Media and Politics in Pacific Asia. **By Duncan McCargo**. London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. 185 pp.

Duncan McCargo's book *Media and Politics in Pacific Asia* provides insights into the role of the media in the politics of Asia, with an in-depth examination in particular of Japan, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Thailand. His findings are based on fieldwork in these locales between 1992 and 1999, through funding provided by entities in Great Britain and Asia. In addition to offering accounts pertaining to these four countries, McCargo draws out comparative examples associated with Burma, Malaysia, and the Philippines. McCargo examined print, radio, television, and electronic media accounts, and both domestic and international media outlets.

The book would be of utmost interest to scholars investigating media influences in Asia, from both media and political science perspectives, as well as those pursuing cultural studies or historical research. It presents intriguing accounts of relative control and the tension between media elements and political factions as a constant process of negotiation, with outcomes not always in favour of societal interests.

McCargo's perspective is that media institutions are political actors in Asia, and as such they can assume various political roles which may be influential in the democratic transition of Asian countries or may work counter to that goal. The author views media institutions in Asia as being capable of instigating political stability, restraint, and change.

The author examines pressures on Asian media institutions from a range of state and non-state sources. He looks at specific media related issues such as ownership, media freedom, partnership, profitability, regulation, and the public interest.

The first chapter sets the perspective that the book will follow. This chapter offers an important discussion about the elements that are involved in Asian media's coverage of politics and the interplay of those elements. He quickly points to the fact that the majority of research on the media and politics emanates from the West, the findings of which, he claims, are of limited relevance to non-Western countries. He discusses the uniqueness of Asian cultures in this context and offers compelling arguments with case studies. Throughout the book, McCargo provides necessary contextual information to enable the reader to assess issues discussed.

The book's second chapter focuses on the actions of the media during times of crisis, in particular during democratic transitions in Southeast Asia. Here he examines the role the media played in the case

of three countries: the Philippines (in the ousting of Ferdinand Marcos), Thailand (the fall of the Suchinda Kraprayoon government), and Indonesia (the downfall of the Suharto regime). The author also describes in this chapter the role of the media in failed transitions, specifically in Burma and Malaysia. McCargo takes the position that "the media do more than simply describe and interpret unfolding crises … the media become actively involved in shaping political outcomes" (p. 48).

Chapters 3–6 provide in-depth analyses of four case studies in which the media played particularly interesting roles. First, the author examines the case of Japan, where after 38 years of rule, the Liberal Democratic Party lost power to a rival coalition in 1993. The author argues that the case of Japan during this time is relevant to countries in the region. In his analysis, McCargo examines the Japanese media vis à vis political processes that were taking place, noting changing power relationships between the media and politicians and the content of political coverage.

Chapter 5 offers a very detailed examination of the interplay between media organizations and political elements in Hong Kong as the country moved from British to Chinese rule in 1997. As part of his analysis, the author talks about the rise of Hong Kong's Chinese language press and its questionable ethical standards. Integral to the author's analysis is the issue of potential censorship as a function of the transition.

Chapters 4 and 6 focus on case studies relevant to Indonesia (the government's banning of three leading weekly publications and the fall of Suharto) and Thailand (the international media and domestic politics in four specific instances). As is the case with the other two chapters detailing events in Japan and Hong Kong, the author's historical account is interwoven with insights about the interplay between the press and politicians and their effects on one another.

The final chapter of the book offers a multitude of conclusions. One of the author's assertions is that his study of Asian media organizations and political forces has raised many questions and problems but no comprehensive answers. This is understandable, since as he points out, little systematic research has been done in this area. Second, the problems he confronts in his book are very complex and not amenable to simple solutions.

The author assists the reader from the beginning of the book by taking a particular perspective on the role of the media in politics and carrying it throughout the volume. The author offers rich examples that back up his assertions throughout the text, utilizing comparisons between countries and media types effectively. He makes good use of historical details and narrative to explain what roles the media organizations

adopt. He is willing to take a critical view of both media organizations and political forces. The author incorporates citations of previous works to back up assertions he makes, and includes current research that is relevant to his study.

Structurally speaking, McCargo aids the reader by providing a preview for each chapter as well as conclusions which often are supplemented by bulleted information. He gives the reader useful headings as he moves from one subject to another. Stylistically, the text reads very smoothly and at a level that is clear but articulate. The presentations are thorough, well-organized, reasonably paced, sufficiently explained, and supported by arguments that are carefully developed. The author leaves the reader with much to consider, as well as a framework for viewing unfolding events in these countries as the press attempts to cover them.

Susan A. Hellweg
School of Communication
San Diego State University
San Diego, California, USA

The Power of Institutions: Political Architecture and Governance. **By Andrew MacIntyre**. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003. 195 pp.

The Power of Institutions, by the Australian political scientist Andrew MacIntyre, is one of the latest books in the distinguished series in Cornell Studies in Political Economy under the editorship of Peter Katzenstein. The book grew out of the author's longstanding interest and research in political institutions, particularly in Asia. In broad terms, one could say that MacIntyre's purpose here is to explore the effects that the dispersal of governmental decision-making power can have on public policy, and he wants to explore these effects not in the advanced industrial democracies, on which much of the extant literature has focused, but in "the world of semi-democracies and non-democracies (pp. 2–3)". He argues that since institutions in developing countries are likely to be either highly centralized or very fragmented, they are especially "susceptible to problematic patterns of governance". In fact, countries with highly centralized decision-making power are likely to experience serious problems with policy volatility, while those with fragmented decision-making institutions will be prone to policy rigidity (pp. 8–9). He sets out to test this hypothesis by examining how the