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Television New Media 2004; 5; 41
DOI: 10.1177/1527476403259747

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Globalization, Nation, and Television in Asia

The Cases of India and China

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In the context of the globalization of television, India and China represent immensely attractive markets to the major corporations that provide television program content and services across borders and regions. However, globalizing pressures on both countries have achieved quite different kinds of liberalization. In the same process, local resistance and adaptation have opened up greater pluralism of cultural choices, as well as new forms of modernization to pursue. Apart from the massive size of their populations and the considerable degree to which they define the centers of two of the major cultures of Asia, India and China are important as the sources of two of the world's greatest diasporas, so each has substantial although dispersed overseas markets to cultivate in pursuit of its own globalization. This article backgrounds the current industry structure of television in each of these nations and outlines the apparent impact of globalization on them.

Keywords: *globalization; television; India; China*

Even just for the massive size of their populations, India and China deserve attention, not to mention the degree to which they define the centers of two of the major cultures of Asia. In the context of the globalization of television, they represent immensely attractive markets to the major corporations that provide television program content and services across

Authors' Note: This article is based on research carried out during 2000. John Sinclair is continuing his research on India under an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant, in conjunction with Dr. Sanjay Srivastava and Dr. Kajri Jain of Deakin University.

TELEVISION & NEW MEDIA
Vol. 5 No. 1, February 2004 41–54
DOI: 10.1177/1527476403259747
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borders and regions, and whose pressures on the systems of both countries have achieved quite different degrees of liberalization. In the same process, local resistance and adaptation have opened up more pluralism of cultural choices, as well as new forms of modernization to pursue. Furthermore, India and China are centers of two of the world's greatest diasporas, so each has substantial although dispersed overseas markets to cultivate in pursuit of its own globalization. This article backgrounds the current industry structure of television in each of these nations and outlines the apparent impact of globalization on them.

Television has become one of the major fields in which India is experiencing the forces of globalization. The availability of international television channels via satellite at the beginning of the 1990s forced the liberalization of a television market formerly held as a national monopoly by the state broadcaster Doordarshan (DD). This led to a profusion of satellite-to-cable services, but although some of the first international services such as STAR TV remain prominent, the most successful services have been Indian. In addition, there has been strong growth in channels broadcasting in the major "regional" languages other than Hindi, such as Tamil and Bengali. Although DD has improved and extended its services in response to the competition, and so maintained its preeminence, the Indian television market has become much more diverse and open to global influences in its content. The first part of the article will describe the structural changes that have taken place and explore some of the implications that the liberalization of television appears to hold for cultural identity and nationhood in contemporary India.

Greater China, understood as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China, has been divided along political and economic lines for most of the past century. Nevertheless, just in the past decade, television has emerged as a medium able to cross the boundaries within and around Greater China, to create new patterns of exchange within the Chinese-speaking world, and to engage in complex ways with global forces of culture and commerce. This process has been driven by the deregulation of the national television industries of China and Taiwan since the 1980s. The establishment of commercial cable and satellite networks, both local and multinational, and the proliferation of the technologies of reproduction of video cassettes and video compact discs have created a unified market for Mandarin-language television programming. The particular characteristics of the regions, with strong commercial production skills in Hong Kong and to a lesser extent Taiwan, and the colossal growth of the mainland Chinese commercial television industry have shaped the kinds of programming being produced and the way advertising has approached the market. The second part of the article outlines this background and considers the impact that global corporations can have on

Chinese television and the ways they have been restrained and co-opted by governments.

Indian Television since Liberalization

The rationale for the former centralization of Indian broadcasting in the state broadcaster, DD, was cast in terms of national integration, economic development, and the maintenance of cultural identity. Traditionally, then, television has had a special role in building national consciousness and culture, as well as an economic and social development communication function. All of these now have become problematized as issues for broadcasting policy as DD's former monopoly becomes ever more opened up, obliging it to compete with scores of new private satellite-to-cable channels.

DD claims that in 2000 there were television sets in 69 million homes, covering as many as 362 million domestic viewers. With communal viewers in both urban and rural areas added in, DD's estimate is that television reaches 479 million viewers in total. Note that the "national" reach of television in fact means only 88 percent of the total population, as these figures are heavily skewed against the rural regions where only 32 percent of India's television households are to be found (see <http://www.ddindia.net/bk1>). Furthermore, high growth should not be equated with audience penetration. An estimated 100 million communal viewers in rural areas could be watching on as few as 64,000 sets (Sinha 1996), which averages out at more than 1,500 viewers per set. Nevertheless, in spite of the inequalities of access even to broadcast let alone cable television, India is already one of the world's largest cable television markets, with subscribers estimated at more than 30 million.

Thus, in a nation in which there are at least four times as many television sets as telephone lines, the popular demand would appear to be for entertainment rather than for communication and information services. There remain important technical limitations on the degree to which television can serve as the platform on which new convergent information services can be delivered. Yet recent maneuvers by Indian and foreign entrepreneurs (including Subash Chandra, Kerry Packer, and Rupert Murdoch) suggest that strategic positions are being taken up with a view to supplying internet and interactive services over fiber-optic cable to television subscribers at some time in the future (Media Moguls Converge on India 2000; The New Moguls 2000).

DD and the Private Competitors

It should be kept in mind that for all the transformation brought to Indian television by the new cable services, DD remains the dominant

broadcaster over all. One reason for this is that DD is still the only terrestrial broadcaster. All the foreign satellite-to-cable services, such as STAR, have to uplink their signals from outside India. As well, all cable operators "must carry" three DD channels, thus ensuring wide distribution (Cable Bill Passed in India 1995; Joshi 1996; Cabinet OKs Cable TV Act 2000).

The national satellite reach once monopolized by DD and dedicated to the building of national unity through its channels, DD1 and DD2, now allows services in "regional" languages from outside the Hindi belt of states in the northwest to be delivered throughout the nation, and both DD and private interests are doing this. DD's special satellite services include a system of fifteen regional language channels that transmit in the major languages of India other than Hindi. Although sometimes referred to as "minority" languages in comparison to India's 337 million Hindi speakers, or "regional" or "local" rather than "national," several of these languages have tens of millions of speakers, such as Bengali with almost 70 million or Tamil with 53 million. Significantly, most of the services are available on a national basis, not just in the region where each of the languages is spoken. As well, there is an international channel, DD-India, carried via PanAmSat's PAS 4 to about fifty of the countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America where there are Indian populations (see <http://www.ddindia.net/bk1>).

Of the satellite-to-cable channels, STAR TV is the most controversial because its arrival over India in 1991 symbolized what many Indians still refer to as a "cultural invasion." CNN was in fact the first global satellite service to transmit into India, at the time of the Gulf War at the beginning of 1991, but CNN linked up with DD, while Hong Kong-based STAR became wholly owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. Soon recognizing that the greater demand was for Indian rather than foreign programming, Murdoch took steps to "Indianize" STAR's repertoire and, even more interesting, took up a 49.9 percent share in Zee Telefilms, parent to Zee TV in 1992 (Ninan 1995; Rusbridger 1994; Sinclair 1997). Yet after a difficult relationship with Zee, Murdoch sold down his interest to a strategic 4 percent in 1999 (Chaya 2000).

So, it is important to appreciate that for all the public debate about "cultural invasion" occasioned by the presence of transborder services over the past decade, their greatest impact has been to stimulate the growth of Indian channels, and Zee has been the greatest beneficiary. Launched in 1992, Zee TV is the most popular of the Indian cable services. It is vertically integrated with Zee Telefilms, which produces programs for Zee and a related channel, EL TV. Zee also has a cable distribution arm, Siticable, which as India's largest multiple systems operator is also prominent in internet service provision. At the international level, Zee has developed services for diasporic Indian communities in the United Kingdom, United

States, Africa, and the Pacific, a private counterpart to DD's service. Within India, as well as an education channel and four music and film channels in Hindi, there are channels in the other major South Asian languages (Ray and Jacka 1996; Thussu 2000).

Television has contributed to the rapid growth of media in languages other than Hindi. Of the new channels transmitting in the regional languages, Sun TV is the foremost with its service in Tamil, a distinct language and culture of southern India. Along with Eenadu, the channel in the Telugu language, and other major Indian cable channels broadcasting all over India in Malayalam (Asianet) and Kannada (Udaya), Sun has joined an industry lobby group, the Indian Broadcasters Association. This has been an initiative of Subhash Chandra, the founder and principal of Zee (Nadkarni 1995).

Programming and Audience Reception

Programming on Indian television in past decades has been distinguished by a number of innovations, all now thoroughly discussed in the literature. Consistent with DD's social and economic development objectives, in the 1980s there was *Hum Log*, an India soap opera carrying a didactic message about family planning and sponsored by a division of Nestlé. This not only marked the advent of the prodevelopment soap opera as a genre but also confirmed the value of commercial sponsorship on DD (Singhal and Rogers 1989, 76-81). Later in the 1980s, there were more famous soap operas, but this time they were religious, based on the Hindu epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. These were unprecedented in the levels of ratings they achieved and provoked controversies centering on their political significance. Quite apart from explicit attempts by the Bharatiya Janata Party to exploit these venerable sagas in their electioneering from this era onwards, the programs had the effect of asserting Hindutva, the "Hindu-Hindi" religio-linguistic hegemony of the northern Indian states over the rest of India and marginalizing the minority religions: Muslim, Christianity, Sikh, Jain, and others (Mitra 1993).

Given such a tradition of using television for developmental and nation-building goals, the arrival of the first satellite-to-cable services in 1991 was greeted with an ambiguous official response. While one minister for information and broadcasting initiated the ongoing critical debate with his durable denunciatory phrase "cultural invasion" in 1993 (quoted in Pathania 1998, 71), there was no serious attempt to stop the spread of the operations of the "cable-wallahs," such as by the banning of satellite dishes as occurred in China and elsewhere. Perhaps the government did not want to alienate the support of the middle classes, who were glad to have CNN's reports on the Gulf War, and was forced to recognize that "the phenomenal

success of STAR programs, especially soaps such as *Santa Barbara* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, all over India clearly indicated that Indians turn to television for entertainment and not for lessons on national integration" (Melkote, Sanjay, and Ahmed 1998, 176).

McDowell (1997) argued that it was the state's prior commitment to economic liberalization, rather than the external pressure from the international satellite services themselves or any internal need to mollify the middle classes, that established the context for official tolerance of those services. For its part, DD had been progressively privatized throughout the 1980s, in the sense that it both increased its use of private program production and came to rely ever more on advertising income rather than the state subvention. Similarly, the government ensured that DD's competitive advantages over the satellite-to-cable competitors were protected, enabling the state to assert some indirect market controls over the inroads made by the new services (pp. 154-55). Pathania (1998) also pointed to the way in which DD, by virtue of programming arrangements with MTV, CNN, and Disney, has "allowed itself to become a conduit for American programming to reach Indian audiences" (p. 66). And not just American either: for example, at one stage, DD awarded a contract to the Nine Network of Australia to produce prime-time programming for DD Metro (Burke 2000).

Nonetheless, the staple popular genre on television is the Indian film, with its characteristic music and dance. As well, some of the most popular panel and game shows are based on film music, notably *Sa Re Ga Ma* and *Antakshari* (Thussu 2000, 199). This has meant that the proliferation of channels has also been a stimulus for the Indian film industry, and not only Bollywood, the Mumbai-based Hindi industry, but also those in some regional languages, especially Tamil. To that extent, film retains its preeminence as the powerhouse of mass-mediated popular culture both in India and for Indians abroad (Pendakur and Subramanyam 1996). Indeed, a recent report suggests that due to the profusion of Indian films and film music programs on television, cinema attendance within India is dwindling. Nevertheless, film remains profitable, thanks to the sale of television rights in India and the international cinema and music rights, especially for diasporic Indians in the United Kingdom and the United States (MacKinnon 2000).

Beyond the undisputed Indian-ness of Indian films, there is the question of "how much of this programming is a reproduction of Western formats with a local twist" (Pathania 1998, 69). Two trends seem evident. One is the spread of the hybridization of language, and the other is the popularity of indigenized foreign programs or, at least, their formats. Several writers have pointed to the emergence of a peculiar fusion of Hindi with English words: "Hinglish." This is the everyday language of the urban middle classes and of the diaspora, transformed into a media language (Pathania

1998; Ray and Jacka 1996; Thussu 2000). There is even a corresponding trend toward "Tinglish" in Tamil broadcasting, and possibly the other regional languages. According to Thussu (2000), it was Zee TV that has actively popularized the use of Hinglish, not only in youth-oriented music programs such as *Superhit Muqabala* but also in the news. He argued that Zee's cultivation of this vernacular was one of the reasons it was able to take so much early ground away from STAR in 1992-93, when STAR was broadcasting only in English (pp. 197-99).

Like STAR's Channel V, Zee's Music Asia channel is a successful indigenized version of Western models such as MTV and Channel V. Other adaptations are not necessarily so popular, such as Zee's *Hullo Friends*, a poached version of the U.S. *Friends* (Thussu 2000, 197-99). However, the most remarkable recent success has been *Kuan Benega Crorepati* on the STAR Plus channel, based on the legitimately acquired format of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. Even *Kuan Benega Crorepati*, or *KBC* as it has become known, has a connection to film, in that the host is one of India's most popular film actors, Amitabh Bachchan.

KBC has been an important success for STAR Plus, which earns nearly 40 percent of STAR's revenue in India. STAR Plus turned a profit for the first time in 1999 and the following year moved from bilingual to all-Hindi programming in an effort to catch up with Zee and Sony (Mitra and Biswas 2000). Murdoch has claimed that the program has brought STAR's prime-time audience share from 5 percent to 50 percent. This has been accompanied by a tripling in ad rates (Burke 2000).

The Local and the Global in Indian Television

Proceeding in step with the liberalization of the economy, television has brought about a liberalization of culture within India over the past decade. This has meant, on one hand, access to sources of news and entertainment not controlled by government but, on the other, exposure to a televisual culture at odds with traditional norms and values.

Yet while it may have been Western programs such as *The Bold and the Beautiful* that led this "cultural invasion," the resulting competition for audiences has clearly been won by those channels that have developed programs based on Indian popular culture, particularly film and film music, and have generally been able to indigenize the global forms of commercial television.

Also remarkable about the transformation of Indian television has been the growth in the regional language channels, which liberalization permitted in that DD lost its exclusive right to define Indian culture on television. What this trend might mean in the longer term for India as a nation-state is hard to gauge. As Skinner, Melkote, and Muppidi (1998) put it, mildly, "It

would be helpful to know whether this emergence represents the maturity of regions within the Indian union or atavistic formations seeking their own, ultimately independent identities" (p. 7).

Finally, against this evident fragmentation, this apparent triumph of the local over the global, of cultural heterogenization over homogenization, there is the global reformulation of Indian identity in diasporic terms, as new international satellite services connect millions of ethnic Indians around the world to the imagined community of their putative homeland.

Greater China

As in India, television in the constituent nation-states of Greater China represents a conjunction of commercial and cultural forces that play out the tension between nationhood and globalization. Being a modern media technology carrying global media products, television has a complex place in discourses of nationhood and modernity in both Greater China and India. Both regions have a place for modernization in their national mythologies, and in both television has been an instrument of imagined national unities, but the countervailing discourses of globalization and regionalization also carried by television militate against it being exploited by the state in narrow national terms. Rather, global capital and both global and local consumer cultures are quite new forces that television has brought to Greater China and India, and with which these states must contend.

Although many of the issues are similar, the conditions under which they are expressed have been very different. The divergent histories and the complex circumstances of the political divisions between Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China have led to quite distinctive practices in both the state and commercial industrial organization of television.

The power of television to challenge the various state-sponsored nation-building ideologies at work across Greater China has come about through parallel policies of deregulation. For the television industry of the People's Republic of China, deregulation began in 1983 under the post-Maoist market reforms of Deng Xiaoping (Huang 1998). The national system was restructured into four levels: national, provincial, city, and county, with each level allowed relative autonomy to establish new broadcasting networks and, significantly, freedom to raise the necessary capital independently of the central government. Therefore, while in theory the state still controls all television in China, like many segments of the Chinese economy, broadcasters have become a hybrid of state organizations and private businesses (Yan 2000, 504).

In contrast to mainland China, deregulation of the television industry in Taiwan was politically rather than economically motivated. Controlling interests in the three commercial operators were held by arms of the state who exercised political control over broadcasting content. After the lifting of martial law in 1988, pressure grew to allow independence in broadcasting. In 1993, the government lifted the restrictions on new free-to-air stations that had been in place since 1971, allowing the opposition-backed Formosa Television to begin legal transmission (Wang and Lo 2000, 668).

In terms of distribution, cable has played a major role in the commercialization of television in both China and Taiwan, with simple semiregulated systems expanding extremely rapidly through the 1980s and being consolidated into major commercial enterprises in the 1990s (Schoenfeld 1994, 25). In Taiwan, the illegal cable system was so ubiquitous that when it was legalized in 1994, 42 percent of households were already cable subscribers.

Therefore, by the early 1990s, television in the three regions of Greater China had for different reasons all come under a powerful and rapidly growing commercial imperative. Despite the remaining differences in regional languages and cultures as well as political and economic systems, the opportunity was opened up to exploit the commercialization of the three industries with new content and systems of distribution that treated Greater China as a unified television market. The patterns of that exploitation have been directed by the particular characteristics of each market and the interests of global capital, as television Greater China has attracted an enormous amount of foreign investment.

The Ideology of Greater Chinese Television

The conceptualization of Greater China as a unified television market is founded on particular ideologies of the Chinese nation. The political mobilization within China and the global Chinese diaspora by both nationalists and revolutionaries at the turn of the twentieth century codified ideologies that conceive of the Chinese as a single people with a unifying culture and historical experience (Fitzgerald 1996). Those ideologies allow a mass media form like television to be considered meaningful across Greater China. However, in proceeding from such ideologies, television in Greater China must negotiate enormous social, economic, and political difference. It does so by reproducing particular themes in Chinese national identity to create common points of reference across difference in the imagined Chinese audience.

One of the ways television expresses difference within Greater China is with the Chinese conceptualization of modernity. As argued by Duara, Fitzgerald, and others, the ideology of modernity in China is a sharply relational one, particularly preoccupied with China's relationship to other

nations and especially the West. The Chinese ideology of modernity is concerned, on one hand, with the national need for China's technological modernization and, on the other, with the value of the personal practice of modern behaviors and lifestyles (Anagnost 1997, 75).

On this basis, Chinese television programming promotes hierarchies of the modern as a common reference point around which differences in China may position themselves in relation to each other. While separated by physical space, the meaning of moving from the rural interior through the urban centers of Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, and out to the highly modernized periphery of Hong Kong and Taiwan, is to move toward greater engagement with the practices of modernity and modernization. Similarly, with the meaning of moving from village to the city, and within the city, without physical space separating between the modern and the unmodern, the space between them is purely one of practice and ideology. As Anagnost (1997) wrote, "A territoriality . . . figures . . . in the political imaginary of the 1990s in which the underdeveloped periphery becomes the defining other of 'civility' with the nation-space itself" (p. 77).

Global Capital

The ideology of modernity and its spatial referencing is used by the marketing campaigns of global brands and their wholesale appropriation of television content. Global capital uses the hierarchies immanent in the ideology of modernization to position itself within the meanings of the international, or the West, and the meanings of China. The globally branded modern consumer products that take advantage of this ideological framework most simply and effectively are differentiated and promoted as signifiers of internationalism and modernity.

The television style of Greater China is, therefore, a nexus of Chinese content that plays across the Chinese-speaking market, underpinned by ideologies of the Chinese nation and modernity. Into this surreptitiously comes global capital that integrates itself into the Chinese market's aspirations for the modern. This television style cross-promotes television programming with music, internet content, and mass-marketed consumer products, making it part of a constellation of programming content and marketing, carrying ideologies of Chinese identity and global capital across all parts of China and the diaspora.

Love Talks

An example of the kind of organization at the very sharp end of creating this trans-China television style is United Media, a Hong Kong-based media company that began in television advertising production and has become adept at exploiting convergent technologies and cross-promotion

of its programming and contracted stars. In 1999, United Media had a major success with its contemporary soap opera *Love Talks*, which was first screened in Hong Kong and Taiwan and at the end of 1999 was syndicated to 160 provincial and city-level television stations throughout mainland China. United Media claimed a potential audience of 700 million viewers (United Media 1999b). Although shot in Shanghai by a Hong Kong company, *Love Talks* is a collaboration between United Media and the multinational advertising agency McCann Erickson, with principal financial backing from the American electronics company Motorola and the global household consumer products manufacturer Unilever.

Love Talks features two Chinese actors contracted to United Media, Hu Bing and Qu Ying; the Taiwanese comedian Zhang Shi; the Hong Kong actor Anita Lee; and a very attractive ensemble cast. It follows the journey of Qu Ying as she heads off to pursue a career in an international advertising agency. The episodes proceed through a string of chance encounters, thwarted affairs, and opportunities taken and lost, driven by the numerous combinations of three-way contested relationships between the cast (United Media 1999a).

The overt theme of the series is *yuan fen*, the romantic Chinese notion of fate in love. In *Love Talks*, the fated lovers are the heroine, played by Qu Ying, and the hero, an advertising executive, played by actor Hu Bing. Hu's first encounter with Qu Ying is auspicious. It comes about as the result of a lightning strike that causes a blackout that resets her alarm clock. She is late for her big interview and as a result contrives to acquire a passing stranger's mobile phone, which turns out to be Hu Bing's.

While the fated love matches make for an occasionally charming narrative, *Love Talks* clearly expresses the Chinese valorization of modernization. It sets up a hierarchy between the lifestyle of Hu Bing and those who aspire to it. His life is characterized by technology-driven consumerism, internationalism, and wealth. Hu Bing's modern life is contrasted to the unmodern world of Qu Ying, whose environment is dirty, chaotic, crass, loud, and overcrowded. She lives in a cramped, cluttered apartment, and despite her talent, she has to fake the cool sophistication that she thinks will get her a job in the advertising agency where Hu Bing works. In an opening montage aimed at setting up his character in relation to Qu Ying's, his sophisticated modern life is intercut with her frenetic and rather vulgar daily existence.

The different parts of Greater China are clearly defined within the text of the series. Although most of the action takes place in Shanghai, there are scenes identified as being in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and there are two characters coded as Taiwanese. However, although these regions of Greater China are clearly marked, they are not shown as a defining element in the relationships between the characters. Indeed, the characters who signify success move freely between the different regions pursuing love and

careers. Rather, it is the respective relationship of each character to modernity that defines his or her identity. Hu Bing has a transparent relationship with his Taiwanese sidekick Zhangshi because both of them exist in the same modern space, whereas Qu Ying must overcome her sense of disempowerment to relate equally to Hu and his colleagues.

In terms of global capital, the series theme of fated love also proves auspicious for the business interests of Motorola. Hu Bing's mobile phone is, of course, a Motorola Startac, and the inadvertent telephone conversations that ensue between it and everyone else's Motorola phones are the plotting device that sets up the entire series. It is a marketing strategy that works off the meanings invoked by the use of products. The privileging of a lifestyle augmented by science and technology, of a practical modernity that shows the Chinese nation, with its history intact, joining the community of nations, fits perfectly with the particular products that Motorola and Unilever have to sell to the avid Chinese consumer. Indeed, the particular notion of a global modern style that the program is drawing on is so integral to the brand identities of consumer technology companies like Motorola that without their presence in the series, the power represented by the modern lifestyle of Hu Bing and his cohorts would be significantly diminished.

Love Talks is a striking example of the consumerist configurations of power across Greater China being transparently manufactured by global corporations. On the face of it, these configurations represent a challenge to state ideologies, particularly that of the Chinese Communist Party. However, political power in China has managed the impact of the conjunction of media technologies, consumerism, and capital with remarkable sophistication. The fundamental conservatism of these new commercial media products, drawing on populist, long-standing ideologies of nationhood and targeting the broadest possible consumer market, has proved entirely compatible with the nationalist direction of Chinese politics. In this way, alternative and subaltern identities such as those of Taiwanese or Hong Kong nationalisms and minorities are suppressed by a Greater Chinese mass consumer culture aligned to the urban centers of power on the mainland.

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Mark Harrison worked during 2000 at Victoria University as the research assistant on the project on which this article is based, which was funded by an Australian Research Council Small Grant.