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

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*Kaba Saun Nat (Lokanat), Mandalay Period, 19<sup>th</sup> Century  
in Art of Burma Exhibit, Chicago, IL, 2005*

*Number 76*

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# Bulletin of the Burma Studies Group

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## Editor

Ward Keeler  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Texas at Austin  
Austin, TX 78712  
email: [ward.keeler@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:ward.keeler@mail.utexas.edu)

## Assistant Editor

Jake Carbine  
Religion Department  
Amherst College  
email: [jcarbine@amherst.edu](mailto:jcarbine@amherst.edu)

## Book Review Editor

Leedom Lefferts  
Department of Anthropology  
Drew University  
Madison, NJ 07940-4000  
email: [lleffert@drew.edu](mailto:lleffert@drew.edu)

## Subscription Manager

Catherine Raymond  
The Center for Burma Studies  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, 60115-2853  
office: (815) 753-0512  
fax: (815) 753-1776  
email: [craymond@niu.edu](mailto:craymond@niu.edu)  
web: [www.grad.niu.edu/burma](http://www.grad.niu.edu/burma)

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## Introduction, with a self-justificatory note

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Readers may recall that in our last issue, which focused on recent research on Buddhism in Burma, we promised a follow-up essay by Frank Reynolds on the state of the field of Theravada Buddhist studies. Unforeseen events have prevented Frank from getting us that essay yet: we hope to include it in the spring issue of the Bulletin. But we are fortunate to have received from Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière a reminder of how important it is to integrate consideration of spirit cults when studying religion in Burma. We include that article, which summarizes a longer essay she is preparing for publication, here. For the rest, aside from a couple of announcements, this issue is devoted to the visual and aural arts. We include three pieces concerning the recent exhibit of Burmese Buddhist art held at NIU's gallery in Chicago. These are followed by an account of my own recent trip to Burma to make recordings of Burmese theatre music.

When the editor of a publication grants himself copious space to fill with his own prose, readers deserve some sort of an explanation. So here's mine: nobody stopped me. That is, no one, despite my entreaties, has seen fit to send along updates on their research for inclusion in the Bulletin. I would like to repeat this appeal to all and sundry who find it useful to know what colleagues are doing by way of research in and about Burma: please do your part by letting the rest of us know what *you're* up to.

In taking the easy way out of filling an issue by writing a lot of it myself, I am reminded

somewhat uncomfortably of a man who pronounces his last name the same way I do mine: Garrison Keillor. A fellow fan of the radio program *A Prairie Home Companion* remarked recently that he couldn't help noticing how Keillor seemed to take up more and more time on the show singing whatever songs he wanted to sing. Shy persons have no choice but to applaud politely Keillor's rendering of American songs of all eras. But readers of this journal, no matter how self-effacing, can right the balance of voices in the BBSG by contributing their own informal accounts of Burma-related activities.

To readers who feel that they have nothing noteworthy to report about scholarly pursuits, I would like to solicit another type of contribution. I hope to focus an upcoming issue on the study of Burmese and/or any other language of Burma. People are urged to send along accounts, however brief, of their experiences related to language learning, or language teaching, or linguistic research. Testimonials about teachers, resources people have found particularly helpful, techniques people have found effective or the opposite—all would be worth sharing. Although a few native speakers of the languages of Burma figure among our readers, most of us have had to work hard to gain whatever linguistic competence we have. If only as a way to support each other in what can be a long-term, and often frustrating, endeavor, it seems worthwhile to share notes. So please send along thoughts and reflections, so that we can begin putting together a language-learning issue.

The Editor

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## A Note on the Field of Religion in Burmese Studies<sup>1</sup>

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*Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, CNRS-  
LASEMA, Paris*

Because access to Burma (Myanmar) was sharply restricted from the 1960s to the 1990s, Burmese studies lay largely dormant for several decades. The field of religion constituted a lone exception, however, and Western scholars managed to do relatively extensive research on Burma's principal religion, the Theravada branch of Buddhism, during those years. In the last decade or so, researchers have gone on to investigate still more aspects of Burmese Buddhism. This recent upsurge has unleashed a flood of new fieldwork on previously unexplored subjects and it has stimulated analysis of previously neglected questions.

Yet this wealth of research on religion has resulted in little overall analysis of Burma's religious system as a whole, one in which Burmese identity is conceived of as essentially Buddhist<sup>2</sup>. Leaving aside the

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<sup>1</sup> This note summarizes a review of Burmese studies in the field of religion that is to appear in a volume that Hiroko Kawanami and I are editing. I wish to thank Andrea Quong for her invaluable assistance in reformulating this essay.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Lehman: "Any Burman will tell you that this traditional religion is Theravada Buddhism", 1987:575. The emic discourse on identity, in which to be Burmese is to be Buddhist, is diffused throughout a wide range of conceptions and opinions in Burmese society, although most Burmese would not necessarily express it in this way. Thus, when I once asked a Burmese national of mixed ethnic origin, "What is your ethnic origin?" using the word *lu myo*, he replied, "I am a pure Buddhist," meaning that because he's Buddhist, he's a true Burmese. Identifying with Buddhism was a way for

other religious traditions represented in Burma – Islam, Hinduism, and different Christian denominations, all of whose adherents are taken to constitute "minorities"<sup>3</sup> - it is true that the Theravada branch of Buddhism is indeed the main religious tradition in Burma. To foreign observers and to the Burmese themselves, Burma appears to be an overwhelmingly Buddhist nation. However, to define Burmese identity and religion as fundamentally Buddhist conceals complexities and contradictions that exist within the overarching framework of Burmese Buddhism.

In Burma, as in other Southeast Asian societies in which the dominant religion is Theravada Buddhism, Buddhists debate about the degree to which practices do or do not conform to the Theravadin canon. Moreover, one finds religious practices that large swaths of the population would dismiss as "non-Buddhist." This is particularly true when it comes to practices related to spirit cults; in Burma's case, this means those related to the cult of the Thirty-seven Lords, otherwise known as the cult of the nats<sup>4</sup>.

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him to assert his Burmese identity and to shield it from question.

<sup>3</sup> Burma's population is a complicated matter, being made of a dominant majority and of diverse ethnic groups mainly located in the highlands. In the specialized literature, Burmese nationality is often opposed to Burman ethnicity (the reverse is also found in Furnivall's writings). Beyond the discrepancies in its use, it does not seem to me that this distinction makes sense as both national and ethnic components actually conflate in the two Burmese words for Burmese (*Bama/Myanma*), and as this conflation shapes the hegemonic dimension of this dominant identity. (See Brac de la Perrière, forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> *Nat* is the Burmese word for spirit. In Theravadin societies, the label of "spirit cult" refers to a variety of local features. In Sri Lanka, the nature of the

In scholarly circles, the problem of how to deal with the complexities of religion in Burma can be encapsulated by posing the question of whether Burma has one religion or two. Should, for example, spirit cults whose devotees are Buddhists be considered, along with Theravadin Buddhism, part of an overarching religion? Or should they be considered a separate religion? Few contemporary scholars have bothered to address this question. In the scholarly literature, there is little discussion of the cult of the nats in their own right, and among those studying Burmese Buddhism, the issue is not even considered<sup>5</sup>. It is not that the question has become irrelevant or has been solved: indeed devotees of the nat cult are Buddhist and cult practices are historically linked to and legitimized by Buddhism.

In this respect, it seems to me that the study of Burmese Buddhism has diverged in a significant way from the study of other Theravadin societies since the end of the Second World War. Social anthropological research in Theravadin societies in the early 1960s led to a change in focus and an effort to “rematerialize” specific, local

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entities that are the object of a cult are more deities from the Hindu pantheon as localised on the island. However, I will retain the generic appellation of “spirit cult” since it fits the Burmese case and allows us to avoid the use of such categories as “animism,” which do not correspond at all to local practices and beliefs.

<sup>5</sup> The scholar who has written the most about the spirit cult is Melford Spiro, whose analysis (1967) will be considered later in this paper. See also essays by Michael Mendelson (1963), Henry Shorto (1967) and Sarah Bekker (1988), and Yves Rodrigue’s book on the nat cult (1992). Schober has recently written an encyclopedia article about the nat cult (Schober 2004). Finally, I have published a book (Brac de la Perrière 1989) and some essays (Brac de la Perrière 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 2000, 2005a, 2005b) on the matter.

manifestations of Buddhism. This thrust stood in contrast to the dominant, Orientalist approach to Buddhism, which treated it primarily as a textual tradition (Trainor 1997). In particular, anthropological research sought to consider religion in all its complexity within specific social contexts.

It is worth emphasizing that Burmese studies contributed importantly to this trend. Without reviewing research on the field of religion in Burma produced during this period in detail, suffice it to say that in 1966 Manning Nash edited the seminal collection *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism* (Nash 1966), containing three papers about Burma (one each by David Pfanner, June Nash, and Manning Nash), and that Michael Mendelson contributed to our understanding of the relationship among different segments of Burmese religion in two papers he published in 1963 (Mendelson 1963a, 1963b). In short, researchers working in Burma at the time were fully engaged in the effort to deal with the complexity of a local religious field more comprehensively than the history of religions had previously accomplished.

But for two reasons, this alignment of Buddhological and anthropological studies in Theravada societies was short-lived. First, after its heyday in the 1960s, the field of anthropology vanished from Burmese studies, because General Ne Win's seizure of power in 1962 put a halt to field research. Anthropological research on Burmese peasant society was simply not allowed to keep pace with work being carried out in neighboring countries.

The second factor to consider is the influence Melford Spiro’s analysis of religion in Burma had, given the fact that it became the best known work on the topic among anthropologists beyond the realm of

Burma specialists. Spiro was resolute in his assertion that Buddhism and what he called the nat religion are “two separate religious systems” (Spiro 1978 [1967]:xxxix).

Although Spiro's position contrasted sharply with the conclusions reached by anthropologists working in neighboring societies, scholars of Burmese Buddhism have never fully challenged it (except for Lehman's critical review (Lehman, 1998)). Indeed, although research on religion in Burma never completely ceased, not even during the Ne Win era, little attempt has been made since the 1960s to approach Burmese religion holistically. With few exceptions, the literature focuses on the Buddhist construction of Burmese society and leaves out whatever insight an analysis of other cultural inputs such as the spirit cult could bring to a better understanding of the society at large. As noted above, few contemporary scholars bother to address the question as to whether Burma has one religion or two.

Even if it is legitimate to see Buddhism as the most prominent element in Burmese religion—given its dominance, its inner complexities, and its interest—a Buddhist-centric bias in otherwise fascinating research on Burmese varieties of Theravadin tradition in Burma distorts our vision by suggesting the existence of a pure, undefiled Burmese Buddhism. As a scholar specializing in the Burmese cult of the nats, a cult that has been largely avoided because of this bias, I cannot help but notice that this picture dovetails, albeit unintentionally, with both Spiro's conception of two separate religious systems, and with the seemingly self-evident Burmese discourse equating Burmese identity with adherence to Buddhism.

The Burmese in Burma legitimize their domination of minority populations with

reference to their own adherence to Theravada Buddhism. The apparently self-evident nature of this discourse about Burmese as “purely” Buddhist serves to establish and maintain their hegemony. As oversimplified as this definition of Burmese identity is, it works to shore up the privileged status of Buddhism in Burmese society today. For this reason, it seems to me incumbent upon scholars to question that status, to ask why it appears as a natural fact, rather than as a social construct, and to reflect on the sociological processes involved in the naturalization of the privileged status of Buddhism.

To view Burmese religion from the perspective of the nat cult enables us to take a subaltern point of view. It alerts us to the processes of exclusion by means of which the privileged status of Buddhism is naturalized, and it reveals how that status sustains Burmese hegemony.

Far from being an entirely separate religious system, as Spiro claimed, the Burmese spirit cult is actually enmeshed in the overarching Buddhist idiom. However its ritual institutions appear to be physically separated and differentiated from those of Buddhism in a construction that has a specific function: to maintain a hierarchical ordering that keeps Buddhism separate, pure and superior. The nat cult is actually legitimized by its encompassment within the Buddhist system of values in processes that have enabled local religious practices and identities to be integrated into a core Burmese identity. The Burmese spirit-possession cult and its very distinctiveness from Buddhist practices are the result of a two-way process of Burmanizing localities and localizing Buddhism.

To conclude, taking into account those practices ruled out of order as “non-

Buddhist" when reflecting on Burmese religion as a whole helps us to think about the dynamic sociological processes that generate differences within Burmese society. Crucial among these processes is one Mendelson labeled the typically Buddhist dialectic of relative orthodoxy, a dialectic that delineates seemingly natural religious domains.

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## Art of Burma

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*The recent exhibit in Chicago of Burmese art from the collections of NIU and Denison University raises the profile of these little-known treasures. To mark this milestone in fostering appreciation of Burma's arts in the U.S., we include in this issue of the Bulletin three articles related to the exhibit: NIU's Press Release about it, the text of the brochure accompanying the show, and a review from the Chicago Tribune. The Editor*

### **Curators discussed the exhibit on 'The Art of Burma' at NIU museum gallery in Chicago**

DeKalb, Ill. — Curators of “The Art of Burma,” a stunning display of artworks from two of the top Burmese art collections in the United States, lead a tour and give a public talk about the exhibition from 4 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 8, at the Northern Illinois University Art Museum Gallery in Chicago.

The exhibition runs through Oct. 29 and is free and open to the public. On display are sculptures, lacquerwares, palm-leaf manuscripts and tapestries dating from the 7th through 19th centuries. The artworks were selected from the vast collections of the Center for Burma Studies at NIU and Denison University in Granville, Ohio.

“The Art of Burma” examines the transmission, protection and sponsorship of Buddhism in Burma, as seen through visual art and artifacts. During their presentation,

co-curators Catherine Raymond of NIU and Alexandra Green of Denison also will explore the nature of collecting cultural art and artifacts in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Significant collections of Burmese art have been formed in the United States over the past 150 years. Denison University amassed its collection from alumni who were missionaries to Burma, while NIU accumulated its collection primarily from American scholars and American foreign diplomats posted in Burma.

“Collectors of Burmese art were originally colonials and missionaries, but after independence in 1948, diplomats and scholars predominated,” NIU’s Raymond said. “Since the Center for Burma Studies was created in 1986, NIU has received major donations from diplomats and scholars who were interested in the art of Burma. These donors knew their collections well and thankfully were familiar with the history of their donated pieces. Konrad and Sarah Bekker were the first ones who initiated the Burma Art collection at NIU and created the core of our extensive collection.”

Burma (Myanmar) is a country with disparate geographical areas and types, ranging from mountainous regions to flood plains, from heavy forestation to semi-aridity. Moving down from southwestern China in the 9th century, the Burman people entered the area encompassing present day Burma, displacing and absorbing the previous occupants, the Mon and the Pyu. The country borders India, Bangladesh, China, Laos, Thailand, the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea and naturally became a center for routes of exchange. Today the country is ethnically diverse, with a population of 43 million people.

The collection of the Center for Burma Studies at NIU is on exhibit for the first time in Chicago thanks to the generous support provided by the Sally Stevens Fund for Excellence in the Arts. This exhibition is funded in part by the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, the Friends of the NIU Art Museum, the Burma Studies Foundation, the Arts Fund 21, the Denison University Art Gallery and the Denison Club of Chicago.

The NIU Art Museum Gallery in Chicago is located at 215 W. Superior, 3rd Floor, and is wheelchair accessible. Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. For more information, visit [www.vpa.niu.edu/museum](http://www.vpa.niu.edu/museum) or call (312) 642-6010. For more information on the collections, see [www.grad.niu.edu/burma](http://www.grad.niu.edu/burma) or [www.denison.edu/artgallery](http://www.denison.edu/artgallery).

*The following guide to the exhibit of Burmese art presented at the NIU Art Gallery in Chicago provides an excellent summary background to the field of Burmese art even for those unable to attend the display. The Editor*

“Art of Burma”, NIU Art Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, September 9-October 29, 2005  
Alexandra Green, Curator of Asian Art, Denison University, Granville, Ohio  
Catherine Raymond, Director for the Center for Burma Studies, NIU De Kalb, Illinois

This exhibition explores several aspects of Burmese Buddhist art, as well as the history of the collectors who brought Burmese objects to the United States. The analysis of Burmese Buddhist art and American collectors is displayed in four sections, comprising Burmese Buddhism and its protectors; donors and religious practice; the transmission of religious knowledge; and collectors. Objects in the exhibition have been drawn from the Burmese holdings at

the Center for Burma Studies at Northern Illinois University and the Denison University Art Gallery.

### Burmese Buddhism and its Protectors

Burmese Buddhism is a combination of indigenous beliefs and customs and Theravada Buddhist concepts and practices. The Buddha sought to teach people the moral and spiritual path to enlightenment. At his own enlightenment, the Buddha became knowledgeable of the cycles of rebirth (reincarnation), karma, and the Four Holy Truths. Karma is defined as the principle that individuals are reborn well or poorly depending on their actions in previous lives. For example, hatred and violence lead to hell, whereas kindness and generosity lead to happy lives in human or god-like forms. Minor actions can have effects on appearance, levels of wealth, and health, among others. All intentional actions contribute to the sum of an individual's karma. A more advanced approach to Buddhist thought can be found in the Four Holy Truths, which state that a) all individuals are subject to suffering, b) the cause of this suffering is craving, c) the attainment of nirvana will end this suffering, and d) the path to nirvana is via the Eight-fold Path or Middle Way which focuses upon correct behavior and thoughts.

Not all individuals are able to understand and practice the Buddha's teachings upon first hearing them, and various methods are used to assist these beings to come to a higher understanding of Buddhist concepts. One method is the production and honoring of Buddha images, which function as reminders of the most recent Buddha and his ideas. Images usually incorporated some of the thirty-two marks of a great man, including the protuberance at the top of the head and other unusual bodily

characteristics. As Buddhism diffused from India to other countries, images of the Buddha were altered to suit local expression. The Buddha figures on display here show the Burmese interpretation of canonical descriptions, as well as revealing peculiarly Burmese features, such as extensive ribbons and crowns.

The Dekkhina Thakka Buddha, for example, is a non-canonical image that functions as a protector to those with one in their home. Shin Thivali, a monk, has also come to symbolize protection, in addition to his position as a spiritually advanced being.

Many other elements of Burmese art also play a protective role. *Nagas* (serpents), *devas* (gods), *bilu* (ogres), *lokanat* (guardians of the directions), and *kinnari* (creatures who are half-human and half-bird) are liberally depicted in Burmese art to ward off evil and to provide a cosmological balance to the world. *Bilu* are usually placed at the entrance to an area; *lokanat* at the entrance to a building or close to the king's throne. *Kinnari* are located on doors or roofs of monasteries and at the corners of buildings. *Devas* and *nagas* can be seen on doors and in carved surrounds. The former is connected with the heavens, while the serpents are associated with water and territory or soil.

### Donors and Religious Practice

One of the central tenets of Buddhism is generosity. By making offerings to the Buddha and the monkhood, people improved their karma in the hopes of being reborn in a better existence. All religious art generated merit, and therefore improved karma, for the donors, the artists, and the viewers. People in Burma gave as much as they could afford in an effort to guarantee future happiness. Kings and other wealthy

individuals generated the most merit by paying for the construction and decoration of buildings, the production of art such as Buddha images and manuscripts, and the funding of monks and monasteries. People less well off financially would pay for smaller items, such as the production of votive tablets, and would make offerings of food and flowers to the Buddha and monks in lacquer vessels. Groups of people sometimes combined their resources to make a joint, large donation; in this way greater merit would accrue to each of the contributing individuals than if they had made separate offerings.

Artistically, donor figures and offering vessels would have been used on altars to pay homage to the Buddha. Votive tablets reflect three significant aspects of religious practice: the generation of merit through the production of sacred imagery, the collection of souvenirs from Buddhist pilgrimage sites, and the incorporation of the tablets into buildings to enhance the sanctity of the edifice. The production and viewing of Buddha images, narratives of the Buddha's lives, and other religious objects would also have improved Buddhists' karmas.

#### The Transmission of Religious Ideas

Buddhist knowledge was transmitted in a wide variety of ways. Burma was once highly literate, and this is amply demonstrated by the extensive numbers and types of manuscripts produced. Often produced by monks, illustrated manuscripts (*parabaik*), lacquer books (*kammawaza*), and works on palm leaf portrayed many of the canonical and Burmese concepts of Buddhism. These would have been carried to different Buddhist areas, thereby enabling the exchange of ideas and the consolidation of beliefs. Manuscript chests and stands were produced to house and make accessible

the written texts, and monasteries throughout the country kept such items. Often Buddha images were placed upon the piles of chests, where they functioned as reminders of the Buddha's teachings.

Burmese monks also played an extensive role in the transmission of Burmese Buddhism throughout the country. Not only were monks sent by the court to travel around the country to standardize the Buddhism practiced in Burma, but some traveled abroad to other religious centers to ensure the standardization of the religion. Specific monks, such as Shin Upago and Shin Thiwali, have been mythologized by the Burmese, and they are attributed with protective and other beneficial functions. These figures have been reproduced in paintings, woodcarvings, and sculpture.

Stories were one of the main ways in which Buddhist concepts were transmitted to lay people and monks. These narratives popularly consisted of tales of the life of the Buddha and his previous lives. The Buddha's last ten lives, where he perfected the ten virtues necessary for enlightenment, were frequently represented in art in such diverse forms as lacquer, paper, textile, ceramic, and wood. Functioning as a reminder of how the Buddha achieved enlightenment, these stories would have provided the viewers with information on the appropriate behavior for eventually achieving enlightenment.

#### Collectors

Burmese art also appealed to the many foreigners working in the country. Significant collections have been formed in the United States during the past one hundred and fifty years. Both of the collections of the Denison University and the Center for Burma Studies were formed

by United States citizens visiting and working as missionaries, scholars, and diplomats in Burma in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Collectors of Burmese art were originally colonials and missionaries, but after independence in 1948, diplomats and scholars predominated. The interest each group took in Burmese society and its religion, and the relationships between the Burmese and people from the United States is often expressed through the kinds of objects collected. Missionaries primarily gathered tourist type materials or had objects produced for western functions, e.g. lacquer objects or silver sugar bowls decorated with Burmese motifs. Diplomats and scholars expressed a greater interest in items that would have been used by the Burmese themselves, though not to the exclusion of other pieces.

*Here follows a brief but discerning review of the exhibition, as it appeared in the October 7, 2005, edition of the Chicago Tribune. The Editor*

Burma show pulls gallery into past

By Alan G. Artner  
Tribune art critic

Anyone familiar with the Northern Illinois University Art Museum Gallery in Chicago will immediately recognize that the exhibition currently on view is something special. In place of the usual crisp presentation of contemporary art is a fairly elaborate installation of historic material, accompanied by extended text panels.

The subject and title of the exhibition is "The Art of Burma," which is essentially an art of Buddhism. Ten centuries ago, the first historical ruler King Anawrahta established orthodox Theravada Buddhism as the state religion of the capital of Pagan. His reign

also encouraged a great flowering of Burmese art and architecture.

The exhibition explores several aspects of Burmese Buddhist art, such as its protectors, donors and religious practice, as well as the history of several collectors who brought it to the United States. As is customary in shows of such material, the lengthy labels and text panels are largely devoted to unraveling iconography rather than focusing on aesthetic qualities that have served to make the pieces high art.

No matter. In the sculpture particularly, viewers will find work of great invention as well as serenity, and time will be well-spent discovering both distinctive Burmese features (such as ribbons and crowns) and non-canonical images (such as a monk that symbolizes protection). This is a show that demands much but repays more.

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### **Recording theatre music in Mandalay, June, 2005**

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*Ward Keeler, University of Texas*

*Anyone who has done fieldwork goes through what feels like the Inspector Clouzot phase, the period when despite all one's best efforts every sentence comes out wrong and even the smallest gestures seem to cause unforeseen and unintended mayhem. By dint of long experience, I did eventually get beyond this stage in Indonesia. I feel like it still describes much of my experience of fieldwork in Burma, though, so it is with some diffidence that I relate my adventures this past June and July in Mandalay. As will become apparent in the second part of this series, I did eventually manage to get out of the way and enable the musicians and other*

*participants to do what they were expecting to do. In this first installment, I describe the lead-up to the recording sessions themselves. The Editor*

This past June I returned to Mandalay to make some music recordings. I had had the pleasure of co-producing recordings by the late, great harpist Inle Myint Maung and the singer Daw Yi Yi Thant in Rangoon in January, 2000. The CD of classical songs Rick Heizman and I put together based on those sessions, issued by Smithsonian Folkways and entitled *Mahagita: Harp and Vocal Music of Burma*, appeared in 2003. But while I was pleased to have had a hand in making available to Burmese music enthusiasts those recordings of a very classical repertoire, I became interested in making further recordings in order to acquaint non-Burmans with other facets of Burmese music.

Two experiences in the past few years prompted me to undertake this project. In June and July of 2002, I spent six weeks in Mandalay doing language work and research. I had asked my wife and two daughters to join me there at the end of my stay, and we had the good fortune of running across Julian Wheatley quite out of the blue on the day we reached Mandalay. A couple of days later, Julian and my family and I all went to the State School of Performing Arts to listen to some Burmese music.

One of the ways that I had tried to deepen my understanding of the Burmese arts was to make an effort, however lame, to learn to sing a song from the classical (*thahcìn gyì*) repertoire, a *Yòudayà* song entitled "*Nàn bou*." Many years earlier, I had started learning the basic songs from the set of "First Twelve *Còu* Songs," with which every student of Burmese music gets started. I did so under the tutelage of Inle Myint Maung.

(This was a bit like going to see Luciano Pavarotti to learn "Do Re Mi" from the *Sound of Music*, but U Myint Maung assured me he had no other students I would be distracting him from, so why not?) Whereas those earlier lessons went at a very deliberate pace—I learned only a couple of lines of a song at each lesson—in this case things moved much more quickly.

My new teacher was U Than Aung, but everyone refers to him as "Saya Lei." An old colleague of U Myint Maung at the State School for the Arts, Saya Lei has been enormously generous with his time over the years, not only with me but with countless performers in Mandalay. He was a dance teacher at the State School, but he is knowledgeable about all of the Burmese arts, and just as importantly, he is delighted to reflect upon the arts and talk about them with anyone similarly interested.

For the purposes of my training, he made two recordings of "*Nàn bou*" for me, once accompanying himself on the *pa'talà*, and once accompanying himself with *sì* and *wà*, the handheld bells and clapper that Burmese singers use to set the rhythm when they sing. I used the latter recording in my hotel room, stopping the tape after each phrase to imitate it. I can't claim ever to have mastered it, but I did get to know the song well. Coordinating the *sì* and *wà* with the vocal line was surprisingly difficult. And of course even if I managed to do that right and sing something resembling the recording, I was missing the most important skill a singer must have, namely, the ability to ornament a line as I went along. "*Nàn bou*," like most songs in the classical repertoire, consists of a long series of phrases and sets of phrases, almost all of them repeated at least once. An experienced singer alters the vocal line subtly on each repeat, as does an instrumentalist playing the song. Anyone

familiar with Haendel can appreciate the practice—and can appreciate how much experience a singer must have to know what is possible, what is expected, and what is in good taste. Very much a novice, I knew only to imitate slavishly what Saya Lei had recorded for me. But I was interested to know what other versions of the song might sound like.

So when Julian and my family and I went to the State School that day, I asked all the people who offered to perform for us if they would give us a rendering of "Nàn bou." A room full of students doing their singing class gave us our first run-through. As is usually the case when about twenty people sing together, this version was four-square and slow, not exciting but a good introduction to the piece. Then the violin teacher performed it, along with a harpist. This was very beautiful, as the violinist tacked back and forth between the "vocal" line and elegant embellishments between phrases, making the violin sound like it had been created to perform precisely this repertoire. The most dramatic contrast came later in the day, when we visited U Sein Muttar at his home and his *hsain wain* troupe performed the piece on that wonderfully loud "outdoor" ensemble. The sheer volume and the speed at which these instruments embellish the lines made it seem like an altogether different piece. Yet it was clear that these were indeed the same melodic phrases that we had heard earlier, and that I had spent much time learning, even if, now decked out with all those bells and whistles, it was as though Duke Ellington and the Chicago Symphony's percussion section had together grabbed the song and run with it.

Hearing several musicians play the same piece on different instruments put the idea in my head that for those of us interested in

Burmese music but little familiar with it, a recording that reproduced something like our experience that day in Mandalay would be instructive. I filed the idea away, unsure when I might have the wherewithal to make such a recording, but definitely intrigued.

A year later I was back in Mandalay, and in line with my interest in theatre as well as music, I attended a number of *za'* performances. Saya Lei has trained most of the famous stars of the *za'* troupes in Mandalay over the past several decades, so it was easy to contact performers. One man he had introduced me to, a star famous in the 1980s and 1990s as "Myo Daw Tin One," had retired by 2003, but he was busy training his nephew, Ye Man, who now had a troupe of his own. When I complained that I never had a chance to see a *nau' pain*, that is, the classical story performed as the last segment in a night-long *za'* performance, Ko Tin One told me that if I came to a performance his nephew's troupe was giving the following week in Sagaing, he and a woman who was a member of the troupe would be sure to perform a *nau' pain*. I did so and on seeing their performance was deeply impressed: Ko Tin One and Ma Mun Mun Aung performed in a highly stylized manner, unlike anything I had seen in Burma. They played constantly on the boundary between speech and song, and sang a number of *ngoù cìn*, the "weeping songs" that aficionados of Burmese music especially prize. It occurred to me that their beautifully rendered performance deserved at least sound recording. Better still would be a video, because they also moved with great dignity and grace. But taping a full-scale performance would require much greater resources than I could imagine marshalling. Making sound recordings struck me as a more easily accomplished goal.

Much as I liked the idea of recording a single song with a number of different musicians, recording classical theatre music of the sort I had heard in Sagaing seemed to me particularly worthwhile, because I knew of no younger za' stars learning, let alone performing, this repertoire. So on returning to the U.S., I proposed to the Asian Cultural Council in New York that they support a recording project of theatre music that I would undertake with Philip Yampolsky. Philip has made a very significant contribution to the documentation of Indonesia's many musical traditions: he spent ten years recording and producing a total of twenty CD's of Indonesian music that appeared on the Smithsonian Folkways label. I had admired his recordings for many years and although I did not know him well, we had a number of mutual friends and I was confident that he would be an able and agreeable collaborator on this project. The Asian Cultural Council approved my proposal, and Philip and I worked out that the time we would both be free to meet in Mandalay was at the end of this past June. Saya Lei had expressed enthusiasm for the project when I had first mentioned it to him two years ago, and I got word to him that I would be getting to Mandalay at the beginning of June to start preparing for the recording.

Many readers of this Bulletin can no doubt appreciate the excitement I felt on returning to Burma after a time away. I had not been able to get to Burma in 2004, having instead made a brief return trip to Indonesia (where I had done earlier fieldwork), so it was a thrill to get back to Rangoon, and then soon after to Mandalay. Nevertheless, there was an edge of anxiety. A very specific project with a very tight schedule, involving some fairly technical equipment and a fair number of people: this was all very foreign to my usual operating procedures. Philip, who

works at the Ford Foundation in Jakarta, was flying up to Burma for exactly eight days. Yes, I would certainly rely on Saya Lei for artistic preparations, and on Philip for taking charge of the gadgetry when the time arrived. But would everything mesh and the crucial week of recording go as planned?

To assuage my anxiety, I had invited an old friend, Dr. Kyaw Kyaw Win, now living with his family in Schenectady, N.Y., and an avid Burmese music fan (and maker of Burmese flutes), to join me in Mandalay. He was not due there until the middle of June, however, so at first I negotiated such matters as where we would make the recordings, what we would record, and in what order, as best I could. As was to be expected, this led to some difficult moments.

Saya Lei was, as always, his gracious, energetic, and expansive self when I turned up one morning at the beginning of June. He was training some young marionette players that particular day. Other mornings I would find him training young dancers, or musicians, or all of the above, while also receiving guests concerned with other artistic matters. He lives modestly with his sister and other relatives in a brick house near the center of town; the second story of his home is an open room in which to train people in whatever they wish to learn from him. I could bike there easily from the hotel where I had negotiated a five-week stay, the very comfortable Myit Phya Ayer Hotel on 80th St. Often after conversing at Saya Lei's home, we and other guests would go for tea, either at the tea shop across the way, requiring us to risk our lives by crossing 84th St., or at the spanking new tea shop on the near side of the road, which was so noisy I understood virtually nothing of anything that got said.

I explained on our first meeting that my main project was to record theatre music, as I had discussed with him previously, although if time permitted I would also be interested in making a recording comparing several ensembles and singers performing the same piece. Saya Lei was enthusiastic about both projects and said that he had already made some arrangements with the performers, Myo Daw Tin One and Ma Mung Mung Aung, since he knew that I had admired their performance two years before. He also spoke of how he wished to make sure that we included as many different examples of various genres of theatre songs as we could, that this would be a valuable record of songs that people were no longer performing. I responded on that day, and then on several subsequent occasions, that I shared an interest in recording these various examples of, say, weeping songs. Still, I thought the best way to make a disc that people would find compelling would be to model it on the example of a specific performance. In other words, to start with the orchestral introduction with which a performance begins, or used to, and then present musical pieces in the order in which they would come up in the course of performing a particular story. In the liner notes that I would write to accompany the CD, I would relate the story, and explain how each musical track fit into it.

Shortly thereafter Saya Lei gave me several sheets of paper detailing plans he thought would be appropriate. Like a squirrel holding a number of acorns in his cheeks, I tucked these away in my shoulder bag and went back to my hotel room to start in. Yet again I rejoiced in the fact that the new government sponsored Burmese - English dictionary made studying these papers' contents so much easier than it would have been when I was living in Mandalay in 1987-88. In those days, I had had to use a

number of outdated, incomplete or otherwise cumbersome dictionaries, each with a different system for ordering the Burmese syllabary. Every word I learned then was acquired only after long struggles with the tomes piled high on my desk. Now I could count on one dictionary to answer most of my queries, if not quite all. But this great efficiency did mean that as I read through the texts I was filled with dismay all the more quickly.

First, Saya Lei had decided that we would start our recording sessions by doing the several versions of a couple of classical songs, not wait until we had completed recording theatre songs and then turning to these other pieces. Secondly, the theatre music appeared to consist of a list of genres, with several examples of each one recorded in turn. Finally, there did appear to be a story line at a certain point in the proceedings. But this raised two further problems. For one thing, I couldn't see how this story would accommodate a range of pieces. As it stood, the script for it alluded only to weeping songs, nothing else. Secondly, as I worked through the script, I found it disturbingly thin. Entitled "The fruits of evil," it consisted of three scenes: 1) a man is going to be executed, and his keepers whip and beat him as they drag him along, while he protests his miserable fate; 2) a rich man's daughter is making up with the help of her maidservant when she spies the handsome criminal out her window, and tells her maidservant to sell off some jewels and use the proceeds to bribe the executioners into freeing the prisoner; and 3) the young couple are walking in the forest, and as they climb a mountain the criminal demands that she hand over her jewelry since, as he states himself, he is after all a criminal and so interested only in her wealth, not her. When she realizes to her distress that he is indifferent to her pleas for

mercy, she begs him grant her a final request, that she be permitted to make obeisance to him while encircling him. He arrogantly assents and when she is positioned behind him, she pushes him off the cliff. In a final tableau, she is seen vowing to become a hermit for the rest of her days.

Hm. I have long become familiar with melodramatic plots in Southeast Asian art forms. And I was in no position to say what would represent an appropriate story to record. Yet this seemed like melodrama of a particularly schematic sort, far less engaging than the story I had seen Ko Tin One and Ma Mung Mung Aung perform in Sagaing.

So there were a number of points to discuss with Saya Lei. Whenever I brought one or another of these subjects up, though, I felt that I was being listened to respectfully, and despite the complexity of what I was trying to convey, apparently well understood. Nevertheless, I was not confident that my words were having much effect. I thought that once Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win arrived, we could together take these subjects up again and perhaps make better progress toward some resolution.

In the meantime, there was the matter of the recording studio to attend to. I had heard from the head of the State School on my last visit to Mandalay that there was a good studio with fairly up-to-date equipment in Mandalay that we could use. That sounded quite adequate: I was not looking to record under state-of-the-art conditions, and I knew that Philip was tolerant of less than ideal circumstances if they assured artists a maximum of comfort and a minimum of alienation. Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win's wife, Ma Ah Mar Kyi, had been in Mandalay a few months before I arrived and she had asked relatives to look into reserving the studio for

us. This was done, and I felt confident that we were in good shape. Nevertheless, thinking it always a good idea to check into such arrangements, one day I went with the same person who had first made inquiries about reserving the studio to reconfirm them. I recognized it immediately: it was a large, old-fashioned teak house where I had attended a recording session many years before. Or so I thought. It turned out once we sat down with the owner of the studio in the low building to the side of house that there was a problem: yes, the dates were still open, but did we intend to record a *hsain wain*? If we planned on having a full Burmese orchestra perform, it wouldn't work. There simply wasn't enough space to accommodate such an ensemble: the beautiful house used to be the studio, but this man had since leased it out and the studio was now located in the small building we were sitting in. The question hadn't come up before because my friend had spoken not to the owner but to his son, who hadn't thought to raise it. So while the studio owner had equipment that could be moved elsewhere to make the recordings, he didn't have a studio where we could do it. He knew that a large monastery near Mandalay Hill had sometimes been used for such purposes: there was a large open hall, and it was far enough away from traffic to be relatively quiet. A couple of other possible venues were named. But there would be a fair number of other people booking such places.... I felt sick.

First stop was the cosmetics store where I sent and received email, to send a somewhat desperate message to Philip asking whether he could imagine making a recording not in a studio but someplace else. Saya Lei was busy that day, so I had to wait till the next day to consult with him about this emergency. When we did go see him the next morning, he heard us out and said, "I

didn't say anything about this because you said it was already taken care of. But there's another studio we should try." We piled into my friend's car and went off into the densely populated area between 84th St. and the Irrawaddy, stopping in front of a cement house near the Ma Soe Yein Thi' Monastery. The studio owner, it turned out, was not only knowledgeable about recording technology but also about classical Burmese music. In fact, he was a former voice student of Inle Myint Maung, and told me, to my chagrin, that we had met at U Myint Maung's house years before! He showed us his recording studio, a fairly large room adjoining the house, with lots of padding to insulate the room from external noise, and a small engineer's cubicle at one end with a huge, thirty-six track console. Wow! And more importantly, Phew!

I reflected later about how often in Indonesia and Burma I have encountered situations in which a person chooses to say nothing about someone else's business dealings, on the grounds simply that they are someone else's business dealings. (In Javanese, there is a phrase, *mangsa bodhoa*, one says in precisely these situations, often behind people's backs, that could be translated, "Far be it from me to suggest that they are so foolish as to be unaware of what they are doing!," the implication being that they are indeed so foolish as to be unaware of the terrible mistakes they are making.) I suppose that Saya Lei would have continued to say nothing had it been possible to fit a *hsain wain* into the other studio we had booked, even though that studio would certainly not have been nearly as well-equipped or as convenient as the studio we went to on his advice. Or perhaps he would have eventually made some discreet reference to the other studio's existence. But I was impressed that he had let us go along as long as he did without alerting us to the

fact that there was an excellent studio we were ignoring. I take it he was reluctant, as many Southeast Asians I know are reluctant, to put himself between two parties to an exchange in which he had no direct interest and so could be seen by others to be interfering—presumably for self-interested reasons. In retrospect, I am relieved that we had hit a snag, since it enabled him to feel he could without moral compromise acquaint us with a very important alternative to the plans we had made.

The cosmetics store is owned by Christians, so they were not open for business that day, which was a Sunday. Sure enough, the next day I found a rather worried-sounding response from Philip. I wrote to reassure him that I had found through the good offices of Saya Lei a far better solution than doing the recording in a monastery or some such. But now we started a new round of worried correspondence. Philip wanted to know if the studio could accommodate DAT tape. DAT, he explained, was absolutely standard world-wide. But then this was Burma. And he had various other questions of a technical nature, questions that to a lot of teenaged Americans would probably have been immediately intelligible and to me were well-nigh unfathomable. So I found myself going back to the studio in order to try to ask in Burmese techno-gobbledygook questions that meant almost nothing to me in English. (I didn't have any trouble, it's true, with the business about "male parts" and "female parts" for certain components, since some technologies are pretty much universal.) I got answers that seemed reassuring, and relayed them to Philip. Philip suggested he would bring a good deal of equipment with him, but then worried whether he would have any trouble getting through customs. What precisely would he say to explain the several thousands of dollars worth of gadgets he had in all those

suitcases if anyone asked him about them at the airport in Rangoon? It seemed as though things to worry about came like white caps, a new one approaching to replace any that subsided. Or perhaps I should say, like hurricanes.

Then there was the conversation with Saya Lei in which I suddenly realized that when we talked about making recordings on certain dates, he was assuming, indeed everyone was assuming, that we would start recording at 9 in the evening and continue until 6 the next morning. Oh, that's right! This is Southeast Asia! Attending many performances in Java, Bali, and Burma, over the years has taught me that I usually do okay till about 3, but 3:30 till 4 is unbearably hard for me to stay awake through. So this realization about our presumed schedule gave me a bit of a start. We learned from the studio owner, however, that he ran his studio on three 8-hour shifts: 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., 3 p.m. to 11 p.m., and 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. He was willing to modify this, though, since he had no other people looking to rent the studio the dates we wanted to record. So we agreed to start at 7 p.m. on five successive nights. That would give us till 3 a.m. on each date, although I didn't imagine we would all hold up that long, or need to. But then my wife tells me that I always underestimate how long things will take.

When Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win arrived in mid-June, he was delighted to meet Saya Lei and found much to talk with him about. He also found an old flute-maker to talk to, and a *hnè* maker, and each of them let him know about other craftsmen he would do well to seek out. These meetings with instrument makers clearly enthralled him, and I was very pleased that he could go about comparing notes with them about Burmese scales, about techniques for constructing

instruments, and so forth. In addition, though, his many relatives of course expected to see him, so he was soon exhausted from the constant visits he was making both in Mandalay and beyond, to Maymyo, to Shwebo, etc. I became somewhat concerned as I noticed that the topics that had been left hanging with Saya Lei remained unresolved. Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win seemed to have no trouble appreciating the points I was making now to him rather than directly to Saya Lei, and he seemed able to convey these ideas to Saya Lei more effectively than I could. Yet I was not sure that Saya Lei was making any emendations to the plans as I understood them to be shaping up. And the recording dates were steadily approaching.

No trip to Burma would feel normal without sudden financial shocks, and this trip proved no exception. I have learned to bring a certain amount of cash with me to Burma, and to make sure that I bring it in large denomination bills, preferably \$100 ("big head, big head," that is, those displaying Benjamin Franklin's big bald pate), with no wrinkles or other flaws. I explained this all carefully to the bank teller I dealt with in Austin before I left, and she and I pored over each note that I took with me, weeding out any but the starchiest representatives of the U.S. Treasury. (I later discovered that an unblemished surface was still a matter of some concern. But it turned out that the rate of exchange differed by serial numbers, too: some fetch higher rates than others!) Still, I am reluctant to carry really large sums of cash with me, so I take some money in travelers checks, as well. I have had my share of troubles about cashing TC's in Burma over the years, but I recalled that it was actually very easy to do in Mandalay on my last trip there, in 2003. Ah, but I had neglected to reflect on stories I had been reading about Burma going over to the Euro.

When, just to make sure that everything would go along as planned, I asked about cashing TC's at the hotel front desk, they assured me that I could do so at the bank downtown, as before. Again, just to be sure, as I biked by the bank soon after, I stopped in to make inquiries and was told no, I could no longer do so at that bank, but rather at another bank nearby. At that bank, though, when I was asked what sort of TC's I had, I was told flatly that none in U.S. dollars were acceptable: the government had "closed" out dollars. Only Euros. I have actually been expecting Europe to outstrip the U.S. economically for many years, since it's only a matter of time before the world realizes that our society is fiscally so irresponsible as to guarantee our economy's eventual collapse. I was startled to realize, however, that I would first experience the consequences of our status as a beggar among nations in the unlikely setting of the entryway to a bank in Mandalay. The two young women at the desk made it clear there was no sense my proceeding inside if all I had in my possession was a bunch of checks in a has-been currency like the U.S. dollar.

More frantic emails, this time to a friend in Bangkok, Alan Feinstein, a friend of mine and of Philip, as well, for many years: we all share a great love of Javanese music and performing arts. And Philip and I had prevailed upon Alan to come to join us in Mandalay for most of the week when were to be recording. Could he bring me cash ("big heads, big heads") in return for a check I would write on my Austin account? Or would he take my travelers checks off my hands? Yes, yes, not to worry. Worry I of course did, though, as I counted and recounted the money I had and the expenses I anticipated and the amounts I would eventually need—but in which currency? The hotel bill had to be paid in dollars, although not the incidental hotel bills (such

as laundry and phone calls and bottled water), also plane tickets, and the musicians would do well to take dollars but might not feel confident about doing so. Etc., etc. It was a pleasant surprise, though, to find that I could unload the last few FEC's I had leftover from my last trip when paying fees for the extension of my visa and for other official purposes. Some legal tender remains legal, fortunately, even after its era has passed.

By the time the recording dates were just about upon us, I started fretting about travel arrangements for what was a surprisingly large group of friends: Philip was bringing his wife, Tinuk, and their son, Arief, along; Alan was coming in mid-week; and another long-time friend, Jennifer Lindsay, yet another ethnomusicologist friend of the Yampolskys and Alan and me, and an expert on Javanese music and the Indonesian arts more generally, was also joining us, flying in from Singapore. I worried about which hotel they would prefer in Rangoon. (I am very partial to the Yoma One on Bogyoke Road, downtown, but would they find it too spartan?) I worried about how they would get from the so-called Mandalay Airport (it could be more appropriately labeled the South Central Dry Zone Airport, given its remoteness from just about everything) to Mandalay. I worried about whether they would be put off by the fact that the hotel where I was staying and had booked all of them found it ruinous to run their generator during the day, so that there was no air conditioning from about 9 in the morning till evening. Feeling responsible for the comfort and well-being of several people whom I had urged to come to Mandalay reminded me why I had chosen to become an anthropologist rather than a travel agent. But it did keep me a little less obsessed with all the things that I feared might go wrong during the recording sessions.

The last Monday morning in June I went out to the airport to greet Philip and Tinuk and Arief. We did a quick tour of the studio, and Philip declared himself satisfied. The Yampolskys had their first taste of Burmese tea and tea shop snacks and were immediately won over. Monday afternoon I went out again to the airport to greet Jenny. We got back to Mandalay in time for a quick supper and then straight to the recording studio. Saya Lei was already there, and we met the musicians and singers. Philip went into the engineer's booth, the musicians took their places, and we got started.

(This is the first of a two-part article. The second portion will appear in the next issue.)

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## 2006 Burma Studies Conference

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*Those readers lucky enough to have attended the Burma Studies Conferences held in Gothenburg in 2002 and/or DeKalb in 2004 are aware of how much the field of Burma studies has grown in recent years and how many new researchers have entered the field. It is with great excitement, therefore, that we look forward to the Burma Studies Conference to be held at the Asia Research Institute, at Singapore National University, in Singapore in July, 2006. Here is the conference announcement. Readers should note that proposals for panels and individual papers are still being accepted by the conference organizers. See below for contact information. The Editor*

The Asia Research Institute and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the National University of Singapore are pleased to announce that the 2006 Burma Studies

Conference will convene 13-15 July 2006 in Singapore. The BSC Program Committee looks forward to a diverse roster of sessions that explore the epistemological construction of Burma/Myanmar through its many communities of interpretation.

We invite participants to consider the ways in which Burma/Myanmar has come to be known, produced, and understood through history, anthropology, politics, economics, sociology, art, religion, popular culture, media, and literature. Specifically, we encourage panels and papers that explore how communities—scholars, colonial administrators, missionaries, politicians, artists, writers, students, musicians, villages, kings, leaders, ethnic groups and nations—have shaped multiple images of Burma/Myanmar that often reflect particular perceptions of the Burmese past, the present, and its possible futures.

In short, the conference organizers welcome presentations that rigorously investigate the nature of these communities, the basis for these linkages and their overall role in the fashioning of Burma/Myanmar.

Interested participants are asked to organize and submit panel proposals with 250-word abstracts. Individual papers will also be welcomed and integrated into the conference sessions.

For more details, please contact: Email: [bsc2006@nus.edu.sg](mailto:bsc2006@nus.edu.sg)

Visit the website at <http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2006/bsc2006.htm>

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## New Publications

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*For several years the primary function of the Bulletin was to alert interested readers to new publications in the field of Burma studies. Now that computers have made dissemination of such information considerably more efficient, and in light of the current editor's lack of bibliographical skills, we devote less space to this matter. Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to signal to our readers important new works in the field. Here are two developments we thought worth pointing out. The Editor*

A new doctoral dissertation in the field of historical geography has been completed in France:

Berliet, Ernelle. "Géographie Historique et Urbanisation en Birmanie et ses Pays Voisins, des origines (IIe s. av JC) à la Fin du XIIIe siècle." Thèse Nouveau Régime Doctorat Langues, Histoire et Civilisations des Mondes Anciens, Ecole Doctorale Sciences Humaines et Sociales Université Lumière Lyon II, 2004.

### Summary

The emergence of cities and states is one of the most complex issues concerning the start of the historical period in South East Asia, and in Burma in particular, where this topic has never been thoroughly researched. This thesis aims to identify ways of territorial occupation and ancient regional planning in Burma, exploring historical geography and urbanization with a focus on those populations that settled into the plain areas, namely: the Pyu, the Mon, the Burmese and the Arakanese. The chronological time period of interest was defined from the 2nd century BC until the end of 13th century AD

- i.e. from the appearance of cities until the collapse of the first Burmese empire - to allow for the study of the urbanization process both over a long period and during short intervals. This thesis also offers a comparative analysis with neighboring countries, mainly to complement information where Burmese sources in this field have been incomplete. Parallels are principally drawn with Bengal and Thailand. The current study draws extensively on field data and archaeological surveys undertaken in Burma between 2001- 2004.

*As Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière points out elsewhere in this issue, anthropological fieldwork in Burma was barely possible for about thirty years. So it is evidence of a new beginning in anthropological study of the country that the University of Hawaii Press has recently released a collection of essays, edited by Monique Skidmore, all written by anthropologists who have done relatively recent fieldwork in Burma. The Editor*

Burma at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century. Edited by Monique Skidmore. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005.

The book's Table of Contents is as follows:

1. Introduction: Burma at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century, by Monique Skidmore

Part 1: Spirituality, Pilgrimage, and Economics

2. The Cheaters: Journey to the Land of the Lottery, by Guillaume Rozenberg

3. Women's Practices of Renunciation in the Age of Sasana Revival, by Ingrid Jordt

4. The Taungbyon Festival: Locality and Nation-Confronting in the Cult of the "37 Lords," by Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière

5. Respected Grandfather, Bless This Nissan: Benevolent and Politically Neutral Bo Bo Gyi, by Mandy Sadan

Part 2: Political and Moral Legitimation

6. Buddhist Visions of Moral Authority and Modernity in Burma, by Juliane Schober

7. Sacralizing or Demonizing Democracy? Aung San Suu Kyi's "Personality Cult," by Gustaaf Houtman

8. The Chicken and the Scorpion: Rumor, Counternarratives, and the Political Uses of Buddhism, by Keiko Tosa

Part 3: Public Performance

9. Writing in a Crazy Way: Literary Life in Contemporary Urban Burma, by Jennifer Leehey

10. "But Princes Jump!": Performing Masculinity in Mandalay, by Ward Keeler

11. Who's Performing What? State Patronage and the Transformation of Burmese Music, by Gavin Douglas

Part 4: The Domestic Domain

12. The Future of Burma: Children are Like Jewels, by Monique Skidmore

*We note with regret the passing of Dr. Than Tun on November 29, 2005 in Mandalay. We will include an appreciation of this distinguished historian's contributions to Burma studies in a future issue. The Editor*