

have been incorporated, at least tangentially, in the final manuscript, for example Barbara Watson Andaya's *The Flaming Womb* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006) and my own *Lost Goddesses: The Denial of Female Power in Cambodia* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008).

Despite some peculiarities that will irk Cambodia specialists, the book is nonetheless an outstanding contribution to the history of medicine, colonial history and the history of Southeast Asia more generally. Historians will be impressed by the depth and treatment of archival material used in the book, while students from the history of medicine and empire studies will not fail to come away understanding that "human beings dwell somewhere between the realm of ideas and practice" (191) in regard to health services in colonial Cambodia.

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BURMA OR MYANMAR?: The Struggle for National Identity. *Editor, Lowell Dittmer.* Singapore; Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 2010, xiv, 380 pp. (Tables, figures.) US\$98.00, cloth. ISBN 978-981-4313-64-3.

The collective astonishment over recent political reforms in Myanmar reflects the legacy of particular discourses that have been in play since the end of the Cold War. For nearly twenty-five years, Myanmar's domestic situation has been internationalized and interpreted through the terms and experiences that accompanied the rise of liberal-democracies in other parts of the world. The anticipation for Myanmar and the failure to meet these prescribed political expectations inspired a whole genre of scholarship that emphasized the country's exceptional differences. As a result, analyses of Myanmar's contemporary situation were often cast in binary terms that overlooked the more complex dynamics and long-term patterns that have characterized Myanmar history and society. At first glance, the publishing of Lowell Dittmer's edited volume, *Burma or Myanmar?: The Struggle for National Identity*, might be appreciated as a product of that epistemological context, having been conceived and published before the elections of 2010 and the ensuing reforms of 2011-2012.

Dittmer introduces the collection of twelve essays as a departure from this framing by proposing that the contemporary struggles and fragmentation that we have witnessed in the last two-and-a-half decades reflect a longer developmental crisis: Myanmar's people were never allowed to fully develop a national identity due to systematic suppression (presumably by the military). As a result, Myanmar's anticipated political development was stunted, resulting in deep rifts within Burmese society and with the international community. Public demonstrations and protests in 1988, 1990, 2003 and 2007 could thus be read as attempts by the masses to realize the pre-ordained

outcome of democracy. While readers might question the volume's brief treatment of national identity as strictly a coherent, organic, non-state process, the initial framing of the collection is an important step because it offers the potential for thinking about contemporary Myanmar from a potentially more inclusive, inter-disciplinary perspective.

The book is organized into four sub-sections (Mass Politics, Elite Politics, Political Economy and Foreign Policy) that loosely link the individual chapters together. Six of the chapters stem from earlier versions that appeared in a special issue of *Asian Survey* (vol. 48, no. 6, 2008) and reflect familiar discourses of Myanmar that followed the so-called Saffron Revolution in 2007. While many of these chapters were updated to 2009, issues surrounding the student demonstrations of 1988, the 1990s elections, democratic change, minority issues, Aung San Suu Kyi, and the various failures of the state continue to structure the analyses.

In the first section, Mass Politics, Ian Holliday considers the prospects for a democratic transition, Tom Kramer surveys the domestic situation from the perspective of ethnic groups, and Christian Fink traces the humanitarian crises to the state's perception of itself in relation to Burmese society. All three contributions exemplify key tropes that have dominated mainstream representations about Myanmar and settle comfortably upon Dittmer's thesis of a developmental crisis.

The second section, Elite Politics, features two of the strongest articles in the collection. The chapter by Kyaw Yin Hlaing, "Daw Aung San Suu Kyi: A Burmese Dissident Democrat" is both courageous and insightful in the way that it historicizes and unpacks the image of the democracy icon and her party. Kyaw Yin Hlaing's analysis urges us to reconsider the many discourses—especially those connected to "the" opposition—that have been deprived of serious academic scrutiny. Win Min's chapter will be appreciated by readers who have been unsatisfied by the portrayal of a monolithic military in domestic politics. Win Min makes a convincing case that the struggles within the military has less to do with current political contests and more to do with the structures of Myanmar society. Where Kyaw Yin Hlaing and Win Min depart from conventional views, Daniel Goma's chapter returns readers to a more recognizable critique of the military government by examining the founding of Naypyidaw.

The third section, Political Economy, provides an important example of how our sources, criteria, and analytical assumptions produce different images of Myanmar. Sean Turnell's article focuses on the oft-mentioned dichotomy between Myanmar's abundant natural resources (in particular natural gas) and the deplorable socio-economic conditions afflicting society, and provides a criticism of state policy that intersects closely with the earlier chapter by Christina Fink. Jalal Alamgir's chapter offers a timely reassessment of the "isolationist" image of Myanmar by showing that the country actually increased its international trade with a wide range of partners despite being

characterized as reclusive and insular. Of all the chapters in the volume, it was the only analysis that attempted to make a connection with the issue of national identity.

The final section, Foreign Policy, addresses relationships that Myanmar has developed with China, India, and ASEAN, respectively. Min Zin evaluates the multi-layered relationship between China and Myanmar, noting that both sides have a range of objectives, despite the perception that their respective policies are coherently articulated. Renaud Egreteau's comments on India's relationship with Myanmar suggest that India has not been as successful as China in developing its strategic position and explores the different partnerships. Stephen McCarthy's survey of ASEAN's relationship with Myanmar recaps the signature diplomatic events and issues that have become part and parcel of the international discussion on Myanmar's domestic affairs. At the risk of understating the moments of fine analysis within each of these contributions, the final section tended to reify and rehash the same narratives and critiques that have structured the mainstream image of Myanmar since 1988.

Taken together, the volume lacked a sense of cohesiveness, both in focus and execution. While most edited volumes suffer from this shortcoming, it was curious that most of the contributors did not attempt to engage the theme of identity. In addition, there was little attempt by the contributors to engage each other's arguments. For example, it would have been interesting to read how Goma and Min Zin (whose chapters rely on the conventional notion of Myanmar isolationism) would have responded to the critique of that image by Jalal Almagir and, to some extent, Stephen McCarthy.

Finally, the majority of the chapters in this volume neglected to comment on the nature of their sources, situate their perspectives, or recognize the contested nature of many of the events or positions employed in their analyses. One of the challenges facing Myanmar is that many of the key stakeholders within the country have had different ideas about what constitutes a national community, due to different historical, geographical, political, religious and linguistic experiences that began well before 1988. Directing our scholarly attention to those long-term factors might broaden and deepen our understanding of community formation in Myanmar.

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