

Reviews

MAGNUS MARSDEN, *Trading Worlds. Afghan Merchants across Modern Frontiers*. London: Hurst, 2016. 480 pages, 9 maps, £30.00. ISBN 978-1-8490-4354-0 (pb)

Images of Afghanistan and trade in the popular imagination revolve around the smuggling of drugs and weapons, perhaps sometimes involving the gemstone business as well. The worlds of Afghan traders and businesspeople who operate across borders have remained completely out of the spotlight. This has now changed with the publication of a landmark study by Magnus Marsden that truly is an extraordinary piece of scholarship. Marsden does nothing less than put together an anthropology, political economy and geography of trade in crossroads Asia, examined and understood through the lens of Afghan businesspeople themselves. In doing so, he is able to de-centre the dominant narrative on Afghanistan as a failed state and bring it into the focus of everyday cross-border trade and relationships as arranged and negotiated through the variety of people whose lives and narrations form the basis of this study.

Marsden's book is set against the background of the vast body of scholarship in anthropology on trade and trade relations, which he neatly analyses and places into the context of Afghanistan. Beyond that, however, it also shows how the power of narration can best be put to work: Magnus Marsden builds his arguments on the basis of deep and trusted relationships with his respondents, who share their experiences with him, allow him to be part of their social network and provide him with their insights into crucial decision-making processes and their knowledge of local and international markets. This information is woven together in a highly readable if sometimes very dense account, providing an exemplary illustration of the practice of anthropological fieldwork and the communication of its findings.

In addition to conveying the results of excellent fieldwork and providing the reader with a summary of the current literature in the field, Marsden also brings some novel results into the discussion on trade and trade relations. While earlier research tended to focus on trading groups and their activities, this book focuses on the practice of individual traders and how they negotiate space, borders, social relations, commodity mobility, material ties, global, regional and local exchange relations, and identity formation. This perspective provides important insights and highlights the highly sophisticated but thus far completely neglected role of Afghan traders in shaping the area of crossroads Asia.

All of these aspects are presented in nine chapters that rely on fieldwork results interpreted in the light of current literature. Each section of the book is guided by clear objectives that provide the reader with a roadmap to navigate

the wealth of presented material and information. The interplay between theory and fieldwork is well crafted and illustrated by numerous vignettes of various lengths that give insights into the everyday experiences and reasoning of Afghan traders.

In his long and rather dense introduction to the book Marsden sets the stage by placing his fieldwork in the context of trade in Central and South Asia and the situation in Afghanistan after the Western intervention. He is careful to counter the popular stereotypes about the Afghan people and traders in particular, and sets out to explore the role of trade in the post-Soviet and Afghan contexts and the constitution of trade carried out by Afghans living abroad. The chapter is very well referenced and interesting also for the reader who wants to learn more about the study of trade and traders in general. Here we are also introduced to the respondents whose narrations form the basis of the arguments made in this book.

The second chapter introduces Afghan trading networks in Central Asia, with a special focus on Tajikistan as one of the more important study sites of the book. Marsden reviews the literature on trade diasporas and trading networks in the context of post-Soviet Central Asia and its rather specific ways of organising bazaars and other trading spaces. He emphasises the role of cross-border relations and exchange regimes as constructed by Afghan traders themselves. In the subsequent chapters, different focal points are established: on trade routes and the material organisation of trade, on Afghan migrants and urban life in Central Asia, on what Marsden calls everyday diplomacies on Afghanistan's northern frontiers, on notions of hospitality and friendship as perceived and enacted through the lens of trade, and on the global networks maintained by Afghan traders in a case study of Afghan traders in London.

In between Marsden presents a chapter entitled "Migrants, Militants, and Merchants: Ahmed's Story, from Trader to Talib" that is set in the town of Kunduz in Northern Afghanistan close to the border with Tajikistan – the only place where he performed fieldwork in Afghanistan itself. In line with most of the book, this particular chapter is very rich in ethnographic material and presents the case study of Afghan merchants as a "tale of three brothers" (p. 208). It illustrates very well the relationship and interplay between regional identities (the three brothers being from the infamous Panjshir valley), professional identities as tradesmen, and Islamic identities as performed and changing in the wake of the Western occupation in Afghanistan. This chapter provides a quite succinct example of Marsden's overall approach: setting the stage through the presentation of clear objectives at the beginning that are based in the literature and guide the argument for each section of the book, and subsequently unfolding the argument by focusing on the real-life experiences of people and their portrayal through vignettes. The "tale of three brothers" is a prime example of how biographical research can be effectively incorporated, as this case study

from Kunduz relies in particular on the shifts in thinking and decision-making over an extended biographical period in the lives of the respondents.

Trading Worlds is a book that caters to many different audiences at the same time. It presents an interesting and important read for geographers and cultural anthropologists alike, while also being important for Afghan historiography, for borderland studies, and for studies on global and regional trade in general.

Stefan Schütte

LENA ZÜHLKE, *Verehrung und Verschmutzung des Ganges. Zusammenhang der ökologischen Probleme und der religiösen Bedeutung des heiligen Flusses*. Berlin: regiospectra Verlag, 2013. 480 pages, €32.90. ISBN 978-3-940132-50-5

The heavy pollution affecting so many rivers is doubtless one of the greatest socio-ecological challenges of India, taking on tremendous significance in the case of the Ganges, the holiest river of India and a lifeline for the north of the country. The decades-long debate on the pollution of the Ganges and its tributaries illustrates the many contradictions that underlie the cultural-religious, socio-ecological and also political-economical transformation processes of the largest democracy in the world. River clean-up programmes in India are characterised by a multitude of actors, unclear and fragmented spheres of competence and responsibility, as well as (practically) ubiquitous corruption and nepotism. The Ganga Action Plan (GAP), begun in 1986 under Rajiv Gandhi, is no exception to this rule; on the contrary, to many environmentalists and observers, it has become a symbol of the continuing failure of governmental – and partly also non-governmental – environmental protection initiatives.

A visit to the holy ghats along the banks of the river reveals these contradictions even to the casual observer and raises the unavoidable question: Why do devout Hindus continue to observe their daily ritual bathing in the Ganges, when they (must) know that its heavy pollution is harmful to their health? Why, after their prayers, do they throw not only garlands of flowers but also plastic bags into the river?

Lena Zühlke's book, *Veneration and Pollution of the Ganges. The Interrelation between the Ecological Problems and Religious Significance of the Holy River*, focuses in this context on the (apparent) contradiction between the (cultural-)religious significance of the Ganges and the socio-ecological problems of its pollution. She takes as her starting point the fact that believers distinguish between the ecological contamination of the Ganges and the religious cleansing power of the goddess Ganga, although these seem to be inextricably linked. This separation has led, in the author's view, to an "equalising of the ecological problems" ("Vergleichsgültigung der ökologischen Probleme", p. 21) from a reli-

gious perspective. Zühlke thus dedicates her central research question to determining “how the complex interplay between the ecological problems of the Ganges and its religious significance are reflected in the public awareness of Hindu society” (p. 27).

The empirical research is based on 26 semi-structured, guided, qualitative interviews with selected experts (newspaper journalists, representatives from NGOs, ritual experts, priests, professors from Banaras Hindu University, officials from the water and environmental protection agencies) in the holy city of Varanasi (also known as Benares or Kashi). In light of the central research question, the focus on expert interviews seems rather unfortunate and indeed a questionable choice, given that the analysis is based on the experts’ interpretation of public awareness, but the direct user groups, such as fishers or launderers, are not interviewed on an equal basis, but rather are quoted here and there throughout the book.

Following the introduction, which outlines the methods of the research, the second chapter offers a comprehensive presentation of the mythological and religious significance of the Ganges, as well as of its ecological problems and their causes. The detailed description demonstrates meticulous work and provides an up-to-date and comprehensive picture of the interconnections involved. The many details, and in particular the frequent repetitions, render the chapter a difficult read at times. The subsequent analysis of the interviews from the individual expert groups underscores the complicated interrelationships between the ecological problems and the religious veneration of the Ganges from their relative perspectives. Dividing the analysis among the different expert groups inevitably produces redundancies, which nonetheless seem both intentional and justifiable.

In the section that follows, the author manages to combine the various perspectives in an illuminating discussion. In particular, the central contradiction between the seemingly unthinking treatment of the river and its veneration is traced back to the dual understanding of “religiously pure” and “ecologically pure”. In keeping with earlier English-language works on the Ganges (Kelly D. Alley: *On the Banks of the Ganga. When Wastewater Meets a Sacred River*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002) and the Yamuna (David L. Haberman: *River of Love in an Age of Pollution. The Yamuna River of Northern India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), the author emphasises the division between the river and its divinity as “a reaction to the unmistakable pollution” and justifies it by saying that the believers thus wish to protect the goddess Ganga (p. 357) while at the same time maintaining their own need for the remission of sins. According to the popular belief, the goddess Ganga cannot be harmed by pollution, otherwise she would lose her almighty power.

In this context, Lena Zühlke stresses the vital role of the priests, who – with their interpretation of pollution and its associated effects on the population – shape public awareness. At the same time, however, the priests find them-

selves in an “ambivalent situation”, since a greater awareness of the ecological contamination could lead believers to doubt the goddess Ganga, thereby weakening the role of the priests (pp. 365–66). Despite these risks, all of those interviewed considered the overcoming of the separation between the religious and ecological dimension – along with the fight against corruption – to be the key to successful environmental protection measures.

Of particular interest are Lena Zühlke’s critical comments on the role of the daily press, which provides only superficial reporting with a strong religious bias, as well as her critical view of the role of local NGOs, which in her opinion, with few exceptions, are poorly networked, merely criticising the measures taken by the GAP and making demands out of proportion to their influence (p. 375). The author convincingly emphasises the fact that the “actual causes of the pollution” from industry as well as the failure of governmental agencies (p. 426) are often pushed into the background of public discussion, “drowned out” (p. 427) by the stronger focus on pollution from religious practices. Overall, the book persuades the interested reader – despite the occasional lengthy passage – through its differentiated consideration of the interrelationships analysed.

Alexander Follmann

GREGOR HAIN, *Die Sicherheit und Stabilität Indiens. Historische, politische und wirtschaftliche Herausforderungen.* (Moderne Südasiestudien – Gesellschaft, Politik, Wirtschaft, 2). Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2015. 534 pages, €98.00. ISBN 978-3-8487-1754-5

The stability of India’s democracy for more than 60 years has become the subject of a lively academic debate. Gregor Hain raises the question of the extent to which India can still be regarded as “stable and secure” (p. 27) given the enormous political and economic challenges that the country is facing. The author uses an extended concept of security and a comprehensive framework of analysis. His main interest is directed towards three areas: The first is India’s historical development, the second is the role of religion – especially the relationship between Hinduism and Islam – and the last is the persistence and impact of social revolutionary movements (pp. 28–30). In his theoretical approach, Hain emphasises theories of international relations but also points out the shortcomings of applying Western theories to non-Western societies (pp. 32ff).

The book is structured in five chapters. After the introduction, the author gives a detailed analysis of the concepts of “security” and “terrorism” (p. 51). The third chapter deals with Indian history until independence in 1947. The following chapter outlines the development of Hinduism and Islam and their impact on India’s society. Chapter five on “India’s Security and Stability” includes the main empirical data and deals with religious conflicts and their

regional repercussions with Pakistan, as well as the variety of ethnic conflicts in the Northeast and their impact on relations with Bangladesh, China and Myanmar. The last part of the chapter analyses the Maoist (Naxalite) rebellion and its impact on bilateral relations with Nepal.

The strength of Hain's volume lies in its analysis of the different domestic conflicts and their regional and international repercussions. He offers a very broad and detailed analysis of the Kashmir conflict, the challenges posed by Hindu-Muslim communalism, the complex conflict constellations in the Northeast and the persistence of Maoist movements in some of the rural areas in India.

Comprehensive volumes such as Hain's book always provoke critical inquiries. Although the author defines his understanding of a broad concept of security, his second main concept, i.e. "stability", remains relatively vague. Moreover, some of his findings seem to be overstretched. First, it is not clearly explained why the creation of Pakistan, which challenged India's secular and democratic model, was the "decisive problem" for India ("entscheidendes Problem", p. 498). Pakistan's state idea failed with the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Moreover, India has a far better democratic record than Pakistan. Second, equating the Indian and the Pakistan states in their support for Hindu extremist and Islamic extremist tendencies respectively (p. 501) seems to overshoot the mark. There appears to be more than a qualitative and quantitative difference in the decades-long support by the Pakistani security forces of militant groups which remain outside any meaningful democratic control compared to the occasional tolerance by state governments in India of communal riots against religious minorities in some instances.

Finally, one may also not necessarily share the pessimistic view of the author that India is still not "a full-fledged democratic and secular nation-state" (p. 510). It seems that India has developed its own understanding of concepts such as democracy and secularism which are, of course, different from Western understandings. Surveys have shown that Indians have a great trust and confidence in their democratic setup and think it is the best suited for their country no matter what outside observers believe.

Hain's critical assessment of the repercussions of Hindu extremist views on India's social fabric are a timely contribution to contemporary debates in the country. Unfortunately, some of his conclusions are not fully supported by his own analysis. In order to foster regional stability in South Asia, he calls for future research to focus on topics such as regional security cooperation (p. 512) in order to deal with the transnational challenges posed by militant networks. Hain's volume offers a comprehensive overview and analysis of the different security challenges that India is facing, both on the domestic and the regional level.

Christian Wagner

LAETITIA ZECCHINI, *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India. Moving Lines*. (Historicizing Modernism Series). London / Oxford / New York / New Delhi / Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2016. Xvii, 229 pages, £28.99. ISBN 978-1-4742-7566-8 (pb)

What did literary modernism look like in India? In portraying its most prominent figure, Arun Kolatkar (1931–2004), Laetitia Zecchini offers fresh insights into the world of Bombay’s Beat Generation. The book provides an intriguing example of the entangled history of literary modernism, maintaining a fine balance between the analysis of transcultural references (amongst others, Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin and the Beatniks) on the one hand, and local narrative genealogies (*bhakti* songs, folk stories) on the other. Arun Kolatkar is introduced as a bilingual “poet-tramp”, who constantly blurred the lines between English and Marathi, Ginsberg and Kabir, the ordinary and the alien, scrap and art.

The study consists of six chapters, divided roughly into three larger sections, each representing a different mode of translation. According to Zecchini, the act of translation is the most significant feature of Arun Kolatkar’s writing and self-conception. The first two chapters set the scene for Kolatkar’s time and network, the Bohemian Bombay circles of the 1950s and 60s. Independent small magazines and presses, which published both contemporary American poetry and translations of popular medieval Marathi poems, testify to the creative exchange between American and Indian writers, among them Allen Ginsberg, whose *Indian Journals* bear witness to encounters with Indian colleagues between 1952 and 1953 (Allen Ginsberg, *Indian Journals. March 1952 – May 1953. Notebooks, Diary, Blank Pages, Writings*. San Francisco: Dave Haselwood Books & City Light Books, 1970). Over the following years, Kolatkar and his poet friends developed “Americanese”, an expressive language inspired by the Beatniks, Bob Dylan and Black American Speech, as an alternative to the elitist (colonial) British idiom. Apart from the strong American affinities, the “overlapping multilingualities” (p. 23) were characterised by the “recycling” of traditional genres such as devotional *bhakti* songs composed in Marathi and Hindvi, an early form of modern Hindi.

How did *bhakti*, a religious movement which had its heyday in the 15th and 16th century, elicit such a vivid response among the Bombay Beatniks? Zecchini argues that Arun Kolatkar, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and Dilip Chitre modelled their own “counter cultural movement” (p. 78) along the lines of the *bhakti* legends Tukaram and Kabir. By translating *bhakti* songs into colloquial English and adapting it to modern contexts, the Bombay poets rebelled against the linguistic agitations of the late 1950s, when nationalistic activists, supported by Socialist and Communist leaders, called for a unified state of Marathi-speaking people (Samyukta Maharashtra), which ultimately resulted in the dissolution of the (multilingual) Bombay State in favour of the creation of the linguistic state of Maharashtra in 1960. In this context, Zecchini states, modernism was perceived “as an offspring of the West and somewhat ‘un-Indian’” (p. 9). Despite

his pioneering role in Americanising and thus modernising Indian English, Kolatkar never gave up writing in his mother tongue, Marathi. On the contrary, he often worked on poems in the two languages simultaneously. Zecchini convincingly interprets these bilingual exercises in Kolatkar's writing as instances of translating between different audiences and realms of experience, "local and cosmopolitan systems" (p. 76).

In chapters three and four, the author reconstructs the artist's aesthetic perception and techniques of defamiliarising the ordinary, based on his diaries and unpublished material. Here, translation served the purpose of looking at the ordinary from "eccentric angles of vision" (p. 24). Kolatkar was a trained painter, who had worked many years in the advertising business (with, among others, the acclaimed novelist Kiran Nagarkar). In his poetry, he envisioned ordinary street scenes as artistic installations, scrap and waste as readymades. We learn that the "Baudelaire of Bombay" spent much time in the setting and subject of his own poetry: every Thursday, he observed street life from inside his "studio", the Wayside Inn Café in Kala Ghoda. Several anecdotes vividly attest to Kolatkar's collecting frenzy: newspaper articles, lyrics and snatches from overheard conversations were, in Zecchini's terms, "recycled" into poetry – yet another translation process, which converted the ordinary into highly stylised forms of art.

"The Politics of Kolatkar (I/II)", the last two chapters of Zecchini's book, shed light on the political and ethical dimension of his work. In *Sarpa Satra*, a cycle of poems that retells the opening myth of the Mahabharata epic, Kolatkar defamiliarises a canonical text by giving voice to a victimised woman, thereby offering an alternative reading beyond elitist and nativist frames of interpretation. Again, Zecchini draws a connection to heterodox *bhakti* and folkloric traditions and stresses the importance of storytelling as a means of expressing multiple voices and different perspectives that make up historical narratives: "Translation is a sacrilege of sorts because it is linked to the plurality of messages, messengers, texts and contexts" (p. 192). Later Indian authors have taken up these unorthodox interpretations of mytho-historical themes and figures. Kiran Nagarkar's award-winning novel *Cuckold* (1997), which tells the story of the 16th century Krishna devotee Mirabai from the perspective of her husband, illustrates how Kolatkar's influence reached far beyond the Bombay Beatnik circles.

Zecchini's study reaches its limits where the intertextual connections to contemporary Marathi poetry and prose are concerned. As Anjali Nerlekar shows in *Bombay Modern* (2016), the poet's occupation with vernacular literature was by no means restricted to traditional sources. By taking up this dimension of Kolatkar's bilingual work, Nerlekar challenges "the dogma of easy global cosmopolitanisms within which all discussions of modern Indian poetry are framed" and thus makes a perfect complementary reading to the present study (Anjali Nerlekar, *Bombay Modern. Arun Kolatkar and Bilingual Literary Culture*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016, p. 214).

Elegantly written, Zecchini's compelling tribute to Arun Kolatkar and the Bombay Bohemian scene in post-independence India organically embeds sample texts which reveal their own aesthetic potential. In addition to exhaustive archival resources, the author draws on numerous anecdotes and information from Kolatkar's circle of friends and fellow poets, most prominently Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. This adds an entertaining touch to this narrative of the pioneer of modernism in India. By integrating a non-Western artist in the canon of literary modernism, Zecchini reminds us once more that modernism as an imaginative mind-set and creative mode of expression was not limited to European avant-garde(s) or American popular culture. More importantly, her study helps us to appreciate how global modernism in the 20th century, despite transcending geographical, cultural and linguistic borders, produced independent forms and varieties "in conversation" with vernacular narrative traditions in South Asia – a relationship still to be discovered in much more detail.

Johanna Hahn

KONRAD MEISIG (ed.): *Utopias from Asia. An International and Interdisciplinary Symposium in Santiniketan on the Occasion of the 150th Birthday Anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore. An Asian Impact Activity in Memoriam of Momoyo Okura.* (East Asia Intercultural Studies / Interkulturelle Ostasienstudien, 8). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012. Xxvi, 205 pages, €54.00. ISBN 978-3-447-06794-2

The articles in this volume derive from two separate international and interdisciplinary workshops, one bearing the title of the volume – "Utopias from Asia" – which took place in October 2011 in Santiniketan, India; the other with the even more general title "Myths from Asia" half a year later, in February 2012 at Mainz University in Germany. The papers from the second workshop are compiled in a separate "Supplement Section". The volume also contains an editor's preface, explaining Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birthday in 2011 as the incentive for a workshop on "Utopias from Asia"; welcoming addresses from the workshop; and the well-informed keynote speech by Udaya Narayana Singh, the then Vice-Chancellor of Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan. His inaugural talk naturally discusses the Visva-Bharati University as a realisation of the utopian vision of Rabindranath Tagore as a humanist and educationist. Singh interprets Tagore as an "author-musician-painter-activist-linguist turned cultural leader who tried to combine different and divergent traditions – Indian, Western as well as East Asian" (p. xxv). From this perspective, Singh does not challenge the common reverential rhetoric which regards Tagore as a cultural harbinger, one whose modernist aim was to transform reality according to a vision (i.e. utopia).

The nicely proofread and laid out volume – only one remark from the layout phase has somehow survived correction and made it into the final version (p. 56) – is a collection containing very different contributions from the two workshops mentioned. Both of them operate with rather fuzzy conceptual frameworks. There is hardly any effort to link up the wide range of material from different contexts into a cohesive whole. Some contributions remain close to the original oral presentation during the workshop and contain only stray references and footnotes, whereas others can be considered as standard academic papers.

The regions covered range from Santiniketan in West Bengal to East Asia, and the subjects explored range from the Pali texts of the Buddhist canon to modern and contemporary East Asian films. The articles on Rabindranath Tagore try somehow to link rather conventional views on Tagore to the general subject of “utopia”, in the sense of a general guideline for moulding reality into a form that supports human progress in a sustainable manner. Several articles refer back to dictionary definitions and the etymology of the term “utopia”, beginning with Thomas More’s book of the same name from 1516.

These general criticisms notwithstanding, one can find worthy contributions in the volume, in particular: the articles by Kasturi Dadhe; the interesting links between epochs and regions that Konrad Meisig refers to in his remarks; Sonja Wengoborski’s comparative study of two contemporary authors, one writing in Sinhalese and one in Hindi; Almuth Degener’s reading of Qurratulain Hyder; and, last but not least, the contributions on aspects of East Asian film.

The workshop in India was organised in memory of the Japanese entrepreneur Momoyo Okura, whose daughter Masako Sato contributed a paper on the friendship of her grandfather, the industrialist Kunihiko Okura (1882–1972), with Rabindranath Tagore, who lived with the Okura family during his first visit to Japan in 1929. Konrad Meisig, in his first article “Utopia – A Definition”, tries to define the meaning of utopia on the basis of a substantial definition of religion as “the quest for otherworldly bliss” (p. 7). The main part of his article is on Mahatma Gandhi’s utopian vision for a decentralised India after independence.

Similarly, Kumkum Bhattacharya (“Utopias in Praxis. Rabindranath’s Rural Reconstruction”) sees the utopian vision as a kind of leading idea for a particular social-political project, in this case the idea of a rural university, i.e. Santiniketan, in the thought of Rabindranath Tagore. Bhattacharya even sees in the Santiniketan of the post-independence area – with Visva-Bharati University becoming a Central University in 1951 – a continual “testimony to the vision of the poet” (p. 17). Swati Ganguly in her article on “Santiniketan and Sriniketan” also follows this line, but she goes more into the development project close to Santiniketan in Surul village, later known as Sriniketan, as a project of rural “reconstruction” or “regeneration”. The central idea of Sriniketan, according to Ganguly, is not the idea of progress, but rather of economic self-sufficiency. There is one more article on Tagore, by Soumik Nandy Majumdar (pp. 53–57),

which tries to reconcile the utopian vision of Tagore with the rather depressing expressions of his late paintings.

Kasturi Dadhe examines “The Concept of a Feminine-Self” in three works in English and Bengali by the 1880-born Bengali author Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. Hossain’s novel *Sultana’s Dream* appeared in 1905 in English, a neglected early feminist novel in modern Bengali literature. *Sultana’s Dream* is narrated as the dream of Sister Sara of the “Ladyland”, a kind of utopian vision of a land where women rule over men. Love and truth are the leading ideas of social organisation in Ladyland. The second novel, *Padmarāg* (1924), is written in Bengali and here too, utopian female companionship is a central theme. The third book analysed, *Abarodhbāsinī*, is a collection of journalistic text productions, written between 1928 and 1930 and focused on the social reality of Muslim women in Bengal at that time.

Luong Van Ke’s contribution “From Utopia to Reality” is focused on the political and economic developments in Vietnam since 1990. The author sees particularly the decisions of the 9th National Congress of the Communist Party in 2001 as a path designed to lead from utopia to reality – a planned development “to turn a poor, backward and authoritarian country into a rich, strong, progressive, and democratic nation, that is: To make a Utopia become a reality” (p. 51).

In his second article in the volume, Konrad Meisig examines the textual evidence of Buddhist utopias. First of all he looks at the well-known Agganna myth, a kind of anti-brahman version of the beginning of mankind as an egalitarian society, which is later drawn into a decline that results in the hierarchical setup of the contemporary society of the Buddha. This Buddhist vision of the egalitarian origin of mankind in a paradise called Uttarakuru inspired the Buddhist convert, Hindi author and critical thinker Rahul Sankrityayan (1893–1963), particularly in his autobiographical novel *Simha Senāpati* from 1951. Meisig draws further links to the Korean Buddhist monk Yulgok (1536–1584) and the Thai reform Buddhist monk Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906–1993), whose social vision was driven by an ideal Buddhist society, which would eliminate the categories of “I” and “me” in favour of the common good for everyone, which Meisig tries to formulate as the basis of a socially engaged Buddhism driven by a utopian vision.

Marion Meisig discusses in “Unity of Politics and Nature” the mythical animal Qilin, part of Chinese culture since the Han epoch, a “mythical beast” and symbol of “the manifestation of perfect harmony between Heaven, the Highest Principle, and the government” simultaneously – and at the same time a symbolic image of a utopian society (p. 73). This is followed by two contributions on utopia and dystopia in Japanese films: Ivo Ritzer (“Against the Modern World: The *ninkyō eiga* as Nostalgic Utopia”) and Marcus Stiglegger (“*Kaijū eiga*: Utopias and Dystopias in Japanese Cinema”), as well as an article by Sonja Wengoborski with an interesting comparison of the utopian in contemporary literature in Sinhala and Hindi.

The “Supplement Section – Myths from Asia” (pp. 111–186), which follows, contains six contributions from a second workshop under the broad framework “Myths from Asia”. Kasturi Dadhe’s article is an interesting contribution on the complexities of a tribal creation myth of the Bhil. Almuth Degener writes on the construction of a mythic history spanning 2,500 years in the famous Urdu novel *Āg kā daryā* by Qurratulain Hyder. Degener relates her interpretation to the subject of the volume, since the novel reveals a “utopia of a golden age, consisting of the peaceful coexistence of free and equal citizens” (p. 124) in contrast to the deep enmity in the present hostile relationship between India and Pakistan.

Ivo Ritzer, in his second contribution “Legends of the Fist” focuses on nationalism and transnationalism in the myth of the superhero in films from China and Hong Kong, while Hans Ruelius discusses the mythic origins of the *yakṣa* in traditional Sinhalese literature, particularly in the *Licchavikathā* (story of the Licchavi clan). Masako Sato’s article describes the symbolic dimension of the spider and her net in traditional Japanese literature, while Markus Stiglegger analyses the myths of the everyday in the film *Mythopoetic* of the contemporary Japanese film director Mamoru Oshii. The last section of the book contains pictures, which relate to some of the articles.

All in all, the volume provides a multi-faceted and entertaining overview of various interpretations of the utopian and the mythological from both ancient and modern Asia and is a fine contribution to the intercultural landscape.

Heinz Werner Wessler

ELLEN WILES, *Saffron Shadows and Salvaged Scripts. Literary Life in Myanmar under Censorship and in Transition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 288 pages, \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-2311-7328-5

Over decades of military rule, Myanmar developed an extremely harsh censorship regime that had a profound impact on developments in literature – writers gained fame for creative ways of coding their messages that were unintelligible to the censors. Paradoxically, censorship had at once a very restrictive impact on Myanmar literature and was at the same time, as one writer phrased it, “the best thing that happened to it” (p. 235), unwittingly forcing writerly creativity and encouraging “public lust for books that are forbidden fruits, which goes hand in hand with intense respect for writers” (p. 251). But what has happened to Myanmar’s literary scene since the end of prepublication censorship in 2012? Ellen Wiles’s book, an “ethnographic investigation of literary culture in Myanmar” (p. 1), sets out to answer this question.

At the core of the book are the accounts of nine writers speaking about their experiences of living, writing and publishing under the censorship regime and

after its end. It also includes new translations of examples from their work, chosen by the authors themselves. This rich material is framed by Wiles's introduction and conclusion. The introduction provides background information to place the writers' accounts in their historical context. Trained as a lawyer, the author discusses the legal framework of censorship, though some of this section seems to be taken from Anna Allott's *Inked Over, Ripped Out: Burmese Storytellers and the Censors* (New York: PEN American Center, 1993).

Wiles's introduction to literary history contains substantial errors, however, such as referring to "the Bagan dynasty in the mid-fifteenth century" (it had collapsed by the end of the thirteenth) having left its earliest works of literature engraved on "stone tablets" (p. 28; the inscriptions were usually incised on large stone steles). Moreover, she characterises Inwa period poetry as a "secular form", although the characteristic genre of the period is poems composed by Buddhist monks on religious themes. And the *yadu* genre originated not in Siam (p. 29) but was first composed by Caturingabala in upper Myanmar around 1340, with no known Siamese influence at all.

The featured writers are grouped into three generations: The oldest (60–90 years), the middle-aged (40–60 years) and the youngest (20–40 years). The oldest generation experienced the period before the censorship regime and subsequently had to adjust to it. This generation is represented by Win Tin (b. 1929), a journalist, founding member of the NLD, political prisoner, recipient of the World Press Freedom Prize, and poet; by Shwegu May Hnin (b. 1940), a radio broadcaster, writer and former NLD Member of Parliament, as well as former political prisoner; and by Pe Myint (b. 1949) a writer and editor (who was appointed Minister for Information by the NLD-led government in 2016). While the first two are chiefly admired for the political heroism that earned them long-term prison sentences – and the veneration of many political supporters – Pe Myint was known as a writer of many widely read short stories, as a recipient of the National Literary Award (in 1995) and as a clever businessman involved with several magazines and publishing companies.

The middle generation "had never known life outside of the regime" and thus, according to Wiles, faced a great challenge "to become good writers" (p. 117). This generation is represented by Ye Shan (b. 1961), who regularly publishes short stories and in 1986 won the National Literary Award; by Ma Thida (b. 1966), a well-known writer and public intellectual who, for some time, was active for the NLD and ended up in solitary confinement; and also by Zeyya Lynn (b. 1958), a former university lecturer in English who is arguably one of the most influential poets in present-day Myanmar.

The youngest generation of writers has experienced the least censorship, but in their early works were still affected by it. They are represented by Nay Phone Latt (aged 31), a blogger, short story writer, political activist and former political prisoner who has received numerous awards, including the Reporters Without Borders' Cyber-Dissident Award and the PEN American Freedom to

Write Award; by Pandora (31), a poet who, after working and writing poetry in Singapore, returned to Myanmar recently and published an anthology of poems by Myanmar women poets, and finally, by Myay Hmone Lwin (26), a young novelist, short story writer and successful publisher.

Wiles's conclusion draws out common themes and key issues from the writers' accounts: the political transition in Myanmar has resulted in a major crisis of the literary scene. Many writers are "at a loss to find subject matter that is as passion-inducing and incendiary as that which they were motivated to tackle under censorship". Given that "the literary devices frequently used to get around the restrictions are no longer as potent or necessary as they once were" and that "in combination with socialist realism, those devices had formed the backbone of literary style and form" (p. 251), it has become difficult to continue writing fiction. Older writers, who are celebrated for their political activism and resulting imprisonment, are now in demand to give "literary talks" (that are hardly about literature at all, but usually about politics), and write essays and articles about political topics or memoirs retelling the story of their struggle with the regime – yet have mostly ceased to write fiction. Some regret the extent to which "politics have usurped the literary" (p. 232), and the fact that economic changes have led to a "flurry of commercialization" resulting in "a plethora of fashion and style magazines [...] with glossy pictures and celebrity stories" (p. 237) that have come to replace the formerly popular literary magazines featuring poetry, short stories and essays on literature and the arts. Younger authors break with all kinds of literary and cultural taboos by writing in slang language explicitly about sex and violence. However, Wiles remains optimistic, seeing literature as so deeply engrained in Myanmar culture that the current crisis can be but a "temporary post-censorship phenomenon: a dip in literature's place in the cultural hierarchy for a short time before an ascending peak of activity" (p. 253). Without romanticising censorship, Wiles does observe how difficult writing has become without it for those who had grown accustomed to struggling against it.

The book presents a multifaceted and vividly polyphonic account of Myanmar's current literary scene based on field research and interviews conducted in 2013. It does, however, have its flaws. The author's admitted "inability to speak Burmese" (p. 11) is a serious one: isn't it too daring to embark on an "ethnographic investigation of literary culture" without being able to read the literature or to talk with the writers – the artists of the word – in their own language? All but one interview were conducted in English with writers who had mostly already published in English; six out of the nine authors had participated as writers in residence at the University of Iowa's International Writing Program; several had featured as prominent NLD politicians or political prisoners in the English language media. How representative are they of Myanmar's literary scene? While Wiles claims that her selection is based on "asking numerous writers and readers for recommendations" (p. 12), I suspect that her linguistic abilities

did indeed play a more important role in her choices than she is conscious of or willing to admit. This brings with it the danger, in a kind of self-amplifying circle, of again featuring only those writers who are already known to an interested international public and of failing to give a voice to those who might be at least as or even more prominent and important for the local literary scene, but have not yet published in English. Another serious issue is that of the translations of the authors' accounts and texts which Wiles claims she "did" on the basis of "initial translations" provided by either the author or by a local translator (p. 12). Without being able to read the original, one cannot do a translation; one can only modify someone else's translation – and in this process, distortions of the original meanings happen easily. Not having access to the original texts (which would have been a major asset to the book), the reader can only hope that the fact that Wiles asked the authors to check "her" translations has minimised misunderstandings. However, some of the translations and transcriptions do contain errors evident to anyone who knows the language.

Her point that there are so few translations (to provide her better access to Myanmar's literary scene) because there are few able translators in Myanmar is not really valid; good translations of literature have to be done by those translating from their second language into their native tongue (and not the other way round) in order to achieve a quality that meets international standards. We can therefore only hope that in the future Wiles and other native speakers of English, French, German or other languages take upon themselves the effort to learn the language and start translating more of the wonderful literature of Myanmar. Her fascinating and very readable account may well be a very good incentive to do so.

Georg Noack

MARIE LALL, *Understanding Reform in Myanmar. People and Society in the Wake of Military Rule*. London: Hurst, 2016. Xviii, 352 pages, £20.00. ISBN 978-1-8490-4580-3

Since the transition of Myanmar to democracy or as some say, a less repressive form of rule, observers and experts have guessed at the reasons for the change of heart of the military government. Generally it remained just that: guesswork.

Marie Lall does not furnish clear-cut reasons or a deep analysis of the process either, but that is not her objective. What she provides is a very detailed, very knowledgeable survey of the processes that led to the changes from 2004 up until the present. What she also does is to discount many of the myths surrounding the transition, such as that the sanctions against Myanmar led directly to the junta bowing down before the international community. She is very decisive about this; the sanctions definitely did not make the military government blink. Yet even if the junta did not suffer under these measures, others like civil

servants and population groups connected to the military through private or public ties did, and that would have weakened the economy (p. 134, 145). Likewise she dismisses the idea that the Myanmar diaspora and international NGOs were a driving force for change. On the contrary: whereas local civil society groups attempted to initiate a dialogue with the junta in order to be able to function at all, these attempts were denounced and dismissed by international NGOs and diaspora organisations. Much more crucial for the changes would have been, she suggests, the attitude of Myanmar's fellow ASEAN countries who, while not openly criticising or condemning the junta would have made known their misgivings about the direction taken (p. 76). This was evident, for example, in the pressure on Myanmar to forego the presidency of ASEAN in 2005.

The book is divided into seven chapters plus an introduction, conclusion, and epilogue and it covers all aspects of social and political life in Myanmar. The author's main thesis is that after the cease-fires of the 1990s, civil society in Myanmar played a major role in at least furthering and fostering change, if not actually initiating it. This was particularly the case for organisations in ethnic regions, above all in the Kachin and Karen areas. The cease-fires, she says, opened a certain space and room for manoeuvre, and enabled both traditional NGOs (or civil society organisations, as she refers to them) like religious ones that had long existed and new ones that emerged in the 1990s to operate and initiate a dialogue with each other below the radar of government supervision, so to speak.

Marie Lall sees a leap forward for these organisations after the dismissal of Intelligence Chief Khin Nyunt in 2004, though he had been the West's "darling" because he was ostensibly open to foreign dialogue. But his exit also removed the close supervision by military intelligence and opened up opportunities for CSOs to expand their activities.

She illustrates the way these organisations worked by means of the example of Myanmar Egress, an educational NGO founded by Myanmar academics both from within the country and in the diaspora, and funded by a range of international organisations. The NGO had to liaise closely with government authorities, providing courses with unthreatening and innocuous titles like "English" or "business classes". Over time, the content was only marginally connected to these titles. The organisation worked with and financed itself through third and fourth party arrangements.

The presentation makes it clear that the transition did not suddenly appear out of the blue but had its beginnings in developments of the 1990s and early 2000s. The junta aimed at a gradual transition to a more open political set-up, the control of which would always remain in their hands. Besides the cease-fires and the peace process the cyclone Nargis in 2008 played an important role: the natural disaster opened the country to international help from Asian neighbours and ultimately from Western countries. The referendum in 2008 shortly after Nargis and the elections in 2010, as well as the re-entry of the NLD and

Suu Kyi into the political process in 2012, meant a process of political education for the population, even though both the referendum and the elections of 2010 could in no way be termed free, fair or representative of the people's wishes. The release of Suu Kyi in 2010 and the surprising suspension of the Myitsone dam project in 2011 were, in a sense, the end rather than the beginning of the transition process, the result of which was reconciliation with the NLD.

The author agrees with the Myanmar academic Kyaw Yin Hlaing that the military was ruled by an *esprit de corps* that did not allow for disagreements, at least not public ones, but she also outlines the fissures and fractures within the junta quite clearly. The last three chapters deal with educational, economic aspects and the strengthening of Buddhist nationalism in the country in the wake of liberalisation, a phenomenon familiar from other cases. The educational needs are described competently, but the chapter on economic reform stresses the necessity and advantages of international investment and touches only lightly on the feared disadvantages of investment in resource extraction and export agriculture, for example with regard to land rights and agriculture (p. 146, 150).

The conclusion and the epilogue are interesting since there is a contrast, even a contradiction, between the author's skepticism over the chances of an NLD election victory, and her discussion of the actual results, namely a huge victory for the NLD.

This is an extremely useful study and summary of developments in Myanmar in the last decade from an expert who knows the situation from personal experience over many years rather than, as she herself puts it, from "sitting in an aid agency office in Thailand" (p. 6). This is a statement this reviewer heartily agrees with: having visited the country since 1999 and observed the changes, she was sometimes astonished by comments from so-called experts who had never set foot in the country. Though the tone is optimistic, the author does not gloss over the multiple challenges and unresolved problems, especially in the ethnic regions and most recently with the upsurge of Buddhist nationalism and even extremism, both of which look decidedly threatening. This book should be required reading for anybody aspiring to know something about the new – and also the old – Myanmar.

Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam

FRANZISKA BLUM, *Teaching Democracy. The Program and Practice of Aung San Suu Kyi's Concept of People's Education*. Berlin: regiospectra, 2011. 112 pages, €18.90. ISBN 978-3-940132-27-7

In the general election held in Myanmar in November 2015, the political party of Aung San Suu Kyi – Nobel laureate and icon of democracy in Myanmar and beyond – won by a landslide. It was a much clearer victory than expected by many analysts. She could not become president, since this was prohibited by a provision in the constitution, but by creating the tailor-made new position of State Counsellor, she managed to become the de-facto political leader of Myanmar.

This development was spectacular, concluding a transition process that had begun already in 1988, when Aung San Suu Kyi somehow accidentally became a prominent figure of the pro-democracy movement, which won the elections in 1990, even then with a great majority. In those days, Myanmar was perceived as part of the Third Wave of Democratisation (Samuel Huntington) – a worldwide trend which reached its climax in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the countries of the socialist bloc, as well as South Africa and many more countries adopted liberal democratic systems. However, in contrast to the worldwide trend, the Myanmar military, by placing Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest, managed to maintain a firm grip on power.

This is why the delayed political victory of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2015 is no less important than the end of the authoritarian socialist one-party systems or the end of Apartheid in South Africa. It fulfils Suu Kyi's life mission and places her on a par with charismatic leaders such as Nelson Mandela or Mahatma Gandhi, who shaped the development of their countries with their political visions: Nelson Mandela, by taking up the idea of *Ubuntu* (African Humanism) and inspiring the idea of a Rainbow Nation, and Gandhi with his concept of non-violence and *Swaraj* (Self-Governance).

Unlike these leaders, however, Aung San Suu Kyi is not connected with any specific political vision or political programme. Although “democracy” – vaguely defined – has been a buzzword in the political discourse in Myanmar for several decades, the exact political vision of the icon of democracy remains largely unknown. This is why Franziska Blum's publication of Suu Kyi's speeches on democracy, some of which were delivered over the fence of her house at University Avenue in Yangon during the time of her house arrest, is so important and revealing. Much as Nelson Mandela's political persuasions, his vision of human dignity were shaped by his decades in prison, the house arrest of Suu Kyi, and her political activities during the time of military authoritarianism, surely helped to shape her strategy and vision.

We owe our access to Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches to a coincidence. During a conference at the centre of Myanmar studies in DeKalb, Illinois, Hans-Bernd Zöllner, historian and, until recently, one of the few and most active proponents of Myanmar studies in Germany, came across a collection of her speeches attached to a book published in Japan. These speeches were then translated by

Ko Ko Thett, a translator of Burmese literature with training in political science, who happened to be among the audience when the speeches were given, before being exiled to Finland. These speeches laid the foundation for the present book by Franziska Blum, which was submitted as a thesis in Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Passau and consists of an introduction, interpretation and edition of the speeches. This entire endeavour deserves recognition for providing access to these historical documents to a Western audience for the first time.

Beyond that, the publication is also a historical document in its own right. The manner in which these documents came to light reveals much about the deplorable state of Myanmar studies in the years just before the opening of the country in 2011. Lacking representation at the university level, Myanmar studies in Germany were reduced to the private initiative of a few committed scholars. Only with the surge in interest following the political opening in 2011 did new resources finally become available.

When we read the book today, five years after publication, it reveals another shade of historic meaning. The opening of Myanmar, the belated establishment of a new democracy after years of military dominance, is acclaimed as one of the big successes of US-American foreign policy under President Barack Obama. However, at the very same time, democracy seems to be under pressure globally and we are witnessing the re-establishment of authoritarian regimes. It looks as if, in the foreseeable future, Myanmar – having finally, belatedly joined the Third Wave of Democracy – may be the last country to be counted like this. What's more, with the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, the once central and most important guarantor of liberal democracy is in danger of sliding into an authoritarian direction itself.

According to Franziska Blum's analysis, the main message of Aung San Suu Kyi is that democratisation depends on political education. This is a noble message – but rather than being a vision, I would argue that it reveals a lack of concepts. In development cooperation programmes, too, the call for better education is a one-size-fits-all solution whenever a problem proves to be too difficult to be tackled directly. In the case of political education, this appeal is particularly unsatisfactory, since it is meaningless unless we talk about the content of the education programme as well.

Certainly, no one is in a position to blame Aung San Suu Kyi for this lack of concepts during her time under house arrest. The democratic awakening had collapsed; the military was firmly in power. Under these circumstances, her perseverance – sometimes deemed stubbornness – was her greatest achievement. Against the background of the worldwide crisis of democracy, however, we cannot afford not to have a clearer vision.

Wolfram Schaffar

AZEEM IBRAHIM, *The Rohingyas. Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*. London: Hurst, 2016. 256 pages, £12.99. ISBN 978-1-84904-623-7

Myanmar's Rakhine State has been in a state of emergency since October 2016. The north of Rakhine State on the border to Bangladesh is sealed off and currently belongs to a military operational zone. The reason for the military intervention was the series of coordinated attacks against Myanmar police border posts. Nine policemen were killed, and weapons and ammunition were seized in October 2016. According to the Myanmar government, the attackers belonged to a militant Rohingya organisation. Meanwhile, there are reports of human rights violations carried out by the Myanmar security forces against the local, predominantly Muslim population, including members of the Rohingya group, in the north of Rakhine State. Around 70,000 people have so far fled to Bangladesh. International criticism of the new government, which began its work in April 2016 and of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is growing. The violent conflicts in Rakhine State between Buddhists and Muslims already led to the expulsion of Muslims in 2012. Since then, more than 100,000 people have been living as internally displaced persons in camps. There have been travel warnings for the region since 2012.

About 3 million people live in Rakhine State: Two-thirds of them are Buddhist Rakhine and other ethnic groups, one third are Muslims, among them members of the Rohingya group. Within Myanmar's population of 51.5 million, 88 per cent are followers of Buddhism and 4 per cent of Islam. Since 2012, anti-Muslim campaigns have been intensifying throughout Myanmar. The Rakhine State, as well as the Muslim group of the Rohingya have so far been under-researched. Thus the book *The Rohingyas. Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide* by Azeem Ibrahim represents a timely and courageous effort to shed some light on the darkness. The aim of the book is summed up in the cover text: "This lucid and starkly written exposé of the plight of the Rohingyas should help bring their cause widespread attention."

In the first part, Azeem Ibrahim, Adjunct Research Professor at the Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College (Pennsylvania), discusses the history of the Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar, while in the second part, he refers to their situation since the outbreak of the 2012 conflict in Rakhine State, in the isolated west of Myanmar. He focuses on the humanitarian situation, human rights violations and the legal status of Rohingya, which he outlines impressively. He postulates: "This is genocide: it is the deliberate destruction of an identified ethnic group. International indifference only encourages the regime to believe it can get away with it" (p. 16). Talking about a genocide aimed at the Muslim group of Rohingya in Rakhine State is controversial. Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman of the United Nations human rights office said when talking to reporters in Geneva in early February 2017 about the recent developments in North-Rakhine State: "The kind of systematic and widespread violations that we have documented could be described as ethnic cleansing", but noted that this

was not a legally defined offence provable in court (Mizzima, Hundreds Likely Killed in Myanmar: UN, www.mizzima.com, accessed 4 February 2017).

The government of Myanmar claims that the Muslim group of Rohingya are Bengalis, who are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, and denies them citizenship, as well as recognition as an ethnic group. Police and military forces were involved in the expulsion of Rohingya in 2012 (p. 81). It is not mentioned and differentiated by the author at this point that the expulsions were generally directed against Muslims in Rakhine State. Among them were Kaman Muslims, recognised as citizens and as an ethnic group, and people who identify themselves as “Rakhine Muslims”. The violence and the isolation in the camps, where more than 100,000 people, mainly Muslims, have been living since the conflicts of 2012 has redefined identity. Even within families there are different identities, and it is by no means a general practice, as Azeem Ibrahim puts it, to speak of “the Rohingya” as if they were a large uniform group. Discussions about the identity of the Rohingya are largely omitted in the book. There is only half a page dealing with the case of the Rohingya as a political movement or a political identity, which was only developed in the 1940/50s (p. 31; see Derek Tonkin: *The Rohingya Identity. British Experience in Arakan 1826–1948*, www.networkmyanmar.org, 9 April 2014; Jaques P. Leider: *Rohingya. The Name, the Movement and the Quest for Identity*, in: *Nation Building in Myanmar*, Yangon: Myanmar Egress & Myanmar Peace Center, 2013).

In the first part of the book, which deals with the history of the Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar, Azeem Ibrahim argues that the Rohingya had already lived in the territory of today’s Rakhine State since AD 1000 (p. 21). At this point, a reference to the difficult source situation and sources that have not been fully developed so far would have been helpful. The historian J. P. Leider, on the other hand, believes according to currently known sources that the existence of a Muslim community in Arakan (today’s Rakhine State) can be attested no earlier than the 15th century, the same being true of the group of Rohingya. However, it can be assumed that the first Muslims already traded in the Bengal sea in the 9th century. Azeem Ibrahim refers to a census from Charles Paton of 1826 to prove the existence of Rohingya in Arakan. The Rohingya, are not mentioned in the census, but they are included in the quotation by the author himself: “a large community in the north (the Rohingyas)” (p. 6).

When describing the Sangha, the Buddhist community, which is very diverse and which is the largest nationwide organisation outside of state structures in Myanmar with about 500.000 monks and novices, the author over-simplifies by assigning the monks to three groups, two of which are ultranationalist: “The 969 Movement, the MaBaTha and a small group of mainly older clerics who reject the anti-Islamic rhetoric” (p. 14). This creates the impression of an extensively radicalised and intolerant monk community, which however does not correspond to the reality of the situation.

The author analyses the root of the violence and the increase in the persecution in Rakhine State. Unfortunately, he offers over-simple justifications when he talks about the Burmese path to socialism, for example, which has led to an economic disaster: “The regime needed an easily identifiable group it could victimise and against which it could construct wider discrimination. The Rohingyas fitted this role. They were unarmed, ethnically easily identifiable, spoke a non-Burmese language and were Muslims in a country where 90 per cent of the population was Buddhist” (p. 53). His finding, namely that the Rohingya were “subject to the official distrust of all non-Burman groups” (p. 53) is not without evidence, but incomplete. It has to be mentioned that under General Ne Win xenophobia and latent racism was promoted: “[...] even people of pure blood are being disloyal to the race [...] if people of pure blood act this way, we must carefully watch people of mixed blood” (Mikael Gravers: *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma. An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power*. NIAS Report Series 11. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1993, p. 69). Besides the Rohingya, this also affected Chinese and Indians, including Muslims in general and Hindus, who were accused of being illegal immigrants who had settled in Burma during the British colonial period.

Unfortunately, the book contains numerous inaccuracies. Facts in connection with the description of the political system in Myanmar are misrepresented: “25 per cent of the seats in the new parliament were reserved for the USDP” (pp. 12, 15). It was not the Union Solidary Development Party (USDP) which benefited: 25 per cent of the seats are qua constitution reserved for the military and are not open for any other candidates in the election. A further inaccuracy: the writer refers to the current situation of the Rohingya in the “Rakhine Province” (p. 1), although the “Province” turned into the Arakan State in 1974 and was renamed Rakhine State later, in 1989.

The author mentions that he conducted interviews with local journalists and Rohingya politicians in Myanmar in 2015 (p. 159), but does not give much background information. It would have been very interesting to know more about how extensive the interviews were, what the main focus was, the background of his interview partners, whether he also spoke with other groups, whether he was in Rakhine State itself to get an overview of the situation. This deficit is regrettable as it weakens the credibility of the sources.

However, the authors’ engagement for his research area is highly commendable, although a more differentiated report on the complex situation might contribute better to a widespread perception of the Rohingya cause, as was the self-declared aim of the book. To further this undoubtedly important aim, well-founded studies on the situation of the Rohingya are urgently needed and of great current importance.

Mandy Fox

HARRO VON SENGER / MARCEL SENN (eds), *Maoismus oder Sinomarxismus? Rechtswissenschaftlich-sinologische Tagung an der Universität Zürich, 5. und 6. Dezember 2014*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2016. 300 pages, €54.00. ISBN 978-3-515-11028-0

Within a short period of time, China has become the second largest economic power in the world after the USA, and the second largest recipient of foreign direct investments. About 50 million private companies have been set up since Deng Xiaoping introduced the socialist market economy at the beginning of the 1990s, accounting for about 80 per cent of the Chinese companies today.

How is this possible in a Maoist country? Could the developments of the last decades have been achieved if the Chinese Communist Party were still officially upholding Marxist doctrine? Has the CCP in reality silently transformed itself into a “Chinese Capitalist Party” and abandoned Marxism? These questions were the subject of a conference organised by the University of Zurich, held on 5 and 6 December 2014, the results of which are compiled in the present volume. The scope of the book renders it impossible for a detailed analysis of all of the excellent topics and interesting discussion materials contained within. Therefore, I will concentrate on the paper of one of the two co-editors of the book, Harro von Senger, followed by a brief overview of the main topics of the remaining contributors.

Harro von Senger’s paper “Der Sinomarxismus zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts” (“Sinomarxism at the beginning of the 21st century”) deals with the alleged deviation from the initial Marxism of Chinese ideology. He quotes the Statute of the Communist Party of China of 14 November 2012, which states that: “The theory of Deng Xiaoping is [...] the Marxism of today’s China” (p. 122). Based on this statement and other Chinese assertions, von Senger maintains the notion of the persistence of some kind of Marxism in China – a point of view in contrast to that of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, for example, which announced a farewell to Marxism in China. Von Senger sustains his thesis through two lines of approach – the phenomenological and the normative – and suggests that these two approaches should be combined in order to describe the current state ideology of China. The ideology of the CCP has been Marxism from the very beginning, even after Mao Zedong’s death in 1976. All the party leaders who followed, such as Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang and Xi Jinping, have praised Marxism, emphasising that China will only be successful as long as it adheres to the principles of Marxism-Leninism. The sinisation of Marxism thus has two developmental phases: the creation of Mao Zedong Thought and the development of Marxism after Mao’s death.

According to Harro von Senger, Mao Zedong did not contribute anything essential to Marxism and therefore the notion of “Maoism” is not used in China at all. But the documents of the CCP evoke not only the writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin but also elements from Chinese politicians, such as “Mao Zedong Thought”, the “Theory of Deng Xiaoping”, the

concept of “Three Represents” and others. Therefore, the denomination of the current Chinese ideology may correctly be called “Sinomarxism” – an amalgamation of Western Marxism and Chinese components – and not “Maoism”, which is a Western construction. The contribution of the second co-editor, Marcel Senn, deals with Marxism as a philosophy that historically derived from the methodology of Western European Enlightenment. He, too, understands Sinomarxism as a specific Chinese interpretation of Marxism.

Daniel Leese analyses the history and contemporary relevance of the concepts of “Maoism” and “Mao Zedong Thought” in Chinese politics and Western academia. He states that the notion of “Maoism” is avoided in official statements of the CCP for both philosophical and political reasons. The use of the notion of “Maoism” in scientific discourse can be understood in three senses: as the designation of an epoch, mostly from 1949 to 1976; as the totality of Mao Zedong’s theories; and, finally, as a form of exercise of rule or concentration of power.

Another contribution, by Beat U. Wieser, deals with Chinese pragmatism, which has created significant economic success. This pragmatism oscillates, the author shows, between openness and closedness according to the political agenda – which is not always correctly understood by Western observers.

Hans van Ess’s paper evokes the renaissance of Confucianism in the PRC. When Hu Jintao came to power in 2002, he emphasised the idea of a “harmonious society”, considered by many as “Confucian”: “Confucian” harmony has been considered as a bulwark against the social differentiation engendered by capitalist processes since Deng Xiaoping. “But should Confucianism replace socialism in China?” Harro von Senger asks, and answers that Confucianism should not be understood as a replacement of Marxism-Leninism.

The presentation of Heiner Roetz discusses the concept of “Legalism”, a state doctrine at the time of the Warring States (475–221 BC). Legalism had been created at that time as an answer to one of the deepest crises of Chinese civilisation and held that this crisis could only be resolved through the institutional power of a centrally organised state. It aimed to terminate personal dependences and commitments, replacing them with impersonal laws. Heiner Roetz explores whether the application of aspects of Legalism may have contributed to the successful establishment of an authoritarian system in the PRC.

The Second Discussion Round presents the contribution by Anja D. Senz on the relevance and function of experiments in Post-Mao China such as, for example, the introduction of foreign direct investment regulations in 1978, the creation of Special Economic Zones starting in the 1980s, the deregulation of some sectors of the economy, the privatisation of a part of economy and the integration of the Chinese economy into the world market. These political changes have not been interpreted as “shock therapy” in China, but rather as a “trial and error” method on the part of the government.

The contribution of Lukas Heckendorn Urscheler opens the Third Discussion Round and Panel Discussion. It investigates Nepal as an example of the spread, diffusion and even adoption of Mao Zedong Thought outside of China, beginning in 1996 and originating – interestingly enough – not from China but from India. The long-festered Maoist insurgency in the heart of India, which has been challenging the Indian state itself for more than forty years, is the focus of Jens Rosenmeyer’s contribution. The last presentation of this round, the only contribution in English, starts with the question: “How does one come to understand China?” Roland Boer stresses in his answer the importance of a knowledge of Marxism – in addition to knowing the Chinese language and classics or Confucianism. According to Boer, it is a great mistake to dismiss Marxism in China and neglect what is arguably one of the most important factors in an understanding of China.

The second contribution by Harro von Senger – “‘Pragmatismus’ und ‘Maoismus’: Rückblick auf die Tagung ‘Maoismus oder Sinomarxismus?’” (“‘Pragmatism’ and ‘Maoism’: A Retrospective of the Conference ‘Maoism or Sinomarxismus?’”) – summarises the discussion of Round Four, thereby providing a useful resume of the two concepts as analysed by several contributors during the symposium.

The CCP continues to espouse Mao Zedong Thought until today, with the exception of a few ideas propagated by Mao during the Cultural Revolution. The party thus takes Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, the Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important concept of Three Represents and the Scientific Outlook on Development as its guiding principles. For this reason, as the book clearly evidences, one should not always focus either on Maoism or Mao Zedong Thought alone, but rather maintain a broader overview of the multiple components guiding the CCP’s governing principles. This concept of political theory is best described with the term “Sinomarxism”, the contributors/editors suggest. The arguments seem plausible and the name appropriate. “Sinomarxism” can thus become a fundamental term for better understanding the Chinese political system.

Stefan Messmann

CHRISTL KESSLER / STEFAN ROTHER, *Democratization through Migration? Political Remittances and Participation of Philippine Return Migrants*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016. 196 pages, \$80.00. ISBN 978-1-4985-1421-7

The Philippines is one of the top labor exporters worldwide. Besides the economic benefits this brings home, there is the widespread hope among Philippine pundits that outward migration will serve as a trigger for a more active citizenship in the political life of the country. This stems from their perception that

such a sense of citizenship is lacking or weak among those Filipinos who stayed behind, and that the inertia of the political system is hard to overcome. Hence, their hopes are pinned on influences from overseas to activate the Filipino citizenry. The millions of migrant workers are widely perceived as catalysts of democratisation due to their exposure to societies considered democratically more developed than the Philippines.

Randy David, one of the country's leading sociologists, like many of his colleagues, assumes that Overseas Filipinos "see how modern and accountable governments take pains to respond to the needs of their citizens. They watch in awe when the inhabitants of these [host] societies, conscious of their civic responsibility to work for the common good, take initiatives to improve their communities rather than wait for their governments to act. Naturally, they begin to ask what it would take for Filipinos to attain the same level of solidarity and political maturity. When they come home or read about happenings at home, they recoil at the incompetence and the privileges of the few who rule us" (Randy David, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 16 February 2013).

However, while the hopes pinned on "democratic remittances" are high, there is little research to prove or disprove this hope as justified. Some research has been done on the impact of migration on the political circumstances of sending societies in the Latin American context, but in the case of Southeast Asia, so far only one extensive research project has been presented. It was conducted in the Philippine context from 2005 to 2007 by a team from the University of Freiburg, Christl Kessler and Stefan Rother. Their book summarises the findings of the study.

The project aimed to understand how far migrants' experience living in a democratic or an authoritarian host society impacts on their political attitudes once they return to the Philippines. For this purpose, the research team interviewed 1,000 migrant returnees as well as 1,000 first-timers about to depart for work abroad within a quantitative survey, and 37 of them in a qualitative survey.

The study comes up with a rather sobering finding about expectations from migrant returnees with regards to democratisation in the Philippine context. The assessment of political performance by migrants clearly shows that there is a considerable discontent among migrant returnees with the Philippine political system and that such dissatisfaction is intensified by the migration experience (compared with the first-timers), since migration makes the country of destination of the migrants the "yardstick" (p. 91) against which the political system of the Philippines is now measured. However, migration seems to weaken rather than foster democratic attitudes, as a comparison between returnees and first-timers suggests. The study concludes that "migrants are not likely to change the rather bleak picture of the level of democratic support in the Philippines" (p. 154) and observed expressions of "hopelessness" as "prevalent in the interviews" (p. 143).

Despite the 37 qualitative interviews included, the research however mainly tests a hypothesis, and provides only a minimal description of the sense of citizenship among migrant returnees. I see this as one of the main weaknesses of the study: it places its focus on changes of attitudes with regard to democratic values, but little can be concluded on how migrants play out such values in their everyday practices – e.g. by becoming politically active “back home” in the Philippines (active citizenship) or expecting more service from state actors and holding them accountable for fulfilling such expectations (passive sense of citizenship).

The study can thus only partly answer the question of whether the hope that migrants will contribute to democratisation in the Philippines is futile or not. While the study concludes (though on a thin basis of data) that “the migration experience has no substantial effect on levels of political participation and civic engagement” (p. 152), i.e. that migration does not enhance active citizenship, the study does not answer the question of how far migration actually leads to a higher sense of passive citizenship, i.e. a more pronounced sense of entitlement towards state services. One of its main assumptions, which is that “the [migrational] experience of a society with a functioning economy and providing for the material needs of its citizens makes migrants more demanding towards their own political system” (p. 130), is not clearly tested.

Furthermore, the Freiburg Research Project was only able to include migrants to authoritarian or semi-democratic societies (with the exception of Japan). Migrants to Europe or North America (societies which are usually used as yardsticks when it comes to issues of a developed sense of citizenship) were not part of the study. It could thus not properly test the (rejected) assumption that “a prolonged stay in a democratic country enhances democratic values” (p. 155). Furthermore, the study did not include long-term migrants. In gauging how far overseas experience might influence migrant returnees to contribute towards change in the Philippines, both subgroups should have been considered essential. The overseas labour migrants interviewed in the study are rather in the middle of a chain of overseas employments, as is typical of service work migrants to the Middle East, Hong Kong or Japan, i.e. they will sooner or later leave the Philippines again. This makes it rather unlikely that they will get involved in citizenship action while on “home leave”, given that the connection between residence and citizenship has been clearly established.

The great merit of this study, however, lies in its pioneering role on this subject. Hopefully, it will trigger and inspire further research towards finding in-depth answers to the important questions it raised.

Niklas Reese

RUI GRAÇA FEIJÓ, *Dynamics of Democracy in Timor-Leste. The Birth of a Democratic Nation, 1999–2012*. (Emerging Asia, 2). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016. 336 pages, €89.00. ISBN 978-9-08964-804-4

Timor-Leste is a small, poor, post-conflict state which has overcome the ravages of a brutal occupation and severe internal crisis to emerge as a successful, stable democracy. The core subject matter and research issues of this book are what the concept of democracy means in the 21st century, and whether and how it has been achieved and consolidated in Timor-Leste, apparently against all odds and in the face of severe challenges and continuing shortcomings. Although its timeframe is ostensibly limited, the discussion goes beyond 2012 and considers serious concerns that will inform and influence the next electoral cycle in the country in 2017.

The author contends that democratic consolidation has been accomplished in Timor-Leste through the installation and maintenance of a balance of power in which an inherently flexible system of checks and balances has allowed political actors to accommodate dissent. This has created the conditions for inclusive consensus in the political and social milieu, through the incorporation of diverse views into institutional governance. This central argument is grounded in the author's core thesis: in a political and social environment in which problems, conflict and competition are unavoidable, the role of democratic institutions is to confine responses to them "within commonly defined and accepted boundaries" (p. 242) which are framed by a consensual, pluralist, social milieu. This has been achieved in Timor-Leste in four core institutional areas, examined in separate chapters of the book, which are posited as a theoretical framework for the assessment of the country's democratic credentials. These are identified as a) the constitution, b) election processes and outcomes, c) the inclusiveness of government institutions epitomized particularly in the semi-presidential model of government, and d) the process of decentralization.

Although there are on-going concerns with respect to aspects of these institutions, their success has provided the basis for Timor-Leste's democratic consolidation, with the result that the state largely satisfies the principal criteria for its status as a democracy. Democratic practices have been incorporated into the "popular culture" as "traditional political values" (p. 279) in which a "common house" (p. 244) with historical and cultural roots in the identity and nationalist narrative of Timor-Leste society has established a "construction of trust" (p. 244) between competing political and social actors.

The author's thesis is grounded on an incisive analysis of the history, nature, and critical elements of democracy, and its development into its present form. The author conducts an extensive analysis and appraisal of both classical and leading contemporary work in his discussion, and in his account of the evolution of democracy in Timor-Leste. Together with his comprehensive literature review and references, the author's exhaustive examination of his subject is

the major strength of the book. He adopts an interdisciplinary approach to his research: it is structured upon a number of methodological devices embracing tools from diverse disciplinary fields, including innovative SWOT analysis which he uses as a device to analyse strategic decisions, and factors that have influenced Timor-Leste's democratisation. This is combined with a range of theoretical approaches which incorporate history, politics and institutional design.

The author's detailed approach to his scientific discussion unfolds in his arguments and in the formulation of his findings. Timor-Leste meets, indeed lies above, the minimum threshold for democracy. The two fundamental criteria of a fully operational and stable democracy, vertical and horizontal accountability, are foundational characteristics of the state's polity. Elected rulers are vertically accountable to a sovereign and the people, and are subject to horizontal controls from different branches of government which exert limitations on the powers of one another. Together, these axes of accountability are embedded within the four core areas of democratic accountability which structure the author's theoretical framework. They underpin the key criteria of popular control and inclusive governance of the political process which he asserts are fundamental standards for the construction of democracy and evaluation of the democratic credentials of the state.

This analysis is a significant contribution to scientific debate on contemporary controversial issues on the nature of democracy and its consolidation in post-conflict states. Without diminishing his achievement in other areas of his research, one can say that here the author's work is particularly valuable in his analysis of the system of semi-presidentialism and of the presidential-parliamentary model that he argues operates in Timor-Leste. Likewise valuable is his examination of the concept of decentralisation, particularly the failure to implement meaningful reform and the risk that this constitutes for the consolidation of democracy in the country. These areas of critique and analysis, the parameters of which are not clearly defined despite considerable academic debate, are identified as issues for further research. The author sets out to examine and critique current literature, and successfully explores new ground, linking both to the fundamental themes of his work of inclusivity, participation, empowerment and accountability, thereby providing incisive opinion as to their conditionality in the process of the consolidation of a democratic polity in the state.

Given that the next general elections in Timor-Leste will take place in 2017, this extremely interesting book is a timely and valuable analysis of the state of the polity that will be re-assessed by the people on this occasion. It is a work of knowledge, insight and analysis in which the author demonstrates a passion for his subject. He successfully demonstrates that democracy is a zeitgeist that has shaped Timor-Leste, permeates its social and political milieu, and is the foundation of its well-being as a state and a people that can accommodate pluralism through inclusive mechanisms of popular peaceful regulation. Every-

one inside and outside of Timor-Leste who has thought about and cares for democracy as a universal but threatened concept will learn from this book.

Guy Cumes

MARTIN KRIEGER, *Kaffee. Geschichte eines Genussmittels*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2011. 307 pages, €24.90. ISBN 978-3-412-20786-1

Coffee. History of a Luxury Food, is a coffee-table book in more than one sense: it discusses coffee in all its aspects and facets, including its botanical characteristics, areas and methods of cultivation, and its role as a trade commodity and lifestyle (and luxury) product.

In an overview in the first chapter the author traces the path of coffee from its origins in the highlands of Eastern Africa through the Arabic peninsula to modern plantations in all parts of the world, particularly Latin America and Southeast Asia, as well as its development from a local “health” drink to a world-wide consumer good. He then dedicates each of the remaining chapters to one aspect of coffee respectively, working both synchronically and diachronically, and ending with a discussion of the German coffee landscape.

The second chapter outlines the botanical properties of the coffee plant and its stimulating and stamina-aiding qualities, and presents – as also later in the book – some of the legends surrounding the coffee plant and its discovery. From there the author turns to the original home of the coffee plant: Kaffa in the Ethiopian highlands, from where the name might possibly have come. Here he also outlines methods of cultivation and harvesting as well as of consumption.

This is continued in the next chapter, aptly entitled Arabia Felix, although, as the author also mentions, current-day Yemen is anything but happy. This was different from the first centuries A.D. until at least early modern times, when some of the best coffee was cultivated, consumed and traded from the area’s ports, not least because of the safety and security provided for the travellers. The port of Mocha here stands for the product in general, though today it is more or less a ghost town. From Yemen, coffee conquered not only Arabia, but eventually also the Ottoman Empire and from there, Europe.

What is interesting, and is outlined by the author in considerable detail, is the role of coffee as a commodity, traded early on not only within Arabia, but to South Asia and back to Africa as well. Traders from the west coast of India played a prominent role in the intermediate trade and were soon joined by Europeans who had begun to expand their trade interests to South and Southeast Asia, leading to considerable interregional trade between Arabia and

Asia. The same chapter also outlines the public and private socio-cultural role of coffee in Arabia, where coffee houses became centres of social life and exchange. He also describes the method of preparing, fermenting and roasting coffee beans and their preparation as a beverage. It is interesting that not only the roasted beans were consumed but the peels and the flesh as well, on occasion, and an early variant of “coffee paste” was taken as a stimulant by traders and pilgrims on long journeys.

This socio-cultural role of coffee was exported together with the beans to Europe from the 16th/17th centuries, a process the author describes in detail. From this time onwards coffee also became an important trade commodity for the European trading companies and agencies in Asia. A coffee drinking culture sprang up in Europe, particularly in coffee houses, in which not only coffee was drunk, but business deals were finalised as well; Lloyds of London, for example, started out as a coffee house. In Asia coffee was bought and sold for vast, albeit volatile profits. To escape the monopoly of traders and the customs duties in Yemen, European companies started to cultivate coffee bushes in their colonies, viz. the Dutch in the Dutch East Indies and Ceylon, and the British in India. The problem was the very narrow genetic base from which all coffee plants originated and which was responsible for periodical coffee blights of various kinds, which wiped out vast properties. In this connection Martin Krieger also outlines the questionable and cruel methods of cultivation and marketing that accompanied this expansion: slavery, forced labour, *cuulturstelsel*, and the cartelisation of production and marketing.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Latin America and especially Brazil became the foremost producers of coffee worldwide, though with decolonisation traditional growers in Africa – Kenya and Tanzania as well as Ethiopia – tried to take up coffee production in a fairer way again and produced, like Yemen, small but qualitatively excellent coffee beans. Since World War II and the abolition of customs duties, coffee has become a trade commodity consumed all over the world, but also dominated by a handful of large food conglomerates. The author discusses the impact on coffee cultivation and trade of the two world wars, which gave rise to coffee substitutes, decaffeinated coffee and instant coffee powders. The final chapters outline the development of coffee bars and coffee chains that span the world and show Germany as one of the foremost coffee-marketing and -consuming countries.

The account places coffee into the context of world trade, monopolisation, colonisation and slavery. It is thus, as the author states, a part of world history and represents this history in all its facets – definitely something that this coffee-addicted reviewer will contemplate when she brews her next cup.

Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam