

The general approach is not at all comprehensive, since no topical maps, such as a political, a geological or even a topographic one are provided. There are just eight maps for the regional chapters on South Asia, West Asia, Central Asia, North East Asia, South East Asia and Australasia, indicating the location of important ranges, peaks, rivers and cities. There are even a few more shortcomings, such as the wrong location of different ranges or peaks in the accompanying tables, different altitudes in tables and maps, wrong national location of peaks or peaks listed in tables but not shown in the map.

The final chapter, providing a "thematic overview" of physical environment and cultural diversity, eventually leads back to the holistic agenda and discusses relevant topics of mountain development. This chapter includes the remoteness of "periphery of the periphery", resources available and their sustainable management, as well as the critical discussion of often found oversimplifications and generalisations of development trends by outsiders. The concluding message that "the problems of the mountain environment cannot be solved without improving the economy of mountain inhabitants" is still valid and needs more consideration by the scientific community, politicians and the general public – one of the central objectives of the current "International Year of the Mountains, 2002". However, a better contribution hereto and to improving knowledge about the diverse Asian mountain habitats might have been made by engaging a team of experienced authors for the different regions under the umbrella of a common guideline of topics and objectives.

Jürgen Clemens

SHELBY TUCKER, *Burma. The Curse of Independence*. London: Pluto Press, 2001. XX, 282 pages, 5 maps, 16 photos, £ 13.99 (pb), ISBN 0-7453-1541-0, £ 40.00 (hb), ISBN 0-7453-1546-1

In 1989, 53-year-old Shelby Tucker accompanied by a 23-year-old chance acquaintance travelled from Yunnan in China through Shan and Kachin territories in Northern Burma to India's small north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. Eleven years later, he published his recollections of this adventurous journey (Shelby Tucker, *Among Insurgents. Walking Through Burma*. London: The Radcliffe Press, 2000). His second book, issued only one year later and reviewed here, complements the first one by presenting the conclusions of another kind of journey. It tries to give answers to the questions that were raised in Tucker's mind while he trekked through the hills of Northern Burma and encountered various ethnic groups and their leaders who were fighting the Burmese military. The book attempts to track down the reasons for Burma's political problems since the country became independent in 1948. It undertakes an expedition into Burmese history. As a travel guide, Tucker makes use of a variety of books on Burma and his contacts with some of their authors and other sources. He does not claim to compete with the scholarly works on this subject but to present a "coherent story" of Burma's troubles. The book elaborates the first glimpse of this story that he caught while talking to some leaders of the insurgents during his journey in 1989.

Therefore, the reader cannot rely on the accuracy, let alone the novelty, of the facts presented. On pages 86 to 89 alone, where Tucker lists the members of the alleged "old boys network" of Burma's pre- and post-war politics, I find some 20 inaccuracies, disputable facts or plain mistakes. Hence, it is Tucker's personal view of Burma's troubles and his intuitive perception of the country's recent history that may make the book worth reading and inspire the reader to make up his own mind.

The title of the book suggests Tucker's general attitude towards his subject. Burma's modern history is a tragic one, influenced by powers beyond human reach. Human actors like the Burmese military contributed to the tragedy. But even after an end to the present military rule which he anticipates in the near future, Burma's troubles will continue, he argues. The traumatic experiences of the ethnic minorities at the hands of Burman soldiers in a civil war lasting half a century has caused an unbridgeable chasm between both sides. After an evaluation of other authors' visions of Burma's future Tucker concludes his book thus: "Burma's fate is not in man's gift. It is a matter of prayer."

The book is divided into nine chapters. The introduction recalls some of the travel experiences of 1989 and presents some of the literature read and recommended by Tucker. Chapter 2 focuses on the related issues of Burmese geography and ethnicity. The author thereby prepares the ground for his main thesis that the diversity of lowland Burmans and the variety of ethnic groups inhabiting the hilly fringes of Burma are crucial for the country's misfortunes in modern times. In chapter 3, a sketch of both British and Japanese rule in Burma between 1824 and 1945 is given. Tucker thus introduces his second main constituent idea to explain Burma's history, namely the militant element that led to the emergence of the Burman army. Chapters 4 to 6 concentrate on the first leader of this army, later the national hero, Aung San. His career, that culminated in the final victorious struggle for independence between 1944 and June 1947 (Chapter 5), is outlined within the context of the Burmese independence movements since the early 1920s (Chapter 4). Tucker demonstrates the fragile nature of this independence that was finally exposed by Aung San's early death six months before the official transfer of power in January 1948 (Chapter 6).

The investigation into the assassination of the military and political leader of a projected "New Burma" and some members of his interim cabinet contains the most disputable aspect of Tucker's interpretation of Burmese history. He disputes the verdict of the court that convicted Aung San's political rival U Saw as the mastermind behind the murder. Without giving any new evidence, Tucker presents Ne Win as the most likely culprit because, in the light of later history, he gained most from Aung San's death. This argumentation pictures Ne Win as a villain with almost superhuman foresight. Moreover, it casts some doubt on the author's profession as a lawyer mentioned on the book cover.

The following two chapters describe the history of Burma since independence, focusing on the Burmese military's involvement in the drug trade (Chapter 6) and the country's economy (Chapter 7). A lot of evidence is presented to demonstrate the misuse of military power since the outbreak of civil war almost immediately after the independence celebrations, but almost no argument that might exonerate the defendant. On this basis, Tucker in the concluding chapter advocates further



weakening the legitimacy of the ruling military junta by, for example, withdrawing the regime's credentials from the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In short, Tucker's book is a very personal and partisan contribution to Burma's problems past and present. It mirrors the splits in Burmese politics and in the analysis of this topic and offers no prospect for overcoming the real and analytical fissures except resorting to prayer. But Tucker has omitted at least one important element of Burmese history, the factor of surprise. He did not foresee the talks between the ruling military and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi that started almost simultaneously with the publication of his two books.

Further travels into hidden Burma/Myanmar are necessary in order to understand Burma's complex problems. Tucker's book can be regarded as an attractive provocation towards such an undertaking.

Hans-Bernd Zöllner

KAZUO TAMAYAMA / JOHN NUNNELEY (eds.), *Tales by Japanese Soldiers of the Burmese Campaigns, 1942-1945*. London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2000. 252 pages, £ 7.00. ISBN 0-304-35978-5

The Burmese campaign was one of the bloodiest of the Pacific War. Most of the 305,000 Japanese soldiers participating died in battle of diseases, untreated wounds, or of starvation.

In December 1941, the Japanese military began to move into southern Burma from its Thai bases. As in its successful Malayan campaign, it bypassed and encircled the road blocks of the superior British Indian forces. They usually retreated after incurring first losses without putting up much of a fight. The undersupplied Japanese troops restocked themselves with food, ammunition, weapons and trucks captured from their retreating enemies. By May 1942, all of Burma was Japanese occupied. Often the Japanese were greeted as liberators. A national Burmese government led by Aung San, the father of Nobel Peace prize winner, Aung Suu Kyi, collaborated with the Japanese. Throughout 1943 border raids along the Indo-Burmese mountainous jungle occurred. Japanese appeals through its Indian National Army commanded by Subhas Chandra Bose for the Indians to rise against their colonial masters met with little response. Only a few Indian units deserted to the Japanese.

With increased Allied submarine and air power intercepting supplies to Burma, the Japanese command felt its only chance of victory consisted in an armed advance into Assam to incite an Indian uprising in March 1944. The disastrous Imphal campaign ensued. This time the British Indian army left no supplies to the Japanese invaders. Rather, it took up the fight and, using its superiority in arms and men, repulsed the starving army. Once beaten, the Japanese were pursued and in spite of brave resistance were driven back towards South East Burma until Japan's surrender on 15 August 1945. By July 1947, all of the surviving men and women were repatriated.

The volume contains 62 reports of Japanese soldiers, infantrymen, airmen, engineers, signalmen, medical doctors and nurses, up to the level of captain at most, de-