

liberalization seems unlikely in Singapore. She describes a model of “corporate pluralism” (concordant with, for instance, the stance of the voluntary welfare organizations that Chua and Kwok describe) in which Singapore Inc. is geared as a whole towards maximum efficiency and competitiveness, as reflected in the common worldview of the state and its “subsidiary”, the AMP. As long as the majority of Singaporeans find the present “management” to be in their economic best interests, they will continue to support it. However, that management must continually reinvent itself and modify its strategies to sustain popular support. In short, pluralism is a positive force for requiring Singapore to be dynamic and inclusive.

Overall, these contributions suggest that the nature, political impact, and social significance of pluralism has been changing in all three countries. Most notably, the salience of particular lines of cleavage has shifted, with ethnicity, religion, gender, generation, and other categories jostling for influence or integration. This volume makes a noteworthy attempt to describe and spark further reflection on the shape and practice of multiculturalism in contemporary Southeast Asia, without losing sight of the historical roots of the present order.

MEREDITH L. WEISS
Department of International Studies
DePaul University
Chicago, Illinois, USA

***Fear and Sanctuary: Burmese Refugees in Thailand.* By Hazel J. Lang.** Ithaca, New York, USA: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2002. 240 pp.

Despite a 1995 ceasefire agreement between Burma’s SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) and the New Mon State Party (one of several ethnic separatist groups), the deep-seated problems that have caused massive civilian displacement still linger, argues Hazel J. Lang in *Fear and Sanctuary: Burmese Refugees in Thailand*. In a broad, interdisciplinary study, Lang addresses the historical, political, and economic circumstances surrounding the predicament of Burmese refugees along and within the Thai border. Specifically, the work explores the nature and causes of refugee displacement in Burma while investigating the ways in which these communities have adjusted to and been affected by the shifting geopolitical circumstances of the

border region. Through a wide variety of sources, Lang demonstrates that a relatively uncontrollable degree of ambiguity has arisen with regard to the definition and recognition of refugee status, boundary, and sanctuary in the region. In fact, it is precisely this flexibility at the borders, this “blurring” of identity, sovereignty, and jurisdiction at the local, state, and international levels that has compounded the underlying historical, political, and ideological issues that are at the heart of the refugee problem. Although diplomatic co-operation between the governments of Burma and Thailand continues to improve, and while ceasefire agreements have temporarily reduced the intensity of the conflict, *Fear and Sanctuary* argues that no fundamental change in this post-colonial predicament is recognizable until an approach espousing “human security” is adopted.

While the problem is very much an ongoing fissure in the region, the deep context of the current refugee crisis must be considered within the historical legacy of ethnic politics that arose out of British colonialism, nationalism, and the eventual post-independence struggle for power. In the concise survey of pre-colonial and colonial forms of representation and communal interaction in Chapter Two, Lang admits that pre-modern cultural integration and homogenization occurred primarily through patron–client relationships, regional affinities, and religious acculturation — a gradual process that began during the classical Pagan period and continued into the early-modern Konbaung dynasty. In contrast, contemporary notions of ethnicity, which were derived from colonial administrative ideas and anti-colonial sentiment, were now being employed in domestic politics to define and preserve minority interests in the wake of what was being perceived as “Burmanization”. Initiatives towards administrative centralization were thus viewed along ethnic lines, which in turn conflicted with efforts to secure political autonomy by minority communities, creating the political dilemma that hinders reconciliation today. Lang addresses the nature of this refugee problem from essentially two perspectives: an “internal” view through the case of the Mons, and “externally” from the perspective of the Thais, who serve as the host country. This approach shows how local conditions and concerns intersect with national, regional, and international interests, thereby illustrating the complexities involved in the problem as well as in formulating viable solutions.

Chapter Three addresses the causes for displacement as the raiding of villages, the coercive demand for “fees” from villagers, the requisition of labour, and the forced relocation of villages. Lang constructs the extent to which these tactics “create” refugees and provides analysis on the repercussions for the communities caught in the crossfire. The alleged atrocities, the association of civilian populations with the

insurgency movements, and the inability to conduct everyday life in a “secure” environment, has facilitated large-scale migrations across the Thai border in search of sanctuary, the nature of which is examined thoroughly in Chapter Four.

Extending the question of Thailand as a sanctuary to both Indochinese and Burmese refugees, Lang juxtaposes the different approaches to refugee hosting by the Thai Government and draws attention to the impact of Cold War politics on refugee policy and practice. In brief, Lang shows that for much of the seventies and early eighties, Burmese refugee camps were overshadowed by the influx of Indochinese refugees, who were fleeing the violence and dislocation of the Vietnam War and subsequent invasion of Cambodia in 1978. The invasion and migrations attracted the attention of the international community and the communist-wary United States, resulting in the establishment of logistical, infrastructural, and financial support, which was implemented in order to maintain the camps on the eastern border. With this international backing, the Thais were able to provide concentrated aid to the camps, which in effect served the resistance structure along the Cambodian border. Thus, the camps constituted an effective buffer to the encroaching Vietnamese, illustrating the way in which Cold War politics and regional rivalries influenced refugee policy and *identity* in the Thai–Cambodian context. In sum, policies surrounding sanctuary and refugee protection in Thailand were fluid and had as much to do with regional and international politics as they were an expression of national security.

This flexibility of policy and the ambiguity of boundaries had significant effects upon the Mon refugees, which are the subjects in Chapters Five and Six. Owing to changes in Thai refugee policy, the need to uphold agreements between Mon political groups and the Burmese government, and the uncertain relationship between boundary and refugee status, several relocation projects placed the Mon groups precariously close to areas controlled by the Burmese army. In addition, the intensification of army manoeuvres upon insurgents in the border areas left them more dependent on Thailand for military and humanitarian relief, precisely at a time when Thailand was becoming “less receptive to those needs” (p. 152). Whereas Chapter Four illustrates the way in which global politics shaped the nature of refugee policy, Chapters Five and Six effectively demonstrate how both domestic and external policies between Burma and Thailand significantly modified the way in which refugee communities and sanctuary were conceptualized.

Finally, the plight of many Burmese students and dissidents who sought political asylum in Bangkok after the 1988 uprisings is examined in Chapter Seven to demonstrate the vagueness of their status as well.

Suggesting that the legal definition of these activists as either “refugees” or “illegal immigrants” is actually blurred in practice, Lang points to the inadequacies of international law and Thai immigration policy as contributing to the contentiousness and uncertainty of their identity.

Fear and Sanctuary presents an important account of the refugee problem along the Burmese–Thai border, and the complexities facing both migrant and host. The many strengths of the work lie in its interdisciplinary approach, its strong theoretical foundation, and its attempt to provide a view “from above” (in terms of state-level approaches to refugees) as much as it is firmly set on giving a view “from the ground”. The latter perspective is augmented by a variety of “official” and “unpublished” materials that support the author’s case, including documents from the Committee for the Promotion of People’s Struggle in Monland, Amnesty International, the United Nations, the Karen National Union, Human Rights Watch/Asia, Shan Human Rights Foundation, the Karen Human Rights Group, and the Mon National Relief Committee, to name but a few. These together with a large number of anonymous refugee interviewees provide a strong but predictable commentary on the border situation. The work’s main sources, in other words, could not have produced anything *but* the reading and interpretation that are presented. What would strengthen the scholarly tone of the book would be to contextualize the nature of the sources provided, for they are so transparent in their orientation that their objectivity becomes an issue. One paragraph (p. 68) does suggest that reports “may be ideologically freighted and tendentious”, but there is no discussion on how to handle these types of sources, nor any attempt to contextualize them in an objective manner.

As a result, one is left wondering what the Burmese government’s position is on these ethnic minorities, the role of domestic, regional, and international politics on its counter-insurgency methods, and how boundaries affect its perceptions of Thailand as a sanctuary. Using a “local Mon human rights commentator” to comment on “the interests of the military authorities in the center” (p. 69) or an anonymous interviewee (p. 70) to demonstrate that “recklessness itself is condoned (or even used as ‘strategy’) by the central authorities” is hardly sufficient to represent those views. In the end, government documents, newspapers, or official statements would be subject to the same criticism as that which is directed to some of the sources in *Fear and Sanctuary* — but what is necessary is to recognize the nature and problem of sources in the first place.

Another area of research might be a closer examination of insurgents and their role among the refugee camps. Lang’s study discloses that factionalism among the Karens has complicated the situation and

contributed to the “blurring” of refugee identity, while Thailand has supported resistance movements on both its borders. Such important insights deserve deeper study, as it is clear that the activities of these insurgents are an important component of the conditions causing the displacement of “citizens” (pp. 71, 88, 141, 142).

Finally, *Fear and Sanctuary* provokes a response to the interpretation of Burmese history that was provided. While Burma specialists have demonstrated the minor role of ethnicity as a category in Burmese history, it is apparent that it still influences the way in which the past is read. Specifically, pre-colonial power centres are described by Lang as “Mon, Burman, Shan and Arakanese” (p. 26), while cities of sixteenth century Lower Burma are given an exclusive “Mon” identity (p. 28), when the chronicles refer to them clearly by their place names. The processes of cultural, administrative, and economic integration are portrayed as violent, aggressive, and suppressive, reminding one of similar colonial interpretations of the encounter between Aryans and Dravidians in Ancient India. One must be cautious in rendering the past through a judgment of the present and be wary of assigning “ethnic” perspectives upon studies of historical processes, as Lang suggests of Lieberman’s work (p. 26). Even if ethnicity is read into the past, one should make sure to include the most recent, relevant, and substantiated work in surveys of the historical narrative. Reference to Michael Aung-Thwin’s work on the “Three Shan Brothers” (*Journal of Asian Studies*, 1996) and his subsequent book on the various “myths” in Burmese historiography (*Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma: Paradigms, Primary Sources, and Prejudices*, 1998), would arguably have yielded a more accurate perspective from which to engage in a discourse on the history of ethnicity in Burma.

MAITRI AUNG-THWIN
Asia Research Institute
National University of Singapore

***Nuclear India in the Twenty-First Century.* Edited by D.R. Sardesai and Raju G.C. Thomas.** New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. 312pp.

This book is an attempt to reassess India’s nuclear weapons programme from a strategic, political, technological, and economic perspective.