

14th AMIC Annual Conference

Beijing, China, 18.-21.07.2005

"Media in Society: Transformations and Transitions" was the title of the 14th Annual Conference of the "Asian Media Information and Communication Center", co-organized by the Communication University of China. It was held in July 2005 at Kunlun Hotel in Beijing, China. During the four days, a variety of topics were discussed in plenary and parallel sessions including media education, media ethics and alternative media such as weblogs. The key focus, however, was on the impact of the media on societies across Asia, and how media organizations are transforming in response to changes in the political, economical and technological landscape, particularly in Mainland China, where the media face many difficulties.

The quality of both the presentations and discussions was very high which is not surprising because the "Asian Media Information and Communication Center", located at the "School of Communication and Information" of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, is one of the most prestigious and best equipped institutions in the field of communication. It was established in 1971 with the support of the government of Singapore and the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation which also sponsored this annual conference. The charity-registered organization is chaired by Ang Peng Hwa, supported by an executive committee including Eddie Kuo and Arun Mahizhnan, and managed by Secretary-general Indrajit Banerjee. All of them have been researching for several years on communication in Asia and gave good impressions of their lines of thought and the results of recent analysis. Very impressive was the presence of John Lent who had contributed outstanding publications about news flow in the 1970s but spoke this time about the relevance and meaning of comic art, another subject in which he has been specializing for some years. He argued that comics reflect the opinions of ordinary citizens in extremely creative manner, but cartoonists become fewer because many media companies prefer buying cheap drawings from syndicated agencies instead of employing artists.

Although the overwhelming majority of the more than two hundred participants from all over the world are related to universities, the conference was not a dry scientific gathering. In fact, it was very lively and inspiring. David Plott for instance, who had long served as deputy chief editor at the *Far Eastern Economic Review* but recently took up a teaching position at the University of Hong Kong, explained the current situation of journalists. Also Cherian George, whose book about "The Air-Conditioned Nation" Singapore is very popular, shared his previous working experiences at *The Straits Times* newspaper. In a plenary session about youth and media he even presented the progressive agenda of a newspaper for children he has recently launched: "We practice values-driven journalism, always putting children's needs ahead of commercial self-interest."

If there is anything one can criticize, then that this conference just takes place annually, not more often. The next one, however, will be in summer 2006 in Penang, Malaysia. Further information about it can be found on time at www.amic.org.sg.

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