nationality. The easiest to distinguish are providers are said to bypass national boundaries by using English as a filter to discriminate when confronted with a potentially lost market. This has been shown in point in the context of India and China. The Chinese objected to BBC world service news and heeded Murdoch's unusually loose remarks about "expanding telecommunication problems for totalitarian regimes".

But should the Chinese government have anything to worry about? Studies have revealed that global news values are incredibly diverse.

In a study, G. M. Dewar tried to analyse of communication in a analysis of one day's (Nov. 19 1991) news stories to predict every day. If system in the world was examined out, the results were fascinating. In the case of news stories about the Soviet statement there were several stories that came from the English-language BBC series. In general ... subject wholly ignored by the local media, though the press conference itself held in Paris ignored by the English world except that it got a brief mention, as an East Asian massacre well reported in Asia but hardly outside the newspaper of Stepanov as Foreign Minister for the USSR; conflict in Yugoslavia did not receive the coverage of media in white and Sutherland was not mentioned in either and the like. So what is the finding?

Chaplin continues: "That story is just one of many stories, and did not travel outside national boundaries. Some may therefore put this as a problem only of interest to western networks. Local concern seems to be limited to the BBC and others. It is somewhat difficult to think one might be myopic, diffuse, pluralistic, if one thinks only within a filter, as authors, and that mostly they stay next to you, and the like, and so on." And in the words of another researcher, "The story here is that news doesn't travel very far at all..."

Currently satellite television works through the downlinks and uplinks which permit local broadcasters to put on and out of particular services.

In looking at Australia's television, for example, the preferences of local broadcasters may vary the service according their concession licenses or their audience tastes takes news, Guangdong in China prefers sports, while others do not, yet tune in to science features. (Our research in Indonesia found similar and varied news item services among audience favourites.) The target audience is concerned with a public right to free for the redistribution of satellite signals. The absence of this redistribution usually hampers the growth of a satellite audience. The geospatial conditions of any country may or may not favour this technology. Singapore, for instance will be completely cabled in a relatively short amount of time; however it will take much longer in

The problems of audience distribution are those of social settings and cultural filters, redistribution technology, the cost of signal, program packages for especially local terrestrial "free-to-air" television, for the distribution to satisfy regional and once tastes which vary from country to country and even within a city, as well. This cross-cultural audience use a part of the audience to acquire their built and often in previous and "locked-in" to maximize viewing.

Satellite television and Indonesian media culture

In turning towards the formation of Indonesia the historical moment is a vortex of past and future ideologies, technologies and transnational communication values. Adopting Collins' hardware-software model, the third axis can be seen to be satellite television's convergence of media and message while the software is local language and culture. The meeting is one not unlike the earlier encounter in the era 1970-1980 between a nationalist press and its global competitors. Because of the potential threats and promises of satellite television and related global communications, a careful assessment of the consequences for public interests is crucial. The concern is nothing less than a need to understand how global television not only stratifies audiences but also how it affects consciousness in formations of cultural identity and values. Our research, based on discussions with satellite viewers, reveals considerable awareness of the importance of television delivered via satellites.

Indonesia was a pioneer in this field and started its first satellite in 1976. Palapa 1 was seen as a potential development tool, in providing news, information, training units, and fully in line with New Order power and culture. Little has changed since then and despite the latest generation satellites launched, Indonesia has continued at the forefront in this field. A new audience that is confronted with a media and cultural sphere that has a strong lineage through their community has been analysed as a set of challenges posed by the dominant media itself - to what has been a government controlled medium, and in this way reinforces the theme of the waning of older ideological schemes (nationalist discourses) of the era of a national audience.

This view also refers to the suppression of a left of peoples or social movements which substantially eroded the strength of labour particularly in the still unbroken division between the left and right in society where there is the apparent consistent activities of New Order media policy with respect to labour along these two main dimensions.

Audiences from the 1980s onwards had no difficulty in transcending even of the constraints on access through local radio, cable, print before either of participation in the media. The benchmark study in 1982 suggested that satellite followed the gap between rich and poor. The study concluded that television technology was well developed socially. Our intermediary account of satellite shows that the findings of the 1982 survey group in that regard showed a definite leaning to middle and upper class suggesting the upper-middle-class may be more inclined to that of the 1982 study.

In the years immediately preceding, Indonesia sought to pursue an open skies policy. No interference in the coverage or future use of American satellites was left to take place. The local channels were rapidly extending as *Pelangi 1* (3.65kW) introduced in 1982 but only reached a national audience with the launch of *Indosat* in 1986. A blend of commercial and government broadcasting, *Pelangi* carried advertising in 1982 a marketing received as became a government mouthpiece. In 1983 the *Regulation of Satellite Services* gave *Pelangi* greater power and with the acquisition of *Indosat* prior to 1986 to satellite programs. In 1986 significant numbers of Indonesian firms began to enter the market directly by establishing the *Indosat*.

The first satellite application came in 1987, a long awaited license granted to a company owned by Sumarno, the chairman of *PT Telekomunikasi Indonesia*, a telephone company. In 1988 further expansion of coverage came as *PT Telekomunikasi Indonesia* was granted a licence in August 1990, this

channel is owned by Sunbeam's client, Imagine. The two other channels are owned by close associates of Sunbeam.

The "open skies" of Indonesian television are in reality "few, wider skies".

The earlier studies that saw the 1990s as an era of US expansion into the government sector in Indonesia seem to have been right. However, it is doubtful that the nationalised media can continue to do so without some form of state intervention, either political purposes or as part of the state's role in the economy. The media, reinforced by military might, can act as the agent of the state, and the global is such that an encounter between warring forces involving commercial and government identities defining a relatively small base of control in the context of global pressures.

This makes foreign satellite television the effective competitor for this television audience and the chief alternative to domestic television in the transmission of cultural values. Our research has corroborated other findings, however, to show that the introduction of increased access to foreign-language programmes has had only mixed results in relation to the lowering of consumption of locally produced programmes. The trend towards a preference for domestic product over imported foreign television is clear.

In an account of the television market in Southeast Asia,¹⁰ May points to a recent study of nine Asian countries. Of the 30 million in these nine Asian countries (Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, China, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore), the authors concluded that a majority of 16 hours in each of the countries was domestically produced with the exception of Malaysia and Singapore. The overall average was 75%.

This last figure is curious, for it reflects a situation of affluence and sentiment. It may also explain why there is less concern about the role of the press in the eyes of the press. The trend towards specificity of language is a result of the reassessment of cultural values. Regional responses may make a case more compelling, but as a general principle:

Brazilian Studies and the Need for a New Model of Cultural National Values

The Indonesian private television system is a mixture of international and local programs, the most popular being Brazilian soap operas, any Brazilian soap opera?

Brazil has the 6th largest television market in the world. Its main channel, TV Globo captures between 60 and 80% of the television audience.

In print there is a tradition of research-based television. In 1993, the top ten production units in Brazil produced 100% of the fiction output. Brazil and I,¹¹ is a television report on soap operas in Brazil, examining the possibilities created by these stories to the media and to society and its role in social contexts and, question the thesis about the inevitable future of traditional media, drafting before the likes of Leyton Place and Bonanza.¹² The success of I, Brazil as a reader demonstrates to the author his swift judgment that the narratives of a cultural tradition like that of Brazil will resonate more strongly with one like Indonesia in their mutual dependence than with others such as the United States.

Our study showed migration as the most significant factor in determining viewer ranking when individuals were asked what they knew about the country.

Music as well may be seen as a factor. Since the television service in Asia has a sparse broadcast and travels world-wide and far and wide, this may have an influence on consumer taste rather than by national culture.

As noted earlier, transmission is a barrier but not an obstacle: i.e., speaking and understanding are different skills. Televising can be heard and understood with sometimes a minimum of language skills. A process called "reversioning" ensures that language and cultural specificity may be served - for example, a Nepalese script might be recast with Russian actors and set in Moscow. In this way the preference for local television is certainly served in conjunction with foreign scripts.

Conclusion

To complete the sense of what values are put into play is to consider an Indonesia transformed by anti-colonial struggle, another in which a sense of progress is impeded by the uncertainties of new relationships with western values - a world of values held at arm's length or further - a narrative of progress that is seen to be disturbed by, perhaps, social, political, fragmentation and dissent.

Second, the accession to the media as a mass recording technology gives birth to the word. Literature is now part of the information resulting; the culture is increasingly translated in the language of the mass media.

Wayang Kulit, the traditional Javanese shadow-puppet theatre is a regularly televised event. The question remains whether this demonstration of the literary by mass media has forever relegated the "aura" of these works to us a term from Walter Benjamin, to a past of lost tradition. Or has television redefined the continuity of storytelling and therefore of the possibility of the communal living experiences of the world, of times provocative and violating of sacred norms.

The research demonstrates the nexus of new and old media as they jostle beside one another in the context of a trans-local world. No sense can be made of these competing media without reference to local cultural preferences for the programs these audiences enjoy. No understanding of policy regulation can be developed without an accounting of the political values which continue to dominate Indonesia, nor the supposed transnational ones. Finally, the media, both local and global, continues to reinforce and re-inforce the partly existing and very cultural continuities as they are imposed by forces of social control or presented with off-the-familiar scenes from a not so distant past.