

DOI: 10.1355/sj37-1h

Myanmar's Education Reforms: A Pathway to Social Justice? By Marie Lall. London: UCL Press. 2020. 320 pp.

One privilege of becoming acquainted with *Myanmar's Education Reforms: A Pathway to Social Justice?* is the opportunity to survey Lall's fifteen years of field research compiled into one volume. To both the general public and interested colleagues, Myanmar's social and education reform processes between 2010 and 2018 were altogether exciting, ambitious and confusing. Lall's volume clarifies this confusion by providing a cohesive inquiry into multiple reform processes of government and non-government education sectors and how this education reform played out across schools and universities around Myanmar.

This volume is not only a record of the current state of education in Myanmar; Lall has constructed a story about the educational philosophy of Myanmar from a wider societal perspective. She invites the reader to look beyond well-known education reform policy—the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) (2010–2015)—to the political, social and educational realities created by the former military regimes to understand how authoritarianism remains an integral part of education policy, system and practices (Hong 2021).

Chapter 1 traces the development of basic and alternative education in the pre-reform period before 2012 (pp. 1–57). Chapters 2, 3 and 5 describe the effects of education reform on basic education, teacher training and development (pp. 58–129, pp. 159–96). Numerous international cooperation programmes during the early reform era focused on basic education and teacher training, as did Myanmar's union government. Lall argues that the scope and limits of Myanmar's education reform were constructed from the global education agenda of various development and organizational interests and international experts. In this regard, Lall's analysis of Myanmar's education reform planning process provides an important case study on the implementation of these reforms.

Chapter 4 focuses on the decade of higher education reform since 2010 (pp. 130–58). Lall provides two critical contributions. First, she provides contextual knowledge and insights into the early stage of higher education reform in Myanmar that are not generally known to the public. Second, by examining the policy process and complex interactions between domestic education stakeholders and international donors, she suggests that education policymakers in Myanmar may have embraced neoliberal education standards without critical review. The active participation of international donors resulting from Myanmar's higher education reform directly affected the policy dynamics around the CESR and the NESP (National Education Strategic Plan, 2016–2020). Lall presents critical insights in this chapter, showing that the internationalization of higher education together with the technocratization of education policy can be easily adapted by a pro-democracy government. Her argument may be further broadened to apply to developing countries with similar ambitions to open up their higher education 'markets'.

The most important contribution of chapters 6 and 7 is that they set Myanmar's educational reform within the context of the sociopolitical changes that have occurred since 2010 (pp. 197–272). Lall rightfully points out that, despite a commitment to greater equality and equity constantly expressed in policy documents, Myanmar has missed a historic opportunity to make use of education reform to engage with deep-seated social injustices. She argues that the social, political and educational inequalities, which persist between the majority Burman and various other ethnic communities, are not fully addressed because of internal tensions and competing international development priorities that divert the professed course towards social justice. Simply put, too many national and international experts were busy writing up the education reform strategy with relevance and efficiency in mind, without discussing the 'worth' of education in 'new' and 'transitional' Myanmar (Hong 2018; Hong and Chun 2020).

Lall's conclusion invites the reader to connect the big questions of Myanmar's authoritarian educational practices, issues of language

and ethnic education to the broader transformations of sociopolitical change that have characterized developments in Myanmar. Since the scope of this book ends at the end of 2020—only a few months before the military’s *coup d’état* in 2021—the reader is left reflecting on how these key debates remain unsettled and are still relevant.

So, is social justice withering in Myanmar? From the standpoint of 2021, the answer is ‘yes’. At the national political level, political power is back in the hands of the military dictatorship as is the decade-long education reforms. However, it is important to be aware of the drawbacks of these reforms. They neglected the multiple political, social and educational realities of various ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic communities. If the political situation changes in the future, these drawbacks could be addressed in renewed discussions on education reform. Lall leaves us with the challenge of reimagining another possible ‘reform’ in Myanmar.

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