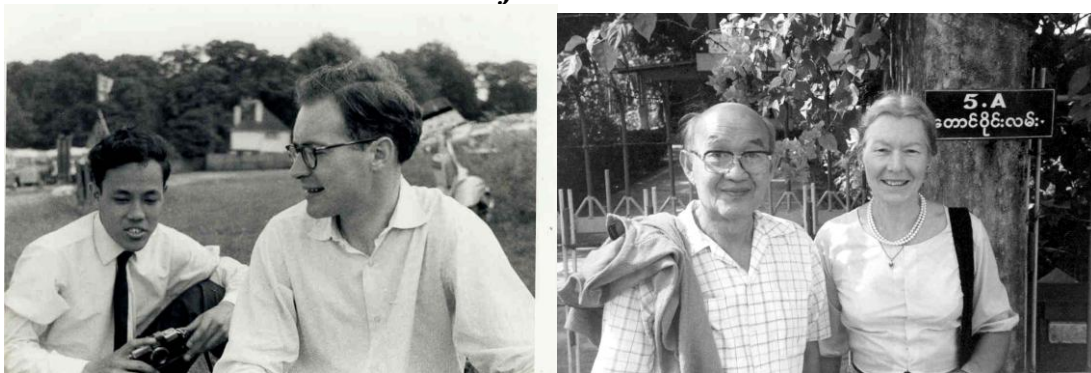


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# ***BULLETIN OF THE BURMA STUDIES GROUP***

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*In honor of our teachers....*



*John Okell in 1967, Anna Allott and Professor Hla Pe in Burma, 1988  
Photos from John Okell and Anna Allott*

# Bulletin of the Burma Studies Group

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## Next Issue

Spring 2007  
(Submissions due March, 2007)

## CONTENTS

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In Honor of our Teachers .....	2
Trying to Learn Burmese .....	2
How I Learned Burmese .....	9
A Tribute to the Late Maung Htin .....	12
Book Reviews .....	15
Myanmar Literature Project .....	18
Myanmar/Burma Update .....	19
Exhibit at NIU .....	20

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## **In honor of our teachers: learning about how our teachers learned Burmese**

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A while back I was talking with Nance Cunningham in Rangoon about the challenges learning Burmese poses to a native English-speaker. We both remarked on how much help we had gotten over the years from Anna Allott and John Okell, both from their various published works and in person, that is, from courses they had organized or even just conversations we had had with them in passing. It occurred to me as we spoke that an issue of the *Bulletin* should be given over to these exemplary *saya*, to whom so many of us owe enormous debts. But as I thought about it, I realized that much more engaging for us all than a series of encomia addressed to them from scores of students and friends would be their own reminiscences about learning Burmese. Can you honor your teachers with an issue of a bulletin but ask them to write most of the contents themselves? I decided not to worry about that and asked both John and Anna if they would give us brief reflections on their experiences studying Burmese. Proving once again their generosity, they both agreed at once and soon sent along delightful accounts. Most of this issue consists of their respective contributions. Those of us who have had the pleasure of meeting each of them will hear their very distinctive, and inimitable, voices. But even people who have not yet had that good fortune will come away with a sense of how modest, charming, and dedicated these two scholars of Burmese are.

Anyone who has spent time in Southeast Asia knows that a student's debts to teachers can never be repaid. The wonderful thing about John and Anna is that they convey to

their students (official or unofficial) a sense that every step forward we make in Burmese constitutes a little bit of a return on the debt we owe them. —Which is one more reason that we all feel so endlessly grateful to them.

This issue contains another remembrance, this of the scholar, translator, and writer Maung Htin. Two book reviews, one of a book on Burmese illustrations of the life of the Buddha, the other on Chin textiles, bring readers' attention to noteworthy publications. Finally, there are brief accounts of a Burma-related conference that took place in Singapore this past July that many of us had the pleasure of attending—an exhibit/symposium on the na' held at NIU this fall—and an ongoing project on Burmese literature. But most of this issue concerns the matter of learning Burmese, a topic that will be the focus of the Spring issue of the Bulletin as well. —The Editor

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### **Trying to learn Burmese—50 years on**

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*It's hard to believe that Anna Allott's induction into Burmese studies was as accidental as it appears to have been. We can only assume some benevolent nat was pulling strings behind the scenes at SOAS at the time. We hope that the same nat will see fit to right the unfortunate situation she mentions toward the end of this account that has her barred from further visits to the country. —The Editor*

What made you want to learn Burmese? This is always the first, or maybe the second, question that I am asked when I tell someone what I do. Well, it wasn't actually my wish to learn this language: I was asked if I would be willing to do so.

I was a post-graduate student in the Phonetics and Linguistics Department of the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London. The then head of the department, Professor J.R. Firth, wanted someone to make a special study of Chinese phonetics and I was being prepared for this work by taking basic courses in linguistics and phonetics and elementary Mandarin. My equipment for undertaking this work was a not particularly relevant degree in Russian and French, and a reasonably good ear, inherited I think from my mother who was Czech.

However this plan did not work out, as Professor Firth was told that SOAS could only afford one new post for his department, not two. He needed more urgently to appoint Eugenie Henderson to a readership in Southeast Asian phonetics so the study of Chinese phonetics was put on hold. But in the meantime, what would happen to me? This is where Burmese comes in. It happened that SOAS had, in 1950, taken over from the University of Rangoon responsibility for the continuation of a major Burmese-English dictionary project. This project, which was to be a revision of Judson's invaluable work, had been started as far back as 1924 by the Burma Research Society. By 1950, when the first very short part of this new dictionary was published, only C. W. Dunn and Dr Hla Pe, a young lecturer in Burmese, were working on it full-time, and there was a very long way to go to complete it.

I think Professor Firth felt he could help me and also the dictionary project by suggesting that I could study Burmese and equip myself to help with editing the dictionary. I accepted the suggestion, which is how I came to start learning what I now consider to be a pretty difficult language spoken in a

country that I had never even thought about, in October, 1952.

I had two teachers, H.F. Searle, an elderly former member of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) who had served in Burma, and U Hla Pe, Lecturer in Burmese. The former taught me the script and read with me some primary school readers; the latter composed for me some simple dialogues which he wrote out in his beautifully legible handwriting and then took me through. Happily I also had, to help me understand the seemingly back-to-front syntax of this new language, a copy of *An Introduction to Colloquial Burmese* by J.A. Stewart which he had published in 1935, after retiring from living and working in Burma. As the first nine exercises of this work had been made into old-style 78 RPM gramophone records, I also had some recorded material to listen to. Without Stewart's clear and logical exposition of the grammar and very practical dialogues I would have had a much more difficult task learning to read. As for learning to speak the language, this was evidently going to have to wait until I went out to Burma on what was known as Overseas Study Leave.

Learning proceeded at an unhurried pace, partly because my teachers had no experience of what they could expect such a pupil to achieve; partly because I was also continuing my training in linguistics; and partly because, in November, 1952, I got married to a fellow member of the staff at SOAS. I was introduced to the work in the Burmese Dictionary Office, shown the corpus of books that had been read and the half a million or so slips that had been extracted from them by readers in Burma before the war, and shown how to correct the proofs of drafted entries. By the end of the academic year I had learnt a lot of words, knew a lot about the pronunciation of

the language and was able to read and enjoy (with the help of Mr Searle) passages from a diary that had been written by a well-loved Burmese author, U Sein Tin, about his time spent studying at Oxford in 1927. I especially treasure his tactful description of the English way of taking a bath, which the Burmese find somewhat repulsive. I could utter a few simple sentences in Burmese but I certainly could not claim to be able to speak the language.

Students who come to learn Burmese (intensively) at SOAS today can expect to attain much greater fluency than I had then, and a similar reading ability, in about 2-3 months. But they have the use of taped materials, the language lab, teachers used to explaining the grammar, John Okell's excellent four introductory course books, and since 1993, a modern, up-to-date Burmese-English dictionary. What a difference these make to the task of learning Burmese!

In September 1953 I left for Burma, not by plane but on a Bibby Line boat, the *Worcestershire*, from Liverpool, a journey which turned out to be a most enjoyable month-long cruise, past Gibraltar, through the Mediterranean and down the Red Sea, calling at Cairo, Port Sudan and Aden and on to Colombo. Having left England, where some food, especially meat, was still rationed, the huge tender steaks and the luscious pineapples which I ate in Ceylon are what I remember most vividly. Apparently it cost SOAS less to send me on a month's cruise than to send me to Burma by air, and I didn't complain.

It had been arranged that the University of Rangoon would look after me so when I got to Burma on October 10th, I was taken to Inya Hall, one of the girls' hostels, and given a room to myself. The senior students could

all speak English quite well but cooperated from the beginning in speaking to me in Burmese and helping me to talk with them. They also fed me, helped me to cope with the unfamiliar food, and explained how I should and shouldn't wash. It was arranged for me to sit in on classes that were reading Burmese literature texts. I did so regularly, but in fact these were far too advanced for me at this early stage, I could barely follow what was going on and I needed to fix up some lessons with people who could work with me at my level—people who would be both teacher and informant. Back then in 1953 there was no experience at all in the Burmese department (Myanma-sa hta-na.) or in the University of Rangoon of teaching Burmese as a foreign language. I asked for help with finding a teacher and by the beginning of November, Professor U E Maung finally managed to find someone to take me on. This was a certain Mya Mya Htun, a post-graduate with a degree in law, a member of a well-connected family; one of her brothers-in-law was U Myo Min, the then Professor of English. From her I learnt a great deal about upper-class Burmese family life, about Buddhist ceremonies, as well as about feeding monks in one's home, and how to play badminton, which I was shamefully bad at compared to my teacher.

Not long after my arrival in Burma I had been taken to meet U Pe Maung Tin, who had presented me with a copy of his recently published book, *Burmese Syntax*. I didn't realise at all what a distinguished scholar this handsome and charming, grey-haired gentleman in his 60s was. In my diary I wrote, "We chatted. I still have only about 50% comprehension. I can't catch the units of speech, if I could I would understand more." In my lessons with Mya Mya Htun we tried reading *Burmese Syntax*, but she was not very good at explaining things in English to me and was quite confused by the

Burmese grammatical terms which I was just trying to get to grips with myself. I decide to change to reading Burmese newspapers with her, which was more rewarding. Local news reports were often quite disturbing: I had noted "Last week the Rangoon-Moulmein train was blown up and 60 passengers were kidnapped." And again, "Lashio train blown up by insurgents, 16 killed, 24 injured." And friends in Rangoon told me that it might even be dangerous to drive to Pegu by car.

In mid-November I was able to arrange to spend fewer hours with Mya Mya Htun and to have three meetings a week with U Pe Maung Tin. As he told me that he became bored teaching someone for more than an hour, I wrote in my diary, "I hope he doesn't find me boring—he is after all Burma's foremost scholar, actually a Pali scholar." I would spend the morning before my lessons reading his book on syntax so that when we met I was able to discuss his grammatical analysis with him. "No, he was not bored," he said, at the end of an hour and a half's discussion. It appears that we saw eye to eye on several language matters. He said that I asked good questions and that it made him think. He explained to me that he was not a poet; that he had initiated a movement to increase the importance of prose; and that he didn't like long sentences and wanted Burmese to write more as they spoke. Even if the Burmese I had learnt at SOAS before coming out had not equipped me to cope with the spoken language, my training in linguistics and phonetics had introduced me to ideas about analyzing and describing the grammar of a language and had equipped me to question usefully someone as able to answer my questions as my new Hsaya-gyi.

I doubt if any one reading this account will be able to picture to themselves the difficulties I had trying to make recordings.

SOAS had given me a tape recorder, a huge, heavy wooden machine which I could just about lift, with large-size reels of tape and a heavy microphone. The customs officers at the harbor had never seen such a thing and didn't know how much duty to charge me, with the result that I had to make several journeys to the customs house before I was allowed to take the machine home to the hostel. I had not had any practice at using it beforehand and was not helped by the heat, which often caused the driving band to expand so that the machine wouldn't work. I did manage to make a number of recordings but I think they have all vanished by now. More important for my progress was the fact that I was mixing all the time with students, hearing Burmese spoken all around me, having lessons with Mya Mya Htun and discussions with U Pe Maung Tin, and even some classes on literature with U E Maung, and on inscriptions with Daw Than Swe. I was very fortunate that so many people befriended me and helped me to progress.

It was considered essential that part of my training should be spent in royal Mandalay, the seat of true Burmese culture, noted for the way its citizens spoke. After Christmas, on January 12th, I flew up to Mandalay in an elderly Dakota; it was too unsafe to travel by train. I was rather apprehensive about my first ever airflight, as on January 11th there had come the news of the Comet that had crashed into the Mediterranean with the death of all on board.

Now began what was perhaps the best part of my stay in Burma, living with the Tokegalay family in a fine *taik-hkan* house (brick base, wooden upper structure) situated in the Civil Lines in Mandalay. Straightaway I wrote in my diary, "around me all the time the most exquisite Burmese is being talked. And the bad habits I have got into have been immediately corrected. My chief fault is

always putting a stress on the low tone words." A few days later I again wrote, "Every minute of the day is spent listening to a flood of exquisite Burmese—it is tiring but wonderful—I should improve by leaps and bounds." Like most foreigners who have spent time in both major cities, it was Mandalay that cast its spell on us.

Talking of bad habits, once acquired they are difficult to unlearn. I can't now recall just how I learnt, or how I was taught to write Burmese, but it was not the right way. I was not shown that most of the circles are written clockwise, not counter-clockwise as in English, nor what order to write the on-top and underneath vowels in, so I have spent a lot of my life trying to improve my Burmese handwriting by unlearning the bad habits that I picked up at the very beginning. This is why an important part of learning the Burmese script is learning how to form the letters correctly, i.e., to write them as Burmese write them. This knowledge helps greatly if you are trying to decipher bad handwriting!

The Tokegale household was run by three unmarried sisters, Ma Ma Gyi, Ma Ma Lay and Khin Shwe Mar. Their great-uncle, their grandfather's brother, had been an ambassador to France from the court of King Mindon; Ma Ma Gyi showed me proudly and read through with me two documents given by the King to her uncle. All three sisters became my teachers, giving me regular lessons, going for walks with me, introducing me to friends, showing me the sights, answering my questions, correcting my Burmese. They also helped me to find and buy books asked for by SOAS library.

The preparation that I had received at SOAS had not actually included guidance as to how I should proceed with my study of the language, what tasks I should set myself,

what aspects of the language I should concentrate on. I used to be slightly annoyed by local Anglo-Burmans saying to me that I had 'picked up' Burmese very well, which was not the expression I would have used to describe the time and effort I was putting into my studies. However I was not very certain where I was going. In mid-January I wrote myself a severe note, "I have no method. Firth would laugh at me. I have started a hundred things and finished nothing. What material shall I take back? I must organize it a bit." I don't seem to have taken my self-criticism too seriously. My interest was primarily in the spoken language and in mastering the everyday language and content of the newspapers. I was not studying Burmese literature, modern or early, and was not attempting at all to learn about poetry. The SOAS linguistics department had made me interested in the analysis and description of grammar, and this interest had been encouraged by discussions with U Pe Maung Tin.

Just before leaving Rangoon I had met some Americans who were learning Burmese and using *Spoken Burmese*, a war-time course produced in 1945 by W.S. Cornyn. They had invited me to come and visit their language laboratory, which I hadn't had time to do. The course was to take 6 months and was on tape but did not include any introduction to the writing system. This meant that they were living in the country, surrounded by signs and names written in Burmese script which they were not even trying to learn. All their vocabulary material had to be written in transcription. Then and now at SOAS we have always been convinced that students of Burmese should learn to read and write the script from the very beginning.

There were several linguistically-trained American teachers of English working in Rangoon and Mandalay at this time, and they decided, together with the Burma

Research Society, to hold a Linguistics Seminar at the beginning of March, 1954. Burmese participants included Professor Pe Maung Tin, Dr Htin Aung, Professor Myo Min, Professor E Maung, and U Wun. G.H.Luce gave a paper on Karen, David Morgan from the British Council gave a paper entitled "An English teacher looks at Linguistics," and I was invited to come down from Mandalay to talk about Burmese studies at the University of London. I felt somewhat overawed in front of all these experienced teachers; happily I didn't have to try to speak in Burmese. (The full details of this ground-breaking seminar are recorded in the appendix to my article on U Pe Maung Tin in JBS, vol.9.)

This is not the place to record my adventures travelling by boat down from Mandalay, in the course of which I spent two days and nights under protective military escort in the old rest-house in Pagan. After the seminar I flew back up to Mandalay, packed up my work there and then went to spend some time with friends in Taunggyi. Here I met up again with a friend from Inya Hall, Khin Hla Hla, a tutor in the English department, who had been learning some French from me and teaching me Burmese. She introduced me to her five sisters all of whom I had the great pleasure of meeting again as recently as 2003 at the wedding in Rangoon of Khin Hla Hla's daughter. I was also privileged to be staying in Kambawza College, whose headmistress was Mi Mi Khaing; her enchanting book *Burmese Family* is the first one I put into the hands of every new student of Burmese.

By the end of nine months in the country I was beginning to feel more confident of my ability to speak and understand the language but I was still a very long way from mastering it. I realized that if I had come out better prepared I would have been able to

make much more rapid progress and would have been able to profit more from being immersed in Burmese surroundings. By June, 1954, when I boarded another Bibby Line boat to return to England, I had been away for 10 months and was missing my husband, whom I had abandoned only nine months after our wedding. Among the passengers on board was a group of Burmese state scholars on their way to England and America; they had never been to sea, easily felt sea-sick, and were now faced with strange food and different eating habits. I had been so often helped by so many friends in Burma, and now I was able to help these young students a little by joining them at meal times and explaining the numerous items on the menu.

This time in Burma was just the beginning of a lifetime spent trying to learn Burmese in all its many styles and contexts. Once back in England, I returned to correcting proofs and to working on part 2 of the dictionary. Soon, I had to think about how to help my SOAS Saya U Hla Pe with teaching a young Foreign Office trainee called Martin Morland, who was due to go out to the British embassy in Rangoon in 1957. We were also trying to recruit another person to join in the work on the dictionary, and after a disappointing trainee who gave up after one year we had the good fortune to be joined by John Okell in 1959. That was the beginning of another story which you can also read here.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Once Saya Hla Pe retired, John and I agreed that the Burmese-English dictionary project, which had been the cause of our learning Burmese in the first place, should not be continued. Work on a new dictionary was going on in Rangoon, and in 1993 it was finally published. It was no longer necessary to spend hours writing out by hand vocabulary lists for our students. And



From 1959 onwards John has been the most understanding, the most helpful, the best of colleagues, and I consider myself extremely lucky to have worked with him. Our life patterns were completely different, which turned out to be a good thing from the point of view of SOAS Burmese studies and contact with Burma. After coming back to England in 1954, I didn't return to Burma for seventeen whole years as my husband and I had three children whom I didn't want to travel so far away from until our youngest daughter was about fifteen. During this time my husband, a member of the SOAS Law Department, traveled extensively throughout Africa and was often away. The confidence that I had felt in my command of spoken Burmese grew less and less as it was difficult for me to find opportunities for keeping it up in London. At the same time, John went out to Burma for eighteen months in 1960 and again in 1969. He had become completely fluent after his first visit, was able to spend a great deal of his time at SOAS talking in Burmese with Saya Hla Pe—I remember that in those days they both smoked!—and managed to keep up with many Burmese friends in London. He was still then a *lu-byo-gyi*.

Saya Hla Pe patiently took us through classical Burmese poems, definitely of a higher order of difficulty than anything in prose, and the three of us worked together on the Burmese-English dictionary. When we had beginning students to teach, John taught the spoken language and I took over teaching the written formal-style language. A ten-page list of grammatical particles used in the written language was the first

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roundabout this time, too, it became possible to use the computer to type out teaching material, thanks to the beautiful Ava font designed by John, and now used throughout Burma.

incarnation of our 2001 Dictionary of grammatical forms. At one point several students of Burmese history (Jeremy Cowan, David Wyatt, later on Vic Lieberman) became interested in learning to read historical material and I was able to extend my knowledge by preparing texts for historians to learn from and to read. This didn't require fluency in the spoken language.

Finally in December, 1976 I plucked up courage to go back to Burma again. Although it was difficult to arrange for a two-month visit, it was a good time to go politically. The British Foreign office helped and all problems were overcome. The visit went extremely well and I wondered why I had been apprehensive. I regained some of my fluency in the spoken language and, even better, was taken to attend unforgettable *sa-pe haw-pyaw-bwe*, mass literary gatherings under the stars. Old friends were still there, and I met and made many new ones. I established a close connection with the *Myan-ma sa* department of Rangoon University, where I was made most welcome, in fact given the freedom of the department, and I started on what became my main area of study from then on—modern prose, especially the modern short story. Roundabout this time, John married and started a family, so just when I was free to visit Burma several times in the 80s (1981, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1988) he was less so. Now of course we have both been back many times. Unhappily, I am now honored by having been placed on the present government's black list, and so will probably not be able to visit again.

I shouldn't finish this story about learning Burmese without mentioning Daw May Kyi Win (1947-2002), the friend who helped me in every imaginable way from the time I first met her at the University library in 1981

until she left Burma for America in 1990. She would arrive at my hotel room with a selection of longyi's for me to wear, bags of bananas and oranges to eat, plans for expeditions with my special friends. She arranged transport, booked tickets, showed me how to get to places, and when I was laid low by a malign stomach bug she would bring me delicious and fortifying soup. Most important of all, she wrote me letters, wonderful long letters—often 4 typed pages—full of the latest news and real Burmese life. Happily these letters came via friends, so she wrote absolutely freely, which is what makes the letters, all of which I have saved, so valuable. I particularly treasure her hilarious account of how she underwent military training at the camp and training school for government servants at Hpaung-gyi. Dear, kind, ever-thoughtful May Kyi Win, how we all miss you!

Anna Allott

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### How I Learned Burmese

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*Endless energy and boundless goodwill may or may not be prerequisites to becoming fluent in Burmese, but in John Okell's case, clearly, they figured importantly in making possible his remarkable achievements. Here is his account of how he got started, and how he keeps at it to this day. —The Editor*

Now and again I am asked how I learned Burmese. First I was blessed with great good fortune: I had skilled and generous help from a long list of kind people, and ideal learning conditions for much of the time. Second I had a consuming passion to become fluent in Burmese: this was a chance to make up for my feeble achievements in French and German. In 1959 SOAS had a vacancy for a specialist in

Burmese, and I was taken on as a trainee. My educational background was in Latin and ancient Greek, but happily for me the selection board thought that was a suitable foundation. I spent a year and a half at SOAS, then a year in Burma, and I've been learning ever since.

The Burmese staff at SOAS when I joined consisted of Saya Hla Pe, who was subsequently appointed Professor of Burmese, and Anna Allott, who had arrived on the scene a few years before me. Anna was generous with help and advice, and Saya tirelessly gave me almost full time, one-on-one tuition. Teaching materials in those days were less than ideal. We used J. A. Stewart's *Manual of Colloquial Burmese*, published in 1948, and some fragments of other incomplete courses. And I made up exercises and lists of questions to submit to my long-suffering Saya.

At the same time I was encouraged to attend lectures in the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics, so I had the benefit of some inspiring and eye-opening linguistics courses taught by the well-known Professor R. Robins, and excellent phonetics courses taught by N. C. Scott, who would with a deadpan expression produce startling sequences of sounds—clicks and sneezes and all sorts—for the class to write down in IPA.

My greatest debt on that side of my induction is to Keith Sprigg, a phonologist with a passionate commitment to the theory of prosodic analysis, who ransacked the Burmese and Tibetan sound systems for material to demonstrate the virtues of that theory. Keith was another master of the deadpan. I remember once asking him to show me what an uvular fricative sounded like. He cleared his throat and made a few gargling noises, dismissing each one with a

gesture of irritation, then without a trace of a smile said, "I'm sorry. My baby has been lying in the garden making uvular trills and I've been making them back and now I've temporarily lost the ability to produce an uvular fricative." He set himself demanding standards. He told me that he only listened to his recordings in the morning, because by lunchtime his ear was not sensitive to the fine distinctions of sound he needed to hear. Whenever I get a compliment on my pronunciation I think of my debt to Sprigg.

Eventually my Head of Department told me it was time to go to Burma. As was the custom in those days, I had no specific brief. One was trusted to do something useful, so one did one's best to oblige. The main objective was to get familiar with the language and the culture. During my time at SOAS Saya Hla Pe had been assiduous in introducing me to all his visitors and ensuring that I joined them at lunch and other outings. And he and Anna had introduced me to the Britain Burma Society and their contacts there. The result was that when my Bibby Line steamer docked in Rangoon in September 1960 (this pre-dates the days of frequent air travel) I was met by an overwhelming crowd of well-wishers.

Thanks to Saya's contacts I had been allotted a room in a hostel for young male teachers on the university campus, commonly referred to, to my deep embarrassment, as "The Chummery". I quickly ascertained the Burmese name for it (literally "Teachers' Hostel") and doggedly used that instead, though it was not universally recognized. It was still axiomatic for many Burmese that a Westerner could not tolerate Burmese food and living conditions, so I was supplied with loads of bread and tins of jam and butter and ham and cheese, towels and kettles and advice on what to avoid and what to look out for.

There followed a few packed weeks of visits and introductions. The other people in the hostel were mostly around my age, and all friendly and helpful. I was taken to see U Wun (Minthuwun) then head of the Department of Translation and Publication, and his colleagues; U E Maung, Professor of Burmese; U Thein Han (Zawgyi), Librarian of the University Library; Dr Hla Myint, Rector of the University; the Professor and lecturers of the Pali Department; Dr Tha Hla, Professor of Geology, subsequently Rector; members of the Burma Historical Commission; and the Controller of Immigration, who kindly removed a ban on travelling for me. I also met members of the staff of the British Council and the British Embassy. Many of these contacts took me sightseeing and introduced me to their families.

As the days passed it became increasingly clear that I was not going to get much language practice in Rangoon. Most of the people I had met spoke English much better than I spoke Burmese, and even when I wandered around the streets trying to strike up a conversation with stallholders and other strangers my carefully rehearsed opening gambits would often elicit only a puzzled "I beg your pardon?"

I pinned my hopes on Dr Nyi Nyi, Professor of Geology and subsequently Deputy Minister of Education. He had said, when Saya Hla Pe introduced me to him in England, that I was welcome to join him on a forthcoming visit to his in-laws in Amarapura. It was a crushing disappointment to hear that the trip was cancelled. I asked if I could go on my own, but that was out of the question: you would have to eat Burmese food, wash at the well, sleep on a mat, talk Burmese all the time. I made several visits trying to persuade Dr Nyi Nyi that that was exactly what I wanted

to do, and eventually, not without misgivings, he agreed to let me go.

I spent a month in Amarapura, in the house of Dr Nyi Nyi's in-laws and their family, and it was one of the best experiences I had. U Nyunt and Daw Mya Thaung ran a weaving business. The back of the house had been extended to house eight or ten looms, and people from the neighborhood came in to weave longyi's as and when they had the time. Occasionally there would be a visit from a textile designer who would set up a loom for a new pattern, or the dyers, with further supplies of dyed yarn, or the buyers, mostly from Mandalay, who came for further supplies. We were also visited by numerous neighbors and relatives.

No one spoke English, the family and their neighbors all lived a pretty traditional life, and everyone had time to sit down for a cup of plain tea and a cheroot and talk to and about the unusual visitor who had landed in their midst. They listened patiently to my incoherent accounts of what I was trying to do and what life was like in far-away England, and then turned to each other and said, "I think what he's trying to tell us is this," whereupon I would hear the authentic version of what I had wanted to say. This was a highly effective method for helping me learn the language.

That month gave me a big boost in fluency and confidence. It was followed by some similar experiences: living for a while in a monastery, to give me an insight into what daily life there was like, and staying in a small village beyond Shwebo. I also learned a lot by going on a month's tour with a zat-pwe troupe. We played at pagoda festivals in Bhamo, Indawgyi and Mogaung, and the leader was so tickled at having a tame foreigner in tow that he devised parts for me in the she-baing pya-zat. Having a genuine

paleface on stage was as good for publicity as a performing monkey. For me it was another way of acquiring new words.

In between these immersion experiences I stayed with friends, sometimes Burmese, sometimes expats, in quieter and less public conditions and roamed out and about collecting words, transcribing speech recordings, noting examples of grammar, recording music, attending weddings and novice ceremonies, visiting craftsmen to hear about thatch-making, stone carving, gilding, gold-beating, ploughing and harrowing, and most of all music-making. All these activities were conducted in Burmese.

It was also helpful just to sit in the stall of some friendly trader in the market and engage him or her in conversation. I worried at first that my presence might be deterring custom, but it soon became clear that I had the opposite effect: people would stop to ask about the unusual visitor. Even on trips to Arakan, Tavoy and Inlay on the track of the dialects of the region I was able to stay with Burmese families and again all our communication was in Burmese. Another high spot was some weeks studying Pagan period Burmese under the guidance of Gordon Luce in Yangon.

After a year of speaking Burmese almost every day, and (for much of the year) all day, I came back to London where I was soon drawn into teaching and research. Saya Hla Pe was always good about using Burmese with me when we were together, and I got to spend time with other Burmans stationed in London, but inevitably there was less opportunity to practise speaking. I tried to make up by reading a lot, both contemporary texts, fiction and factual, and older materials—poems, chronicles, Buddhist texts—all with help from Saya.

Another activity I found helpful—and still do—is to transcribe a recording. I would choose something that seemed useful, either impromptu conversations I'd recorded in Burma, or broadcast announcements, interviews and plays, and write out as much as I could, then persuade some kind native speaker to sit with me and help with the phrases that were too fast or too slurred for me to decipher. The need to play each section many times over really helps whole phrases to stick in your memory.

Looking back, I'd say that what you need first to learn Burmese is a good grounding: learning to read and write the script, learning to hear and reproduce the vital distinctions between sounds, acquiring a small but useful vocabulary, and becoming familiar with the rudiments of the grammar. Nowadays there are several published courses that will help you through this phase. After that the most helpful activities for me were spending time with people whose English was non-existent, or at least weaker than my Burmese, and doing much reading and listening to recordings. I feel hugely grateful to all the kind and patient friends and contacts and teachers and helpers who made that possible. And I always urge other learners to try and set up similar conditions for themselves.

John Okell

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**A Tribute to the late Maung Htin:  
Burma's Foremost Satirist**

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'Before the extended arm is bent and before the bent arm is extended, [anyone can die]' goes a Burmese saying. Before I learned about the death of the 96-year-old Burmese

writer Maung Htin (this was his well-known pseudonym—his real name was U Htin Fatt), I had intended to write about him in time for his 97<sup>th</sup> birthday, which would have fallen on 21 March 2006. But for a 96-year-old person, just as for other 'worldlings,' death can come swiftly, even if not, given his advanced age, unexpectedly. The venerable satirist and scholar died in Insein, a town near Rangoon, the erstwhile Burmese capital, on 29 January 2006. It was only about a week or so later that I learned that Burma had lost yet another venerable writer aged in the 90s. (In August 2004 the renowned Burmese poet Minthuwun died at the age of 94 in Rangoon.)<sup>2</sup>

Partly of Chinese parentage, Maung Htin was born on 21 March 1909 in the town of Laputa in Irrawaddy Division, Lower Burma. Maung Htin was only two months younger than the late U Thant (22 January 1909-25 November 1974) who served as third Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1961 to 1971. But Maung Htin survived U Thant by more than thirty-one years and his venerable age makes this tribute more of a celebration than a lament, even if Maung Htin's passing does constitute a loss for modern Burmese literature.

Maung Htin obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree from Rangoon University in the early 1930s. Apart from writing, Maung Htin worked as a high school teacher, as a mayor or administrator of various towns, as Secretary as well as Director in the Ministry of Information, and as Director of Broadcasting Services. He also served as Chairman of the Burmese Writers Association and Burmese Journalists

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<sup>2</sup> For my tribute to Minthuwun, see Myint Zan, 'Minthuwun: A Tribute to a Gentle Burmese Poet' 50 *Westerly* 179-83 (2004).

Association. In more scholarly roles he was a consultant for the Burmese Encyclopedia project and a member of the Burma Historical Commission. He was also one of the few Burmese writers to write in both Burmese and English, although his English language writings are restricted to articles and are less numerous than his Burmese language books and other writings. Maung Htin also translated some of Guy de Maupassant's short stories and also Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

Among Maung Htin's scholarly writings, probably the most prominent is his annotated commentary, first published in 1960 and revised in 1978, on the work of the learned 19<sup>th</sup> century Burmese Minister Yaw Atwin Wun U Po Hlaing who wrote on good kingly governance. However Maung Htin will probably be best remembered for his effective, punchy satirical writings. These took the form of at least two major novels, in addition to short stories and essays.

A satirical novel entitled *Ko Daung* ('Brother Peacock') was first published in 1940. Ko Daung was a simple Burmese farmer, and his life and loves are narrated in a humorous—but not disrespectful—way. One particular segment of the story dealt with the protagonist's two attempts to elope with his high school sweet heart – when he was still in high school. Both attempts failed miserably, and Maung Htin wrote unsentimentally but sympathetically, and with gentle humor, of how Ko Daung used his longyi to wipe away his tears. Ko Daung narrated his story on a boat on a river at night where the only lights that could be seen were from his cheroot and from little huts yonder as he recounted more than twenty years later of his failed 'missions'. To me the first 'botched' attempt of Maung Htin to elope seems too contrived, as though the author was bent on thwarting Ko

Daung's attempted elopement. Minutes after Ko Daung brought his would-be-bride to his Uncle's house he went to a food stall to buy edibles for himself and for his bride. The food stall happened to be near his high school and the feared headmistress saw him and summoned him to class. Would even a very naïve farmer boy have left his bride that he had just eloped with to buy food near his high school? But had there not been such inanities in Maung Htin's stories, the 'tragedy' of Ko Daung's bungled attempt to elope would have succeeded and we would have one less satirical story to read from Ko Daung's life.

Maung Htin first serialized the Ko Daung stories in a pre-war magazine and published the serials as a book in 1940, just before the winds of war reached Burmese shores. Maung Htin was not quite thirty years old when he wrote the Ko Daung stories. In another elopement story that Maung-Htin wrote forty-six years later and published in 1986, at the age of seventy-seven, Maung Htin staged the elopement of yet another naïve protagonist, a village boy like Ko Daung. But to this attempt Maung Htin granted success. Not only that, in the later story the bride's mother cooperated in the elopement. When the couple were just about to sneak out of the bride's compound before daybreak, to the horror of the bride the back door of the house opened and the mother of the bride called out, 'Oh what a foolish girl you are!' She then threw a warm blanket in the daughter's direction while chiding her daughter at how negligent she was in forgetting to take a blanket in such cold weather. The human warmth and the satirical situations, in both the unsuccessful and successful elopement stories written nearly fifty years apart, is a testament not only to Maung Htin's skills as a satirist but also to his charming, generous way of

describing humanity, with all its foibles, charms, foolishness, failures and successes.

Perhaps the most famous of Maung Htin's literary works is the novel *Ngaba*, named for another Burmese farmer, the protagonist of the novel. The novel deals with this man's travails and trials, starting from the time the war reached Burma. It relates his and his family's struggles with the Japanese military police, including Ngaba's stint as a forced-laborer on the Burma-Siam death railway, his exploitation at the hands of Burmese quislings and opportunists, as well as by Chinese and Indian money-lenders and merchants. *Ngaba* has been translated into several other languages including Chinese, Hindi, Russian and Japanese. It was first published in 1947 and has been republished five times, most recently in 1999.

It may be an exaggeration to claim that Maung Htin was the George Bernard Shaw or perhaps even Bertrand Russell of Burma. While he, like the two Englishmen, lived well into his nineties, his literary gifts, output and quality, superb as they are in the Burmese context, are neither 'Shaw-like,' nor do they reach Russellian proportions. Yet I am of the view that Maung Htin better deserves to be called the 'Bernard Shaw of Burma' than another Burmese who was twice so deemed by *Time* magazine during the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> This was the late Prime Minister

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<sup>3</sup>[i]n nearly 20 years of political life, Burma's smiling, round-faced [then Prime Minister] U Nu has never lost the conviction that he is primarily "a dreamer, a writer." He is even convinced that, given a chance to concentrate, he might have become the Burmese Bernard Shaw. Circumstances have never given U Nu the opportunity to test his theory'. 'The Day of the Tiger' *Time* magazine, June 18, 1956. (Web based archives) <http://www.time.com/time/archive>

U Nu (25 May 1907-14 February 1995), whose apparent ambition to devote his life to writing was 'thwarted' when he unexpectedly became Prime Minister in 1947-48 and remained most of the time in that post till he was overthrown in the military coup of March 1962. Having read some of both U Nu's and Maung Htin's literary products I am of the view that Maung Htin was the superior writer.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of *Ko Daung* Maung Htin killed off the eponymous hero. And unlike Conan Doyle who 'resurrected' Sherlock Holmes, Maung Htin never revived Ko Daung. He ended the series of stories with the phrase 'Ko Daung is dead. May Ko Daung live for more than a hundred years!' Planning my ninety-seventh birthday tribute to Maung Htin, I had intended to end by noting that it is usual for Burmese to wish for persons whom they admire that they may live for more than a hundred years—and Maung

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[/preview/0,10987,862231,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,862231,00.html) (accessed 30 March 2006). Less than two years earlier, in a cover story on Burma entitled 'House on Stilts', with a cover painting of U Nu, *Time* wrote: 'U Nu once confessed to himself that he might some day become the Bernard Shaw of Burma, for he had "the talent and the inspiration" . Instead, U Nu became Free Burma's first Prime Minister, and has remained so—despite four attempts to resign—for the past 6 years'. *Time* August 30, 1954 (web based archives) <http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,891048,00.html> (accessed 30 March 2006)

<sup>4</sup>I did search for 'Maung-Htin' in *Time's* archives but it failed to reveal a single reference to the late satirist. Perhaps we should assume that it was U Nu's position as Burma's foremost politician in the 1950s that led *Time* to confer that accolade on U Nu.

Htin, unlike most humans, was not far from achieving this. But now one can say with confidence, and in celebration, that 'Maung Htin is dead. He lived nearly to be a hundred. His literary works, satirical or otherwise, remain noteworthy and fresh. May they continue to spread.'

Myint Zan

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### Book Reviews

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*The Life of the Buddha*, Herbert, Patricia M. San Francisco, California: Pomegranate Communications, Inc in association with The British Library, 2005. Pp 96, appendix of notes, pp. 81-93, Glossary, pp. 94-95. ISBN: 0-7649-3155-5, \$19.95 (Reprint and re-format of book of same title, published in 1993 by same company. Pp. 95, with appendix of notes, and glossary, pp. 93-96. ISBN: 1-56640-602-1)

This new edition of the original, 1993 publication of *The Life of the Buddha* represents a breakthrough in the presentation of Southeast Asian manuscript painting. Unlike the original edition, here the accordion-pleated horizontal format of Burmese manuscripts is preserved – a most convincing variation on the usual vertical book shape more familiar in the West. The text and reproduction of paintings of two early nineteenth century Burmese manuscripts from the British Library are little changed from the first edition. However, the paintings linked to the stories of the life of the Buddha are better placed: they stretch across the right page, illustrating text on the facing left page.

While the book primarily concerns the many episodes in the life of Gautama Buddha, the first story relates that of the Boddhisatva

Sumedha, who throws himself on the muddy ground so that the Dipankara Buddha will walk over him to arrive at the King's Palace unsoiled. The second life story concerns the Boddhisatva Vessantara, the epitome of Generosity or Charity. Then begin the stories of Gautama Buddha, with his conception and birth, as Queen Mahamaya, his mother, holds the branch of the sala tree in Lumpini Park. The holy infant emerges from her side to be carried to the royal court where the court Brahmins predict the future of the Buddha-to-Be. And so the long and colorful life commences.

Thirty full-page paintings are reproduced here, remarkable in their thoroughly Burmese-inspired traditions. Clothing, architecture, and customs of the royal court in Mandalay are carefully depicted. The court costumes and military dress are painted authentically; particularly delightful are the scenes with the court ministers in their characteristic tall headgear and the court musicians playing the Burmese orchestra as well as the very distinctive Burmese harp.

The scene showing the Attack and Defeat of the Forces of Mara is particularly impressive. Curiously, however, the text makes no mention of the Earth Goddess, a central figure in the painting and in this episode, as it is the rivers of water wrung from her hair that wash away the attacking demon army. Appropriately, the mudra of the Buddha here is Calling the Earth to Witness. From this point on in the paintings, the Earth-touching mudra is used frequently, even when the text does not appear to call for it. For Burmese, the Earth-touching mudra appears to have multiple meanings. For instance, when the Naga King inserts his coils under the Buddha to raise him above the flood while putting his head over the Buddha to keep



him dry in order to protect him from an impending storm, the Buddha is depicted making the Earth-touching gesture rather than meditating. Unlike the Buddhist art conventions in other Southeast Asian countries, where this mudra is attached to only one episode, in the remaining paintings here the Earth-touching gesture appears more frequently than any other.

The book's useful and detailed appendix discusses each painting, identifying the characters depicted and pointing out significant elements present. A brief glossary of terms provides further assistance. Dr. Patricia Herbert has performed a unique service in presenting these paintings in a format so helpful to the teaching of Buddhist legend and thought. And the publishers, Pomegranate Communications, Inc., are to be commended for their lively and original presentation of this unique material—altogether a most worthy accomplishment.

Sarah Bekker

*Mantles of Merit: Chin Textiles from Myanmar, India and Bangladesh*, David W. and Barbara G. Fraser. Bangkok: River Books, 2005. 288 pp. 554 ill. ISBN: 974-9863-01-1, US\$ 60.00

This volume on Chin textiles, ably written by David and Barbara Fraser, is a welcome addition to scholarship on hill groups in Burma. Not only does it provide extensive details about the production and use of the textiles, but it demonstrates how this information can be put to interdisciplinary use in order to augment and corroborate anthropological and linguistic studies.

The first chapter introduces the various Chin groups. Acknowledging that cultural divisions among the Chin are often difficult

to make, since there are over fifty clans and over forty related, but distinct, languages, the Frasers state that their book “uses analysis of textile culture to differentiate divisions when other factors are not definitive” (p. 12). The Frasers have divided the Chin into four major groups—the Northern Chin, the Southern Chin, the Ashö, and the Khumi, Khami, and Mro. Chapter One further includes brief discussions of Chin linguistics and the environment in which the Chin reside, particularly the geography and climate of the area.

An exploration of textiles must go beyond a straightforward recording of fibers, techniques, and colors, however. In the second chapter, the Frasers make clear that it is also important to know about the structure of Chin society and its history, as well as other factors that affect the production and use of textiles. The Chin have a patrilineal social structure and they place great emphasis upon status and wealth, as indicated in part by the possession of textiles, which form a significant part of Chin material culture.

The exact date of the migration of the Chin people into an area that today overlaps with the modern states of Burma, Bangladesh, and India is unknown, but probably occurred during the first millennium CE. Clan migrations within the area continued long after that. The first written references to the Chin are found in inscriptions from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries at Pagan. Because the Chin had no writing until missionaries developed a system in the late nineteenth century, the Frasers rightly pay attention to oral traditions, many of which have been found to correspond to anthropologists' and linguists' findings. They also consider the impact of missionaries and the British colonial government on Chin society. In addition to

village types and architectural forms, the Frasers discuss social structure and its effects on the family, marriage rules, inheritance, ideas about death, and religion. Sections on tattooing, cultivation methods, trade, and warfare have also been included

Chapter Three addresses textile construction, examining the fibers, textile structures, dyes, and the back-strap (or back-tension) loom used by the Chin. Traditionally, cotton, hemp, and flax were used, but silk was introduced from China and modern cloths and fibers from India. Locally grown vegetable dyes have now been supplanted by chemical ones. Useful diagrams of back-strap looms, along with numerous photographs of people in the process of weaving, are supplied. The Frasers explain the three main methods of attaching warp threads to the loom to begin the weaving process, as well as the use of specific weaves for the ground fabric and patterning. They accompany these descriptions with good diagrams of textile structures. The abundance of photographs of specific weave types aids comprehension of highly technical information. Finally, information about finishes, selvages, ends, and joins is provided, making the intricacy of the Chin textiles clear.

Chapters Four through Seven form the core of the book, each one describing the textiles of one of the four major Chin groups the Frasers identify. Each chapter begins with a description of these groups and sub-groups and their geographical location. Next comes a description of technical features of the textiles. Finally, the Frasers examine what people of different communities, sexes, and ages wear. They provide a detailed study of textile use, types, styles, and historical changes for the different groups and sub-groups. The amount of information in each chapter is extensive.

The Northern Chin produce warp-faced textiles and have shared designs. Now elaborately patterned, the authors speculate that early pieces (prior to the nineteenth century) were simpler. The blanket is one of the most important textiles in Northern Chin culture, so the Frasers discuss its wide variety of types, designs, and uses. Men's and women's garments are also illustrated and described, with an account of how these vary between different sub-groups. Unlike the Northern Chin, the Southern Chin produce considerably less complex textiles and they have adopted some of the former's textiles. The Khumi, Khami and Mro weave pieces that are a combination of local ideas and borrowings from other traditions, particularly the Northern Chin. Supplementary weft is used extensively; the Khumi, Khami, and Mro differ from other groups in low weft density and in their use of a single loom width, compound wefts, complex end finishes, false embroidery, and decorated selvages. Their most common textiles are breast clothes, headbands, skirts, loincloths, shoulder cloths, blankets, and ceremonial textiles. The production and use of these, and a few other textile forms, such as tunics and jackets, are all described. Finally, textiles of the Ashö are analyzed. Since the Ashö are highly assimilated, the Frasers expected to find few interesting textiles, yet the opposite proved to be true. Some of the most sophisticated textiles are Ashö and they show little outside influence. Of the textile types, the Ashö produce particularly impressive tunics.

Chapter Eight, titled "Wellsprings and Flow of Textile Ideas," concludes the book by exploring the possible origins of the various weaving methods as well as possible interconnections between the various groups, as suggested by similarities (and differences) among these weaving techniques. Since weaving structures are

slower to change than materials and patterns, such studies can indicate which groups were significant in the development of weaving. The Frasers reaffirm that textile structure analyses corroborate the findings of linguistic and anthropological studies and that in areas of uncertainty regarding the classification of groups, textile analysis has assisted in realizing distinctions.

An appendix of loom parts and related items and a bibliography complete the book. The volume is nicely designed and laid out. That the book is also well written further augments its value. The extensive combination of diagrams, historic pictures of textiles in use, contemporary photographs of people, and textile pictures provide a thorough record of this aspect of Chin culture, making this a significant addition to cultural studies of Southeast Asia.

Alexandra Green  
Denison University

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### Myanmar Literature Project



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Starting with an investigation into the Nagani Book Club, this project intends to document and analyse the role of Burmese/Myanmar literature as a medium between the world and the country's society from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until today. The project is a joint venture between people interested in the subject both inside and outside of present day Myanmar.

The project's results are published in a series of working papers in English which cover material on the 100 books issued by

the Nagani Book Club and its sister enterprise, the Burma Publishing House, between 1938 and 1941. In addition, articles related to the broad topic of the project shall be published.

Five volumes of working papers are currently available.

No 10:1, An Introduction into the Nagani Book Club

No. 10:2, Material on Thein Pe, *Biography of Saya Lun* and *Royal Advisers*

No. 10:3, Material on Ba Hein, *The World of Capitalists*

No 10:4, Material on Thein Pe, *Student Boycotters* (Two Volumes)

No. 10:5, Material on Ba Khaing, *Political History of Burma*

They are accessible through the website of the University of Passau:

<http://www.iseap.de/content/view/89/>

and—as printouts—from the Myanmar Book Centre in Yangon:

<http://www.myanmarbook.com>

The next papers will cover material on Nu's book *Gandalarit* on his travel to China in late 1939, two books written by Ba Hein and Aung San on "World War and Burma," Mogyo's translation of a book on the Philippine national hero José Rizal and the papers presented at the panel "Interpreting Interpretations of Burma's Intellectual and Literary Heritage" at the 2006 *Burma Studies Conference* in Singapore.

Anybody interested in the subject is invited to participate in the project by

- writing comments and reviews on the contents of the volumes;
- contributing essays on

Burmese/Myanmar literature as a medium between the international world and Burmese society;

- providing material which sheds more light on the Nagani Book Club, its context and impact on Burmese intellectual and literary life;
- offering assistance as translator, commentator, or assistant editor.

For more information, please contact:

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### **Myanmar/Burma Update Held in Singapore**

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The 2006 *Myanmar/Burma Update Conference* was held in Singapore from 17-18 July, back-to-back for the first time with the Burma Studies Conference. This was the Australian National University's seventh Myanmar/Burma Update conference, and it was the first time that the conference was sponsored jointly with the Institute of South East Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore. Organised by Trevor Wilson, Monique Skidmore, and Tin Maung Maung Than, it attracted a good attendance of slightly more than 100 scholars from around the world.

This was the first Update Conference to examine trends in Myanmar/Burma since the dramatic October 2004 leadership changes and it provided an opportunity for considered assessments by Burmese and non-Burmese scholars. Updates on the political, economic and military situations were followed by a specialised session on developments in the ethnic communities, where progress directly affects future

directions for the country. Presenters included former British Ambassador Vicky Bowman, Mary Callahan, Ikuko Okamoto, Ashley South, Sean Turnell, Khin Zaw Win and former Australian Ambassador Trevor Wilson. While the overall situation in Myanmar/Burma was not seen as offering grounds for much optimism, the extent to which groups and individuals inside the country were committed to working towards gradual reform was an unexpected bright note.

For the first time, some of the critical environmental issues currently confronting Myanmar/Burma that have prompted increased concerns about Myanmar/Burma's natural resource endowment and its natural environment were analysed thoroughly from all perspectives. As well as assessing the problems of environmental governance, researchers from inside and outside Myanmar/Burma offered case studies, including on the impact of new development schemes such as off-shore gas. Presenters on the environment included Ken MacLean, Tun Myint, Matthew Smith, and Tint Lwin Thaug. Conference papers are currently being edited for publication by the ANU's Asia Pacific Press early in 2007.

Trevor Wilson  
Australian National University

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### **From Heaven to Earth: A Ritual to the 37 Nats Exhibit at NIU**

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The Center for Burma Studies at Northern Illinois University held an exhibit at the NIU Art Museum during the fall of 2006 to highlight a set of seventeen nat images newly arrived from Amarapura and donated to the NIU Burma Art Collection. The exhibit, co-curated by Catherine Raymond

and Benjamin Lemon, which reproduced a temporary altar on which the images were displayed, explored from various angles the well known Burmese ritual dedicated to the pantheon of the thirty-seven nats.

A 2006 graduate seminar in art history linked to the exhibit was held at NIU. In addition, a symposium focused mainly on history, art history and literature was organized with the participation of Kris Lehman, Professor of Anthropology, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, Trustee and co-Founder of the Burma Studies Foundation.

Listed below is the program of the symposium:

“Nats and Identity Formation in Burma: Some Long-Term historical Considerations”  
Benjamin Lemon, Ph.D. Candidate in History, NIU

"Devising Images for the Nats During the Early Pagan Period 1084 -1111 AD"  
Richard M. Cooler, Professor Emeritus of Southeast Asian Art History, Founder and Former Director of the Center for Burma Studies, NIU

“Change and Continuity in the Depiction of Specific Images in the Ritual to the 37 Nats”  
Catherine Raymond, Associate Professor of Asian Art History, NIU, Director of the Center for Burma Studies, NIU

“Nats in Burmese Literature: comments from writers”  
Saw Tun, Associate Professor of Foreign Languages & Literature (Burmese), NIU

“Offering Food to Nangarine”  
Ma Sandar, Library Assistant, Founders Memorial Library, NIU

In the afternoon a Burmese performance was dedicated to the thirty-seven nats with Burmese performers and traditional music.

The exhibit will be on the website in 2007.  
[www.grad.niu.edu/burma](http://www.grad.niu.edu/burma)

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