

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

The Armed Forces in Asia, by Olsen and Jurika

Review Author: Aileen S. Baviera

Philippine Studies vol. 36, no. 2 (1988) 260–263

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

cases could be presented more positively, as in the MSG analysis, there is no haphazard conclusion typical of ideological propaganda.

While the sequence of articles could be improved to give better continuity and cohesiveness to the issues in question, the book is still able to give the reader a unified idea of the major concerns. The magnitude of the problem leaves a note of despair, but also a note of hope in the rethinking of values by people practising technology. The challenge to reevaluate technologies and relate them to just and humane working practices is no easy task, and requires the contribution of both scientists and nonscientists. What should probably be more emphasized in the book is the role of the latter. The fate of technology is actually determined by politicians, economists, businessmen, and others. S&T develops through their support; S&T is used for their ends. It is, therefore, important for each member of society to realize the social responsibility each one carries. S&T should develop according to society's needs, and should be reintegrated with the culture. Above all, the actual practice of S&T can be influenced by Christian work ethics, by principles of justice, peace and integrity. Spelling out this commitment is the difficult part.

Ma. Assunta C. Cuyegkeng
Department of Chemistry
Ateneo de Manila University

THE ARMED FORCES IN CONTEMPORARY ASIAN SOCIETIES. Edited by Edward A. Olsen and Stephen Jurika, Jr. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Pres Inc., 1986. viii, 368 pages.

If the August 28 coup d'état in Manila led by Col. Gringo Honasan is to be at all credited with any achievement, perhaps its biggest contribution to the political situation in the country today is that it has helped sharpen focus on the issue of military roles in government.

The tradition of civilian supremacy in Philippine government was first undermined by the imposition of martial law in the country in 1972, and the subsequent close political partnership between the dictator Marcos on the one hand and his loyal troops and ominous intelligence network on the other. The subsequent expansion in the powers and functions of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the spillover of its influence into the political and economic arenas, and even the astounding growth in numbers of its members as well as officer corps have created new realities that have to be cautiously dealt with by the civilian leadership. The armed forces must now be recognized as a distinct power center, having a clear stake in local politics, anxious and, as

recent events have shown, extremely capable of pushing for recognition of its institutional interests.

Philippine martial law signalled the collapse of the much-touted (by the Americans) "showcase of democracy in Asia." In the rest of Asia, however, at one time or another and with few exceptions, military intervention in the supposedly civilian domain of government had long become quite commonplace.

Olsen and Jurika's *The Armed Forces in Contemporary Asian Societies* discusses the roles of the military in sixteen Asian countries, covering the three subregions of East, Southeast and South Asia. Each of the sixteen authors reflects on the history, present circumstances, and prospects of each country and delves into an analysis of the military, political, economic and cultural roles of their respective armed forces.

The authors and editors identify themselves as mostly affiliated with the faculties of such U.S. government and defense establishment institutions as the U.S. Air Force Academy, the Naval Postgraduate School, the Virginia Military Institute, the U.S. Naval Academy, the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Information Agency. Others belong to more independent academic institutions including the University of Georgia, University of Illinois, University of Miami, University of California Berkeley, Arizona State University and the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

Readers of this rather voluminous collection are reminded of the following past and present facts:

Japanese militarism will forever be etched into the annals of world history. In the rest of East Asia, the military dictatorships of Chun Doo Hwan in South Korea and Chiang Ching-kuo in Taiwan have of late been suffering tremendous pressure from both internal and external sources to effect meaningful democratization measures. North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, is technically still at war with the United States, as no peace treaty was effected following the 1950-53 war on the Korean peninsula. This partly explains its continued state of military preparedness. The People's Liberation Army of China, which played a key role not only during the communist-led national democratic revolution but also in postliberation mass mobilization campaigns, remains important albeit the least so in the order of priorities for the "Four Modernizations." The PLA, and its Vietnamese counterpart the PAVN, however, maintain utmost loyalty to the Communist Party and in this sense, while representing a more conservative line compared to the reformists at the helm, pose no real challenge to the civilian government. Civilian-military relations in these two socialist countries are moreover facilitated by interlocking directorates and close coordination

bequeathed by their revolutionary history.

The militaries of Thailand, Indonesia, and Burma continue to exercise a commanding influence over their respective societies since grabbing the political reins from civilians in 1932, 1965 and 1962 respectively. And while keeping a somewhat lower profile in Malaysia and Singapore, the extensive powers granted to the armed forces under the Internal Security Act are freely used to implement what one of the authors calls "Draconian" internal security policies, despite the virtual nonexistence of a military threat from either their internal communist movements or external enemies.

The Indian armed forces is the fourth largest in the world, and reserves its main blows for perceived external enemies China and Pakistan, while internal unrest and disturbance are primarily stifled by police and militia. India's civilian political leaders have a clearly defined authority over the troops. But in Pakistan and Bangladesh, both countries born out of civil strife and military conflict, the attempt to balance civil-military roles in government is impaired by the all-too-strong temptation to acknowledge the supremacy of the gun. Meanwhile, the government of Afghanistan is said to be totally dependent on Soviet support and military control of the country.

In the light of these realities, one is almost inescapably lured into asking: Did the Filipino people merely prove true to our Asian identity and environment when we likewise succumbed to the command of the military establishment—a power that, no matter how finely disguised, prettified or rationalized by constitutional subterfuge or legalese, stems from "the barrel of a gun"?

The question can perhaps be rephrased: Is there something in the Asian *psyche* or culture or even the prevailing socioeconomic conditions that predetermines Asian proclivity and responses to militarism? Unfortunately, this book offers no such explanation. Some of its authors impute such a phenomenon more to the histories, external environment and the propensity of regional and global superpowers to intervene. It is difficult to discern common threads of analysis among the articles collected here, as each of the contributors has his distinct approach to the subject matter. The editors also admit failure to come up with a concluding chapter that would integrate the contents of the book. In lieu of a concluding chapter, Sheldon Simon's piece on *Regional Threat Environments in Asia* tries to provide the regional, or rather, subregional perspectives on the roles of the military in Asia. Simon in fact begins his chapter with the statement "To search for a single Asian security paradigm is a fruitless enterprise."

Frankly, most of the authors quite unexpectedly displayed nonpartisan objectivity in addressing the theme of authoritarianism in military or military-dominated regimes, and the resultant restrictions on freedom and democracy

this entails. Mention is also made of the crisis of legitimacy facing military regimes, and their difficulty in amassing popular support. The perceived lack of legitimacy is largely due to the fact that most Asian armed forces are organized and directly oriented towards internal security or the preservation of regime stability against threats from domestic opposition and insurgency—in many cases stemming from minority ethnic groups.

The Philippine case illustrates how a highly politicized military, under martial rule performed a variety of roles from civic action to anti-insurgency to judicial functions and even dispersal of demonstrations, breaking of trade union picket lines and dismantling of squatter settlements. For the impoverished masses of Filipinos it is therefore seen largely as an instrument of elite dominance; author William E. Berry, Jr. failed to zero in on this aspect.

The significance of this work is of course not limited to providing a comparative perspective with which to view the growth of military influence in Philippine government and other Asian governments. Outside of considering the subject matter of military roles, glimpses into the development of Asian political systems and what has been the function of external conditioning factors, principally superpower intervention, are provided the reader.

It is in discussing superpower intervention that the authors unmask their bias. While admitting the influence of the United States and other former colonialist powers on the development and expansion of the Asian armed forces, there is no allusion to direct American participation in militarization of the region, particularly during the Korean and Indochina conflicts and the period of escalation of the Cold War. The available data point to the overwhelming supremacy of the United States in the region in terms of American military capabilities and the scale and strength of its influence among allies vis-a-vis a *potential* Soviet threat obscurely felt by the Asian countries. This is somewhat inconsistent with the statement of one of the authors that "The Soviet Union insists on an international managerial role equal to that of the United States," serving to confound our attempts to read accurately the security situation in the region.

As is usually the case with collections of comparative articles, what the book lacks in depth it more than compensates for in expanse. Its usefulness as a quick reference guide warrants no criticism.

Aileen S.P. Baviera
Department of Political Science
University of the Philippines