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<Book Review>

Kusaka Wataru

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between the many laudable actions monks have undertaken, such as spearheading relief efforts after Nargis devastated the Delta and defying the military during the “Saffron Revolution,” and the hateful rhetoric and incitements to violence monks have unleashed upon Muslims. Brac de la Perrière notes that there is no contradiction: monks, whose prestigious position was assured during the years of military rule, are uneasy about what the democratic transition may mean for their place in a changing Burma, and all of their actions are so many soundings as to how they may retain or even augment their authority in what she refers to as “the new game.”

In his brief but passionate closing essay, “To Be Burmese Is Not (Only) Being Buddhist,” Robinne bewails the trend toward rigidifying rather than effacing ethnic divisions, and divisions based on religion, that appears to be proceeding apace in Burma. He notes how the hopelessly complex variety of identity cards tangles together ethnicity and religion, such that being Muslim is assumed to mean that someone is Indian, although they might well be of Chinese origin. Christians among ethnic minorities, meanwhile, fracture into competing congregations while finding it hard to amalgamate across ethnic lines. Indeed, “Kachin” consciousness waxes and wanes: the period from the signing of a ceasefire in 1994 until its abrogation by the military in 2011 saw a reversion to less encompassing notions of community, whereas intensified warfare, as continues up to the present, heightens a sense of “Kachin” solidarity. Yet Christians, while subject to military attack, do not suffer the sorts of rhetorical attack, in addition to physical violence, that Muslims suffer so much in today’s Burma. Robinne remarks, sadly, that such attacks are not actually anything new in Burma: Muslims have simply been singled out as the latest target.

The two books under review differ inasmuch as the volume edited by Gravers and Ytzen is intended as a handbook to bring all interested readers up to speed on Burma’s many challenges—their contexts, their origins, their recent vagaries—whereas that edited by Egreteau and Robinne addresses specific subjects in more scholarly depth. Each book has its uses. Together, they provide a panoramic and clear-eyed, if cautionary, view of a country facing daunting problems, no matter how great the relief we all feel at its recent shift from military to civilian rule.

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Tulong: An Articulation of Politics in the Christian Philippines

SOON CHUAN YEAN

Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2015, xvii+275pp.

The dominant analytical framework of elite rule in the Philippine local politics has been the patron-client relationship and machine politics in which politicians provide *tulong* (help) to the poor and

the poor return the debt with their votes. Criticizing the dominant view of pragmatic and functional exchange of material benefits as being too narrow, Soon Chuan Yean argues that the relationship between politicians and ordinary people entails a moral and religious dimension in which the poor have agency to negotiate with politicians from the bottom up. His methodology to support his argument is in-depth fieldwork to explore “the clients’” viewpoints based on their everyday struggle in Tanauan City, Batangas.

Chapter 1, “Layering the Level of *Tulong* (Help) from the Peasantry,” examines the “Janus-faced” characteristics of the patron-client relationship in Tanauan. The local political landscape is very similar to the arguments of patron-client relations and machine politics. Local politicians subordinate and manipulate the poor through material benefits, fraud, violence, and coercion. However, moral order also exists between them, in which the poor negotiate with the elites. Even though the poor receive help from the elites, they are not always subordinated to their patrons because the poor scrutinize politicians’ *loob* (inner being) and authenticity of *tulong*. Through such moral judgment, the poor determine whether they support a politician, receive benefits without supporting him/her, or cast a vote for a rival politician.

Chapter 2, “The Research Setting,” introduces the physical landscape of the main field site, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City, and how the author collected data as a Malaysian researcher. The chapter also describes how ordinary people in the villages struggle for everyday subsistence.

Chapter 3, “Reaching the Popular,” explores the moral order between politicians and ordinary people beyond a mechanical exchange of money and votes by examining the discourse of development in local politics. For local politicians, money is not sufficient to win the hearts and support of ordinary people. They are required to project their *loob* as righteous and *tulong* as unselfish sacrifice within the framework of moral order while blurring the hierarchical gap between the rich and poor in order to capture the sentiments of the people. In other words, politicians and constituents actively negotiate within the moral order.

Chapter 4 “Locating a Language of Emotion in Popular Politics,” discusses how ordinary people scrutinize whether politicians’ help comes sincerely from their *loob*. Only when ordinary people believe in the righteousness of politicians, the latter’s act (*gawa*) is recognized as *tulong*. For ordinary people to have the ability to appropriately scrutinize acts of politicians, *lakaran* (journey) and *sariling sikap* (self-initiative) to discipline and purify their *loob* is important. The negotiation of *loob* between a politician and ordinary people produces different outcomes. When ordinary people feel harmonization of *loob* transcending the hierarchical gap, they are emancipated from *utang* (debt). On the contrary, if harmonization of *loob* is not achieved, a politician’s acts are not recognized as *tulong*. This is the situation of *pulitilka* (politics) equated with spoils and blank promises in the game of personal interests.

Chapter 5, “Religious Ideas in the Politics of Moral Order,” explores the religious background of moral politics over *tulong*. Ordinary people associate *tulong* from God with *tulong* from a politi-

cian. They believe that those who help the needy along a *matuwid na landas* (straight path) will be blessed with *liwanag* (light), and those who reach *liwanag* must circulate this *liwanag* through their sacrifice of giving *tulong*. Such mutual help represents equality of people before God and breaks down the hierarchy. In the religious framework, politicians are morally required to act as Christlike leaders who are willing to sacrifice themselves for the salvation of the weak from miseries, without any vested interests. Ordinary people's ultimate aim in submitting themselves to a politician is not any material gain but freedom from darkness and constructing a society where everyone is treated equally.

The Conclusion emphasizes that ordinary people's submission to a saintlike patron is a strategy to escape from the debtor's position. Therefore, the author concludes that "politics of *tulong* is a process of negotiation of power to transform the patron-client relations into an equilibrium of the *loob*" (p. 240).

I believe that the book makes three major contributions to Philippine political studies. First, Soon radically reexamines the interest politics of material transactions between politicians and the poor from the perspective of moral politics based on a religious worldview. This does not mean that previous studies on the patron-client relationship entirely ignore its moral aspects, but they emphasize that the poor who receive help from a politician inevitably embrace *utang na loob* (debt of inner being) as a moral obligation to be paid back in the form of political support. In contrast, Soon insists that even though politicians are superordinate to the poor in interest politics, the poor actually have the agency to force politicians to provide sincere help to the needy in moral politics.

Second, Soon makes his argument convincing by introducing the unique analysis that bridges studies on local politics and folk Catholicism. The two topics have been separately discussed by scholars in different fields, and this division has prevented scholars from fully exploring the moral and religious aspects that characterize interaction between local elites and the poor. For the marginalized, the choice of asking help from a politician or God in order to overcome everyday hardships would be analogous but not the same, because God is perfect while politicians are often dubious. The difference gives moral power to the poor to scrutinize politicians and induce them to behave morally.

Third, with the religious analysis, Soon successfully sheds light on the emancipatory moment in moral politics. He disintegrates the concept of *utang na loob*, which has been analyzed to highlight the poor's submission to elites. Rejecting the dominant view, he points out the tension between *utang* and *loob*: while the former is associated with the economic debt that subordinates the poor, the latter is marked by the poor's desire to attain an authentic self, namely, freedom. Help from an ambitious and devious politician further subordinates the needy, but *tulong* from a politician with good *loob* can lead to a harmonization of *loob* that transcends the hierarchy of a patron-client relationship. Therefore, even though ordinary people are trapped in a vertical patron-client relationship, their behavior and decision to seek freedom of *loob* can realize horizontal mutu-

ality in moral politics.

Considering that Philippine political studies have been dominated by various versions of elite democracy arguments such as patron-client relations, machine politics, and patrimonialism, these findings of the book are a great contribution, especially in highlighting the moral agency of the poor that challenges the elites' control. However, I cannot help questioning whether the freedom of *loob* in moral politics can really be emancipation for the poor.

First, I regret that Soon does not further elaborate the complicated interaction between moral politics over the definition of "good" and interest politics over the distribution of resources. Freedom of *loob* in moral politics means neither economic emancipation nor the disappearance of social hierarchy in interest politics. I wonder whether the voting behavior or "resistance" of the poor who seek salvation of *loob* has had any impact on improving unequal distribution of wealth or paradoxically perpetuated the elite rule that exploits them. If the latter is the case, freedom of the *loob* that the poor enjoy as a result of "resistance" in moral politics has an ironic implication for interest politics.

Second, although Soon evaluates the poor's appreciation of moral leadership as "resistance," it may actually signify penetration of the elites' hegemony over them. We are familiar with cases where ambitious politicians exploit moral discourses and images to woo votes of the poor. Sometimes the poor are skeptical over politicians' morality but still support them in order to maximize their own economic benefit. However, if the poor truly appreciate the moral discourses and behaviors of ambitious politicians, it may imply that the poor are actually subjugated by the latter's hegemony. I am afraid it might be a paradox that while Soon tries to figure out the agency of the poor, his study might implicate their further hegemonic subjugation.

Finally, the poor cannot always enjoy the initiative in moral politics, especially at the national level. The urban middle classes who uphold the morality of neoliberalism totally criticize the patron-client relationship as a corruption that has damaged national development. They believe that hard-working taxpayers are morally superior to the poor, who are dependent on handouts from corrupt politicians. Moreover, the state's and NGOs' attempts to uplift the poor through moral education via conditional cash transfer programs assume the cause of poverty is the poor's lack of morality. Against the moral marginalization, the poor may be utilizing another form of moral discourse that even rejects a patron-client relationship. For instance, in the 2016 presidential election the number of poor that supported Rodrigo Duterte, who appealed the moral discourse of discipline, was bigger than those who voted for Jejomar Binay, who exploited morality in the patron-client relationship. It needs careful examination if many of the poor only avoided Binay who seemed to have a dubious *loob* or entirely rejected traditional politics based morality of patron-client relationship.

As a scholar who also works on moral politics in the Philippines, I attempted a critical engagement with the new findings of the book, but I know that some of the criticisms I have made in this review are beyond the scope of the book and must not lower its value. I expect that studies on

moral politics in the Philippines will further develop from the book, which will give us a new understanding of Philippine politics beyond the elite democracy arguments.

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Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America

CHRISTINE BACAREZA BALANCE

Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, xviii+230pp.

Tropical Renditions by Christine Bacareza Balance tracks the sounding of Filipino America through its social and cultural geographies of popular music. These geographies traverse three conceptual boundaries that have long constricted the critical understanding of popular music and culture from the United States to (and through) the Philippines: the geopolitical distinction between nation-states; the sensorial separation of visual and sonic forms of cultural production; and the social-aesthetic divisions of music-making as creation, interpretation, and imitation. Assuming a conceptual stance of “disobedient listening,” Balance redraws these boundaries by resisting conclusions made by two discourses dominant in racial-cultural politics. The first, a holdover from imperial colonialism, reads Filipino music as mere mimicry through the lenses of visibility and authenticity. The second is its antithesis: a nationalist project that seeks to render Filipino culture visible through a formalistic categorization of its content as culturally distinctive. Rather than parse what Filipinoness means in light of this essentialist problematic, Balance instead tunes into what is made as Filipino in America through the performative, improvisatory, and participatory, in translocal and alternative spaces of community that continually “[unsettle] dominant discourses of race, performance, and U.S. popular music” (p. 26).

To accomplish this, Balance analyzes four case studies frequently misread or unread by colonial as well as nationalist perspectives on Filipino American popular music. The first chapter is a profile of Invisibl Skratch Piklz, a turntablist-DJ collective from the Bay Area whose futuristic musical aesthetic and artistic branding resist direct reference to their Filipino heritage. The second chapter contemplates karaoke from two disparate ends of Filipino American musical labor—performance art and social activity at house parties—to foreground its ability to generate alternative spaces of socialization and vocal pedagogy. The third chapter explores the musical oeuvre of the renowned Filipino American writer Jessica Hagedorn, whose collaboration with the multiracial and multi-genre collective the West Coast Gangster Choir produced a rich rock ‘n’ roll poetics of Third World immigrant subjectivity in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the final chapter, these themes of translocality, sociability, and performativity are located in two cultural histories of Pinoise