



## REVIEWS

Julian Go and Anne L. Foster, eds. 2005. *The American colonial state in the Philippines: Global perspectives*. Pasig City: Anvil Publishing Inc. With foreword by Patricio N. Abinales. First published 2003 by Duke University Press. 316 pp.

Patricio N. Abinales's foreword to the Philippine edition of *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives*, with its claim of four "first" for the book, might as well serve as the book's campaign statement for an entry in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. In his foreword, Abinales claims that the book is the first to compare American colonialism with other colonialisms in Asia, the first to put the Philippines alongside other American possessions and compare colonial state formation with the (re)building of the American state itself, the first substantive critique of American exceptionalism "from below" and from an "Asian location," and the first multidisciplinary volume on the American colonial state in the Philippines.

A reader not conversant with American exceptionalism and the historiography of imperial America and colonial Philippines cannot counter or affirm these claims, or if indeed they are true, discern their significance. Only in reading Julian Go's introductory chapter will dabblers in history have a fuller understanding of Abinales's claims. For Go, the book "marks the first systematic attempt to take stock of [the] moves away from the [American] exceptionalist narrative and toward

critical studies of the [Philippine] colonial state and colonial governance” (16).

The American exceptionalist narrative asserts that “the United States was not quite an empire. If it was an empire at all, it was a special one. For unlike European empires, the U.S. enterprise was an exercise in effective benevolence, bringing to those whom it touched the benefits of Anglo-American civilization” (2). Other historians have called this America’s “immaculate conception” of the Philippine colonial state, that is, that it was conceived without sin. There is, however, an inherent paradox in this claim. As pointed out by Go, “the exceptionalist paradigm is possible only through comparison and contrast between the United States and other imperial powers or processes. The larger imperial field was the condition of existence for the paradigm that has for so long dominated thinking on U.S. imperialism and colonialism” (23). Yet in reviewing the historiography of US colonial rule in the Philippines, Go showed that previous scholars have failed to take into account this particular context and thus there is a dearth of “sustained comparative investigations or studies of cross-colonial links, imitative logics, and inter-imperial debates” (24).

Go then argued that this research gap can be filled if scholars will employ a “global perspective” in studying the US colonial rule in the Philippines. To compare the American colonial state in the Philippines with other (though not necessarily similar) colonial endeavours of other imperialists during the early 20th century is to construct the global perspectives that undergird the novelty of this book. This effort is evident in the seven essays that comprise the book: Paul A. Kramer’s comparison of British and American use of race as instantiated in the discourse of Anglo-Saxonism; Anne L. Foster’s study of opium and colonial policies in Southeast Asia; Donna J. Amoroso’s comparison of American and British approaches to the “Moro problem;” Abinales’s study of the struggle between the American colonialists who either belong to the “localist, patronage-driven, and compromise prone interests of the [machine politics]” or to the “federalist, ‘professional,’ and pro-autonomy reformers of the [Progressive Movement]” (149); Go’s study of American state building and political education in Puerto Rico and the Philippines; Paul Barclay’s comparison of how the Japanese imperialists treated the *genjūmin* (wild barbarian) in Taiwan and how the Americans dealt with the Igorots; and Vince Boudreau’s

comparison of Dutch, British, French, and American colonial rule and the kind of social resistance they begot.

Besides deflating the American exceptionalist discourse, what purpose(s) will be served in gazing at the US colonial rule in the Philippines through a global perspective? Go points to the global perspective's heuristic value: that it will serve "as an exciting and fruitful approach for understanding colonial state building and governance in the Philippines" (25), that it will allow "a more holistic understanding of tensions and complications that the U.S. regime of power in the Philippines confronted" (26), and that it will "highlight the specificity or generality of U.S. colonial-state formation in the Philippines" (26). This is expected only of works that deals with historical comparison, which, "in practice, the importance ... will more often be measured by the stimulus they give to subsequent researches" (Grew 1980, 773). This is then the double burden of this pioneering work. It is not enough that it was able to break new grounds with its advocacy of global perspective in studying American colonial rule in the Philippines; it must have progenies to show that indeed it led the way in developing this particular field.

And in works dealing with historical comparisons, "one seeks explanations and generalizations but not universal laws" (Grew 1980, 773). However, given all the comparisons and the global perspectives contained in this book, one expects it to offer a panoramic view that will help the reader understand not just the exigencies of imperial America but the logics of empires. To say that the "rise of the modern empires brought with it inter- and intra-imperial dynamics that were more subtle—specifically, new circuits of exchange and movement, constituted by the flow of goods, people, and ideas within and among imperial domains" (20) is only half the task. The other half is to synthesize the seven essays into a coherent conclusion to demonstrate this thesis. Without this, one is left to wonder whether this thesis, whether the use of global perspectives in dissecting American power, is relevant in understanding America's current dominance in world affairs. Can we talk today of inter- and intra-imperial dynamics when there is just the American empire?

Perhaps this is the reason why Abinales, in his foreword, talks of the current "de facto colonial state-building of [the United States] in Iraq and Afghanistan" as "echoes of similar undertakings in a not so-distant colonial past." Echoes are reflected sounds. If the book offered a concluding explanation on the workings of empires gleaned from the

seven essays, Abinales's "echoes" might prove to be the unceasing screeching, hammering, pounding sound of the perpetual machine of power called empire.— **JOEL F. ARIATE JR.**, UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, THIRD WORLD STUDIES CENTER, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES DILIMAN

## REFERENCE

Grew, Raymond. 1980. The case for comparing histories. *American Historical Review* 85 (4): 763-778.

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**Urvashi Butalia, ed.** *The disenfranchised: Victims of development in Asia*. Hong Kong: ARENA Press, 2004. 354 pp.

The authors of *The Disenfranchised: Victims of Development in Asia* thoroughly demonstrate how development, rather than eliminating poverty and bringing general prosperity to Asia's populations, has often exacerbated problems for people and the environment. This book is the second volume of a previous publication released by the Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA), which seeks to document the harmful consequences of development in various Asian countries. The authors examine development's impact in Indonesia, Singapore, Burma, Taiwan, Bangladesh, and Vietnam.

The elites of Asia accepted the Western-originated development discourse and pursued high economic growth, rapid industrialization, acquisition of high technologies, modernization of agriculture, and so forth. In pursuit of development goals, states and corporations used large amounts of natural resources and human labor. However, the development discourse has too often been accepted uncritically, including its key assumption that the "underdeveloped" peoples of the world are inferior to and need to be uplifted by the superior "developed" societies. Top-down policies for development have led to the massive dispossession of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands, displacement of peasant communities, violent repression against those who resist, adverse impact on women, and alarming environmental destruction. All too often, the benefits of development have ended up in the hands of a few. Indeed, "elite-oriented, North-serving developmentalist discourses are designed not only to secure consent to