

7-1997

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S. C. Berggreen
University of Colorado, US

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Recommended Citation

Berggreen, S. C., Locating Chinatown in the global village: Cultural innovation in Taiwan's multichannel environment, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 3, 1997, 32-48.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss3/3>

Locating Chinatown In The Global Village: Cultural Innovation In Taiwan's Multichannel Environment

The availability of media technology in the mid-1980s in Taiwan has forever changed the landscape of its television industry. With the help of cable and satellite technologies, audiences in Taiwan today receive an average of 60 channels, 20 times the number available just a few years ago. Through focus group interviews, this study examines the possible cultural implications of such speedy changes for a society that is in the midst of political, cultural, social and economic transitions. The results indicate that Chinese cultural identity in Taiwan has come to another crossroad and stress the prospect of cultural innovation as a possible outcome in the age of a multichannel environment. The study also advocates further thoughtful consideration over potential media impacts on culture as the world strips itself of distinguishing characteristics on the path toward the global village.

Shu-Ling C. Berggreen

University of Colorado - Boulder

The onset of the television industry in Taiwan can be traced to 1962 when the first television station, Taiwan Television Enterprise (TTV), was established. By 1971, two more stations (CTV and CTS) had joined the market (Wun, 1983). Until recent years, the Taiwanese audience has been able to watch only programs provided by those three stations. As one critic said, "[t]he three stations told the audience when to watch what" (Liu, 1993, p. 36). Under such circumstances, any alternatives seemed quite attractive to the audience and profitable to any potential providers. That mindset, along with the availability of technology in the mid-1980s, changed forever the landscape of the television industry in Taiwan.

A State Of Transition

With the help of cable and satellite technologies, the audience in Taiwan today receives an average of 60 channels, 20 times the number available just a few years ago (Tang & Chung, 1994). Previously banned Hollywood productions and Japanese programming can now be seen live by Taiwanese audiences. What are the possible cultural implications of such rapid changes for a society in the midst of political, cultural, social and economic transitions?

Taiwan has been an island in transition, since the 16th century. While Taiwan remained a remote and uncultivated territory to the Ming Dynasty of the Chinese empire in the 1500s, culture and civilization loomed above the horizon of this island. Located on the trade routes of the western Pacific, Taiwan's southern harbors were used by traders, merchants and even pirates from Japan, Portugal, Spain, and the Chinese empire. Such opportunities for prosperity through trade and commerce led many Taiwanese aborigines to agricultural settlement around sea ports and brought waves of migration from mainland China.

In the 17th century, the Dutch established Taiwan as their east Asian commercial center, further galvanizing Taiwan's interaction with the outside world. When Manchuria overthrew the Ming Dynasty, the Ch'ing Dynasty was instituted. A group of Ming loyalists fled to Taiwan, hoping one day to reclaim the mainland and re-establish their dynasty. The loyalists led by Cheng Ch'eng-Kung evicted the Dutch and accelerated the mainland Chinese settlement on the island. Eventually, Taiwan was annexed by the Fukien province under Ch'ing's vast empire. Foreign trading and outside interaction subsided temporarily.

By the mid-19th century, the once infallible Ch'ing Dynasty was humbled by Western imperialists. Taiwan was emancipated temporarily from the purview of the Ch'ing and became a free trade zone. Merchants and missionaries from the West came to the island seeking prosperity. Mainland Chinese also renewed their migration to Taiwan. Nevertheless, this season of blooming was short-lived. As a result of the Sino-Japanese war, Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895. The Japanese occupied Taiwan for 50 years until the end of World War II (Lee, 1993). During those 50 years, the Chinese in Taiwan adopted, willingly or not, much of the Japanese way of life. Culture in Taiwan became a fusion of various civilizations through official and unofficial colonization enveloped within Chinese traditions and heritage. Then, in 1949, the Communists defeated the Nationalists or KMT in the Chinese civil war. The KMT government fled to Taiwan, vowing to reclaim the mainland one day. As a government in exile, the KMT philosophy was manifest through rhetorical devices corresponding to political motives. A maze of cultural contradictions emerged.

For example, people in Taiwan had received Japanese education and spoke Japanese and Taiwanese, the dialect of the island. Mandarin Chinese replaced the vernacular when the KMT set foot in Taiwan. Those who considered themselves well-educated under Japanese rule were rendered illiterate, to a degree. Information originally accessible to them (however limited it was under Japanese scrutiny) became unavailable. Ironically, the guests, those who had just migrated from the mainland, enjoyed enhanced information access compared to the island's native people.

In addition, the KMT declared and enforced martial law, because the island needed to be on constant alert against possible military confrontation with the mainland. While Taiwan, the Republic of China, espoused democratic ideology, martial law necessitated a narrow interpretation of democracy. People had been repressed during the Japanese occupation. Now they encountered another form of control under their own government. For more than 30 years, people were free, but only within finite boundaries set by the government. However, this ostensible peace and unity would soon be disrupted. In the 1980s, a shift in the prevailing political sentiment, drastic economic growth and an increased availability of communication technologies led Taiwan once again to another crossroad—this time a crossroad on the information superhighway (Harrell & Huang, 1994).

Highway To The Global Village

In the late 1970s, motivated and necessitated by financial factors, Taiwan began to move from a labor-intensive industry toward an information economy. This shift provided not only a natural path for Taiwan to enter the information age, but also encouraged increased consumption of information and consumer products (Sutter, 1988). In addition, the quest for true democracy was realized in 1987 when martial law was lifted. After years of underground activities, a new opposition political party was legalised.

Furthermore, government censorship of print media was abolished. As a result, people could finally voice diverse views openly, while information sources from outside became accessible as never before (Shee, 1994). This situation was amplified by the vast and rapid development of electronic media in Taiwan, as exemplified by the technology of "little ears" (miniature rooftop satellite dishes) which became popular in the mid-1980s. With an initial installation fee and a monthly payment, subscribers received an additional four channels through Direct Broadcast Satellites (DBS). The popularity of such services reached its peak in 1988,

when Seoul in South Korea, hosted the Olympic Games (Chan-Olmsted, 1990).

While for several years "little ears" were an obvious part of Taiwan's residential skyline, such mini-cable services were actually illegal until November, 1988. Although illegal, they did not seem to discourage opportunity seekers. Seeing the obvious trend of audience demand and willingness to pay for alternative programming, coupled with the availability of transborder satellites in Asia, many large-scale cable companies sprouted illegally in Taiwan in the early 1990s (Chan-Olmsted, 1990).

In April 1990, *AsiaSat 1* was launched. Though not the first communication satellite in Asia, it was the first transborder satellite of its scale in the Asian sky, with a footprint covering 38 nations in Asia and the Pacific, encompassing half the world's population. In late 1990, a television program service offered through *AsiaSat 1* was established by STAR TV. Through cable and satellite, Taiwanese cable subscribers could receive seven STAR TV channels by 1993 (Dang, 1994; Tang & Chuang, 1994; Wang, 1993).

The combination of cable and satellite technologies soon became the hottest commodity in Taiwan. The number of cable television companies mushroomed; by 1993 there were an estimated 600 to 700 cable companies wiring the island nation of 14,000 square miles. A chaotic battle among cable operators competing for the same consumers became inevitable. In 1993, the government was forced to step in to legalise, therefore regulate, the industry. Through the government's integration and legalisation processes, only 138 operators have received official cable operating licenses (Ho, 1994; 'Satellite Transmission Station,' 1995, September; 'Satellite Transmission Station,' 1996, February; 'Satellite Transmission Station,' 1996, September).

This decrease in number by no means implies a slowdown of the cable and satellite development in Taiwan. In fact, Taiwan's cable subscribing households increased from 45% of total TV households in 1993 to 73.73% in 1996 (Tang & Chuang, 1994; 'Satellite Transmission Station,' 1996, June; Berggreen, 1997). Furthermore, in addition to *AsiaSat 1*, many other satellites, such as Indonesia's *Palapa*, and *Asia-Pacific 1*, have been stationed above Asia, currently providing more than 60 channels of programming services for Taiwanese cable TV subscribers as compared to only 10 to 30 channels in 1993 (Coy, 1995; Berggreen, 1997). Via this new electronic path, the world entered the living rooms of people in Taiwan. Meanwhile, other technologies, such as the Internet and other on-line computer services, also became readily available and easily affordable in Taiwan, now an affluent country. This enabled people to interact directly or para-socially with the outside world. Taiwan has moved into the global village.

Media in The Global Village

With only three channels available less than a decade ago, the sudden surge of multichannel television service can only mean mass importation of current foreign-produced programming, frequent reruns of old productions from both domestic and foreign sources, and some low-quality, quick and easy, locally produced programming of various kinds. For the most part, American, Japanese and Chinese programming (from Hong Kong and Taiwan) have dominated and competed for TV screens in this newly established marketplace (Liu, 1993).

One intriguing phenomenon is the popularity of Japanese shows, which were previously banned by the government because of the World War II conflict between the two countries. For instance, one of the most watched shows in 1994 in Taiwan was *Oshih*, a Japanese soap opera about a fictional female who, after a tragic life, finally succeeds in her old age. This show aired in Japan from 1983 to 1984 (Browne, 1989). A decade later, a Japanese oldie became a modern hit in Taiwan.

The emergence of foreign productions seemed not only to add to the mixture of programming sources but also to interact with domestically produced media imageries. For example, even the Chinese programming itself looks very transnational. Nowadays, dialogues in a Chinese drama, sitcom or soap opera can encompass four or five languages. Thus, English, Japanese and Taiwanese words are often included in one Mandarin sentence. This trend can also be observed in daily conversation. Other cultural practices also have this "multicultural" tendency without a clear distinction of being Chinese. One cannot establish whether TV started the trend or merely is reflecting the trend. Nevertheless, there seems to be a clear interaction between media and cultural scenes in Taiwan.

The possible influence of electronic media on the cultural production process has long been a concern of many observers. Various theories have been employed to study this phenomenon. During the 1960s and 1970s, when many developing countries established their television industries and imported large volumes of first world programming, cultural invasion, media imperialism and media dependency were used to analyze unequal media flows and structural inequalities of cultural production. While they have been central concepts in the debate over unbalanced cultural exchange, these theories are often criticized as oversimplifying the situation.

Galtung (1971) stressed asymmetrical interdependence as opposed to simple dependency. He argued that while developing countries might find themselves in an unequal media relationship, they possess certain degrees of power and initiative in politics,

economics and culture. Following the same line of reasoning, Pool (1977) argued against the strict interpretation of media imperialism. He did not see audiences inactively being invaded and influenced by cultural products. Instead, television audiences choose their programs actively based on cultural relevance or proximity. As competition between domestic products and foreign programs heightens, he predicted that audiences would prefer their own culture reflected in media products. These preferences in turn lead television industries to increase local productions and import more programming from within the same region, language group and culture. Straubhaar (1991) further argued the cultural proximity concept by examining audiences through different classes, ages, genders and interests, and concluded that they tend to prefer and select domestic cultural content that is more proximate and relevant to them.

While cultural imperialism and dependency theories are still valuable inquiries, cultural proximity theory may serve a better framework to analyze audience acceptance and preference among the competing program sources in today's multichannel media environment. However, with Taiwan's intertwined cultural, historical, political and technological developments, cultural proximity may turn out to be an oversimplified concept as well. After all, culture in Taiwan is in transition. It is difficult to engage in a proximate process when the point of reference is still in flux.

Nevertheless, the rapid growth of communication technology has many social, legal and technological ramifications. Focusing on social implications, this study attempts to understand the cultural scenes in Taiwan's new media environment from two aspects: (1) The new electronic media's impacts on people's daily lives, and (2) whether and how information from this multichannel environment is integrated into cultural cues, such as language and sense of identity, of the society?

Considering the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon, a holistic approach is necessary to understand the complexity of the situation. A triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative data gathering methods was used in this study. However, due to space limitation, this paper will report the methods and results from focus group interviews.

Eight focus groups, a total of 75 people, were conducted in June, 1995. Each group interview lasted between two to two and a half hours. The demographic distribution is as follows:

Gender

Male: 30 participants

Female: 45 participants

Age

Teens: 8 participants

20s: 23 participants

30s: 20 participants

40s: 7 participants

50s: 2 participants

60s: 8 participants

70s: 7 participants

Occupations

Student (includes elementary, junior high, senior high and college), computer programmer, accountant, bookkeeper, office manager, public relation practitioner, independent businessman/woman, home maker, temple manager, Christian youth group counsellor, computer engineer, waiter, receptionist, secretary, teacher, reporter, commercial artist, maid, fashion designer, taxi driver, bus driver, department store clerk, police officer, unemployed and retiree (their occupations were: chef, police, retailer, teacher, motorcycle dealer, hardware store owner, grocery store owner).

City of Residency

Hsinchung, Chungli, Tainan, Taoyuan, Kaohsiung, Taichung, Hsinchu, Keelung, Taipei, Pahchiao. The researcher tried to recruit participants from various cities in Taiwan, hoping to reflect some of the diverse views from across the island. However, for practicality, all groups were assembled and interviewed in four cities: Taipei, Pahchiao, Hsinchung, Keelung.

Research Methods & Findings

Focus groups were chosen because they tend to provide in-depth information and clear articulation from respondents' own words. They are not intended for statistical generalization. Therefore, assertion analysis through induction was used to organize the research findings. Through repeated search and review of the data corpus, evidence of various assertions was established. The validity of the assertions was repeatedly tested by seeking disconfirming evidence as well as confirming evidence (Wittrock, 1986). The processes yielded the final assertions presented below.

Assertion 1: Television (includes VCR and cable) was an integral part of the participants' daily lives. So integrated, in fact, that none of them mentioned watching television in describing their recreational activities and daily routines. However, after the moderator probed them by asking "do you watch television?,"

every single participant immediately spoke of television. Most people watched television every day.

Assertion 2: Respondents seemed to think of television quite negatively through the analysis of their words and thought associations. Words used to describe television (cable and satellite included) were: vain, low class, regretful, a complete mess, idiot, advertising. Ironically, while they thought so poorly of the medium, most of them spent tremendous amounts of time viewing it. When the moderator noted the paradox, typical responses were: "I don't know. I always watch it. Why not." "But there is nothing else fun to do!" "It is just too crowded outside." "When the weather is bad outside, it is nice to turn on TV. Just let the world come to you through cable and satellite and you don't have to get wet."

Assertion 3: Reasons for liking programs were based mainly on the stories, casts and production techniques of the specified shows and the purpose of the viewing. For example, almost all participants agreed that Euro-American production techniques are far more superior than those of domestic programs. The following is a vivid example of the relation among genre, production source and preference. One participant stated: "If I want to see an explosion I would like to see a real one with real blood, dynamite and everything, like how they do it on American TV. Here in Taiwan, we do it so politely; it is like watching you accidentally scrape yourself. It is not exciting enough. I don't have to watch TV to get that."

Such rationale also became evident when participants discussed a completely different genre from action and violence. For example, a female participant explained why and how she liked to watch *Oshih* and *Tokyo Love Story*, two popular Japanese soap operas at the time of this interview: "I don't understand Japanese, but I love the music and the tender love and romance in Japanese programs. As for *Oshih*, I like the realism conveyed through the plot. I guess I could see all that in our soap operas, too. But Japanese actors and actresses are refreshing. They are handsome and beautiful and they don't overact like ours. I love Japanese soap operas. The stories and people are always beautiful."

The final factor influencing viewer preference was the purpose for watching certain programs. When it was for information-seeking, content determined program choices. As one respondent stated: "I like to watch news from CNN even though I have to read the subtitles in order to understand what is being presented. It is different from watching our own newscasts. They [our newscasts] don't tell you about anything. In order to know more about the world, you need to watch news from elsewhere. So, when I want information, I go to the place [channel]

that will give me the best choice.”

However, after all these discussions, when the moderator asked what their favourite and most frequently viewed program was, it was unanimously a domestically produced program of one kind or another. All the rationale seemed utterly irrelevant when such a direct question was posed.

Assertion 4: The respect for other family members' wishes was the top reason for cable subscription. However, there was evidence that some people (even those who did not initiate the subscription) watched more television than before the arrival of cable and satellite. As a young professional in his 30s confessed: "Things on television have become so amazing and fascinating, I can watch and watch and change channels and channels and never grow tired of it. My girlfriend says I am addicted to TV, but she watches just as much as I do, different programs, perhaps. Sometimes I get drawn to a program so much that I stay up too late and have to call in sick for work the next day, so I have time to sleep. Sometimes I call in sick because there is a program I really want to see and I feel I could skip the work that day. Don't look so surprised, I know quite a few friends who do that, too. My girlfriend's friends do that as well."

Assertion 5: Family interaction has changed drastically since the advent of cable and satellite. When there were only three channels, families gathered together and watched TV in the evening or during the weekend. Now the programs are so diverse and there are so many choices available that many families have purchased several TV sets to accommodate different family members' viewing interests. It seems families are as fragmented as the programs are segmented. The following is a good example of the change in the family scene from a 75-year-old grandfather who lives with his wife, son, daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter.

"I don't know what my granddaughter is watching anymore. Before, there were three choices and we could easily decide as a family what we wanted to watch. Every night we ate fruit and dessert after dinner while watching a nice show on TV. Now there are hundreds of choices, I cannot keep track of what's going on. I don't want to see the childish cartoons my granddaughter is watching. Before, she watched them from 5 to 6 in the afternoon and I would go for a walk. Now you can see that [cartoons] all day long from one of the channels. Her mother bought a TV to put in their own room now. Her mother likes to watch American movies. She thinks American men are handsome, but I think they are too hairy. Anyway, my granddaughter just goes to their room and watches cartoons or maybe something else whenever she wants. Now I never see my granddaughter after

dinner and I don't know what she is watching or doing anymore. I don't like that. But it is not too bad for me either. Now I also have my own TV in my own room and I just watch it in my room. I can also view whatever I want without worrying if it is appropriate for my granddaughter."

Assertion 6: As mentioned in Assertion 1, participants' lives were heavily integrated with television, whether they knew it or not. They used information from television to help make both daily and specific decisions. When asked about where they would go if they have to leave Taiwan, various places around the world were mentioned. The moderator then asked how and why they made that selection. Many participants cited different television shows as their information sources. Among the most cited were travel shows from the *Discovery* channel and foreign soap operas and movies. For example, one participant would choose to go to Tokyo for "the romantic atmosphere I saw in *Tokyo Love Story*." Another participant wanted to move to Seattle, Washington, USA, because she "fell in love with the place from watching *Sleepless in Seattle* on a movie channel." Though many participants said they selected the place because they had travelled there before, when asked how they decided to visit there in the first place, their answers mostly were, "Oh, I (or friends/relatives) saw it on television first."

Assertion 7: In almost all sessions of the focus group interviews, the researcher noticed that many participants used more than one language in a given sentence, mirroring the rhetorical style on many TV shows. When asked about this phenomenon, most participants' responses echoed the answer given by a male temple manager: "I did not realise this multilingual thing until you pointed it out. It seems so natural to use whatever is available. Come to think of it, your (researcher's) Mandarin is not fashionable. You only use one language. You should add a few English words here and there. Nowadays, if you don't show off, people don't think you know anything. Modesty has no room in this society. You need to step on people to avoid being stepped on. I think all my friends speak in the same way as I do. I don't know. I actually never pay attention to how they speak. We just talk. I think all the TV characters converse in the same way, too. But I have to confess that I have not paid attention to how they carry out TV dialogues either. I just watch TV. Who cares what they are saying and how they are saying it?"

Ironically, when probed where he acquired the non-Chinese words in his vocabulary, he replied that he learned his ABCs in his junior high school years ago but has picked up all the new words from *The X Files* and *The Superman*, two popular American drama series in Taiwan, and *The Gifted Mama*, a Mandarin sitcom.

Furthermore, most participants did not feel the Chinese language is being threatened because of the sudden availability of programs in all languages. They thought it was quite positive that multiple languages on TV could help increase their daily vocabularies and enhance conversations. For example, one participant commented that it has "made conversation so much easier. If you are shy to say certain things in Chinese just use English for that particular word, like words about love or when you want to curse."

Another respondent followed up by saying, "I do the same. Sometimes when I take notes, it is so complicated to write in Chinese, I just use Japanese." This particular participant actually does not know Japanese. However, she has picked up a few words, such as the possessive usage in the Japanese language, from opening scenes of some Japanese shows. She has been using those few words frequently in her note taking.

One participant summed it up well, stating: "The language thing is just like TV. We have many choices now. Use them and enjoy them. We are Chinese; we will never forget our language. It is good we can borrow some here and there for fun, for practicality and sometimes just to show off. Why not?"

Assertion 8: Culturally, people did not identify themselves, or at least did not perceive to identify themselves, with Chinese traditions. As this female entrepreneur in her late 40s described: "We (Chinese) are just too old. Just look at those foreigners on television. They are free, advanced and knowledgeable. We, on the other hand, are just stale. Our government and textbooks keep talking about our 5,000-year tradition and so on. I don't even know or care what those Chinese traditions are. If those traditions are that good, how come we are not among the dominant countries in the world? We can't even get into the UN. Forget about Chinese traditions! We are just old and pretentious. If I could, I would move my family out of here."

The moderator then followed that thought and asked her how she would identify herself. She replied without any hesitation: "International Being, of course. What is Chinese or what is Taiwanese? Who knows? Taiwan is just a part of the world, and we can see the world and link to the globe from the mass media here. You see, just a few weeks ago, the moment Michael Jackson's new album came out in America, we had it in Taiwan the same day. Maybe even earlier, because of the time zone difference. There is no temporal or spatial differences anymore the way we communicate today. I think of myself as an International Being, not a Chinese or Taiwanese. I train my daughter and my employees to think that way as well."

Some other participants expressed the same sentiment but

used a different term, such as “the global citizen.” Such type of self-perception could also be a result of the political conflict between two Chinas. For example, the first generation mainlanders who were born in Taiwan tended to think that while they were taught to perceive themselves as Chinese, they actually grew up in Taiwan and have never been to China. Identifying themselves as Taiwanese or Chinese, one participant argued: “[I]s not as meaningful as calling myself “a citizen of the globe,” because I know for sure I am a citizen of something tangible. And why not? I can see the world from my living room and I actually travelled to some of those places I see on TV.”

The last four assertions illustrate the potential impact of the advent of cable and satellite technologies. At the same time, they also indicated the power of certain deeply rooted cultural values and norms that are not easily swayed merely by the importation of technologies or programs. Though the long-term effects are yet to be seen, some of the short-term changes are stunning and worth further examination.

The introduction of new technologies sometimes encounters opposition from various segments of a given society. That was certainly not the case with the advent of cable and satellite in Taiwan. People in Taiwan embraced the technologies with a certain degree of fanaticism. Taiwan was technologically, ideologically and financially, if not legally, ripe for the advent of cable and satellite. The social conditions forced the government to legalise the cable and satellite industries. Ironically, this is a society where the government had a long history of social engineering such that any new technology would be carefully planned and established with the government’s assistance before it would enter the society.

In many ways, the explosive development of cable and satellite in Taiwan could be viewed as a manifestation of people’s power when people/consumers began to follow their own desires. The conventional top-down, government-guided approach was completely toppled. The fact that 45% of TV households subscribed to cable and more than 600 cable companies were in operation before the industry was legalised is a vivid demonstration of the phenomenon. That emancipated mindset was also reflected in many other facets of the television consumption behaviour.

Based on focus group results, people watched more television than ever before. Some respondents called in sick for work periodically, either because they watched too much television the day before and needed the rest or because there was something on TV that day they really did not want to miss. Even though

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VCR taping could solve the latter problem, the delayed viewing would not satisfy the instant gratification certain respondents sought. This picture counters the stereotypical Chinese image of workers who are not only extremely hard-working but also sacrifice individual freedom for the greater societal good.

However, certain Chinese traditional values, such as strong family ties, surfaced through the cable and satellite consumption behaviour. Getting cable for the enjoyment of other family members was a frequently mentioned rationale for subscription. Adult children subscribed to cable for their parents or grandparents. Parents and grandparents signed up for cable for the young ones in the family. In other words, family members' wishes were a serious concern in the decision-making process of cable choices.

Whether this deeply-rooted value can stay the test of technology is yet to be seen. As the 75-year-old grandfather described in the interview, the once nightly routine of family get-togethers after dinner had completely disappeared after subscribing to a cable service. Now after dinner, different family members just went to their own rooms to watch the channels of choice on their own TV sets. It seems that in Taiwan, the physical family structure is still in place, while the social family structure is in question. To a degree, this phenomenon is an indication of social values in transition.

One discovery from the study is an undercurrent of consistent contradiction. While many people referred to themselves as "international beings" or "citizens of the globe" instead of Chinese or Taiwanese, domestic productions instead of programs from around the globe were still the most watched and the highest-ranked programming. Most people perceived television very negatively, yet they spent an exceedingly great amount of time watching it. While family-oriented values tied a household together, family camaraderie has begun to come untied. While a top-down government infrastructure is still in place, a bottom-up decision-making process is emerging. Evidently, Chinese culture in Taiwan has come to another crossroad of self-redefinition. What are the forces at work in the search for Chinese cultural identity within the global village that Taiwan has entered with the help of cable and satellite systems?

Conclusion

Historically, Taiwan has always assumed Chinese cultural identity. Except for the 50 years of Japanese occupation, the island has always been under the "protection" of Chinese dynasties or the republic. Naturally, the culture also reflects certain characteristics unique to the island. However, generally speaking,

the culture has been unmistakably Chinese. Especially after the cultural revolution in mainland China, some outside observers argued that the true Chinese culture perhaps could only be located in Taiwan (Chan, 1996).

For almost half a century the Nationalist government worked diligently to enforce and preserve Chinese traditions, ideologies, heritage, values, rituals and language, while mainland China underwent an excruciating cultural revolution. The KMT's approach, embodying the systematic repression of local culture, was justified under the name of reunification. Motives aside, the government was successful in its efforts. It controlled communication systems and information flow. Even travel abroad was under strict restriction until the late 1970s. The information people received and, consequently, the meanings they constructed from the worlds inside and outside of Taiwan, were carefully structured by the government.

This sheltered system provided a carefully guided and designed cultural intelligence with which people could construct their identity. Until the mid-1980s, the society in many ways has been building a cultural "self" without reference to "others". Such a self is easy to compose and comprehend, because it is clear and without alternatives. However, it is also incomplete. As W. James described in his work on "socius" (social/cultural self), an individual has multiple selves, one for each way others recognise that individual (James, 1948). Following this logic, G. H. Mead (1934) suggested that it is through others that an individual defines "self". Many scholars, such as S. Rosenberg, B. Braun and A. Kardacz, have conducted numerous studies since then and concluded that there are two integral parts of one self. A person or a culture not only describes "self" based on what is familiar but also develops identity by distinguishing the differences between self and others. Only through the interaction between familiar self (own self) and comparative self (other self) can a sense of self and identity be achieved.

The cultural identity of Taiwan has historically been constructed from the familiar self. As a culture, through the careful control of Japan and the KMT, Taiwan had no opportunities to encounter "others" and develop its "other self" in this century. In other words, while its cultural identity has always been Chinese, it is unfinished and imperfect. With the sudden proliferation of accessible "others" through electronic communication technology, the familiar self now seems lost while the comparative self is yet to be defined.

Many rituals and values that distinguish the Chinese from other civilizations seem to be faltering. Even the Chinese language, for better or for worse, is now a multicultural linguistic code. Many

Chinese in Taiwan want to be "others," although they have no personal experience with "others" after which to style themselves. Taiwan is undergoing a transformation of its cultural identity in the midst of other political, social and economic transitions.

All cultures evolve over time, as has Taiwan's culture over the last four centuries. In light of the world-wide trend toward communication exchange and cultural clash, the phenomenon of cultural transition clearly is not unique to Taiwan. What is peculiar to Taiwan is its ability to sustain itself through periodic upheavals over the past four centuries. Many scholars have fretted about possible cultural invasion and media imperialism under this new media milieu. However, I contend that Taiwan is immune to such an onslaught. Its history as a transitional state is conducive to its survival in an unstable and inscrutable world. Culturally, Taiwan has been hard at work redefining itself for more than four centuries. Given time, Taiwan will be a pioneer of cultural innovation, not a victim of cultural invasion.

In such an innovation process, the existing culture will absorb but not be invaded by new cultural products and practices. Over time, the culture reinvents itself to a distinct form unlike either the old or the new. Take the transnational language currently used by many in Taiwan as an example. It will not become English or Japanese. It will be Mandarin but with a variety of invented words, which are products from localizing imported foreign vocabularies. With such a transformation, the language certainly is global in its nature. But, is it Chinese anymore?

Therefore, the more prudent question to ask, then, is what cultural identity will emerge from this expeditious innovation? Never before has Taiwan's familiar self collided with other selves so violently and with so little opportunity to prepare. Given their inexperience with other selves throughout history, especially in this century, it's natural that those other selves may seem far superior to the Taiwan people's own selves. Since the 1980s, Taiwan has become a cultural whirlpool, in which new values and old traditions spin in a vortex of political uncertainty. While culture in Taiwan will inevitably reinvent itself, will the once distinct Chinese culture evaporate? In many ways, culture in mainland China is paralleling the transformation process in Taiwan. What can be perceived as Chinese cultural identity in this age of media revolution?

Where and how can one locate the Chinatown in the global village? Is or should there be a Chinatown in the global village? It seems that cultures of the world are diverging and converging at the same time. What is the role of localism in the trend of globalism? Taiwan's situation epitomises the media's impact on culture as the world strips itself of distinguishing characteristics

on the path to being a homogeneous global village. As more social engineering and cultural architecture take place in the village, media scholars and practitioners need to concern themselves with the environmental impact of information highway construction through the world's civilizations, with the global village as terminus. ■

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SHU-LING C, BERGGREEN PhD is associate professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Colorado, Boulder, USA.
Email: berggree@colorado.edu
