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A Caring Society: Multimedia Records for Taiwanese Citizen Action in a New Era

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BOOK REVIEW

A caring society: Multimedia records for Taiwanese citizen action in a new era, edited by Chung-Shiang Kuang, Taipei, UnderTable, 2013, 254 pp., ISBN 978-9-86878-096-5 (in Chinese: 管中祥主編, 公民不冷血: 新世紀台灣公民行動事件簿, 臺北: 紅桌文化, 2013年出版。)

Kohlberg (1975, p. 51) once wrote, 'If moral development centers on a sense of individual justice, it becomes apparent that moral and civic education are much the same thing.' Kuang's edited book not only reveals this connection between moral issues and civic engagement, but also further demonstrates moral predicaments between emerging democracy and economic development in Taiwan as well as other countries. The book contains five main topics, including typical examples of land justice, environmental justice, labor rights, minority rights and gender equality as well as an introduction to the leaders of nine social movements.

The book describes three protests against governmental violation of land justice in Taiwan during the last decade, including the Dapu incident, Shihlin Urban Renewal and the Lesheng Sanatorium. The Miaoli County Government designated an area in Dapu Village, which includes a large number of private homes and farmland, for a controversial science park extension project. The residents, mostly farmers, joined together with protesters to resist the proposed expropriation of land and demolition of buildings. The protesters accused the local government of abusing its power by applying the Land Expropriation Act, which resulted in the collapse and destruction of these rural villages and communities. The Dapu incident, which began in 2008, is a good example of the land justice rights upon which the Taiwanese government has infringed.

The book uses the Anti-Kuokuang Movement as an example of a social movement to defend environmental justice. Readers should know that this is just one of a number of environmental rights protests that have occurred in Taiwan in the last three decades. The Anti-Kuokuang Movement centered on the Kuokuang Petrochemical Project (KKPP), a large investment development project in the Da Chen village in Zhanghua in 2008. KKPP did not meet the standards of environmental assessments, particularly for wetlands ecology and dolphin conservation and faced strong opposition from protesters. As a result, the project stopped in 2011.

The third part of this book addresses infringement upon labor rights, using the case of Taiwan's Young Fast Optoelectronics Trade Union. The union accused the factory of earning a tremendous amount of money but not caring about social responsibility or the working conditions of their workers. The union and their supporters held a number of anti-sweatshop movements in 2011.

The book focuses on minority rights in the fourth section. The book discusses several typical examples of the rights of indigenous people being violated by the government. One such case involved protests opposing nuclear waste on Orchid Island, which is off the southeastern coast of Taiwan and home to the Tao, an ethnic minority group. The local residents and protesters have called on Taipower to remove the Nuclear Waste Storage Facility, built in 1982, from the island for more than 30 years. Taiwan enacted the 'Basic Law for the Indigenous People' in 2005 and shortly thereafter, in 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The last topic of this book examines Taiwan's annual Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Pride Parade beginning in 2003 in Taipei. Since then, the LGBT Pride Parade has made some progress in gender equality education, exactly as the theme of the 2004 parade—'Awaken Citizen Consciousness'—aimed to do. The last Pride Parade mentioned in this book describes how more than 50,000 people took to the streets of Taipei in 2012 to express their support for the rights of LGBT people and called upon the government to respect gender pluralism, sexual diversity and to legalize same-sex marriage. However, it is hard to change Taiwan's conservative images on gender and family. The 2013 parade entitled 'Make LGBT Visible – 2.0—The Voice of Sexual Sufferers' (similar to the theme of the first parade 'Let LGBT Be Seen') hoped to mobilize every LGBT victim of the oppressive and violent system and to fight for an equal and just distribution of resources.

The most valuable contribution that Kuang's edited book makes is to show that Taiwanese citizens' actions have made momentous progress for Taiwanese moral and civic education by putting moral ideals into practice—no matter whether their protests succeeded or failed. The protests seemingly broke the law, but they perfectly exemplify an ideal of civil disobedience, defined by Rawls (1971, p. 364) as 'a public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or policies of the government'. Furthermore, Habermas (1985) argued that civil disobedience is related to active resistance against the unjust state, so it is a litmus test for the democratic constitutional state to distinguish legitimacy from legality. Finally, the book inspires us to reflect on how a structural factor hinders justice from forming a caring society in a so called 'free market and a globalized world'. Modern moral and civic education can be used to cultivate students to defend social justice and human rights by means of energetic and deliberative citizen action on diversified moral issues—exactly like what Niebuhr (1944, p. 5) proclaims, 'Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.'

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