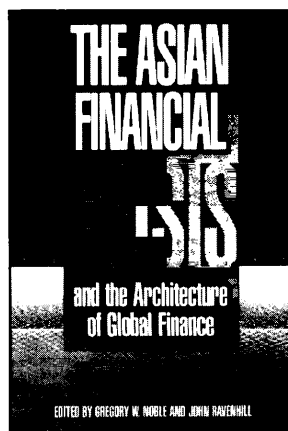


Reviews

***The Asian Financial Crisis and the Architecture of Global Finance*, edited by Gregory Noble and John Ravenhill, Cambridge University Press, 2000; pp310; \$39.95.**



The financial crisis across Asia in 1997-1998 came as a shock to most observers. The crisis occurred after a huge upsurge in the mobility of international capital and threatened countries that had been hailed as models of development in sustaining rapid

export-driven growth. Most of these economies displayed few of the classical warning signs of collapse, such as mounting government budget deficits or high rates of inflation.

The inability of the international financial community to predict the crisis or to prevent it from causing catastrophic damage to some economies has led to debate about the relative roles in the crisis of domestic economic weaknesses and flaws in the international financial system.

In this volume of essays a distinguished group of political scientists and economists examines the causes of the crisis and its implications. Of particular interest to the general reader are the early chapters, which introduce the evolving debate on the cause and consequences of the crisis and the second part of the book, which examines its implications for the global architecture of finance, including for the role of the International Monetary Fund.

Other essays look at comparative issues – why some countries in the region proved so much more vulnerable than others with whom they shared apparently similar economic and developmental characteristics, and the role of Japan as the regional economic linchpin.

The essays illustrate a broad consensus on the causes of the crisis, but much less agreement on the lessons that should be learned from it. While some of the essays are rather technical they are for the most part accessible to people with an interest in critiques of global capital.

The vulnerability of regional economies to economic shock had been increased by recent liberalisation of capital movement, poor prudential supervision of banking systems and problems with unproductive investments, all within a context of fixed or managed exchange rates. The system did not cope with vastly increased capital flows, including from pension funds in Western industrialised economies with enormous capital to invest, and changing technology that made it easier for global investors to move funds instantaneously.

Despite the crisis, it appears that the leading financial nations and institutions have not been strongly pressured to promote fundamental change in the global financial architecture. While some of the root causes of the crisis lay in the misguided economic policies of some East Asian governments – various shades of ‘crony capitalism’ – it seems equally apparent that the ineffective multilateral oversight of global finance renders emerging economies extremely vulnerable to the herd-like behaviour of speculators.

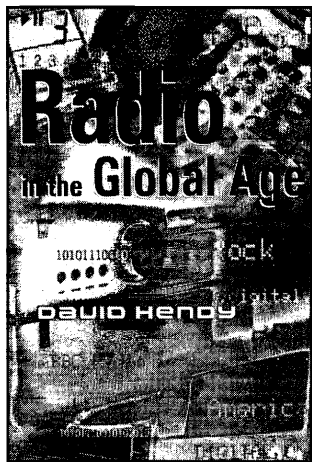
Given the pace of transformation and expansion in the international financial system, further strains and crises can be predicted, regardless of enhancement in prudential supervision and corporate governance in Asian countries. One heterodoxy, which may gain

increasing support in this environment, is whether the case for carefully structured capital controls or taxes should be re-examined as a legitimate tool to assist emerging economies to limit the excessive instability inherent in the everyday operation of world financial markets.

Even fully developed economies, like that of Australia, are vulnerable to the amplified impact of capital flows on real economic variables, such as inflation, as illustrated by the depreciation of the Aussie dollar against the greenback – the full effects of which are yet to emerge.

- Bruce Alston

***Radio in the Global Age*
by David Hendy, Polity
Press, 2000; pp260;
\$49.95.**



Radio in the Global Age is a comprehensive study of the structures, contexts, and issues surrounding radio at the end of the 20th century.

The text is split into five sections, looking firstly at radio technicalities in production and industry, and then moving onto a theoretical analysis of

audience, meanings and culture.

In exploring its relationship to globalism, the author states that radio has been overlooked as a key medium in global communications despite being the most direct, accessible and effective disseminator of information. Radio, he claims, transcends economic and literacy boundaries by broadcasting to more people than any other medium, especially in the third world where radios are relatively cheap to purchase, maintain and transport. With minimal training, it is easy to produce and broadcast specialised information.

Radio now reaches more people than ever before, while gathering its broadcasting content from a variety of

sources. It is this issue that highlights the paradox at the centre of this study: are audiences introduced to a wider variety of views or does this mass dissemination of information and the subsequent creation of niche markets insulate listeners by providing a 'homogenised' listening experience?

This paradox is explored through a variety of studies on community, state, pirate, commercial and public radio. The dichotomous roles of the latter two are most interestingly illustrated here, focusing on the polarities of their audiences, their evolving structures and roles as broadcasters.

The 'death' of the individual producer within the slick production of commercial radio is also examined, and the author queries whether programming is created for audiences or advertisers – although the deconstruction of a standard day's play-list leaves no doubt that priority lies with the latter.

While globalism claims – or threatens – to transcend, cultural, geographic and communication boundaries, the text explores those radio forms that try to maintain a local focus. The internal machinations of community radio are examined here, as too is state radio, with a particularly frightening Rwandan Radio transcript from the months preceding the 1994 genocide.

'Ways of listening' and the manufacture of the 'artificial' relationship that is developed between broadcaster and individual are also explored in detail, as is the slow death of locally produced music as commercial radio focuses on big hits and golden memories to keep the wandering listener safe in familiar territory.

Drawn from a large bibliography, this study not only gives a thorough analysis of radio and globalism, it also reflects the varieties of radio throughout the world, be they large networks servicing the USA, or a local station operated by tin miners in Bolivia.

While the writer's native British radio is most commonly discussed, along with that of the US, Australia's ABC also gets a look in, as does Aboriginal radio, produced by and for Indigenous Australians.

- Stephanie Dawes