

**Book review: Frauke Kraas, Regine Spohner, Aye Aye Myint: Socio-Economic Atlas of Myanmar. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017. ISBN 978-3-515-11623-7**

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Augusto S. Cacopardo's recent *Pagan Christmas. Winter Feasts of the Kalasha of the Hindu Kush* (London 2016).

The late Karl Jettmar was an outstanding, eminently respected scholar, who “successfully combined ethnographic studies with historical and anthropological views, resulting in a holistic perception of cultural history in a way only few of his contemporaries could parallel” (obituary, p. XIII). His *The Religions of the Hindukush* was indeed a masterpiece of scholarship devoted to this part of Central Asia, but other works published subsequently should have been mentioned, at least within an appendix to the bibliography.

*Jürgen Wasim Frembgen*

FRAUKE KRAAS / REGINE SPOHNER / AYE AYE MYINT, *Socio-Economic Atlas of Myanmar*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017. 188 pages, 52 photos, 13 tables, 54 illustrations, EUR 39.00. ISBN 978-3-515-11623-7

The *Socio-Economic Atlas of Myanmar* is the first such publication and combines copious amounts of valuable data on the country with skilful and accessible visualisations. The authors have identified six key themes – administration and spatial organisation; environment and natural resources; population, settlements and urbanisation; infrastructure; economic development; social development: household infrastructure, education and health – and provide insights on specific themes such as hydropower and thermal power plant projects or the garment industry in Yangon.

In many cases it is easy to see how the data and its visualisation will aid improved policy making or research on the relevant sector. Researchers and policy makers in the past often struggled to find the right data or any data at all. Thus, the *Socio-Economic Atlas of Myanmar* contributes to filling an important gap. This is especially true for topics that were not covered by the 2014 Myanmar Census Atlas, such as the sections on the environment, natural resources and infrastructure.

Despite these important contributions, it is unfortunately also easy to see how the atlas might fail its readers, at least in part. An atlas is never a mere presentation of data but inevitably also presents a specific point of view, consequently shaping the way that readers perceive the information at hand. The authors, however, reflect little on the perspective they are generating. The atlas includes no data or visualisations regarding questions of ethnicity and belonging. The authors write that “despite the enormous relevance of questions of ethnicity, especially in the process of national reconciliation, it was not possible to include a map of the regional distribution of ethnic or ethno-

linguistic groups [...]” (p. 14). The authors justify this by pointing towards a lack of available data. In so doing, they fail to mention that data on ethnicity and belonging does exist – it was part of the 2014 Census that is one of the key sources for the data provided in the atlas. However, the findings on ethnicity were not released by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, likely because they would have undermined the ethnonationalist narrative that remains prevalent in many parts of the Myanmar Government. The absence of an appropriate framing for the existence and non-existence of such data ultimately serves to perpetuate an understanding that the data is simply “non-existent” or “difficult to obtain”, thereby failing to acknowledge the important debates we should be having regarding data on ethnicity.

A lack of reflection is also evident in other descriptions of controversial topics. The authors write that “interpretations and statistics on the highly charged and controversial so-called Rohingya issue vary greatly” (p. 14) and go on to explain that an adequate representation of the matter was not possible. The latter point is understandable, but the wording is problematic. In referring to the “so-called” Rohingya issue the authors subtly question the legitimacy of the term. However, they fail to provide any justification for such scepticism, thus covertly lending approval to a narrative in which the very term Rohingya is contested.

There is also a key issue surrounding the data. The authors write that “in Myanmar there is a significant body of scarcely tapped knowledge that has attracted very little international attention” (p. 12), notably in the form of reports, research papers, and PhD and MA theses. The authors also note that this data is of varying quality but unfortunately do not provide further explanation. Consequently, the methodological approach to data review and selection remains elusive for the reader except for the section on the Geographical Information System. Being able to learn more about how the data was acquired would be not only interesting but also important for the contextualisation of the findings in the atlas.

This becomes clear when considering the data of the 2014 Census, which is used widely in the atlas without so much as a word on the controversy surrounding it. Indeed, some observers have argued that the census statistics should be treated with scepticism due to a) allegations that not all participants were asked the full number of questions; b) the lack of a post-enumeration survey; c) the lack of proper consultation with civil society in the run-up to the census and d) the highly problematic and politicised handling of ethnic identity, whereby respondents were allowed to identify with only one ethnic group (Mary Callahan on Twitter, 21 February 2018, Census Ethnic Data Saga Continues, <https://twitter.com/marypcallahan/status/966544105022021632>, accessed 20 March 2019).

Discussing such concerns would have strengthened the atlas as a resource for policy makers and researchers who would have been able to gain a clearer understanding of the reliability of the data. Even if the authors had ultimately chosen to defend the controversial census data, their arguments could have provided valuable insights for readers. The absence of a discourse on these themes leaves the atlas vulnerable to criticism. Critics of the 2014 census, for example, might disregard non-related findings in the atlas simply because of the book's association with it. This is extremely unfortunate, especially since publications like this atlas are rare and much needed. Nonetheless, the atlas also has the potential to spark new debates on data gathering in Myanmar and will provide a basis for the further exploration of the themes it contains, thus likely inspiring a new wave of interesting research.

*Richard Roewer*

RONALD McCrum, *The Men Who Lost Singapore, 1938–1942*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2017. Xv, 265 pages, \$36.00 SGD. ISBN 978-981-4722-39-14

The Japanese conquest of Malaya and Singapore – famously styled “Britain’s worst disaster” by Churchill – has been analysed and re-assessed on so many occasions that we now have a small library on the subject. So can anything new be said about this military debacle and subsequent human catastrophe? Ronald McCrum’s answer is to the affirmative, as he points to the role of the civil administrators and their difficult relationship with the military commanders and advisers sent in to defend the island. For his study (a remake of his 2014 MPhil thesis from SOAS, London), McCrum has singled out four leading British figures as “the men who lost Singapore”: Governor Shenton Thomas; Commander-in-Chief Robert Brooke-Popham; Admiral Geoffrey Layton of the Royal Navy; and Alfred Duff Cooper, who had been sent to Singapore to mediate between the civilian and the military “camps” but ended up chairing the island’s War Council.

As McCrum shows, it wasn’t the number of cooks as such that spoiled the broth but rather a general lack of coordination and communication – often resulting from the assumption that someone else would make necessary decisions and take action – that led to the collapse of the “impregnable fortress”. McCrum positions the agency of his four protagonists, both by action and default, in a broadly chronological framework spanning from 1937 (when the war in Asia began) to the fall of Singapore in March 1942. Much of his analysis focuses on the individual errors of judgement and misconceptions concerning the events that unfolded before them, while at the same time he acknowl-