Chuan Lyu Lectures in Taiwan Studies, 2018

Image and Ideology in Colonial and Post-Colonial Taiwan

Professor Joseph R. Allen
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First Lecture
May 14 (Monday), 2018
5pm (Rooms 8 & 9, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies) [pre-lecture tea reception starts at 4:45pm]

Picturing Gentlemen: Portrait Photography and the Colonial Mask

Taiwan Governor General Kodama Gentarō, 1899
Taiwan Governor General Kodama Gentarō and Civil Administrator Gotō Shimpei
There is an 1899 photograph of the Japanese Governor General of Taiwan, Kodama Gentarō, playing croquet on his mansion's back lawn. That photograph, which arrests the eye in its spontaneity, was the beginning of my exploration of the conditions of portrait photography in Taiwan during Japanese colonization. In this lecture, I consider the Japanese colonial photographic industry and its products (portraits) in three contexts: the state of photographic technology in the world at that time, the ideological machinery of colonization in Taiwan, and the wider phenomenon of colonial mimicry. Here I focus on colonial-period photo albums and commercial directories that present portraits of politically and economically influential men, both Japanese and Taiwanese. Bringing these considerations together suggests an aspect of the colonial ideological machinery that has been understated in other studies: the colonial portrait as a mask in several forms.

Second Lecture
May 15 (Tuesday)
5pm (Room G19, Faculty of Classics) [followed by a wine reception]

A Bronze Horse and State Ideology
In the corner of a small park in downtown Taipei stands an elegant bronze horse, head and hoof gallantly raised, with a streaming tail. Unlike other installations in the park (statues, memorials, pavilions, works of art), this horse has no signage. Its origins and meaning are shrouded in silence; we are only told “Do Not Climb.” Yet upon closer inspection, there is a sign for this horse, but it has all but been erased. If we can read that sign, in a language all its own, then we can begin to unravel the small mystery of whence this horse came to the park. In that mystery is a larger story: how this bronze horse was formed and transformed by state ideology, from the early modernization of Japan, through its colonization of Taiwan, then Taiwan’s four decades of martial law, and now its post-colonial condition. This horse tells all.

This year’s Chuan Lyu Lecturer

Joseph R. Allen is a Professor Emeritus of Chinese literature and cultural studies and Founding Chair of the Department Asian Languages and Literatures, University of Minnesota. His PhD in classical Chinese literature is from the University of Washington, Seattle. He has held a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, two Fulbright Research Fellowships to Taiwan, and a Faculty Fellowship in the Humanities at Harvard University. In 2016 he received the Dean’s Medal for Academic Achievement from the College of Liberal Arts. First trained in classical Chinese poetry, Allen’s early work includes In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry and a study of the early Mulan narratives, "Dressing and Undressing the Chinese Woman Warrior." He has also translated and written about modern and contemporary Chinese poetry, both of Taiwan and China. More recently his work has focused on cultural studies, including his “From Textbooks to Lingerie: Classical Chinese Poetry and Taiwan Popular Culture” and Taipei: City of Displacements, which won the 2014 Levenson Book Prize in Chinese Studies. His current research focuses on photography in Taiwan.