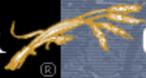


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from the January 04, 1995 edition

EAST MEETS WESTERN TV EXECUTIVES, BUT BOTH ARE A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED

Fred Hift, Special to The Christian Science Monitor

HONG KONG— IN Hong Kong, the MIP Asia television market recently provided a first contact point between television executives from East and West.

Chinese TV executives, many of whom had their first opportunity to meet their American and European colleagues here at the Marche Internationale du Programmation (MIP) exhibition, expressed concern about an evident "culture gap" between China and the West - and, for that matter, between China and many of its more politically liberal neighbors.

Westerners who came to Asia for the first time may have been enticed by the size of the Chinese market: China has a population of more than 1 billion served by some 700 TV stations and more than 1,000 cable channels. But their enthusiasm was dampened somewhat when a major Chinese executive urged them to recognize the realities of dealing with television in China.

"You cannot do business with us unless you keep in mind that, in our country, the public is the market and the government is the master," the general manager of the China TV program Agency, Xu Xiongxiang, told a symposium.

The timing of MIP Asia coincided with the launch of two new satellite TV services in Asia, CNBC-Asia, NBC's new Asian Business Service, and CETV (China Entertainment Television), run by Hong Kong producer/entrepreneur Robert Chua and his wife, Peggy, which represents the first foreign channel to be accepted by the Chinese government.

The growth of satellite-dish receivers in Asia represents a major problem not only to the Chinese, but also to a number of other Asian governments which sense danger in the free dissemination of news and other programming.

The Chinese government has banned the dish antennas. Singapore and others have followed suit, but allow community antennas, which are under government control. One satellite-antenna manufacturer from Singapore said in Hong Kong that he had an assignment from the Malaysian government to investigate the possibility of jamming satellite signals.

Rupert Murdoch's Star TV, which feeds its satellite signals all over Asia from Hong Kong, was blocked by the Chinese. They demanded that Star TV drop the BBC World Service from its bands. When Murdoch complied, but then relayed programs from Taipei, China reimposed the ban.

MR. Chua's motto for his programming, which appeals to the Chinese government, is "No Sex, No Violence, No News." Instead, his network focuses on game shows, comedy, variety, and other types of non-controversial programming. Most of his shows are broadcast in Mandarin.



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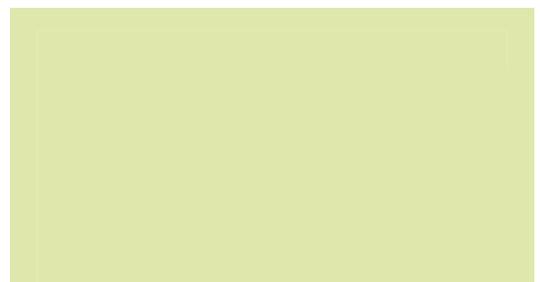
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Mr. Xu notes that, while China's Central Television (CTV) covers the entire country from Beijing, each local station is essentially independent. While all the stations carry national programs (particularly news) from CTV, local programming is being produced in volume, and the stations have an exchange system that allows them to supplement their own fare.

Mr. Xu, whose agency buys foreign programs as well as selling Chinese shows abroad, explains that certain types of programming, like children's offerings and animation, are very popular in China, but the overall imported content of Chinese programming is restricted to 20 percent. Even so, that percentage is rarely reached, he says.

"Asia doesn't want to Westernize itself via the examples portrayed in so much of today's programming originating in the West," Chua explains.

China produces some 5,000 hours of television programming every year, including some 2,500 features and documentaries. But Chinese movies are not particularly popular among Chinese audiences.

On a visit to China Guangdong Television, Wu Xiao Ping, the director of the programs acquisition department, said he does not like the current crop of Chinese films. "They shouldn't make these movies about our history," he says. "I personally prefer films like 'Speed,'" the recent American action thriller, he says.

Attendance at the initial MIP Asia, which will be repeated later this year, was impressive - more than 3,000 TV producers, buyers, sellers, and equipment manufacturers attended from 59 countries, including 50 representatives from mainland China.

While the many Chinese who attended MIP Asia bought very little from abroad, and offered very low prices when they did, other Asian nations, reflecting their local economic surge, went on a buying binge. India, Indonesia, Taiwan, Singapore, Korea, and the Philippines bought not only from the US and Europe, but also from one another.

Americans were disappointed by the Chinese unwillingness to pay the going rate for material, but a number of contracts were signed nonetheless. Wharf Cable, a major cable operator in Hong Kong, signed a deal with MGM to provide movies for its new pay-TV service, and a number of coproduction contracts involving China and the US were initiated.



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