Economic and Political Aspects of Foreign Contents on National Television

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the abundance of foreign contents on national television broadcasting in Indonesia. It looks at the situation of national television and the growing numbers of foreign productions broadcast for the nationwide audiences. This study has traced the historical, political and economic aspect of foreign cultural productions that have been distributed by the commercial television stations after the reformasi periods. The data were collected through interviews with several officers of television stations in Jakarta, policy documents on broadcasting industry, and the media discourses surrounding the issues studied. This study suggests that foreign imported programs have become the alternative sources of entertainment of the local viewers, and at the same time they have captivated the attention of local/domestic audiences and have created a new programming pattern for the Indonesian television industry in post-New Order. The rating trend and the appeal of ‘new’ star idols from Asian countries for Indonesian viewers follow the trend away from American “fandom” and programming intensity.

Keywords: foreign production, national television, non-Western cultural production, Asian programs, political-economy television, broadcasting regulations.

Tulisan ini mengulas berlimpahnya konten asing dalam siaran televisi nasional serta situasi televisi nasional dan peningkatan jumlah siaran produksi asing pada pemirsa nasional. Studi ini menelaah aspek historis, politis, dan ekonomis dari produksi kultur asing yang terdistribusi melalui stasiun televisi komersial pasca-reformasi. Melalui serangkaian wawancara dengan beberapa staf stasiun televisi, penelusuran dokumen kebijakan industri pertelevision, dan diskursus media yang muncul, ditemukan bahwa program asing telah menjadi sumber alternatif hiburan bagi pemirsa lokal dan di saat yang sama telah menciptakan pola penyiaran baru bagi industri pertelevision Indonesia di pasca-Orde Baru. Tren kemunculan idola-idola baru dari Asia menunjukkan peralihan dari dominasi Amerika.

Kata-Kata Kunci: produksi asing, televisi nasional, produksi kultural non-Barat, program Asia, aspek ekonomi-politik pertelevision, regulasi penyiaran.
The global flow of television programming continues to be the enduring political problem in international cultural trade and the media industry. Nordenstreng and Varis (1974) studied that the United States has long dominated as the largest television exporter, with about one third of its exports going to Latin America. The Far East and East Asia took another third and the rest was distributed to Western Europe (Nordenstreng and Varis 1974, 32). From their study on the international flow of television programs and news, Nordenstreng and Varis concluded that there were two “indisputable trends” (Varis 1985, 15): first is a one-way traffic from the major exporting countries to the rest of the world; second, the dominance of entertainment material in the flow (Nordenstreng & Varis 1974, 40). These two aspects of a “tendency towards concentration” continued and showed no significant changes to the domination of the world television market by US and Western European productions in the main structure of television broadcasting systems of several third world countries (Varis 1985). This is what Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham (1996, 1) maintain, “The rubric of ‘globalization’ has forced the West to confront the television cultures of the more ‘peripheral’ regions of the world.” They see a new pattern of television flow in many regions of the world bringing new cultural arrivals and influences of non-Western sources as an effect of the shifting geopolitical patterns within the world system, especially in the West, and the rise of Asian economic powers (Sinclair et al. 1996, 1).

The focus of this paper is on the increasing presence of Western and non-Western imported products as new resources and patterns of national television programming in the national television industry in Indonesia. It interrogates how the bourgeoning television industry responds to public demand for models of cultural integration and modernity in the global flow of television in contemporary Indonesia. Global cultural formations have, to some extent, affected the local site of television programming in Indonesia. Local programs such as music, quiz shows, teledrama programs, and the so-called ‘reality TV shows’ are examples of how local programming formats have been adopted and adapted from foreign program formats with some modifications to meet the taste of the Indonesian viewers.

The popularity of television productions from Asia, particularly Korean productions in the programming pattern of national private television, those cultural productions are very well alike by large numbers of audiences especially teenagers and young viewers. Although the proportion of local productions on national television still remains around 60 to 70 per cent, thus, maintaining top position of national television program ratings, foreign drama programs, particularly those non-Western (Asia) importations, have provided sources of cultural consumption different to both local productions and their American
Hollywood counterparts. In particular, the Asian productions that are continually broadcast in specific time slots of the national private television stations are positioned in the second layer of the national programming pattern, thus finding a supplementary niche in the domestic TV industry.

Also, since these foreign programs, especially non-Western productions, are low cost, often significantly below the cost of producing local programming, they have become a form of speculation of the burgeoning television industry in Indonesia to determine the consumption patterns of the domestic markets and to generate revenues. This study raised questions: what kind of decisions that have been made by the television stations in Indonesia in broadcasting imported program both from Western and non-Western countries? Do these imported productions have shaped the pattern of TV content in Indonesia? To what extent the Indonesian producers have been utilized these imported productions for their local productions?

Sourced from interviews with several program officers of three commercial television stations in Jakarta and media discourses, as a method of study, this study examines the historical condition and present trend of the Indonesian television contents and the flourished of foreign programs. To begin with, the discussion of this paper is situated in media theory, which in the last two decades has shifted from an emphasis on cultural/media imperialism of the West to an acknowledgement of global diversity of sources of media programming. Next, I present an overview of the development of imported programs in the national television industry and describe the rationale behind the decision to screen imported materials by the television stations.

Global Flow of Cultural Productions

The term ‘global’ still tends to be exclusively associated with the West. Few would still argue that ‘globalization’ just provides domination and homogenization of the universe in regard to western modernity. These anxieties of west-domination paradigm and homogenization-culture perspective are expressed in the thesis of ‘cultural imperialism’ or ‘media imperialism’. The ‘media imperialism’ perspective views that the major sources of cultural and informational flows are located in America and Western Europe, in which these flows of cultural products dominating the peripheral part of the world (Sinclair, et al. 1996, 6).

Media cultural imperialism thesis provides descriptive mappings of unequal global flows which are seen as an indicator of global domination and threat to indigenous cultural survival. Beyond that, media cultural
imperialism tends to suggest a ‘hypodermic needle’ model of international effects in which ‘American’ values are injected into the Third World. For Schiller (1976, 9) the cultural imperialism thesis

[b]est describes the sum of processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system.

Media cultural imperialism, according to Tomlinson, does not simply understand the internationalization of media market in the developing countries, but the more complex political issues, which are embedded in the notion of cultural domination (Tomlinson 1999). In addition, Tomlinson posits that although the cultural domination thesis, which was first formulated in the late 1960s, has been discredited, it does not indicate that cultural domination no longer exists. The trend has been shifted to the domination of the ‘transnationals corporate authority’ over the ‘national’ (largely American) media-cultural power (Schiller 1991, 13). According to Schiller (1991, 14):

Media-cultural imperialism is a subset of the general system of imperialism. It is not freestanding; the media-cultural component in a developed, corporate economy supports the economic objectives of the decisive industrial-financial sectors (i.e., the creation and extension of the consumer society); the cultural and economic spheres are indivisible.

He also contends that as a result of the dominance of transnational media corporations, a global culture is being constituted through sameness rather than difference. While Tomlinson (1999) calls globalization – as an empirical condition of the modern world – a form of ‘complex connectivity’. He simultaneously maintains that globalization signifies “the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life” (Tomlinson 1999, 2). The discourse of globalization, according to Tomlinson, appears suffused with metaphors of global connectivity and proximity or intimacy. Accordingly, globalization

[i]s transforming the local order, but the significance of this transformation reaches beyond the technological accomplishments of communications and transport. Putting it simply, connectivity means changing the nature of localities and not just occasionally lifting some people out of them (Tomlinson 1999, 9).

Nevertheless, Straubhaar (1997, 284-285) explains since the discussion of globalization focuses only on ‘globalized cultural actors, corporations and government, as well as globalized audiences’, there is little attention
to ‘the relative dependency of the peripheral nation-states’. Therefore, Straubhaar suggests that the discussion of globalization should also look at the emergence of a “new level of television flow” and its impact within the regions of the world. For instance, since the 1980s, the global flow of television programming in Indonesia has not been dominated by only Hollywood America. The emergence of some regional centers of television exporters such as Mexico, Brazil, Hong Kong, Japan, and India has offered alternative business sources for the pattern of television programming in the country.

Straubhaar criticizes the idea of globalization as the worldwide homogenization of television, the diminishing of national and cultural differences, and the domination of all by American productions. According to him, in the last twenty years, there has been a major trend in the ‘regionalization’ of television flow into multi-country markets connected by geography, language and culture, or what he called ‘geocultural markets’ (Straubhaar 1999, 291). Geocultural markets emerge for some regions, which are unified by language (even though they have different accents and dialects) and have similar old common cultural traditions. The countries can be seen as bound into a common cultural region, and welcome common television programming. Geocultural markets go beyond the language to include:

- History, religion, ethnicity (in some cases), and culture in several senses: shared identity, gestures and non-verbal communications; what is considered funny or serious or even sacred; clothing styles; living patterns; climatic influences and other relationships with the environment (Straubhaar 1999, 291).

He then suggests that geocultural markets sometimes do not live in the centered geographic region, but they are globally spread across the world by colonization, slavery, and migration. “Populations defined by these kinds of characteristics tend to seek out cultural products, like television programs or music, which are most similar or proximate to them.” (Straubhaar 1999, 292). For him, the cultural markets have increasingly extended beyond the neighboring countries as the people have migrated from the central geographic region. For instance, the Chinese audiences are not only concentrated in the Great China region, but are also in the nations near it such as in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore; even extending further away to the Chinese populations mixed in with others like in Malaysia and further to the Chinese speakers around the world (Straubhaar 1999).

From this point of view, Straubhaar posits that television industries and advertisers respond to the audiences—who make a choice to view international or regional or national TV programs based on a search for cultural relevance or proximity—by producing more programs nationally.
and selecting “an increasing proportion of what is imported from within the same region, language group, and culture, when such programming is available” (Straubhaar 1991, 39, citing Pool 1977). This is what he introduced as ‘cultural proximity’.

The cultural proximity thesis emerged to counter the idea of ‘dependency market’. The cultural proximity thesis maintains that “audience preference for national culture is not uniform, and it can be shown to be related to social class” (Straubhaar 1991, 51). Based on Bordieu’s (1984) study on economic class determination and cultural capital, Straubhaar noted that the purchasing power or economic class defines the access and preference of elites or bourgeoisie to the particular program genres of particular origins such as U.S. programming, as they have a greater access to various new media such as VCRs, satellite dishes and cable TV, which carry more programming from the U.S.

The Political-Economy of Foreign Programs

Indonesian television first emerged in the 1960s at which time the political landscape was dominated by nationalism. The state’s interest in promoting national development was at the core of national broadcasting policy. Despite the rapid development of technology and economic liberalization in the 1990s, the enduring effects of nationalism remain powerful in the Indonesian media culture. Indonesian television, particularly Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI), the state-owned station, has worked to promote and present national identity in the interests of national development, integrity and unity. Consequently, the requirement to broadcast 80 per cent of local culture in TVRI’s programming schedule has long been insisted on.

Apart from the so-called ‘nation-building’ tasks, the composition between the local and the foreign content in national programming patterns are always crucial and dilemmatic. On the one hand, in this ethnically diverse nation, the demand to present particular local cultural values and identity continues to put pressure on national programming schedules. On the other hand, the television stations seem to broadcast imported programs, as those programs are cheaper than those locally made programs, which according to television stations’ personnel whom I interviewed, means their marketing is also unpredictable. In terms of audience share rating, imported programs both from the Hollywood and the Asian productions are competing with local programs, particularly the local teledrama (sinetron) shows. Although on the top twenty chart of television programming rating the first six positions are always occupied by local programs i.e. Indonesian sinetron, imported programs
such as new release Hollywood movies and/or Asian dramas also frequently gain high ratings.

The regulations on the quantity of imported programs that can be aired on Indonesian television have been ambiguous. The state-funded channel, TVRI, as indicated earlier runs 80 per cent of local productions and only a few foreign productions such as series, cartoons, and films, which are mostly from the U.S. However, from when the private television channels were introduced (since 1989), there were no strict regulations on the limits of foreign programs for these institutions. “Although the Ministerial Decree stated in general terms that Indonesian television must ‘prioritize’ domestic productions, private television was introduced with no specific requirement on domestic content” (Sen & Hill 2000, 120). Sen and Hill argue that the Indonesian government regulation on the operation and programming of national television was modeled on the regulations for the film industry which was required to support the 1945 constitution, the state ideology Pancasila, and avoid issues that might give rise to ethnic, religious and racial conflicts between groups (commonly known by its acronym of SARA). Under the Indonesian Minister of Information Decree No. 111/1990, the national television institutions were set up as

[all] programs were obliged to ‘support national development plans in accordance with government policy, both domestic and foreign’ and they must ‘be arranged with full regard to good manners and in Indonesian language that is true and correct (baik dan benar) . . . programming must avoid ‘all possibility of becoming a channel for the spread of foreign ideology or culture which could weaken the national character and national defence’ (Sen & Hill, 2000, 119).

Nonetheless, the fact was that during 1990 and 1991, Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI) and Surya Citra Televisi (SCTV), the first two private television channels, broadcast 90 per cent imported programs. RCTI, for instance, broadcast the abundance of foreign programs on its station during that time was purely an economic consideration, because the cost of imported programs was less than the costs to produce local or in-house programs such as talk shows and the most-watched program, sinetron. In an interview, the program officer explained that the station paid US$ 2.000-3.000 for box office American movies, whereas to produce a talk show cost RCTI between US$ 4.000 and 5.000.

Nevertheless, after the national economic crisis in 1998 the private stations have reduced foreign content to about 30 to 40 per cent. Consequently, the numbers of foreign programs broadcast on private channels declined. Most foreign programs broadcast on private channels during the nation’s economic crisis period were repeat
programs (personal interview with personnel from RCTI, SCTV, and Indosiar). Since 1997 private television has used more local productions, particularly locally made sinetron and Indonesian films. However, when economic stability was achieved during 2002 and mid-2003, the foreign content tended to increase to about 50 per cent and it continues up to present. Commenting on these fluctuations, in a personal interview, one of commercial station’s officers explained that this trend showed the television station’s effort to respond to market demands. In an era of competition within the national commercial channels in Indonesia, a TV station the officer said, had to monitor and follow the trend of programming patterns and audience’ preferences. The officer added that imported programs are cheaper than local productions.

However, under the new broadcasting bill No. 32/2002, article 36, all national private television stations and the public broadcasters must broadcast at least 60 per cent domestic program and up to 40 per cent imported program. As a result of this regulation, in January 2005, Global TV, for instance which was previously designed as an ‘Indonesian MTV’ channel, has to restructure its content from a music broadcaster to become a “general” broadcasting service. Although it is still questioned whether the reformulation of Global TV is purely because of the implementation of that new broadcasting regulation or because of the marketing or business strategy of the MNC groups, which own the station and also control several other channels, the official statement of Global TV reported that the change is a consequence of the implementation of the broadcasting law. In fact, both the revenue share and audience share of Global TV was severely below the margin revenues of those ‘general’ TV stations.

In fact, every television station has a different policy in its program mix of the local and imported programs. For instance, several private channels consistently broadcast about 30 per cent foreign content; whereas several others broadcast more foreign programs (60.9 per cent).

### The Popularity of Korean Productions

The demand for ‘indigenization’, ‘localism’, and ‘authenticity’ of Indonesian cultural identities appears to clash with the rationale behind the private television institutions’ choice between imported programs and local programs. With the principle of profit maximization, private TV stations always claim that buying imported programs is cheaper compared to buying local programs from production houses or producing in-house (studio) programs. This appears to demonstrate Bates’ contention that:
Foreign programmes, because they tend to recoup their costs in their native markets, are often available for foreign syndication at relatively low cost to the broadcaster, often significantly below the cost to programming locally. Thus, even if the foreign programme is less valuable to the local audience, it may be more profitable, as profits are the differences between value and cost (Bates 1998, 239).

Private television stations are still interested in Asian productions, as these are relatively cheap. On the average, the price of Asian productions, which can be rerun or repeated two to three times by the TV stations, is between 100 and 200 million rupiahs (US$ 10,000-20,000) for about 52 episodes. These prices are claimed to be considerably cheaper than the cost of locally produced teledrama, which star well-liked and therefore highly-paid Indonesian actresses, at between 200 and 300 million rupiahs (US$ 20,000-30,000) per episode (personal interview).

The motive appears to be a significant reason for the flourishing of imported programs, particularly from East Asian countries such as Korea, Hong Kong, and Japan. Indosiar Visual Mandiri (IVM), for example, pioneered the broadcast of Asian teledrama programs for Indonesian viewers when it introduced Mandarin Kung Fu serials as part of its joint business with TVB Hong Kong. The success of its first Mandarin Kung Fu serials, titled Return of The Condor Heroes, in 1994, placed IVM as the leading private channel for broadcasting Mandarin productions. Later, IVM, which is owned by the Chinese businessman Sudono Salim (his Chinese nama is Liem Sioe Liong), also broadcast Korean youth dramas and Japanese ‘dorama’ contemporary drama such as the popular Tokyo Stories and Itazura No Kiss. In a personal interview, an officer explained that the purchase of imported programs, either directly from TVB Hong Kong or through the Indonesian brokers, is not only a matter of cheap cost, but also of taking a gamble. The station officer said indeed he could not predict whether the audience would like or not like the production, as in the case of Korean drama serials Meteor Garden.

The IVM’s officer continued that the level of popularity of imported serials particularly from Asia, such as Meteor Garden (hereafter MG) starring four young Taiwanese males, first broadcast in 2001, was unexpected by the station. The show, which was formerly only an hour with advertisement break, had been stretched to two hours screening with one hour allocated for advertisement spots.

The popularization of Korean productions for Indonesian audiences continues to be a phenomenal experience of young television viewers. The recent trends of ‘Korean style look’ boys and girls bands, which commonly perform on television stations have attracted significant
numbers of young viewers in Indonesia. Viewers not only watch Korean productions on TV, but also watch on the internet streaming. This phenomenon could be found very common in university campuses in Surabaya and elsewhere in Indonesia.

**American and other Asian productions**

In a different way, SCTV chooses to purchase Western imported programs when the festival films market is opened in America for fourth or fifth times a year. With its annual budget for imported programs is about 65 per cent of the total production cost of its local program, SCTV sometimes also hunts for Western programs at the annual Festival Film Cannes in France. This strategy is applied to get cheaper prices in bulk buy. However, for imported non-Western programs such as from India, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea, SCTV prefers to purchase from local brokers. The composition of imported programs on SCTV is still dominated by Western (U.S.) movies (40%), Indian films (20%), and Asia Mandarin (20%) (personal interview).

Hong Kong films have been shown on Indonesian television since ten years ago. Up to the writing of this article, almost all national private television channels run those Asian serials, series, and movies. For instance, in 1997, IVM provided a slot every Saturday noon, namely *Pesona Asia* (Asian enchantment), for only Asian (Mandarin) movies. In 1999, the channel added more slots for Asian movies every Wednesday 10 pm (called *Sinema Bintang Asia* or Asian stars cinema program) and every Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon at 1 pm for Asian Mandarin drama serials (called *Sinema Drama Mandarin* or Mandarin drama cinema program). Since March 2002, IVM has provided another slot every Thursday evening 8 pm, called *Mega Asia*, which screens only Mandarin hits.

Another private TV station, RCTI, has provided three slots for Asian movies every Saturday and Sunday morning, and every Thursday night (called *Layar Emas Kamis* or Thursday’s Golden Screen), excluding the Asian (Mandarin) drama serials every evening, in 2002. At present, this station provides more time slot for American productions and local/national programs, though some of them are adapted from foreign programs.

However, Indonesian viewers’ preferences for Asian productions have changed over time. For instance, in 1994, the audiences preferred to watch Mandarin (traditional) Kung Fu movies. In 1995-1997, Mandarin action movies using tricks and visual effects and starring Jackie Chan, Andy Lau, Jet Li, and Aman Chow were favored amongst others. After
the success of MG in 2001, the trend has shifted from favoring action Kung Fu to Mandarin romance dramas. When the mystery/ghost films became popular in the Indonesian television programming pattern between 2002 and 2003, the private channels chose to broadcast some Asian horror movies and serials such as horror serials from Thailand titled Darayan, which were broadcast on TPI and watched by 1.12 million viewers. Trans TV broadcast horror serials from Korea titled Sorum and Japanese hit horror movies such as The Ring, The Ring O, and The Ring 2, and Lativi broadcast comedy horror from Thailand titled Nang Nak every Tuesday afternoon 2 pm.

Even though many Mandarin movies and drama have been so popular, mainly their ratings are still below local sinetron. For instance, Chinese action serials such as The Magic Monkey (popular as Kera Sakti in Indonesia), The Legend of Master Chienping (Legenda Pendekar Chienping), and Princess Hwang Chu (Putri Hwang Chu), which broadcast on Indosiar, are widely recognized Chinese legend films for Indonesian viewers. Some popular serials such as Drunken Fist, Judge Bao, Kung Fu Master, Condor Heroes and Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon broadcast on private channels are also examples of the popularity of Mandarin television serials in Indonesia. Reputable actors such as Jet Li, Jackie Chan, Andi Lau, and Chow Yun Fat, it can be predicted for certain that the rating will be high.

What is interesting from the above is that the popularity of the stars in the films appears to determine whether the films would be watched by the viewers or not. For instance, movies starring Chow Yun Fat or Jackie Chan or Jet Li gained TV rating up to 10-16, meaning the films were watched by more than 2.8 million viewers in five major cities of Indonesia. The TV rating of the films not playing those reputed stars was only 8, or watched by less than one million viewers (personal interview).

The success of Korean dramas like Winter Sonata, which was first broadcast on Trans TV in 2001 then rerun by SCTV and TV 7 in 2002,

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1 Many titles of Asian (Mandarin) films, including Indian and Latin telenovela serials, are translated into bahasa. Therefore, it would be difficult to distinguish the category between local productions and foreign (non-Western) productions from the TV program guide, if we do not watch the shows. Even the programming staff, for example from Trans TV whom I interviewed, could not distinguish between the local programs and foreign programs from the titles alone. They usually had to ask the acquisition staff who bought the programs. The private television channels in Indonesia seem to feel threatened by the use of foreign language, as there was a pressure in the late 1980s by the Soeharto New Order regime to eliminate the use of foreign languages (especially English phrases) for naming hotels, shops, shopping malls, banks, and others.
has been ensured by the abundance of other Korean productions on Indonesian television. Top private channels like IVM and Trans TV are initially the first two television channels to screen Korean dramas. Many Korean dramas such as Endless Love, All About Eve, Hotelier, and Love Storm screened on IVM achieved success as some like Sun Flower, Mother Sea, and Glass Shoes on Trans TV. The TV rating of Endless Love, for instance, even reached 10 (or watched by 2.8 million viewers in five major cities of Indonesia) closed to MG that gained TVR 12 (or watched by 3.08 million viewers).

“Endless Love is another alternative choice for the viewers who favors with Asian (Mandarin) teledramas. The drama consists of 18 episodes telling about the story of poor female and rich female that were swapped when they were born,” explained the officer of IVM in a personal interview. The popularity of Korean dramas on these two private television stations has tempted other television channels like RCTI and SCTV. Endless Love is rerun on RCTI, while SCTV broadcast another Korean drama, Winter Sonata, which gained top rating several weeks after its first broadcast during 2002.

The present popularity of Asian productions in the Indonesian market suggests resistance of the Asian cultural productions in their neighborhood markets to their American counterpart. For instance, the exportation of Japanese popular culture to Asian markets, including Indonesia, signals the acceptance of Japanese cultural dissemination in this region and articulates “the indelibility of Japan’s imperial history, unresolved issues of Japanese war responsibility, and its lingering economic exploitation of the region” Iwabuchi (2002, 75). Iwabuchi also emphasizes that the dissemination of Japanese contemporary culture to Asian countries has been intended for a younger generation “who did not experience Japanese imperialism.” In the case of Indonesia, perhaps the perceived similarity of cultural values as an Eastern’ society allows Asian cultural products to be accepted without a concern that they will disturb or interrupt the ideological and cultural formations of Indonesia. The cultural flows from “the non-Western semicentre” (Iwabuchi 2002) and the rise of the economic power of transnational media corporations in a global space, have showed alternative patterns of transnationalization of media and popular culture from those non-Western countries to their regional markets under the banner of ‘locality’, that is “a non-Western mode of indigenized modernity for culturally and/or geographically contiguous nations” (Iwabuchi 2002, 48).

In fact, the popularity of Asian productions does not mean replacing the existence of U.S. domination. Western movies, serials and series are still broadcast many on national private television. However, the U.S. productions have been less watched than those Asian dramas and Indian
films. As can be seen from the following charts, in terms of number of titles, Western (U.S.) series in 2002 and 2003 were broadcast more than the number of Asian series (the Nielsen Media Research Indonesia uses the term ‘oriental series’). Whereas, in terms of TV rating and TV share (advertising revenue), Asian series are leading. In other words, those Western series are less watched than Asian (Mandarin) series. In addition of the chart, Western titles seem predominant compared to Mandarin titles, as the figure of other non-Western sources like Indian films and Latin telenovelas do not present.

The policy makers and television critics – those who on the one hand are concerned with modernization, but on the other hand with authentic local identity – still believe that foreign cultural productions will affect the local or traditional cultural identities of Indonesians.

To many policy makers, foreign programmes—whether imported or brought in by satellite television—need to be limited not merely because they are in great numbers and may acculturate the audiences, but because their transportability across markets and low prices have made it difficult for local programmes to compete (Wang 1998, 260).

In addition, for many developing countries, the arrival of foreign cultural productions is seen as threatening local ethnic culture and, more widely, the great traditions of the societies (Katz 1979, 66). For those countries, modernization is seen to carry in its wake “a standardization and secularisation of culture” (Katz 1979) in which the arrival of Western in particular (or foreign in general) popular culture has overwhelmed the traditional values and cultural artifacts that give a culture ‘its characteristic’. However, there is no more anxiety to the notion of ‘cultural imperialism’, when it has been elapsed by the economic considerations or the ‘logic of capital’ (Ang 2000), particularly when the foreign productions are utilized by the capitalist television producers as sources for local adaptation and translation.

Source of Local Adaptation

Wang and Dissanayake (1984) suggest one of the features of culture is an open system, which at the same time, accepts, integrates, or rejects stimuli for change. For them culture is “constant interaction of elements within the system and interaction with the outside environment brings stimuli to change, and the extent of change varies” (1984, 4). Culture will change, but the presence of one or two manipulated stimuli does not always bring the desired change. As part of a process of globalization, Indonesia cannot ‘close’ its territory from the arrival of foreign culture, as globalization and modernization are always embedded in the process of cultural development in the country. These views suggest that the
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notion of hybridity might explain the process of cultural combination occurring between the local and the foreign, particularly in many Asian countries. “Other forms and artefacts of popular culture have been transformed by Asians into hybrid blending foreign and indigenous characteristics in often innovative and culturally appropriate ways” (Lent 1995, 5). Lent also suggests that popular cultures and fast foods are two areas in which hybridization has been prevalent and very visible in Asian countries.

Foreign programs, to some extent, have stimulated ideas for the programming and format for Indonesian production houses and television stations. For instance, the format of local television drama (sinetron) productions in Indonesia has been claimed as an adaptation of the format of Latin telenovela soap operas or Indian Bollywood films (Wardhana 2001, 375). Even Mandarin dramas from Hong Kong and Korea are often adapted for the local sinetron production. Katz states,

[i]n examining the situation of broadcasting in the developing countries, one must look beyond the importation of tape and films to the importation of program ideas and formats. What is not directly imported may be—at second glance—imported as a model or ‘stimulus’ for local translation (Katz 1979, 70).

The popularity of those Asian pop dramas and films has already invited domestic imitation in the production of some local Indonesian television dramas. For instance, the Indonesian sinetron, Siapa Takut Jatuh Cinta (Who is afraid of falling in love) in 2001 was an adaptation of MG. Several sinetron have also been adapted from serials on TVB Hong Kong. For example, teledrama Tahta (Authority, 1996) was adapted from the serial Big Family (Hong Kong), Tirai Sutra (Silk Shade, 1996) was adapted from My Friend, My Enemy (TVB Hong Kong), Kipas-Kipas Asmara (Wind fans of love, 1996) was similar to a comedy serial Lin Mon Chang Fu (Hong Kong). Several Japanese dramas, such as Love Generations, Perfect Love, and Tokyo Love Stories aired on IVM, have also inspired the bulk creations of locally produced sinetron, like Cinta SMU (High School Love) and other typical drama remaja (youth drama) aired on Indonesian television in recent years.

The adaptation and translation of foreign productions for the local market have also been continued in the Indonesian music recording industry. The recent phenomenon of boys and girls bands that style like Korean boys and girls bands on Indonesian television have gained good appreciation from the young fans. Korean boys and girls looks are very well like. The hysteria of young viewers on the presentations of those Indonesian boys and girls bands can be seen in everyday life music performances on TV.
Nevertheless, the process of adaptation and the results are criticized as troublesome and often upsetting. Veven Wardhana commented that the phenomenon of adaptation or imitation in some Indonesian sinetron productions occurred because producers have seen it as the short way to be successful in sinetron business (Wardhana 2001). According to Wardhana, it is difficult to stop these adaptations or copying patterns. There is still not yet a formal regulation about plagiarism issues in the sinetron business. This hole then is used by some sinetron production houses to produce sinetron that are copied from foreign screen movies or other foreign television serials. Several Indonesian media have also criticized the model of adaptations on Indonesian TV. The critics pointed out that the adaptations created in some Indonesian sinetron have not tried to explore and show prominently the nuances of locality.

From these critiques, it becomes apparent that the adapted creation does not produce a ‘distinctive’ creative dialogue between the original (foreign) version and the local version. The adaptations are unable to show the richness of local characteristics and scenes, so that the products can be utilized as a breakthrough to add to and challenge the local productions. The term ‘hybridity’ appears to be problematic in the development of Indonesian national/cultural identity. In the course of Indonesia’s modern history, the essence of national/cultural identity has been constructed in the face of ‘foreign derived’. The capacity of Indonesia for cultural borrowing or assimilating foreign origin does not simply articulate the process of hybridization in practice; rather it is more the process of translation, or even conversion, into an Indonesian scene.

**Conclusion**

Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham (1996) theorize that the success of ‘peripheral nation’s export’ is contingent on factors such as cultural and geographical proximity. The flourish of Asian series and serials, as a ‘new resource’ of imported programs in Indonesian television, is considered as alternative programming for the domestic audiences. Those foreign programs have become a supplement to the plethora of local productions and form alternative sources of programming in the contemporary era of Indonesian television industry. Indeed, the Indonesian government, through broadcasting law number 32/2002, has regulated to limit the foreign content on national programming, a policy intended primarily to protect domestic television and entertainment industries. In fact, while the local shows are overwhelmingly still the most popular in Indonesia, some foreign imported productions sometimes draw substantial audience numbers. Perhaps, foreign programs on Indonesian national private TV stations...
these days are primarily utilized as a means of capturing audience size to reap profits for the television station.

The popularity of Asian serials in Indonesia, as the recent Korean drama productions, suggests that non-Western sources have captivated the attention of local/domestic audiences and have created a new programming pattern for the Indonesian television industry post-authoritarian era. The rating trend and the appeal of ‘new’ star idols from Asian countries for Indonesian viewers follow the trend away from American ‘fandom’ and programming intensity. Moreover, just like other Asian cultural productions, which are borrowed and adapted from Western (Hollywood) productions in a ‘strategically [sic] process of hybridization’ (Iwabuchi 2002), the Indonesian cultural productions have also been inspired by both Western and Asian encounters, but have not strategically produced the feature of Indonesia’s national/cultural identity.

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