Date: 30/3/2011

Name of Source: Cracking the Maya Code (TV program, 1/3/2008)

Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56t6WSbg7eY&list=SL

Theme: Social Science

Summary:

This video is about the ancient Maya civilization. This mysterious civilization of Central America left behind an intricate and mysterious hieroglyphic script, carved on monuments, painted on pottery, and drawn in handmade bark-paper books. For centuries, scholars considered it too complex ever to understand—until recently, when an ingenious series of breakthroughs finally cracked the code and unleashed a torrent of new insights into the Mayas' turbulent past. The video presented the epic inside story of how the decoding was done—traveling to the remote jungles of southern Mexico and Central America to investigate how the code was broken and what Maya writings now reveal.

Response:

I feel extremely angry and depressed when I finished watching the video. I first believe the Maya civilization was lost because of the passage of time and abundance in the forest. Yet, the truth is the culture was decimated by the Spanish conquistadors. Until 1774, Spanish explorer Jose Calderon rediscovers the temples of Palenque and the ancient hieroglyphs of the Maya. I can not agree with the conquistadors though I understand they were doing that because they want to protect their own religion. Nevertheless, I believe no one on earth have the right to decimate others culture nor religion just because of their own disagreements. Yet, this reflected the hard work of the archeologists and guides me to reorganize about the relationships between different nations. Though the globe is now treated as an “Earth Village” under the influence of Internet, there are still places in remote area like villages in Africa, where brutal tradition are still in practice. Although we do not agree with them, we should also show our respect to them and by teaching them, hoping they will change but not decimating their culture by force.

The video is in fact divided into five chapters. The most enjoyable part to me is when it focuses on the archeologists that work on this field. I particularly remember David Stuart, who submits his first scholarly paper on glyphs at age 12 and later becomes a major player in Maya studies with his advances in script decipherment. Not just his talent amazed me, I am completely stunned by him and the other archeologists who have tried to crack the Maya script in these hundreds of year. They have spent their entire life just wanted to find out the history of the civilization. The Maya codes are just like pictures in my eye and I can imagine how hard it is to encode them. However, as stated at the end of the video, this study can help to know more about human history and the civilization. And in fact, the descendants of Maya in modern-day Mexico and Central America begin to relearn their lost language and history. Therefore, I really appreciate the work they have done to improve the study on human civilization and I believe in the foreseeable future, the decryption in Maya code will have a breakthrough.

Date: 3/4/2011
Name of Source: Hunting the Hidden Dimension (TV program, 28/10/2008)

Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbK92bRW2lQ

Theme: Science

Summary:

Fractals, a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole, a property called self-similarity. In this video, it takes viewers on a fascinating quest with a group of maverick mathematicians determined to decipher the rules that govern fractal geometry. It started by revealing the history on the study of fractals by interviewing mathematicians who have spent their life to investigate fractals, like Benoît Mandelbrot, a famous mathematician who proposed the Mandelbrot set, a famous example of a fractal. Then followed by telling how fractal is found in our everyday life, like the cloud formations and tree limbs, in stalks of broccoli and craggy mountain ranges, even in the rhythm of the human heart. At the end of the video, it focuses on what the study on fractals can help in improving our life.

Response:

As stated in the video, fractal-like irregular shapes were considered beyond the boundaries of mathematical understanding but an art for centuries. I am shocked by that because when I learn about fractal in my additional mathematics lesson, it is so natural that I won't even doubt that it is not part of mathematics and I really appreciate all the effort made by the mathematicians. Their remarkable findings have deepen our understanding of nature and stimulating a new wave of scientific, medical, and artistic innovation stretching from the ecology of the rain forest to fashion design.

I was surprised when the video highlights a fashion designer, who found the fractal image will be great on her cloths and then she found two professionals, a physician and a mathematician to help her in designing. I have never thought a mathematical theory can apply in this way. People always say that art and science are two different and distinct areas, yet, I believe it is not the real case. Not only in the case of fractal, through out the history, there are excellent artists who also show their talent in science, Leonardo da Vinci is a famous example.

In Hong Kong, scientific development is not common, mainly because of the concept that participating in science can hardly earn a living. After watching the video, I believe this is a wrong way of thinking. Without the kin effort of the scientists, we can hardly know about the earth and this can also stop the development on other aspect like medical and artistic innovation. Therefore, I believe Hong Kong government should spend more resources on scientific investigation so to remain the competitiveness with other cities nearby, like Singapore.

Without the mathematicians' keen effort, our knowledge concerning the environment will be limited, therefore, I would like to express my appreciation on the hard work of them.