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The recent election of President Rodrigo Duterte has puzzled many casual observers of Filipino politics. How could this thuggish provincial mayor make it to the highest office in the republic? Why wasn't his admitted involvement in extra-judicial killings immediately disqualifying? How can voters tolerate his misogyny and homophobia? Why would anyone vote for a politician seemingly so hostile to democracy, human rights, and a free press? How was he able to serve as mayor for so many years? Isn't he a threat to the health of democratic institutions in the Philippines?

While published three years before "The Punisher's" election, Pak Nung Wong's *Post-Colonial Statecraft in South East Asia: Sovereignty, State Building and the Chinese in the Philippines* helps to answer many of these questions. Wong is especially adept at offering an analysis that explains the importance of regional strongmen in the country's political system without moralizing or condemning them. The book successfully shows that the Philippines' unique layers of regional/traditional chieftainship, Spanish and American colonial arts of governance, and Cold War counter-insurgency campaigns created a mestizo nation-state. This complicated post-colonial state relies on individuals willing to govern in a constant state of exception. Wong terms this process "frontier governmentality," arguing that strongmen have provided order in times of crisis and that such crises have slowly extended state influence. Rather than a threat to the central state system, Wong holds that the violent, corrupt, and even rebellious regional strongmen of Filipino provinces are essential in expanding state sovereignty into outlying corners of the vast archipelago. Thrown into this diverse and complicated mix are the Chinese, as over-seas settlers, as regional business networks, and as the large, powerful, and wealthy empire just across the South China Sea. Wong utilizes insights from history, political science, ethnography, and Foucauldian discourse analysis in this tightly structured 260-page monograph. Outside of those interested in Filipino and Southeast Asian politics, the book will be of use to a number of audiences, including students of China as a regional power, democratic institution building, and theorists of the state.

Post-Colonial Statecraft is composed of nine chapters. Each chapter is firmly grounded in Wong's insightful ethnographies, conducted in Cagayan province in the northeast corner of Luzon and informed by Wong's impressive command of theory (which he manages to render accessible to less theoretically inclined readers). Chapter one situates his case study in the unique context of Filipino history, with its historical layers of state formation. Wong argues that his study of regional strongmen will revise the idea of the Philippines as a "weak state" and show how these strongmen actually increase the power of the central state to monopolize real and symbolic violence. This chapter also holds that the Filipino state can contain China's economic influence. The second chapter introduces the Cagayan Valley with a historical survey from Marcos' declaration of martial law in 1972 to the end of Wong's research in 2009. Wong offers the metaphor of rhizomes to explain the province's power networks as lateral and entangled, as opposed to vertical and hierarchical. Wong presents a complicated portrait of China and the Chinese as alternately a source of capital, patrons of Marxist insurgency, and an alien group that controls multiple levers of power via inter-regional networks. The third chapter offers a comparison of the struggle between the state and strongmen in the Philippines and in Burma/Myanmar. The author's case-study finds that both states inherited culturally specific political practices as a result of previous colonial regimes: British divide and conquer in

Myanmar and American cooptation via the electoral system in the Philippines. Wong argues for a “reflexive historical sociology of post-colonial statecraft in South East Asia” that understands the state as working in the realms of discourse, institutional rituals, and creative strategies. We see Cagayan’s strongmen playing each of these roles throughout the rest of the book. The fourth chapter uses cultural anthropology’s technique of Thick Description (Wong even goes to a cock-fight in an homage to Geertz) to probe the power/knowledge structures, noting that they are firmly rooted in pre-colonial chieftain and clan practices. Chapter five is a dramatically different chapter from the rest of the book. In it the author compares Filipino anti-coup strategies with the history of military coups in Sub-Saharan Africa. The sustained discussion of Sierra Leone and Wong’s suggestions for exporting the Filipino model to Africa are the least successful sections of the book.

The next three chapters focus on specific aspects of post-colonial statecraft: techniques of discipline and surveillance, electoral politics, and discursive resistance to state justice. In each of these sections, Wong uses his impressive ethnographies of individuals ranging from the Sino-Filipino businessman/gangster/politicians and regional don Delfin Ting to impoverished farmers and small shop owners intimidated and/or seduced by the strongmen’s “guns, goons, and gold.” Importantly, Wong analyzes these practices with an objective eye and studiously avoids moralizing about abusive and exploitative practices. Considering that many of his informants are figures such as Delfin Ting and his rival clan, Wong’s restraint may be an issue of security as much as it is of academic rigor. That said, Wong’s tales of political violence during elections when armed men stand at polling stations, unhidden vote buying, and murderous clan vendettas are hair-raising. Yet ever the astute social scientist, Wong demonstrates how even brutal and thuggish behavior works in a culturally specific setting to create a legitimizing charisma. When fusing cultural and political analysis, Wong is at his best.

The final chapter neatly and concisely summarizes the book’s argument (Wong deserves much praise for the clarity of his prose, even when dealing with complicated post-structural theoretical constructions). *Post-Colonial Statecraft* holds that since the 1972 declaration of martial law following the Filipino military’s discovery of a shipload of small arms headed for the Marxist New People’s Army, the state has faced numerous social, economic, and military crises with a successful series of state-building initiatives. Most significantly, says Wong, electoral politics contains and buys off regional strongmen, thus turning potential threat into a method of extending state sovereignty into outlying provinces in the vast archipelago nation. Wong conceives of this strategy as “frontier governmentality.” The book concludes with an optimistic assessment of the ability of the Filipino state to respond to increased Chinese influence in the region.

An admirable book that deserves great praise, *Post-Colonial Statecraft* is not without some shortcomings. As mentioned, the chapter with the comparative analysis of Filipino and African coups lacks the strength of the rest of the other eight chapters. In contrast to that chapter, the section on Myanmar is quite strong and insightful, fitting nicely with the book’s argument about both state building and life as a neighbor of China. It was surprising that the Wong did not pursue a discussion of Indonesia. There are many parallels between the Philippines and Indonesia, making this missed opportunity rather frustrating, especially so since Joshua Oppenheimer’s films *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* have demonstrated how central Indonesian *preman* (from “free men” but really meaning gangster or thug) are to the functioning of the post-colonial Indonesian state, from Suharto’s mass murder of 1965-1966 to today’s intimidation of labor organizers on Sumatra’s palm oil plantations. Furthermore, a comparative

discussion of the Chinese populations in both Indonesia and the Philippines would help to theorize the position of this important ethnic minority in Southeast Asia. That said, Wong has written an impressive book that will reshape our understanding of strongmen in Southeast Asian politics, a conversation all the more important since the spike in bloody extra-judicial murders that followed the election of the foul-mouthed Duterte as head of this post-colonial state.

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