censorship, there were several examples of censorship of artworks, including painting, under the new government. For example, in 2017, after public criticism on social media went viral, artist Zaw Zaw Aung was instructed by Aung San Suu Kyi to modify his finished painting because the Buddha images in his work were placed too low and close to street level in the composition. The modifications took him a year to finish. In another instance, street artists from Kachin State were arrested and jailed for three months after criticism on social media that the Grim Reaper figure in their mural looked like a monk (www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/artists-freed-anti-buddhist-claims-dropped-covid-19-mural-myanmar.html). The democratic government closed one eye in the latter case as political interests trumped freedom of expression when it came to issues related to the majority religion, Buddhism.

Overall, this book could be a very useful introductory reference for journalists, art students and researchers who wish to learn about the history of contemporary art in Myanmar. As the editors of this book and most people inside the country assume, the age-old censorship, political upheaval and communal violence of the 2010s in Myanmar isolated local artists from developments in global contemporary art and from the art market as well. Although the presentation of generational divides seems meaningful in terms of the political periods in which the artists were born, it would have been clearer to divide artists into those born in pre-independence and post-independence Burma, which never enjoyed much freedom and peace; all the post-independence generations have lived, to a great extent, under political repression and in turmoil. Nevertheless, *Painting Myanmar's transition* well documents how the artists from all four designated generations have withstood such hardships through their careers. Even in the transitional 2010s, they did not sell enough due to the decline of tourism after the communal violence in Rakhine State broke out. The brief Introduction reflecting on how local artists migrate to parallel trades to make a living is very helpful for readers to understand what artists have to do to survive in Myanmar.

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Everyday economic survival in Myanmar

By ARDETH MAUNG THAWNGHMUNG

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019. Pp. 276. Tables, Maps, Photographs, Notes, Bibliography, Index.
doi:10.1017/S0022463422000741

This interesting monograph is about economic and political coping strategies employed in Myanmar to withstand economic hardship in the context of authoritarian rule. The analysis was inspired by the author's own experiences following the 1988 coup. The findings are based largely on the results of semi-structured interviews, life histories, personal conversations and a survey conducted between 2008 and 2015.

Its twin objectives are to detail the myriad coping strategies found in Myanmar and to draw out their political, economic and social implications.

Sandwiched between the Introduction and Conclusion are chapters which provide vivid detail on coping strategies of an economic ('Living frugally', 'Working on the side'), social ('Networks, community and external aid'), psychological ('Boosting morale') and political ('Accommodating, resisting, and exiting') nature. The accessible narrative is replete with fascinating insights about everyday struggles to make ends meet. It is complemented by around a dozen photographs which nicely profile aspects of daily life in Myanmar.

The analysis stands at the intersection of at least three bodies of literature, namely: analyses of 'passive' resistance to authority, in the tradition of James Scott's *Weapons of the weak* (1985), studies of coping and survival strategies or 'livelihood analysis', and empirical analyses of poverty and vulnerability in Myanmar. It makes at least two important contributions to these literatures.

First, it addresses a gap in the empirical literature on poverty in Myanmar where good qualitative studies of coping strategies have been relatively rare (with a few exceptions such as United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Studies in social deprivation in Myanmar*, 1999). There are many intriguing examples of the latter in the book including: adding large quantities of red pepper in curry to curb hunger and limit consumption (p. 48); establishing home-based mini-enterprises such as a pig-ear salad and noodle shop set up by one civil servant (p. 69); drawing on labour-sharing arrangements for agricultural and infrastructural work in the Pa-O community (p. 98); consulting clairvoyants and practising *yadaya* rituals to guard against misfortune (p. 141). Such accounts add a different dimension to existing studies of poverty in Myanmar with potential policy implications (though the latter are not the focus of the book).

Second, it presents a very useful conceptual framework to distinguish coping strategies, drawing on categories in Albert Hirschman's *Exit, voice and loyalty: Responses to declines in firms, organizations and states* (1970). Specifically, on one axis, strategies are categorised in terms of Loyalty/accommodation, Passive resistance, Voice or Exit (the LPVE framework). On the other axis, categorisation is based on whether strategies are self-enhancing, self-defeating or resilience-promoting. The framework generates a number of interesting insights. First, contra the *Weapons of the weak* tradition, harmful effects of passive resistance are highlighted (evasion of public health or safety directives, p. 174) and further, strategies of passive resistance are dwarfed in number by those of loyalty/accommodation (p. 177). Second, contra much of the literature on 'sustainable livelihoods', emphasis is placed on the limitations or harmful effects of local coping strategies. Examples include reducing expenditure on food, healthcare and education (pp. 47–56), using social mobilisation and voice to foster ethno-religious conflict (pp. 172, 192) and generally, employing accommodative strategies which serve to increase the regime's staying power. All of this makes for a nuanced and thoughtful inquiry which profiles, but does not romanticise, 'the local'.

I have two small quibbles with the analysis. First, the work would have benefited if more closely linked to the large conceptual literature on poverty, vulnerability and sustainable livelihoods. Poverty and vulnerability tend to be conflated in the book,

though they are not the same thing, and coping strategies may be quite different for each. Further, many of the same arguments presented in the book about the limitations of coping strategies are found in the complementary, critical literature on sustainable livelihoods.

Second, at times, it wasn't clear that the evidence presented in the study provided sufficient warrant for some of the claims made. I refer to claims that the quality of life in rural Burma is worsening (p. 37), that democratic processes create conditions favourable to economic development (p. 17), that small-scale informal activity does not fuel economic growth (p. 180), and so on.

These quibbles do not detract from the core contributions of this monograph, however. Further and sadly, there can be no quibble with the book's ominously prescient concluding remarks: 'Because many of the forces at work in the country run counter to democratic norms and nurture conditions favourable to the return of the military rule, … there can be no guarantee that substantive democratic outcomes will emerge in Myanmar' (p. 202).

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The men who lost Singapore, 1938–1942
By RONALD MCCRUM
Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2017. Pp. 240. Maps, Images, Bibliography, Index.
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This book updates a two-part claim about the fall of Singapore to the Japanese imperial forces in the Second World War. First, that Britain almost certainly could not, once it had prioritised Africa and Russia for reinforcement of tanks and modern aircraft, have held Singapore and Malaya in 1941–42 (pp. 220–21). Second, however, that had civil authorities prepared better it could have been defended for longer. Lives could have been saved (for instance, through more air raid shelters) and the Japanese attack slowed (by early preparation of fixed defences in Johore and Singapore) (pp. 239–40). At best, it is sometimes suggested, the Japanese might not have taken Singapore, since they were running low of ammunition at the end. The latter is a tenuous claim (the South Seas were awash with Japanese ships carrying troops that would soon take the entire region), so the case that civil administration made things worse than they needed to be has always been the stronger one. Had people been warned more clearly and honestly (pp. 182–5), had they been enlisted more enthusiastically, defeat could, perhaps, have been seen as merely an interlude, rather than as a failure in competence and protection. As a symptom of the confidence-sapping effects of failures, McCrum highlights the first Japanese air raid on Singapore (pp. 135–7), at 4.30 am on 8 December. Despite some troops having been held at the ready for invasion