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Book Reviews

Jennifer Richards ^a; Gabriel Kolko ; Jason P. Abbott ^b; Garry Rodan ^c; Jeremy Menchik ^d; Herb Thompson ; Frances Mae Carolina Ramos ^e; Robin Visser ^f; Geoffrey C. Gunn ^g

^a Department of Anthropology, California State University, San Bernardino, USA ^b Department of Politics, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, UK ^c Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, Murdoch, Western Australia ^d Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison, WI, USA ^e Department of Anthropology, University of the Philippines, Diliman, The Philippines ^f Department of Asian Studies, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, USA ^g Faculty of Economics, Nagasaki University,

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Book Reviews

Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War

Grace Cho (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008)

When Grace Cho first states her intention to disinter the historical background of the Korean War and the mechanisms of the subsequent diaspora of Korean citizens using the perspective of certain women's experience, she also establishes the structure for a hermeneutic that relies heavily on the analogies suggested by the words "haunting" and "ghosts." In her exposition, she goes further than simple comparison and explores all the ramifications and implications of the concepts inherent in both words, especially with regard to their effect on the lives of future generations and as examples of the psychic collateral damage caused by the war.

This book is an in-depth examination of war and its casualties broadened by both her writing style and Cho's sometimes (seemingly) unconscious choice of descriptive phrases, as she seeks to lay bare the bones of the rotting carcass of secrecy and shame. Again and again, she harkens back to the literal meaning and to the connotations implied in the definitions of *ghost* as ethereal incorporate body, and *haunting* as a numinosity that cannot be dispelled or eradicated. In bringing the darkened past to light, Cho speaks from the authority of personal involvement as a daughter of a former *Yanggongju* or "Western Princess" who was everything but royal. She exorcises demons that have hovered in the background of her own life and illuminates a period in history that governments have sought to forget, ignore or summarily dismiss.

Cho begins by equating the "silences" present in her family dynamics with an unnamable emptiness or space of continuum that requires "fleshing out." Silence also characterises her mother's answer to questions about war times in addition to words that went unspoken in the household, words like *yanggongju* ("entertainment hostess") and "Comfort Woman." Recognising the fact that realities are not being given voice or are being hidden as if they never existed helps embody the silences and, according to Abraham and Torok (*The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003: 176), "gives sustenance to the illusion" of their absence. Cho also notes that history either fails to acknowledge the human face of war-time prostitution or euphemistically glosses over the actual unmentionable-in-proper-company role of the camp follower by labelling the *yanggongju* a "war bride." This absence of truth in which the figure of the sex worker paid for with GI bucks is subsumed into the illusion of the loving wife is what makes the Comfort Woman a veritable non-entity/ghost and belies the integral part played by those women who also contributed to the support of other family members and brought the American Dream within possible grasp.

Another perspective that Cho discusses with regard to silence is the erroneous belief held by the women themselves that by remaining silent and not speaking out about their horrific and degrading experiences, their shameful secret and the ghosts of their past would go to the grave with them to be buried for good, and their children would be sheltered and kept safe from their stigma. This permanent erasure did not occur, of course, as hoped for by the former *yanggongju* who sadly did not realise that it was the consciousness of the experience itself that was the vehicle for ether-realities that were no less palpable, real and capable of haunting the present in spite of their being unspoken and invisible.

The following poem illustrates the images that Cho calls forth in Chapter 2, in her further descriptions of how ghosts of the war continue to make their presence known:

Voiceless screams from the past
 mixed with bullets
 and the tumult of fleeing feet,
 crushing together and underfoot
 the self, and faces of families.
 lost in roiling clouds of acrid smoke.
 Voiceless screams,
 Disembodied, but relentless
 in their clamoring for attention.

Her images are the stuff of nightmares in the same sense that memories resurrected by the revisiting of personal trauma are capable of producing a psychic flinch and an involuntary galvanic bodily response. Cho goes on to describe how these bodily remembrances continue into succeeding generations, re-cycling and re-circulating by virtue of what Abraham and Torok name as “transgenerational haunting” (p. 175). The power of latent as well as collective memory to override the absence of storytelling and public discourse and to seep into future lives is a testament Cho writes, to the strength and resiliency of the spectre of unresolved physical, mental and spiritual injury. She does not seem, though, to have realised that haunting is sometimes a two-way street, and that her personage may be a kind of trans-generational haunting of her mother who might view the physical presence of her Korean-American children as a constant reminder of both her indomitable will to survive, and her compliance in her own sexual enslavement in exchange for the illusory “better life.”

Not only do these buried memories manifest themselves in the psyche of survivors and their progeny, there are also tangible physical reminders indicating the precise spot of their inhumation. Honbul or “ghost flames,” common in Gyeonsang province, symbolic because it is the birthplace of Cho’s mother, rise from the earth as a witness of the bloody massacres that took place there. The flames, caused by chemical reactions in the soil due to the presence of decaying bodies, are said to be the tangible/visible release of the intangible ghosts of the “grief and rage” of the murdered.

As Cho boldly conjures the ghosts of her mother’s past, she makes a conscious shift away from “traditional sources of data.” In doing so, she is then free to extend her search beyond the bounds of “acceptable” academic inquiry, and to use alternate means to tease the truth from those liminal spaces that exist in the chasm between

official and unofficial narratives. She also teaches us the valuable lesson that there are many ways to know what cannot be discovered using only empirical or intellectual means.

Although the scientific community might classify her methods as quackery or pseudo-sociology, Cho “listens to the silence” to hear truth, and argues against a system that uses the inability to physically record dimensions of the unseen as justification for the assertion that it does not exist. Cho also employs other unconventional ways to confront the apparitions of the past. In addition to dream work, she relies on a tenet of quantum physics that states the “now” moves in a wave both forwards and backwards in a temporal plane, and so she waits for a voice from the future (p. 20) that can perhaps reveal a disarticulated memory capable of combining with other dislocated elements to form a single witness to trauma that can be expressed in bearers of unconscious thought such as performance art (p. 46). It is this stepping over the accepted scholarly line that helps make the ghosts more opaque to others, and the haunting across generations more visible.

As the reader proceeds through the book beyond, Cho introduces other literary tools that strengthen the tandem themes of ghosts and haunting and their connection to the story of the diaspora. Some of the devices are extremely subtle and others are explicit. To reiterate the concept of haunting as something that recurs, the author restates her premises throughout the book and uses many separate and distinct voices as “layers of the multiple” to rearticulate a single traumatic event. She also introduces the idea that her final work is itself the product of “reworkings of multiple drafts” (following J. Johnson, *Information Multiplicity: American Fiction in the Age of Media Saturation*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) so that the haunting and the ghosts generated by the repetition of the story in different voices become manifest and corporeal. In effect, Cho uses her work as a means to perpetuate a haunting of her own construction that is comprised of three things: the destruction of an idyllic view of the war as just and beneficial to Korea; the shattering of the ideal self-image of Americans as rescuer and saviour; and the still existing political power imbalance between American dominator and Korean dominated. She does this in hope that, finally, the perception of the real ghosts of the Korean war will produce, as Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997: 8) writes, “not cold knowledge but transformative recognition” that can, in turn, be passed on to future generations.

Jennifer Richards © 2010

Department of Anthropology, California State University – San Bernardino, USA

Email: jennrichards@charter.net

Vietnam’s Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War

David Hunt (*Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008*)

The southern Vietnamese radical movement was always unique. In the 1930s the Communist Party in the south was very distinct from that in the north, although its

leaders were intellectuals and quite unlike the poor peasant men and women who later overwhelmingly filled the ranks of the revolution in the south. But there were always important differences between the northern and southern parties, and when the military in Hanoi published my history of the war they excised most of the parts dealing with the origins of the upheavals in the south in the late 1950s and the nature of the National Liberation Front (NLF).

David Hunt has written a superb book, mainly on the NLF in and around My Tho and in the Mekong Delta, and although his basic source is the invaluable Rand Corporation interviews taken in the late 1960s, he goes far beyond them to convey with great sensitivity the human meaning and pathos and dilemmas of the war on revolutionary peasants in the hamlets and villages.

At first, there was a euphoric, almost millenarian and naïve quality about the mass of poor peasants who were in various ways a part of the “revolution.” The Mekong was home of millenarian religions – above all the syncretic Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao – and Hunt rightly believes this had some influence on many of the NLF’s followers.

Hunt goes through the stages of mass peasant attitudes, ranging from the idealised, almost Utopian, hopes of equality and abundance poor peasants had at the beginning of the 1960s to their shattered existences as the Americans, with their overwhelming firepower, escalated throughout the decade.

The result of the horrors the Americans imposed, through airpower, artillery, defoliation and the like, caused former militants to become discouraged and fear for their very lives. Many were poor peasants who had to work in the fields to support themselves as well as serve as guerrillas, liaison agents, or the like – the NLF paid few of them predictable salaries. Some, exhausted by the experience, lost their sense of time and their ideological moorings weakened. Others turned themselves in to the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) programme for ralliers but in many cases still retained their commitment to the “revolution.” It was these ralliers on which the Rand interviews were based.

By 1968 and the Tet Offensive, the NLF seemed exhausted, and the war increasingly became the responsibility of the better-armed North Vietnamese army.

Hunt very ably describes and explains the nuanced progression of thoughts and human dilemmas of these adherents of the “revolution.” In this regard it is the best account in print of the southern experience. It is so richly-textured that a mere review does it no justice. Above all it shows how the priorities of the NLF based in the south and the Communist Party in Hanoi differed, often very sharply.

In the end, however, the Americans and their Vietnamese dependents lost the war and Hunt fails to address why this occurred, despite all of the NLF’s travails. The Saigon system was incredibly weak and venal, and literally fell apart in 1975 despite its great superiority of military equipment.

But that is another story. Meantime, Hunt has written the best book on Vietnam’s southern revolution.

Gabriel Kolko © 2010

Wittenburgergracht 53, 1018MX Amsterdam, Netherlands

Email: kolko@kpnmail.nl

Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-building Project

Michael D. Barr and Zlatko Skrbis (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008)

One of the “puzzles” about Singapore is that it seems to fundamentally contradict the orthodoxies of economic and political development which purport to demonstrate a causal link between modernisation and democratisation. In a little over 40 years Singapore has gone from the ranks of the Third World to one of the most developed and dynamic economies in Asia, with a GDP per capita in excess of many Western economies. But instead of the concomitant political liberalisation of the country that is often expected, Singapore remains a semi-authoritarian regime dominated by the People’s Action Party (PAP). While this book does not directly explore this apparent enigma, it does provide a detailed account of the mechanisms of social control by which the country’s elite have facilitated and legitimised their rule in spite of the assumed liberalising impact of economic development.

Despite the book’s title this is not a post-modern analysis of the discourse of the nation-building project but instead principally a detailed analysis of how the Singaporean government has micro-managed the country’s education system from kindergarten to secondary school in order to both inculcate specific cultural and ethnic values and to produce a pool of highly motivated elite students from which the country’s administrative, military and political leaders can be drawn.

Throughout their study, Barr and Skrbis directly challenge the twin “national myths” upon which Singapore purportedly rests: multi-racialism and meritocracy. Instead they maintain that these are chimeras that hide a reality in which “personal and family background, race and ethnic identity, language and gender are just as crucial in smoothing the path on the road to the elite” (p. 252). Even more important “is a willingness to be *socialised* [my emphasis] into the conformist mind-set and values of the elite” (p. 252). Indeed, while the authors identify three fundamental elements to nation-building in Singapore (government ownership of the nation-building project, micromanagement of everyday life, and the role played by the elite), it is the final one that the authors concentrate on.

For a book that essentially is about the power of the elite to control and shape society there is remarkably little explicit coverage of Singaporean politics and the dominance of the country’s political system by the PAP. This therefore is *not* a book for those unfamiliar with the country’s history or the machinations of Singaporean politics, with the PAP or of the pivotal role of the country’s first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

Chapters 2-5 explore the way in which the original civic-orientated nation-building project, with its stress on a multi-racial Singapore, has since the early 1980s become an increasingly “ethno-racial form based on a peculiarly Singaporean nation of Chinese values” (p. 5) and that this ensures that “ethno-racial hierarchies permeate every aspect of Singaporean society” (p. 11). While Chapter 2 illustrates this through analysis of both a government-produced “Singapore Story” CD-ROM and the secondary school history syllabus introduced in 2006, Chapter 3 explores the role of the ruling elite and Lee Kuan Yew in particular as an “animator” of nationhood. Given the colonial origins of Singapore, and deprived of any indigenous heroic figures, masterly literary works or conscious cultural elite to construct a national mythology, the task subsequently befell the political elite. This chapter, as well as

subsequent sections of the book, therefore points to Lee's positive experience of the elitism of the British education system, with its public schools and dominance by Oxford and Cambridge, as having a decisive and enduring influence on his views of the role of elites in society. The authors argue that Lee was to marry this to the societal vision of the Singaporean Chinese community, with its veneration of scholarship and filial piety, and ultimately with the core values of Confucianism to arrive at a view of elitism not as an end in itself but as "the instruments for a progressive reform of society from above" (p. 46). Initially Lee was unable to explicitly refer to these values as Chinese values because of the identification of "Chinese" with communism and chauvinism, but gradually as these waned, the process of Sinicisation became more overt and increasingly reflected Lee's belief in the superiority of certain races.

While Chapter 4 defines and explores the institutions and role of Singapore's technocracy it also highlights the personalised nature of power which in many ways arguably betrays an unofficial patronage-based system at the heart of the elite itself. While not denying that talent and paper qualifications are necessary to succeed, Barr and Skrbis maintain that "[p]atronage and sponsorship is a vitally important element in the rise of *anyone* in Singapore" (pp. 69-70, my emphasis); therefore, at some point "one needs to plug into a patronage network ... [and] the earlier in life one is able to do this the better" (p. 70). Ideally they argue such ties would be familial or kinship ties but networks forged at school or through military service can be advantageous.

The most visible example of the personal nature of power is the continued presence of former Prime Minister Lee in Cabinet. Following his retirement as Prime Minister 18 years ago, Lee first served under Goh Chok Tong as Senior Minister and then, when his son assumed the premiership in 2004, he remained in Cabinet as "Minister Mentor." Furthermore Lee has made it clear that he will continue to serve for as long as *he* sees fit.

In Chapters 6-9, the authors demonstrate that one of the most important mechanisms by which the "ruling elite strives to ensure its vision of the nation, society, the world and itself will be accepted ... and will dominate the social cognition of the population" (p. 12) is through the education system. Furthermore they also show how the education system itself is also crucial to the self-reproduction of the ruling elite. In great detail, Barr and Skrbis describe the extent to which the populace is subjected to an ever greater degree of examination and testing in order to identify their ability. From such testing, Singaporeans are streamed at an early age into selective schools and testing continues once the brightest and best are selected for public service. The result is that successive Cabinets under Lee Senior, Goh and Lee Hsien Loong, are dominated by those from the public sector. It is striking that Singaporean parents resort to private kindergartens to ensure that their children are not disadvantaged in the first formal examinations since early failure or poor performance usually results in students being confined to a disadvantaged position for the rest of their schooling and subsequent careers.

However, while Singaporean children are routinely placed among the highest in the world for their maths score, to the government's frustration this does not translate into Nobel prize winners or increased patent rights. As the authors note from their interview data, much of the success comes from cramming for specific

questions and rote-learning. Consequently Singaporean students are less well-equipped for independent and critical thinking. Indeed this culminates in the absurdity of the country's elite civil servants being sent on training courses to foster independent thinking (p. 244).

Throughout this study, and particularly in Chapter 10, Barr and Skrbis reveal that contrary to the multi-racial and meritocratic ideals, ethnic, class and gender biases are pervasive, with gender and ethnic discrimination carried out at the highest level of government. Indeed, until 2009 no woman was a member of Cabinet. Central to the system of elite selection are government-sponsored university scholarships of which the most prestigious are the President's Scholarships and the Singaporean Armed Forces Overseas Scholarships (SAFOS). Citing statistics from 1966 to 2007, the authors note that only 30% of President's Scholarships went to women, while only 14 (about 6%) have gone to ethnic minorities, despite the fact that the non-Chinese constitute almost a quarter of the total population. President's Scholarships that did go to non-Chinese were mostly awarded before 1981. Between 1980 and 2007 the proportion fell to 3.5%, with only a single non-Chinese student winning a scholarship between 1983 and 2004.

The situation is even more pronounced in the SAFOS. First, these scholarships are only open to men and, secondly, by 2007, 97.8% had gone to Chinese; none had been to a Malay. Indeed, the Malays as the largest minority, suffer the worst discrimination. Largely denied access to the military because of lingering implicit concerns about the "loyalty" of Singaporean Malays, those who do enter the country's armed forces are invariably assigned menial roles.

The authors conclude by arguing that they have exposed the two main national myths as chimera instead revealing that Singapore is ruled by "a self-appointed elite, dominated by middle-class Chinese in general, and the Lee family in particular" (p. 252). However, one of the weaknesses of this study is that it does not provide an explicit account of socio-economic class. While they make it clear that to succeed in the country's education system one needs to have been the recipient of a private kindergarten education, independent schools and private tuition, the authors do not interrogate class in the same way they do ethnicity or indeed gender. Similarly, conclusions about the Lee family are drawn from the simple fact that the country's first Prime Minister has been succeeded by his son. There is no analysis of more widespread familial or kinship ties, nor any suggestion that they are a feature of the system of governance.

Another criticism is that portions of the book have been published before and this leads to a degree of disjointedness in some chapters, and the data sometimes appear dated.

There are also methodological weaknesses in terms of how the interviews, which form an important part of the empirical evidence, were selected. The introduction provides an account of this process which reveals a weak scientific sample overly reliant on "snowballing" from personal contacts and graduate students known to one of the authors. Although Barr and Skrbis acknowledge that the participants do not represent a scientific sample, it is nevertheless a weakness of the study given the country's racial and ethnic mix. Crucially, given the ethnic and socio-economic inequalities that are discussed, we are not presented with a statistical picture of which sections of society the 66 interviews are taken from.

This notwithstanding, the strengths of this study far outweigh the weaknesses and *Constructing Singapore* should be essential reading for anyone wishing to study further the nature of elite rule in Singapore and in particular the stark realities that underpin that elitism.

Jason P. Abbott © 2010

Department of Politics, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XH, UK

Email: j.abbott@surrey.ac.uk

Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-war Singapore

Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (eds) (*Singapore: NUS Press, 2008*)

Long before 1998, when the first volume of Lee Kuan Yew's memoirs were published under the title *The Singapore Story* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall), the essentials of Lee's narrative of the city-state's modern political history had been firmly institutionalised through school texts, mass media and official propaganda. For Singaporeans who had not consciously experienced events during the turbulent 1950s and 1960s, the official Singapore story could be comforting. After all, in this account, the ascendancy of Lee and his right-wing nationalist People's Action Party (PAP) colleagues was not just a prerequisite for the impressive social and economic progress that transpired, but also averted an otherwise calamitous path at the hands of communists, ethnic chauvinists and incompetents. At its core, the official Singapore story thus depicts the city-state's modern political history as one of stark choices, one that squeezes out any space for political pluralism as a legitimate contending *modus operandi* through which social and economic progress and national security could be achieved. The importance of *Paths Not Taken* is precisely its contribution to restoring greater record of, and potentially debate about, the nature and significance of political pluralism and visions thereof before civil society was emasculated under the PAP.

Paths Not Taken testifies to the inspiration and practice of quite different models of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism among social and political activists to that which subsequently prevailed. While the PAP's *Singapore Story* emphasises racial tensions in this period, this volume highlights how class consciousness and values of social justice formed the basis of a range of communist, socialist, social democratic and liberal initiatives within and across formative political parties and student, ethnic, cultural and other emerging civil society organisations. It also underlines how the various social and political movements involved were outward looking, products of and open to a host of ideas well beyond the city-state and its hinterland. To be sure, lively debates and real differences existed over what constituted an authentic local expression of some universal aspirations. But resolving or managing those differences through genuine political competition and compromise was one option for modern Singapore.

Editors Michael Barr and Carl Trocki have divided this volume into four parts, starting with chapters by Chua Ai Lin and Sunil Amrith that look at some of the roots of, and international influences on, political consciousness that gained open

expression in the 1950s. The final part of the volume selectively examines some current or recent illustrations of the dramatically different political space within which social and political activists now operate. Here Michael Barr focuses on the suppression of lay Catholic social justice activists in the late 1980s; Lenore Lyons on the official strictures and self-discipline within which the feminist organisation AWARE operates; and Cherian George explains the political economy basis to the containment of media diversity and the narrow channels through which PAP political hegemony can be challenged. However, it is the middle nine chapters of the book – on the dynamics of emerging political parties and on activists and popular movements in the 1950s and 1960s – on which the over-arching rationale of the book most heavily rests.

C. C. Chin provides a fascinating account of the Malayan Communist Party's (MCP) united front strategy in the 1950s and 1960s, especially bringing into question the PAP depiction of the MCP as being able to manipulate the labour movement almost at will. Chin maintains that key MCP actors tactically erred in their struggles with Lee Kuan Yew. For instance, Fang Chuang-Li, also known as "the Plen," may have been able to advance the MCP cause more effectively after burning various bridges with united front partners by forging links with the Workers' Party and *Partai Rakyat Singapore*.

Sikko Visscher argues that the political role of ethnic Chinese merchants through the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC) has been under-estimated, attributing inclusion of demands for increased political rights for local residents in the respective platforms of the Labour Front and the PAP to SCCC pressure. Later, the SCCC was to prove a significant player in shaping the outcome of the referendum on political merger to join the Federation of Malaysia. Ultimately, though, the "old-fashioned and traditionalist merchants" were casualties, argues Visscher, of the PAP's global economic vision and orientation towards direct foreign investment. However, it could be added to Visscher's observations that the political marginalisation of domestic business groups was as much a political as an economic strategic choice by the PAP. Hence, the subsequent proliferation of government-linked companies as well as foreign investment.

Seeking to redress another aspect of the official *Singapore Story* is Lily Rahim, who argues that Lee Kuan Yew owes a far greater political debt to ethnic Malay activists, ideas and organisations than the current Minister Mentor has ever acknowledged. Anti-colonial ideologies and cross-ethnic coalitions functional for the PAP were facilitated through the Malay-language newspapers *Utusan Melaya* and *Indonesia Raya* and associated networks. Once merger with Malaysia collapsed, though, previously valuable political capital for Lee now became a threat. On a similar theme, Carl Trocki argues that the appeal of English-educated and self-avowed social democrat David Marshall transcended ethnicity to be well received in the vernacular press because of his "sincerity, his idealism, and his commitment to justice" (p. 118). By contrast, during the same period, Lee Kuan Yew relied heavily on his links with others to disseminate his message.

In the subsequent chapters on activists and popular movements, Timothy Barnard and Jan van der Putten examine the creative expressions of Malay leftist and nationalist ideology through literature and film and the unifying vision of nationhood and the importance of Malay language to it. Meanwhile, Kay Gillis

examines the Malay Education Council campaign beginning in 1951 to show how adept at pressure group politics ethnic Malays were becoming before the PAP-imposed consensus politics after 1959. You Souchou's examination of the rise and demise of the Chinese community-founded Nanyang University provides yet another illustration of the vibrancy of an emerging civil society. Yao offers an interesting analysis of the different elements of the Nanyang movement, which does not dismiss the existence of communist influences and other inspirations from China, which the PAP naturally played up, but explains how they combined with other factors to contribute to Nanyang's absorption into the National University of Singapore in 1980. Huang Jianli's chapter complements Yao by showing how the popular depiction of student activism as centred exclusively on ethnic-based issues ignores various other contentions. Finally, Michael Fernandez and Loh Kah Seng challenge a key PAP interpretation of industrial confrontations in post-war Singapore in arguing that:

The unions' story belongs not to the theme of communist subversion but of the rise of a people uplifted by idealism and anti-colonialism ... The labour movement's emphasis on social justice and worker solidarity and its collaboration with the Chinese school students cut across ethnic, social and occupational divides (p. 222).

Arguably the editors could have imposed a tighter discipline to the various chapters in order to reveal more systematically why the different paths of political pluralism all ultimately met the same fate. This would have helped sharpen the theoretical significance of the volume. However, the book's value lies more in challenging prevailing myths about Singapore's contemporary political history in order to chart a promising new research agenda. Barr and Trocki deserve high praise for this intellectual leadership. There were many contingencies in the struggles for power that have been submerged in the self-serving *Singapore Story* promoted by the PAP over recent decades and all too readily accepted by others. Without romanticising the past, *Paths Not Taken* invites new critical consideration of the contingencies that explain how and why a flurry of civil society activity in the 1950s and 1960s was so comprehensively extinguished so quickly. While the past cannot be changed, this line of enquiry does have implications for our understanding of what preconditions might be needed to support a future political pluralism in Singapore.

Garry Rodan © 2010

Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, Murdoch, 6150, Western Australia

Email: G.Rodan@murdoch.edu.au

Chinese Big Business in Indonesia: The State of Capital

Christian Chua (London: Routledge, 2008)

Christian Chua's book seeks to map the evolving face of Chinese big business in Indonesia. Based on the author's doctoral dissertation in Sociology at the National University of Singapore, Chua makes two arguments. First, that Chinese capitalists were subjugated, politically marginalised and financially co-opted by the

politico-bureaucrats of the New Order. As a result, the Chinese capitalists were unable to become a full ruling class by virtue of their political handicap. Secondly, that the reforms of the *Reformasi* period have facilitated the emergence of plutocracy in Indonesia. Rather than being co-opted by the new regime, or disappearing in the face of neo-liberal economic reforms, Chinese big businesses have adapted to their new environment and now effectively control society through a plutocracy. Together, Chua seeks to revise the existing understanding of class relations under the New Order and present an updated portrait of relations between capital and the state in post-Suharto Indonesia.

On one level, Chua's conclusions are unsurprising. Scholars of Indonesia have long noted the durability of ethnic Chinese businesses irrespective of the political context. In his 1960 text, Clifford Geertz (*The Religion of Java*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2) noted,

The Chinese form the heart of the economic circulatory system of Modjokuto, pressing goods, many of them imported, down through the arteries, pulling back goods, the greater part of them agricultural, through its veins, and passing them on to the large urban centers for further distribution.

Even earlier, in a 1905 travelogue of Java, Augusta De Wit (*Java: Facts and Fancies*, London: Chapman and Hall: 52) noted,

A Chinaman is a merchant with his whole heart, his whole soul, and his whole understanding, a merchant always and everywhere, from his cradle to his grave, at table, at play, over his opium pipe, in his temple . . . He has few wants, infinite resources, and the faith (in himself) that removeth trading towns. Small wonder if he succeeds.

In other words, Chinese businesses have thrived during colonialism, the revolutionary period, parliamentary democracy, Sukarno and Suharto. Small wonder if they succeed today.

Thankfully, Chua provides a more critical analysis of Chinese big businesses than his Orientalist predecessor. In chapters three and four, he examines how successive regimes systematically channelled Chinese elites into being both a source of capital and a tool for bolstering their public authority. He is careful to demarcate the continuity between policies of colonial rule, the post-colonial state and the policies of the New Order. These policies lay the foundation for his explanation of the alliance between Chinese capitalists and the politico-bureaucrats of the Suharto regime as well as the structural contradictions that led to the rise of the conglomerates.

In chapter five, he traces precisely how the Chinese conglomerates adapted to the changing political and economic environment after Suharto. In chapter six, he argues that regime change in Indonesia facilitated the emergence of the Chinese as an autonomous capitalist class with unambiguous domination over the state. Chua's strength in these chapters is the empirics: chapter five features several nice vignettes showing how the conglomerates harnessed the tools of democratisation, decentralisation and deregulation to bolster their businesses. The best part of the text is where Chua uses two case studies to illustrate how the Lippo and Salim group

transitioned into the *Reformasi* period (pp. 97-112). Likewise, chapter six's description of the restoration of KKN (corruption, collusion and nepotism) under democracy provides some of the most engaging material in the volume.

Paradoxically, then, the main weakness of the text is the author's use of data. While the author reports doing more than sixty original interviews (pp. 145-6), the voices of his informants are muffled under the weight of secondary sources: only halfway into chapter four does he begin using his interview data. It is also unclear whether Chua interviewed the right people. To assess his claim that plutocracy now rules Indonesia, Chua relies mostly on journalists and the "tycoons' subjective perception of the business climate after the New Order" (p. 121). In doing so, he provides a rather easy test of his argument. Interviews with elites newly subjugated by Chinese conglomerates, such as politicians, bureaucrats, lawyers and judges, would have made his claims significantly more convincing.

A second shortcoming is theoretical. In order to map the changing configurations of capital, state and ethnicity, Chua draws on a framework that is simultaneously Marxist, Weberian and culturalist. That is a heavy theoretical load and the underlying tensions lead to contradictions in the narrative. For example, he relies heavily on Paul Hutchcroft's ("Booty Capitalism: Business-Government Relations in the Philippines," in A. MacIntyre (ed.), *Business and Government in Industrializing Asia*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) Weberian typology of capitalist systems but downplays the power of the state after the New Order. Hutchcroft's patrimonial oligarchy quickly becomes Chua's plutocratic capitalism but without adequate delineation between the competing Weberian and Marxist accounts of the *Reformasi* period. Likewise, the text vacillates between privileging the agency of ethnic Chinese tycoons and rooting their behaviour in the Marxist class structure. During the New Order, the Chinese were simultaneously "ambivalent" towards the system (p. 25) while also "at the regime's mercy" (p. 44) and yet profiting from the "economic and political arrangements which had been so beneficial for them" (p. 69). Just before the Asian financial crisis, they "silently emancipated themselves to become a structurally decisive bourgeoisie inside the capitalist oligarchy" (p. 69) but they were also in "existential crisis" and not acting "voluntarily, arbitrarily, or even purposefully" (p. 70). The text would be more theoretically cohesive if Chua had dropped one of the frameworks, for example by focusing on the role of the Chinese-Indonesian bourgeoisie in the transition period (for an example of such an analysis, see John Sidel, "Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy Revisited: Colonial State and Chinese Immigrant in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia," *Comparative Politics*, 40, 2, pp. 127-47).

Overall, the text addresses an important topic during a critical period of Indonesian history. Scholars of political economy will undoubtedly appreciate Chua's broad knowledge of business relations while scholars of ethnicity will enjoy his careful attention to the dilemmas of the Chinese-Indonesian community. On the whole, *Chinese Big Business in Indonesia: The State of Capital* is a good first book by a newly minted scholar of Indonesia.

Jeremy Menchik © 2010

Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison, WI 53706, USA

Email: menchik@wisc.edu

The Rapidly Transforming Chinese High-technology Industry and Market: Institutions, Ingredients, Mechanisms, and *Modus Operandi*

Nir Kshetri (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2008)

In the past decade China has become an increasingly sophisticated and major, player in the global supply chain for technological commodities, and the nation's technology research and development activities are rapidly and continually expanding.

During recent hearings before the *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission of the Congress of the United States* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2005: 82) it was noted by a number of experts and witnesses that China's production and export of advanced technology goods have provided for a rapidly increasing surplus for China in trade with the USA. The products of relevance fall into ten categories: biotechnology; life sciences; opto-electronics; information and communications; electronics; flexible manufacturing; advanced materials; aerospace; weapons; and nuclear technology. Specific evidence provided in the hearings drew attention to the fact that the Chinese have used cloning technology to produce a live buffalo; they have scaled up supercomputers to operate at 50 to 64 teraflops per second (one teraflop gives one trillion calculations per second); they have produced an amino chip nanogram detector for *Staphylococcus* enterotoxins; and completely enhanced the safety of nuclear reactor design by using "pebble-bed reactor technology" which significantly reduces the possibility of reactor meltdown. This is to list but a few of the many technological breakthroughs in recent years. The BYD Corporation has become the world's second-largest battery producer in less than a decade and has now turned to hybrid cars and began rolling them off the production line in 2009. Government policies now favour high-tech economic zones, research and development centres and companies that promise higher salaries and more skills. A computer chip plant being built by Intel in the northern city of Dalian is welcomed; whereas a textile mill churning out US\$1 pairs of socks is not (*New York Times Online*, 1 August 2008).

There are still plenty of obstacles, including managerial weaknesses, a concentration on "product-based" rather than basic research, weak intellectual property rights enforcement, and a culture of copying or stealing technology from foreign companies or joint venture partners. But there is also a rising aggressive entrepreneurial class, legions of new science and engineering graduates, and a fiercely competitive domestic marketplace. And this is where Nir Kshetri comes forward, offering the reader a detailed analysis of the institutions, processes and *modus operandi* of Chinese high-technology advance.

Kshetri examines the Chinese high-technology terrain with the emphasis on the market, institutions, government and various industries and how they have shaped the technology trajectory. There is an attempt to establish a theoretical framework, but most unimpressively, the framework is not much more than sets of definitions. For instance, with reference to institutional analysis, Kshetri's "framework" is a definition provided by North twenty years ago (cited by Kshetri, p. 3): "institutions are rules of the game in a society." In pursuit of this "framework," Kshetri presents two research streams, "strategic decoupling" and "selective adaptation," both of which are provided with definitions. As is evident, theory is not the author's forte in

this book. What Kshetri does do very well is predominantly descriptive, in which he elicits a marked amount of evidence to show the rapid and extensive transformation of high-tech research, development and product-positioning by Chinese engineers and scientists over the past three decades. This reader was often surprised, if not taken aback by the achievements the Chinese have made in cellular technology (Chapter 4), open source software (Chapter 8) and nanotechnology (Chapter 11). Clear, comprehensible data and evidence are presented to show how China has grabbed the global spotlight in these sectors. Unfortunately, even the description is marred by excessive repetition throughout the book. A much better editing job would have removed this repetition and given the book a more professional structure.

Kshetri makes it clear that global technology analysts continue to disagree as to the nature and importance of Chinese high-technology. Some see today's Chinese high-tech firms as comparable to Japan in the 1950s, and suggest that it is more useful to regard China as a normal emerging economy, such as Brazil and India. On the other hand, there are many voices who warn businesses and governments about the capacity of China to organise its intellectual capacity and financial resources to become one of the top three high-technology developing and producing nations in the world within the next decade. Kshetri warns against a one-sided perspective and suggests that both points of view are correct in a simplistic but incomplete fashion. The Chinese high-technology industry has both strong and weak elements and the end result will depend on the intersection of many variables, dependent on market and institutional conditions. This makes the book, despite the aforementioned weaknesses, useful reading for both economic and political analysts.

Herb Thompson © 2010

Perth, Australia

Email: herbieta2001@yahoo.com.au

New Masters, New Servants: Migration, Development and Women Workers in China
Yan Hairong (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008)

Reading about the plight of *baomu* (women rural migrant workers employed as domestic help in urban centres in China) from the vantage point of a Filipina reviewer is a morally compelling exercise. On the one hand, the *baomu* has her homologue in the Philippines in the identity of the *kasambahay*, which literally translates to a domestic helper living under the fold of her employer. Like the *baomu*, she usually hails from the rural areas and is likely to fall within the same demographic brackets as Hairong's research subjects. She will also most likely be crushed by historical, cultural and socio-political forces that will undermine her rural roots, and it is highly probable that she will be caught in the swirl of consumerist cultures and pop fanfare that are supposed to be the fringe attractions of working in the city.

I thought Hairong's reflections and analysis of the lives of *baomu* or the *dagongmei* (women migrant workers) in general would be a simple exercise of discovering how

these women, who suffer the same fate across unequal rural and urban development circumstances, might find themselves real identities. Hairong starts tracing the migration of rural women from Wuwei county in Anhui province with a flashback of life there during the Mao era. Collective labour then was instituted, “with women’s labor contribution publicly recognised and compensated in terms of work points, which gave women some standing in the public arena” (p. 29).

This would be the turning point and start of exodus for the *baomu*, as she brings the Mao era value for her labour in the 1970s to the city, toward which she had been pushed by food shortages in her native town. During these initial chapters Hairong extends valuable analysis to the sense of shame that afflicted migrant women (p. 33), as they straddled ideological conceptions that discredit domestic service in the context of the Cultural Revolution. The *baomu* came to represent the incongruous dregs of “the bourgeois lifestyle of high-rank officials” during this period.

As the book progressed I was swept by the ideological transitions that accost the *baomu* in reclaiming dignity. Hairong’s research methodology is comprised of well-articulated ideas from both Chinese history and her ethnographic methods in the form of sustained correspondence with her *dagongmei* informants. Both these areas of her study feed into each other and nourish her main reading of the fate of her compatriots: that the experience of being a *baomu* or *dagongmei* is inscribed within official, post-socialist discourses of the Communist Party.

What might seem like an analytical long shot – relating the agency of *dagongmei* to shifting structures of Chinese society – had been defended by Hairong so well. Letters of informants to her are particularly enlightening and suggest China’s own misreading of its migrant workers and new value systems among middle class intellectuals that neglect the nuances of domestic labour. What Hairong does so elegantly is to take these misshapen notions of rural-urban dichotomy and politics of the body and commit them to a historical reading that spans the Cultural Revolution and Deng Xiaoping’s love for the free market.

This way, the image of Chinese leadership that emerges is crass, infantile and undeniably dangerous for the state’s five million rural immigrants. Hairong saucily reels back to Deng Xiaoping’s call for Chinese citizens to “let a few people get rich first” (p. 140). At the same time, she reveals Chinese leadership as a master manipulator of human subjectivity, first interpolating a desire for *suzhi* improvement among rural migrant women and encoding them within the ploys of “neohumanism” (p. 136). With the capitalization of the human life, Hairong argues, “one encounters this unprecedented attention to, and exaltation of, human subjectivity as the most important agent for market growth and development.”

Suzhi is a Chinese term that resists exact definition for that quality of an individual or population that, under my reading, approximates the term “cultured” and all the neo-liberal prejudice it carries. The *baomu* are often taught and encouraged to uproot themselves from their “impoverished” rural provenance and worldviews, pick up some *suzhi* in the cities and transport it back home. Hairong devotes considerable discussion to the term and the manner it is hammered into the consciousness of the *baomu*, who in turn learns it by living in the household of her intellectual, middle- and upper-middle class employers who cannot be bothered by the physical exertions of household chores, and whose *suzhi* spoils them with special state attention to ensure that they never have to waste precious time in acquiring

more *suzhi* doing menial labour. Hairong frames this situation in Foucauldian terms (p. 98), involving “one class speaking to another ‘which has neither the same ideas as it nor even the same words.’”

This is the exact contradiction that would plague the ordinary *baomu*, who finds herself in the land of urbanity, modernity and a real opportunity to transform her low *suzhi* into a higher one, to the effect that she’s both learning and unlearning in the city, as she is constrained to exhausting menial conditions. In the end, too, the state’s desire to improve the quality of its population and make them agents of Development is undermined by basic inequalities between rural and urban, lower and upper classes, and even men and women. Hairong’s class analysis based on the exchange of *suzhi* makes her ethnography even more compelling because it complements very well the fatigue, disenchantment and vulnerabilities as told by her informants in their letters.

Yao Hairong’s book might inspire other cultures where development discourses strive to make humans better neo-liberal subjects than actually give them better life options. Governments like China’s that resort to tampering with people’s consciousness through all sorts of discursive devices, from neo-humanism to vulgar Marxism, in the end, cannot expect better quality citizens as it endlessly foments inequalities.

In a sense, the identity of the *kasambahay* is stuck in the same ideological quagmire as that of the *baomu*, who, at the most, “not being able or desiring to return, yet unable to cohere as subjects of Development in the city, (they) remain stuck as struggling liminal subjects” (p. 224). This position echoes the work of Filomeno V. Aguilar (“Ritual Passage and the Reconstruction of Selfhood in International Labor Migration,” *Sojourn*, 14, 1, 1999, pp. 98-139), whom Hairong cites in the same page, describing the “transitional stage” of migrancy

during which the migrant, like a ritual initiate, is a liminal subject separated from the community and suspended from his or her pre-ritual habits of thinking and action. After undergoing a ritual self-transformation, the migrant rejoins the community as a post-ritual subject with a new personhood and an elevated cosmopolitan status.

Hairong’s work should be read by development scholars and neo-liberal advocates obsessed with the “good graces” of labour export.

Frances Mae Carolina Ramos © 2010

Department of Anthropology, University of the Philippines, Diliman, The Philippines

Email: francesmaecarolinaramos@yahoo.com

Body in Question: Image and Illusion in Two Chinese Films by Director Jiang Wen
Jerome Silbergeld (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)

As in his previous book, *Hitchcock with a Chinese Face: Cinematic Doubles, Oedipal Triangles, and China’s Moral Voice* (University of Washington Press, 2004), art historian Jerome Silbergeld attunes keen visual and moral sensibilities to interpreting

remarkable Chinese films. Here Silbergeld views two controversial films by actor-turned-director Jiang Wen, *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994) and *Devils on the Doorstep* (2000), through the lens of “body talk” (connotations of and narratives about bodies). This is a perceptive approach because not only is the politically subversive nature of both films conveyed more through body language than its script, but Jiang Wen draws heavily on body conventions from the Chinese theatrical tradition. The result is a book rich in interpretative nuances informed by references to visual arts (painting and photography) and narrative ethics.

The script for *In the Heat of the Sun*, the 1994 box-office leader in China, which swept Taiwan’s 1996 Golden Horse Awards, was “radically adapted and autobiographically transformed” from a best-selling novella by 1980s bad-boy author Wang Shuo. Such children of privilege (both Jiang Wen and Wang Shuo were sons of ranking military officials in Beijing) were “abandoned to an ironic coming-of-age” in the absence of clear rules of authority during the Cultural Revolution. What makes this film so controversial, according to Silbergeld, is its progressive theatre of unmasking, first of misplaced faith in political ideals, then of idealised female body parts, then of memory itself. Silbergeld insists on reading the film allegorically, hence “the fantasy relationship between Mi Lan and Ma Xiaojun parallels that of Mao and his idolaters, and is celebrated under a question mark about the reliability of ‘knowledge’ that designates the uncertain and fragile relationship between the Party and the people” (p. 48). Silbergeld reads a failed attempt by Xiaojun to rape Mi Lan as follows:

Xiaojun reduces Mi Lan to an object of shame and disgust, the final rupture of his constructed myth in that awful, overheated summer. But Mi Lan proves the stronger and survives Xiaojun’s clumsy efforts to overthrow her, just as the Communist Party survived the youth upheaval of 1989, which similarly started with the genuine desire for the body politic but ended in a violent failure to penetrate the inner sanctum of the state. Ma Xiaojun’s failure shames him even more than it does her (p. 57).

These interpretations are suggestive but may also be over-determined, at odds with the playful indeterminacy at the heart of Jiang Wen’s film, which finds precedence in Wang Shuo’s fiction. The penultimate scene, where Xiaojun’s teenaged buddies shove him under the water when he reaches up for help in a swimming pool, is seen as “a metaphor, an embodiment of the people’s betrayal by the Party and of China’s loss of faith in her glorious Revolution” (p. 60). Yet a film that playfully undercuts all signifying systems cannot be read metaphorically. As Tonglin Lu (“Fantasy and Ideology in a Chinese Film: A Žižekian Reading of the Cultural Revolution,” *positions*, 12, 2, 2004, p. 554) puts it, “Jiang Wen’s protagonist finds enjoyment in the nonsensical nature of the dominant ideology.” In contrast to the final scene set in the dystopian present, the only scene shot in black-in-white, the Cultural Revolution days are “remembered” as being far more colourful, the “bright, sunny days” (*yangguang canglan de rizi*) of the film’s literal title.

Silbergeld suggests that the “jarring mixture of truth and untruth” in Jiang Wen’s first film is without precedent in the Chinese tradition, more akin to Molière’s theatre of unmasking. This is a surprising statement; one calls to mind the unmasking in the

classic Chinese novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, informed by Buddhist and Taoist philosophical traditions which posit as mere appearances the certitudes claimed by the Confucian tradition. And Jiang Wen's ironic unmasking of the façade of revolutionary, romantic, positivist ideals is directly beholden to Wang Shuo's literary sensibilities which, in turn, came to characterise a post-modern Beijing aesthetic in the 1990s.

The second film, *Devils on the Doorstep* (*Guizi laile*), won the Cannes Film Festival Grand Jury Prize in 2000, but was then banned from distribution in China and Jiang Wen banned from directing in China for the next five years. The reasons the film was banned are still the subject of debate on blogs in China, the main suspects being its unauthorised submission to the Cannes festival competition or the lack of hostility displayed by the Chinese toward the Japanese invaders. Superficially the film is highly nationalist in its stark portrayal of Japanese violence and duplicity, yet the censor's primary discomfiture with the film may have to do with the fact that the Chinese national body is implicated as well. According to a leaked propaganda paper from the Beijing Film Bureau, the film "violates history severely" (p. 130). It is the fact that "*Devils* focuses on 'the beast,' the devils in man, inbred and waiting to be unleashed," that may be most reprehensible to censors, according to Silbergeld (p. 130).

Body in Question includes 71 film stills in all, and Silbergeld's frame-by-frame analysis and keen attention to cinematographic details is particularly effective in *Devils*. Silbergeld starts by analysing the gruesome execution, late in the film, of a translator of a Japanese prisoner-of-war. These two 'devils' were deposited on the doorstep of villager Ma Dasan in the film's opening scene by an undercover communist operative identified as "me" (*wo*), which Silbergeld later interprets as a critique of the Communist Party. In the execution scene the translator flies forward, with the bullet passing through his skull kicking up dust sooner than he can land there. To achieve this effect cinematographer Gu Changwei shot the sequence at twenty frames per second, then projected them at the normal twenty-four frames per second, creating the time-lapse effect of the actor being hurled forward more rapidly. Silbergeld astutely notes that "for the film audience, the instrumentation of death suddenly becomes more real than the emotional life of the victim . . . thus by a detail – and by many such gathered details – the film audience is brought to close ranks with a society desensitized to institutional brutality" (p. 83).

Silbergeld's compelling analysis of the tiniest gestures – the smiles, smirks, grimaces and sheepish expressions of horses, donkeys, Japanese, Chinese – also attests to Jiang Wen's mastery of theatricality. He notes, for example, that "the contrast between Japanese officer Sakatsuka (tautly drawn, reserved, purposeful, and totally confident) and Chinese villager Ma Dasan (big but flabby, morally inquisitive but usually uncertain, highly emotional and frequently clueless) is visible in every detail of their appearance and their behavior" (p. 98). He also discusses at length the cultural antecedents for personification of the animal realm in the film, both zoomorphic (Japanese reference to the Chinese as pigs and dogs) and anthropomorphic (the Japanese commander's horse bowing its head in shame at the prisoner-of-war's return, and in turn being shamed by a Chinese donkey). Historically, relations between humans and animals are linked to Chinese concepts of justice and punishment; Jiang Wen, says Silbergeld, is especially beholden to Lu

Xun, whose trenchant critical realism was directed at the national body as much as the “foreign devil.” The rural aesthetics informing conflation of humans and animals in *Devils* also recall Lu Xun’s disciple, Xiao Hong, whose “anti-Japanese” novel, *The Field of Life and Death* (1937), portrays a highly ambivalent ‘body politic.’ Both, like Jiang Wen, query the pleasure derived from staged spectacle in Chinese culture, particularly torture and executions. Silbergeld aptly concludes that “what is acceptable to the culture and unacceptable in the film is the reduction of Ma Dasan’s tragedy to an occasion for public spectacle” (p. 122).

Both of Jiang Wen’s films resonate widely with audiences due to their intense emotional investment in the details of shared trauma, but what makes them so aesthetically appealing is their ethical and political ambiguity. Silbergeld acknowledges this ambiguity at times, only to assert a clear object under attack at others. The *wo* (“I”) that sets the tragedy of *Devils* in motion may not so much denounce a particular political system or culture as recognise personal complicity in human trauma. As a sustained inquiry into the meaning of body expression, *Body in Question* is well worth reading, and invites us to view Jiang Wen’s two seminal films anew.

Robin Visser © 2010

Department of Asian Studies, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
NC 27599-3267, USA

Email: rvisser@email.unc.edu

Site Fights: Divisive Facilities and Civil Society in Japan and the West

Daniel P. Aldrich (*Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008*)

Obviously the Not In My Back Yard phenomenon has generated a great deal of literature as well as heat. Author Aldrich, however, is undoubtedly the first to offer extensive comparative analysis on the politics of siting big projects in Japan. It stands to reason that only states with strong civil society movements could even entertain major challenges to such siting decisions. But even within democracies, some communities have less potential for protest and controversy. Rather than neutral technocratic grounds for siting choices, the author argues that concerned bureaucrats actively choose weak civil society settings. More than that, coercive measures, as opposed to incentive packages are frequently employed. Only intense civil society activity obliges the state to adopt soft solutions. Protest raises the costs, as with protracted siting delays, just as the trend is towards greater public resistance. Broadly adopting a “social capital” approach to the problem, Aldrich terms siting decisions targeting the more vulnerable as “public bads,” as opposed to general understandings of “public goods,” or benefits. In a nutshell, Aldrich argues that civil society deeply conditions the selection of sites and, reciprocally, the way the state responds to opposition to big and controversial projects.

An introduction intricately elaborates the argument, ranging over most of the themes and issues discussed in the rest of the text. A first chapter focuses on how states select sites for often unwanted projects. Having established that state agencies do pay attention to civil society when choosing to locate these projects, in a second

chapter he then discusses how states deal with conflicts when they arise. Separate chapters examine the siting of airports, dams, with another two chapters on nuclear power plants in, respectively, Japan and France. A conclusion extends the discussion on civil society-state interactions.

The method is both quantitative and comparative; just as it is fieldwork-orientated and scholarly, including a reading of Japanese texts. Rather than focusing on single sites, Aldrich draws on hundreds of cases of successful and unsuccessful siting cases.

There is a wealth of descriptive data and analysis. The “horrible” battles over the Narita airport put into pale moderate resistance to airport sitings in France, although the author allows that the Narita case is not generalisable in Japan. Even so, in crushing the Narita holdouts, the state also revealed its panoply of coercive powers. By the mid-1990s, opposition to dams in Japan began to generate widespread local and extra-local community support. More the pity the asinine Ariake Sea draining project is not offered as an example. This 60-year project to create more rice-land out of wetland and seaweed beds is a battle royal between distant bureaucrats and local fishermen and their local and extra-local friends. France, it turns out has only seen moderate resistance to dams and little state coercion.

Aldrich has also been assiduous in showing how the authorities actually utilise their “tool boxes” or repertoires of coercive and/or dissuasive measures in order to neutralise dissenters. Given Japan’s national experience with nuclear holocaust, the success of the state in going nuclear obviously entails some explanation. Ministry of International Trade and Industry/Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry, the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of Finance and even the Education Ministry (now linked with Science and Technology), were all brought into play. Faced with growing resistance in the 1960s, all kinds of soft social control measures were deployed, alongside buyouts and other sharper practices but, in deference to the nuclear allergy, the authorities held back from outright coercive actions. In France, the reverse was found to be the case.

Aldrich does not dwell on the matter, but local Okinawa resistance to current US plans to relocate one of its urban bases to a coral reef-maritime habitat has fired up civic consciousness from Okinawa to Tokyo, notwithstanding the relative remoteness of the chosen site. Bureaucrats have reacted accordingly. But the targeting of depopulating zones or other areas with disaggregated civil society groups (in Okinawa the landowners have been bought off) is typical in Japan. But states are also capable of changing from the coercive to the soft-sell approach, when it dictates. The author claims his definition of civil society is not a neo-liberal view but, rather, sees in civil society relatively autonomous groups that can either support or contest.

Aldrich also makes space to configure Japan, the USA and France against the background of their demographics and political-bureaucratic cultures, finding remarkable similarities in Japan’s and France’s professional elite bureaucrats, just as both countries are committed to nuclear power.

Needless to say, Aldrich’s conclusions bear out his premises; states are simply Machiavellian in responding to societal opposition. This is not to say that the state in Japan, etc., is especially predatory as with, say, the Democratic Republic of Congo, but it is to acknowledge the “tool box” at hand such as in neutralising potential anti-globalisation activities (actually overkill). Neither did he find that international

pressure is necessary to cause changes in state policies and strategies (probably counter-productive if we relate this sentiment to global actions to pressure Japan to reverse its pro-whaling activities in a distant southern ocean “site”). But, for Aldrich, networked local communities do count even in strong nations. In Japan, dubbed by some a “plutonium superstate” (G. McCormack, “Japan as a Plutonium Superpower,” <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/08005McCormack.html>), there is nothing like an earthquake and radioactive leak (such as at Kashiwazaki in July 2007) to set public alarm-bells ringing, even though new power plants are on the drawing board.

Finally, Aldrich puts his faith in more citizen consultation even in the absence of crisis, but the yardstick here is democratic state and the candidates are actually finite in this rather Hobbesian world. One commonplace from the Japanese political lexicon that could be heeded is that the bureaucrats know best though – even without Aldrich’s rich analysis and fine social science – it is a testament to the strength of Japanese civil society that repeated exposure to bungles, cover-ups, arrogance and just plain corruption have badly exposed the nature of the beast.

Geoffrey C. Gunn © 2010
Faculty of Economics, Nagasaki University
Email: nag-gunn@net.nagasaki-u.ac.jp