

The Social and Cultural Integrative Role of Asian Media Productions In The New Millennium: Pan-Asian and International Co-Productions

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Abstract

Economic integration and security alone will not be sufficient to realise the vision of an ASEAN Community or that of a larger regional East Asia in a global world. Rather, as ASEAN nation-states struggle to accomplish their nation-hood project while competing in a larger East Asian and Asia Pacific marketplace, these countries increasingly need to rely upon the less defined areas of cultural, social and lately, media cooperation. Rather, television broadcasting, film and animation productions have become the site for developing regional circuits of cultural production that are reshaping the contours of media globalization and integrating cultural markets in South East and East Asia.

This paper seeks to examine the roles that Asian Media Productions - in Television, Film and Animation - play in the social and cultural integration of Asian media and communication systems, against the backdrop of diverse societies and cultures. It will use three emergent industry trends – regional game shows, Pan-Asian film experiments and Asian-made animation productions – to explore the impact of media and communication policies that promote creative industries, cultural marketisation of stars, and regionalisation of industries have made towards building a pan- Asian youth and audience marketplace of ideas, creativity and innovation.

Global media corporations have been steadily expanding in the region by supplying imported television programs to national broadcasters, obtaining landing rights for their foreign television channels and investing in larger-scale marketing budgets and dominating screens in multi-cinema complexes. Recently, local broadcasters have moved towards format adaptation of game shows and new media applications for animation, while Asian film industries experiment with pan-Asian casting and genres that pander to geo-linguistically similar markets. These reflect the creative responses of local players to global competition.

Keywords: Regional Circuits, Globalization, Marketplace

Introduction

The current literature reflects a tendency for the cultural and in particular the media industries to consolidate in this increasingly competitive era of media globalisation (Hesmondhalgh, 2001; Miller, Nitin, Maxwell and McMurria, 2001). Following this capitalist logic towards industry consolidation, it is timely to explore the possibilities and problematic idea of regionalization of television industries in South east and East Asia.

Its continued population growth, increased cultural trade of Asian-original programming at international markets like MIPTV, and positive economic figures reconfirm the continued vitality of the Asia Pacific for the media

industries. Asia accounts for over 50 % of the world's population, and the region's rising affluence is attributable to the growing middleclass in these markets. With the growing expenditure carved out by urbanised and youthful demographics of an affluent East Asian region, the demand for more sophisticated productions and services will similarly increase, driving these markets to offer better quality TV productions and broadcasting services.

PriceWaterhouse Coopers estimated Asian media markets would grow on average about 5.6% annually¹. Asia's television marketplace is huge according to the recent CLSA/CASBAA 2004. The Asia Pacific cable and satellite TV market already rakes in annual revenues of US\$14 billion (Tanner, 2004), excluding the advertising expenditure on terrestrial television networks across the region. Variety reported that Korean dramas enjoyed "record sales in Asia, including Taiwan, China and Japan" as Korean exports amounted to US\$71 million in 2004, making a 70% improvement over 2003, and in particular, Korean dramas accounted for 92% of the total sales volume. In one year, KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) had six of the top 10 local dramas, and clocked \$26 million in sales and appeared to be gearing up to make their productions have more 'pan-Asian appeal' (Groves, 2005).

Compared to the failure of pan-European television (in terms of audience reception) in replacing national sentiments of European viewers when the single economic market that begun in Europe Union became a reality (see Collins, 1998), the rise of a very substantive East Asian popular culture in the 1990s (see Chua, 2004) poses an interesting question of whether there are alternative mediated pathways towards regionalization in Asia.

Collins surmised that where state-supported TV networks failed to develop viable patterns of pan-European viewership, the real alternatives to attracting viewership are pan-national commercial TV networks – such as Rupert Murdoch's BskyB. While agreeing with Collins (1998:11-13) that audience reception determines the level of success of pan-national television networks, the regionalization issue in Southeast and East Asia is also shaped by complex cultural/ linguistic similarities (ie cultural capital of Chinese culture) and new consumption patterns triggered by Info-communication technological convergence (ie internet, mobile phones, cable and satellite TV). The intersection of these forces is now part of the embedded modern 'culture' in developing Asia. This dimension of media globalisation elicits gradual change in the 'ensemble of assumptions' of 'public service broadcasters' who have to commercialise. It can enable or deter regulatory desires for local industry development and growth. In Southeast Asia, this pro-development ethos is most visible in the more advanced and developed of these Asian cities – globalising cities that aspire to be media cities.

These cities are sites for various kinds of innovative and creative breakthroughs on the industry-level have been the result of a need to be enterprising while coping with the rising horizons of expectations by the domestic audiences and choices offered by global competition. National or local cultural industries like television and film industries may strive to develop

indigenous content while developing competitive strategies to export their productions regionally or even globally by 'modelling, imitating and mutual learning' (Wang, Ku and Liu, 2000: 64).

However, the economic forces of cultural marketisation in Asia have also attracted many Western and particularly Hollywood media players to seek landing rights, commission and even co-produce with local Asian media producers. Indeed, these Western players and other foreign broadcasters in Asia have co-opted local elements to increase their presence. Some already started with pan-regional co-productions like MTV Asia's first television drama series, *Rouge*², or formatted thematic channels like the daily news programmes focusing on Asian markets on CNBC Asia, the regionalisation of international channels like Star TV into geo-linguistically similar Asian markets. Asian broadcasters have also begun to internationalise through regionalization as evidenced by the Taiwanese-influenced news and entertainment programmes on Hong Kong satellite channel, TVBJ for the potential 22-million audiences in Taiwanese that is re-broadcast across Southeast and East Asia.

Customizing international co-productions to suit a variety of locales requires a collaborative spirit and international expertise. In this context, regional knowledge requires a familiarity with different national audiences and regional markets, besides the entrepreneurial ability to convert know-how, insights and creativity into concrete programmes. Viewing their international satellite broadcasters as competitors, the media companies based in these cities that aspire to export their productions need to have the means to create a circuit of cultural production beyond domestic borders.

In this paper, I firstly attempt to examine the existing strategies employed in the service of particular East Asian media productions that are pan-Asian and international co-productions that could foster closer social and cultural integration amongst people from different countries. Through this, I identify a number of dimensions that we should use to analyze the roles that Asian Media Productions – that is made-in-Asia and made-for-Asia media productions – that focus on pan-Asian co-productions play when they define their marketplace as the larger East and Southeast Asian region, fostering stronger micro-macro processes for social and cultural integration amongst the nations. Where possible, I have also compared how Hollywood and other non-Asian media players have responded to the rise of an East Asian popular culture that is mediated by Asian media productions.

By investing or participating in international co-productions, members of various Asian media industries are attempting to become cultural entrepreneurs in the Asian region so as to increase their audience reach, and profitably leverage on the high consumption patterns of a growing region. Rather than simply making strictly local Asian media productions that serve a different purpose of satisfying their current local industry and consumption needs, creating, and distributing pan-Asian co-productions can create new products and services that are transnational, or borderless but still enable each city or urban location to be interlinked with each other. This new phase

of activity is occurring at the time when Asia's 'Sinic' civilizations (see Huntington, 2000/1993) are collaborating via friendly competition in the cultural sphere. Investment in popular TV dramas featuring modern urban life, traditional costume dramas (Woods, 1997), as well as new cinema projects (Beals and Platt, 2001; Kim, 2001; Yeh and Davis, 2002) that involve countries such as Korea, Japan and China (Hong Kong).

Is there a role for Asian Media Productions to greater unify and integrate different countries politically under the guise of cultural entrepreneurship and cultural marketisation? I argue that there are some opportunities where they could perform this role but this would depend on the context of several factors and conditions, as well as the motivations and modalities of each media co-production.

Defining International Co-productions

There are various definitions of international co-productions cited in the literature on international businesses, media and communications studies, and media economics: these range from project-level descriptions such as 'international co-ventures' to responses to globalization such as 'institutional adaptations to trade' (Strover, 1994 cited in Hoskins, McFayden and Finn, 1999) to legalistic differentiations of 'official treaty co-productions and unofficial co-ventures' (Hoskins et al, 1999). Pan-Asian productions are not explicitly explained by the few studies on the topic (see Yeh and Davis, 2001) but a working definition of such productions tend to have some international dimension to them that involve mostly creative talents and like co-financing or co-distribution from more than one Asian country. For the purpose of this discussion, Pan-Asian productions can be grouped as a sub-category of international co-productions, where international co-productions are productions that involve substantial creative and/or financial collaborations from a creative team, production crew and cast that reside in more than one national territory.

Co-productions are a risky and heavy investment of time, resources and effort, placing all those involved in creating, marketing, circulating and consuming them under great pressure. The most commonly stated benefits are financial pooling and the biggest liabilities tend to be inter-national coordination and work culture issues (Hoskins & McFadyen, 1993; Hoskins, McFadyen, & Finn 1996; Hoskins et al, 1999). International co-productions can then be seen as adaptation to the pressures of media globalisation that indigenous companies face – pressures that include a fragmenting audience, multi-channelling, and piracy. Indeed, as alluded to earlier, creating international co-productions could often be seen to be a strategic response to competition and a hostile media economy or an ambitious project of building an international reputation and stature for home-grown creative enterprises.

Some authors argue this trend towards pan-Asian and international co-productions may be due to similar structural changes in their respective domestic marketplaces – such as policy shifts towards market liberalisation and increasing audience fragmentation (see Beals and Platt, 2001; Kim, 2001; Keane, 2004; Iwabuchi 2002; Fung 2004). Over time, as the uneven

developments of differently-located Asian media industries learn from each other, as Yeh and Davis (2002) noted of pan-Asian strategies of Hong Kong filmmakers that they refer to as 'Japan Hongscreens', local industry players develop templates or abilities to harness imported media, skills and talents as 'value-added, flexible elements' to create pan-Asian cinema and other types of pan-Asian productions that rival Hollywood's offerings.

These international co-productions also signify the shift in mindsets among enterprising Asian media producers towards investing in pan-Asian co-productions through renting East Asian popular culture as an innovative method for regional expansion (Lim, 2006). As Asian television industries become more viable enterprises and production is ratcheted up via broadband and other new technological capabilities, 'regional production networks' that have developed in traditional industries such as manufacturing and electronics (see Peng, 2000) begin to play a greater role in Asian television production.

Examining Pan-Asian Co-productions/International Co-productions as Asian Media Productions

As a brief methodological note, I propose to examine Pan-Asian co-productions/ international co-productions as Asian Media Productions. An Asian Media Production is a concept developed by Moeran (2001) to undertake empirical work on investigating the intersection of individual agency, culture, society and power relations through studying Asian cultural products from their print, films, music, to television industries. Each Asian media production that circulates overseas becomes part of the output and flow of a larger East Asian popular culture (see Chua, 2004: 204).

Moeran (2001) see the critical areas of analysis for East Asian popular culture or Asian media productions as the "structure and modalities" that products engage in at each stage where the products are produced, circulated and consumed. These require that we examine the 'circuit of culture' (Du Gay et al, 1997) that Moeran borrowed from cultural studies to be applied to the analysis of each Asian Media Production.

It is a useful way to conceptualise and discuss each co-production by allowing us to describe and identify the players/agents, their roles and the processes involved at each stage or 'moment' of the circuit – Production, Identity, Regulation, Distribution and Consumption. This approach also has comparative value as one can observe and compare different industry structures, the relations of productions, distribution and consumption of individual TV programmes from different Asian countries when they enter overseas cultural marketplaces, or their individual responses to environmental challenges.

The Case Studies

What follows are examples of how different pan-Asian co-productions have attempted to or could potentially offer integrative effects on building an integrated Southeast and East Asian regional community. During the discussion, I will use the methodology associated with the study of Asian media productions selectively to illustrate the uneven pathways of success in

establishing a common Asian region that individual media products traverse as people, resources, ideas and capital circulate across different Asian cities.

Pan-Asian Celebrity Casting - *Perhaps Love* (2005)

Perhaps Love (2005) is one of the most ambitious Asian film projects to date at an atypically high cost of US\$10 million in a highly unusual genre – Bollywood-style Chinese opera/musical – that was deliberately created for a pan-Asian audience. Like many international co-productions, the structure of financing and creating the project is usually complex and involves multiple parties. *Love* was co-financed by ASTRO-Shaw, TVB, Ruddy Morgan Organisations, Morgan & Chan Films Ltd, and Applause Pictures, the production team was equally pan-Asian with Hong Kong filmmaker, Peter Ho at the helm, an Oscar-winning cinematographer, Peter Pau, and Bollywood choreographer, Farah Khan. Celebrity casting also reflected a variety of Asian nationalities with Zhou Xuan (from China), Takashi Kaneshiro (of Japanese and Taiwanese descent), Jacky Cheung (from Hong Kong), and Ji Jin-Hee (from South Korea).

At the 'production moment' of this circuit of culture for this film, the celebrity casting reflected both the cumulative power of an ensemble of actors signifying an East Asian popular culture and the role of cultural citizenship in promoting greater media globalisation. The film's ability to appeal to pan-Asian audiences depended upon the negotiation of the 'identity moment' – the producers and writers 'solved' partially by situating the musical as a story-within-a-story and shooting in Shanghai and Beijing as romantically as they would with many European cities and art house films. However, with the heavy weight casting, its filmmakers invested in a 'circulation moment' where the integrated marketing communications strategy is typical Hollywood-style – promoting *Love* across Asia like 'event films that are star-driven' (Rosen, 2003) featuring the famous Hong Kong, Chinese, and Korean stars, through television advertisements, billboards and behind-the-scenes documentary. Although the critics' reviews were generally positive, it did not appear to have the high audience receptivity that the filmmakers had hoped for.

Interestingly, in the same year, the Hollywood film *Memoirs of Geisha*, based on the same-titled internationally best-selling book, used a similar strategy of pan-Asian celebrity casting except that the filmmakers chose to de-couple the nationality or ethnic differences of the actors from the roles they played in the English-language film. The fact that *Memoirs* had already enjoyed popularity through the strong branding from its successful published form probably ensured that *Memoirs* was more successful in the box office than the more esoteric *Love*.

Other more 'conservative' pan-Asian projects that use similar Hollywood-style marketing with an eye on the processes of consumption and managing Asian audiences' expectations of portraying Asian identities have varying levels of pan-Asian co-production involvement. For example, the Japanese and Koreans have used the opportunity to mend their political and cultural fences through the making of their first TV drama co-production, *Friends* (2002), planning two years before its telecast during the year of the

World Cup 2002 in which Japan and South Korea co-hosted the global event. Aligning with global events allows the two broadcasters involved to obtain exposure to each other's markets as well as proximate markets that recognize their stable of TV stars.

Subsequent co-productions between the two broadcasters –Fuji TV and MBC – were experiments that provided Fuji more Japanese goodwill and media co-branding opportunities to enter the highly protected South Korean TV market. They also offered MBC a safe template to produce and also extend their brand in the highly competitive Japanese TV marketplace (Lee, 2005). Some filmmakers believe in pan-Asian co-productions so much that they are willing to set up companies to specialize in them, like Show East, a South Korean production house which recently involved themselves in a tripartite co-production involving Chinese and American partners, Chen Kaige's US\$30-million-dollar, *The Promise* (2005). This film injected pan-Asian celebrity casting into the formula but selected a more familiar Asian genre – Chinese martial arts-sci-fi epic (Russell, 2005).

Formatting Animation in the Region: *Animax (2005)*, *Tomato Twins (2002)* & *Meteor Garden (2001)*

A different kind of pan-Asian co-production modality operates when media enterprises create successful formulas for animation in East and Southeast Asia. Increasingly, Asian-made animation has become a strategy for regional expansion. Emboldened by how Japanese animation and comics have a strong audience among youths and adults in Asia and growing Western fan-base, Asian-made animation has begun to take on a regional cultural currency of its own in recent years. The kind of formatting – rationalization of creative industry practices aimed at reducing market failure (see Ryan, 1992) – of popular culture that occurs through developing made-by-Asian animation usually involves more than one territory.

The Japanese animation industry has always relied upon outsourcing of its production capacity to South Korea or the Philippines for many years (Osaki, 2001) have led some of their Asian partners to develop their own animation productions in the process of learning the craft. While many Asian cities have regular bookstores and libraries with dedicated sections on Japanese comics and manga-drawing books (i.e. Japanese comics), the recent launch of the first all-anime channel, *Animax* (firstly launched in 2005) in Southeast and East Asia has received very strong viewership (see *Animax.com*, 2006), reinforcing the belief that Japanese animation can aggregate audiences across many different linguistic territories with great commercial success.

Other evidence of the viability of co-investing in Asian animation includes the recognition by Hollywood satellite broadcasters that co-investing in or distributing Japanese and Asian-made animation are astute commercial decisions to increase their footprint in Asia. For example, Nickelodeon Asia (Nick) invested in their first Asian production in 2002 with a newly-formed independent Singaporean production house, Peach Blossom Media (Lim, 2005, unpublished thesis) on a hybrid Asian-Western-styled animation series

entitled *Tomato Twins* (2002) which was the first Singapore-made animation series telecast on Nick's satellite channel. This experience eventually led Peach to other landmark animation deals with Walt Disney in November 2005 (PBM/MDA website, 2006).

Yet another way in which formatting animation became a successful regional template is shown by the phenomenal success of the first Taiwanese teenage idol drama, *Meteor Garden* (2001), a live-action drama series based on the format for a popular Japanese manga, *Hana Yori Dango* (Boys for Flowers). *Meteor* launched the careers for its four male leads first as TV heartthrobs and then as a boy-band, F4. This single drama series revived regional interest in Taiwanese TV and boy-bands as East Asian popular culture. The producer, Angie Chai, also became their talent agent, and they were marketed as having pan-Asian appeal when touring across East and Southeast Asian. The active co-optation of popular if short-lived East Asian icons is not confined to Asian media producers. Rather, it extends to speed with which international brands like Pepsi, Disney and Toyota have also copied these strategies by creating pan-Asian advertisements such as the Gladiator-style themes of 2003, getting the latest boy-band, F4 to sing on the Chinese-language dubbed version of *Lilo and Stitch* (2002), and Toyota's continued relationship with the almost now defunct F4.

Friendly competitions: *Asia Bagus* (1994) to *Asian Idol*?

Another group of pan-Asian co-productions have potentially regional and integrative appeal is the variety genre such as game shows and competition shows. For this, the way in which audiences can share a temporality is to consume and compare the different version of TV gameshow formats *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, and *The Weakest Link*. Before the popularity of *American Idol* led to international format sales for the singing competition, many Asian countries already had talent times (see Cooper-Chen, 1993). With so many individual *American Idol* formats being produced for local television in Southeast Asia, it would seem conceivable that one of the Asian broadcasters may initiate an *Asian Idol* that audiences across the Asian region could participate in – something that parallels to the successful *World Idol* (2004).

The mid-1990s also saw an innovative attempt to integrate Asian audiences involving three broadcasters – Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, Fuji Television Network and an Indonesian terrestrial broadcaster, involved in a three-country singing competition entitled, *Asia Bagus* (Iwabuchi, 2004). Since then, few commercial attempts were made to replicate similar co-productions amongst broadcasters. For international co-productions done under official MOU cultural exchanges to foster bilateral ties, and the 'live' coverage of regional sporting events like the Commonwealth Games or the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games, social integration is an underlying theme not only at the competition level but also at the broadcast level. Smaller scale attempts that were made included celebrity-hosted variety shows like *The Jacky Jack Show* (2003), a Singapore-Taiwanese variety-cum-talent competition show that compared the

talents and wit of ordinary contestants from their respective countries for entertainment. For this modality to work commercially and yet fulfil a social integrative agenda, audience consumption habits, industry exchanges and open-door state relations would have to be synchronous.

Proposed Framework for Assessing Pan-Asian Co-productions

Now that we have discussed several case studies, we now consider some of the important theoretical dimensions when assessing whether particular strategies for pan-Asian co-productions or individual projects have social and culturally integrative roles. The key dimensions highlighted are: firstly, the impact of media globalization on how international co-productions are an industrial and cultural response to its contradictory processes; secondly, the structure and modality of each co-production affects their reach and success as much as their ability to cultivate a regional community of viewers; and the third dimension is the confluence of political, social, economic and technological factors that set the stage for sustainable and successful pan-Asian co-productions. Perhaps these could be used to select Pan-Asian co-productions to investigate further or offer inputs into policy actions and industry development programmes in developing Asian media industries.

(a) Impact of Media Globalization on Cultural entrepreneurship in Asia

Cities across the globe have been marked increasingly by media flows that are successive waves of cultural and economic influence emitting from different origins. As Asian cities and their diverse pathways to modernity become increasingly expressed and defined by media globalization, many of their developing media industries have converted their cultural capital, new resources and new media technologies into different forms of cultural entrepreneurship. The Hollywoodization of the world's media industries (Miller *et al*, 2001; Schiller, 1991) has given almost everyone with access to television, films or the Internet, a familiarity with American popular culture. Yet, the emergence of smaller 'media capitals' (Curtin, 2003) to rival Hollywood's offerings in the late 1990s are re-defining the continued domination of audiences' tastes and consumption practices in Asia – from Hong Kong martial arts films, Japanese anime and manga, to Chinese-language and Korean drama serials.

Lately, Asia-based media producers are establishing networked modes of production, marketing and distribution to leverage upon alternative yet popular avenues for cultural consumption. These include using cultural citizenship among their talents to attract the 'diasporic' communities that are seeking to link up their national identities with their social and personal ones. The producers collaborate to compete for the attention of fragmenting and distracted audiences. Of particular interest is the range of strategies that developing media industries are using to make capital from culture. As shown by the case studies on Asian animation, Southeast and East Asian media companies are no longer content to be merely workshops for larger, richer companies with global reach from developed nations. Instead, these fledgling and expanding companies are assembling and renting regionally-relevant

popular culture, and regional cultures of production to create, own, and trade in Asian media productions. Amidst the growing number of Asian blockbuster films, TV dramas, and animation, the economic impact of the co-productions may seem paltry in the short-term but the social and cultural integrative potential of international co-productions involving regional neighbours is growing stronger, thereby altering the face of media globalization.

While discussing Canadian TV networks expansion globally, Hoskins and McFadyen (1993) noted that international co-productions 'may be beneficial, even necessary' for big-budget productions. Logically, Asian media productions that hope to capture linguistically different and competitive media markets may need to use international co-productions as part of their internationalization ensemble. As Asia's economic growth increases, education levels, Asian youths' and women's consumption power rise, media consumption in Asia is expected to become more sophisticated if not more cosmopolitan. These factors as well as the advent of a multi-channel universe force media producers to develop Asian Media Productions in the right genre and formats that can re-aggregate audiences.

For the successful productions, they also have a natural tendency to integrate markets. For example, regionally popular TV shows like *Meteor Garden* and the *Animax* channel united many audiences from different cities as well as became bonding sites for exchanging views, hobbies and tastes in the language of popular TV shows. This reflects the influence of youth consumption in moving not only cultural trade but also of the integrative power of cultural translations. With the success of Taiwan's live-action adaptation of the Japanese manga, *Hana Yori Dango*, a flurry of new websites emerged that were dedicated to both the original Taiwanese series as well as new cast-turned celebrities of the Taiwanese adaptation, F4. Meanwhile, Hollywood has become the ultimate remake capital of East Asian film hits, earning even higher box office receipts than the original films (Xu, 2005).

This complicated picture of social practice through new forms of connectivity and new expressions of citizenship is not only found in the political sphere and industrial sectors of trade and the economy. It has begun to revitalize the cultural and creative industries of newly industrializing and industrialized countries. As media companies seek to compete in both their domestic mediascapes and the larger regional or even the global cultural marketplace in which many firms have begun to operate.

(b) Structure and Modalities of International/Pan-Asian Co-productions

The structure and modalities of each pan-Asian co-production also co-determine the reconnection and alignment of neighbouring cities, if not countries. Alongside industrial and socio-cultural changes are the rise of specialist enterprises in niche cultures of marketing. These enterprises often invoke discourses that champion the need to satisfy and offer products and services that proximate the emerging taste cultures of youths, women, urban

professionals and other transitional demographic groups everywhere in Southeast and East Asia.

From the brief case studies illustrated earlier, the various modalities and motivations of Asia-based producers and distributors that have publicly expressed interest in undertaking international co-productions. They include television giants such as National Geographic Channel, Discovery Networks Asia, MTV Asia, TVBI Hong Kong, Fuji Television Networks, Myung Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), to filmmakers such as Teddy Chan³. All of these media producers appear to have converged on adopting strategies and mindsets/cultural citizenship that build a regional or pan-Asian audienceship. The case studies further reveal that there are indeed many different modalities that govern a variety of pan-Asian co-productions that have or are currently circulating in East Asia. I have listed these below but the list is not exhaustive:

As shown in *Perhaps Love (2006)*, one such modality is focused on co-financing, cultural citizenship and globally prospecting talents to create new genres for increasingly sophisticated audiences. Transnational carriage must be supported by international co-productions that foster a sense of regional or global cultural citizenship.

While international co-productions have a stable and long-term place in the Asia Pacific, different producers and distributors respond variously to the processes, contests and negotiations that each co-production inevitably involves. Their experiences and outcomes are mediated by both the conditions and constraints they encounter even as they aspire to circulate their content to an ever-widening marketplace. Each production would be the site of various cultural 'moments' that set up a dynamic circuit of culture and cultural production.

It may lead to different outcomes – whether these lead to stronger integration of their respective industries and audiences or to an unwitting cannibalization of each other's marketplace depends upon the extent to which audience fragmentation is and the presence of factors for internationalization. For example, globally-networked media companies with the branding, resources, talents and clout to enter multiple markets, they tend to sustain a mode of behaviour that is 'conforming'. This consolidates their position in the media-centric flow of culture, using well-established patterns of social, economic and cultural production. While Hollywood film blockbusters and their children's animation and TV shows continue to distribute globally, other media production centres have developed strong counter programming. Hong Kong's popularity with marital arts, urban serials, and Chinese courtly dramas and Taiwan's variety shows, Latin American strong market in producing and exporting telenovelas (Wilkinson, 2003), the vibrancy of Japanese animation and other Asian animation players (Osaki, 2002), Australia's globally recognized success with children's educational programmes and New Zealand's TV and film-based magic-kingdom factory, WETA, are testament to the regional, if not global appeal of these non-Hollywood cultural goods. What

makes them distinctive is that their successes are based on developing inclusive neo-networks that ensure their place in the global marketplace.

If some production companies have the goals to create globally appealing programmes – TV, film, and animation – but not the means to do so, they will seek to either innovate or rebel from conventions set by their industry. For this category of companies, many East Asian producers have emerged, from Angie Chai with *Meteor Garden* (2001), to Peach Blossom Media's *Tomato Twins* (2002). Otherwise, companies that have the means to co-produce but are un-ambitious to break into overseas markets, they would engage in 'official co-production' of which many government-endorsed TV shows are really a type of 'ritualism'. Still others are not considering co-productions at all during this time, because of perceptions and resources to which they have negative or poor access to.

(c) Changing the Polarity: Opposites attract but proximity consolidates

A final dimension is the confluence of political, economic, social and technological factors that promote industry growth through cultural export and internationalization which have some integrative effects on the region. Politically, international co-productions, whether endorsed by official co-production treaties or not, have become signposts of the possible integration of economic, social and cultural flow of culture amongst different countries. These can be the result of commercial enterprises seeking to increase their presence and display their talents in global markets, or seeking to collaborate with other creative and /or financially able companies.

While East Asian and Southeast Asian nations mature and develop economically, so do their social and cultural policies play crucial roles in its citizens adapt to new conditions of global competition abroad and domestic growth and issues at home. Indeed, social policy is increasingly seen by researchers in the Middle-east and Asia as instrumental in solving many problems related to negotiating a commonly acceptable identity or a tolerance and respect for cultural diversity that binds people to the region (Kardshenas and Moghadan, 2006). Cultural policy is acquiring similar emphasis and status in government and industrial strategies for cultural and economic survival.

In place of waving protectionist policies articulated in discourses on 'Asian values' (Chua, 1995; Chadha and Kavoori, 2000), a more all-inclusive way in which social and cultural integration can occur is to substitute the political institutions for a cultural market mechanism for cultural exchange where audiences across multiple countries increase their receptivity towards the covalence of their modernity through joint production and consumption of the same media productions as both national and regional cultures. This can mostly be fulfilled by an intensive regional flow of East Asian popular culture.

Indeed, consumption practices are converging at certain sites of cultural production, while today's Southeast Asian audiences are equally familiar with the actors and actresses of movies and TV shows from different East Asian countries. Media producers have a wider choice of selecting Asian

stars for big pan-Asian film or TV projects than ever before. Furthermore, new media platforms allow audiences to actively participate in various kinds of transnational cultural citizenship through fan-sites and web-logs that keep them updated on the latest happenings.

Websites that are dedicated to individual cultural flows such as Korean pop culture, Hong Kong TVB stars or newsblogs are also joined by intersecting interests in pan-Asian productions that are genre-specific such as coverage of Kungfu cinema, or author-specific sites like sites that translate Louis Cha/Jin Yong martial arts novels, or even media production-specific ones such as those devoted to popular fiction like *Hana Yori Dango* (the Japanese mangas). Well-known formatted game-shows like Cellador's *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* (1999-), and even Asian game-show creators have started to create online versions of their TV game-shows like Singaporean Robert Chua's, interactive game-show entitled *Everyone Wins* (2003). All these dimensions to media globalisation in Asia change the polarity of rivalry to friendly competition and cooperation instead. To what extent that integration occurs is subject to how successful flagship and key co-productions have been in changing mindsets and ultimately behaviours, and how this benefits the citizens of today and 'regionalites' of tomorrow.

Conclusion

This paper examined, in a preliminary manner, how the presence and uneven frequency of socio-cultural processes in production, distribution, and consumption across different geographic locations resulted in boosting international co-productions and collaborations amongst East and Southeast Asian media industries. In Asia, with their multiple-language cultural markets, the more entrepreneurial, ambitious and well-connected amongst the media producers appear keen to invest creatively and financially in developing regional circuits of cultural production. These are focused on creating pan-Asian media productions since the beginning of the millennium.

A more familiar flow of cultural products and services have now appeared as visibly Asian/pan-Asian. These Asian Media Productions either emulate or dodge Hollywood and enable not only producers to reach consumers but for consumers to connect back with producers. New forms of community-building have appeared as virtual communities, fan-sites, online forums on TV shows and films, simulcasting, direct off-satellite, MMORPG (that is, massively multiplayer online role-playing game), and telephony services. Reducing social distance and cultural discounts to make different cultural productions more familiar to foreign audiences may be easier with a wider range of tools from more traditional and costly ones such as subtitling and dubbing. The new tools are vastly cheaper and offer quicker feedback with back-channel revenues like mobile SMS interactivity, web-blogging, and online/offline extensions of popular media productions.

Robertson (1995) and Appadurai (2000/1990) believed that global developments are uneven in their impact on the local industries and cultures. While imported western TV programmes and popular culture are indigenized and transformed into local productions (Robertson, 1990), the production and

consumption of culture is no longer bounded by national boundaries. Rather, these cultures exist in 'imagined worlds...that are constituted by historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe' (Appadurai, 2000: 325). Where political and economic policies are slow to catch up, the interplay of various factors that boost the internationalization of cultural industries and in particular neo-networked media companies involved in pan-Asian co-productions have initiated an integration of cultural markets from Hong Kong to South Korea.

International co-productions are responses to external pressures, motivations, structural changes, and different modalities, aimed at expanding the marketplace for cultural products, ideas and asserting their right to express their nationhood, history and culture. As East Asian and Southeast Asian nations mature and develop economically, so do their social and cultural policies play crucial roles in its citizens adapt to new conditions of global competition abroad and domestic growth and issues at home. Indeed, Middle- eastern and Asian research viewed social policy is increasingly as instrumental in solving many problems of negotiating a commonly acceptable identity or a tolerance and respect for cultural diversity, to integrate various geo-political/linguistic regions (Kardshenas and Moghadan, 2006). Cultural policy is acquiring similar emphasis and status in government and industrial strategies for cultural and economic survival.

To what extent Asian media co-productions have a vital role to play in accelerating the integration of an East Asian region depends on the presence of enterprising and visionary producers. They are likely to be neo-networked firms that can attract, transact in multiple flows of culture, the vitality of regional networks of cultural production, and pro-development cultural policies that encourage internationalisation. Agency and structural factors that allow many international media co-productions to take-off will also reflect on structural homology for building an integrated region.

Recent milestones in co-productions and consumption patterns indicate that East Asian popular culture is gathering intensity with the multiple flows of TV programming, animation and films circulating within the region. Also, ASEAN's ambitious integration plans have recently accelerated at the 11th ASEAN Plus Three Summit and the inaugural East Asian Summit in Kuala Lumpur, 12-14 Dec 2005. Under this climate, we need to further examine critically whether the East Asian region and southeast Asian region manifested by the polity of ASEAN needs a clearer cultural and social mandate to support the development of a strong institutional framework like that of Europe and the European Union's in order to succeed.

Therefore, various sites of Asian Media Productions – in television, film, music or animation – are ideal testing grounds of regional and international cooperation. Alongside other social projects such as the strengthening of educational networks, creating environments to prepare youths for their future role as ASEAN citizens, establishing research and training centres to support the development of human resources and trans-border environmental hazards, this paper suggests that successful pan-Asian

co-productions that foster deeper collaboration amongst media firms and establish neo-networks if not regional production networks across the Asia Pacific are ideal in building vibrant Asian media industries. They further cultivate an imaginary and eventually a shared sense of pan-Asian cultural citizenry that function as cultural ballasts for the successful integration of a problematic East and Southeast Asia.

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¹ See Speech by Mr David T.E. Lim, Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts at the Opening of the Asia Television Forum, Asia Animation and Asia Film Market and Conference 2002 on 3 Dec 2002. Website: http://www.mita.gov.sg/pressroom/press_021203b.html.

² Of course, MTV Asia was mindful of its audiences in both the Southeast and East Asian regions when it produced Rouge, its first pan-Asian drama-action-comedy series. The series premiered on 6 Oct 2004 across Asia to 25 million households. Rouge featured four Asian girls from the Philippines,

Singapore, and the United States. Website:

<http://www.mda.gov.sg/wms.www/thenewsdesk.aspx?sid=581>.

³ Teddy Chan's 8th feature film, *Purple Storm* (1999) swept the 19th Hong Kong Film Awards, and his first international production with Jackie Chan entitled *The Accidental Spy* (2002) was a commercial hit. He started his own production company, Jin Chuan Pictures in 2002 to make "quality pan-Asian films that are both sophisticated and accessible to an international audience." This information is extracted from his biographical note published during the recent Asian Festival of First Films 2005, Available: <http://www.afff2005.com/bios.htm>. Retrieved on 10 March 2006.