Book review: Culture, Politics and Television in Hong Kong

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cases” section and this is a pity given the cross-cultural application of this otherwise excellent journalism text.

Interviewing for Journalists is British-centric with references to print and broadcast organisations that may not be familiar to other readers. For example, when discussing the preliminary research phase for an interview, there is an abstruse reference to “the Lady Porter investigation” (p.23), and the entertaining interviewer profiles of Andrew Duncan (p.117) and Lynda Lee-Potter (p.126) assume knowledge of their work.

Despite this, Adams and Hicks have come up with another highly useful journalism textbook that would suit journalism students or trainees anywhere as either an introductory or advanced studies reference.

MA, Eric Kit-wai (1999)
Culture, Politics and Television in Hong Kong

Reviewed by John Herbert
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This book is a fascinating insight into the way Hong Kong works in media terms and the mind of Hong Kong pre- and post-handover. It has an excellent historical development of television in Hong Kong since the 1960s. It has highly relevant case studies drawn from television programmes to show the mind of the present and past (and to some extent the future) Hong Konger. It is a work of scholarship, most certainly, and this sometimes gives it an air of difficulty and occasional impenetrability which will probably appeal to media scientists the world over. But that is a small price to pay for the more general reader to learn some important truths about Hong Kong media and its people.

The book moves beyond the obvious media toward comparisons of the life and work of the Mainland Chinese and the Hong Kongers. It is somewhat of a model of how to study the media in a particular location. Hong Kong of course is a good place to do such a study because of its relative homogeneity and size. Right from the start the author sets out his stall clearly by referring to ‘the
missing link' (p7) at the heart of media studies. He describes this as the bridge between academics and practitioners and as such it is intended to be a “multi-dimensional exploration of HK TV programmes” (p6). And it is. It also is fascinating on the submersion of the Chinese identity in Hong Kong under colonial rule and its return to China after 1997 — another fascinating and important insight into TV in HK from this comparison.

The difficulty of course is that HK TV is so Americanised — even the Chinese channels seem to have moved this way, while keeping a definite Hong Kong Chinese flavour to the entertainment, news and drama programmes. And it was so before 1997 as well. I would perhaps have liked more of this flavour to come out in the book, but then you can’t have everything. Likewise, I would have liked some more cultural comparisons between the Chinese and English channels run by the two major Chinese television companies. It is good though that the author includes the Public Service broadcaster, RTHK, although again more on this would have been welcome.

This book starts with an in-depth and insightful look at identity, culture and the media, which I found particularly interesting and original. It is a book firmly rooted in the 1997 changeover and is intent on looking at what has happened since then. As such, it is an important addition to any library shelf and media course; not just in Asia or Australia, but everywhere because of the relationship it builds between these events and the culture of the media.

Chapters 2 and 3 look in great detail at the Hong Kong identity in two parts: de-sinicisation and re-sinicisation in which the author uses a socio-historical analysis to identify the factors which have shaped television and culture in Hong Kong.

Have no fear that this is therefore a parochial book. It is local only in the sense that Hong Kong is a case study used in depth. Its lessons and implications are totally international. As Ma points out in this chapter why a study related to the specifics of Hong Kong should be any different to a study related to the specifics of the United States or Britain. And he is absolutely right. The lessons that can be learned from this kind of study are universal and international. This is not a local book in any sense; it merely uses the local to generate the global.

The historical approach highlights the TV dimension in a fascinating way. Likewise, the discussion of what is described as “the local generation” (those Hong Kongers who know no other country than Hong Kong) and their impact on local TV is also very interesting. He also believes that the new cultural identity that emerged had a direct correlation to HK TV and he traces the development of television in Hong Kong thoroughly. Then, having
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dealt with this cultural growth, Ma moves to the section on re-sinicisation to show that the reversion of HK back to China focussed cultural identity in a new way. Again, with the help of television.

I particularly enjoyed in this and the next chapter his discussion of some Chinese TV serials. To anyone who spent time in Hong Kong the ‘Ah Chians’ (“primitive mainlanders coming to HK” — p 57) are a big point of discussion. I was very glad that the author brings this issue into the book and highlights it by looking in detail at several relevant programmes. This is pursued in the next chapter, “Outsiders in Hong Kong”. He ends the book with a summary of his thoughts on the subject called “rethinking television culture”. The book ends with three excellent appendices of great value as well as copious notes, bibliography and index.

Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI) (2001)

Reviewed by Dedy N. Hidayat
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The significance of this annual report, from the Indonesian Alliance of Independent Journalists, is that it immediately plays a part in the broad debate about the compatibility between economic liberalisation and democracy. Free-market fundamentalists postulate that “the greater the play of the market forces, the greater the freedom of the press; the greater the freedom of the press, the greater the freedom of consumer choice”. Advocates of the liberal political-economy perspective also tend to uphold the proposition that liberalisation or deregulation of Indonesia’s media industry will support a process of democratisation, creating a free-market place of ideas where the public has sovereignty to determine which media industry products they will consume. However, the concerns of Indonesian journalists, which are poured into this annual report, offer a competing proposition. In the context of capitalistic development in post-New Order Indonesia (i.e. May 1998 onwards), the media industry’s liberalisation is not proving compatible with the freedom of the press, operation of public sovereignty and expression of public interest that are vital for the process of democratisation of national life.

The AJI report proposes that the end of the New Order’s