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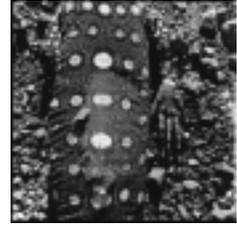The online version of this article can be found at:

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Media capital

Towards the study of spatial flows

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ABSTRACT ● Prior studies that emphasize a one-way flow of US programming to the periphery of the world system are now being reassessed in light of the increasing volume and velocity of multi-directional media flows that emanate from particular cities, such as Bombay, Cairo, and Hong Kong. These emerging centers of transnational cultural production suggest a need to supplement the current scholarly emphasis on national media systems with a more intensive examination of media capitals. Examining the histories of Hollywood, Hong Kong, and Chicago television, this essay illustrates how scholars might use media capital as a concept that would foster empirically grounded analysis of the temporal dynamism and spatial complexity of the global media environment. ●

KEYWORDS ● Chicago ● cultural geography ● culture industries ● globalization ● Hollywood ● Hong Kong ● media imperialism ● television

Although Hollywood exports continue to dominate global entertainment markets, debates about transnational flows of television have moved beyond the media imperialism thesis to focus on deliberations about globalization (Barker, 1997; Curran and Park, 2000; Hoskins, et al., 1997; Tomlinson, 1991, 1999; Wark, 1994). The complexity of this key word is perhaps suggested by the fact that TVB, Hong Kong's dominant local broadcaster, is now busy concocting a global satellite service in collaboration with MEASAT, a Malaysian media corporation. Meanwhile, the Hong

Kong office of Sony Pictures Entertainment (led by a Hollywood executive in charge of a Chinese staff that is reporting to the LA division of a Japanese conglomerate) is annually producing close to 4000 hours of TV programming specifically targeted at local Asian audiences. Similarly, Rupert Murdoch has forged an alliance with a former official of the Chinese propaganda ministry, establishing a joint-venture company based in Hong Kong that has taken charge of Star TV's mainland satellite programming and is now in the process of trying to take control of ATV, Hong Kong's number two local broadcaster. These unprecedented initiatives point to new patterns of television flow. As the local goes global and the global tries to become local, or perhaps regional, one is struck by disjunctures very much like those observed by Arjun Appadurai (1996: 46) more than a decade ago, when he contended that contemporary culture is fundamentally fractal, 'possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures, or regularities.' Political, economic, and cultural phenomena overlap, converge and collide, disrupting prior confidence in holistic approaches to culture and society. As scholars, we are challenged to make sense of this increasingly complex environment, which is now commonly characterized by transnational and transmedia alliances. But the most pressing question confronting us may not be 'What?' or 'Who?' but 'How?'. How do we study these complex patterns of flow? How do we deploy our limited research resources? Where do we invest our time? The challenges scholars now confront are as deeply methodological as they are conceptual.

Traditionally, television studies have been resolutely national, focusing on a medium contained within the regulatory, political, and economic environs of the nation-state. International media studies maintained a similar respect for state sovereignty attending to the exchange of cultural products between nations or producing comparative studies of national media systems. More recently, however, scholars are relinquishing the metaphor of national containers, choosing instead to examine the ways in which contemporary television is transcending frontiers and disrupting conventional structures of domination. Studies that emphasize the one-way flow of US programming to the periphery of the world system are being reassessed in light of increasing multi-directional flows of media imagery (Straubhaar, 1991; McNeely and Soysal, 1989). These new patterns of flow should not be construed as multilateral in the conventional sense, since they do not involve the exchange of programming between sovereign states. Instead these flows emanate from particular cities that have become centers for the finance, production, and distribution of television programs; cities like Bombay, Cairo, and Hong Kong. One might refer to these cities as media capitals, since they represent centers of media activity that have specific logics of their own; ones that do not necessarily correspond to the geography, interests or policies of particular nation-states. For example, Hong Kong television is produced and consumed in Taipei, Beijing, Amsterdam, Vancouver,

Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur. The central node of all this activity is Hong
Kong, but the logics that motivate the development of the medium are not
primarily governed by the interests of the Chinese state, or even the Special
Administrative Region (SAR).

Given that such media capitals have grown in importance and that new
logics seem to be governing the development of transnational television, this
essay suggests that it might be time to supplement one unit of scholarly
analysis with another. That is, we commonly study television as a national
phenomenon. What if we were to shift our attention to the study of *media
capitals*, seeing them as bound up in a web of relations that exist at the
local, regional and global levels, as well as the national level? Such a sugges-
tion is anticipated in recent research, for example, in David Morley's (2000)
analysis of the electronic landscapes of Europe, Joseph Straubhaar's (1997)
approach to multicentric media flows, and Marie Gillespie's (1995) explo-
rations of audience uses of Bombay film videos in Punjabi neighborhoods
of London. These and other studies urge us to see the nation as an import-
ant but not sufficient site of media analysis. Yet despite this growing body
of work, the residual attractions of nation-based research are still strong.
Most television histories and most global communication textbooks exhibit
this tendency. Even some of the best volumes, such as *New Patterns in
Global Television* (Sinclair, et al., 1996), nevertheless portray the medium
as primarily connected to particular states. In large part, this bias is due to
the fact that it is difficult to find a locus for talking about television flows
without falling back on methodologies and narratives that direct our atten-
tion to national boundaries.

On the other hand, the concept of media capitals portrays cities like Hong
Kong as positioned at the intersection of complex patterns of economic,
social and cultural flows. A media capital is a nexus or switching point,
rather than a container. In some ways, this approach compares to Saskia
Sassen's notion of global cities. In her estimation, urban locales that once
served as national centers of industrial production have now been super-
seded by global financial and service centers. Since the 1980s, as marketing
and manufacturing operations dispersed, Sassen (1991) contends that
finance, planning and design functions have congregated in transnational
centers of the global economy. Yet she points out that 'the maintenance of
centralized control and management over a geographically dispersed array
of plants, offices, and service outlets cannot be taken for granted or seen as
an inevitable outcome of a "world system". The possibility of such central-
ized control needs to be produced' (p. 325). That is, scholars need to under-
stand the historical processes and the specific institutional practices by
which some cities rise to the status of global centers and other do not. Sassen
focuses her analysis primarily on the financial and producer service sectors
(such as accounting and law), showing how patterns of economic exchange
and institutional organization were dramatically transformed during the

1970s and 1980s. Yet the question remains, how have such patterns of globalization affected other important industries, especially the culture industries? Economic analysis can certainly tell us a great deal about the emergence of global media capitals, but as we will see below, social and cultural forces are tremendously influential as well. How, then, does one write the history of media capitals without either characterizing them as epiphenomena of capitalist development or as mere extensions of the nation-state?

In his assessment of Latin American media, Jesus Martin-Barbero (1993) contends that 'historians of the mass media have studied only the economic structure and the ideological content of the mass media; few have given close attention to the mediations through which the media have acquired a concrete institutional form and become a reflection of the culture' (p. 163). By invoking the concept of mediations, Martin-Barbero points to the complex ways in which quotidian experiences of human migration, social change and popular memory in Latin America have found expression in the cultural output of media institutions during the 20th century. Rather than merely acting as instruments of elite control, he suggests that these institutions mediated a complex array of historical forces. By extension, this essay will show how the future, as well as the past history of media capitals most crucially hinges on their ability to register and articulate the social experiences of their audiences.

Media capitals, then, are sites of mediation, locations where complex forces and flows interact. They are neither bounded nor self-contained entities. Rather, we should understand them in the manner that geographers like Doreen Massey (1992) and Kevin Robins (1991) understand cities, as meeting places where local specificity arises out of migration, interaction and exchange. As such, media capital is a relational concept, not simply an acknowledgement of dominance. For example, Hong Kong's claim to such status is crucially dependent on historical, cultural and institutional relations with such places as Guangzhou, Singapore and Taipei. Moreover, the city's status as a media capital is an ongoing matter of negotiation, contention, and even competition. Singapore, for example, officially touts itself as the 'media hub' of Southeast Asia, and Taipei eagerly attempted to take advantage of Hong Kong's seeming vulnerability when sovereignty over the territory was transferred to the People's Republic of China in 1997. Thus capital status can be won and lost, and the term itself evokes both senses of the word: capital as a center of activity and capital as a concentration of resources, reputation and talent. Media capitals are places where things come together and, consequently, where the generation and circulation of new mass culture forms become possible.

The aim of this essay is to suggest how scholars might use media capital as a concept that would foster empirically grounded analysis of the temporal dynamism and spatial complexity of a global media environment.

Such an approach does not seek to diminish the importance of economic or national forces, but rather to elaborate more fully the complex logics of contemporary television. It poses such questions as: On what basis does a particular locale deserve to be called a media capital? How did it emerge as such? Why does it succeed? How does it operate in relationship to various states, markets and audiences? What is its relationship to other media capitals? And perhaps most importantly, what does the history of a particular media capital tell us about processes of globalization? In other words, this essay advocates historically informed *cultural geographies* of television and it speculates about the viability of such an approach by comparing the history and fortunes of three media capitals – one that is currently in an ascendant phase (Hollywood), another that is in a state of disarray (Hong Kong), and a third that was eclipsed by more powerful rivals despite showing early potential as a significant site of cultural production (Chicago). Although this preliminary study is limited by its focus on television, it nevertheless attempts to discuss the medium's relations other cultural forms – film, radio, music – and social forces – migration, geopolitics, capitalism. Hopefully, the comparisons elicited from this inquiry will yield some productive insights and point towards potential avenues for future research, even if it fails – within the scope of a single essay – to account for all factors and influences that shape a media capital.

Chicago and Hollywood

The competition to become the acknowledged media capital of North America begins with the early history of radio during the 1920s. At that time, the cornerstone of US broadcast regulation was the concept of *localism*, which designated licensees as trustees of the airwaves, operating on behalf of a local community. Localism is a concept that refers back to the New England village green of the early Republic, where it was intended that political decisions should grow out of interpersonal deliberation among the assembled population of any given town or borough. When first adopted as a centerpiece of broadcast policy during the late 1920s, the concept was already an anachronism since radio and, later, television were largely dominated by major corporations based in New York City. Nevertheless, the concept of localism was enshrined in key pieces of legislation, no doubt partially due to public nostalgia for small group communication and widespread criticism of monopoly corporations, such as RCA (Kahn, 1984). This combination made New York corporations cautious about their national network aspirations and alerted them to the potential benefits of limited autonomy for some of their local and regional operations (Barnouw, 1966; McChesney, 1993; Streeter, 1996; Smulyan, 1994). Besides government policy and public opinion, other forces militated for the dispersion of

creative activity during the radio era in the US. For example, production costs were somewhat modest, making the differences between network and local programming less consequential. Those cities with a substantial pool of creative talent in related art forms could develop music, variety, drama and public affairs programs of comparatively high quality. Such was the case with Chicago and Hollywood, both of which became important centers of program production.

The national networks understood the fairly obvious advantages of Hollywood radio. As historian Michele Hilmes (1990) has pointed out, major broadcasters turned to Hollywood in an attempt to tap an existing pool of cinema stars and to realize cross-promotional strategies between the two media. Film stars would draw viewers to a radio show and the radio show would help promote the performer's next movie. Yet outside the Hollywood film community, Los Angeles itself offered few incentives as a base of network operations. At the time, population in the far western part of the US was relatively sparse, and manufacturing output remained comparatively insignificant until World War II. Los Angeles had a modest social infrastructure, a diminutive regional economy and (apart from Hollywood) relatively thin cultural resources. Consequently, when the networks looked westward, they were not tapping existing regional or local circulations of capital, talent or audiences so much as they were tapping the assets of a relatively self-contained creative enclave of the national film industry.[1]

Chicago, on the other hand, offered the advantages of a major *regional* center of manufacturing, transport and communication. Located at the heart of a vast interior railroad network, Chicago was the premiere locale for the processing and transshipment of agricultural commodities from the American heartland to urban markets on the East Coast and an important center for the manufacture and marketing of consumer goods. It became the central node of a powerful agro-industrial complex during the 19th century; and in the 20th century it continued to play an important role despite the increasing synchronization of the national economy. Chicago mediated between rural and urban, between local and regional, and between Midwestern and national contexts. It both brought agricultural goods to the national market in processed form and it returned finished products to the prosperous towns and cities of the Midwest (Carey, 1989; Cohen, 1990; Cronon, 1991; Gilbert, 1991).

As a consequence of this mediating role, Chicago became an important base of operations for advertising firms that wanted to be close to the headquarters of their clients, such as meat processing companies, household products manufacturers and grocery store chains. Just as Chicago-based catalog sales corporations – such as Montgomery Wards, Spigel and Sears Roebuck – played a mediating role in the emerging consumer culture of the pre-radio era, Chicago-based advertising agencies became leaders in the development of radio programming and promotion. In part this had to do

with the proximity of these agencies to the corporate headquarters of their clients, and in part it had to do with the fact that Chicago agencies also promoted themselves as particularly responsive to the complexities of marketing to audiences in small towns as well as major urban locales. They claimed the unique advantage of being able to tell a manufacturer that a particular sales approach was designed to 'play in Peoria', a small Midwestern city close to Chicago that was portrayed as embracing the epitome of mainstream values and tastes. Peoria was to Fordist mass culture what Los Angeles is perhaps to neo-Fordist niche cultures today. It was emblematic of the terrain that many advertisers wished to navigate in the pursuit of responsive consumers. Between the 1930s and 1950s, Chicago advertising agencies touted themselves as standing at the nexus of national and local sentiments. They operated in a huge city with a substantial immigrant population who came both from overseas and from the rural heartland. Radio signals from Chicago stations traversed ethnically diverse urban neighborhoods as well as many towns and small cities across the Midwest. As such, Chicago supposedly provided an assimilationist laboratory, where foreign and domestic, urban and rural, would hopefully come together as a mass American market. Major corporate sponsors specifically commissioned these agencies to produce promotional messages that were less governed by the logic of big-time show business than by the worldviews of middle-American listeners (Allen, 1985; Cone, 1969; Ely, 1991; Marchand, 1985).

Since, at the time, the actual production of radio programming was primarily in the hands of sponsoring advertisers, the New York-based networks shared managerial control over broadcasting content with program producers in Chicago and Los Angeles. Sponsors in search of expensive star power turned to Los Angeles, while those plying the cultural terrain of the heartland sought out the talents of the Chicago creative community, which for its part offered innovative contributions to such narrative genres as the drama, soap opera and domestic comedy, as well as information formats such as home improvement and farm programming. Famous programs included *Ma Perkins*, *Jack Armstrong*, *Vic and Sade*, *The Story of Mary Marlin*, *Amos 'n' Andy*, *Lum 'n' Abner* and *Fibber McGee and Molly*. Although lower wages were paid to Chicago scriptwriters and performers, the city nevertheless became a vibrant center of radio production, offering opportunities to a broad range of creative personnel.

Later, with the emergence of television, Chicago seemed poised to continue its mediating role in US popular culture. Radio dramas were adapted to television and broadcasters pioneered innovative formats for children's programming and variety-talk shows. The national networks welcomed these ventures and even adopted some Chicago programming for regional and national distribution (Sternberg, 1973, 1975). Network responsiveness to local initiative was largely due to the creative, economic and technical challenges confronting national broadcast services during the

late 1940s and early 1950s. TV production was far more expensive than radio, and the major networks were unsure about the popularity and commercial viability of various forms of programming. Local experimentation therefore complemented development efforts at network headquarters in New York. Furthermore, national broadcasters were receptive to such initiatives because they needed to convince local television station personnel and government regulators that network affiliation was advantageous to viewers in local communities. Regardless of their ultimate intentions, the network executives needed to appear committed to the concept of localism if they were to entice stations to affiliate and if they were to convince regulators that television networking would serve local as well as national interests (Boddy, 1990; Kepley, 1990). For all of these reasons, the 'Chicago School' of television flourished during the first decade of the new medium.

Yet by the middle of the 1950s, network infrastructures were solidly in place and television was emerging as the pre-eminent form of national media. Demand for network advertising time grew dramatically, although supply was limited by regulatory design to two, and later three, national services. Given these oligopoly conditions, the networks now seemed confident that they had consolidated their dominant position in the industry. Consequently, they then sought to 'rationalize' and centralize their operations. One of the key steps in this process was to pry loose the creative control that sponsors and advertising agencies enjoyed in the field of program production. Whereas networks previously offered entire blocks of broadcast time to a sponsor who would then develop program content under the guidance of an advertising agency, networks now began to produce more of their own programming. Instead of the *Texaco Star Theatre* or the *Kraft Music Hall*, networks developed programs like *Ben Casey* or the *Beverly Hillbillies,* programs over which they enjoyed creative and operational control. Consequently, the networks increasingly turned to Hollywood film producers and commissioned them to develop telefilm series under network guidance rather than continuing the New York- and Chicago-based practice of broadcasting live performances. Whereas during the early television era, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles all served as major production centers, the New York-based networks chose to consolidate studio operations on the West Coast during the late 1950s, shutting down production in their own city as well as Chicago. This new network partnership with Hollywood supposedly made it easier to contain costs and retain creative control. Furthermore, it took advantage of new distribution opportunities, as telefilm programming could now be marketed to local stations as inexpensive reruns of primetime hits, and it could be sold in newly emerging markets overseas (Anderson, 1994; Balio, 1990; Boddy, 1990; Curtin, 1995).

This centralization of creative activity took place during a period of lax

federal oversight and by the time regulators began to respond, local television production was a shambles. *Ex post facto* government hearings in Chicago, Illinois and Omaha, Nebraska in 1962 only testified to how thoroughly the networks had altered the conditions of production and transformed the discourse of television. During these hearings, it was virtually impossible for critics to mount a coherent attack on network policy and consequently the Federal Communications Commission buried the findings without taking action (Anderson and Curtin, 1999). Indeed, the FCC, during the early 1960s, seemed more preoccupied with the potential uses of television as an instrument of international diplomacy. Under the aegis of President Kennedy's New Frontier, FCC Chair Newton Minow promoted the export of US telefilm and negotiated the rapid deployment of the world's first communications satellites. In these ventures, government partnership with the major networks was seen as more important than principles of localism or antitrust (Curtin, 1997; Schiller, 1969).

The government therefore tacitly endorsed the consolidation of network operations, heralding both the high network era of US television and the apogee of a Fordist regime of accumulation. Television became a vital complement to national systems of mass production, distribution, and consumption. The role of regional economies diminished as a result and the mediating role of regional cultural centers such as Chicago, Cincinnati and New York diminished as well. Television became so widely perceived as a national medium that many viewers saw local programming as little more than an occasional nuisance. American TV had become Hollywood TV, financed and managed on the East Coast and produced on the West Coast, a binary relationship that belied the centralization of media power at the national level.

As for the global context, Hollywood television embraced an international rather than a transnational logic. As was the case with most industrial behavior under Fordism, program export policies and technology development were largely predicated upon the projection of national power. Rather than a cooperative transcultural venture, the main objective of industry executives and government policy makers was to sustain US leadership among an alliance of nations. Primetime programming was exported intact, as if the modern, consumerist qualities of Hollywood fare would invariably draw the allegiance of populations around the world. Consequently, series development and production remained focused on US audiences and advertisers (Kendall, 1996). The tastes of overseas viewers were rarely taken into account, except by syndicators as they attempted to hawk the programs in diverse cultural contexts. Moreover, the infrastructure of American television remained resolutely national – foreign ownership of media enterprises, transnational co-productions, and the conscious design and marketing of transnational programming was virtually unheard of. During the high network era of the 1960s and 1970s, US television was

Hollywood television, which had an international afterlife but was nevertheless an emphatically national phenomenon.

Neo-network Hollywood

The cultural logic of American television today remains largely the same. Producers primarily focus on national audiences, thinking little about viewers at the local or global levels, which in large part is due to the economics of the industry. The US national networks still provide the broadest promotion and exposure for new programs and they pay hefty license fees that help to defray much of the initial production cost. Moreover, program popularity at the national network level is still considered the most important signifier of syndication potential, and syndication is where most programs begin to turn a profit. Accordingly, success on US network television rarely means financial disaster, but failure on the US networks can rarely be turned into success in the syndication market.

Exceptions exist, of course, and they portray the ways in which Hollywood is changing. For example, the old maxims of the international syndication market are giving way to new calculations regarding audience tastes and behaviors. Increasingly, overseas viewers are being defined by demographic factors other than citizenship. Syndicators often strategize about program marketing on a regional basis, by thinking about similarities among viewers in Taipei, Seoul and Tokyo rather than automatically presuming differences between Chinese, Korean and Japanese audiences. Despite the many national influences that continue to exist, syndicators and satellite broadcasters are now alert to the opportunities engendered by the emergence of a pan-European business class, a South Asian youth culture and a Greater China media market.

These changing patterns in TV syndication are attributable to a number of factors, including the growth of transnational media conglomerates, the proliferation of new distribution vehicles (cable, satellite, video cassette), the re-regulation of electronic media, and the emergence of new production arrangements – all of which might be collectively referred to as marking the transition from a 'high network' to a 'neo-network' era of television (Caldwell, 1994; Curtin, 1996, 2000; MacDonald, 1990; Wasko, 1994). Program distribution was once constrained by government regulation of technology so as to minimize the number of network competitors at the national level and to control the flow of international programming. Now, however, conditions have changed dramatically, not only in the US but also in countries around the globe. Audiences that were once interpellated by the monopoly institutions of national broadcasting are now hailed by media products that flow through a wide variety of channels. What was once organized as television for all citizens of a nation, is now organized

according to niche demographics and consumption patterns. The number of services and programming choices is multiplying rapidly in countries as diverse as India, China and Italy. In this environment, media producers find that the branding of products is often more important than futile attempts to control the mode of distribution. Unlike the network era when the control of a few national channels was the key to profitability, neo-network television firms focus on marketing, promotion and the control of intellectual property (Curtin and Streeter, 2001). Star Trek, Star Wars, and Disney animation all are powerful brands in markets around the globe. Given a greater range of choices, audiences are drawn to products by textual elements – characters, storylines, special effects – rather than by the technological and regulatory constraints formerly imposed on the delivery system.

One would think that under such conditions, Hollywood would only feel more confident about its future prospects. Yet one need only consider the example of the *X-Files* to identify some of Hollywood's most recent sources of anxiety. The program initially achieved notoriety on Fox Television, the first new network to dislodge the traditional broadcast monopolies in the US and the first North American one to become part of a transnational conglomerate with origins outside the United States. Just as remarkable, the *X-Files* was produced on location in British Columbia during its first five seasons, largely because a favorable currency exchange rate, a compliant local government and lower costs of labor and materials made the northern location especially attractive to the program's producers. The *X-Files* is not alone in making this decision to migrate from its creative operations. Since the late 1990s, industry representatives and local government officials in Southern California have been ranting about the flight of television and film productions to such locations as Vancouver, Toronto, London, Melbourne, Orlando and, interestingly enough, Chicago and New York. Although these productions still bear the markings of Hollywood generic conventions, stylistic devices and financing arrangements, and although they feature well-known stars, Hollywood representatives nevertheless sense a dispersion of activity that begins to question the necessity of locating production in Southern California. Hollywood remains an important node for the 'face-work' of the industry (Giddens, 1990), but new circuits of transportation and communication may be rendering the material location of a production less consequential. Even the vaunted advantages of Hollywood's technological sophistication are no longer so palpable. As the case of the *X-Files* suggests, high-tech effects are becoming available at lower cost in more dispersed locations. Indeed, one of the most visually elaborate science-fiction films of recent years, *The Matrix*, was filmed at a studio in Australia with a producer from Hollywood, directors from Chicago, a stunt coordinator from Hong Kong and a digital special effects team from the San Francisco Bay area. All of which raises the question: is Hollywood really necessary as anything other than a meeting point for industry personnel, as

a place to do the necessary face-work to get a production online? Moreover, will this dispersion of program production engender the development of collateral creative activity in distant localities that may, in turn, begin to compete with Hollywood? In British Columbia, for example, runaway Hollywood productions have helped to revive the television production industry of Western Canada, which now generates programs for global, national and local markets (Tinic, forthcoming).

Another issue that generates tremendous anxiety in Hollywood these days has to do with the control of copyright. During the high network era, television producers controlled the exposure of their programs by technological and regulatory means. One could only gain access to a program at a certain time in a certain locale. Today, anxieties about unauthorized circulation of product have motivated Hollywood to think more transnationally. International release windows for films and television programs have been tightened so that pirates have a tougher time getting product to market before the exhibition of the copyrighted version. Transnational copyright enforcement has also become a major preoccupation of the Hollywood establishment. After intensive lobbying that began during the Reagan years, intellectual property issues have risen to become one of the leading foreign policy concerns of the American government. In most US embassies around the globe, one can find at least one foreign service officer specializing in intellectual property issues.

Such anxieties suggest how the geography of television is changing and how Hollywood's status as a global media capital remains, but the conditions of its dominance have been altered dramatically. Its hegemony is neither stable nor inevitable. Even though producers and directors in Hollywood may continue to fix their attention primarily on US audiences during the creative process, they nevertheless are working in an environment that is rapidly changing around them. Besides the challenges posed by new competitors, runaway production and intellectual property, Hollywood is also facing competition from regional television services that are connected to the specific patterns of circulation in different parts of the world. One of the media capitals that has proven both durable and resilient in generating such challenges is Hong Kong.

Hong Kong television

When broadcast television first came to Hong Kong in 1967, the local society was only beginning to experience the emergence of a broad-based consumer culture. Throughout much of the 1940s and 1950s waves of immigrants from mainland China and from overseas Chinese communities flooded into the city, dramatically altering the quality and tempo of everyday life in the colony. Previously, Hong Kong had been a transit point

for Chinese trade, culture and human migration, but only a relatively small population made the territory their home. Located on the south coast of China at the mouth of the Pearl River, Hong Kong was an entrepot for a lucrative flow of goods between Europe and Guangdong Province. Yet Hong Kong itself was not the center of economic or cultural activity in southern China. One hundred miles inland, the city of Guangzhou (Canton) was the main nexus of a lucrative network of agricultural and cottage manufacturing industries. It was also the cultural and intellectual capital of Cantonese society. In the mid-1800s, Hong Kong was, by comparison, a sparsely populated stretch of rocky headlands that was seized by British traders in order to establish a base for their commercial operations in East Asia. Most Chinese who traveled to the colony to find work or to do business planned to return to their homeland as soon as possible.

Cataclysmic events of the 20th century would forever alter the character of Britain's furthest imperial outpost. During World War II, the Chinese civil war, and periods of economic reversal, hundreds of thousands of people of all political stripes sought sanctuary in the colony. Most imagined the city as a temporary home, seeing their fortunes as ultimately tied to the villages where they had grown up and where their ancestors had lived for centuries. Yet the political tides of the era forced many to remain in the territory, where they found work, started businesses and raised families. A city of little more than a million at the end of World War II, the population in Hong Kong tripled before Cold War tensions and government regulations began to restrict the flow of newcomers during the 1960s (Leung, 1996). Despite these political constraints – and because of its central position in the Chinese diaspora – the city continued to prosper as a nexus for financial and trade relations between mainland China and the rest of the world, serving as the conduit for well over two-thirds of China's international trade and investment during the last four decades of the 20th century. Just as importantly, Hong Kong became the central locus of banking and investment for the extensive transnational business activities of overseas Chinese communities around the world. Moreover, the city's growing wealth and influence during the 1960s and 1970s in turn fostered its status as a regional trade and finance center for all of East Asia. Like Chicago, Hong Kong mediated a vast and complex field of material and economic flows (Cragg, 1996; Seagrave, 1995).

The city's emergence as a media capital must, furthermore, take into account the influences exerted by migrations of cultural institutions and creative talent. Prior to World War II, Chinese performers and audiences looked to Guangzhou for leadership in matters of art and culture, with Cantonese opera serving as one of the most popular forms of entertainment. During the 1930s, nascent film studios happily appropriated the songs, narratives and performance styles of the art form. Indeed, many film-makers simply recorded and exhibited opera performances via the new cinema

technology. During this formative period, Guangzhou therefore became both the center of Cantonese opera *and* Cantonese film production. But as the fortunes of war disrupted cultural activities on the mainland, many creative personnel sought refuge in Hong Kong. Likewise, filmmakers and artists from other parts of China, especially Shanghai (then known as the Hollywood of China), fled south during the Japanese invasion and the civil war between Nationalist and Communist factions. Hong Kong offered sanctuary to members of these creative communities and therefore emerged during the post-war period as the most prolific producer of popular Chinese cinema (Choi, 1990; Fonoroff, 1988; Jarvie, 1977; Teo, 1997).

Yet despite the territory's ascendant status, Guangzhou, Shanghai and mainland culture had tremendous influence on the creative styles of this powerful new center of cinema production, in part due to the fact that refugee filmmakers continued to feature themes, stars and genres that had proven popular in their place of origin. Although the influx of refugees enhanced the creative resources of the Hong Kong film industry, it nevertheless diminished the medium's ability to express local concerns. For refugee filmmakers commonly addressed diasporic audiences that were scattered far beyond the territory in such places as Taiwan, Singapore, Bangkok and London (Leung and Chan, 1997). Accordingly, films produced in Hong Kong during the post-World War II period were powerfully influenced by external economic, political and cultural forces, and therefore were not particularly expressive of life within the colony. Narratives were often set in mythical locales or distant Chinese cities. Indeed, the urban landscape of the rapidly changing colony was rarely glimpsed in these productions. Similarly, the dilemmas that on-screen characters faced were only allegorically linked to the complex challenges confronting immigrants to the city. Although widely popular with audiences during the 1950s, many critics and historians contend that this diasporic Chinese cinema became increasingly irrelevant to Hong Kong audiences during the 1960s, as the city experienced a period of dramatic social and economic change. By mid-decade, filmmakers began to offer more contemporary topics and treatments that responded to these changes, but it happened too late, as attendance at Chinese films, particularly Cantonese films, began a serious period of decline (Choi, 1990; Fonoroff, 1988; Teo, 1997).

One of the key causes of declining attendance was a significant population shift in the colony. During the 1960s, immigrants were beginning to accept the fact that their stay in Hong Kong might be longer than they expected and many were beginning to enjoy unrivaled prosperity. As incomes rose, so did the size of families, and young people came to comprise a larger percentage of the population. The youth culture that subsequently emerged in Hong Kong exhibited distinctive tastes, values and life experiences. Many young people had absolutely no contact with life on the mainland and therefore did not share their parents' nostalgia for home. This

cultural amnesia was compounded by the fact that the colonial school system sought to neutralize political tensions between the pro- and anti-Communist factions of Hong Kong society by eliminating 20th-century Chinese history and civics from the school curriculum. Although the refugee generation had fixed its attention on the fortunes of mainland society and politics, members of the younger generation harbored no such proclivities (Fu, 1997). In many cases, they had more experience with Western popular culture than they did with traditional Chinese culture and politics. Hollywood movies and US music became extremely popular in Hong Kong during the 1960s. Nevertheless, young people also seemed to be searching for cultural forms that were more proximate, more relevant (Lee, 1991).

It was at this juncture, after extensive government deliberation, that broadcast television was introduced to Hong Kong. The first license, TVB, was allocated to a consortium of local business leaders, among them Sir Run Run Shaw, head of Hong Kong's most powerful film studio, which had dominated the world of Chinese cinema for much of the post-World War II era.[2] Shaw's success emanated from the fact that he and his brothers built a vertically-integrated media empire that operated throughout East and Southeast Asia. In virtually every major city with a substantial Chinese population, Shaw owned theaters and film distributorships. In Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, as well as a host of other cities throughout the region, Shaw had a dominant position in the market, both for Chinese and Hollywood film exhibition. Based in the Clearwater Bay section of Hong Kong, Shaw Brothers established the largest studios in Asia, with elaborate sets and thousands of artists under contract. Yet Shaw noticed the slackening of cinema attendance during the late 1960s and consequently began to shift his attention from film to television. Within a decade he took control of TVB and – due in part to pressure from government regulators who were concerned about media cross-ownership – he relinquished his active involvement in cinema in favor of the new medium. Although no longer able to access transnational Chinese film audiences, Shaw was able to address a rapidly growing and increasingly prosperous local television audience.

The popularity of local television grew with fantastic speed. By 1973, some 80 percent of Hong Kong homes owned receivers enabling them to pick up two local Chinese-language stations that produced most of their own programming. Wildly popular, television quickly became the dominant advertising medium, with TVB reportedly attracting more than 50 percent of total advertising revenues for all media in the territory. The station then used its leverage to put pressure on advertisers and creative personnel in order to forge long-term contracts that insured the continued dominance of TVB. Although many criticized Shaw's vertically-integrated monopoly, TVB was nevertheless a hotbed of creative endeavor during the early years of the medium. Revenues were high, budgets were big, and the station served as

a magnet for writers, performers and directors from theater, film, publishing and other realms of creative endeavor (Cheuk, 1999; Choi, 1990; Kung and Zhang, 1984; Lo and Ng, 1996).

Consequently, television became the primary site of public deliberation regarding the emergence of a distinctive Hong Kong identity. Local news programming was tremendously popular during this period, especially stories about the work of an independent commission set up to investigate business and government corruption (Chan, 1992). As the first public examination of malfeasance in the colonial power structure, the inquest had a transformative impact on Hong Kong society, generating widespread discussion about tradition, ethics and the rule of law. Television producers furthermore tapped this popular fascination by crafting primetime crime series that were among the first dramas produced in the colony. Variety shows were also an important genre during the early years of television, with singing stars fashioning a local musical style that merged US, Japanese and Chinese influences into a distinctive pop form featuring contemporary lyrics by local songwriters. Out of this milieu emerged Cantopop, a style that still dominates the Hong Kong music scene today and has a powerful influence on entertainment industries throughout Asia. Finally, domestic dramas about the dilemmas of everyday life in the territory produced legions of loyal fans that tuned in on a nightly basis. Among the most popular was a serial narrative about the fortunes of a local family that is unexpectedly reunited with a long-lost son from the mainland. Unable to adapt to modern Hong Kong society, the mainland character, Ah Chian, explicitly foregrounded distinctions between the values and attitudes of the societies on either side of the border. Viewed by more than 90 percent of TV households, the series provided a pretext for wide-ranging discussions regarding identity, migration and popular values (Ma, 1999).

In sum, Hong Kong's rapid embrace of television was connected to the fact that it mediated complex relations between East and West, between tradition and modernity, and between immigrant and indigenous populations. Television both responded to and shaped the social transformations then taking place in the colony. Furthermore, the medium is credited with sparking the revival of the commercial Chinese film industry and with fostering the growth of the Cantonese pop (Cantopop) music industry (Kung and Zhang, 1984). Thus locality and identity were important factors during this period of cultural ferment but, interestingly, the output of these local culture industries also proved popular when circulated in overseas Chinese communities where similar social dynamics were at work. Younger generations of overseas Chinese seemed to share the interests and enthusiasms of Hong Kong residents, becoming fans of exported film and music. For the very first time, Hong Kong, rather than Guangzhou or Shanghai, was globally recognized as the capital of Chinese popular culture. No longer seen as a colonial enclave inhabited by immigrants, Hong Kong shed its

reputation as a conduit for cultural influences from afar and instead became recognized as a cosmopolitan center of East Asia.

Neo-network Hong Kong

Yet even though Hong Kong television emerged at the juncture of complex transnational flows of people, goods and culture, the circulation of its television programming – as opposed to its film and music texts – was largely restricted to the confines of the territory due to regulatory and technological constraints of the network era. In neighboring mainland China, television receivers were not widely available until the 1980s and national governments in Taiwan, Singapore and other East Asian countries placed restrictions on program imports. Moreover, telefilm copies of Hong Kong programs were difficult to syndicate in other overseas locales because broadcasters were loath to relinquish airtime to programming that seemed targeted at Chinese minority communities. During the 1970s, programmers in London and even Bangkok (home to a large Thai-Chinese community) commonly saw TVB programs as niche products, ill-suited to the needs of British or Thai mass audiences.

Such obstacles were not immediately problematic for Shaw, since TVB profits from Hong Kong operations grew annually at a fantastic rate during the first two decades of the medium. Yet by the late 1980s growth rates began to plateau and consequently TVB and ATV, its key competitor, began to show significant interest in international markets. Thanks to the increasing diffusion of cable television and videocassette technology, Shaw and his management team began to turn their attention to overseas Chinese communities, the very same audiences that had fostered the first incarnation of Shaw's media empire. Beginning first with video rentals, TVB established outlets and franchises in cities as diverse as Amsterdam, Penang and Vancouver. Then, culling information from its rental database, TVB began to invest in cable services in places like Canada and Taiwan where its video rentals had proven especially attractive to local viewers. At the same time, TVB was experiencing uncanny popularity in mainland China where spillover signals into the Pearl River Delta region became (and remain) the most popular television programming. During the 1990s, Hong Kong film, music and television were exceptionally influential in the popular culture of the PRC. In fact, numerous studies have suggested that the culture industries of Hong Kong and Taipei mediated the re-opening of mainland China to cultural influences from afar and TVB was perhaps the most influential company during this era of transition (Gold, 1993; Lull, 1991; Yang, 1997; Zha, 1995).

As TVB turns its attention from the territorially defined mass audiences of the network era to the geographically dispersed audiences of the neo-network era, the company envisions itself as playing a significant role in the

future development of Chinese television throughout East Asia and around the globe. The scope of this aspiration is suggested by the diverse nature of TVB's media ventures. In Amsterdam and other cities around the world, one can walk into a TVB video shop that is stocked from floor to ceiling with television series available for sale or rent. In Toronto, TVB's main broadcast feed is available on cable TV in virtually the same form as one would find it in Hong Kong. TVB's signature is also recognizable at one of its most profitable overseas operations, TVBS, a joint venture with Taiwan's ERA Communications that is one of the top four channels in Taiwan. More recently, TVB is also developing the infrastructure for a global satellite service with interactive capabilities. Interestingly, these and other ventures have reminded TVB management of the importance of feature films as the anchor of any successful cable/satellite programming platform. Consequently, Shaw's company is actively exploring the reinvigoration of its film operations, which have languished for more than 20 years (Chan, 2000; Lee, 1997).

In her study of Shanghai media use during the mid-1990s, Mayfair Mei-hui Yang found that Hong Kong and Taiwanese television and music were far more popular and influential with mainland audiences than Hollywood fare. As state influence over everyday life receded in post-Mao China, audiences seemed to be searching for cultural resources that reflected upon the quotidian challenges they were confronting. Yang observed that such media products 'enabled the detaching of Chinese subjectivity from the state and its mobilization across imaginary space to link up with alternative Chinese subjectivities far away' (Yang, 1997).[3] These linkages and subjectivities resulted from interactions among Chinese societies as they experienced processes of modernization and geopolitical realignment. Moreover, they represented something quite different from common characterizations of Hollywood hegemony or the McDonaldization of Chinese culture. Instead, Yang observed, 'The binary constructions of center versus periphery and West versus the rest prove inadequate, as the outside "center" that is having the most impact on China today is not the West but the modernized and commercialized Chinese societies of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese.'

Although many changes have taken place since Yang's research during the mid-1990s, the receding influence of centralized state institutions and ideology continues to stimulate new patterns of flow and interaction among Chinese populations in Asia and around the world. Circulations among these societies do not, of course, preclude interactions with the West, but those interactions are often mediated via the popular texts and institutional practices of media institutions based in Hong Kong. And although it increasingly competes with Beijing and Shanghai, the city still serves as a nexus for flows within a Chinese cultural sphere. It also serves as a site where media practitioners from all over cultural China congregate to do the

face-work necessary for mass media production. Furthermore, the city sits at the apex of career pilgrimages by successful performers and impresarios: director Peter Chan hails from Bangkok, actress Michelle Yeoh from Malaysia, singer/actress Faye Wong from Beijing, actor/veejay David Wu from Seattle, director Sylvia Chang from Taipei and TV executive Robert Chua from Singapore.

Thus, capital, expertise, and cultural resources from Chinese societies around the world flow through Hong Kong. Yet the city's fortune as a media capital rests not only on its centrality, but also on its marginality. Hong Kong is very Chinese *and* remarkably Western, and *yet* it's not really either, nor can we simply say that it's both. It exists at the center of flows among Chinese communities, yet it's also on the periphery of both China and the West. One might say that its power and its vulnerability derive from its 'marginal centrality'. The recent restoration of Beijing's political control over the city highlights these ambiguities, significantly altering the intentions, strategies and behaviors of media organizations based in the former British colony. On the one hand, Hong Kong broadcasters must now acknowledge the influence of Beijing's political elite and must find a place in the national order. Yet on the other hand, these broadcasters seem determined to carve out transnational strategies that offer them some hope of maintaining a modicum of independence and prosperity. Ironically, Hong Kong is both threatened by Beijing and dependent on historical and cultural legacies that the two cities share. It therefore must mark its distance from Beijing and from Hollywood if it is to survive as a media capital. For the attraction of Hong Kong TV, as Yang suggests, resides in its perceived distance from the disciplinary logic of the Chinese state and the cultural logic of Hollywood.

This peculiar dilemma bears consideration in light of Chicago's experience as a media capital. Part of Chicago's demise as a broadcasting center can be explained by its diminishing identity as a site of mediation between national and regional, urban and rural, Anglo and Other. By the 1950s, the city lacked a political, economic, or cultural rationale for its existence as a major media production locale, thus making it difficult for Chicago broadcasters to mount substantial resistance to the consolidation of national network television. Now, in the neo-network era, Hong Kong faces a similarly complex challenge of re-positioning its television institutions in relation to Beijing and Hollywood. At the center of current debates over the future of Hong Kong media floats the illusory visage of a Greater China audience – the Asian counterpart to aspirations for a pan-European 'television without frontiers' or a Latin 'audio-visual space' (Mattelart et al., 1984). At its economic core, this Greater China audience is composed of Hong Kong residents and close to 50 million overseas Chinese with per capita incomes that rank among the highest in the industrialized world. Add to this total the roughly 250 million urban inhabitants of mainland China

– almost all of whom have access to television in their homes – and one begins to discern why this potential audience has generated so much discussion. Hong Kong plays a key part in this speculation since it is widely acknowledged for its central role in trade, investment, migration and cultural flows among Chinese communities around the world. In other words, like the Chicago of a prior era, Hong Kong plays a distinctive mediational role for a vast and enormously complex economic and cultural formation. But this mediational role is crucially dependent on its position at both the center and the margins of Greater China. It furthermore depends on the useful fiction of Greater China, when in fact the concept lacks both boundaries and coherence. It is perhaps more appropriate to suggest that Hong Kong mediates a useful fiction rather than a coherent entity.

In his controversial 1993 essay, Samuel Huntington argues that geopolitics in the post-Cold War world will be shaped by civilizational conflicts, rather than economic or political tensions. Huntington identifies seven great civilizations – among them Islam, India, China, and the West – that are based upon underlying religious, linguistic and cultural affinities. In an attempt to chart new patterns of transnational media flow, Joseph Straubhaar (1997) appropriates Huntington's approach in order to explain the emergence of what he refers to as geo-cultural television markets. Writes Straubhaar, 'If [Huntington's] analysis extends to culture as represented on television, then we might expect to see the Chinese market broaden to a "Confucian" cultural influence area market, the Arabic language market broaden to an Islamic market, and a Slavic-Orthodox market emerging out of the ex-USSR and Eastern Europe.' Straubhaar contends that such geo-cultural markets are often spatially dispersed, but nevertheless held together by historical, religious, linguistic and cultural affinities. Hong Kong might be seen as both responding to flows within a Chinese – or Confucian – geo-cultural sphere and as participating in the maintenance of an infrastructure that sustains that very sphere of interaction.

Great care must be taken, however, to appropriate this insight without bringing on board the cultural essentialism that informs Huntington's analysis. One danger is that his approach reifies an Orientalist opposition between East and West. It creates unities where none may exist and it suggests that such unities are 'facts of nature' rather than products of power. Another problem with Huntington's approach is that it recenters 'authentic' Chinese culture as emanating from the Middle Kingdom, when in fact some of the most dynamic centers of this sphere are to be found in places like Singapore, Taipei and Hong Kong (Ong and Nonini, 1997). But perhaps most worrisome, Huntington's essentialism refocuses our attention on boundaries and containers rather than complex patterns of flow. And here is where we might find particular advantages to the study of media capitals. For the concept asks us to think in terms of patterned change rather than essential qualities. It furthermore directs our attention to the uneven

and often conflict-ridden development of contemporary media, focusing our attention on difference as well as similarity. And it allows us to speak of cultural spheres of influence without conceiving them as coherent, bounded entities. Consequently, it makes sense to refer to Hong Kong as a media capital of television production that is situated at a nexus of flows among Chinese societies. Yet it is also important to notice that its capital status is historically and spatially contingent, relying on Hong Kong's continuing ability to distinguish itself from competing rivals, such as Tokyo, Shanghai and Hollywood.

Conclusion

Although an unlikely combination, these brief cultural geographies of Hollywood, Hong Kong and Chicago suggest new ways to study patterns of flow and articulation within the increasingly globalized realm of television and popular culture. Unlike the media imperialism approach that tends to understand the dominance of Hollywood as an epiphenomenon of American empire, the study of media capital directs our attention to complex interactions among a range of flows (economic, demographic, technological, cultural and ideological) that operate at a variety of levels (local, national, regional and global). Such an approach seeks to understand both Hollywood's rise to dominance in the network era and its peculiar vulnerability in the neo-network era as it experiences competition from other media capitals with transnational aspirations. For, on the one hand, Hollywood has succeeded as the media capital *par excellence* by absorbing elements from around the world and transforming them into a distinctive textual style that has broad global appeal. Yet, as conditions have shifted, Hollywood now faces growing competition from producers in cities like Beirut, Madras and Rio de Janeiro. Just as Hollywood throughout its history borrowed elements and artists from afar, so too are these emergent media capitals adapting the genres, visual conventions, technologies and institutional practices of American television to markets that lie across cultural divides from Hollywood. Like Detroit in the 1960s, Hollywood today produces big, bloated vehicles that command the fascination of audiences around the world. Yet at the same time, it increasingly must take account of competitors who fashion products for more specific markets, using more localized labor, materials and perspectives. Such programs are not only cheaper to produce but also more attractive to their audiences because they are more culturally relevant.

Hong Kong is one of these competing media capitals, as a consequence of its status as a nexus for economic and cultural flows within and between Chinese societies throughout the 20th century. The city furthermore benefits from a relative lack of censorship and from open trade policies, both of

which encourage transnational alliances of talent and resources. It also sits at the apex of career pilgrimages by successful performers and impresarios, making it an important site for conducting the face-work necessary to mass media production. Thus, media capital – as a concept – allows us to speak of Hong Kong's marginality as well as its centrality, and to consider the implications of a Greater China audience without falling prey to this powerful fiction. It furthermore invites us to acknowledge the attractions of Hollywood media without presuming their inevitable dominance in all corners of the globe. And, finally, it encourages us to remember the history of Chicago broadcasting in anticipation of the inevitable changes that await Hong Kong and Hollywood in the not too distant future.

Notes

1 Space limitations do not allow a full consideration of the rise of Hollywood and the decline of other film producing centers around the United States, such as Chicago, New York and Florida. For a discussion of the move to Holly-wood during the 1910s, see Bordwell et al. (1985). For an examination of the international operations of Hollywood distributors during this early period, see Thompson (1985).
2 For the sake of clarity, I focus on Shaw in this essay. A fuller discussion of the Hong Kong film and TV industries can be found in Curtin (1999).
3 For related and similar findings see Gold (1993), Lull (1991) and Zha (1995).

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