

## **Television Flows: A Regional Alternative?**

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With the impressive economic and technological development throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century, Asian countries rose strikingly in the world. Their rising powers have driven them to go abroad and cooperate more and more closely with other countries beyond their once self-contained borders in the field of media industry in order to capture larger overseas markets. As a result, a highly interactive dynamic figures outstandingly within the East Asian region, such as mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, and Taiwan.

East Asia, which is almost twice as big as Europe demographically, is both immense and lucrative, catching the attention of speculative investors. However, in spite of the impressive number of potential customers, the multifarious language usages within East Asia seem to overshadow this beautiful scenario. Although, generally speaking, there are only three main languages most commonly and broadly used (Chinese, Japanese and Korean), a great variety of sub-languages with divergent tonal and analytic structures further complicates the situation. In the case of China, encompassing 56 ethnic groups, there are more than 80 dialects still being used today. What is worse, these sub-languages are not interchangeable and mutually intelligible, so that even Chinese people cannot communicate with each other if they are from disparate geo-linguistic places.

However, thanks to the intertwined ancient history and ancestry between China, Japan, and Korea, the East Asian audiences are united literally by the sole common system of written characters—Zhongwen—rather than as fragmented as their European counterparts, especially in China, where the Mandarin is mandated and promoted as the official language by the Chinese government. This simplified “linguistic complexity” lays the very foundation for the regional media flows.

The special socio-cultural characteristics—the political power—is another feature that sets East Asia aside from other similar populated regions. Japan, among other East Asian countries, is the first that experienced rapid leap into major economic power from 1950s to 1980s through its post-war economic reform. Accordingly, its culture has long proliferated and been felt outside its border as early as late 1970s. Nowadays as the second wealthiest country in the world, Japan has positioned itself as the role model for Asia’s modernity, sets the trend, and Westernize and hybridize Asia according to its “American model.” With the close and constant contact with the West and its significant status in Asia, Japan shapes itself as a powerful negotiator with Western values through Asianess, representing not just a Westernized Asia, but also a both indigenized and Asianized West.

The 1990s was marked by the expansion of media globalization among East Asian nations, though with asymmetrical cultural relations between them. Their strengthened economy has led to the intensification of media and cultural flows and their exponential increase in circulation within the region. Broadly speaking, they are remunerative, expansive and multidimensional, with their own characteristics cultivating distinctive geo-linguistic-cultural markets. For instance, Hong Kong has a

more transnational and commercial media industry, serving a wide range of audiences, from dispersed Chinese expatriates to relative conservative mainland compatriots. As opposed to Hong Kong's liberal environment, mainland China's markets are nevertheless marked by national protectionism and authoritarianism, though at the same time driven by concerns of profitability to liberalize and commercialize itself in recent years. In the middle is Korea and Taiwan, which in the last decades enjoyed a more liberalized atmosphere with less political constrain owing to the government's recognition of the economic benefit brought by commercial media market. All in all, along with the relatively synchronous deregulation and liberalization, the similar Western colonial past, Japan's imperial attack, the written system alike, as well as shared religions and ideologies such as Buddhism and Confucianism all contribute to the imagined unification among East Asian members in the media sector, which is growing strikingly with technological advancement in Asia.

Take the state-owned media outlet *CCTV* as an example. Headquartered in Beijing, *CCTV* has a close and favorable nexus with the state, comprehensive distribution system, and large economic scale owing to the rapid rise of mainland's economy, rendering it the number one position among other national or local media institutions. On the other hand, its state-controlled institutional structure in turn obstructs it from absorbing new cultural forms and content from abroad and grassroots, which is most apparent in the aspect of news report. Nevertheless, taking advantage of mainland's highly potential domestic market, its authoritative status among "peers," and Beijing, as its media hub, which boasts naturally gifted political and economic resources, *CCTV* is able to spread out pervasively into other cities, "monopolize" local and national markets, and, therefore, guarantee its unshakeable standing.

In sum, once ignored and undervalued as East Asia was, its dynamic and free market nowadays makes it stand out in the world's limelight, awaking and magnetizing media investors within and outside its purview to pursue an alluring money-making dream. Be it phantasmagoric or not, one thing is sure: today's East Asia can no longer be left aside.