

Book Review

State and Society in the Philippines, 2nd ed., by Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017. Pp. 464. ISBN 9789715507943.

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Similar to the first edition, the second edition of *State and Society in the Philippines* is an indispensable reading for people interested in Filipino history and politics. The first edition, which was published in 2005, was selected as one of the “Choice Outstanding Academic Titles” for 2006 by the American Library Association. Employing the same state-society framework, the second edition extends the historical coverage: while the first edition commenced with a discussion on the history of the pre-Spanish era and ended in 2004 at the beginning of the second Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo administration, the second edition includes three new chapters on Filipino politics up until 2016 that evaluate the administrations of Macapagal-Arroyo (Chapter 10), Benigno Aquino III (Chapter 11), and the initial seven months of Rodrigo Duterte (Chapter 12).

The book mainly targets people interested in Filipino history and those who wish to understand the complexities of contemporary Filipino politics. As historian Lisandro Claudio writes in the Foreword, this book “will remain the definitive Philippine history textbook” (p. xix). Each chapter has a succinct yet comprehensive discussion on the major political developments in the Philippines. Excerpts from various primary sources scattered throughout the book add color and background to the narratives. The book also gives deeper historical and structural perspectives on Filipino politics. The crucial political question addressed in the book is: How was the “weak state” in the Philippines able to “maintain territorial integrity” during the postwar

period despite adversarial circumstances such as poverty, insurgencies, corruption, and mismanagement (p. 3)? The authors of the book do not offer a single answer or “hypothesis” to this question. Instead, readers are provided with in-depth and varied information that allows them to develop their own viewpoints about Filipino politics.

The narrative starts in the prehistoric era, in which the Philippines was seen as a part of maritime Asia, with the authors emphasizing the regional commonalities and connections across all aspects of life at that time (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 focuses on the introduction of Islam and Christianity during the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries. The authors discuss the origins of the state (centralized authority and territorial definition) in the Philippine archipelago, covering areas from the southern Islamic sultanates to the Spanish-dominated Christian areas. Chapter 4 presents a discussion on the efforts made by the waning Spanish colonial power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to modernize the political economy of the colony and the gradual emergence of a “Filipino” identity among local elites in reaction to the Spanish rule. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the transition from the Spanish colonial rule to the United States’ administrative control up to the end of the World War II, when the modern forms of the state—the three branches of the government and the bureaucracy—emerged.

The authors claim that the American colonial era generated two important developments that continue to influence contemporary Filipino politics. The first development was the “parallel state building” in the “special provinces” (i.e., the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordillera Administrative Region) alongside the Christian areas, as the “American racial classification... perpetuated the outsider status of Muslims and other non-Christians” (pp. 123–24). Unlike in the Christian Filipino provinces, there were no elections in the special provinces because these were under the direct rule of the US Army and constabulary officers. Around this era, Muslim leaders in Mindanao began to lobby for a separate nation from the rest of the Philippines. A legacy that can be seen today is the “Bangsamoro” (Moro Nation) separatist movements, waging fights “based on the map produced by American colonial governance” (p. 125).

The American era’s second crucial development was the introduction of elections at various government levels in the Christian areas. The first municipal-level officials were elected in 1901, with provincial governors being elected in the following year. In 1907, elections were held for the first National Assembly members, and in

1935, elections for the Commonwealth president and vice president began. The authors traced the origins of Filipino “crony capitalism” to this era, explaining that elected office began to be used as a tool for “primitive accumulation.” More importantly, in corroboration with historian Alfred McCoy’s observation, the authors point out that the authoritarian-style politics observed in most Filipino presidents—and most notably in Ferdinand Marcos—was present since the first Commonwealth president, Manuel Quezon, who “set the precedent for future leaders seeking to strengthen state power” (p. 157).

Chapters 7 to 9 deal with the post-independence era’s continuities and discontinuities from the colonial era. Chapter 7 covers the period from just after independence in 1946 until the election of Ferdinand Marcos in 1965. As new provincial elites rose, this postwar period saw the power shift from the center to the local level; at the same time, amidst the weak state some “islands of state strength” occasionally appeared and then ultimately failed. Chapter 8 discusses how Marcos created the “militarized state” after declaring Martial Law in 1972, and his eventual downfall in 1986 through the “People Power.” The post-Marcos era presidencies of Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos, and Joseph Estrada up until the 2004 election of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo are evaluated in Chapter 9.

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 are new additions to the second edition. However, in comparison to the chapters in the first edition, these new chapters appear to be somewhat hastily written. For example, the content in Chapter 10 (The Rise and Fall of “The Strong Republic”) is not mentioned in the Introduction, and the budget deficit decline in 2003 is described as “from \$385 billion to \$3.7 billion” (p. 302) but it was actually from \$3.85 billion to \$3.7 billion (Montesano 2004, 98).¹

More substantively, there appears to be a mismatch between the contents and titles of the new chapters. For example, in Chapter 10, I expected to read about how the second Macapagal-Arroyo administration sought to strengthen the Philippine state, as had been promised in her State of the Nation Address (SONA) in 2002. In this SONA, Macapagal-Arroyo outlined two key evaluation benchmarks: the state becoming independent of sectoral and class interests, and the strengthening of the state’s capacity through a well-developed bureaucracy. However, Chapter 10 provides little analyses of these benchmarks and concludes with the observation that “little had changed in the relationship between local clans and bosses and the state in early twenty-first-century politics” (p. 301).

Chapter 11 titled “Cacique Democracy Personalized” appears to have not only a title-content mismatch but also a conceptual ambiguity in its use of analytical terms. The title refers to a famous article by Benedict Anderson (1988) called “Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams” published in the late 1980s, in which he characterized Filipino politics as a regime ruled by oligarchic families dating back to the beginning of the US era. Therefore, the title of Chapter 11 suggests that the authors are going to offer a modified interpretation of Anderson’s famous characterization by adding the adjective “personalized” when evaluating President Benigno Aquino III administration. However, I had difficulty understanding why this title was offered. As the phrase “cacique democracy” already hints at a personal rule (as against the rule of and by the law), how can a personal cacique rule be further personalized? It would be helpful for readers if the authors had explained why the adjective “personalized” was added, and in what ways the Aquino III administration was a personalized version of cacique democracy.

Furthermore, I wish to point out the seemingly inappropriate use of “authoritarianism” in Chapter 12 from the point of view of comparative politics, which is a subfield in political science. Authoritarianism is an established term in comparative politics that refers to a nondemocratic “political regime” (the set of rules and norms that regulate government operations), rather than a style of leadership that pertain to individuals. Therefore, it seems somewhat inaccurate to claim authoritarianism when discussing President Rodrigo Duterte’s leadership style. Moreover, the chapter title “Neo-Authoritarianism?” requires further explanation as to why “neo-” is added to authoritarianism; however, no explanations are provided in the chapter.

Last but not the least, it would have been more fitting if a concluding chapter had been added in which the authors evaluate and summarize the changing or unchanging nature of state–society relations in the Philippines. However, the book ends with the list of statistical figures about Duterte’s campaign on the War on Drugs under a subsection heading “Ominous Future.”

Regardless of these issues, this book remains an indispensable reading for students of Filipino politics because, overall, it has an excellent coverage of the formation of the state-society relations and political regime dynamics in the Philippines.

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Note

1. An additional typo found is the publication year of Montesano's article appeared in *Asian Survey*. The correct year is 2004, not 2003 as listed on page 309, fn. 68.

References

- Anderson, Benedict. 1988. "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams." *New Left Review* 169.
- Montesano, Michel J. 2004. "The Philippines in 2003: Troubles, None of Them New." *Asian Survey* 44 (1): 93–101.