

12-1-2017

## Jie Yang, J. (Ed.). *The Political Economy of Affect and Emotion in East Asia*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.

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### Recommended Citation

Wesocky, Sharon R. Ph.D. (2017) "Jie Yang, J. (Ed.). *The Political Economy of Affect and Emotion in East Asia*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 9: No. 1, Article 16.

DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1381

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol9/iss1/16>

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**Jie Yang, J. (Ed.). *The Political Economy of Affect and Emotion in East Asia*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.**

This book employs the approach of “affect studies” to examine governance and governmentality in East Asia and is thus an important contribution to contemporary theorizing of East Asian political economy. As Jie Yang notes in the introductory chapter, “affect” can be both an “analytical tool and a force for reconfiguring power and achieving political and economic objectives,” noting the tendency to look at East Asia in terms of “dispositions,” which in some cases can also be categorized as “affective registers,” ways of employing emotional bonds to “closely shape the material and ideological processes of everyday life” (p. 3). While reluctant to narrowly define “affect,” the editor notes that ultimately affect exists as “a relational approach to emotions,” one which is “a felt quality that gives meanings and imaginative potential to social, political, and economic transformations” (p. 11). As discussed in various chapters of this book, such relationships can exist in the conflation of the nation-state with the family, in aspirations for “happiness” and optimism in modes of neoliberal self-governance, in bodily sensations mediated through social settings, and in labor as part of biopolitical economies.

The best way to comprehend the book’s approach is through how each chapter employs and applies the concept of “affect” to specific case studies in various East Asian countries. The first section, “Happiness and Psychologization,” focuses on China. Yanghua Zhang writes, importantly, of the Confucian revival in 21<sup>st</sup> century China, examining the scholar and television personality Yu Dan’s lectures on China Central Television in 2006 on the “affective undertone” of *The Analects*, looking to Confucianism as a “source of happiness and everyday life in the fast-paced market-oriented” environment of contemporary China (p. 31). Yu Dan’s “maternal” inflection of the Confucian classics is consistent both with situating the state as an “object of love and loyalty” and with global neoliberalism’s emphasis on individualized solutions to social problems, a process that Zhang terms “neoliberal localization” (pp. 36, 38). This is a “therapeutic” approach that plays into the Chinese interest in happiness but also, in the end, provides an affective approach to promoting “political stability” (p. 42). This chapter does a fine job of taking an important Chinese cultural phenomenon and juxtaposing the concept of “affect” with both Chinese political contexts and local manifestations of global neoliberalism.

Such an emphasis on “happiness” is also found by Jie Yang in her chapter on counseling programs for “newly marginalized” populations in China, such as laid-off workers (p. 45). Yang effectively demonstrates how such approaches are an individualized “psychologization” of socio-economic problems that also have a wider social purpose in seeking to create entrepreneurial selves and promote political stability; they develop “self-reflexivity” but also produce resistance among workers in some cases and thus are not always accomplishing their state-mandated goals. Such “contestation” shows the multifaceted consequences of statist affective programs, and as such, this chapter usefully complicates the emphasis on “happiness” in contemporary China, showing how the relationship between affect and power is a complex one.

The next section of the book, “Body, Affect, and Subjectivity,” features two chapters examining the affective dimensions of subjects situated in wider landscapes. Teresa Kuan examines another dimension of contemporary China’s neoliberal turn in the *suzhi jiaoyu* (“quality education”) movement in the mid-2000s, which, in Kuan’s view, like the programs emphasizing “happiness,” also sought to create entrepreneurial individual subjectivities. Kuan finds affect to be a useful theoretical category in understanding the experiential dimensions of these programs, by examining, for instance, how the *suzhi*<sup>1</sup> expert Zhou Ting employs affective

approaches in her cultural education programs for children, asking them to create “banks” of feelings during these excursions. The close-reading of one expert’s approach in this chapter is interesting, though a bit more situating of the chapter in relation to other scholarly analyses of the *suzhi* craze might help the reader further comprehend how *suzhi* is (or is not) more broadly an affective phenomenon.

Shiho Satsuka’s chapter on Japanese tour guides in Canada takes a transnational turn, featuring guides who left Japan for a Canadian “dreamland,” who now professionally introduce that land to tourists “embodying the fantasy of Japanese cosmopolitanism” (p. 87). The guides, in Satsuka’s assessment, adopt a detached approach to their clients, exhibiting hospitality in the “now” but not wanting any sort of enduring relationship with them; the affective context here is thus a very ephemeral one. Satsuka finds this to be the way that the guides manage their commodified selves, as a demonstration of the imbrication of the commodity economy with the affective self and the guides’ “unintentional critique” of this (pp. 92-93), although in some ways, the use of the concept of “affect” remains a bit unclear in this chapter.

The following section, “Tears, Media and Affective Articulation,” examines affective qualities in television media in Japan and China. Daniel White sees the surfeit of tears on Japanese television as “highly affective sites of consumption” (p. 99) and looks at how these tears exemplify the embodied elements distinguishing affect from emotion in their relational and ethical dimensions. Such a process is in part constitutive of a Japanese public sphere and the “actualization” of problems, although the wider political dimensions of such “problems” is not entirely specified in the chapter.

The melodramatic elements of Japanese TV tears are also present in Chinese television dramas, as discussed by Shuyu Kong. Examining *kuqing xi* (“dramas of bitter emotion”), such as the series *Crying Your Heart Out*, which depicts the tales of laid-off women, Kong asserts that emotions of suffering impart these dramas with a “polysemic or ambivalent meaning” (p. 130), in which the shows have a “happy ending” but also show the pain and grief experienced along the way towards a new life. Such “affective articulation” complicates the “aspirational story of neoliberalism” that these dramas seek to emphasize (pp. 117-118). This chapter thus usefully demonstrates the ways that even officially-recognized media forms depict the complicated and often dislocating effects of China’s changes.

The section “Gender, Affective Labor, and Biopolitical Economy” also has a transnational dimension, with chapters examining the role of Southeast Asian migrant workers in Japanese nursing homes (chapter by Ayaka Yoshimizu) and in South Korean homes (chapter by Toshiko Tsujimoto). These chapters usefully examine both gendered and globalized dimensions of affect. In Japanese nursing homes, “subjects circulate within and are formed through affect” (p. 139), with female care workers from Indonesia seen as kind and competent while still being marginalized by both their race and their gender. Meanwhile, Filipino domestic workers in South Korea are likewise subordinated but also attain new modes of “self-fulfillment” not only as breadwinners but also as community volunteers largely through Catholic churches; in this case, “emotional labor” is more “dynamic” than it is often given credit for being (pp. 169-170). Both of these chapters thus show the ways in which affective labor can be both marginalizing and empowering.

The final section, “Affect, Modernity and Empires,” features three chapters. Momoko Nakamura examines the “affective attachment to Japanese women’s language” in its historical context and especially in relation to colonialism, both during Japanese colonization of East Asia during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and during the US occupation of Japan after 1945, during

which women's language was an affective site for "Japanese tradition, order, and identity" (p. 192). This chapter thus importantly shows the imbrication of gender and national identity, though it perhaps could problematize this relationship more than it does.

Sung Kil Min looks at the phenomenon of *haan*, meaning "roughly suppressed anger," in South Korea, and how it is a motivational force for achieving socio-economic goals through the process of *haan-puri*, or "dissolving or resolving *haan*" (pp. 198-199). *Haan* is affective in that it is a "collective emotion" that has changed meaning as South Korea has transitioned from poverty to economic success and has been not only part of the country's industrial development but also a force for social protest. This chapter thus shows how affective qualities such as *haan* can be both socio-political causes and effects.

Finally, Craig MacKie provides an "affective political economy" of North Korea through an analysis of the ways that narratives about reunification of the Korean family are central to "North Korea's affective training" and provide hope for the future amidst daily discipline (pp. 224-226). This is especially evident in propaganda for children, which often seeks "to produce an affective link between the military, home and security" (p. 235) and through which the "longevity" (p. 236) of the North Korean regime can be explained through affective discourses linking family and nation.

This book is a very useful application of the concept of "affect" to East Asian political and social contexts and thus helps the reader better understand both this contemporary theoretical approach and its application to East Asian polities. It would be a useful textbook in courses on East Asian politics, society, and culture; some of its chapters would also be valuable cross-cultural contributions to any courses dealing with "affect theory."

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<sup>1</sup> *Suzhi* is typically translated as "quality" and has been a widespread social discourse in post-Mao China that, in the words of Kuan, "constructs the problem of national strength and economic development in terms of personal improvement (p. 68).

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