

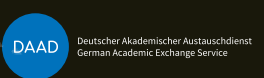
4th International Conference

BURMA/ MYANMAR STUDIES ABSTRACT BOOK

ASSEMBLAGES OF THE FUTURE *rethinking communities after the state*

2-4 AUGUST 2024
CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

hosted by the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable
Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University



FOREWORD

Welcome to the 4th International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies (ICBMS4), which brings together scholars, practitioners, and experts from across the globe to examine and contribute to the ongoing discourse on Burma/Myanmar.

This year's theme, "Assemblages of the Future: Rethinking Communities After the State," offers a crucial opportunity for participants to reconsider development and political trajectories. It also allows for an exploration of how Myanmar's diverse communities have responded with innovative thinking and action to reimagine their communities' present and future amidst challenging circumstances following the 2021 coup.

The inaugural ICBMS took place at Chiang Mai University in 2015, followed by the University of Mandalay in 2018, and back to Chiang Mai in 2021. However, due to the current political climate, we have organized the 4th ICBMS at Chiang Mai University rather than inside Myanmar.

As one of the largest international conferences on Myanmar studies in the region, ICBMS4 attracts 500–600 participants from Southeast Asia and beyond. This year's conference program includes five plenary sessions, two special lectures, two book launches, two film screenings, 19 roundtables, 23 panels, and 87 individual presentations. Beyond serving as a platform for intellectual and academic exchange, ICBMS4 engages key regional and international partners in policy dialogues relevant to the ongoing crises in Myanmar. Our keynote speakers, plenary sessions, and roundtable discussions all feature distinguished scholars and practitioners sharing their research and experiences.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all contributors, participants, and organizers who have made this conference possible. Your commitment to advancing the field of Burma/Myanmar studies is truly inspiring. We hope that the discussions and knowledge shared during this conference will spark new ideas, collaborations, and approaches that contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and peaceful future for Myanmar.

We welcome you to ICBMS4 and look forward to your active participation in the stimulating conversations that will undoubtedly emerge from this gathering.

Sincerely,

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti

Chair

4th International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies (ICBMS4)

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Education for All – An Impossible Dream, or a Potential Reality for Myanmar?

Charlotte Galloway
Australian National University

According to UNESCO, education is a basic human right. Many in Myanmar are currently deprived of this right due to the consequences of the 2021 military coup. The State Administration Council has abandoned many of the education reforms implemented by the overthrown elected government, leading to changes in the pre-coup education system. The National Unity Government's Ministry of Education is supporting teachers and students no longer in the state system and continues working towards the goals set out in the first National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2016–2021). Donor-funded initiatives have emerged to address the issue of access to education for those who can no longer attend regular schools or universities in Myanmar. However, sanctions have made it difficult for donor countries to support state-based education. So far there has been fragmented dialogue between concerned parties on the best way to sustain education. As the situation in Myanmar becomes more protracted, what approaches would be most beneficial for those most affected? Is it time to move beyond sanctions and work towards more pragmatic outcomes? Is achieving education for all an impossible dream, or a potential reality?

PLENARY 1: UNPACKING ASSEMBLAGE

Unpacking Assemblage: Navigating Complexity

Aung Naing

Policymaking, particularly in situations of protracted conflict in which state structures have broken down, is often hampered by analytical models that presume a prior structure (such as the state), obscuring more complex ground realities. In civil conflicts, much analysis focuses on antagonistic relationships between the state and opposing actors. In such analyses, the focus is often state-centric, whereby those opposing the 'state' are termed 'rebels' and the focus of peacebuilding tends towards the restoration of prior configurations of the state. Such approaches tend to produce analysis based on what *was* or what *should be*, rather than what *is* or what *could be*. In contrast, assemblage theory rejects an independent ontology of prior structures, positing instead that such structures emerge from complex inter-relationships between multiple human, material, and non-material elements. The relationships between elements determine how the resultant 'assemblage' is shaped. The focus is thus on the elements which make up the assemblage, and how they relate to each other. This is presumed to be constantly changing and subject to influences from new elements which may change the form of the assemblage. This pays close attention to grass-roots dynamics, and can identify new 'sites of possibility' within an apparently chaotic scenario, leading to policy-making which can contribute to the development of an as yet undefined future.

PLENARY 1: UNPACKING ASSEMBLAGE

Care Assemblages and Citizenship Vulnerabilities in Burma/Myanmar

Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho
National University of Singapore

A care assemblage approach brings together assemblage theory and care theories. Through its attentiveness to emergent and interdependent relations, I argue that care assemblages can be fruitfully used to cast a different light on the citizenship vulnerabilities experienced by communities within Burma/Myanmar. Informed by perspectives from feminist or intimate geopolitics, this plenary presentation considers how communities—particularly those in the borderlands of Burma/Myanmar—experience ambiguous and/or unequal citizenship realities, which are in turn accentuated by perpetually evolving domestic and international geopolitical tussles. Alongside casting a critical eye on the macro-structural force fields that make care urgent and necessary, a care assemblage approach advocates giving attention to how vulnerability can be attenuated by care practices on the ground and brokered through likely and unlikely alliances.

PLENARY 1: UNPACKING ASSEMBLAGE

Beyond Assemblage: Reframing Burma's Revolution

Gustaaf Houtman
Anthropology Today

This presentation, titled 'Beyond Assemblage: Reframing Burma's Revolution,' will critically examine assemblage theory's application to Burma's current struggle while highlighting its limitations. Drawing parallels with the French Revolution, the presenter will argue that revolutionary success demands more than physical resistance—it requires a profound collective and inclusive intellectual reimagining of society and governance.

PLENARY 1: UNPACKING ASSEMBLAGE

Activism as Education: Reshaping People in the Aftermath of Rupture

Ei Thinzar

Ph.D. Candidate, University of Wisconsin-Madison

While nation-building projects of the state create a certain ‘kind of people’ that the state requires, activism opens up spaces of resistance to create conditions for social change and make new forms of social action possible. Activism is a space of action, where social movements can be formed, in which judgements are made, types of objects are recognized and conclusions are drawn in the present as an effect of an anticipated future. In the disruptive space created by the 2021 coup, a moment of deterritorialization, unstructured assemblages emerged. Under these conditions, new forms of social symbiosis based upon sympathetic recognition have been observed. For example, a distinctive educational space as a site of resistance and a rejection of state influence has produced a more participatory curriculum. Combining ethnographic and journalistic methods, I explore how the power of resistance makes an inclusive community possible and how, under adverse circumstances, new forms of subjectivity appear through the articulation of a curriculum in action. At the same time, it is necessary to draw attention to enduring forms of social and political structural domination that stubbornly resist reterritorialization of assemblages.

PLENARY 2: THREE YEARS AFTER THE COUP: SITUATION IN MYANMAR

Bringing Politics Back in Myanmar: Identifying Levers, Processes, Entry Points, and Mechanisms

Min Zin
Institute for Strategy and Policy – Myanmar

The military junta has lost a significant swath of its territorial and functional control in Myanmar in the wake of the recent ‘Operation 1027’ military campaign launched by the Three Brotherhood Alliance on October 27, 2023. Additionally, the junta's position has been further weakened by subsequent offensives carried out by the Arakan Army in western Myanmar and other armed resistance groups throughout the country. These events have also exposed China's blatant interference in Myanmar's sovereign affairs. The weakening of the central state and the expansion of war economies present a risk of creating a new conflict landscape. Various armed groups may compete to establish ethnic enclaves or mini-states, focusing on expanding their territorial control, economic turfs, and service provisions, and enforcing identity in ethnically diverse and interdependent communities. Despite the desire of every conflict actor to ‘give war a chance,’ neighboring countries are keen to restore a veneer of “the center,” while preventing any negative spillover in the neighborhood. Therefore, this presentation argues that the radical ‘all or nothing’ approach is not sustainable and suggests that conflict transformation to address Myanmar's crisis is still possible. This is despite the analytical landscape being predominantly occupied by two extremes: the Kool-Aid drinkers of victory is around the corner’-type ideologues and the doomsayers of the ‘apocalyptic future of Myanmar.’ This presentation identifies three key leverage points that can initiate a process strategy that facilitates de-escalation and political resolution.

PLENARY 2: THREE YEARS AFTER THE COUP: SITUATION IN MYANMAR

Materializing the Federal Principles: Practical Approaches and Challenges

May Oo Mutraw

The conflict long plaguing Myanmar has transformed itself in many facets, as have the actors of the conflict. Yet, the bottom line remains: the aspiration for a federal democracy as a political solution and an unequivocal rejection of authoritarianism. While the sound of it may not be so complicated, the devil is in the details as the actors attempt to untangle the yarn ball of conflict. While the rejection of a unitary state and ethnic chauvinism started soon after independence in 1948, a united call for the establishment of a federal democracy as a political solution was initiated in 1976 with the formation of an alliance group called the National Democratic Front (NDF). Included in its membership were Rakhine (Arakan), Chin, Karen, Karenni, Kayan, Kachin, Lahu, Mon, Pa-O, Palaung, Shan, and Wa representatives. This effort and subsequent others, although morphed into different acronyms, were met with often violent rejection. The struggles of the non-Bamar ethnic minorities have continued peripherally and are often neglected, while their quest for ethnic equality and right to self-determination remain unfulfilled. Then came the third coup staged by the country's military, the Tatmadaw, in February 2021. The coup unprecedentedly changed the context of the wars being fought along the country's borders. I will discuss the continued endeavor of the non-Bamar minorities to establish a federal democracy from the bottom-up and the ever-surmounting challenges they face in the midst of a do-or-die fight against the increasingly ruthless but also weakening regime.

PLENARY 3: HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Given that many influential stakeholders in the international community view humanitarian assistance as pivotal in de-escalating conflict in Myanmar, this panel aims to examine the current landscape of humanitarian efforts in the region from diverse perspectives, ranging from international engagement strategies to practical on-the-ground implementation. Esteemed panelists will share insights gained from their experiences in collaborating with both international and local actors involved in the delivery of aid. This collaboration spans from upstream entities such as international organizations, governments, and donors to downstream participants including local civil society organizations, implementing partners, and Thai authorities. The discussion will outline existing challenges and explore potential opportunities to enhance the effectiveness and timeliness of humanitarian assistance efforts.

PLENARY 4: REGIONAL RESPONSES TO MYANMAR: THAI FOREIGN POLICY, ASEAN ROLES, AND THE CHINESE ENCLOSURE

This plenary session explores critical dimensions of regional dynamics toward Myanmar through the lenses of geopolitics, Thai foreign policy, ASEAN's engagement, and the influence of Chinese interests. The session features distinguished speakers offering deep insights into these complex issues. First, Dulyapak Preecharush will discuss 'Geopolitics and Thailand-Myanmar Relations.' This analysis sheds light on the implications of geopolitical dynamics and great power competition on Thai-Myanmar relations and Thailand's responses. Second, Fuadi Pitsuwan presents 'ASEAN and Thailand's Roles in Resolving the Myanmar Crisis,' addressing current challenges, opportunities, and the evolving roles of Thailand and ASEAN's approach to Myanmar. This presentation navigates the complexities of diplomatic engagement and regional cooperation amidst the ongoing crisis in Myanmar. Finally, Pinkaew Laungaramsri concludes with 'Dark Zomia: Myanmar's Frontier and the Chinese Enclosure.' Analyzing the proliferation of illicit enterprises operated by Chinese syndicates in the Myanmar-China border region, she argues that Myanmar's 'indigenous Zomia' has increasingly been transformed into a 'dark Zomia'—a non-state space of runaway criminals evading China's state-making project. Overall, this plenary session aims to present diverse perspectives on the diplomatic, geopolitical, and socio-economic dimensions shaping regional responses to Myanmar.

PLENARY 5: THE ROLE OF ASEAN AND ITS NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES IN ASSEMBLAGES OF THE FUTURE: WHAT'S NEXT?

The ongoing crisis in Myanmar has significant implications for Southeast Asia and its neighboring countries, prompting the need for strategic and impactful responses from ASEAN and its neighboring countries. This plenary will critically examine how ASEAN and India can effectively address the immediate and long-term needs of Myanmar beyond geopolitical considerations. Speakers will explore potential steps that regional bodies can take action on, moving beyond traditional state-to-state collaboration. The discussion will focus on essential sectors, with a strong emphasis on practical steps and strategies that can lead to future stability and development. Additionally, the plenary will highlight how different sectors, outside of formal avenues like ASEAN summits, can be mobilized to effectively respond to the situation in Myanmar. Speakers will explore the potential for ASEAN and its neighbors to create a comprehensive framework for cooperation in education and health, leveraging each country's strengths. By critically examining current approaches and proposing forward-thinking solutions, the session seeks to outline a possibility for regional collaboration that transcends traditional diplomatic dialogues and focuses on diverse sectors. The goal is to foster a more resilient and supportive regional framework that can address the immediate needs and long-term aspirations of the people of Myanmar.

ROUNDTABLE

Federalism in Burma Since the Coup

Coordinator(s)

Ashley South

Description

Federalism has long been considered an important tool for resolving the country's protracted state-society conflicts in Myanmar and achieving self-determination for ethnic nations and other sub-national units. However, federalism is an 'essentially contested concept,' meaning different things to different stakeholders and there are several different theoretical and empirical approaches to the subject.

This roundtable will explore different understandings and practices of federalism, through the experiences and insights of a range of participants. The focus will be on using academic/theoretical concepts of federalism in practice, on the ground in conflict-affected parts of Burma.

The panel convener/moderator will begin with a general overview of the topic, and will introduce the concept and practices of 'federalism from below' (or 'emergent federalism'). Each of the other speakers will talk for about 10 minutes, responding to the introductory comments and/or elaborating their own understanding and experiences of federalism. Following the roundtable input, discussion will be opened up to the audience for a Q&A session and dialogue.

The panel addresses the following conference theme: Negotiating New Realities: Power, Practice, and Praxis (Emergent Governance and Civilian Protection).

Panelists:

1. Ying Lao
2. Kasauh Mon
3. Mi Rot Chan

ROUNDTABLE

Unveiling the Journey: Women Politicians' Diverse Challenges Before and After the Coup Coordinator(s)

Aye Lei Tun

Description

In the tumultuous landscape of Myanmar's political arena, the experiences of female political activists stand as a testament to resilience, determination, and unwavering commitment to change. This roundtable discussion delves into the nuanced realities women leaders face in Myanmar, both pre-and post-coup. In this engaging and insightful discussion, we will bring together experts and Myanmar's esteemed women politicians to share their firsthand experiences navigating the ever-evolving political landscape. From the challenges of advocating for change to the complexities of maintaining a political presence amidst shifting power dynamics, our panelists will shed light on the multifaceted journey of women in politics.

Furthermore, this roundtable discussion serves as a platform to showcase the latest research findings, providing empirical insights into the unique challenges women political activists face. By intertwining academic discourse with real-life narratives, we aim to offer a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles and triumphs that define the political sphere for Myanmar's women. Emphasizing the importance of intersectionality, our discussions will explore how factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status intersect to shape the experiences of women politicians. Through this lens, we seek to uncover the diverse layers of challenges and opportunities that define their journeys. As the roundtable will be conducted primarily in Burmese, we aim to create a space where local voices can be heard and understood. This inclusive approach ensures that Myanmar's women politicians' rich tapestry of experiences and perspectives is at the forefront of our discussions.

Panelists:

1. Sanda Thant
2. Aye Mya Mya Myo
3. Evelyn

ROUNDTABLE

Tracing Histories of Citizenship and Displacement in and from Myanmar

Coordinator(s)

Elizabeth Rhoads

Since Myanmar's 2021 military coup, civilians have faced multiple displacement events including in situ, internal, and cross-border displacement. Every previous period of military rule in Myanmar was accompanied by deportations, citizenship stripping and denationalization, emigration, and widespread urban and rural displacement. Previous periods of military rule also led to widespread exclusion of those deemed not to fit within the narrowly drawn parameters and impractical evidentiary requirements of Myanmar's citizenship regime, causing longstanding inequality and producing millions of emigrants, exiles, and stateless people within and beyond Myanmar's borders, with Myanmar's Muslim, Hindu, and other 'unofficial minority' communities particularly impacted.

Yet, many previous population movements and forced migrations do not appear on the radars of international organizations tasked with displacement, statelessness, migration, and refugees, particularly as many of these movements occurred before the Refugee Convention's 1967 Optional Protocol extended the temporal and geographic scope of the Convention to include Myanmar. Furthermore, Myanmar's well-documented racialized citizenship regime, and Myanmar and Thailand's status as non-signatories of the relevant Conventions, have complicated international policy responses to myriad forms of displacement and irregular documentary status on both sides of the border. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of contemporary refugees, evictees, and internally displaced persons in the archive, Myanmar's displaced include multiple and often overlapping subjectivities: war-time evacuees, urban squatters, fire victims, emigrants, internal and cross-border migrants, and disaster victims, many of whom would have been considered refugees or internally displaced persons had contemporary definitions been applied.

This roundtable explores the multiple modes of displacement in Myanmar's history, not limited to development-induced displacement and conflict-induced displacement and the overlaps of displacement with other forms of marginality. It asks panelists to reflect on how histories of displacement and displaceability intersect with contemporary forms of ongoing and repeat displacement, such as that experienced by the Rohingya in 2017 and since the 2021 military coup. Furthermore, we intend to explore the after-effects of displacement, home-creation, rebuilding, and emplacement in communities within Myanmar and abroad. The discussion will also touch upon understandings of communal and political belonging in minority and other marginalised communities in the context of the Spring Revolution and in post-SAC futures. In discussing displacement, citizenship, and belonging across a longer time period, we hope to make links between past and present state practice and the agency of communities in resisting and rebuilding.

Panelists:

1. Elizabeth Rhoads
2. Aung Ko Ko
3. Tun Min Oo
4. Tharaphi Than

ROUNDTABLE

Fieldwork Under Double Fire: The Challenges of Burma's At-Risk Researchers Studying At-Risk Communities

Coordinator(s)

Gustaaf Houtman

Elliot Lodge

Description

This panel explores the methodological, ethical, and practical hurdles Burma's at-risk researchers face while conducting fieldwork and scholarship under life-threatening conditions amidst the unprecedented humanitarian and political crisis following the 2021 military coup. Operating under a dual threat as resistance activists and researchers seeking to understand their communities' experiences, these scholars have adapted innovative ethnographic methods, including digital tools, narratives, and participatory approaches.

The panel offers a case study with global relevance, providing lessons for conducting ethical and adaptive research in other conflict-affected regions worldwide. It aims to provide concrete strategies for researchers, universities, and ethics boards to navigate the unique challenges and responsibilities of supporting research conducted in conflict zones, contributing to broader debates on developing innovative methodologies that prioritize the safety and well-being of researchers and participants alike.

Through discussions on emotional resilience, researcher precarity, methodological adaptations, insider perspectives, ethical dilemmas in crisis, the use of technology for at-risk research, gender dynamics in militarized environments, navigating unequal partnerships, impact and outreach, and the long-term impact on at-risk scholars themselves, the panel seeks to illuminate the crucial role of knowledge production in times of conflict and the challenges it entails. It will also address pressing concerns about the need for flexible and context-sensitive research ethics frameworks tailored to the unique demands of conducting research in high-risk environments.

Ultimately, the panel aims to contribute to broader debates on developing innovative, adaptive methodologies that prioritize the safety and well-being of researchers and participants alike while extracting lessons that apply to other authoritarian or crisis contexts. The panel's discussions will engage scholars, human rights advocates, and policymakers interested in understanding the complexities of conducting research in challenging environments and supporting the work of at-risk researchers.

Panel Discussion Topics:

1. Emotional Resilience: Strategies for researchers to manage the psychological toll of studying community trauma while personally at risk.
2. Researcher Precarity and Impact: How researchers navigate mobility restrictions, lack of institutional support, and the impact of necessary secrecy on research design and the framing of research questions.

3. Methodological Adaptations: The use of digital ethnography, narrative methods, and participatory research, in particular, for confidential data collection in conflict zones, as compared to other methods.
4. Insider Perspectives: Potential biases and advantages of researchers studying their own at-risk communities, leveraging local knowledge and trusted networks.
5. Ethical Dilemmas in Crisis: Researchers and communities targeted by a repressive regime for whom research may constitute a crime face unique challenges of informed consent, confidentiality, and participant protection.
6. Technology for At-Risk Research: Secure digital tools and strategies for data collection, collaboration, and anonymity in high-risk environments.
7. Gender Dynamics in Militarized Environments: Adapting research methods and frameworks to address gendered dimensions in militarized conflict and resistance.
8. Navigating Unequal Partnerships: Challenges at-risk researchers face in collaborating with better-supported foreign researchers, including power imbalances, exploitation risks, and ethical dilemmas arising from potential ties to the military regime and developing more equitable collaboration frameworks that recognize at-risk researchers' unique contributions and risks.

ROUNDTABLE

Bridging Borders: Exploring Myanmar Nationals' Profiles, Experiences, Intentions, and Needs in Thailand

Coordinator(s)

Hélène Syed Zwick

Description

Understanding the current situation in Myanmar and how its people deal with the economic, social, and political realities requires a nuanced examination of the movements of Myanmar nationals to Thailand and focused attention on those living and working in Thailand. The SAC's conscription law further complicates these dynamics, affecting both those remaining in Myanmar and those already in Thailand. This session aims to shed light on the profiles, experiences, needs, and vulnerabilities faced by Myanmar nationals in Thailand and explore possible solutions, considering that the Royal Thai Government (RTG)'s tools for managing migrants from Myanmar were developed and established prior to the current crisis and may not adequately address present needs.

The Thailand-Myanmar border represents the largest country-to-country corridor in Southeast Asia. It is ranked one of the 20 largest corridors in the world. According to IOM monitoring activities, 1.3 million Myanmar nationals crossed the border in 2023. Among those, an average 20 percent intend to stay in Thailand for one week or more, making nearly 22,000 longer term entries per month in 2023. In Thailand, this population is economically active, with Myanmar migrants mostly present in Bangkok, Samut Sakorn, and Samut Prakarn. There is also a large concentration of Myanmar nationals in Tak province.

Through a roundtable discussion, this session will provide attendees with insights into the evolution of coping strategies, needs, and vulnerabilities of Myanmar nationals living in Thailand. The roundtable will address various aspects of the economic, social, and political realities. First, it will delve into the socioeconomic profile of Myanmar nationals in Thailand, highlighting factors such as their province/state of origin and educational background, with a focus on recent arrivals. Then, lived experiences of Myanmar nationals in Thailand, including their livelihood strategies and contributions to Myanmar's socioeconomic development through remittances, will be discussed. Third, Myanmar migrants' migration intentions will be explored, especially considering the SAC's conscription law and the current regular pathways' features, including their intentions to visit or return to Myanmar. Fourth, the session will examine the evolving needs and vulnerabilities of Myanmar nationals in Thailand across key domains such as education, health, food, employment, and protection.

Upon completion of the session, attendees will possess a deeper and nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding Myanmar nationals' movements and realities in Thailand. They will be able to articulate patterns of migration from Myanmar to Thailand, understand and explain the diverse experiences of these migrants, and assess the evolving needs and vulnerabilities that impact both individuals and the demographic and socioeconomic development of Myanmar. Ultimately, this knowledge will empower attendees to contribute to informed discussions and initiatives aimed at

supporting and enhancing the wellbeing of Myanmar nationals in Thailand and humane and orderly migration.

Panelists

1. Moe Moe Myint Aung
2. Yoon Htar Aein
3. Khaing Kaung San

ROUNDTABLE

Fostering Resilience, Empowerment, and Protection Mechanisms for Myanmar Scholars and Activists in Thailand

Coordinator(s)

Kyaw Kyaw

Description

Since the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021, the country has been thrust into a devastating cycle of violence, conflict, and widespread human rights abuses. The aftermath of the coup has led to the loss of thousands of lives, mass detentions, and a significant wave of displacement, with many civilians, including scholars, seeking refuge across the border in neighboring Thailand.

The journey of Myanmar refugee scholars to Thailand, however, is fraught with challenges. Many arrive without legal documentation, facing heightened risks of arrest, intimidation, and deportation by authorities. Even those with some form of documentation, such as a Myanmar passport or Certificate of Identity (CI), grapple with complex emotions, uncertainty, and the formidable task of adapting to a new environment.

In response to the pressing need to understand and address the vulnerabilities faced by Myanmar refugee scholars and activists—and, by extension, the wider emerging exile community in Thailand—the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Chiang Mai University and Nonviolent Peaceforce Myanmar initiated a collaborative research project. This project employed a method of co-production of knowledge (CPK), engaging a group of at-risk Myanmar scholars as co-researchers. Through this approach, the study aimed to shed light on emergent forms of community and support that provide critical and holistic forms of protection.

The research process involved a series of co-production workshops, where research questions and design were collaboratively honed. Co-researchers undertook analytical self-reflection of their personal experiences and engagement to examine selected case studies, revealing emergent protection tactics and strategies. The study focused on Mae Sot and Chiang Mai, the two pre-eminent sites of recent Myanmar exile communities in Thailand, each featuring distinct characteristics shaping the nature of community efforts.

This panel discussion seeks to bring together scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders to explore the findings of this research and discuss implications for policy, practice, and future research. By centering the perspectives and experiences of at-risk scholars, the discussion aims to amplify the voices of marginalized communities and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the refugee experience and the importance of context-specific approaches to protection and support.

Panel Discussion Objectives:

1. To provide an overview of the challenges faced by Myanmar refugee scholars and activists in Thailand, including legal barriers, security threats, economic instability, and mental health concerns.

2. To highlight the resilience, agency, and collective spirit of at-risk scholars and activists in Myanmar exiled communities in Thailand.
3. To explore the role of proactive agency, interconnected networks of trust, and mutual aid in fostering resilience and empowerment within displaced communities.
4. To discuss the efficacy of locally-led initiatives in transcending the limitations of traditional NGO-based approaches to protection and humanitarian assistance.
5. To examine the transformative potential of solidarity and collective agency in rebuilding communities and inspiring hope in the face of adversity.

Panelists

1. Elliot Lodge
2. Daphne Iris Macatimbol
3. Agatha
4. Min

ROUNDTABLE

Resilience in Crisis Time: Mental Health and Education

Coordinator(s)

Kyaw Kyaw Min Htut

Description

Decades of political turmoil, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 military coup, have plunged Myanmar into a profound crisis. The ensuing civil war has inflicted immense suffering on the population, particularly youth, who bear the brunt of trauma and lost opportunities. Yet, amidst adversity, resilient communities and individuals have emerged, determined to rebuild a future centered on human dignity and protection.

This panel will delve into the experiences and insights gained from trauma response programs implemented as part of broader resiliency-building initiatives along the Thai-Myanmar border. We argue that individual resilience is foundational to fostering collective community strength, essential for navigating ongoing challenges and creating sustainable solutions. Our approach to resiliency building comprises three interconnected phases: rebuilding inner capacity through trauma and mental health support; developing individual skills and capacities; and re-engaging communities in protection and development activities.

Panel participants are seasoned practitioners with extensive experience in trauma response, education, and youth empowerment in the border region. Through their shared knowledge and expertise, this panel aims to contribute to the broader discourse on building resilience in crisis-affected communities.

By sharing our findings and lessons learned, we hope to inspire and inform policymakers, humanitarian workers, and civil society organizations working to support populations affected by conflict and displacement.

Panelists

1. Grace
2. Aung Khant Thu
3. Kyaw Kyaw Min Htut

ROUNDTABLE

Community Resilience and Adaptive Solutions

Coordinator(s)

Coordinator: Kyaw Shinn Thant

Description

Myanmar faces challenges in participating in global efforts to address climate change and promote renewable energy due to political instability and foreign investment constraints, especially in the energy sector. Additionally, the country struggles with limited access to electricity, particularly in rural areas, hindering socio-economic development. Overcoming these challenges requires tailored solutions.

Despite these obstacles, Myanmar has seen notably success in renewable energy initiatives, such as hydro mini-grids and solar projects, even amidst political uncertainty. Scaling up these efforts and incorporating local expertise can improve energy access, drive rural development, and contribute to global climate goals.

To summarize, implementing mini-grid projects at the community level is crucial for addressing Myanmar's electricity access challenges. These projects offer decentralized and resilient solutions that can provide reliable and affordable electricity to rural areas, fostering socio-economic development and contributing to climate resilience. Prioritizing community-based approaches can expedite progress towards universal electricity access and unlock Myanmar's potential for sustainable development.

Panelists

1. April Kyu Kyu
2. Khine
3. Theint Ei San

ROUNDTABLE

Scholars of the Spring Revolution: Applied Anthropology, Education, and Social Change Since the Military Coup

Coordinator(s)

Ma Khin Mar Mar Kyi

Description

Composed of senior female Burmese CDMer anthropologists, this panel will explore the validation of new anthropologies of modernity and technologies that helped to open the displaced anthropologist CDMers to becoming legitimate subjects of inquiry and autonomy. Because of their precarious circumstances and situations compounded by their status, these senior anthropologist CDMers have to struggle for everyday safety and survival. Despite all the challenges, these scholars have found autonomy and academic freedom and have been able to utilize inventive hybrid-empirical ways while creating 'field,' 'curriculum,' and 'methodologies' to co-create, co-disseminate, and replicate new forms of knowledge, producing critical thinkers and leading to practice inclusion, equality, and social change in Myanmar. These 'native' anthropologists' 'gaze' powerfully captures how much applied anthropology and education are needed for social change in Myanmar.

Panelists

1. Ma Khin Mar Mar Kyi
2. Mya Aung
3. Kalyah
4. Hazel
5. Cathy

ROUNDTABLE

Community of Becoming at the Thai-Myanmar Border

Coordinator(s)

Malee Sitthikriengkrai

Description

Following the coup in Burma in 2021, various groups of people have gathered to express their opposition to living under the rule of the State Administration Council (SAC). People have formed a movement known as the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). This panel will examine the emergence and assemblage of three types of people: students who cross the border for education, CDM members, and displaced people with a strong desire to become Thai citizens. This panel will present the desire and potential of the three groups that are creating a community independent of Myanmar's state power. In addition to the three cases, Professor Shigeharu Tanabe will present a paper on assemblage and community of becoming.

Panelists

1. Malee Sitthikriengkrai
2. Aryuwat Raruen
3. Shigeharu Tanabe

ROUNDTABLE

Experiences of Education Provision from Refugees for Refugees in Mae Sot

Coordinator(s)

Mariel Kistemaker

Gustaaf Houtman

Description

In an era marked by growing levels of forced displacement, the world faces the critical challenge of protecting the right to education for undocumented migrants and refugee youth. Education has been found to be a lifeline for people in times of crisis, providing refugees with hope and security amidst uncertainty. Ensuring undocumented migrants' equal access to education is one of the challenges in realising the fundamental human rights of refugees. Education can build social cohesion, can provide them with tools to rebuild their lives, and it can create pathways to a brighter future.

The roundtable discussants will talk about the various challenges in providing education to refugees in Mae Sot, the needs of youth that they see that they observed in Mae Sot, and potential ways to overcome these challenges. This hybrid virtual roundtable will discuss key experiences, learnings, and promising practices that have emerged while responding to undocumented refugee education needs in Mae Sot since the 2021 coup in Burma. The coup has left Myanmar's higher education system in shambles. The recent influx of those avoiding conscription from Burma into Thailand, driven principally by the Burmese national army's recruitment efforts, but also by ethnic and People's Defence Force (PDF) armies, presents a complex and pressing challenge for the displaced community. The young individuals, seeking refuge and opportunities, require support, skills, and resources to navigate their new circumstances and build sustainable livelihoods. Undocumented refugee youth in Thailand face significant risks, including drug addiction and exploitation.

Considering this situation, the roundtable discussion will focus on the following themes:

1. Adapting education approaches to learning in precarious conditions
2. How to facilitate education projects for undocumented migrants by undocumented migrants
3. How to make education safe and inclusive
4. How to enhance refugee self-reliance
5. What donors should consider
6. What would be part of a 'Streetwise' Survival Kit

This roundtable discussion will explore this topic and the challenges involved in supporting Myanmar youth, and the participants will come up with recommendations. The recommendations will be aimed at offering a roadmap for action and a chance to change the educational trajectories of displaced learners. The roundtable will be a solutions-based discussion with ideas to improve refugee education in Mae Sot. Furthermore, the roundtable discussion aims to educate the audience in, and raise awareness about, the situation faced by Myanmar youth and educators in Mae Sot.

4th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BURMA/MYANMAR STUDIES:
ASSEMBLAGES OF THE FUTURE: RETHINKING COMMUNITIES AFTER THE STATE
2–4 AUGUST 2024, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Panelists

1. Mariel Kistemaker
2. Gustaaf Houtman
3. Migrant College representatives

ROUNDTABLE

Current State of Health, Environment, and Education: Bringing Stories of Rohingya Camps to the Light

Coordinator(s)

Md Akib Javed

Description

The Rohingya, an ethnic minority of Myanmar, have been an ill-fated community who have been forced to leave their homeland. For the last few decades, Rohingyas have been forced to flee their home country and take shelter in nearby states where a substantial portion of them are living in camps. Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries in the world, has been sheltering more than a million Rohingya refugees since 2017. In addition, Rohingyas have taken refuge in countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The crises in Rohingya camps have always remained behind the curtain and investigations have been quite inadequate. This roundtable will shed the light on the health, education, and environmental status of Rohingya refugee camps in all hosting countries.

Health is the foremost basic need for a person, no matter whether they live in a camp or sovereign state. Without assuring mass and quality education for forcefully displaced persons, there's an uncertain future for them, no matter if they are repatriated, stay in the camp, or are resettled to a third country. On the other hand, environmental crises like climate change-induced hazards are topics for which discussions are negligibly centered around climate change impacts on Rohingya refugees. We talk about the right to live, right to health, and right to environmental justice; however, there are very few discussions focused on the lives of people who are passing excruciating days in camps.

Researchers who have carried out primary investigations will share their findings and stories in this roundtable. Moreover, experts who have first-hand experience of working with Rohingya refugees will be invited to join the discussion to share their thoughts on the ongoing health, education, and environmental crises. These three aspects are indispensable for human beings to survive in a better way. As there have hardly been any discussions on these three topics, this roundtable discussion will certainly generate new ideas to be added to the ongoing discourse about Rohingyas. Moreover, the discussion will illustrate the urgency of the crisis in the Rohingya camps located in different countries and urge the global community to take drastic steps to support this less fortunate community.

ROUNDTABLE

A View from Mae Sot: Developing Oral History Methodologies with Myanmar Migrants Coordinator(s)

Michael Mandelkorn

Description

According to the Royal Thai Government, nearly 50,000 Myanmar refugees have fled to Thailand since February 2021, while other estimates place the numbers even higher. Many thousands of those displaced persons crossed through Myawaddy into Mae Sot, joining the multitude of migrants and refugees who have made Mae Sot their home. The scale, origins, and implications of this crisis have all been well studied. But the practical realities of everyday life in this border town—what it actually means for migrants to call Mae Sot home—has comparatively lacked scholarly attention. If given the tools and time to interview different community members about their lives pre- and post-displacement, what type of research questions might be raised by emerging young scholars in Mae Sot? How do they understand the shifting boundaries and intricacies of their own heterogenous community? Whose stories would they most like to tell? This roundtable will explore these questions and more.

In January 2024, a workshop on oral history methods, ethics, and safety was conducted in Mae Sot for a small group of Myanmar migrant participants. This roundtable will pair the workshop's two main facilitators with two workshop participants who have since turned their project plans into reality. One participant's project explores how migrant families maintain cultural traditions when kinship ties are strained by distance. The other participant's project focuses on the sounds of displacement by asking migrants to reflect on the differences in soundscape and noise pollution between their home towns and their new surroundings.

This roundtable will showcase these oral history projects, providing a platform for workshop participants to present their research. The workshop facilitators will then contextualize the projects in a broader conversation on the universal right to research, and how the democratization of research methodologies and storytelling toolkits not only amplifies local voices, but makes scholarship stronger by allowing local communities to shape academic conversation around their own community issues.

Panelists

1. Michael Mandelkorn
2. Joshua Mitchell
3. Nan Shwe Pwint Hlwar Oo
4. May Thu Khine
5. Thiri Aung
6. Aung Khant Thu

ROUNDTABLE

Reporting from a Closed Country as Protracted Conflict Continues

Coordinator(s)

Naw Seng

Description

Myanmar's media is facing critical challenges in the aftermath of the 2021 military coup. Journalists and media outlets operate under extreme pressure, with their rights to inform the public severely confined. The panel will cover the following three areas: SAC-controlled areas, resistance forces-controlled areas, and exile.

Regarding SAC-controlled area challenges, all journalists, apart from pro-regime media outlets, are working underground and face a lack of safety, community difficulties, and travel restrictions in their working environments. Independent journalists are criminalized, facing long-term imprisonment and threats of having their properties seized or their families taken hostage. This oppression of the media not only hinders journalists but also contributes to reluctance among news sources.

Journalists from areas under the control of resistance forces are facing the risks of airstrikes, which are mostly targeted to civilians and the junta's troops on-ground raids. As the SAC shut down internet and telephone connections as a tool to control the flow of information, journalists find it hard to communicate and report. In addition, traveling from place to place is also a critical challenge for journalists in these areas. Female journalists are facing additional challenges from sanitation issues due to the poor living conditions affecting health and hygiene to gender-based harassment.

Journalists from neighbouring countries and those in exile are also struggling with financial challenges, relying only on irregular and insufficient international grants or crowdfunding to continue their work and survive. Regarding legal challenges, many journalists have entered neighboring countries, particularly Thailand, illegally and feel insecure about this practice as it breaks the rules of the host country. Due to the lack of legal work documentation, journalists cannot work and have to live in hiding, which complicates their reporting efforts. In addition, language barriers pose significant daily obstacles, hindering communication and integration, making it difficult for journalists to navigate their new environments, access resources, and build networks that could support their work.

However, Myanmar's media remains resilient in the face of these severe challenges. Media practitioners continue striving to report on the real, on-the-ground situation inside Myanmar by demonstrating their unwavering commitment to truth and public service. Their efforts ensure that the world remains informed about the ongoing conflict in Myanmar. This resilience is seen in the continued publication of news, the use of alternative platforms like social media to disseminate information, and the robust solidarity among journalists to support each other in these difficult times.

The Burmese media's resilience amidst severe oppression is a testament to their dedication to truth and journalism. Their efforts are crucial in keeping the international community informed and advocating for the rights and freedoms of the Burmese people.

4th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BURMA/MYANMAR STUDIES:
ASSEMBLAGES OF THE FUTURE: RETHINKING COMMUNITIES AFTER THE STATE
2–4 AUGUST 2024, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Panelists

1. Toe Zaw Latt
2. Tin Tin Nyo
3. Nyein Nyein

ROUNDTABLE

The Future of Myanmar: Possible Scenarios in a Post-Conflict Environment

Coordinator(s)

Nay Yan Oo

Description

Shortly after the February 2021 military coup that overthrew Myanmar's democratically elected government, the world's attention to the situation began waning, even as the country became engulfed in a civil war. However, recent territorial gains by resistance forces against the military junta suggest that the conflict may be approaching a turning point. On one hand, limited visibility into the conflict makes it difficult to confidently assess whether the junta is becoming more vulnerable to defeat. On the other hand, recent reports indicate that the forces fighting against the Tatmadaw have gained ground, pushing the conflict into a new and uncertain phase.

The timing and nature of Myanmar's transition to a post-conflict phase remain highly uncertain, as does the nature of any potential post-conflict settlement. Regardless of when or how that happens, the world appears dangerously unprepared for what comes next.

This panel identifies some of the most critical 'What next?' questions, aiming to mobilize thinking and discussion around the options that may be available to key groups, both within and outside of Myanmar. It will consider the possible pros and cons of these options, and how external actors and the international community can work to minimize harm and help set up the next phase of Myanmar's history for stability and democratic governance.

During the panel, we will explore several critical aspects:

1. Potential pathways to end the conflict
2. The role of the military in a post-conflict society
3. Prospects for Myanmar's economic system
4. Myanmar's foreign policy and international relations in the post-conflict era

By examining these facets, we aim to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for Myanmar and to foster informed engagement from the international community.

This panel will present an overview of a research project conducted by the University of British Columbia (UBC) Myanmar Fellows, organized by the UBC Myanmar Initiative and The Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada.

Panelists

1. Nay Yan Oo
2. Ngu Wah Win
3. Napas Thein

ROUNDTABLE

Doing Myanmar After the 2021 Coup: Challenges and Opportunities

Coordinator(s)

Nyi Nyi Kyaw

Description

After the February 1, 2021 coup, researchers are facing unprecedented challenges in attempting to study Myanmar, including but not limited to complex and risky access to the country and its people, the dominance of the Spring Revolution in most, if not all, analysis of the country, and the moral questionability and perceived political incorrectness of doing fieldwork inside Myanmar under the military junta, at least in urban areas and large cities such as Yangon and Naypyidaw. But post-coup Myanmar also offers unique opportunities to study or 'do' it. New opportunities arise from the spatial shift of the resistance to neighboring countries, especially Thailand; the increasingly visible and noticed interdependence between Thailand and Myanmar; the forced migration and cross-border movement of hundreds of thousands of people and the consequent need to study them and advocate for their rights and protection wherever they end up; and the exile or displacement of thousands of Myanmar undergraduate and postgraduate students and independent scholars to Thailand and the provision of educational and research opportunities for them. Additionally, the cross-border haze problem is a major concern that necessitates the active involvement of all stakeholders. However, there is a significant need to increase awareness and ensure it is prioritized on the agendas of all relevant parties.

This roundtable, composed of four scholars with backgrounds in law, political science, and public policy, will reflect on the challenges and opportunities of 'doing' Myanmar after the 2021 coup. The discussion will include viewpoints from various disciplines on the study of Myanmar. Meanwhile, the roundtable will serve as a platform to demonstrate interdisciplinary approaches, enhance understanding, and establish foundational work for Myanmar studies in the post-revolution era.

Panelists

1. Nyi Nyi Kyaw
2. Bhanubhatra Jittiang
3. Nuthamon Kongcharoen
4. Sirada Khemanitthathai
5. Warathida Chaipayapa

ROUNDTABLE

Rebuilding Trust and Harmony After Turmoil

Coordinator(s)

Ohnmar Nyunt / Alison

Description

Besides political unrest and armed conflicts, Myanmar has faced a range of social conflicts, including racial discord, ethnic tensions, religious conflicts, gender inequality, etc. Racial issues in Myanmar are controversial, and closely connect with the country's history and politics. Persecution and discrimination against the Rohingya Muslim minority highlights the racial divisions in the country. Furthermore, there are also tensions that have been entrenched between the dominant Bamar ethnic group and various ethnic minority groups in Myanmar along with the issues of autonomy, resource sharing, and unresolved historical grievances. Along with the ethnic divisions, discrimination based on religious identity has also played a role in fueling various forms of conflicts in the country. The Bamar community has frequently emphasized Buddhism as a cornerstone of Burmese national identity and governance, marginalizing other religious and ethnic communities while extremist beliefs and actions heighten the tensions based on religious differences.

The political turmoil following the 2021 coup has shifted focus and resources away from addressing gender-related issues in the country. Furthermore, the coup has led to a surge in repression, violence, and human rights violations affecting all parts of society. Women and girls, especially from ethnic regions and including individuals identifying as LGBTQ, are subjected to more forms of violence. Therefore, the society should be more aware of minorities, not only about the issues of ethnic and religious minorities, but also about gender minority groups.

It is important to approach discussions on the above issues in Myanmar with sensitivity and awareness of the complex dynamics at play. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that includes promoting dialogue, understanding circumstances, and advocating for human rights and equality for all minority groups in the country.

Panelists

1. Zar Oo
2. Flora
3. Lach Baniya
4. Khin Aye

ROUNDTABLE

Thai-Myanmar Border Health Cooperation in the Time of Humanitarian Crisis

Coordinator(s)

Sirada Khemanitthathai

Description

Border health has been a crucial issue for national public health policymakers and practitioners, as a single country would not be able to sustain capacity and quality of healthcare services without caring for the population beyond its borders. In the case of the Thai-Myanmar border area, there have been struggles to maintain cross-border healthcare services since the Covid-19 pandemic. The Myanmar coup of 2021 and the ongoing armed conflicts have escalated the irregular reasons for seeking healthcare in Thailand, such as the increasing numbers of injured from armed clashes. The loss of the right to health and human rights, and the breaches of medical neutrality in Myanmar, have resulted in urgent need not only for humanitarian assistance but also for reconfiguring missions for cross-border health cooperation. Such cooperation primarily focuses on preventing and controlling recurring and emerging diseases in the region and universal healthcare coverage for all populations regardless of their administrative status. The unfathomable impacts of lacking access to healthcare and the disruption of medical capacity building for health professionals in Myanmar have already created a shift in the border health situation on the Thai side. This roundtable invites experts and practitioners who have been dedicated to border health issues to discuss the current challenges for the Thai-Myanmar border health cooperation and also share their insightful experiences which are important in making the change that will meet the needs on the ground.

Panelists

1. Nyein Chan Oo

ROUNDTABLE

Rohingya Oral History Archives (ROHA) Findings

Coordinator(s)

Zau Tu Francis

Putri Kanesia

Description

Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) has documented some 100 stories from Rohingya refugees who have left Rakhine State, sought refuge in Bangladesh, and then in three ASEAN countries: Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia. Despite the promise of protection within ASEAN communities (the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration affirms “the right to seek and receive asylum in another state in accordance with the laws of such state and applicable international agreement”), a bleak picture has emerged. Displaced Rohingya experience statelessness and lack of protection, with further vulnerability for women and children, especially those who take on dangerous journeys across oceans and borders.

The research highlights the layers of vulnerability and trauma experienced by women and children, which are hidden, unknown, and unaddressed. There is a 'migration churn' in which conditions in Cox’s Bazar, as well as the deteriorating situation in Myanmar, mean that more people will undertake these risky journeys. In the meantime, in the three countries, there is growing anti-refugee and, in particular, anti-Rohingya sentiment. The paper concludes with key recommendations for NUG, ASEAN member countries, AICHR, the UN, and the international community, as well as urgent action that needs to be taken by civil society working in Myanmar and the ASEAN communities.

Background

The Rohingya, categorized by the UN as one of the world's most persecuted minorities, have been continuously subjected to systematic discrimination, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and deprivation of civil, political, cultural, and economic rights. This has led to the mass displacement of the Rohingya communities within and outside of Burma, resulting in further deprivation of rights. This situation has been further exacerbated following the military coup in February 2021, making it more complicated than ever to imagine solutions to the plight of the Rohingya. While progressive voices and approaches regarding Rohingya issues have been generated by the coup, nothing concrete has been done and/or could be done in this unfolding situation. Meanwhile, the response of the regional bloc, ASEAN, has been almost toothless given a lack of political will to take action on the issue, leaving hundreds of thousands of displaced Rohingya in a perilous condition. Despite all the hardships, the displaced Rohingya continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and courage. The Rohingya Oral History and Archives Project documents the experiences of displaced Rohingya individuals, capturing the essence of their perspectives, aspirations, and coping mechanisms to deal with challenging circumstances.

PANEL

In and Out of Myanmar: Dynamics of Language Contact, Part 1

Convener(s)

Ampika Rattanaipitak, Mathias Jenny

Description

The present-day nation of Myanmar includes languages and cultures of local Burmese groups such as Bamar, Intha, Tavoyan, etc., as well as other ethnic communities, such as Shan, Palaung, and Mon, among many others. Some of these groups have long recorded histories as independent polities, while others have had no written documentation until very recently. Contact with neighboring communities has led to cultural and linguistic exchanges within and without the boundaries of modern Myanmar. Often, but not always, Burmese as the national majority language has a dominant role, although it is not immune to influence from other languages, as witnessed for example by the numerous loanwords from Indic languages. The widespread use of both ethnic languages and Burmese in Myanmar and Myanmar-related communities abroad has led to a wide range of language contact scenarios. Communities from Myanmar have resettled in other countries over many centuries, with Thailand being a major hub of resettlement. These contact scenarios resulted not only in the flow of loanwords, but also the restructuring of languages and language use, as well as adaptations of parts of cultural-linguistic systems in the languages within Myanmar as well as in diaspora and migrant communities. The latter, through continued contact and exchange with the homeland, add to the influx of foreign elements in local languages in Myanmar. As a multiethnic state, modern Myanmar has vast cultural and linguistic resources which can and should play an important role in the development of the country. Rather than posing a threat to stability and unity, this rich heritage can be an invaluable asset to the country and its development in the modern era.

This panel combines presentations illustrating the dynamics of contact and contact-induced spread of features and the resulting complexity of the cultural and linguistic landscape of Myanmar communities within and without the country. The individual papers highlight different aspects of the mosaic that is modern Myanmar, ranging from early and later Indic influence in Burmese to language use in present-day diaspora communities in Thailand. While diverging in topics, approach, and perspective, all studies present parts of the same larger picture: the diverse and unique make-up of Myanmar as a country at the crossroads between South and Southeast Asia and its future as a nation united in diversity in a globalized context.

Note: The first block of four papers for this two-part panel focuses on the role and mutual influence of different languages within Myanmar, while the second block presents different aspects of Myanmar language use in Thailand.

Panel members

1. Aung Myint Oo
2. Rachel Weymuth
3. Han Tin, Mathias Jenny, Alexandra Herdeg, and Rachel Weymuth
4. Kaung Htet

PANEL

In and Out of Myanmar: Dynamics of Language Contact, Part 2

Convener(s)

Mathias Jenny, Ampika Rattanapitak

Description

The present-day nation of Myanmar includes languages and cultures of local Burmese groups such as Bamar, Intha, Tavoyan, etc., as well as other ethnic communities, such as Shan, Palaung, and Mon, among many others. Some of these groups have long recorded histories as independent polities, while others have had no written documentation until very recently. Contact with neighboring communities has led to cultural and linguistic exchanges within and without the boundaries of modern Myanmar. Often, but not always, Burmese as the national majority language has a dominant role, although it is not immune to influence from other languages, as witnessed for example by the numerous loanwords from Indic languages. The widespread use of both ethnic languages and Burmese in Myanmar and Myanmar-related communities abroad has led to a wide range of language contact scenarios. Communities from Myanmar have resettled in other countries over many centuries, with Thailand being a major hub of resettlement. These contact scenarios resulted not only in the flow of loanwords, but also the restructuring of languages and language use, as well as adaptations of parts of cultural-linguistic systems in the languages within Myanmar as well as in diaspora and migrant communities. The latter, through continued contact and exchange with the homeland, add to the influx of foreign elements in local languages in Myanmar. As a multiethnic state, modern Myanmar has vast cultural and linguistic resources which can and should play an important role in the development of the country. Rather than posing a threat to stability and unity, this rich heritage can be an invaluable asset to the country and its development in the modern era.

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Panel members

1. Thanyarat Apiwong
2. Ampika Rattanapitak, Ubonrat Pantumin, Iza Hasim, and Ouasarmanee Jamsai
3. Karl Seifen
4. Mutita Boonwayapon and Myint Myint Aye

PANEL

Assemblages of Peace: The Ongoing Role of Violence in Post-Conflict Myanmar

Convener(s)

Aung Naing

Description

Whilst conflict continues to both widen and deepen in Myanmar, practitioners and scholars rightly focus on shaping the discourse for an anticipated future peace. Whilst much of the focus on peace-building is on addressing root causes of violence and avoiding negative or ‘thin’ peace, less attention is paid to the ways in which violence necessarily pervades the peace-building process itself. In contrast to Galtung and others, this panel suggests that not only is overt acknowledgement of historic and contemporary violence necessary for peace-building, but robust peace-building may in fact require the persistence of certain forms of violence—particularly where oppressive structures remain intact.

Lwin Lwin argues from the perspective of women who, prior to the coup-instigated violence, experienced multiple forms of subjective and structural violence, which in all likelihood will continue in whatever new political settlements emerge. Rather than focus on their experience of violence as victims, she instead draws attention to the agency of women in response to such violence, highlighting the ‘third way’ responses which utilize cunning, manipulation, and deception to maintain survival in the face of disempowerment.

Thida explores the nature and structure of narratives of victims, perpetrators, and observers of violence, considering how discourses continue to perpetuate violence even after hostilities have ceased. This points to the powerful role of storytelling in the process of peace-building, and urges an approach which eschews collective silence and instead promotes spaces for the discourses of violence to exert transformational effects.

Su Su analyses the role of prior exposure to violence, both as a perpetrator and as a victim in building post-conflict identities. This is crucial when considering the psychological trauma of exposure to violence, and the complex process of negotiating individual and collective identities where prior social orders have collapsed. Self-identity in post-conflict scenarios is inevitably shadowed by a relationship with violence. The resulting ‘identity assemblage’ is fluid, framed by tensions between trauma and emergent post-conflict norms which seek to sanitize, relativize, or eliminate certain histories.

Cho Cho argues that the pursuit of peace may require ongoing violence, particularly where systems and symbols which perpetuate structural and cultural violence remain. An example is the ongoing dominance of Burmese language and culture in the wider post-conflict discourse, a legacy of the Burmanization process which suppressed minority identities. However, displacing one official language with another (for example, English) itself entails an act of cultural violence. To what extent is such violence acceptable?

Finally, Aung Naing considers how the performance of public service, such as welfare distribution, can act as a means to validate civic space and non-violent power, serving to relativize and displace the power vested in the control of the means of violence. The strengthening of civil power through transparent, accountable, and equitable delivery of public service may be a critical step towards eventual disarmament. Using assemblage theory to analyse local governance as an emergent phenomenon helps identify pathways by which the strengthening of particular components, such as public service, alter the shape and nature of local governance.

Panel members

1. Thida
2. Lwin Lwin
3. Su Su
4. Cho Cho
5. Aung Naing

PANEL

Powerful Affects: Mental Assemblages in the Face of Terror (Mental Health, Self-Identity and Ethical Boundaries in Post-Coup Myanmar)

Convener(s)

Aung Naing

Description

Deleuze was concerned with the idea of becoming in which "individuals and groups struggle to come to terms with events and intolerable conditions' to create something new." This panel considers how the terrors unleashed by the 2021 coup have wreaked havoc on the physical, social, and psychological well-being of people in Myanmar. In exploring different means of coping, this panel draws on assemblage theory to trace particular affects of survival, and how these give shape to new forms, identities, and alliances in the post-conflict context.

Aung Naing sets the scene with data from the 2023–2024 Civic Monitoring survey, tracking a range of socio-economic indicators in 20 different locations in Myanmar. The presence of violence is ubiquitous, but takes on different forms. Whilst those living in areas liberated from the junta pay a heavy price for their (relative) freedom, those in junta-controlled areas are subject to staggering levels of everyday violence, undermining any notion of 'safe spaces.' This generates a complex assemblage of terror, itself subject to churning affects of hate, fear, self-preservation, and extraordinary courage.

The second paper considers how forced displacement shapes identity, particularly for people with disabilities. For those whose identity has been deeply rooted in locality, sudden displacement to a new location can have catastrophic physical and mental consequences. For those left behind, the outcomes may be even worse. Whilst there is ample research on people with disabilities displaced into camps, little is known of the 'informal' displacement which characterizes much of Myanmar's current conflict.

Displaced people are known to suffer disproportionately from mental health issues, often compounded by lack of access to support services. In Rakhine State, a long-standing internet shutdown has further restricted access to psychosocial support, both formal and non-formal. This has generated new 'walls within walls' for those within the camps. How is life constructed in such contexts, and how do the multiple physical, mental, and digital barriers intersect to prevent any sense of 'breaking out'?

Young people in Myanmar have faced successive waves of terror: the Covid-19 pandemic, which curtailed educational development; the coup, which unleashed violence, social breakdown, and economic disaster; and the recent announcement of mandatory conscription, which destroyed any 'middle ground' between overt resistance and compliance with the junta. Mental illness rates have soared amongst young people, and with a dearth of formal services, most turn to non-formal providers for help. Little is known of how religious and civic leaders construe and construct mental health, and whether their support is helpful or harmful to young people.

Finally, the focus broadens to humanitarian support. Here, the dissonance between prominent humanitarian actors and local organizations is interrogated. In particular, this paper explores how international actors seek to justify their continued tacit support of the military junta despite its recalcitrant barbarism. At the core is the notion of humanitarian neutrality. By exploring how this is constructed by different actors, this paper exposes hidden power dynamics and motivations which ultimately serve to hinder the provision of humanitarian aid in Myanmar.

Panel members

1. Aung Naing
2. Shwe Oo, Ok Tai, Win May, Ei Mon, and Nay Hein
3. Myat Myat, Ikhi, Pan, Hyacinth, and Eugene
4. Arnold, Phoe Ni, Nway Oo, Cho, and Zaw Zaw
5. Ma Wai, Ma Phyo, Ko Phone, Ei Ei, and Jaden Lee

PANEL

Navigating Insecurity, Negotiation, and Resilience in Civil Disobedience Networks

Convener(s)

Elliot Lodge

Description

This panel examines the complex and multifaceted experiences of Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) practitioners who have been displaced and forced to navigate new realities under severe threats. Focusing on the dynamics of negotiated identities, gendered insecurities, and community resilience, the panel offers a nuanced understanding of the lives and strategies of CDM members in exile. Each study provides unique insights into the lived experiences and challenges faced by individuals involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), shedding light on their survival strategies and efforts to reclaim agency and identity.

Firstly, Kalyah examines the lives of CDM practitioners who fled to Mae Sot, Thailand, facing the dual challenge of integrating into a host community while maintaining their cultural identity and sense of purpose. This study highlights the concept of negotiated identity, showing how these refugees continuously adapt their self-presentation to build trust and stability. Through extensive ethnography, the author reveals how these former civil servants balance adaptation and cultural preservation, using Mae Sot as a 'state of exception' where dynamic identity negotiations take place. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of identity in exile and the agency of CDM practitioners in maintaining their dignity and purpose under challenging conditions.

Secondly, As the CDM practitioners are mostly women, Rose explores how the everyday insecurities they face are inherently gendered. This research argues that militarization is linked to the emergence of gendered everyday insecurities and downward social mobility, seeing their urban lives in Mandalay as part of an emerging post-coup urban precariat. The project sheds important light on the changing lives and views of these women as they have been forced to grapple with the longer-term realities that have stemmed from an initial principled stance. Despite their security and survival threats, they continue to defiantly resist military dictatorship, reclaim the loss of a vibrant society, and rebuild their new commons driven by a desire to make a fundamental system change in new Myanmar.

Finally, Mya Aung focuses on the community resilience of CDM practitioners who were forcibly displaced to Mae Sot, Thailand, where they faced a new reality of acute erosion of livelihoods, wellbeing, and security. Specifically, this research seeks to discern the precise nature of practitioners community resilience by studying the interaction of the physical and digital communities. The research sheds light on the significance of online spaces in building physical security and wellbeing in exile, over time enabling the construction of resilience and new ways of life and community.

By focusing on the lived experiences and adaptive strategies of these practitioners, the panel contributes to a deeper understanding of civil disobedience, displacement, and the creation of resilient communities amidst political upheaval. In viewing these studies—all the work of CDM

academics themselves—in conversation with each other, this panel offers a comprehensive understanding of the insecurities, negotiation processes, and resilience strategies within Myanmar’s groundbreaking civil service-led social movement.

Panel members

1. Gustaaf Houtman and Yee Mon
2. Kalyah
3. Rose
4. Mya Aung

PANEL

Everyday Resistance, Shifting Relations, and Communities of Potential in the Dry Zone

Convener(s)

Elliot Lodge

Description

Resistance to the February 1st, 2021 coup in Myanmar rapidly expanded as the junta authorities used violence to crush peaceful demonstrations. To the surprise of many, the country's dry zone, with little prior history of civil conflict, emerged as the epicenter of resistance. Although pre-coup research has consistently highlighted the high levels of social capital in the dry zone, significant changes to the nature of social cohesion and mutuality are key to the emergence of a new social solidarity-orientated 'war economy.' Crucial to this transformation are four factors: a broadening of mutual aid, changing gender roles, a broadening of cooperative endeavors such as community-led education, and the strengthening of community welfare (parahita) organizations through the involvement of striking civil servants (CDM). This produces a resilience rooted in prior practices of self-organization and mutuality, but with a broadening of scope and cooperation and a modus operandi which embraces more radical structural change rather than maintaining the status quo of existing social class relations.

Ayathaw Thu focuses on the impact of social capital on the Anyar (Ayadaw) community's resilience following the military takeover, and the role of long-established networks of reciprocity. A strong sense of community and belonging among residents are critical components of their resilience. The paper argues that a form of generalized and balanced reciprocity strategy has been essential for boosting community resilience and the ability of locals to transition from individual to community agency.

Lwin Lwin explores rural households in Myanmar which have well-documented resilience to natural disasters, often relying on local networks of welfare, and where the current crisis has undermined many normal coping mechanisms. A common (and false) assumption is that women are less able than men to face and overcome crises, but the research argues that these many challenges are the source of new forms of resilience. She suggests that amid crisis, women display highly adaptive and creative coping strategies that can help make displaced communities more resilient.

Following this, Moe Moe looks at a community that has been facing severe insecurity for more than three years, where children have faced difficulties in learning for their education, and the local economy has suffered. She argues that the community has, somehow, seen subtle changes in relational dynamics—particularly as it relates to the state and established systems of authority—through forms of emergent collective organization. The daily resistance of the masses amidst struggle and isolation suggests that collective action can rebuild common political ground that has the potential to reshape community.

Finally, Orchid considers the shifting gender dynamics of CDM teachers in their family and community lives during this crisis period. The research explores the strength of CDM teachers' crisis

management skills and their reactive resilience, showcasing how the social construction of their roles and responsibilities has transformed after the coup. She shows that transformations in gender-social relations result from the participation of women, who play an important role in providing social welfare (parahita) and forging grassroots humanitarian networks.

Panel members

1. Ayathaw Thu
2. Lwin Lwin
3. Moe Moe
4. Orchid

PANEL

Contesting the 'State': Politics of Inclusion and Shifting Subjectivities

Convener(s)

Elliot Lodge

Description

This panel explores the dynamics between state policies, identity politics, and the lived experiences of marginalized communities in Myanmar. By integrating three interrelated studies, it investigates the contested terrains where ethnic, religious, and socio-economic identities are negotiated and reshaped amidst political and social upheavals. The presentations illuminate the persistent struggles for inclusion and recognition within Myanmar's evolving political landscape, dissecting how historical legacies, state actions, and grassroots movements interact to redefine notions of belonging and agency in a context marked by rapid transformation.

The panel focuses on understanding how these identities are not static but constantly evolving as they are influenced by historical precedents, current state actions, and grassroots responses. The presentations shed light on the ongoing fight for inclusion and recognition within Myanmar's political system, revealing how different communities strive for acceptance and visibility in a nation where power dynamics are continuously shifting. By analyzing the intersection of historical legacies, state initiatives, and local movements, the presentations aim to reveal how these factors collectively redefine what it means to belong and have agency in Myanmar today. Presenters Thar Gyi, Yan Way, and Phill explore themes of marginalization and political exclusion in Myanmar through their respective research.

Thar Gyi's presentation delves into the marginalization of the Myanmar Muslim community, highlighting both historical and contemporary challenges. Despite being sidelined by successive governments since independence and facing increased tensions during democratization attempts, Myanmar Muslims maintain a strong self-identification as part of the national fabric. Thar Gyi notes a recent, cautious shift towards greater inclusivity among non-Muslims, offering hope for future integration.

Yan Way addresses the contentious issue of establishing a 'Bamar State' within the proposed Federal Union of Myanmar. Historically, Bamar elites have resisted federalism due to fears of losing centralized control. However, the post-2021 coup era, driven by the Spring Revolution, has renewed demands for federalism. Yan Way's research explores persistent ethnic calls for a Bamar State and the Bamar populace's growing readiness to engage with federal ideas.

Phill's study focuses on the forced evictions in Hlaing Thayar, Yangon, following the 2021 military coup, particularly affecting squatter communities led by women. Phill provides a nuanced understanding of how these evictions transform community identities and gender roles, emphasizing the critical role of gender in navigating the resulting adversities. The study highlights the resilience of affected communities amidst significant social and economic disruptions.

By integrating these case studies, the panel aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how marginalized communities in Myanmar navigate and contest their identities and inclusion within the

state's political and social frameworks. It seeks to uncover the deeper socio-political undercurrents that influence these processes, offering insights into the potential pathways towards a more inclusive and equitable society in Myanmar. In summary, this panel invites an in-depth discussion on how to foster a more inclusive society by recognizing and addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by these communities.

Panel members

1. Thar Gyi
2. Yan Way
3. Phill

PANEL

Community Experiences and Perceptions of Climate Change During Violent Rupture, Part 1

Convener(s)

Justine Chambers

Description

Myanmar is one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This stems not only from global shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, but also from governance issues, exploitation of natural resources, and long-running conflicts. The situation has worsened significantly since the 2021 military coup, which triggered widespread military atrocities and a violent nationwide conflict that continues to intertwine climate change crises with devastating humanitarian ones. In a country where more than seventy percent of the population relies on the environment and agriculture for their daily needs, the coup and climate change have hit rural and remote communities especially hard. Post-coup, the majority of state-led climate change initiatives have come to a halt, environmental activism has been stifled, and unregulated natural resource exploitation, driven by war economies, is causing alarming environmental consequences. In this challenging context, local people's ability to respond and adapt to climate change are under severe threat.

This panel explores how dynamics of violent conflict influence the experiences and perceptions of climate change amongst local communities in Myanmar. Based on in situ fieldwork in different parts of the country, these papers delve into the experiences of conflict-affected communities and how they live with and understand climate change. Theoretically, the panellists engage in state-of-the-art discussions on 'rupture' (Lund 2016) and 'chronic crisis' (Vigh 2008), exploring the intertwining of the political rupture caused by the coup with the enduring legacies of military rule, conflict, and other forms of chronic crisis.

Panel members

1. Nyan Pyi Thit
2. Saw Ner Dhu Da
3. Htet Sint Pine
4. Joseph Ceuceu

PANEL

Community Experiences and Perceptions of Climate Change During Violent Rupture, Part 2

Convener(s)

Justine Chambers

Description

Myanmar is one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This stems not only from global shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, but also from governance issues, exploitation of natural resources, and long-running conflicts. The situation has worsened significantly since the 2021 military coup, which triggered widespread military atrocities and a violent nationwide conflict that continues to intertwine climate change crises with devastating humanitarian ones. In a country where more than seventy percent of the population relies on the environment and agriculture for their daily needs, the coup and climate change have hit rural and remote communities especially hard. Post-coup, the majority of state-led climate change initiatives have come to a halt, environmental activism has been stifled, and unregulated natural resource exploitation, driven by war economies, is causing alarming environmental consequences. In this challenging context, local people's ability to respond and adapt to climate change are under severe threat.

This panel examines Myanmar's vulnerability to climate change and the impact of the coup on environmental activists and displaced women in Tanintharyi Region.

Panel members

1. Mo Aung Nay Chi
2. Naw Htee Ku and Kasper Hoffman
3. Ei Ei Lin

PANEL

Women, Peace, and Security in Myanmar, Part 1: National/Union Level

Convener(s)

Kyoko Kusakabe

Description

With Myanmar's myriad conflicts deepening and prolonging, the impact on women and how their voices can be heard is a growing concern. At the same time, there have been great efforts in pockets in which important strides have been made to ensure women's voices receive recognition. These two sets of panels will shed light on both sides—the serious impacts of the conflicts, as well as the initiatives and progress that have been made in terms of women's rights and equality in Myanmar.

Part 1 of this panel discussion will cover the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda at the national/union level, while Part 2 will focus on WPS at the state/regional level.

In order to fully address the four pillars of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda (participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery), we require interventions at all levels from the national to the grassroots, and with all sectors from academia and practice. Through this discussion, and by covering all these levels and sectors, we attempt to further our exploration of how best to collaborate/coordinate and what steps need to be taken towards paths to peace and security with full gender equality and secured women's rights.

Panel members

1. Sanda Thant
2. Myanmar Women Parliamentarian Network
3. Nang Moet Moet
4. Zar Chi Htwe

PANEL

Women, Peace, and Security in Myanmar, Part 2: State/Regional Level

Convener(s)

Kyoko Kusakabe

Description

Note: This panel will follow immediately after Women, Peace, and Security in Myanmar, Part 1 with the discussion for Part 2 continuing from Part 1.

With Myanmar's myriad conflicts deepening and prolonging, the impact on women and how their voices can be heard is a growing concern. At the same time, there have been great efforts in pockets in which important strides have been made to ensure women's voices receive recognition. These two sets of panels will shed light on both sides—the serious impacts of the conflicts, as well as the initiatives and progress that have been made in terms of women's rights and equality in Myanmar.

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Panel members

1. Agatha Nu Nu
2. Maw Day Myar
3. Ja Seng Ra
4. Eaint Khai Oo

PANEL

Youth Voices, Perspectives, and Experiences in a Myanmar in Crisis

Convener(s)

Maria Monica Wijaya

Description

This panel brings together four panelists whose work explores the multifaceted responses of Burmese youths to the military coup in 2021, focusing on resource mobilisation, educational experiences, disaster risk awareness, and resistance. Through diverse methodological approaches, their presentations shed light on the dynamic interplay between societal resilience and political contention in Myanmar.

Panelist 1: Renaud Egreteau

Title: Resource Availability and Mobilisation in Myanmar's Anti-Coup Protests (2021)

Egreteau's presentation examines the unprecedented mass mobilisation following the 2021 coup in Myanmar, analysing the availability and impact of material and symbolic resources for protesters. The study investigates two core hypotheses: the role of pre-existing social networks from Myanmar's decade of democratisation and the influence of early-phase resources on protest tactics and strategies. This research aims to refine the resource mobilisation paradigm and enhance the understanding of political contention during democratic breakdowns.

Panelist 2: Sebastian Gries

Title: 'Now I Feel Safe': Myanmar Student Experiences at ASEAN Host Universities

Sebastian Gries explores the experiences of Myanmar students who fled the country post-coup to continue their education in ASEAN universities with the support of EMPM mobility scholarship. This presentation delves into the students' adaptation to new academic environments, the challenges they face, and their aspirations for personal and their country's futures. It offers insights into how disrupted educational journeys can resume in foreign contexts and the broader implications for Myanmar's educational landscape.

Panelist 3: Frauke Kraas

Title: Multiple Disaster Risk Awareness, Perception, and Preparedness of Young People in Urban Areas in Myanmar

Kraas addresses the significant gap in disaster risk awareness and preparedness among urban youth in Myanmar. The study combines quantitative household surveys and qualitative expert interviews to highlight varying levels of disaster risk perception across different demographic groups. The research aims to propose strategies for enhancing disaster risk management, focusing on urban youth, amidst the country's vulnerability to natural disasters like cyclones, floods, and earthquakes.

Panelist 4: Dr. Francesca Chiu

Title: Beyond School Boycotts: Waiting, Resistance, and the Future in Post-Coup Myanmar

Chiu examines the complex dynamics of school boycotts by university students in urban Myanmar supporting the civil disobedience movement against the military junta. This research explores the

tension between students' commitment to resistance and the practical challenges of their academic and career futures. By analyzing individual decisions and collective resistance, the study contributes to understanding waiting as a form of resistance and its evolving role in Myanmar's political landscape.

Together, these presentations offer a comprehensive view of how the youth of Myanmar are navigating the challenges of a post-coup environment, highlighting their resilience, resourcefulness, and their evolving strategies of resistance.

Panel members

1. Renaud Egretteau
2. Sebastian Gries
3. Frauke Kraas
4. Francesca Chiu

PANEL

Politics of Ethnicity and Territoriality: Past, Present, and Future

Convener(s)

Masao Imamura

Description

Since the coup in 2021, Myanmar has entered a new phase of the old civil war. This panel will present studies of the very long armed conflict from four distinct perspectives.

Hideyuki Okano will analyze ethnic affiliation within the post-coup constellation of anti-junta campaigns, elucidating the mediating roles of urban actors of mixed ethnic background. In the aftermath of the coup, some EAOs have thrown their support behind the pro-democracy movement. How did a political movement centered on the ethnic Bamar majority become intertwined with the aspirations of ethnic minorities? Okano sheds light on the roles played by ethnic minorities who spent their social lives indistinguishable from those of the ethnic Bamar majority in urban areas. 'Bamarnized' ethnic minorities have served as a bridge between the pro-democracy movement and the political aspirations of ethnic minorities.

Based on her long-term fieldwork in northern Thailand, Amporn Jirattikorn will analyze the post-coup politics in the Shan region especially through the prism of migrant workers. Amidst the turmoil following the coup, the Shan State Army (SSA) and its political organization the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) failed to join the nationwide uprising against the junta. Focusing especially on the migrants' disillusionment with the SSA's position, she will detail their sentiments and opinions regarding the political choices of the SSA/RCSS amidst Myanmar's political upheaval. She will also analyze the future aspirations of Shan migrants, examining whether they envision returning to Myanmar or opting to remain in Thailand due to the current levels of disillusionment.

Laur Kiik will unpack ethno-nationalism in Myanmar through an ethnographic and etymological study of Kachin vernacular concepts such as nation and patriotism, state, ownership, and sovereignty-liberation. How do indigenous concepts shape an armed nationalist revolution? How do Kachin people talk politics? According to Laur, Kachin political concepts have evolved by logical continuity and scaling-up from indigenous models, within the decades-long ethnonational revolution movement, and in relations with Burmese nationalism and Christian theology. They anchor both popular political worldviews and future visions, as well as sensitive debates about this diverse region's many-sided inter-ethnic conflicts.

Masao Imamura will turn to the impact of the international human rights movement on the long armed conflict in Myanmar across ethnic and territorial boundaries. His analysis will focus especially on the discord between humanitarianism and human rights. While humanitarianism seeks to deliver charity and relief, human rights seeks to deliver justice. In theory these goals are not incompatible, but in practice the differences often result in contradictory actions on the ground. The schism between the two different approaches flared up in the late 2000s, especially when Cyclone Nargis caused a crisis in Myanmar. It remains unresolved even after the coup.

Together these four presentations will shed light on how Myanmar’s ethnic and territorial politics have evolved—and continue to evolve to this day.

Panel members

1. Hideyuki Okano
2. Amporn Jirattikorn
3. Laur Kiik
4. Masao Imamura

PANEL

Gender as a Battleground: Militarized Masculinity, Nonconsensual Pornography, and Gender-Based Violence in the Wake of the Coup

Convener(s)

Michael L. Gray

Description

This panel will explore aspects of how gender has emerged as a battleground in post-coup Myanmar. Three papers by a range of activists and journalists will look at key issues in how the military coup has not only impacted gender relations and realities, but how specific tactics and tools have contributed to a worsening human rights situation for women across all walks of life in Myanmar. This may have profound long-term impacts on gender relations and gender equality in Myanmar unless the issues are addressed with concerted efforts by stakeholders inside the country and in the international community.

Of particular concern are the actions of major digital platforms Facebook and Telegram in committing to uphold their community standards and remove hate-driven content. The first panelist will examine the concept of militarized masculinity and how it has shaped online discourse among the pro-resistance forces, which in its rhetoric aims to promote gender equality or at minimum a less overtly patriarchal view of gender relations than the pro-military side.

A second panelist will present a group study on the spread of non-consensual pornography as Myanmar's digital use grew rapidly in the years before the coup, until the problem has grown to an extent that it threatens to eradicate the promise of digital empowerment for women and girls whose lives are impacted and unable to seek redress.

The final panelist will discuss research that examines the impact of gender-based violence on Myanmar's female journalists in the wake of the coup, which exists as not one issue but an entire set of problems that act to exclude women from this crucial profession at a time when their voices are urgently needed. Together, the panelists will inform a discussion offering great insight into the concerted actions needed by civil society groups, digital platforms, donors and the international community to ensure gender is at the forefront of efforts to protect human rights in Myanmar.

PANEL

Understanding the Cyber Coup in Myanmar: Tactics to Address Digital Repression

Convener(s)

Michael L. Gray

Description

This panel will explore how the military regime is using digital tactics and tools to control and repress the people of Myanmar, while also highlighting the strategies of resistance among citizens to adapt to and counteract digital repression. The internet is now widely understood as a 'digital battleground' in times of conflict, and Myanmar since before the military coup was already a testament to this trend. Now, citizens across the country face reminders and risks in daily life ranging from no access (network shutdowns) to online environments that perpetuate the spread of hate and violence.

The first panelist will outline detailed research that examined five pro-military Telegram channels for hateful content that was used to dox hundreds of people, leading to detention and arrest in the worst cases.

A second panelist will examine how military control of the finance sector led to frozen accounts and a range of privacy threats that require significant innovations to overcome.

The third panelist will look at the impact across Myanmar of internet shutdowns and digital rights restrictions, and the limited solutions available to maintain access in particularly vulnerable areas of the country.

Finally, the rise of 'digital security' as an action area for citizens and the resistance will look at the inconsistent set of practices employed by journalists to keep themselves and their informants digitally safe—an effort that requires more concerted and holistic effort to have its intended impact. Together, the panelists will give an overview of the broad terrain of digital repression and tactics to oppose a cyber coup, sharing experiences that have growing relevance in Myanmar and conflict areas around the world.

PANEL

Varieties of Displacement and (Self-)Exile: Myanmar People at Home or Across the Thai Border

Convener(s)

Nyi Nyi Kyaw

Description

This panel will discuss the varieties of displacement and (self-)exile of Myanmar peoples displaced within Myanmar or across the border into Thailand, some of whom end up living in the kingdom for extended periods of time and forming diasporas. Displacement around the world often receives more attention when it occurs across borders and the displaced end up in more or less protracted refugee situations. However, there are altogether more internally displaced persons (IDPs) than refugees in the world.

The widely assumed or accepted dividing line between IDPs who remain within their own countries of origin or habitual residence, on the one hand, and refugees who have crossed one or more international or interstate borders, on the other, is blurred. There are IDPs who often cross the border into a neighboring country due to conflict, are forced by the neighboring country to return to their country of origin, and end up in IDP camps along the border, albeit with the potential to re-cross into the same neighboring country, as in the case of ethnic Karen IDPs along the Thai-Myanmar border. There are also other forcibly displaced people who cross the border into a neighboring country for political reasons and in search of asylum, such as those (former) Myanmar government employees who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). The lived experiences of ethnic Karen IDPs and CDM-ers are different, and how the two groups make the most of their displaced lives, or at least try to, can also differ. In addition, there are also self-exiles and other displaced people who do not end up in IDP or refugee camps, but instead take up more or less permanent residence in one or more foreign countries, legally, extralegally, or through a mix of legal and extralegal channels, as in the case of the Myanmar diaspora communities in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot in Thailand. Again, their lived experiences and how they make the most of their displaced, self-exiled, or diasporic lives may differ from those of the IDPs and CDMers mentioned above.

Panel members

1. Nyi Nyi Kyaw
2. Naw Htee Eh Hsoe
3. Aung Kyaw Soe
4. Wint Lae Aung

PANEL

Propaganda, Social Media, and Information Landscapes in Myanmar

Convener(s)

Phyu Phyu

Description

The Myanmar military regime has been utilizing tactics of digital dictatorship by imposing an internet shutdown and restricting access to the internet since immediately after the 2021 coup. Furthermore, the regime is operating a campaign of terror via social media. At the same time, resistance forces are using new digital technologies to enhance the pro-democracy movement through online campaigns to organize protests, fundraise, and share information for the safety of the people. Furthermore, digital rights activists and civil society organizations are advocating to keep media companies accountable for their responsibilities. In this panel, three main panelists will be presenting their research under the theme of Propaganda, Social Media, and Information Landscapes in Myanmar, and will be joined by two experts from the digital rights community as discussants.

PANEL

A Multiethnic Panel on Ethnic Education Systems in Myanmar: Challenges, Responses, and Resilience

Convener(s)

Pleh Pleh R Reh

Min Layi Chan

Description

The educational landscape in Myanmar has been irrevocably disrupted by what has become the most widespread conflict in the nation's history. The number of children currently out of school is unprecedented, with estimates that only 56.8% of children and youth aged 6–22 are currently accessing education (World Bank, May 2023). Education in Myanmar is provided by a myriad of actors: a tapestry which reflects diverse and multiethnic communities with pluralistic histories since independence from British colonialism in 1948. Ethnic education service providers support mother tongue-based multilingual education using curricula that include the distinct cultural backgrounds and situational realities of respective ethnic communities. Over the past 60 years, these education providers have been forced to navigate protracted armed conflict, political unrest, and natural disasters to provide education to some of the hardest-to-reach children in Myanmar.

Despite a number of disruptions, ethnic education systems, accustomed to overcoming historic obstacles, continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience. As a result, many ethnic education systems either did not stop education, only suspended education in specific districts with high rates of infection, and/or were able to re-open schools quickly while all centralised government public schools remained closed throughout the pandemic.

Aiming to seek contextually relevant solutions, and as part of the Integrated Research Training Program (IRTP), the following ethnic education-providing organizations co-developed and co-implemented six unique qualitative research projects with local researchers:

Centre for Rural Education and Development (CRED), Kachin Education Consortium (KEC), Karen Education and Culture Department, Karen Teacher Working Group (KTWG), Kayan New Generation Youth (KNGY), Mon National Education Committee (MNEC), and Seh Theh Foundation (STF).

Exploring the perspectives of children, teachers, parents, and education leaders, the cross-ethnic team of local researchers identified the challenges of their respective ethnic education ecosystems over the preceding two years. Report findings point to decentralised solutions that empower communities to determine what is needed in their schools and how those needs can be met. These findings are in line with broader research on schooling in conflict settings. Networks and relationships lie at the heart of resilience, and this research underscores the importance of strong networks at every level. Ethnic education has endured for decades, providing opportunity and hope to children in low-resource environments throughout the country. The education they continue to receive will, in part, be defined by how the lessons learned and resilience capacities documented in these reports are drawn upon to improve their education system.

At its core, this panel of practitioners and researchers will spotlight the transformative potential of resilience capacities and strengths-based approaches that avoid the potential pitfalls of deficit models to programming. In this panel discussion, the cross-ethnic research team will delve into the impact of disruptions to ethnic education systems, their resilience capacities, effective approaches utilized by ethnic education institutions in responding to adversity, and the rationale behind supporting resilience. Importantly, this panel aims to spark critical dialogue and share evidence-based recommendations for donors, academic institutions, educators, and civil society actors invested in promoting the resilience of ethnic education in Myanmar.

Panel members

1. L Doi Aung and Sai Lao Main
2. Moe Kyaw and Suphakon Akkarayannawat

PANEL

Uncovering the Experiences of Individuals, Students, and Organizations in the Aftermath of the Coup in Myanmar and Their Coping Strategies

Convener(s)

PNMD Secretariat

Description

Once the Myanmar military seized power in 2021, different layers of people across the country reacted with peaceful social movements such as civil disobedient movements, banging pot and pans, and boycotting the military leaders' affiliated products and businesses. Systematic oppressions including arbitrary arrests, tortures, and enactment of unfair laws by the military regime pushed people to transform peaceful resistances to armed resistances, forced them to flee to border areas or areas controlled by EAOs, and caused unpredictable situations for the operations of civil society and non-governmental organizations. In the meantime, there are people inside Myanmar who are unable to flee for various reasons.

This panel will particularly focus on how the 2021 coup impacted three different groups: individuals in Mandalay, students who joined the Civil Disobedient Movement (CDM) and were forced to flee to Mae Sot without documents, and youth-led organizations. The panel will discuss not only the challenges and restrictions faced by these entities, but also the strategies they use to increase resilience and to create opportunities for themselves and others.

The first paper explores patterns of violations and threats used by the military forces against rights to privacy of individuals in Mandalay and challenges faced by those individuals to enjoy other related human rights such as freedom of movement and freedom of speech. The researcher reveals that individuals are threatened and forced to bribe to obtain identity cards in conflict areas, for joining the Civil Disobedient Movement, or for being suspected of supporting resistance groups. Their freedom of speech is restricted through telecommunication/telephone and online monitoring systems.

The second paper highlights the experiences of CDM students in Mae Sot in attempting to enjoy their social lives and pursuing education. The main challenges for students are financial needs for their survival, residential documents for safe and secure living, recognition of completed education certificates through different online education platforms, and relaxations of the requirement for transcripts issued by public universities in Myanmar. Additional challenges they are facing are language and cultural barriers. Based on these challenges, this research proposes possible and practical solutions to support students in need.

In the third paper, the researchers reveal that though youth-led organizations have faced several constraints, such as mobility restrictions, funding shortages, security threats, and barriers in project coordination, these organizations have successfully modified their working strategies by using technology, relying on informal networks, reframing activities, and enhancing security protocols. The researcher believes that amidst these challenges, the youth-led organizations play multifaceted

peace-building roles in delivering acute relief, cultivating resilience, and enabling democratic participation.

Panel members

1. Aye Chan
2. Wai Yan Linn, Nann Sat Naung, and Hayman Soe Nyunt
3. Lorna Wai, Kaung Kaung, Thae Ma, and Pyae Lwin

PANEL

Evolving Scholarship on Myanmar's Chin State: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Chin Emancipation(s) Convener(s)

Sena Galazzi

Description

This panel is presented by the Chin State Academic Research Network (CSARN), a project of TheHILLS Myanmar. The panel brings together a number of young scholars and analysts, academics, and civil society actors who are involved in research around complex, contested questions that are key to everyday life (survival) as well as to evolving social imaginaries (contestation, rebuilding) in today's Chin State.

The panel brings together analysts who are engaged in both academic and non-academic research and aims to highlight how different forms of resistance are coming together not just as survival within existing confines of utter humanitarian crisis, but as a creative, historically ground-breaking, and emancipatory meaning-making, therefore contextualizing the discourse of self-determination in contemporary Chin existence.

The panel will first present an overview of the acute challenges in livelihoods across the Chin region based on new primary data collected from 2023–2024. It then looks at the crisis in education, analyses the potential of digital tools and methodologies for enhancing the resilience of Chin communities, and addresses the challenges of supporting grassroots educational initiatives. The panel will thus provide a critical overview of attempts at bridging divides between academic and non-academic research worlds, as well as desk and field data collection practices, with special focus on gender and Chin women. Finally, it will look at the current crisis and its reverberations of impact across the region's borderlands into India.

Panel members

1. Honey Dawt Sung and Thawn Lian
2. Pum Khan Pau
3. Mary Nei lang
4. Peter Suante

PANEL

Thai Responses and Policies after Myanmar's 2021 Coup: Foreign Policy, Migration, and Health Convener(s)

Sirada Khemanitthathai

Description

Myanmar's political crisis since 2021 has had a direct spillover effect on Thailand as a neighbouring country across all dimensions. This panel will discuss Thailand's responses to the Myanmar crisis in three main areas: foreign policy, cross-border migration, and border health.

Amidst the turmoil following the 2021 coup in Myanmar, Thailand's reactions have been multifaceted yet marked by a certain level of passivity and continuity in established practices. Thailand has exhibited a reactive stance towards the crisis in Myanmar, largely maintaining conventional approaches in their interactions with the country. The panel will also address relevant actors, encompassing the perspectives of various state agencies, political actors, and authorities. Panelists will present their papers by exploring different aspects of the issues.

Firstly, Assistant Professor Bhanubhatra Jittiang will provide a comprehensive analysis of major political actors in Thailand, including the Thai government and opposition, in response to the ongoing conflict situations in Myanmar since the 2021 coup. Secondly, Dr. Khathaleeya Liamdee will discuss the role of Thailand's International Cooperation Agency (TICA) in upholding its border health programs in the wake of the coup and navigating several challenges to align health security strategies. Lastly, Dr. Sirada Khemanitthathai will examine Thailand's evolving approach to managing migration and displacement from Myanmar post-2021, emphasizing Thailand's reluctance to engage comprehensively with the political dimensions of cross-border migration from Myanmar. Overall, the panel aims to enhance understanding of the dynamics of Thailand's responses to the Myanmar crisis, while also highlighting the challenges and opportunities for more assertive and holistic policymaking in the face of evolving realities.

Panel members

1. Bhanubhatra Jittiang
2. Khathaleeya Liamdee
3. Sirada Khemanitthathai

PANEL

Rebel Governance in Myanmar: Exploring the Belt and Road Initiative, Forced Conscription, and Gold Mining Operations

Convener(s)

Ta-Wei Chu

Description

Security and conflict studies have largely overlooked Myanmar. David Brenner and Enze Han's research (2021) reveals that prominent security studies journals primarily concentrate on conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Despite Myanmar being home to one of the world's longest-running civil wars, only a scant number of articles pertaining to Myanmar are present in these journals. In his latest article, Brenner makes a further observation. He contends that our understanding of the troubled fate of Myanmar has often been oversimplified as part of the global struggle for democracy and human rights (2024: 751). This oversimplification has hindered a comprehensive understanding of conflict dynamics in Myanmar, as many security issues are intricately linked to ethnic politics dating back to the British colonial period. To address these two epistemological challenges—the neglect of conflicts in Myanmar and the associated misunderstanding—a focus on Myanmar's postcolonial state formation offers an alternative approach. This approach delves into the involvement of ethnic armed groups (EAGs) and their control over rebel societies (Brenner, 2004). By examining the governance of three EAGs on various issues, this panel aims to enhance our understanding of Myanmar within the broader context of security and conflict studies.

This panel includes three articles. Ta-Wei Chu, Saw Jonathan, and Kyaw Lynn's article investigates why the United League of Arakan (ULA) supports the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone. By analyzing this within the context of the ULA-controlled rebel society, this article addresses a theoretical gap in the research on Myanmar's Belt and Road Initiative, which has predominantly used state-centric approaches.

Gum San Seng's article examines how the Kachin Independent Army's practice of forced conscription has created human insecurities among Kachin youth and undermined the state-building efforts led by the Kachin Independent Organization. This scrutiny of the endogenous factor of forced conscription provides valuable insights into the literature on rebel society in Myanmar.

Finally, Wai Yan Tun's article delves into how the Karen National Union (KNU)'s Brigade 4 has managed gold mining operations within the Tanintharyi Nature Reserve. By focusing on power dynamics and the interactions between KNU Brigade 4 and non-Karen groups through the lens of power exclusion, this study offers a broader understanding of the complexities within rebel society in Myanmar.

Panel members

1. Ta-Wei Chu, Saw Jonathan, and Kyaw Lynn
2. Gum San Seng
3. Wai Yan Tun

PANEL

Writings of Historic Myanmar from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day: Literature Genres and Primary Sources Convener(s)

Yi Li

Thanyarat Apiwong

Description

There are many ways to read historical writings. As scholars interested in Myanmar history and literature, members of this panel collectively investigate and interpret narratives that are composed, with considerable literary value, either by Myanmar's multi-ethnic residents and expats expressing their lived experiences and intimate feelings, or by foreign visitors observing significant events and dramatic changes. Furthermore, these materials were written in different languages, at various historical stages over the past three centuries, and prove to be valuable sources offering unique, and sometimes competing, perspectives of their authors and the communities they represent.

Four works with great diversity are discussed here: a historical account of the Burmese-Siamese War (1765–1767) by a French observer, the evolving historical accounts of Suvarnabhumi in the Myanmar context, classical Chinese poems appreciated among a Rangoon-based, Sino-Burmese group during the Cold War era, and finally, two novels about young Myanmar women's adventures across political and social borders in the twentieth century. Many intertwined themes have been touched upon despite hugely different approaches and authorship: displacement and disorientation, boundaries and margins, communities and belongings, and resilience and determination, to name just a few. Together, these narratives offer a glimpse at the remote and near past of Myanmar—a past that is rich in context, complex in nature, and which involves diverse actors and manifestations of provocative perspectives, all of which deserve a close examination for their current relevance at this time of crisis. As fine writing samples in their respective genres, and vital historical sources, they show us a historic Myanmar that directly consonants to many contemporary concerns for the country's present and future.

Panel members

1. Thissana Weerakietsoontorn
2. Thanyarat Apiwong
3. Tongchen Hou
4. Yi Li

Women, Peace, and Security in Karenni State: Strengthening Women’s Rights Through the Interim Executive Council

Agatha Nu Nu

Abstract

Karenni State has established the Interim Executive Council (IEC) as a governing body and is embarking on establishing post-conflict governance of the state. The speaker, who is the head of the Department of Women and Children’s Affairs of the IEC, will share with us the exciting plans for the future and the challenges that they face in implementing gender equality and strengthening women’s rights in Karenni State.

**Where Anthro-Sociology Meets Ontology Through Fictional Films:
(Re)presentations of the Burmese Migrant/Refugee
in Thai Independent Cinema**

Alvaro Malaina

Abstract

The author has applied the theory of the rhizome and assemblages of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to Thai independent cinema, including films that constitute what the author refers to as “ethno-cinematographic rhizomes” (Malaina, 2020, 2022, 2023). Such films are emerging assemblages of time, dreams, memories, fantasies, and myths, moving between realism and surrealism, which would constitute, for a project of anthropo-sociology what the author refers to as “ontological”, a heterodox methodology of visualization of other 'worlds' or ontologies different from globalized Western modernity. Ethno-cinematographic rhizomes/assemblages allow giving voice to subaltern peoples of the Global South precisely by not seeking to 'represent' them objectively, but rather to 'present' them, opening up to their deep subjectivities and their 'social unconscious' prior to modernity, thus leaving the framework of Eurocentric social science and connecting with the decolonial perspective (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018) and the so-called ontological turn (Hoolbrad and Pedersen, 2017) in anthropology. They present to us the animist ontology that would underlie in Thailand as in many Southeast Asian countries, often mixed with Theravada Buddhism or other religious practices and especially present in less modernized or developed regions, such as the Thai region of Isaan portrayed by Weerasethakul or rural areas of Laos and Myanmar.

In this paper, the author analyzes how the figure of the Burmese migrant/refugee in Thailand has been represented in Thai independent cinema, especially in the film work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Phuttiphong Aroonpheng. The study finds that the works' (re)presentations combine both the quasi-documentary realism of migrants'/refugees' difficult social situation together with surreal openings to their own subjectivities, where elements of animist ontology emerge, showing mystical connections with nature and becoming ethno-cinematographic rhizomes that reveal to us through the sensorial and the emotional their own ethno-social world and its complex intermingling with global modernity.

Translation Strategies: Burmese Notice Boards in Thai-Myanmar Border Hospitals

Ampika Rattanapitak, Ubonrat Pantumin, Iza Hasim, and Ouasarmanee Jamsai

Abstract

Mae Sot district in Thailand's Tak Province is a border area between Thailand and Myawaddy in Myanmar. According to a report from the Office of the Permanent Secretary for the Interior (2019), 2,137,003 people from Myanmar crossed the border between Mae Sot and Myawaddy in 2019 for various reasons, such as political, economic, social, or healthcare purposes. One significant reason for border-crossing is to access healthcare services, as locals trust Thai healthcare services more than those in Myanmar. Therefore, notice boards written in both Thai and Burmese can be found in hospital areas to conveniently serve Myanmar people.

This paper aims to identify the translation strategies used on notice boards from Thai into Burmese found at Mae Sot Hospital and to identify translation errors to propose new translation choices for problematic utterances. A total of 61 utterances collected from the Mae Sot Hospital area were analyzed. The results reveal two main translation strategies: 1) literal translation, and 2) meaning translation. Additionally, five categories of translation errors were identified in this study, including: 1) incorrect spelling, 2) the use of non-equivalent words from the source language, 3) word omission, 4) word insertion, and 5) loss of meaning.

The most common error found in this study is incorrect spelling, while the least common is missing meaning. These findings reveal that most of the notice boards written in Burmese found in Mae Sot Hospital are useful for Myanmar people crossing the border from Myanmar to Thailand, though corrections and adjustments would increase overall communicative efficiency in some cases.

The Shan State Army's Political Stance and Disillusionment Among Shan Migrant Communities: A Post-Coup Perspective

Amporn Jirattikorn

Abstract

Amidst the turmoil following Myanmar's military coup of February 2021, the Shan State Army (SSA) and its political organization the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) have notably refrained from joining the nationwide uprising against the junta. While heavy fighting persists in Shan State between the Myanmar military and other ethnic armed groups, the SSA's stance of non-participation has raised questions about its role in the broader context of Myanmar's ethnic politics. This absence of engagement may evoke bitterness and anger among groups actively resisting the State Administration Council (SAC) junta, possibly positioning the SSA in an ambiguous light.

This paper explores the ramifications of the SSA/RCSS's political stance on the morale of Shan migrant communities in Thailand. Focusing on disillusionment with the SSA's position, this study aims to uncover the sentiments and opinions of Shan migrants regarding the political choices of the SSA/RCSS amidst Myanmar's political upheaval. The paper also investigates the future aspirations of Shan migrants, examining whether they envision returning to Myanmar or opting to remain in Thailand due to disillusionment. By analyzing these perspectives, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the socio-political dynamics affecting Shan communities in the aftermath of Myanmar's military coup.

Ethical Negotiation: Analyzing Thai Responses Toward Myanmar Displaced Persons in Thailand

Andrew Wai Phyo Kyaw

Abstract

Understanding the historical context of migration flows to Thailand underscores the complexities of refugee issues and their management in balancing humanitarian obligations with national security. There have been numerous forced migration waves to Thailand that have included individuals from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos seeking asylum in Thailand during the Indochina wars in the 1970s and individuals from Myanmar starting in the 1980s. Although Thailand is not a signatory to the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, known as the International Refugee Laws (IRLs), Thailand has been one of the host countries for internationally displaced people who have been forced to leave their homes. Recently, the first law on "Aliens who Enter the Kingdom and are Unable to Return to their Origin B.E. 2562 [2019]," also known as the "National Screening Mechanism (NSM)" in Thailand, was passed by the cabinet on December 24, 2019, and it was designed to differentiate between migrant workers and asylum seekers as 'Protected Persons.'

This study investigates Thailand's complex balance between humanitarian commitments and concerns about national security, political interests, and economic burdens. The study emphasizes the difficulties Thailand faces in resolving forced displacement while balancing national interests, regional diplomacy, and humanitarian responsibility. More importantly, the study examines existing policies and responses toward Myanmar displaced persons in Thailand using the framework of Christina Boswell's 'Ethical Negotiation,' which entails combining national interests with humanitarian commitments, guaranteeing appropriate responsibility distribution, protecting refugee rights, and maintaining transparency and accountability.

Squalid Rohingya Camps: The Right to Access Humanitarian Aid After Cyclone Mocha in Sittwe, Rakhine State, Myanmar

Ar Mee Mar

Abstract

The crisis of the Rohingya in Myanmar is one of severe human rights violations, including ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Multiple waves of violence against the Rohingya have occurred over several decades. Among them, 2017 was the most significant year of crisis (Haar et al., 2019). 700,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh, and around 142,000 Rohingya remain as internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in IDP camps that resemble open-air prisons with numerous restrictions. Rohingya IDPs depend on humanitarian aid for their survival and livelihoods. However, Cyclone Mocha added another layer to the humanitarian crisis for Rohingya IDPs. The military imposed travel restrictions on organizations seeking to deliver emergency aid after the cyclone. Denying access to humanitarian assistance is a human rights violation.

This research uncovers the challenges involved with accessing humanitarian aid for Rohingya IDPs in Sittwe, Rakhine State, by applying qualitative research methods. Ten Rohingya IDPs in four camps were interviewed with direct phone calls. The findings confirm the Rohingya IDPs received an alert about Cyclone Mocha but did not get any support for the evacuation. Additionally, the Rohingya IDPs lack of trust in the military was a barrier to evacuation. The Rohingya IDPs did not receive emergency humanitarian aid after the disaster due to restrictions imposed by the military. There has been no significant change regarding humanitarian aid after Mocha. It has been six months since Mocha, but most of the shelters have yet to be rebuilt and repaired, and IDPs face difficulties for many reasons.

Living on the Margins: The Psychological Challenges of People with Disabilities in Internal Displacement

Arnold, Phoe Ni, Nway Oo, Cho, and Zaw Zaw

Abstract

Despite recent legislative changes, disability is a leading cause of social stigma and exclusion in Myanmar, resulting in significant socio-economic inequalities. According to the 2019 Myanmar Inter-Census Survey, approximately 12.8 percent of Myanmar's estimated 46 million population, equivalent to 5.9 million people, have disabilities. Both the prevalence and impact of disability have worsened since the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2021 coup, with widespread conflict and deepening economic turmoil not only causing an increase in the number of people with disabilities, but increasing the degree to which disability results in social and economic disadvantage. Many of those with disabilities are not displaced into stable camps, but rather into shifting, ad hoc arrangements. Disability may result either in being left behind in the face of military raids, or being uprooted from a familiar environment into a place likely characterized by more extreme physical and social barriers.

Whilst there is extensive research on the lived experience of people with disabilities in more established refugee settings, less is known about the process of self-identity negotiation amongst people with disabilities displaced into informal settlements. This paper uses narrative interviews to explore how self-identity is negotiated and constructed by people with disabilities experiencing displacement, highlighting the relationships and tensions between prior social status and stigma, physical environment, and broader psychological and social challenges. Understanding the mental assemblages of people with disabilities in turn highlights the specific challenges of humanitarian assistance to displaced persons with disabilities, taking into account not only general and specific physical needs, but the complex interplay of social norms, gender, and geography in shaping self-determination amongst people with disabilities.

Bottom-Up Federalism in Post-Coup Myanmar: Federating Education

Ashley South, Emily Stenning, and Tim Schroeder

Abstract

Reforms under the previous semi-civilian government in Myanmar aimed to partially decentralise the basic and higher education sectors. However, these attempts at increasing autonomy within—or ‘federalising’—the field of education largely failed.

In the absence of a legitimate or credible central education authority in Myanmar following the February 2021 coup, long-standing Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO) and a range of non-state actors, including local communities, provide education to up to one million of the most vulnerable and conflict-affected children in the country. In partnership with resilient communities, EAO education departments and civil society networks are playing critical roles in a new ‘federating’ moment in Myanmar education—demonstrating effectiveness and building capacity and alliances from the bottom-up.

This article explores the complex and contested post-coup education context in Myanmar, analysing the difference between ‘federalising’ and ‘federating’ approaches. We provide examples and compare approaches before and after the coup to illustrate the importance of an adaptive, bottom-up approach based on local ownership and resilience.

A Comparative Analysis of Two Politically Engaged Myanmar Diaspora Communities in Thailand Following the Coups of 1988 and 2021

Aung Kyaw Soe

Abstract

This study utilizes the social capital framework to compare two politically engaged diaspora communities in Thailand, specifically in Mae Sot and Chiang Mai. The comparison is made in the context of the coups that occurred in Myanmar in 1988 and 2021, with a particular emphasis on examining intergenerational differences. The paper aims to explain the impact of social networks, trust, and collective action on diaspora activism and political engagement, as well as their role in helping to ensure survival of individuals. This is achieved by analyzing the evolution of social capital within these communities during two different historical periods.

Using data-driven research and ideas from social capital theory, the author examines how the creation and utilization of social capital has impacted the ability of diaspora movements to adapt and endure over a period of history. Moreover, the paper examines the impact of socio-political developments, technology advancements, and communication methods on the nature and distribution of social capital in these communities. The study aims to reveal patterns of continuity and change in the production and application of social capital among diaspora members across different generations via the use of comparative analysis.

The Influence of Indic Languages on Burmese

Aung Myint Oo

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the effects of the Indic languages on Burmese (Myanmar) language. This study is based on two perspectives: historical linguistic and sociolinguistic. The influence of Indic languages on Burmese is presented here mainly in two parts. In the first part, this paper explains how the Indic languages influenced the Burmese through religion, culture, and trade about a thousand years ago, from the early Pagan period until the end of the Burmese monarchy. The second part of this paper deals with the influence during the Colonial Period (1885-1948) when ethnic Indians migrated into Burma for the administrative purposes and labor of the British government. From then until the present, due to the close contact between Burmese Indians and Burmans, Indic language influence persists and influence of Indic languages can be observed in daily life conversation.

In the first part of the paper, the Pali language is highlighted as the most influential language, and Sanskrit as the next most influential. The main evidence of early Pali influence is found in ancient Burmese stone inscriptions. Pali influence continues to this day. In the second part, the most significant influence is the Hindi language. There is also a small number of other modern Indic (Hindustani) words borrowed by the Burmese. Many adopted words from Indic languages can be found in Myanmar (Burmese) dictionaries such as the Myanmar-English Dictionary (1993), the Brief Myanmar Dictionary volumes 1 to 5 (1978–1980), and the Myanmar Dictionary, 3rd edition (2022) compiled and published by the Myanmar Language Commission of the Government of Myanmar.

Civic Authority and Armed Actors: How Public Service Displaces the Hegemony of the Gun

Aung Naing

Abstract

Post-2021, newly emergent resistance groups have gradually established liberated or semi-liberated zones in previously conflict-free areas of central Myanmar. There, nascent peoples administration systems have been established, often affiliated with the National Unity Government (NUG). However, at the community level, authority remains largely vested with armed actors: either the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) or local security groups, and considerable tension exists between civil administration and armed authorities.

An assemblage analysis of local governance at the community level in such areas reveals the centrality and primacy of guns as key materiality. Whilst acknowledging that the operating space for civic actors is maintained by armed protection, sustainable future local governance will need to develop rapidly towards civilian structures, with authority vested not in the control of the means of violence, but in a more nuanced and responsive social contract. This paper explores the role of social protection as a platform for a performance of public service which can serve to legitimize civilian authority: by delivering effective, transparent, accountable, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable public service, civilian actors can build legitimacy based on a social contract rooted in redistributive ecologies, which in turn supports the emergence of a form of 'humanitarian citizenship' which can serve as a core element of future political communities.

Displacement, Violence, and Conscription: Tracking Outcomes in the Civic Monitoring Study 2023–2024

Aung Naing

Abstract

Whilst official figures for forced displacement in Myanmar have reached over 2.5 million since the 2021 coup d'état, the figures themselves obscure a more nuanced picture of post-coup terror, with up to 10% of Myanmar's population subjected at any one time to eviction, having to flee military raids, or more quotidian threats such as armed robbery. The enactment of the National Service Law in February 2024 gave licence to junta-affiliated groups to arbitrarily detain young people, whilst at the same time using the threat of formal conscription as a means of extorting funds from wealthier families.

Periodic sentinel surveying across 20 sites in Myanmar has tracked changes in socio-economic conditions and mental well-being, as well as analysing trends in exposure to violence and actions to evade violence, such as conscription. Contrary to presumed wisdom, rates of exposure to violent crime or robbery are highest in areas still largely under the control of junta forces; however, rates of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression are highest in areas subject to junta aggression. This study tracks specific terrors, highlighting social and economic consequences of liberation, in contrast to the costs of remaining under junta control.

Chinese Investment and Myanmar Civil War

Aung Nyi Lwin

Abstract

This article delves into the role of Chinese investment in agribusiness, particularly in tissue-culture banana plantations, within Kachin State following the ceasefire agreement between the Myanmar Army and the Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA) in 1994. Drawing upon the concept of 'ceasefire capitalism', the article examines the significant role played by Chinese investment in the contestation between the Myanmar military and the KIO as they vie for control over territory in Kachin State, utilizing the ceasefire agreement to reshape governance and economic landscapes. Additionally, it explores how Chinese investment navigates this contested terrain to implement its business ventures to broaden our understanding of Chinese economic engagement in the region. Through a combination of literature reviews and on-the-ground findings, this research demonstrates how Chinese agribusiness ventures have been successfully established. Methodologically, this study employs qualitative research methods, including interviews with stakeholders such as local villagers, government agencies, and KIO personnel, to gather data and deepen insights into the intricacies of Chinese investment in this complex socio-political context.

Reciprocity and Social Capital: A Successful Case of Post-Coup Community Resilience in Ayadaw Township, Sagaing Region

Ayathaw Thu

Abstract

The scale of military violence after the 2021 military coup, as well as the widespread public resistance, have exceeded that seen in previous events in the country. This is particularly the case in Sagaing Region, where the military's ground and arson attacks have caused severe impacts. Prior to these events, Ayadaw Township remained at a distance from conflicts and firearms, an isolation that brought challenges in organizing an effective response. Over the past three years, the military has targeted villages in the township through air and column strikes, house fires, arrests, and torture to terrify the local population as a form of punishment for their refusal to accept the legitimacy of junta rule. However, one village in Ayadaw known as Anyar, despite villagers' full commitment to the revolution, has somehow suffered minimal damage compared to its neighbors. No homes have been destroyed, students have been able to continue their education, and the villagers have managed to mobilize to assist other villages and the broader Spring Revolution.

This research studies this community to understand the characteristics that have made this possible, analyzing the impact of social capital on Anyar's community resilience following the coup, and the role of long-established networks of reciprocity. The study uses a variety of qualitative methods in the challenging research context, including in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, and informal interaction, as well as secondary sources, to collect data regarding participants' experiences. According to Putnam (2000), social capital can be useful when cooperation for mutual benefit is facilitated by social networks and reciprocal norms. This paper argues that forms of generalized and balanced reciprocity strategies have been essential for boosting community resilience in Anyar.

Challenges of the Right to Privacy Following the Coup in Myanmar: A Case Study in Mandalay

Aye Chan

Abstract

This paper examines the violation of privacy rights following the 2021 coup in Myanmar. Before the coup, the 2008 Constitution of Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the 2017 Law for Protection of Privacy and Security of Citizens guaranteed privacy rights to certain degrees. However, the State Administration Council (SAC) suspended some provisions of such laws following the coup.

The main objectives of this paper are to describe and analyze violations relating to the right to privacy in the aftermath of the coup in Myanmar. This study applies a qualitative method and a case study of three groups: Civil Disobedience Movement participants, professionals, and non-professional individuals in Maharaungmay District, Mandalay. This study explores the challenges faced by individuals in Myanmar under the regime of the SAC government, analyzes how the right to privacy of individuals is being violated, and presents potential solutions to the challenges of protecting privacy faced by individuals. This research discusses two interrelated issues related to the right to privacy: freedom of movement, constrained by searches and seizures, surveillance with CCTV, and home searches, and freedom of speech restricted by surveillance systems such as with telecommunications/telephone and online monitoring systems. Therefore, this research shows the ways that the right to privacy is predominantly violated in Mandalay and the potential solutions to protect individuals' rights.

Resisting the Devastation: A Comparative Study of Civil Society Strategy Responses to Mining Operations in Myanmar

Aye Mon Thu

Abstract

This research paper examines the dynamics of resistance and advocacy against mining operations threatening Myanmar's livelihoods and ecological integrity. Set against the backdrop of ethnic conflict, border politics, and authoritarian governance, the study focuses on two key areas: (1) Tanintharyi Region, impacted by tin and tungsten mining operations funded by Thai investment, and (2) Kachin State, affected by Chinese-funded rare earth mining.

These two regions, with their distinct geopolitical and ethnic landscapes, underscore the intricate challenges communities face in resisting mining activities. The methodology, which includes a comprehensive literature review, stakeholder analysis, and in-depth interviews, has been meticulously designed to understand the factors that hinder effective resistance, such as political contestations including protests and legal strategies; use of science/evidence; formulated narratives; and various types of allegiances forged with particular actors in both areas.

Political ecology, environmental justice, and social change theory form the robust theoretical foundation and conceptualization that underpin the analysis of the political economy of Myanmar's mining sector, as well as geopolitical and socio-environmental dynamics. The analysis will also serve as a compelling case study for regional and global comparisons.

This research contributes to understanding civil society strategies and limitations and advocating for environmental justice. It offers insights into how local and international entities can better support resistance efforts using legal frameworks and inform relevant authorities regarding responsible regulation of mining investments.

Community Mobilizing in Defending Land Rights: A Case Study of a Stone Mining Project in Mon State, Myanmar

Ba Nyar Oo

Abstract

This study examines the mobilization of villagers to defend their community and land rights against a stone mining project initiated by the Excellence Fortune Company in Magyi Village Tract, Ye Township, Mon State. The project's commencement involved land acquisitions from villagers, encompassing orchard land, farmland, and village housing land, thereby profoundly impacting the community. In response, villagers organized collective efforts to impede the project's progression.

This research employs a qualitative methodology, and the research conducted involved online interviews and synthesized literature from diverse sources. Central to the analysis is the application of Karl Polanyi's concept of the commodification of nature, land, and labor. This paper aims to study how people in this community use land and nature surrounding their village, how the stone mining project was able to access the agricultural frontier during the democratic period, and how the community mobilized and de-commodifies their land to protect their land rights and their community. Through their local knowledge systems and engaging with broader networks of support, they have attempted to resist the encroachment of external forces and protect their land.

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of land issues in Myanmar, and community struggles to protect their land. The commodification of land and natural resources, driven by legislative frameworks and facilitated by local governance mechanisms, underscores a broader trend of land appropriation. This process has not only disrupted traditional livelihoods, but also has social impacts. The case of Magyi Village Tract offers valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to understand dynamic land issues in Myanmar during the transition period.

The Challenges of Mental Health and Integration: A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Newly-Arrived Refugees in Mizoram

Benjamin Langle

Abstract

This study investigates the mental health challenges and resettlement experiences of refugees from Myanmar in Mizoram, India. Utilizing a qualitative approach, 12 Chin refugees who arrived in Mizoram between 2021 and 2023 were interviewed to understand their struggles with integration and mental health. The study employs thematic analysis to categorize their experiences into five main themes: the impact of past and present events, legal status, discrimination, social impact, and coping strategies. The findings reveal that refugees face significant psychological symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD, exacerbated by pre-migration trauma and post-migration stressors. The study highlights the need for comprehensive mental health support, legal recognition, anti-discrimination policies, and improved socioeconomic conditions to facilitate the integration and well-being of refugees. The results emphasize the resilience of the refugee community and the critical role of social support networks in their adjustment process. This research underscores the importance of inclusive policies and sustained support to safeguard the rights and mental health of refugees in Mizoram.

Responses of Political Actors in Thailand to Myanmar Crises Since the 2021 Coup: A Reflection After Three Years

Bhanubhatra Jittiang

Abstract

This study explores how major political actors in Thailand, including the Thai government and opposition, view the ongoing conflict in Myanmar since the 2021 Myanmar coup and what they have pursued in response to unfolding crises in Myanmar. It draws insights from various qualitative studies with multiple data collection methods, including desk review, participant observation, field visits, conversations with officials, and participation in academic conferences and seminars. Building on a previous study by Jittiang, Sirijintana, and Wangpuchakane (2022), the author argues that over the periods of two administrations in three years, Thailand's responses to the crises in Myanmar have remained reactive and have continued to exhibit the conduct of 'business as usual' with the regime led by a military junta. The Thai government has only paid closer attention and has made some engagements with wider stakeholders in Myanmar after the major event in Myawaddy in April 2024.

Different interest groups in Thailand, including opposition parties and civil society organizations, have limited influence over the Thai government's consideration of Myanmar policy. However, since the Move Forward Party has become the major opposition in the Thai parliament, it has also leveraged parliamentary mechanisms to remain relevant to Myanmar affairs, providing another channel for Thailand to engage with opposition forces inside Myanmar. Despite these various actions, the author concludes the study with an observation that Thailand could have done more and been more proactive in engaging with Myanmar, but that may have required concrete foreign policy and an active agent of change on the Thai side.

Sustaining Kachin Ethnic Identity Through Food Practices of Family-Run Restaurants in Myitkyina, Kachin State

Brang Lat

Abstract

This study examines how ethnic culinary practices preserve Kachin identity. Kachin State comprises six sub-ethnic groups: Jinghpaw, Maru or Lhaovo, Rawang, Lachik, Zaiwa, and Lisu. Each sub-ethnic group cooks differently, and culinary tastes vary throughout Kachin State. Kachin culture includes cooking and consuming traditional meals during wedding ceremonies, housewarming parties, and funeral events in the Kachin community. Kachin cookery primarily uses water instead of oil, which is unique. In addition, the ingredients used in Kachin traditional foods are also of utmost significance. They include garlic, chili, ginger, basil, coriander seeds, dry garcinia, Vietnamese coriander, and Kachin spices such as magram and machyang. Kachin cuisine relies on these elements for its traditional features.

Many people settle in Myitkyina, the Kachin State capital, for business, educational, and social activities. It is the only area in Kachin State where foreigners can visit freely. Furthermore, Kachin State shares a border with both China and India, thus many people have visited to discover its natural riches and ethnic customs. Mobility also allows access to adjacent nation's goods, plants, and spices. This results in the blending of Kachin traditional dishes due to such circumstances. To preserve ethnic identity, Kachin family-run restaurants adjust dishes for international customers and to foster cross-cultural engagement.

This study investigates the significance of family-run restaurants in Myitkyina, Kachin State, as cultural centers for maintaining and promoting traditional Kachin cuisine. It includes analysis of how Kachin family-run restaurants in Myitkyina utilize specific food practices (traditional dishes, cooking methods, ingredients) to preserve and transmit Kachin ethnic identity. This study employs qualitative methods to collect and analyze data. Semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and data collection from traditional cooks and Kachin food vloggers are utilized.

Mutual Support Networks: Myanmar Food Not Bombs as a Solidarity Economy

Carolyn Hirsch

Abstract

After February 2021, a group of people with masked faces marched the streets with other anti-coup protestors, carrying a banner in front of them which read "Food Not Bombs Yangon." The presence of the Yangon chapters of Food Not Bombs at the early street protests raised the issue of life-threatening economic inequality, which became worse after the military's attempt to take power. Since 2013, the Yangon chapter of Food Not Bombs has provided free food in public spaces in Yangon. The focus is on financially precarious people: older adults, street children, homeless people, and low-wage labourers. Through addressing them instead of monks, for example, Food Not Bombs refuses to reproduce a social hierarchy in which specific lives are promoted while others are neglected. Food Not Bombs in Yangon forms an informal economy by and for people whose existential needs are overlooked by political power holders and whose existence became more endangered after 2021. Although the Yangon chapter was not the only chapter in Myanmar, there have been new chapters since 2021, such as that in Mae Sot in Thailand.

Furthermore, the Myanmar Food Not Bombs groups are part of an international solidarity economy in which economic power is redistributed. The redistribution of economic power from an international support community to the Myanmar Food Not Bombs groups promotes the lives of those who are endangered by a fascist institution that seeks total control. By presenting the ethnographic research, the author explains how the simple practice of offering free food in public spaces, combined with networking and mutual support, is a powerful and life-promoting way of resisting fascist state structures and abuses of power.

Asiayin, Auk Lan Yadeya, Kyeinsa: Ritual Dynamics of Resistance and Mediatization in the Burmese Revolution

Chloe Baills

Abstract

Following the coup of 1st February 2021 in Burma, ritual modes of action were mediatized by resistance in the streets and on social media to counter the power rituals (known as yadeya) allegedly performed by the military. The resistance mobilized a ritual repertoire that is widespread in Burmese and Buddhist society. This enabled the resistance to counter the actions of the military, face violence, and fill space using the same meaning-making system alongside other forms of mobilization. But these ritual modes of action (auk lan yadeya, kyeinsa, asiayin) mobilized by the resistance have served as a basis for a variety of interpretations: psychological warfare against the military, denunciation of their alleged beliefs, manipulation of powerful forces, feminist revolution, etc. The circulation of ritual content on social media, sometimes reappearing in traditional media, has been reinvented or transformed in the public space, constituting an unprecedented moment in the Burmese revolution, which was effective in the early months of the coup as a means of taking action, or rather resisting the military.

This paper aims to explore the significance of this ritual mobilization and to question it in terms of the concept of social assemblage. The author's aim is to demonstrate that this cross-border ritual mobilization has given a community of resistance the opportunity to federate around this dynamic, both political and religious, that does not cover the same meanings within the country and in the diaspora in exile.

English as the National Language: A Necessary Form of Cultural Violence to Counter Burmanization?

Cho Cho

Abstract

Much research has highlighted the long and complex legacy of Burmanization, particularly under authoritarian rule in Myanmar. The post-coup conflict has challenged this legacy in multiple ways, primarily through negating the 2008 constitution, and through promoting more equal alliances between different ethnic-affiliation groups in the negotiations on federal structures. However, little attention has been paid to the legacy of Burmese as the official language, and indeed, much of the official discourse on future federal structures has been conducted and published in Burmese language, with little critical analysis of whether that itself perpetuates a Bamar-centric privilege.

This paper examines the legacy of Burmese language dominance as an element of Burmanization, and, through an analysis of historical, post-colonial legacies of other multi-ethnic societies, considers the likely impact of replacing Burmese as the official language of Myanmar. This represents a form of cultural violence against Burmese language and culture through the removal or displacement of Bamar-centric arrangements and structures. This paper considers whether this represents a justifiable form of violence in the post-conflict period.

The Nexus of Legality and Human Security: Informal Coping Strategies Among Shan Migrants in Chiang Mai

Cho Zin Thet

Abstract

The modern notion of borders has greatly transformed the meaning of mobility and migration. The lived experiences of migrants in dealing with foreign state bureaucracies to attain the legality of their existence are rather complex. Thailand's changing immigration policies, which are primarily driven by economic and political circumstances within the state as well as cross-border and inter-state relations with Myanmar, impose many difficulties on migrants seeking formal and legal pathways to ensuring their well-being in Thailand.

This study delves into the informal strategies employed by undocumented Shan migrants to access human security in Thailand. Departing from the conventional refugee/labour migrant dichotomy, this research will consider all migrants of Shan ethnicity from Myanmar under one rubric to reflect the complexity of empirical reality. The primary objectives of this study are to describe the lived experiences of undocumented Shan migrants regarding their access to human security, to explore the practical strategies they employ in their daily lives to access human security, and to analyze the nexus between legality and human security among this population in Thailand. Through ethnographic fieldwork and life-story interviews with 30 Shan migrants in Chiang Mai, this study argues that community and collectivism act as a crucial social safety net when the lack of documentation renders individuals vulnerable and fosters antagonistic relations with the state. The findings underscore the significance of these informal networks in safeguarding livelihoods within the challenging context of undocumented migration.

Healthcare Reimagined: The Making of Mobile Healthcare in Post-Coup Myanmar

Chun Lean Lim and Nang Noom Hseng

Abstract

This paper examines the challenges and transformation of Myanmar's healthcare system, particularly in response to the political and social upheaval following the military coup in 2021. It traces the historical development of healthcare from the colonial era, through successive military regimes, to the current crisis characterized by severe infrastructure damage, manpower shortages, and split healthcare governance between the military and the National Unity Government (NUG). Amidst this turmoil, mobile healthcare has emerged as an indispensable solution, addressing the urgent needs of the population in conflict zones and remote areas. Employing assemblage theory, the paper conceptualizes mobile healthcare not merely as an alternative to traditional healthcare institutions, but as a dynamic, community-driven model that adapts to the specific needs and conditions of various localities. Mobile healthcare functions both as a practical response to the crumbling formal healthcare system and as a form of grassroots activism against oppressive state control. The study proposes reforms for democratizing and communalizing healthcare in the post-coup era, focusing on integrating mobile healthcare into the national framework without stringent institutional constraints and decentralizing healthcare management to empower local communities. These reforms would aim to foster a healthcare system that is not only accessible and responsive to all citizens, but also resilient and adaptable to ongoing political challenges, ensuring community empowerment and sustainability in the face of uncertainty.

Women, Peace, and Security in Chin State: Perspectives from Women's Organizations

Eaint Khai Oo

Abstract

Chin State continues to struggle to secure its territory, but residents have set up several centers to start establishing its local governance. The speaker will share how local women's organizations are struggling to push forward the WPS agenda in Chin State to ensure women's voices are heard.

Gender and Environment in Conflict: A Case Study of Displaced Women in Tanintharyi Region, Myanmar

Ei Ei Lin

Abstract

Climate change and armed conflict are impacting communities globally. In Myanmar, Tanintharyi Region is a significant example of this intersection. Displaced women in conflict areas face unique hardships, compounded by environmental degradation and gender inequalities.

This study examines the experiences of women engaged in environmental conservation during conflict and displacement in Tanintharyi region. Through qualitative methods, including interviews and participant observation, it explores their current situation, experience, coping strategies, roles, and contributions to environmental preservation. Key findings highlight the resilience and empowerment of women in adverse circumstances, emphasizing their important roles in sustaining communities and ecosystems.

This research contributes to academic discussions by addressing gender dynamics in forced displacement and environmental conflict, informing initiatives for gender equality and empowerment. It underscores the specific roles and contributions of women working on environment preservation within the context of Tanintharyi Region. It also explores how women adapt and continue to participate in environmental conservation amidst conflict and displacement, thereby contributing to bridging the existing knowledge gap on the gendered aspects of environmental issues in Tanintharyi Region. This research offers insights crucial for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars striving to address the multifaceted challenges facing displaced women in conflict-affected regions.

Post-Revolution Strategies: Dismantling Gender Stereotypes and Empowering Women Across Myanmar's Societal Landscape

Ei Nandar Khin

Abstract

With an emphasis on women's roles, this study explores the intricate dynamics of Myanmar's post-revolutionary landscape, examining the long-standing patriarchy, the transformative impact of the 2021 Spring Revolution, and the persistent efforts of women to shatter cultural stereotypes while advocating for gender equality. Despite facing formidable challenges, women have emerged as pivotal figures in the struggles for democracy, equality, and social justice. Against the backdrop of the 2021 Spring Revolution, women have emerged as central agents of change, spearheading social justice movements and overturning entrenched patriarchal norms. Their participation in armed resistance groups, fundraising efforts, and leadership positions marks a significant enhancement of gender roles, particularly impacting the persistent struggle against gender discrimination and cultural stereotypes.

This study employs a qualitative research approach, in-depth interviewing of 10 respondents from diverse backgrounds to offer insightful information about the cultural shifts and the revolutionary impact of the 2021 Spring Revolution on social norms and practices, as well as the implications for women's empowerment and gender equality at different levels of society. The findings underscore the transformative power of collective action in dismantling gender stereotypes and empowering women across Myanmar's societal landscape. To realize the vision of a more equitable and inclusive society, this study provides practical ideas and scholarly knowledge of how social movements and gender equality are connected, and offers actionable recommendations to foster gender equality and empower women during and after times of political upheaval.

The Struggle and Resilience of Rakhine Women's Livelihoods Amid Triple Challenges: COVID-19, the Resurgence of Armed Conflict Following the 2021 Military Coup, and Cyclone Mocha

Ei Phyo

Abstract

Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, women in western Myanmar's Rakhine (Arakan) State have been facing varieties of calamities exacerbated by ongoing armed clashes and socio-cultural norms. These challenges compound situations of existing limitations in which their perspectives and struggles have been overlooked. Therefore, this research investigates specific themes regarding diverse livelihood challenges faced by women, with a particular emphasis on the compounding effects of Cyclone Mocha in 2023, the resurgence of armed clashes amid political turmoil following the 2021 coup, and economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Using a qualitative research approach involving nine in-depth interviews and data analysis, the study describes how women in northern Arakan contend with dire livelihood situations in both rural and urban areas impacted by armed conflict, natural disasters, and the pandemic. These factors elevate the risk of food insecurity and economic instability for vulnerable women and their families. Furthermore, the findings reveal the negative impact on women's livelihoods due to increased security risks, incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and gender role discrimination at household and community levels during the crises. In addition to these challenges, the findings also highlight notable individual and community-level coping mechanisms that partially alleviate complex livelihood hardships experienced under marginalization.

The study highlights the weaknesses and lack of effective resilience strategies implemented by local and state-level stakeholders (both the Arakan Army and the State Administration Council), indicating the need for more effective interventions such as reducing restrictions on travel authorizations set by the junta for humanitarian organizations in order to support women in crisis-affected areas and improving supportive actions for their livelihoods. By addressing specific needs of women across various contexts, this study aims to provide essential insights for policy-makers and stakeholders, empowering women in the region and enhancing their resilience amidst multiple crises.

Voices from Exile: The Safety Needs of Myanmar Women Journalists

Exile Hub

Abstract

The objective of this session is to disseminate and present the findings of the research paper, “Voices from Exile: The Safety Needs of Myanmar Women Journalists.” The session aims to raise awareness about the unique safety challenges faced by exiled Myanmar women journalists in Thailand, foster dialogue among stakeholders, and promote a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding their experiences. Through the presentation of key findings, open discussions with women journalists, and interactive dialogue, the session seeks to spark meaningful conversations, encourage engagement, and ultimately contribute to concrete actions that address the safety and well-being of women journalists and exiled Myanmar media more broadly.

Journalism plays a pivotal role during times of conflict and authoritarianism, serving as a vital tool for communication, activism, and the pursuit of democratic ideals. Following the 2021 military coup, working conditions for Myanmar journalists significantly deteriorated. The survival of exiled Myanmar media relies on the survival of media professionals, highlighting the importance of protecting journalists’ rights to practice their profession securely.

This session highlights findings from Exile Hub’s recently published research report, “Voices from Exile: The Safety Needs of Myanmar Women Journalists.” The primary objective of the research is to gather evidence on the experiences of exiled Myanmar women journalists, with a particular focus on non-dominant perspectives about their working and living conditions in the post-2021 coup landscape.

Representatives of Exile Hub will present insights into the safety, working conditions, and gender challenges faced by Myanmar women journalists in exile. Women journalists will also share firsthand experiences, including safety concerns, financial disparities, and gendered expectations in their professional journeys, while other speakers will reflect on the presented insights, share their own experiences, and discuss actionable strategies for creating a more equitable working environment for women journalists.

Beyond School Boycotts: Waiting, Resistance, and the Future in Post-Coup Myanmar

Francesca Chiu

Abstract

Students often employ school boycotts to advocate for change and challenge oppressive systems. This study focuses on the boycotts carried out by university students in urban Myanmar to support teachers participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement sparked by the military coup of February 2021. It investigates the reasons behind the contemplations of certain university students in Myanmar to return to school despite their firm rejection of the military regime. Findings show that university students' commitment to resistance through school boycotts poses a critical dilemma, impacting their academic progress and career prospects. While a significant number of students persist in resisting the junta through school boycotts, others critically assess the sustainability of this approach in light of Myanmar's uncertain future. By examining individual decisions within the broader context of collective resistance among university students in Myanmar, this paper contributes to the literature on waiting by exploring both the potential and limitations of waiting as a form of resistance and sheds light on how resistance evolves in response to the uncertainties and challenges posed by the military state.

Challenges of the Ayeyarwady Delta/Myanmar: Transformation Processes, Environmental Change, and Socio-Economic Vulnerability

Frauke Kraas

Abstract

The Ayeyarwady Delta has undergone three distinct stages of development over the last 200 years: The colonial development into the 'rice bowl of Asia' was followed by socialisation and nationalisation after 1962 and an increasing shift towards a market-oriented economy after 1988.

This paper analyses the more recent challenges of the delta, in which multidimensional transformation processes, multiple risks of environmental change, and issues of socio-economic vulnerability are intertwined. Future options and possible development pathways are addressed.

Multiple Disaster Risk Awareness, Perception, and Preparedness of Young People in Urban Areas in Myanmar

Frauke Kraas

Abstract

Myanmar is prone to multiple natural disasters, including tropical cyclones, floods, and earthquakes. Major fault lines are known for their seismic activity and frequent earthquakes; coastal and delta areas are prone to strong tropical cyclones and flooding. In addition, most of the major cities—the country’s capital Nay Pyi Taw, the economic powerhouses of Yangon and Mandalay, and regional capitals such as Taunggyi, Mawlamyine and Patheingyi—are all located either on fault lines or are exposed to tropical cyclones and flooding in coastal or delta areas. Quantitative household surveys show that a large proportion of the urban population is either relatively unaware or uninformed in terms of multiple disaster risk awareness, perception, and preparedness. Qualitative expert interviews highlight low levels in almost all population groups, although there are differences between age and income groups, education, and occupational levels. This is particularly challenging given the specific difficulties in urban areas in protecting and restoring so-called lifelines.

Against this background, this paper examines the multiple disaster risk awareness, perception, and preparedness of young people in urban areas in Myanmar and seeks to develop strategies, measures, and recommendations for strengthening disaster risk management with a special focus on young people.

Education Challenges Faced by Chin Refugee Children in Mizoram State

Gin Dim

Abstract

After the 1 February 2021 military coup in Myanmar, thousands of people fled to neighboring countries such as India, interrupting their education. The right to education is a fundamental human right and education is essential for refugee children's social-emotional development and wellbeing. Although India has not ratified the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention, the Mizoram State government recognizes the right to education as stipulated in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2009 Right to Free and Compulsory Education of Children Act. Even so, Chin refugee students face many difficulties related to their education in Mizoram State.

This study investigates these challenges and explores how students cope with and/or overcome them. It discusses the role of state schools, education policies, and civil society organizations in helping refugee children access education. The study uses qualitative methods, with interviews conducted with 17 research participants originally from different townships across Chin State, Myanmar, including 12 students. Language and curriculum barriers were reported as the main challenges. Financial issues and a lack of documentation are also difficulties. Nevertheless, Chin refugee students are resilient and use various coping strategies such as self-study, peer support, teacher assistance, and positive attitude. This study recommends that the right to education for refugee children be guaranteed by local governments of host communities, and that refugee children should exercise their right for quality, inclusive education.

Designed for Disruption: A Comparative Case Study of Karen Teacher Education

Greg Tyrosvoutis, Naw Paw Kolo Htoo, Naw Cleo, and Saw Sam San

Abstract

A multitude of actors are engaged in the provision of teacher education within Myanmar and on its borderlands: a nuanced mosaic emblematic of the nation's diverse, multiethnic composition. This complexity is rooted in the diverse historical trajectories that have unfolded since the country's independence from British colonial rule in 1948. Non-state, parallel, ethnic, and refugee education providers, such as the Karen Education and Cultural Department (KECD), the Karen Refugee Committee – Education Entity (KRC-EE), and the Karen Teachers' Working Group (KTWG) provide teacher professional development using locally developed curricula which includes the distinct cultural backgrounds and contextual realities of ethnic and indigenous Karen communities. Despite this, Karen teacher education continues to be underfunded and remains largely unrecognized by international governments and academic institutions. The continuity, reflexivity, and resilience of Karen teacher education needs to be recognized in its own right.

Using the dual lens of complexity and systems theory, this paper identifies the leadership approaches and organizational features that have supported the continuity of Karen teacher education in temporary shelters and in Karen State. KECD, KTWG, and KRCEE have developed fit-for-purpose structures and strategies allowing them to continue operations despite manifold challenges including decentralized decision-making, programmatic pragmatism, strong institutional memory, the triangulation of formal and informal data, feedback loops and the practice of intentional reflection and analysis, adaptable approaches and modalities, sensitivity to local environment, and a shared sense of duty and collectivism. Without complexity-aware support, future humanitarian interventions are likely to ignore, at best, and undermine, at worst, the very practices that have enabled Karen teacher education systems to navigate disruption. This paper will offer contextualized recommendations on how teacher education can be supported without hindering the essential aspects that have enabled these systems to navigate crises.

Ek Khaale - Once Upon a Time - Restoring and Re-Imagining the 'Potential History' of the Rohingya Through Unseen Visual Archives

Gregory Constantine

Abstract

Today, nearly all visual representations of the Rohingya portray a people defined by displacement, violence, desperation, and victimhood. Unlike most communities in Burma, a collective visual history of the Rohingya does not exist. Successive Burmese regimes have rejected the existence of a 'Rohingya' community indigenous to Burma and have manufactured a historical narrative labelling the Rohingya as a threatening 'foreign other.' This narrative has been widely accepted by the public throughout Burma. As a result, the Rohingya have endured a legacy of violence, exclusion, and displacement that has dismantled long-established ways in which the Rohingya preserve, share, and endorse cultural memory and identity among themselves and with others.

This research and the author's resulting project, Ek Khaale, which is the Rohingya expression for 'Once Upon A Time,' explores and presents a visual portrait of the Rohingya community and their history before the decades of violence committed against them. Utilizing the visual, this research challenges the permanency of statuses forced upon the Rohingya over the past fifty years and disrupts the trajectory of imagery depicting displacement, erasure, and on-going violence against the Rohingya. Over the past three years, this collaborative, co-participatory research project has gathered, collected, and digitized hundreds of rare photographs, documents, letters, and other visual materials displaced among the global Rohingya community, including Rohingya inside Burma. It also includes materials from public and private archives. This research repatriates and activates these materials from the past to present a new form and shape to Rohingya history and identity that has never been seen before. At this critical time in re-imagining of national identity in Burma, this research seeks to facilitate the 'unlearning' of Rohingya identity currently fixed in contemporary representations and present a 'potential history' of the Rohingya within the collective memory of those in Burma and beyond.

Forced Conscription of the Kachin Independence Army in Myanmar

Gum San Seng

Abstract

This study examines the forced conscription implemented by the Kachin Independent Army (KIA), the armed wing of the Kachin Independent Organization (KIO), the armed resistance group in Kachin State. KIA-led forced conscription has created human insecurities in the KIO-controlled territory. Some deserters have questioned the legitimacy of KIO-led nation-building. The author employs the concept of human security to analyze how these human insecurities have occurred. They also employ the concept of 'rebel society' to examine how these human insecurities have affected the KIO-led nation-building process.

It is argued that the KIA has implemented forced conscription through extra-legal means, involving violent recruitment without individual consent. These oppressive measures have consequently led to human insecurities, including livelihood degradation in affected households and the destruction of youth prospects, both crucial for supporting the KIO-led nation-building process. Existing literature on rebel society in Myanmar primarily examines how exogenous factors such as Myanmar government-led ceasefire agreements have influenced the relations between rebel elites and their grassroots. By scrutinizing the endogenous factor of forced conscription, this article can broaden our understanding of and enrich the literature on rebel society in Myanmar.

Exploring Burma's Civil Disobedience Practices

Gustaaf Houtman and Yee Mon

Abstract

Following the 2021 military coup in Burma, the unprecedented Spring Revolution Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) emerged. Civil disobedience is the intentional and nonviolent violation of specific laws undertaken to protest specific laws, policies, or government actions. It is performed to express dissent and to demonstrate a superior moral position against government to the broader society, aiming to bring about social, political, or legal change. Civil disobedience is performative, aiming to garner public support for this action by appealing to higher laws. Civil disobedience has a long history worldwide, with examples such as the American Civil Rights Movement, Indian Independence Movement, and various movements in Burma, from the anti-colonial struggles of the early 20th century to the pro-democracy uprisings in 1988 and 2007.

Civil disobedience has proven to be a crucial mechanism for social and political change worldwide. However, under a military dictatorship, the consequences are severe, with approximately 60% of participating civil servants fired from their jobs and criminalized. This panel will explore how Burmese civil disobedience practices draw from and enrich international discourses on nonviolent resistance. By illuminating the synergy between local traditions and global movements, we aim to bring out unique aspects of Burma's civil disobedience, focusing on the interplay of traditional values, digital innovation, and global strategies to pursue justice and humanitarian goals. We will examine how these elements intertwine to shape the strategies and outcomes of the Burmese resistance.

Burmese as a Linguistic Resource for Htanaw

Han Tin, Mathias Jenny, Alexandra Herdeg, and Rachel Weymuth

Abstract

It is commonly accepted knowledge that in scenarios where one language is highly dominant over others in most or all domains and communicative situations, the subordinate languages are seriously threatened by the dominant one and are likely to eventually disappear. In this paper, the authors explore the situation of Htanaw, an Austroasiatic language spoken by about 3,000 people in southern Shan State and not written until very recently. Burmese is used in all official domains such as administration and education, while Htanaw is the primary language spoken in villages with Htanaw community members. Switching to Burmese is natural when non-Htanaw speakers are present. The younger generations especially are fully fluent in both Htanaw and Burmese.

Interestingly, the highly dominant role of Burmese and the general bilingualism among the Htanaw has not had the effect of making Htanaw obsolete, but rather serves as a lifeboat for the language. Despite, or because of, the fact that Burmese and Htanaw are not cognate and have vastly different phonological and grammatical systems, Htanaw easily integrates and nativizes Burmese terms by adjusting their pronunciation to the Htanaw sound system. In the newly devised orthography for Htanaw, based on Burmese spelling without Burmese idiosyncrasies, Burmese loans can be written according to their Htanaw pronunciation, making them part of the language visually.

With the extensive resource of terminology available in Burmese covering all domains, Htanaw has a convenient way to expand its vocabulary and make the language functional beyond family and village settings. This, together with the introduction of a written form, contributes to the continued use of Htanaw and to the maintenance of the linguistic and cultural diversity of Myanmar.

In this talk, the authors will present examples of Burmese terms in Htanaw and their likely histories and the implications for the future of Htanaw.

Seeking Formalization: The Forcibly Displaced People from Myanmar in Mae Sot

Hein Htet Aung

Abstract

Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, a significant number of activists, including Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) leaders and their family members, fled to Thailand. Mae Sot, where migrants can enter illegally through different routes either with the help of local ethnic organizations or brokers, was one of their primary destinations. These newly and forcibly displaced people struggle with their agency to survive in a new environment where the context is culturally and socially different for them. Being an illegal migrant also creates vulnerability with their livelihoods, as they frequently face various forms of exploitation and extortion from their employers and local officials. In Mae Sot, a state of negotiation under a neoliberal context, these individuals seek forms of social security and freedom of mobility through the support of pre-existing networks and organizations, while they also navigate opportunities to acquire legal documentation.

This study investigates the various steps and methods involved in the formalization process of people compelled to migrate, while questioning the challenges they continue to face. Ethnographic research methods are utilized to explore the formalization methods of forcibly displaced people in Thailand via in-depth interviews and case studies focusing mainly on the working age group to gather more information about their challenges and upcoming plans for their livelihoods. These individuals, abandoning their properties and social networks while migrating to avoid life-threatening actions by the Myanmar military, often struggle to survive while waiting for the day they can either return home safely or be resettled in third countries via the UNHCR. The aim of this study is to discover how various forms of documentation can be used as a tools of power in dealing with authorities, job seeking processes, assessment of health, and even for further migration within Thailand or furtherance of education.

Politics of Ethnic Affiliation within the Pro-Democracy Movement: Understanding the New Civil War Through ‘Bamarnization’

Hideyuki Okano

Abstract

This presentation discusses how a new civil war for restoring democracy is being fought alongside ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). Using the case of Karen people in Kayin State, this presentation contends that "Bamarnized" ethnic minorities have served as a bridge between the pro-democracy movement and the political aspirations of ethnic minorities. Since the coup in 2021, Myanmar has been engulfed in a new civil war; resistance groups have emerged in various regions to combat the military government, the State Administration Council (SAC). What is intriguing about this civil war is its interconnectedness with the longstanding conflict involving ethnic minorities. Some EAOs that have historically fought for enhancing their own political rights have thrown their support behind the pro-democracy movement, enabling them to be armed. How did a political movement centered on the ethnic Bamar majority become intertwined with the aspirations of ethnic minorities? The key to understanding this phenomenon lies in the vernacular affiliations of ethnic identity within Myanmar.

Despite scholarly tendencies to essentialize ethnic identities such as Karen, Shan, and Kachin, the fluidity of ethnic identity has been acknowledged since the era of British colonization. Particularly in today's urban centers, it is not uncommon for ethnic minorities to spend their social lives that are indistinguishable from those of the ethnic Bamar majority. The author has conducted online interviews with internally displaced persons and political activists residing in Kayin State, facilitated by a Burmese political activist living outside Myanmar. This individual is a strong supporter of the National League for Democracy and belongs to the ethnic Bamar majority with no familial ties to ethnic minorities. However, those whom this person has introduced to the author have affiliations with ethnic groups. By focusing on them, this study explores the interconnectedness of the pro-democracy movement and the aspirations of ethnic minorities.

Determinants of Microfinance Repayment in Magway Township, Magway Region, Myanmar

Hnin Ei Ei Naing

Abstract

Limited access to financial resources for farmers in Myanmar hampers their profitability, prompting the use of microfinance. Some research findings show that most borrowers of microfinance programs have positive experiences and are able to increase their sources of income. However, access to microfinancing is still limited and its full impacts remain unclear. Microfinancing for farmers may satisfy urgent needs, but not improve the socioeconomic lives of farmers in the long run, which may lead to insurmountable debt burdens. Many scholars criticize microfinance, a neoliberal tool, for treating services for the poor as profit opportunities rather than as an opportunity to address broader structural issues. Doubts about microfinancing's effectiveness in reducing poverty are discussed, with regulation seen as part of a broader concept of neoliberal financialization.

However, microfinance is already being practiced in many developing countries. Although it is believed not to be a comprehensive solution for eliminating long-term poverty, microfinance is assumed to address the urgent needs of marginalized people, providing support for social welfare, food, and healthcare. Therefore, it makes sense to examine the current challenges that borrowers face in the world of microfinance. The critical question lies in identifying the contributing factors that determine whether microfinance borrowers benefit or lose after obtaining loans. This study examines the specific repayment challenges faced by loan borrowers by investigating the current state of the microfinance sector in Magway Region, Myanmar utilizing a qualitative approach. Given the current political climate in Myanmar, a limited sample size has been interviewed remotely, and the collected data has been subjected to thematic analysis.

Social Impacts of Conflict in Chin State and Priority Needs of Rural Communities: A Livelihoods Assessment

Honey Dawt Sung and Thawn Lian

Abstract

Chin State's rural communities are currently enduring a multi-faceted humanitarian crisis brought about by the conflict experienced in the region which compromises the physical safety and sense of security of community members, with some killed or injured and most traumatised and fearing for their safety. The conflict is also undermining normal economic activities they depend on and impacting incomes, food security, water and sanitation, and health and education.

This presentation introduces fresh primary data and provides new analysis from across rural areas of Chin State, revealing how the conflict has affected communities and their current priority needs. It presents policy suggestions aimed at improving understanding and facilitating targeted humanitarian relief and livelihood and development support.

Field research was conducted across 45 villages in late 2023. The presentation highlights that Chin communities urgently need both humanitarian relief and longer-term support to develop their resilience. In order of priority, community members request the following support: education, food, water infrastructure, health support, cash, agricultural support, vocational training, housing, road access, electricity, investment, clothing, and job opportunities.

Everyday Forms of Resistance and Political Killings in Post-Coup Myanmar

Htet Hlaing Win

Abstract

From 1962 until 2010, Myanmar existed under the rule of one military junta or another. During this period, the ways Myanmar people perceive the world around them and their behaviors were shaped by their living conditions. These include adhering to certain standardizations when writing, spelling place names in officially-prescribed ways, and adhering to certain clothing and hair styles. These behaviors remained unproblematic until the February 2021 coup. Following the coup, some people began to intentionally change their behaviors. For example, when writing, some started to deviate from official standardized script and began to refer to places by their unofficial names. On one level, this can be interpreted as variations of James Scott's "everyday forms of resistance" in which people who are not willing to join armed resistance groups revolt against the state in more subtle ways. On another level, this can be seen as an attempt on the part of anti-military individuals to distinguish themselves from military supporters.

Following the 2021 coup, political killings have been rampant throughout the country. The desire to completely eliminate one's political opponents has become a dominant feature of Myanmar political culture, and oftentimes targets are identified due to differences in behavior vis-à-vis perpetrators. In order to understand Myanmar's contemporary political violence, it is necessary to grasp the role political killings play in post-coup Myanmar politics and how potential victims are selected based on their behaviors. This can be done by observing whether an individual employs "everyday forms of resistance" or not. This paper deals with how ordinary citizens utilize "everyday forms of resistance" to subtly protest against the coup and how victims of political killings are selected based on whether they adhere to social rules prescribed by the government.

Call for Revolutionary Care: Racializing Religion Against the Backdrop of Political Federalism

Htet Min Lwin

Abstract

The 2021 coup in Burma/Myanmar and the consequent anti-coup resistance not only gave rise to a revolutionary situation in the country, but also provoked the people of Burma/Myanmar to question many things they would not otherwise question readily. Among these is the role of the Sangha in the society, especially its senior leadership, due to the fact that many prominent senior monks have visibly sided with the military junta. In this context, one well-known forest monk, Mong Pong Sayadaw (Ñānasamvara) aka Khruba Bunchum, after finishing his vowed solitude of three years, returned to society. This led to a major controversy among Buddhists.

In this paper, the author demonstrates how these discursive sites of contestations related to Mong Pong Sayadaw during the Spring Revolution in Myanmar reveal important questions about the intersections of class, revolutionary ideals, majority/minority racial relations, and the respective racialization process that continues even and especially during the times of the revolution. Specifically, it underscores the role of religion in racialization and construction of minority status at the intersection of Lanna Buddhism and Shan/Burmese Buddhism. I argue the concept of 'revolutionary care' against the backdrop of political federalism and the revolutionizing of religion.

From Sanctuary to Strife: The Unintended Climate Consequences of Chronic Crisis-Driven Forest Inhabitants

Htet Sint Pine

Abstract

This paper investigates the dynamic relationship between chronic crisis and climate change in a Mon community facing long-term displacement in southeast Myanmar. The community has experienced what Vigh (2008) refers to as a 'chronic crisis' for more than seven decades, exacerbated by recent civil conflict and limited access to basic needs. Situated near the Thai border, the village faces complex governance arrangements, including mixed control by the Myanmar military State Administration Council (SAC), the New Mon State Party (NMSP), and the Karen National Union (KNU), who all vie for control of both people and natural resources in the area (Lund, 2017). As a result of these dynamics, much of the surrounding forest land has been converted into rubber plantations owned largely by armed elites. On top of this, the community is now dealing with the effects of climate change, which has affected their ability to survive off the local environment.

This study draws on a mixed methods analysis, triangulating precipitation and temperature data with ethnographic fieldwork. The author examines how the observed and projected impacts of climate change, including rising temperatures and changes in precipitation, are exacerbated by the chronic crisis and ongoing mismanagement of forest land by different authorities. The author further analyses how the decline in forest resources due to rubber plantations impacts subsistence agricultural production while exploring the socio-economic implications for the local population. The findings underscore the urgent need for context-specific interventions tailored to the complex challenges faced by displaced communities relying on the environment for survival. The ethnographic lens provides a rich, comprehensive narrative that enhances our understanding of the community's resilience in the face of difficulty.

The Way Forward for Armed and Political Movements to Implement Women, Peace, and Security: The Case of KNU

Ja Seng Ra

Abstract

Based on her recent research, the presenter will discuss a feasible way forward for Armed and Political Movements (APMs) to implement WPS, referring to the case of the Karen National Union (KNU).

Higher Education in Myanmar Three Years After the Coup

James Htut and Eric Aung

Abstract

Myanmar's public higher education system has been severely weakened since 2021, and new stakeholders from private and civil society sectors are gradually filling in the space. The number of matriculation exam takers, which is a quick indicator for university enrollments, has plummeted to 128,725 in 2024 from the annual average of 750,000 prior to 2021, demonstrating declining trust in traditional education pathways. Alternative education providers—which now include ethnic education departments, parallel university councils formed by professors of the Civil Disobedience Movement and student union leaders, online learning platforms, and community initiatives in conflict areas—are increasingly crucial in offering interim education in these turbulent times and in shaping the federalised higher education system of the future.

In order to map out the myriad number of service providers and the evolving landscape, this research employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative data analysis of students and teachers with qualitative insights gathered through interviews and focus groups. This paper outlines a profile of alternative education providers with further elaborations on their targeted student groups, faculty resources, delivery channels, and corresponding challenges in their operations. Additional studies on qualitative assessments of these new actors, such as the institutional structures and policy-making frameworks of these organisations and the inclusiveness and diversity parameters of their student intakes, are recommended for holistic understanding of the new paradigm of higher education pathways in Myanmar.

Farmers' Perceptions of Climate Change in Conflict-Affected Chin State

Joseph Ceuceu

Abstract

Communities in Chin State are extremely vulnerable to climate change as both highland and lowland regions are exposed to it. Agriculture provides 90% of household income, and rural Chin families have traditionally relied on swidden agricultural production on marginal land to fulfil their food needs, cultivating a small number of basic crops (usually millet and maize) with minimal inputs other than seed, human effort, and organic fertiliser. Aside from low profitability, insufficient diversification, and a significant reliance on loans, agricultural households face additional stress from soil erosion, irregular rainfall patterns, harsh temperatures, and commodity price volatility associated with climate change. In recent years changing weather patterns and seasonal volatility have come to be seen as a major barrier to crop production in Chin State's Hakha Township.

This paper examines how farmers view agricultural challenges caused by climate change, as well as the techniques they use to cope with and adapt their customary agricultural practices, using traditional knowledge. Based on household surveys and key informant interviews, the author discusses how most farmers see climate change as a major impediment to their everyday livelihoods since they believe their agricultural productivity is being significantly harmed, particularly by irregular rainfall.

Resilience and Migration: The Resilience of Migrants from Burma/Myanmar in Thailand and Malaysia Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic

Khen Suan Khai

Abstract

This research project explores the challenges faced by irregular migrants from Myanmar in Malaysia and Thailand, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Employing a qualitative approach, the study integrates firsthand experiences, academic literature, and NGO inputs to provide insights into the resilience of migrants and their coping mechanisms. The analysis is conducted through a multisystemic resilience framework, considering various factors influencing migrants' well-being.

The findings highlight the significance of social networks, community-based aid initiatives, remittances, employer support, and informal sector adaptation in bolstering migrants' resilience during the pandemic. However, challenges such as limited access to formal employment, vaccine hesitancy, mental health issues, and educational disruptions persist, warranting targeted interventions.

The research underscores the agency and resilience of irregular migrants in navigating adversity and offers practical implications for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars. It advocates for inclusive policies and practices prioritizing migrants' well-being and integration, offering a roadmap for future action and change. The study also emphasizes the need for further research on policy implementation issues, particularly migrant health, and highlights the value of cross-disciplinary resilience understandings in developing multisystemic resilience approaches.

Overall, this research project provides a unique and comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by irregular migrants in Southeast Asia and offers practical implications for addressing these challenges. It contributes to the literature on resilience and migration while highlighting the importance of inclusive policies and practices for safeguarding migrants' well-being and dignity.

Negotiated Identities in Exile Spaces: The Dynamic Agency of CDM Practitioners on the Border

Kalyah

Abstract

Many civil servants involved in Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), having lost their livelihoods and facing daily, severe security threats inside the country, have fled to the town of Mae Sot on the Thailand border with Karen State. Upon arriving, this group was forced to contend with the consequences of their 'illegal' entry and stay in Thailand, the challenge of adapting to the specific context of Mae Sot, the host community, attempting to build a degree of trust and stability amid this complex and dynamic context. While several studies have outlined the lives and threats faced by CDMers in Mae Sot, this research seeks to specifically understand the negotiated identities of these former civil servants. Notably, it explores how these undocumented CDMers in exile on the one hand adapt their presentation of self in making constant assessments of their own ability to be seen to build trust and 'integrate' in their new lives, while on the other hand remaining steadfast in their sense of purpose and pride, while clinging to aspects of their own cultural identity. It shows how, over time living in exile, this process of negotiated adaptation becomes a recognized, accepted strategy among CDMers. The researcher, herself a CDMer living in Mae Sot, as well as a trained anthropologist, has conducted extensive ethnography among the community, eliciting rich data on daily lived experiences. The idea of negotiated identity shows how this group of refugees has complex and multifaceted strategies employed in their daily lives, how Mae Sot continues to serve as a 'state of exception' where such negotiations can take place, albeit requiring frequent adjustments amid changing context. The research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the concept of negotiated identity in exile spaces and a more robust sense of CDM agency and identity.

Motion Expressions in Shan Compared with Burmese and Thai

Karl Seifen

Abstract

For this presentation, the researcher looks at the encoding of motion events in Shan (Tai Yai) and compares it to the encoding of motion events in Burmese and Central (Bangkok) Thai. More specifically, they look at two main properties of motion events, (1) Serial Verbs Constructions (SVCs), and (2) Source-Goal Asymmetry. For serial verbs, the order of verbs within the directional SVC, typically Manner-Path-Deixis in Thai (Thepkanjana 1986), but Path-Manner-Path-Deixis in Burmese (Vittrant 2015), as well as the possibility of inserting nominal phrases in-between verbs are examined.

For the Source-Goal Asymmetry, the difference between the encoding of Sources (initial point of a Trajectory) and Goals (endpoint of a Trajectory) are explored. Studies of both Thai and Burmese (Seifen and Bunkham 2021; Vittrant, Seifen, and Champin 2023) point out that Burmese is more symmetrical than Thai (i.e., the encoding of Sources is more similar to the encoding of Goals).

The data for this presentation were collected using the Trajectoire stimulus set, designed to elicit descriptions of motion events in typologically and culturally different languages and communities (Ishibashi, Kopecka, and Vuillermet 2006; Vuillermet and Kopecka 2019). The speakers were Shan natives from Mae Hong Son province and from Shan State, living in Chiang Mai.

Comparing the encoding of motion in Shan to the encoding in Burmese and Central Thai, we see that Shan exhibits properties found in Central Thai and Burmese. On one hand, features shared with Thai may be explained through inheritance from proto-Tai, universal linguistic tendencies (in the case of Source-Goal Asymmetry), or even through more recent contact in the urbanized environment of Chiang Mai. On the other hand, features shared with Burmese may be due to older and prolonged contact between the Shan State(s) and Burmese polities (from the Pagan era to the Union of Myanmar).

Post-Secondary Education in Myanmar and the GED: Qualification Versus Education

Katie Julian and Lao Kham

Abstract

The pathway to university has long been a challenge for many students from Myanmar. Graduates of schools run by ethnic-based education providers (EBEPs) outside government controlled areas, as well as graduates of migrant learning centres (MLCs) in neighboring countries, are unable to receive official recognition of their K-12 schooling. This situation has exacerbated since the 2021 military coup, with hundreds of thousands of students unable to access any form of government-recognised basic education. One common route to international universities is via the US General Educational Development (GED) certificate, which is widely accepted as an entrance qualification in Thai universities and other regional institutions. In recent years a number of online and face-to-face programmes have established GED tuition programming.

In this paper, the authors discuss some of the issues involved in teaching and studying for the GED qualification, and assess some of the alternatives, with a particular focus on educational programming designed by post-secondary providers catering to the contextualised and changing educational needs of students within their constituencies. We argue for the establishment of a university entrance qualification combining quality assurance and contextualised content options, recognised by international tertiary education providers.

Data for this research comes from interviews undertaken between May–July 2023, with students enrolled in or graduated from GED preparation programmes, teachers and managers involved in education sectors targeting Myanmar students currently living in Thailand, and the researchers' personal and professional experiences working in the field of education on the Thai-Myanmar border over the last three decades. Sources referred to in this paper cover a range of related topics, from analysis of and access to higher education prior to and since Covid-19 and the 2021 Myanmar military coup to education planning and implementation amongst ethnic and community-based education providers, migrant learning centres, and online educational initiatives.

The Fate of the Danu Ethnic Minority in Myanmar

Kaung Htet

Abstract

According to the government, Myanmar has 135 ethnic groups, including the Danu. The Danu population is approximately 250,000 (with 100,000 Danu speakers according to Ethnologue) found mostly in the Pindaya and Ywa Ngan Danu Self-Administered Zone, as well as in Kalaw, Aungban, and Taunggyi, with diaspora communities in Yangon and Mandalay, as well as abroad. The Danu people have their own culture, beliefs, customary practices, and traditional clothing. However, the Danu language is considered a Burmese dialect despite many differences in vocabulary and sound system. Currently, the Danu ethnic group is facing difficulties as their language, culture, and traditional practices are fading away. This is happening because the culture of the Burmese majority of Myanmar is becoming more influential, and many Danu people, especially the younger ones, are adopting the ways of Burmese culture, which is different from their own. Because the majority culture is so dominant in society, Danu customs are often pushed aside and not given much importance. Danu traditions are thus not passed on to younger generations, and the Danu people are losing their unique identity.

The Danu language, originally clearly distinct from, though closely related with, Burmese, is being forgotten. More and more young Danu people speak the language of the Burmese, losing the distinctive features of their own language. This means that over time, the Danu language might disappear completely. Despite these challenges, some young Danu people are trying to develop their own language and keep Danu culture and traditions alive.

In this talk, the author will share examples of the changes and loss of Danu language and culture among younger generations. The presentation is based on a short video showing traditional Danu compared with more modern examples. Ideas on how to promote, integrate, and conserve Danu will be critically assessed and discussed.

The Role of TICA and Its Challenges with the Border Health Program After the Coup

Khathaleeya Liamdee

Abstract

The idea of ‘chuay khao chuay rao’/‘help them to help us’ refers to one of the major goals of Thailand’s Development Cooperation Program that Thailand’s International Cooperation Agency (TICA) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in charge of as part of health security strategy and development diplomacy towards neighboring countries. This agency has been working closely with the Ministry of Public Health and its border health-related agencies on various issues, namely: 1) a preparedness and response program for emerging infectious diseases (EID); 2) medical and public health capacity building; 3) patient referral system; and 4) twin/sister hospital program.

The political instability caused by the 2021 coup in Myanmar not long after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the efforts of TICA to improve situation of border health and cooperation across the Thai-Myanmar borders. In addition, armed conflict along the border has enlarged the border health crisis, resulting in urgent need for humanitarian assistance for the injured and displaced persons who have fled across the border to Thailand.

This study examines the role of TICA as an actor that merged Thailand’s foreign policy and public health initiatives long before the Myanmar coup, and the challenges that TICA is facing in order to maintain health security and its mission for developmental diplomacy. How do Thailand’s foreign policymakers understand and perceive the border health issues aligned with the urgent humanitarian needs? What would be the most suitable response for TICA’s ‘chuay khao chuay rao’ strategies toward ongoing conflict in Myanmar?

The Role of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 2020 Election in Myanmar

Khin Nway Nway Hlaing

Abstract

This article explores how National League for Democracy (NLD) supporters used Facebook to conduct campaigns during Myanmar's 2020 election. Examining election issues through Facebook is particularly crucial, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Facebook has essentially become the internet in Myanmar. Consequently, the entire nation has turned to Facebook as a primary platform for discussing election-related matters. Additionally, the scarcity of research on this issue in the Asian context further underscores the significance of conducting this study.

The author argues that while providing a platform for political expression and information dissemination, Facebook has contributed to political polarization in Myanmar. To comprehend the role of Facebook in fostering political polarization, this research employs securitization theory to conceptualize relevant securitization actors and audiences. Secondly, political polarization theory is utilized to gauge the extent to which the securitization process by NLD supporters contributes to increased political polarization. The author examines public data on Facebook from throughout the election campaign period of September to November 2020. Data was collected through the CrowdTangle system, which is provided by Facebook. Additionally, social media reports from Myanmar Tech Accountability Network and in-depth interviews with election social media observers are analyzed.

This study finds that the strategic use of Facebook by NLD supporters, including the employment of influential figures, dedicated lobby pages, and securitization tactics to shape narratives, contributed to the party's success. The final section draws the conclusion that interactions on Facebook influenced by securitization and Facebook's system design lead to the creation of echo chambers, making constructive conversations challenging and intensifying political polarization.

**Navigating Economic Hardship in the Aftermath of the Coup:
Land Use Dynamics and Identity Discourse in Highland Communities
of the Naga Self-Administrative Zone**

Khin Pyae Sone

Abstract

This study examines land tenure dynamics in Myanmar's northern frontier, focusing on the interplay between customary and state land laws in the multiethnic Naga region. Amid Myanmar's transition towards democracy and a market economy, significant political and legislative reforms have reshaped land governance. Key legislative changes, such as the Farmland Law and the Vacant, Fallow, and Virgin Land Management (VFV) Law, have introduced new frameworks for land ownership, but have also led to contested property claims and power struggles between state authorities and local communities.

Most studies on customary tenure in Myanmar have focused on single ethnic settings, often oversimplifying customary tenure as the sole form of land governance and overlooking the complexities of multi-ethnic environments. This paper investigates the impact of formalized land rights on land use and tenure dynamics in a multiethnic region. It explores how communities navigate statutory and customary land tenure systems to protect their land rights and how land transactions have evolved from trust-based exchanges to more pragmatic, transactional approaches.

The study also explores the concept of 'forum shopping' within legal pluralism, where individuals strategically select legal forums aligning with their interests. Using legal pluralism as a lens, this paper contextualizes interactions between customary and statutory systems in Naga society, highlighting the adaptable nature of engagements with these dual frameworks. Through case studies of Yaung Shi village and its historical establishment, the research illustrates the evolution of legal frameworks in a multiethnic setting. It underscores the importance of traditional dispute resolution methods and the strategic use of both customary and statutory legal systems in resolving land disputes. The findings emphasize the need for the state to recognize customary tenure and support these recognition efforts for a more integrated land governance system.

Transnational Support in Myanmar's Post-Coup Revolution: The Humanitarian Resistance of Myanmar Migrants in Thailand

Khin Sabai Aung

Abstract

The 2021 coup in Myanmar led to a humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the military junta's attempt to block and attack the country's telecommunication systems, channels for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and humanitarian volunteers themselves across Myanmar communities. Countering the limitations inside the country, informal support from outside the country has been significant for coping with the humanitarian crisis and supporting the revolution against the junta. At the same time, the migration patterns of Myanmar people in Thailand has shifted from largely economic motivations towards the imperatives of safety and security, as persecutions and weaponized, targeted attacks by the junta have caused civilians to flee to Thailand. These new migrants continue their involvement in the revolution by harnessing their expertise and existing connections. Alongside longer-term migrant workers in Thailand, these migrants provide important informal humanitarian support to Myanmar through personal and organizational networks.

This research seeks to understand the motivations behind migrants' informal support and how these motivations influence their support for specific causes within the revolution. The research builds on the relatively new concept of 'humanitarian resistance,' in which Hugo Slim contends that the saving of human lives and the achievement of justice and freedom are the core values of humanitarian support against oppression, and humanitarianism must therefore move away from its traditional 'neutrality.' The research primarily comprises interviews with Myanmar migrants in Thailand who have recently participated in what can be understood as acts of humanitarian resistance.

Religious Nationalism and the Historical Othering of Rohingya in Myanmar

Khin Thinzar and Hurriyah

Abstract

The Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority group in Myanmar living in Rakhine State, are regarded as the most persecuted and largest identified stateless community in the world. For several decades, they have endured systematic torture, including loss of citizenship to mass killings and forced expulsion from their homes. The Myanmar government utilises religious nationalism to safeguard national ethnicities and impose a long-held view of the dominant Burmese majority as having more power and privileges than other ethnic groups through the policy of Burmanization, a political ideology of race-based religious nationalism introduced by General Ne Win, the 1962 coup leader. The Burmanization strategy also permits overt discrimination against ethnic nationality groups in areas such as culture, education, language and religion, and historical narratives. As a consequence, minority groups or religions become targets of the state's othering strategy, as seen with the Rohingya being labelled as 'Bengali' and illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Using Han Kohn's theory of two-types of nationalism, 'civic' and 'ethnic' in the Western and Eastern context, this research examines how religious nationalism is employed to justify state control by presenting it as a protector of religious interests while also perpetuating systematic imbalances and cultural assimilation of the Rohingya community in Myanmar.

Rural Education in Northern Shan State, Myanmar: Challenges, Responses, and Resilience

L Doi Aung and Sai Lao Main

Abstract

The Centre for Rural Education and Development (CRED) aims to improve the lives of rural communities through sustainable educational development initiatives in Myanmar. CRED is committed to providing quality education for marginalized communities, children, and youth in remote, low-resource, conflict-affected areas of Shan State. In the last two years, these communities have faced a number of educational challenges as the result of the ongoing political instability.

Through qualitative research with 23 respondents including students, parents, teachers, and education organization representatives, this study examines the challenges that children, teachers, and educational communities have faced during the past two years and the responses that have been taken by different stakeholders in order to overcome the challenges. The Shan community has faced innumerable challenges, including school closures, inadequate teaching and learning materials, loss of community livelihoods, displacement, and recruitment of children and youth by armed groups. Together with different stakeholders and other educational and humanitarian organizations, CRED has implemented a number of projects to support the continuity of education in rural Shan State.

Through documenting the lessons that have been learned from the responses to challenges from 2020–present, this research investigates the core resilience capacities of the Shan rural education system. Drawing upon these resilience capacities, a series of recommendations are presented to outline how the Shan rural education system can strengthen both its sustainability and its ability to continue to respond to ongoing adversity in the region.

Talking Nationalisms in Burma: Kachin Concepts of Nation, State, and Liberation

Laur Kiik

Abstract

How do indigenous concepts shape an armed nationalist revolution? How do Kachin people talk politics? People in Burma have lived amid competing nationalisms, military repression, and wars since the Second World War. In the current countrywide struggles, the Kachin national movement has again emerged as a leading force. Understanding such ethno-national movements on their own terms helps understand where Burma may be moving. Thus, this presentation discusses Kachin Jinghpaw language concepts, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork among Kachin people since 2010 and a basic etymological study. The presentation focuses on a few words that express the modern nation-state model in everyday talk: nation and patriotism, state, ownership, and sovereignty-liberation. Such concepts have evolved by logical continuity and scaling-up from indigenous Kachin models, within the decades-long ethnonational revolution movement, and in relations with Burmese nationalism and Christian theology. These concepts anchor both popular political worldviews and future visions, as well as sensitive debates about this diverse region's many-sided inter-ethnic conflicts.

The Role of Youth-Led Organizations in Advancing Sustainable Peace in the Aftermath of the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar

Lorna Wai, Kaung Kaung, Thae Ma, and Pyae Lwin

Abstract

This research investigates the crucial role of youth-led organizations in fostering the peace-building process in Myanmar after the military coup of 2021. This study seeks to unveil both the challenges and diverse array of coping strategies of Myanmar youth in peace-building and their narrative of resilience. The study employs qualitative methods, including individual interviews with 20 participants from various youth-led organizations. The results reveal that despite facing restrictions in the community due to military laws and restrictions, youth-led organizations still play a crucial role in providing and delivering humanitarian aid, enhancing community resilience through capacity strengthening programs, and sustaining democratic activism. However, youth-led organizations also face several constraints, such as mobility restrictions, funding shortages, security threats, and barriers in project coordination. Youth-led organizations have modified their operations to work around these challenges via the use of technology, relying on informal networks, reframing activities, and enhancing security protocols. Youth organizations play multifaceted roles in peace-building efforts, including delivering forms of acute relief, cultivating resilience, and enabling democratic participation amidst repression. By addressing urgent humanitarian needs while also nurturing empowered, politically active youth, these groups make significant contributions towards laying the foundations for positive peace and rehabilitation in Myanmar. Thus, this research emphasizes the remarkable resilience and importance of these groups as key drivers of positive peace and societal transformation in Myanmar, highlighting the urgent need for international protection and support.

Resilience and Protest Motivations Among Young Myanmar Pro-Democracy Activists in Exile

Lukas Nagel

Abstract

Myanmar observers initially predicted a quick end to any civilian resistance against the coup d'état by the Myanmar military on February 1, 2021. More than three years later, the colourful civilian opposition persists and continues to defy the regime's legitimacy and armed forces. The unexpected resilience of the Spring Revolution and its various groups is now often explained by the novel leadership that seems to flow from a highly political generation of young Myanmar citizens. However, the reasons for young activists' unexpected persistence are poorly understood. Therefore, this PhD project asks how exiled Myanmar youth activists of the pro-democracy movement in Thailand maintain their resilient opposition to the military dictatorship.

To answer the research question, data collection and analysis rely on an extensive literature review and a mixed methods research design, namely an exploratory sequential design (ESD), which includes semi-structured interviews conducted since April 2024 with exile activists in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot. Preliminary findings about political values, protest strategies, and resilience of youth activists will be presented. This study, therefore, investigates youth activism in the 21st century in general and protest motivations, political values, and resilience in facing authoritarian suppression in Myanmar specifically. It also contributes to the research on conflict settings in the Global South, amplifies youths' authentic voices during Myanmar's civil war, and explores how youths imagine a post-conflict political system and society.

Gendered Resilience and Coping Strategies Among Internally Displaced Communities in Sagaing Region, Myanmar

Lwin Lwin

Abstract

In the aftermath of the 2021 coup d'état in Myanmar, the intensification of armed conflict has resulted in the displacement of nearly four million people. The largest concentration of conflict is in Sagaing Region, where junta forces have established particular notoriety for extreme violence against civilians, including the burning of villages. Although men are often targeted as potential resistance personnel, women bear the brunt of indiscriminate violence, particularly displacement. Whilst rural households in Myanmar have well-documented resilience in relation to natural disasters, often relying on local networks of welfare, the current crisis has undermined many of the normal coping mechanisms. Whilst a common (and false) assumption is that women may be less able than men to cope with and overcome crises, much of the challenge of resilience derives from structural inequalities, such as access to and control over financial resources, particular gender-based vulnerabilities such as assigned roles, vulnerability to threats or acts of violence, and limited legal benefits, protections, and decision-making authority (Quisumbing et al. 2008).

This paper uses narrative interviews with women in conflict areas to consider the research question, 'How does gender influence the expression and building of resilience in conflict-displaced communities, both in terms of the gendered nature of the post-coup societal context and the forms of resilience emerging in response?' This research suggests that, amid crisis, women exhibit highly adaptive and creative coping strategies that in turn can help displaced communities to develop greater resilience.

The Third Way: Subversive/Creative Strategies by Women in Response to Violence in Myanmar

Lwin Lwin

Abstract

Whilst the focus of recent academic and humanitarian discourse has been on the extensive subjective violence in the post-coup period, this is in many ways superimposed on prior legacies of structural, sexual, and cultural violence, not least that experienced by women in Myanmar. Whilst research has often highlighted acts of violence against women, largely focusing on women's status as victims, there is less analysis of women's agency, particularly the myriad coping strategies which are employed against the various forms of violence they experience.

The research question is: How can the third way strategy used by women in response to multiple forms of violence apply to post-conflict social reconstruction? These extend beyond confrontation or avoidance and include a range of strategies characterized by cunning, manipulation, and deception employed in the pursuit of survival against more empowered threats. The likelihood of such forms of violence persisting beyond formal ceasefires and peace agreements is high; thus, this paper seeks to analyse women's survival strategies as a source of learning for other disadvantaged and disempowered groups in the post-conflict period. Using the narrative method, the author studies stories about women's responses to gender violence that occurred after the 2021 military coup. Whilst these strategies may not appear morally or ethically appealing, they nonetheless represent a kind of quotidian realpolitik: the means of survival for those who have been systemically and socially denied other tools and avenues.

Navigating Ethical Boundaries in Humanitarian Aid Provision for Displaced People in Myanmar

Ma Wai, Ma Phyo, Ko Phone, Ei Ei, and Jaden Lee

Abstract

Since the 2021 coup, Myanmar has been engulfed in civil war, as diverse revolutionary forces act in support of the public's resistance to the junta takeover. Conflict has displaced over 2.5 million people, creating a complex humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian assistance, however, has been complicated by restrictions imposed by the junta authorities on international actors (mainly international organizations, donors, and UN agencies), and by the latter's insistence on continued cooperation with junta line ministries, and avoiding contact with opposition groups on the basis of humanitarian neutrality. This has led to a dissonance in the humanitarian discourse between the agents claiming a mandate to provide assistance, and grassroots organizations who are more closely aligned with the public commitment to revolution, and who now provide the majority of humanitarian assistance in conflict areas. The stance of many international actors hinges upon a particular interpretation of humanitarian neutrality, which is actively contested by local actors.

This research interrogates the construction of humanitarian neutrality by both international and local actors, using assemblage theory to demonstrate the intrinsic inconsistencies, tensions and vested interests. Analysis of case studies derived from interviews with local and international actors are used to explore the construction of humanitarian neutrality, and how the different actors navigate the ethical barriers it creates.

Fostering Resilience and Well-Being Among Community Leaders Serving Myanmar Migrants in Thailand Amidst the Post-Coup Mental Health Crisis

Marni Reynolds

Abstract

The 2021 military coup in Myanmar has led to a significant displacement of people, resulting in a mental health crisis among Myanmar migrants in Thailand. Community leaders—including psychosocial caregivers, social welfare therapists, non-profit administrators, medical and social professionals, teachers, and social workers—often prioritize serving members of these migrant populations at the expense of their own health and well-being. This wellness strategy leads to an increased level of compassion fatigue, physical and emotional stress, and mental health issues among these leaders.

In 2024, the author conducted three retreats for over 50 community leaders in the Chiang Mai, Mae Sot, and Chumphon areas, focusing on those experiencing compassion fatigue, burnout, and exhaustion. Participants reported symptoms such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, dissociation, and dysregulated nervous systems. This paper shares the emotional well-being survey findings from these retreats, discusses the emotional regulation indicators, and outlines a plan for maintaining resilience and sustainability among community leaders. These groups in particular are in charge of leading the displaced populations of Myanmar and are rarely supported in the maintenance of their own psychosocial wellness. Emphasized is the importance of understanding intergenerational trauma, epigenetics, healing collective trauma, and neuroscience in developing a progressive, culturally sensitive methodology to support these leaders. The paper explores the necessary steps to create circles of compassion and healing, aiming to foster resilience and well-being among community leaders serving the Myanmar migrant population in Thailand. By addressing the mental health needs of these leaders, the initiative seeks to strengthen their ability to continue supporting their communities and promote overall social well-being. By recognizing the cyclical nature of intergenerational trauma, the fostering of resiliency and compassion for these leaders is a vital initiative to incorporate in all psychosocial programs going forward.

Learning Opportunities and the Role of Digital Technology for Education in Chin State

Mary Nei lang

Abstract

Chin State is experiencing a devastating educational crisis amid ongoing conflict and humanitarian hardships. This presentation provides an overview of a 2023–2024 study that included original field research to explore how digital technology shapes education access in this critical context. It examines the role of digital tools, exploring both their opportunities and potential risks.

Amid the disruptions caused by Covid-19 and the 2021 coup, individuals and social organizations in Chin State turned to the internet to access educational services. Some communities established independent schools or learning centers, while others have collaborated with faith-based groups, various armed factions, or the National Unity Government (NUG). However, these initiatives faced severe obstacles, including attacks by the State Administration Council (SAC), such as airstrikes, shelling, arson, and teacher arrests. Furthermore, the SAC has hindered education services by cutting off internet access.

This groundbreaking research on digital education in Chin State utilizes freshly gathered data tailored for this study, offering an up-to-date perspective on the region's digital education landscape. The paper concludes with recommendations directed at policymakers, donors, and stakeholders, focusing in particular on educational practitioners.

Resistance and Resilience of English Teachers of Myanmar Through Renewed Identity, Agency, and Pedagogy

Mary Wong

Abstract

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2021 coup on the heels of massive educational reforms in Myanmar has created a crucible in which teachers are forging a new vision of education that is more just, inclusive, and critical. Educators, and most notably English language teachers, have joined others to claim agency in this process, demonstrating resilience during and after the Covid crisis, resistance to the military junta following the coup, and innovation in reimagining and reforming education.

This paper focuses on experiences of English educators in Myanmar from 2015–2024, drawing from interviews that the author conducted with English educators in Myanmar biannually from 2016 to 2024. Four of the five datasets come from previously published studies (Wong, 2017; Wong, Miller, & Treadwell, 2019; Wong & Kareng, 2023; and Wong, Matthews, & Kyawt Thuzar, 2024 in press). The research questions for this study are (1) How did the experience of the twin crises of Covid and the 2021 coup impact English language educators in Myanmar in terms of their identity, agency, and pedagogy?, and (2) What can we learn about resistance and resilience in crises from their experience over the past decade? This retrospective study of 'snapshots' of teachers in Myanmar before, during, and after the two major events of Covid and the coup provides valuable insights on how the crucible of crisis can lead to transformations in who we are (our identity), how we respond (our agency), and what and how we teach (our pedagogy).

This paper is an adapted version of a recently submitted manuscript to TESOL Journal Special Topics Issue, scheduled for publication in 2025. It is hoped that a robust discussion at this conference regarding the role and needs of teachers from Myanmar will result in deeper insights and applications to support teachers.

Humanitarianism and Human Rights: Two Different Approaches to Myanmar

Masao Imamura

Abstract

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the international human rights movement as we know it today has grown in the past fifty years. Its growth has been so significant that it has come to influence humanitarian operations around the globe. There remain, however, fundamental tensions between the two movements: humanitarianism and human rights. In this presentation, the author will present an analysis of these tensions in the context of aid to Myanmar—especially cross-border aid from Thailand.

International humanitarian aid to Myanmar began to be formalized in the early 1980s, when the scale of refugees (mostly Karen) fleeing to Thailand increased dramatically. As investigation and advocacy by international human rights NGOs spread around the world in the 1990s, the cross-border assistance too increasingly adopted rights-based approaches. Human rights advocacy, however, faced criticism from the old guard of humanitarianism. The schism flared up and resulted in a bitter exchange of public criticism when Cyclone Nargis devastated the Irrawaddy Delta in 2008. While this exchange has often been characterized as discord between two sets of actors (those in Mae Sot and those in Yangon), this presentation points to fundamental differences between the concepts of humanitarianism and human rights as the underlying reason. Whereas humanitarianism deals with immediate symptoms, human rights does so with root causes. While humanitarianism seeks to deliver charity and relief, human rights seeks to deliver justice. In theory these goals are not incompatible, but in practice the differences often result in contradictory actions on the ground. It is worth reminding us that these fundamental tensions remain unresolved today, while we witness an unprecedented growth of cross-border assistance from Thailand to Myanmar.

The Way Forward for Armed and Political Movements to Implement Women, Peace, and Security (WPS): The Case of KNPP

Maw Day Myar

Abstract

Based on her recent research, the presenter will discuss a feasible way forward for Armed and Political Movements (APMs) to implement WPS, referring to the case of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP).

Historical Perspectives on Agriculture and Biodiversity: The Role of Royal Orders During the Konbaung Era

Maw Maw Aye

Abstract

This paper examines the role of monarchs in agricultural expansion and their attempts to plan for food security and environmental conservation during the Konbaung era (1752–1885) in Myanmar. It primarily analyzes the contents of the Royal Orders issued by the palaces during the 19th century against the backdrop of political instability and the impoverished socio-economic life of the people. In addition to revisiting analyses of Royal Orders by notable historians, other reliable literature in Burmese was also explored. It suggests that most of the kings during the Konbaung period were concerned about the stability of an economy relying mainly on agriculture, which was experiencing a dramatic transition from a subsistence economy to commercial farming. Rural agricultural projects were a principal source of royal income, forming part of the revenue of both local and foreign trade during the late Konbaung era. While most of the monarchs keenly promoted the idea of cash crops, they also sought to build legitimacy by symbolically performing the role of 'Farmer King.' The preservation of wildlife was part of a religious ritual and served the political purpose of becoming a virtuous king, in accordance with the traditional Buddhist belief in the "ten virtues of the King." The ceremonial role the kings played in the Royal Ploughing Ceremony can be considered a propaganda tool to shape positive public opinion towards the king, despite the deep impoverishment in rural regions.

Thai Universities and Human Rights Promotion and Protection for the Myanmar Academic Community: What Role Can, or Should, Universities Play?

Mike Hayes and Jan Boontinand

Abstract

Whether the university agrees to it or not, it plays a role in human rights promotion and protection. Hopefully that role is positive, in that it teaches students about their rights, promotes research, and protects vulnerable populations that it can, for example displaced academics and students in the case of Myanmar. Delivering human rights higher education in conflict sites such as the border areas of Myanmar and Thailand is both crucially important and challenging. The duty of Thai universities to the Myanmar academic community is both unclear and potentially open to exploitation. While universities can ensure that democracy, justice, and human rights are established in education, ensuring a rights-based community, they also profit from this relationship and can undermine future attempts to establish Myanmar higher education because of a brain drain, or an outflow of students following international scholarships.

This paper addresses challenges and the politics around the delivery of human rights education (HRE) by Thai institutions in the current Myanmar conflict. The training of Myanmar youth about human rights can be seen as merely encouraging youth to protest and get jailed, or it can be a pathway to protection through education visas. The role played by universities leads to uncomfortable questions about their accountability. Universities may privilege ideas of freedom and participation but be unwilling to take on the political role of supporting human rights defenders (HRDs). However, for many teaching, learning, and research have become acts of resistance in Myanmar, where thousands of students and lecturers have walked off campuses when they came under the control of Myanmar's military after the coup of 2021. This paper is based on activities of the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, which has been working closely with Myanmar organizations to deliver HRE, support HRDs, and promote research.

Understaing the Salween Peace Park as an Indigenous Conservation Initiative within the Global Debate on Conservation and Indigeneity

Min Htin Thu

Abstract

The notion of conservation has been around for a while and is becoming increasingly prominent with the decline of biodiversity at an unprecedented rate. The connotations, in terms of its meaning and how to engage, and the implications, such as forced displacement of indigenous people and exploitation of nature for capital accumulation, have been shifting significantly over the years. Likewise, the relation between conservation and indigenous people has been shifting since the first implementation of conservation via protected areas.

In Myanmar, conservation in the form of state-led protected areas is highly controversial for its features of forced displacement and human rights violations against locals and its entanglement with longstanding civil conflicts. The ongoing conflict between ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and the Myanmar military adds an extra dimension to the relationship between conservation and indigenous people, complicating the establishment of both state-led and indigenous grassroots conservation initiatives. Following arguments against essentializing indigeneity or assuming indigeneity as being in harmony with nature, it is imperative to assess indigenous conservation initiatives in Myanmar/Burma for potential political, ideological, and economic connotations.

Using the Salween Peace Park (SPP), a Karen indigenous grassroots conservation initiative, as a case study, this research explores how a grassroots conservation initiative positions itself within the global trends on the relationship between conservation and indigeneity, navigating global politics surrounding the debate, as well as local politics in the struggle for self-determination. This thesis argues that indigenous Karen communities in—and a coalition of stakeholders of—the SPP are carefully crafting and navigating the SPP discourse within the global politics of the relationship between conservation and indigeneity to realize their core aspirations. These aspirations broadly align within the coalition, but also differ in emphasis, including on the specific meaning of conservation and its relationship with ‘peace.’

Assessment of Climate Fragility in Myanmar Based on Regional Climate Model Simulations

Mo Aung Nay Chi

Abstract

Myanmar is highly vulnerable to climatic changes and extreme weather such as increased precipitation and extreme temperatures. During the dry season of the last two years, Myanmar has already endured such events. To understand the complexity of future impacts of short-term extreme weather and long-term climate change in Myanmar, we require high-resolution climate model simulations that allow us to understand the effect of different emission scenarios on the climate at regional to local scales. While global climate model simulations cover the region with a horizontal resolution of around 100 km, the regional climate models publicly available have a resolution of up to 25 km. This is insufficient to accurately assess the vulnerability to climate change for such a diverse country with complex topography, and thus, new high-resolution simulations are needed.

The presenters are running dynamically downscaled climate simulations across a large section of Myanmar using the Weather Research and Forecasting (WRF) model. Downscaled climate data are produced for five simulation periods: one for the present (1981–2010), and two for each of two future periods (2031–2060 and 2071–2100), under both the intermediate-emission shared socioeconomic pathway (SSP2–4.5) and the very high-emission pathway (SSP5–8.5). The simulations are run at a high spatial and temporal resolution. With these simulations, we can obtain more realistic precipitation patterns and detailed information on local precipitation and temperature extremes that also consider daily cycles.

The authors will present their preliminary findings from the downscaled modeling on location-specific weather extremes, information about heat stress, drought indices, and estimations on changes in tropical cyclone occurrence. This will provide insight into potential impacts on food security and fragility to climate change in general, both of which have tremendous implications for local society and economy.

Ethnic Education and Resilience: A Case Study of Karenni Education

Moe Kyaw and Suphakon Akkarayannawat

Abstract

This research investigates the resilience capacities of the Karenni education system in the face of conflict and displacement. By examining the challenges experienced by different stakeholders from 2020–present, the study identifies the individual and organisational responses and lessons learned. Qualitative methods were used to collect data at various stakeholder levels, including focus group discussions with parents, teachers, and school directors from two Karenni schools, a key informant interview with a leader of a Karenni education organisation, and child-friendly participatory art methods to gather data from students. The findings highlight the compounding effects of the crises on education delivery, particularly for displaced populations. This study sheds light on the challenges faced by Karenni education stakeholders during crises and offers insights into effective responses and lessons learned, contributing to the understanding of education resilience in conflict-affected contexts.

Everyday Resistance and Strategic Negotiation: The Undermining of Traditional Authority in Peri-Urban Monywa

Moe Moe

Abstract

This paper studies a peri-urban community in Monywa, Sagaing Region, where mass movements rapidly broke out after the 2021 coup before the governmental machinery responded and the military regime imposed military law to reassert control of the town. In the period since, clashes have continued to emerge regularly, and often soldiers search and arrest local people under vague pretenses, especially targeting teenage boys and young men. The community has been wrecked by insecurity for more than three years, children have faced severe difficulties in accessing education, and the local economy has suffered. Under this local political dynamic, security, health, education, and economic destitution are the most severe problems. In this context, the author of this study—a long time community member—conducted ethnographic research which seeks to uncover the forms of negotiation and everyday resistance which community members have engaged with.

By conducting in-depth interviews where the security situation allows, but relying primarily on subtle observation and informal engagement in the community, the researcher sheds light on the rebuilding of the people's adaptive capacities and the process of coming together in dynamic ways. People in Monywa are confronting to military power through different forms of resistance in daily practices, such as by undermining authority in their practices of consumption and negotiating space for accessing critical needs (linking to the electrical grid, finding options for student's education). The author argues that this community is creating some changes through a form of emergent collective organization. Decision making, while generally not directly confrontational, seeks solutions based on incorporating local needs, thus rejecting top-down forms of power. Amid struggle and isolation, the everyday resistance of community members in Monywa suggests the re-construction of a common political terrain which has the potential to establish new systems of political representation based in collective action.

Sociolinguistic Study of Min Thu Wun's 'Thabyay Nyo' Poem: Present Perspectives in Myanmar

Mon Mon Aung

Abstract

This paper describes current perspectives on Min Thu Wun's poem 'Thabyay Nyo' within the context of the field of sociolinguistics. The objective of this paper is to analyze the impact of Min Thu Wun's poem not only on Myanmar's struggle for independence during the colonial period, but also on aspirations to establish a federal Myanmar in the present. 'Thabyay Nyo' was written by Min Thu Wun (1904-2004), the father of Myanmar President U Htin Kyaw (2016-2018). A prominent Burmese poet, writer, and scholar, Min Thu Wun penned the poem on January 4, 1938, while studying at Oxford University in England. 'Thabyay Nyo' was first published in O-Way Magazine No. 1, Vol. 7 in 1938. On January 4, 1948, ten years after Min Thu Wun wrote the poem, Myanmar gained independence.

Sociolinguistics, which explores the relationship between language and culture, serves as the methodological framework for examining how 'Thabyay Nyo' intersects with Myanmar's contemporary social and political landscape in this qualitative research. For example, today the thabyay flower is a symbol of hope in Myanmar society, and the Thabyay Flower Campaign was initiated in Myanmar to support the struggle for democracy. The research seeks to address the following questions: (1) What factors contributed to the impact of 'Thabyay Nyo' on Myanmar's social and political developments?, and (2) In what ways does 'Thabyay Nyo' reimagine contemporary situations in Myanmar?

Color Term Use in Burmese Communities in Thailand

Mutita Boonwayapon and Myint Myint Aye

Abstract

This paper reports on preliminary results of extended research on color terms in Burmese. The objectives of this paper are to present the basic and non-basic color terms in Burmese used by Myanmar people living in Chiang Mai, Thailand and to identify different strategies applied in formations of Burmese color term. Data used in this study was collected from 20 university students.

The results show that there are seven basic color terms in Burmese: /phyù/ 'white', /né?/ or /mɛ/ 'black', /nì/ 'red', /wà/ 'yellow', /sein/ 'green', /pyà/ 'blue', and /pò/ 'brown'. According to Berlin and Kay (1969)'s theory, basic color terms in Burmese are at stage six. As for non-basic color terms in Burmese, four color terms were found: /khə-yan/ 'purple', /pan/ 'pink', /lèin-mò/ 'orange', and /mi-kho/ 'gray'. There are four strategies applied in the formation of Burmese color terms, including: 1) combination of basic color terms, 2) basic color terms modified by words defining darkness and lightness, 3) color terms derived from words defining objects, and 4) color terms derived from loanwords.

Interestingly, the data reveal that most non-basic color terms reflect Burmese society and culture, such as the color of thanaka or the green color of school uniforms. Additionally, some object-specific terms from Thai society are also used by Myanmar people living in Chiang Mai. For example, the yellow color of the Thai monk's robe which is brighter than the robes of monks in Myanmar.

Digital Communities and the Construction of Resilience: Online Spaces and New Possibilities for CDM Exiles

Mya Aung

Abstract

The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) began as an online campaign in response to the Myanmar military's coup of 2021 and has since expanded into a wider pro-democracy movement, mobilizing vast swathes of the Myanmar population to oppose the illegal, unconstitutional seizure of power by the military (King A.S., 2022). This research focuses on the community resilience of CDMers who were forcibly displaced to Mae Sot, Thailand, where they faced a new reality of acute erosion of livelihoods, wellbeing, and security. Community resilience is the development and engagement of community resources by community members to thrive in an environment characterized by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, and surprise (Magis, 2010). Specifically, this research seeks to discern the precise nature of the exiles' resilience by studying the interaction of the physical and digital communities. It explores how CDMers organized into a cohesive community, noting their connectedness as a product of this interplay between online resource sharing, support, and coordination, which underpins the cautious use of in-person interactions to help sustain people's wellbeing.

Two types of ethnographic methods are used in the research: ethnography and digital ethnography. The former includes interviews with key informants and participant observation in selected emergent social settings, and the latter includes the close study of two Signal groups using digital ethnographic techniques. At the beginning of migration, physical connections were not easy, leading to the emergence of virtual communities established for various purposes; information exchange on issues of security, politics, food, and help; social support exchange such as sharing awareness and vocational training; and lastly, psychosocial support, including sharing perspectives and a sense of belonging. The research sheds light on the significance of online spaces in building physical security and wellbeing in exile, over time enabling the construction of resilience and new ways of life and community.

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Advocacy Plan at the National Level

Myanmar Women Parliamentarian Network

Abstract

An advocacy plan for Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) has been developed by the Myanmar Women Parliamentarian Network (MWPN). This plan shows how women MPs can contribute to WPS agenda.

The Ramifications of 2024's Internet Shutdown on Psychological Assistance for Displaced People in IDP Camps in Rakhine State: A Case Study of Yanbye Township

Myat Myat, Ikhi, Pan, Hyacinth, and Eugene

Abstract

How do the assemblages formed by the intersection of physical, mental, and technological boundaries following the internet shutdown in 2024 impact access to formal and non-formal sources of psychosocial support for displaced individuals within IDP camps in Myanmar's Rakhine State? Whilst post-2021 violence has resulted in a rapid increase in displacement and trauma, residents of Rakhine State in western Myanmar have a longer legacy of state-sponsored oppression. Aside from displacement into camps, restrictions on movements, and severe constraints on access to food and healthcare, residents of Rakhine State have also been subject to one of the world's longest internet service cuts, imposed in some areas since 2019. One example is Yanbye (Rambre) Township, with 39 camps sites for displaced persons and no designated humanitarian agency. Aside from physical needs, many IDPs have experienced considerable psychological trauma; despite this, the availability and access to psychosocial support services is patchy. This situation is worsened by limited internet access, which not only restricts access to formal support, but also to informal, interpersonal networks. Digital restrictions serve to reinforce physical boundaries, in turn exacerbating mental distress.

Utilizing narrative interviews with displaced individuals, the authors aim to understand the consequences of physical, mental, and technological barriers on their daily survival strategies amidst political upheaval. By examining the intricate interplay of these barriers, this study endeavours to shed light on the challenges faced by IDPs in accessing psychosocial support services, thereby informing humanitarian efforts and policy interventions. This study seeks to comprehend the ramifications of the convergence of physical, mental, and technological barriers subsequent to the internet shutdown on the accessibility of both formal and non-formal psychosocial support for displaced individuals residing in camps within Rakhine State. These barriers give shape to particular 'mental assemblages' which arise in the context of prolonged displacement and isolation.

Constitution by Whom and for Whom? Examining Inclusivity in Myanmar

Myint Myat Thu

Abstract

Myanmar's 2008 Constitution is widely criticized for being undemocratic. Anecdotal evidence suggests amending the constitution in order not only to be democratic but also to pave the way to federal state-building is important to build sustainable peace within the country's inter-ethnic politics. In 2019, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led the official push for constitutional amendments. While major ethnic-based parties and civil society expressed interest, a heated debate emerged regarding the inclusivity of its process, procedures, and content. After the 2021 military coup, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) released the Federal Democracy Charter I and II, acknowledging ethnic groups' struggles for identity and a long-term federal democratic solution. Thus, this paper examines the previous NLD-led constitutional amendment efforts and the Federal Democratic Charter to assess their inclusivity, essential for building a genuine federal democratic country in the post-coup period.

Evaluation of Domestic Tourism in Myanmar for Pilgrimage and Leisure Travel

Myo Oo

Abstract

This article delves into the phenomenon of travel within Myanmar, specifically examining the preferences of domestic tourists regarding destination choices. Myanmar, with over 80% of its population identifying as Buddhists, has a deeply ingrained tradition of undertaking religious pilgrimages to sites adorned with pagodas, both urban and rural. Referred to locally as 'phayaphu,' pilgrimage holds significant cultural and religious significance. Despite evolving trends in tourism, including the exploration of beaches and local sightseeing, some Myanmar tour operators still specialize in organizing 'phayaphu' tours to various pagoda sites across the nation. Additionally, there is a notable trend of outbound tourism, with companies facilitating trips to foreign destinations such as Thailand and Vietnam. Despite these shifts, pilgrimage tours remain steadfast, retaining their original concepts and services. This article aims to elucidate the enduring popularity of pilgrimage tourism in Myanmar, examining the underlying motivations that drive individuals to partake in religious journeys in the contemporary era of globalized tourism. Through an exploration of domestic travel concepts in Myanmar, this study sheds light on the intricate relationship between traditional religious beliefs and travel preferences.

Impact of Political Stability on Foreign Direct Investment Inflow to Myanmar

Myo Thurein Min

Abstract

This study aims to examine the impact of political stability on foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow to Myanmar by using two time series data sets published by the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA) of Myanmar: (1) aggregated data from 1996 to 2022, and (2) te disaggregated data from 2017 to 2022. A multiple regression analysis is performed on the possible relations between political stability and FDI inflow. The variables of regulatory quality, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and inflation rates are controlled. Then, a robustness test is also performed to check the consistency of the empirical results.

The findings reveal that political stability is insignificant for the first set of data—that is, it does not affect the aggregated FDI inflow amount. The findings, therefore, reject the hypothesis of a positive correlation between the two variables. However, the analysis of the disaggregated data in the manufacturing sector highlights the positive correlation between the two variables. Furthermore, the control variable 'regulator quality' has a positive influence on FDI inflows to Myanmar, with a one percentage point increase in regulatory quality leading to a substantial rise in foreign investment, thereby presenting an opportunity for further studies.

The Role of Reactionary Identity in Impeding Myanmar's Democratic Revolution: A Critical Analysis of Constructed Realities and Their Implications for Social and Political Transformation

N. H. Aung

Abstract

In the context of Myanmar's complex political landscape, the construction and propagation of reactionary identities have emerged as significant barriers to the nation's democratic revolution and progress toward a democratic federal union. This research aims to critically analyze how various actors, such as religious leaders, businessmen, and ethno-nationalists, construct and perpetuate reactionary identities, and the implications of these constructed realities for social cohesion and transformative change. By employing a qualitative approach and drawing upon a critical perspective, this study seeks to uncover the power dynamics and mechanisms through which reactionary identities impede social and political development in Myanmar. It highlights the importance of understanding the diverse nature of these identities and the context-specific factors that contribute to their construction. The findings of this research will offer insights into the challenges faced by Myanmar's democratic revolution and the barriers created by reactionary identities. Moreover, it will provide a deeper understanding of the impact of these identities on social cohesion and the potential avenues for fostering transformative change in the country's current context. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on the intersection of identity, politics, and social development in Myanmar, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and progressive narratives for the nation's future.

Tai Migrants' Access to Land and Their Livelihood Security in Northern Thailand

Nan Mya Oo

Abstract

The Shan, also known as Tai, from Myanmar's Shan State have endured forced migration for several decades due to socio-political disruptions, including forced relocations, armed recruitment, and severe human rights violations. Given their shared cultural and linguistic heritage, most of these migrants have relocated to northern Thailand in search of improved living conditions and economic opportunities.

This study employs a qualitative approach and a case study methodology to explore the experiences of Tai migrant workers in northern Thailand, with a particular focus on migrant strategies to access land and livelihoods. The findings indicate that access to land is crucial for these Tai migrants to secure their residency, livelihood, and income in northern Thailand. In addition, the study also emphasizes the strategies of access to land involving access to markets, labor opportunities, social relations, and negotiations involved in facilitating access to land and livelihoods. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of the cultural and linguistic similarities between Tai migrants and the local northern Thai people, which aid in overcoming land access barriers and establishing livelihoods, as well as facilitating smoother integration and adaptation processes. The insights gained from this study are invaluable for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to support migrant integration in similar socio-economic contexts.

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Framework in the Context of Myanmar

Nang Moet Moet

Abstract

Women's League of Burma is working on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework at the national level. This is to be endorsed by the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) by the time of the conference, and the audience will be able to learn the updates of what is discussed under the WPS framework in the context of Myanmar at national level.

Social Dynamics of Internally Displaced Persons Along the Karen State-Thai Border

Naw Htee Eh Hsoe

Abstract

The sophistication and practices of insecurities which have arisen from diverse plights have persisted for decades, and the recent 2021 military coup has worsened the migration experience of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar. The military operations of successive dictatorship governments have resulted in several generations of IDPs under the legacy of conflict in Karen State and along its border with Thailand.

This study aims to explore how IDPs along the Karen State-Thai border since the 2021 coup d'état create spaces of networking to address their humanitarian issues. It also examines the resilience born out of the sharing of capital. An IDP camp, Site-3 on the Thaungyin riverbank, was observed and interviews were conducted, ensuring inclusiveness of background, gender, and age. The research finds that the sharing of capital among IDPs and host villages—including relatives, friends, and existing humanitarian network members along the riverbank—benefits those displaced. While livelihood, education, and healthcare resources do not secure all needs of human security, they have become an option amidst the humanitarian crisis with the underlying motivation to survive. Additionally, the development of information technology has facilitated the journey of IDPs. This paper shows the importance of considering the capacities of IDPs, and respecting and acknowledging their decisions at the ground level, which can enable policymakers and assistance providers to more effectively address the current humanitarian crisis within a wider context.

A Closing Window? Environmental and Climate Change Activism Before and After the Coup

Naw Htee Ku and Kasper Hoffman

Abstract

Drawing on interviews, participant observation, and material published by activists, this paper investigates the development of environmental activism in Tanintharyi Region in southern Myanmar since the military coup of February 2021 and how it relates to transformations in the political order of Myanmar.

Environmental activism gained momentum during the 2010s as political space gradually opened up after decades of military dictatorship. However, after the coup in February 2021 many activists throughout Myanmar, including in Tanintharyi, had to flee the country and work incognito to avoid reprisals. Others fled to forested areas. Important changes happened to the political identity of activists, as many of them became more explicitly political and radical as they started to engage with the growing revolutionary movement. Some became involved with humanitarian assistance while others joined armed groups. Furthermore, the coup convinced many activists that resource federalism must be one of the outcomes of the revolution and initiated awareness-raising activities along those lines.

In terms of organization, there was a noticeable generational change as youth started leading the movement, partly because many first-generation leaders were forced into exile. Environmental activism also underwent an online revolution to avoid violent repression. In this paper, the authors argue that the coup constitutes a ‘revelatory crisis’ (Sahlins 1972) that makes central issues and stakes of conflict visible. Through analysis of how environmental activists in Tanintharyi have responded to the coup, we argue that while the coup led to the suppression of environmental activism, it did not cause it to disappear, but instead transformed it with respect to organization, activism practices, and political identity.

Unraveling Media Warfare: An Analysis of Post-Military Coup Propaganda in 2021 in Myanmar Through Social Network Analysis

Naw Moo Moo Paw Paw

Abstract

This paper investigates the post-military coup propaganda landscape in Myanmar in 2021 through the lens of social network analysis. Using diverse data sources, the study constructs matrices to reveal the intricate connections among anti-military media agencies. The analysis, grounded in network theory, explores how media networks shape narratives and counter authoritarian regimes. The study confirms that increased network density enhances narrative effectiveness, with local media showing scale-free characteristics due to highly connected 'hubs.' These findings highlight the influential role of specific media entities within the network, particularly local outlets such as Khit Thit and community media. The research underscores the importance of supporting well-connected media groups to foster socio-political change and suggests strategies to sustain media networks. These insights extend beyond Myanmar, offering valuable perspectives for scholars, policymakers, and activists on media dynamics in resistance contexts.

The KIO's Facilitation of Cross-Border Sugarcane Contract Farming and its Impact on Local Farmers' Livelihood Security in Mai Ja Yang, Kachin State, Myanmar

Nu Ra Lashi

Abstract

This paper examines the Kachin Independence Organization's (KIO) facilitation of cross-border sugarcane contract farming in Mai Ja Yang, on the Kachin-China border, Kachin State, Myanmar. The KIO's role as a mediator in sugarcane contract farming further enhances its governance and sovereignty, while also helping reconstruct the Kachin kinship in the liminal, border space.

This research utilizes in-depth interviews and secondary data as methods of data collection. The research finds that sugarcane contract farming, initiated by the KIO as a livelihood improvement approach, brought positive changes in the social and economic conditions of the sugarcane growers who gained higher incomes to support their children's education. Furthermore, growers have obtained skills in managing sugarcane, building household networks, and contributing to social communities. However, sugarcane farming has also exposed growers to environmental, social, and health hazards. The massive use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers in sugarcane farming has led to health problems and mysterious illnesses among the local farmers, as well as causing land acidification, environmental degradation, and decreased productivity due to infertile soil. This has contributed to the insecurity of local people's livelihoods. The research also finds that sugarcane growers from Mai Ja Yang are currently facing a dilemma in growing sugarcane.

Community Experiences and Perceptions of Climate Change During Violent Rupture

Nyan Pyi Thit

Abstract

The violent rupture caused by the 2021 military coup in Myanmar has impacted the environment and strongly shaped rural and urban citizens' experiences with and perceptions of climate change—but in different ways, depending on the variability in political and conflict dynamics across localities in Myanmar.

Based on ethnographic community research studies carried out since June 2022 across eight localities in Kachin, Rakhine, Tanintharyi, Naga, Sagaing, Bago, Karen, and Mon states, we explore in this article how the political, security and economic rupture is layered upon and worsening the climate change crisis, seen from the perspective of the everyday lives of citizens. We explore local perceptions of climate change and trace the variability of people's experiences with environmental deterioration and climate change impacts according to the different ways that the localities are governed and affected by violent conflict – ranging from localities characterized by a) control of the military state administrative council (SAC); b) armed resistance against SAC control; c) contestations between ethnic resistance; d) SAC control together with ethnic armed groups. Theoretically, the article deepens understandings of the climate change-conflict nexus, by grounding the analysis in the local perspectives and experiences of conflict affected populations across areas governed in different ways. We combine the concepts of 'rupture' (Lund 2017; Holbraad et al. 2019) and 'chronic crisis' (Vigh 2008), to capture how the sudden changes and disruptions caused by the coup, becomes layered upon decades of living with long-term crisis.

A Typological Theory of Displacement

Nyi Nyi Kyaw

Abstract

Displacement is often understood as the phenomenon of people being forcibly displaced from or compelled to flee their homes or places of habitual residence due to armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, natural or man-made disasters, and/or development projects. The lack of will or consent on the part of these displaced individuals and communities is the defining factor. However, in the actual responses to and debates on situations of displacement, there is a somewhat arbitrary, but in fact blurred, dividing line between internally displaced persons (IDPs) who remain within their own countries of origin or habitual residence on the one hand, and refugees who have crossed one or more international or interstate borders on the other. In reality, however, the emergence and persistence of displacement is much more complex. Displaced individuals and communities often experience a variety of situations through and within which their status, lived experiences, and responses are constantly or frequently changing for better or worse.

Based on in-depth interviews with and life histories of displaced, exiled, and self-exiled Myanmar people who have moved to or entered Thailand, legally or extralegally, regularly or irregularly, in the past three years following the February 1, 2021 coup in their home country, this paper presents a novel typological theory of displacement or displacements.

The Influence of Middle Class Dynamics and Strategic Leadership Choices on Myanmar's Democratization: A Comparative Study of Pre-Coup (2015–2020) and Post-Coup (2021–2024) Periods

Oratai Soparat

Abstract

This paper examines the interplay between middle-class dynamics and leadership choices in Myanmar in the context of democratization, comparing the period of 2015–2020 with the post-2021 coup era. Prior to the coup, Myanmar experienced significant growth in its middle-income population, with projections indicating a doubling in size between 2012 and 2020. This growth was largely attributed to a surge in foreign direct investment. However, the aftermath of the coup saw a reversal of this trend, as several foreign direct investment initiatives aimed at infrastructure development were suspended or terminated, leading to a contraction of the middle-class population.

The research framework explores the correlation between the middle class and democratization, acknowledging that the definition of middle class may differ from Western norms as it encompasses not only economic indicators, but also political participation rooted in tradition. This article studies various middle-class segments, including military government, civilian disobedience movements, refugees, and bureaucrats, analyzing how their roles were affected pre- and post-coup in the democratization process.

Emphasis is placed on leadership choice, particularly the Sit-Tat's (military's) withdrawal from various regions. Drawing from Leadership Choice theory, the study considers several factors, including uncertainty, stakeholder persuasion, and goal achievement in leader decision-making. It employs Przeworski's Preference-Centered Model and integrates insights from O'Donnell and Hirschman's work on democratic transition and consolidation to analyze the implications of the strategic leadership decisions. Data collection relies on secondary sources, including articles, seminars, and interviews.

This study aims to elucidate the dynamics of civil movements and the potential trajectory of democratization in Myanmar, viewing crises as opportunities for change. The findings underscore the pivotal role of the middle class in fostering stable democracy in Myanmar. However, the influence of the SAC remains significant in determining the participation of various actors in Myanmar's political landscape.

CDM Women's Leadership During Crisis: A Transformation in Gendered Moral Authority in Shwebo District

Orchid

Abstract

Shwebo, a district of Sagaing Region in central Myanmar, achieved notoriety as one of the most at-risk zones during the Spring Revolution. The area is significant for the cultivation of rice, and is also known for its production and distribution of traditional woven cotton products, which historically relied on the engagement of women in the community. As Shwebo's economy developed, the weaving of cotton products became mechanized and younger generations became professionalized, including large numbers of civil servants, mostly teachers. After February 2021, the gendered dynamics of labor in Shwebo shifted again as large numbers of teachers joined the grassroots Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in the western part of Shwebo, expressing their collection action.

This research examines the shifting gender dynamics among CDM teachers in both their family and their community lives during this period of crisis. It explores the strength of CDM teachers' crisis management skills and their reactive resilience, showcasing how the social construction of their roles and responsibilities was transformed after the coup. The study involves a narrative research approach, analyzing the experiences of 10 CDM teachers in western Shwebo following in-depth interviews. The research showcases how CDM teachers manage their security and livelihoods during the period of crisis. CDM teachers connected with each other to provide displaced people with support, linking to urban-based donors who lived in the city. By playing a vital role in facilitating networks of solidarity and reciprocity, social welfare (*parahita*), and grassroots humanitarian networks, the research contends transformations in gendered social relations are a product of the pre-coup professionalization of women in rural parts of Myanmar, the moral standing gained through the positioning of the CDM, and the resilient capacity that emerged in the face of crisis – potentially placing women leaders at the forefront of the new commons in Shwebo.

Education in Emergency: A Snapshot of Crisis in Tedim and Tonzang Townships

Peter Suante

Abstract

In 2023–2024, a Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) was conducted in Chin State to investigate the status of education in villages across the townships of Tedim and Tonzang. The specific objective was to identify the requirements of community-based learning centres in these areas.

The needs assessment was carried out as part of the planning phases of an ambitious new education-in-emergency programming, and was a key learning opportunity for the research team involved. This presentation provides an overview of the questions the assessment sought to address, but importantly delves into the practical challenges that research in situations of conflict bring. If the objective of the assessment was to capture the number and status of students and teachers in their respective learning centres, and to identify key needs, the research team learnt much more.

The presentation starts by asking what it means to do research during a civil war, and then goes into details of the research project's objectives and findings. It does so by providing an introduction to the design and rationale of the methodology of the research, provides an assessment of why and how consultations with ground-level stakeholders were carried out, and then proceeds to share its key findings. The presentation also provides an overview of the importance and challenges in gathering information around children with disabilities (CWD) in target areas and provides analysis on why a systematic assessment is not feasible in conflict conditions. This presentation concludes by providing key information about the needs of students and teachers across community-based learning centres in Tedim and Tonzang.

Removal of the 'Unauthorised' and Shifting Community Subjectivities: Squatter Evictions in Yangon after the 2021 Coup

Phill

Abstract

This research focuses on the complex dynamics of forced evictions and evolving identities within squatter communities in Hlaing Thayar, Yangon, following the 2021 military coup. Hlaing Thayar, characterized by a dense population and a significant number of informal settlers, especially migrant workers and squatters, faces profound impacts from both evictions and political turmoil.

Drawing from existing literature on eviction patterns, urbanization, and gender perspectives, this study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in narrative methods and participatory action research. Through the lenses of assemblage theory, the research seeks to explore how eviction dynamics intersect with gender roles within squatter communities. Approximately 40 households, led predominantly by women, that have endured forced eviction and resettlement to hostels in Hlaing Thayar, are involved. Data collection methods include oral and online interviews, correspondent discussions, and secondary data analysis. Ethical considerations prioritize participant privacy and anonymity. By integrating narrative methods with participatory action research, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the transition from semi-documented squatters to hostel-dwellers and the broader implications of eviction on their lives and community roles.

Enduring Vulnerability: The Legal and Humanitarian Challenges Facing Stateless Rohingya Children

Phuong Linh Vu, Dinh Tai Nguyen, and Quynh Nhi Phan Nguyen

Abstract

The Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim group primarily residing in Myanmar's Rakhine State, have endured a long history of marginalization and persecution rooted in complex social and historical contexts. This persistent crisis has resulted in many Rohingya children being born into statelessness, depriving them of fundamental rights and increasing their vulnerability.

Utilizing secondary data from a range of research and reports on the issues of statelessness and the situation of Rohingya child refugees in particular, this paper starts by tracing the origins of the Rohingya refugee crisis that ultimately led to the denial of citizenship of Rohingya children, detailing the impact it has had on their rights to citizenship, healthcare, and education. It then examines international laws related to citizenship, statelessness, and children's rights to outline general international obligations and to investigate the effectiveness of domestic Myanmar laws in this area. Reflecting on the dangerous conditions currently faced by Rohingya children in refugee camps, the paper also evaluates the effectiveness of assistance from Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Thailand, based on a study of these countries' national laws. The research outlines critical gaps in addressing the crisis for stateless Rohingya children.

Myanmar's Political Turmoil and Its Ripples in Neighbouring Areas: India's Reaction to the 'Refugee' Crisis in Mizoram and Manipur

Pum Khan Pau

Abstract

The Myanmar military coup of February 1, 2021, not only shattered the people's dream of harvesting their democratic rights and enjoying a peaceful existence linked with development, but also propelled the country into a Spring Revolution. The people of Myanmar are facing an unprecedented situation where they are in an unabated struggle against the military-controlled state that has deprived them of their democratic rights and privileges. In the ongoing conflict between the military and armed civilians, it is the common people who suffer the most. Tens of thousands of individuals have been displaced and many have lost their lives in the continuing conflict that persists. Due to political and economic circumstances, many from Chin State have crossed the international border to seek refuge in Mizoram and Manipur in India. This study aims to analyze India's varied responses to the 'refugee' crisis in its two border states. While the local reaction of Mizoram state to the crisis has largely been influenced by ethnic ties, Manipur aligned more closely with the directives of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Burmese and Shan Elements in Rumai, Palaung

Rachel Weymuth

Abstract

Rumai, a variety of Palaung language, is mainly spoken in northern Shan State in Myanmar. As a minority language with about 170,000 speakers, Rumai for a long time has been, and still is, influenced by dominant languages in the area. Until the 1960s, Shan, the most important regional language and the language then used in education, was the main source of lexical borrowings for Rumai. This changed with the introduction of the public school system, which prescribed Burmese as the sole language of classroom instruction. Shan was therefore replaced by Burmese as the second language for Rumai speakers, while Rumai is still the primary language spoken in the villages and the first language acquired by local children.

This change of the dominant language from Shan to Burmese led to interesting features of loans in Rumai, and the language turned out to be very flexible in accommodating the changed situation. While older loans tend to be from Shan and more recent ones from Burmese, Shan words are often replaced by Burmese ones, such as $p\lambda p$ (Shan $p\hat{e}p$) by $cəʔuk$ (Burmese $saʔouʔ$). English words may even undergo more changes and close the circle to the original form, from kap^hi (Shan $kàp^hi$) over $kəp^hi$ (Burmese $kəp^hi$) to the presently used form $kəʔfi$, which is the most similar to the original. There are more domains like words used in Buddhist religious texts that show the diversity of loanwords in Rumai. Furthermore, the script may play a role in the pronunciation of the loans, reflecting the paths and times of individual borrowings.

The aim of this study is to explain the sources of some loans in Rumai, their development, and their embedding in the language and its history.

Resource Availability and Mobilization in Myanmar's Anti-Coup Protests (2021)

Renaud Egreteau

Abstract

The mass mobilization of Burmese citizens that ensued following the 2021 coup developed on a scale unseen in decades. This paper leverages a case study of this anti-coup movement to investigate the validity of classic resource mobilization hypotheses developed by the social movement literature. In particular, it seeks to identify the various material and symbolic resources available to Burmese protesters at the time of the army takeover in 2021 to then examine their impact on the collective action built up against the new military regime.

The study tests two central propositions: (1) pre-existing social networks, structures and organizations which emerged, or were consolidated, during Myanmar's decade of democratic experimentation (2011–2021) provided Burmese social actors with the necessary resources for mobilizing against the breakdown of democratization; and (2) the types of resources available and aggregated during the early phases of contention in 2021 decisively influenced the tactical action, technique of resistance, and innovative strategies then deployed by anti-coup protesters. The paper hopes to advance ongoing conceptual discussions about the resources and attributes that can most effectively explain the development of political contention, particularly in the context of a democratic breakdown. It also aims to rehabilitate the disputed resource mobilization paradigm, which remains grounded in the idea that newly acquired resources are critical to the emergence and sustainability, if not success, of protest movements.

The Cost of Myanmar's Coup d'Etat and Ongoing Civil War

Richard Takhun

Abstract

Will Myanmar's civil war permanently reshape ASEAN's geopolitical, intra-economic, and financial structures, while shattering millions of civilian lives? Despite its critical importance, the economic costs of Myanmar's civil war remain inadequately examined in academic literature and public discourse compared to other conflicts. With no resolution in sight since the military coup on February 1, 2021, Myanmar is descending into a full-scale civil war.

This article employs an analytical framework akin to evaluating American civil wars to analyze Myanmar's civil war's economic costs from the military takeover in February 2021 to the end of 2023. The most significant economic losses, however, stem not just from diverted resources but also from the human toll and damage wrought by those resources when used for violence. The central argument posits that even if Myanmar's civil war were to end promptly, the extensive destruction of infrastructure and other losses would necessitate years of recovery and social progress. Crucially, it underscores that civilian populations, not military personnel, bear the brunt of such devastation. Hence, foremost among imperatives is the establishment of humanitarian passages for safe civilian evacuation and to bring this deadly civil war to a swift and humane conclusion.

Transnational Refugee Youth Identities: Digital Diaspora Networks and Embodied Heterogeneity

Rosalie Metro

Abstract

How do refugee youth remain connected to their homelands and their communities despite displacement? Using a snowball sampling method, the authors recruited and interviewed 15 ethnically diverse “1.5 generation” Myanmar refugee-background youth who arrived in various parts of the United States as children or teenagers between 2008 and 2015. This unique population has roots in Myanmar and its borderlands, but came of age in the US.

Through a series of three interviews with each participant over the course of one year, as well as use of digital ethnography methods, we have found that these young people maintain strong bonds with multiple “homelands” via digital networks, in-person gatherings, and return trips to Southeast Asia. Almost all of them include in their professional ambitions the desire to give back to communities in and displaced from Myanmar through health, education, or other fields. Their intersecting identities —“refugee,” “citizen,” “American,” “Asian,” “Burmese,” as well as the multiple ethnic identifiers they embrace—embody the “entangled ways of life” that Anna Tsing (2015) describes.

Building on Tsing’s (2015) insight that “disturbance brings us into heterogeneity” (p. 161), we use a Critical Grounded Theory approach to generate the concept of “embodied heterogeneity.” Embodied heterogeneity describes the mosaic of identities and experiences, the many-things-at-onceness, that these young people exhibit. In this qualitative study, we place the voices of participants in conversation with each other to illuminate the social landscapes and digital borderlands in which they make homes for themselves despite displacement and precarity.

Everyday Insecurities and Downward Social Mobility: The Gendered Experiences of CDM Women in Mandalay, 2021–2024

Rose

Abstract

The dominance of the militarized masculine regime in Myanmar has been created through multiple forms of violence after the SAC seized power in 2021. As has been well-documented, Myanmar has become a failed state featuring political, economic, and social collapse, with no peace, security, or rule of law across the country. In this context, military domination constitutes a process of militarization which increasingly affects the everyday lives of individuals and especially those practicing civil disobedience. Mandalay has been more dominated by the military regime relative to other regions where some potential for liberation has emerged. As part of their resistance to the illegitimate coup, CDMers (Civil Disobedience Movement participants) in Mandalay are living in insecurity with constant fear of arrest, while also experiencing and mourning the loss of relative middle-class security from their former lives, becoming increasingly part of the urban precariat in their everyday lives during Myanmar's Spring Revolution.

As these former civil servants are mostly women, this research explores how the everyday insecurities they face are inherently gendered. This project undertakes a deep ethnographic study of six CDM women in Mandalay—including the author—seeking to understand their lived experiences and changing perspectives. This research argues that militarization is linked to the emergence of gendered everyday insecurities and downward social mobility, seeing their urban lives in Mandalay as part of an emerging post-coup urban precariat. The project sheds light on the changing lives and views of these women as they have been forced to grapple with the longer-term realities which have stemmed from an initial principled stance. Despite security and threats to their survival, they continue to defiantly resist military dictatorship, seek to reclaim the loss of a vibrant society, and rebuild their new commons, driven by a desire to make a fundamental system change in a new Myanmar.

Beyond Birth: Expectation of Pregnant Shan Migrants for Their Newborns' Citizenship

Sai Phyo Zin Aung

Abstract

This article explores the aspirations of pregnant Shan migrants (PSM) in Chiang Mai regarding the future of their children who will be born in Thailand. It aims to uncover how these migrants envision their newborns' futures and how they actively engage with healthcare services to attain their expectations. Conducted using qualitative research methods, this study involves nine PSM from Myanmar who still hold travel documents issued by the Myanmar state. Data was collected by interviewing PSM with different lengths of pregnancy periods, different lengths of stays in Thailand, and different economic statuses.

The findings reveal that the hopes of PSM for their children's future is embedded in the documents from healthcare service providers, i.e., PSM expect their newborns, who will hold Thai birth certificates, will be able to attain Thai citizenship. Additionally, they hope that Thai birth certificates will enable their children to gain access to education and healthcare. Hoping to secure Thai citizenship and service access for their children, PSM actively seek antenatal care and give birth in hospitals to simplify the process of obtaining the necessary birth records. Their proactive approach to utilizing healthcare institutions illustrates their agency to successfully stitch their naked newborns with rights and affiliation to the sovereign state of Thailand, aligning with their expectations for the future.

Meandering Complexities and the Kachin Substates

Sai Tun Aung Lwin

Abstract

A federal democratic union has long been the ultimate political dream of ethnic minorities in Myanmar. Such a federal union would have its member units divided into seven states and seven regions following the nation's current structure. States are named in ethnic names and surround the perimeters of the country like a horseshoe. The borders between states were somewhat arbitrarily drawn based on assumptions regarding the concentration of similar ethnic communities' settlements and geographical differences. The borders are full of controversial and complex issues. Generally, such problems are poorly understood and, in many cases, falsely based on diverse historical perspectives. The Kachin, for example, believe that some parts of the northern areas of the country are a part of the larger Kachin State, sometimes referred to as Sub-Kachin State, while the Palaung (Ta'ang) ethnic communities also stake a claim to the region in hopes of creating their own state beyond the current boundaries of the Palaung Self-Administered Zone. The local Shan communities, meanwhile, contest the claims of both the Kachin and the Ta'ang. These issues have boiled into ethnic tensions like a bomb that is waiting to explode into violent conflicts.

This research investigates northern Shan and Kachin states, an area where several ethnic armed organizations are active and seeking to claim the territory for their ethnic groups. The area is a multiethnic community comprised of more than five different ethnic groups, and the area also serves as one of the important economic gateways along the China-Burma border. The research aims to better understand the intricacies of territorial claims of outreach beyond boundaries of current ethnic states, autonomous regions, and self-administered zones, and to contribute to the prevention of communal violence and inter-ethnic conflict.

India's Challenges in Negotiating New Multipolar Realities in the Border Regions with Myanmar

Saket Ambarkhane and Sanjay Gathia

Abstract

Three years post-coup, the relationship between the military junta of Myanmar and its prominent neighbour India is experiencing strains as India's central government claims to be walking a tightrope between international relations and regional geopolitical nuances. India is noticing the increasing confidence of the resistance forces gaining ground in Myanmar, thereby altering the power-dynamics internally and externally. The evolved situation is presenting new realities on India's borders and across contested regions. India's lack of quality engagement with anti-junta forces and its continued tacit support for the military junta since the coup to safeguard its interests has jeopardized its existing approach towards Myanmar.

This desk research-based paper relies on existing literature published since Myanmar's most recent coup focused on its western border areas, where the organically evolving and unfolding dynamics of multi-polarity in the India-Myanmar border areas needs to be studied with in-depth quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in the future. At best, this research paper is an attempt to understand the emerging multipolarity of military, culture, and economic influences for dominance in border areas, which seemingly India has yet to come to grips with, including the refugee crisis, demands for federalism, and movement of EAOs/EROs post-Operation 1027. This secondary research brings to attention the emerging and ongoing evolving dynamics impacting Indian policymakers due to their lack of willingness to understand the post-coup power praxis in Myanmar.

India's stated and unstated position vis-à-vis Myanmar's, the military junta, resistance/revolutionary forces, and pro-military groups in an increasingly contested region along its borders will continue to present immense policy challenges until Indian stakeholders start the Herculean task of learning and changing mindsets.

Economic Challenges and Social Networks: Migration of Myanmar Weavers to Mizoram, India

San Win Aung

Abstract

This study examines reasons for the migration of weavers from Myanmar to Aizawl, Mizoram, India, as well as the challenges faced by the migrants. Using interviews and observations, the research explores critical factors such as wage differences, access to information, and moving costs. The findings show that higher wages in Mizoram are a significant reason for migration, as weavers can earn three-to-four times more than in Myanmar. In addition, social networks and communication tools help them obtain reliable information about job opportunities. However, the cost of moving can be a significant obstacle, though some weavers receive support from employers or members of their social networks. Despite higher earnings, migrant weavers face financial instability and delays in receiving policy support. They also struggle with language barriers and cultural differences in Mizoram. The author recommends that the Mizoram government implement fair wage policies and enhanced support systems to better support migrant weavers' integration into the local community. This research provides valuable insights for those working to support migrant communities in India, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address financial instability, improve access to reliable information, and reduce the financial burden of migration. By understanding the economic and social factors influencing the migration of Myanmar weavers, policymakers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies to support these migrant communities and enhance their overall well-being.

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) in the Gender Equality Position Paper of National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC)

Sanda Thant

Abstract

The speaker will share the Gender Equality Position Paper (2023) of the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) that she has been engaged in developing, and which was adopted by NUCC in 2023. WPS is an important part of this position paper. The speaker will explain how the position paper frames WPS. This will give an overall framework to the panel on the discussion of WPS at the national/union level.

The Resilience and Everyday Life of Exiled Myanmar Activists in Thailand

Sarah Riebel

Abstract

The paper aims to examine the resilience and everyday life of exiled activists from Myanmar in Thailand who were forced to leave their country due to the military coup of 2021. The forced exile of activists from Myanmar to Thailand is not a new phenomenon and has a complex history. To this day, many activists from past conflicts and resistance movements are active advocates and support the current anti-coup struggles. Through encounters with activists and representatives of (I)NGOs during an 18-month research stay in Thailand—predominantly Mae Sot—this ethnographic research sheds light on the various activities and challenges which Myanmar activists in exile must contend.

Mae Sot is a place where the resilience of exiled activists from Myanmar and their importance for past and current historical and political debates and knowledge transfer within and outside the country becomes visible. The historical and current dynamics in the 'activist diaspora' are driven by (new) creative methods of protest, fundraising, and advocacy in a transnational setting. Despite this, activists living in Thailand, particularly in Mae Sot, face many hardships, from fears and insecurities resulting from their status as 'illegals,' to (mental) health problems, lack of future prospects, financial and physical insecurities, survivors' guilt, and so on. Yet more than three years after the military coup, they still demonstrate resilience and creativeness in uncountable ways. The aim of this research is to examine the diverse commitment activists in exile display in their everyday lives, and to show how activist aesthetics, actions, and narratives are interwoven in the history of protest and revolution in Myanmar, as well as embedded in trans- and international environments and worldwide struggles for democracy.

Hidden Threats, New Approaches: Analyzing the Utilization of Innovative Responses to the Threat of Explosive Weapons in Myanmar

Saw Matthew and Mrat Aye

Abstract

Since the February 2021 coup in Myanmar, civilian casualties from landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) have skyrocketed. Recorded data shows 1,052 men, women, and children killed or maimed by these weapons in 2023, and while this is likely a significant undercount due to the lack of comprehensive data collection systems, it would still put Myanmar near the top of a grim list including Ukraine and Syria in regard to civilian casualties. One of the traditional responses to this threat, in-person Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE), can also be difficult to implement in heavily conflict-affected areas where the SAC denies access to humanitarian actors, preventing trained facilitators from reaching displaced people and others who face landmine and ERW contamination in their villages, fields, pathways, and around civilian infrastructure. Resistance forces and local humanitarian actors are thus confronted with the immense challenge of keeping people safe in a highly volatile and contested environment where junta forces prevent even life-saving interventions, and in some cases specifically target both the individuals and entities providing aid, as well as the physical infrastructure, such as prosthetic limb clinics, that addresses the impacts of explosive ordnance contamination.

How then do humanitarian actors address these threats in such a contested environment? This paper explores the diverse and innovative ways in which humanitarian mine action operators, local civil society and media, and resistance forces have delivered EORE and other services to affected communities through non-traditional mediums, such as the use of Facebook and its targeted advertising functionality, interactive mobile phone applications, and others, to mitigate this threat. It highlights the attempts to leverage key tools, actors, and opportunities in the information space to deliver potentially life-saving messaging to civilians and indicates a number of ways in which lessons learned could inform future efforts.

Food Security in Klerlwehtu: Epistemic Inquiry and Practices Amid Climate Change and Armed Conflict

Saw Ner Dhu Da

Abstract

Geography, land management, cultural practices, weather, seeds, production modes, local administration, and many other factors, determine the food security of a particular place. Epistemic inquiry into the source of food, its management, and its distribution in a context gives us insight into patterns of food (in)security.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the conflict affected region of Klerlwehtu in eastern Bago region, this paper shows how food security and people's ability to cope with climate change is deeply impacted by mixed governance arrangements and conflict dynamics. People's food systems in Klerlwehtu are impacted by conflict, social and power dynamics, resource contestation, and weather irregularity that lead to a distinctive nature of food production mode and eating habits. In this article, the author examines the local dynamics of the food system and the way different forms of violence shape local social, environmental, and food resource patterns. Building on Rob Nixon's (2011) concept of 'slow violence,' the author shows how invisible and unpredictable social and political forces impact people's livelihoods and food security. In particular, this research focuses on the livelihoods, food resources, practices of dealing with food, and experiences and interactions with the environment and different armed actors over time of communities in Klerlwehtu. The author describes villagers' knowledge and practices in responding to the uncertainty of climate and conflict and how it has a significant impact on their food security.

Resilience of the Karen Higher Education System

Saw Thaw Thi and Naw Paw Moo

Abstract

This paper investigates the resilience of the higher education system in Kawthoolei (Karen State), focusing on its current implementation and management under the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD). Examining the policies, strategies, and curriculum, the study assesses the impact, operation, and service delivery to the community. Through a desk review and key informant interviews with KECD leaders, the research sheds light on the challenges and successes faced by the Kawthoolei higher education system.

The historical context, marked by socio-political changes in Burma since 2021, and subsequent impacts on refugee and internally displaced persons' (IDP) education, frames the study's backdrop. Notably, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and Myanmar's political turmoil, the resilience of the KECD stands out, ensuring continued education despite adversities.

The research delineates the crucial role played by KECD and its affiliated bodies in overseeing higher education programs, producing graduates in various fields, and meeting the needs of community-based organizations. However, challenges persist, including limitations in certificate recognition and nationality issues for graduates, demanding further attention and resources. In response, KECD and associated entities are actively expanding higher education programs, seeking additional funding, and venturing into non-formal education to cater to growing demands. The study underscores the significance of these programs, highlighting their role in preventing social issues such as early marriages and fostering a transformative environment that empowers youth, contributes to peace-building, and addresses community needs.

The paper concludes by emphasizing the vital importance of sustained investment and support from international donors and communities to ensure the continuity and enhancement of education in Kawthoolei. It advocates acknowledgement of the challenges faced by educators, students, and parents, affirming education's pivotal role in shaping a more democratic and sustainable society in Kawthoolei.

‘Now I Feel Safe’: Myanmar Student Experiences at ASEAN Host Universities

Sebastian Gries

Abstract

This paper focuses on students who left Myanmar after the 2021 coup and their attempts to continue their higher education journeys outside the country. The focus is on students who received an EU Mobility Programme for Myanmar (EMPM) scholarship and who are currently being hosted by an ASEAN university to complete their studies. The paper will discuss students' experiences of studying in a foreign country, in particular on how they engage with the resumption of an interrupted academic journey. The paper will also discuss the dreams they hold for themselves and the future of Myanmar.

Centering the Periphery: An Alternative Analysis of Protracted Conflict in Kachin Regions of Myanmar

Seng Maw Lahpai

Abstract

For the Kachin of northern Myanmar, unresolved violent conflict is not a new phenomenon. The Kachin, one of Myanmar's eight main ethnic groups, have been in continuous conflict with Myanmar's armed forces since 1961, constituting one of the longest running conflicts in the world. Most accounts of the conflict are based on a dominant assumption that the conflict is intractable because it is understood as an 'ethnic conflict.' In doing so, they overplay the ethnic dimension and fail to adequately address other factors.

Drawing on theories of international relations related to intractable conflict, this paper examines the political, economic, and cultural factors that have contributed to the intractable nature of the conflict. A central underpinning of this approach is the recognition that the views of marginalised groups themselves are often overlooked. In essence it centres and prioritises the 'periphery' over the 'centre.' The primary methodology of this research are interviews, life stories, and surveys of Kachin to give a grassroots voice to the conflict in their own words. By doing so, a micro-pluralistic analysis is prioritised over a state-centric analysis. Early Kachin migrants in Thailand due to the conflict in Myanmar and Kachin in regions of northern and eastern Myanmar were interviewed. This paper analyses the question of how the Kachin understand the conflict with consideration of the extent to which the conflict is, from their perspective, intractable. The data elicited from these interviews illustrates the complexity of the causes of conflict and the need to shift analysis from an over-arching state-centric categorisation of conflict to a micro-pluralistic level that interprets conflict from the local perspective.

In summary, this paper offers insights into possible avenues for an empirical contribution to conflict resolution in Myanmar and to fill the gap in the existing literature and theories of intractability.

Psychosocial Support for Young People in the Face of Covid-19, Coup, and Conscription: The Role and Strategies of Non-Professionals

Shwe Oo, Ok Tai, Win May, Ei Mon, and Nay Hein

Abstract

Long-standing insufficient access to mental health services in Myanmar, compounded by the three crises of Covid-19, the 2021 coup, and the enactment of the national service (conscription) law in 2024, has heightened pressures on young people. Recent evidence indicates a sharp rise in mental health issues among younger generations, yet services remain inadequate. Consequently, individuals tend to seek non-professionals' help, highlighting the pivotal role of non-professionals in supporting the psychosocial needs of young people.

The objective of this paper is to explore the nature of support provided by non-professionals for young people with stressful life events in the aftermath of these three crises in Myanmar. This paper analyses narrative interviews with young people and non-professional support providers (such as religious and civic leaders) to examine the role of non-professional providers, and the different coping methods and strategies offered to young people. Little is known of the strategies, and how mental health is construed and constructed by non-professional support providers. Using the concept of mental assemblages, this paper will analyse the way in which mental health, coping, and resilience are constructed by both young people and non-professionals, highlighting the intrinsic tensions, forms of dissonance, and power dynamics which define the role of non-professionals. Given the likely continued scarcity of formal psychosocial service provision, a better understanding of 'what is already there' may be crucial in addressing the growing needs of young people coping with the overlapping, or at times simultaneous, terrors of Covid, coup-related violence, and forced conscription.

Challenges of Access to Quality Secondary Education in Myanmar in the Aftermath of the 2021 Military Coup

Shwin Lei and Khin Kyaw

Abstract

Improving education quality and accessibility is essential for reducing poverty, developing human capital, and fostering a peaceful and prosperous future. Armed conflicts inflict severe disruptions on children's access to education, leading to the destruction of school infrastructure, displacement of students and teachers, and the closure of educational institutions. Myanmar's 2021 military coup has had negative consequences, and one of the sectors most deeply affected in the aftermath is the education sector which has had devastating effects on access to a quality, functioning education system, particularly secondary education in Myanmar. The coup worsened existing challenges and created new barriers in access to quality secondary education for approximately 200,000 children in Myanmar (Burmese, 2022).

This study aims to investigate challenges faced by students, teachers, and educational institutions in the realm of secondary education related to access to quality secondary education in Myanmar. Moreover, the study examines the impact of technology integration in secondary education, investigating how digital tools and online resources affect teaching and learning outcomes.

Qualitative data collection methods—including interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions in four schools in conflict areas such as Bago, Sagaing, Mon, and Magway—are utilized for this study. These methods allow us to get a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by students in conflict areas in accessing continuous quality secondary education.

The findings reveal the primary challenges of access to quality education faced by students in Myanmar after the 2021 military coup, the impact of technology integration, and impact of digital tools and online resources on teaching and learning outcomes in secondary education. By exploring the primary challenges faced by secondary students in conflict areas and assessing the role of technology, this research aims to illuminate the education crisis in Myanmar and provide insights into potential solutions to addressing the issues.

A Reluctant Receiving State: Thailand's Responses to Migration and Displacement from Myanmar After 2021

Sirada Khemanitthathai

Abstract

The paper examines Thailand's evolving response to Myanmar migrants and refugees following the political upheaval in Myanmar since 2021. While Thailand has long been a destination for migrants and refugees from Myanmar for several decades, the recent crisis has intensified these migratory patterns, posing challenges for Thailand. The situation has led to a surge in undocumented migrant workers and complex mixed-migration flows, including those fleeing armed conflicts and political persecution.

This study explores Thailand's post-2021 policies and practices regarding labor migration and refugees from Myanmar. It analyzes the implications of these policies and practices within the broader context of Thailand's diplomatic stance with Myanmar. Despite the upheaval in its neighboring country, Thailand's response has been primarily characterized by a passive and non-responsive approach, focusing on maintaining existing labor migration management with ad hoc regularization and attempts at adhering to the bilateral arrangement. While the realities of forced migration from Myanmar are practically recognized and seen, Thai authorities impose indifferent strategies by largely overlooking the irregular migration of political exiles and refugees at the official level. Only those refugees directly fleeing armed conflicts at the Thailand-Myanmar border are formally recognized as persons fleeing from fighting. Moreover, Thai authorities still view comprehensive migration and refugee policies as creating pull factors, and they continue to prioritize bureaucratic protocols.

The analysis underscores the dilemma Thailand faces as a receiving state caught between the political realities of the sending state and the need to maintain diplomatic relations, as well as the disconnection between official responses and on-the-ground situations. Apart from national security rationale, Thailand's reluctance to engage with the political dimensions of migration management and to fully accept Myanmar migrants and refugees serves to maintain official relations with Myanmar's military regime.

Unexpected Immobility: Finding Purpose and Identity Among the Kachin in Chiang Mai

Stephen Zau Zin Myat

Abstract

This paper is an exploration of the existential and experiential dimensions of im/mobility within the Kachin diaspora community in Chiang Mai, Thailand. While initially arriving with plans for temporary employment or onward migration to a third country, many Kachin individuals found themselves unexpectedly rooted in Thailand. They've settled down, started families, and institutionalized their status in Thailand. Yet given their original intentions of transition, many of these migrants view their current situation with exasperation. They feel stuck. In contrast, their offspring, who have only lived in Thailand, view their situation differently. This is exemplified by intergenerational differences in migrants' relationship to Kachin identity. While parents strive to maintain Kachin identity, their children increasingly identify with Thai culture, feeling detached from their Kachin heritage. The transition from temporary migrants to embedded residents reflects a profound shift in perception. As aspirations for mobility give way to the reality of prolonged stay, a generation gap emerges in response to this situation. Attending to lived experience, this paper examines how the Kachin diaspora make sense of their unintended settlement in Thailand. More specifically, I explore the role of Christianity in providing meaning and purpose amidst uncertainty. Through beliefs in divine purpose and plans, the older generation of migrants reinterpret their prolonged stay as part of a larger existential journey, transitioning from a temporary existence to a deeper sense of rootedness. On the other hand, as the younger generation distances itself from religious narratives, alternative frameworks for understanding and navigating identity and purpose emerge. By attending to the complexities of transition, displacement, and the search for identity, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on immobility and belonging in Myanmar's borderlands. It underscores the nuanced ways in which individuals navigate existential dilemmas and construct meaning within the context of unexpected immobility.

Conflict, Trauma, and Identity: Narratives of Self-Hood in the Aftermath of Conflict

Su Su

Abstract

"Because I could not bow my head to injustice, I decided to take up arms and start a revolution."

Particularly for the younger generation, the post-coup resistance has effected a profound change on self-identity, with self-identity strongly influenced by one's relationship with the revolution. For some, as direct participants, the changes are profound: displaced from their homes and exposed to violence both as victims and as perpetrators, deep psychological trauma represents a formidable barrier to realizing self-identity outside of the white heat of armed conflict. Likewise, for some victims of trauma, such as those who have experienced sexual violence, the event is shrouded in shame and guilt and often suppressed. This research explores how those who have been victims or perpetrators of violence use narratives to project a self-identity. How do PDF fighters recount their experiences to their families, friends, and associates? How do rape victims avoid, suppress, or re-cast their experiences to avoid a self-identity framed around victimhood? Finally, how do those who choose to avoid active participation in resistance self-narrate to justify their identity as non-combatants? As a deeply traumatized Myanmar society seeks to navigate post-conflict identities at the political level, so individuals will undertake complex narrative turns to project a particular identity to the emergent new order.

Participatory Solutions to Research Amidst Conflict in Myanmar: Lessons Learned from the Multiethnic Integrated Research Training Program (IRTP)

Su Wai Phoo, Seng Hpung Aung, Min Layi Chan, Wirachan Charoensukaran, and Hsu Mon Thein

Abstract

In 2021, the International Commission on the Futures of Education introduced a new social contract for education, emphasizing the need to strengthen education as a public endeavor and common good (UNESCO, 2021). This framework calls for an educational institution-led research agenda that embraces multidisciplinary approaches. Having long and turbulent histories of colonialism and oppression, Myanmar's ethnic education systems in the context of widespread conflicts highlight the need for contextually relevant transformative approaches in educational research. Thus, 11 ethnic education providers from six ethnic institutions initiated the Integrated Research Training Programme (IRTP), grounded in the principle of participatory action research (PAR).

This study explores the role of PAR in producing new insights into education amidst conflict and in decolonizing research with conflict-sensitive practices, drawing on examples from two specific research projects. Guided by established frameworks for evaluating action research (Melrose, 2001; Herr and Anderson, 2014), the practitioners' field notes, participants' reflections, and pre- and post-assessments of practice-embedded training sessions were analysed. The results indicate that PAR is highly effective in the development of the IRTP and in decolonizing research methodologies. They facilitate the identification of conflict-sensitive research practices and the formulation of contextually relevant solutions for education in conflict-affected areas along with practitioners. Furthermore, the findings suggest that PAR can play a crucial role in cross-ethnic learning and promoting more inclusive and equitable educational practices.

In conclusion, this study underscores the potential of PAR to significantly contribute to the transformation of educational research in conflict-affected contexts. By embracing multidisciplinary and contextually grounded approaches, PAR can help foster educational practices that are both inclusive and equitable, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and strengths of ethnic education systems in Myanmar and solutions for addressing the unique needs of diverse ethnic communities.

Vulnerabilities of Burmese Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons in Mae Sot after the 2021 Military Coup

Su Yin Htun

Abstract

After the military coup on February 1, 2021, the military junta treated people around the country inhumanely by means of arbitrary arrest, extra-judicial killing, burning of homes, torture at interrogation centres, confiscation of property, sexual violence, denial of humanitarian assistance, incommunicado detention, and mass killing. Although Myanmar ratified the four Geneva Conventions, of which Article 3 prohibits violence to life and person, cruel treatment, and torture as war crimes, the military junta fails to follow international law. As people are displaced due to threats to their lives and security, they flee to neighbouring Thailand, which is south of Myanmar. Southern groups as well as Burmese ethnics flee to the Myanmar-Thai border, especially to Mae Sot. Due to their illegal status, they lack fundamental human rights, especially access to health care, education, job opportunities, taking part in religious activities, and cultural rights. Moreover, they face security risks of being arrested by Thai police and sent back to Myanmar by Thai Immigration.

This research paper focuses on how Burmese migrants, refugees, and stateless persons overcome their insecure lives for development, inclusiveness, and integrity in Mae Sot with illegal status. This paper explores desk studied literature, analysis of international law with a qualitative research method by looking at the vulnerable living status of targeted people. The paper highlights the needs of international obligations for the sustainable development of vulnerable displaced persons in Mae Sot pursuant to International Human Rights Law.

Exploring Why the United League of Arakan Supports the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone

Ta-Wei Chu, Saw Jonathan, and Kyaw Lynn

Abstract

In this article, the authors explore why the Myanmar-based insurgency organisation known as the United League of Arakan (ULA) supports the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (KSEZ), a controversial Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project. The authors argue that the ULA's support for the KSEZ is rooted in a biopolitics that benefits the ULA by attractively showcasing its insurgent aims and by effectively boosting its local authority. The ULA's pro-KSEZ policy partially explains why the KSEZ, unlike other BRI projects in junta-led Myanmar, has enjoyed moderate progress. Despite its biopolitical benefits, the ULA's pro-KSEZ policy has marginalised certain anti-KSEZ actors in the rebel organisation's sphere of control. The resulting fragmentation may both destabilise the ULA's hard-fought social order and undermine the prospects of the KSEZ. This examination of the ULA-KSEZ relationship empirically contributes to BRI-in-Myanmar research, which has heretofore paid little attention to rebel-controlled societies' significant influence on foreign-led domestic development projects.

An Investigation into the Accessibility of Current Virtual Education for Education University Students in Myanmar

Tauk

Abstract

This research explores the educational challenges and opportunities of university students to continue their education in post-coup Myanmar. It looks at accessibility to current virtual education in Myanmar, and how students ensure their access to education. Data was collected using a survey. Participants in this study include 111 education university students from selected universities. To carry out this research, students specializing in education who reside in all regions and states of Myanmar and who are enrolled in either private virtual universities or one of virtual universities under the National Unity Government of Myanmar were involved. Ensuring quality education was taken to comprise four dimensions, namely, teaching and learning, connection and assessment, communication between teachers and students, and understanding and rights to education.

For this research, t-test and ANOVA were used to compare the different strategies used by the education university students towards the accessibility of the current virtual education in terms of age, year, and region. Findings reveal that the challenges of students towards virtual education are poor internet connectivity, shortage of electricity, security concerns, and difficulty with communication in group work activities. Benefits include opportunities for students to join foreign universities and improved access to professional development. The qualitative data also supported the findings of the quantitative study. This research contributes to awareness-raising of the standards of current virtual education and understanding of strategies of students to ensure continued education during the current political situation in Myanmar.

The Challenges Faced in Teaching and Learning During the Spring Revolution

Thant Zin Tun, Thu Ya, and Thida Myint

Abstract

This research is aimed at uncovering challenges encountered during the teaching and learning processes of Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) teachers and students during the Spring Revolution and understanding the conditions that have allowed CDM education to thrive despite the difficulties.

On 1st February 2021, Myanmar's military seized state power by citing unsubstantiated allegations of vote fraud in the 2020 general election. On 3rd February 2021, millions of people expressed their disapproval of the military's illegal usurpation of people's power and began making peaceful demonstrations and demands. Government civil servants who did not accept the military's injustice engaged in a revolutionary protest with CDM and youths, especially those of Generation Z who seek justice and truth, but who found only one choice to root out the military junta with the Spring Revolution. During the time of the Spring Revolution, more than 10,000,000 students experienced an immense loss of their rights to education. With the support of the Ministry of Education of the National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar, CDM teachers and staff have strived to create learning platforms for the CDM students and to implement an online education system as revolutionary education.

By using the mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative research, this paper attempts to propose solutions for the challenges of teaching and learning during the revolution. This research experimentally investigates the challenges of teaching and learning during the Spring Revolution. At the present, there is no opportunity to collect the opinion of all the people of Myanmar, and thus only the opinion of the revolutionary forces have been collected. The case study method has been used in this research. The results of this study provide an opportunity for aspirational growth of the educational field.

Language Use of Myanmar People in Northern Thailand

Thanyarat Apiwong

Abstract

Migrant workers from Myanmar belonging to different ethnic groups have moved across borders into northern Thailand for many generations. They have become the majority population of foreign workers in the region and live in what can be referred to as 'imagined communities' in the context of local Thai societies.

This paper examines the evolving dynamics of language and cultural adaptation among ethnic migrants from Myanmar who have been living in northern Thailand for a long time and investigates how migration experiences, languages, cultures, and identities are transformed across generations. In doing so, this study draws upon historical documents, scholarly literature, and case studies in order to illustrate important factors influencing language adaptation, including migration policies, socio-economic contexts, and cultural interactions from the 1960s–2020s. The research finds that Myanmar migrants use Thai language for economic opportunities, educational attainment, and social cohesion within local societies. At the same time, Burmese and ethnic languages play crucial roles in creating social networks among migrants and in maintaining cultural identity and a sense of belonging for the younger generations.

Writing the History of Suvarnabhumi from the Myanmar Perspective

Thanyarat Apiwong

Abstract

Suvarnabhumi, meaning 'Golden Land,' not only refers to a script, but also to an ancient kingdom that has influenced scholars and the writings of Suvarnabhumi in Myanmar. The history of Suvarnabhumi in Myanmar is intertwined with the cultural heritage of the Mon people, an ethnic group with a rich history in the region. Scholars have devoted attention to the study of Suvarnabhumi within the context of Myanmar's historical narrative. Since the twentieth century, numerous Myanmar authors have progressively identified Lower Myanmar as the center of Suvarnabhumi.

This paper examines how Myanmar scholars perceive and represent Myanmar as the center of Suvarnabhumi and what significance it holds for the country and its people in the present day. The research utilizes historical evidence, archaeological data, textbooks, and oral history interviews.

Shifting 'Myanmar Muslim' Identities and Their Political Inclusion in the Renewed National Imagination

Thar Gyi

Abstract

Since the country regained independence, the Myanmar Muslim community has been systematically and gradually marginalized and excluded by successive governments from mainstream political processes and public life. Recently, the situation has become more intense, and the Muslim community has been instrumentalized by both the military and semi-civilian government during last decade of so-called democratization. The lack of meaningful inclusion of ethnic and religious minorities in public life and in the political landscape threatens the functioning of democracy and creates deep challenges for the stability of a diverse society, as evidenced by regression and collapse of Myanmar's semi-democratic transition and similar experiences in other countries. Following the 2021 coup and dialogues on the emerging federal democratic union of Myanmar there have been some encouraging initiatives, accompanied by a positive shift in sentiment, which intend to create meaningful and effective inclusion of Myanmar Muslims.

Based on extensive interviews conducted with prominent figures including politicians, students, political actors, religious leaders, and representatives of civil society organizations from both Myanmar's Muslim and non-Muslim populations, this research indicates a notable absence of substantial shifts in the self-perception of their identity among the Myanmar Muslim community members themselves—they have and continue to want to identify themselves as part of the broader Myanmar polity. However, it also suggests that there has been a positive shift in the perceptions of non-Muslims towards the identities of Myanmar's Muslim population and their role in a future Myanmar. This research seeks to make sense of these perceptions and ultimately suggests an encouraging increase in the possibility for their inclusion and integration into spheres of public life and the broader political arena, albeit caveating this with a warning that, in the absence of pursuing the efficacy of an associative democracy model, the crisis of exclusion is destined to run on repeat.

Of Horrors and Heroes: Discourses of Violence in Post-Conflict Social Reconstruction in Myanmar

Thida

Abstract

Widespread conflict in the post-coup period has exposed almost all of the population of Myanmar to violence, as victims, perpetrators, observers, or in other ways indirectly affected. Current discourses are mainly framed in revolutionary terms, condemning the acts of counter-revolutionary forces, and justifying those of resistance groups. This serves to obscure the complexity and multi-faceted nature of post-coup violence, which includes an increase in domestic violence, crime-related violence, and a range of structural and cultural violence. The need to ‘de-violencize’ a society inured to violence is acknowledged by peace activities, but this paper argues that such a process requires an honest appraisal of the multiple, often suppressed or marginalized narratives of violence. This paper explores such discourses from the perspectives of victims, perpetrators and observers to analyse the nature and form of different narratives: who tells what kinds of stories about their experiences of violence, and why? This points to the ways in which narrative discourses of violence can shape future peace, both positively and negatively. This paper argues that, in contrast to some more future-orientated peace-building efforts which marginalize or suppress histories of violence, genuine transformation can only occur through an unflinching appraisal of the lived experience of conflict.

Whispers of the River: Exploring Relational Values of Water Ecosystem Services in Burmese Literature and Music

Thiri May Aye

Abstract

Relational values within ecosystem services explore the profound connections between ecosystems, individuals, communities, and culture. These values illuminate the inherent significance of ecosystems beyond their mere utility to humans. They emphasize how ecosystems are intertwined with the cultural, spiritual, and social fabric of societies. In Myanmar, amidst political turmoil, ethnic conflict and forced migration, the essence of this relationship with nature has been obscured by the shadows of war, violence, and the erosion of traditional livelihoods. This research explores the rich tapestry of Myanmar's cultural heritage, where water holds a central place in literature, visual arts, and music. From the metaphorical depths of fictional novels to the poetic resonance of lyrical compositions and the symbolic representation in artifacts, water emerges as a central motif, reflecting its profound influence on the collective consciousness of Myanmar's society. It aims to revive these cultural nuances, thereby enriching the exploration of the relational value of ecosystem services within the field of sustainability science. Through the poetic narratives of Burmese texts, it traces the emotional depth with which water is depicted, revealing the intimate portraits of livelihoods intricately tied to streams, rivers, waterfalls, lakes, and landscapes abundant with water. Regardless of being anchored in Burmese language texts, this study transcends linguistic boundaries by incorporating the voices of artists and authors from diverse ethnic backgrounds. By doing so, it embraces the plurality of experiences and perspectives, enriching our understanding of the profound relationship between people, culture, and the natural world.

The Historical Writing on the Burmese-Siamese War (1765–1767) of Jacques Corre

Thissana Weerakietsoontorn

Abstract

Among various accounts of the Burmese-Siamese War (1765–1767), which led to the fall of the Ayutthaya kingdom, is the journal of Jacques Corre, a member of the Paris Foreign Missions Society who had been evangelizing in Siam since 1762. Taken prisoner during the Burmese invasion in 1767, Corre eventually escaped and took refuge in the Ha Tien region of southern Vietnam. His journal was originally written in Latin and kept in the Vatican Library, but was later translated into at least three languages: English, French, and Thai. However, none of these translations have been published to date.

According to Corre's account, the Burmese conquest of Ayutthaya on April 7, 1767, was divine punishment, explained by the "fact" that most inhabitants in Siam were non-Catholics. Moreover, Corre attributed the siege of the Siamese capital to four main factors: Firstly, the Siamese soldiers lacked bravery, repeatedly withdrawing to the capital, considered the kingdom's safest area. Secondly, Siam lacked effective leadership, with King Ekkathat (1758–1760/1762–1767) criticized for weakness and ignorance, while his decisive younger brother, the monk prince King Uthumphon (1758, 1759–1762), refused to leave the priesthood to fight the Burmese as he had done previously. Thirdly, the corruption among nobles, especially the king's four favorites, who rejected British assistance to the royal court against the Burmese army to remain in the king's favor. Finally, during the war, the Siamese suffered from famine and infectious disease, making conditions within the city walls worse than outside.

In summary, Jacques Corre's journal and local chronicles provide similar details about the Burmese-Siamese War of 1765–1767. This source supports considering royal chronicles as a trustworthy resource for explaining the final years of the Ayutthaya kingdom.

Responses to Cases of Gender-Based Violence: A Study of the Role of Local Women's Organizations in Southern Shan State, Myanmar

Thu Thu Aung

Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive global issue of gender inequality that is deeply rooted in conflict-ridden regions, violating fundamental rights and perpetuating cycles of inequality. In the conflict-ridden regions of Myanmar, especially among ethnic minority communities, women have endured horrific sexual assaults perpetrated by individuals and personnel of different armed groups. This brutality, employed as a means to assert dominance, has tragically led to consistent under-reported cases of gender-based violence. Throughout history, the entwining of conflict settings and sexual violence has been profound, yet formal reporting and legal prosecution have been rare occurrences.

This research focuses on the specific context of southern Shan State, Myanmar, a conflict-ridden region where GBV has been exacerbated by prolonged armed conflicts and political instability. This study aims to understand the responses and the approaches to addressing the situation of GBV cases and the roles and activities of women's organizations in supporting survivors. In this study, a local women's organization, which is providing a range of services including legal aid, psychological counseling, medical treatment, and safe shelters in southern Shan areas, has been taken as a case study. Drawing on historical analyses, documentary evidence, and interviews, this research presents the dynamics of GBV in Shan State, where survivors, predominantly women, face formidable barriers in accessing essential services encompassing social support, healthcare, and justice.

Locating Burmese Voices in the Historiography of the Separation of Burma from India

Thurein Naing

Abstract

The separation of Burma from India in 1937 could be considered an early episode in the fragmentation of the Indian subcontinent and the British Indian Empire, widely known as the partition of India. The separation can be seen as the first partition of India. It was also a significant episode in the political and national history of Burmese history. The separation emerged alongside colonial politics in Burma. The Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), arguably the first Burmese national political organization, viewed the separation of British Burma from India as the inevitable political advancement of the emerging Burmese nation within the British empire. It had been a looming issue for the Burmese political leaders of the time, such as Ba Phe, Chit Hlaing, and the infamous anti-colonial agitator and Buddhist monk, Ottama. For the Burmese, the separation was remembered for its vigorous political scheming and divisive electoral politics. Despite these facts, the literature on the topic is rather thin. The current historiography, especially the Western canon, has forgotten this episode in Burmese history for much more politically dramatic and explosive episodes. So far, there has yet to be a dedicated study on the separation. Therefore, this study locates and discusses the Burmese voices on the separation and attempt to bring in discussions from the local historiography over the issue. The study discusses how the local Burmese historiography remembers and constructs narratives behind the separation. It will also include current views on the separation in the existing literature.

**Social Capital and Its Role in Implications of Rohingya Youth Migration
from IDP Camps to Malaysia: Lessons Learned from Perceptions of Youths
in IDP Camps in Rakhine State**

Tin Maung Htwe

Abstract

This research endeavors to examine the significance of social capital in the ramifications of the migration of Rohingya youth from internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Rakhine State to Malaysia. The study seeks to explore the multifaceted effects of migration on family structures, community cohesion, and the socio-political landscape, as well as the economic aspects of the Rohingya community. Employing qualitative research methods, this study investigates the influence of social capital on the migration experiences and outcomes of Rohingya youth, encompassing their networks, relationships, gender roles, and the resources they gain or lose during the migration process, with a particular focus on the period following the coup. The findings contribute to the comprehension of the role of social capital in providing support to Rohingya youth in IDP camps and efforts addressing the challenges they encounter throughout their migration journey. By emphasizing the significance of social capital in the discourse on migration, this study underscores its profound impact on the livelihood of the Rohingya community, especially those residing in camps in Myanmar.

The Nexus of Social Capital and Migrant Learning Schools in Mae Sot's Post-Coup Landscape

Tin Maung Htwe

Abstract

This study focuses on the role of migrant learning schools in Mae Sot, Thailand, following the 2021 coup in Myanmar. Utilizing Social Capital Theory, the research delves into how these institutions have adapted to the increased demand and limited resources brought about by a surge in student numbers from refugee and migrant populations. Ethnographic methods, including interviews, focus groups, and participant observations with educators, students, parents, and local leaders, were employed to gather comprehensive data. The findings reveal that these schools are pivotal in providing not just educational services, but also in fostering significant social capital among diverse migrant groups. They serve as crucial integration points, aiding in both academic and social assimilation.

Despite facing severe logistical and financial challenges, these schools have demonstrated remarkable resilience and ingenuity. This study advocates for stronger collaborative efforts and policy enhancements by NGOs, government bodies, and international organizations to support and extend these educational services to displaced populations. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of educational provision in displacement and crisis contexts, highlighting the mechanisms through which social support and capital are developed within marginalized communities.

The insights obtained underscore the essential nature of these educational settings as social anchors, providing stability and continuity for displaced communities. They not only facilitate academic learning but are also instrumental in the broader social integration processes, reinforcing the importance of inter-sectoral collaboration to sustain and expand these critical services. This investigation enriches our comprehension of the dynamic interplay between education, social capital, and community resilience in regions affected by conflict and displacement.

Borders and Belonging in Wendy Law-Yone's *The Road to Wanting* and Kyi Aye's *Longing*

Tongchen Hou

Abstract

To examine the concepts of 'border' and 'belonging', this paper focuses on two pieces of fiction, *Longing* (1961) by Kyi Aye and *The Road to Wanting* (2010) by Wendy Law-Yone. One rationale for juxtaposing these two authors is their shared background of being born in Burma and subsequently relocating to America, a condition the author refers to as "writers in-between." The two novels both relate to Burmese historical landscapes, but during different time periods. *Longing* (1961) is a Burmese literary work purportedly grounded in the life of a Shan historical figure within the Kachin region during the 1930s. On the other hand, *The Road to Wanting* (2010) delineates the tragic trajectory of a Burmese woman's life from the 1960s onwards, spanning across Thailand and the border regions of China and Myanmar. Despite different historical backgrounds, these chosen works of fiction respectively delineate the tumultuous destinies, emotional fluctuations, and personal choices of two young Burmese women within a grand historical background.

Instead of focusing on historical accounts, this paper attempts to analyse fictional narratives centered around female individual mobility and the quest for identity. The study initially examines the intersectional process of marginalization and the exclusion female characters confront. Secondly, through delineating their experiences of displacement, it aims to refine the notion of 'border' for individuals in motion, to shift focus from geographical demarcations to cultural boundaries, from nation borders to community thresholds. Finally, it analyses the imaginary homeland through which these characters seek a sense of belonging amidst processes of border-crossing.

The Rohingya and Myanmar: Examining Conflict and Resolution Strategies Through the Lens of the Assam State of Northeast India Detention Model

U Sa Jen Mog

Abstract

Refugees are a pervasive global concern, vividly illustrated by the plight of the Rohingya people in Myanmar's Rakhine State. The Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group, have faced severe persecution and discrimination for decades within Myanmar, culminating in intensified violence in 2017. The crisis has garnered international condemnation due to its humanitarian toll, yet meaningful solutions remain elusive. Historically rooted in Myanmar's Rakhine State for centuries, the Rohingya have consistently been denied citizenship and basic rights by the Myanmar government, which views them as illegal immigrants despite their longstanding presence. The conflict is deeply complex, rooted in ethnic and religious tensions exacerbated by political and economic factors.

There are two dominant groups in contemporary Myanmar: one supporting the Rohingya, and another opposing them. The pro-Rohingya faction argues that the Rohingya have been in Burma since the ninth century, intermingling with various ethnicities for centuries. In contrast, the opposing faction claims that Rohingya are a recent creation, primarily composed of illegal Bengalis from Chittagong who migrated to Burma during British colonial rule, and holds them responsible for their own crisis. Resolving the Rohingya crisis requires addressing immediate humanitarian needs, and therefore, centralized refugee camps based on the Assam (a northeastern state of India) detention model could potentially provide a sustainable and humane solution to the displaced Rohingya crisis and improve the current situation in Myanmar.

The data for this study were obtained primarily through secondary sources. The primary data were gathered through systematic personal interviews. The research questions of this study are: (1) How has the term 'Rohingya' been used historically and in contemporary contexts?, (2) What historical events have contributed to the ethnic conflict involving the Rohingya community?, and (3) What alternative solutions should be considered to address the needs of Rohingya refugees while improving Myanmar's reputation?

India's Approach Towards Refugees from Myanmar: An Analysis of Approaches and Factors Impacting Refugee Accommodation in the Country

Vignesh Ram Guruswamy

Abstract

India has been home to several persecuted minority communities from its neighbouring countries over the years. The continuous political instability and conflicts in the region has led many persecuted persons to seek shelter in the country. Myanmar has not been an exception. Over the years, India has received 74,600 refugees from Myanmar, out of which 54,100 have arrived after the coup of 2021. Most have sought refuge in India's northeastern states. Adding to the complexities, the Rohingya refugees who fled earlier are spread out throughout the country. India's approach towards handling of refugees takes on a complex dimension as it overlaps with ethnic and legal dimensions of administering laws in the country. Moreover, the growing complex nature of geopolitics in the region has also altered positions of India's policy towards Myanmar impacting how it deals with the actions of the military junta and its treatment of ethnic minorities.

While some have argued that India has been more than benevolent based on humanitarian reasons to accommodate the refugees, some allege that a harder line towards refugees indicates a growing pressure on the country to prioritize domestic and geopolitical considerations as opposed to larger humanitarian considerations. This paper argues that India, as a non-signatory to the UN's refugee convention, continues to support refugees from neighbouring countries including Myanmar. The paper explores the impact of domestic considerations, geopolitical interests, and international outlooks to determine how these factors have affected India's approach towards refugees from Myanmar over the years. The paper also specifically looks at the northeast region of the country and analyze the complexities in accommodating refugees there. Finally, the paper provides an analysis of India's Myanmar policy and seeks to explore if it can play a role in shaping a position in a post-conflict scenario in the country.

Exploring Educational Challenges: A Study of Myanmar CDM University Students in Mae Sot, Thailand

Wai Yan Linn, Nann Sat Naung, and Hayman Soe Nyunt

Abstract

On 1 February 2021, Myanmar experienced a military coup that has had a profound impact on the country's political and social landscape. The academic community at universities and state schools, including many teachers and staff, as well as other civil servants joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), refusing to cooperate with the junta. As a result of the ongoing political turmoil, the lives of many CDM staff, students, and supporters are under threat and many have been forced to flee the country in order to avoid being arrested by military authorities. However, these displaced persons face significant social and educational challenges related to residential documents and financial needs. For CDM students, although the Thai government has been attempting to fill the gap of education for migrant students from Myanmar, the current situation leaves them at risk of being marginalized and excluded from university-level education, which could have long-term impacts on their educational journeys.

This study investigates the educational challenges faced by Myanmar CDM university students in Mae Sot, Thailand. As research methodology, the authors utilize a quantitative method for conducting a descriptive statistics survey and a qualitative method for conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The study identifies the factors contributing to university students' challenges and proposes potential strategies to address them. The study's findings will be disseminated to relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, non governmental organizations, and community-based organizations to inform policy and programming decisions. Additionally, the study's recommendations could help improve the educational and social prospects of Myanmar CDM students in Thailand.

Rebel Governance of Gold Mining within the Tanintharyi Nature Reserve

Wai Yan Tun

Abstract

In 2005, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) collaborated with the energy company TOTAL to establish the Tanintharyi Nature Reserve (TNR). Located in the Tanintharyi Region, the TNR shares borders with Mon State and Thailand. The Karen National Union (KNU), an ethnic armed resistance group in Karen State, has contested the legitimacy of the TNR, with Brigade 4 claiming most of its area as its territory. Since 2019, a noticeable scale of mineral mining has occurred within the reserve area controlled by the KNU Brigade 4. Miners on-site comprise Karen ethnic groups as well as non-Karen groups, including Burmese, Tavoyan, and Mon individuals.

This research examines how KNU Brigade 4 has governed gold mining and both Karen and non-Karen communities within the mining site. The author argues that KNU Brigade 4 has employed the power of exclusion to govern the mining sites, granting privileges to miners closely associated with the KNU Brigade 4 while excluding certain Karen and non-Karen communities who have raised concerns about the negative impacts of mining activities. The mainstream literature on rebel society in Myanmar has primarily focused on the interaction between rebel elites and their grassroots. Through the lens of power exclusion, exploring the interaction between KNU Brigade 4 and non-Karen groups can broaden our understanding of rebel society in Myanmar.

The Lived Experiences of Myanmar's Displaced Former Civil Servants in the Civil Disobedience Movement in Mae Sot, Tak Province, Thailand

Wint Lae Aung

Abstract

This paper investigates the lived experiences of Myanmar's displaced former civil servants who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and currently reside in Mae Sot, Tak Province, Thailand. Subsequent to the 2021 military coup, these individuals, denoted as CDMers, encountered serious consequences for their resistance against the junta that led to their displacement.

This qualitative research is based on in-depth interviews of CDM former civil servants who have been dismissed, arrested, or forced into hiding. The preliminary data collection and field observations in Mae Sot expose the multifaceted challenges of these CDMers. It studies their struggles for survival in Mae Sot, where they face financial, political, and socio-cultural hardships, highlighting the impact of their illegal status on their ability to secure employment, their freedom of movement, and their basic human rights. The paper examines how CDMers navigate their precarious situations, including employment in low-income jobs irrelevant to their expertise and the continual threat of deportation, which could mean death.

The findings indicate that despite these adversities—including the loss of formal status and constant threats—the resilience and unwavering spirit of resistance among the CDMers continues even in the face of uncertainty and risk. This aligns with the literature on precarity, which focuses on the adopted negotiated strategies of individuals to deal with insecurity and vulnerability. The paper presents the first-hand experiences of Myanmar's former civil servants within insightful discussions on illegality, precarity, and political activism by integrating the literature review. It contributes to a deeper comprehension of how displaced populations reconstruct their identities and communities while coping with adversities. The study's conceptual framework provides a subtle approach to the emerging governance and civilian protection in challenged areas by focusing on the interplay of civil disobedience, displacement, and precarity.

Coming Together (or) Pushing Away: Challenges in Locating a Bamar State in the Proposed Federal Union

Yan Way

Abstract

Representatives of the major ethnic nationalities of Myanmar proposed in 1960 to form a federal union which would supposedly ensure national equality, self-administration, and self-determination for all ethnicities. As an integral part of their proposal, ethnic leaders urged the leaders of the Bamar majority to give up the role of central authority and to form Myanmar proper into a single 'Bamar State' so as to cooperate with ethnic states on an equal basis. The proposal was not welcomed by either those in power or the elite opposition Bamar political circle. Significantly, several generals of the Bamar-dominated military censured these ethnic leaders as “destroyers of the union,” a pretense for the 1962 coup. Ironically, while repudiating ethnic leaders' notions of forming a 'Bamar State,' they proceeded to divide Myanmar proper into seven divisions, placing them on equal footing with the seven states named for ethnic nationalities, together under a centralized unitary system. The generals continued to propagate the idea that federalism was an evil construct that would inevitably destroy the union, a campaign which undoubtedly shaped misconceptions towards the concept of federalism among the majority Bamar populous. The persistence of ethnic leaders towards their federal aspirations continued and became more prominent during the Spring Revolution. Notably, the call of ethnic leaders to form a 'Bamar State' with equal status to ethnic states as the foundation of a proposed federal union became louder than ever before. However, as this research seeks to grapple with, the Bamar majority, subjected to the rule of military regimes for nearly half a century, may yet not be ready to respond favorably to this call. This research makes sense of this ongoing debate and accounts for the challenge of locating a 'Bamar State'.

Appreciating Classical Chinese Poems in Zhubo: The Sino-Burmese Poetry Society in Cold War Myanmar

Yi Li

Abstract

This paper focuses on the post-war Sino-Burmese community through their own writings. After the independence of Myanmar in 1948, a group of Sino-Burmese ‘men of letters’ made collective effort to establish a distinctive communal identity at the time of national reconstruction and social realignment in early post-war Myanmar. Growing up in trilingual (Chinese, English, and Burmese) pre-war Burma, often of mixed ancestry, they were self-tasked with rebuilding their war-torn community through the pen. In particular, this paper traces the activities and writings of members of the Zhubo Poetry Society, whose literature endeavour was in the form of classic Chinese poems – a genre that requires special training in classic Chinese, a rarity among post-war Southeast Asian Chinese.

Representative members and selective works from the late 1940s to the 1960s are analysed to understand the social implication of this cultural experience, along with individual members’ communal aspirations and personal trajectories. Inevitably, this activity coincided with the 1962 military coup and the anti-Chinese riot of June 1967, the latter of which effectively brought an end to all communal initiatives.

Using literary works as primary sources, the paper explores the vulnerable yet lively Sino-Burmese community-building effort in the context of the regional Cold War, both in the group’s self-articulation on their tentative position in independent Myanmar as one of its groups of multi-ethnic citizens, and its aspired connection to the ancestral and cultural homeland of China, then under a newly established, potentially threatening Communist regime.

**Current Debate on Women, Peace, and Security in Myanmar:
Report from GenderLab Talk Series**

Zar Chi Htwe

Abstract

The speaker will introduce the GenderLab project, which has been established to provide a forum for activists, researchers, and other concerned people to discuss gender equality challenges in Myanmar's conflict situation. One recent series that GenderLab hosted was focused on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). The speaker will give highlights from the talks and the dialogues that followed, giving a firsthand account of the current debate on WPS in Myanmar. This will also serve as an introduction to discussion with the audience.

In the Shadow of Peace: Analyzing Violence in Non-Violent Civil Disobedience Movements in Burma

Zar Zar Win Thein

Abstract

The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) emerged as a pivotal force during Myanmar's Spring Revolution following the 2021 military coup, representing a broad cross-section of public services. CDMers, including those from health and education sectors, railway workers, foresters, and other civil servants, reject collaboration with the military junta and engage in nationwide nonviolent protests for democracy. Their primary aim is to express dissent against the military dictatorship without legitimizing it, embodying a commitment to democratic principles amidst repression and violence. The main challenge CDMers face is repression and violence, even though they joined a non-violent movement and have boycotted military products.

A multi-method approach is employed to examine the phenomenon of violence within the context of nonviolent civil disobedience movements. Media analysis scrutinizes how violence is portrayed in reliable media sources and local news through fact-checking. Additionally, interview surveys are conducted among participants of the CDM in Myanmar to gather qualitative data on their experiences, perceptions, and responses to violence. By combining these methods, a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding violence in nonviolent resistance movements aims to shed light on their implications for social change and peace-building efforts in Myanmar.

Key findings highlight significant challenges faced by CDM participants, including forced evictions, coercive repayments, and disregard for compensation requests. Amendments criminalizing dissent have resulted in widespread arrests, imprisonment, and travel restrictions, exacerbating socio-economic hardships. Moreover, CDM participants are barred from external employment, workplaces are shuttered, and individuals struggle to access housing and food, all violations of their human rights. These findings underscore the urgent need for international intervention to address systemic abuses in Myanmar and to advocate for socio-economic justice. Immediate action is imperative to uphold fundamental rights and support the well-being of those affected by civil disobedience movements amidst political upheaval.

No Place Like Home: Displaced Kachin People's Decisions to Return Home Amid Conflict

Zau Tu

Abstract

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kachin State have experienced continuous displacement since the resumption of conflict between the Myanmar military junta and the Kachin Independence Army in 2011. Even so, after 2011 but prior to the military coup of 2021, many IDPs were preparing to return from temporary camps to their villages of origin. Those that returned did so in the face of ongoing conflict and persistent security risks in those areas.

This research aims to comprehend the factors influencing these IDPs' decisions to return home, the challenges they encountered in their daily lives upon returning, and the central role their spiritual connection to home played in their return decisions. Exploring the complex motivations behind peoples' eagerness to return home after prolonged displacement in the face of security risks and a deteriorating political situation is crucial to better understanding people's decisions, which may otherwise appear ill-advised or unintelligible. By examining data generated from interviews with displaced people, human rights defenders, representatives of United Nations agencies, church leaders, and humanitarian organizations, it is revealed that older IDPs yearn to return home due to their many fond memories from times of peace. On the other hand, young people exhibit a stronger commitment to returning to rebuild their communities, demonstrating dedication to education and grassroots development. This paper contributes to our understanding of IDPs by highlighting the robust sense of belonging within returning communities, even in the face of threats. This sentiment is intricately tied to the desire to establish and maintain identity and to live with human dignity.

Myanmar Secondary School EFL Teachers' Perceptions of English Teaching Strategies During the Period of Curriculum Reform

Zaw Aung

Abstract

English language teaching in Myanmar has undergone substantial changes in recent years due to curriculum reforms and external socio-political events. Understanding the perspectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Myanmar secondary schools is crucial for improving teaching practices amidst these transformations. This research investigates the perceptions and experiences of EFL teachers regarding the employment of new teaching strategies as part of the implementation of the new national curriculum (2016–2024).

A mixed-methods approach was utilized for this research, involving 103 secondary English teachers from online federal schools in Myanmar. Quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were gathered via semi-structured interviews and observations. Quantitative analysis reveals teachers' adaptability and resilience, acknowledging the positive impact of curriculum changes on their teaching practices. Qualitative findings provide deeper insights into themes such as teacher collaboration, teaching methods, ongoing professional development, and technology integration. Experienced educators endorse diverse approaches and emphasize the importance of tailored support mechanisms. Despite challenges, teachers view curriculum changes as opportunities for growth and innovation. Additionally, younger educators have been observed to actively incorporate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in their teaching practices. Gender, experience, and teaching qualifications significantly influence perceptions, underscoring the need for personalized support systems. Collaborative environments, comprehensive professional development, resource management, and effective technology integration are identified as crucial for optimizing teaching practices amidst curriculum transformations.

Recommendations include ongoing evaluation and adaptation of teaching methods to align with evolving curriculum objectives and student needs, ultimately benefiting students, teachers, and school communities. This research contributes valuable insights to the dynamic landscape of English language teaching in Myanmar, offering practical guidance for educators and policymakers navigating curriculum reforms and promoting effective teaching strategies.

Bridging the Divide: Interim Higher Education Providers in Myanmar Amidst Turmoil

Zeyar Hein Htet and Chue Thinzar Win

Abstract

After General Min Aung Hlaing's military coup of 2021, Myanmar's higher education system worsened as a result of university lecturer and student participation in the Civil Disobedience Moment (CDM) to oppose the coup and the subsequent shuttering of internet access across the country. In April 2021, various interim councils and organizations began assisting university students' learning processes with the support of CDM teachers, researchers from both international and local universities, and the NUG government. Since that time, university students have had some opportunities to continue their education under the education systems of these organizations.

This study aims to explore the encountered struggles of the new education initiatives and to propose optimal solutions to overcoming the difficulties that can be useful for the education reform process after the revolutionary period. The purpose of this study is to identify the obstacles that newly established education initiatives encounter while attempting to provide quality education to university students post-coup, as well as to offer a roadmap to improve the sustainability of Myanmar's higher education sector in the long run with the support of interim education providers.

The research uses narrative methodology to gather the perspectives of administrators from different providers of interim education, with a primary focus on non-profit educational organizations that have emerged since the coup and have been providing online education. To achieve the research goal, primary data through structured, in-depth interviews has been collected from representatives of these organizations. In addition, secondary data gleaned from the reports of international organizations, NUG Ministry of Education reports, and other reliable sources is utilised. Based on the interviews of each representative, the research employs narrative analysis to explore the struggles and potential improvements of interim education providers in Myanmar.

Agency, Transformation, and Loss: Diverse Myanmar Women's Experiences of Displacement to Thailand and Mizoram

Abstract

Post-2021 coup, both Thailand and Mizoram (India) have seen an influx of refugees from Myanmar, joining previous waves of migrants and refugees. This paper explores how women of different ages, of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions, as well as women living with disabilities, have experienced and navigated displacement after the coup differently. It draws on multi-sited qualitative research consisting of 61 in-person and online in-depth interviews and 10 focus group discussions conducted with Myanmar women in Thailand and Mizoram in early 2024, as well as background expert interviews.

While not forgetting refugees' urgent needs and vulnerabilities, this paper focuses mainly on women's agency, their mutual informal support mechanisms, as well as care and social engagement. It highlights the differences and commonalities of how women of different identities and backgrounds navigate the challenges of forced displacement and conflict, and the role intersectional identities play in this. In doing so, the paper is also able to examine to what degree the Spring Revolution and displacement have – or have not – changed gender roles and norms, especially in terms of women's participation, the role of young women in society, and acceptance of persons who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Analyzing Social Media Engagement During Myanmar's Spring Revolution: The Influence of 'Operation 1027' on Citizen Political Participation

Abstract

Social media platforms have become essential for communication, particularly during politically charged events. This research examines the influence of 'Operation 1027' on the level of political participation exhibited by Myanmar citizens during the period known as the Spring Revolution, with a specific emphasis on the action taken on Facebook pages.

The study uses a mixed-method approach, incorporating content analysis, network analysis, and statistical tools, to investigate alterations in engagement measures before and during the procedure. The findings indicate a complex interplay between network dynamics, media alignments, and the impact of visual media and news content on engagement. After military operations, there is a noticeable rise in the level of interaction on media pages that are critical of the military. In contrast, media pages that support the military have relatively less engagement. The consistent pattern of video posts leading to increased engagement indicates changing viewing habits. Moreover, the data highlight the importance of accurate classification and in-depth analysis to clarify variations in engagement metrics. This study enhances comprehension of the complicated aspects of social media during politically fraught incidents and proposes directions for further investigation, such as examining the long-term effects and performing cross-cultural assessments.

Beyond Borders: An Analysis of Operational Challenges in Assisting Myanmar Refugees at the Karen-Thai Border After 2024

Abstract

The military coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2021 has resulted in a humanitarian crisis marked by extensive crime, mass displacement, and an urgent need for humanitarian aid, particularly along the Karen-Thai border, the situation of which has worsened in 2024. This research aims to analyze the operational challenges faced by humanitarian and civil society organizations (CSOs) in delivering aid to Myanmar refugees in the borderland. The study hypothesizes that these challenges are significantly influenced by political, economic, and logistical factors, necessitating a thorough investigation. With over a million internally displaced persons and an estimated 14 million requiring immediate aid even within Myanmar, the international community faces obstacles in providing assistance due to restrictions imposed by the military junta. Local CSOs operating along the Thai-Myanmar border have become crucial in delivering aid, yet encounter numerous operational difficulties impacting their effectiveness.

This study investigates how escalating armed conflicts in 2024 in the Myanmar-Thailand borderland exacerbate operational challenges faced by humanitarian aid workers. The research objectives include analyzing operational challenges, assessing CSOs' effectiveness, and proposing efficient techniques for aid delivery, frequencies, and destinations. Sub-questions also delve into financial restrictions, banking system hurdles, access limitations, bans on humanitarian work, and security challenges. A mixed-methods approach involving qualitative and quantitative analyses, including in-depth interviews with community workers from NGOs and CSOs, will be employed. The research's significance lies in informing humanitarian actions, influencing policy, and fostering collaboration for more efficient aid delivery to impacted refugees. Interview questions cover political, economic, operational, and manpower challenges. By addressing these issues, the research aims to contribute meaningfully to improving humanitarian assistance in the context of Myanmar crisis.

Challenges Encountered by LGBTQ+ Individuals in the Workplace: Analysis of Cases in Myanmar

Abstract

This paper investigates the numerous challenges encountered by LGBTQ+ individuals in Myanmar's workplace environments, with particular emphasis on the violation of their rights to work with freedom and equality in accordance with international human rights treaties. Additionally, it explores the key concepts and factors that contribute to the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community.

This research employs qualitative methods, including in-depth online interviews with 10 participants, a Google Forms survey with four participants, and a comprehensive review of relevant documents. The findings of this study show that the LGBTQ+ community in Myanmar has encountered significant workplace challenges, which not only cause difficulties in their daily work lives but also sometimes affect their loss of jobs and employment opportunities. They frequently face violations of their rights to work, including the freedom to choose employment, the principle of equal pay for equal work, entitlement to an appropriate working environment, safeguards against unemployment, and freedom of expression, as guaranteed under Article 19 and Article 23(1)(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the Myanmar government has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the absence of legal protections to safeguard the LGBTQ+ community in Myanmar from workplace discrimination and diminished employment opportunities contribute to these challenges. Similarly, the deeply rooted traditional customs and religious beliefs in Myanmar, as well as a significant lack of understanding of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE), have fostered a challenging workplace environment for this community. This research aims to highlight the factors that hinder LGBTQ+ individuals' equal opportunities, and to support the creation of more inclusive workplace environments for members of Myanmar's LGBTQ+ community.

Crisis Under the Coup: Gender-Based Discrimination, Violence, and Sexual Harassment Against Myanmar Women Media Professionals

Abstract

Women media professionals around the world face gender-based discrimination, gender-based violence, and sexual harassment. Following the coup in 2021, many women media professionals relocated from Myanmar to Thailand, specifically, Mae Sot and Chiang Mai. To date, there is limited research on gender-based discrimination, gender-based violence, and sexual harassment specifically targeting women in media in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot. The data that does exist has remained unpublished or with limited access.

This research uses a qualitative research methodology. Methods for this piece consist of targeted focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The focus group discussions consisted of 36 women and 20 men in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot. While this piece focuses on the experiences of women as the primary sources of data, men and members of the LGBTQ community provide important insights and perspectives through their personal experiences as witnesses to their female colleagues' experiences, and in obtaining diverse input addressing these problems. LGBTQ members were included because their sexual orientations and gender identity are often underrepresented in women-focused research. LGBTQ members participated in the groups they self-selected and felt most comfortable participating. Safety and security were of highest priority. Therefore, the study used purposive sampling to ensure respondents had the strongest fit for the study. Researchers then used snowball sampling to add additional focus group discussion members and key informant interview connections. The study is based on three research questions. First, what are the main forms of gender-based discrimination, gender-based violence, and sexual harassment experienced by women media professionals? Secondly, in confronting these challenges, what strategies do women media professionals use when facing these challenges? Thirdly, what are the current needs to overcome these challenges according to the interviews?

Dangerous Channels: Misinformation and Hate Speech on Telegram in Post-Coup Myanmar

Abstract

This study aims to raise awareness about the pernicious patterns of misinformation, malinformation, and hate speech that threaten Myanmar's digital landscape. It focuses on the spread of mis/disinformation and mal-information on pro-regime Telegram channels in Myanmar after the coup in 2021. Beyond posing a threat to digital safety and security for pro-democracy groups, these channels have alarming instances of hate speech and dangerous speech that generate real-world consequences. In the wake of the 2021 coup, the pro-military regime shifted its primary information channel from Facebook to alternate platforms, including Telegram, highlighting the adaptability of disinformation networks. Responding to this shift, the research analyzes data from five Telegram channels, with anonymization measures in place to protect personal information from other Telegram users. The research faced limitations in verifying incidents in areas with limited internet connectivity, and some pro-regime channels were removed during the process. Furthermore, language barriers hinder insights into Telegram content featuring non-Burmese speakers.

The findings reveal that malinformation is the dominant category on the pro-regime channels, at about 30% of analyzed content. The Telegram channels frequently advocate for retaliatory military action while omitting or denying certain events. Doxing incidents are prevalent, with the findings revealing 16 documented cases of Telegram doxing resulting in arrests. Interviews with fact-checkers and journalists shed light on the motivations behind spreading misinformation and the tactics employed by the State Administrative Council. The impact of mis/disinformation is evident in community trust, the economy, and social cohesion, leading to changes in public opinion. Doxing incidents have wide-ranging effects, from loss of property to loss of life and citizenship. Improving digital literacy, fact-checking, and monitoring efforts are essential to mitigate these issues. Telegram also needs to take part in greater responsibility by implementing policies on mis- and disinformation and hateful malinformation.

Disconnections and Vanishing Rights

Abstract

In the wake of the Myanmar military coup in 2021, the junta regime has used both short- and long-term internet outages to cut off communications among the public for political and control purposes. Certain regions and states have experienced internet blackouts since August 2021, while these regions have experienced phone line disconnection since mid-2022. These outages have been conducted for military purposes in some regions, while others have been impacted by delays in goods flow and fuel shortages due to restrictions on freedom of movement. Analysis reveals that mobile data and networks have been shut down in six states and regions of Myanmar by the military as of 2022. As a result, there is a lack of information flow and the ability to access and share information among the public in a timely manner, leading to a risk of misinformation. Furthermore, cutting off internet access has a significant impact on the nation's economy, education, health, and daily social life, resulting in job scarcity, rising commodity prices, and lack of access to education and public health services. This communication shutdown in Myanmar has also affected the ASEAN region's communication sector, disrupting the real-time information flow in the area.

Ethnicity, Territory, and Belonging Amidst Crisis in the Burma-India Borderlands: Issues and Challenges

Abstract

Along the India-Burma border, people in Myanmar's Chin State and those residing in the Manipur and Mizoram states of northeast India have shared experiences with colonization, conflict, and climate change. This paper focuses on the Chin people, better known as Chin-Kuki-Mizo in colonial vernacular, who are today predominantly found along the India-Burma border. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and intersecting histories, territories, conflicts, and displacements that have overwhelmed the India-Burma borderland.

This topic was chosen because following the 2023 ethnic conflict in India's Manipur state between Kuki and Meitei communities, the central government of India suspended the FMR and began installing fencing along the Indo-Burma border in February 2024. However, communities in Mizoram and Nagaland oppose the government's decision to fence the border and cancel the FMR with Myanmar. This research relies on secondary data. The author uses qualitative research approaches with a case study of Chin communities living along the India-Burma border. The objective of this study is to better understand issues of ethnicity, territory, and belonging amidst conflict in Chin State and how it impacted the Manipur crisis in India. Research questions focus on the factors leading to the central Indian government's suspension of the FMR and installation of fencing along the India-Burma border, as well as how the suspension of the FMR and the border fencing will affect Chin individuals' everyday lives, including displacement.

Examining Perceptions on the Level of Women's Participation in Decision-Making Roles in NUG and NUCC

Abstract

This research study delves into the underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles within the National Unity Government (NUG) and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) in Myanmar following the 2021 coup. Despite active participation in political movements, women continue to face barriers hindering their involvement in leadership positions. This study aims to explore the challenges and perspectives surrounding women's participation in these key political entities. The research methodology employs a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 10 participants to capture diverse viewpoints.

Findings from the study reveal persistent disparities in women's representation in leadership roles within the NUG and NUCC. Security concerns and transparency issues emerge as significant obstacles, particularly in urban areas where risks exist. The study emphasizes the importance of evaluating the qualified skills required for government positions to address gender disparities effectively. Discussions focus on themes such as security concerns, transparency, political background, accessibility, and institutional support influencing women's participation in leadership roles. The study underscores necessary and more transparent application processes, and enhanced security measures to foster inclusivity and to ensure the quality of applicants. While religious and cultural norms have a limited impact on women's participation, security and transparency remain critical for improvement.

Future research should focus on enhancing transparency and security measures to facilitate women's participation in political processes. The authors acknowledge limitations related to the sensitive political environment and emphasize the importance of safeguarding sensitive information. Overall, this research contributes to the discourse on women's political participation in post-coup Myanmar by addressing key challenges and perspectives. By promoting inclusivity, transparency, and quality evaluation in the application process, the study aims to pave the way for a more diverse and representative government.

From the Ground Up: Progress and Potential of Community Conservation Areas in Myanmar

Abstract

In Myanmar, community conservation areas (CCAs) represent a new initiative in natural resource management. Prior research on conservation in Myanmar has primarily focused on government-established protected areas. This study fills a critical gap by investigating the evolution of CCAs, different CCA initiatives, and their potential as a better pathway for area-based conservation given the current political unrest in Myanmar. In this context, the authors conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with a purposive sample of 21 key stakeholders, including ethnic conservation leaders, conservation professionals, and representatives of funding agencies actively supporting community conservation efforts.

The findings suggest a standardized approach to CCAs may not be optimal for Myanmar's geographically and culturally diverse landscape. The authors argue that localized strategies should be tailored to both indigenous territories and other areas throughout the country. Notably, indigenous communities advocate the formal recognition of their territories as Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs). However, the current lack of established ICCA categorization and limited focus on conservation outcomes within CCAs pose challenges. While policy discussions and advocacy regarding CCAs and ICCAs are robust, their on-the-ground implementation and comprehensive documentation remain limited. This research underscores the critical need for further studies to assess the effectiveness of CCA initiatives in achieving conservation goals. Such investigations would allow for a comparative analysis with existing government-established protected areas and national parks in Myanmar.

Internet Freedom Violations and the Impact of Internet Shutdowns in Myanmar

Abstract

This research paper examines the violation of internet freedom and the pervasive issue of internet shutdowns in Myanmar. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implications of these actions on human rights, democracy, and socio-political stability. Utilizing a multidimensional approach, this research combines qualitative analysis of case studies, reports, and interviews with stakeholders, alongside quantitative data on internet accessibility.

The qualitative analysis investigates the systematic violation of internet freedom in Myanmar, highlighting various tactics used by the military junta to stifle freedom of expression, access to information, and the right to assemble online. Additionally, it examines the consequences individuals and communities face due to internet restrictions, including the curtailment of civil liberties, suppression of dissent, and hindrance to economic development.

Furthermore, the research delves into the phenomenon of internet shutdowns in Myanmar, assessing their frequency, duration, and impact on society. It analyzes the underlying reasons for these shutdowns, ranging from political instability and social unrest to attempts to control information flow during critical events. The study investigates the immediate and long-term consequences of such shutdowns on businesses, education, healthcare, and human rights, particularly for marginalized communities and vulnerable groups. Through the integration of quantitative data, this research provides a comprehensive overview of the state of internet accessibility in Myanmar. It examines key indicators such as internet penetration rates, and availability of digital infrastructure. This quantitative analysis contextualizes the qualitative findings and sheds light on the situation's broader implications.

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of challenges faced by individuals, communities, and the democratic processes in Myanmar due to the violation of internet freedom and frequent internet shutdowns. The research aims to raise awareness among stakeholders about the urgent need for safeguarding internet freedom and access to information in Myanmar and similar contexts.

Kachin Education in Myanmar: A Case Study of Six Schools

Abstract

The educational landscape in Myanmar has been irrevocably disrupted as a result of the country's ongoing political crisis. The number of children currently out of school is unprecedented, with estimates ranging between 4 to 7.8 million missing an education. Education provision in the Myanmar context is provided by a myriad of actors—a tapestry which reflects diverse and multiethnic communities with pluralistic histories since independence from British colonialism in 1948. Ethnic education service providers support mother tongue-based multilingual education using curricula which includes the distinct cultural backgrounds and contextual realities of ethnic communities. Over the past 60 years these education providers have been forced to navigate protracted armed conflict, political unrest, and natural disasters to provide education to some of the hardest to reach children in Myanmar. Today, these ethnic education providers face new challenges, but they meet these challenges equipped with the knowledge, tools, and resilience learned through decades of disruption.

Through qualitative research with students, parents, teachers, school directors, and representatives of education organizations, this study documents the challenges that the Kachin education system has faced from 2020–present, the responses that have been implemented by various stakeholders, and the lessons that have been learned. The research identifies some of the core resilience capacities that have enabled educational continuity in the face of crises. A series of recommendations outlines how different stakeholders can support and strengthen the Kachin education system to remain resilient in the face of future adversity.

Karen Education in Myanmar: Challenges, Responses, and Resilience

Abstract

This qualitative study examines the resilience of Karen education during the period of 2020–present, identifying two major challenges: armed conflict and natural disasters. The study employed focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and child-friendly participatory-art methods to collect data from 105 respondents across six schools and six representatives of three education providers of Karen education institutions in the Karen National Union administration area.

Through data analysis, the study identifies two types of lessons learned. The first category highlights successes, including greater awareness of risk, dangers, and risk mitigation strategies; improved capacities to adapt teaching and training methods; the importance of flexible and effective institutions; decentralized decision-making; community involvement in decision-making; and collaboration and communication. The second category of lessons learned is drawn from challenges that could not be addressed. These include teacher shortages; safety and security concerns; socio-emotional support; accessing remote, rural and conflict-affected areas; challenges with PTA meetings; electricity challenges; communication with donors; supporting displacement; protection from natural disasters; and a lack of resources.

Despite the challenges faced, Karen ethnic education has demonstrated resilience and continues to provide education to the Karen community. These findings can inform policies and programs aimed at supporting and strengthening Karen ethnic education.

Kayan Region Education in Myanmar: Challenges, Responses, and Resilience

Abstract

This report reflects the efforts of Kayan New Generation Youth (KNGY) to document and better understand resilience in the Kayan education system in the hope of helping forge new paths forward. Research covering 2020–present was undertaken in the Kayan region through interviews and focus group discussions with a variety of education stakeholders. Faced with innumerable challenges, including school closures, lack of resources and teachers, increased financial burdens on parents and the community, and loss of motivation and hope on the part of students, local communities, teachers, and education service providers have demonstrated incredible resilience in keeping schools running and offering new education opportunities for children. The education Kayan children are able to receive in the future will, in part, be defined by how the lessons learned and resilience capacities documented in this report are drawn upon to strengthen the local education system, and increase both its sustainability and its ability to respond to the region’s diversity.

Manifestations of the Myanmar Spring Revolution in Poems (2021–2024)

Abstract

The Spring Revolution is the latest skirmish to contend with Myanmar's succession of military regimes. The entirety of Myanmar has been unilluminated since the latest military coup of 1st February 2021. Myanmar people nationwide, especially the younger generation, feel hopeless about their futures. As their dreams have been destroyed, they express their extreme antagonism toward the military junta by taking to the streets and raising three fingers. People who simply hunger for democracy have been dispatched brutally in various ways. Consequently, the tempo of the Spring Revolution has steadily increased step-by-step from demonstrations in the street to armed revolution and fighting back the 70 year-old so-called Myanmar Standard Army. The Spring Revolution has compelled some writers and normal people to become revolutionary poets. Some of these poets have been killed by the military junta, but their poems remain alive in the hearts of Myanmar revolutionaries.

This research focuses on how Myanmar's Spring Revolution is expressed in poems written between 2021-2024. In total, 106 poems by 22 poets have been collected and studied. The 22 poets are generally between 20 and 70 years old, and 20 continue writing today. Most of them are ethnic Bamar, but ethnic Karen and Mon writers are also included. Thematic analysis is applied and it is observed that the poems manifested during the Myanmar Spring Revolution can be categorized according to five common themes: a revolution of the people, strong determination of people, new trends of leadership, being a diverse society, and public to public. All poems are written in Burmese language except one is bilingual (Burmese and English). Each of the poems was translated into English and described as examples of their respective themes.

Mon Education in Myanmar: Challenges, Responses, and Resilience

Abstract

The Mon education system has formerly worked to support the education of Mon people in Myanmar for over 50 years. The Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) was founded in 1992 to formulate, implement, and advocate for education policies that benefit all Mon people. Throughout its long and proud history, the Mon education system has overcome many challenges in delivering community-based education to ensure children in Mon State have access to education. The events of 2020–present have resulted in multiple, overlapping challenges as a result of political instability.

Through qualitative research with 48 respondents including students, parents, teachers, school directors, and education organization representatives, this study documents the challenges that the Mon education system has faced from 2020–present, the responses implemented by various stakeholders, and the lessons that have been learned. Furthermore, the study identifies three core resilience capacities that have enabled educational continuity in the face of crises: trust and mutual understanding, teacher’s committed engagement to education, and parenting support for education. A series of recommendations outline how different stakeholders can support and strengthen the Mon education system to remain resilient in the face of future adversity.

Nonstate Higher Education in Myanmar in Hegemonic Perspective

Abstract

Higher education in Myanmar has mostly been associated with the central state system, but in the recent political conjuncture, new alternatives have sprung up, organised by both civil society and para-state regimes. To what extent do nonstate structures of education represent an alternative to state structures? This paper looks at the history of nonstate education through a critical lens that focuses simultaneously on the autonomy of these schools and how they relate to state power. In doing so, the author rejects the hegemonic idea of a state-centred approach, one that has seen nonstate education systems as intrinsically subordinate to the state. The growth of new higher education represents a tentative break with this hegemony, yet the author cautions that there are multiple angles to hegemonic power, including class and international elements.

Not Your Body, Not Your Business: Decoding Non-Consensual Pornography in Myanmar's Digital Space

Abstract

Non-consensual pornography has become a growing public concern worldwide. Myanmar is no exception: A growing number of groups, pages, accounts, and channels have sprouted up on Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and other platforms, publishing and sharing non-consensual pornography targeting hundreds of women and girls, from celebrities to ordinary women and teenage girls. However, this problem often goes unaddressed. Women and girls facing sexual violence and online harassment do not often seek help due to a culture of silence. Victims of non-consensual pornography in Myanmar hesitate to contact the police due to the complicated process for registering complaints at police stations. The 2021 coup exacerbated the problem. There is no effective rule of law or an independent judicial system that can protect the human rights of people in Myanmar. Moreover, women's rights and women's roles in Myanmar society have backslidened due to the military's long history of patriarchal oppression.

This research finds that institutional capacity to deal with the spread of non-consensual pornography is limited. Social media platforms have community standards but still need to improve enforcement and address some key challenges, especially in terms of respecting human rights. Civil society groups have raised the issue, but struggle to have an impact. The researchers suggest that it is a key issue in the struggle for human rights and women's rights. In seeing the issue through the lens of 'human rights' rather than personal privacy or digital literacy, this can help overcome the engrained culture of victim-blaming that prevents concerted action.

Online Terrorization: An Examination of the Myanmar Junta's Propaganda Tactics

Abstract

This paper examines the history of the propaganda ecosystem of the Myanmar military and how its online threats and tactics are currently operating. The first section includes an explanation of nationalism and ultranationalism in the context of Myanmar, military propaganda, elections, and the impact of foreign intervention. The second section features analysis of how the Myanmar military has strategically initiated online terrorization after the 2021 coup with disinformation, life threatening content, and coordinated strategies of information operations.

Policing Mobile Money Digital Financial Repression in Post-Coup Myanmar

Abstract

Mobile money and banking systems have become an integral part of daily life in post-pandemic Myanmar. However, following the military coup of February 2021, efforts have increased to monitor these transactions and seize the assets of those accused of supporting the resistance during Myanmar's ongoing armed conflict, often leading to arrests.

This research focuses on the military junta's regulation of mobile money usage, its impact on users, and the role of online financial systems, including mobile wallets, in facilitating state surveillance. This has contributed to the rise of techno-authoritarianism in Myanmar, with the military junta transitioning from traditional surveillance methods to a more encompassing strategy, targeting dominance in cyberspace. This shift includes cooperation with telecom companies and banks, significantly enhancing surveillance capabilities. The report also examines the emergence and viability of technologies such as encryption and social media, which play a critical role in the ongoing civil conflict and in bypassing repression techniques. Moreover, the research discusses the establishment of resilient and decentralized critical infrastructures in Myanmar to promote digital freedom. The research was conducted under repressive conditions, making interviews with key stakeholders such as legal experts and banking personnel challenging due to security concerns. Despite these difficulties, the results provide valuable insights into the struggle between techno-authoritarianism and techno-democracy in Myanmar.

Political Resilience and Resistance: The Role of the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team in Advancing Federal Democracy in Post-Coup Myanmar

Abstract

The military coup in Myanmar in 2021 caused a significant change to the political landscape, prompting widespread resistance and mobilization across the country. Amidst this turmoil, the Kachin community has risen as a powerful entity, leveraging its historical resilience and resistance tactics to confront the military junta. Central to their efforts is the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT), a strategic entity formed to advocate for Kachin political aspirations and the forging of federal democracy in Myanmar, fostering engagement with different key stakeholders.

Drawing upon the theories of resistance dynamics and resilience, this research examines the strategies employed by the Kachin community and KPICT to confront oppressive power structures and adapt in the face of political adversity. The study investigates the efficacy of KPICT in promoting federal democracy and resisting the military regime, engaging with various stakeholders including the shadow government, ethnic political coordination agents, civil society groups, and international actors. The research aims to provide significant insights into the complex dynamics of community agency, resilience, and political mobilization within the Kachin community and the political landscape of Myanmar. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative interviews, archival analysis, and field observations to comprehensively understand the KPICT's efficacy and influence. Ultimately, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering insights into the adaptive strategies of marginalized communities in the face of political adversity. This research highlights the resilience of the Kachin people and the significant contribution of grassroots initiatives such as KPICT in advancing the broader struggle for federal democracy and human rights in Myanmar.

Reporting Against the Odds: Digital Security Perceptions and Practices Among Journalists Active in Myanmar

Abstract

The 2021 military coup in Myanmar reignited a climate of pervasive fear, especially among journalists—a problem compounded by an environment where media freedom is already fragile. With digital platforms and technologies now essential to news reporting, journalists must remain vigilant of potential surveillance and control afforded through the internet. This paper examines the security practices of journalists working both within and outside Myanmar. The research finds that predominant threats and risks to journalists stem from low-tech surveillance and control. Furthermore, it proposes that a universal ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to security does not exist and that a holistic approach to security is critical. In addition to enhancing digital savviness, security training must be considered a need to safeguard physical and psychological well-being, implement organisational security protocols, and, most importantly, must actively involve journalists in the training design.

The Emerging Local Governance of Chin State in Myanmar

Abstract

The state of public administration in Chin State following the 2021 coup in Myanmar is characterized by a complex and volatile situation. The administration in Chin State is based on negotiated administration and remains in need of development according to governance and democratic principles. Thus, this research focuses on local management in Chin State post-2021 coup, yielding significant insights.

This research employs a qualitative methodology and includes fifteen key informants from townships and the regional administration of Chin State. As a result, Chin State local governance has pinpointed specific areas of administration, delineating township-based and region-based governance structures. Secondly, the study underscores the emergence of negotiated governance, with regional actors actively shaping a state-level governing body while seeking to understand prevailing political practices. For instance, the research delves into the structure of local administrative bodies, examining how local actors approach forming a state-level governing body. It also evaluates the effectiveness of public services in Chin State, aiming to enhance governance practices.

Furthermore, the study sheds light on the struggle for administrative power and reflects the dilemmas and challenges within the local governance process. Lastly, it addresses the dilemma of ethnic inclusion in administration, emphasizing the need for ethnic and tribal engagement to establish inclusive governance principles. These findings collectively offer valuable insights into the current state of governance in Chin State, highlighting challenges and opportunities associated with negotiated governance approaches in post-coup Myanmar.

The Impact of Militarized Masculinity on the Pro-Democracy Movement

Abstract

This research paper explores the relationship between militarized masculinity in digital spaces and online behaviors within resistance groups in Myanmar in the aftermath of the 2021 military coup. In response to the coup, various resistance groups and pro-democracy movements began using digital platforms as a tool for organizing peaceful protests, disseminating information, communicating in the field, and mobilizing support and fundraising from domestic and international sources. But there were negative aspects to the use of digital tools as well, as they came to be a site of harassment and violence reflecting offline realities.

Through comprehensive media monitoring, analysis of online content, and interviews with local resistance groups and gender experts, this study examines the concept of 'militarized masculinity' and how it influences online behaviors and narratives on the resistance side. With the rise of digital media and online activism, militarized masculinity has found new expressions within digital spaces, shaping narratives, images, and discourses surrounding the country's tumultuous political landscape. Using concepts common to gender, militarism, and digital media studies, this paper investigates the manifestations, implications, and consequences of militarized masculinity on activism and resistance efforts, as well as implications for social and political change. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between gender, power, and digital media in Myanmar's ongoing struggle for democracy and human rights.

The Nexus of Natural Resource Management and Federal Democracy in Myanmar

Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of natural resource management and the federal democracy framework of post-coup Myanmar. It delves into state formation, power distribution, resource sharing, and inter-ethnic relations within the context of constitutional developments. The country's history reflects a diverse, multi-ethnic society that agreed initially on peaceful coexistence and equitable power-sharing as outlined in the Panglong Agreement. However, ongoing power struggles, particularly with the Burman majority, have fueled the longest civil war in Myanmar's history. The coup on February 1, 2021, marked a significant shift in the political landscape, leading to the emergence of the National Unity Government (NUG) and a renewed focus on federal democracy. This research evaluates the allocation of powers and responsibilities concerning resource development under the federal democratic framework, assessing adherence to democratic principles and potential encroachments among various levels of government. It also examines the effectiveness of institutions tasked with resource management and the challenges they face. Ultimately, the study suggests that Myanmar's federalism presents challenges in realizing the full benefits of state sovereignty and interests within a federal democratic system.

Understanding the Roots of Discrimination Against Gender Diverse Youth in Myanmar

Abstract

Gender diverse youth (or LGBTQIA+ youth) in Myanmar face discrimination due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Most of the previous studies on this topic have tended to look at the discrimination that gender diverse people currently face, whilst this study looks further into the past to explore the reasons behind this discrimination. This study examines the root causes of the discrimination against gender diverse youth by exploring how the socio-cultural norms of Myanmar lead to discrimination and how those norms impact different sectors such as education and healthcare.

Online individual in-depth interviews with five gender diverse youths from Myanmar were undertaken along with interviews with other key informant groups of people including doctors, teachers, and a Buddhist monk. In addition, a public opinion survey was conducted with 86 in-person and online participants. This study finds that the forms of discrimination faced by gender diverse youth commonly results from religious, specifically Buddhist, beliefs interrelated with culture, and that youths are most discriminated against during their school years. The study concludes with recommendations focused on legal reform, building the capacity of teachers in order to protect gender diverse youths in middle and high schools, and the implementation of nationwide campaigns to increase knowledge and awareness of the harmful effects of discrimination against LGBTQIA+ youth.

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ABSTRACT BOOK

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