

Book reviews

Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring women, colonialism, and modernity in Burma*.
Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011, xii + 239 pp. ISBN
9780824834616. Price: USD 45.00.

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This book came into being by accident. In 2002, Chie Ikeya arrived in Burma to do research on the Japanese occupation. While she was waiting for official permission to enter the archives, she started reading newspapers from the period 1910-1948 and became fascinated by the appearance of 'the modern Burmese woman' and the discussions about her. She never did receive permission to conduct her research on WWII, so thanks to the Burmese authorities we now have a wonderful book on the relationship between colonialism, modernity, and gender in Burma. In contrast to conventional and male biased histories focusing on nationalism or plural societies, Ikeya uncovered stories about the contested role of women in the nationalist movement, the extent to which ethnic boundaries were crossed, how modernity was manifested, and how 'modern women' emerged in colonial settings.

Chapter 1 sketches the far reaching changes that took place in Burma under colonial rule, such as the massive influx of male migrant workers that accelerated racially mixed relationships. While in practice ethnic boundaries were blurred, the colonial regime fostered a plural legal system. Together with institutions which offered secular education, new print media help to lay the foundation for mass consumption and new discourses about modernity. Chapter 2 looks at the modest participation of women in modern education and the appearance of 'the modern women' in public discourse. Despite their small numbers the role of women in nation building and modernization became a key issue in the local press. Chapters 3 and 4 contrast the role of women in the nationalist movement – and the image of women as both housewife and mother of the nation – with the image of self-conscious women as consumers of modernity. Chapter 5 further explores the tension between the role and image of women as custodians of tradition, who are expected to preserve Buddhist culture, and the modern women, for whom hygiene, beauty, and self-fulfilment was central, but who were also accused of being engaged with foreign men and decadence. The last chapter compares two novels which look in different ways at the colonial experience, illustrat-

ing the conflicting ways urban middle class men and women coped with the constraints and possibilities offered to them under colonial rule. Discussions about modernity and self-realization should also be seen against the backdrop of the idea of the emasculation of Burmese men who had lost control over their country as a result of colonial intervention and mass immigration. Ikeya argues that Burmese men felt humiliated and marginalized due to the economic effects of colonialism and the Depression in the 1930s, which were compounded by the social and psychological disgrace of foreign men's access to the bodies of Burmese women.

This book is part of a growing body of literature that explores modernity and gender in Asia during the colonial period and after. Following the example of *The modern girl around the world: Consumption, modernity and globalization* (Weinbaum et al. 2008), it is time to start a broader comparative project on this topic. Chie Ikeya is well equipped to play a central role in this endeavor.

References

- Weinbaum, Alys Eve, Lynn M. Thomas, Priti Ramamurthi, Uta G. Poiger, Madeleine Yue Dhong and Teri E. Barlow (eds)
 2008 *The modern girl around the world: Consumption, modernity, and globalization*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. [Next Wave.]

Thomas J. Conners, Mason C. Hoadley, Frank Dhont, Kevin Ko (eds), *Pancasila's contemporary appeal: Relegitimizing Indonesia's founding ethos*. Yogyakarta: Indonesia History Centre, Sanata Dharma University, Yale Indonesia Forum, 2009, iv + 380 pp. [International Conference Book Series 2.] ISBN 9789791088563.

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Meekly submitting to the demands of an apparently outcomes-obsessed world, scholars often feel a binding obligation to commit the proceedings of their various conferences and workshops to print, as if to show that, yes, they really did achieve something worthwhile. This volume provides compelling evidence, however, that they should usually ignore any such claim upon their consciences. It brings together seventeen papers presented at a conference at