

he could rely — as if he were back in Moscow in the Second World War — on the Russians. The President, as Jacobs points out, felt that he had to increase the commitment to Diem in order to show that the United States was not giving mainland Southeast Asia up. It was to be much more difficult to get out of South Vietnam, and Nixon and Kissinger can hardly be said to have done it well.

‘The American attempt to try to make an anti-Communist bastion out of Laos was never physically or objectively possible’, the British ambassador John Addis concluded. ‘We couldn’t have got out with anything so good as the 1961 ceasefire and the 1962 settlement, such as they are, if we had all been behind the Graham Parsons line, and we could have got something much better if the Americans had seen reason earlier.’ Jacobs says almost nothing about the British or indeed other powers. That foreshortens the perspective even on American policy, let alone neutralism. Lord Home — strangely emerging doubly mistitled on p. 250 as ‘British foreign minister Alexander Frederick Douglas-Home’ — is not given the credit he deserves for getting the Geneva conference started in May 1961 in face of an obtuse Rusk. Regarding Harriman as the conference’s ‘catalytic figure’ (p. 255] downgrades Malcolm MacDonald, as my own account of the conference suggests. Over Laos the British were able to play the moderating role that they were unable to play over Vietnam.

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## Myanmar

*In the name of Pauk-Phaw: Myanmar’s China policy since 1948*

By MAUNG AUNG MYOE

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Sino–Myanmar relations are very important, but there are few in-depth scholarly studies of this field from the perspective of either of the players. Chinese research has long been prejudiced by adhering to the intellectual framework and patterns of Pauk-Phaw (sibling) harmonious relations. Any book devoted to Sino–Myanmar relations still has to face pre-publication censorship in China. Conflicts between the two countries have often been filtered out in Chinese research in order to highlight their long-standing Pauk-Phaw status. Consequently, such ‘Chinese friendship’-oriented research has failed to provide a complete picture of Sino–Burmese relations since 1948.

Maung Aung Myoe’s book offers a valuable interpretation of the Burmese version of Pauk-Phaw relations. The author uses hitherto inaccessible (Burmese) sources, particularly the archives of the Myanmar Defence Services Historical Museum and Research Institute (DSHMRI). These provide Myanmar’s official perceptions and thinking about its relations with China, allowing for fresh insights.

The vicissitudes of Sino–Myanmar relations between 1948 and 2010 reveal the dual character of Myanmar’s balanced diplomacy with China — flexibility and

prudence. On the one hand, Myanmar has always highlighted its own geopolitical significance to China (p. 185) and skilfully played the geostrategic card to serve and maximise its national interests. On the other hand, 'Yangon has always tried to find alternatives to counter China's growing influence in the country' when necessary. According to the author, this is not intended as a balance against China (p. 105). Myanmar, as the 'younger sibling', for all practical purposes and to its own advantage, constantly repositions its China policy to accommodate China's interest in the country and in the region (pp. 189–90). So Myanmar's China policy, as the author describes it, 'has always been placed in somewhere between balancing and bandwagoning', and this policy hallmark 'is likely to remain unchanged' (p. 190).

While the book's most important feature is its Burmese perspective and sources, herein too lie the book's chief weakness. The author points out in the Introduction that previous research has failed 'to examine Myanmar's China policy in the wider context of her overall foreign policy' (p. 8). In fact, this appears to be the case in this book as well. For example, analysing the reason for the shift in relations in 1954, Maung Aung Myoe claims that 'Yangon had convinced the Chinese leadership that it had much to gain from improved relations with neutralist Myanmar', which prompted Beijing to pursue a flexible policy toward Rangoon (p. 23). He exaggerates Burma's role in the bilateral relations shift in 1954 although he also attributes it to 'a result of changing perceptions and political realities in China' (pp. 26–7). The shift of China–Burma relations in 1954 was essentially because China changed its overall foreign policy, particularly the policy toward all neutral neighbours, not only Burma.

The author also argues that China was dissatisfied with Burma's failure to demonstrate 'socialist solidarity' (pp. 61, 181) in her international relations between 1963 and 1966. The argument is inauthentic because the CCP never believed that the 'Burmese Way to Socialism' was 'true and scientific' socialism, but rather bureaucratic capitalism and state capitalism with outward appearances of socialism, according to the declassified documents of China's Foreign Ministry.

The book also suffers from a fair number of incomplete or missing source citations.

To take but a few examples, the author cites many communiqués and official statements issued by both governments without full details (e.g. pp. 13, 30–31, 47, 57, 69, 83, 96, 107, 110, 112–13, 121). Several notes lack proper source details (chap. 2: nn 40, 50; chap. 3: nn 35, 36, 41; and chap. 4: nn 66, 107, 108). There are a few pinyin spelling mistakes (e.g. Cao Gangchuang, Fu Quangyou, Keng Sheng, Xiao Jingguang, Xinhwa, Shaanxi, Wantin, Wang Jiayang, Lanhan) and traditional and simplified Chinese characters have been mixed and used inconsistently in the volume.

The author's arguments and conclusions sometimes fail in terms of persuasiveness and proof. For instance: the author argues that Premier Zhu Rongji's negative impression of Myanmar's leaders affected his government's policy toward the country (pp. 113–14); in China–Myanmar economic cooperation projects, China uses trickery (p. 164); and that since early 2008, Sino–Myanmar relations began to enter a difficult phase (p. 131), but by late 2008, both sides understood the rules of the game and the emerging framework of bilateral ties (p. 137). The author could provide sufficient facts and grounds to bolster and substantiate his statements; in chapter 4, the

extensive quoting of both Chinese and Burmese leaders could be more analytical and less descriptive.

On the whole, though, this is a worthwhile study of China–Myanmar relations in spite of these weaknesses, and is a must for all those interested in an area in which little academic work has been done, particularly because Myanmar has unrolled a succession of great changes since 2011.

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*The authority of influence: Women and power in Burmese history*

By JESSICA HARRIDEN

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*The authority of influence* provides an overview of the development of Burmese women's role in their country's history. The author appears to include some ethnic minority women such as Olive Yang, Kokang state patroness during the 1960s, and a few representatives of other major minorities such as the Karen and Shan in this review. The book may have begun life as a doctoral thesis which has been slightly revised. Although it was published in 2012, the main perspective of the writing appears to be prior to the 2010 elections and the subsequent initiation of the reform processes, the major focus is on the misdeeds of the former military government.

The author skips through many centuries of Burmese history up to the colonial takeover from 1826 up to 1885 with a general rendition of the historical trajectory, but without, however, contributing any innovative insights. The main conceptual framework appears to be that Burmese women (read also ethnic minority women) occupy a subordinate place in both Burmese history and society, but exert influence on their menfolk through their marriages and family connections. One feels like remarking, is this not also the way of the world in other societies both in the past and currently? The author singles out a few historical exceptions such as Queen Me Nu, consort to King Bagyidaw, and Queen Supayalat, consort to the last Konbaung dynasty monarch, King Thibaw, whose uncharacteristic accessions were marked by the usual distasteful bloodletting resulting in the loss of the kingdom to the invading foreign forces.

No new perspectives are however given to the reader about these historical figures and their rather pedestrian interpretation and portrayals are standard fare. When one arrives at the redoubtable, revolver-toting, drug-smuggling Olive Yang, about whom there is already a very good biography, one might be forgiven for anticipating that at last the author will have found an exciting, atypical female to examine critically. But alas, Olive is passed over with only cursory treatment despite her very modern lifestyle and lesbian film-star lover. The author's description of some of the women involved in the exile movement and the long-running civil war promised greater reward and some of the information proffered about these females is revealing. However, not enough is made of this information and in the final analysis the author admits that they too were unable to rise to real power in their movements, but were mostly