

BACKGROUND

1 The Advisory Committee on Chinese Programmes (ACCESS) [华文节目咨询委员会] was set up in 1994 to advise and give feedback on Chinese programmes that are shown on Free-to-air Chinese TV channels so as to enhance the broadcasters' role to entertain, inform and educate the viewers.

2 This report by ACCESS covers the period April 2004 to April 2006. The current Committee was appointed for a two-year term with effect from April 2004. The list of members in the Committee is as follows:

Chairman: **Professor Wang Gungwu**
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主席: **王庚武教授**
东亚研究所所长

Members: **Dr Amy Khor**
Member of Parliament, Hong Kah GRC
成员: **许连碯博士**
丰加集选区国会议员

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General Manager, Diethelm Keller Engineering Pte Ltd
陈志邦总经理

Ms Claire Chiang
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张齐娥女士
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Associate, Monetary Authority of Singapore (from Oct 2005)
吴玉如女士
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TASKS PERFORMED

3 Under Professor Wang's chairmanship, the Committee held eight meetings during the period of April 2004 to March 2006. Dialogue sessions were also held with Channels 8 and U, as well as the board of MediaCorp to update and exchange views on improving the quality of Chinese programmes.

4 The role of the Committee included the following:

- a Review and give feedback on Chinese programmes shown on Channels 8 and U;
- b Review and provide recommendations on the range and quality of Chinese programmes; and
- c Review and provide feedback on censorship issues.

5 This Committee also took a more pro-active approach in terms of monitoring of various genres of Chinese programmes in order to provide valuable feedback to the broadcaster. To ensure an equitable spread of focus on specific areas, the ACCESS formed various interest groups to monitor and assess the different genres of programmes. Specific areas such as programmes for children or the elderly, variety and sitcom, drama, news and info-educational content were watched by members familiar or with keen interest in such areas.

¹ Resigned from the Committee with effect from 21 Mar 2005.

OVERVIEW ON THE RANGE AND QUALITY OF CHINESE PROGRAMMES

Introduction

6 Following the merger between the incumbent broadcaster MediaCorp, and the second Free-To-Air (FTA) TV broadcaster, SPH MediaWorks, the Committee expressed concern about the removal of competition from the local media scene and how it would affect the future development of the industry.

7 Specifically, with the closure of SPH MediaWorks' English channel (Channel i), the Committee hoped that the merger would not lead to the possibility of one of the two channels being axed or combined, resulting in a step backwards to the past when viewers had little choice of TV channels, especially since Channel U had brought the viewers many innovative and creative local variety shows.

8 Having observed MediaCorp's Channel 8 and U over the past years since the merger, the Committee recognised that both Channel 8 and Channel U each have their own merits, with Channel 8 being adept in its production of local dramas, while Channel U's stronghold is in variety shows, and is glad to conclude that range and quality of Chinese programmes have not suffered after the revamp of the two channels.

OBSERVATION OF CHINESE PROGRAMMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

News Bulletins

9 The Committee applauded the strategy of having news bulletins at different timings on both Chinese channels, as it enables more opportunities for viewers to watch the news. In particular, the 11pm news is welcomed by many professionals, who reach home late and are still able to watch the news. However, members observed that even though news bulletins on Channel 8 and Channel U are scheduled at different timeslots with different presenters, the content is similar.

10 To encourage viewers to have more exposure to news by watching news bulletins from both channels, members suggested that news bulletins on both channels be differentiated by focusing on different story angles. For example, Channel 8 may concentrate on analysis and foreign news, while Channel U could leverage on lifestyle reporting and local issues. However, if this approach is taken, the 2 channels will need to collaborate by ensuring that presenters invite viewers to watch the news on the other channel for greater coverage, so that viewers do not miss out on local or foreign news. The Committee, however, did not see a need for a fixed entertainment news segment during bulletins as news stories should not be sacrificed for entertainment trivia that are probably covered by other entertainment programmes.

11 In addition, members observed that the language standards of Chinese news broadcasters have declined, especially with the usage of inappropriate phrases by presenters (e.g., .大海啸死亡人数“突破”2 万“大关” [inappropriate to use “record breaking” to describe a tragedy]; 匪徒再次“出击”; 我的“身后”; 车臣事件“圆满结束” [inappropriate to use “a good ending” to describe a tragedy] etc).

Current Affairs and Info-educational Programmes

12 Similarly, there is a need for better positioning of local current affairs programmes between the two Chinese channels. For example, Channel 8's *Frontline* 《前线追踪》 and *Focus* 《焦点》 sometimes touch on similar issues as Channel U's former *Inside Out* 《非常透视眼》 and the current *Scoop* 《十分头条》, and these programmes often over-emphasize local issues at the expense of in-depth analysis of foreign developments like elections in other countries or global developments.

13 The Committee suggested that *Scoop* 《十分头条》 focus on local news while *Focus* 《焦点》 concentrates solely on foreign news, and recommended that current affairs programmes experiment with new ways of presentation.

14 However, members felt that the broadcaster's many years of experience in producing good quality current affairs programmes like *Frontline* «前线追踪» and *Focus* «焦点» stood them in good stead. Their experience in the sensitive treatment of controversial topics, together with the synergy they enjoy internally with their news counterparts (e.g. in the conversion of topical news to current affairs topics, as well as the usage of footages), is a quality that may not be easily replicated by new independent production houses. In addition, in-house productions also have the option of translating good Channel News Asia (CNA) programmes to Chinese and be shown on the Chinese channels. A good example is the forum programme which the young had with MM Lee (*Why My Vote Matters — A Dialogue with the Minister Mentor*) which was shown on Channel 8 after the initial CNA telecast.

15 As for info-educational programmes, the Committee would like the broadcaster to keep up the good work done with classics like *Money Week* 《财经追击》, *World This Week* 《世界一周》, and in particular, the *Tuesday Report* 《特写》 series, where the sub-series like *Heirloom Recipes* 《家传菜》, *My Home* 《我家在这里》, *My Little Angel* 《小超人》 etc were very well researched and well produced.

16 Channel U was also commended for its efforts to push its current affairs and info-educational programmes into prime-time slots, enabling more viewers (specially the young) to benefit from these programmes. The channel was also praised for successfully managing and producing forum discussion programmes like *Shoot!* 《有话就说》 and *Crossfire* 《针锋相对》, the former encouraging more students to be interested in serious topics, while the latter explored and navigated sensitive topics professionally.

17 As for the acquired "sex education" series *Love Airways* 《爱之航》, the Committee felt that the programme did not come across as educational or informative, but rather more of an entertainment programme with sex as its focus. Although there was running written commentary and little nuggets of information provided via pop-up stills in an attempt to put certain issues in perspective, the lack of elaboration resulted in a programme that over-emphasized the physical aspect of sex with little attempt to put the topic in perspective, like respecting others as human beings, and building responsible relationships etc.

18 In the main part of the series where people were interviewed on their sex lives, ACCESS found this hardly 'educational' as no professional views were provided. The quality of interviews was also disappointing due to the type of people chosen (mainly those who are more sexually active) and the nature of questions asked (merely sharing one's personal sexual habits). If the difficulty was in finding Singaporeans to

give frank views, the producers could have anonymous interviews with married couples discussing their sex lives in healthy ways, such as difficulties faced (some of which are actually psychological and may warrant medical help or counseling). Counselors should also be invited to share their cases. This would definitely be more informative and serve to make people more aware of these "usually-not-discussed" topics.

Dramas

19 The Committee reported that while the stories and acting for local dramas have improved, language standards have dropped. There were frequent problems with expression and instances where the Chinese language was improperly used. Members were also particularly concerned with the excessive use of foul language in family dramas like *Double Happiness 2* 《喜临门 II》, where expletives like “*Ta Ma De* (他妈的)” or “*Wang Ba Dan* (王八蛋)” were sprouted repeatedly in the show, especially by the ruffian character played by *Xie Shaoguang*.

20 While members understand that this is a means of characterizing a ruffian as close to reality as possible, the resultant low language standards are inappropriate for primetime television. It is acceptable to use foul language occasionally and in the right context, but they should not be exploitative or used repeatedly, especially during family viewing hours and family dramas. As such, producers are urged to try to explore alternative means to flesh out such characters, but cautioned against portraying gamblers or gangsters in a positive light among local productions, examples being the lovesick loanshark in *Double Happiness 2* 《喜临门 II》 and the gambling mother in *My Lucky Charm* 《情来运转》.

21 Another problematic area the Committee observed in local family dramas recently is the presence of intimate and kissing scenes not suitable for children, as well as excessive quarrelling and even family and spousal violence, particularly in the 2 seasons of *Portrait of Home* 《同心圆》. Members commented that while there is a need for conflict in drama series, the treatment of conflict themes can be more skilful and warm-heartening, such as in the Hong Kong drama serial *A Kindred Spirit* 《真情》. Graphic violence like those appearing in *Beyond the aXis of Truth 2* 《法医 X 档案 II》 or *Wing of Desire* 《天使的诱惑》 should also not be repeated in future dramas shown during primetime.

22 On the other hand, positive dramas like *A Promise for Tomorrow* 《拥抱明天》, *A New Life* 《有福》, *A Life of Hope* 《活下去》, *A Child's Hope* 《孩有明天 2》 are applauded for the message of hope that were transmitted, and should be encouraged, though producers should tone down on the promotion of the sponsor organization's activities that were written into the script.

23 On the whole, ACCESS felt that scriptwriters and producers have generally improved the creativity of their works, but there is still room for improvement as there seems to be too many family dramas now, following the immense success of *Holland V* 《荷兰村》. Members suggested that the broadcaster consider producing dramas detailing a particular occupation (especially those occupations that Singaporeans shun) or the more “romanticised” idol drama genres, of which the recent *The Rainbow Connection* 《舞出彩虹》 and *Love Concierge* 《爱的掌门人》 were good attempts. The epic drama *An Ode To Life* 《三十风雨路》 was also felt to be well researched and well produced, and the recent heart-warming drama *The Shining Star* 《星闪闪》 was highlighted as a gem that should set the standard for future dramas.

Variety Programmes

24 After the merger, a revamp of the two Chinese channels resulted in a bumper crop of variety shows, some innovative, and some still relying on low brow slapstick antics to garner ratings.

25 The Committee is full of praise for variety shows that are both entertaining and educational at the same time, and encourage both channels to attempt more of such variety shows. For example, programmes that improve viewers' general and specialized knowledge (e.g., *Scholar of Scholars* 《挑战状元榜》, *Trivia Trove* 《不说你不知》, and *Health in Pulse* 《钟爱一身》 etc); those that showcase interesting local matters and places (e.g., *Made In Singapore* 《十分新加坡》, *Where in Singapore* 《到底在哪里?》 etc); programmes that help viewers improve their grasp of language (e.g., *Get it Right* 《正是如此》 and *Say it if you Dare* 《有话好好说》); as well as variety shows that showcase various occupation or industries in Singapore (e.g., *Star of all trades 2* 《行行出艺人 II》, *I'm the One* 《也许或者有可能 II》, *Made In Singapore* 《出奇制胜》 etc).

26 In addition, members would also like to see more of innovative variety shows like *Barter Trade* 《物物大交换》, *Say Cheez* 《好摄 2 人组》 and *Kungfu Chef* 《神厨双怪》, interesting travel programmes like *Planetshakers* 《自游疯》 and *Rail Adventure* 《男得风光》, entertaining programmes involving kids (e.g., *Small Kids*, *Big Wits* 《谁敢小看我》, *My Happy Days* 《哎哟哟 宝贝!》 and *Zoe's Treasure Trove* 《阿姐有个宝》), as well as well-hosted dating shows like *First Date* 《敢敢来约会》 and *Love Bites* 《缘来就是你》.

27 Although there is a generous output of variety shows on Beauty and Grooming (e.g., *Closet Affair* 《IN 女皇》, *Beyond Body and Soul* 《健康就是美》, *A New You* 《亮丽秀出》, *Pretty Women* 《想·得·美》, *Man Enough* 《男人本色》, *Man O Man* 《男人帮》, *Project Slim* 《享瘦人生》 etc), lifestyle programmes (e.g., *Condo & The City* 《寓望城市》, *Home Décor Survivor* 《摆家乐》, *City By Night* 《夜森林》, *On The Beat* 《都是大发现》, *I Love Shopping* 《陪你去 Shopping II》 etc), and food programmes (e.g., *Makan King* 《好吃王》, *Foodball Tic Tac Goal* 《食在好球》, *Quirky Foodies* 《餐餐有趣味》), the Committee would like the broadcaster to attempt a wider range of topics in lifestyle programmes instead of continuously focusing on food and shopping. For example, a variety show that reviews good books and encourages the public to pick up reading would be a refreshing change as it has never been done locally before.

28 Following up on Channel U's pioneering move to come up with innovative variety format that encourages public interaction, programmes that close the gap between artistes and the public like *Star Run* 《跑吧! 艺人》, *Stars.Beat It* 《王牌对王牌》, and *Maid To Order II* 《明星好帮手 II》 are also observed to be popular with viewers.

29 At the other end of the spectrum is the comedy-type of variety shows which often resort to mindless and crass humor to titillate viewers, sometimes degenerating into bad taste. For example, members found the segment in *Top Fun* 《欢乐巅峰》 where a dance competition contestant stripped to his swimming trunks, shocking the audience and judges, was an insult to viewers' intelligence, as well as giving a bad representation of local culture to tourists and foreign viewers who happen to catch the programme. It seemed to be trying to imitate the less tasteful side of Taiwanese variety

programming. The Committee is concerned that if all the local comedy shows depend on slapstick humour to garner viewership, it would slant the interpretation of ratings, giving the impression that the public like such programmes when the fact is that they have little choice. As such, the J-team is encouraged to break out of their normal mould of such slapstick comedy and attempt at more intelligent humour. With the creativity they display in films, members are confident that they are capable of doing it.

30 Also of concern in the above comedy variety programmes are the poor standards of spoken Mandarin used, as well as hosts dressed in a way that expose their tattoos (e.g., *Top Fun* 《欢乐巅峰》), which is not something that should be promoted as glamorous in programmes easily accessible by children and teenagers.

31 The Committee would also like to discourage variety shows that rely more on sexual innuendoes (e.g., jokes from the eunuch character played by Rayson Tan in *New City Beat* 《走走吃吃看一看》), as well as the trend for variety show hosts/characters to cross-dress (e.g., *Comedy Nite Party* 《搞笑行动派》, *KP Club 2* 《鸡婆俱乐部 II》, *Let's Party With Food* 《食福满人间 III》 and *King of Variety* 《周五娱乐王》).

32 Lastly, the types of variety shows that ACCESS hopes to see less of are those which are over-commercialised. In the previous annual report, broadcasters were advised to draw a clear distinction between what is considered advertisement and sponsorship from normal programming, and to avoid overt product/service endorsements by celebrities in a programme that blur the line between advertising and the programme content, as these could mislead viewers and influence their judgement of the products/services being featured. In this respect, over-commercialised programmes that should be discouraged are: 《*Jean Yip* 魅力百分百》, 《*Carlsberg* 好友满天下》, 《*NETS* 有钱坤》, *Spring N Slide* 《威力无比加油战》, *Smile With Oral B* 《ORAL B 笑一笑 比一比》, and *Gone in 72 Days* 《看我 72 变》.

33 On acquired variety shows, the Committee found Taiwanese talk-shows like *Lady First* 《女人我最大》, *Mr Con And Ms CSI* 《康熙来了》 and *Body Code* 《身体密码》 to be interesting additions to the now-staple Taiwanese variety shows that viewers have requested for (e.g., *Fun Club* 《周日八点党》, *Variety Big Brother* 《综艺大哥大》, *Guess* 《我猜我猜我猜猜猜》, *100% Entertainment* 《娱乐百分百》 etc), although raunchy segments from these programmes should not be shown during primetime.

34 Members suggested that broadcaster should try outsourcing more variety shows to independent production houses for more variety in style and ideas.

Cultural programmes

35 The Committee is glad that the programme *HeART & Soul* 《艺心艺意》 was produced to provide insights and updates on the local arts scene, while *My Hero Teacher* 《中华 INK 雄》 attempted to enable viewers to better appreciate the Chinese cultural heritage. More of such programmes are encouraged.

36 For acquired cultural programmes, the Committee is also delighted to observe that effort was made by both channels to telecast quality drama series and programmes such as *Chien Lung Dynasty* 《乾隆王朝》, *Xiao Zhuang Epic* 《孝庄秘

史》, *Chinese Folklores II* 《俗礼俗趣》, *China's World Heritage* 《世界遗产之中国档案 - 布达拉宫》, *Chinatown* 《唐人街》, and *Sin Sing Song* 《流传的歌》.

37 However, instead of relentlessly promoting programmes like *Campus Superstar* 《校园 SuperStar》, *Star Idol* 《明星偶像》, or *Superband* 《非常 SuperBand》, which are already very popular, more resources should be spent on promoting the above quality cultural programmes. Otherwise they would end up at the bottom of ratings charts due to insufficient awareness and eventually drop out of broadcaster's priority, perpetuating a vicious cycle of quality programmes being accorded less priority over popular ones.

Children & Youth Programmes

38 The Committee observed that there is a lack of Chinese children's programmes on FTA TV and that the quality of existing Chinese children's programmes, whether local or imported, leaves much to be desired. In comparison, English children's programmes are more accessible on both weekdays and weekends, and better in quality and content. Members feel that Chinese children's programmes are important in promoting the Chinese language and imparting important Chinese cultural values and heritage, and children nowadays have little interest in watching Chinese programmes in general. So as long as the content of the programmes is of a certain level of quality, children will still be inclined to watch them.

39 Except for one Taiwanese classroom drama *Happy Campus* on Sunday mornings, it was observed that there are no children's programmes shown on Channel U currently. For Channel 8, while children's programming on weekends is acceptable in content, cartoons and acquired children's programmes broadcast at the 6 to 7am timeslot on weekdays is not a convenient timeslot for children, as morning school students would be on their way to school while afternoon school students would still be asleep. As such, it is suggested that broadcaster produced a weekly news bulletin for teenagers, preferably from 5.30 to 6.30 pm.

40 As for programmes for youths, the Committee is glad to note that the new Channel U line-up has some new programmes targeted at the youth. Programmes like *Shoot!* 《有话就说》 and *Youth Decode* 《青春游走》 do a very good job in engaging the youths as well as showcasing their unique talents. Channel 8's *Creatively Mine* 《我是创新王》 is also an excellent platform to discover students' creativity.

41 On the explosion of public-voting talent shows like *Project SuperStar* 《绝对 SuperStar》, *Campus Superstar* 《校园 SuperStar》, *SuperHost* 《超级主持人》, *Star Idol* 《明星偶像》 and *SuperBand* 《非常 SuperBand》, members are ambivalent about the effects of these programmes. On one hand, it is good that such programmes are successful in reaching out to youths, engaging them, as well as encouraging them to pursue their dreams. However, there are also concerns about the psychological effects on youths who did not make it or those who receive harsh/nasty comments from the public, as well as the over-glamorizing of dreams of becoming a star. The broadcaster is advised not to milk this genre too intensely as it will soon lead to viewer fatigue if there is no moderation.

42 In addition, there are still a lot of youth activities out there (e.g. various sports meets, recital competition, debates, musical performances by school orchestras etc.) not reported in the news or used as content for local programmes. These activities need national support, and broadcasters have the responsibility to lend media support to them. It would be sad if educational and cultural objectives are sacrificed due to

commercial considerations. For a start, members hope to see the National Primary and Secondary School Chinese Debate being covered by the media, as the standard is very high these days.

43 Lastly, care must be taken in the choice of Japanese animation (*anime*) targeted at youths shown on weekend afternoons on both channels to ensure that they do not contain undesirable values or behaviours (e.g., excessive close-up focus on the smoking behaviours exhibited by the four characters in *Saiyuki Reload* 《最游记》 on Channel U).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

44 ACCESS has been keeping track of follow-up on feedback/recommendations made by the Committee since April 2001. While broadcasters have taken note of the feedback given and have also followed up on most of the suggestions made, some concerns raised by the Committee have not been fully addressed and there remain areas which broadcasters could improve upon. These suggestions, as well as some new thoughts, form the key recommendations of this report.

Multiculturalism

45 This theme has consistently appeared in the recommendations from the past three years' annual reports in various forms:

- *Annual Report 2001/02*: "More programmes that promote racial harmony and help foster understanding among the different racial groups in Singapore".
- *Annual Report 2002/03*: "More programmes with cross-cultural and multi-racial themes" and "Incorporating multi-racial casts and using bilingual presenters".
- *Annual Report 2003/04*: "Leverage on our multi-cultural roots to develop cosmopolitan content" and "Broadcasters can acquire and/or produce documentaries on the festivities of the different races".

46 ACCESS has observed some limited attempts made by the broadcaster in this area (e.g. interviewing trendy shop owners of other races in variety shows; having bilingual presenters in large scale charity shows etc), but it is felt that more can be done to promote multiculturalism in programmes like dramas as well as info-educational programmes.

47 Although the Committee understands that the two Chinese channels are targeted at the Chinese population, and dialogue with the broadcaster revealed the operational difficulties in artificially infusing foreign language and cultural elements into Chinese programming, members are still concerned that local (especially current affairs) programmes on Channels 8 and U are too focused on the Chinese community and culture. It would be good if broadcaster can find a way to assimilate the lives and cultures of the other races in Singapore into Chinese programmes to help foster a greater understanding of other racial groups.

More Chinese Programmes for the Young

48 One of the past recommendations raised in the Annual Report 2001/02 that has yet to be taken up is for the broadcaster to collaborate with the Ministry of Education to telecast the Primary School Debate series in order to promote the event and raise the level of Chinese among the young.

49 This recommendation is now expanded to include the National Secondary School Chinese Debate as well, plus a host of youth activities (e.g., *Xiang Sheng* or Chinese story-telling competition, various sports meets, recital competition, debates, musical performances by school orchestras etc.) that deserve coverage by the news or used as content for local programmes. These activities need national support, and broadcasters have the responsibility to lend media support to these activities.

50 The Committee reiterates that broadcaster should fulfil its responsibility to uplift society, instead of shunning such programmes due to perceived poor ratings. Members feel that the educational and cultural objectives should not be sacrificed due to commercial considerations, and suggests that if broadcaster finds it hard to show the whole series of the debate, they should at least show the finals. The Committee is fully confident that for a broadcaster that has successfully turned around the talent search genre and turned it into top-rating programmes, it would be able to find creative ways to bring these quality events to the young viewers.

Programmes for the Elderly

51 With the greying population, the Committee feels that there is a need to have more programmes targeted at the elderly. As the baby boom generation is approaching the 60s, they are now coming into the segment of the "elderly". These "elderlies" will appreciate content suited to their needs and intellectual level, like how to use their CPF money wisely, health advice for the aged etc. Members also added that programmes that have the effect of bringing the elderly together for group activities (e.g., watching TV together at Community Centres/Clubs, organise teams to participate in singing contests etc) have a place in broadcasters' repertoire.

Better Promotion & Scheduling of Quality Programmes

52 The Committee is pleased to observe that quality info-educational and publicly funded programmes have recently been scheduled during prime time on Channel U, and recommended the same to be attempted on Channel 8, so as to reach out to the mass viewers. However, it was also noted that quality productions from China on Channel U have been relegated to Sunday afternoon timeslots, and the Committee is not sure if this is optimal as families tend to go out for lunch, outings or dinner on Sundays.

53 ACCESS feels that there is still a lack of public awareness on good publicly funded programmes, and that broadcasters do not seem to be giving these programmes as much publicity as their commercial programmes. To the Committee, the promotion of a programme (especially cross-channel marketing) plays a very important role on how it is received, and broadcasters should not spare any effort to promote high quality programmes even though they may not have mass appeal. Precisely because broadcasters are market-led, it is even more important for them to give these quality programmes more publicity and promotion so as to generate the viewing market for them.

54 Hence, instead of just catering to the tastes of viewers, members feel that broadcasters should be more pro-active in the effort to raise the cultural intelligence of viewers in Singapore by ensuring good quality programmes get trailed as much as variety shows. Otherwise a negative cycle would be propagated where lowbrow slapstick programmes gain popularity and demand more trailing due to higher ratings.

55 From a larger perspective, in addition to efforts at promoting quality programmes, it is also important for MediaCorp TV to promote the new identities of the two Chinese channels, so that viewers know what they are getting from the different channels and can adapt to the programming that they prefer. Members suggested the production of pocket-sized programming branding and grid for these channels to be distributed to the public, much like that of the activity list from The National Library which people could carry in their pockets.

Localisation VS Internationalisation

56 It was noted that during the period of competition, MediaCorp's strategy was to produce very localised drama serials like *Holland Village*, as viewers seem to prefer dramas they could identify with than acquired ones. With "negative competition" now a thing of the past, perhaps MediaCorp should start to go the way of Korean dramas and try to raise the standards to increase the exportability of their dramas as well as other genres of programmes it produce. Related to this are three recommendations from the previous annual report (2003/04) on how to look beyond current viewer base:

- **No.3:** "*Need to identify programming niche for local productions. Documentaries are one such niche*".
- **No.5:** "*Leverage on our multi-cultural roots to develop cosmopolitan content*".
- **No.8:** "*Ratings for non-Chinese viewers of popular local Chinese programmes can be collated to ascertain the potential of the untapped market. Subtitling Chinese programmes for non-Chinese/non-Chinese speaking viewers*".

57 The key to exportability is compelling content; there may not be a need for a local-international differentiation if local productions are of good enough quality. For illustration, the local film *Homerun* 《跑吧！孩子》 was able to suit local viewers while attracting international audiences. Singapore currently does not have anything that is as popular as the successful Korean drama *Winter Sonata*, whose success lies in its idealisation of one's lifestyle. In contrast, local productions like *Holland V* are too practical and localised in context to win market opportunities overseas.

58 As such, it is important for MediaCorp TV to create compelling content for local productions in order to reach out to both local and international Chinese markets. There is a need to create compelling content by capitalising on our unique perspective and position in this region, as well as acting as a bridge between China and the west by producing programmes that help one side understand the other better.

59 The Committee had also deliberated on the possibility of the broadcaster creating two separate focuses for Chinese TV channels - one to cater to local audiences and the other to cater to international audiences - as it is felt that a Chinese TV channel that caters to the needs of regional Chinese audiences could be justified, using *Channel News Asia* (CNA), *Phoenix TV* and *CCTV 4* as examples.

60 The Chinese TV channel for international audience could take the form of a Chinese News Channel, and for this to succeed, market demand is the most important factor. Using Channel U and Channel i as examples, the experiences of these two channels showed that the local market could only support the Chinese channel. On the international front, a Chinese news TV channel may perform better than CNA as it may fill a niche for the Chinese populations in various Southeast-Asian countries.

61 ACCESS observed that in the last five years, more and more Chinese schools/courses have sprung up in Southeast-Asian countries, with countries like Thailand and Indonesia looking to recruit more Chinese teachers. Changes in political environment, as well as the recognition of the importance of engaging China has made the need to understand the Chinese culture more urgent. From the outset, programmes taken directly from China or Taiwan may not sit well with viewers from Southeast-Asian countries as the programmes are too entrenched in their native culture. This is where Chinese productions or a Chinese news TV channel from Singapore may have an advantage, as Singapore is closer to Southeast-Asian countries culturally, and thus able to produce Chinese programmes with a unique way of looking at the world. As such, the broadcaster is encouraged to take a serious look at this suggestion.

CONCLUSION

62 In this report, the ACCESS has offered targeted recommendations for improving the range and quality for Chinese television programmes. These suggestions need greater commitment from the broadcaster to realise their implementation.

63 The Committee envisions that in the post-merger environment where direct competition is now less of a concern, what is needed now is for the broadcaster to have a clear stand and direction for future development. In this respect, the broadcaster needs to strike a balance between its ultimate objective of social responsibility as a FTA broadcaster as well as to ensure commercial viability. The key lies in the need for broadcasters to improve local content standards and raise the quality of viewers' taste pattern with sufficient promotion and good scheduling of quality programmes. When a positive cycle of viewing standards can be cultivated, then the progression of quality local programmes to the international market would be an easier path.

64 The broadcaster's response to this report can be found in Annex A.

Annex A**BROADCASTER'S RESPONSE TO ACCESS' FEEDBACK & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Annex A gives some of the responses of broadcaster to ACCESS' feedback and recommendations given in this report.

Observation of Chinese Programmes & RecommendationsNews Bulletins

2 MediaCorp News thanked the Committee for its compliment on their effort in scheduling news bulletins at different timings on both Chinese channels, and explained that the earlier news bulletins focus more on local news and some lifestyle reporting while the later news bulletins focus more on international news, business news and sports. They would like to assure the committee that the 1-minute entertainment news segment only appears in the earlier news belts on an ad-hoc basis, when there are interesting news in the entertainment scene.

3 MediaCorp News also explained that as viewers usually tune in to programmes at varied times and that there are limited events happening on certain days, it is inevitable for the news segment on some days to be perceived as relatively similar in content. They have also noted the feedback on some incidents of inappropriate use of phrases in News bulletins and promised to be more vigilant in the future.

Current Affairs and Info-educational Programmes

4 MediaCorp TV responded that the current affairs programmes on Channel 8 & U are quite well differentiated, and gave the following examples: For local issues, Channel 8's *Frontline* 《前线追踪》 is an investigative programme that aims to address heartland “bread & butter” and “livelihood” issues closely related to daily lives of Singaporeans. The approach is gutsy as the editorial team tackles issues with frank opinions and discussions. Examples of topics addressed in this programme include 《再见, 红灯码头》, 《醉酒外劳扰居民》, 《街头艺术, 前景暗淡》, 《大选, 阿裕尼集选区》. *Focus* 《焦点》 on the same channel provides weekly updates on major socio-political issues happening beyond our shores, and incorporates expert analysis and public opinions on issues such as 《黄禹锡神话破灭?》, 《巴勒斯坦政局变天, 哈马斯当家》《陈水扁抛出新春炸弹》. According to MediaCorp TV, these two long-running weekly anchor programmes have garnered consistent viewership with local viewers. On the other hand, *Scoop* 《十分头条》 on Channel U takes an in-depth approach on social topics and issues that are relevant to local audiences (e.g. 新加坡人的公德心(抛垃圾问题), 离婚率上升, 网络诱骗少女 etc).

5 MediaCorp TV noted the committee's comments on *Love Airways*, and will keep the production house informed.

Dramas

6 MediaCorp TV said that their producers have worked hard at fleshing out a variety of stories with many different characters, ranging from the inspirational underdog-made-good to the ruffian-with-a-heart-of-gold, and explained that local

viewers who are exposed to different media platforms no longer prefer stereotype stories. For a good and layered story, they said that a portrayal of varied characters is essential, but assured the committee that they would continue to make a conscientious effort not to glorify shady characters. They also noted members' comment on the treatment of drama serial at early prime time slot which is more accessible by younger audience, and assured that they will always ensure that each of their serial convey positive message (e.g. *Portrait Of Home* is about family togetherness).

7 Responding to the Committee's feedback on *Beyond the Axis of Truth II* 《法医X档案II》, MediaCorp TV is of the view that their censors have been vigilant in their vetting of serials of such nature to ensure that they do not breach the guidelines.

Variety Programmes

8 MediaCorp TV highlighted that the lifestyle genre is a fundamental aspect of variety programmes, alongside game shows, comedies, and reality shows, among others. They explained that it is a genre that could provide viewers with useful tips and relatable information while being entertained, and has been highly popular with viewers. They reiterated their commitment to provide variety, and to continually explore new feasible categories under the lifestyle genre, so as to provide a wider range of topics.

9 The broadcaster also noted the Committee's views on a segment of *Top Fun*, and promised that it was a one-off incident, one which the J-Team has been informed and they have been conscientious in ensuring that such incidents are not repeated. They said that they also kept the instances of portraying characters of gender ambiguity in our programmes in the past year to the minimal, only featuring them sporadically, and when necessary.

10 Regarding over-commercialised variety shows mentioned by ACCESS, MediaCorp TV explained that such commercial programmes are inevitable as they operate as commercial channels and have to work with commercial partners for advertising revenue. However, they endeavour at all times to ensure that programme quality does not suffer and conscious effort would be made to ensure that the level of commercialism is kept within the guidelines set.

11 On the suggestion by the Committee to try outsourcing variety shows to independent production houses for more variety in style and ideas, MediaCorp TV said that they have worked with external parties to complement their own production and creative resources over the years, citing a recent collaboration with an external party to produce some interstitials, as well as with external production companies to produce two new variety programmes.

Cultural Programmes

12 The broadcaster thanked the Committee for its compliment on their effort in producing and acquiring quality cultural programmes, and reiterated that it has always been their desire to promote these programmes in order to achieve better viewership. They assured that they will continue to ensure equitable airtime be given to promote these programmes.

Children & Youth Programmes

13 MediaCorp TV explained that Chinese children programmes are presently not commercially viable, but despite such constraint and limited resources, Channel 8 has a dedicated time belt 《乐乐窝》 for Children's programmes on weekends (Saturday and Sunday from 8 to 11am), where a good mix of local and acquired productions is being offered. According to the broadcaster, these programmes are aimed at entertaining, instilling positive values and educating children in the Chinese language, tradition, customs and culture. Their children's programmes range from entertaining cartoons like 《多拉 A 梦》, 《大英雄狄青》, to popular local dramas 《我的朋友不是人》 and 《大儿子, 小老爸!》 to info-educational ones like 《天眼》 and 《Aha 快乐派!》, as well as 《小小企业家》 and 《成语万花筒》 which are fun variety game shows that engages participative learning by working with primary schools.

14 With regards to the comment on no children programmes shown on Channel U, MediaCorp informed that the channel adopts a different positioning and programming direction from Channel 8 - while Channel 8 is targeting audience age 4 and above, Channel U targets audience age 15 and above with emphasis on youth and young working adults.

15 On programmes for the youth, the broadcaster thanked the Committee for its compliment on *Shoot, Youth Decode* and *Creatively Mine*, and acknowledged the feedback on talent shows such as *Project SuperStar*, *Campus Superstar*, *SuperHost*, *SuperBand* and *Star Idol*. However, MediaCorp TV highlighted that these were specially planned in such a manner that each programme caters to different groups of viewers, and the result is that they were able to reach out to bigger audience groups and also help perpetuate a more interactive/ participative TV viewing experience.

16 MediaCorp TV is of the view that these talent shows provide a healthy platform for Singaporeans from all walks of life to pursue their dreams and to showcase their talent, as well as for the broadcaster to uncover multi-skilled talents and to provide regional exposure for Singapore talent. For example, the entire series of *Project SuperStar 2005* was aired on Malaysia's 8tv, allowing our variety format and our talent to be sampled by Malaysian viewers.

Key Recommendations

Multiculturalism

17 MediaCorp TV reiterated that Channel 8 and U are Chinese channels that cater mainly to the Chinese-speaking population, but nevertheless, Channel 8 will continue to commit efforts into weaving in multiculturalism within programmes where appropriate. The broadcaster also highlighted that through 2005 to 2006, they have integrated multicultural elements in MediaCorp's programmes ranging from drama serials (*Portrait of Home* 《同心圆》), kids drama (*Big Melon & Little Durian* 《大西瓜与小榴连》) and *Teens Cook Book* 《小厨当家》), variety programmes (*Say It If You Dare* 《有话好好说》, *Star of All Trades* 《行行出艺人》) and children reality programme (*Little Entrepreneurs* 《小小企业家》), and is pleased to announce the broadcast of a 12-episode info-educational series 《我们的大日子》 in July 2006, which features multi-ethnic festivals like Vaisakhi (Sikh), Thaipusam (Indian), Purim (Jewish), Hari Raya Puasa etc. Past series like 《特写: 我家在这里》 and 《城市记艺》 also covered stories of other races and nationalities.

More Chinese Programmes for the Young

18 MediaCorp TV announced that as part of their initiative to produce more meaningful Chinese programmes for the young, Channel 8 recently started a regular segment 《校园开讲》 on 《早安您好》, which is also simulcast on Capital Radio 95.8FM. This fortnightly segment which airs on every Thursday 7.45-8am will invite secondary schools and junior colleges to participate in discussion of social issues. They have encouraged schools to weave this segment into their curriculum as an additional avenue to learn Chinese the participative way.

19 Other initiatives in the past two years highlighted by the broadcaster include platforms where the youth could voice their opinions and demonstrate their talents (*Shoot!* 《有话就说》 and the various talent shows), youth-based drama (*The Rainbow Connection* 《舞出彩虹》, *The Champion* 《任我遨游》), youth variety programmes (*School Belle & the Beau* 《流星校园》, *Super Funkies* 《绝对大玩家》) and kids programmes like *Little Entrepreneur* 《小小企业家》, *Happy Sunday Kids* 《哗! 乐在星期天》, *The Cheer Team* 《无敌啦啦队》, *Na Na Shalala* 《魔法傻娜娜》, *Storm Raiders II* 《旋风小侦探 II》 and *Dancing Notes* 《跳跃音符》).

Programmes for the elderly

20 For this genre, the broadcaster named *Golden Age* 《黄金年华》 (the magazine staple for the senior citizens) and info-ed programmes like *Planning for Golden Age* 《特写: 阿公阿嬷当自强》 and *The Silver Lining* 《骤雨骄阳》 as examples of programmes for the elderly. They also highlighted Channel 8's recent introduction of opera programmes on a weekday morning to serve the need of senior citizens.

Better promotion & scheduling of quality programmes

21 MediaCorp TV said that the Committee has noted that info-educational and current affairs programmes on Ch U has already been allocated the Monday to Friday 9.30pm belt, while most of the quality info-educational and publicly funded programmes on Channel 8 are also scheduled during prime time belt (e.g. Channel 8 Sat 9.30pm, Thur 10.30pm, Fri 10.30pm, Sunday 10.30pm). The broadcaster assured that they will continue to promote such programmes as their ratings are important for the channels.

Localisation VS Internationalisation

22 MediaCorp TV reported that over the years, they have made good progress in terms of exporting their local dramas to audiences in the region. Even very localised dramas such as *Holland V* have been exported to markets like Malaysia, Taiwan and is in fact being aired right now.

23 In terms of local drama production, the broadcaster differentiated between those made for local viewers, those made for both local and regional viewers (co-production drama), and co-production dramas made primarily for the bigger China market. In recent months, they will be commencing work on co-production dramas in Taiwan and Malaysia as well.

24 MediaCorp TV listed the following as examples of their track record of exporting local dramas and variety programmes to the regional markets:

- (1) They operate two time belts in Malaysia (one on 8tv and another on ntv7) which deliver 520 hours of our local programmes (both dramas and variety) to Malaysian audiences annually;
- (2) Last year MediaCorp exported 565 hours of content (dramas and variety) to ASTRO, the cable network in Malaysia. This year, the number of hours will go beyond 700;
- (3) For Cambodia, they export 600 hours of drama annually to both cable and free-to-air TV stations;
- (4) For Vietnam, 300 hours of drama are exported annually to both cable and free-to-air TV stations;
- (5) For Thailand, 200 hours of drama;
- (6) For Indonesia – 120 hours of drama;
- (7) Taiwan just acquired 100 hours of *Holland V*; and
- (8) 300 hours to China, 450 hours to Hong Kong, 60 hours to Japan and approximately 100 hours to USA.

25 Regarding the Committee's proposal for a Chinese News Channel to target South East Asian Chinese on the premise that programmes taken directly from China or Taiwan may be too entrenched in their native culture to appeal to those in SE Asia, MediaCorp feels that to appeal to just Chinese in SE Asia is too narrow a focus, and cited *Phoenix TV* from Hong Kong as an example of a channel with a very distinct North Asian feel, but could still attract the Chinese in SE Asia to watching its news, cultural and entertainment programmes. The broadcaster is of the view that a Chinese News Channel for SE Asia is a tough proposition, as the available demographic watches not just Chinese but English and other language news channels native to each of their country, and look look to China, Taiwan and Hong Kong as places where quality programmes originate.