

stay on active duty for a period after basic training. Career-oriented professionals, meanwhile, would have renewable, long-term contracts. The principle of nearly uni-

versal service would thus be retained, but the mass citizen army—rendered unaffordable by expensive high-tech weapons systems—would not.

Miss Thailand's Many Meanings

“The Ideology of Miss Thailand in National, Consumerist, and Transnational Space” by William A. Callahan, in *Alternatives* (Jan.–Mar. 1998), Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1800 30th St., Ste. 314, Boulder, Colo. 80301-1026.

When the young women in a beauty contest strut their stuff, high national politics is usually the furthest thing from anyone’s mind, on stage or off. But the history of the Miss Thailand pageant tells a different story, suggests Callahan, a lecturer in East Asian politics at the University of Durham, in England.

The pageant got started in Siam (as Thailand was then known) in 1934, after two years of political turmoil that left Siam’s king in exile and a new democratic constitution in place. The new government inaugurated the “Miss Siam” beauty pageant as part of a “Constitution Festival,” in the hope, Callahan says, of promoting “modern, Western ideas—constitution, progress, civilization, nation—against the ‘traditional’ Thai absolute monarchy.” The first Miss Siam was awarded a crown engraved with an image of the constitution.

Starting in 1938, with the invading Japanese at war in China, the pageant’s government sponsors increasingly emphasized nationalism rather than constitutionalism. The Interior Ministry’s pageant office vowed to produce a “Miss Siam who is as beautiful as the beauty queens of other countries.”

Though interrupted by World War II, the Miss Thailand Pageant (as it became known after the country’s name change in 1939) was revived in 1948

and held almost every year until 1957, when a military coup brought an end to the constitution, its festival, and what might be termed Miss Thailand’s governmental phase.

In 1961, however, the Los Angeles-based proprietors of the Miss Universe Pageant came looking for “Miss Thailand,” and persuaded a local organization to convert its annual beauty contest into a new national pageant. It survived until a massive student uprising for democracy brought the curtain down on the shameful “meat market” in 1973.

But only for a time. “After 12 years in mothballs,” Callahan writes, “Miss Thailand was resurrected” in 1984 as a wholly commercial venture, sponsored by Colgate Palmolive and others. Not only is the contest a U.S. import, he observes, but so are some of the Miss Thailands! Miss Thailand 1988 had earlier reigned as Miss Teen California; all grumbling about that ceased when she went on to become Miss Universe.

“Neither the Thai government nor the Thai public seem to mind having U.S.-raised women representing them in international competitions,” Callahan notes. To him, this suggests that “nationalism, like ‘beauty,’ is not a natural category, but one constructed and reconstructed for various purposes—political, military, economic, and otherwise.” Nationalism, it seems, is in the eye of the beholder.



Miss Thailand is crowned Miss Universe 1988. She had come to America at age two and only returned to Thailand for the pageant that year.