

SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

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Editorial Note

Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 10, No. 2, August 2021, pp. 197-198.

(<Special issue>“Faces of Local Transformation: Policy Coalitions and Socio-economic Development in the Philippines,” edited by Takagi Yusuke)

How to Cite:

Takagi, Yusuke. Editorial Note. In “Faces of Local Transformation: Policy Coalitions and Socio-economic Development in the Philippines,” edited by Takagi Yusuke, special issue, *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, August 2021, pp. 197-198.

Link to this article:

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Faces of Local Transformation: Policy Coalitions and Socio-economic Development in the Philippines

Editorial Note

Recalling the period right after the 2016 national elections in the Philippines, I cannot forget the disappointment of a friend who flew from Manila to Tokyo for a short stay. As a student studying pockets of efficacy in Philippine politics, whose gloomy picture has been highlighted by other scholars, I scrambled to convince her that the country had achieved a series of policy reforms that one administration could hardly dismantle. However, my efforts were in vain. The conversation stayed in my mind for a long time and pushed me to consider a new perspective on Philippine politics.

The 2016 election was indeed a great starting point for reconsidering our perspective on Philippine politics. Newly elected President Rodrigo Duterte was apparently a typical reminder of local bosses whose stories have been compiled and discussed for many years within the circles of academia and investigative journalists. The victory of Leni Robredo as vice president, however, rejected any black-and-white judgment on Philippine politics. Her late husband had been a symbol of reform at the local level in restored Philippine democracy, and research on civil society mushroomed after the Philippine democratization in 1986. The cruel picture presented by President Duterte and the rosy picture symbolized by the late husband of Vice President Robredo are at opposite ends of the spectrum of Philippine local politics.

To begin with, research team members got together at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) in March 2017 and sought pockets of efficacy or bright spots in local politics. At the second meeting, at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, in July 2017, I explained the idea of policy coalitions to shed new light on Philippine politics, and we discussed several examples of bright spots in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. At the last meeting at GRIPS in March 2018, we discussed the findings. The contributors submitted their drafts and revised them through a peer review process. The results form the chapters of this special issue.

In the first chapter, Takagi Yusuke reviews existing literature on local politics in the Philippines and proposes the concepts of coalition politics and policy coalitions to appreciate the role of human agency in making a difference in various areas, rather than presenting snapshots of success stories.

The next four chapters are detailed case studies on local development. Chapter 2 captures the dynamics of how local leadership sought business-friendly governance and achieved economic growth in San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte. Chapter 3 scrutinizes the politics of disciplinarian leadership to achieve eco-friendly local governance and the continuous efforts of reform policy by successive mayors in Marikina City, National Capital Region. Chapter 4 studies the endeavor of a governor to eradicate poverty and insurgencies by promoting ecotourism in Bohol, Central Visayas Region. Meanwhile, Chapter 5 shows a different face of the military in “governing” Sulu, where the military engaged in civil-military operations and brought about a certain stability.

Last but not least, let me recognize those who helped us make this project possible. First, as an editor, I would like to appreciate each contributor and participant of the workshops held in Tokyo and Kyoto. Aside from the contributors to the current volume, I appreciate the participation and substantial contributions by Marilen Danguilan, Marites D. Vitug, Miriam Grace Go, Romel Dongeto, Danica Aisa P. Ortiz, Nenita Dalde, Ma. Aurora Quilala, Arnold Alamon, and Orville Ballitoc. Without your insights and understanding, we could not have completed this project. I would like to recognize the administrative support provided by Kawamura Akiko and Fukuma Ritsuko of GRIPS. I am also grateful to Carol Hau for helping us to organize the workshop in Kyoto. I am grateful to those who helped us in the review process with their tough but constructive comments. I also appreciate Nathan Badenoch, Shitara Narumi, and unanimous reviewers for their guidance and valuable input.

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