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



Belief Made Tangible Exhibition, 2008 from the NIU Burma Art Collection
at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL, USA

Bulletin of the Burma Studies Group

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INTRODUCTION

Once again, I must apologize for the long delay since the last issue of the *Bulletin* appeared. We hope to have the next issue of the *Bulletin* ready by June, in order to get back on a more regular schedule.

Following a brief piece from Jake Carbine to put us in the properly calm and judicious frame of mind, most of this issue consists of abstracts of the papers presented at the Burma Studies Conference held at NIU on October 3 – 5, 2008. Those of us who recall the small gatherings characteristic of BSG conferences in the old days, when all involved could sit at a single long table, can only marvel at how much more populous, cosmopolitan, and stimulating the event has become. It was frustrating having to choose among different panels when there were so many interesting and important topics under discussion. But it is gratifying that so many people have now turned their attention to Burma, such that Burma studies begins to approach a depth of field appropriate to its size and significance.

The next Burma Studies Conference will take place on July 6 - 8 of 2010 at the Université de Provence in Marseille, France burmastudies2010@gmail.com, an event and a venue we can all look forward to enjoying. At the end of this issue, readers will find notices about other upcoming conferences and about the most recent issue of *The Journal of Burma Studies*.

A SAMVEGA GATHA: TEXT AND TRANSLATION

One of the more meditatively calming moments in my recent life came unexpectedly during an afternoon gathering at a Burmese friend's house in the LA area, about three months ago now. I'd been invited to attend the events of the day to gain some "understanding of how Burmese women practice Buddhism." Of course, I was told, some men and a few monks would be present. One of the monks had recently traveled to the U.S. from Myanmar and was soon to head back home. The monk was reputed to be gifted in the ways of preaching about the nature of the mind and body, and also gifted in the ways of vipassana practice. I couldn't resist. Monks, mind/body doctrine, women, and probably tasty food (about which I was right). Sounded like a good way to spend an afternoon to me.

The most memorable part of the afternoon came not during a sermon by the vipassana-adept monk, but during a particular segment of chanting as the afternoon came to a close. During that segment, the preaching monk and the twenty or so Burmese women and teenage girls engaged in a melodious, back and forth recitation of a *samvega gatha*, a poetic verse intended to promote religious sentiment or agitation by pushing one to contemplate the miseries and possibilities of birth. Prior to his enlightenment, Gautama's experience of *samvega* is said to have played a crucial role in his quest.

The monk would chant a line; the women and girls would repeat his chants. The

laymen who were there joined in the chanting, but the tone and sonorous nature of the whole thing was carried by the women, girls, and monk. In the process, each new line of the chant slightly overlapped with the previous, creating one of the most calming sensations of peaceful sound I'd heard in some time; certainly a break from the noise and hustle of the LA sphere of existence.

The *samvega gatha* appears relatively frank in terms of Buddhist thought. And it is not emotionally over-the-top like some *samvega gathas* I've seen and heard about for other occasions (i.e. funerals for monks). It is impossible to reproduce the sounds of the *gatha* here. Perhaps when we go to a totally digital world we can include audio files in the *Bulletin*. Even so, some may recognize it in the Burmese and find it enjoyable in a religious way. What follows is the text itself and a possible translation, based partly on explanations provided by another monk (not present at the recitation) and a lay person (who was present at the recitation).

Translations are often hazardous exercises, and so a note about the translation is in order, particularly in regard to the phrases *lawki ot-sa* and *lawkottaya ot-sa*. *Ot-sa* seems straightforward enough: "possession," "asset." The word *lawki* carries a connotation of being conditioned by situational attachments (e.g. to one's money, family, life). In contrast, *lawkottaya* carries a connotation of being increasingly detached from various things and directed towards nibbana. For example, when asked about the meaning of *lawkottaya ot-sa*, the monk leading the recitation responded that this referred to the three parts of the path to nibbana: moral conduct, concentration, and

wisdom. As with much Buddhist thought and practice, *lawkottaya* orientations are predicated on *lawki* experiences. There are different ways to render *lawki* and *lawkottaya*. One way was suggested to me by a monk: *lawki* = mundane; *lawkottaya* = supramundane. Another way was offered by the lay person: *lawki* = worldly; *lawkottaya* = Buddha's path. I've decided to leave the terms untranslated.

သံဝေဂ ဂါထာ

လောကီဥစ္စာ နေ့မြှောက်ကာ
ညမှာ ချောက်လေသည်။
လောကုတ္တရာဥစ္စာ နေ့ပျော်ကာ
ညမှာ ပျော်လေသည်။

လောကီဥစ္စာ ရှင်စဉ်မှာ
မြှောက်ကာ သေကာ ချောက်လေသည်။
လောကုတ္တရာဥစ္စာ ရှင်စဉ်မှာ
ပျော်ကာ သေကာ ပျော်ရသည်။

လောကီဥစ္စာ သေတဲ့ခါ
ထားကာသွားရ ဘုံဆိုင်မည်။
လောကုတ္တရာဥစ္စာ သေတဲ့ခါ
ယူကာသွားရ ကိုယ်ပိုင်မည်။

လောကီဥစ္စာ တစ်ဘဝသာ
သယ်ရှာဆောင်ပို့ ကျိုးနွံသည်။
လောကုတ္တရာဥစ္စာ ဘဝများစွာ
သယ်ရှာဆောင်ပို့ ကျိုးများသည်။

A Poem about Religious Sentiment

Lawki assets, uplifting during the day,
bring anxiety at night.

Lawkottaya assets, endow one with
happiness, day and night.

Lawki assets, all the time you're alive,
uplifting; when you die, bring anxiety.
Lawkottaya assets, all the time you're alive,
enjoyable, and when you die, bring
enjoyment.

Lawki assets, when you die,
are left behind, becoming community
possessions.

Lawkottaya assets, when you die,
are yours to take to the next life.

Lawki assets, good for one life,
bring little benefit for the next life.
Lawkottaya assets, good for many lives,
bring much benefit throughout many
rebirths.

Since I will be using this material in a
college 1st-year writing seminar dealing with
Burmese culture and society, please feel free
to send me any comments
(jcarbine@whittier.edu).

Jake Carbine
Whittier College

**INTERNATIONAL BURMA STUDIES
CONFERENCE: ABSTRACTS
OCTOBER 3-5, 2008
NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DEKALB, IL U.S.A.**

BUDDHIST ART AND RITUAL

**“NAGAS, ALCHEMISTS, MAGIC AND HELL
IN SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY BURMESE WALL PAINTINGS”**

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Seventeenth- and eighteenth- century Burmese murals are conservative in their subject matter. The twenty-eight previous Buddha's, the life of Gotama Buddha, including the Seven Stations, the Eight Victories, and the *waso* seasons, the Jataka stories, lotus pools, and floral and geometric decorations comprise the main imagery painted onto temple and cave walls and ceiling. Occasionally, in doorways, window niches, and on the ceilings, however, other elements were also incorporated into the program; these include images of nagas, the *thuyaung* or 'fake person' tree associated with the practice of alchemy, hell scenes not associated with the Nemi Jataka, and both magic squares and circles. In this paper, I will describe this material, which is fairly standardized, explore where it is located and the format in which it is presented to the viewer, and assess its meanings. Of particular interest is the reason why such imagery has been included with canonical material, for which there are a number of explanations, including the embeddedness of

these concepts in Burmese religious beliefs and the necessity of protection.

“NINETEENTH CENTURY BUDDHIST CLOTH PAINTING FROM BURMA”

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Apart from several rare exceptions, such as the scroll painting dating from the twelfth/thirteenth century discovered in Pagan in 1984 and now on permanent display at the Pagan Museum, very little is known about Burmese Buddhist painting on cloth. Their history and their specific usage have received little attention, yet the existence of this art form has been recorded at least since the sixteenth century in the Royal Orders of Burma. Buddhist cloth paintings can be seen represented in murals temple or on palm-leaf and on *parabaik*, shown as a partition/divider or as a banner, and they appear to have formerly played a role in Buddhist merit-making, where such donations were displayed either at the entrance to, or within the interior of, a temple compound. Or alternatively they may have been produced for some other public function, or even to provide personal protection.

In recent years the NIU Burma Art Collection has received two separate donations of Buddhist cloth paintings, most on cotton coated with a thin whitish priming. We now possess four remarkable examples of such paintings dating to the nineteenth century.

The subjects vary from a distinctive cosmological representation superimposed on a superb *shedawya*, or “footprint of the

Buddha”, to depictions of his celebrated disciples Shin Thiwali and Shin Upago, and to certain events in the life of Buddha.

The objective of this paper is to present the artistic and iconographic affiliations of Burmese Buddhist cloth paintings, contextualized both historically and geographically, vis-à-vis the neighboring Buddhist countries, in order to gain a better understanding of their larger social and religious significance.

“THE *PONGYIBYAN*: FUNERAL CEREMONIES OF SENIOR MONKS IN 19TH CENTURY BURMA AND ASSOCIATED ARTIFACTS”

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This paper describes the Burmese festival of *pongyibyan*, the ceremonies at the cremation of a senior monk, mainly by collating written accounts and photographs by Europeans who witnessed *pongyibyan* in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Possible canonical precedents for certain rites of the *pongyibyan* may be found in accounts in the Parinibbanna Sutta of the Buddha’s own funeral. The paper cites descriptions of the evisceration, embalming and gilding of the monk’s corpse; the simple inner coffin, and elaborate outer coffin; the mortuary chapel (*neiban-kyauung*) where the body lay in state awaiting cremation; the architecture and symbolic significance of the tall funeral pyres with figures of mythical beings; and the role of the *sat-hsaya*, the craftsman in bamboo and cut paper, who built them. The *lonswethi*, the tug-of-war for merit, is described. Numerous foreign observers reported the Burmese passion for rocketry.

At least three types of rockets (*don*) were used at pongyibyan for kindling the funeral pyre. Rockets commonly caused injury or death to spectators, and were discouraged by the British colonial government.

MUSIC

“THE SLIDE GUITAR IN POST-COLONIAL BURMA: LOCAL ADAPTATIONS TO A GLOBAL INSTRUMENT”

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Since the 1920s, the slide guitar has been a prominent fixture in Burma’s music culture. Introduced in the early part of the century, it was quickly adapted to accommodate Burmese *thachin gyi* (classical), colonial period *khit haung* (popular oldies), and *kalabaw* (modern traditional) music (1930-1960). Owing to its ability to mimic Burmese vocal melodies, the slide guitar was used extensively to accompany popular singers and as a central instrument in movie soundtracks for nostalgic and romantic scenes. Today the popularity of the slide guitar is waning as youth turn their attention to international folk and rock guitar styles, although several government institutions (radio, national competitions, and universities) have provided contexts that preserve this style of playing.

This presentation will describe the manner in which the Hawaiian slide guitar has been adopted into Burmese music. Observation of techniques drawn from other Burmese instruments, repertoire choice, tunings and unique approaches to harmony will show how thoroughly Burmanized the instrument has become in the hands of Burmese

musicians. In contrast, the paper will also discuss the guitar’s role in fostering changes to Burmese musical aesthetics as Western Tin Pan Alley and Jazz repertoire became popular amongst guitarists and composers in the 1940s and 50s.

“THE FORMATION OF GENRE DIVISIONS IN BURMESE CLASSICAL SONGS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SONG ANTHOLOGIES IN PALM LEAF MANUSCRIPTS”

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In this paper, I aim to demonstrate the basis on which certain songs are classified as Burmese classical songs or *thachingyi* and the manner in which these songs are categorized according to genre. There are over one thousand songs of these classical songs, and they are categorized into approximately 20 different genres in published song anthologies. According to the conventional literature on *thachingyi*, it is evident that almost any song can be classified under a certain genre. However, these studies do not address the basis on which these song anthologies are compiled and the criteria that determine the genre of a song. Song manuscripts that were written from 1788 to 1849 did not include all the songs, or revisions made to certain kinds of songs or certain author’s songs. Many songs that were listed in U Sa’s song anthology, written in 1849, were not classified as to their genres; however, these songs were categorized in the 1870 manuscript, which compiled the song titles. Following this, in all manuscripts and publications pertaining to songs that were published after 1870, the songs are comprehensively edited and

compiled according to their individual genres. However, some songs can still be categorized under two different genres. Therefore, the relationship between songs and their genres is not absolute; this relationship is determined when the song is edited and compiled in anthologies, and not at the time of its composition.

**“ADAPTABLE SONORITIES: GITA LU LIN U
KO KO’S DEPARTURE IN SANDAYA TONE
AND STYLE “**

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Improvising pianist-composers will often be recognized for their ingenuity in creating material. Less noted is how they distinguish themselves through their craft in touch and timbre. Because this art is elusive and resists discursive presentation, it gets overlooked and ‘under-heard.’ Yet it is precisely U Ko Ko’s sandaya touch and technique which produced either great elation or studied indifference among some of his audiences.

U Ko Ko (1928-2007) was extraordinarily articulate about and proud of his development of a personal piano style which combined “international fingering” with a Burmese musical sensibility. Yet many Burmese listeners – both musicians and music aficionados – while acknowledging U Ko Ko’s stature and genius as a composer and pianist, would state privately that he wasn’t really playing Burman/Myanmar music with a “true” Burman sound. What would that authentic sound which listeners wanted be? And how would listeners with these aural expectations be both disturbed by U Ko Ko’s sandaya playing yet enticed by his art?

I will play some short musical examples (from a cd and on keyboard) contrasting some aspects of U Ko Ko’s technique with that of other pianists. In conclusion I will raise some points about what constitute listening habits as 21st century Burmese musical culture embraces both notions of nostalgic return and a perceived foray into “the new” among different generations of musicians and audiences.

**ART HISTORY: ICONOGRAPHY AND
ARCHITECTURE**

**“THE ROCK-CUT TEMPLES OF SHWE BA
TAUNG – CENTRAL BURMA”**

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The religious complex of Shwe Ba Taung, closed to the archaeological site of PWT, is located in the heart of central Burma, on the west bank of the Chindwin River. Shwe Ba Taung, studded with temples-shrines accessible from ground level through narrow stairways and alleyways, contain several colossal standing images of Lord Buddha. Its uniqueness stems from the fact that all of it is dug out from the rock by human hands.

The temples-caves of Shwe Ba Taung are dated from the colonial period (1886-1948). Containing over 200 Buddha sculptures in the Mandalay style, they are chiselled from soft volcanic stone. Among a hundred grottoes of different sizes at the site, about 50 are considered temples-shrines. Others are designated as monastic residences or living accommodations for laypeople.

According to inscriptions found there, the shrines at Shwe Ba Taung were mostly constructed during the first quarter of the 20th century. The majority have two or three entrances. These contemporary temples are partially built in solid stone blocks on the upper part of the shrines so as to give the façades a monumental appearance. The height of the façades can rise up to 6 meters. The main feature of Shwe Ba Taung is the architectural ornamentation on the façades, imitating the traditional wooden architecture and buildings constructed during the colonial period. This paper focuses on the artistic creation of the façades: compositions, diversities and influence.

**“THE POINTED ARCH AT PAGAN: WHAT
SHAPE JAMBUDVIPA?”**

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One of the most arresting sights encountered by a visitor to the ancient city of Pagan is the widespread architectural use of the pointed arch, or, as it is known in the West, the Gothic arch. This architectural preference becomes all the more intriguing upon a realization that Pagan is the only site in Asia where the pointed arch is extensively used for structural purposes. Although the pointed arch was known in India, it was only employed for small niches, never for wide spans as was its use during the Medieval Ages in Europe.

Hindu-Buddhist buildings did not require a large interior space because worship in these religions is not congregational as in the West, but processional, so that small interior spaces were adequate for worship. Therefore, devices to span large spaces were

not needed. However, the use of the pointed arch began during the reign of King Kyanzittha and continued throughout the remainder of the Pagan Period. This paper seeks to answer how the pointed arch became the preferred spanning device during the Pagan Period, how it expressed an ardent wish for the future Buddha, Meitreyā, to return to Burma, and why it was later forgotten.

Since no contemporary written records exist that address themselves to these questions, this paper will review the evidence of sculpture, wall paintings, and various aspects of the temple architecture that are relevant to these issues.

**“A PYU TRANSITION AT BAGAN:
ICONOGRAPHIC LINKS”**

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Bagan's origin as a Pyu settlement has gained general support in recent years through the integrated analysis of archaeological research and historical records. However, until the partial excavation of Temple 996 around 2002 there was only scattered physical evidence of a Pyu presence at Bagan, all pre-dating Bagan's emergence as the centre of a major Southeast Asian empire in the 11th century. This material exists principally in the form of votive tablets, while the Nga-kywe-na-daung and Bu-hpaya stupas are linked to the Pyu through their design. Concurrently, there has been further excavation and evaluation of the artifacts found at the major Pyu sites, with the majority of objects being found at Sriksetra. The artifacts and architectural design elements at Temple 996

have been linked to the Pyu and represent a significant increase in the amount of Pyu related material found to date at Bagan. This ‘discovery’ has provided a bridge which offers for the first time the opportunity to evaluate the material remains from both sites in relation to each other. This in turn is a potential starting point for determining an origin from which the distinctly Burmese aesthetic emerged. Stylistic and iconographic links between Srikshetra and Bagan are identified, and these connections are used to infer that Pyu cultural models were a significant influence in the development of Bagan period artistic expression. In addition, through the similarities in decorative elements between some of Bagan’s early temples and acknowledged Pyu design it is proposed that there is evidence which supports a Pyu transitional phase at Bagan which possibly extended through to the early 12th century.

**“THE MAKING OF A BUDDHA IMAGE IN
ARAKAN”**

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The paper is about the making of Buddha’s image today in the Arakan State of Burma. The Buddhist Kingdom of Arakan was independent until 1785, the date of the Burmese conquest. Although their kingdom has not existed for more than two centuries, today the Arakanese still refer to it and its palladium, the protective Mahamuni Buddha image, maintaining a strong sense of historical and religious community amongst Arakanese. During fieldwork conducted mostly in Arakan State starting in the late nineties, I came to note the vitality of Buddhist statuary. Looking at this along

with many oral and written narratives about the images of Buddha in Arakan, I wondered why these images of Buddha are so important.

Today in Arakan, in producing new Buddha images connected to the Mahamuni image, as well as through devotions, rituals and donations, this society perpetuates what I have called its “mythical space” but also its particular social and religious space.

The paper is based on ethnographical data covering the whole process of making the Buddha image, step by step, from the original drawing of the future image to its ritual consecration. Most of the studies on ceremonies associated with Buddha images in Theravada societies are concerned with the consecration ritual; fewer concern the venerating of Buddha images or remains. However in one case, several ceremonies and rituals were carried out while the image was being made, before its consecration. These findings concern the study of material religion, Buddhist rituals, and the general store of knowledge about Arakanese society.

It appears that most Buddha images are believed to contain power, not only through the consecration ritual but also, as the analysis reveals, in the process of making the image itself.

**NINETEENTH CENTURY HISTORY AND
CULTURE**

**“BURMA STUDIES ON TOUR: BAPTIST
PORTRAYALS OF BURMA IN 1830S AMERICA”**

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In 1833, the American Baptist missionaries Jonathan and Deborah Wade returned from Burma to the United States with two assistants, Ko Chet-thing, and Maung Shwe Maung. They toured the country speaking at churches and conventions raising money for missionary schools, and they spent several months in residence at the Hamilton Theological Institute in New York. While at Hamilton, Maung Shwe Maung and Ko Chet-thing led classes in Burmese and Karen language for students preparing to go to Burma as missionaries. As well as occasioning the first Burmese language classes in the Western Hemisphere, the Wades' tour undoubtedly portrayed Burma and its culture in a new light to those who attended their fundraising talks. This paper will attempt to discern the impact of the 1833-34 tour on American Baptist discourse about Burma as reflected in the periodical press.

**“BUILDING THE ‘CITY OF DHAMMA’:
KING MINDON’S FOUNDATION OF
MANDALAY IN THE FACE OF
ADVERSITY”**

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This paper examines the nature of King Mindon’s extensive building program for

Mandalay at the time of its founding against the backdrop of preceding Konbaung royal capitals (Shwebo, Ava and Amarapura). The purpose of this study is to highlight the strong correlation between textual traditions, contemporaneous royal records and actual building practices in Mindon’s undertaking. It is also to apprehend the ‘historical thickness’ of a ‘Theravadin landscape,’ a dimension that too often goes unnoticed in traditional Burmese historiography. In doing so, we hope to contribute to the larger question of Buddhist kingship in Burma and its final evolution during the Konbaung dynasty under the influence of great external challenges.

The argument here proposed is that the founding of Mandalay is not so much equated with the building of the royal palace and its *'shwe myodaw,'* as was the case in the preceding Konbaung capitals, as with the building of an outer city, *'hsin kye hpoun,'* and its extensive building program of Buddhist relics and structures.

To support this view, this paper will examine how King Mindon’s building program was designed to: (1) make the ‘presence’ of the Buddha ubiquitous and conspicuous throughout the city; (2) provide the population with an infrastructural network aimed at improving their welfare and facilitating their engagement with religion; (3) and establish the new royal capital as one of the main centers for scholarship in the Buddhist world.

This study draws on field and archival data gathered in Mandalay and Yangon since October 2007.

**“A NEW THEORY ON THE EVOLUTION OF
BURMESE PUPPETRY”**

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Traditionally, U Sa, a multi-talented man and minister at the court of Bagyidaw during the Konbaung dynasty, is credited with the invention of puppets in 1837 when he lost out in a court intrigue and went into solitary confinement where he entertained himself with puppets. So cultural specialists studying performing arts are left with the impression that puppetry was born out of a single man's inspiration. Such a full scale invention is shown to be unsustainable by Lieutenant Pemberton's travel account, written a decade earlier when, sent from Manipur to Ava to discuss a border dispute with Burmese authorities, he noted a puppet and was very much fascinated by its performance. Prior to this, there is evidence for the existence of puppets in Burmese literature as early as the 15th century. Clearly, the puppetry tradition developed over a long period. To consider its evolution more comprehensively, we have to include: 1) puppets' anatomical structure and material, 2) their size, and 3) the methods of their manipulation.

The presentation will first present the historical context in which the art of puppetry developed in Burma and secondly address the different questions of its technical development. All these aspects are at issue in the long historical development culminating in the present state of the art of puppetry.

**MIGRATION WITHIN AND OUT OF BURMA:
HOW TO COPE AND TO WHAT EFFECT?**

**“REFUGEES AS TRANSNATIONAL ACTORS:
THE IMPACT OF BURMESE DIASPORA
ENGAGEMENT”**

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In contrast to the popular depiction of refugees as ‘vulnerable victims’, their creative agency needs to be stressed. Refugees are continuously developing new strategies to cope with their displacement, some of which are transnational in nature. In this paper, the economic, social, cultural and political transnational activities of Burmese refugees in Thailand are expounded. The second and main part of the paper analyses the cumulative impact of these activities on several stakeholders: the families and community back home and in exile, the Burmese junta, the Thai government and the international community. This analysis aims to contribute to a wider understanding of the involvement of refugees in transnational activities and the subsequent effect on conflict as well as development.

**“RECENT RESETTLEMENT OF PEOPLE
FROM BURMA AND THE (RE) EMERGENCE
OF THE ‘BURMESE’ COMMUNITY IN
AUSTRALIA”**

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People from Burma have migrated to Australia over two reasonably distinct periods – from the late 1940s to the mid 1970s, and the early 1990s to the present.

Those that arrived in Australia more recently have been sourced from a number of different ethnic groups, including the Burman, Karen, Mon and Chin. This paper will utilize oral history testimony and additional archival research to canvass the resettlement experiences of these groups, many of whom came to Australia through its refugee and special humanitarian visa programs. In doing so it will explore shifts in Australian migration and resettlement policies, including the recently announced refocusing of its humanitarian resettlement program from Africa to Asia, which will ensure that the number of people from Burma resettling in Australia in the near future will steadily, if not dramatically, increase.

Despite the long established nature of the “Burmese” community in Australia it is not until very recently that this community has received significant attention from academics, service provider groups and Australian governments. The paper will offer an examination of the emergence of the “Burmese” community as a focus for the work of such groups, and more broadly in the consciousness of the wider Australian community. It will conclude with a discussion of the impact of the anti-regime protests of 2007 in Burma on this growing awareness.

The research presented in this paper forms part of a larger PhD study on the migration of people from Burma to Australia. The project aims to produce a transnational history that explores the ways in which both Australia and Burma have participated in larger international exchanges, highlighting how the histories of both nations intersect and can be fruitfully combined.

“THE ‘EVERYDAY POLITICS’ OF IDP PROTECTION IN KAREN STATE”

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While international humanitarian access in Burma has opened up over the past decade and a half, the ongoing debate regarding the appropriate relationship between politics and humanitarian assistance remains unresolved. This debate has become especially limiting in regards to protection measures for internally displaced persons (IDPs) which are increasingly seen to fall within the mandate of humanitarian agencies. Conventional IDP protection frameworks are biased towards a top-down model of politically-averse intervention which marginalizes local initiatives to resist abuse and hinders local control over protection efforts. Yet such local resistance strategies remain the most effective IDP protection measures currently employed in Karen State and other parts of rural Burma. Addressing the protection needs and underlying humanitarian concerns of displaced and potentially displaced people is thus inseparable from engagement with the ‘everyday politics’ of rural villagers. The present article seeks to challenge conventional notions of IDP protection that prioritize a form of state-centric ‘neutrality’ and marginalize the ‘everyday politics’ through which local villagers continue to resist abuse and claim their rights.

**“CYBER SPACE: THE ROLE OF
TECHNOLOGY IN MOBILIZING DISPLACED
KAREN IN THE THAILAND-BURMA
BORDERLANDS”**

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In today’s world, mobilizing people for action has taken on new spatial forms as we come to terms with the idea of a cyber space. We find ourselves living in a paradox: the shrinking of space requires an expansion in consciousness related to ideas, knowledge and accessibility to the greater world. The result of this nexus is the capacity to mobilize large or small groups of people across vast geographical distances. Building on Stanley Brunn’s work on ‘virtual communities,’ this paper will look at how the Karen, an ethnic group from Burma, have utilized new technology and communications infrastructure to support their claims of ethnic persecution and injustice, and to mobilize a dispersed Karen population. Since the nineties the Thailand-Burma borderlands has been defined by the influx of this new technology. Blogs, chat forums, cyber groups, video, digital, and sound recordings are increasingly common mediums in which the Karen document and disseminate information – largely political and cultural in nature. Communications technology has also allowed the Karen to tap into international networks that have the potential to change not only the way in which the Karen conflict will be viewed but also how possible solutions to the problem might be found. While this paper will focus on the solidarity aspects enabled by this new technology in the borderlands, it will also offer some observations on how this might

change the nature of the Karen resistance movement.

**QUESTIONS OF HISTORY AND
HISTORIOGRAPHY**

**“THE RAJAWANGSA KATHA: WRITING
AND TELLING MON NARRATIVE
HISTORIES”**

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This paper is a preliminary discussion of a close reading of a collection of Mon-language historical texts, known as the Rājāwangsa Kathā in Mon and the “Pāk Lat Chronicles” in English, that raise a number of questions and open possibilities for writing new kinds of histories of Mon speakers, Lower Burma, and the interactions between Burmese-, Mon- and T(h)ai speakers.

Mon tradition holds that these texts, thought to originate from the Mon communities of 19th-century Siam, are the earliest known records of Mon history written in Mon. The largest component text is the story of Rājādhirāj, known in Mon, Thai, and Burmese-language versions. Although the Rājāwangsa Kathā is written in Mon, the language reveals extensive interaction with the Burmese and Thai languages, and in fact a large tract appears to have been translated directly from Thai.

Not only have these texts survived until the present, but Rājādhirāj is a central historical narrative in no less than three vernacular traditions of Mainland Southeast Asia. Why are this narrative and its contents so compelling? While the Burmese and Thai

versions are highly regarded for their literary merit, the Mon version challenges the modern Mon reader with difficult language and syntax, and the events depicted do not always agree with the other versions.

Leaving aside the question of the ultimate origins of these texts, I discuss what this particular telling in this collection of historical narratives might reveal to us, including transmission of the texts over time and through speakers of different languages in different places. They suggest alternate chronologies and depictions of events considered seminal in the Mon and Burmese historiographical traditions.

**“COLLAPSOPHE, HISTORICITY AND THE
DECLINE OF PAGAN: CYCLICAL HISTORY
AND HISTORICISM VERSUS GENERATIVITY
IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PRE-MODERN
MYANMAR”**

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The writing of this essay was stimulated by an observation made by Michael A. Aung-Thwin in *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma: Paradigms, Primary Sources, and Prejudices* (1998). A statement that suggests, in contrast to earlier historiographical paradigms, that simply put there was more continuity than discontinuity between the Pagan and Ava dynasties. Myth-busting has political implications and uses that Aung-Thwin addresses in his book, but not in a way that has satisfied his subsequent critics. Revision is an important tool for the historian because it allows for new evidence and methods to be applied to history writing, allowing for a more intelligible and meaningful understanding of

the past. However, as Karl Popper noted, “all description is necessarily selective.” Historicity or historical fact really has little basis beyond the consensus of scholars. If politics is taken to refer to the process of decision-making, then historiography is inherently political. This implies that history writing is susceptible to politicization.

In Myanmar studies (here implying Burma studies rather than Burmese studies) the works of Michael A. Aung-Thwin, including *The Mists of Rāmañña* (2005) and more pertinent to this essay, *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma*, have created a crisis in consensus, because Aung-Thwin's conclusions are far enough removed from the preexisting literature to threaten a revolution in Myanmar historiography. A large part of Aung-Thwin's critique revolves around the dialectic or rise and fall basis of previous history writing (cyclical history), and the perception that earlier historians fit the evidence to the paradigm rather than letting the evidence inform the paradigm. On the other hand, a large part of the criticism directed at Aung-Thwin implies he relies on historicism or historicism (tradition) as the basis for his own paradigm—a paradigm which seems to privilege his “dry zone paramountcy” and its majority ethnically Myanmar population over peripheral areas (in particular littoral and highland areas) and other ethnic contributors (e.g. Mon, Rakhaing and Shan) in the continuum of Myanmar culture and history.

Generativity is the idea that forces unrelated to and independent of the origins of a system (in this case a cultural system or culture) can nonetheless change the system from the inside, adding onto and creating new aspects

that are a cohesive and integral part of that system as a whole. This suggests that new or adapted practices and symbols are not merely a veneer or an imperialism of some sort, but part and parcel of historical change. This concept suggests continuity and adaptation as a historiographical paradigm. In regards to Myanmar history between the final end of the Pagan Dynasty sometime around 1364 AD and the end of the Ava Dynasty in 1531 AD, I suggest there was a minor collapse or loss of knowledge, and then a subsequent reinscription of ritual knowledge as a means to continuity and legitimacy. By looking at changes in regnal titles, as opposed to practices found in donative inscriptions, over the course of the period, it is evident that Hindu-Buddhistic Indian titles were replaced by more Buddhist Indian titles in the transition, while at the same time a continuous ritual basis was maintained. This suggests that those who wielded the specialist knowledge associated with the Pagan court, most likely Brahmins imported from India, either did not make the transition to the Ava court (suggesting a new group of Brahmins), or the ritual needs of the Ava court required a slightly different set of specialized knowledge for some reason. Though this question is left unanswered, the result of a modified epistemological and methodological understanding of the processes of history writing in this case is an emphasis on continuity and adaptation, in which the past influences historical change, but does not necessitate or determine it. This modified historiographical paradigm can help clear up some of the political disagreements that can form during the process of history writing, allowing for the integration of new knowledge into the historiography, while also allowing for an

emphasis on people, rather than structures, as the agents of historical change, while at the same time allowing for more soundly based claims of historicity.

**“WHAT IS ‘FAMILY’ IN BURMA STUDIES:
SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS”**

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This paper explores aspects of conceptual and methodological issues concerning family study in Burma. In particular, I trace the evolution of academic dialogues about the family in Burma studies since the time of Pagan and analyze critically the relevance and usefulness of the “family” as a category of academic study on Burma. One of the initial works that placed the family at the foreground is Mi Mi Khaing’s autobiographical account, *Burmese Family* (1946). Nonetheless, when the “family” is broadly defined, alternative headings such as religion, law, kinship, and gender, for instance, also become vehicles to study aspects of family dynamics. To take religion as an example, the household has long served as a donor to the Sangha or Buddhist church, starting as early as the time of the ancient kingdom of Pagan from the 9th to the 13th centuries (Aung-Thwin, 1983). Inheritance laws, which have typically been characterized by the bilateral pattern of allocating family possessions equally to male and female lines (Okudaira, 1980), are another area that have brought to light norms of family relationships. The study of “kinship” and “marriage” has also in more recent years provided an alternative vocabulary to document aspects of family dynamics (Spiro, 1977). Novels and short stories, too, have illuminated the social and

cultural fabrics of family life through discussions of gender roles and relations (Ma Ma Lay, 1991).

I plan to further document and analyze change and continuity in family dynamics in Burma since Pagan through (re)reading particular types of sources in Burmese originals and English translations that have been incorporated extensively into Burma studies yet whose usefulness for the study of family and household has yet to be examined in depth. One depository of family and household history in Burma I plan to compile is *thamaing* and *sittan*, histories of localities and administrative records, respectively. I will be documenting the surviving *thamaing* and *sittan* to chronicle change and continuity of household structure and the household's relations with the state and the sangha. I will also consult selected inscriptions, *dhammathat* and literary materials. Collectively, these readings will contribute to building source bases on structural and ideational histories of the family and household in Burma. The primary focus of this paper is to review English-language literature. This exercise will lead to subsequent research in Burmese, which I plan to conduct upon the completion of language training at the Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute this summer.

SHAN 1

“BLASTING THE PAST: OR WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE SILVER SCREEN PROMOTES BURMAN-CENTRIC HISTORY AMONGST ETHNICALLY DIVERSE VIEWERS”

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In her detailed ethnography of television viewing practices in India, the anthropologist Purnima Mankekar argues that the semiotic skills of viewers are shaped by their positions along multiple axes of power. In post-independence Burma, we can see a growth and expansion of the culture industries, and particularly following Ne Win's coup of 1962, a consolidation of media production and content at the behest of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party. How these shifts in the culture industries of Burma were meted out by their consumers demands closer examination. The film *Shwezayan*, released in 1963, ostensibly about the history of the 11th century Shan princess, Sao Mon La, who was given to the Bagan King Anawrahta, incited some Shan viewers to protest. Although, arguably, most representations of King Anawrahta at this time could be considered examples of Burman-centric, revisionist history, it was the (mis)representation of the Shan princess which struck a chord amongst some Shan viewers. In examining Shan language sources on the history of Sao Mon La, I have found there are key differences in the framing of the Mao King Sao Hom Mong's motivations for giving his daughter to Anawrahta's court, the notions of civilization, and the role of this Shan princess once she arrived in Bagan.

Exploring these differences in Shan and Burmese-language history texts, and looking at the particularities of the film *Shwezayan*, this paper will flesh out this example as a "hot button" issue in comparative historiography and popular culture representations of history which continue to have relevance to ethnic relations in Burma today.

**“WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SHAN?
SHIFTING ETHNIC MARKERS FOR SHAN IN
NORTHERN THAILAND”**

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The recent influx of Shan migrants from Burma into northern Thailand has prompted a fresh reappraisal of what it means to be “Shan” by those with a claim to that identity on the Thai side of the border. In this paper, I will explore some of the ways Shan ethnic identity is being cultivated, displayed, and marketed by various groups in Mae Hong Son province and in the city of Chiang Mai. I am especially interested in drawing attention to the increasingly complicated connections that exist between different “kinds” of Shans in this region and how these connections contribute to emerging views of Shan identity.

**“THE CHAIN OF CHIANG AND VIANG:
QUESTIONS FOR LINGUISTICS AND
ARCHAEOLOGY”**

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According to the U.S. Library of Congress Country Studies 1994 Laos webpage, (<http://hdl.loc.gov/gdc/cntrystd.la>), the

origin of the toponym *chiang* (Chiang Rung) and cognates, such as *keng* (Kengtung) and *xiang* (Xiangkuang) derives from the Nanchao administrative practice of organizing its ten prefectures into *kien*—a Sino-Tibetan, not a Tai term. The purpose of this presentation is largely to investigate the linguistic and environmental geography of the term, which extends in chain-like fashion from Jing Hong, in Yunnan, Kengtung, in Burma, Chiang Mai in Thailand, Xieng Khuang, in Laos, and into Vietnam. The Tai Dam area of northwest Vietnam has many places named *chiang*. Hoang Luong (2004) has brought to light the obscured history of Tai places named *chiang* in Vietnam. He points out that even Hanoi was once called Chiang Loi. Even more tantalizing are the ruins of a 6500 year old village, Chiang-chao of the Yang-shao culture in North China. Maps reveal a regional pattern of historically important *chiang* located along the Mekong river and tributaries in one unified zone, and near the Red and Black rivers in northwest Vietnam in another concentration. Allied with *chiang* is the toponym *viang*, but much less prominently. Anthropologists such as Condominas and O’Connor have paid a great deal of attention to the significance of *müiang* in their theory of “emboxment” of mandalas but have largely overlooked the place of *chiang* in a moving chain of trade and marriage alliances among the elites of these emergent urban centers. Borrowing of the terms *chiang* and *viang* is at play; *müiang* is a native/proto Tai term which simply meant “basin” before it acquired political reference. A cursory look at older sketches of the remnants of walls in some of these *chiang* reveal a circular/oval pattern with as many as twelve gates in the case of Kengtung. The question raised in this paper

is what triggered the chain of these linguistic and archaeological events—the Mongol invasion? A corollary question is what curtailed further dispersion of the linguistic and archaeological form?

**“A BOOK FOR THE DEAD: A SHAN
BUDDHIST TRADITION BEING A MEANS FOR
THE PRESERVATION OF THEIR CULTURAL
IDENTITY”**

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In Shan Buddhist communities, when a member of a family dies, the remaining members of the family do some good deeds and then transfer the merit of their good deeds to their departed relative. They believe their departed relative will receive the merit and as a result he/she will be reborn or have a better life in a future rebirth. One of the common methods of merit-making for the departed one is to hold a formal ceremony comprising many kinds of ritual performances, such as giving a feast to the whole village, making offerings to monks, and listening to sermons. The ceremony usually starts at the house of the family of the dead first and then ends at the village temple. One of the most important things to do in the ceremony is to donate a Buddhist text. The text is usually composed in Shan poetry in the form of a manuscript. The poetic text is performed at the ceremony, which is attended by older people. In Thailand, there is a tradition of producing a text called a “cremation volume” published in remembrance of a dead person. There is also a Pali saying: “The gift of the dhamma excels all other gifts.” In this paper, I shall examine the Shan tradition of producing Buddhist texts

and compare it with that of the Thai and other similar Buddhist traditions. The central point of this paper is an analysis of the Shan tradition of presenting Buddhist texts as a way of preserving Shan Buddhist identity.

**POLITICAL SCIENCE: NATION, STATE AND
ECONOMY**

**“BURMA’S ECONOMY 2008: DECLINE,
DISASTER....AND WAYS FORWARD”**

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‘Economic development’ is not a process that is currently taking place in Burma. Indeed, and notwithstanding the windfall gains from natural gas exports that are currently accruing, present-day Burma is perhaps best described as an ‘un-developing’ country, as the modest gains made in the early 1990s are steadily wound back. In 2008, and in the immediate period ahead, some growth in GDP will be apparent, but this will largely be the result of the gas windfalls that otherwise mask an economy that is regressing in every important respect. This paper will present the current state of Burma’s economy and explore the reforms that will be necessary if Burma is to achieve any measure of economic prosperity.

“THE WAR ON DRUGS IN MYANMAR”

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The international community has evinced a desire to reduce drug production in Myanmar. There is controversy concerning the extent of production over the last twelve

years. This obfuscates debate as to how best to proceed.

With the cooperation of the Burmese Government, both the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United States have conducted opium surveys over the 10 years ended in 2005 and the UNODC has continued through early 2007.

Because of even greater obstacles to accurate measurement, Myanmar, the United States and the UNODC have not attempted to survey, much less publish, any precise numbers on the annual production and distribution of amphetamine pills. The last two have offered only estimates.

Those surveys conclude that opium cultivation and production has decreased dramatically since 1996. Narcotics interdiction by the Burmese government has increased substantially in that time. The total area under poppy cultivation has diminished between 75 and 80 percent since 1996. The decrease in total yield is equally dramatic. This trend was reversed in both categories only in the 2007 growing season.

The cessation of opium cultivation in many areas of the Shan State has caused farmers' incomes to diminish precipitously. The decreasing acreage and tonnage through 2005-6 increased the per kilogram price substantially for the opium actually harvested in 2006 and 2007. This, together with the lack of adequate assistance to farmers who terminated cultivation and suffered diminished income, prompted a minority of them to relocate and to resume poppy growing, given the price incentive and lack of assistance to act otherwise.

The failure of the international community, especially the United States, to render adequate assistance to these cultivators threatens to drive more of them to resume poppy farming.

The refusal of the United States to certify Myanmar as making substantial efforts to interdict drugs continues. Were the policy reversed and American assistance calibrated to continue suppression by Myanmar, and to additional aid by other countries and, to the extent appropriate, the relevant cease-fire groups, then the cultivators' dire straits would be ameliorated. Moreover, an alteration in the impasse between the American and Burmese Governments might be commenced.

“EROSION OF TRUST IN MYANMAR BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT”

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Myanmar adopted a market-oriented economy in 1988 after the failure of the socialist economic system, or “Burmese Way to Socialism,” which was formulated in 1962. A number of private firms engaged in production and especially in trading emerged. Before 1988, private property was strictly limited and almost never protected. However, since 1988, those firms have faced business transactions of unprecedented scale and scope. As activities in international trade are legally permitted, many traders or players have been confronting new challenges and opportunities.

Traditionally, transactions were carried out on a cash-basis. Both parties in trade were old friends or relatives. However, now they

need to do business with total strangers. Conventional ways of making transactions through oral contract no longer work for them. On the other hand, they seem to have a very low level of knowledge about business contracts.

Myanmar businessmen are rarely willing to make deals with government officials and officers. Despite this reluctance, they are obliged to do so. Furthermore, the scale and scope of transactions has become extremely large for them. Additionally, as their businesses become exposed to integration into the world economy, they become vulnerable to instability and unpredictability in the international market.

Poor understanding of business practices, weak enforcement of contracts, heavy reliance on go-betweens, abrupt changes in markets, and the rudimentary role of NGOs, all lead to the erosion of trust among players on the business playground.

Business people need to strengthen the capacity and capability of their organizations. Knowledge of business contracts has become essential for their firms. On the other hand, they need to comprehend relevant business laws. Above all, there must be enforcement of contracts and agreements which could strengthen commitment to the agreements.

“BUILDING A BRIDGE: LITERAL AND METAPHORICAL BUILDING OF NATIONAL UNITY IN BURMA”

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The ‘Desire for National Unity’ has been at the forefront of political slogans of the Burmese government for decades. This desire is integral in justifying continued military rule and it has manifested itself in numerous programs that cater to a homogenous vision of society in an ethnically diverse and conflicted nation. The human adaptation of Burma’s physical landscape, with its multitude of waterways and diverse topography, has also reflected this desire for unity through the construction of roadways, bridges and the like. To some extent, this has integrated outlying and inaccessible regions into the central economic and administrative zones. Bridge building, in particular, has played a significant role in this physical adaptation under the present government. It is part of a wider campaign to promote the image of Burma’s progression towards ‘a modern and developed nation’, but it also can be understood as a salient metaphor for the government’s ideological program of cultural and political hegemony. Within the physical and social landscape, bridge building has become manifest both in form and word. This paper will examine connections between the literal construction of bridges by the present government and bridge building as a metaphor in the government’s nationalist discourse and its impact on ethnic relations in Burma. It will propose that bridge construction, as a move towards a ‘modern and developed nation,’ also reinforces the desire for national unity

and a singular as opposed to multi-nationalist state.

EDUCATION

“RECOGNITION OF IDENTITY AS CONTROL OF DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY BURMESE STATE HISTORY TEXTBOOKS”

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It has long been recognized that one of the primary functions of schooling is to reproduce state ideologies (Althusser, 1971; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), and in particular to interpolate the conceptions of citizenship and identity that benefit dominant groups (Luykx, 1999). With these insights in mind, I will examine the language and images in contemporary Burmese state history textbooks. I will argue that the metaphors, metonyms, and images used to describe identity (ethnicity, nationality, and religion) reveal underlying ideologies of inclusion, exclusion, and boundary maintenance. In order to make this argument, I will draw on Frederic Schaffer's (1998) method of “language-centered conceptual analysis” and Sara Ahmed's (2004) readings of the emotional performativity of texts in the public domain. My argument will illustrate how these textbooks display what Mary Callahan (2004) calls the simultaneous homogenization and differentiation of ethnic identity in the post-Socialist era in Myanmar. Furthermore, I will suggest that these texts reveal a specific governmental strategy: recognition of difference in order to control identity formation and “manage” diversity (Markell, 2003). Finally, I will assert that history textbooks appropriate for

a federal, democratic, post-dictatorship Burma would need to present multiple perspectives on identity while making room for student participation.

“NGO'S IN BURMA/MYANMAR: THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE AND ETHICAL PERSONHOOD IN CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES”

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Ideas of empowerment, self-reliance, and capacity-building are ubiquitous in today's development, humanitarian and other aid efforts. While many aid workers show enthusiasm for these concepts, social science scholars have tended to critique them for being neoliberal forms of governmentality (Duffield 2001; Sharma 2006). In this paper I circumvent an analysis that takes such positions of idealism or cynicism. Rather, I follow anthropologists who study NGO activities such as capacity-building as social practices that generate forms of collective knowledge and ethical personhood (Bornstein 2003; Feldman 2007; Fortune 2001; Redfield 2006; Riles 2000). That is, instead of assessing whether particular capacity-building efforts truly enable people or in fact ensnare them in structures of domination, I ask: What kinds of knowledge do NGO workers create in capacity-building activities, and how do these activities cultivate particular affective responses and bodily practices in order to form ethical forms of personhood? How might NGO workers incorporate technical NGO tools, particular cultural values, or other concepts such as trust (Lahtaw 2007) in their activities? This exploration of knowledge-making and ethical personhood in NGO

capacity-building activities is an initial effort towards understanding the effects of the rise of civil society groups in Burma/Myanmar (Heidel 2006), as well as the most recent work of international and local aid organizations after cyclone Nargis.

“AT THE INTERSECTION OF EDUCATION & POLITICS: HOW TEACHERS NEGOTIATE CIVIC EDUCATION IN BURMA”

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This paper explores how teachers’ political and educational contexts have affected their practice of civic education between 1988 and the present. Government sanctioned civic education-related curricular content is discussed, followed by an analysis of how teachers determine what civic education material to deliver to their students and how to deliver it. Based on this analysis two key questions will be considered: (1) what degree of agency do teachers have to encourage or discourage their students to dissent against the government? and (2) to what extent have teacher-student interactions determined students’ choice to engage or not engage in political activism against the Burmese government?

This study is based on field work carried out from May to August 2008 in which the author interviewed former teachers and students from Burma. Former teachers include those who taught at government schools as well as those who taught at private tutoring centers.

“MYANMAR UNICODE: COMPARATIVE STUDY ON USING ADHOC FONTS AND STANDARDIZED ENCODING FOR MYANMAR SCRIPTS”

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The Burmese language is used by about 50 million people who live mostly in Myanmar as well as in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Australia and the United States. A Burmese font using True Type Technology was developed more than two decades ago. However, the True Type Font can only be used for desktop publishing purposes. Due to the lack of standard encoding, different vendors use different mapping. Unicode 5.1 was published in the first week of April, 2008. It is the first-ever standard encoding for Myanmar scripts, intended to be used by Burmese, Mon, Shan, Karen, and Arakanese. Some local and international developers started work with fonts based on this standard encoding. With this development the Burmese Language Project at OpenOffice.org published its beta version of the Burmese language Office Suite in tandem with Unicode 5.1. Wikipedia is the major web developer that uses Unicode 5.1 compliant Burmese language web pages. Though it has only been a little more than six months since the standard encoding was published, major developers are still improving the software. There are many more things that need to be done.

SHAN 2

“BEING SHAN ON THE THAI SIDE OF THE BORDER: CONTINUITIES AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN SHAN CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN MAEHONGSON, THAILAND”

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My focus is on Shan in Maehongson Province who are long term residents in Thailand and are Thai citizens. This separates them from more recent Shan refugees and illegal immigrants as well as those Shan who no longer live in Maehongson and have acquired other Thai regional identities. Since I began my research in 1977, many aspects of the community's social, economic, and cultural lives have changed. They've gone from being a relatively isolated community to one entangled in the larger political and cultural systems that entail being both Shan and Thai. Their political rituals have shifted in parallel with the shifts in the larger political and economic context. While ceremonies that focus on the community as a bounded political unit continue, other ceremonies have been added that relate the community to the larger Thai nation state. Here “being Shan” is an ethnic identity that is counterbalanced with being Thai citizens. In this paper I explore the contours of being Shan and being Thai citizens for the ways in which these categories and identities play out in the larger political, social, and economic contexts.

“PORT POLITIES IN THE HILLS: SHAN STATES AND TRADE IN THE CHINA-BURMA (MYANMAR) BORDER REGION”

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This paper draws on work I have done on the China-Burma border between 2001 and 2007 as well as my earlier research on Shan in Burma and northwestern Thailand. Shan traders cross national boundaries and interact with a wide range of ethnic groups. They serve as key cultural and knowledge brokers, facilitating the trade in precious gems. These trading relationships help structure the political, economic, and social relations of Shan polities. As such, these polities resemble the "port polities" on the coasts. Here I support my argument by showing how Shan polities interacted with a broad range of uplanders.

POLITICAL SCIENCE: INTRA-ASIAN FOREIGN POLICY

“THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EMERGENCE OF TAIWAN FOR THE FOREIGN POLICY OF BURMA”

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I would like to argue that although Burma engaged in an active and independent foreign policy up to the early 1960s, taking part, for example, in the non-aligned movement's Bandung Conference, it later adopted an isolationist policy in order to defend itself from intrusion by the PRC and to avoid a proxy war between the US and

PRC in the 1960s and 1970s. So the generals' introverted and xenophobic attitude was part of the Burmese response to cold war politics, in which the PRC was fighting remnants of the KMT in Burma supported by the CIA through Thailand. Burma's social democratic government had already experienced stress due to the multi-pronged insurgency born with independence. The government's leaders became still more nervous in the face of the conflict between the PRC and KMT. Their greatest fear was that Burma would be invaded by the PRC as it pursued the KMT. Although they expected to get diplomatic help from the UN and the USA, the main supporter of Taiwan, their only option as they waited was to strengthen the Burmese army. Their strictly non-aligned foreign policy became more entrenched. In 1962, the army seized power to suppress attempts on the part of ethnic minorities--suspected to be close to SEATO--to force the federal issue. The military leaders then imposed an isolationist foreign policy. Burma was no longer active in the non-aligned movement and it refused to join ASEAN as the latter's member states still accommodated Western military bases. The current junta retains many of these suspicious and aggressive attitudes in dealing with the international community, as it seeks to protect the country's national unity and sovereignty from foreign influence. But these attitudes pose a great obstacle to Burma's road to democracy and national reconciliation.

**“DILEMMAS OF THAILAND'S FOREIGN
POLICY TOWARD MYANMAR FROM 2001
TO 2004: A COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS”**

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Border skirmishes in 2001 and 2002 marked the low-point in relations between Thailand and Myanmar. In order to alleviate tensions, Thaksin Shinawatra's government provided a series of economic agreements with Myanmar. The Thai government named this strong, economic-oriented foreign policy, "Forward Engagement." Apparently, the relationship between Thailand and Myanmar has improved since both governments signed the 'Pagan Declaration' in 2003. Conflicts and confrontations between the two neighbors have eased. Even though Thailand has gained economic benefits, this paper argues that Thailand has had to pay a cost to its own democratic values in exchange for this better relationship with Myanmar. At the time the declaration was signed, Thailand was accused of neglecting the democratic principles on which Thailand has always relied. This situation presents a dilemma for Thai foreign policy. This paper will apply a cost-benefit analysis to explain this feature of foreign policy by using Thaksin Shinawatra's government as a case study. This paper concludes that border proximity and different regime types between Thailand and Myanmar pose a policy dilemma to which no Thai government can be indifferent.

**“INDIA’S BURMA POLICY IN QUESTION –
ACHIEVEMENTS AND SETBACKS OF THE
NEW INDO-BURMESE PARTNERSHIP”**

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Since 1993, India has opted for a smooth diplomatic engagement with the Burmese military regime, dropping its initial, open support for the civil democratic opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi. At the dawn of the 21st century, India was facing new strategic stakes at its eastern borders. Not only China’s obvious thrust into Burma, which was kicked off by the 1988 changing of the guard in Rangoon, but also the rise of insurgency along the Indo-Burmese borders and the desire of Indian liberal thinkers to catch up with the booming economies of Southeast Asia, made India rethink its approach to neighbouring Burma.

The proposed paper intends to discuss the achievements of fifteen years of India’s constructive engagement with the Burmese military regime and the setting up of a new Indo-Burmese relationship. Has this new Burma policy paid off in the strategic, commercial and political fields?

Based upon much fieldwork in and around Burma, this paper will thus postulate that while China seems well entrenched in Burma’s strategic and economic space, India still faces many obstacles in its tentative thrust eastward and struggles to get a credible toehold there. Although limited successes have been obvious, with rising bilateral trade and mutual understanding in military cooperation, strong geopolitical obstacles, political mistrust and historical legacies impede the swift establishment of a

close and valuable partnership between Burma and India, the latter appearing much less influential in its neighbouring country than China or even Thailand.

**“WEAKNESS IN THE TRADITIONAL AREA
STUDIES APPROACH AND BURMA”**

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Burma Studies has traditionally been included as a subject within Area Studies. In this approach, only what happens within the national boundaries of a country is treated as relevant to the study of that country’s problems. From two to four decades of Burma Studies have shown that these parameters are too limited. They have discouraged scholars from talking or collaborating with each other as much as they should, and from paying enough attention to systemic and regional matters, not to mention the international setting in which both Burma and Burma Studies need to operate.

For instance, academic articles and journalistic ones are event-driven and have time only to speak about the most micro-economic of matters, whereas it is macro-economics that we need to understand. The historians, some of whom fall back on an ultra-nationalistic model, have also failed us, as they are unable to handle the problems of the moment and apparently see nothing wrong with the SPDC’s paradigm. Most Burma scholarship is focused on subject matter which is limited to Burma, without enough cross-system, cross-national, intra- and inter-regional and international analysis. That this approach has failed is widely evident from how the junta took advantage

of the misguided approach of Burma's friends and the international community to “depoliticize” Burma strategy during Cyclone Nargis. As a result, aid has disappeared into the junta’s pockets. Ban Ki-Moon’s visit did not succeed, nor did that of Mr. Gambari during the Saffron Revolution in 2007, nor have any of the UN Rapporteurs since 1988. At the same time, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is still under house arrest, the NLD's leaders and members and other dissidents have been under arrest or under severe oppression, and the junta is continuing with “business as usual” – in fact it has even won windfall profits from natural gas etc.

My 1994 dissertation and my article in *Asian Survey* that summarized it mentioned that we need to look at systems which were then similar to Burma’s, such as the former Soviet Union, and the PRC and its economic and hopefully political reforms. We now also need to look at China and India and their preferred position as economically strong neighbors of Burma, and at the United States and the Western world and China and India as strongly emerging powers in this world as we know it. The dissident community is now highly conscious of this, but the academic community is not.

I would like to propose that the Burma academic community reach out to other approaches, including the dissident community, and the artistic and writerly ones, which are now at the forefront. This would result in much more cogent advice, and much less waste of economic and human resources in the international responses to ongoing and recurrent major crises in Burma. That the crises will

continue and also continue to escalate is beyond doubt.

SINO-BURMESE LIVES AND CULTURES

“THE SOUNDSCAPES OF ETHNIC CHINESE IN RANGOON BETWEEN 1949 AND 1988”

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This paper explores the soundscapes generated between 1948 and 1988 by a group of Chinese migrants in Rangoon. The concept of soundscapes allows us to undertake a flexible and inclusive approach: that is, to study the cultural process through which people engage in music. Consider that music has been traveling transnationally to reach a broader audience. Most places today support a wide range of disparate music that might be rooted in different cultures but is reinterpreted in new ways. I embrace these ideas in this current study. Drawing on extensive ethnographic and archival research, I attempt to show how the soundscapes of the Chinese community in Rangoon were constructed.

By the early 1950s, a confluence of transnational forces had helped form diverse soundscapes in Rangoon’s Chinatown. Sundry musical ideas, ensembles, and organizations were thriving, due primarily to the migrants' strong connection to their ancestral homeland. In particular, the conflicting nationalistic ideologies of the Kuomintang (KMT) in Taiwan and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in China brought most music into the bipolar political arena. Yet the anti-Chinese riots and the Burmese government’s nationalizations in

the 1960s called a halt to such musical prosperity. Still, the Chinese musical scene's "dark era" did not last too long. By the mid-1970s, the Chinese community had reconstructed its soundscapes in light of new cultural experiences.

“LIFE HISTORY OF TWO KOKANG CHINESE IN BURMA”

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Applying the individual-centered approach to ethnography, I attempt to look into the life history of two Kokang Chinese in Burma. Kokang is located in northern Shan State adjacent to China's Yunnan province. It is primarily a Chinese inhabited area. The ancestors of many residents arrived there from Yunnan a few hundred years ago. The Kokangnese are recognized as an ethnic group in Burma. The two individuals treated here are father and son; the time span of their life history runs from the 1960s to the present day. Through their narrative accounts, I highlight the intricate intertwining of the subjectivity of these two people with their contingent historical circumstances. Their life experiences reflect the social history of the Shan state as well as a broader picture of Burma's socio-political trajectory. Their personal development illustrates the dynamic agency with which they expanded their social connections.

“THE CHINESE IN BURMA. TRADITIONAL MIGRATION OR STRATEGY FOR A CONQUEST”

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Stretched between China and India, Burma, the only country in Indochina to share a common border with the two Asian giants, has been saved by its mountains, deep jungles and swampy shores from the influence of its powerful northern neighbour. For two thousand years this land had a history of its own, progressing from a loose organization of petty tribal chiefs to a series of independent indigenous emperors ruling over most of the territory of contemporary Burma.

Following the British intervention and annexation (1824-1886), Burma was exposed to a steady immigration of Indian and Chinese workers needed by the colonial administration to control and develop the country. For nearly a century, newcomers poured into Burma with the British colonizers' blessings. After independence (1948) the new republican rulers pushed both Indian and Chinese communities to leave Burma, either to go back to their countries of origin or emigrate elsewhere. That nationalist policy, formulated to preserve “the purity of the Burmese race,” was reinforced by the “Burmese Way to Socialism” promoted by the military regime of General Ne Win from 1962 to 1988.

Since the advent of the new junta, that policy, although not officially abandoned, has been reversed. While border relations with India have been kept at a minimum, the

generals rapidly and quietly removed administrative obstacles in order to ease the way for Chinese immigrants. The Yunnanese and the inhabitants of Shan State of Chinese ancestry took immediate advantage of this favourable political environment. The consequence is that for a decade now Mandalay has experienced a strong Chinese immigration: Burma's first "Chinatown" seems to be in the making there. The process has also started in Rangoon.

HISTORICAL BUDDHISMS

RESPONDENT: CHIT HLAING

"BUDDHISM, LAW, AND SACRED SPACE"

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Focusing especially on case study materials that concern Burma and the wider South and Southeast Asian Buddhist world of which it is a part, this paper addresses how some Buddhists have understood the intersections between law and sacred space. To accomplish this task, the paper explores relationships between sacred space and law that were established by Buddhist monks and lay people alike well before the advent of Burma's colonial and post-colonial periods (periods which witnessed the destabilization of Burma's traditional legal systems). In particular, the paper examines the themes of law and sacred space as established in the Kalyani Inscriptions. Ultimately, drawing on the evidence in the inscriptions, the paper argues a series of points about Buddhism, law, and sacred space in South and Southeast Asia. It also concludes by arguing that, in regard to

Burma itself, a particular kind of emphasis on Buddhist identity, law, and sacred space has not only survived but flourished because of certain developments (e.g. military rule) in Burma's tumultuous post-colonial history.

"CLASSIFICATION OF BUDDHIST LITERATURE IN BURMESE INSCRIPTIONS AND 'HISTORIES OF PITAKA' (*PITAKAT THAMAING*)"

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Large scale donations of manuscripts and the establishment of libraries have been an important form of elite merit-making in Burma at least since the eleventh century. The requisite recopying of manuscripts and the donations themselves were described in lithic inscriptions and in manuscript inventories. The ritualization of manuscript recopying sponsored by Avan overlords and their chief consorts in the Nyaungyan period (1597-1752) resulted in the development of a specialized genre of Burmese literature called "histories of Pitaka" (*pitakat thamaing*), defining the domain of sacred texts that the court and other pious patrons of the sasana should help to preserve. All these documents taken together comprise a unique source of information on the history of Buddhist teaching in Burma. A comparative analysis of these documents reveals a number of significant changes in the ways pitakat literature have been conceived and what texts have been understood as comprising it.

The paper analyses two inscriptions listing manuscripts donated to religious establishments in the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries (Singhavira Sujjabala or

Theingaweit Thotzabo Inscription of 1223 and Tetnwe-kyaung Inscription of 1442) and compares their data with several pitakat-thamaings of the sixteenth (?), seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It suggests that changes in classification of texts and the structure of manuscript inventories reflect shifts in authority assigned to certain classes of texts and individual works. It also discusses possible links between these changes and more general trends in the history of Buddhism in Burma and identifies some implications this may have for our understanding of textual Buddhism and Buddhist practice in Burma.

“HYBRID BUDDHISM IN EARLY PAGAN”

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Recent scholarship has undermined various truisms about Myanmar’s history, including the ‘purity’ of Pagan’s Buddhism classified by the country’s current historical memory as “Theravada.” Guillon’s discovery of Mulasarvastivada traces in one temple, and Gillman’s linkage between a famous image and Sanskrit sources, reflect innovative contestations of those claims. The question is whether such traces indicate the co-existence of different Buddhist paths in Pagan’s history. I will argue that though such paths may well have been co-present, evidence insinuates something else. It suggests a capacious Pali-defined construct harboring what are *now* regarded as non-Pali components.

To prove this contention, I will examine the presence of beings like Rahu, featured in images of Mara’s Attack and Retreat on the Night of Enlightenment. Though

embedded in the Nidana-katha, Pali informed Buddha biography, they derive from non-Pali narratives. Such details have broader significance because the name of Siddhartha’s son Rahula is differently interpreted by various Buddhist paths. The absence in Pagan era temples of images depicting Siddhartha’s last look at his sleeping wife and child indicates deliberate omissions of conflicting components from Pali sources in favor of information from Sanskrit ones. An extended depiction of the Buddha’s visit to his son, in an early temple, opposite the image containing Rahu, sheds light on early Burmese monasticism, for which Rahula is a paradigmatic monk. Such visual clues echo an inclusive late 11th century Buddhist sensibility governed by a slightly differently redacted Pali Vinaya that harbored details now associated with different translocal languages and Vinayas.

“DHAMMAZEDI AND THE WRITING OF MON BUDDHIST HISTORY”

PATRICK PRANKE
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The inscriptions erected by the Mon king, Dhammazedi, in the 15th century are arguably the earliest examples of historical writing in Burma, and without a doubt they have exercised a greater influence on Mon and Burmese religio-political historiography than any other sources. Partly because of their importance, the historical veracity of Dhammazedi’s inscriptions has been much debated in Western scholarship, and in recent years the king’s role in constructing a history for the Mon kingdom has been the subject of renewed critical scrutiny. In this paper I will examine the narrative in Dhammazedi’s Kalyani Inscription erected

in 1479 and compare it with what is found in several inscriptions installed by the king subsequently at pagoda restorations elsewhere in his kingdom. By applying a method of redaction criticism to these materials, I hope to suggest what of Dhammazedī's "Mon history" was adapted from existing indigenous sources, and what were his own innovations to the narrative that has come down to us today.

ROUND TABLE

**RESEARCH IN BURMA: DIFFICULTIES AND
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HISTORY RESEARCH

**STATE INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY AND
CULTURE**

**"INFLUENCES AND NON-
INFLUENCES OF WESTERN THINKING AND
LAW REGARDING MADNESS AND
(CRIMINAL) RESPONSIBILITY IN BURMESE
SOCIAL AND LEGAL DISCOURSE"**

MYINT ZAN

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The presentation will include:

- excerpts from a traditional Burmese medical text describing the causes, symptoms and remedies for mental diseases or madness
- a query as to whether or not some of the critiques of the foundations or 'paradigm' of the concept of 'madness' made by Michel Foucault in his *Madness and Civilization* can be extrapolated and applied to the Burmese context
- a survey of and comments on the part of modern Burmese elite psychologists, psychiatrists, writers in their 'primers' and novels concerning mental diseases, concepts of madness, and the portrayal of mental patients
- an analysis as to why some dissident Western criticisms of the Western concept of madness or mental illness, such as those of Foucault and Thomas Szasz (author, among others, of *The Myth of Mental Illness*), have not seeped through into modern Burmese elite discourse,
- a brief exposition of the legal concept of insanity and criminal responsibility as can be gleaned from the Burmese apex courts decisions since the 1950s
- an analysis as to why some of the legal issues, such as proposals to abolish the 'insanity defense' (in criminal cases) altogether on the one hand, or to adopt a more liberal approach as regards the insanity defense (benefiting, in general, alleged offenders or the accused in criminal cases) on the other, which are some issues that can be discerned in aspects of Western legal literature,

are ‘non-issues’ in the current Burmese social and legal discourse.

“RE-EXAMINING THE RELATION BETWEEN THE UPPER BURMA VILLAGE REGULATION (1887) AND LOCAL SOCIETY”

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Many historians who describe the change that took place in the society of Upper Burma under the British colonial administration have focused on the Upper Burma Village Regulation. Enacted in 1887, the purpose of this regulation was to establish a "village system." Under the village system--or in brief, the "one village, one headman system"--a new administrative unit called the "village" was instituted, and a village headman was appointed by the government. With this system, the colonial government aimed to administer the local society efficiently with respect to both security and revenue collection. The village system is thought to have led to transformations in every part of Upper Burma because the position of the *myothugyi*, the local official in the pre-colonial period, was abolished. Moreover, the social ties among the local people dissolved as well. However, upon re-investigating the documents pertaining to the situation before and after the enactment of the regulation, it was found that the system had to adapt itself to the districts' prevailing administrative circumstances. Some district officials claimed that they faced great difficulty in applying the principle of the village system to their jurisdictions, while others stressed the administrative usefulness of *myothugyis*, whose influence over the people still

persisted. The additional rules eventually included in the regulation in 1890 contained provisions allowing the incumbent *myothugyis* to retain their positions for a certain period of time. Thus colonial administrative policies like the village system never penetrated local society without some modifications in response to local circumstances, which varied among the districts.

“SOUTHEAST ASIAN SLAVERY AND SLAVE GATHERING WARFARE AS A VECTOR FOR CULTURAL TRANSMISSION: THE CASE OF BURMA AND THAILAND”

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Southeast Asia has long been understood as a place where cultures hybridize and interact. Global trading networks, migration, religious pilgrimages, and labor diasporas are just a few of the globalizing forces that are critical to understanding the political, economic and cultural development of Southeast Asia as a region. Yet I believe that this framework has contributed to another feature of Southeast Asian studies: the general sense that the region is incoherent; that it essentially contains many wildly heterogeneous groups that share some common cultural features due to shared contact with foreign groups and foreign ideologies, but relatively little due to intra-regional relations.

In this paper I will argue that the region's endemic slave-gathering warfare should be examined in the very same ways that we study the movement of “foreign groups” within the region. I demonstrate that slave-gathering warfare should be considered a

significant force or vector for cultural exchange and adoption amongst populations located in Southeast Asian. To make this argument I will focus on warfare between kingdoms located in what are today the modern states of Burma and Thailand and examine two art forms that appear to have moved into Burma via Thai captives: the Ramayana dance tradition and lacquer etching.

**BUDDHISM IN EARLY 20TH AND 21ST
CENTURIES**

**“THE RISE OF THE LAITY AND THE
ORIGINS OF INSIGHT MEDITATION”**

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Group practice of insight meditation among lay people, though today a world-wide phenomenon, began in a particular place: early twentieth-century Burma. This paper will explore what happened in colonial Burma at the time that set the stage for the mass meditation movement. Specifically, I will examine how the Burmese monk Ledi Sayadaw responded to perceived threats to Buddhism in Burma by forming social organizations for common lay people that played a key part in preparing them to do something that had not been done before: to take up the serious practice of insight meditation on a large-scale basis. Paying close attention, on the one hand, to the Buddhist intellectual resources and cosmological worldview upon which Ledi relied to create these organizations will allow us to consider the role of tradition in responding to change and why this led to the promotion of meditation. On the other hand, considering the colonial context in which

Ledi formed these groups will allow us to assess the relationship between Ledi's actions and Western influence, particularly from the British.

This paper argues that Ledi's traditional worldview formed the basis for his understanding not only of the means to deal with challenges to Burmese Buddhism, but his understanding of what those challenges were. Challenges defined in this way, through a particular Theravada cultural modernity, allowed insight meditation to take root in Burma and, ultimately, to spread throughout Southeast Asia and beyond.

**“SHOES AND SHIKHOS: BUDDHISM,
RITUALS AND BOUNDARIES OF RELIGION”**

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British colonialism brought challenges to the categories and concepts that organized daily life in Burma, challenges that were often experienced and confronted through Buddhist discourse and practice. The interactions between Buddhism and colonial rule in Burma offer valuable purchase for investigating issues of how local movements negotiate the constraints of colonial categories and how they reinterpret these categories for local needs. This paper will investigate these issues by looking at a series of conflicts between colonial officials and Buddhist leaders in Burma over proper rituals of respect. On a number of different occasions the Burmese objected to the ways in which British policy required them to demonstrate their respect and the contrasting ways in which Europeans were expected to demonstrate respect—specifically issues of wearing shoes at pagodas and public

buildings and performing the prostration shikho versus a hand shake. While these conflicts have been read as nationalist struggles for autonomy, at their core they centered around differing conceptions of the nature of rituals and symbols. Buddhists came to define certain instances of these rituals as coming inside the boundaries of the category of religion, and defended one set of rules for rituals for these, while acceding and often asserting the European understanding of rituals for those areas labeled outside of religion. In doing so they negotiated boundaries for the category of religion that both asserted Buddhist sovereignty over certain areas and promoted a locally inflected Buddhist vision of modernity.

**“THE SAFFRON REVOLUTION AND
BUDDHIST SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN
MYANMAR”**

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In September 2007, the world watched "the Saffron Revolution" unfold as tens of thousands of Buddhist monks marched in defiance of military rule. My paper examines the events surrounding the Saffron Revolution by locating them within a broader struggle for political legitimacy, civil society and moral authority in Myanmar. The analysis speaks to competing visions in the politics of nation-building and to fragmentation within the sangha and the military regime. Further concerns address the role of socially engaged Buddhism in the context of globalizing economies and the emergence of China's consumer society. In the case of Myanmar (and Tibet), these

economic trends brought Buddhist monks into violent confrontations with the military.

ROUND TABLE

**BURMA'S CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM:
FACT OR FANTASY?**

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LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

**“BURMESE LANGUAGE USED IN KYAE
GAUNG & SHWE LI”**

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This paper explores how the growing trade between Burma and China is causing use of the Burmese language to spread. Shwe Li, a small town of Yunnan State in China, and Muse, a small town of Northern Shan State in Burma, are two trade centers for Upper Burma today. Most Chinese products come into Burma through the road linking Muse and Mandalay. This road sees a lot of ethnic minorities (Shan, Burmese, Lisu, Co-Kant, Wa etc.) migrating for work to Muse and Shwe Li. There are two immigration checkpoints between Muse and Kyae Gaung manned by immigration officials. Interestingly at the Chinese border most of

the staff and workers can speak Burmese well.

This presentation will be divided into three parts:

1. a brief background of economic conditions in these two border towns
2. Burmese language use in Kyae Gaung
3. Burmese language use in Shwe Li

I will explain why the Burmese language is spreading in Kyae Gaung & Shwe Li regions, and what kinds of specialized Burmese are currently being used. This paper draws on research done in the field over three different stays.

**“REREADING *BURMESE DAYS* IN THE
EARLY 21ST CENTURY”**

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If George Orwell had lived long enough would he, like Doris Lessing, another anti-colonial fiction writer, have received the Nobel Prize for Literature? The novel *Burmese Days*, published in 1935, was based on Orwell's life experiences as a policeman during the 1920s. *Burmese Days* has never been out of print since and has been translated into several languages. Eighty years later this story still evokes intense interest. Most recently, book length publications have included *Why Orwell Matters* (2002) by Christopher Hitchens, and *Finding George Orwell in Burma* (2004) by Emma Larkin, as well as scholarly journal literature. The presenters, Edith Piness and Oliver B. Pollak, initially read *Burmese*

Days in the 1960s. They earned their doctorates at Claremont Graduate School and UCLA, respectively, during the 1970s with dissertations regarding British policy and Burmese responses during the nineteenth century. We propose to take the opportunity of the 2008 Burma Studies Conference to reevaluate the reading of Orwell's Burma-inspired work in the light of postcolonial studies, the genre of travel narratives, anthologies, and the ideology of anti-colonialism expressed in fiction authored by the oppressor.

**“THE YOUNG REVOLUTIONARY AND THE
SKEPTICAL NATIONALIST: A PILOT STUDY
TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF BURMESE
POLITICAL THOUGHT AND THINKERS”**

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The paper will analyze the writings of two keen political thinkers, (Thakin) Ba Hein and (Fabian U) Ba Khine, whose works were published in the late colonial period, before World War II. Their writings were published by the Nagani Book Club and its “sister enterprise”, U Tun Aye's Burma Publishing House. Both publishing houses were closely connected to the Do Bama Asiayone. The authors' writings will be compared with their respective political activities as a basis for suggesting a typology of Burmese political thought and thinkers, thinking that can still be seen to shape the politics of the country to this day.

**“DEFINING PERSONHOOD, SERVANTHOOD
AND JURISDICTION: SOUTHEAST ASIAN
POLITIES VS. EAST AND SOUTH ASIAN
POLITIES KYUN, KHA, NGA”**

CHIT HLAING (F.K. LEHMAN)
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Some years ago I published a paper on freedom and bondage and its vocabulary in Burma and nearby countries. I want, now, to elaborate and refine part of that work in the light of later work. In particular, I want to argue that words like Burmese *kyun*, and Shan (and Thai and Lao) *kha* basically refer not to servanthood, as I claimed earlier, but rather to something more resembling clientship. True, they refer to a form of ‘bondage’, but it is specifically a matter of proper *jurisdiction* rather than simply subordination. I want to examine, in this regard, how such words were used (or, as in Burmese, not used) to refer to upland ethnic groups in the context of varying systems of political relations with such groups. In addition, refining a point made earlier, this will help make clear why such words tended to replace etymological first-person pronouns.

ETHNOGRAPHY

**“DISEASE CONCEPTION AND TRADITIONAL
MEDICAL PRACTICE IN ARAKAN”**

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Concepts of sickness and practices of protection and cure existing nowadays in Arakan are at the crossroads of different traditions, which reached this country over

centuries, each contributing its own concepts and practices. These traditions are Buddhism, astrology, spirit cults, magic, and traditional medicine.

I wish to show that different concepts of sickness are mixed up in discourse and practice, yet that this whole makes sense because the amalgam fits with a conceptual context shared by many Asian cultures, which consider the cosmos in a harmonious and holistic way, i.e. as a complex of elements linked to and affecting each other. Actually, when any perturbation takes place in the system, it affects the individual and his or her component elements. The individual is a microcosm and their sickness is the symptom of a disorder which goes beyond themselves.

These are the four aspects on which I will focus my interest:

Firstly, every tradition considers sickness as a disorder, and therapeutic practices aim toward the restoration of order.

Secondly, practices aiming to prevent or restore order will operate on the individual and all their component elements, realigning him or her with the cosmos.

Thirdly, healers, even if defined by a specific reductive vernacular term, never exercise only one kind of practice but mix many, in order to accumulate many powers and to act at different levels to give a holistic protection and cure.

Finally, people confronted with sickness always have recourse to many practices and healers at the same time, to increase their chances by different means, at different

levels. Personal “therapeutic paths” show that logical consistency is considered less important than practical efficacy.

“WHY ARE TRANSVESTITES BETTER THAN WOMEN AT MAKING WOMEN BEAUTIFUL IN MANDALAY?”

WARD KEELER

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In response to Michael Peletz’s question, “Where have all Southeast Asia’s transgendered ritual specialists gone?,” the short answer is, “Into beauty parlors.” What affinities might there be between the two apparently very different roles of na’gadaw and beautician? I suggest that both roles play upon specialists crossing boundaries to tap into reserves of power. Furthermore, if we take status competition, rather than authenticity, as important to Burman understandings of sex and gender, we can make better sense both of how people in Mandalay look upon the transgendered individuals in their midst, and how the transgendered fare in Southeast Asia more generally.

“THE ANNUAL CEREMONY OF AN ARIYaweizzadhour SECT”

NIKLAS FOXEUS

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Most of the Buddhist organizations in Burma concerned with the belief in *weizzadhour* (P. *vijjadhara*) hold an annual ceremony attended by their members. Although these ceremonies may be of utmost importance to the organizations and their members, they have not yet received much scholarly attention. A conspicuous

feature of the cult of the weizzadours, which will be discussed and illustrated in this paper, is the use of royal symbolism, insignia and symbols pertaining to the *cakkavattin* ideal, the “world emperor”, as well as alleged connections to past royal dynasties.

The aim of this paper is to delineate and render how some of the rituals are performed during the annual ceremony at the spacious temple compound of an *ariyaweizza* sect, and to unravel the various objectives for holding it. By holding the ceremony, the participants believe, for instance, that certain results will be produced, such as the fulfillment of wishes. These may be a wish to bring about a set of cosmological effects, to be able to successfully propagate the Sasana (*thathana-pyu*), to be able to save beings (*thatta-wa-keh*), to have the opportunity to meet the future Buddha’s (Arimetteyya Buddha, Rama Buddha etc), and a variety of other wishes. Most of the members have taken a vow to become a *hpayalaung*, that is, a bodhisattva, in order to attain buddhahood in a very distant future. All the higher weizzadhours and *natbyahmas* (devas from the Brahma heaven) are invited to attend the ceremony, to make the participants wishes become fulfilled.

**RESPONSES TO CYCLONE NARGIS
ROUNDTABLE:
“NARGIS RELIEF AND THE
ENTRENCHMENT OF MILITARY POWER IN
BURMA”**

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Cyclone Nargis slammed into the Irrawaddy Delta on May 2, 2008, killing 138,000 people and leaving 2.4 million more without food, water and shelter. In the months that followed, the regime rebuffed international furor over the refusal to admit foreign aid workers into the delta, pushed through a sham election over the national referendum, imprisoned or otherwise silenced domestic aid workers and monks critical of the regime's recovery efforts, and imposed a strict moratorium on news and photographs detailing the toll of human suffering and the ongoing need for food relief. At the four month point it appears that the regime has secured control over the population and further entrenched their hold on power.

In this paper I examine the politics of anti-politics in getting relief to Nargis survivors. I focus specifically on the role of sasana and civil society groups working in the delta region. I critically explore some of the problems large international organizations and institutions (INGOs, UN, ASEAN) encounter when they are required to partner with authoritarian regimes such as the SPDC. Finally, I explore the potential for capacity building and people-to-people networks.

**“GITAMEIT MUSIC CENTER AND
UNLEARNING AVOIDANCE (SHAUN SHA
DA)”**

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One of many obstacles encountered in starting Gitameit Music Center in 2003 was a rash of claims by both friends and detractors in Yangon that the school would never get off the ground, that it would be closed by the government or suffer internal fracture, or that Burmese students were not “ready” or fit for such an endeavor, that resources and Burmese society lacked sinews to support an institution with goals in music-making and teaching similar to those of many such institutions all over the world.

With all due respect to the nay-sayers – acknowledging that at any moment there could be a collapse for unpredictable or predictable reasons - Gitameit has prospered. It has developed a fine secular chorus, several a cappella vocal groups, a jazz band, a string ensemble, and a Burmese music ensemble. It has sponsored theatre performances and new compositions, sent students for exchange study abroad, participated in community outreach projects and performed more than 400 concerts in Yangon, Mawlamyaing, Mandalay, Myitkyina, Mogok and elsewhere. It has also enjoyed supportive journal coverage since 2004. All this with an amicable combination of both foreign and local teachers, visitors from ‘outside’ and the tenacity of the adult musicians on the ‘inside’.

This paper addresses that tenacity on the part of the Burmese students – Burman,

Mon, Shan, Zo, Karen, Buddhist and Christian – to become musicians in a supportive community and take on – rather than avoid – challenging issues in musical and social development.

**BELIEF MADE TANGIBLE:
EXHIBITION ANNOUNCEMENT**

In conjunction with the International Burma Studies Conference 2008, the Center for Burma Studies mounted a new exhibition of Burmese art at the Northern Illinois University Art museum entitled *Belief Made Tangible: Devotion, Transformation and Protection*. This exhibition was comprised solely of pieces from within the NIU Burma Art Collection and explored the sacred process and products issuing from the imagination materially transformed and solidified into works of Buddhist devotion - viewed here as works of art. The range of items on display extended from sublime and refined works created by court artists under royal commission, through artisan-crafted meritorious temple donations and ceremonial requisites commissioned by both wealthy and middle-class devotees, to the humblest artifacts used for protection in daily life by indigenous popular cults at the fringe of austere Theravada Buddhism.

Concepts of belief, otherwise invisible, are made tangible, recognizable and usable to the practitioners by way of transformation and protection. **Devotion** could be seen in the *Footprint of the Buddha* beautiful and unique banner representing Buddha's presence in a microcosm of the universe at a meeting point between *devas* (celestial beings), *nagas*, (beings from the

underworld) and humans. Throughout the gallery, **Transformation** could be seen in the carved ivories given as a royal tribute and transformed into a sacred object or in the *Jataka* story depicting the Buddha's own transformation in either tapestries or carvings. **Protection** in daily life was seen in astrology, tattoos, protective guardian figures from Burmese Buddhist cosmology and *Nat* spirits for which a room was completely dedicated to a traditional altar for the 37 Nats ceremony.

BURMA-RELATED CONFERENCES

FRENCH-GERMAN WORKSHOP

**The Constitution of a Religious Field
in Southeast Asia**

Paris, 14-16 May 2009

Centre Asie du Sud-Est, CNRS-EHESS

Thursday 14 May

Opening by the director of the Institut d'études de l'Islam et des Sociétés du Monde Musulman (IISMM) and presentation by Andrée Feillard (Centre Asie du Sud-Est, CNRS-EHESS, Paris).

Robert Hefner (Boston University)
*Where Have all the Abangan Gone?
Normative Hegemony and the Collapse of
non-Sunni Islams in Indonesia*

Nico Kaptein (Leiden University)
*Some fatwas on local customs in Southeast
Asia*

Werner Kraus (University of Passau)
*Yusuf in Southeast Asia: Introduction and
Transformation of a Literary Topic and its*

Implication for the Study of Southeast Asian Islam

Alexander Horstmann (University of Münster)

Conversions to Islamic Fundamentalism in Southern Thailand?

Friday 15 May

Cécile Barraud (Centre Asie du Sud-Est, CNRS-EHESS, Paris)

Ritual versus religious discourses and activities

Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière (Centre Asie du Sud-Est, CNRS-EHESS, Paris)

Ritual and the religious field in Burma

Michel Picard (Centre Asie du Sud-Est, CNRS-EHESS, Paris)

The Invention of a Balinese Religion: Adat, Agama, Hindu

Volker Gottowik (Goethe-University, Frankfurt am Main)

The Lingsar-Rinjani-Complex. A Multireligious Ritual in Indonesia

Annette Hornbacher (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

Adaptation and Resistance in Balinese Ritual: Dialectical Aspects in the Making of Agama Hindu between National and Global Influences

Étienne Naveau (Centre Asie du Sud-Est, CNRS-EHESS, Paris)

The question of monotheism for the "Syriac Christians" of Indonesia

Guillaume Rozenberg (Centre of Social Anthropology, LISST-CNRS, Toulouse)

The weikza phenomenon in Burma: reflections on the frontiers of Theravāda Buddhism

Guido Sprenger (University of Münster)
Shamanism as transcultural knowledge production

Saturday 16 May

Stocktaking of the workshop, followed by a general brainstorming session.

ATELIER BIRMANIE

18 -19 - 20 Juin 2009

Université de Provence - Marseille

Disparités et convergences

Jeudi 18 Juin

François Robinne & Alice Vittrant
Présentation et Bienvenue

*Thématique 1: « Disparités et convergences
Les sources »*

Louise Pichard & Cristina Cramerotti & Cao Thi Lieu
Le(s) fond(s) birman(s)(dans les différentes bibliothèques de France

Sylvie Pasquet
Quelques réflexions sur l'utilisation des sources chinoises pour l'Histoire de la Birmanie

Christine Hemmet
Aperçu du fonds d'objets et photos d'archives du musée du Quai Branly

Thématique 2: « Disparités et convergences: autour du corps »

Justin Watkins
Enquête sur la Communauté sourde en Birmanie

Denise Bernot *Corps humain, outil multifonctionnel : l'exemple du birman*

Vendredi 19 Juin

Thématique 2 : « Disparités et convergences »

Catherine Raymond *Réflexion sur l'art birman en lien avec celui des états voisins: de l'Arakan aux pays shan et mon.*

Claudine Bautze-Picron *Pagan – entre l'Inde, la Chine et la Péninsule sud-est asiatique: source d'inspiration, lieu de passage ou de confluence?*

Pascal Bouchery *Continuité-discontinuité transfrontalière entre l'Inde et la Birmanie (parenté chez les Thangkulnaga)*

Mathias Jenny *Birman et Môn: mille ans de contact*

Alice Vittrant *Le birman, une langue tibéto-birmane caractéristique de l'Asie du Sud-Est*

Bénédicte Brac de la P. *Métamorphoses dans le domaine du religieux*

Céline Coderey *Les conceptions de la maladie et les pratiques thérapeutiques en Arakan*

Alexandra de Mersan *Disparités dans les appellations des Arakanais*

François Robinne *Identités hétérogènes: une perspective birmane*

Aurore Candier *Réforme et continuité en péninsule indochinoise: la Birmanie 1820-1880*

Samedi 20 Juin

Thématique 2: « Disparités et convergences »

Gustaf Houtman *Titre à venir*

Thématique 3: « Art, Archéologie et Architecture »

Christophe Munier *La peinture murale des 14e-19e siècles en Birmanie*

Anne Chew *Les grottes d'Ingyin Taung en Birmanie Centrale*

Jean-Pierre Pautreau / Anne-Sophie Coupey / Emma Rambault
Sépultures des Ages du Bronze et du Fer dans la vallée de la Samon (sud de Mandalay)

Ernelle Berliet *Recherches archéologiques à Thagara, un poste militaire du royaume de Pagan (Birmanie centrale)*

François Tainturier *Fonder une ville royale dans la Birmanie moderne: nouvelles perspectives*

Guy Lubeigt *Naypyidaw. La nouvelle capitale de l'Union de Birmanie: localisation, construction et perspectives*

Pierre Pichard) *Today's Burma - New Pagan*

Catherine Raymond and François Robinne
Perspectives: le point sur les prochaines Burma Studies 2010 en France et à Marseille

ANU 2009 MYANMAR/BURMA UPDATE

Australian National University, Canberra
17-18 August 2009

The Burma Update is a series of regular conferences that focus on recent economic, political and social conditions in Burma and provide in-depth analysis into a select theme of particular relevance to Burma's socio-economic development. Updates have been held approximately every 18 months since their inception. From 2004 it has been called the Myanmar/Burma Update.

The main objective of the Update is to inform government agencies, academics, policy makers, the corporate sector, NGOs, journalists and other key sectors about this strategically important country. Each conference has featured Burmese and non-Burmese professionals presenting the results of research on recent developments and timely issues in Burma. People attending the conference come from diverse backgrounds: development assistance specialists, journalists, lawyers, government officials, business people, academics, and students.

Previous Burma Update themes have addressed national reconciliation, state/civil society relations and the role of the military, agriculture and rural development, issues of governance, economic prospects, and regional relations.

In recent years the conference series has been organized in conjunction with researchers from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore. Financial assistance for the series has been provided

by the Australian National University and ISEAS.

Co-conveners of the conference are:

Monique Skidmore, Associate Dean Postgraduate, College of Arts and Social Sciences, ANU

Monique.Skidmore@anu.edu.au

Trevor Wilson, Visiting Fellow, Department of Political and Social Change, ANU

Trevor.Wilson@anu.edu.au.

For more information about this year's Update, see
<http://rspas.anu.edu.au/polsoc/Myanmar/about.php>

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SHAN STUDIES

Chulalongkorn University
Bangkok, Thailand
15 - 18 October 2009

The Institute of Asian Studies (IAS), the Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, and the Euro-Burma Office are organizing the first international conference on Shan Studies, in Bangkok, Thailand. The conference seeks to bring together scholars of Shan Studies from all over the world to share their knowledge and discoveries as well as to meet and promote their co-operation.

For more information, please contact: Mrs. Charunee Lucktong, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University.

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shanstudies@chula.ac.th

**NEW ISSUE: THE JOURNAL OF BURMA
STUDIES**

The Center for Burma Studies at NIU is pleased to announce that volume 12 of *The Journal of Burma Studies* is now out. The issue includes articles by Patrick Pranke, "Bodawpaya's Madness: Monastic Accounts of King Bodawpaya's Conflict with the Burmese Sangha, Part One," by Tasaw Hsin-chun Lu, "Festivalizing Thingyan, Negotiating Ethnicity: Burmese Chinese Migrants in Taiwan," and by Myint Zan, "Legal Education in Burma since the mid-1960s."

The journal is available for purchase at:
<http://www.grad.niu.edu/Burma/webpgs/subscriptions.html>

The former issues of the journal, Volumes 1-10 are available online at:

<http://www.grad.niu.edu/Burma/webpgs/journal.html>

**BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT FROM IRASEC
PUBLICATIONS**

E-Book from the Institut de recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est contemporaine (IRASEC)

Renaud Egreteau and Larry Jagan. *Back to the Old Habits: Isolationism or the Self-Preservation of Burma's Military Regime*. Irasec – Occasional Paper n°7, November 2008, 92 pages. ISBN 978-974-383-406-6

Hard-copies are available on request.

Available free via downloaded at:

http://www.irasec.com/index.php?option=com_irasec&task=document_listing&type=occasional

This e-book argues that the Burmese military regime has always favored an isolationist-type policy that finds its grassroots in Ne Win's autarchic and xenophobic era as well as in Burma's royal traditions, but without being completely cut off from the outside world. This policy approach is well suited to the Burmese authoritarian state which boasts an important strategic position in the region. In the past decade, the politics of "isolationism without isolation" has been skillfully developed by Burma's military elite in order to preserve itself from both internal and external threats.

Since the Depayin crackdown in May 2003, every step the Burmese junta has taken indicates that it has been consciously defining both its foreign policy and its internal political agenda according to these isolationist tendencies, as the recent fallbacks that followed the "Saffron Revolution" (September 2007) and the Cyclone Nargis (May 2008) illustrate. Not only does the military regime tend to strategically withdraw itself from the regional scene, by choosing only a few but crucial diplomatic and commercial partners like China, India, Singapore, Russia or Thailand, but it also gradually isolates itself from the rest of the Burmese society, by opting for a strategic and nationalist entrenchment which was perfectly highlighted by the purge of the pragmatic Military Intelligence Services (2004), the transfer of the capital to Naypyidaw (2005) and the strict control over the transitional

process initiated by its own “Road Map towards a disciplined democracy” and undisrupted by the recent crises.

About the Authors:

Renaud Egreteau holds degrees in Oriental Studies (Hindi) and a Ph.D. in Political Science (maj. Asian Studies) from the Institute of Political Sciences of Paris, France (cum laude, 2006). His Dissertation, written in French, dealt with the “Sino-Indian rivalry through Burma and its limits since 1988”. He is the author of "Wooing the Generals" – India's New Burma Policy (New Delhi, CSH-Authorspress, 2003). As a political scientist, he has been focusing his academic research on Burma's geopolitical situation, India's Foreign Policy (with regard to Asia and China) and India's North-Eastern States instability.

Larry Jagan holds a Masters in Education (1979), Bachelor of Arts, with honors in History (1971) and a Diploma of Education (1972) from Monash University in Australia. For the last eight years, he has worked as a freelance journalist and political analyst based in Bangkok, writing extensively on Burma and the region. Previously he worked for the BBC World Service as News and Current Affairs editor for the Asia and Pacific Region.

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