



**COMMUNICATION
AND MEDIA STUDIES
IN ASEAN**
Bridge to New Frontiers

Editors
UMI KHATTAB
FARIDAH IBRAHIM



SECTION B: THEORY AND PRACTICE

11. BUILDING A (REGIONAL) COMMUNICATION THEORY Musa Abu Hassan	89-98
12. BUILDING AN ASEAN PERSPECTIVE FOR MEDIA STUDIES: FLOGGING A DEAD HORSE? Zaharom Nain	99-103
13. FROM PETTY THEORY TO IDEOLOGY: OLD MEDIA HABITS DIE VIRTUALLY IN MALAYSIA? Umi Khattab	105-119
14. ON-LINE COMMUNICATION IN MALAYSIA: AN ANALYSIS OF CHATTERS' PROFILE, USAGE AND RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT VIA INTERNET RELAY CHAT (IRC) Mohammed Zin Nordin & Ab. Rahman Bin Ibrahim	121-133
15. DEVELOPMENT OF ICT IN ASEAN COUNTRIES: A NEW BRIDGE? Mazni Buyong & Mohd Yusof Abdullah	135-143
16. INTERNET ADVERTISING: THE NEW PARADIGM FOR MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS Hamisah Haji Hasan & Brian Lee Chin Hin	145-159
17. ON TELEVISION AUDIENCES AND INTERNET USERS Tony Wilson	
18. GLOBALIZATION AND THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY IN ASEAN THE MALAYSIAN CASE Mohd. Helmi Abd. Rahim	161-172
19. CONCEPTUALIZING INTERNET COMMUNITY: FROM USERS TO AUDIENCE TO CONSUMERS Adnan Hussein	173-185
20. MALAYSIAN MEDIA: OWNERSHIP, CONTROL AND MUSICAL CONTENT Rick Shriver	187-195
21. GENDER AND ETHNICITY IN MALAYSIAN TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS Shanthi Balraj	197-208
22. DESIRABLE OBJECTS: WOMEN IN P. RAMLEE'S MELODRAMA Mahyuddin Ahmad	209-221

MALAYSIAN MEDIA: OWNERSHIP, CONTROL AND MUSICAL CONTENT

RICK SHRIVER

Introduction

This paper will examine research into the current ownership, control, structure, content and consumption patterns of the Malaysian electronic media. For these research purposes, we focused on radio, television, recorded music, and motion pictures.

Ultimately the purpose of this examination was to seek corroboration for the hypothesis that *traditional music* was not available through the popular media. As a part of a broader project aimed at recording examples of indigenous Malaysian musical instruments and preserving traditional musical styles, a preliminary examination of the Malaysian media was undertaken. Thus the objective of the media analysis was to gauge the extent to which the *traditional music* was available, and being preserved and perpetuated through the contemporary Malaysian media. This project was carried out from June 1999 through March 2000.

To help place this investigation in perspective, it may prove useful to summarize a few key points regarding Malaysian culture, relative to the issues under scrutiny. Peninsular Malaysia is a multi-cultural/multi-ethnic environment. Roughly half the population is Malay, an estimated one-third of the people are ethnic Chinese, and about ten percent of the people are of Indian descent. A very small percentage of the population is the aboriginal *Orang Asli* ("original man"). Roughly eighty-five percent of Malaysia's nineteen million people live on the peninsula, with the remainder inhabiting the states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo (Malaysian Tourism Council, 1998).

It is within this environment that we defined *traditional or indigenous* Malaysian music as that which is indigenous to peninsular Malaysia, and based on *Malay* scales and modes. Further, to be considered traditional, the music must be performed on traditional Malay instruments (Taylor, 1989). (These instruments are categorized and illustrated in the Appendix at the end of this paper.)

Thus music based on Indian (Hindi) or Chinese scales and instrumentation, while omnipresent in Malaysia, was not considered as *traditional* music in the following analysis. Neither Indian nor Chinese music are native to the Malaysian peninsula, neither are based on the same musical modes, and neither are performed on traditional Malay instruments (Malm, 1996).

Media Ownership and Control

Privatization of the media is a recent phenomenon in Malaysia, having begun in 1983. Ownership of the private media, while often somewhat obscured and difficult to ascertain, appears to follow a consistent pattern. That is, many media outlets, like many industries in Malaysia, are owned by people with some connection to the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammed or members of his *UMNO* party. According to Edmund Terence Gomez and Jomo K. S. in their book *Malaysia's Political Economy, Politics, Patronage and Profits*, one of the first efforts to transfer ownership of the electronic media from the government to the private sector involved the privatization of TVS. TVS was licensed in 1983 to *Sistem Televisyen (M) Berhad*. Forty-percent of the STMB stock was held by the *Fleet Group*, UMNO's holding company, and thus had the right to select the remaining ownership partners (Gomez & K. S., 1999).

Since the licensing of TVS, several more media outlets have appeared in the Malaysian marketplace, all privately owned, frequently by someone tied to Mahathir and UMNO. In 1994 a license was issued to *Melewar Corporation* and *Utusan Melayu (M) Berhad* to operate *MetroVision (METRO)*. *Melewar* is controlled by Tunku Abdullah, a close associate of Mahathir (Gomez & K. S., 1999).

According to the U. S. State Department's *Reports on Human Rights Practices*, "leading political figures in the ruling coalition, or companies controlled by them, own most major newspapers, thus limiting the range of views. At times, the susceptibility of the press to government pressure has a direct and public impact on operations. For example, in 1998 the editors of two of the country's largest daily newspapers and a television operations director were removed, apparently because of government displeasure. The removals apparently stemmed from political rivalries within the ruling party" (United States Department of State, 2000).

The same State Department report goes on to claim that "in fact the two private television stations have close ties to the ruling coalition and are unlikely to provide a forum for the opposition parties, and it is unlikely that the Government would grant the opposition a broadcasting license" (United States Department of State, 2000).

So perhaps it should come as little surprise that despite the privatization of media ownership, all media except the Internet are subject to heavy government regulation, either through formal controls or less formal guidelines set forth by owners. According to the U.S. State Department, "the (Malaysian) Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, some important legal limitations exist, and the Government restricts freedom of expression and intimidates most of the print and electronic media into practicing self-censorship" (United States Department of State, 2000).

The Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1984 limits press freedom. Under the act, domestic and foreign publications must apply annually to the Government for a permit. The act was amended in 1987 to make the publication of "malicious news" a punishable offense, expand the Government's power to ban or restrict publications, and prohibit court challenges to suspension or revocation of publication permits. Government power over license renewal and other policies create an atmosphere that inhibits independent or investigative journalism and results in extensive self-censorship.

Film and television content are conspicuously subject to a priori censorship via the following "ratings system."

U = general viewing "suitable for all levels of society;"

18SG = for 18+ with non-excessive violent/horrifying scenes;

18SX = for 18+ with non-excessive sex scenes;

18PA = for 18+ with political/religious/counter-culture elements; and 18PL == for 18+ with a combination of two or more elements.

Implicit in this rating system is the notion that no excessive sex or violence is acceptable, and the system is applied in a "zero tolerance" fashion. Scenes that are deemed "excessive" in their violent or sexual content are completely removed, often with the result of the destruction of story-line continuity.

Some ex post facto control of foreign media and the Internet is also exercised, particularly as it applies to content that would "put the government in an unfavourable light." The Constitution provides that freedom of speech may be restricted by legislation "in the interest of security (or) public order." For example the Sedition Act prohibits public comment on issues defined as sensitive, such as racial and religious matters. In practice, the Sedition Act, the Official Secrets Act, criminal defamation laws, and some other laws have been used to restrict or intimidate dissenting political speech. Police detained four persons under the Internal Security Act in 1998 for "cyber rumor-mongering" (United States Department of State, 2000).

Radio

Ownership of radio services is now divided between the state-run stations operated by *Radio - Television Malaysia (RTM)* and privately owned commercial stations. RTM operates ten stations available as free-to-air FM signals, while seven privately owned FM stations are also available over the air. Five of those seven stations are owned by *Airtime Management and Programming Sdn. Bhd. (AMP)*. AMP additionally operates four "FM" services that are available only via digital direct broadcast satellite (ASTRO). The privately owned stations are known by names or acronyms (rather than by their frequencies or call letters) in a manner similar to that observed in the U.S. (e.g. "HITZ-FM," "MIX-FM," "BEST FM," "Light and Easy FM," "Time Highway Radio," etc.).

Radio listener-ship research commissioned by AMP, and carried out by A. C. *Nielsen* in western peninsular Malaysia, indicates that aggregate listener-ship for the AMP owned stations (*HITZ-FM, MIX, Light and Easy, ERA and MY Radio*) exceeds the aggregate listener-ship of the RTM stations (AC Nielsen, 2000). Further anecdotal evidence such as direct observation of listening patterns in shops, pubs, restaurants, markets and taxis, and conversations with many Malaysian residents reinforces the conclusion that these stations are the most popular listening alternatives.

The programming on these privately owned stations is predominantly, if not exclusively, familiar western popular music formats such as "contemporary hit radio," "adult contemporary," "easy listening," and "dance music." On-air promotions, outdoor advertising and stations' web-sites all reinforce the "Americanized" character of the radio stations. According to the on-air announcers, who have adopted equally familiar western delivery styles such as the morning drive "ensemble," the play-lists are drawn largely from western "chart" sources such as Billboard. In fact, if not for some colloquialisms and dialectic idiosyncrasies, one might believe that one was listening to a U.S. station.

Further confirmation of the western influence in programming of privately owned Malaysian radio stations was sought through long-term content analysis, conducted over the nine-month period from June 1999 to March 2000. Representative one-hour segments of programming, from various day-parts, were taped and logged from each station's broadcast at least once per month, and appear to confirm that western music ranks highest in popularity based on radio airplay. Thus, the analysis suggests that traditional Malaysian music is nearly non-existent on Malaysian commercial radio.

As in the U.S., Malaysian radio broadcasting has become almost entirely dominated by FM. According to A. C. Nielsen's Malaysian office, AM radio is no longer a "viable medium" in peninsular Malaysia. But *unlike* in the U.S., Malaysian FM radio stations typically operate a number of translator transmitters throughout the peninsula, resulting in the signals being nationally accessible. Although the frequencies of the translators vary from location to location, a clear signal is nearly always available as one travels around the countryside, with some re-tuning of the receiver. Most stations based in peninsular Malaysia also relay signals to transmitters located in the states Sabah and Sarawak, on the island of Borneo.

State-run (RTM) radio offers similar popular music fare, in addition to its news and information services in all of the Malaysian languages (Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil). Of particular interest relative to this project is that of the ten radio channels operated by RTM, only *Radio Irama Malayu Asli* consistently programs *traditional* Malaysian music.

Other national channels operated by RTM are: *Radio One* (Malay language, international music); *Radio Music* (day-parted, English and Malay language, predominantly western music); *Radio KL* (English language, western music); *Radio Four* (English language, western music); *Channel Five* (Mandarin language, Chinese and international music); *Radio Six* (Tamil Language, Indian music); *Radio Seven* (Orang Asli dialect, eclectic music); *Radio Eight* (Malay language, no music).

To summarize the character of contemporary Malaysian radio, it is simply this: it is westernized.

Television

An analysis of Malaysian television programming content yields results similar to those above relative to the preponderance of western or western-influenced programming. Malaysia currently has five "free-to-air" television channels (available via conventional antenna): TVS, NTV7 and *Metrovision* are privately owned, while TV1 and TV2 are operated by government-owned Radio-Television Malaysia. The privately owned stations all offer a mixture of U.S.-produced programming, Taiwanese productions, and locally produced programming following the conventional western template. (Especially notable in the context of music programming is NTWs daily schedule of music videos, culled from U.S. pop charts, airing from 1:00pm to 5:00pm.) TV1 and TV2 rely somewhat less on western-produced programming, but their local productions adhere to conventions firmly rooted in western tradition.

Serialized dramas are a staple of Malaysian-produced prime time free-to-air television programming. Shot on videotape and often on location, these dramas look much like any other low-budget single camera production. A conspicuous feature of the serials as they relate to this project is the heavy use of sequencer/sampler/synthesizer based musical accompaniment, all based on western (versus Malaysian) motifs

In order to gauge whether Malaysian television might be further contributing to the decline of indigenous music, and the subsequent engendering of western music, a quantitative analysis of the free-to-air programming was performed. Television content was examined and classified according to these broad operational definitions:

Locally produced cultural programming: Programming focusing on local traditions and culture of peninsular Malaysia, including performing arts, fine arts, crafts, history, folklore, language, etc. It is worth noting that for the purposes of this project, "religious" programming was counted as cultural programming. This decision was made in light of the government's recognition of Islam as the "official religion" of Malaysia, one result of which is that religion has become inextricably intertwined with most other aspects of the culture, including media and music. All of the free-to-air stations offer some type of Islamic programming daily during prime time. Nearly all the religious programming contains music, and although sometimes of Arabic origin, other of the music might be considered as traditional indigenous music.

Locally produced news/public affairs/documentary: This category included all newscasts, news interviews, discussions and documentaries in which the content was primarily political, scientific or topical, but not *cultural*, as defined above.

Locally produced entertainment: Dramas, situation comedies, children's programming, musical variety, serials, etc. produced in peninsular Malaysia.

Non-Malaysian Asian produced news/public affairs/documentary/cultural: Any non-entertainment programming produced in other Asian countries including China, Japan, India, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand, etc.

Non-Malaysian Asian produced entertainment: Any entertainment programming produced in Asian countries.

Western produced news/public-affairs/documentary/cultural: Non-entertainment programming produced in the U.S., Western Europe, Australia and Canada.

Western produced entertainment: Entertainment programming produced in the U.S., Western Europe, Australia and Canada.

A simple coding scheme was devised and tested to assign a numerical rating according to the classifications above. Randomly selected weekly program schedules (Monday through Friday, 6:00pm to 11:00pm) were taken from newspapers over a two-month period, and content analysis conducted for each quarter hour. Sample viewing was done to confirm the appropriate classification.

A rating of seven was assigned to locally produced cultural and documentary programming, which had the greatest likelihood of containing traditional indigenous music. A rating of six was assigned to local news and public affairs, which was somewhat less likely to include traditional indigenous music. Five was assigned to locally produced entertainment programming, which was likely to have local but not traditional music, and so forth.

The intent of the system was to rank highest those locally produced programs containing examples of traditional indigenous music, to rank lowest those programs imported from the west, and to assign ordinal rankings to all others according to their perceived local cultural (musical) content.

- 7 = locally produced documentary, cultural programming
- 6 = locally produced news, public affairs programming
- 5 = locally produced entertainment
- 4 = non-local Asian-produced news, documentary, public affairs, cultural programming
- 3 = non-local Asian-produced entertainment
- 2 = non-local western-produced news, documentary, public affairs, cultural programming
- 1 = non-local western-produced entertainment

This coding system facilitated two simple analyses. First each station's programming could be "scored" and a composite rating assigned which would suggest the amount of "cultural content" being aired by that station. Each quarter-hour of programming from 6:00pm to 11:00pm was coded and the program schedule given a rating by totaling the scores.

When the five free-to-air stations' programming was scored, TV1 emerged as the station with the apparent highest number of hours of cultural programming per week, while METRO offered the least. Across an eight-week sample, TV1 scored an average of 99.6 (out of a possible 140), while METRO scored a 53.3 (with 20 being the lowest score possible). This pattern was consistent over time, and seems to indicate that METRO'S programming is considerably more westernized than that of TV1.

Second, an overall weekly schedule could be easily analyzed for the total number of hours of programming from any of the foregoing content categories. The significant results of this examination for the purposes of this paper indicate the following: "cultural" content accounts for 2.5% of the available programming; "news/public affairs/documentaries" accounts for 25% of the programming; locally produced entertainment accounts for 23.5% of the programming; 18% of the programming is non-local Asian produced; and 31% is western produced programming.

Sample prime-time television schedule from newspaper, October 1999.

TV1	TV2	TVS	NTV7	METRO
6:00pm News	West. Sitcom	Chin. Drama	News	West. Doc.
6:30pm Religious	News	Drama cont.	Malay. Serial	Malay. Serial
7:00pm Malay. Serial	Chin. Serial	Malay. Serial	Serial cont.	Serial cont.
7:30pm Interview	Serial cont.	Discussion	Game	West. Children's
8:00pm News	News	News	News	News
8:30pm Discussion	Malay. Serial	News	West. Drama	West. Comedy
9:00pm Malay. Movie	Serial cont.	Indian Movie	Drama cont.	West. Comedy
9:30pm Movie cont.	News	Movie cont.	Music videos	West. Comedy
10:00pm Movie cont.	West. Movie	Movie cont.	West. Comedy	West. Serial
10:30pm Movie cont.	Movie cont.	Movie cont.	West. Comedy	Serial cont.
11:00pm News	Movie cont.	News	News	News

When programming in the sample schedule above is examined for 'musical motif (i.e. simply western versus non-western style and instrumentation), viewing confirms that approximately fifty percent of the programming contains western motif music. But perhaps more significant, when programming in which music plays no significant role is excluded (e.g. news, public affairs, etc.), non-western motif music accounts for only twenty percent of the musical content. Moreover, only about ten percent of the televised content (notably Malay films) contains music that would be considered traditional Malaysian music, with the rest being Hindi and Chinese.

Thus it might be concluded that viewers whose only choices are free-to-air signals have little access to local cultural programming which would contain and perpetuate traditional indigenous peninsular Malaysian music.

Two additional television programming alternatives available in peninsular Malaysia are MEGA TV and ASTRO. MEGA is a subscription service delivered by microwave that offers CNN (Asian feed), The Discovery Channel, ESPN (Asian feed), HBO (Asian feed), AXN (Action Network), a Taiwanese channel, and a day-parted channel which is divided between Cartoon Network, TNT and Variety Channel; nearly all western programming.

Many upscale Malaysians and much of the sizable expatriate community subscribe to ASTRO TV, which is a digital direct broadcast satellite service. ASTRO currently offers approximately 20 television channels, including all of the same channels available on MEGA-TV, the free-to-air channels, plus Disney, National Geographic, Showtime, CNBC, Star Movie, Bloomberg, MTV, Nickelodean and others. ASTRO currently claims to have three-hundred-eighty-thousand subscribers.

Thus, one might also conclude that traditional Malaysian music is not readily available via television.

Recorded music, video discs, and film

Sales of recorded music appear to further corroborate the suggestion that popular western music is the genre of choice for most Malaysians. In a country whose culture has historically viewed intellectual property law as an impediment and an unnecessary expense, it is somewhat difficult to determine sales statistics with any certainty. But, the ubiquitous CD/tape shops typically devote approximately one-third to one-half of their shelf space to Chinese artists. The remainder is given over almost entirely to popular western music. Similarly, vendors at the abundant open-air 'night markets' offer a nearly identical ratio of Chinese and western music, albeit in the form of illegally pirated copies.

One final home entertainment viewing option which should be noted, as it constitutes a large if unmeasured commercial and leisure activity is the 'video compact disc' (VCD). The vast majority of the VCD's sold are illegal copies of recently released U.S. feature films and Hong Kong-produced Chinese action movies. The pirated discs are widely available at all night markets for a price of about two U.S. dollars. Malaysian viewers seem willing to overlook the miserable quality of the discs, which are often clandestinely recorded in a cinema with a palm camcorder. Prices are about double (four U.S. dollars) for legal copies purchased in legitimate outlets.

The output of feature length productions from Malaysia's film industry is currently almost non-existent. Malay Film Productions produced a total of 162 films over a period of 22 years before finally closing its gates in 1969. Cathay-Keris Film Production, which was formed from the merger of Keris Film and Cathay in 1953, produced 120 films during a twenty-year span ending in 1973.

The last of the big studios and the third most prolific producer of films, Merdeka Film Studios, was launched in 1960. This entity, the only one of the big three to be located in Kuala Lumpur, produced some 99 films over a 20-year period, before closing in 1980 (New Straights Times, 1999).

The importation of Hollywood action films of the 1960s and the advent of television in the 1970s are both cited as contributory factors to the demise of the Malaysian film industry (New Straights Times, 1999). The result is that currently Malaysian multiple-screen cinema exhibit films produced primarily in the U.S., Hong Kong and India.

Conclusions

The present status of Malaysian media and traditional music may best be understood by looking briefly at the broader cultural milieu that seems to be shifting toward westernization. This shift may be attributable in some part to the current prevailing push in Malaysia toward modernization and the achieving of first world status. Labeled "Vision 2020" by Prime Minister Mahathir, the heavily publicized plan is to have the country fully developed by the target year, 2020. Various components of "Vision 2020" include such conventional measures as improvements in literacy rates, poverty rates, life expectancy, and infant mortality rates.

Another conspicuous feature of the Prime Minister's plan is the much-ballyhooed "Multimedia Super-Corridor" (MSC). The MSC is touted as a geographic region that is foreign-business friendly and Information Technology (IT) ready. Recently Mahathir also announced the addition of a Hollywood-like entertainment village at the MSC. This entertainment village will be positioned to attract film production projects to Malaysia, which is climatically well suited to year-round production. The announcement also carried with it the call for more "technologically skilled" workers in the media arts. This theme of increasing the number and quality of Malaysia's IT workers is pervasive throughout the Vision 2020 rhetoric, to the exclusion and potential detriment of cultural preservation.

So it would appear that as sometimes happens in a developing country, the indigenous musical culture of Malaysia is being obscured and adulterated by the proliferation of imported media content. According to ethnomusicology scholars at Universiti Putra Malaysia and other Malaysian educational institutions, some musical forms that have only been perpetuated through the aural tradition are already disappearing or lost completely (Nasuruddin, 1992). Certain forms of traditional Malaysian music are said to possess therapeutic powers, which were once described as "magical" powers by early western scholars (Skeat, 1967). These beliefs are strongly rooted in animism, and as such are officially discouraged by the Malaysian government because ironically they are contrary to the teachings of Islam.

Based on the research and direct observation carried out during the period June 1999 to March 2000, we are left with the conclusion that the original hypothesis is supported: traditional music was not available through the popular media. Instead, the Malaysian electronic media continue to westernize, taking on the characteristic sound and appearance of electronic media in the U.S., Western Europe, Canada, Australia and other developed countries. Much of the media content is imported from the west, and production styles mimic those in the west. While journalistic content appears to be heavily regulated through formal and informal methods, as is often typical of developmental media systems, no mechanism appears to be in place to preserve and perpetuate the rich musical culture of peninsular Malaysia through the electronic media.

References

- Fauzi, Ahmad. 1999. 'The Malay Film Industry'/ *New Straits Times*, November 23.
- Gomez, Edmund Terence and Jomo K. S. 1999. *Malaysia's Political Economy, Politics, Patronage and Profits*. Cambridge University Press.
- Malaysian Tourism Council. 1998. *Welcome to Malaysia!*
- Malm, William P. 1996. *Music Cultures of the Pacific, the Near East and Asia*, Third Edition. Prentice-Hall.
- Nasruddin Mohammed Chouse. 1992. *The Malay Traditional Music*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Nielsen, A.C. 2000. 'Radio Listenership Survey 2000', presented to the industry on August 3.
- Salleh, Nik Mustapha Nik Mohammed. *Alat Muzik Tradisional Dalam Masyarakat Melayu Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Watan Sdn. Bhd/ (no date given).
- Skeat, Walter William. 1989. *Malay Magic*. (Originally published 1900). Dover/ Taylor/ Eric.
- Musical Instruments of Southeast Asia. London: Oxford University Press.
- U.S. Department of State. 2000. "1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices." Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. February 25.

The author is Associate Professor, Ohio University, USA.