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CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS IN TELEVISION: THE SINGAPORE EXPERIENCE

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1. RESEARCH CONTEXT

1.1. Television and Reality

Over the last decades, the question of the impact which mass media in general and television in particular have or may have on societies and individuals has developed into an issue of permanent concern for politicians, social scientists, and the general public alike. In contrast to the commonly held belief that media have a direct effect on attitudes and behaviour, most scholars have become more cautious and describe media as factors in socialization and as mediators of value orientations and world views. Media are regarded as instruments of enculturation, which serve primarily to reinforce the prevailing cultural patterns and thus stabilize and integrate society mainly through the reinforcement of existing value orientations.

Cultural anthropologists, in particular, regard media - like other societal artefacts - as giving material expression to the symbolic patterns of meaning of a culture, of a social system. Media content, however, is not a mirror-like portrait of all structural elements, political views, or actual events of the 'real' world. It is rather a reflection of the dominant value structures of a specific society or even only of the more direct communicators, i.e. those who either produce or have political control over media content.

From about 1970 on, media researchers have increasingly argued not to conceive of media as reflections of reality only, but as defining and creating reality, as providing a construction of reality. The description of media as 'definers of reality' does not only mean that they selectively inform about events but also that they, at the same time, offer interpretations about these matters as well as, at least implicitly, prescriptions for reacting to them. Media provide cognitive frames of reference for the perception and interpretation of social and other phenomena. Because of the dominant position of television among the media of today, meaning that it "tends to articulate the negotiated central concern of its culture", one of the main characteristics of

its messages has been defined as that of "socio-centrality" (Fiske/Hartley 1978, p.89).

Studies in modern mass communication often state as a fact the cultural determination of television systems and programmes, but seldom demonstrate and establish the specific manner and manifestation of a cultural influence - apart from a rather global juxtaposition of US American and non-American cultures of European or Third World countries. What is usually lacking are thorough analyses of the content and form of television programmes and their relation to the specific socio-cultural and socio-political context in which they appear.

1.2. Singapore and the Issue of Identity

A discussion of mass media in developing countries or regions almost inevitably turns to the issue of media, tradition, and change and to the role which television plays in the preservation, formation (and deformation) of cultural and national identities. In Singapore, these questions are rendered even more complex since Singaporeans are faced with the problem of

- the simultaneous identity as a member of a culture, the centre of which is outside Singapore, and as a Singaporean, as well as
- living side by side with other Singaporeans, who are supposed to have the same national identity, but different cultural identities.

The reason for this peculiar situation lies in the historical and political development of Singapore. When modern Singapore - as the official story describes it - was founded by Raffles in 1819, the island was virtually uninhabited, apart from some 150 Malays from Johore, Chinese gambier planters, and *orang laut*. The 2.5 million Singaporeans of today are either immigrants or, by now, descendants of immigrants, who came to Singapore either as a result of colonial manpower policies or attracted by the opportunities the new entrepot port and trading place seemed to offer. Using the official ethnic classification, which disregards further possibly relevant subdivisions, about 76 % of the population are Chinese, while 15 % are classified as Malays and about 7 % as Indians. With a view to the ethnic set-up of the surrounding countries, Singapore hence has been described as a Chinese island in a Malay sea. During the struggle for independence in the 1950s, Singapore - because of its limited land area and its lack of natural resources - was not, even by its own politicians, intended to become an independent nation of its own, but a state within the Federation of Malaysia. This idea, however, became reality only during the years from 1963 to 1965. Because of political incompatibilities, Singapore was forced to leave the Federation in 1965 and to become an independent sovereign nation, which - contrary to many expections - has proved its viability and vitality till today.

It has been the policy of the Singapore government since that time to create in the population a Singaporean national consciousness, while at the same time

maintaining a consciousness of the cultural origin and traditions of each ethnic group. In a simplified manner, one could say that the cultural identity of a Singaporean has its most obvious manifestations in his language (Chinese, Malay, or Indian), while the shared national identity is founded on the English language. Hence the typical Singaporean has been described as bicultural (Clammer 1981); this is similar if not identical with what Chan/Evers (1973) have termed the "double identity" of the Singaporean population.

The reference to language, however, is not enough to satisfactorily answer the question: What is the substance, the uniqueness of this cultural or national identity? A number of authors have attempted to contribute to an answer (e.g., Benjamin 1976; Chan/Evers 1973; Chew 1976; Clammer 1981; Hassan 1976). Most of them make reference to the composite elements "Asian/traditional" and "Western/modern" and the respective value orientations. The Asian element is usually not specifically defined but taken for granted and just referred to as the traditional cultural background of the distinct ethnic group the individual belongs to. The majority of authors focus on the second element "Western/modern". A closer analysis, however, reveals that what is often termed "Western" are, in fact, simply secondary virtues of industrial achievement-oriented societies, pragmatic and "highly universalistic values that are not connected with any particular cultural tradition" (Chan/Evers 1973, p.315). Hassan (1976) regards Singapore's society best characterised by the Transition Syndrome, which he defines as "a set of interrelated attitudinal and behavioural orientations which emphasis change and progress as a highly desirable end" (p.340). An appropriate description of the "Singaporeanness" not just of the Singaporean population as a whole but also of the distinct cultural subgroups would have to identify the underlying value structure of the modern or transition domain as well as that of the more traditional ethnic-cultural background. Values, however, cannot be observed and analysed p e r s e, they become manifest via beliefs and expectations in customs, institutions, roles etc.:

> "Values are communicated, both explicitly and implicitly, through symbolic behaviour" (Sitaram/Haapanen 1979, p.153).

If it is true, firstly, that television in societies with a developed technological mass communication system occupies the centre of the culture, and, secondly, that the problem of national and cultural identities is a central issue in multilingual and multiethnic Singapore, then this issue should be reflected in the programmes telecast in Singapore. Hence the research questions for the present study can be defined as follows:

- What are the behavioural patterns, attitudes and value orientations implied or explicitly communicated by the television programmes in Singapore?
- What in the television programmes can be explained as an expression or as symbolic manifestation of cultural and national identities in Singapore?

A thorough investigation of these questions cannot get by without a general discussion of basic issues like the following:

- paradigms and results of media research,
- the social definition/construction of reality,
- national and cultural identity,
- ethnicity and cultural heritage,
- language and culture,
- Asian and Western values, or
- tradition and modernization.

These issues indeed form an important part of the background and a framework for the study as a whole and will be dealt with in the final manuscript.

1.3. Assumptions about Television

In an attempt to partly make up for the shortcomings of this part-manuscript and in order to connect the following analysis to the everyday experience of the reader, I shall start from a number of assumptions, or better: myths about television. Although the examples and quotations are taken from Singapore, these assumptions show very little variation throughout the world and are the common property of average viewers, politicians, and media people alike. Starting from the general and moving towards the more specific, one may find the following sequence of assumptions:

(a) Television as such exerts a "profound influence on human behaviour, attitude and values" (Dhanabalan 1981); it "has greater impact than any other media" (Report of the Committee to Review Censorship 1981, para 21).

(b) The impact of television is dangerous: "the television medium has an insidious way of influencing values and behaviour patterns" (The Mirror, 18 June 1979); this is particularly true for children and hence all parents have to "break the television habit and help your children to cultivate the reading habit" (Tay Eng Soon 1981).

(c) In Singapore, the bad influence is due mainly - if not only - to programmes imported from the West or oriented towards the West, which are "primarily designed to cater for pleasure, excitement and entertainment - depicting Western standards and values" (Lee Koon Choy 1979) and which introduce "undesirable alien values and permissiveness" as well as "deviant social values and behaviour" (Chen, Straits Times, 19 November 1982). Violence and sexual permissiveness, in particular, are the catchwords.

If, considering these dangers, one begins to wonder why the government allows - even runs itself - the television service in Singapore, one comes across a similar selection of positive assumptions:

(d) Television (in particular, but not only, in its local productions) is an effective and important instrument to "inject the desired values and moral standards" (Ong Teng Cheong, The Mirror, 1 March 1980, p.4); it can, in particular, contribute to "the task of inculcating the correct social and moral values among the younger generation" (Dhanabalan, Sin Chew Jit

Poh, 9 August 1982).

(e) Television in Singapore is especially "committed to, and participating in, the complex task of nation building" (Chai/Mohan 1973, p.26); its programmes are to contribute "to the enlightenment of the nation" (Zainab Rahim 1981, p.202). This function of "enabling the people to identify closely with the nation" (Ow 1979, p.140) is one which television shares with radio and the other mass media.

(f) Television, like radio, will "explain the need for the process of adjusting and adapting to modern living" and has already played "a positive role in promoting an understanding of and right attitudes towards social changes in this nation" (Ow 1979, p.142).

(g) Only locally produced television programmes "can reflect the cultural background, the values and attitudes, the lifestyles and pattern of behaviour of our people, and capture the pulse and tempo of our society" (Ow 1979, p.143).

(h) In the unique Singapore environment, television programmes are "to reflect our cultural heritage" (Straits Times, 14 January 1983), "to create sympathy for the various strands in our cultural heritage" (Chai/Mohan 1973, p.14) and to cater for "the different and varied needs of different ethnic groups" (Ow 1979, p.141). This is considered done mainly through telecasts in the four official languages.

Before one can reasonably study the impact of television programmes on an audience or make well-founded assumptions about the quality of their influence, one should first take a closer look into what is there to make an impact. Since that has hardly ever been attempted, this study should be regarded as a first step to find out whether the popular assumptions just mentioned can be corroborated from an analysis and description of a full week's telecast. I hasten to add that I am concerned only with the programmes as they are telecast in Singapore, not with the programmes as they might have looked before they passed the auditioning panel nor with 'Western', 'Hong Kong' or 'Asian' programmes as a whole.

2. TELEVISION IN SINGAPORE: INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

Before turning to the television programmes themselves, it is necessary to shortly outline their institutional framework, since this influences the selection and composition of programmes.

Singapore has a well-developed television service within the overall structure of an equally well-developed mass media system. According to the available data from the Department of Statistics, the government issued a total of 424,089 television licenses in 1982. The population of Singapore is estimated at 2.47 million in mid 1982. According to the Media Index - General Report 1982,

published by Survey Research Singapore, about 96 % of the population live in households possessing television. Over 50 % watch television everyday and some other 30 % three to four times a week. These data equal figures on media availability and utilization in the industrialized countries in the West.

In a media structure which throughout is characterized by a strong and unconcealed government guidance broadcasting "has always been, except for its initial years, a government 'business' " (Ow 1979, p. 135). The political rationale behind the development of broadcasting in Singapore has been described in detail by Nair (1980) and by Ow (1979). Although the television programmes from Malaysia can be received in Singapore, the two television channels in Singapore itself are operated by the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC)[2]. SBC, a semi-governmental statutory board, was established in February 1980 to replace the former Radio and Television Singapore (RTS), which had functioned as a government department within the Ministry of Culture. The government made it quite clear, however, that the main reason for this conversion was an organisational one, viz. to allow for greater flexibility in recruitment, salary scales and promotion of staff, and for greater financial autonomy. In all other aspects, the government retains its direct control over the broadcasting organisation.

The functions of SBC, given in the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation Act in the by now universal formula as "disseminating information, education and entertainment" have to be translated into more specific terms. Prominent among the often quoted desired features of broadcasting in Singapore is that the programmes contribute to a positive national development and that they cater for the different cultural subpopulations. Hence the two television channels transmit programmes in all four languages: English, Chinese (Mandarin), Malay and Indian (Tamil). Other than with radio, where four separate language channels are in operation, the two television channels have to blend the different language programmes. This is done in such a way that Channel 5 transmits mainly the bulk of the English plus the Malay programmes, while Channel 8 telecasts the Chinese, the Tamil, and the rest of the English language programmes.

Most programmes telecast in Singapore are imported from other countries. In order to assure that these programmes do not run counter to the desired direction of television in Singapore, they - like all other imported media products - have to pass a censoring panel. The Report of the Review Committee on Censorship (popularly known as Jayakumar Report) has argued - and this argument has been commonly accepted - that because of "the generally recognised impact which television has upon people, both young and old" (1981, p. 10), television censorship has to be - and is - at least as stringent as that for cinema theatres. Television programmes, however, are not vetted by the Board of Film Censors. SBC has its own auditioning panel, which censors every imported programme before it is telecast. Data for 1980 show - and there is no reason to assume that this has changed - that the main reasons for cuts or ban were, in that order, (1) public morals, (2) politics, and (3) crime and

violence, or to use more popular labels: sexual permissiveness/pornography, communist propaganda, and violence.

3. METHODS OF STUDY

The source to be analysed is evident: the programmes of the two channels of the only television station in Singapore, i.e. the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation. Since television stations all over the world usually have a very strict programme structure, in which one day differs from the next but in which the same weekdays over the months are very similar, it was held that each weekday should be represented. In view of the time limitations of the project, a full week also seemed to be the maximum, which could be handled. Although it was hence not possible to select a sample which - in the strict sense of empirical research methodology - can be regarded as representative of Singapore's television programmes, care was taken to make the sample as typical of the average Singaporean television programme as possible:

- Considering the month of analysis, August was ruled out, since the extensive coverage of events related to the National Day for more than two weeks results in a very obvious deviation from the average programme. September, in comparison, could be considered normal.
- A "constructed week" procedure was used (cf. Jones/Carter 1959), in which a sample of seven different weekdays was selected during the period from 10 to 25 September 1982. During this period, every third day was selected.
- In order to further identify deviations from the normal programme structure, the programme schedule of each selected day was compared with the published schedule of the three other same weekdays in September 1982. The comparison was made with respect to overall structure, time allocated to the four languages, and type and content of programmes. No major deviation was found.

During the seven selected days, all television programmes (with the exception of the special school television programmes) of both SBC's channels were video-recorded. In this way, they were available for easy replay and reference.

It is relatively easy to describe the programme structure and time allocation with respect to languages, imports, types and 'open' content, using categories which allow for easy quantification. These statistical data offer already some interesting insights. The main questions of this study, however, which refer to cultural differences, are not adequately answered by neither statistical data nor by a quantitative assessment of manifest content in the tradition of content analysis. What I am interested in is not just a description of surface events but rather an analysis of these events with respect to some underlying structure or pattern which may be regarded as culture-specific,

as ways of categorising and describing the world by which one culture may be discriminated from others. Since behavioural norms, world views, and values are usually not expressed explicitly, i.e. in manifest content, but implicitly, i.e. in latent content, a heuristic approach with qualitative interpretative methods is required. Although, of course, this approach may be termed 'content analysis', it seems important to stress the differences to what is usually described by this label as a method in empirical social research. The difficulties in following standard procedures of content analysis concern, in particular, the use and definition of categories and of units of analysis.

For the purpose of this study, one has to look at the 'message' of television programmes. This message may be inferred from different levels of signification of content items. And here it is difficult and unduly restrictive to apply a fixed set of narrowly defined categories, which comply with the requirements of being mutually exclusive, exhaustive, and derived from a single classification principle (Holsti 1969, pp.95 ff.). Neither the definition of categories through generic concepts nor the description of all elements coming under one category are viable options, given the purpose of this study. It seemed more appropriate instead, to describe the scope of categories, and to specify some of the relevant and characteristic elements. Such an approach causes a practical methodological problem: the use of this kind of category depends, heavily and unavoidably, on the existing mental categories and on the sensitivity and sensibility of the analyst. In an attempt to at least partly counterbalance a personal or cultural bias, all programmes were viewed and analysed at least twice: once by a research assistant from the relevant ethnic/language group and once by me.

A similarly exact definition as for categories of analysis is usually required for the units to be analysed. For the purpose of this study, it is apparently easy to define a unit as "a programme item as it is produced, announced, and hence generally perceived as a reference label by the audience"; and so the first analysis concentrates on units according to this definition. The matter, however, becomes more complex with the introduction of the concept of "television as flow" as put forward by Williams (1974), since this involves a shift from recording units to context units (Holsti 1969). While in all other media and communication systems before broadcasting the essential items were discrete (they were offered as a sequence of specific events), the television experience of today is one of flow. This explains why the viewer tends to stay with whatever channel he began watching (this recognition has direct consequences for programming, in particular for advertising policies), and why it is so difficult for many viewers to switch their television sets off. Media research to date has hardly been influenced by this concept, which does not regard the published sequence of discrete programme units as the most important characteristic, but rather the sequence transformed by the inclusion of another kind of sequence (first, by the broadcasters and, then, by the viewers). The project described here will in its final report include such an attempt to identify and describe the relation and interrelation

of programme items in the flux of a particular evening's telecast.

4. PROGRAMME STRUCTURE: A QUANTITATIVE VIEW

The following quantitative analysis and description is based on the recording of seven weekdays. It describes the programmes as they have been really telecast and deviates slightly from all printed programme schedules, since it takes into account those changes which occur without prior announcements[3].

The following statistics, which break down the total air time into time-slots allocated to different languages, programme types etc., do not take into account those "hidden" programme types which are never published, although they are telecast each day and take up a considerable amount of air time. They comprise commercials, internal publicity of the television station, national policy messages, and presentation of national symbols. Taking these programmes statistically correct into account would have required an enormous time-taking effort, since these programmes, in particular commercials, are quite unevenly distributed, so that some popular dramas are surrounded and interrupted up to five times by over 40 advertisements, while other programmes are not affected at all. Time for these programme types has been taken cumulatively but nevertheless carefully. Exact timing of these short items (often below 20 seconds), however, is prone to marginal errors.

4.1. Types of Programmes: Categories

The categories used to describe the different types of television programmes are not fully mutually exclusive. It is not always easy to separate one category from another. The ensuing difficulties in unambigously describing actual television programmes by means of these categories is enhanced by the fact that an individual programme may contain elements which fall into different categories. In each case, however, it has been attempted to use that category which either describes the main focus of the programme or the terms in which it is planned, presented, and hence generally perceived by the audience. Furthermore, in the following descriptions an effort has been made to identify potential cases of ambiguity and to indicate relations and distinctions between categories.

The following listing of programme types does not constitute an order of priority or importance attached to the different types of programmes. The categories are grouped in such a way that numbers 1 to 5 may be described as having their main focus on information transmission. In contrast, categories number 6 to 10 have their main focus on what is traditionally labelled "entertainment". Categories number 11 to 14 refer to "hidden" programme items which as a rule are not printed in any television schedule, but which

nevertheless often give a distinct colouring to an evening's telecast.

1. News
2. Documentary/Feature/Magazine
3. Opinion/Discussion
4. Education
5. Local Information
6. Children's Programme
7. Drama
8. Sports
9. Music
10. Show
11. Commercial
12. National Policy Message
13. Publicity (TV Internal)

4.2. Programmes of the Week: An Overview

Television transmission hours in the recorded week total 115 : 40 hours. Of this total air time 72 : 50 hours, or over 63 % were transmitted on Channel 5, while the figures for Channel 8 are 42 : 50 hours, or 37 %. Hidden in the total transmission time are the unannounced programme items of commercials (8 : 22 hours), SBC internal publicity (1 : 57 hours) and national symbols (1 : 02 hours), which together amount to 11 : 21 hours, or 9.8 % (i.e. as much as "News") of transmission time. Leaving these unannounced pieces out of consideration, the total number of programme items telecast in the recorded week was 203. This number still comprises the two programme items of Your Shopping Guide (one in English, one in Chinese), which present only sequences of SBC produced commercials and hence are elsewhere in this study included in the category "Commercial".

A listing of these programmes according to programme type reveals that by far the largest group in terms of air time allocated is (adult) drama followed by children's programmes and shows (Table I).

A more detailed breakdown according to language is given in the following table II.

Table I

Programme Type	Number of Programme Items	Percentage of Total Air Time
1 Drama	53	44.8
2 Children	44	14.3
3 Show	14	11.6
4 Documentary	29	10.7
5 News	35	9.6
6 Sports	5	3.2
7 Opinion	4	2.9
8 Education	6	1.6
9 Local Information	6	0.7
10 Music	5	0.4

Table II

Type of Programme	Air Time in Each Language (Hrs:Min)				Total Air Time of Programme Type	
	English	Chinese	Malay	Tamil	Hrs:Min	%
News	4:05	2:20	2:20	2:20	11:05	9.6
Documentary	9:35	1:15	1:00	0:25	12:15	10.7
Opinion	2:35	0:45	-	-	3:20	2.9
Education	1:25	-	0:25	-	1:50	1.6
Local Information	0:20	0:30	-	-	0:50	0.7
Children	13:15	2:05	0:25	0:50	16:35	14.3
Drama	27:55	19:45	1:20	2:50	51:50	44.8
Sports	3:40	-	-	-	3:40	3.2
Music	0:05	0:15	-	0:05	0:25	0.4
Show	6:35	4:30	1:30	0:55	13:30	11.6
Commercial (Shopping Guide)	0:10	0:10	-	-	0:20	0.2
Total	69:40	31:35	7:00	7:25	115:40	100.0

4.3. Languages of Programmes

The language distribution for the recorded week very closely resembles the average pattern as confirmed by an analysis of 4 weeks of telecasts in September and October 1982:

Table III

Total Air Time	:	115:40 hrs	=	100.0 %
English	:	69:40	=	60.2
Chinese	:	31:35	=	27.3
Malay	:	7:00	=	6.1
Tamil	:	7:25	=	6.4

Of the total air time 72:50 hours, or 63 % are transmitted via Channel 5, and 42:50 hours, or 37 % via Channel 8. The different language programmes are distributed between the two channels as follows:

Table IV

	Channel 5	Channel 8
English	59:20	10:20
Chinese	6:05	25:30
Malay	7:00	-
Tamil	0:25	7:00
Total	72:50 hrs	42:50 hrs

Figures show that - although programmes are telecast in the four official languages - the distribution of air time to the various languages is quite uneven and does in no way relate to any census data about language distribution among Singapore's population. BBC officials, when asked about the criteria for allocating just this proportion of air time to the four languages, referred to "historical reasons". Further questioning revealed that this pattern apparently just evolved over time, and that, if in the beginning a deliberate decision was taken, broadcasters today are no longer aware of the reason.

If one takes a look at which percentage of total air time is allocated to the programme types in the different languages, one finds that the list is topped

by English drama (24.1 %), followed by Chinese drama (17.1 %), English children's programmes (11.4 %), English documentaries (8.3 %), and English shows (5.6 %). All other programme types score less than 4 %. A comparison of programme types across the four languages reveals a quite uneven distribution. In the English language section, the three programme types with the largest share of air time are drama (40.1 %), children's programmes (19 %), and documentaries (13.8 %). Among the Chinese programmes, the list is topped by drama (62.5 %), followed by show (14.2 %), and news (7.4 %). The sequence for Malay is news (33.3 %), show (21.4 %) and drama (19 %); for Tamil, it is drama (38.2 %), news (31.5 %), and show (12.4 %). The total transmission time, however, allocated to Malay and Tamil language programmes is too short to base far-reaching conclusions on small differences in transmission time for a particular programme type. Considering that in general television is mainly watched for entertainment, what can be said is that - in comparison to English and Chinese - the two minority language programme are overweighted with news and documentaries, which have no cultural connection with that specific language group. Among the Malay as well as among the Tamil programmes, 2:45 hours (equalling 39.3 % and 37.1 % respectively) are taken up by such informational items. That leaves 4:15 hours for the Malay and 4:40 hours for the Tamil transmission time for all other programme types of the week. Although survey data show "that there is a very high correlation between the ethnic background of the audience and the language of TV programmes they watch" (Chen/Kuo 1978, p.9), it is quite obvious that in particular the Malay and the Indian communities have to turn to other language programme for entertainment (and further information). This assumption can be corroborated by audience data collected by Survey Research Singapore for 1982. According to this survey, more than 50 % of the Malay and Indian population (like all other Singaporeans) watch television everyday or almost everyday. Both groups turn out to be heavy viewers. Slightly over 50 % of the Malays and almost as high a percentage of the Indians watch television for more than two up to five hours daily. This figure is considerably higher than the Singaporean average of about 26 % of viewers in that group. In most cases, the additional programmes chosen will be in English. And SRS data show that, of necessity, in comparison to the Chinese audience a much higher percentage of the Malay and Indian viewers watch English language programmes.

The language allocation pattern is somewhat changed through the use of subtitles. The distribution of subtitles is, again, uneven. Although, of course, subtitles are a useful means to make programmes accessible to other language groups, there are certain shortcomings. More often than not, the subtitles are not direct translations of the dialogue, but only summaries of what is said. Thus the viewer from another language group is able to follow the action and get a rough idea but misses the finer points of the dialogue.

4.4. Imported Programmes vs SBC Productions

Much has been said and written about the detrimental and alienating effects of imported programmes (in particular those from the West) on Singapore's society. The use made in the following analysis of categories like Asian, Western etc. is - in contrast to most of these statements - purely descriptive and not meant as an explanation for anything.

During the recorded week, the relation of SBC productions to imported programmes shows that there has been no significant change over the last years:

Table V

	Number of Programmes	Air Time	Percentage of Total Air Time
SBC Productions	72	31:25 hrs	27.1
Imported Programmes	131	84:15 hrs	72.9
Total	203	115:40 hrs	100.0

Of the imported programmes, 101, equalling 58:50 hours or 50.9 % of air time, are of Western origin, while 30 programmes, equalling 25:25 hours or 22.0 % of total air time, stem from Asian countries. The categorization of programmes as Western or Asian according to their country of origin - and the implicit assumption that Western productions present Western topics, values and world views, while Asian programmes deal with Asian topics etc., - has to be qualified by a closer look at the content, since sometimes the opposite is the case. The US production Erica, e.g., attempts to teach the appreciation of Far Eastern, i.e. Japanese and Chinese art forms. The Japanese programme Heidi, on the other hand, is based on the Swiss novel, while World Famous Fairy Tale, which is also imported from Japan, tells a story about slavery problems in 19th century USA.

The list of countries from which programmes are imported is topped by the United States, but Hong Kong - although with only a marginal advantage over Great Britain - has made it to the second position (Table VI).

Considering the discussion of this topic in Singapore, I feel that a strong warning is necessary not to base any conclusions about the potential influence of imported programmes on these figures. Even if such a high percentage of programmes is imported, that does not mean that there is a free market or a free uncontrolled influx of programmes and ideas. Apart from the fact that the country of origin does not reveal anything about the content, ideas etc.

Table VI

	Country	Number of Programme Items	Percentage of Total Air Time
1	USA	70	35.9
2	Hong Kong	10	10.6
3	Great Britain	17	10.1
4	Taiwan	6	5.1
5	Japan	11	4.0
6	India	2	2.0
7	Germany	5	1.7
8	Canada	4	1.3
9	Australia	3	0.9
10	Spain	1	0.8
11	Brunei	1	0.4
12	Netherlands	1	0.1

conveyed in a programme, officials have repeatedly stressed that programmes telecast by SBC are, firstly, carefully selected and, secondly, censored and cut, if that is considered necessary. Dubbing and the introduction of subtitles provide and additional means of control.

An analysis in terms of programme types reveals that most SBC productions are news programmes, followed by shows:

Table VII

	Programme Type	Number of SBC Produced Items	Percentage of SBC Production Time
1	News	35	35.3
2	Show	8	22.3
3	Opinion	4	10.6
4	Documentary	5	9.5
5	Children	7	7.7

Or to put it in another way, all news, opinion, and local information programmes as well as half of the shows are locally produced.

Despite the assumption of even many of the better informed Singaporeans

that local production "is divided equally among the four languages" (Koh 1980, p.303), language distribution of SBC productions is as uneven as the language distribution of television programmes in general:

Table VIII

Language	Air Time	Percentage of SBC Production
English	11:50 hrs	37.7
Chinese	8:45 hrs	27.9
Malay	6:10 hrs	19.6
Tamil	4:40 hrs	14.8
Total	31:25 hrs	100.0

On an average, Chinese production percentage over the year will be higher because of SBC's Mandarin drama productions, none of which fell within the recorded week. Considering that in 1982 an average of about two hours per month of Chinese dramas are produced, this would increase the Chinese share to about 30 %.

To put it again in another way, SBC produces 17 % of all programmes telecast in English; the percentage of SBC productions for the other languages are for Chinese 27.7 %, for Malay 88.1 %, and for Tamil 62.9 %.

5. CONTENT: A QUALITATIVE VIEW

It has been explained above that the main approach in this study will be the qualitative analysis of telecast programmes. The basis of my analysis is a view of culture which is derived from the field of anthropology and cultural analysis in general, and not from the area of mass communication research in particular. This approach does not from the outset distinguish between mass or folk culture on the one hand and elite or high culture on the other, as it is quite common in mass media studies. In the anthropological tradition the term "culture" applies to the whole "body of learned behaviour" of a social group (Mead 1956, p.205). This shared knowledge embodies the shared understanding within a community of how life is ordered and how it should be lived (Geertz 1973).

A literature survey reveals that on the level of the most basic and general human values, there is a considerable overlap of accepted values for quite

different cultural groups. More obvious differences can be found, when one looks at the importance attached to these values and at the ways in which they are translated step by step into forms which are more concrete and hence better accessible for observation, analysis, and inferences.

If different cultures have different value orientations, then the question is: how are these orientations reflected in the set-up of institutions and in the behaviour of individuals in different situations? I must hasten to stress, however, that I do not start off with a ready-made list of values, focussing on the mechanisms of their translations into everyday life, but that I am rather interested to find out whether there are different value orientations and what they are. Hence the question guiding the analysis has to be re-phrased in the following way: It is possible to detect pattern of behaviour and features of institutions, as presented in the television programmes in Singapore, which may be interpreted as an outflow from different value orientations of different cultural groups?

It is beyond the scope of this paper to present the detailed analysis of all programmes or even the summaries for all programme types. In order to give a first idea, however, of what such a study may result in, I have selected findings from my analysis of news and of drama programmes. The reasons for this selection are that, firstly, both programmes have a large and often regular audience. Secondly, while all news are locally produced, most drama programmes are imported, with the main bulk coming from Western countries but also with a considerable number from Hong Kong and Taiwan (these letter are the most popular television programmes in Singapore). Because of the structural similarity of individual news programmes, it is possible to summarize findings for this genre as a whole. The analysis of the more than 50 hours of drama programmes, however, can be presented only in a selected and very codensed version, which unavoidably gives a much shortened picture of this complex genre.

5.1. News

SBC telecasts five news programmes each day throughout the week at fixed times. The four main evening news programmes are broadcast at 6:45 pm (Tamil), 7:30 pm (Malay), 9:00 pm (Chinese), and 9:45 pm (English). The first three have a scheduled length of 20 minutes, and the English one of 25 minutes. The fifth programme News in Brief in English is a 10 minute programme broadcast at 6:15 pm; as it brings only a condensed version of what is reported in more detail later in the evening, the focus in this section will be on these later main programmes.

No important systematic difference could be detected between news in the different languages. No international topic was completely left out from any of the four language programmes. In the whole week, there are only three programmes telecast in one language only and not in the others. The Chinese

news report that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce conducts a seminar on productivity in the commercial sector, while the Malay news announce the Malay Drama Festival 1982 and report on Dr. Ahmad Mattar's speech on drug addiction for one of the Malay organisations. These items are obviously of interest only for the respective language group.

Compared to other countries which are struggling with the problem of a newly won or regained national-political entity, Singapore's television news are almost conspicuously void of direct references to national achievement or to cultural heritage. References to Singapore's outstanding development are hardly ever explicit but seem to slip in by implication, when, e.g., reports on foreign visitors to Singapore are broadcast: the Lord Mayor of London is shown the changing Singapore's landscape (Shenton Way and City) and is briefed on the public housing programme, a French senatorial delegation is informed about the wage-bargaining system in Singapore, the industrialization programmes and economic policies, while a Sarawak Minister studies the Republic's urban transportation planning and learns from Singapore's traffic policies. It should be noted, however, that these items are all taken from one day, while the rest of the week is without similar references.

As in the example just quoted, so in all other news items as well, the notable characteristics of Singapore appear to be the technological achievements of modernization. There is not a single reference to the traditional roots of the cultural heritage of the Singaporeans. Singapore seems to be characterised by efficiency, an emphasis on teamwork, and the efforts required to improve the economy further. Recurring topics are WIT (Work Improvement Teams), QCC (Quality Control Circles), the management of human resources, and education in general. This agenda is in accordance with the government's present drive to upgrade knowledge and skills in order to further progress on the path towards modernization.

If we compare the block of international and the block of local news and take a closer look at how Singapore is treated in each section, in particular, how Singapore is seen in the context of the international world system, of Asia or the ASEAN region, then we can observe an interesting difference. Only the international news present what Fiske/Hartley (1978) have called the "mythology of the news", i.e. the tendency in television news to portray institutions (governments, armies, employers etc.) as responding bravely to crisis, ultimately, however, as inadequate and doomed to failure. Individuals within these institutions act as positively and effectively as the institutional framework allows. The news hence suggest a disillusionment with institutions as such, while at the same time paying respect to the individual. In this international context, which is characterised by wars, strikes, and similar crises, Singapore is mentioned only once, viz. when it is reported as condemning the Beirut massacre.

Otherwise, Singapore is apparently unaffected by what happens in the outside world. Local news are mainly concerned with modernization, more than half of the news items reporting on praiseworthy social activities and campaigns,

on education, and on business and national development. In contrast to the war-and-strife-ridden outside world, Singapore is presented as running smoothly without any major problems. If there are minor ones like, e.g., vandalism in housing estates or dangerous drivers, then effective action by the respective government agencies is reported. There seem to be no controversies, neither political nor otherwise. What seems to be required, is improvement along already existing lines, efforts to make Singapore more effective, more beautiful, and more competitive. There is a general focus on institutions and individuals who serve the community and who hence are singled out for praise and awards, which go to citizens who contributed to national campaigns etc. At the same time the news maintain their neutral tone of reporting: Singapore is never referred to as "our republic" (a formula used by other countries in a deliberate attempt to create a homely "we"-feeling), but always remains "the republic".

5.2. Drama

This category comprises by far the largest number of programmes, viz. 53 items, which take up 51:50 hours or 44.8 % of air time of the recorded week.

Because of the volume of programmes, the items will be dealt with in main groups according to language. Within each language group the programmes will be further categorized according to the conventional content categories of (a) 'adventure', inclusive of crime and detective, and (b) 'family/social', which includes comedies. As with children's programmes, an attempt was made to introduce more specific content categories. It turned out, however, that often items belong to more than one category, e.g. most comedies are family or social comedies and most adventure dramas involve the fight for justice and against crime. Even the two subcategories chosen in the end are nor truly mutually exclusive. They should be regarded as conventional labels of convenience describing what I perceive as the main characteristic of the programmes under these respective headings.

English Language Drama: Adventure

11 out of 13 dramas in this section have crime and its investigation as their primary topic. With the exception of the only British police drama, Target, all these detective programmes depict the social world in principle as a peaceful place, where the good majority is threatened by individual villains. These have, of course, to be caught, but each case is an individual, almost unfortunate and deplorable event. After it has been taken care of by dedicated individuals, the disturbed order is - at least for some time - restored. With the exception of Target and Supertrain, all adventure dramas feature heroes who are fair and socially responsible individuals. The values they stand for

and their patterns of behaviour conform to traditional norms of good social behaviour. None of them takes drugs, drinks, gambles, cheats or has an excessive sex life (even Magnum's womanizing is more a reputation and a self-conception than corroborated by action within the drama). None of them displays prejudices against other racial groups but a number of them can be regarded as offering examples of racial harmony (in particular Magnum, Shannon and Ramsey). No drama in this section shows disregard of traditional family values. On the contrary, many dramas emphasize the importance of or the high value placed by the heroes on close family ties, e.g., Pellegrino, Shannon and Ramsey. The value of family ties is underlined by a number of side-stories: in The Wild Wild West, e.g., a daughter offers herself as a sacrifice in order to save the life of her father. Even the cases, where children, grown-ups by now, attempt to revenge the wrong they perceive as having being done to their parents (as in Magnum and Cassie and Co), serve as examples for the timeless relevance of the family.

English Language Drama: Family and Social

Although family and social relations play already an important role in adventure and detective drama, they are the main topic and concern in another group of programmes. Of the 17 dramas in this section, 9 are comedies. They will be dealt with together as a subgroup further below.

Of the 9 non-comedy programmes, 2, viz. Dallas and Falcon Crest, stand out as examples (Dallas even as the prototype) of the fashionable new wave of US social drama series. Although they - like all other programmes under this category - depict family ties, in particular those between parents and children, as overriding other loyalities, they differ in that the overall social picture is not very positive. Dallas and Falcon Crest place the family story in a big-business setting and combine and intertwine family and business transactions. JR as well as Angie, who in the two series represent the family business, perceive and define their own interests and their desire for power as family interest, and both are ruthless when they see these interests endangered. In both series, big business seems to involve necessarily unfair tricks, disregard of the feelings and fate of others, and the rich apparently have always a skeleton in the cupboard, which they try to keep hidden.

East of Eden and The German Lesson have at their centre a father-son conflict, which in the first case also involves a conflict between brothers, while in the second programme it is set within the conflict between Nazis and non-Nazis. Both dramas do not put forward simple generalizing explanations for the events happening, but as individual case studies point at complex psychological explanations and mechanisms.

The remaining programmes in this group are not family dramas in the narrow sense but revolve around small groups which develop something like a family spirit and which emphasize the importance of good personal relations

and of social responsibility.

The 9 comedy programmes are all imported from the United States. Even without the "canned laughter" which is the official trademark of 7 of them, they would be recognised as comedies by a Western mind (the difficulties in understanding what other cultures regard as humorous seem to be rather great). Of the 5 programmes, which are set in a contemporary American surrounding and hence may be seen as seemingly "real life" comedies, 3 revolve around aspects of family life, while 2 involve aspects of public life.

Even in those comedies which involve the family as an important element the traditional family values are not made the target of ridicule. What is made fun of is the shortcomings of individuals, their problems in defining their proper roles and in displaying the appropriate behaviour. This may include the relationship between man and wife in Love, Sydney, between girl and male date in Laverne and Shirley, or between mother-in-law and son-in-law in Harper Valley, PTA, but never those between children and parents. Their relation is always warm, understanding and loving. Even in Mork and Mindy, where the "child" is older than his parents, the child-parent relationship conforms to the traditional stereotyped ideal.

Comedies get most of their fun out of playing on audience expectations and by overacting stereotypes, thus laying them open to ridicule. Although they sometimes seem to confirm certain negative stereotypes, e.g., that young men are easily seduced or looking for easy adventures, that mother-in-laws are bullies etc., the outcome always reaffirms conservative family ideals: the attempt at seduction is foiled, and the over-strong female is - with or without her consent - subdued.

While in adventure drama black actors - although treated without prejudice by the white heroes - appear only in secondary or minor roles, the stars in two comedies, Benson and One in a Million are black. And in none of them it is the black character who is the loser or who is made fun of - it is always the white upper middle class.

Chinese Drama: Adventure

In contrast to the English language adventure programme, where 11 out of 13 item can be classified as detective or crime dramas, 6 out of the 7 Chinese adventure dramas are historical plays, and only 1 represents an example of the detective genre.

Although they are not documentary, all historical dramas do not refer to a completely fictious past. They include names and characters of historical persons and refer to known historical events and thus pretend, or can be understood to present a picture of those times, which may be fictional in detail but which in spirit conforms with our knowledge about these periods and hence may be regarded as basically true. The pattern of all these dramas is similar: everybody connected with the court, i.e. the emperor, eunuchs,

and other high officials, is as a rule egoistic and utterly ruthless. It is a strictly hierarchical world, and in order to come into high positions, people apparently have to intrigue, scheme and kill. Once they are at the top, there is always someone threatening their position, and in order to stay where they are, they have to go on fighting. Their adversaries are, firstly, other ambitious pretenders for their positions, who belong to the same category as they themselves and who are often relatives, and, secondly, a group of honest men and women, who are willed to fight these evil practices and their proponents. All groups in this setting employ, among other means, skillful pugilists, and the many gongfu scenes and sword fights form one of the main attractions of these series.

Chinese Drama: Family and Social

Of the 11 programmes under this category, 5 blend family and big business story in a way reminiscent of Dallas. 4 other programmes focus on family and love relations without a dominant business setting, and 2 dramas are comedies.

The family-business programmes are Crocodile Tears, A House Is Not A Home, The Jaws (two episodes), and Current. The first 4 items are Hong Kong productions and belong invariably to the top ten popular programmes in Singapore, as data collected by Survey Research Singapore reveal. All of them present a not too pleasant picture of the Hong Kong Chinese upper business class. Materialistic values seem to guide people's actions with priority, overriding personal and social concerns. All personal relations are defined in an essential way by business interests. Other people are "used" and friendship are not dependable but easily sacrificed. The family as a unit is part of that picture. "Love" relationships and marriage are often based on egoistic grounds of business interests or personal revenge. The relations between husband and wife, between parents and children as well as other relatives are usually bad, at least below the surface: everyone is set on his or her own course, pursuing their own interests. In these dramas the bad ones are not the traditional crooks but the successful business people, who maintain a respectable facade which, however, hides immoral and power- or money-obsessed egoists with hardly any sense of social values and responsibilities. Looking back at the Chinese historical drama, times do not seem to have changed very much: those at the top (court officials in the historical serial and big businessmen in the contemporary drama) get their positions by tricks, intrigues and scheming, and go on using these means to stay in place, enhance their power and wealth and to do away with rivals.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The following section does not comprise the systematic conclusions of the project as a whole. It contains rather a tentative selection of the more obvious results of my analysis, first findings with respect to the popular assumptions quoted in the introduction. These first conclusions have to be supplemented by the not so obvious findings and they have to be qualified and explained in the framework of more general sociological paradigms. With these reservations in mind, I would single out the following observations.

Compared to the emphasis placed on these topics when the role of television in Singapore is explained, neither nation-building nor cultural heritage are particularly noticeable issues in the actual telecasts.

Although there are differences between the different language programmes, they are not of the general kind expected. In particular the analysis of drama programmes shows that the differences are more subtle than suggested by the popular dichotomy of good Asian vs. bad Western values or traditional Asian vs. modern Western world views. The fact that even the imported programmes do not present - not to speak of propagating - "undesirable Western values" like promiscuity, permissiveness, drug addiction etc., might be explained by the effective censorship in Singapore, which either did not pass these programmes or made the appropriate cuts as explained by an SBC official:

> "We would like to assure Mr. Wong that our censors would edit out the scenes or reject programmes in their entirety if any are found offensive or not conducive to the general good" (Straits Times, 26 November 1982).

If this is the case (and there is no reason to call this intention into question), television in Singapore cannot be blamed as being one of the main agents for the dissemination of Western counter-values, which help to undermine the traditional cultures. Audience data collected by SRS should also caution against a rash and precipitate assumption of a strong impact of Western programmes. All through 1982, the list of the ten most popular television programmes includes at best one single item from Western (European or American) sources but usually 7 programmes imported from other Asian countries. If audience numbers are indicators of preference, then only exceptionally does a Western programme meet the taste of Singapore's population.

The effort to contribute to a cross-cultural understanding amongst the different ethnic groups in Singapore seems to be mainly restricted to the transmission of programmes for each group, which members of the other ethnic/linguistic groups may watch as well. Leaving subtitles out of account - their short-comings have been dealt with elsewhere in the study - only the English language programme transcends ethnically defined linguistic groups. All other programmes exclusively address a single linguistic/ethnic group. Only one programme out of 200 (Musical Soiree) is truly bilingual. In addition, even the SBC produced dramas have a racially homogeneous cast. This is in marked

contrast, e.g., to the production policies of Radio and Television Malaysia where it is an established rule "that local programmes should reflect the multi-racial composition of the population" (Lowe/Kamin 1982, p.6).

Looking back after the analysis of a full week's telecast at those assumptions quoted in the introduction about television in Singapore, I cannot help feeling that rhetoric far exceeds evidence. The longer and the closer I watched television in Singapore, the greater did my difficulties become in regarding the quoted statements as appropriate descriptions of the actual telecast programmes in Singapore in the autumn of 1982 and one may have one's doubts whether there ever was a time when the situation was very much different.

Notes:

1) For a conceptual discussion of these categories cf. Heidt (1985).
2) On 31 January 1984 a third channel, providing mainly educational and cultural programmes, started operating.
3) For a more detailed description of the quantitative analysis cf. Heidt (1984).

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