

economy of the Muslim world, in the 14 selected major states. Its key argument, “only an expansion of economic democracy can ultimately increase the political awareness of the masses leading to political reform to improve civil and political rights” (p. 382) is well substantiated in the analysis. It is hoped that the author would look seriously into the issues raised in this review and come up with an updated second edition free from stylistic and grammatical errors.

Myanmar: State, Society and Ethnicity. Edited by N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007, pp. 311. ISBN: 978-981-230-434-6.

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This edited volume is the outcome of two workshops held at the Hiroshima Peace Institute in March and October 2005. The aim of this book is to cumulatively increase scholarly interest and research on Myanmar. It has twelve chapters each contributed by a distinguished scholar except for the introductory chapter which is written by the two editors. The chapters are arranged logically beginning with two broad chapters that survey the Southeast Asian region before locating Myanmar within it. In the first chapter, N. Ganesan emphasises a combined state-society approach to study the complex relationship between the state and society in Southeast Asia because, as he points out, this offers a more “balanced and holistic approach.” Ganesan advances several interesting arguments. One, maritime Southeast Asian states generally fared better than others in terms of developing state-society relations. Two, countries that gained independence through negotiated settlement like Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore fare better, at least in terms of overall development, than those that achieved independence through revolutionary struggle like Indonesia and Vietnam. Three, Monarchies do not play only a symbolic role but also intervene in state and political matters. Finally, ethnic and religious divisions significantly complicate state-society relations in Southeast Asia.

Ganesan, like other scholars, points out that Southeast Asia is home to a number of strong military authoritarian regimes and these, in turn, impacted substantially on state-society relations. The continued military rule in Myanmar and the 2006 military coup in Thailand (democracy was restored there in early 2007) substantiate his argument. In order to understand the continued military rule in Myanmar, Ganesan suggests that one should examine the history of the country, the structure of the society and internal socio-political developments. This is what Rachel Safman did by locating Myanmar within the broader context of ethnic minorities and state-building in Southeast Asia. She examines the historical dynamics of majority-minority relations and argues that the Bamar identity in Myanmar was the result of such colonial British conceptions of “Burma proper” and “Ministerial Burma” and “excluded territories” or “frontier areas.”

Safman’s chapter is followed by five chapters dealing directly with foreign historical influences on Myanmar. Robert H. Taylor explains that the present state of Myanmar was created when imperial Britain was at the peak of its power. He explains the paucity of studies on British policy toward Burma in the post-colonial era partly by arguing that Britain is a declining power in Asia and that Myanmar had been relatively unimportant for Western economic interests. Kei Nemoto analyses Japan’s policy towards Myanmar that led to the special relationship between the two countries. According to Nemoto, the post-war relations between Japan and Burma officially started in April 1955 when a peace treaty was signed and an agreement on war reparations went into effect. Burma also became one of the exporters of rice to Japan after Japan lost its colonies of China, Korea and Taiwan because of its defeat in World War II.

David I. Steinberg’s chapter is different in that it deals with the slippery concept of legitimacy and how it has been contested in Myanmar. He makes the pointed argument that legitimacy may also be related to hope in the society. In this sense, it is difficult to assess the extent of legitimacy that persists in the Burmese context. Steinberg argues that in Westernised societies such hope is linked to middle class aspirations but such aspirations are limited in Myanmar because the military in Myanmar has monopolised all avenues of mobility and, therefore, of hope.

Kyaw Yin Hlaing in “Associational Life in Myanmar: Past and Present” argues that since exerting control over the population is part of the state formation process, every government in Myanmar tried to control the population through co-optation, neutralisation, and suppression. Not all governments, however, placed equal emphasis on all three means.

The fifth chapter is by Tin Maung Maung Than which attempts to map “the contours of human security challenges in Myanmar.” He argues that since the military took over power in Myanmar in 1988, most of the academic literature and almost all of the commentaries on Myanmar politics and security have been focused on three themes. First, human rights and democracy issues revolving around the democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi. Second, the narcotics issue associated with the infamous “Golden Triangle” and third, the ethnic issues viewed as a dichotomous relationship between the majority Bamar and the minority ethnic nationalities. He provides a good deal of information about the wellbeing of the inhabitants of Myanmar and argues for the incorporation of a human security perspective in state-sponsored attempts to create security.

The remaining four chapters study three major ethnic groups in the country - Karen, Kachin, and Shan in their dealings with the national government. Alan Saw U reflects on confidence-building and cooperation among ethnic groups in Myanmar with particular reference to the Karen. According to the author, many Karen people have become very weary with the chronic civil war and its consequences. Therefore, it is not surprising that since the beginning of the 1990s, various Karen groups have been trying to build confidence and strengthen the capabilities of the various elements in the Karen community and to foster cooperation between them and the government. The Karen leaders have projected the idea of transferring the “armed struggle in the battlefield” to the “political struggle around the table.”

Ja Nan Lahtaw focuses on the Kachin case and discusses their struggle to achieve unity since they are divided along linguistic and cultural lines. One of the attempts to unite the Kachins has been through the celebration of Kachin State Day. On this day, the traditional Manau dance festival is performed to bring together the Kachin linguistic tribes such as Shan, Bamar, Chinese, Ghorhka

and other ethnic nationalities living in Kachin state. Ja Nan Lahtaw also explains the peace-building concepts in order to bring about social, political and economic changes.

Sai Kham Mong discusses the Shan in Myanmar and documents their development from the mid-nineteenth century and gives details about various insurgent movements located within the Shan states since 1948. The discussion in this about the Kokang and Wa States is certainly relevant when talking about the Shan ethnic issue.

In the final chapter, Khin Zaw Win provides a reality check on the sanctions policy against Myanmar. The author argues that the economic sanctions, termination of loans, arms embargo and the like, did affect the country but are counter-productive in achieving the goal of pressuring the rogue regime to change its policy. The author points out that the sanctions contributed to the high rate of unemployment and underemployment and has adversely affected social services and social development. Sanctions meant to punish the rogue regime have undesirable effects on civilians.

Win apparently is against sanctions because of their negative consequences and also because Myanmar has not committed aggression against another state. Win cannot condone such sanctions as he argues "... according to the civilisational ethos that reaches to the bedrock, there can be no greater sacrilege or transgression than to actively advocate for punitive measures against one's own land and people" (p. 286).

The book under review is quite comprehensive as it covers the most important questions about Myanmar, analyses the historical influence and political considerations that have shaped the country and provides relevant approaches to studying the state, society and ethnicity in Myanmar. The book is well organised and neatly divides into three parts. The editors in their introduction did mention the division of chapters into three parts but this division, for unexplained reason, is not shown in the table of contents. Nevertheless, the book has covered almost all issues regarding the state, society and ethnicity in Myanmar. This book is highly recommended to those interested in understanding Myanmar.