BOOK REVIEWS

***Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia.* By Dan Slater.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. 342.

Why did a strong, unified authoritarian state supported by ethnic and religious leaders, government officials, students, and trade unions evolve in Malaysia but not in the Philippines? More generally, why are some authoritarian states able to dominate society with the consent of factionalized elites for a long period of time while others are not? Political scientist Dan Slater addresses this question in his fascinating book *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia.* Beginning with the assertion that no country can be ruled by a single, unified political elite, he argues that any regime hoping to stay in power requires support from the various influential upper classes. Despite wide-ranging interests, these groups will sometimes surrender considerable amounts of their autonomy to support an authoritarian regime while in other cases they will not. Slater proposes a set of conditions that produce cross-elite coalitions and then tests his theory by conducting detailed historical case studies of post-colonial Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. It is this linking of theory and empirical evidence that differentiates this book from standard historical accounts of the development of states in Southeast Asia.

Slater proposes a Hobbesian explanation for cooperation. Elites are more likely to cooperate with one another and surrender some of their autonomy to the state when they fear that failing to do so will result in the loss of their property, privileges, and/or life. The more that political elites fear social and political disorder, the more likely they will band together and support an authoritarian state that can guarantee order.

The most serious threat likely to unite the divergent interests of business leaders, religious leaders, the well-educated middle classes, and the military in post-colonial states is "contentious politics". Slater defines this as events where significant numbers of people challenge the state simultaneously through actions like strikes, ethnic riots, rural rebellions, protests, and social revolutions. The variation in elite response (cooperate with one another/do not cooperate with one another) comes down to whether they perceive such events as "episodic" and "manageable", in which case cooperation with other elites will not be necessary, or "endemic" and "unmanageable", in which case they will work together. Elites fear most those events that affect urban centres, that mobilize radical leftist demands for income and land redistribution, and/or that exacerbate communal tensions between different religious or ethnic groups. This explains why the years of contentious politics and the violence targeting ethnic Chinese in Malaysia in 1969 and PKI supporters in Indonesia in 1965 convinced local elites that the costs of cooperation would be lower than the benefits.

The cross-elite alliances that emerge as responses to contentious politics are "protection pacts". Elites conclude that a democratic government is unable to handle the potentially destabilizing mass movements facing the country and so lend their support to increasing state power and authoritarian control in an attempt to decrease uncertainty.

Over time, a protection pact may evolve into a set of political institutions granting the state strong coercive power that it can then use to dominate society resulting in regimes known as "authoritarian leviathans". Elites will supply resources, such as tax revenues by economic elites, or ideational legitimacy, such as statements of support from religious leaders, to an authoritarian regime so long as they perceive these costs lower than those of living in a society where the masses consistently threaten violent action. It is therefore more likely that a strong, unified state will rise from a post-colonial society wracked by societal divisions and violent conflict than in one that is more peaceful and homogeneous.

The most endemic and unmanageable cases of contentious politics that also involve urban social movements can produce an authoritarian state marked by "domination". Elites in these societies face the constant uncertainty that violence may erupt at any time so they are willing to sacrifice political pluralism in the name of maintaining order. The constant and unmanageable nature of Malaysia's contentious politics was a major reason for the emergence of a state characterized by domination. The Malaysian state that evolved was produced mainly by elite concerns over the manageability of tensions between ethnic Malays and ethnic Chinese in the 1960s. Urban riots in Kuala Lumpur in May 1969 were the last straw convincing communal elites to support an UMNO-alliance as a protection pact to prevent further instability and violence. This alliance continues to the present day.

When elites do not perceive contentious politics to be an unmanageable or persistent threat, however, they do not see any need for a protection pact. Rather than handing authority over to the state, power is fragmented as elites have no need to sacrifice their particular interests to a greater authority. This lack of collective action tends to produce a weak set of political institutions.

The most important contribution of this book is to bring contentious politics into the discussion of state-building in Southeast Asia as an explanatory variable. If contentious politics does generate authoritarianism, as is convincingly argued here, then this has implications for all post-colonial states divided by religion, ethnicity, and/or class. Authoritarian states, this suggests, are products of their societies and so are more likely to evolve from those that are deeply divided than those that are more homogeneous.

To conclude, *Ordering Power* should be required reading for both scholars of comparative politics in Southeast Asia and the region's policy-makers. The main message is that the authoritarian states that developed are not the result of chance or of elites seeking private benefits. Rather, they are the product of historical processes specific to each country in which the nature of long-term societal divisions led to specific elite responses and, therefore, particular configurations of state power. The logical extension of this, as suggested by the Indonesia case, is that once elites cease to see contentious politics as an unmanageable threat, they will defect from the ruling coalition and possibly challenge the regime. Comparing the cases of Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, we see that state provision of benefits to supporters is a far less effective means of maintaining elite loyalty than protection from a commonly perceived threat. Slater's book is a fascinating read that deserves space on the bookshelves of any political scientist, historian, or policy-maker interested in the development of the Southeast Asia's post-colonial politics.

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Malaysia's Development Challenges: Graduating from the Middle. **Edited by Hal Hill, Tham Siew Yean, and Ragayah Haji Mat Zin.** Oxford: Routledge, 2012. Pp. 376.

This book examines the policy challenges that Malaysia faces in its aim of moving from a middle-income to a high-income country. To