

TV without Frontiers in Japan: Problems and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

This paper was originally presented to the 20th Conference of the International Association for Mass Communication held in Sydney, Australia, on 18-22 August 1996. The session on "Satellite TV and Cultural Future of Asia Pacific Region" was chaired by Dr. Binod C. Agrawal of India. The other discussants were John Sinclair from Australia, S Anura Goonasekera from Singapore, Humid Mowlana from the U. S. A. and the author.

In this paper, I forecasted that in Japan there will be less cultural influence from foreign television programs telecast from communication satellites. This is because of the Japanese language barrier and the dissimilarity in culture.

INTRODUCTION

- 1) There is no so-called "cultural invasion" problem caused by foreign satellite telecasts to Japan at present.
- 2) However, problems will occur sooner or later when several safeguards no longer function in Japan; I will explain later.
- 3) In order to solve the "cultural invasion" by satellite telecasts, I am going to propose that a conference be held to discuss "Agreements on Controlling Telecasts Without Frontiers on a Multi-Lateral Basis."
- 4) Each country should encourage "media education" in and outside schools to teach students about television and other visual media so that people will use TV effectively and wisely. If the public in each country understands the power of the media, then they will be able to maintain their cultural identity.

I. Why Is There No Cultural Invasion via TV in Japan?

1. Well-developed TV networks

A variety of conventional TV programs are already available to Japanese viewers. Kazuo Kawatake, Professor of Communications at Komazawa Women's University, pointed out that there are seven well-developed terrestrial television networks covering all of Japan. By terrestrial, I mean the traditional telecast method by which a TV transmitter on the ground sends signals along the surface of the Earth to reach individual home. This is a new term invented after satellite-based TV transponders appeared.

2. Variety of choice

Unlike some countries, where the variety of programming is limited, there is a great variety of choice among channels in Japan. Two TV networks out of seven are operated by NHK. NHK is a non-profit public corporation, something like the BBC. NHK is operated by subscription fees from the viewers. One of its two networks is a general service; another is educational. The general service presents three sorts of programs: news, entertainment and culture, each sharing a sensible balance, while the educational service presents school broadcasts, adult education and cultural programs.

The other five networks are operated by commercial broadcasters. More than 50 % of their programs are pure entertainment, such as dramas, variety shows, quizzes, and pop music shows.

In addition to these, there are local UHF TV stations, cable TV and satellite TV. Some emphasize local news, while others emphasize world news, foreign movies and sports events. Thus Japanese viewers' needs are already well met by a wide variety of programs offered by conventional stations.

3. The history

The history of prime time preferences reveals that foreign programs are not popular among Japanese viewers. From the later 1950s to the early 1960s, when our TV services were young, there were many TV programs imported from the USA. Such shows as "I LOVE LUCY", "THE UNTOUCHABLES", "HIGHWAY PATROL" and "LASSIE" were among those imported. But, after the 1980s, the number of American programs has remarkably decreased in prime time and today almost none are aired in Japan. This is because foreign programs could not earn favorable viewer-ratings. For instance, the American drama series "ROOTS" earned a 40 % rating in the USA, while in Japan it was about 20 % despite a great deal of public relations air time.

4. Japanese culture acts as a "barrier" to foreign programs.

Japanese viewer preference for domestic shows is partly accounted for by Japanese program production techniques, which are relatively high and therefore satisfy Japanese viewers. But largely this is because, Japanese culture is different from that of America and the west. Forty-six years ago, when Japan was suffering from defeat in the Second World War, American life as shown in Hollywood movies was what we dreamed of. When our TV service started 30 years ago, most TV viewers were upper-middle income people. They were eager to absorb anything better from foreign materialistic civilization. Materially, we now have cars, electric washers and first-food restaurants. If you call this modernization a "cultural invasion," then Japan was culturally invaded by Hollywood movies 46 years ago, and perhaps by China two thousand years ago.

Our young people's behaviors now are very different from those of the older generations, but if you compare them with the same young people in the West, or the South, they are still far different from other areas of the world. Material life may change, but the inner life of a people changes only slowly. The inner life of a people is like the landscape and climate of the place they live.

5. Japanese language is a safeguard to foreign programs.

When foreign programs are beamed to Japan from satellites, who will translate their languages into Japanese? Unfortunately, most Japanese people are not fluent enough in foreign languages. Very few Japanese comprehend foreign languages when they listen to them. Simultaneous translation from

English to Japanese added to news programs is generally unnatural to listen to, because the word order is so different. When drama dialogs are shown in translated subtitles, they require constant eye fixation on the TV screen. TV screens are smaller than those of movie theaters, and TV captions occupy a relatively larger area on the screen, hindering pictorial appreciation. Eyes get tired after one hour of viewing, jumping between captions and pictures on TV.

6. Financial problems and house construction.

Viewing costs will hinder foreign programs being presented to Japanese viewers. At present, NHK's viewing fee is about \$13 per month. If one watches NHK satellite services, it costs another \$10. The cable TV fee is about \$30-40 in addition to the NHK fee. Various satellite broadcasts from Japanese stations (such as WOW-WOW and other conventional analogue and new digital TV channels) cost additional \$20 or more, depending on one wants to watch. So the total cost will exceed \$100 if one wishes to watch all available TV services.

There are also costs for the receiving equipment. The price of a receiver is becoming lower, but still most people pay \$500 for a satellite dish and a receiver. Since each satellite position is different, one needs several different antennas on one's rooftop. Japanese houses are usually small, and the danger of typhoons is large; the consequence could be dreadful.

7. Restrictive policy

For many years, the Japanese government has had a restrictive policy concerning which satellite broadcasts can be received and which cannot, yet nobody was punished. But since 1995, a de facto, "open sky policy" began in Japan.

II. Cultural Effects of Foreign Programs

1. Foreign satellite programs will effect the culture of Japan

As I mentioned earlier, there are several safeguards against "television without frontiers" and its effects on the culture of Japan. These safeguards are: 1) Complete coverage of the land by networks, (1) Enough variety in programming, (2) Historical experience, (3) Culture, (5) Language, and (6) The costs for reception.

The majority of Japanese houses will not directly receive foreign satellite telecasts for some time. But foreign programs will be shown on conventional TV channels and gradually spread to direct reception modes in the future as receiving and translating systems advance.

Before this, however, foreign programs will effect conventional television program producers and change their directing styles of TV programs in Japan. For instance, I would like to cite the "Sesame Street" effect. It changed the styles of children's shows in various countries, Japan was no exception. Many Japanese children programs followed the Sesame Street format. In Japan, 60-channel digital TV via satellite started this year. The broadcaster is a Japanese company. It will utilize BBC, CNN and other foreign programs as its sources.

Recent domestic communication satellites can transmit hundreds of television channels. Since all of them are digital television signals, special adaptors are required to watch them. In the future, in the majority of homes in Japan, satellite TV will be the norm; however, this will take a period of at least five to seven years. But domestic satellite broadcasts are already threatening present terrestrial

television stations, causing a degradation in the quality of the programs broadcast and it is foreseeable that, in the near future, the quality and content of programs will further decline.

2. Cultural effects: their merits and demerits

As for international TV program exchange, I would like to point out the following merits and demerits deriving from it.

1) CHANGE OF DIRECTING TECHNIQUES

MERIT:

A) Generally speaking, the tempo of theatrical movies is getting faster, as Hollywood movies become popular in Japan. Meanwhile, video editing techniques have improved. More fast cutting of shots, and more independent insert shots are frequently used in music promotion program editing than before as a result of viewing foreign programs.

B) At the Japan Prize International Educational Contest, held in Tokyo every year, I saw a number of good programs produced in foreign countries: not just visual techniques, but teaching elements were well-arranged. Instead of just a straight presentation to children, a number of inductive and pedagogical processes were carefully employed in these programs. I hope it will spread among many countries participating in the contest.

DEMERIT:

A) The faster tempo will make people, especially young people, more restless, and they will refrain from reading books or from more serious thinking. Such a tendency is being observed at the moment among college students in Japan.

B) What I am going to say, cannot be classified as a demerit, but transplantation of educational television program production techniques is no easy task; these are difficult to pass on even within the same country or company. Because of frequent changes of personnel engaged in ETV production and because of other factors like traditional school systems, production techniques are difficult to convey.

2) DOCUMENTARIES:

MERIT:

By watching good documentaries and drama programs, viewers change their stereotypical attitudes towards other countries. As an anecdote, a friend of mine, rather than watching movies from Hollywood, decided to view movies from all over the world. The result was, according to him, that he gained a more international view of people and the countries depicted in the movies he viewed.

Another example is that in 1995, KOBE was hit by a severe earthquake, and a great amount of assistance and many foreign volunteers came to Japan as soon as the news was telecast to the world. The idea of a global village had become a reality.

DEMERIT:

Of course, there are many "quasi-documentaries" which pick up unusual topics from other countries for coverage. These programs create and expand "stereotypes." In the case of the GULF WAR, many

people were misled by the pictures of sea-birds suffering from oil slicks in the gulf waters. Later, we found oil pollution was the same as in peace time. While earthquakes in Japan are well reported, there are many more people suffering from sickness and hunger in various parts of the world. But these facts are not reported, because they are not new.

Very few programs are made now on CHERNOBYL since the Russian atomic reactor disaster ten years ago, but the residents of the area are still suffering.

3) THE NEWS EXCHANGE WITHIN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION

MERIT:

By exchanging news programs directly via satellite, opinion leaders and news editors as well as common people can access news programs originated in Asia and the Pacific. So far, international TV news has been gathered, edited and distributed by three Western news agencies: RUETERS-TV, AP-TV, and WTN. World-wide television news services are mainly controlled by "CNN", "BBC-WORLD-SERVICE" and the DEUTSCH-WELLE, according to Prof. Kawatake. So, all the TV stations (including those in Japan and perhaps in Australia) telecast foreign news through American or European reporters eyes. The news-stories are processed to reflect a Western or Northern Hemisphere sense of news values. This is a big problem. But, thanks to "TV without frontiers" we will exchange news directly among Asian and Pacific countries.

DEMERIT:

Since international communications have increased, a careless news commentary may cause an international dispute. Governmental control over TV news may become more restrictive. The defensive attitudes of officials may result in the limitation of the freedom of speech.

Moreover, new digital systems can transmit many TV channels via the one-channel capacity of present TV systems. This is done through multiplex TV technology. The transmitter of the broadcast and the producer of the programs will be separated and it is conceivable that the freedom of expression might be restricted. This means the owner of the channel can refuse some news items he doesn't want by threatening the news-broadcaster with the withdrawal of contracts. Thus a small number of men can control the news.

4) LEARNING OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

MERIT:

John Donne declared, "No man is an island, entire of itself". We cannot live like a Robinson Crusoe on a small island separated from others by the sea. Sooner or later, like it or not, we will live in a global village where we will meet other cultures. Through TV, we will learn the ways of other cultures and thus enrich our own lives.

DEMERIT:

TV does not always show the reality because it is edited by a TV director. Misleading changes by the sender and misunderstanding by the receiver are inevitable. In order to earn viewer ratings or popularity, sensationalism is always employed by the sender. Thus violence and sexist ideas will spread among young people. AIDS, DRUGS, GUNS and CORRUPTION are all modern hazards that threaten

the health and happiness of whole populations. They must be eliminated, as in the past diseases like smallpox and polio were cured through science, education and technology.

Government propaganda and political and economic campaigns may drive away impartial news commentary, just as in the fascist period of the 1940's. One cannot be too optimistic.

III. Now, What Shall We Do?

1. International Conference:

Before each country successfully achieves the idea of "media education," which is the instruction of young people on effective viewing skills, I would like to propose an international conference. At the conference, government officials from various countries as well as representatives from various cultural groups will be gathered. They will discuss control methods and a quota system on the content of programs and what is morally acceptable in TV broadcasting.

Unlike Europe, where some shared cultural values exist, there are many cultural groups in Asia. Each cultural group now receives 20-30 satellite TV which overlaps from different sources.

At any given moment, there are 6 groups of TV services which share a common culture and language.

(1) Australian TV Service: As you may well know, Australia started an English language service aimed at Southeast Asia and mainland China.

There are more than 100-thousand people who watch this service.

(2) American TV Services: American companies aim at English speaking people in Asia and the Pacific. Those are HBO (Movies), TNT (Cartoons), the Discovery Channels (Documentary) and CNN (News).

(3) Chinese Language TV: This aimed at the Chinese living in and out of China. The service includes STAR-TV and Phoenix TV based in Hong Kong and Singapore. At present, the mainland Chinese government prohibits the direct reception of satellite TV to by the Chinese people, but they will adopt an open sky policy again in the future.

(4) The Hindi and other Indian Languages TV: In the case of Indian languages, TV targets Indian people in and outside India. The Hindi, Tamil and Kannada languages are used on more than 20 channels. These are Hong Kong-based ZEE-TV and European TV ASIA etc.

(5) The ASEAN countries TV: Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia each started a satellite service covering the ASEAN district. As a result, the district is forming a large TV cultural area.

(6) Japanese Language TV: international TV started by NHK in 1995. At present, the main target is Japanese people living in America and Europe. It may be received in Asia and the Pacific. The content

of the programs is selected from NHK's domestic service and except for news and some other programs, many programs are scrambled by local sponsors. English simultaneous announcements are added to a limited number of programs. But Japanese is used extensively. English or other language services will not be started in the near future.

Since Japanese as a language is becoming gradually more attractive to foreign people, Japanese language program may become popular among those who want to practice Japanese. NHK domestic TV programs via satellite are already watched in the Far Eastern countries by those who have satellite dishes.

2. The Need For "Media Education"

Lastly, media education in and outside of the school should be provided for TV viewers, especially younger people. They should learn that TV programs are "produced" by people with special skills. The programs show some "reality", but they are carefully selected and edited by directors, and there are other ways to present the same thing.

Viewers should use programs effectively while watching them critically and write to the broadcasters if there is anything worth commenting on. I was formerly a director of international radio news programs and educational television programs. I have been greatly concerned about international understanding via TV and radio through my experience.

There are diversified cultures among Asian countries. Even within one country, cultures and languages differ every 50 kilometers. Other solutions will be co-production of programs such as music & drama and exchanging news on economics as was proposed by ASIASPEAKSOUT at a meeting held in August 1996 at Kuala Lumpur.

Reaching international agreement on preventing cultural invasion is no easy task. Consequently, through international conferences and media education I hope we can minimize the problems and look forward to the day when we all live in a great global village harmoniously respecting each culture.

(REFERENCES IN ENGLISH)

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The List of Foreign Satellite Telecasts Received in Japan:

(*)=Officially recognized by the Ministry of Telecommunications in Japan as "Broadcasts"

NAMES OF SATELLITE	NATIONALITY	NAME OF THE CHANNELS (STATIONS)	ORIGINATED FROM
Asiasat 1	Hong Kong 5 channels	STAR TV {5 channels(*)}	Hong Kong
Asiasat 2	Hong Kong 13 channels	Star TV {2 channels(*)} WORLDNET. CCTV CHINESE DOMESTIC TVs(2 Ch) DEUTCH WELLE TV 5 MCM MONGOLIA TV VIVA CHANNEL RTP INTERNATIONAL TVE BBC WORLD SKY NEWS	H.K. China China China Germany France France Mongolia P.I. & H.K Portuguese Spain U.K.
Palapa C 1	Indonesia 10 channels	CNBC CNN INTERNATIONAL DISCOVERY CHANNEL ESPN INTERNATIONAL HBO ASIA MTV ASIA(*) TNT & CARTOON NETWORK(*) AUSTRARIA TV INTERNATIONAL ASIA BUSINESS NEWS(ABN) STAR TV	USA USA USA USA USA USA USA Australia Singapore Hong Kong
Apstar 1	HONGKONG 8 channels	CNN INTERNATIONAL DISCOVERY CHANNEL ESPN INTERNATIONAL HBO ASIA MTV MANDARIN TNT & CARTOON NETWORK DISNEY CHANNEL CHINA ENTERTAINMENT TV	USA USA USA USA USA & Singapore USA USA Hong Kong
PANAM SAT 2	USA 12 channels	CNBC ASIA(*) CNN INTERNATIONAL DISCOVERY CHANNEL ESPN INTERNATIONAL TNT & CARTOON NETWORK(*) COUNTRY MUSIC TV(CMT) MTV MANDARIN ASIA BUSINESS NEWS(ABN) KARA OK:TV CHINESE TV NETWORK(CTN) TVB SUPER CHANNEL ABS CBN	USA USA USA USA USA USA USA & Singapore Singapore Singapore Hong Kong Hong Kong Philippine