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Su-Ann Oh (ed.). *Myanmar's Mountain and Maritime Borderscapes: Local Practices, Boundary-Making and Figured Worlds*. Singapore: ISEAS. 2016. 398pp + xx, figures, tables, index. ISBN 978-981-4695-76-3

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The present volume brings together the contributions to a November 2013 workshop held at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore on the subject of borderlands. In recent years, borderlands have become an increasingly prominent focus of scholarship on mainland Southeast Asia, in particular along the edges of Myanmar, a country that has undergone major political change since 2010. There is now better access to the highlands for everyone a host of social, medical, and other development problems in Myanmar's highlands that sat out of the reach of many NGOs and scholars can now much more easily be tackled and studied. Trade and movement across the country's frontiers has increased and This has brought a range of very serious challenges to local people, including everything from land-grabbing by outsiders resulting in displacement and suspicion about just what the goals of development initiatives really are (p. 337). As a result, life in the borderlands is clearly changing before the eyes of the people living in them, sometimes for the better and sometimes not. The contributors to the volume view the borderlands as a key paradigm for understanding these changes and seek to show this in their respective chapters.

The book is divided into six main sections. First, Nicholas Farrelly and Maung Aung Myoe provide an overview of Myanmar's "Mountain Borderscapes" and "Maritime Borderscapes." In the second section, Maxime Boutry, Alexandra de Mersan, and Anders Bjornberg look at territorial claims and imagined boundaries. Alexander Horstmann and Su-Ann Oh examine societal organization and border economies. Fourth, Karin Dean and Jianxiong Ma and Cunzhao Ma look at mobile practices and the "moving border." In the fifth section, Decha Tangseefa, Kazi Fahmida Farzana, Amporn Jirattikorn, Carl Grundy-Warr, and Chin Wei Jun examine identity construction and "the politics of belonging." A final sixth section examines "institutionalised identity" and "border practices." The contributors to this last section include Takahiro Kojima, N. William Singh, and the late Bianca Son, the present volume being unfortunately one of the last opportunities scholars will have to access unread work by this promising historian of the Chin-Zo people and their history. The unusual range of sections indicates the variety of subtopics explored and just how diverse an impact borderlands have on the lives of the people who live in them. The sixteen chapters and the range of subjects they deal with might easily have given the book a hydra-headed feel, but fortunately an astute introduction by editor Su-Ann Oh and the shared perspective of the contributors that the centre of gravity of change in contemporary Myanmar is being worked out in these borderlands helps to give the volume an undeniable cohesiveness.

The volume emphasizes border-making rather than borders and the latter as social practice, not as a fixed line. Practice theory is applied to suggest that local practices play a major role in making borders, boundaries, and worlds. These local practices reveal commonalities across borderlands that distinguish them from what Oh

calls “heartlands.” Ecology and geography make them different, but so too does the currently ambiguous nature of peace and conflict in these areas, which is contrasted with the relative peace of the heartland. The two main, defining features that Oh concentrates attention on, in fact, are the “gravitational pull” of the country’s neighbours and armed conflict (p. 17). Oh also mobilizes James Scott’s work on the highland areas, the Southeast Asian massif or zomia, as a paradigm through which to contrast lowland and highland and the negative views of the highlands applied by the “padi” lowland states to them.

Historiographically, the volume’s approach views the history of mainland Southeast Asia in a way parallel to that of Eric Tagliacozzo’s work on the region’s maritime frontiers, by viewing the whole from the periphery. It is not an easy thing to do. By asserting that despite their geographical particularism, their geographical and political peripherality give them a cohesive and discernible historical experience that together contrasts them from the lowland states, the job of the historian to develop a historical narrative that incorporates the perspective of the highlands becomes much easier. Certainly, the introduction highlights one of the major contributions of the volume that is the further elucidation of what is loosely called “watery zomia” by comparison to the mountainous zomia. This is largely the contribution of the chapter by Maung Aung Myoe that looks at Myanmar’s maritime frontier in the last two decades. Here too, resource exploitation and depletion, regarding both fish and hydrocarbons, has dramatically increased in recent years. What makes exploitation distinct here from the highlands onshore is that the politics resulting from this exploitation is less ethnicized (p. 91). Considering that this issue is especially important in Rakhine, it is arguably the case that the Rohingya issue has helped to obscure and downplay local anxiety that might otherwise have materialised more clearly as Rakhine regionalism in reaction to exploitation from the Myanmar state. Many of the chapters indicate the significant impact that emergent anti-Muslim hostility is having across the country as a whole.

The volume demonstrates overall that border development has not just been between Myanmar and other states but various kinds of internal boundaries as well. The civil war played a big role in this. Not only have militarized zones controlled by extra-state forces and populations dotted the landscape, but military counter-insurgency operations also worked to reinforce these borders within states as “institutionalised boundary-making practices” (p. 12). A series of maps concentrated in the chapter by Farrelly demonstrates vividly the ways in which conflict now define the highlands as an area distinct from the lowlands (pp. 40, 44, 60, 61).

There is a lot to recommend the volume to scholars of contemporary Myanmar and Southeast Asia. But there are also some gems that if identified correctly by the reader can lend themselves usefully to broader historiographical projects. One of the limits of the volume is that while it succeeds in places in showing how work on pre-contemporary Southeast Asia can be relevant to an understanding of what is happening locally today, with the exception of Maxime Boutry, Karin Dean, and a few others, the contributors are often unable to demonstrate how looking at the local phenomena they examine can be lent to better understandings of Southeast Asia historically. In other words, border-making geographically is well recognised in the volume, but relational periodization is not enunciated so well. While the distinction between lowland and highland, on the one hand, and lowland and maritime, on the other, comes out clearly, the tacitly accepted division between modern and contemporary Myanmar and the Myanmar of the past (before World War II) is not challenged with the same vigour.

Overall, the volume contributes much important work on borderlands. It also provides an important overview of what might be called a “borderlands” paradigm through an insightful introduction. On the other hand, opening up scholarly debate to local areas increases the range of case studies to be explored that are not so clear when Myanmar is read through a singular, lowland framework. The diversity of coverage and the many different directions in which the contributions go demonstrate just how much work potentially there is to do. It is in this regard perhaps that more work on local areas within the lowlands might now be mobilised to question or modify some of the assertions made about just how distinct the lowlands are compared to the “diverse” highlands presented here.

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