

Michael G. Elasmr (Ed.). *The Impact of International Television: A Paradigm Shift*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2003, 213 pp. ISBN 0-8058-4220-9 (paperback). \$25.00.

Ping-Hung Chen

*Graduate Institute of Mass Communication
National Taiwan Normal University*

This edited book is about the theoretical and empirical debates on the effects of imported television. Editor Michael G. Elasmr brings together studies and perspectives of cross-border television from diverse research periods, raising criticisms about cultural imperialism theory as a dominant paradigm in international communication. In addition to challenging cultural imperialism and related dependency theories, he offers an alternative paradigm to the study of imported television effects for a more objective reevaluation of the influences of foreign television on local viewers.

The Impact of International Television: A Paradigm Shift aims to provide theoretical arguments and empirical studies for students and researchers interested in understanding the effects of imported television. The editor also proposes an alternative paradigm for readers in the field to reconsider the impacts of foreign television on domestic audiences, as the dominant paradigm, cultural imperialism, is not necessarily reflected in the body of research that exists within this field of study. In general, this book can be an appropriate reference for students and researchers interested in international communication and intercultural communication, as it contains relevant and broad-ranged topics like influences of transborder information flow, effects of international television, roles of transnational media, and cultural perceptions of local viewers on imported television programs.

This book includes 10 chapters divided into three parts according to the editor purposes to review the legacies of cultural imperialism in international communication, to showcase representative cross-border television studies, and to present his alternative and objective paradigm to conceptualize the process of imported television. The first part, chapters 1 and 2, traces the historical factor leading to the emergence of cultural imperialism as a dominant paradigm of studying the effect of international television. The second part, chapters 3 to 7, brings together five contemporary studies that have investigated the impact of imported television programs on the local audiences. The studies cover diverse situations of cross-border

television viewing and launch both cross-national and cross-regional levels of examination between countries and regions like the United States, Greece, Argentina, Brazil, and Ecuador. These researchers examine the impact of imported television on local viewers from diverse theoretical perspectives like social cognitive theory, cognitive functional theory, cultivation theory, cultural discount, and cultural proximity. Most studies illustrate that their findings are inconsistent with the premises of the cultural imperialism theory, which often implies strong and homogenous effects.

The volume's final three chapters, either authored or coauthored by Elasmár, serve an important and forward-looking function. They explain the theoretical framework of media effect studies and international television from a broader perspective, followed by a proposition of an alternative paradigm for conceptualizing and labeling the process of influence of imported television programs.

Since the 1970s, the academia has seen a growing literature and scholarship regarding cultural imperialism. However, Elasmár observes related research findings have been insufficient to prove the effect of imported television on local audience. Thus, the main intention of this book is to initiate a perspective change in the existing cultural imperialism paradigm. Elasmár refers to the new process of influence the model of Susceptibility to Imported Media (SIM) and labels such an alternative effect as Media-Accelerates Cultural Diffusion (MACD), meaning imported television influences only some aspect of the receivers culture. Furthermore, he calls for a paradigm shift of searching for the impact of international television. The editor concludes the effect of imported television is far more complicated than cultural imperialism advocates believe it to be and its impact is not homogenous, although it could still be influential, such as reinforcing existing notions about the foreign individuals and nations.

Cultural imperialism, or precisely speaking, media imperialism, has long been a dominant paradigm for those interested in revealing the effects of imported television on local viewers. The main notion of media imperialism emphasizes foreign television program will impose its cultural and social values on local audiences. Its effect has been significant and gradually raising concerns among those countries importing foreign television programs. However, Elasmár criticizes the dominant paradigm of media imperialism for lacking empirical evidence. He collected several quantitative studies on local audience of imported television and asserted that media imperialism doesn't exist, at least, from the findings of those studies. As he denotes, many of those relationship between imported television and local culture cannot be tested as they are based on ideological interpretation and assume conspiracy (p. 2).

Besides theories of dependency, modernization, globalization, and world system, newer theories have been developed to explain impacts of international television on local viewers. For instance, Thomas L. McPhail (2002) proposes the theory of electronic colonialism, meaning that the importation of foreign-produced programming from the West will establish a set of foreign norms and values that, to

varying degree, alter domestic culture of LDCs. These theories have all shed light on the phenomenon of imported television effects from a broad and ideological level, although they may not have empirical studies on local audiences to support. From macro school researchers, this does not mean that effects of media imperialism are nonexistent. Reasonably, the effect may occur in a subconscious rather than conscious process, which is beyond the empirical awareness of the audience.

In summary, both CI and MACD are central to our understanding of the impact of imported television on local viewers. The main contribution of this edited book is that it provides the academia an alternative perspective to the study of cross-border television. However, researchers should be cautious about whether a paradigm shift has indeed occurred since the alternative Elasmar proposed may, in the end, complement rather than replace the dominant paradigm in the field.

REFERENCES

- McPhail, T. L. (2002). *Global communication: Theories, stakeholders, and trends*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.