

Book Review: Werning, R., & Schwieger, J. (Eds.). (2025). *Von Marcos zu Marcos. Die Philippinen seit 1965.*

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The political anthology *Von Marcos zu Marcos. Die Philippinen seit 1965* (in English, *From Marcos to Marcos. The Philippines since 1965*) is highly relevant today, offering insights into both the country's evolving political landscape and the diasporic view of Philippine politics. The mix of stories, interviews, data, and personal accounts, presented as chapters, offers a good introduction and overview. They reveal what most people do not know about the country or its people, what the international media do not report, or what people in society do not mention when discussing what they know or have heard about the Philippines. The articles in the anthology edited by Rainer Werning – a political and social scientist and journalist specializing in South-East and East Asia who has spent extended periods studying in the Philippines –, and Jörg Schwieger – a Protestant theologian who has served for many years on the executive committees of the Aktionsgruppe Philippinen, the philippinenbüros e.V. and the Stiftung Asienhaus – go beyond talking about Philippine history. In contrast to their preceding anthology, *Handbuch Philippinen: Gesellschaft, Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur* (2021) (in English, *Handbook Philippines: Society, Politics, Economy, Culture*), the editors compile a variety of insights, particularly into the seven thematic areas covered in the book, including life and survival, society and politics, Filipinos abroad, climate and the environment, and the political left.

The central argument of their book is the criticism that the political situation has not improved since the early days under Marcos Sr. and has deteriorated further under his son, the current President Marcos Jr. Although the anthology cannot and does not provide a complete picture of the Philippines, it is intended to shed light on various aspects and encourage reflection.

The 262-page book comprises three introductory and concluding articles as well as seven thematic sections containing articles, interviews, and personal stories. The book begins with the editors providing an introduction offering an overview of structural data and demographic information on the Philippines as well as details of the political system. The first introductory article, written by Eric D. Gutierrez, is entitled “The Art of Ruling: The Tiblan Family” and recounts the history of Wahid Tiblan, of deadly clan feuds between local people and settlers in southern Mindanao, and of the displacement of undocumented families who had lived there for a long time. The second is an interview with Carol Padaguan-Araullo, discussing how it was possible for Marcos Jr. to politically succeed his father Marcos Sr., even though no one could

have imagined this after the EDSA Revolution in 1984. The People Power Revolution, also known as the EDSA Revolution or the Yellow Revolution, was a series of non-violent mass demonstrations in the Philippines that took place from 22 to 25 February 1986. It successfully overthrew the former President Ferdinand Marcos, ending his 20-year rule and restoring democracy in the country. The final introductory article is written by Julie Smit on solidarity and NGO work.

The next topic covered in the book is the history of the Philippines, which is the first thematic section. In the first two articles, Rainer Werning provides a chronological overview of the most important historical milestones, focusing in particular on the rise and fall of Marcos Sr. This is followed by an article by Luis V. Teodoro, who writes about the strengths and weaknesses of the People Power movement at the time and its significance today. Another article by Rainer Werning follows, in which he reflects on further political dynasties and their respective policies, namely those of the Aquino's and Duterte's.

The second thematic section is "Life and Survival" and broadly examines the current human rights situation and violations affecting journalists, children, indigenous peoples, and communities, as well as within the education and health sectors. This thematic area is explored through brief articles by various authors, including Astrud Beringer, Hannah Wolf, Marina Wetzlmaier, Jörg Schwieger, and Rufa Cagoco-Guam. The articles reflect on Marcos Jr.'s politics and policies on human rights, particularly with regard to the rights of children and indigenous peoples. They reflect on how the media are under fire since his administration, how the health and education systems are deteriorating, how the US is exerting greater influence, and how slowly the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) is developing.

In the third thematic section on society and politics, various authors such as Michael Lim Tan, Carol O. Arguillas, and Walden Bello write about the political situation and history of the Philippines, focusing on political dynasties, dynastic family feuds, and political offices held by several members of the same family. Stories are also told about other political conflicts, such as the Moro or Mindanao conflict, colonialism in the Philippines, and demographic change. The recent political developments are also discussed, along with how political resistance is taking new forms and evolving into both cooperation and confrontation. This thematic area also addresses the ties between the Philippines and the USA, examining the geopolitical situation and shedding light on China's position in the conflict in the West Philippine Sea.

The fourth thematic section focuses on Philippine's economy. It discusses the economic development of the country during the Marcos Jr. era. Articles written by Sonny Africa, Arnold Padilla, Michael Reckordt, and Mary Lou U. Hardillo talk about issues such as land reforms and rural development, trade union and labor movements, ecology and digitalization. It is noted critically that economic developments are moving towards investor-friendly legislation, whilst inconvenient realities are being ignored and neglected, such as the slow pace of digital transformation or digital colonialism.

In "Filipinos Abroad", the fifth thematic section, the authors criticize the idea of 'export hits' related to people who leave their homeland to work abroad. They are individuals who are often not recognized as such in the media and in politics. Due to various factors, many Filipinos are forced to leave the Philippines every year. This section therefore explores stories about Filipino seafarers, the migration of care workers, and OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers). Mary Montemayor's article, for example, tells the story of the second generation of the Filipino diaspora, who find themselves caught between integration and the search for their roots. In another article, Epifano San Juan Jr. reflects on whether OFWs really are 'new heroes'. OFWs are often described as 'new modern-day heroes', as their influence on their families and the Philippine

economy is exceptionally profound, measurable, and long-lasting. They sacrifice stability, time spent with their families, and personal comfort in order to support their loved ones and, through their work and remittances, keep the national economy going.

“Climate and Environment” is the sixth thematic section of the book, which covers highly topical issues, including the climate crisis, transitions in the energy and transport sector, and approaches to maritime issues and nuclear power. Mirjam Overhoff and Hannah Wolf talk in their article, for example, about climate change, typhoon seasons, and several weather phenomena that are shifting. This has an impact not only on nature, but also on society and everyday life, as agricultural practices must be adapted accordingly. In doing so, the implications of ecological and economic risks are often overlooked. This is mentioned, for example, in the article by Kenneth Roland A. Gula, which discusses the declining fish stocks in Manila Bay, where marine life is under threat from extensive land reclamation.

The final thematic section deals with stories relating to the political left in the Philippines and in the Filipino diaspora. The articles explore various aspects of the political left, including communist movements, accounts of revolutions, and the reasons why the masses voted for Marcos. One article, written by Herbert Docena, examines the question of whether Philippine society is semi-feudal or backwardly capitalist.

The book concludes with a selection of political commentaries on the 2025 by-elections, further data, and an interview on the topic of society’s moral compass, in which the politically persecuted Bishop Antonio Ablon of the Independent Church of the Philippines (IFI) reflects on how the IFI could exert greater influence on the political developments in the Philippines. There is also an appendix containing a selection of Philippine media outlets online which, in the editors’ view, provide critical and investigative reporting, as well as contact details for organizations, associations, and groups that feel a sense of solidarity with and connection to the Philippines and maintain close intercultural communication with the country.

Why is the anthology more relevant than ever? It is because today’s political landscape in the Philippines is still deeply shaped by the enduring power of political dynasties. A political dynasty refers to a family in which multiple members hold elected office either sequentially, passing positions from one generation to the next, or simultaneously, occupying different posts such as governor, mayor, or congressional representative at the same time. Through name recognition, extensive networks, and significant financial resources, these families maintain long-term control over political power, often resulting in corruption, nepotism, weak democratic competition, and barriers for new candidates. This concentration of power also reinforces patronage politics, limits accountability, and contributes to persistent poverty, even as some argue that dynasties can provide continuity or stability in governance. Political dynasties remain widespread and central to the country’s political system, with numbers indicating that around 250 families dominate provincial and national politics, making the Philippines one of the most dynasty driven democracies globally. Prominent examples include the Marcos family, including Ferdinand Marcos Sr. (President 1965–1986), Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. (President since 2022), and Imee Marcos (current Senator), the Aquino/Cojuangco family with Corazon Aquino (President 1986–1992) and Benigno Aquino III (President 2010–2016), and the Duterte family with Rodrigo Duterte (President 2016–2022) and Sara Duterte (Vice President). Other influential clans such as the Villar, Cayetano, Binay, Estrada, Angara, Revilla, and Osmeña families have also held significant political power, particularly in Congress. In this context, the examination of Philippine politics across decades offers essential insight into how these dynasties emerged, why they persist, and how they continue to shape both domestic politics and the diasporic understanding of Philippine political life.

In this context, it is also important to highlight the respective professional expertise, political stance, and decades-long commitment of Werning and Schwieger to the Philippines, which shape the tone, the selection of contributions, and the analytical focus of the book. Both are regarded in the German-speaking world as leading experts on the Philippines and are among the few German-speaking academics who have been engaging intensively with the Philippines for decades. Their names signal that the book is scholarly, historically sound, and politically sensitive. Over the decades, they have built up a network of Filipino and international authors, Filipino academics, activists, and journalists. This explains why the volume contains a diverse range of voices rarely found in German-language publications. Their perspective combines academic analysis with political commitment, giving the anthology a clear critical focus underpinned by a human rights-based analysis. Both editors have studied the Marcos era in depth, which is why their expertise is crucial to understanding the continuities between Marcos Sr. and Marcos Jr.

Although the anthology offers valuable insights, it is not without shortcomings. Many contributions are shaped by the authors' personal impressions and political convictions, resulting in a subjective emphasis that reflects a strongly activist stance and, consequently, a lack of neutrality. This becomes evident in the selection of the more than 40 contributors, many of whom come from the solidarity movements of the 1970s and 1980s or are closely aligned with the political left. As a result, the book does not maintain a neutral, political-science distance, and offers limited perspectives from conservative, economically liberal, or middle-class sectors of the Philippine society, making parts of its analysis appear one-sided.

Additional criticism concerns structural weaknesses: The attempt to cover six decades of history through 70 to 80 very short essays means that complex subjects, such as South China Sea geopolitics or economic structures, are often only briefly mentioned, leaving gaps where more systematic analysis would be expected.

Furthermore, there is an absence of a cultural dimension; art, culture, and the Philippine literary scene are largely missing, overshadowed by the book's strong focus on oppression, elites, dynasties, and economic exploitation.

The anthology serves as a compelling and critical introduction for politically interested readers seeking to understand the rise of Ferdinand Marcos Jr., while those looking for an objective, academically balanced, and comprehensive overview of the Philippines may find its activist orientation and fragmented structure limiting and are therefore invited to look further in the thriving academic literature on and from the Philippines.



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DISCLOSURE

The author declares no conflict of interest.