

In this sense, the book is a good one for background information but not very useful for readers wishing to catch up with the current dynamic changes that are taking place in China-ASEAN relations or East Asian international relations.

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Burma

Exploring ethnic diversity in Burma

Edited by MIKAEL GRAVERS

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Gravers' edited volume, *Exploring ethnic diversity in Burma*, offers a much-needed interdisciplinary addition to Southeast Asian Studies in general, as well as Burma studies in particular, as it unites the work of eight scholars of Burma to discuss the various issues of ethnic categorisation, politics and conceptualisation in the country. As Gravers rightly notes, the book is the first of its kind in several decades, and represents a crucial step in redressing the fact that much popular discourse conflates Burma Studies with *Bamar* Studies. In so doing, the volume not only surveys and problematises the ways in which political and geographic understandings of human diversity in the region have led both to conflict and resistance, but also seeks to examine how ethnic categories and exception have often defied those very categories as well.

In addition to the instructive and meaty introduction and conclusion by Gravers, the book consists of six individual chapters dealing with issues of the Kachin, Karenni / Kayah, Mon, Shan, Karen and Chin groups. Particularly useful are the ways in which individual authors, particularly Sadan, Chit Hlaing and Takatani, are careful to discuss the ways in which Burmese politics, both internally and externally, have consistently conflated these ethnic categories, thus making the volume a useful comparative study of such politics in the Southeast Asian country.

The Kachin end up being the most heavily represented group in this volume, and the coverage of this group by Sadan, Dean and South offers a useful exploration of Kachin politics through the lens of the varying fields of political science, history and social geography. Particularly salient are Dean's analyses of boundaries and sovereignty in relation to Kachin political, social and symbolic places and the politics of the Kachin Independence Organisation. Furthermore, Takatani Michio's contribution, 'Who are the Shan? An ethnological perspective' is especially useful, not only in that the author draws upon both Shan and Bamar written sources, but also looks at the ways in which the political interrelations have been posited over the *longue durée*. Furthermore, especially since there is considerable scholarship on Burma as well as the Shans in the Japanese language, it is useful that the author draws upon this corpus.

In terms of possible course assignments, several chapters of *Exploring ethnic diversity in Burma* would be instructive for both undergraduate students of

Southeast Asian Studies as well as Anthropology. Chit Hlaing's useful chapter, 'Some remarks upon ethnicity theory and Southeast Asia, with special reference to the Kayah and the Kachin', draws broader linkages to theories of ethnicity in that it helps to interrogate notions of geographic determinism and ethnic exclusivity which are commonly held by students new to Southeast Asian studies.

Although I would not like to diminish the importance of this volume's intervention into scholarship of Burma and Southeast Asia, the scope of the project (in its objective of 'exploring ethnic diversity') is somewhat disappointing in that all of the chapters are written by scholars whose work focuses on ethnic nationality groups other than *bamar*. The book runs the risk of placing the burden of 'diversity' upon the shoulders of non-Burman groups, and by default could semantically reify the prior dynamic which conflates Burma studies with *bamar* studies. Ethnicity, after all, is hardly the exclusive reserve of the minority groups, when, after all the country name is also an ethnonym. As a brief aside, it is worth pointing out that the back of the book jacket refers to the groups as 'minorities' rather than the more empathic term 'ethnic nationalities'. Continuing on the tack of the 'ethnic nationalities' of Burma, despite the fact that the authors, in general, do a very good job of interrogating the ways in which these ethnonyms are often condensations of other groups, it also would have been instructive to see more explicit coverage of an ethnic group which has not achieved recognition as an ethnic nationality, such as the Pa-O, Akha or the Rohingyas, who have drawn great media attention, controversy and sympathy from the international community in recent months. Aside from criticising what the book is not, the very fact that the volume exists to raise these additional questions also gives it another important place in the small, but growing, corpus of engaged, on-the-ground research on Burma.

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Buddhism, power and political order

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The German political theorist Carl Schmitt believed that political concepts and theories of the modern state are based upon secularised theological concepts. The recent popularity of Schmitt's work in relation to notions such as sovereignty and law, or (post-) Foucauldian studies of governmentality mirror ongoing debates on power and order in the social sciences and humanities. In Social Anthropology and Buddhist Studies, substantial work has been devoted to the study of Theravada Buddhism's link to the wider socio-political field in which power is enacted and performed. The only seemingly simple fact that 'all religions also have a political dimension', as editor Ian Harris (p. 1) puts it in the introduction, and the extensive body of literature on the subject cannot conceal that we actually still understand little