Book Reviews

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Although the concept of harmony is by no means exclusive to Asian traditions, Harmony (“he”) and disharmony have been major topics in Chinese research (ethical, ontological, philosophical, political and religious discussions). The book “Governance for Harmony in Asia and Beyond” fills a gap in literature offering a collection of essays that build bridges between liberalism in the West and Confucianism in the East. Additionally it develops exchanges of key issues and debates on governance such as the different dimensions of harmony debates (harmony, disharmony, pseudo-harmony and negative harmony), the possible bridges between Eastern and Western political and philosophical traditions and how harmony can help to overcome problems of governance today such as distrust and hyper-individualism, among others. As the co-editors (Julia Tao, City University of Hong Kong, Anthony B.L. Cheung, The Hong Kong Institute of Education; Martin Painter, City University of Hong Kong; Chenyang Li, Central Washington University) of the book state “governance for harmony is an urgent task which challenges all levels of government and the world community at large in an age of increasing globalization and pluralism” (p. 11). The book also discusses potential problems that may arise in the pursuit of harmony, such as the threat of totalitarianism and the mitigation of this kind of risk.

The book presents a collection of essays derived from an international research projects (Asia and other regions). The researchers have different disciplinary backgrounds with contributes to enrich the discussion of topics in the book. The book is comprised by 17 essays that can be dived into two sets: the first set explores and analyses the meaning, dimensions and methodologies of harmony from a normative ideal in politics and government. The second set examines how harmony is pursued or endangered in the real world of governance. The authors based the analysis on experiences in East and West countries.

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Cambodia’s Neoliberal Order: Violence, authoritarianism, and the contestation of public space
Simon Springer
Routledge. Routledge Pacific Rim Geographies. 2010
Pages: 206

Simon Springer (National University of Singapore) focuses his research on the crossroad between neoliberalism and violence. Now he publishes this book entitled “Cambodia’s Neoliberal Order. Violence, authoritarianism, and the contestation of public space”. He discusses the relationship between “pot-conflict” geographies of authoritarianism, neoliberalisation and violence in a South East Asian country that suffered tremendously in recent years: Cambodia (formerly known as Kampuchea). This beautiful land has lived a cycle of ruin and rebirth under the rise and fall of the Khmer Rouge regime.

The book is structured into 4 main chapters. First chapter presents the setting of stage for neoliberalization, which needs an understanding of the interplay of local and extralocal forces acting within the global political economy. Democracy arrived in Cambodia in 1991, under a United Nations sponsored transition. However politically motivated killings are frequent during election times. Second chapter assesses the meaning and value of democracy and after that it reviews the literature on democracy, development and public space in order to develop a framework for understanding public space, moving beyond Eurocentric and “top-down” approaches. Third chapter describes the period from genocide to elections to coup d’état. Using the theories and geographical framework laid out in the previous chapter, it combines Cambodia-specific literature with empirical findings from the research developed by the author (November 2006-August 2007). Cambodian participants in this study show a strong desire for democracy. And the last chapter compares the neoliberal doctrine of order versus the democratic expression of the people’s will. It presents the contemporary developments in Cambodia’s continuous battle for public space and democratic accountability, from the post-coup era to the present day.

Finally in the conclusion section, the author analyzes what conflicts may potentially arise if the Cambodian neoliberal order continues to operate without the popular approval of Cambodian citizens. It also questions the possibility of a revolution if the democratic conception of public space continues to be suppressed in the future.

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