

Sulu Power, Contexts and Dynamics

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Sulu power evokes a rare display of man's potential to reign over himself and the world as it consequently ushers the birth of one of the most phenomenal civilizations in the Malay world. Emanating from a seemingly negligible epicenter in the Sulu Archipelago and, subsequently, swaying vast territories and oceans, Sulu power is, strategically speaking, destined to emerge. It is not only stride in a geographically unique location that borders the Pacific Ocean, Celebes Sea, Malacca Strait, and South China Sea, Sulu is unbelievably rich in natural resources—a fundamental reason why big powers near and far, past and present—and expectedly the future—have come and gone successively and oftentimes simultaneously to trade, to negotiate, and to war with the Tausugs. While some colonial powers got what they wanted, many had to sail away and nursed ashamedly their frustrations. The Tausugs stood their ground; they harnessed their heretofore human potentials as they were emboldened, too, by Islam to face the crucible of history. Undoubtedly, while the Tausugs pride themselves of having been unconquered and proudly claimed of having built a civilization of epic proportions in Southeast Asia that was probably unparalleled during its height, it is undeniable, however, that like other civilizations, Sulu power has also been subject by the vicissitude of history to experience its inevitable rise and decline. Even then, while other civilizations are short-lived, Sulu's longevity is exceptional. Why and how?

This paper tries to explain the nature of Sulu power, its dynamics, and its domestic and international contexts, including the factors and forces that shaped and continuously re-shaped it. It also discusses the reasons for the rise and decline of Sulu power, including its trajectory, challenge, and imperative today.