

MULTIMEDIA FOR EDU – TAINMENT OF CHILDREN IN ASIA: THE CASE OF TELEVISION IN SEVEN ASIAN COUNTRIES¹

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"I like what I get is the same thing as I get what I like"

Most mass media programmes are not produced with children's interest in mind. Like other commercial commodities these are produced for profit in the market place. However it is sometimes asserted that at he market place provides the people with what they like to get. The quotation, from Alice in Wonderland, cited above is a reminder to us that things are not as simple as that. As a group of professionals concerned about children living in a multimedia age, we must question the logic of such assertions.

It is now increasingly recognized that new communication technologies are creating a new type of community. These are variously referred to as intelligent communities, para-social communities, virtual communities, smart communities etc. In future, children will be socialized within this new and unfamiliar environment. The social institutions that are responsible for introducing children to this new environment are themselves quite inexperienced in dealing with this situation. Their methods of socialization are still influenced by old mode of thinking. For instance we speak of global villages, electronic super-highways, multimedia corridors, all metaphors borrowed from earlier periods of history. These are totally irrelevant in the emergent intelligent communities.

Social relationships in the intelligent communities will not depend on physical proximity. New communication technologies have made it possible for business to produce, consumers to purchase and workers to interact without the need for common physical location. Children must be introduced from a very early age to live happily in this new multi-media environment. We know that children interact with their environment intelligently. Yet they are vulnerable to influence because they are not experienced. Unless the socialization institutions such as the family, school, neighborhood make special efforts to orient children to live in the new multi-media environment they might grow up to be misfits, alienated from their surroundings. This will have deleterious consequences for the children themselves as well as for the society at large.

1. March Hare at the Mad Tea Party in Alice in Wonderland.

This presentation is based on empirical work carried out by the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre, Singapore, in a number of Asian countries. The studies were conducted under the direction of the author. An article summarising these findings will appear in the Yearbook of the UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen (forthcoming).

In most Asian countries children under the age of 15 comprise around 40 percent of the population. This proportion is even higher in poorer countries such as India and Bangladesh. However only a very small proportion of TV programmes, radio programmes, cinema, books, periodicals and newspapers are made for children. While published data on the proportion of children's media are scanty, it has been estimated that in some Asian countries, such as India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka this is less than five percent. The lack of information on Children and media is indicative of the lack of interest among research community and the ruling classes about this tissue. It is also indicative of the absence of an accepted policy regarding communication for children. This situation becomes all the more glaring when one considers the fact that in many poorer countries in Asia, a large proportion of children who should be in school are not in school. The proportion is particularly high in the case of Asian girls.

In those countries where the economies are growing rapidly and racing ahead to stay competitive, rampant commercialism has entered children's media programming. Programme related products are heavily advertised and marketed to children. Different media systems collaborate to produce and market children's products as part of their media fare. For instance the TV programme Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle spawned comic books, computer games, movies and countless commercials over radio and TV to make it a household name.

In this situation what kind of television programmes are offered to children between the ages of 6 and 15 years in Asian countries? Do they get what they like or do they like what they get? What sort of a world is created for children by these television programmes? Do the TV programmes help children to understand the new multi-media environment to which they will enter? To what extent are the policy makers and programme producers in Asian television stations aware of children's rights as enunciated by UN?² What are the resources available for the production of children's television programmes in Asia?

These are some of the questions that the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) addressed in an empirical study of television and children in nine Asian countries³. A monograph containing the more significant findings is planned for publication in late 1998.

2. Children have inalienable rights. This fact was endorsed by the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the UN General Assembly in 1989. 187 governments are now State Parties to this international treaty including all nations in Asia-Pacific.

3. The countries are China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The study was partially funded by UNICEF. In addition to these countries data for Sri Lanka and Thailand are also included in this paper.

It is common knowledge that countries in Asia have many cultural, economic and social differences. At the very elementary level one could discern two Asias: the poorer Asia and the richer Asia. Access to television are different in these two regions of Asia. Bangladesh and Nepal, two of the less developed countries in Asia, have around 14 and five television sets for 1000 population respectively. The comparable figure for India and Indonesia are 67 sets and 46 sets respectively. In contrast to this in the richer parts of Asia ownership of television is quite wide-spread. South Korea has 416 sets per 1000 population and Singapore 224 sets. (Goonasekera and Holaday, 1998) There are also different types of ownership and management of television stations in different countries in Asia. The stations may be owned by private individuals or it can be a mixture of the two. These factors have an important bearing on development of television broadcasting in Asian countries. They also influence the policies that are followed in relation to children's television programmes in these countries. Table I is a summary description of the television scene in terms of the level of economic development and patterns of ownership in 11 Asian countries.

Table I: Television Ownership in Eleven Asian Countries

	Government	Private	Mixed
Less-Industrialized/Poor	China, Nepal, Vietnam	Philippines ⁴	India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka
Industrialized/rich			Japan, Malaysia Singapore, Thailand

What are the types of television programmes available for children in Asia? For purposes of this research television programmes were classified into 12 types. The 12 categories are: Animation or Cartoons; Puppets; Story Telling; Serial/Drama; Pre-school Magazine Information; Information/News; Magazine Entertainment; Quiz/Games; Music; Religious; Cultural/Traditional There is also an "other" category to include those programmes that cannot be classified within these 12 categories.

Tables II, III and IV give data on the basis of this classification for two countries. The countries are India and Malaysia. India is from the poorer region of Asia and Malaysia is from the richer region. India has an open skies policy regarding reception of satellite television programmes by its citizens whereas Malaysia has imposed restrictions.

Table II gives data for Doordarshan in India. It is based on programme schedules for one week in January 1995. Two factors stand out in this data. One is the predominance of animation programmes. It is the single largest category of programmes (19.83%). This is so for many other countries in Asia. The second is the dominance of foreign programmes in this category (63.8%).

4. Philippines does have two government supported stations.

The predominance of foreign programmes is compounded by a more recent phenomena in the television scene in India. This is the transmission of programmes by foreign multinational television broadcasters such as StarTV, CNN and BBC World Service to Indian audiences. In addition India has its own satellite channels, some of which are up-linked from foreign points of origin such as Hong Kong (See table three). Here again the dominant type of programme for children are animation or cartoon programmes (41.8%) followed by drama programmes (20.9). India has not controlled direct access to satellite programmes by its citizens. However most of the foreign satellite programmes are distributed mainly through Indian Cable Companies. Most people in India cannot afford satellite reception dishes as they are too expensive for them. These people subscribe to the cable services which re-transmit foreign satellite services along with local programmes such as local language movies.

Table II: Telecast of Children's Programmes* Doordarshan India

Program Type	Duration in Minutes		Total Broadcast Time Per Year in Minutes (Hours)***	As Percentage of all Children Programmes
	Local	Foreign		
Animation	85	150	12220 (203.66)	19.83
Puppets	-	-	-	-
Story Telling	-	90	4680 (78)	7.59
Serial/drama	60	60	6240 (104)	10.12
Pre-school magazine	20	-	1040 (17.33)	1.69
Magazine information	70	-	3640 (60.66)	5.91
Information/News	-	-	-	-
Magazine Entertainment	110	-	5720 (95.33)	9.28
Quiz/Games	60	-	3120 (52)	5.06
Pop music	-	-	-	-
Religious	-	-	-	-
Cultural/Traditional	30	-	1560 (26)	2.53
Others***	450	-	23400 (390)	37.97
Total	885	300	61620 (1026.98)	100

	Total Broadcasting Per Week in Hours	Total Broadcasting Per Week in Hours	
National DD	5.05	Bombay Regional	3.00
Metro DD2	5.30	Hyderabad Regional	1.00
Madras Regional	2.20	Bangalore DD	1.30
		Thiruvananthira	1.00

* Based on schedule for 1 week.

** Calculated on the basis of broadcast time per week 1995.

*** Covers variety programmes for children which include story telling, drama, quiz/games, music.

Table III: Telecast of Children's Programmes in Indian Satellite Channels*

Type of Program	Duration in Minutes Per week		Total Broadcast Time Per Year in Minutes (Hours)	As Percentage of all Programme for Children
	Local	Foreign		
Animation	60	780	43680 (728)	41.79
Puppets	-	-	-	-
Story Telling	-	-	-	-
Serial/drama	-	420	21840 (364)	20.9
Pre-school magazine	-	-	-	-
Magazine information	-	-	-	-
Information/News	-	-	-	-
Magazine Entertainment	-	-	-	-
Quiz/Games	150	60	10920 (182)	10.45
Pop music	30	-	1560 (26)	1.49
Religious	-	-	-	-
Cultural/Traditional	30	-	1560 (26)	1.49
Others	480	-	24960 (416)	23.88
Total	750	2010	104520 (1742)	100
Total Broadcasting Per Week in Hours				
Star TV	20			
ZEE TV	4			
SUNTV/ASIANET/RAJTV	3.30			
JAIN TV	6			
	33h 30m			

Table IV: Telecast of Children's Programmes in Malaysia (RTM1, RTM2, TV3) (1994)

Programs Type	Duration in Minutes Per week		Total Broadcast Time Per Year in Minutes (Hours)	As Percentage of all Programmes for Children
	Local	Foreign		
Animation	-	390	20280 (338)	37.14
Puppets	-	180	9360 (156)	17.14
Story Telling	-	60	3120 (52)	5.71
Serial	-	30	1560 (26)	2.85
Pre-school magazine	30	-	1560 (26)	2.86
Magazine information	20	60	4160 (69.3)	7.62
Information/News	-	60	3120 (52)	5.71
Magazine Entertainment	60	-	3120 (52)	5.71
Quiz/Games	-	20	1040 (17.3)	1.90
Pop music	-	-	-	-
Religious	20	-	1040 (17.3)	1.90
Cultural/Traditional	-	-	-	-
Others	-	120*	6240 (104)	11.43
Total	130	920	54600 (909.9)	100

* Action packed drama.

Table IV gives comparable data for Malaysia which is a much wealthier country than India. Unlike India, Malaysia controls access of its citizens to foreign satellite broadcasts by requiring them to get a license to use a satellite dish. The data in this table are in respect of locally broadcast programmes in three Malaysian channels viz. RTM1, RTM2 and TV3. Here again there is a predominance of foreign material among children's programmes. Nearly 88 percent of all children's

programmes are of foreign origin. Controlling satellite access to its citizens alone is not enough to prevent the dominance of foreign programmes. Along side such a policy there should also be active encouragement of local programme producers to produce programmes for children. Market forces by themselves may not generate sufficient local television programmes for children.

How widespread in Asia are the characteristics of children's programmes we have described for India and Malaysia? Table V and Table VI give a summary of comparable statistics for seven Asian Countries. The statistics show a predominance of animation programmes followed by drama. Furthermore nearly 48 percent of all programmes for children are of foreign origin. The data also shows paucity of informational, cultural and preschool programmes among the total fare offered to children.

While these characteristics are common to many Asian countries there are also significant differences in policies regarding children's television in Asia. Some of these are described below.

In China⁵ there are two kinds of programmes relating to children. One is programmes aimed directly at children. Such programmes include entertainment, education and news. The other type is programmes aimed at educating adults regarding their duties towards children. How familiar are the TV producers of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC)? Leading group of China Central Television (CCTV) in Beijing and particularly CCTV youth and Children's Department were aware of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Contents of the Convention are consciously incorporated into TV programmes. Examples of such television programmes are those made for Children's Broadcast Day (December), International Children's Day (June) and programmes telecast on winter and summer vacations. Big Wind Mill and Tell It Like It Is are two television programmes that incorporated the principles of UN-CRC. Implementation of the UN-CRC provisions is often considered in combination with that of the National Programme of Action for Child Development in China.

In India⁶ the total number of children's programmes in all channels is less than one percent. Most of these programmes are designed for upper class urban child. However these are not popular among this audience because of lack of entertainment. Not a single of the programmes recalled by the sample of children interviewed was made in India. When respondents from DDI were asked about

5. Prof. Huang Chang Zhu, Deputy Director and Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Documentation and Information of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing was the lead researcher for the study in China.

6. Ms. Lalita Eashwer of Kanoi Marketing Services, Madras, was the lead researcher for the study in India.

Table V: Availability of Children Programmes in 7 Asian Countries by Programme Type by Duration for One Year

Programme Type	Doordarshan India		India Satellite Channels		Malaysia		China		Nepal		Pakistan		Sri Lanka		Thailand	
	Foreign (%)	Local (%)	Foreign (%)	Local (%)	Foreign (%)	Local (%)	Foreign (%)	Local (%)	Foreign (%)	Local (%)	Foreign (%)	Local (%)	Foreign (%)	Local (%)	Foreign (%)	Local (%)
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Animation	4420 (7.17)	7800 (12.65)	3120 (2.98)	40560 (38.80)	-	20280 (37.14)	6760 (10.92)	14560 (23.52)	2080 (21.05)	-	7260 (15.38)	-	540 (2.13)	600 (23.02)	1040 (4.25)	-
Puppets	-	-	-	-	9360 (17.14)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	900 (3.55)	38 (1.42)	-	-
Story Telling	-	4680 (7.59)	-	-	3120 (5.71)	2340 (3.78)	-	-	1560 (15.78)	-	-	-	4000 (15.81)	-	-	-
Drama/Serial	3120 (5.06)	3120 (5.06)	-	21840 (20.89)	-	1560 (2.85)	10920 (17.64)	-	-	-	10920 (23.07)	-	1140 (4.50)	1200 (4.14)	7800 (31.91)	-
Pre-school Magazine	1040 (1.69)	-	-	-	1560 (2.85)	-	-	-	-	-	1820 (3.84)	-	100 (0.39)	200 (7.00)	-	-
Magazine Information	3640 (5.90)	-	-	-	1040 (1.90)	3120 (5.71)	6240 (10.08)	-	1560 (15.78)	-	-	-	450 (1.77)	80 (3.16)	3120 (12.76)	-
Information/News	-	-	-	-	-	3120 (5.71)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mag Entertainment	5720 (9.28)	-	-	-	3120 (5.71)	-	-	-	-	-	7280 (15.38)	-	300 (1.18)	200 (0.9)	3120 (12.76)	-
Quiz/Games	3120 (5.06)	-	7800 (7.46)	3120 (2.98)	-	1040 (1.90)	780 (1.26)	-	1580 (15.78)	-	10920 (23.07)	-	1500 (5.93)	-	3120 (12.76)	-
Pop-Music	-	-	1560 (1.49)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5460 (11.53)	-	1700 (6.72)	100 (0.19)	-	-
Religious	-	-	-	-	1040 (1.9)	-	-	-	-	-	3640 (7.69)	-	4000 (15.81)	-	4680 (19.14)	-
Cultural/Traditional	1560 (2.53)	-	1560 (1.49)	-	-	-	1560 (2.52)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1560 (6.38)	-
Others	23400 (37.97)	-	24960 (23.88)	-	-	6240 (11.42)	18720 (30.25)	-	3120 (31.57)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	46020 (74.66)	15600 (25.30)	39000 (37.71)	65520 (62.67)	6760 (12.36)	47840 (87.58)	47320 (76.47)	14560 (23.52)	9880 (11.20)	-	32760 (69.20)	14560 (30.76)	14630 (57.79)	10550 (42.2)	24440 (100)	-

Table VI: Telecast of Children's Programmes in 7 Asian Countries 1994/1995

Programme Type	Average Broadcast Time Per Year in Hours (%)		As Percentage of all Childrens Programmes
	Local	Foreign	
Animation	11312.66 (3.4)	82162.66 (25)	28.4
Puppets	900 (0.27)	9720 (2.95)	3.22
Story Telling	5599 (1.7)	7800 (2.37)	4.07
Drama	23162 (7)	27720 (8.43)	15.43
Pre-school magazine	4520 (1.38)	(2000 (0.60)	1.98
Magazine information	9914 (3.01)	3920 (1.2)	4.21
Information/News	-	3120 (0.95)	0.95
Magazine Entertainment	12260 (3.72)	7480 (2.27)	5.99
Quiz/Games	28033 (8.52)	4160 (1.26)	9.79
Pop music	8720 (2.66)	100 (0.03)	2.69
Religious	13360 (4.07)	0	4.07
Cultural/Traditional	4706 (1.42)	0	1.42
Others	51792 (15.75)	6240 (1.9)	17.65
Total	174278.66 (52.9)	154422.66 (46.97)	100

programme priorities none of them mentioned children's programmes. None of the networks has any specific policies to create awareness or to create programmes on children's rights. An obvious gap in children's television programming in India is the virtual absence of programmes specifically made for early teens.

In Indonesia⁷ tight competition for advertising revenue has resulted in little attention being paid to children's programmes because such programmes are perceived as being less attractive to advertisers. The emergence of private television and lack of proper policies and guidelines about programming content has resulted in an uncontrolled and confused situation. In this situation it has become difficult to develop children's television. Of 15 programmes most preferred by children seven were programmes for adults. Station managers had little or no knowledge about UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In Japan⁸ NHK, has taken a leading role in the production of children's programmes. Its productions are enjoyable and has educational value. Children's programmes are broadcast in three out of four NHK channels. A project called YUMEDIA uses a traveling caravan to bring hands on broadcast experience to grade school children. In contrast to NHK, which is a public broadcast organization, the commercial stations in Japan do not have separate children's

7. Mr. Bob Gantarto, Researcher at Indonesian Child Welfare Foundation in Jakarta, was the lead researcher for the study in Indonesia.

8. Ms. Sachiko Kodaira, Senior Researcher at NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, Tokyo, was the lead researcher for the study in Japan.

programmes. Children's programmes are included in programmes for family viewing. In commercial TV stations animation and metamorphosis drama are the main kinds of children's programmes. All top rated children's programmes in Japan are produced in Japan. Producers in NHK are well aware of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Publicity for children's rights are given through information and educational programmes.

In Malaysia⁹ the government broadcasting station, RTM, is making a serious effort to produce children's television programmes. The commercial stations, TV3 and Metrovision, have not shown similar enthusiasm. This neglect is due to the perception that children's programmes do not have much appeal to the advertisers. RTM producers are quite aware of the UN Convention on Children's Rights. They have gained this knowledge through international conferences in which they had participated. Private broadcasters on the other hand are unaware or vaguely aware of UN-CRC.

In Nepal¹⁰ severe financial constraints have hampered the production of children's television programmes. Children's programmes hold low priority due to the perceived lack of advertising/market support. This is made worse by lack of adequate training in the production of children's programmes and lack of creativity. Nepalese television producers have heard of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child but are not familiar with its detailed provisions.

In Philippines¹¹ there has been an increase interest in children's television programmes in recent years. However this still remains a neglected area. Lack of profit in children's programmes is the main reason for its neglect. Furthermore many children's issues have become politicized. Sometimes the way television handle these issues are not in the best interests of the children. For instance child victims of sex and violence are made to relate gruesome details for the benefit of TV cameras. Several bills have been field in the Philippines Congress to improve television programming for children. These include the introduction of a rating system and regulating television advertising.

In Singapore¹² there has been some revival of children's television programmes after corporatization of television in 1994. Locally produced children's TV programmes target a wide age range: from 4 to 12 years. Children within this

9. Prof. R. Karthigesu and Dr. Shanti Balraj of the School of Communication, University Sains Malaysia in Penang, were joint lead researchers for the study in Malaysia.

10. Ms. Josefina Dhungana of DECORE Consultancy Group in Katmandu was the lead researcher for the study in Nepal.

11. Dr. Theresa H. Stuart, Social Mobilization Officer in UNICEF, Manila was the lead researcher for the study in the Philippines.

12. Ms. Lin Ai Leen of the School of Communication Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, was the lead researcher for the study in Singapore.

age range have a wide variation of cognitive abilities. Television programmes targeting such a wide age range are generally ineffective in appealing to such a group. Television stations also broadcast a large number of programmes for pre-schoolers. Older children's needs are not sufficiently met. Consequently older children consume a large proportion of adult programmes. No special training has been provided for children's programme producers. The programmes reflect Singapore's political and cultural climate. Stress is on maintaining racial and religious harmony and political stability. The priority given to children's programmes are low. This is because of the belief among managers that the audience ratings of these programmes do not justify high expenditure. Only few producers were aware of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In Vietnam¹³ every year the government sets targets for producing children's programmes. These programmes are directed at children or are aimed to educate adults regarding the needs of the children. Financial limitations are a major factor which inhibits production of children's television programmes. There are very few programmes catering to children over ten years of age. Producers are aware of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and related state policies.

Overall children's programmes produced in many Asian countries do not appeal to the children for whom they are meant. Consequently only a small percentage of what is made available are actually watched by children. According to Mira Aghi, (1996) Indian media researcher, around 75 percent of her sample of children mentioned programmes made for adults as the ones they liked. Crime, thrillers, comedies and family serials form the core of the programmes liked by her respondents. Sri Lankan researcher Dharmadasa (1994) observes that locally produced children's programmes are often not up to the level with regard to quality and content that most children demand. According to a survey carried out by Survey Research Malaysia (1994) of 100 most viewed programmes in Malaysian television by children between the ages 6-14, only three are children's programmes. These are all foreign productions. Their rank is given in brackets. *Cyber Cop* (39); *Uetraman Trio* (63); *Alamria Disney* (80).

Of the countries surveyed three have followed policies conducive to the development of television programmes for children. These are China, Vietnam and Japan. In China and Vietnam support received from the government was crucial. In Japan public broadcasting policy of NHK was behind the success of children's television. However in many other countries children's television programmes had to compete in the marketplace. In this it could not succeed. The advertisers and marketers saw little profit to be made from children's

13. Prof. Chung A, Director, Centre for Sociology at Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy was the lead researcher for the study in Vietnam.

television. AMIC survey shows clearly the need to develop children's television in many countries in Asia. It also shows that market forces will not do this. A concerted effort by concerned groups is needed to mobilize support for children's television in Asia. Resources of government, civil society, educational institutions and commercial organizations need to be mobilized. At the Asian Summit of Child Rights and the Media¹⁴ AMIC proposed the creation of an Asian Children's Communication Fund for the production and marketing of quality children's programme for television, radio and press. We believe that this is a practical way of addressing issues concerning children and media in Asia.

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3. Goonasekera Holaday D. *Asian Communication Handbook 1998*. Singapore, AMIC, 1998.
4. Karthigesu R. *Children and Television. Malaysian Interim Report*. Singapore, AMIC, 1994.

14. The Summit was held in Manila, Philippines, during 2-5 July 1996. It was the first Children's Summit organized for the print, broadcasting, film and advertising media. It was supported by Asian Broadcasting Union (ABU), Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC), Philippines Children's Television Foundation (PCTVF), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Government of the Philippines.