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**Wataru Kusaka's**

*Moral Politics in the Philippines: Inequality, Democracy, and the Urban Poor*

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The scope of *Pan-Asian Sports* is wide but needs further explanation because, although Huebner justifies beginning it in 1913, the year the FECCG was founded, there is little explanation for ending the book with the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran. There is also the obvious limitation of focusing on elite perspectives, although Huebner admits to this bias early in the introduction. Still, the focus is justifiable given his sources and conceptual framework. He also analyzes the social impact of the games by looking at ticket sales (when sources are available) and press coverage (broadsheet, radio, and television), but concedes that such sources cannot paint a complete picture of the effectiveness of symbols, ceremonies, and speeches.

Huebner's book provides insights into the circumstances and motivations of the people who decide when, where, and how to host international sports events. In Asian sports, the symbols and rhetoric employed in the FECCG, the WAG, and the Asian Games are shown to be products of the asymmetrical power relations between Asian and Western (and later on, among different Asian) elite sports actors. Huebner's book foregrounds sporting events in Asia, where the historical relevance of sports remains to be fully explored, making *Pan-Asian Sports* a welcome addition to the ongoing conversation on international sports history.

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WATARU KUSAKA

## **Moral Politics in the Philippines: Inequality, Democracy, and the Urban Poor**

Singapore: NUS Press; Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2017. 341 pages.

*Moral Politics in the Philippines: Inequality, Democracy, and the Urban Poor* has been a long-anticipated book since its Japanese version came out in 2013. Its author, Wataru Kusaka, obtained his postgraduate degree at the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies, Kyushu University, but his first exposure to the Philippines was doing volunteer work in Leyte as an undergraduate student. He also attended graduate classes at the University of the Philippines-Diliman (266). But above all, it was his engagement with

the people in the slums of Barangay Old Capitol Site, Quezon City, where he found his passion and formed his insights about the Philippines.

Kusaka's work provides a theoretical proposition for rejecting the loose populist and elite democracy approaches in interpreting Philippine democracy. He highlights the interclass antagonism and the ambiguous attitude of the middle class toward the poor. He celebrates the demise of elite democracy and the disabling of clientelist politics among the urban poor (31), two of the main constitutive political institutions in Philippine society, thus allowing the poor to have more freedom and become less dependent on politicians in asserting their political rights. However, Kusaka criticizes the revival of "moral nationalism," which he defines as consisting of "attempts to create a common enemy by encouraging antagonism toward 'the elite' (referring to the traditional politicians or *trapo*) in the civic sphere and toward 'the rich' (referring to groups of people that deprive the livelihood of the poor, which may not belong to the *trapo*) in the mass sphere, thereby constructing the 'people' that transcends class lines" (277). Even though he does not differentiate the term "moral nationalism" from the usual definition of nationalism, Kusaka regards moral nationalism as arising from a "hegemonic practice that calls for 'moral solidarity of the nation'" (238). His identification of the initial rise of moral nationalism, however, is not clear. It perhaps arose during Pres. Joseph Estrada's administration, when Philippine society was most clearly divided along class lines (chapter 3), and its revival came during Pres. Benigno "Noy" Aquino's term (chapter 6).

Most challenging is identifying Kusaka's definition of "civic" and "mass" spheres. He offers this lengthy explanation on these concepts

[Civic and mass spheres] represent the living environments and discourse spaces of the middle and impoverished classes, respectively—a division engendered by the language, education, media, and livelihood gaps . . . [These environments and spaces] engender an antagonistic "we/they" relationship between these dual public spheres, one drawn between classes and the other between moralities. The class demarcation line, which derives from the unequal distribution of economic, occupational, educational, cultural and other resources, is fairly fixed due to divisions among people . . . [But] the moral demarcation line derives from differing concepts of good and evil, and is thereby more fluid. (5–6)

*Moral Politics* is critical of this emergence of dual spheres, which “creates groups that are seen as either ‘good’ or ‘evil’ and draw[s] a demarcation line between the two” (1), and the consequent antagonistic relations between the middle and lower classes that are detrimental to democracy (5). It argues that the good–evil dichotomy, engaged in by both the middle class and urban poor, includes the struggle for hegemony (13–14). Kusaka does not define “moral politics” in specific terms but gives general characteristics of how both classes practice it (38–42). For the middle class, moral politics is characterized by, for example, “policy-based debate,” “accountability,” “transparency,” “good government,” and “rule of law” (38), as opposed to politics that deals in “corruption, cronyism, personality, and elite domination of the poor through clientelism” (39). For the urban poor, moral politics is denoted by “fairness without regard for wealth or [for] the poor, and on concern for and generosity toward those in need” (40) and respect for “‘dignity’ (*dangal*, *dignidad*, *pagkatao*)” (41) especially of the needy without depriving them of their means of making an honest livelihood.

Cutting across class relations and relying on the construction of these dichotomized discourses, Philippine politics brings about a society divided between a civic and a mass sphere. The struggle for hegemony between these spheres over moral politics has affected the quality of democracy that has been in place since the 1986 People Power and has concealed issues of social inequality, inefficiency of governance, and “interest politics,” or a politics defined by “domination and struggle over the distribution of resources” (237). Kusaka’s solutions to the Philippines’s problems with democracy involve enhancing the contact zone or “space where these two spheres partially interact—where disparate people and discourses encounter one another” (5), and creating agonism, a term borrowed from Chantal Mouffe (*On the Political*, 20; Routledge, 2005) that refers to “a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging there is no relational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents.”

Kusaka deftly leads readers to follow his argument in stages, accompanied with rich empirical data, as he uncovers the gaps in scholarship on Philippine politics. The introduction and chapter 1 explain how the analytical frameworks, approaches, and model provide the bases for his arguments (3–7). His approaches to social change do not rely on a

linear perspective. Instead, he recognizes the “fluid and contingent nature of antagonistic we/they relations (or the civic/mass sphere)” (3). Referring to works on constructivism such as those by Ernesto Laclau, Mouffe, and Antonio Gramsci, Kusaka’s approaches allow him to go beyond institutional politics. Kusaka derives much of his analysis and methods from discourse analysis and cultural politics. Chapter 2 describes the social conditions that create the civic–mass divide through the analysis of language (English versus Tagalog), media (English medium versus Tagalog medium), and living space (localization versus neoliberalism).

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are case studies that identify the “we/they” struggles for hegemony, focusing on People Power movements, elections, and urban governance, respectively. These case studies serve as “historical junctures” of moral nationalism—which was most salient during Estrada’s administration—and focus on the emergence of populism in the Philippines and how various attempts have been made in the contact zone to ameliorate moral division. Chapter 5 is the most interesting and substantial chapter. It narrates the nuances and discourses of the urban poor, their political ideals, notion of politics, everyday struggles in their livelihood, strategies for survival, and contestations with the state (such as the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority). It is ethnographically rich and gives the urban poor more agency and voice.

In chapter 6 Kusaka continues to analyze Philippine politics during the administrations of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Aquino, which saw the revival of “moral nationalism” that impeded politics based on populist schemata. The two administrations marked a period of unaddressed social inequality, poverty, and unequal urbanization under the rubric of neoliberalist agenda despite Aquino’s “Daang Matuwid” (Straight Path) reformist discourse. Chapter 7 offers a solution to further Philippine democratization by encouraging agonism to widen the space for communication and recognition of the plurality of discourses in the public sphere (256–59). To juxtapose the changing characters in Philippine politics and the continuation of moral nationalism between the civic and mass spheres, Kusaka inserts an addendum on Pres. Rodrigo Duterte’s administration. He argues that there is a new version of the discourse of moral nationalism characterized by “an ‘un-civic’ or social-bandit-like form of morality that aims to destroy existing systems and their vested interests in order to save the people even if by resorting to extra-judicial means” (261).

The distinctive feature of *Moral Politics* is that it is not purely a political science study. Kusaka utilizes a combination of cultural studies (popular media analysis, political jokes, and songs), urban studies, and anthropological perspectives in giving the informants agency in the analysis. This is the book's major contribution to Philippine studies.

The many facets of structural changes (or contingencies) that *Moral Politics* attempts to uncover also constitute the limitation of the book. The analyses in the arenas of Philippine history, popular media, urban and space politics, study of social movements, NGO politics, neoliberalism, and the field of education describe different aspects of change in Philippine society, but individually remain thin. Such is in contrast with chapter 5, where Kusaka gives a thick description of street vendors. This kind of ethnography is necessary for each of the enumerated arenas to convince readers about the utility of the book's new theoretical framework in explaining the ongoing shifts in Philippine politics. Although Kusaka's intention is to analyze the contingencies of Philippine politics as widely as possible to grasp the complexities of social relations deriving from the arenas mentioned above, perhaps it will be more convincing to focus on the ethnography and anthropology of street vendors and slums in Metro Manila, in which he has invested so much in terms of fieldwork, and thus develop a theoretical framework to explain social change in the Philippines.

*Moral Politics* is an important work for readers who seek to comprehend the complexities of post-1986 Philippine politics. It fills in gaps in scholarly knowledge by unearthing the discourses of the *masa* (masses) and the middle class and juxtaposes them vis-à-vis the structural changes within the processes of Philippine democratization. It steers the reader's attention toward pondering the idea that it is time to engage the Philippine "democratic problem" beyond the formal political realm and employ multidisciplinary perspectives in understanding people's social lives.

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