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Introduction

Just as the months of the northern summer brought Burma into the news for unfortunate reasons last year, the same must be said for this year, as well. The current intermingling of legal proceedings and political machinations in Rangoon make the picture, never clear, particularly murky. Yet efforts to make sense of the present always benefit from greater awareness of the past. So it seems appropriate to devote much of this issue to an article by Sean Turnell, reprinted from Cornell's *Southeast Asia Program Bulletin*, about the Chettiars in Burma. Following this, I provide my informal log of a very interesting, relatively small-scale but highly enjoyable conference about Burma that took place at the Université de Provence in June. Put on by people who are helping to organize the Burma Studies Conference to take place at the same location next July, the success of this year's conference bodes very well for next year's larger endeavor. The remainder of the issue provides information about recent dissertations concerning Burma, some new publications about Burma, efforts to help Burma's libraries recover from the damage caused by Cyclone Nargis, and finally, the call for papers for next year's BSG conference. —The Editor

A "Wicked Creeping:" *The Chettiars in Burma*

Reading through a copy of Cornell University's Southeast Asia Program Bulletin last year, I was fascinated to read Sean Turnell's article about the Chettiars in Burma. It occurred to me that many readers of the BBSG would share my interest but would not see it if they were not Cornell alumni. Sean and Thamora Fishel, who edits the SEAP Bulletin, have graciously granted us permission to reprint the article here.

*Sean, who is Associate Professor of Economics at Macquarie University in Sydney, is well-known to many of us, of course. He spoke at last fall's Burma Studies Conference in DeKalb, and he is cited, quoted—and clearly greatly admired by—journalists and academics the world over for his impressive knowledge of Burma's economic affairs and his ability to discuss the topic intelligibly. His book examining the history of Burma's monetary and financial system, *Fiery Dragons: Banks, Moneylenders and Microfinance in Burma*, has just been published (2009) by the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) Press.*

—The Editor

The economic history of Burma contains a myriad of controversial themes, but none has been quite as divisive as the role of the *Chettiars*. A community of moneylenders indigenous to Southern India, the *Chettiars* operated throughout the Southeast Asian territories of the British Empire. They played a particularly prominent role in Burma, where they became the major

providers of the capital that turned the country into the “rice-bowl” of the region. Yet, the *Chettiars* were also vilified as rapacious usurers whose real purpose was to seize the land of the Burmese cultivator. This accusation became widespread in the wake of the global depression of the 1930s, during which paddy prices collapsed. This collapse, and the fact that the *Chettiars* applied British land-title law to enforce collateral pledges against their loans, brought about a substantial transfer of Burma’s cultivable land into their hands. Demonized thereafter, the *Chettiars* fled Burma when the country fell to the Japanese in 1942. They were never to return. Effectively banished by successive Burmese governments, the *Chettiars* remain reviled figures in the country to the present day.

In 2006 I spent my time at SEAP and Cornell (as a Visiting Fellow) completing a book on Burma’s monetary and financial history, in which the *Chettiars* have a starring role. In the book, however, I deliver a “not guilty” verdict with respect to the charges against the *Chettiars*. Applying modern economic theory to the issue, I found that the success of the *Chettiars* in Burma lay less in the high interest rates they charged, than it did in patterns of internal organization that provided solutions to the inherent problems faced by financial intermediaries. A proper functioning financial system could have provided better solutions perhaps for Burma’s long-term development, but Burma did not have such a system, then or now. Easy scapegoats for what went wrong, I believe the *Chettiars* merit history’s better judgment.

In what follows I offer something of a vignette into the story of the *Chettiars* in

Burma. Of course, for the full story one could hardly do better than to consult the vast array of primary sources on Burma held by the marvelous Kroch Library at Cornell. There are plenty of reasons to visit SEAP and Cornell – but this was excuse enough for me!

The *Chettiars* in Burma

The *Chettiars* came from the Chettinad tract of what is now Tamil Nadu. A distinct sect of the *Vaisya* (commercial) caste, the *Chettiars* were originally salt traders who, sometime in the eighteenth century, became more widely known as financiers and facilitators for the trade in a range of commodities. By the early nineteenth century, however, *finance* had become the abiding specialization of the *Chettiars*, and they became famed lenders to India’s great land-owning families (*zaminders*) and in underwriting trade through the provision of *hundis* (more on that later).

The first, substantial, expansion of the *Chettiars* beyond their homeland was to (what was then) Ceylon, sometime in the second decade of the eighteenth century. The motivation seems to have been simply the offer of higher returns on their capital—nearly double that which they could earn at home. Establishing links with European banks, they followed the British Empire into (what is now) Malaysia and Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, as well as the former French colonial territories of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Of all their overseas spheres of operations, however, it was Burma that dominated. The tin, rubber, tea and opium trades of maritime Asia created a ready demand for *Chettiar* capital, but this was significantly overshadowed by the volume

of credit demand, and the quality of the collateral, that could be yielded from the expanding “rice frontier” of Burma.

The first *Chettiars* arrived in Burma at the outset of British rule – in 1826 accompanying Indian troops and laborers following the first Anglo-Burmese war. It was, however, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the passing of the *Burma Land Act* in 1876 that brought about the first substantial movement of *Chettiars* into Burma. Cutting shipping times to and from Europe by half, the opening of the Suez Canal not only directly opened up European markets to rice exports from Burma, it also stimulated demand for the commodity more generally in a region suddenly exposed to greatly expanded commercial opportunities. Meanwhile the *Burma Land Act* revolutionized land tenure arrangements in Burma, essentially importing British “property rights” and creating the ability of cultivators to pledge land as collateral against loans such as those offered by the *Chettiars*. By 1880 the *Chettiars* had fanned out throughout Burma and by the end of the century they had become by far the most significant providers of capital to the cultivators that were transforming Burma into the “rice bowl” of renown. By 1930 there were nearly 2,000 *Chettiar* offices throughout Burma (most concentrated in Rangoon and the Irrawaddy Delta), supporting total lending of almost 1 billion rupees (about \$US3.5 billion today) – or roughly equivalent to that of all British investments in Burma combined. A deeply significant role played by the *Chettiars* was the way in which they functioned as a “bridge” between what had formerly been the subsistence agricultural economy of Burma, and the European banks that had

newly become interested in the country. This role was similar to that played by *compradors* elsewhere in Southeast Asia. It was celebrated thus by the Diwan Bahadur Murugappa Chettiar, the leading spokesperson for the *Chettiars* in Burma at a government enquiry into their activities in 1930: The banking concerns carrying on business on European lines did not and do not care to run the risk of advancing money to indigenous cultivators and traders; and it is left to the *Chettiars* to undertake the financing of such classes, dealings with whom are naturally a source of heavy risks. So far as banking business is concerned the *Chettiar* banker is the financial back-bone of the people....

***Chettiar* Banking Operations**

The *Chettiars* carried out an extraordinarily wide range of banking business in Burma. They made loans, took in deposits, remitted funds, discounted hundis, honored checks, exchanged money, dealt in gold, and kept valuables for safe-keeping. They were, in essence, a “one-stop-shop” that covered pretty much the gamut of financial needs, especially those of agriculturalists and cultivators. But, of course, the *Chettiars* were known above all for *lending* money and in this activity they were extraordinarily liberal. They avoided obvious speculative loans, but were otherwise willing to lend more or less for *any* enterprise that offered security and profit. Importantly, their loans were not determined by the purpose of the loan or the identity of the borrower – a *commercial* virtue that brought with it the considerable *social* virtue that they dealt with people of all races, classes and creeds on equal terms. This was not something that could be said of most other lenders in

Burma. *Chettiar* lending was overwhelmingly made to agriculturalists, but this was because it was precisely this sector that most fulfilled their profitability and security prerequisites, rather than any philosophical predisposition to rural pursuits. Crop-loans and loans for land purchase, redemption and improvement, were the most common forms of *Chettiar* lending to agriculturalists. Cultivators typically drew multiple loans from their *Chettiar* lender throughout the year according to season – for the purchase of seed, transplanting and broadcasting, for payments to laborers, for the purchase of cattle, to repair dykes and borders, and to meet general expenses. These multiple loans constituted a type of “revolving credit” facility, upon which repayment was due only once a year, after the sale of the cultivator’s crop. Recognizing the essential fungibility of money, however, (a fact often overlooked by other lenders in Burma) *Chettiars* also lent for a range of cultivator needs – for marriage expenses, funerals, religious and other social festivities, and for household contingencies generally. *Chettiars* were also the providers of funds to other lenders – primarily Burmese, and a mixture of professional moneylenders and large land-owning families who on-lent (mostly to their employees and tenants) for consumption purposes. One of the most important financial products provided by the *Chettiars* in Burma were *hundis*. *Hundis* were (and are) bills of exchange that could be used both to remit funds and to advance credit. An ancient financial device used in India and surrounding countries well-before the dominance of Europeans in regional commerce, they were integral to the operation of indigenous bankers such as the *Chettiars*. Today *hundis* are well-known for

their use in informal remittance systems, in which context the word *hundi* has an identical meaning to *hawala*, *hui kwan*, *chiao hui*, *poey kwan* – and various similar but differently named instruments in use around the world. The word “*hundi*” is derived from Sanskrit and means simply to “collect”. Its origins can be readily identified by the fact that “*hundi*” is also the word employed to describe the collection box in a Hindu temple.

Chettiars generally did not charge for *hundis* issued to people who were otherwise their customers as borrowers or depositors. For people for whom they had no existing relationship, charges were not much more than a couple of “*annas*” per 100 rupees. Such charges were very competitive with other remittance forms, but perhaps the greatest competitive advantage enjoyed by the *Chettiars* was the ubiquity of their presence – enabling *hundis* to be sent to Rangoon, and to cities throughout South and South-East Asia, from all but the humblest of villages.

Interest Rates

One component of the hostility to the *Chettiars* was the accusation that the interest rates they charged were usurious and, as such, were the means by which later loan default and the seizure of land was activated. The question of *Chettiar* interest rates is not easily settled, not least because of the data problems that might be expected given the passage of time, and the relative informality of the transactions in question. Very high *Chettiar* interest rates have been reported down the years, but most reliable accounts do not usually have them exceeding 25 percent per annum, and even rates of this

magnitude tended to be restricted to loans without collateral. Typical cultivator loans secured against land seem to have averaged from 9 to 15 percent. To modern eyes, used to assessing interest rates in formal financial markets in a low inflationary environment, rates of 12 to 25 percent look quite high. Compared to typical moneylender rates of the era, however, they were surprisingly low. This was especially true when one considers the interest rates charged by the *Chettiars*' competitors – the credit provided by Burmese moneylenders, shopkeepers (indigenous and non-indigenous), landlords, employers and so on. On this score, the *Chettiars* compared very favorably. The interest rates charged by non-*Chettiar* moneylenders in Burma varied enormously, but it is amongst this cohort that “true usury” was perhaps apparent. This was especially the case with regard to so-called *sabape* loans – advances made “in kind” (usually in rice) to cultivators to be repaid after harvest. Such loans, most often made by Burmese landlords to their cultivator tenants and farm labourers, were subject to all manner of social norms, but the interest rates applicable on them usually ranged from 8 to 10 per cent *per month* – in per annum terms between around 150 and 220 per cent.

A Modern Appraisal of Chettiar Interest Rates

The interest rates charged by moneylenders such as the *Chettiars* have, until recently, attracted little in the way of intellectual attention. This is understandable. For millennia the actions of moneylenders have been easily explainable as simply the manifestation of malice and greed. As such, very little in the way of nuance or

sophistication was required to explain the charges of “usurers,” “parasites,” “loan sharks,” “shylocks,” “leeches,” “vampires,” “dragons” – and all the other derogatory labels that have been created for the moneylender down the ages. Of course there were, and no doubt are, many examples of rapacious moneylenders bent on expropriating land and bonding labor through debt. Economists, however, are (arguably) rarely satisfied with simple answers that ascribe generalized economic behavior to moral predilections. As such, especially over the last three decades, a large literature has grown up that has attempted to explain the behavior of moneylenders and the markets they operate in. Prominent in this literature is the concept of “transaction costs.” In the context of moneylending, “transaction costs” is the umbrella term used by economists to refer to the expenses that creditors confront when making a loan. These include the costs of identifying and screening borrowers, processing and dispersing loans, collecting and monitoring repayments, assessing collateral, “policing” and salvaging loan delinquencies, and so on. Such costs are essentially invariant to the size of the loan – meaning that they loom larger, *in percentage terms*, the smaller the size of the loan. Of course, it is precisely such “small” loans that are usually the stock and trade of moneylenders. Very little data has survived regarding transaction costs for the *Chettiars* in Burma, but modern studies of informal lenders in Burma and elsewhere typically estimate “administrative costs” of about 5 to 10 per cent of their loan book. Given advances in information technology in the intervening decades, it is difficult to imagine that the administrative costs of the *Chettiars* in Burma could have been any less. There remains much controversy over

the extent to which transaction costs can reasonably explain high moneylender interest rates, but if the numbers above are only proximately accurate for the *Chettiars* in Burma, their interest rate charges hardly seem usurious.

A “flipside” to the transaction costs burden on moneylenders such as the *Chettiars* is that their services imposed relatively *lower* transaction costs on their customers. Borrowers, like lenders, face a raft of transaction costs when seeking a loan – costs which are, for the most part, simply the mirror image of the transaction costs noted above on lenders. Borrower costs, especially for rural clients, rise according to the degree of “formality” of the arrangements imposed by the lender. The more “formal” the arrangements, the less “access” poor, and/or geographically marginalized people have to credit. This is important since it is typically the case that most poor borrowers consider ready access to credit as rather more important than its cost (something widely-recognized in the modern “microfinance” movement). Juxtaposed against high interest rates then are what are usually convenient access and low transaction cost attributes of moneylenders – minimal loan procedures, quick cash availability, flexible payment and maturity schedules as well as the costs savings that result from the fact that the moneylender usually lives amongst his borrowers. Such general “virtues” of moneylenders were readily apparent in the operations of the *Chettiars* in Burma. Most *Chettiar* loans were organized in under an hour and *Chettiars* were more or less accessible all day, every day. The following extract from the *Burma Provincial Banking Enquiry*, a far-reaching inquest into credit arrangements in Burma commissioned by

the colonial government in 1930, gives us a flavor of *Chettiar* customer relations:

Chettiars have no fixed hours and do not observe public or official holidays. Except for their own festivals of *Pangani Uthram* (in March or April) and *Thaipusam* (in January), when business may be stopped for about four days in all, they are ready to transact business on any day and at any time. This is often a great convenience to depositors who wish to withdraw money, and also to some borrowers whose circumstances make it desirable for them to conceal from others the fact that they are borrowing. Beyond transaction costs, the question of risk – and risk premiums – must also be factored in when considering the interest rates charged by moneylenders. The greater the likelihood of borrower default, the greater the need for an interest rate margin sufficient to cushion the lender against loss. Arguably, moneylenders have always lent to borrowers, and into economic environments, of greater risk than considered acceptable to more formal lenders. Indeed, one of the hitherto assumed advantages moneylenders possess over their more formal competitors – their proximity to their clients (noted above) – is an example of the heightened risk they face from being less geographically diversified and more exposed to covariant shocks.

Reasons for the Success of the *Chettiars*

How to account for the extraordinary dominance of the *Chettiars* in rural finance in colonial Burma? A traditional answer, widely-held amongst contemporary European observers, ascribed the success to various cultural attributes, especially as they related to the education of young *Chettiar*

males into the “secrets” of banking. Representative of such a view, rich in the stereotypes and prejudices of the era, was this assessment of Edgar Thurston, the legendary author in 1909 of the (Indian government-published) *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*:

A *Nattukottai Chetti* is a born banker. From his earliest childhood he is brought up on the family traditions of thrift and economy. When a male child is born in a *Nattukottai Chetti's* family, a certain sum is usually set aside to accumulate at compound interest and form a fund for the boy's education. As soon as he is ten or twelve, he begins to equip himself for the ancestral profession. He not only learns accounting and the theory of banking, but he has to apply his knowledge practically as an apprentice in his father's office. Thus in a *Chetti's* training, the theory and practice of banking are not divorced from each other, but go hand in hand, from the very start. When a boy is married he attains a responsible position in the family. Though, being a member of the joint Hindu family system, he may not make a separate home, yet he must bear his own financial burden. He is allotted a share in the paternal, or ancestral, estate and he must live on it. He alone enjoys all that he may earn and suffers for all that he may lose. So he naturally grows self-reliant and ambitious, with a keen desire to build a fortune for himself...Strict economy is scrupulously practiced, and every

little sum saved is invested at the highest rate of interest possible... So particular are the *Chettis* where money is concerned that, according to the stories current about them, if they have a visitor – even a relative – staying with them longer than a day he is quietly presented with a bill for his board at the end of the visit.

A modern, and arguably superior, explanation of the success of the *Chettiars* in Burma would draw attention to the nature of *Chettiar* organization in Burma. And, of particular importance in this context, the role of “trust” as the keystone of *Chettiar* finance. Of course, trust is the foundation of finance of all kind. Financial intermediaries of any stripe depend upon trust, without which their assets (merely promises to pay when all is said and done) are worthless, and without the trust of depositors and investors there would be nothing to “mediate” in any case. In modern banking systems such trust is established by norms of behavior that have been centuries in evolution, shaped by the state, the law, and other institutions (such as a central bank) that are easy to identify but hard to replicate.

In the case of the *Chettiars*, “trust” was a function of caste and kin rather than more impersonal institutions, and most *Chettiar* firms were formed by partnerships of individuals connected through marriage, home village ties and other loose forms of kinship. Interestingly, because of Hindu inheritance laws based on primogeniture, partnerships were generally not formed between close “blood” relations. This trust was manifested in a number of ways, including via a unique inter-firm lending/deposit system between *Chettiars*

that not only provided individual *Chettiar* firms with much of their financing, but also constituted a most effective framework of “prudential” arrangements that acted to dampen systemic risk. Alleviating systemic risk in a modern financial system is the responsibility of a central bank, but in the *Chettiar* arrangements this role was subsumed by collective “caste” responsibility.

Perhaps the most important way through which trust was manifested in the *spread* of *Chettiar* operations in Burma, however, was via the way it was embodied in their “agency arrangements.” The use of “agents” allowed *Chettiars* without financial means to establish their own firms (usually in the rural hinterland) to act as agencies for their wealthier kinsmen. *Chettiar* agents had almost complete discretion on the lending out of their patron’s money and, indeed, they usually enjoyed “power of attorney” generally over what might be regarded as the activities of the “joint” firm. The arrangement seems to have been enormously successful in creating appropriate incentives for the agent, and *Chettiars* firms boasted not only that their agents strived harder than employees of European banks – but that as a consequence Burma had little need for such institutions organized on formal (“Western”) lines. Unwittingly, since the problem had yet to find a name, in their agency arrangements the *Chettiars* also solved what is known within the discipline of economics as the “principal and agent” problem. In the modern world solving the problem – which simply refers to the dilemma of how to ensure that the agent acts in the best interests of the principal – has generated all manner of methods, including franchising, incentive

contracts, commission-based payments, and so on.

The *Chettiars* sent into the Burmese countryside as agents were exclusively male, and were almost never accompanied by spouses or other family members. Their “tour of duty” was usually for three years, after which they returned to Chettinad (many to marry) for around six months, before further postings elsewhere in Burma. Most *Chettiars* seemed to have lived an extraordinarily frugal existence, with such expenses as they had (including accommodation) usually met by the firm they represented. Typically between half and two-thirds of their entire triennium salary was paid a month after taking up their station, whereupon it was mixed in with the proprietors’ capital advance and employed in making loans. Key to an agent’s likelihood of establishing their own firm later was not so much their salary, but the size of the “bonus” they were able to secure at the end of their three year service – which typically amounted to around 10 percent of the profits they generated.

It All Comes Crashing Down...

Chettiar success in Burma came to a shuddering halt with the onset of the global depression of the 1930s. An event with severe economic repercussions in most countries, in Burma these were manifest primarily in the near total collapse of paddy prices. Paddy prices had been trending downwards across the latter half of the 1920s, but they went into a precipitous decline after 1930, reaching their nadir in 1933 when prices fell to less than a third of that prevailing a decade earlier. They remained at unremunerative levels until after

the Second World War. The impact of the collapse in paddy prices was soon felt amongst the cultivators of Burma's Irrawaddy Delta, many of whom, after suffering immense hardship as they tried to remain on their land, walked away from their paddy fields in search of employment as subsistence labor.

At the end of the chain of distress were the *Chettians*. Unable to collect even interest payments on their loans, increasingly they came to foreclose on defaulting borrowers and to seize the pledged collateral. For the most part this was land. The result was what would prove a catastrophe for Burma's future as vast tracts of the country's cultivatable land passed into the *Chettians'* hands. By 1938 the proportion of the land in Burma's principal rice growing districts in the hands of the *Chettians* reached an astonishing 25 percent. With new *Chettiar* loans also drying up, much of this land – and notwithstanding the evidence pointing to *Chettiar* efforts to keep cultivators on their land, and to nurse borrowers generally – fell fallow. Joining the spiral of falling paddy prices was thus falling production, too.

The alienation of much of the cultivatable land of Lower Burma, a tragic and seminal event in the political economy of Burma, would also prove to be the equally tragic climax to the story of the *Chettians* in the country. Exposed to the (understandable) anger of indigenous cultivators and the demagoguery of Burmese nationalists of all stripes, they became easy scapegoats not just for the current economic distress, but the foreign domination of Burma's economy more generally. The following testimony, relatively mild in the scheme of things, was

presented by a Karen witness to the *Burma Provincial Banking Enquiry*:

Tersely and pointedly speaking, Chettiar banks are fiery dragons that parch every land that has the misfortune of coming under their wicked creeping. They are a hard-hearted lot that will ring out every drop of blood from the victims without compunction for the sake of their own interest...[T]he swindling, cheating, deception and oppression of the Chettians in the country, particularly among the ignorant folks, are well known and these are, to a large extent, responsible for the present impoverishment in the land.

Anti-*Chettiar* feeling in Burma during the depression soon turned into anti-Indian (and anti-foreigner) feeling generally, and in the latter half of the 1930s communal riots became commonplace. These were particularly severe in Rangoon – which over the fifty years from 1872 went from a city whose population was overwhelmingly Burmese to one in which, by 1930, had become predominantly Indian. The *Chettians* themselves were a tiny proportion of the Indian population in Rangoon (and the rest of Burma), the vast majority being poor Tamil laborers and sharecroppers. Whilst the *Chettians* were reviled for their perceived wealth and success, most of these other Indian migrants were despised for their poverty and for the competition they presented to equally poor and desperate Burmese in search of work.

In the wake of the Indo-Burmese riots, Burma's colonial government (which under the so-called "Dyarchy" constitution

consisted of a Representative Assembly, but with most significant powers reserved still for the Governor) drew up a series of laws designed to limit the role of moneylenders such as the *Chettiars* in the future. A sop to a rising cohort of Burmese politicians, these laws restricted the interest rates moneylenders could charge, imposed limits on the total amount of interest arrears that could build up, required the maintenance of proper and regular accounts, and required that all moneylenders be registered. Another set of laws, transparently directly aimed at the *Chettiars*, disallowed the passing of land into the hands of non-resident moneylenders, eliminating in one stroke the ability to pledge land as collateral to such lenders. Most of these laws were not promulgated before the Second World War began, but they returned after the war and following Burma's independence. They largely remain on the books, where today they number amongst the many inhibitions to the development of a modern functioning financial system.

War and Flight

On March 7, 1942, Rangoon fell to the forces of Imperial Japan. On May 1, Mandalay followed, and what remained of the Burmese colonial government evacuated Burma for the "hill-station" of Simla, India – and exile. In a matter of months British rule in Burma had come to an end. The British would, of course, return temporarily after the war, but a chapter of Burma's history had come to a close.

The *Chettiars* also fled Burma in front of the Japanese advance, but for them there would be no triumphant homecoming (however fleeting). We do not know how many

Chettiars died on the long march out of Burma (most on the road from Rangoon to Assam) but, given the high death toll amongst the full cohort of fleeing British and Indian merchants, workers and administrators in 1942, it could not have been trivial.

After the war the *Chettiars* were, to all intents and purposes, prevented from returning to Burma. Burma achieved independence in 1948 and the country's new constitution declared that the state would hold ultimate title over all of the country's cultivatable land. Land use rights were available to cultivators, but this was of little benefit to the *Chettiars*, since farmers they were not. The *Chettiars* sought compensation for their lost property, and the issue became something of an irritant to the otherwise close relationship between the governments of newly-independent India and Burma. Meaningful progress on this front, moreover, was slow. When a military coup brought Burma's democracy to an end in 1962, any hopes the *Chettiars* might have entertained for compensation were finally, irrevocably, dashed. The property they had acquired in roughly a century of moneylending in Burma was effectively nationalized by the new Burmese regime and, alas, ultimately dissipated by the same.

Some Final Thoughts

The story of the *Chettiars* in Burma ended tragically, but it is not without useful lessons for those concerned for the country and its prospects. One of these lessons – essentially a warning – is that it highlights the dangers that come from circumstances that lead to a concentration of economic wealth in the hands of an ethnic minority. Such a

concentration took place in the colonial era via the *Chettiars*, but it is happening again in Burma today. Now the resented ethnic minority is economically-dominant Chinese business owners and traders rather than Indian moneylenders, but the oft-predicted backlash will surely follow the familiar pattern.

A second lesson from the story of the *Chettiars* is more hopeful and, for that, all the more welcome for those of us all too familiar to pessimism when it comes to Burma. This lesson is simply that Burma's development disaster can perhaps be turned around rather more quickly than we often suppose. The application of sound property rights, together with the provision of adequate capital (as supplied back then by the *Chettiars*) brought about a twenty-fold increase in Burma's agricultural output in the latter-half of the nineteenth century. Today Burma is somewhat off having a government interested in applying sound property rights, or facilitating the flow of adequate capital, but it will not be for ever thus. And, in this, lies hope.

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**Burma Workshop (Atelier Birmanie)
Université de Provence**

Marseille, June 18-20, 2009

In keeping with the ongoing pattern of holding our conferences at NIU in alternation with sites outside the U.S., the next Burma Studies Conference will take

place at the Université de Provence in Marseille next July (2010). (See the call for papers at the end of this issue.) But this past June a smaller conference was held there, this one for Francophone specialists on Burma. Thanks to the support of NIU's Center for Burma Studies, I was able to attend the conference and I include below an informal account of the papers that were presented.

I can't help adding that Marseille is a beautiful city with a rich history. After the conference ended, I had one more day to wander about the place and found that extra time very enjoyable. Particularly fascinating is the old quarter (called "Le Panier," meaning "The Breadbasket") whose narrow streets drenched in sunshine is evocative of a broadly-shared Mediterranean culture. As some of us joked at dinner after the conference was over, "Marseille, it's practically Italy!" —The Editor

The first session consisted of three presentations concerning bibliographical and historical sources on Burma presently found in France. Louise Pichard and Cristina Cramerotti gave an account of Burma related holdings relating to in various French libraries. Although, these are not comparable to those to be found in Great Britain, for obvious historical reasons. Still, it appears that there exist certain collections well worth keeping in mind, as the digitization of library resources now makes it much easier to access previously more obscure such materials.

Christine Hemmet, from the Musée du Quai Branly, acknowledging that she was not herself a Burma specialist, wished to make better known to Burmanists what sorts of

materials were available at that institution, and some of their holdings look quite tantalizing.¹ Hemmet showed a number of interesting photographs in the museum's holdings. Given my own interests, I was particularly intrigued to learn that a French ethnomusicologist, a Mme de Chambure, had done much research in mainland Southeast Asia in the 1930s, including trips to Burma in 1929-1934. Apparently, though, while her notes and photos are now at the Quai Branly, the instruments that were housed at the Musée de l'Homme are to be deposited at the University of Paris in Nanterre.² Hemmet showed a number of

¹ For those not up on their French cultural politics, the Musée du Quai Branly replaces the old Musée de l'Homme. It seems that the original intention was to call it something along the lines of the Museum of the First Peoples but this aroused a storm of controversy, since it evoked the conceptually fraught notion of "primitive" peoples. In the end, it was decided that the least tendentious way to name the museum was after the quai upon which it is located in Paris. It's as if the Museum of Natural History in New York were to be named the Museum at Central Park West and 86th St., a policy that would probably help out visitors to the city find it but mystify them enough to keep them from feeling the need to do so.

² There is a complicated and even at times sordid history concerning the dislocations Southeast Asian studies have undergone in France in the past thirty years, with fights over who has legitimate claims over books and other collections figuring prominently in the process. I don't expect ever to learn the whole story, but there are of course a great many different versions and it can be fun to ask people for their various, always highly dramatized, renderings.

other very intriguing photos from the museum's collection, many dating from the 30s, including some taken in the Chin Hills.

A third talk in the same opening panel, that of Sylvie Pasquet, differed slightly in that it focused on how Chinese sources and Burmese ones reflect contrasting takes on the relations between the two countries. Pasquet reads both Chinese and Burmese, so she is well-qualified to point out these contrasting perspectives: they turn on the fact that the Chinese always took Burma's relationship with them to constitute a frank recognition of China's suzerainty, while the Burmese took it to represent more of a fraternal bond. This contrast not only goes way back in time but may still characterize their respective attitudes to this day. (Sylvie told me in conversation later that she started Chinese at Langues Orientales in Paris when she thought she might like to go into the diplomatic service. The entrance exam required a second Asian language, and since she had been one of hordes of students taking Chinese, her criterion for choosing a second language was to find the one with the lowest enrollment. Burmese won that competition easily, and so Burma studies are now blessed with Sylvie's remarkable qualifications.)

The second panel focused on linguistic matters. Mathias Jenni, whose post is in Zurich but who has recently taken over teaching Mon at Langues Orientales (INaLCO) in Paris, gave a presentation on the vagaries of language contact between Mon and Burmese. It seems that when, during Pagan's early glory, the Burmans first found in Mon access to cultural refinement and religious distinction, language contact tended to favor Mon's

transmission into Burmese. Then for several centuries thereafter influences went both ways. But in the colonial era and since, Mon has tended to receive more from Burmese than the other way around, as might be expected from the Burmans' relatively greater political strength. Nevertheless, certain fundamental differences between the two languages, such as the fact that Mon is not a tonal language, discourage some kinds of exchange between the two. Listening to Mathias's interesting account, I couldn't help thinking of French and English, since French was the language of prestige at the "English" (but really Norman) court after 1066—during the early Pagan period, one might say. But now it seems clear that English enjoys greater prestige: how else to explain that the way to say in French that something is "really cool" is to say that it is "*vraiment cool*"? Mathias demonstrated something else about language contact when we spoke (in English) at lunch the next day. I was struck at how much his English reminded me of Thai friends' English, with respect both to the timbre of his voice and the tones that seemed to lie just beneath the surface of his otherwise excellent English. Justin Watkins, linguist extraordinaire, assured me that that was Swiss German intonation coming through. But Mathias told me he had lived for twenty years in Bangkok, which I think probably explains things better than taking yet another potshot at the poor German-speaking Swiss (the Appalachians of the German-speaking world).

Alice Vittrant, a linguist and co-organizer with François Robinne of the conference, showed in the final presentation of the day that there exist a number of common features of Tibeto-Burman languages, and

that these commonalities set such languages apart from other languages, such as Karen and Shan, also to be found in the same region. Alice, by the way, was, like François, remarkably calm and gracious throughout the conference, which is not easy for conference-organizers anywhere.

Catherine Raymond led off the second day of the conference with her account of Buddha images in Burma and their relations with such images from elsewhere in Southeast Asia (among the Shan, the Khmer, etc.) and even as far afield as Tibet. The stock in trade of art historians is of course to note tiny details that enable them to distinguish products of one area from those of another and to trace the flow of influences among them. This seems just as painstaking as noting, as a linguist like Mathias Jenni does, affinities between Mon turns of phrase and Rangoon variations on standard Burmese expressions. The patience either kind of detective work, art historical or linguistic, takes is astonishing. Listening to Catherine, I was struck at how much the history of Buddhism and the history of Buddhist iconography must have to tell each other, as scholars trace out the various schools and concepts that moved, along with images, through the Buddhist areas of Asia.

Following Catherine's presentation, Claudine Bautze-Picron recounted how Westerners reported on Pagan over the centuries, from the earliest reports on. She paid particular attention to the many photographs Westerners took of the site starting in the nineteenth century, showing us a number of them. Some she couldn't show, since they have disappeared, but that she knew of them—of their having been

taken but since lost—only demonstrated the considerable depth of her research.

Christophe Munier also showed us images but of paintings, delightful ones, dating from the Nyaungyan period, to be found at sites located in the region of Monywa, Magway and Mandalay. Focusing on scenes that occur only here, in an area extending from Powin Taung to Yezagyo (a region just above the confluence of the Chindwin and the Irawaddy), Munier takes these scenes of a palace guardian in conversation with an acolyte, and ones of him engaged in an argument with his wife, as setting the region apart, possessing its own particular tradition. He suggests that the nearby presence of a community of Muslims and another one of Europeans may explain the development of the iconography of the palace guard in this region. He considers these scenes relating to alcohol consumption and adulterous relations, depicted in a humorous mode, as indicating a trend toward a more popular and humane approach to Buddhist instruction.

Anna-May Chew reported on ongoing research she has been conducting at another site near Monywa, but in this case in grottoes still in use as meditation sites. Continual renovation of some sites reduces their archeological interest. But inscriptions dating back as far as the eighteenth century are found in them, and Chew sees in some of the materials interesting indications of the transition from the Ava to the Amarapura styles.

If Munier's and Chew's presentations pointed to how much interesting archeological work is being done in Burma today, Pierre Pichard's presentation was a

sobering demonstration of how much harm can be done by the archeologically uninformed. Many readers of the BBSG will know what valuable work Pichard did in Pagan to assure the long term viability of the site's many treasures. So it is distressing to learn what extensive "restoration" has been done in Pagan since the 90s, putting new stupas on top of ruins, or even, starting with only the merest hints of old walls as a basis, building whole structures, in an effort to restore Pagan "to its former glory." It is disturbing but not surprising that government officials should find this exercise to their liking, casting them as they think it does in the light of virtuous lay supporters of Buddhism. It seems appalling, though, that, according to Pichard, many foreign donors, including many Singaporeans and Taiwanese (of Burmese origin?), should have provided a great deal of funding for these projects. Such support for any officially sponsored projects in Burma today seems less naïve than morally negligent, but perhaps it is only immensely unthinking.³ Pichard's only positive

³ I shouldn't be too proud. When I went on a walking tour of an old quarter of Toulouse the day before going to Marseille, our guide showed us several "hôtels particuliers," mansions, dating from the 18th century. Only after we had seen two or three vestibules with magnificent staircases but peeling paint and pockmarked plaster did it occur to me that it was out of historical respect, not stinginess or neglect that the owners had failed to keep these places up. If I owned one of them, I would be sorely tempted to restore them "to their former glory" by grabbing a spatula and paint brushes. That way, guests would be impressed by the magnificence of my surroundings, and I

comment was to note that these additions have been so poorly built that one good earth tremor will probably bring a great many of them down. And he told me later at dinner that while the supplementary construction has been dreadful, little inside or below the original structures has been disturbed. So archaeologically the damage has been less thorough-going than one might fear.

François Tainturier presented some results from his ongoing research about royal initiatives to establish new capitals, with particular emphasis on the case of Mandalay. While apparently similar to earlier Burman kings' practice of setting up a new capital in such places as Shwebo, Ava, and Amarapura, Mandalay's founding reflected changing ideas about the nature of a city. By the time of the city's construction, the British were well-embarked on making Rangoon conform to their expectations of what a city should be. This, plus the British triumphs in the first two Anglo-Burman Wars, induced King Mindon to place as much importance on areas outside the palace as those within it, and to make royal support for Buddhism particularly salient. Tainturier draws on maps and *parabaik*, in addition to better-known textual sources, to make his very interesting analysis.

Guy Lubeigt then reported on the latest such Burman project to found a new capital, namely, Naypyidaw. Showing astonishing photographs, he made vividly clear the immense proportions of the place, with hugely wide roads (and round-about to scale) and great distances between buildings,

would happily discount the mutterings of a few nay-saying historic preservationists.

such that getting about poses considerable challenges. Rarely has grandiosity taken such literal and impractical form.

Three archeologists, Jean-Pierre Pautreau, Anne-Sophie Coupey, and Emma Rambault, members of the Mission Archéologique Française de Myanmar, then presented findings on funerary practices in the Bronze Age based on four hundred and sixty burial sites discovered in Central Burma. Noting similarities with findings in other sites in Thailand and northern Vietnam, they pointed out that their work sheds light not only on funerary practices but also on metalworking more generally in late prehistory, and also on the origin and spread of exchange patterns, both local and long distance, during that period.

Another archeologist, Ernelle Berliet, reported on her research on a military outpost established by Pagan, one of forty-three such forts built at the foot of the Shan Hills. They are alluded to in the Glass Palace Chronicle. The one she chose to study, Thagara, is located near Meiktila. The presence of relatively well-preserved ramparts and the absence of current inhabitants whose lives would be disrupted by an archeological dig made it an appropriate choice among the many sites she considered. Yet the fact that the fort was apparently in use till the end of the Ava period indicates both how sturdily built it was and how militarily useful it was considered.

Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière spoke of new developments in the spirit cult in Rangoon. The Ministry of Culture has seen fit to classify *nat pwe* as performances, but ones that must conform to regulations of that bureaucracy's devising: no more pop songs

and over-the-top costumes but rather, in both cases, appropriately traditional ones. And, in light of Rangoon's shifting demographics, as the cult's likeliest supporters have been forced to move to the city's outskirts, relatively few nat pwe now take place in town. Familiar nats with known stories, furthermore, are tending to be displaced in people's consciousness by guardians of pagodas, more generic figures with vaguer identities and histories.

Gustaaf Houtmann discussed the way that Buddhist concepts, particularly those of *samsara*, *loka*, and *nirvana*, permeate Burmese political discourse and have done so, although in varying ways, ever since the days of Aung San. In the anti-colonial struggle, opposing the British was taken as comparable to an individual's efforts to proceed on the spiritual path away from suffering and toward *nirvana*. Aung San was clear that politics always remains bound to the worldly, to *loka* and *samsara*: that politics stems from defilement, indeed that defilement makes politics necessary. U Nu wished to get beyond politics in order to pursue what really matters, namely, *nirvana*. Daw Aung San Su Kyi, Gustaaf showed, taking up another strand in her father's Buddhist vocabulary, now places more emphasis on *metta* (loving kindness) than "freedom from fear," because to have no fear of moral constraints enables the sort of political action she opposes.

Aurore Candier presented an analysis of nineteenth century texts in which members of the religious and political elites tried to reconcile political events with Burmese/Buddhist understandings of kingship and morality. In a close investigation of specific terms, she showed

how both events and foreign ideas inflected the meanings and implications those words took on, and how they shifted, over the decades between 1820 and 1880.

Alexandra de Mersan pointed out the conundrum of how to conceive of the Arakanese. Are they a distinct ethnic group? How does one deal with the variety of their religious affiliations? Their linguistic relationship with Burmese is also complex. In the end, their identity can only be considered a tenuously constructed one, even if it strikes many people in Burma as obvious and unproblematic.

François Robinne discussed the similarly vexed question of what identity is assigned to Chinese Muslims living in Mandalay. At different points in modern Burmese history, they have been identified on identity cards as "of Chinese origin (Muslim)," or "Burmese, Indian, Muslim," while colloquially they are referred to as "Panthay," a word perhaps derived from "Parsi." They now self-identify as Burmese but are concerned that their children marry other Muslims, and, like many elite groups intent upon maintaining their superior economic power and family connections, often find no appropriate spouses for their daughters, who remain unmarried. At present, for that matter, many leave Burma to live abroad.

Céline Coderey has conducted research in Arakan concerning the many ways people think about and act upon sickness. Buddhism, the spirit cult, magic, astrology and both Burmese and Western medicine all enter into their understandings of what causes sickness and how best to respond. While no single source predominates in their

thinking, a consistent assumption in this array of ideas has it that sickness signals a disruption in the harmony that should prevail between the social and cosmic orders.

Justin Watkins discussed the preliminary findings of his brief but clearly very fruitful research on sign language use at the Mary Chapman School for the Deaf in Rangoon. He demonstrated some signs of various origins, including some which appear to be indigenous Burmese signs, some calqued from spoken Burmese, and some showing the influence of other sign languages which the school has had exposure to at various times over the years, including Korean Sign Language and ASL. He also demonstrated some signed sentences indicating syntactic patterns which both conform to and contradict the word order of spoken Burmese. He pointed out that there remains much to be investigated on the subject of Burma's sign languages - in particular the differences between Yangon and Mandalay signing, and efforts to agree on common signs for a unified Burmese/Myanmar sign language.

Denise Bernot, known to all the people present at the conference and responsible for the training of a great many of them, gave the last presentation. She discussed the many ways that the human body can be made a tool for use in a great array of productive activities and illustrated that point with notes and photographs from her fieldwork experiences in Burma. I should add that throughout the conference Denise made interesting and germane contributions to discussion, posing some intriguing question to virtually all of the presenters. It was a particular delight for me to see her in

such good form when it was forty years ago this past fall that I signed up for Burmese with her and we started in with ka kyì and hka gwe at Langues Orientales in Paris.

Recent Dissertations on Burmese Topics

As I have mentioned a few times in recent issues of the Bulletin, there is a gratifying rise in scholarly activity taking place today in and about Burma. The number of people that attended the Burma Studies Conference last fall in De Kalb gave clear evidence of that fact, as do, too, the lively exchanges that take place through the good offices of Mike Charney and his Burma Research clearing house. To enable readers to learn more about recent academic achievements, I include the following abstracts of some dissertations submitted in the past few years, plus brief accounts of what these newly-minted scholars are up to now. I would welcome information about other recent dissertations that could be noted in future issues of the Bulletin. —The Editor

Erik Braun

Erik received his Ph.d from the Committee on the Study of Religion at Harvard University in 2008. Janet Gyatso supervised his work. Charles Hallisey and Donald Swearer also served on his committee. Erik, currently Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, is now turning his dissertation into a book, while drawing on some of the more technical material for one or more articles.

Ledi Sayadaw, Abhidhamma, and the Development of the Modern Insight Meditation Movement in Burma

Scholars in Buddhist Studies and related fields have long acknowledged the Burmese monk Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923) as an important figure in the start of the modern insight meditation (*vipassana*) movement in Burma, yet no scholarly work to date has focused on his specific role in shaping that movement. This dissertation is an intellectual biography of Ledi Sayadaw that analyzes the nature and extent of his contributions to the complex origins of insight meditation in the modern era.

This study connects the events of Ledi Sayadaw's life—from his birth in the Konbaung dynasty of Burmese kings to his death in the fully entrenched British colonial state—to particular texts he authored that shed light on his understanding of what meditation is and what it can do. His writings show that his vision of the ideal Buddhist life for the laity stressed doctrinal study, especially of the Abhidhamma, in addition to simplified meditative practices formulated through an Abhidhammic perspective. Using print technology, preaching, and social organizations, Ledi Sayadaw promoted meditation and study as key means for Buddhists to make sense of the modern world. Doctrinal study and meditative practice were understood to work together in a Buddhist's life for soteriological and social benefits.

Examination of Ledi Sayadaw's life and work offers not just the chance to understand local circumstances in Burma that contributed to meditation's modern efflorescence; it also offers the opportunity

to view how a conservative figure negotiated the disjuncture between the pre-colonial world in which he was born and the challenges to Buddhism presented by the colonial transformation of Burmese society. Pre-colonial knowledge and practices served as the resources for Ledi Sayadaw's development of meditation as he responded to the perceived threats posed by the technological developments, societal fragmentation, and missionary attacks of the colonial period. Ledi Sayadaw stands as an example of someone who had clear connections to a pre-colonial heritage, even while he reformulated Burmese Buddhism into a modern form that promoted insight meditation as a mass movement.

Jane Ferguson

Jane received her Ph.d from the Department of Anthropology at Cornell University under the supervision of Andrew Wilford in 2008. She is now Lecturer in Asian Studies at the Australian National University in Canberra.

Rocking in Shanland: Histories and Popular Culture Jams at the Thai-Burma Border

This dissertation is an ethnography of inter-related ethno-national history and popular culture re-interpretation in a contested zone at the Thai-Burma border. Based on over two years' fieldwork amongst Shan former insurgent soldiers and stateless migrants, I focus on how concepts of nation and ethnicity encrypted in artifacts of popular culture are meted out and re-signified through the semiotic skills of this group of politicized and/or marginalized Shan people.

Prior to presenting the ethnographic findings, I examine how Burmese, Shan and Thai nation-building projects have presented upland Southeast Asian history. By comparing the ways in which these three nations have narrated historical events, I interrogate notions of symbolic difference – hence “ethnicity” – and strategies of and for cultural distinction over the *longue durée*. In so doing I flesh out not only how these categories have changed from pre-colonial, to colonial to the Cold War periods of history in upland Southeast Asia, but also the ways in which nation-building projects often anachronistically project contemporary categories onto past societies for the purpose of garnering political solidarity. Although the decades-long insurgencies in Burma are often attributed to post-colonial disintegration, ethnography of popular culture practice presents compelling evidence as to how national identities and so-called ethnic conflicts have been crucially framed by the black market economies and culture industries of the region during the Cold War.

Therefore, in order to tackle the ways in which this group of Shan people interrogates and re-signifies popular culture, I have divided my analysis according to technological platform or genre: jokes and folklore, Shan print media, Burmese rock music, Shan rock music, Burmese cinema, Shan video production, and finally a Buddhist novice ordination ritual. Ultimately, I argue that the effective production of a hypostatized Shan nation is a project of reworking and re-signifying texts in the local milieu. Through this process, these actors’ vision of the future includes a fully-fledged Shan nation, and because of the use of popular culture genres,

this vision also anticipates recognition of the hypostatized Shan nation within a larger cosmo-political order.

Pamaree Sukariat

Pamaree completed her dissertation in the Department of History at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, working under the supervision of Sunait Chutintaranond, in 2006. She is currently affiliated with the Department of History and Art at Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus, Thailand.

Dynamism of Thai-Myanmar Warfare From the Mid-16th Century to the Mid-19th Century

This thesis aims to study the dynamism of Thai-Burmese warfare from the mid-16th century to the mid-19th century by analyzing this warfare within the historical context of the growth and development of Burmese states: the first Toungoo, the restored Toungoo, and the early Konbaung empires, respectively. The studies indicate that the continuities and changes of Burmese states’ power structure, governance structure and proclaimed “Mandala”, together with the changing economy and international trade, which were the external factors causing the changes within the Southeast Asian region, were the significant factors and conditions driving the continuous changes in Thai-Burmese warfare from the mid-16th century to the mid-19th century. The changing aspects were the nature of the conflict leading to the wars, the military operation (both tactics and strategies), and the nature of warfare.

Burmese states' war strategies toward Thai states mainly corresponded to Burmese proclaimed "Mandala". The first Toungoo and the early Konbaung empires incorporated the Thai state, the center of Ayutthaya, within their "Mandala"; meanwhile the restored Toungoo empire did not. Consequently, Burmese states' strategies toward the conflicts with Thai states were different in level and degree. The first Toungoo and the early Konbaung empires endeavored to subjugate Thai centers; conversely, the restored Toungoo empire had confined her wars with the Thai state only to the peripheral areas. Moreover, the dynamism of the nature of warfare and military operation of the Thai-Burmese warfare were related to the changing of governance structure from the loose patron-vassal relations tending to a more centralized administrative system. As a result, the nature of warfare and military operations of the first Toungoo and the early Konbaung empires for gaining control over Thai centers were contrasting. The former was for gathering up networks of loyalty; thus, Ayutthaya was controlled as her tributary state. The latter was for devastating other rival centers; therefore, Ayutthaya was completely demolished and became powerless, being unable to challenge the early Konbaung empire anymore.

Note: Pamaree notes that her thesis is written in Thai, which may prevent a number of potential readers from being able to consult it. But she has already published two articles based on it. They are as follows:

Thai-Burmese Warfare during the Sixteenth Century and the Growth of the First Toungoo Empire. *Journal of the Siam Society* Vol. 93, 2005. pp. 69-100

The Changing Nature of Conflict between Burma and Siam as seen from the Growth and Development of Burmese States from the 16th to the 19th Centuries. ARI Working Paper, No. 64, March 2006. <<http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/pub/wps/htm>>

Alicia Turner

Alicia received her PhD from the History of Religions program in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago this past June (2009). Steven Collins and Bruce Lincoln co-supervised her doctoral studies, with Michael Charney of SOAS serving as her third reader. Alicia spent the last academic year on a visiting position at the Center for Burma Studies at Northern Illinois University. She is now Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at York University in Toronto. Alicia plans to reformulate one section of her dissertation as an article and the entire project as a book in the future.

Buddhism, Colonialism and the Boundaries of Religion: Theravada Buddhism in Burma 1885-1920

In Burma, the first mass public response to colonialism was a Buddhist response. It took the form of a series of Buddhist movements that interpreted colonialism not as a threat to sovereignty, nature, or economy but as a religious threat precipitating the decline of the Buddha's dispensation or *sāsana*. This dissertation sets out to understand this response as a means of exploring the complex interactions of Buddhism and colonialism. In this, it serves not just to narrate religious conflict or change but to investigate how religious discourses offered

a means of comprehending the challenges posed by colonialism and responding to points of conflict. The response to colonialism in Burma between 1885 and 1920 subtly shaped Buddhism and produced modes of collective identity alternative to those proposed by nationalism and colonial rule.

This dissertation examines a number of Buddhist projects, their conflicts with colonial rule and discourse of the decline of the *sāsana*. Organized thematically, it offers four studies of projects undertaken by Buddhist associations that highlight key issues in their tactical engagement with colonial discourse and the struggles over meaning. The first examines how efforts to preserve *pariyatti* textual study brought earlier Buddhist reform techniques together with colonial technologies to produce a moral community based on shared responsibility for the *sāsana*. Then a study of Buddhist education explores how a conceptual disconnect between colonial education policy and the pedagogical goals of Buddhist monasteries opened space for new formulations of Buddhist learning. An investigation of concerns about moral decline looks at how focus on behavior in moral reform campaigns shaped how Buddhists came to understand themselves within the moral community. The last study investigates how direct confrontation with British officials over issues of respect inflected Buddhism as a public and political entity and came to shape expectations of the category of religion. Together these investigations paint a picture of a period of dynamic change and interaction that came to subtly shape what was understood as Buddhism in the public discourse and how those who took responsibility for its

preservation understood themselves both individually and collectively.

Recent Publications of Note

Although the BBSG no longer provides complete coverage of new publications about Burma as it did during Daw May Kyi Win's editorship, it seems worthwhile to include notices about books or articles people might not otherwise come across. Here are three items concerning recent materials of interest to Burmanists. —The Editor

Come Rain or Shine: an account of the "Saffron Revolution" in Rangoon

The Mizzima News Agency has sent the following announcement concerning their publication of a short book about the events that took place in Rangoon in 2007.

—The Editor

What was it like to be on the streets in Rangoon in September 2007 when the hopes of a nation, dominated by saffron robes, bravely took to the streets? Now, courtesy of Mizzima News Agency, an eyewitness account brings to life the 2007 Burma uprising that captivated the world's attention.

Come Rain or Shine is the first book to be released featuring day-to-day accounts of last year's Saffron Revolution, the subsequent military crackdown and the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis the following May.

Providing the reader with a unique “sense of the street,” the book includes over 50 color photographs taken by Mizzima reporters and contributors. Additionally, the book can be of benefit to individuals and groups in advocacy work as well as assisting in raising awareness of the situation inside the Southeast Asian country.

Come Rain or Shine incorporates the experiences and writings of both Mizzima staff and external contributors – including reflections on the comparison between the protests of 1988 and 2007 by Mizzima Editor-in-Chief Soe Myint and an analysis of the economic underpinnings of the current crisis by Sean Turnell of Burma Economic Watch and Sydney’s Macquarie University.

For more information on how to order *Come Rain or Shine*, please write to mizzima.news@gmail.com

Easy access to Bertil Lintner articles

I pass along the following announcement from Mike Charney’s Burma Research listserv. —The Editor

A large number of pdfs and htmls of articles on Burma by Bertil Lintner can be found on the Asia Pacific Media Services Limited website at:

<http://www.asiapacificms.com/articles/>

Additionally, another section of the site has a presentation made by the same author in March 2009 in Japan at Aichi Gakuin University entitled: "The Staying Power of the Military Regime in Burma," which is also in downloadable pdf:

http://www.asiapacificms.com/papers/pdf/burmese_military_staying_power.pdf

Articles related to Burma in the *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*

Dr. Marco Bunte sends the following notice about articles in a German periodical. —The Editor

I would like to draw your attention to the latest issue of the *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* published by the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg. It includes three articles on Burma/Myanmar and, therefore, might be of interest to you. The articles on Burma's/Myanmar's refugee problem are written by Stephen Hull (Karen Human Rights Group), Inge Brees (University of Gent) and Susan Banki (Griffith University). You can also find the articles online, since the journal has been transformed into an academic open access journal. Please visit:

<http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/jsaa>

You can also find book reviews and other articles on this page.

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The Nargis Library Recovery Project

Efforts to aid Burma recover from the trauma of Cyclone Nargis are ongoing. Even though the initial event was over in a matter of only a few hours, mitigating the effects of a disaster of such magnitude requires many years of work. One admirable project aims to restore libraries affected by the storm. Here follows an overview of the project. Interested readers can learn more about it by turning to the web page www.myanmarbookaid.org.

—The Editor

On May 3, 2008, Cyclone Nargis completed its devastating sweep across the Irrawaddy delta in Myanmar (formerly called Burma), passing directly over Yangon. No natural disaster has taken so many lives or destroyed so much habitation in Myanmar.

One of the casualties of Nargis has been the destruction of many of the nation's libraries. Despite its poverty, Myanmar has more than 30,000 community libraries, in addition to 150 college and university libraries. Burmese have long valued reading: their appreciation for literary and other documents is evident throughout their known history. But Nargis has exacted a terrible toll on people's access to books.

In 2008, the Nargis Library Recovery Project was born out of the vision of John Badgley, retired librarian/professor from Cornell University and founder of the Institute of the Rockies, and U Thaw Kaung, founder of Burma's library diploma program and retired Central Universities Librarian.

The project is jointly sponsored by the Institute, the Myanmar Book Aid Foundation, and Ashin Nyanissara, abbot of Sitagu International Buddhist Academy.

"We're off the ground," writes John Badgley. "We completed our first demonstration project: a 20 foot container of 8,000 books donated by the University of Washington and Halfprice Books was shipped in November, 2008, and distributed for use by 16,000 students in February, 2009. A committee of Burmese librarians sorted and distributed the books to libraries and schools where they were most needed. We are now sorting more books and raising money for additional shipments."

Rebuilding Libraries

The more ambitious phase of the project involves rebuilding and furnishing libraries destroyed by the Nargis cyclone, providing books and laptops, and helping to train community librarians to access world knowledge. Business owners in towns and cities often have access; training programs exist in most cities at small cost. In addition to our Myanmar NGO, Book Aid and Preservation Foundation, and Ashin Nyanissara's NGO, our project is assisted by local businesses and monasteries.

Donations are Welcome

Please send checks to: Nargis Library Recovery Project % Institute of the Rockies, P.O. Box 603, Edmonds, WA 98020. The Institute of the Rockies is an IRS-accredited 501c-3 organization and will continue sponsoring this project until we gain our own tax status later this year. This means your donations are tax deductible.

Alternatively, if you wish to donate directly to our Myanmar-based foundation, please email us for details. Several hundred Burmese have donated, mostly residents in Singapore and Yangon, so we can purchase Burmese texts to replace those destroyed in school libraries. Most contributions came through purchase of donated books our libraries deemed more suitable to individuals than to public use. Our five-day book fair in February raised over six million kyats, which helped restore holdings in 60 libraries around Pyapon. Our next container of 50,000 books, donated by Thrift Books, will be sorted and distributed by mid-June, and a third container should be underway by early July. Thrift Books has donated a million books, or as many as the libraries and public can absorb, all books that fit within the conspectus designed by the Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation.

Book Donations

We still need donations of good quality academic texts in English or Burmese (except for proselytizing literature). The libraries of the University of Washington and Cornell University have contributed 6,000 books for these first shipments. Other donors in London and Bangkok are gathering titles. Please email us to confirm before sending books to P.O. Box 603, Edmonds, WA 98020.

Burma Studies Conference 2010 Call for Papers

Burma in the Era of Globalization

The next International Burma Studies Conference will be held in France, at l'Institut de Recherche sur le Sud-Est Asiatique (IRSEA-CNRS), Université de Provence, Marseille, 6th-10th July, 2010.

Deadline for submission of panel proposals: 1 December 2009

Deadline for paper proposals (titles and abstracts): 30 March 2010

We invite panel participants to focus their proposals on the theme of understanding Burma/Myanmar's position vis-à-vis processes of globalization. How does globalization contribute to change – or not – in Burma and also to our perceptions of Burma? Such an overview should be consequent to a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach by specialists in anthropology, sociology, linguistics, political science, economics, history and archaeology; as well as in religion, literature, art and architecture.

Interested participants are asked to organize and submit panel proposals with 500-word abstracts by 1 December 2009.

Individual papers, for which a 250 word abstract is requested, are also welcome and will be duly integrated into the conference sessions by the organizers. The deadline for

the individual paper proposals is 30 March 2010.

In addition to the title and abstract of the proposed panels and papers, please include the contributors' names and academic affiliations if applied, mailing address, email address, and specify equipment needs for the presentations.

Contacts:

Please send the requested information to:

Burma Studies Conference, 2010
Université de Provence IRSEA-CNRS 3,
Place Victor Hugo, Marseille 13003, France

Conference Primary Email Contact Address:

burmastudies2010@gmail.com

Organizing Committee:

Conference co-chairs:

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**For further information regarding the
Conference, please visit our websites:**

www.grad.niu.edu/burma

Sponsored by: Center for Burma Studies
(CBS), Northern Illinois University, USA;
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Paris); Institut de Recherche sur le Sud-Est
Asiatique (IRSEA-CNRS, Marseille);
Maison Asie Pacifique (MAP, Marseille);
Université de Provence (Aix-Marseille 1);
Ville de Marseille.

Conference fee:

Euros 180 prior to April 30, 2010
Euros 220 thereafter