

Radio Broadcasting in Asia and the "Voice of America"

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One of the more significant developments in Asia in the past fifteen years has been the beginning of a mass communications revolution. Its consequence may be no less important than the dramatic political and social changes if measured in terms of fulfilling objectives enunciated during the past years of triumphant nationalism in Asia.

The economic and social goals of Asia today are ambitious ones and cannot be achieved without the active participation of its millions. Educational campaigns through the medium of radio in various fields have already been undertaken and completed with encouraging results. New programs in agriculture, public health, and community development are planned in most of Asia, from Korea southward to Indonesia and thence across South Asia to Pakistan. There are indications that radio broadcasting will continue to play a key role in the process of national development.

Radio's importance has been summarized in a study prepared for UNESCO. The author of this work states that while there are sound reasons for improving other mass media in less advanced areas, "there is an even stronger one for an intensified effort to expand broadcasting facilities."¹ He notes that broadcasts can be transmitted over great distances despite natural barriers such as mountains and jungles, and although initial installation costs are high, radio is "relatively inexpensive and considerable use can be made of local personnel The third and most important advantage of radio is that it can fulfill its task of informing and educating the public regardless of whether listeners are literate or illiterate."²

Since the end of the Second World War we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of Asians who have access to radio

receivers. According to UNESCO figures, the number of radio receivers in Asia almost doubled in the period between 1949 and 1956.

Of greater significance, however, has been the resultant revision of program content and redirection of purpose. The broadcaster today is addressing an audience that includes more segments of Asian society than was the case in the period of colonialism and semicolonialism.

TABLE I
STATISTICS ON RADIO RECEIVERS IN ASIA

	1956 (except where noted)	1959 (except where noted)
Afghanistan	12,000	21,000
Burma	26,000	50,000
Cambodia	6,500 (1954)	7,000
China	1,800,000	3,500,000
India	1,075,900	1,740,500
Indonesia	500,000 (1955)	794,700 (1958)
Japan	11,263,000	15,865,400
Korea	300,000	589,000
Laos	330	5,000
Malaya	144,000	226,000
Philippines	217,000 (1954)	512,000
Pakistan	100,000	395,000
Singapore	73,000	104,000
Thailand	108,000	800,000
Vietnam	21,000	303,000

Sources: *World Radio Handbook*, Annual Editions, Copenhagen. United States Information Service, "World Wide Distribution of Radio Receiver Sets" (Washington, 1959).

Table I shows the increase in radio receivers in Asia in a recent three-year period. Asia is obviously in need of additional receivers, both for private residences and for community listening centers. While an overwhelming majority of the world's population is located in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, these areas account for only one-sixth of the world's radio receivers. Some 3,500,000 receivers were purchased in Asia in 1958.³ But the need remains great. India still has but one receiver per 1,000 inhabitants. UNESCO considers 50 receivers per 1,000 as adequate for a minimum radio audience.⁴ It is still apparent, despite its lack of receiving facilities, that Asian broadcasting is no longer the exclusive province of a relatively select and fortunate few. The pre-war

audience could be described as elite, generally limited to individual, and families possessed of unique financial status. Europeans residing in Asia owned a disproportionate share of the receivers, and substantial portions of the broadcast day of many Asian stations were directed to this audience, oftentimes relaying news and feature programs originated in London and Paris. Programs in the indigenous languages were broadcast, though their number and frequency were far below the total now carried by Asian stations.

There are many reasons for these new directions in Asian radio broadcasting, apart from the obvious one that fewer Europeans control the schedules and operations of these stations. The most apparent is the availability of cheaper sets. Japanese manufacturers, particularly, have found in South and Southeast Asia a growing market for their moderately priced receivers. Communist China has also exported low-cost units in large numbers. Transistorized receivers and flashlight-battery-powered units are bringing radio for the first time to Asians living in areas without electricity. Many governments are installing receivers in remote villages in order to develop and sustain coordinated educational campaigns. Ministries of health, education, and agriculture are adding radio information specialists to their staffs to develop new programs through the medium.

Agricultural production continues to lag in most Asian countries. As was pointed out at the 1959 meeting of the Far East-American Council of Commerce and Industry in New York City, not nearly enough food is being produced to meet Asia's rising population curve. Farm output in Asia as a whole has risen only 23% above the pre-war figure, far below the percentile population increase. Asian government officials are turning, many for the first time, to radio as a farm education weapon. It was unthinkable twenty years ago that broadcasters should direct programs to, for, and about farmers. Observers have noted the exemplary work of the private broadcasters in the Philippines in extending news and knowledge to the republic's rural audience. Farm programming is only beginning, but an important start has been made.

An encouraging report of a rural broadcasting project was presented at the Fourteenth Conference on Public Opinion Research in May, 1959. Dr. Paul Neurath, of Queens College, reported on a UNESCO-financed "radio farm forum" series broadcast by All-India

Radio. He concluded that the series, directed to an audience in 150 villages in India, achieved its goals of disseminating practical knowledge of new farming methods to increase yields, public health instruction, and suggestions for general improvement of village welfare. The community listening project served as a spur to decision-making by villagers and generally resulted in concrete gains for the Marathi-speaking groups to which the series was directed. Dr. Neurath reported that the Government of India in January, 1959 decided to expand the radio forum concept to advance education to other rural sections of India.⁵

Any program of this type underlines, however, the complex problem of language diversification in radio broadcasting. India's more than 400 major languages and dialects pose a near insoluble problem for effective programming. The necessity of training staffs capable of conceiving, writing, producing, and directing major educational campaigns in the different languages merely compounds the vexing dilemma of a general lack of trained broadcasting personnel.

Of equal importance to the future of radio in Asia is the need for broadcast transmitters. Even though transmission facilities have been constructed at a prodigious rate since 1946, a serious shortage persists. A formidable barrier to the acquisition of new and improved materials is the lack of hard currency. In many countries matters of higher priority naturally receive the bulk of available funds. Licensing revenues are insufficient to meet national broadcasting budgets. Pakistan, as an example, was able to collect only 15% of its 1954 Radio Pakistan budget of Rs. 5,340,000.⁶

At the beginning of the Second World War, many of Asia's broadcasting facilities were already obsolete. Transmitters were generally of a low wattage, incapable of reaching all sections of many countries. The only exceptions were those transmitters installed by the warring powers for tactical propanganda purposes. War's end marked the resumption of full-scale electronics production in the West and permitted the countries of Asia to develop communications facilities at a more accelerated pace. Asia does not possess any degree of electronics production self-sufficiency (with the notable exception of Japan) and must rely on Western manufacturers for new facilities and materials.

Despite these obstacles, progress is being made. Radio Republik

Indonesia now broadcasts on 70 transmitters, and 10 of these have been installed in the past two years. Thailand, equipped with less than 10 broadcast transmitters before the war, now operates more than 50 standard-band broadcast stations, in addition to a variety of short-wave and frequency-modulation (FM) units.⁷ The number of broadcasting transmitters on Taiwan increased from 88 to 115 from July, 1957 to October, 1958. Thirty-one of these are short wave and are designed primarily for broadcast to the Chinese Mainland.

Radio is recognized as a powerful force in nation-building by the governments of Asia. Increased expenditures for new transmitters and the purchase of improved production materials point up the importance of the medium. The Government of Pakistan in its five-year development plan outlined in 1957 called for a vast program to supplement Radio Pakistan's meager broadcast facilities. The plan called for the establishment of regional transmitters in Lahore, Peshawar, and Karachi, a short-wave facility sufficiently powerful to permit East Pakistan to direct programs to West Pakistan, and eight new local stations in each region.⁹ It will thus be seen that important developments leading to expanded programs have occurred in the past decade. To the broadcaster concerned with programming in Asia the most important consideration is the increase in the size of the potential audience (persons who have access to receivers) and the composition of that audience.

With the exception of Japan,* the countries of Asia have yet to develop the broadcasting medium on the scale to which it has been employed in the West. (This does not refer to programming, but only to technical material and the mass distribution of receivers, for the West has not distinguished itself by its neglect of the educational potential of radio broadcasting.) Still, the past several years have seen a rapid growth of radio, and there is every indication the coming decade will add to the importance of the medium.

In January, 1960 a conference on the mass media of Southeast Asia was sponsored by UNESCO in Bangkok. The findings revealed the variety of problems confronting publishers, journalists, and broadcasters. Asian representatives noted the need for the development of truly mass media for the education and benefit of all

* Japan has more than 100 receivers per 1,000 and is the single exception
10 generalizations about mass media in the region.

peoples. Delegates from twenty-two countries and experts and observers from ten international organizations issued a report at the conclusion of the conference stressing the role of radio in Asia's development. However, the report stated that if the region was to achieve a goal of one radio set per family, some 90,000,000 radio receivers would have to be produced or imported by 1965. Recommendations made by the participants included a study of Asian manufacturing facilities, greater exchange of radio programs within Southeast Asia, and additional training of radio broadcasting personnel.

The Voice of America is directing its programs to several different audiences, including one composed of relatively young people. One of the largest potential audiences in Asia is its youth: Malaya, as an example, has a population of which more than half are under 21 years of age. These persons are possessed of a great curiosity about the countries beyond its borders. They may be highly suspicious of the Great Powers and see ulterior motives in foreign aid, whatever the source, and are highly conscious of Malaya's national traditions and cultures. They are eager to learn foreign languages; indeed, to many, languages represent an important key to individual and national betterment.

Another audience group is older and is generally made up of persons who have established themselves in career positions. Many have studied abroad, and they are more likely to listen to foreign broadcasts than to locally produced programs broadcast by national stations. They are internationally minded and may well be more familiar with the writings of U. S. Revolutionary leaders than are most Americans. They constitute the largest portion of a short-wave audience.

The third group is more representative of the "new audience." It is made up of the greatest numbers of persons in most Asian countries. It is hoped that a large portion of the Voice of America audience is made up of Asians in this group. But within the category are those who may more likely favor their local medium-wave station over a foreign short-wave station, and indigenous over Western music.

So far as program content is concerned, the general objective

of VOA is stated in the Charter of the United States Information Agency, which reads in part:

The purpose of USIA shall be to submit evidence to people of other countries by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress and peace.

USIA now maintains some 200 information centers in 80 countries. VOA is but one part of the U. S. government's information program. In the fiscal year 1959, \$18 million of the Agency's allocated budget of \$105 million was spent by VOA.

VOA now broadcasts in 13 Asian languages and English to the Far East and South and Southeast Asia:

Mandarin	—	4 hours daily
Cantonese	—	3 hours daily
Amoy	—	2 hours daily
Indonesian	—	2 hours daily
Japanese	—	2 hours daily
Korean	—	2 hours daily
Vietnamese	—	1½ hours daily
Hindi	—	1 hour daily
Burmese	—	1 hour daily
Bengali	—	1 hour daily
Urdu	—	1 hour daily
Malayalam	—	½ hour three times weekly
Tamil	—	½ hour four times weekly
English	—	10 hours are broadcast daily to Asia, although many programs are of general world-wide interest and are not specifically aimed at Asia.

A total of 76 transmitters are maintained throughout the world, including two one-million-watt medium-wave transmitters on Okinawa and the Philippines, the most powerful broadcast units in the world.

News broadcasts are among the most important of the VOA programs scheduled. VOA strives for objectivity on these newscasts: it is the paramount requirement for all news programs, since there would be no quicker way to antagonize and lose an audience than by reporting only those stories favorable to the United States and

its allies. The fifteen-minute broadcasts, which include stories of regional foreign interest and general coverage of developments in the U. S., are prepared by a central news desk before translation into broadcast languages. Stories which are embarrassing to the United States are not avoided, however unpalatable they may be to report. Little Rock, white citizens councils, mass retaliations are stories that are covered from the first news break. In the final analysis this is the only treatment possible. It is the only way to report disturbing problems, and telling the unpleasant truth perhaps best represents our American form of democracy to an audience abroad.

News constitutes approximately one-half of the total output of the VOA. Other programs are varied, and include commentaries in which official U. S. positions and attitudes are reviewed and explained (commentaries are clearly separated from the news broadcasts and labeled as such), and discussion and forum programs; interviews and reports on cultural, economic, and scientific developments are also scheduled regularly. Some language services (notably Vietnamese) instruct their listeners in the English language. It would be impossible to provide a detailed account of programs in the various languages. However, to indicate the nature of material available to listeners, here is a weekly summary of the feature programs broadcast by the Indonesian service:

- Sunday: "Listeners' Choice" (music request program)
 - "Cultural Column" (feature material on U. S. cultural developments)
 - "Footnotes to the News" (background data on current affairs)
- Monday: "Announcers' Choice" (music program)
 - "Report from Indonesia" (Alternates with "Report on the U. N." and "News of Hawaii.")
 - "Press Opinion" (review of U. S. press comment)
- Tuesday: "Magazine of the Air" (feature or documentary program)
 - "American History"
- Wednesday: "On the Scene Reporter" (documentary visits to U. S. cities)
 - "Economic Digest"
- Thursday: "Guest of the Week" (interview with Indonesian visitor to U. S.)
 - "Labor News"
- Friday: "Answers to Listeners' Questions"

"Developments in the World of Science"

Saturday: "Saturday Night Showcase" (popular music)

"America This Week" (documentary covering major news events in the U. S.)

In addition, on Tuesdays through Fridays a short feature, "Timely Topics," dealing with a current topic, is also broadcast.

It might be noted that the Indonesian Service has more than a normal share of request programs. The service receives approximately 750 letters each month.

The number of hours broadcast in English by VOA has increased from 3½ hours daily in 1958 to 22 hours in 1960. This is a result of the growing number of persons speaking English as a second language, among them persons in important positions in government, education, and science, and of the fact that English broadcasts are not as likely to be jammed by Communist transmitters.

In October, 1959, VOA asked its English-language listeners to write to Washington in order to better determine the composition of the audience. Listeners were asked to give their ages, occupations, education, and program to which they were listening at the time. More than 65,000 letters were received. It is interesting to note that 27% of the mail came from Asia and the Pacific Islands (excluding Australia and New Zealand). The Asian countries responding with the greatest numbers of letters were India (7,335), the Philippines (3,751), and Indonesia (1,448). Results indicated that the audience to the English-language programs were primarily students and professionals.

The English-language programs basically follow the format of the other services, news and general feature material, with extensive use of programs originally broadcast in the U. S. by commercial and educational stations. From 1957 to 1959 the National Association of Educational Broadcasters supplied some 300 hours of programming to VOA for English-language broadcasts.

Two feature programs for Asian listeners, "Report to Asia" and "Report to South Asia," include interviews with Asian visitors to the U. S., reviews of American journals and periodicals dealing with Asia, and other programs of specific regional interest.

The efforts of VOA and USIA are but a small part of the total

image of the U. S. projected to Asia. Unfortunate stereotypes of America and Americans held by Asians, and of Asia and Asians by Americans, can be changed through many processes, through official government policies, through continued contact between the peoples of our two continents. The medium of radio can play an important part in the creation of a fair and objective image of one to the other.

NOTES

1. George A. Coddington, Jr., *Broadcasting Without Barriers* (Paris: UNESCO, 1959), p. 48.
2. *Ibid*, p. 49.
3. United States Information Service, "World Wide Distribution of Radio Receiver Sets" (Washington: 1959).
4. *World Communications* (Third Edition) (Paris: UNESCO, 1956), pp. 48-49.
5. More detailed information on the pilot project and general information on rural broadcasts is contained in the "Preliminary Summary Report on the UNESCO Project of Adult Education at All-India Radio, Poona" (New Delhi: 1956) and J. C. Mathur and Paul Neurath, *An Experiment in Farm Radio Forums* (Paris: UNESCO, 1959).
6. Kenneth E. Olsen and Abdul G. Eirabie, "Radio Pakistan: Voice of a New Nation," *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 73-79.
7. See the annual publications of the *World Radio Handbook*, Copenhagen, Denmark.
8. "Press and Radio in Free China" (Taipei: Government Information Office, 1959).
9. *Ten Years of Pakistan (1947-1957)* (Karachi, 1957).