

BURMA TODAY: THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY

FRIDAY, FEB. 8, 2013

Panel on Myanmar (Burma) by faculty and graduate students from Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL



PANEL DESCRIPTION:

This panel of faculty and graduate students from Northern Illinois University will provide a brief glimpse into the challenges facing the Southeast Asian country of Myanmar (also known as Burma) as it moves from a nation under military rule towards a new era of democracy and engagement with the rest of the world. Despite recent changes, Myanmar/Burma still faces many issues with refugees, political prisoners, ethnic conflict, and issues with its democratic process. This panel will discuss Burma's past and present focusing on the most pressing issues facing the nation.

PROFESSOR CATHERINE RAYMOND will give an overview of Burmese history and culture, as well as an introduction to Burmese refugees living in the United States.

PROFESSOR THARAPHI THAN will give a history of elections and previous democratization processes in Burma.

THOMAS RHODEN (Ph.D. candidate) will discuss conflicts surrounding the Karen refugees on the Thai-Burmese border and the displaced Muslim Rohingya refugees on the Bangladesh-Burma border.

NICOLE LORING (M.A./Ph.D. candidate) will describe Burma's recent elections in 2010 and 2012.

Sponsored by Phi Alpha Theta

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Panel Participants

Prof. Catherine Raymond is associate professor of Art History and Director of the Center for Burma Studies as well as an associate with the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University. Prof. Raymond holds a Ph.D. in Art and Archaeology and in Indian and Southeast Asian studies from *La Sorbonne (Université de Paris III)*. She also received her DREA (equivalent to an M.A.) in Burmese Languages and Civilizations at the *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales*. Her research has largely focused on the iconography of Theravada Buddhism. Her special interest is the arts of Burma/Myanmaras more broadly interactive with South and Southeast Asian civilization. Since her appointment as Director of the Center for Burma Studies at Northern Illinois University, she has resumed her research in the former Buddhist kingdom of Arakan (presently Union of Myanmar's Rakhine State). She also curates the extensive Burma collection at the NIU Art Museum, where she is presently developing new digital approaches to teaching Burmese art at all levels and towards lending a much wider familiarization with this unique resource, both on- and off-campus. She is also interested in issues relating to World Heritage Sites.

Prof. Tharaphi Than is assistant professor of Burmese in the department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at NIU as well as an associate with the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University. She earned her M.A. and Ph.D. at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Her research interests include women of Burma and Southeast Asia, print media and migration. She is also working on producing intermediate Burmese language materials in both book form and digital formats. For non-academic work, Prof. Than volunteers at a small charity based in Burma (Myanmar), Link Emergency Aid & Development (LEAD).

Thomas Rhoden has lived and worked abroad in China, Czech Republic, Germany, India, and Thailand since he was 20. Seven of those years were specifically in Thailand. He is a graduate of Webster University- Thailand, the Thunderbird School of Global Management and is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Thailand 2005-07). Rhoden is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in political science at Northern Illinois University (NIU) with an area concentration in Thailand and Burma through NIU's Center for Southeast Asian Studies. He is fluent in Thai and Lao and was awarded a federally-funded Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship to learn the Burmese language in Yangon, Myanmar in the summer of 2012. Rhoden's most recent books include the epistolary account *Burmese Refugees: Letters from the Thai-Burma Border* and the more lighthearted travel guide *Chiang Mai and Northern Thailand* (Other Places Travel Guides). When not fretting over term papers in Northern Illinois, Rhoden makes his home in Mae Sot, Thailand.

Nicole Loring has studied Burma ever since she wrote a research paper about the country in seventh grade. Since then, she has earned her B.A. in political science and economics at Syracuse University and is pursuing a M.A. and Ph.D. in political science at Northern Illinois University with an area concentration in Burma and Southeast Asian Studies. She is a graduate assistant at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies and a Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship recipient for Burmese language. Loring is also president of the NIU student organization, Burma Interest Group, and conference coordinator for the Southeast Asia Student Conference. Loring has traveled extensively in her quest to visit all seven continents, including the countries of Burma, China, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Ireland, Italy, France, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. A native of New Hampshire, Loring is an avid skier and horseback rider and loves NPR and college basketball.