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BOOK REVIEW

The Lexus and Olive Tree of Global Communications

International Communications: Continuity and Change, Daya Kishan Thussu, Oxford University Press, Inc., 2000, 342 pages.

Donna Gregg*

In *International Communication: Continuity and Change*, Daya Kishan Thussu presents a comprehensive and thoroughly readable overview of the significant global impact of communication from ancient times to the Internet era. The book describes major technological, political, cultural, and commercial breakthroughs and trends, and explains how each has helped to make the world a smaller place.

Thussu, who holds a doctorate in international relations from the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi and served as associate editor of a London-based international news agency and a senior lecturer in journalism and mass communication at several British universities, views his topic from the perspective of an international journalist and multicultural scholar. Moreover, he strives for an objective approach, advocating neither the policy agenda of multinational communications conglomerates with roots in Western democracies, nor the perspective and media aspirations of the developing world.

While acknowledging the demonstrated potential of modern communication technology to effect revolutionary change in all corners of

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the globe, the book also recognizes certain enduring cultural and economic forces that have influenced the cross-border exchange of information and ideas for centuries. Like *New York Times* foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman's recent best seller, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thussu's book sees the tension between technological progress (the lexus) and deep rooted cultural tradition (the olive tree) at work in the era of post-Cold War globalization. But while Friedman focuses on globalization in general, Thussu considers the lexus/olive tree paradox in the narrower context of communication.

To set the stage for the book's theme of continuity, Thussu traces the development of long-distance communication from ancient times—"a line of shouting men positioned on the heights" passing news from one end of the Persian Empire to the other—through the advent of the printing press, the telegraph, and early radio communication. The focus goes beyond the history of the *means* of communication, however, to consider historical *uses* of communication from the development of the popular entertainment media to political propaganda.

After providing historical background, the book moves to a more conceptual plane and prepares the reader for the theme of change by examining a number of prominent theories and models for viewing international communication. A chapter on creating a global communication infrastructure follows, emphasizing the importance of privatization and the influence of international organizations such as the WTO and ITU. The author explains how powerful multinational business concerns, such as Lockheed Martin and Loral, played an important part in distribution. On the content side, the chapter illustrates vertical integration on a global scale with a case study on the growth and development of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.

In its overview of the global media marketplace, the book explores the roles of convergence, privatization, and commercialization in the development of multinational media conglomerates. Thussu follows companies such as AOL Time Warner, Viacom/CBS, Disney, Bertelsman, and Sony through the mergers and acquisitions that transform them from dominant national companies and players in a few industry sectors into multifaceted, multinational giants in both distribution and content.

Readers will have fun with the book's many interesting lists and world rankings of leading companies in film and television production, newspaper and magazine publishing, sound recording, equipment manufacturing, and advertising. Some surprises may be in store as to which company is the world's largest exporter of television programming, what percentage of Hollywood's revenues comes from overseas markets, which

countries top the list for the number of book titles published annually, and which company is the world's biggest producer of documentaries. Appendices also contain a glossary, a chronology of international communication and helpful lists of web sites for those interested in pursuing the topic further.

The book's most intriguing chapters describe media ventures in the developing nations of the Eastern and Southern Hemispheres, a subject that garners scant attention in much of communication literature or the public press. Indeed, one is hard pressed to find as comprehensive an account of the successes and failures of communications activity from around the globe in a single convenient source. The engaging and enthusiastic case study of the burgeoning Indian film industry ("the other Hollywood") alone provides reason for picking up this book. After a fairly optimistic review of nascent communication industries and projects in remote regions of the globe and of the satellite and Internet-stimulated "counter-flow" of communications from the emerging to the developed world, Thussu nonetheless concludes that the giant media and communications conglomerates from the West will continue to dominate the marketplace and set an agenda promoting commercialization for years to come. The lexus clearly is outpacing the olive tree.

International Communications: Continuity and Change offers an accessible and easy-to-digest source of background information on the international aspects of communication. The book considers the dynamic field of communication from a variety of viewpoints, touching on communications as a business, a source of news and information, a political tool, and an agent for social change on a global scale. While the author avoids venturing opinions and brings little original insight or new thinking to the topic, he has compiled and reported a wealth of factual information about the past and present flow of information around the world. A valuable collection of resource material, this volume certainly deserves space on any library shelf and would be a worthy text for courses in international communication and media studies.

