

cell of the prison to the camping/staging ground of the emergency shelter (*posko*) and the rented room (*in de kost*)' (p. 148). It looks at domestic space as a 'technology' that helped create a type of middle-class activist youth. Lee considers these physical spaces as containing information on these students' worldviews and practices. The last chapter discusses youth 'identity's uneven integration into post-Suharto Indonesia' (p. 179) by looking at the discourse amongst activists during the 2004 election. This election represented the end of *Pemuda fever* and its domestication and commodification by the political establishment into money and status-making ritual enactments. The youth activists became *tokoh* (prominent figures), and their new legitimacy became a mechanism to contractually engage with the elites, thereby turning the activists into a new type of social brokers.

Lee's account of the production and ultimate commodification of the historically bounded phenomenon of Indonesian youth activists has the potential to serve as a comparative model for the study of the production of such activists during the early years of Indonesia's national awakening. We have the great analytical works of Takashi Shiraishi or Benedict Anderson on the rise of Indonesian nationalism during the early twentieth century, yet there is very little discussion in this book on the phenomenological structures and 'technologies' that encouraged and enabled the rise of a certain social type of rebellious youth with a mission. This lack of *longue durée* historical analysis is a bit disappointing, yet completely understandable as Lee herself is not an historian.

This exploration into Indonesian youth culture and its discourses does not explore the viewpoints of individual actors, who come and go in the narrative, but never long enough to tell their personal stories, however. The account is rather heavily analytical while forgetting to touch the ground, so to speak. This may perhaps be rooted in Lee's choice of discussing various overarching aspects of this youth culture, rather than privilege individual voices. Despite this, *Activist archives: Youth culture and the political past in Indonesia* is undoubtedly a significant contribution to the anthropological analysis of youths and political culture in modern Indonesian history.

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Myanmar

A delicate relationship: The United States and Burma/Myanmar since 1945

By KENTON CLYMER

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015. Pp. xi + 409. Figures, Map, Endnotes, Appendix, Bibliography, Index.‡

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In November 2012, Barack Obama paid the first visit to Burma, or Myanmar, by a US head of state. The widely-shared photograph of the American president embracing an uncomfortable Aung San Suu Kyi, kissing her cheek in a move breaching Myanmar's social etiquette, could have provided a good illustration of the 'delicate'

relationship — as the title of Kenton Clymer's new study suggests — that the United States has attempted to establish with the former British colony. Bilateral interactions since the end of the Second World War have long been 'friendly and correct, but not cordial' (p. 204), and this book seeks to understand why.

With this rich and dense monograph, Clymer — a Distinguished Research Professor at Northern Illinois University and a 2011–2012 Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars where he started this research — sheds light on the various dimensions that have undergirding seven decades of Washington's Burmese policies. No other book has offered such archival details; not even John Cady's *The United States and Burma* (Harvard University Press, 1976), which was solely concerned with Burmese domestic events.

The core value of Clymer's work lies in the meticulous archival research he has carried out, and for which he must be commended. The author has indeed not only delved into massive folders of US diplomatic cables and telegrams about post-1945 Burmese state affairs. (All were subtly complemented with a handful of British and Australian archival data). But he has also scrutinised congressional public hearings, private papers of key US politicians from John F. Kennedy to Ronald Reagan, and collected face-to-face interviews with retired diplomats, Washington-based lobbyists, and former policy advisers to enrich the analysis of post-1980s events and foreign policies.

The result is a thickly descriptive, yet highly readable monograph, with a flurry of details and footnotes that fellow historians and Burma aficionados will most certainly enjoy. There are such archival minutiae that the sporadic errors or typos are easily pardonable (for instance: the *Thakins* were not all students, as Sayagyi Thakin Kodaw Hmaing illustrates on pp. 22–4; Premier U Nu thought about the reconvening of the parliament elected in 1960 and dissolved in 1962, not 1963, on p. 225).

Clymer has opted for a classical approach to history writing, looking at 'fluctuation and continuity in the relationship' (p. 2) and presenting a chronological narrative of the American perceptions, involvement, and strategic interests in, and on, postcolonial Myanmar. Each of the 14 chapters (the book lacks a conclusion) is devoted to the analysis of a few consecutive years of the post-1945 relationship until the later part of the second Obama administration (2012–16).

The book proposes three distinct periods of analysis of the US approach to Myanmar's post-1945 political affairs and strategic context. First, it explores the early Cold War years when the recently decolonised, left-leaning Burmese state chose a non-aligned credo (1940s to 1960s). America's policy circles and their regional allies (including the Kuomintang forces stationed in northern Shan State during the 1950s) had to gradually learn to live with this peculiar diplomatic stance. Second, it focuses on the isolation imposed by General Ne Win's xenophobic and inward-looking rule after 1962. The United States then merely found in the military regime a reliable partner for its regional anti-narcotics efforts (1970s–80s). But in the context of a Sino-American detente, relations were kept minimal. And third, it investigates the post-1988 democratic struggle in and around Myanmar, and the evolving attitudes of US policymakers towards it. Washington's policy vis-à-vis the junta that replaced Ne Win's regime in 1988 has indeed oscillated between 'regime change' and 'regime modification' (p. 318). The towering figure of Aung San Suu Kyi, rightly explains the author, has also from the late 1980s started to distort most American perceptions of the country.

However, if Clymer's book carefully documents how successive policymakers in the United States have perceived the Burmese polity and adapted over the decades their strategies towards a little-known state located at the crossroads of China, India and the rest of continental Southeast Asia, the book almost completely misses the Burmese point of view. This is indeed a monograph about the policies devised by the various US agencies of power towards Myanmar rather than a balanced analysis of a bilateral relationship. As an illustration, the sole appendix of the book lists all successive US diplomatic envoys to Rangoon since 1945 (pp. 321–4), but the reader is left without a similar list of the successive Burmese ambassadors to Washington DC since U Soe Nyunt in 1947.

Clymer argues in the last sentence of his introduction (p. 20) that the US–Burmese relationship has been one of confidence and 'friendship'. Yet, had he taken the Burmese viewpoint, his assessment would have certainly been less straightforward and optimistic. The author mentions some research carried out at Myanmar's National Archives, but the use of Burmese data has proven marginal in this study. There are a few welcome exceptions, though. The author indeed briefly discusses the resentment of many a Burmese postcolonial leader towards the condescension of US aid advisers sent to the country in the 1950s, the low commitment of American teachers and experts to Burmese society, and the arrogance of wealthy foreign residents in Rangoon before the 1962 coup d'état (pp. 170–71). This will sound quite familiar to anyone having spent time in Myanmar in the early 2010s, when the country began to be, once more, flooded with proposals for foreign investments and aid. Also, the author sharply recalls the frequent humiliation faced by high-ranking Burmese (and Asian) visitors to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s — including General Ne Win and his wife — in times of plain racial segregation there (p. 179).

Notwithstanding this fact, Clymer offers — as in his previous books — a fascinating account of US strategic and political shenanigans in post-1945 Southeast Asia. Beside Burma specialists, the volume will indeed also appeal to students and historians of America's circles of power and foreign policymaking. With the Burmese case, the book provides a captivating read on how various US agencies involved in defining America's international strategy and diplomacy — the State Department, the White House, and the CIA, but also the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Congress (which seemingly took control of America's Myanmar policy after the 1988 coup), and the US Armed Forces — have often proven at odds with each other on many foreign policy issues, skirmishing all over the globe.

In all, Kenton Clymer has probably produced the most meticulous archival research on the relationship the United States has attempted to build with Burma/Myanmar since 1945. But the story of how the Burmese have responded to America's evolving diplomacies towards them, and how they have perceived the US hegemon's interests, ambitions and actions in the region remains to be told, or at least thoroughly researched.

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* The original version of this book review was published with Renaud Egreteau's name spelled incorrectly. A notice detailing this has been published and the error rectified in the online PDF and HTML copies.