



Asian Cities in an Era of Decentralisation

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This book critically engages with the idea of decentralization as empowering cities and their residents to act innovatively and creatively. The contributions thus highlight how the term ‘empowerment’ in the context of decentralization regimes masks a competing array of intentions and agendas. Who and what are ‘empowered’, given a ‘voice’ and allowed to ‘participate’ via the processes and structures of decentralization (and to what ends) are too frequently assumed in normative conversations about ‘bringing government closer to the people’ and ‘community driven development’. Creating an illusion of a shared language and common set of priorities therefore obscures more complex realities, particularly when there is a disconnect between the official goals of decentralization and civil society aspirations that reinforces politics of exclusion at the grassroots. Equally, official processes of decentralization can, and often are, accompanied by less visible processes of ‘recentralization’ through the reassertion of central state control over putatively autonomous jurisdictions. Through studies in six Asian countries (India, the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Thailand and Japan) the essays in this book examine cases whereby a range of urban actors and institutions have been ‘empowered’ via decentralization, and how this realignment of local power relations impacts upon the dynamics of urban governance, albeit not always in socially progressive ways.

This book was published as a special issue of *Space and Polity*.

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