

***Burma Redux: Global Justice and the Quest for Political Reform in Myanmar.* By Ian Holliday. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011/New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. Paperback: 287pp.**

After Cyclone Nargis devastated the Ayeyarwaddy Delta in May 2008, there was much debate concerning how the international community should respond to Myanmar's biggest natural disaster. Then French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner suggested implementing the United Nations' (UN) Responsibility to Protect (R2P) to deliver aid as the then ruling junta failed to meet human security obligations and also limited foreign humanitarian aid and disaster relief assistance. While a tripartite arrangement involving the Myanmar government, ASEAN and the UN was eventually inked that enabled a coordinated relief operation, Cyclone Nargis presented a key case in the debate of intervention concerning Myanmar dating back to the 1988 coup: how, and to what extent, should external entities be involved in Myanmar?

Focusing on the theme of global justice and the debate on intervention, Ian Holliday's book examines the key issues pertaining to external intervention and applies the analysis to Myanmar. The first book-length study on Myanmar to be completed since the contentious 2010 general elections, it affirms the importance of foreign intercession in Myanmar through grassroots engagement efforts encompassing foreign states, aid agencies and corporations.

The first four chapters course through Myanmar's colonial and post-colonial history, and provide succinct contextualization. Holliday meticulously describes how Myanmar came to its current state of affairs: the "liberal imperialism" enterprise under the British which was unrivalled in terms of colonial economic mobilization; the birth of Burman nationalism; the post independence turmoil and the military's rise to domination; the plight of the country under General Ne Win's ostensibly socialist rule; and the reassertion of military dominance after the September 1988 coup. These chapters allow the reader to contextualize the reforms currently underway in Myanmar and the formidable challenges facing the country's democratization process.

The subsequent chapters are theory oriented, as the author examines the gamut of academic work concerning justice and the approaches and roles of foreign involvement. Chapter Five covers global attention towards Myanmar over the years, and

examines the aspects and failures of both engagement and isolation strategies practised by Myanmar's neighbours and Western countries respectively. The debate between cosmopolitan and communitarian approaches to duties of global justice, the specific historical injustices perpetrated against the Burmese by their colonial and wartime occupiers and the general universal justice owed to them are elaborated in the sixth chapter. Chapter Seven surveys the different types of intervention and their justifications, the internal and external deliberations of such interventions, and the notion of "interactive intervention" where insiders are given the leading role in identifying injustices and determining interventions while outsiders assume a "following role". The final chapter deals with the different possibilities of intervention, capacity-building intercession to bring about socio-political change in Myanmar, and the potential political impact of principled and sustainable investment to promote reforms. Holliday concludes by surveying the prospects of "unmaking Myanmar" through the injection of democratic principles and re-evaluation of ethnic relations, the "remaking of Burma" by reinvigorating civil society, the possibilities for external involvement based on global justice, and the prospects for outsiders to join locals in opening up opportunities for action within Myanmar.

The author believes that interactive intervention is the best approach to re-energize and reconfigure Myanmar's return to the international community. He argues that interactive intervention would be able to deliver the demands of global justice in Myanmar's case (p. 159). Holliday forwards the notion of consensual engagement through intercession and investment by aid agencies and responsible global corporations to empower local people to implement political change (pp. 193–94). He also argues for discursive intervention, where development action seeks to "reshape the society from bottom up" (p. 164), arguing that since assertive strategies are not favoured domestically and are shown to have vague prospects, meaningful social change supported by external intercession is a key condition for sustainable political reform.

Holliday repeatedly emphasizes the lack of canvassing of Burmese grassroots opinion on foreign intervention and the importance of heeding grassroots views on such issues. As the domestic population is the most likely to be affected by any kind of intervention, their opinions must be prioritized over that of others, be it their oppressors or dissidents. Obstacles have hampered canvassing popular opinion within Myanmar. This is complicated by the morality tale-like

portrayal of domestic politics which has been widely consumed abroad, particularly in the West. However, limited listening projects, such as that undertaken by CDA Collaborative Learning Projects with local agencies in late 2009, have, to a certain degree, allowed the outside world to comprehend domestic perception thus helping to improve the effectiveness of external involvement.

Another key theme of the latter chapters is assessing the isolation and engagement strategies adopted by various countries against Myanmar. The sanctions and isolationist approach implemented by the West and supported by dissident and rights organizations, and cooperative non-interference engagement strategies forwarded by Myanmar's Asian neighbours, have both failed to achieve their desired outcomes. A general lack of cohesion of the international community's policies towards Myanmar, and general inattention towards the country, has rendered all engagement strategies as failures, contributing to the injustice faced by the people of Myanmar. Holliday rightly notes of the urgent requirement for a "thorough re-examination of options for external action" (p. 122) as most countries' diplomatic initiatives have registered disappointing results.

Holliday's book provides an excellent and succinct introduction to modern Burmese politics and Myanmar's position in the global debate for justice. The theory aspect of the book offers a thorough analysis of the arguments on external involvement and would be a good case study companion for students of International Relations and justice. Citing numerous published materials and copious end-notes, Holliday has crafted an engaging, well-researched and balanced book which will definitely prove useful as Myanmar pursues reform. Although Myanmar has seen rapprochement with the West over the past two years and a nascent civil society and domestic media landscape strive to report grassroots opinions on a variety of pressing issues, the book remains very relevant to the debate of intervention and implementation of justice in Myanmar and of other distressed communities elsewhere.

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