

## BOOK REVIEWS

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***War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire, 1994–2011.* Edited by Mandy Sadan. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016. Softcover: 517pp.**

This collection of essays on the historical precedents, anthropology, political economy and prospects of conflict and peace in Kachin State, Northern Myanmar makes an outstanding contribution to the literature. It should be regarded as essential reading on these issues, together with the editor, Mandy Sadan's earlier account of Kachin histories (*Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma*, Oxford University Press 2013, reviewed in the December 2015 issue of *Contemporary Southeast Asia*).

Sadan has brought together a diverse and stimulating collection of voices, ranging from well-established analysts to first-time authors. Veteran Myanmar-watcher Martin Smith provides a comprehensive overview of and reflection on the Kachin Independence Organization's (KIO) ceasefire with the government between 1994 and 2011, arguing that it should be seen in the larger historical context of fluctuating but deeply inequitable relations between the Myanmar government and the military, and minority communities (pp. 57–91). Representatives of a younger generation of Myanmar scholars include Matt Walton, who provides a useful conclusion (pp. 461–72), and Lee Jones (pp. 95–113) and Kevin Woods (pp. 114–48) who contribute important assessments of post-ceasefire political economies, including Woods' critique of "development" activities as a form of counterinsurgency, wherein "battlefield enemies" become "business bedfellows" (p. 114).

Two chapters on the view from China add much to understanding the dynamics of peace and conflict in (particularly northern) Myanmar. Enze Han (pp. 149–68) assesses changing Sino–Myanmar relations,

while Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (pp. 169–201) describes the situation of Jingpo communities in Yunnan Province, and their relationships with the Jingphaw in Myanmar, and the state (very different to that of their cousins across the border). Particularly interesting, readable and informative are the chapters contributed by first-time Kachin authors; less academic in approach and style, but extremely valuable in providing a nuanced account of how it was to live through some of the traumatic events of these years. Khkum Bu Lu's chapter on the experience of women in conflict and peace (pp. 291–307), Hkanhpa Tu Sadan's piece on Kachin university student life in 1990s Yangon (pp. 308–29) and Duwa Mahkaw Khun Sa's chapter on the history and dynamics of the Kachin National Organization (KNO, pp. 330–58) communicate memories and lived experiences in a way which is impossible to capture in more formal academic analysis. Their chapters include accounts of both suffering (e.g. the problem of drugs in many Kachin communities) and hope (e.g. the solidarity and friendship between individuals and Kachin subgroups). The final four chapters provide comparative accounts of other peace processes in Myanmar, and India. Of these, Patrick Meehan's succinct history of peace and conflict among the Palaung (Ta'ang) is particularly useful, offering a nuanced and comprehensive contribution to the sparse literature on this community (pp. 361–87).

As the focus throughout is on the KIO ceasefire, it is surprising that the book contains no voices directly from the KIO itself — especially given the (interesting and important) contribution from its sometime rival organization, the KNO. Before and during the ceasefire period, the KIO had built up an impressive state-like structure, including a fairly sophisticated political administration and departments of health, education etc, which remains intact in those areas not overrun by the Myanmar Army since fighting broke out again in mid-2011. This already excellent volume of essays might have benefited from an account of the situation in the KIO's "liberated areas", during the ceasefire and since.

Another partial omission is an in-depth discussion of quite why the KIO ceasefire broke down in June 2011. Duwa Mahkaw Khun Sa comes closest to addressing this issue in detail, and provides part of the story. Martin Smith sketches the parameters of an answer, but does not draw a conclusion: "...were the Kachin people and region deliberately targeted for suppression during the transition from the SPDC [State Peace and Development Council] to Their Sein governments or was the ceasefire failure caused by a series of coincidental but progressive events in which there is no single

pattern of blame? There will probably never be a simple answer” (p. 78). The proximate cause was a Myanmar Army attack against Kachin Independence Army (KIA) positions near the China-backed Dapein hydropower project. This was the latest in a series of provocations by the military, against which the KIO/KIA had previously avoided retaliating, despite the apparent desire of Myanmar Army leaders to draw the Kachin into a fight, due to the latter’s refusal to transform into a government-controlled Border Guard Force. While a more detailed probing of these issues would have been useful, the different contributions provide an important corrective to sometimes glib and superficial assessments of the peace process and transition underway in Myanmar, questioning the degree to which these developments have really addressed the underlying grievances and concerns of the country’s long-suffering ethnic nationality communities. As the editor notes in her Introduction (p. 6), there are well-founded reasons why the Kachin and other ethnic nationality groups have learned not to trust a government which has so often failed them in the past. A comprehensive settlement to decades of state-society and armed ethnic conflict in Myanmar will have to go beyond military truces like the KIO ceasefire to address underlying structures of violence and inequality throughout the country.

This book is an important and timely contribution to the literature on peace and conflict in Myanmar, and Kachin history and socio-political dynamics. Its value is further enhanced by some excellent photographs (including for example those by Martin Smith, pp. 63, 68).

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ASHLEY SOUTH is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Ethnic Studies and Development, Chiang Mai University. Postal address: c/o Centre for Ethnic Studies and Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50000, Thailand; email: [lerdoh3@googlemail.com](mailto:lerdoh3@googlemail.com); website: [www.AshleySouth.co.uk](http://www.AshleySouth.co.uk).