Cover: Illustration of Bo Bo Aung meditating in a cave, surrounded by four celebrated weikza, offset lithograph paper, cardboard, plastic, c. mid-20th century, artist unknown. H. 13-1/4 in. x W. 10 in., Burma Art Collection, Northern Illinois University, IL, USA. BC. 98.1.05. Gift of Hugh MacDougall, 1989.

Cover design: Jeff Strohm, Northern Illinois University.

This is a typical illustration of Bo Bo Aung, wearing the white robes of a lay religious practitioner, depicted "practicing metta/myitta (loving kindness) meditation for the happiness of all sentient beings," as mentioned on the yellow banner above him. He is surrounded by four types of weikza; i.e., on the upper level are two mythical figures: on the left side is Zawgyi, the mythical magician-alchemist, dressed in red and gold holding his staff; while on the right side is the millenarian figure of Setkya Mill, the world-conquering emperor, considered as a powerful weikza. Coming to prepare the path for Arimettaya the future Buddha, he is always dressed in the traditional Royal Army officers' uniform. Each of these two figures holds the shining alchemic stone (the dat-lon) obtained after long hours of meditation" which gives them supernatural powers and long life. At the two extreme upper corners, the chariot of the moon (right) and the chariot of the sun (left) are nearly identical to their representation in older Burmese manuscripts. At the middle level are two more mundane figures: on the left side we find a htzvet-yap puggo, i.e., a hermit who has attained virtual immortality. He is wearing monk-like robes with his right shoulder bare, head dressed in a typical leather hat with a rosary of beads around his neck, and holding a staff. Across from him to the right of Bo Bo Aung, in a dark cloth covering both his shoulders, is a lup-yap puggo, a householder practicing alchemy but deeply devoted to religious practice.

As typically appearing on a devotional image, at the two lower corners are found candles and flower bowls with the caption: myitta shwe-oh, which means: "loving kindness golden vase," that frame the visual composition and underline the importance of the practice of meditation. The central offering plate presents the traditional kadaw pwe made of green coconut and bananas.

This type of color illustration on paper, popular in the late 1940s, was mounted on cardboard and covered with clear plastic, to be placed by devotees on their domestic altars.

—Catherine Raymond, Curator, Burma Art Collection at Northern Illinois University