

fashion, providing bits and pieces from “The Home Front” without much focus or coherence.

Curiously, it should have been quite straightforward to write a coherent and informed economic and political history of Ceylon during the war as a background (or possibly even foundation) for the military events that besieged the island, given that a good number of relevant sources are easily available in printed or online editions. These include the four volumes of the *Documents of the Ceylon National Congress, 1929 to 1950* (edited by Michael Roberts, Colombo 1977), but more importantly the comprehensive, data-rich yearbook *Ferguson’s Ceylon Directory*, the publication of which began in the 1870s and continued for more than a century until the 1980s. Most of its volumes have been digitised and are now easily available online. And not to forget the Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaj Party, which enjoyed glorious moments of anti-colonial resistance in 1940 and again in 1942 and duly commemorated those activities in a post-war publication (*Britain, World War 2 and the Samajists*, ed. by Wesley S. Muthiah and Sydney Wanasinghe, Colombo 1996). Those broader considerations apart, the book is welcomed as a useful, geographically focused contribution to our understanding of WWII in the East, its course and its consequences.

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HELENE MARIA KYED (ed.), *Everyday Justice in Myanmar: Informal Resolutions and State Evasion in a Time of Contested Transition*. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2020. 388 pages, 1 map, 34 illustrations, £70.00. ISBN 978-87769-4281-6

This recently published edited volume addresses the important topic of legal pluralism and contested versions of authority and justice in the daily lives of minority ethnic communities in Myanmar. The work brings together a number of chapters that address how ethno-communal sources of justice typically supplant the state and its institutions in the country. The reason for this development is the conscious willingness of those involved in disputes or crimes that require arbitration and settlement to choose such ethno-communal sources of justice in order to avert and circumvent state power and its intrusion into minority communities. The state and its related agencies are generally regarded by ethnic minorities in the country as complex, expensive and ineffective purveyors of justice; official mechanisms are described as being costly, confusing and corrupt, and thus intimidating. Additionally, minority communities are anxious to avoid the negative image that might befall any individuals who refer their

problems to state agencies, as well as any redounding effect in turn on their communities. Consequently, the internal resolution of problems is the preferred option, with the occasional use of related ethnic armed groups to broker disputes that are referred upwards for resolution.

The book is divided into an introduction and a total of ten chapters that deal with case studies involving different ethno-linguistic groups. The introduction, which is written by the editor of the book, places the discussion within the theoretical perspective of legal pluralism and “acknowledges the possible coexistence of different forms of social ordering, meanings of justice, and interpretations of the causes of disputes, victimhood and suffering” (p. 2). The approach that is adopted by the authors of the case studies takes into account persons and agencies that are well beyond the confines of what would be regarded as the formal state and its legal and enforcement agencies. The recognition of such diverse sources of authority, despite their being embedded within local socio-political structures, naturally challenges the exclusive claims of the state to legally recognised authority within its territorial confines and hence poses a legitimacy problem (p. 6). Nonetheless, the authors are well aware of the on-the-ground realities that obtain in the challenge of such state centrality in the daily lives of ethnic minorities in Myanmar. The ethnographic case studies, based on observations by the writers, are triangulated with other case studies, interviews with justice providers and their protocols in order to ensure sound methodology (p. 13).

The first case study examines the concept of forum shopping within an ethnic Mon community in the southern Mon state that affords the community a choice of different fora for resolving communal disputes and offences. The term “forum shopping” is actually commonly used in international relations theory as well to describe how states rationalise and negotiate which fora to adopt in order to maximise gains and minimise losses within an econometric-styled pattern of behaviour. This case emphasises the importance of the village tract administrator, who tries very hard to resolve cases even when they appear to be beyond his level of jurisdiction (p. 57). Part of the reason for this practice is described as the preference for resolving problems within the community and also the aim of preventing the projection of a bad image for the village. Interestingly, this case highlights the importance of the ethnic armed group that represents the community, the New Mon State Party (NMSPP), as one of the fora available for conflict resolution. Such an option appears to be a recurring theme in the other case studies as well.

The second case study is from a Pa-O Self-Administered Zone (SAZ), a legacy of ceasefire arrangements with ethnic armed groups in recognition of their territorial control and authority over contiguous spatial areas. The importance of the Pa-O National Organisation (PNO), another ethnic group with its own army, features prominently. The recourse to justice provision in

this instance is described as deriving from oral traditions, although codification of these traditions is now underway (p. 85). However, this case study also points to the difficulties associated with bringing powerful and well-connected outside perpetrators of crimes to justice (p. 88). In other words, while the provision of remedies for problems works well if these involve residents of an organic community, this may not apply for perpetrators of crimes from outside that community.

There is an interesting turn to the third case study, which involves the Naga tribal community. Here it is the *pha thar su*, the unit of patrilineal kinship across an extended network of families, that deals with problems. The elders from this lineage negotiate compensations that often include livestock as well as monetary payments. The rules pertaining to the provision of justice are prescribed by the Naga Literature and Culture Committee (NLCC), which was formed in 1993 by influential Naga tribal leaders (p. 109). The *pha thar su* is described as the collective that binds all males and females on the patrilineal side and not only provides group identity but also protects and preserves the group, including through the pooling of resources to ensure harmony and survival (p. 111). The provision of justice is said to focus on compensation, reconciliation and shaming as primary remedies (p. 113). The Naga are also described as having suffered tremendous repression by previous military governments and therefore as having little interest and faith in the state and its system of justice (p. 125).

The Karen state is in the focus of the fourth case study, which emphasises the importance of religious and animist recourses to justice within a plural setting. Both these options are described as offering an explanation to individuals who have suffered misfortune or harm and such explanations are viewed as providing consolation. This consolation is regarded as offering greater legitimacy than state mechanisms of justice among the inhabitants of the village studied (p. 153). Buddhism also helps to render an unfortunate situation more acceptable by framing it within the notion of karma, in which a person's poor behaviour in a previous life can lead to misfortune in this one. The chapter that follows involves the practices of an urban Karen community in Yangon that is under government control and administered by a Bamar ward administrator. In this instance the major communal construct for the administration of justice is the Baptist church. Religion provides a strong and shared sense of identity, and religious leaders are involved in the provision of justice for secular offences (p. 165). This situation is actually quite similar to that of the Kachin ethnic group in the north, where the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) is a major focus of identity and mechanism for dispute resolution within the state.

Than Pale's sixth chapter examines collaboration and conflict avoidance between Buddhist and Muslim Karen who live in the same village. The three factors that allow for such harmonious coexistence are described as a strong

attachment to the village and community in terms of identity, an aversion to state mediation of conflicts and the absence of external intervention in matters related to the village (pp. 190–191). This chapter again highlights the utility of Karen ethnic armed groups, who offer assistance and avenues for conflict resolution should the matter escalate beyond the village level. Chapter seven addresses the exclusion of Hindus and Muslims in Karen state and how this discrimination evolved over time owing to the reification of ethnicity and the British policy of recognising and cataloguing indigenous peoples as a way to exclude those perceived as outsiders (pp. 221–222). This exclusion is also attributed to bureaucratic practices through the military-dominated Ministry of Home Affairs that controls the General Administration Department (GAD). Incidentally, the GAD, which had been brought under the control of the Office of the President under President Win Min, has recently reverted back to the control of the Ministry of Home Affairs following the February 2021 coup staged by General Min Aung Hlaing. Exclusion is also often advocated by right-wing monastic groups such as Ma Ba Tha, as well as being enforced by complicated procedures for applying for citizenship.

Chapter eight looks at a forcibly relocated community in an urban setting in Mawlamyine in Mon state and examines how state disregard for a marginal community has a deleterious impact in turn on state-society relations as well as interpersonal relations, a negative influence that then percolates downward into the community (p. 264). The ninth chapter is not concerned with any particular ethnic group per se, but examines the role of brokers in Myanmar's property market and how they perform a useful role in overcoming poorly codified laws and record-keeping of property transactions and ownership.

Finally, the role of ethno-cultural factors in the acceptance of justice provision is again examined in the last chapter. Dealing with justice in Karen refugee camps in Thailand, the author traces the tension between the demands for justice on the part of international agencies and donors versus the traditional Karen methods of seeking justice (p. 316). Camp inhabitants are described as generally preferring harmony over conflict and as seeking to resolve issues peacefully while avoiding the involvement of the Thai state, under whose legal jurisdiction the camp operates.

The book has more cases from the Karen than from other ethnic groups and would have benefitted from a conclusion that brings the discussion full circle at the end. Nonetheless, the book is an enjoyable read and can be recommended to anyone who seeks an understanding of communal life in ethnic minority areas. There are a number of common themes in the book that connect the several case studies and allow a broader impression of the informal conflict resolution strategies applied by the studied Myanmar minority communities: a general preference for community-based justice, a preference for compensation over punishment, the importance of the ward and village tract

administrators, and the avoidance of resorting to state agencies. The procedural emphasis is on negotiation and mediation to obtain compensation on the basis of preferred negotiation mechanisms chosen by the affected parties. There is an equally strong emphasis on understanding (*nalehmu*) and on the maintenance of social harmony through de-escalation of conflict (p. 17). There is also a general tendency to work within religious norms as well as spiritual beliefs that reinforce social norms and harmony rather than enforcing punitive prescriptions for offenders (p. 27). Consequently, identity politics is an important aspect of justice provision for ethnic minorities in the country (p. 29). Finally, the common goals of cooperation and development bind the communities and ethnic armed groups, whose mediation is clearly preferred over that of Myanmar state agencies if a conflict escalates upwards for resolution.

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ODD ARNE WESTAD, *Empire and Righteous Nation. 600 Years of China-Korea Relations*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021. 205 pages, 4 maps, €27.00. ISBN 978-0-6742-3821-3

A scholar of Korean history is bound to become knowledgeable in the history of China and the numerous dynasties, states and ethnicities subsumed under this label. Cultural, political, economic, and religious connections and entanglements between the people of the Korean peninsula and those of the Chinese landmass are, irrespective of historical period, simply too significant to be ignored. Consequentially, Sino-Korean relations have proven to be a fascinating but also complex field of study. Past connections between China and Korea have produced historical contradictions that are often difficult to reconcile with historiography that focuses on the modern nation-state and that today produce issues of contention between the Korean states and the People's Republic of China. The contemporary political situation on the Korean peninsula cannot solely be explained as the result of conceptions about this shared history on both sides. Nonetheless an understanding of the historical relationship between China and Korea and modern attitudes towards it are certainly a prerequisite to comprehending and engaging with Chinese and Korean stakeholders today.

In his new book *Empire and Righteous Nation. 600 Years of China-Korea Relations*, Odd Arne Westad sets out to offer precisely this: a concise history of Sino-Korean relations that provides context for scholars of international relations with an interest in the situation on the Korean peninsula. In the brief introduction to his book Westad states his belief that a resolution of the Korea