

***Comparative Study of Child Soldiering on Myanmar-China Border: Evolutions, Challenges and Countermeasures.* By Kai Chen. Singapore: Springer, 2014. Soft Cover: 98pp.**

As this book is the first comprehensive study of child soldiering on the Myanmar-China border it represents a welcome addition to the extensive literature on Myanmar politics and society. The book is clearly structured and logically argued, and this reviewer finds it valuable for those who are not only interested in armed conflict in Myanmar but the global problem of child soldiering in general.

“Limited Statehood” and “Transnational Public-Private Partnership” are two key concepts that form the conceptual framework of the author’s research. Limited statehood means that “central government is unable to implement and enforce rules in certain parts (or part) in its territory” (p. 11), while Transnational Public-Private Partnership means “continuous and relatively institutionalized transboundary interactions between public and private actors that formally strive for the provision of collective goods, whereas private actors can be for-profit and/or civil society organizations” (p. 12). As he is not satisfied with the existing definitions of “child soldiering”, the author argues that “the definition should refer to a process of associating any person below 18 years of age with any armed force or group which contains recruitment, training and deployment” (p. 18). The author discusses the intensity and various stages of armed conflicts in Myanmar, and the organizations involved in recruiting, training and deploying child soldiers as well as the negative consequences of child soldiering on the border.

The author provides six structural causes of child soldiering in Myanmar: first, the decentralization of security which allows local military units to mobilize resources for troops and conduct business for unit welfare; second, inadequate manpower resources, due mainly to high rates of desertion in the armed forces, an imbalanced population structure which results in a relative shortage of adults, and competition for manpower between the military and ethnic-based militias; third, insufficient legal enforcement; fourth, the displacement of children as a consequence of armed conflict, drug smuggling and the HIV/AIDS epidemic; fifth, stateless children due to the lack of marriage and birth registration; and sixth, chronic poverty. While the last five causes are quite obvious, this reviewer

finds it hard to understand the decentralization of security as a structural cause of child soldiering. The author appears to confuse the decentralization of security with the policy of turning a blind eye to child soldier recruitment which is a means to expand the force structure of the Myanmar armed forces.

In addition to structural causes, the author provides three situational contexts that force children into soldiering. The author calls these contexts child soldier-recruiter relationships. In the victim-coercer relationship, children are forcefully recruited with the use of threat, force, or violence, and sometimes by abduction. In the patron-client relationship, two motivating factors for children to serve in armed organizations are the need for survival and the desire for military prestige. In the comradeship relationship, children are motivated to join armed organizations in order to avenge the death of family members or because they have been ideologically motivated. In the case of why some children are recruited or involved in armed conflicts and not others, the author explains that those who are not recruited as child soldiers are mostly disabled children, child labourers or children seeking refuge in monasteries and/or with relatives.

How can the problem of child soldiering along the Myanmar-China border be reduced? According to the author, there is no optimal solution, and conventional approaches such as state-centred partnerships, i.e. finding solutions through working mostly with government agencies, and international intervention are of limited utility. Instead, the author proposes a multi-stakeholder Transnational Public-Private Partnership consisting of four essential elements: first, non-hierarchical relationships among all and participation by relevant partners such as civil society organizations, international NGOs, local NGOs and transnational companies; second, priority must be given to disadvantaged groups; third, risk allocation for funding, personnel safety and prospects for success must be divided between the public and private sectors; and fourth, trust building among the partners. Under the Transnational PPP, the author suggests four programmes: a monitoring system and complaint regime; partnerships in public health and humanitarian assistance; opium substitution schemes; and private mediation in peace talks. Transnational PPP should aim to provide education and vocational training as countermeasures for reducing the negative consequences of child soldiering in the short term, building mutual trust and monastery-based protective mechanisms in the medium term and

eliminating the underlying causes of child soldiering in the long term.

There are some factual and typo errors in the book. For example, on p. 19, the author mistakenly states that the March 1946 Panglong Conference was organized by “the then-Prime Minister U Saw”; in fact it was organized by Shan Swabwas (chieftains) and U Saw was just a participant. On p. 25, the author claims that in response to the Burmese government’s rejection of Kachin’s desire to secede from the Union of Burma, a group of World War II veterans established the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in February 1961 near Lashio. Most research work on the subject of insurgencies in Myanmar dispute this. For instance, Martin Smith, in his renowned book *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, argues that the KIA was established in response to the transfer of three Kachin villages under the Sino-Burma boundary treaty and attempts to make Buddhism the state religion. On pp. 28–29, when it comes to the issue of negative consequences of child soldiering, the two aspects of injuries should be physical and “psychological” (the word “physical” is used both times). On p. 86, the reviewer assumes that it should be “cash allowance” rather than “case allowance”. And on p. 87, there is a typographical error and the sentence should read “a decisive role in the construction of civil society” rather than “a divisive role”.

Overall, Kai Chen’s book provides a serious examination of the causes, challenges and countermeasures of child soldiering along the Myanmar-China border. If the author had expanded the scope of study to include child soldiering in other border areas, this book would have provided a better and more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

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