

Book Reviews

ASIA: COMPARATIVE AND TRANSNATIONAL

Cultural Governance and Resistance in Pacific Asia. By WILLIAM A. CALLAHAN. London: Routledge, 2006. 256 pp. \$135.00 (cloth); \$33.95 (paper).

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William Callahan begins his recent book, *Cultural Governance and Resistance in Pacific Asia*, by analyzing the complicated machinations of several actors surrounding the 2002 Miss China pageant. Although the 2002 pageant was raided by police for lacking a permit, the winner, Zhuo Ling, was eventually crowned and went on to place third in the Miss Universe pageant held in Puerto Rico; only three years later, China hosted the Miss World pageant.

Tracing the shifting meanings of femininity, beauty, diplomacy, and opposition as beauty pageants went from illegal action to state industry in China, Callahan foregrounds the ambivalent relations between resistance and repression that are generative of social transformations. Through a series of five compelling case studies ranging from the disposal of U.S. military waste on Johnston Atoll in the North Pacific Ocean to the experiences of diasporic Chinese communities across Southeast Asia, Callahan problematizes life and the production of knowledge under what he terms *global capitalist modernity*. The most explicit definition of modernity appears more than halfway through his text, when he identifies it as “a search for the cognitive unity of tradition, the moral unity of the common good, and the geopolitical unity of the nation-state” (p. 106). The problem with modernity, as Callahan and many other critics cast it, is that these impossible unities, or the appearance of them, are maintained through practices of exclusion and often violence.

Callahan demonstrates the effects of capitalist modernity through studies of electoral politics, mass uprisings, and patriarchy. What is apparent from his work is that the divisions and dichotomies between state and society, corrupt and free, and masculine and feminine are anything but absolute and free of contention. While the case studies are framed by a lucid discussion of semiotic and poststructuralist theories, the cases themselves offer a more compelling explanatory framework. Through the author’s analytic juxtaposition, for example, of the search for a civil society separate from the state in South Korea and China (chapter 4) with the multiple ways in which the Miss Thailand pageant is militarized (chapter 2), the importance of “speak[ing] truth to power whenever and wherever we encounter it” (p. 16) is sharply illustrated. The possibilities and limitations of this strategy, as well as Callahan’s stated reliance on semiotic and poststructuralist methods, are

most apparent in his discussions of photographic memorials of student uprisings and massacres (chapter 3) and the discourses of corruption and vote buying (chapter 5).

Chapter 3 begins with a deconstruction of so-called Asian democracy, which emerged across the region in the latter half of the twentieth century. Although proponents of Asian democracy presented their models of difference to the liberal democracy found in the so-called West, Callahan argues that they were “a spin-doctoring response to Pacific Asia’s ‘people power’ movements of the late 1980s and 1990s” (p. 71). In what can be read as a rejoinder to this obfuscation, Callahan examines four photographic publications commemorating the progressive movements and crackdowns in the Philippines (1986), Burma (1988), China (1989), and Thailand (1992). His analysis of the books, which he terms “revolutionary photo albums,” reveal the gendered politics of both struggle and representation. Despite the fact that the transnational circulation of the albums positively invites broader participation in the critique of injustice, Callahan finds the valorization of revolution, itself another impossible unity, dangerous and calls for the strategic use of impiety. Chapter 5 is instead about academic discourses of corruption in Thailand—and in particular vote buying—and what they hide. By focusing on vote buying as a problem in Thailand, scholars have failed to see the broader problems of demographic disparity between urban and rural regions in Thailand and aspects of democracy that exceed the single action of voting in an election. Examining the meteoric rise of Thaksin Shinawatra and the Thai Rak Thai party in 2001, Callahan illustrates the problems that emerge when politics are used for personal gain. Taken together, these two case studies stand as a warning that the effects of privileging dominant narratives are often material as well as political.

In *Cultural Governance and Resistance in Pacific Asia*, Callahan addresses questions of cultural politics, rule, and opposition through a series of meticulously detailed examples that should be of interest to anyone concerned with the intersection of culture and power in Asia. His analysis is motivated by a concern with the unjust dividends of global capitalist modernity and how scholars can write against it. Yet it is in the move to the political that Callahan’s important work falls short. In the last lines of the book, he argues that the purpose of resistance is “to carve out space for a more contingent politics that allows difference to thrive” (p. 191). While effective in the pages of a book, this strategy does not work on the streets.

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CHINA

The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History. Edited by JOSEPH W. ESHERICK, PAUL G. PICKOWICZ, and ANDREW G. WALDER. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006. x, 382 pp. \$65.00 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

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