

NEW TELEVISION, GLOBALISATION, AND THE EAST ASIAN CULTURAL IMAGINATION

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Hong Kong University Press is honoured that Xu Bing, whose art explores the complex themes of language across cultures, has written the Press's name in his Square Word Calligraphy. This signals our commitment to cross-cultural thinking and the distinctive nature of our English-language books published in China.

“At first glance, Square Word Calligraphy appears to be nothing more unusual than Chinese characters, but in fact it is a new way of rendering English words in the format of a square so they resemble Chinese characters. Chinese viewers expect to be able to read Square Word Calligraphy but cannot. Western viewers, however are surprised to find they can read it. Delight erupts when meaning is unexpectedly revealed.”

— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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Out of Nowhere

For decades, we worked under the assumption that mass culture follows a steadily declining path towards lowest-common-denominator standards, presumably because the ‘masses’ want dumb, simple pleasures and big media companies want to give the masses what they want. But in fact, the exact opposite is happening: the culture is getting more and more intellectually demanding, not less.

– Johnson (2005: 9)

For more than five decades since television was introduced into East Asia, widespread debate has ensued concerning the pervasive influence of American and Western popular culture. The key arguments can perhaps be summarised as follows: Hollywood is the dominant centre of production; it produces movies and television that have global recognition; this content promotes individualist values; these values are damaging to Asian social traditions.

Since 1998, viewers in Japan, China, Taiwan and South Korea have been introduced to a new kind of entertainment television. Celebrity chefs compete in highly stylised culinary combat; winners ‘take all’ in survival reality shows; quiz contestants walk away with extraordinary prizes; and instant celebrities are created in documentary-style talent quests. Of course, one can speculate that economic recession in East Asia during the late 1990s led people to choose escapist diversionary activities. But when *Time Asia* announced its annual survey of ‘Asia’s heroes’ in October 2005, the person featured on the cover was not someone who had performed heroic deeds in the wake of the Asian tsunami or who had fought against endemic corruption, but rather an androgynous tomboy called Li Yuchun, the winner of *Super Girl* (*chaoji nüsheng*: literally ‘Super Female Voice’), a Chinese version of the popular *Idol*

format. With the headline ‘Li Yuchun: loved for being herself’, *Time Asia*’s correspondent pointed out that the show had drawn the largest audiences in the history of Chinese television, producing a media frenzy comparable with coverage of a war or the O. J. Simpson trial (Jakes 2005). In China, critics moved quickly to either praise or condemn this media event which was staged by Hunan Satellite Television in south China. Not for the first time, this upstart broadcaster had challenged the purity of China Central Television (CCTV) whose own soporific talent quest *Special 6+1 Dream China* suddenly encountered a ratings freefall.

Reactions to the spread of global television ideas are not isolated. As integration of the world economy increases, and as products and services rapidly replicate around the globe, cultural globalisation fears persist. And as we travel from country to country, we may be reassured or dis comforted — depending on our political position — in being surrounded by familiar products, images and brands. Franchise capitalism has reproduced Starbucks, Disney product stores and McDonald’s in the United Kingdom, in Europe and in East Asian cities. In television industries, the franchising model is also on the ascendant. This model of production is recognisable in reality TV, game shows, and a range of lifestyle and infotainment programs. While many critics berate the banality, viewers of such shows have highly individualised reactions. Many consume with discrimination, ambivalent to a show’s origins, while accepting these global developments as indicators of what constitutes new television.

In this book we examine the contribution these shows make to social and economic relations in East Asia. If what was once deemed bad is now good — to take Johnson’s opening provocation on board — is Western-style popular culture now good in East Asia? Is the injection of individualistic values into Asian reality TV now ‘good’ for cultures that have traditionally espoused co-operation and hierarchical relationships? Or are there more nuanced processes of accommodation occurring between individualised models of material progress and the social interdependency that frames Confucian family values?

United States success in global media and advertising markets forms a common theme within cultural studies and political economy. Recent studies have asserted that Hollywood continues to relentlessly impose its presence on ‘weaker’ cultures. Miller et al.’s *Global Hollywood* thesis sees dominance reproduced through a combination of distribution, marketing, exhibition, and production efficiencies. This so-called New International Division of Cultural Labour (NICL) is consolidated by influence over global copyright regimes (Miller et al. 2001). In another account, aptly entitled *Hollywood Planet* (Olsen

1999), American cinema and television programming achieves dominance across cultures through ‘narrative transparency’. Many American popular cultural texts make sense in international markets due to the formulaic presentation of themes such as good and evil. In the end, whether it is *Global Hollywood* or *Planet Hollywood*, we contend that such approaches undervalue the importance of local content by denying a sense of agency to viewers in non-English-speaking regions.

This book traces a different narrative of the globalisation of television. It looks at distribution channels and production strategies that manifest outside the purview of mainstream English-language scholarship. And it works on a different premise than the *Global Hollywood* and *Hollywood Planet* models. Our assertion is that Hollywood is a dominant centre of production; it produces blockbuster movies with a global cachet; it exploits competitive advantage in distribution and marketing; its content is associated with individualist values; but its television products have a diminishing influence in East Asian schedules.

The reassertion of regionalism in television production is a result of several factors: the integration of East Asian economies within global markets has produced more opportunities in television production and distribution; increased levels of trade and exchange of creative personnel across the East Asian region have resulted in new niche markets; transfer of technologies through joint ventures and co-productions has created efficiencies; rising cosmopolitanism in cities has led to demand for content reflecting everyday life; and new flexible models of production have emerged as a response to multi-channel platforms and digitisation. It is apparent from these environmental changes that we are not concerned with the United States, except to point out that constant focus on the success and dominance of Hollywood perpetuates a scholarly imbalance and contributes to misunderstandings of how East Asian media engage within the global cultural economy.

Globalisation is a topic that has been widely addressed by scholars with varying degrees of definitiveness, and where Asian media studies is concerned there has been a tendency within much English-language literature to emphasise the political economy of global media penetration and the (often assumed) ‘effects’ of Western programming. Our intention in this study of new television in East Asia is to shift the focus of debate towards processes of cultural exchange, and in doing so, further challenge the West-East imperialism model that is framed on culturally destabilising effects imposed on recipient nation value systems. Of course, this presupposes that we are not focusing our intention on finished programs — that is, the sale of programs across national borders. Our key propositions are: first, that trade in format

licenses is significantly different from trade in ‘finished program’ rights; second, that adaptation is increasingly widespread as media producers search for compelling content; third, that a shift to conceptual and interchangeable ‘media artefacts’ is accounting for a greater percentage of the market (Aris and Bughin 2005); and fourth, that East Asia is generating more tradable media content. These propositions underpin a different model of trans-border program flows, and they challenge totalising theories such as the NICL and ‘narrative transparency’.

Our approach will test sociological notions of cultural value, cultural studies’ celebrations of hybridity and political economy evaluations of Western influence. Our research methods combine interviews with producers and distributors, industry data, academic critique and policy research. While we visited eleven countries in Asia in conducting our fieldwork (Moran and Keane 2004), in this book we are concerned with the internationalisation of television trade within the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea.

The examples we present straddle cultural theory and industry practice: they are fundamentally about how new programming ideas are created, shaped and sold to television stations — and how these ideas are creatively redeveloped in different global locations. In terms of distribution and marketing, this book is also about how new program concepts are repackaged and targeted at different cultural demographics. While the focus is on the role of formats within this region, the stimulus for this study comes from examining change in programming strategies within global television networks and media production companies. Growth in independent production during the past decade — a response to multi-channelling and diminishing advertising revenue for in-house production — has stimulated new models of television production in the countries of East Asia.

While many of the television programs in this study have Western origins (particularly Europe and the United States), it is their take-up and creative adaptation within East Asia that illustrates what we term the *East Asian cultural imagination*. In other words, the scope of the research is not just the licensing of programs into East Asia, but the refashioning of ideas into new versions, spin-offs and ancillary products. In fact, the key concern of this project is to understand processes of adaptation. More importantly, we are considering not just the West-East trade flow, which has been the dominant theme of political economy, but the equally important East-East and East-West dynamics of television program trade.

Globalisation and Localisation

Globalisation is one of the key themes of this book. In embracing the concept of global media, we acknowledge that sale of television programs constitutes the core business for transnational media companies. Alternatively, we note that imitation, localisation, co-productions and niche programming are a strategic means for new or under-capitalised production companies to compete against high-budget international programs. Do we therefore make a distinction between the globalisation strategies of transnational media corporations and the internationalisation aspirations of smaller domestic companies? If domestic companies are endeavouring to tap into new markets, are they globalising, internationalising, or regionalising their business, or are they just being savvy about the opportunities that exist in the marketplace? We find evidence of economic exchange and cultural translation across cultures. In many instances this activity is hard to categorise as either globalisation or localisation. As we shall see in the study of television formats, globalisation discourses need to be grounded in economic and social contexts.

Other themes that recur are cultural transfer, translation, discount, proximity, and compatibility. The cultural transfer model that we develop in this study draws on a new international division of cultural production (*in addition to* cultural labour). Technology is transferred in several ways, not least being the exchange of expertise. Translation occurs as ideas are localised. Cultural discount, where non-familiarity with international cultural nuance undercuts the tradability of many audio-visual exports — except for American drama and sit-coms in English-language markets — is avoided (Hoskins and Rolf 1988). Adaptation avoids the problem of cultural discount by substituting local accents and cultural references such that many viewers fail to distinguish the program's true origins. Cultural proximity refers to the capacity for film and television content to be read symptomatically in countries where cultural traditions, values and structures of feeling are aligned (see Straubhaar 1991). For instance, television dramas made in Japan achieve great success in Taiwan (Iwabuchi 2002). By the same measure, programs made in Japan have less success in mainland China, where compatibility is a function of enduring national sensitivity to Japanese imperialism.

The Universality of Adaptation

In the present stage of audio-visual industry development, the most significant dynamic seems to be one of adaptation, transfer, and recycling

of narrative and other kinds of content. This tendency is not limited to television, but is characteristic across many media and related areas of cultural production. Nor is it unique to the present epoch. However, in the present age of international media conglomerates, the recycling and adaptation of content across different media platforms is rapidly multiplying to the point of marginalising other economic and cultural practices. Many kinds of adaptations are familiar. For example, films become television series just as television series trigger feature films. Remakes are equally common, although these are sometimes known under other names such as the sequel, the spin-off or even the prequel. This general phenomenon of a content-genealogy does not end there. Narratives can span several media: theatrical film, television, video, DVD re-release, video games, CD soundtrack, radio, comics, novels, stage shows, musicals, public concerts, posters, merchandising, theme parks and so on. Fanzines and internet websites further spin out these contents. Individually and collectively, this universe of narrative and content constitutes a loosening of the notion of closure and the self-contained work of art (Thompson 1999, 2003).

Behind this proliferation of transfers — this ever-expanding recycling of content — is a set of new economic arrangements designed to secure a degree of financial and cultural insurance not easily available in the present multi-channel environment. Adapting already successful materials and content provides an opportunity to duplicate past and existing successes. In other words, media producers are attempting to take out financial and cultural insurance by using material that is in some way familiar to the audience (Fiddy 1997; Moran 1998). Having invested in the brand, it makes good business sense to derive further value from it in these different ways. This tendency of recycling is further facilitated by the fact of owning the copyright on the property in the first place.

Although we identify a great deal of adaptation activity based on Japanese programs, many of the programs identified in this study originate in Europe. Important questions considered here include: whether the practice of emulating, copying, and adapting is cultural diversity in action, an attempt to localise and claim the *de facto* intellectual property, or just recycling what sells? It is our contention that increasing demand for content dictates that adaptations are economic solutions to increased pressures in the multi-channel marketplace, rather than 'nationalistic' desires to propagate local content using international models. Of course, the strategies inherent in producing local versions constitute a significant part of our analysis. But the bottom line is that the successful localisation of a television program is about using cultural identity to deliver ratings.

Adaptation is an exemplar of post-Fordist practices intersecting with the new logic of creative production. The logic of post-Fordism evokes recent work on creative industries where media industries are understood as dependent on a range of mainstream services: finance, legal, management, advertising and marketing. Writing about the new symbiosis between Japan and Hong Kong's audio-visual industries, Yeh and Davis (2002:2) have written of flexible accumulation as a means of corporative survival in which there are ready-made models and sources of material to 'allude to' or 'copy outright'. This in turn echoes Jeremy Rifkin's thesis of a shift from ownership to access which refers to the 'new Hollywood model' of outsourcing that has largely displaced the old studio system in which every facet of production was managed by the vertically integrated company (Rifkin 2000; Storper 1989). Rifkin also speaks of leasing and franchising as new economy management strategies. Rifkin's tag-line — 'the age of access' — denotes a global shift towards more flexible models of service provision.

In the same way, the international franchising of TV represents a stage in the evolution of TV production. The formatted adaptation is a franchise in which the core intellectual property is licensed to producers or television networks. The idea of business franchising is predicated on an arrangement between the owner of a concept (the franchisor) who enters into a contract with an independent actor (the franchisee) to use a specific model to sell goods or services under the former's trademark. As Karin Fladmoe-Lindquist notes, 'This approach to franchising involves a set of procedures, designs, management approaches, and services that are to be delivered exactly as specified by the franchisor' (Fladmoe-Lindquist 2000: 198). In cases where the franchise is taken up in new markets, the challenge is to retain the original image and service of the franchise.

Cultural Imperialism Versus Cultural Geography

In the space of the past several years, shows such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, *The Weakest Link*, *Survivor*, and *Idol* have formed a new currency of program exchange. As they trade across cultures and networks, such formats demonstrate the importance of cultural geography while countering some of excesses of Marxist political economy, which remains resolutely wedded to the media imperialism thesis. Various accounts of media and cultural imperialism have surfaced since the 1960s, reaching a high point in the McBride Commission New World Information and Cultural Order, instigated by UNESCO in 1980. The influential study of television flows by

Nordenstreng and Varis (1974) provided empirical support for the 'one-way flow' thesis. It was not until the 1980s that scholars began to challenge this model. In 1988, Michael Tracey presented an image of increasing complexity. He spoke of 'a patch-work quilt' rather than a one-way street. In 1991, Joseph Straubhaar nominated 'cultural proximity' and 'asymmetrical interdependence' as key determiners of markets, while Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Daya Thussu (1992) looked at outbreaks of local 'resistance' in the global media and 'contra-flows' of information. In 1996, John Sinclair, Liz Jacka and Stuart Cunningham (Sinclair et al. 1996) examined how 'peripheral centres' had created a presence and reputation in world content markets — albeit mostly through analogue and narrative formats (movies, telenovella, television drama) targeted at diasporic communities and geo-linguistic regions.

During the late 1990s, the media and communications field witnessed a reassertion of the media imperialism thesis, coinciding with an upsurge in mergers and acquisitions activity among global media companies (Schiller 1999). The pendulum has swung from the one-way street (1970s) to main thoroughfares with a series of smaller roads (1980s–1990s), and finally back to globally networked capitalist superhighways and new international divisions of cultural labour (Miller et al. 2001). However, accounts emanating from political economy and the cultural geography tradition have been premised on the licensing and syndication of finished programs in multiple markets. Little information has been produced about the TV format business, which developed in scale during the late 1990s, and which now constitutes an alternative model of media globalisation, providing new evidence as well as new models of integration within global media markets (Moran and Keane 2004).

There is ample evidence from our fieldwork to suggest that program flows and cultural influences are more regional than global. This may seem self-evident, but in much global media literature, the local is often glossed over. In other words, while the Western global program may be the vehicle of transfer, the important dynamic occurs within East Asian regional cultures where modification is based on cultural compatibility factors. To fill in the history of the model of program adaptation that we call 'formatting', however, it is important to acknowledge another regional origin. The role of European production in the new movement of ideas is central. Witness the various adaptations of the *Survivor* format. Originally devised in the United Kingdom and piloted in Sweden by the reality television production company Strix Television as *Expedition Robinson*, it has morphed into a growing number of spin-offs in various cultural landscapes including the United States, Japan and Australia, to name but a few of the more than 30 variants (Mathijs and Jones

(2004). This is the mother of the ‘survival of the smartest and fittest’ reality shows in which contestants and viewers ‘vote off’ those they consider are threats or unworthy to progress. The attraction here comes in seeing how different personalities cope under the stress of a supposedly dangerous environment and a struggle for an ultimate prize.

These northern European reality shows — and much of the associated cross-media promotion — have found their way into East Asian mediascapes. An example of adaptation into a most unlikely market is the Chinese show *Into Shangrila* (*zouru xianggelila*) which manages to blend elements of the Chinese Communist Party’s Long March from south China to its revolutionary base in Shaanxi, north-west China in the 1930s and the Liberation of Tibet in the 1950s into an escapist game show (see Chapter 8). Central to the analysis, therefore, is a theorisation of cultural exchange. What happens when new ideas are introduced through adaptation and formatting? How are these programs refashioned, resignified, modified — and how are they subsequently read and evaluated? In the past, academic responses to phenomena of cultural flow have ranged from charges of cultural imperialism against the sending culture to celebrations of local resistance on the part of the receiving host culture. Many accounts of resistance seek to describe the manner in which texts (or television programs) are creatively appropriated and refashioned for local distribution and consumption (Erni and Chua 2005). The concept of hybridity is construed as a kind of ‘clearing house’ in the process of localisation. Some proponents of globalisation contend that hybridity implies a pure origin and that humanity lives in cultural formations that are already hybrid (Cowan 2002; see Kraidy 2005). Pure origin has resonance when we talk about traditional knowledge invested in cultural artefacts; however, anthropology confirms that most ancient myths and symbols were a result of interaction across communities and cultures. Pure origin, like the concept of copyright (see Chapter 11), becomes more problematic in discussions of contemporary popular media texts which are constantly mutating and absorbing different cultural inputs. Moreover, the application of hybridity within media studies often tends towards uncritical celebration of adaptation. Nor are producers reluctant to evoke the idea of the hybrid: they enthusiastically celebrate hybridity when referring to their own output, but are often scornful of others’ hybridity, seeing it as opportunistic use of their ideas to make short-term gains.

The polarisation of critique into global domination scenarios and local resistance and hybridity is ultimately unsatisfactory and somewhat misleading. Television programming is a commodity form. However, television is unlike cultural technologies such as the internet and mobile phones that relentlessly innovate in content and applications (for example, producing a churn effect).

Television production tends towards the mundane, the conservative and the formulaic. Much of its audience is aged over forty. Ironically, the high degree of standardisation within television industries drives the circulation of low-risk ideas. From this perspective, adaptation of television programs and the shift toward the media artefact (or franchise) model may be seen as television's response to increasing competition from new media technologies. The globalisation of successful formats is the industry conducting research and development internationally rather than nationally. In the words of Steven Johnson:

The forces at work in these systems operate on multiple levels: underlying changes in technology that enable new kinds of entertainment; new forms of online communications that cultivate audience commentary about works of pop culture; changes in the economics of the culture industry that encourage repeat viewing; and deep-seated appetites in the human brain that seek out reward and intellectual challenge. (2005: 11)

The inquiry into television program adaptation and trade in the following chapters leads us to the following two propositions:

Significant remodelling of local production occurs where adaptation is genuinely responsive to local values.

Globalisation creates tensions as societies encounter ideas that are incompatible with their own cultural values and political ideologies. Much finished programming (movies, TV drama) encounters intractable obstacles in East Asian markets. In other words, programs are subject to censorship or are forced into black market distribution networks. However, globalisation proceeds on another level through adaptation as inappropriate elements of foreign programs are stripped away and substituted with local flavour and values. For many writing within cultural studies, there is a temptation to celebrate hybridity and overlook the economic logic of the imported idea. The foreign program provides the DNA, the recipe, and the technology for invigorating local television industries that are struggling to commit funds to program development. In many cases, the knowledge provided from outside is taken without any form of payment. Claims and counter-claims of copyright infringement circulate.

Transnational media companies that localise a foreign program as a strategy for gaining entry into the national market usually accrue short-term benefits.

Transnational media companies encounter resistance when breaking into culturally and linguistically distinctive markets. Localisation is the mantra of the market. The successful international brand is invested with local characteristics: strategies are developed to make it speak to local cultures, and to reduce the emphasis on individualistic values. In many examples we find that the international program, professionally localised and marketed, out-rates local imitators. However, the project-based formulaic nature of such television programs means that there is a use-by date.

Chapters

The chapters in this book may be read in any order, as each focuses on different aspects of the TV program trade and adaptation. Part I is entitled 'Adaptation and local production in East Asia', and attempts to introduce fresh theoretical approaches to the globalisation literature and to the field of Asian media studies. Part II, 'Formats, clones, and generic variations', examines program adaptations familiar to audiences, as well as addressing sociological issues of adaptation and localisation. The examples are the licensed brand format, the information challenge, the mass participation talent quest, the reality game show, and the advertising magazine program. The final section, 'New television', returns to the theme of globalisation through the lens of industry volatility, re-examining the value of trans-border format licences, and the implications for the future of television.

Any claim to offer a complete inventory of new television programs is beyond the scope of this book. The focus is on the increasing occurrence of adaptation as a modality of cultural exchange and translation; the impact of formats (and formatting) upon television scheduling; the hybridisation of genres; the role of audiences in informing the direction of program development; and ultimately the economic and cultural value of these new programs. In examining cultural dynamics of localisation in the second section of the book, we offer interpretations of success factors. We have selected several noteworthy case studies that have drawn both audience and critical response.

Chapter 2 argues that there are cultural dynamics which predispose the production, distribution, and reception of particular forms of content in China,

Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. We discuss the role of television in each country, including background to development and historical influences. The evolving television production environment sees new television (reality television, quiz shows, and family formats) reincarnating and stimulating ideas that are both familiar and foreign. In short, we observe logics of production that have been based upon a rapid turnover of ideas within institutions that have limited financial capacity. These changes are situated within existing indigenous genres (e.g. tele-dramas, 'restaurant' shows, *wanhui*, news genres, etc.) and newer genres (idol dramas) that have claimed large audience followings. We ask whether traditionally popular forms are giving way to new formats and ideas. What are the impacts of new technologies and distribution platforms upon the way that television addresses its audiences in these countries?

Chapter 3 looks closely at cultural exchange, examining globalisation, localisation and cultural translation, and their relation to cross-border flows of television formats. The discussion interrogates the idea of cultural exchange through the work of the Russian writer Yuri Lotman, who proposed that countries progress through stages of sending and receiving texts (Lotman 1990). The initial discussion centres on how texts are exchanged and adapted as they cross cultural borders. On a more material level, however, we look at the economics of global media. How does creative content from East Asia find its way into world markets? Is there a television strategy that will take Asian ideas out of their domestic containers and into international living rooms? The missing dimension in many accounts, particularly those emanating from political economy, is the idea of 'conditions of possibility' — that is, the factors that have led, are leading, and could lead to success. The chapter provides a bottom-up model of cultural production which is a necessary corrective to the domination-resistance models that currently abound in cultural studies.

Chapter 4 provides definitions and conceptual frameworks that will allow us to investigate the fertile ground of adaptation: from formatting as a mode of cultural production and exchange to specific examples that we identify as reality television, docu-soap, talk shows, and quiz shows. While the practice of adaptation is not new, imitation is accelerated by a proliferation of media channels. The chapter reveals the format behind the genre, and argues that that much critical analysis currently operates on the basis of conventions that have evolved from screen and literary theory. In order to make distinctions clearer, we provide historical background to the format industry and introduce the role of intellectual property, which — although regularly abused — nevertheless functions to caution against direct duplication of programming.

In the final part of the chapter, we introduce the concept of program ‘engines’ to describe some of the innovations that have become widely recognisable within new television. These include million-dollar prizes, lifelines, exotic locations, and contestant elimination by audience voting.

In Chapter 5 we look at the idea of technology transfer through adaptations — both licensed and unlicensed. We adopt an industrial perspective to the logic of cultural production, and in particular to cultural borrowing. We utilise the idea of cultural technology transfer to explain how the transfer of formats embodies change in the creative stage of production (Ryan 1992). This concept supports the argument that the format adaptation is a vehicle for extending the product life cycle and for organising production in order to minimise costs. When formats are introduced across television systems through licensing arrangements they inevitably involve a degree of co-production, the extent of which depends on how closely the new program resembles the original.

Chapter 6 examines the internationalisation of perhaps the best known television format — *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* The program’s success illustrates the value of cascading rights, in particular how to monetise branded content. Despite many attempts to copy the format, the original — with its distinctive catchphrase ‘lock it in’ — has beaten off competitors and brought profits to its licensees. Chapter 7 continues a discussion of how information challenges formats. The popularity of ‘winner-take-all’ quiz shows within the East Asian landscape demonstrates how wealth is linked to knowledge and technology as the knowledge-based economy looms as a blueprint for twenty-first century supremacy. While the values of contemporary quiz formats might clash with local cultural values, nevertheless, the presentation of wealth as an outcome of knowledge acquisition echoes local political and economic discourses, and perpetuates aspirations for material success. The information challenge show, best exemplified by *The Weakest Link*, incorporates elements developed in reality television, such as the tendency towards forming coalitions among contestants in order to maximise the chances of survival.

Reality formats are the subject of Chapter 8. Reality formats in East Asia provide examples of legitimate licence sales through international networks, as well as a multitude of generic variants and clones. While there are many reasons for the abundance of reality television programs in East Asia, their success is an indication that viewers are increasingly predisposed towards interactive forms of popular culture that allow connectivity across platforms, particularly exploiting the pervasiveness of SMS (short message services via mobile phones). The chapter proceeds from an investigation of the reality genre and its sub-genres (docu-soap, reality game shows) to specific instances

that echo global formats. We look at the ‘survival of the fittest’ format in East Asia — how resourceful participants use relationships with fellow contestants and community dynamics to progress. We investigate the concepts of reality, performativity, and authenticity in adventure formats in which contestants compete for an elusive prize, often by ‘voting off’ fellow contestants.

Chapter 9 concerns mass participation through talent quests — the by now familiar *Idol* format. *Super Girl* (*chaoji nüsheng*) from China, a generic variant (some would say clone) of the global *Pop Idol* formats was produced by the Hunan Satellite Channel and has taken the Middle Kingdom by storm, in the process raising debates about embedded democracy and the quality and moral comportment (*suzhi*) of its participants. Ironically, the previous occasion in China’s history when amateurs took centre stage was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. This current revolution, however, is less about overthrowing ‘stinking intellectuals’ than establishing a voice for popular expression. The chapter also looks at the uptake of the *Idol* format in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan. While international debate on the mass popularity of *Super Girl* in China has taken up the theme of democratisation, we find that issues of authenticity and the secularisation of celebrity are equally important.

Chapter 10 addresses cultural compatibility, illustrating the convergence of politics and economics through examples drawn from Hong Kong. The intersection of familial governance, cultural value systems, and discourses concerning cosmopolitanism explains why television stations are predisposed to programs that can incorporate merchandising and integration of products. This is a region of paradoxes where conspicuous consumption and accumulation of wealth are held as mutually reinforcing principles. We discuss how cultural compatibility admits certain forms of representation. Then we illustrate how economic progress opens the door for new models of funding. We look at episode insertion formats, advertising magazine shows, and weight loss reality formats that might be paradoxically entitled ‘survival of the fattest’. The final section looks at how new formats may indeed undermine cultural compatibility norms by allowing new ideas to enter into formerly restricted public viewing spheres.

We turn to the vexed question of ownership of ideas. The propensity to imitate raises a number of important questions. Is this behaviour exploitative or expedient, excessive or necessary? Alternatively, is the idea of copyright — defined as the legal right to make copies — a means of assuring market growth or just a Western notion with little relevance to East Asian television? In the age of multi-channel television where the value of license and syndication rights is diminished, there is a clearly identified need to derive as

much financial mileage out of an ownership as possible. However, the adaptation of television shows proceeds largely under the radar of formal intellectual rights regimes, despite threats of litigation over copyright and trademark. In this chapter, we look at the *Castaway Television Production Ltd v Endemol Entertainment International* dispute, as well as infringement incidents that have occurred in East Asia.

The final chapter returns to our title theme and advances the idea that formats represent a progression to a new mode of television production, one in which producers and consumers meet as co-creators of hybrid programming. While the imminent death of reality television has become a constant refrain from television critics nostalgic for a glorious past of quality programming, the reality pulse is still strong. Meanwhile, the logic of formatting and franchising extends globally. Evidence from our research points to the fact that formats have impacted significantly upon the logic of production, and have spawned new business alliances and models, bringing together independent producers, broadcasting networks, advertisers, and telecommunications companies. In this coalition of the willing, where does creativity reside?

Other Contexts: What's New?

If our research findings are correct, adaptation has significantly reshaped not only the television landscape in East Asia, but also the way we understand the globalisation of information and cultural commodities. The tendency to proclaim newness is symptomatic of business literature. However, what is radically, disruptively or pervasively new for some might be construed as a standard evolutionary process by other observers. In drawing a more macro-perspective on our case studies of television formats, we can reflect on Nigel Thrift's notion of 'soft capitalism' (Thrift 2005) which signifies the adaptive capacity of capitalism — and, more specifically for media industries, the acceptance of a greater role for end-users in determining the shape and direction of innovation. Greater recycling of products and knowledge, however, is not simply illustrative of an excess of commodification. Utility and expediency, as well as cultural development, are embedded in these processes — particularly for users (adopters) of knowledge.

What this tells us is that there is something important occurring in the process we are outlining in this book. TV formats have not come on to the radar of critical academic research in any major form, until recently (Moran 1998; Moran and Keane 2004). While the term 'new television' might be a

premature assessment of what is always going to be an evolving phenomenon, at least we can confidently state that change is driven by bottom lines as television industries confront rapid flows of ideas across national television systems, as interactivity challenges business assumptions, and as adaptation services a need for novel content.

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