

Chapter 6

The Emerging Media Exchange in the Cultural Regionalization of Asia

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ABSTRACT

*This chapter focuses on the emerging media regionalization that takes place in Asia in 2000s. Japan and Hong Kong used to be the dominant cultural exporters commercializing their national media products to the nearby Asian markets. The recent market success of Korean wave and the gradual opening of Chinese market bring media regionalization to a different level. The chapter selects three cases to present the detailed image of cultural standardization in Asia's media regionalization. The first centers on the circulation of media text in television drama, emphasizing on Korean wave and the particular TV series, *Boys Over Flowers*. The second case discusses Taiwanese popular music and its influence on Mandopop in the Chinese communities. The last case studies the regionalization of online game from China. This case examines the localization of Chinese online game, *Westward Journey Online II*. Chinese online games initially begin with the imitation of Korean game but later form their national branding based upon a mixture of global and local cultural elements that speak to the largest group of online game consumers in the pan-Asian market.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years we have seen an increase of regional media exchange emerging in Asia. As the media systems in most Asian countries become liberalized and privatized, more media companies are able to export media products to nearby coun-

tries. Part of the reason for this growth in media regionalization is a developed system for media content delivery resulting from decades of cultural trade in the region. Another reason speeding up the cultural exchange in Asia is the advancement of new media technology, as satellite and the internet have provided convenient access for audiences to receive diverse programming from various sources (Iwabuchi, 2005). The other factor

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benefiting the frequency of media exchange is the improvement of Asian economies in the 2000s. As the size of the international media market in developed economies shrinks during the economic downturn, international advertisers begin to look for consumers in emerging markets. These factors altogether contribute to an active production and consumption environment that allows a self-sustainable economic community to form in Asia.

This chapter provides an analysis of emerging trends in Asian regionalization. The chapter examines the complex relationship that shapes the current expansion of popular culture in Asia. According to a multinational survey on Asian soft power in 2008, United States, Japan, China and South Korea are the four countries that have prevalent popular culture in Asia (East Asia Institute, 2008). On the one hand, as the United States benefits from the free market and open competition in the region, many Asian countries are strongly influenced by the US at the levels of policy, politics, economy and culture. On the other hand, we also witness Asian regionalism on the rise. The report shows that Japan, South Korea and China have increasingly established active interdependence that leads to a greater integration among nations in the Northeast Asia. A shifting hierarchy of cultural order in the region also emerges in the area of popular culture. Japan and Hong Kong used to be the dominant cultural exporters commercializing their national media products in the Asian markets. For instance, Japanese comic books have been routinely translated into the local languages in South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia and Taiwan (Otmazgin, 2008). A variety of Japanese TV programs are also widely apparent in many cities in East Asia (Keane & Moran, 2005). In addition to Japan, Hong Kong film and music also achieve wide circulation, in particular with Hong Kong film talents successfully crossing to Hollywood (Lo, 2001). The recent market success of *Korean wave* and the gradual opening of the Chinese market further bring this structure of media regionalization to a different level. There

is a shift of power in media production and the obvious is the case of *Korean wave*. The increasing popularity of Taiwanese music in China and the gradual commercialization of Chinese online games in Southeast Asia reveal an evolving state of Asian media culture that does not purely rest on any particular national territory in forming the collective identity of the region

The chapter looks into the hierarchy of this emerging media trend in the 2000s. The purpose is to use the theoretical concepts of cultural adaptation and hybrid regionalism to explain the evolving process of cultural convergence in the popular media of Asia. I argue that media regionalization in Asia should move beyond the discourse of national media in which global information flow means an encounter of the global to the local. The cultural phenomenon in Asia shows that certain Asian media industries are emerging in the region. These industries have formed strategies to increase the internationalization of their media content. Their Asia-centered approach demonstrates a new regional identity based upon power negotiation among national media at the regional level.

The chapter examines three cases to present a detailed image of cultural regionalization in Asia. Firstly, the paper focuses on the circulation of media text in television drama – with emphasis on *Korean wave* and the particular TV series, *Boys Over Flowers*. This television series is selected for analysis because the show provides a unique example on the marketability of Korean television drama in Asian markets. Secondly, I discuss Taiwanese popular music and its influence on Chinese Mandopop in China. This case focuses on the connectivity of Taiwanese popular music to Chinese market. Taiwanese popular music also reflects the complexity of cultural exchange in various Chinese communities. Thirdly, I study the regionalization of online games from China. This section examines the adaptation of foreign content in Chinese online games. The section uses the case of *Westward Journey Online II* to show a collective trend of cultural standardization

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