



Than Pale's chapter 6, which again is based on extensive field research and scores of in-depth interviews, examines the situation for Buddhists and Muslims in Hpa-an, the capital of Karen State. The four case studies highlight the types of issues requiring careful interreligious and cross-cultural dispute management: a farming dispute, the theft of a chicken, a public disturbance, and threats of violence. Than Pale's positive appraisal of the interreligious conflict resolution landscape ends with the assessment that 'ethno-religious conflict is politically constructed from the outside, rather than being the result of identity differences in everyday life, where Muslims and Buddhists share more similarities than differences' (p. 213). Religious issues are also at the heart of the chapter by Mikael Gravers and Anders Baltzer Jorgensen, who draw on decades of experience researching Karen issues.

In chapter 8, Annika Pohl Harrison explores the challenging justice landscape in a 'marginal neighbourhood' of Mawlamyine in Mon State. This chapter offers conceptual insights about state avoidance and what she calls 'inherently inauthentic authority' (p. 274). It is a fascinating study of the tragedies of everyday injustice in Myanmar, where a 'long life under authoritarian rule leaves its mark on communities' (p. 277). The final two chapters, by Elizabeth Rhoads and Kirsten McConnachie, respectively, deal with important aspects of everyday justice in Yangon and in Karen refugee camps in Thailand. These chapters help to situate the broad themes of legal pluralism in contexts of significant state (and international) involvement.

Taken together, the chapters of *Everyday justice in Myanmar* capture the complexities and contradictions of the country's recent moves towards more democratic and inclusive governance. With the February 2021 coup, Myanmar's legal and political order has been re-defined to match the narrow priorities of the military leadership. Injustices—including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, state-sanctioned murder—are used to eliminate the army's opponents and terrorise the population-at-large. The lesson of this book is that, with its interlocking traditions of cultural, religious and legal pluralism, Myanmar has vast resources on which a more inclusive and fairer system may eventually be built. Tragically, the Myanmar people now face a future where, too often, the outcomes of disputes and conflicts will be determined based on armed force alone.

NICHOLAS FARRELLY
University of Tasmania

Myanmar

Painting Myanmar's transition

Edited by IAN HOLLIDAY and AUNG KAUNG MYAT

Hongkong: Hongkong University Press 2021. Pp. 189. Plates, Bibliography.
doi:10.1017/S0022463422000832

For many months after February 2021, Myanmar often featured in international media headlines and attracted the attention of millions of social media users attempting to capture daily life in the country after the military coup. One question that has arisen

is how Myanmar's arts community is dealing with the changed political atmosphere, which has taken the country back to a repressive repetition of the wheel of its history.

Painting Myanmar's transition, edited by Ian Holliday and Aung Kaung Myat, will help provide a rich background to this question, as it presents the concise responses to interviews with 80 Myanmar painters conducted in the first eight months of 2020, just five months prior to the military coup. The editors carefully trace the political meanings of the country's name, Burma/Myanmar, in the Introduction and Conclusion, along with historical and contextual landscape changes over the past two centuries. While the interview questions are framed around how artists have experienced political developments during a decade-long democratic transition, the book also provides a political overview of the past 60 years through their eyes. The editors also have paid close attention to the constraints that the artists have worked with since Independence, and thus they are divided into four broad generational groups, each born under a different regime. Still, the artists' responses show that censorship, survival, personal safety, and severance from the international community were unchanged concerns across the generations.

Reading the responses of 80 painters and seeing their paintings feels as if I'm visiting each of them and chatting over a cup of green tea as they show me their paintings. It is also very interesting to know how they became more self-sufficient as their works started to sell after the democratisation of the 2010s. This change in the art market was explained as a result of the rolling back of censorship and of having more freedom, with the visual arts scene in Myanmar seeing a market boom.

As the editors set out to record the artists' experiences and feelings during a sociocultural and political transition, they framed their questions to solicit a range of answers that addressed this theme. However, some of the artists perhaps did not respond in ways the interviewer or editors hoped. It is not surprising that, as seen in their comments, neither the artists nor editors expected that the democratic transition would be stopped abruptly and reversed so soon.

Some might regard the generational divisions here according to the four political regimes as a repetition of knowledge production about former socialist states. Most mainstream Western films (the fourth *Rambo* movie, *The Lady* and *Twilight over Burma*, for instance) about Burma have portrayed it as a failed state, one that is assumed to be on the Soviet Union side of the Cold War. Most books on the history of modern Burma tend to do so as well, as if the success and failure of a nation totally depends on its relationship to one or other superpower. The emphasis on politics seems to imply that only bloody uprisings and revolutionaries have tried to save the country from the wrong course (of history), and that when/if the democrats win, the country would become prosperous and peaceful.

Although politics is part of daily life, there are other facets of life that can transform and catalyse ways of thinking, like religion, art, fashion, music and cinema, any or all of which could nurture the minds and creative output of certain classes, which these artists also belong to. The editors recognised that the artists represented here are more 'educated, metropolitan and cosmopolitan than the mass of the people'. So, the expectations and experiences that the 80 artists related are mostly a reflection of the political and social interests of a certain class. Although the transitional period is extolled by these artists as a period of liberalisation marked by the removal of state

ensorship, there were several examples of censorship of artworks, including painting, under the new government. For example, in 2017, after public criticism on social media went viral, artist Zaw Zaw Aung was instructed by Aung San Suu Kyi to modify his finished painting because the Buddha images in his work were placed too low and close to street level in the composition. The modifications took him a year to finish. In another instance, street artists from Kachin State were arrested and jailed for three months after criticism on social media that the Grim Reaper figure in their mural looked like a monk (www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/artists-freed-anti-buddhist-claims-dropped-covid-19-mural-myanmar.html). The democratic government closed one eye in the latter case as political interests trumped freedom of expression when it came to issues related to the majority religion, Buddhism.

Overall, this book could be a very useful introductory reference for journalists, art students and researchers who wish to learn about the history of contemporary art in Myanmar. As the editors of this book and most people inside the country assume, the age-old censorship, political upheaval and communal violence of the 2010s in Myanmar isolated local artists from developments in global contemporary art and from the art market as well. Although the presentation of generational divides seems meaningful in terms of the political periods in which the artists were born, it would have been clearer to divide artists into those born in pre-independence and post-independence Burma, which never enjoyed much freedom and peace; all the post-independence generations have lived, to a great extent, under political repression and in turmoil. Nevertheless, *Painting Myanmar's transition* well documents how the artists from all four designated generations have withstood such hardships through their careers. Even in the transitional 2010s, they did not sell enough due to the decline of tourism after the communal violence in Rakhine State broke out. The brief Introduction reflecting on how local artists migrate to parallel trades to make a living is very helpful for readers to understand what artists have to do to survive in Myanmar.

HTOO LWIN MYO

Myanmar Knowledge Society Pink Bear Production

Myanmar

Everyday economic survival in Myanmar

By ARDETH MAUNG THAWNGHMUNG

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019. Pp. 276. Tables, Maps, Photographs, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463422000741

This interesting monograph is about economic and political coping strategies employed in Myanmar to withstand economic hardship in the context of authoritarian rule. The analysis was inspired by the author's own experiences following the 1988 coup. The findings are based largely on the results of semi-structured interviews, life histories, personal conversations and a survey conducted between 2008 and 2015.