

Introduction

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Southeast Asian specialists may be pleasantly surprised at the extra-regional focus of this special issue of *Southeast Asian Studies*. Hence, there is a need for an explanation.

The original core of this collection is made up of papers presented at a panel on state formation organized as part of the Center for Excellence International Symposium on "Area Studies: Past Experiences and Future Visions." The symposium, which was held in January 2001, was sponsored by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies and the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University. Later, the organizers added papers by Patricio Abinales, Julian Go and Vincent Boudreau.

The essays re-examine the colonial legacies of the state in the postcolonial world. The center of analysis remains Southeast Asia, but given the colonial foundation of many of the region's states and the trans-regional nature of the colonial empires, we deemed it worthwhile to broaden the inquiry by looking at colonialism comparatively. Three kinds of comparison are employed here—cross-continental inquiry in which Southeast Asian experiences can be read against African examples; side-by-side examination of Southeast Asia countries; and reconsideration of the relationship between colonial and postcolonial states and their colonizers.

Two of the authors (Go and Boudreau) evaluate how states developed and ideologically legitimized their governance. Go notices the isomorphism between various postcolonial constitutions and the charters of their former colonizers, but also suggests that in a number of cases state leaders introduced revisions to suit local conditions. Boudreau looks at a later phase of state development in an attempt to understand why those who were marginal or played secondary roles during the early histories of postcolonial states eventually came to power and governed autocratically. His case studies are Burma under military rule, Indonesia under Suharto, and the Philippines under Marcos.

Mary Callahan's paper focuses on Burma, examining colonial state formation in the context of this Southeast Asian nation's earlier position as a peripheral province of British India. Burmese political development, she proposes, was not simply a local process but one inextricably tied to the policies and programs of the British administrative center in India. Abinales also considers a colonial state in relation to a colonial center; his spotlight is on how the American model of democratic political development was transformed in the

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Philippines by what Oliver Wolters referred to as “localization.” He argues that confronted with this mutation, colonial officials tried to demonstrate that parts of the Filipinized colonial state showed traces of the American ideal, while at the same time distancing themselves from its Filipino features.

Geographically, the paper by William Reno may appear out of place. It looks at violence and the pursuit of economic resources by quasi-state and private armed forces following the breakdown of national states in Africa. If we shift to a comparative lens, however, the African cases highlight some shared experiences with Southeast Asia, notably the role played by coercion in the formation of states during and after the colonial era. Reno’s paper alerts us to more comparative possibilities, given the overarching imperial frame that once dominated the nations of Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa. For example, state breakdown and the proliferation of “private armies” in Africa find resonance in Burma immediately after independence, when the *tatmadaw* fought other armed groups for political control, and in the peripheries of present-day Indonesia and the Philippines, where the state is but one of many armed forces.

Violence is at the heart of many of these stories. The papers of Boudreau, Reno, and Callahan are indicative of how many postcolonial states were particularly shaped by the violence of their colonial predecessors. Callahan puts it aptly when she describes how the British use of violence “as the currency of politics [established] a legacy that helps in part to explain the unusually repressive nature of state activities in postcolonial Burma today.” The Burmese *tatmadaw* and the Nigerian military’s propensity to rule by force can be traced to the British colonial era, while the Indonesian and Philippine militaries were similarly legatees of the brutality of Dutch and American colonial rule and the nationalist and radical resistance they spawned. This is not to deny attempts by these states or their colonial mentors to legitimize their respective political authority. Go’s exploration of postcolonial constitutions in Africa and Asia, as well as Abinales’ examination of a bureaucrat-scholar’s effort to account for the unexpected outcome of the American colonial project, show the concern national and colonial state leaders alike had in broadening the bases of their governance.

These papers testify that the thread connecting the colonial to the postcolonial remains resilient. The past continues to define the present, and one underlying theme of these papers is the need for more scholarly investigation into how states are formed in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. It is the authors’ as well as the editors’ hope that this volume can contribute to that effort.

List of Contributors

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Julian Go is assistant professor at the Department of Sociology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He presently is an Academy Scholar at the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies at Harvard University where, among other things, he is preparing a book manuscript tentatively titled *Transcultured States: Elite Political Culture in Puerto Rico and the Philippines under US Colonial Rule*.

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