This book is an upper-level student sourcebook for contemporary approaches to media studies in Asia, which will appeal across a wide range of social sciences and humanities subjects including media and communication studies, Asian studies, cultural studies, sociology and anthropology. Drawing on a wide range of perspectives from media and communications, sociology, cultural studies, anthropology and Asian studies, it provides an empirically rich and stimulating tour of key areas of study. The book combines theoretical perspectives with grounded case studies in one up-to-date and accessible volume, going beyond the standard Euro-American view of the evolving and complex dynamics of the media today.

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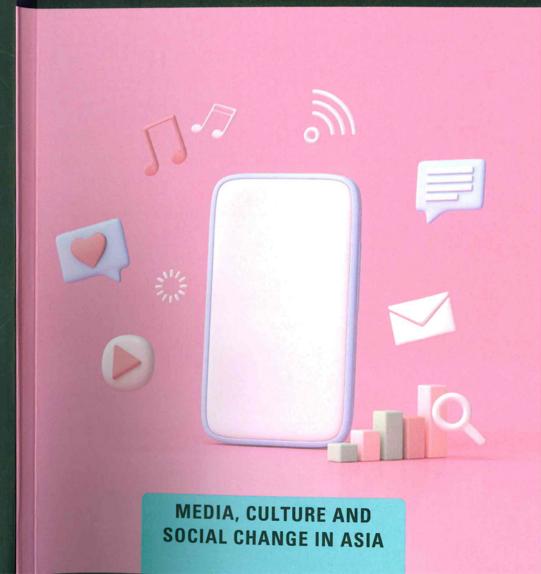**ASIAN STUDIES / MEDIA STUDIES**

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MEDIA, CULTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN ASIA

1

NETFLIX, THE DIGITAL WEST IN ASIA

New Models, Challenges and Collaborations

Anthony Fung and Georgia Chik

Asia has always been prone to the influences of Western and Anglo-Saxon entertainment and popular culture. Cultural globalization, if not cultural imperialism, and deglobalization continue to be issues in both academic and industrial debates (Fung 2013). Global popular culture, including Hollywood movies, American TV series and Western pop music, has become a part of Asian popular culture in different degrees of localization. In the present era of digitalization, online entertainment is no exception. From video platforms such as YouTube to music platforms such as Spotify, platformized digital entertainment has been predominant in Asia.

This chapter focuses on the growing number of digital media streaming platforms in Asia, particularly East Asia, including China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. Streaming video-on-demand (SVOD) services have become increasingly popular in the consumption of television content (Lobato 2018). Conglomerate platforms, such as Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime, have secured a significant market share in Western nations. In 2019, Netflix became the world's eighth-largest Internet market leader, recording a staggering 266% increase from the previous year (*Applify* 2020). In 2020, Netflix expanded its paid subscriptions in the Asia–Pacific region by 9.3 million, an increase of 65%, which outperformed Europe, the Middle East and Africa. In an interview, the company's chief operating officer and chief product officer, Greg Peters, acknowledged the potential of the Asian market (Iyengar 2021).

An intriguing question is whether Netflix, as a Western digital platform for the dissemination of popular culture and entertainment, could become another dominant form of cultural globalization. Would the presence of Western digital media streaming platforms in Asia become another form of global popular culture that competes with, challenges and overshadows local platforms? Could some forms of localization in which Western streaming platforms would

collaborate with Asian media productions create and advance the global media landscape? Are there variations in terms of willingness for collaboration among Asian cities and nations? As explained below, the presence of Netflix as the globalizing Western media has encountered strong obstacles. This implies that the argument about a simple, Western form of cultural globalization is not likely to happen in Asia. Rather, this chapter argues that a more viable model of cultural globalization/localization would involve collaboration between Western streaming platforms and Asian counterparts in terms of coproduction of content that is conducive to distributing Asian content globally while Western platforms can smoothly integrate their business in Asia.

Western Digital Media: Their Rise and Venture into the East

Streaming digital platforms such as Netflix are generally referred to as over-the-top (OTT) video, video-on-demand (VOD) or online television services that are considered the major competitors of traditional terrestrial (and mainly free) television services. Such platforms are also seen as a creative industry or communication technology that threatens traditional television. However, digital video platforms have also been viewed as bringing new hope to an unequal market because they are expected to operate more "democratically" and hence provide equal distributions of control to producers and distributors (Christian 2012). A theoretical argument concerns whether Netflix or other streaming video platforms can transform the present media ecology, such as in the USA, in which television networks are dominated by a few media giants. This argument could be particularly relevant in Asia, where the media ecology is controlled by either the state or an oligopoly.

OTT platforms provide users with the unique service of easy, fast and affordable access to a massive library of audiovisual content in a single platform. Instead of being bound by a fixed broadcasting schedule, the audience can freely explore the platform's rich library of audiovisual content. In theory, audiences are provided with a greater variety of programs, including those produced in foreign countries. However, "binge-watching," in which several episodes of audiovisual content are consumed in a single session, may be an emerging viewing pattern (Limov 2020). While some scholars have regarded the new viewing pattern as an "insulated flow" that pays tribute to broadcasting schedules (Perks 2015), others have found it to be a reflection of the viewer's autonomy and a fundamental attribute of VOD platforms (Merikivi et al. 2020).

On streaming television platforms, the audience's experience is enhanced by the ability to personally custom content based on recommendation systems that are driven by viewership data in conjunction with the use of algorithms and machine learning (Gomez-Uribe and Hunt 2015). Big data technology enables analyzing and predicting users' preferences based on their previous behavior patterns and peer data on audience taste (Thorson and Wells 2016). Based on viewers' behavior patterns, the production of Netflix's famous series *House of Cards* created a winning combination of actors, producers and themes. Furthermore, these platforms can be viewed on multi-screens so that viewers can access content using different devices, including personal computers, tablets and smartphones. Hence, the audience is not bound by the household television screen. This flexibility also means that streaming television platforms are able to explore a wide range of audience profiles to attract viewers who are not accustomed to watching traditional television at home. Such new consumption patterns also challenge traditional television, the ratings of which have declined in both the East and the West (*Phonetic House* 2020; Adgate 2021).

Nonetheless, the growth and development of Internet platforms are restrained by external factors, particularly the digital infrastructure that delivers the content through the Internet. An increasing number of reports have documented conflicts among Internet service providers (ISPs), carriers that distribute the content, and content providers in the USA (Friden 2015). Among all digital platforms, streaming platforms that require high volumes of data transmission pay huge fees to ISPs. Despite several lawsuits, Google, which is a dominant digital company, laid its own fiber optic cable for data transmission (*CBInsights* 2018). However, when transmissions reach local audiences such as in Asia, the accessibility of telecommunication infrastructures is still controlled by local companies or governments. The most obvious case is in China, where the Great Firewall and its proxy servers forbid the entry of all foreign streaming videos.

Unlike traditional media content, the import of which depends on content copyright, broadcast right, distribution or minimal localization of content to meet local legal regulations, if not censorship, streaming platforms that seek to enter the Asian market are challenged by the lack of accessibility. Moreover, because local audiences have access to a wider diversity of choices beyond their cultural and national geographical regions, OTT video could be perceived as a competitor by local media stakeholders. Thus, it is likely that Netflix's entry has not been without obstacles. Netflix first entered the Asian market in 2015 in Japan, and then in South Korea in 2016. In September 2020, there were 3.3 million paid household subscriptions in South Korea (Choudhury 2020), and in 2021, there were 5 million household subscriptions in Japan (Levy 2021).

Since 2016, Netflix has almost doubled its content catalog annually in South Korea (Choudhury 2020). It has also gained a strong foothold in the anime market in Japan, and it has collaborated with Japanese production companies to produce 40 new animes per year for a global audience (Levy 2021). In the first quarter of 2021, Asia accounted for approximately 10% of Netflix's total revenue (*Statista* 2021). Moreover, Asia has been perceived as the fastest-growing region in the world (Choudhury 2020). In addition to Netflix, HBO GO also has a presence in Asia, either through a direct business to consumer (B2C) subscription model or as a channel for local pay-TV subscriptions.

Competitions and Barriers in Japan, South Korea and China

The initial entry of Netflix into Asia was challenging as it was an external competitor for internal players. The main competition for Western streaming platforms comprises two types of local platforms. The first type was established by traditional television broadcasters as online extensions of their television services, which is prominent in regions. The second type was established by third-party, independent platforms that provide video-on-demand services. Currently, the business model of most Asian streaming video platforms derives income directly from subscriptions and indirectly from advertisements, both of which depend on the size of the viewership. Thus, Western OTT video platforms were perceived as potential competitors that would erode the local market share if the latter were perceived as a zero-sum game.

However, competition is regulated. Because of the lobbying of local incumbent broadcasters, local regulators have remained skeptical of the penetration of Western platforms. In free markets such as South Korea and Japan, the local operators complained that they were not on a level playing field because Asian broadcast regulators in general had stringent regulations on terrestrial TV broadcasting. Hence, programs on the digital platforms of local broadcasters were more restricted than those on Western digital platforms.

Regarding the comparative advantages of streaming video platforms in Western nations, it is likely that the library of television and film content appeals to audiences there. However, the appeal of a global library to audiences with cross-cultural appetites in the Asian market was largely discounted because prior to the emergence of digital platforms, Asian local television channels could have owned the broadcast rights of movies or arranged exclusive licensing agreements with local broadcasters for broadcast rights within a region. Because of existing content and the influence of local broadcasters, the entry of foreign platforms such as Netflix into Asia was not easy. In this research, Japan, South Korea and China, which are the biggest markets in East Asia, have been selected as case studies to facilitate an understanding of the digital media market in this region.

Japan's media scene is dominated by an oligopoly of five major media conglomerates that include both traditional and digital media. These market leaders include Asahi, Fuji, Nikkei, Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) and Yomiuri. In recent decades, they have expanded their business from newspaper publishing to television broadcasting. In addition to being the major distributor of media content, these giants are also the major producers and owners of media copyright content. Hence, these major conglomerates occupy a dominant and powerful position in the market. As communication technology advanced, they ventured into digital broadcasting and online delivery before the entry of Western platforms into the Asian market.

In Japan, the digital media trend is mostly a response to changing audience behaviors and preferences (Zhu 2019). The five major conglomerates have developed their respective online presence, providing the audience with access to

current and archival audiovisual content. While current content could be viewed for free, a premium structure is adopted for access to older and exclusive material. The market leader of the digital media platform is a digital site called TVer, which was established jointly by the five major media conglomerate groups in Japan, together with the top advertising agencies. Holding the copyright of all local audiovisual content, the platform provides easy and extensive access to the broadcasters' wealth of quality entertainment content. The latter has been a strong battlefront against foreign digital streaming platforms since they came in 2015. Netflix and Amazon Prime both entered Japan in 2015. Disney Plus is the newest addition to the market, entering the country in 2020 at the spike of the COVID-19 lockdown. In general, Western streaming platforms were selling their bulk of English-speaking content to a niche segment of the audience sector. For Western platforms without local content, the strategy is seen as an avoidance of head-on competition.

Similarly, in the case of South Korea, the traditional media industries are dominated by three incumbent broadcasters, namely MBC, SBS and KBS. South Korea is known for a mature and competitive audiovisual market, being home to reportedly some of the earliest OTT platforms, such as Pandora TV and Gom TV (Dwyer et al. 2018). The local digital media landscape was vibrant for a multitude of reasons. South Korea is among the countries with high Internet connectivity that greatly facilitates Internet viewing everywhere. The audience's familiarity with viewing video content on devices has resulted in favorable user habits (Park 2017). In light of their own strong competitiveness of Internet platforms (Hsu et al. 2016), South Korea is less stringent in regulations of OTT business. This has resulted in fierce competition in the OTT service market because of a high number of competitors, none of which has secured a predominant position (KCC 2019). Legacy broadcasters in South Korea have also established their online presence, with the three major terrestrial groups collaborating to establish and operate the video-on-demand platform POOQ in 2012.

As a latecomer, Netflix has had to fight a tough battle in entering the market. On one hand, the company's initial entry into South Korea was met with strong resistance by local filmmakers who feared the competition. In fact, Netflix had approached other major telecommunication carriers, such as SK Telecom and KT Corporation (Song 2019), which were also major providers of Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) services. These platforms were reluctant to collaborate with Netflix, and they objected to its market entry because they were attempting to be "the Netflix of Asia" (Rosati 2019). Eventually, Netflix entered South Korea through licensing agreements with local digital TV providers, such as D'LIVE in 2016 and then LG Uplus in 2018. The alliances were aimed at providing Netflix access to the market while enabling local counterparts to leverage the international platform to deliver services that competed with traditional media service providers (Lee and Kim 2018). Local providers that collaborated with Netflix were denigrated. The Korean Broadcasters Association, which criticized

LG Uplus for collaborating with Netflix because it endangered the local market, urged the government to respond (Kim 2018). Nonetheless, the alliance proceeded, and it became evident that Netflix's presence was not necessarily detrimental to the local market. Instead, in Korea, the number of Netflix users and the number of LG Uplus subscriptions both tripled from 2018 to 2019, which provided clear evidence that the market's demand and potential for SVOD services does not necessarily entail a zero-sum game.

On the other hand, the strong presence of local digital media offerings was also strategized to outwit foreign streaming competitors; bundles of telecommunication plans and OTT subscriptions were offered at lower prices (Dwyer et al. 2018). Hence, Netflix could not successfully enter the market until the successful lobbying and persuasion of local film companies could foster the acceptance of collaborations and coproductions. The shared interests of the international platform and the local film industry overrode the tension among the competitors because Netflix's presence was seen as promoting the general consumption of Korean dramas and movies (Stangarone 2019) which is discussed in the following section.

Western streaming platforms have not been able to enter the Chinese market because, in addition to the commercial pressure from local competitors, the government considers that all audiovisual content is ideological and therefore must be controlled (Fung 2016). First, local SVOD platforms had already gained a significant audience. In 2019, the top three video service platforms in China – Tencent Video, iQiyi and Youku – had secured an active monthly audience of over 40 million users (QuestMobile 2019). In addition, major broadcasters in China ventured into digital media platforms, either through creating their own platforms and applications or through collaboration with conglomerate platforms. Consequently, over 97.1% of central and municipal broadcasters in China had established an online presence (*People.cn* 2019).

Second, foreign streaming platforms are faced with Chinese market regulations. China is known for stringent control over foreign media, both politically and economically (Fung 2016). This is a matter of not only conflict regarding political ideologies but also protection of the country's local players, which are thus sheltered from foreign competition. The Chinese authorities have set a long-established import quota on foreign entertainment content on both private television and public cinema. The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), which was responsible for censoring media content including digital media, was abolished in 2018 and subordinated to the Communist Party of China Central Committee's Publicity Department. The latter then issued an online streaming quota for foreign audiovisual works; however, the details were not disclosed. Hence, the entry of foreign companies into the Chinese market is difficult, if not *de facto* impossible.

Therefore, foreign streaming companies must rely on local service providers to squeeze into the market. Machkovech (2015) identified two methods used to bypass the blockage – licensing the content to a Chinese distribution platform

and establishing a partnership with local counterparts. Netflix initially sought collaboration with Wasu Media Holdings, which is owned by the Internet giant Alibaba's founder Jack Ma. Eventually, in 2017, it sought an alliance with iQiyi, one of China's leading streaming platforms, and then with a subsidiary of the other Internet giant Baidu. However, only two days after the Netflix animated series *BoJack Horseman* began streaming on iQiyi, it was removed by regulators because of its cynical and black humor which was not approved by the Chinese censors (Liu 2017). However, Netflix's reaction to this incident was passive, and it continued to license other content as usual. As Kokas (2020) suggested, the platform company's willingness to comply with Chinese content control demonstrated the tension between upholding creative freedom and meeting the demands of shareholders in expanding into the alluring Chinese market. According to Netflix CEO Reed Hastings, entertainment companies are required to make compromises (Cox 2016) and in practice, apparently, Netflix is willing to follow local regulations, norms and policies.

In summary, the initial entry of Western streaming players was based on a largely unsuccessful "competition strategy" that led to conflicts with local players and regulators. First, local competitors had distinct, long-standing advantages over Western latecomers. Second, China's protective policies and regulations were incontestable barricades to the direct entrance of Netflix. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the cultural factor of language among Asian audiences weakened the attractiveness of Western content presented in a foreign language. Finally, as Netflix began to blend in with the local media ecology and received the implicit consent of local regulatory authorities, Western streaming platforms such as Netflix sought collaboration with their counterparts in the region.

Toward a Collaborative Partnership

When digital platforms compete in the "red sea," they fight to gain access to a fixed number of audience members. In contrast, Western streaming video platforms explore a "blue ocean" by collaborating with local incumbent broadcasters. In South Korea, at least, the market is expanding. Ted Sarandos, the chief content officer of Netflix, explained that the company did not attempt to distribute Hollywood content worldwide but to bring the content of different countries to a global audience (Spangler 2018). This implies at least two levels of collaboration. The first is the creation of content that targets the audience's interests while leveraging the unique features of the platforms. Second, as a form of partnership or alliance, Western streaming platforms collaborate with local platforms and broadcasters in content distribution.

Netflix has entered into partnership agreements with various local Asian producers, including those in China, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Taiwan and India, to coproduce localized movies, dramas and animations that are distributed on Netflix. In some cases, the series is screened exclusively or initially on Netflix. Through collaborating with local producers, Netflix creates content that

suits the preferences, tastes and languages of local audiences. This strategy also attracts new audiences in addition to audiences that demand English-language content. Some examples include South Korea's television series *Crash Landing on You* (2019), *Sweet Home* (2020) and film *Okja* (2017); Japan's *Alice in Borderland* (2020), *Switched* (2018) and *Erased* (2016); Taiwan's *Nowhere Man* (2019) and *Triad Princess* (2019) and Indonesia's *The Night Comes for Us* (2018). Through such collaborations, Netflix leverages its advantages as a global platform on the local market. Coproductions also enable Netflix to invite the best local talent to create shows that are broadcast worldwide.

In Japan, Netflix's strategy has had an increasing focus on the purchase and commissioning of anime series and motion pictures, taking advantage of the country's fame as the world's animation, comics and games (ACG) powerhouse. This strategy aided the platform company in its ongoing competition with other global SVOD platforms, particularly Disney Plus. As a result, Netflix, the foreign platform, facilitated the reverse flow of Asian content across the globe.

South Korean dramas had already become a widely received genre in Asian countries. Netflix's productions in South Korea also reach audiences in other markets. Between 2015 and 2020, Netflix invested over $700 million in South Korea, including the establishment of two production facilities in proximity to Seoul (James 2021). As previously mentioned, local broadcasting companies in South Korea did not welcome international competitors, whereas Netflix's strategy of coproduction was approved. The influx of capital not only has increased local content production but also has created job opportunities in the local industry. For example, the series *Kingdom*, which was Netflix's first Korean drama, was record-breaking in terms of production costs for non-US original content (Baek 2019). The series has helped to convey Korean content to a global audience through the platform's international reach (Stangarone 2019). Another example is the investment in talent through providing training workshops with local partners in filmmaking and scriptwriting. Previous collaborators include the Korea Animation Producers Association, Thailand's National Federation of Motion Pictures and Malaysia's Digital Economy Corporation. Netflix's experience in Australia provides a parallel example. Despite initial protests against potential competition engendered by Netflix, local producers have benefited from the platforms' commissions and collaborations, which have also provided funding opportunities (Cunningham and Scarlata 2020).

The successful collaboration between Netflix and South Korea's film industry is exemplified by the action-adventure movie *Okja*, which was released in 2017 and directed by South Korean director Bong Joon-Ho, who won an Academy Award for Best Director for *Parasite* (2019). The film was funded by Netflix, created by a transnational production team and distributed internationally on the platform within a month of its premiere at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, where it competed for the Palme d'Or. When Netflix's logo appeared on the screen, the audience booed to show its disapproval; however, the high quality of the film eventually earned a four-minute standing ovation (Lewis

2020). The audience's initial reaction demonstrated the continuous tension between local media and Netflix productions. Similar reactions occurred in South Korea. *Okja* was boycotted by three major theater chains in South Korea – CGV, Lotte Cinema and Megabox. They considered that Netflix's practice of simultaneously releasing the film online and in theaters was a serious threat to their established business model. The confrontation significantly curtailed the film's local box office receipts, thus shedding light on the local debate regarding the existing monopoly of preexisting players (Lee 2020: 157). At present, based on successful cases in terms of reputation and popularity, it seems that, commercially, Netflix has opened the door for the Korean market. Perhaps it has also taken advantage of the international praise for Korean entertainment by both worldwide distributors and coproducers. However, whether the model of collaboration is acceptable as a long-term strategy for local media and producers remains to be seen.

Last is the tricky case of China. In a context where China retains tight control over foreign cultural content, Netflix's strategic collaboration and licensing of content with Baidu's iQiyi has been akin to walking a tightrope. It seems that the collaboration will continue under a low profile. When Netflix announced its ambitious global expansion strategy in 2016, China was not on the list. More relevant in the long term is China's attitude toward the coproduction of content. This scheme is open to Netflix and many other producers worldwide. In October 2020, the coproduced animation film *Over the Moon* was launched on Netflix and later in China. Although the box office reception in China was not satisfactory, the film was applauded for featuring Chinese culture, which was a very different reception from that of Disney's live-action film *Mulan* (Shen 2020). CNBC wittily commented that Netflix indeed has a strategy in China; it is simply outside China. Instead of attempting to climb over the regulatory barricade, Netflix adopted an expansive strategy to target millions of Mandarin-speaking Chinese audiences outside the country. Netflix has been licensed to distribute popular television series such as *The Untamed* and *Empresses in the Palace*. The series has been well acclaimed internationally, which has contributed to the flow of Asian cultural content into previously unexplored territory.

Digital Entertainment in Unfamiliar Times

Based on the cases of South Korea, Japan and China, evidence suggests that for Netflix and other Western streaming video platforms in Asia, collaboration with local production houses and media is a viable strategy that minimizes opposition and reduces controversy. Coproductions of videos in Asian languages, which are either streamed only on Netflix or shared with incumbent media or platforms, at least in Japan and South Korea, have met with positive audience responses. Although there is no concrete evidence that digital West–Asia coproductions foster diversity or creativity, the ever-increasing popularity of Netflix in Asia implies that new hybrid forms, tastes and aesthetics, to various degrees, have

been well received by local audiences who were used to consuming only locally made productions and global cultural products such as Hollywood movies.

From the point of view of local media, in the wake of declining TV viewership in Asia, collaboration with Netflix is a new way of retaining young audiences and increasing viewership and advertising revenues. Hybridized productions also have the potential to open a new avenue for Asian language films to reach Asian and Western audiences in global markets. Such avenues not only create commercial and market value but also possibly enhance Asian cultural values. In shifting from inward-looking strategies, many Asian media could broaden their global reach through Netflix. Hence, as an American platform company, Netflix not only globalizes American culture but also creates "reverse globalization" or contra-flow media, which enables Asian productions to enter the global market.

As a matter of fact, it has been demonstrated that the USA and Britain are driving the phenomenon of "reverse globalization" as a way to tackle the crisis of neoliberalism (Zhang and Gu 2021). It is, however, not a typical case of reverse globalization which people usually refer to – a reverse flow of culture from the East to the West or reverse Americanization (van Elteren 2011). Suffice to say, the East-to-West flow of content is now being seen; it is no longer a one-way flow of content, information or capital. This can be understood as compensation for Asia as a result of Netflix's Asian penetration. But the *de facto* transmission of content is totally in the hands of Netflix with its global platform. Besides, the content made is a hybrid coproduction between Netflix and Asia, not purely Asian-produced cultural content. To be more exact, this "reverse globalization," if anything, should be understood as a reversed flow of cultural content managed by the West or American counterparts without the participation of the East.

Hybrid coproductions have been continued during the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. While theaters and public performances have been closed, and lockdowns and quarantining have grounded audiences in their homes, the demand for digital streaming entertainment indoors has surged. According to an estimate by Nielsen USA's media team, media consumption had increased by 60%. Statistics in South Korea, Japan, China and Hong Kong indicated strong increases in mobile app use, the need for entertainment and the rise in media advertising revenue (Nielsen 2020; *Nikkei Asia* 2020). In many Asian countries, such as South Korea and Japan, the market requires an increasing amount of content to meet increasing audience demands. Increasing demands for online entertainment, as well as new home-based audiences, have led to an unprecedented opportunity for digital media platforms to invest in innovative collaborations and creative coproductions.

Some nations still have embargoes on Netflix and other Western streaming platforms, although their citizens are exposed to global information. It is likely that these governments will be subjected to pressure "from below." In early 2021, for instance, Chinese authorities cracked down on the country's allegedly largest copyright piracy site, YYeTs. Such sites provide free access to copyrighted video content, and they are financed primarily through advertisements. Despite

its illegality, YYeTs attracted a significant amount of traffic because it carried content that was not available elsewhere. Netizens have raised a perceptive question: If foreign content had been legally available in the first place, they would not have to resort to infringing and illegitimate venues. This argument is perhaps a clear call for authorities to allow the distribution of foreign content. Instead of forbidding them, allowing collaboration between Western digital content platforms and their local counterparts might be a temporary, if not a synergic, means of responding to audience needs.

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2

THE SHIFTING TERRAIN OF ASIA'S TELEVISION LANDSCAPE

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In our previous work "Media Imperialism Revisited: Some Findings from the Asian Case" (Chadha and Kavoori 2000), we explored the relevance of the concept of media imperialism in Asia against the backdrop provided by the initial emergence of satellite television in the region. Analyzing how nations across the continent engaged with the growth of foreign television content delivered by satellite-based services such as Star TV that had been established in the early 1990s, we made the case that though the forces of media globalization had brought Western media programming into the continent on a large scale for the first time, local media landscapes had resisted being overwhelmed by it due to the workings of a complex trifecta represented by national gate-keeping regimes, competition from local media as well as audience preference for culturally relevant programming. In other words, we argued that even though contemporary political discourse all over Asia was replete with references to the grave dangers posed by Western media, there was little empirical evidence to support pervasive assertions regarding the destruction of indigenous cultural subjectivities and media production.

In this chapter, we revisit this terrain again, justified on the grounds that Asian television landscapes are now more accessible to transborder media flows than ever before, with satellite television service availability and penetration increasing steadily all over the continent, including in countries such as Myanmar, Mongolia and Vietnam that have come to represent the newest frontiers for growth and expansion (Galace 2012). We begin by re-examining the factors – national gate-keeping policies, local competition and audience preferences – that we originally identified as key to limiting foreign, mainly Western, media flows, in order to evaluate their relevance in current Asian mediascapes, followed by tracing larger trends related to media flows in the region.