

Some might feel that Phillips is too effusive in his admiration for the soldiers he writes about, but given their tale of survival one would be hard pressed not to be awestruck. Phillips does a good job in explaining the technical terms and acronyms that permeate the text, while his prose also manages to capture the personalities of the men he interviewed. In sum, this book serves as an interesting example of the use of both oral history and traditional archival materials to recreate the events of a battle at the level of the individual.

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

COLIN GREEN

THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF FORESTRY IN BURMA. *By Raymond L. Bryant. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. 1996. xiv, 257 pp. (Tables.) US\$39.00, cloth. ISBN 0-8248-1909-8.*

THE COLONIAL PERIOD was something of an institutional time bomb for the world's forests. The establishment of capitalism and land-use bureaucracies, that served government and business unevenly and fluidly, unleashed social and economic pressures that paved the way for contemporary loss of primary forest cover and conversion to far less diverse and sustainable ecosystems. This is an axiom in environmental studies in the 1990s. But without careful studies, how much can be generalized about the links between colonialism and postcolonialism and the institutional obstacles to forest protection between and within countries? And how can we identify the most significant historical factors in terms of developing conservation strategies for today? Raymond Bryant provides one of a number of new models for political ecology studies that begin to answer these questions.

The most powerful implication of Bryant's detailed study of colonial archives for Burma is of the intensity and extent of the contradictions that have often existed within colonial forestry agencies. Policy was never straightforward about either liquidation or conservation of forest and a range of conflicts hampered whatever ideological perspectives were in vogue. Since the early nineteenth century in Burma, alliances between forestry agencies and other sectors, notably local peasants, government and various local and imperial business interests, were always highly dynamic and only partially manageable. Time and time again, unresolved conflict quickly led to loss of forest. In this sense, Bryant's study is more about political economy than political ecology, and the reader is only given a superficial portrait of forest fragmentation in Burma and the changes in regional landscape ecology. More problematic is that little is said about the local rivalries, with their long-running social and cultural conflicts, that set the stage while never quite exiting it, for the incremental colonial takeover of Burma's forest land base.

Bryant comes back to some favourite themes. Debates over whether *laissez-faire* approaches were either good or bad for forest conservation recur as do those around the importance of "scientific forestry." The only partially

effective colonial strategy of internal and external territorialization through state-sponsored logging operations, one applied from British Columbia to Burma, is well illustrated. But given the overreliance on English-language material archived in London, divergent cultural perspectives on biological resources and conservation priorities, and how they limited the efforts to exploit and maintain forest cover, are barely mentioned. This is a book about the fading world of a colonial bureaucracy and not a local ethnography of conservation and forest exploitation. Consequently, the conclusions that relate to the current situation in Burma, with continuing declines in forest, are only tentative. There are such enigmatic statements as "Precolonial forestry thus developed as a means to tax and control forest use. Its overall effectiveness from the state's viewpoint is to be seen in the fact that the British continued or later revived many indigenous forms of forest control" (p. 41). But the colonial register appears to have been short on specifics.

One of the other significant contributions of this book, on such a little-known country, is in highlighting the construction of the still commonly held but highly simplistic notion of peasant as shifting cultivator as major threat to the forest land base. Burma was one of the locations where such simplistic and culturally biased notions were constructed. Viewed from today's vantage point, a large portion of the lack of government effectiveness at forest conservation, including local burning, appears to be part of broad efforts at local resistance as well as partial reassertion of the precolonial elites.

Bryant moves through the postcolonial period too quickly. The forest continued to be the central zone of contention under both socialism and the more recent reassertions of the Burmese elite. In Burma, wealth continues to be invariably tied to often illegal levels of liquidation of the country's remaining forest. Most intriguing are the conclusions which compare Burma's situation to that in India, Indonesia and Thailand. In looking at the conundrum of contemporary loss of forest, *The Political Ecology of Forestry in Burma* reminds us that these multiple "wicked problems" and the inability to solve them is as much about historically based institutional obstacles as the specific social and cultural conflicts of today.

University of California, Berkeley, U.S.A.

GORDON BRENT INGRAM

SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTI-LEVEL AND MULTI-ACTOR POLICY PROCESSES: Case Studies of the Incorporation of the Environmental Dimension into Sustainable Forest Management in East Kalimantan-Indonesia. By Aleksius Jemadu. Leuven (Belgium): Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. 1996. xii, 309 pp. (Tables, figures.) Belgium francs 850, paper. ISBN 90-75376-09-X.

THIS is an unedited dissertation, containing many of the typical characteristics that make so many book publishers wary of dissertations.