dals (chapter 5) and a typology of political talk shows (chapter 9). Both offer intriguing sets of variables to consider in examining television’s involvement in the shaping of the public sphere.

The Israeli case discussed in this engaging book can be a useful springboard for consideration of issues of concern to researchers and professionals in other media systems: Live coverage of disasters challenges the norms, practices, and ideologies of the journalistic profession worldwide. The role of the media as part of the political process, and not solely a channel for its discourse, is a relevant assertion not only in Israel and the U.S.; the debated role reserved for public broadcasting in the commercialized news arena and the media’s attempts to adjust to the needs of social sectors and cultural enclaves too are shared by many countries. Finally, struggles with the tension between the dominance of global-commercialized culture and maintaining a sense of local identity and collectivism are, as we well know, of major concern in most societies.

Reading the text as an Israeli researcher was also a form of reliving some of the most intense days of the last decade through the lenses of a critical media analyst. I was struck by Liebes’s position as a “participant-observer” of her own culture, serving as the “native-griper,” willing to hold up some of the “dirty linen” of Israel’s politics and media coverage to public scrutiny, and I commend her for her academic courage and straight-forward analysis. She continues to challenge both media and their researchers in her final comment: “Post-Americanization Israeli media, cynically continuing to promote internal strife, encouraging extremism and escape, are still the only public space left for debating Israel’s future bravely and seriously” (p. 204).


 Reviewed by ARIEL HERYANTO

Studies on the mass media in many of the countries of Southeast Asia have begun only as recently as the growth of the subject matter itself in the 1980s. As countries in this region underwent rapid industrialization, the speed and scale of the media network expansion have been breathtaking.

Among the few pioneering experts on Indonesia’s mass media, Krishna Sen and David Hill have made themselves two authorities. Sen previously published her doctoral thesis on Indonesian cinema, and Hill published his on the Indonesian press. Their collaborative book under review demonstrates an admirably critical and engaging analysis of contemporary Indonesia’s cultural politics, whose complexity and vibrancy have no precedence. Reading **Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia** provides rare insight into the depth and more subtle aspects of Indonesia’s contemporary culture, politics, and history.

No class reading list, especially at undergraduate levels, on Indonesian media can be justified today without including this book. The book is highly recommended for any

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teachings on contemporary Indonesia, and Asia more generally. It is enjoyable reading for anyone interested in the dynamics of an Asian society in transition from being predominantly agrarian to industrialized, from heavily militarized authoritarianism to a more liberalized and democratically aspired society.

The main strength of the book resides in the combination of the authors’ breadth of knowledge of the society analyzed, perceptiveness of subtle issues in the light of recent theories in media and cultural studies, and eloquent writing style. It is lucid, original, and engaging. It is highly informative, but it presents no deadly boring facts and figures compiled from preexisting documents, as can be found in some related publications.

One central issue of interest in this book is captured in the following statement: “Censorship does not work if the censors and programmers, the creators of cultural texts and their consumers interpret differently” (p. 10). The authors took the task of examining the multiple layers, contradictions, and misreadings that characterize Indonesia’s mass media expansion in the late years of the past century.

Far from simply filling the old framework so familiar in mainstream media, cultural, and political studies with current empirical data, the book questions the validity of many old assumptions and frameworks, and suggests new ways of analyzing them. Key terms such as *book*, *original/translation*, and *political/cultural* are seriously problematized with the assistance of findings from grounded fieldwork, making it more intellectually stimulating than most other works of its kind.

This is clearly a product of an extended ethnography that leads to original findings and richly nuanced insights and arguments presented in a well-structured narrative; the account of the significance of the Social Agency bookshop in Yogyakarta’s market is a case in point (pp. 26–27). As suggested by the title of the book, it discusses media, culture, and politics in Indonesia; what cannot be gleaned from the title is the successful treatment of each of these “spheres” evenly throughout the book, making these formally distinct areas—books, the press, radio, television, cinema, music industry, and the Internet—blend so well in the wide-ranging chapters.

In the second half of the book, the authors present a fascinating account of the conflicts between various government ministries that will have far-reaching consequences. On the one hand, there are those (e.g., Department and Trade) that took a more liberal outlook in sponsoring the expansion of the mass media industry for its economic values. Another camp (e.g., Department of Information) opposed that strategy for fear of losing political control of the increasingly decentered flow of mass disseminated messages.

The only problem with a publication of this kind is that some of the empirical data presented will be outdated very quickly. The subject matter is alive, and the apparatus of book publication is just too slow for it. When Sen and Hill prepared the book in the late 1990s, three new Internet stalls (*warnets*) had just opened in Yogyakarta (pp. 198–199). When the book was launched in Melbourne in July 2000, Yogyakarta had almost 100 *warnets*. Since the end of that year, the number has fluctuated around 200. Despite this, the book remains a must-read for anyone interested in contemporary Indonesia, especially its political culture and rapidly expanding media industry.