

Panel Abstract: This panel will explore the situation facing media during the current transitional period in Burma/Myanmar. The panel will engage with both the history of the various media in the country and the current social, economic and legal contexts the media must now navigate. The panel will consist of three research presentations that will lay out the current situation facing both urban-based media and the regional and ethnic media covering the rural areas, and that will also place the Burmese media's transition period in historical and conceptual context. By laying out the current situation and analyzing how Burma's case is similar and different from transitional periods faced by other media systems, our hope is that journalists, policymakers, and educators might benefit. We have identified a senior Burmese journalist and editor to respond to the research, but if this panel is accepted, we will invite one or two additional senior journalists/editors who plan to attend the conference to participate as respondents as well, in the interests of promoting communication between researchers and practitioners about how media research might be most beneficial to practitioners in the field.

Proposed Papers:

Myanmar Media in Transition: The Legal Framework - Jennifer Leehey, Research Coordinator, "Understanding Myanmar's Development" project, Chiang Mai University

Abstract: This paper will report on the shifting media-scape in Myanmar in the post-2010 period, focusing especially on the changing regulatory framework for print media. Without question, there has been significant liberalization of Myanmar's private media sector in recent years, following decades of overtly repressive state control. The long-standing Press Scrutiny Board was dismantled in 2012. In 2013, the government granted dozens of new broadcast and publishing licenses to private entities, and privately owned daily newspapers went on sale in Myanmar for the first time in 50 years. These developments have been hailed by Burma-watchers and analysts as critical in the country's move toward democracy and political reform. However, there is continuing uncertainty about the new legal framework that will replace the 1962 Printers and Publishers' Registration Law and how far freedom of the press will really extend. The Ministry of Information has proposed legislation that, arguably, replicates aspects of the old system, much to the dismay of independent journalists' organizations. At the same time, journalists and editors voice concern about the rising influence of powerful business interests on the media, as tycoons with links to high-ranking members of the former military junta position themselves in the new media scene. This paper will draw on interviews conducted with journalists and editors in the country in the past year. While the focus is on print news media, it will also assess conditions for broadcast and online media. At stake here is the image of a post-authoritarian Myanmar where free speech flourishes in a liberalized "marketplace of ideas." The paper is a critical consideration of the emerging constellations of power and interest that are poised to shape and constrain public discourse going forward.

The Role of Ethnic Media in Reforming Myanmar – Ko Htwe, Research Fellow, Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Chiang Mai University, and freelancer based in Chiang Mai

Abstract: Myanmar is a country where Kachin, Karreni, Karen, Chin, Mon, Arakan, and Shan are main ethnic groups that have their own literature and language as well as culture. Between 1836 and 1846 first ethnic Karen language newspapers were appeared. In 1842 September, a monthly Sgaw Karen language publication was established by the Baptist mission. However, after Ne Win's regime took power in 1962, all of the ethnic publications disappeared. In the 1990s, ethnic media bloomed again in exile. Since 2011, political reforms implemented by President Thein Sein's nominally civilian government have significantly become a focal point in international concerns. In the new government's reform process, improvement of press freedoms is noticeable not only for mainstream media but also for many different exile and ethnic media organizations, who now have a chance to gain a foothold inside the country. This paper will explore the role of ethnic media in a reforming Myanmar. Proper media outlets for ethnic groups are necessary because media in any form is important for maintaining ethnic culture that can help each group to understand and explore their own culture. This research includes analysis of print and online media as well as ethnic radio and TV outlets of the smaller ethnic media such as *Kantayawaddy Times* (KT), which is operate by ethnic Karenni journalists who were previously based in a refugee camp in Mae Hong Son, Thailand. Such cases will be compared with larger ethnic media outlets such as the Karen Information Centre (KIC), run by ethnic Karen journalists based in Mae Sot. The comparative study, through surface appearances to deeper conceptualizations, will offer the attitude of ethnic minorities and their journals as well as a deeper understanding of the particular challenges facing ethnic media in reforming Myanmar, where the landscape of ethnic media has a different market, funding, and language.

Media, Human Rights Discourse and Democratic Transition: What Burma/Myanmar Can Learn from Other Experiences – Lisa Brooten, Associate Professor, College of Mass Communication and Media Arts, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, USA

Abstract: This paper provides an overview of lessons learned from media in transition, with a focus on the use of human rights discourse in transition periods and on those situations most useful to analyze in relation to the current transition period in Burma/Myanmar. Much human rights discourse uncritically and implicitly employs the dominant focus on individual and civil political rights, tacitly diverting attention from calls from critical scholars to more fully respect social, economic and cultural rights, especially those of minority and otherwise marginalized groups. In media and communications scholarship, this tension is obvious in the focus on freedom of expression and freedom of the press to the detriment of a broader understanding of communication rights, especially for those groups marginalized in mainstream media discourse. This broader concept includes the recognition of people's right to access media as citizens rather than merely as passive recipients of (often state-controlled or commercial) media, and the move from an *information transmission* model to

a *relational model* of media. This paper will provide a comparative overview of media reform efforts in transitional countries, in which calls for media democratization involve contextually and culturally specific visions for a broadened set of communication rights. The exploration of these efforts offers insights into the challenges and opportunities for promoting communication rights and other human rights in Burma/Myanmar and other non-western contexts.

Respondent(s): Ye Ni, Editor, Burmese section of *The Irrawaddy*

Additional respondent TBA
