Review Article

The State and Institutions in Philippine Local Politics

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John T. Sidel, *Capital, Coercion, and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 225 pages.

Patricio N. Abinales, *Making Mindanao: Cotabato and Davao in the Formation of the Philippine Nation-State* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), 235 pages.

Studies on Philippine local politics have been dominated by cultural and society-centered structural approaches for a long time. Culturalists pick up cultural values as independent variables which define patterns of politics while society-centered structuralists explain it through social relations or structure. Key words of these approaches are "reciprocity," "utang na loob," "compadrazgo," "patron-client relationship," "extended-family," "faction," "landed-elites," etc.[1] In practical application, these two approaches are combined. This combination of cultural and society-centered structural approaches, which may simply be called the socio-cultural approach was revised by modernization theory which stressed the emergence of "new men" and "political machine."[2] However, the revision was made within the category of the sociocultural approach since it explains the new political pattern as the consequence of the transformation of the socio-economic situation.

Recently, two scholars, John T. Sidel and Patricio N. Abinales have proposed to pay more attention to the roles of the state and institutions rather than society and culture. This review article examines the major book of each of the authors in the context of studies on Philippine local politics and in particular within existing statist and institutionalist approaches in the discipline.

Re-emergence of the State in Political Analyses

The long time dominant socio-cultural approach shares a common perspective with Joel Migdal's "Strong Societies and Weak States" framework (Migdal, 1988). Migdal asserts the importance of social structure to understand patterns of politics. To explain why so many third world states are ineffective in accomplishing what their leaders expect, Migdal points out the weakness of state capability against societies. He assumes that there are struggles between state leaders and social organizations over the hegemony or dominance in a society. In his discussion, state leaders seek to mobilize people and resources and impose a standard set of rules, while social organizations try to keep their own rules in their bailiwicks. By giving much attention to social structure, Migdal asserts that non-state organizations try to keep their own dominance in such struggles. He argues that social control remains fragmented and social strongmen keep their influence by attending to the needs of the local population in most of third world countries.

The frustration with this explanation lies in its slim attention to the role of the state especially in terms of the elites' acquisition of power and wealth. One question usually raised to critique this framework is: "Is it only society that structures and determine political patterns?" or "Does the state not matter in the determination of political patterns?" In his landmark article, Paul Hutchcroft sharply addressed the role of the state in Philippine politics in this manner: "Access to the state apparatus remains the major avenue to private accumulation, and the quest for 'rent-seeking' opportunities continues to bring a stampede of favored elites and would-be favored elites to the gates of the presidential palace." (Hutchcroft, 1991: 414-415)

"Bossism": Monopoly of Coercive and Economic Resources

Sidel is one of the initiators of the "warlordism" argument about local politics. After the 1986 EDSA Revolution, Philippine media started to emphasize the continuity rather than the change in local

politics and to call local politicians either "warlords," "caciques," or "bosses." They stressed both the political violence and longevity of political families in some regions.[3] Sidel (1989) is regarded as the first author to use systematically the concept of "warlordism" as developed in his case study of Cavite politics. He uses the term "bossism" in order to combine state-centered structural approach and this "warlordism" argument. Sidel disregards the role of "the sociocultural legacies of Spanish colonial rule" and the "supposed salience of patron-client relations" in defining political patterns. He criticizes the two conventional frameworks represented by the patron-client relations school and its revision by modernization theory; and the neo-Marxist tradition which emphasizes classes and the control over the state apparatus by oligarchs with their largely independent base of private wealth.

In response to the patron-clientelism school, Sidel points out the existence of coercion, especially violence, which is the opposite of reciprocal relations assumed by this framework. In addition, he also mentions the longevity and resiliency of local political families as counterfoil to the argument of the emergence of "new men." Sidel doubts if clientelism has ever existed in traditional Philippine society and asserts that it is a historical myth. On the other hand, he also questions the argument of oligarchic control over the state. Arguing that the oligarchs could not have established their economic power independently of the state apparatus, Sidel further points out that even land accumulation was made possible through access to state resources such as finance and regulatory powers.

Instead of socio-cultural factors, Sidel emphasizes two state-centered structural factors for the explanation of local power. First is the institutional structure of the state which was introduced during the American colonial era. This institutional structure is characterized by the subordination of the state apparatus to elected officials, which enables them to monopolize the coercive and economic resources of the state. Second is a phase of capitalist development, so-called "primitive accumulation," where a "significant section of the population loses direct control over the means of production and direct access to means of subsistence" (Sidel, 1999: 18). In such a situation, he says, considerable economic resources and

prerogatives remain in the "public domain." Sidel claims bosses and bossism emerge under these two structural conditions. Here, the term "bosses" is defined as "predatory power brokers who achieve monopolistic control over both coercive and economic resources within given territorial jurisdictions or bailiwicks."(Sidel, 1999: 19)

To present empirical data, Sidel chooses Cavite and Cebu as case studies. Both share a related pattern of continuing urbanization and industrialization but the patterns of political power differ in the respective places. By comparing two provinces, he intends to explain the variation of bossism.

Sidel finds two layers of power in Cavite which are composed of provincial and municipal powers. Significant characteristics of the bosses in Cavite are as follows. Firstly, the Cavite bosses depend on illegal economic activities like smuggling and gambling and show inclination to violence. Secondly, they have failed to maintain power over several generations. Power is maintained by each single generation only. Thirdly, the bosses fully depend on relations with superior bosses. Municipal bosses need support from a provincial boss and a provincial boss does the same with national level bosses. Sidel explains that these characteristics or patterns occur because the Cavite bosses depend excessively on state-generated resources. To get involved in illegal activities, one normally needs the protection of the state and linkages with superior bosses are crucial as these decide access to the state resources. Dependency on such relations makes building local political dynasties harder, especially by over reliance on the support of national political bosses who may themselves prove to be vulnerable to electoral challenges.

On the other hand, Cebu shows three layers of power, composed of municipal, congressional district, and provincial level. The bosses in Cebu have shown their ability to maintain their power over several generations. In contrast with the Cavite bosses, Sidel argues that the Cebuano bosses have been less dependent on illegal activities for the maintenance of their power. He stresses that the key to the Cebuano bosses' pattern of private wealth accumulation lies in land holding and legal businesses rather than illegal activities.

Therefore, they are less affected by difficulties or disruptions in accessing state power compared with their Cavite counterparts, even as access to the state apparatus continues to be an important mechanism for private wealth accumulation. In short, Sidel tries to show that the variation of bosses is caused by the difference of the pattern of state apparatus utilization. Direct dependency on the state has created the gangster type bosses of Cavite while indirect dependency has nurtured the dynastic type bosses of Cebu.

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"Mutual Accommodation":
Modifying "Strong Societies and Weak States"

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Compared with Sidel's emphasis on the state, Abinales focuses more on state-society relations. Abinales is concerned with southern Mindanao with its two significant particularities: its Muslim population and the domestic migrants from other parts of the Philippines. In explaining the political patterns in the area, Abinales rejects two conventional approaches. One is identity politics, and the other is an economy reductionist approach. Identity politics which is part of cultural analysis treats religious and communal identities as independent variables. On the other hand, an economy reductionist approach sees economic changes as the main factor for defining political patterns, claiming that the infusion of transnational capital and the processes of commercialization cause the class disparities. Instead of taking these factors (identity and economic change) as independent variables, Abinales considers these as caused by the process of state formation and the pattern of its transformation.

Abinales accepts "Strong Societies and Weak States" as a basic framework. Nevertheless, he argues that this framework has several defects and tries to modify it to overcome these problems. He claims that the formality of the distinction between state and society causes some difficulties in analyses. Abinales considers that the state and society dichotomy is not separated clearly, contrary to Migdal's thesis. Pointing out the significant degree of interdependence between the state and society, Abinales stresses the ambiguity of the "state-society" distinction. He proposes instead to adopt the notion of "accommodation" whereby the state accommodates social

strongmen in order to implement its rules. Conversely, social strongmen adapt themselves to the state for their power consolidation. This process is termed as "mutual accommodation." In this process, social strongmen play dual roles of the representative of the state to society and that of society to the state.

Abinales sees the importance of institutions, especially the electoral system, as a factor to facilitate social strongmen's behavior. The institutions brought by the American colonial rule work as the structural framework for their participation in national level politics and acquisition of resources. Abinales understands that social strongmen utilize the institutions as the "new rules of the game" to gain the power. To provide empirical data for his arguments, Abinales chooses Cotabato and Davao. The former shows the typical features of Muslim society, and the latter as a "frontier" of new settlers.

At first, Abinales looks back at the history of Mindanao, from the American military rule to the era of Filipinization to show the process of introduction of new institutions like suffrage, political parties, and appointment of officials in the construction of state-society relations. Then, he underscores the political changes in Cotabato and Davao. In Cotabato, the political leadership changed from those who traditionally based their power on personal charismatic resources, the so-called "men of prowess", to those leaders who are now more dependent on their relations with politicians in Manila.[4] On the other hand, in Davao, the success of Japanese abaca plantations is explained as the product of collaborative relations with Filipino politicians in Manila. These two cases provide the material bases for the "mutual accommodation" during the American colonial period.

The second half of the work deals with politics in the postcolonial era. After viewing the socio-economic change in Mindanao and the state-society relations in the period, Abinales focuses on two prominent politicians, Salipada Pendatun of Cotabato and Alejandro Almendras of Davao. Through these two cases, Abinales illustrates how mutual accommodation facilitates the power base for local power. Although there are differences between the two leaders, both were successful in holding power by means of balancing state resources and societal demands.

Lastly, Abinales mentions the Marcos era in which state intervention increased. He argues that the collapse of mutual accommodation increased violence and coercion which eventually led to the rise of the communist insurgency and the Muslim separatist movements in Mindanao.

"Predatory State" or "State-Society Network"

The books by Sidel and Abinales open up a new understanding of Philippine politics by refocusing on the role of the state and institutions in explaining political practices and behavior. However, their approach also dramatizes one enduring theoretical and empirical puzzle. If the Philippine state has been argued as a "weak state" by so many authors how can it be critical in determining and patterning political practices and behavior? For instance, from the viewpoint of "attributes" of the state like quality and size of bureaucracy or level of power concentration vis-a-vis the central bureaucracy, the Philippine state shows weak features as compared with Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, or even neighboring countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The repeated failure of Philippine state policies reinforces this perception. Yet, Sidel and Abinales assert significant roles by the state and its institutions.

Sidel tries to solve this problem by employing the distinction of "predatory states" and "developmental states" which was originally proposed by Evans (1989).[5] Sidel writes that the Philippine state is strong as a "predatory state" for "those who control the state apparatus seem to plunder without any more regard for the welfare of the citizenry than a predator has for the welfare of its prey" (Evans, 1989: 562), though it may be weak as a "developmental state." Through the "predatory state" argument, Sidel tries to be free from the "strong/weak" state argument which solely depends on the "attributes" of the state. In his discussion, Sidel implies that the Philippine state is "strong" by some definition[6]. Using some of Migdal's key concepts to argue his point but with different conclusions, Sidel writes:

Contesting Migdal and others' caricature of an emasculated 'weak' state lacking in autonomy, this study highlights 'the ability of state leaders to use the agencies of the state to get people in the society to do what they want them to do.' Successive case studies have detailed the Philippine state's impressive capacity 'to *penetrate* society, *regulate* social relationships, *extract* resources, and *appropriate* or use resources in determined ways' and have underscored the weakness of constraints imposed upon many state leaders by 'any set of organized social interest' (Sidel, 1999: 145-146).

For Sidel, "the Philippine state is neither simply a resource for patron-client relations nor merely an object of oligarchical plunder. It is also a complex set of predatory mechanisms for the private exploitation and accumulation of the archipelago's human, natural, and monetary resources." (Sidel, 1999: 146) In other words, Sidel insists that the Philippine state is not controlled by society (a certain class or civil society) and it is strong as predatory apparatus, even though it is "weak" in terms of its structural attributes.

On the other hand, Abinales addresses the same problem by modifying the understanding of state capacity. Instead of sticking to Weber's ideal type of the state, Abinales asserts that: "In southern Mindanao, we see that state capacity was not based on its ability to rise above and impose its hegemony on civil society. Rather, its influence lay in defining the parameters of doing politics." (2000: 182) He calls our attention to the state's "ability to compromise with societal forces" (2000: 183). Moreover, he states that, "in structurally weak states like the Philippines, state capacity is defined by an exchange between state and society, through the mediations of regional and local strongmen" (2000: 183).

In short, while admitting that the Philippine state is "structurally weak," Abinales sees that the state has capacity in defining patterns of politics through the accommodation process, which is facilitated by the state's institutions. Both discussions present significant argument to overcome the problem of "attributes"-oriented measurement of the state's strength.

Statist, Institutionalist and the Philippine State

As mentioned above, Sidel and Abinales show the way to treat the state and emphasize its importance in the analyses of Philippine local politics. However, they have some differences, which are found in their assessments of state capacity and their stances to deal with society. Sidel stresses the strength of the state and the weakness of the society. He considers that the latter is unable to give pressure to the former. In contrast, Abinales does not deny the strength of the society, though he also insists on the importance of the state. He assumes that state and society have equal statuses at least. This is implied in his argument on the interdependence of both sides.

One reason for such differences lies in their choice of case studies. Sidel chooses Cavite and Cebu, where Spanish and American rule affected the communities more deeply and where urbanization and industrialization have taken place more rapidly. These are located at the center, in short. In contrast, Abinales chooses Cotabato, where the Muslims kept their traditional society against Spanish rule, and Davao, which was built by settlers less than one hundred years ago. They are located at the periphery, in short. The degree of state penetration differs significantly in the respective cases.

However, the variation of cases does not provide a fully sufficient answer. It should be also discussed in relation to the streams within statist and institutionalist approaches. Mabuchi (1987) portrays three streams of statist and institutionalist approaches. Two among them are previously identified by Theda Skocpol. First is the school of state autonomy. This school perceives the state "as an actor whose independent efforts may need to be taken more seriously than heretofore in accounting for policy making and social change" (Skocpol, 1985: 21).[7] Second is the school of state-centered structuralist or "Tocquevillian," which claims that "states matter not simply because of the goal-oriented activities of state officials. They matter because their organizational configurations, along with their overall patterns of activity, affect political culture, encourage some kinds of group formation and collective political actions (but not

others), and make possible the raising of certain political issues (but not others)" (Skocpol, 1985: 21). The third stream is the so-called "policy network" school, which tries to grasp state capacity with regard to institutions between state and society. "Policy network" is defined as the "encompassing system of collaborative political arrangements" which establishes the linkage and interdependence of state and society (Katzenstein, 1985: 228). In this tradition, attention is given not so much to each structure of the state and society, but to the structure of the interface of state and society.

Considering these three streams of statist and institutionalist approaches, Sidel's argument is situated at the second, since he emphasizes that the state and its institutional setting defines the political pattern. On the other hand, Abinales is apparently a part of the third, as he is concerned with the institutional linkage between state and society. In this perspective, variation of theoretical stances is another cause of their difference.

Sidel proposes the "revolutionary" change of frameworks on Philippine politics as he disregards the strength of the society. Furthermore, he emphasizes the continuity of the political pattern in the Philippines as long as the institutional structure of the state, and the phase of capitalist "primitive accumulation" do not change (Sidel, 1999: 153-154). In contrast, Abinales' work can be situated in the extended line of previous works, but with remarkable change regarding the discussion on the state and institutions. In this sense, Abinales puts forward a relatively "milder change of framework on the study Philippine politics.

The difference of the two works seems to raise a further argument regarding society, or state-society relations. As mentioned above, Sidel does not see the society as a crucial factor for politics. However, Abinales recognizes the strength of the society, even though he does not treat the society directly. On this point, Hutchcroft's argument gives some clues for further discussion. He writes,

The Philippines is not plagued by the overpowering strength
of a predatory state but rather by the overpowering strength

of a predatory oligarchy; as discussed earlier, the primary direction of rent extraction in the Philippines is the opposite of that in Zaire. Few would dispute President Ramos's observation that the 'Filipino State has historically required extraordinarily little of its citizens'; in fact, the overriding concern is how a few of its citizens can so systematically plunder the state for private ends. The distinction between the 'patrimonial administrative state' and the 'patrimonial oligarchic state' highlights at least one key difference in types of predation obstructive to capitalist growth (1998: 57-58).

Hutchcroft emphasizes that the "predatory state" model cannot be applied to the Philippine state since oligarchs, whose base is outside the state, dominate politics. In this sense, Hutchcroft's stance is different from Sidel's. Although Abinales' discussion is not necessarily exactly the same as Hutchcroft's argument, they share a common understanding in recognizing the existence of the social base of strongmen. From Sidel's point of view, one can raise the question about what the oligarchs' or social strongmen's base outside the state is.[8] On the contrary, Abinales, as well as Hutchcroft, may provide empirical examples to counter Sidel's stance. At any rate, this argument opens the possibility of further research on Philippine politics, especially on state-society relations.

Conclusion

By shifting the approach from socio-cultural to statist and institutionalist ones, Sidel and Abinales have opened up a new focus for the study of Philippine politics.

Statist and institutionalist approaches may find further opportunities in the study of Philippine politics, especially in the field of political economy where these approaches are frequently employed as seen in case studies of other countries. Regarding local politics, advance studies on center-local relations are also necessary to clarify the institutional structure, which is crucial for the pattern of local politics.[9] More productive researches are expected to be conducted along this approach. ✤

Notes

1 Landé (1965) represents the most systematic work in this approach.

2 Although there are several works in this school, Machado (1974) is the most notable.

3 Nevertheless, we should recognize the important contributions of Kerkvliet and Mojares [1991], as they present various aspects of change in terms of ideas, integrity, leadership capabilities, and issue-oriented politics.

4 For the notion of "men of prowess," see Wolters (1999: 112-113).

5 Evans developed this idea later in 1995. Sidel does not explain Evans' argument fully, but it is noteworthy to clarify it here. Evans points out that the difference between a "developmental state" and "predatory state" lies in the feature of "embedded autonomy," characterizing the former state. Embedded autonomy is defined as the existence of a "meritocratic bureaucracy with a strong sense of corporate identity and a dense set of institutionalized links to private elites"(Evans, 1989: 561). The development states like Japan, Korea, and Taiwan have this "embedded autonomy." On the other hand, the predatory states like Zaire typically lack this feature. Thus while a "developmental state" achieves "embedded autonomy," a predatory one is characterized by its "incoherent absolutist domination" (Evans, 1989: 574).

6 Regarding a "predatory state," Evans (1995: 45) writes "[c]onventional dichotomies like 'strong' versus 'weak' mislabel this state. By some definitions, it is a 'strong' state. It certainly has what Michael Mann (1984: 188) would call 'despotic power.'"

7 Doronila (1992) is a representative of this state autonomy school in Philippine political science.

8 This question may be asked especially in relation to the following statement: "In the patrimonial oligarchic state, on the other hand, the dominant social force – an oligarchy – has an economic base quite independent of the state apparatus, but access to the state is nonetheless the major avenue to private accumulation." (Hutchcroft, 1998: 234)

9 The relation between state-society relations and center-local relations should be clarified for the discussion. Moreover, center-local relations should not be confined only to the relations between central governments and local governments. Congress and political parties should be included in the relations, too. Hutchcroft (2000) is an interesting study in this sense. It distinguishes the political sphere from the administrative sphere in the analyses. As an excellent work on central-local relations in Japan in similar perspective, see Muramatsu (1997). Kawanaka (1996) also argues the importance of such a distinction in the Philippines.

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