

Panel Abstract: While colonial rhetoric and contemporary government rhetoric in Myanmar seek to portray the country as “home” to over a hundred ethnic nationality groups, we know from the ongoing conflict that many people, particularly those in minority groups do not share this harmonious vision. First of all, ideas of race and nation have hardly been static over the past six decades of internal conflict in Burma/Myanmar. How might post-Cold War shifts have affected ideas about ethnicity in the notoriously diverse Shan State? To many observers’ surprise, Khruba Boonchum has been able to attract followers beyond the boundaries of the Thai nation-state as well as its *sangha*. What is his attraction amongst non-Buddhist minority groups, and how does the changing Burmese state view this movement? With changing international investment laws, the Myanmar government has sought to attract more international investments, but how this affects notions of indigeneity and generations-old ethnic Chinese networks in the Shan State remains to be seen. Finally, the Golden Triangle emerged as a political and geographic construct during the Cold War, but has it reached the end of its analytic utility, or can it be re-appropriated? An examination of its historical context offers a useful background to this question. In sum, these four papers seek to interrogate present transnational networks and their related political categories of meaning.

Papers:

1. **Thai Buddhist Holy Man Khruba Boonchum, Burmese Ethnic Minority and Transnational Religious Movement at the Thailand-Burma Borders** - Amporn Jirattikorn, Lecturer, Department of Social Sciences and Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Abstract: Khruba Boonchum is perhaps the most famous contemporary Thai monk with a significant Burmese diasporic following. These followers include ethnic Shans as well as other ethnic minority populations previously known as non-Buddhist people such as Lahu, Palaung and Wa. Over the past two decades, Khruba Boonchum’s religious mission has included traveling extensively throughout the upper Mekong borderlands, building numerous religious monuments, and consequently turning many non-Buddhist believers into his followers. His immense popularity provoked the former military junta to restrict his travel in Burma. This paper focuses on Khruba Boonchum’s relationship with ethnic minority people, namely the Shan, Palaung, and Lahu populations in the northeast borderlands of Burma. The paper asks two related questions: First, how is it that a monk ordained in Thailand and still officially a member of the Thai *sangha* can gain so much respect from non-state, non-Buddhist people living at this corner of Burma? In order to understand the meanings of worshipping a monk from across national borders, I look at both Khruba Boonchum’s religious practices and the socio-economic and political contexts of those ethnic minorities. Second, What is Khruba Boonchum’s relationship with the Burmese state? After surviving a decade of minimal interference, Khruba Boonchum was forced to leave Burma in 2005. It was only recently, in 2013, that President Thein Sein has invited him to return to reside in his former monastery at Mong Phong, Burma. The question I ask is to what extent his reputation and sacred power are

linked to the economic and political advantages of the Burmese state? Data presented in this paper come from my long-term ethnographic research with Khruba Boonchum's multi-ethnic followers from Burma, particularly from my participant observation over the past six years during his birthday ceremony held in the Thailand-Burma borderland.

2. **Whose Permanent Home? Myanmar's National Races and the Concept of Indigeneity** - Mu-Lung Hsu, PhD Student, Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA

Abstract: This article is intended to contribute to the understanding of Myanmar's racial atlas, specifically focusing on constructions of racial indigeneity. Since Myanmar's independence in 1948, racial indigeneity has been the foundation for citizenship, whereby foreign-born races, such as ethnic Chinese, are legally excluded. This study historicizes the construction and legal representation of foreign-born races and indigenous races alike in both colonial and independent Myanmar in order to interrogate the ongoing making and remaking of concept of indigeneity as applied in the definition of national indigenous races and their permanent home, the territory of Burma/Myanmar. Specifically, it will look at the struggles of Yunannese Chinese, and particularly the struggles of the Mounwun and Pathay, to achieve indigenous status. Seeing racial indigeneity as a political myth, this article argues that in addition to its ideological importance in the ongoing task of nation-building, a subconscious anxiety about the authentic indigeneity might be a potential force that induces the remaking of the myth of racial indigeneity.

3. **Diversity Revisited: Ethnicity in Burma/Myanmar Through Six Decades of War** - Jane M. Ferguson, Research Fellow, Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Abstract: Where much of Myanmar's strife in recent years has been chalked up to ethnic/minority/religious differences, often these explanations fail to contextualise these tensions within a larger historical context. With particular attention to the Shan State, this paper will look at how ideas about ethnicity (*luu myo* and *hkö*) have been instrumentalised not just by rhetoric seeking to foster national unity, but also by political movements advocating separatism. As I will argue, understandings of ethnicity were crucially formed by the fusion of Southeast Asian ideas of civilization and colonial ideologies of race, but contemporary conflicts today need to revisit the ways in which the Cold War era enabled connections between ethnicity and political and economic advantages.

4. **The Politics of the Emergence of the Golden Triangle** - John Buchanan, PhD Student, Department of Political Science, University of Washington, USA

Abstract: The Golden Triangle is a geographical designation created by the United States government during the Cold War as a referent to the opium producing highland areas of the Shan State, northern Thailand and northern Laos. The origin of the term

dates back to the Richard Nixon Administration and reflects in part its concern about the growing consumption of opiates in the United States, but its geopolitical interests in Asia also influenced the emergence of the discourse on the region. The construction of the Golden Triangle as an analytical unit reflects knowledge generated by academics, counter narcotics agencies and popular media (including the news media and the cinema). The region is often depicted as anarchic, filled with despotic drug “warlords” and dangerous, which has shaped the perceptions of the Shan State held by outsiders. This paper examines the utility of the Golden Triangle as an analytical referent by tracing the emergence of the discourse on the region and the sources of the biases inherent in its creation. The paper argues that its limitations and shortcomings are reflective of the following: a focus on “narco metrics” in analysis of the region, which represents an attempt to quantify opium production in a manner consumable to outsiders, but provides only limited understanding of local intra-Triangle dynamics, because of its inattentiveness to localized forces and processes operating within its constituent regions; the influence of Cold War period, U.S. geopolitical interests in Asia on the construction of the region, including the maintenance of cordial bilateral relations with allies in Southeast Asia and détente with the People’s Republic of China; the omission of the historical dimensions of opium production and trade within the region, which ignores its previous status as a government sanctioned commodity and the recent transition to semi-commercialized production and the factors which account for it; inattentiveness to the political economy of opium production, which does not take into account the dramatic variation in profits from opium production and the non-economic factors that lead farmers to produce it; and bias inherent in contemporary scholarship on opium production in Southeast, which in part stem from a reliance on secondary sources.
