

### Society – Panel 1

1. Envisioning “Myanmar Sangha”: An “Imagined Community” of monks created by a “learning pilgrimage” – Ryosuke Kuramoto, Visiting Researcher, National Museum of Ethnology, Japan

**Abstract:** After the 20th century, following Thailand’s lead, Theravada Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia formed a State Sangha Organization, which has a centralised governance structure to control domestic Sangha (monks) and homogenise its religious practice. However, many researchers have pointed out that such a state control over Sangha has been very limited. For instance, anthropological studies that focus on Buddhist practices in rural areas revealed the strong autonomy of monks and regional diversity of their practices [Hayashi ed., 2009, etc.]. The same is true for Myanmar. Furthermore, the State Sangha Organization in Myanmar, which was established in 1980, seems to be more superficial and fictional than other State Sangha Organisations because there are many formal and informal monastic groups (called *gaings*) in it. However, if we draw attention to monks’ lives, we can find cohesion of monks beyond the boundaries of *gaings* and regional diversity. Anti-government demonstrations by monks, which often occurred in post-colonial Myanmar, symbolized such cohesion. That is, we can find another type of Myanmar Sangha, not as an institution, but as a type of “Imagined Communities” [Anderson, 1983]. Then, how is it created, and how does it work? In this study, based on field data analysing life courses of monks on “a learning pilgrimage” in Myanmar, I insist that monks who wander from one scholarly monastery to another in search of good education of Buddhist canon are important in creating and characterising Myanmar Sangha as an “Imagined Community.” This study would be helpful to understand the world of monks in contemporary nation-states.

2. Proudful Mindfulness: Meditation and Burma’s Honour – Ward Keeler, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin

**Abstract:** Burmans have long suffered concern about their place in the world, in light of their subjugation by the British and their own political and economic difficulties. But they have remained convinced through it all that they have the world's most vibrant and authentic meditation tradition, a point of pride to counter all other sources of status-anxiety. I want to address the question of why meditation has enjoyed such salience in public discourse in Burma, and such prestige. I suggest that conventional tropes contrasting a practical West and a spiritual East explain some of that prestige. But just as important is the way that meditation represents, while exaggerating, idealized understandings of social relations. A Burmese Buddhist inclination to individualism fits well with meditation's emphasis on individual action, and inaction, as the most effective response to stress and conflict.

3. Nature of Buddhist Sunday Dhamma Schools in Myanmar – Su Myat Aung, Researcher, Centre of Harmony and National Diversity, Yangon

**Abstract:** Within a decade, more than one thousand Sunday Dhamma Schools aiming for Buddhist children were established successfully in Myanmar. There have been a few years that well educated monks, nuns and religious people try to build up the culture of Myanmar Buddhist children going to Dhamma schools every Sunday. Nowadays, there are three main foundations (so; three main curriculums) which are starting Dhamma schools throughout Myanmar and each foundation had opened more than 300 Dhamma schools. In addition to, there are still several more foundations opening a small number of Dhamma schools with their own methods. My perspectives and data will be based on interviews, surveys and analysis of Dhamma schools and three main foundations (Dhamma School foundation, Dhamma Yaungchi and Hitadara) in Myanmar. First, I will explain about the brief history and probable background reasons of establishing numerous Dhamma Schools within a few years. Then, I will elucidate all detailed work and visions of three main Dhamma school organizations and the future mapping of their positions.

---

## Society – Panel 2

4. Myanmar and its Sorry State of Affairs: Whose Fault is it? – Kirtiraj Daradao, Social Sciences Centre, Bharti Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Pune, India

**Abstract:** Myanmar has recently begun an unprecedented array of fundamental political, economic and social changes. Since 2011, the country has moved to institutionalize a more democratic system of governance, open up the economy, unshackle the press, promote access to the internet and consolidate peace agreements with armed ethnic insurgencies. Although these reforms are still in their nascent stages, it appears that the country has embarked on an irreversible transformation (ASPI, Special Report, 2013). Even though, this is a welcome move, looking back, we find that years of people's suffocations under the oppressive military junta regimes has led to widespread abject poverty, deterioration of the public health system, rampant economic corruptions and complete mismanagement of nation's natural resources, collapsed of the educational system and continues unrest and violence either for democratic rights or for the ethnic minorities rights. This sorry state of affairs happens in a country which is supposed to be ruled according to the noble Buddhist order which is principally more egalitarian, compassionate, democratic, and above all well recognised by the world community as highly ethical and moral. However, Myanmar's entire socio-economic and political functioning and character contradicts the very teaching of Buddhism. It appears that the majority of the people sitting at high places in the junta regimes were/are also Buddhist and those who are victimised are also Buddhist with exceptions. To whom should we attribute this self contradictory nature of the Burmese society? Is it a failure of Buddha's doctrine that preaches its followers to be away from lobha, Dosa and Moha or Buddhism

never streamed into the veins and arteries of Burmese people? Why it is that Myanmar government looks at IMF, World Bank and WTO to guide them in their domestic affairs and forgets their rich heritage which is unmatched in the world of good governance? How open market economy based on unlimited consumerism and Buddhism can go hand in hand? How does the strong Buddhist monk community in Burma respond to these dilemmas? The present paper is an attempt to throw new light on the questions raised above and analyse the recent development in Myanmar from a Buddhist Perspectives. The paper will be based on the secondary data and the primary data collected from the Burmese Buddhist monks living and studying in different Universities in the state of Maharashtra in India.

5. Miss Myanmar: Constructing Gender and Identity – Chit Win, PhD Candidate, Australian National University

**Abstract:** While some activists criticise the Myanmar government for exploiting beauty contests as a sign of political and societal change in Myanmar, it is undeniable that Myanmar's return to international beauty pageants after a pause of more than fifty years is changing perceptions of Myanmar's identity.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of "Miss Myanmar" deserves a gender analysis because it not only carries social constructions of female and male roles, but also introduces symbols for the national, morality, modernization and globalisation.<sup>2</sup> Beauty pageants are revolutionizing the way Myanmar perceive women wearing swimsuits; inspiring women of all ages in Myanmar with some degree of hope; and uniting society through internet voting for their beauty queen even though internet connectivity is still in primitive. "Miss Myanmar", as a portfolio of social responses, is changing contemporary Myanmar identity. In this project, I explore how Myanmar people adapt to beauty pageants in the face of external and internal pressures. My field work will be based on semi-structured interviews applying intensity and criterion sampling.

6. The Choices and Relationships of the Producers: A Case Study on Tea Production in Namhsan Township, Shan State – Miki Ikoma, Graduate Student, Graduate School of Global Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

**Abstract:** In Myanmar, tea is used not only as a drink but also as a food product, known as pickled tea or *Let Hpet So*. Tea plays important roles in both the traditional culture of Myanmar and the daily lives of the people. The Namhsan Township, in the highlands of the northern Shan State, is the largest tea-producing region in Myanmar, where the Palaung people, of the Mon-Khmer group, constitute 90 percent of the population. Three kinds of tea—pickled tea, green tea, and black tea—are produced for domestic consumption in Namhsan, where producers consistently choose one particular kind of tea for processing among these three. These circumstances result in some peculiarities in tea production in Namhsan. The objective of this study is to investigate how tea producers in Namhsan choose the particular kind of tea they process and how their social relationships

---

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Buncombe, "Burma's Return to Miss Universe Contest after 50-Year Break Sparks Controversy," *The Independent* 4 October 2013.

<sup>2</sup> S. Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

stem from their choice, by considering three factors. This study first examines various changes in tea leaves according to seasons and considers processing as the fundamental factor. The study then considers the social relationships of tea producers, including laborers, farmers, agents of tea leaves, and factories. The study finally describes the influences of the consumption market in urban areas such as Yangon and Mandalay. In conclusion, this study discusses how these three factors either correspond with or are contradictory to each other and how producers in Namhsan respond to the contradictions. The study also attempts to reveal how the changes in producers' choices affect the social relationships among producers in Namhsan. This paper will contribute to a better understanding of recent transformations in the societies of the highlands of Myanmar.

7. Economic and Social Sustainability and Survival of Kengtung, Eastern Shan State of Myanmar, in the global trend – Prateep Chayalee, Lecturer, Division of International Business Management, International College, Naresuan University, Thailand

**Abstract:** Kengtung or Chiangtung has been generally accepted as one of the biggest and richest city of Shan State, Myanmar by its strategic economic and political geography. It had been, later, occupied and controlled by absolute Burmese junta for 60 years until it was released to the new world and also the new regime of development, neoliberalism. This study focuses on the pattern of economic development and its transformation process since the dark period to a present day of globalizing world by also taking the influence of global order to domestic development policy. Interestingly, we found that the globalizing trend is the main catalyst of change both miracle and debacle. Moreover, the most valuable alternative economic development policy should more concentrate on cultural based economic development in order to balance both of traditional and modern sustainable social and economic streams in the long run, respectively.

---