BOOK REVIEWS

***Beyond Metropolis: The Planning and Governance of Asia's Mega-Urban Regions.* By Aprodicio A. Laquian.** Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. Pp. 488.

The book begins with a rather controversial title — *Beyond Metropolis*. In a world where the majority of cities in developing countries are struggling with metropolitan growth and change, the title might appear to be rather mocking to the governments that have been shown up more often than not for their inaptitude at metropolitan governance and change. It is a world, as the author has rightly pointed, where the mega-cities in Asia dominate the world's urban population growth statistics and, hence, urban development issues. Yet, the fastest growing urban areas are not the mega-cities but cities with populations of 1.5 million to 5 million. These are growing at triple the rates in mega-cities. In terms of sheer numbers, however, population growth in the mega-cities would be breathtaking compared with the population growth in the smaller cities. The author speaks of Shanghai as the "head of the dragon" in the Yangtze River delta and the dominant core of a metropolitan region covering about 100,000 square kilometres with a population of 72.7 million (p. 30).

What the author, however, has focused on in his discussion, has been the spatial growth of mega-cities to encompass regions or mega-urban regions. Intriguingly, much of the growth of these mega-urban regions is being attributed to planning aimed ironically at containing metropolitan growth or what many North American cities would be familiar with — urban sprawl. Debates are ongoing concerning the measurement and impact of urban sprawl. There are similar debates, which the author has highlighted, concerning the growth of metropolises and whether mega-urban regions are necessarily the best things that can happen in Asian urbanization, at least. While one school of thought has argued for smaller cities and cities apparently of "lower levels", the author notes that in Asian countries there has been a high degree of policy measures and intervention aimed at planning for and "regulating" the course of the urbanization process and city growth. The measures aimed at controlling the rate and nature of urbanization range from China's *hukou* or registration system to planning medium-sized cities as well as industrial estates or satellite towns to divert the stream of population migration from rural areas or small towns headed towards the mega-cities.

The concerns of the book are, first, the role played by planning and governance in the development of mega-urban regions in Asia and, second, the position that if the role of mega-urban regions in national economic and social development is important, then improved planning and governance, so the author argues, can enhance

this role in Asian economies. Asia's long history of planning for cities is reviewed beginning with that of the ancient cities like Beijing and Tokyo to those that have been the handiwork of colonial plans — Dhaka, Karachi, Kolkata, Metro Manila, and Mumbai. The origins of planning are traced variously to utopian ideals like the "garden city" framework which Singapore, Bangalore, and Baguio employed, as well as the more ideological positioning of city plans in China. While the garden city framework sought the balance between a natural and built environment, the political ideologies of Marxism have stressed plans or state-centric agendas for industrialization, social housing and monumental architecture. The author then rightly points out that urban planning in more recent times, has had to be more "comprehensive, encompassing not only the highly urbanized areas of city-regions but also adjoining rural areas and open spaces (Bangkok, Jakarta, Tokyo). As a whole, the most common urban plans in Asia have been formulated to deal with specific problems, such as the proliferation of slums and squatter areas (Dhaka, Karachi, Kolkata, Mumbai), traffic congestion (Bangkok, Metro Manila), en-vironmental pollution (Mumbai, Seoul, Tokyo), serious health and safety problems (Dhaka, Kolkata), and uncontrolled urban sprawl (Bangkok, Jakarta, Metro Manila, Seoul)" (p. 55).

The author, however, does not clarify why if there is a long history of urban planning in Asia, more urban plans are being formulated to solve a long list of problems that are challenging both the capacity and resources of metropolitan states in Asia. There are indeed a long list of urban issues of which the author has focused on: urban mobility, solid waste removal, and housing. In criss-crossing time and space, some effort to provide a sub-grouping of cities or mega-urban regions would have helped provide a guide with which to gauge the scale of problems as well as the planning approaches to address them. Such sub-grouping could be along the lines set out in the introduction where sub-regional grouping was discussed. Indeed, the sweep through cities included in the Asian region is hardly discussed in

terms of the urban history and legacy which would warrant the focus on the Asian city. There is effort to include global trends that have thrust cities and particularly the fast growing ones in Asia into the limelight but the links to urban development and planning — whether strategic or otherwise — are never fully established.

Urban governance concerning metropolitan finance as well as aspects such as decentralization is discussed separately from questions related to the sustainability of mega-urban regions. Here, the author jumps into the debates about whether it made any sense to talk about sustainable cities rather than a more critical assessment of the translation of a rather fuzzy concept into terms meaningful to cities and, in particular, Asian cities.

Cross-urban discussions are always difficult in the light of the challenge in getting comparable data. For Asian cities, it is more difficult not least because of the problems of decentralization and the scale as well as territorial extent of the urban areas covered by the author. Securing updated data can be even more challenging, and this is clear from the discussion of Singapore's transport policies as well as the nature of changes in public transport seen in New Delhi. In both cases, the author has not caught up with the implementation of electronic road pricing as well as the certificates of entitlement introduced in Singapore nor the role which the courts played in New Delhi in mandating the change to natural gas by public transport vehicles.

For much of the urbanizing world, the metropolis remains an important platform upon which to determine economic development polices and programmes. The author has highlighted the pitfalls posed by a mindset on exclusively economic aims in tackling the challenges posed by the development of mega-urban regions. Yet the author's alternatives oscillate rather vaguely between civic participation and more effective planning intervention. The question is whether more effective co-ordination of agendas of the different sectors in government might be a good starting point upon which to critique the haplessness of the local state in grappling with the

economic as well as explosive demographic growth seen in mega-urban regions.

The strengths of the discussion in the book lie most in the range of topics concerning urban governance and planning issues. Having painted such a wide canvas, the book is still highly readable because of the richness of the details in the discussion on living conditions in inner city areas and their redevelopment. This volume provides a planning perspective of the Asian city that has seriously considered the politics and economics of accommodating rapid urban growth in the mega-urban regions. It is a book likely to leave the reader wanting to learn more of what lies beneath the dynamism, at least demographically speaking, of mega-urban regions in Asia.

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Citizen Power, Politics, and the "Asian Miracle". **By O. Fiona Yap.** Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005. Pp. 186.

Yap's innovative volume stresses the importance of symbiotic relationships among citizen power, political processes and "miracle" economic performance in four Asian economies. She offers an alternative to the foci of the genre of academic literature that characterizes "Asian governments as benevolent overlords and Asian citizens as politically naïve and docile" (p. 187). Her alternative model is designed to test the validity of the hypothesis that citizens co-operate and invest their economic resources when economies are strong but when economic performances are poor they withdraw their resources *if* governments demonstrate a lack of accountability and choose not to exhibit transparency. In her analysis, "people count" and when Asian governments know this and are accountable and transparent

during economic downturns, citizens will continue to co-operate and support them by providing resources required to bring about recovery and propel growth.

Citizen support has been, and continues to be, an indispensable building block upon which "Asian miracles" in Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia can continue to flourish. At first glance, her model might appear to be simplistic and not particularly useful. However, such premature judgement about her work is misleading and will be abandoned once readers embark on their journey through the book's pages within which the author "explores the dynamic interactions between state and citizenry in the arena of economic policy" (p. 187).

Citizenry and state interaction is a timely topic as evidenced by what recently happened in Thailand where former Prime Minister Thaksin was widely viewed as being far from a "benevolent overlord" dedicated to the interests of the citizenry. He was widely viewed as a powerful and wealthy person who acted in his personal, political, and financial interests. The citizenry was far from "naïve and docile" and consequently took steps that eventually forced the former Prime Minister to resign. During February and March of 2006 a substantial segment of the citizenry took actions that were detailed daily and with great care and professionalism by *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*. Their daily accounts of the political steps that Thai citizens were taking and their actions confirmed that citizen power "made a difference". The Prime Minister was forced to call a snap election, which he was unable to win, and this is why he resigned.

Thaksin was seen as neither accountable nor transparent in his actions and, in response to this perception, hundreds of thousands of Thai citizens living in Bangkok and other urban centres gathered in demonstrations aimed at calling for a more open, transparent, democratic, and accountable political system. If no such system can be created, a significant portion of the electorate will likely continue to withdraw their political support, thereby setting the stage for a