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ASSEMBLAGES OF THE FUTURE

rethinking communities after the state

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS A-H

2-4 AUGUST 2024
CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

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HENRY LUCE FOUNDATION

MUTUAL AID MYANMAR

KNOWLEDGE FOR DEMOCRACY MYANMAR K4DM

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4TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BURMA/MYANMAR STUDIES

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Volume 1: A-H

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4th International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies: "Assemblages of the Future: Rethinking Communities after the State"

PROCEEDINGS

Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD)

The International Conference on Burma Studies has been organized four times. The first International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies was held at Chiang Mai University in July 2015, focusing on the topic "Burma/Myanmar in Transition: Connectivity, Changes, and Challenges. The second ICBMS was held in 2018 at Mandalay University, co-hosted by Chiang Mai University. The third ICBMS, delayed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the February 2021 military coup, took place as a hybrid event in March 2021 at Chiang Mai University, under the theme "Myanmar/Burma in the Changing Southeast Asia Context. Finally, Chiang Mai University (CMU) hosted the fourth International Conference on Burma Studies (ICBMS4) from August 2 to 4, 2024, under the theme "Assemblages of the Future: Rethinking Communities after the State."

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Introduction

The 4th International Conference on Burma Studies (ICBMS4): "Assemblages of the Future: Rethinking Communities after the State"

The 4th International Conference on Burma Studies (ICBMS4), "Assemblages of the Future: Rethinking Communities after the State," was organized from August 2 to 4, 2024 at Chiang Mai University (CMU) by the Regional Center for Social Sciences and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, with support of The Henry Luce Foundation, Mutual Aid Myanmar, Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar, IDRC Canada, CDE, University Bern, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst and the Heinrich-Boell-Stiftung. The event served as a platform for intellectual debate and dialogue on post-coup Myanmar's evolving socio-political and cultural landscape, and facilitated policy talks with major regional and international partners regarding Myanmar's ongoing crises and future directions.

The overall conference theme, *"Assemblages of the Future,"* guided explorations related to the intricate and dynamic social, economic, and political realities arising in various contested spaces in Myanmar after the coup. With assemblage theory serving as an overarching theoretical framework to the specific fields, the event paid particular attention to grassroots dynamics and finding new "sites of possibility" inside seemingly disorderly settings. It focused on creating a deeper understanding of social complexity by analyzing how diverse elements unite to create fluid interconnected systems, evolving according to the situation. These assemblages include various constituents, including human and non-human elements, practices, and ideas, and create characteristics, behaviors, and agency within the network of relationships that cannot be attributed to individual components. By looking at creative ways in which diverse assemblages have responded to challenges amidst conflict and crises, the ICBMS 4 fostered reflections on Myanmar's future configurations beyond the state.

In various sessions, presenters and discussants explored a diverse range of themes, many of them through the lens of assemblage theory, reflecting the complexity and multifaceted nature of the current issues facing Myanmar, highlighting the interconnectedness of various factors and offering a more detailed understanding of the current realities. The sessions included the following themes:

Negotiating New Realities: Power, Practice, and Praxis

- Emergent Governance and Civilian Protection
- Multipolarity in a Contested Region
- Resilience and Localization in Service Provision: Education, Healthcare, and Religion
- Energy, Infrastructure, and Sustainable Development
- Identity, Territory, and Belonging amidst Conflict and Climate Change

Ethnicity and Territoriality

- Border Politics & Transnationalism

- Migration, Forced Displacement, and Refugees
- Livelihoods, Agriculture, and Food Systems
- Uncovering Lived Experiences and Marginalized Narratives

Nascent, Marginal, and Informal Economies

- Inequality and Empowerment
- Gender, Sexuality, and Power
- Civil Disobedience, Social Movements, and Everyday Life
- Remaking Knowledge and Finding Truth in Revolution

Discourses of Peace, Conflict, and Justice

- Propaganda, Media, and Information Landscapes
- Arts, Literature, and Popular Culture
- Research Ethics, Decolonization, and Methodological Challenges

Over the course of 3 days, the conference featured one keynote speech, 5 plenary sessions, 2 special lectures, 23 panels, 87 individual presentations, 19 roundtable discussions, 2 book releases, and 2 film screenings.

As one of the largest international conferences on Burma/Myanmar studies in the region attracted, the event attracted a total of 845 participants, 416 males and 429 females, from a wide range of backgrounds, including researchers, students, activists, and representatives from non-governmental organizations, civil society, and the media. The majority of them held Burmese nationality, many of whom ethnic minority groups, accounting for 64% of the total attendance. A total 200 speakers presented their work at the conference. Out of these, the majority (64%) came from Burma, followed by Thailand (11%). The high attendance rate of participants and presenters from Myanmar highlights the importance of the conference for regional dialogue, collaboration and scholarship.

Overall, the conference was highly appreciated by the participants for its organization, diverse participation, the quality of discussions, the opportunity to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, and to gain new insights into Burma/Myanmar studies. A number of challenges were faced in organizing the conference, primarily in relation to security concerns. Conference topics were largely related to conflict and war in post-coup Myanmar, and thus, sensitive in nature. It required measures and planning to ensure the safety of the attendees and contributors.

These proceedings, in total, 3 volumes containing 42 papers, capture the essence of some of the new research and ideas shared during the conference. In the three volumes of these proceedings, many contributing presenters and authors contributing have chosen to publish their work under pseudonyms. This reflects the ongoing threats and precarious situation facing researchers and scholars from Myanmar conducting research, which poses enormous risk for their personal and professional lives. The courage they take in continuing their work and in keeping the international community informed on the ongoing political crisis under such conditions is remarkable and inspiring.

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

Ar Mee Mar

Abstract

The crisis of Rohingya in Myanmar is one of the most severe human rights violations, leading to ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Over decades, Rohingya were brutally cracked down on in several waves of violence. In 2017 was the most significant crisis (Haar et al., 2019), with around 700,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh and 142,000 remaining as internally displaced persons (IDPs). They are living in the IDP camps like open-air prisons with various restrictions. The Rohingya IDPs must depend on humanitarian aid for their survival and livelihoods. However, the Cyclone Mocha added another layer of humanitarian crisis for them. The military also imposed travel restrictions on organizations to deliver emergency aid after Mocha. Denying access to humanitarian assistance is a human rights violation. This research uncovers the challenges of accessing humanitarian aid for Rohingya IDPs in Sittwe, Rakhine State, by applying a qualitative research method. Ten Rohingya IDPs from four camps were interviewed, and the findings confirm that the Rohingya IDPs received an alert and announcement about cyclone Mocha from the military, but did not get any support for the evacuation. Additionally, the lack of trust among Rohingya IDPs toward the military was one of the barriers to the evacuation. The Rohingya IDPs did not receive emergency humanitarian aid during the cyclone due to the restrictions imposed by the military. The humanitarian aid situation has even deteriorated after Mocha. Even six months after the disaster, most of the shelters have not been rebuilt or repaired, and Rohingya IDPs continue to face difficulties for several reasons, and they are still struggling with the challenges of humanitarian aid.

Keywords: IDPs, Rohingya, Mocha Cyclone, Humanitarian Aid

1. Introduction

Rohingya people have inhabited Myanmar for many years; they are identified as a minority Muslim indigenous group, and most live in Rakhine State. However, they have struggled with their fundamental human rights of citizenship based on the 1982 Citizenship Law. Although the Rohingya people demanded the right to citizenship since they identify themselves as Myanmar citizens, they are defined as illegal immigrants. Rohingya were excluded from society and treated as enemies of the Burmese majority because of their differences in language, religion, culture, and history (Shafiq, 2020). The 1982 citizenship law increased the number of stateless Rohingya people who were born in Myanmar (Burmese Rohingya Organization UK, 2014). Furthermore, Rohingya have experienced different kinds of discrimination due to various laws and policies aimed at isolating them. The Rohingya have been denied freedom of movement, social and economic rights, access to health care and education, freedom of religion, and the right to public participation for many decades (Amnesty International, 2020). The crisis facing the Rohingya in Myanmar is one of the most severe human rights violations, leading to ethnic cleansing and a crime against humanity. The 2017 crisis was one of the most significant. A group of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked and killed 12 members of Myanmar security forces on 24 August 2017. As a result, the Myanmar military began moving troops and equipment into the area to launch a violent campaign. However, the Myanmar military targeted Rohingya civilians in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung townships instead of armed groups (Haar et al., 2019). The Myanmar military cooperated in an ethnic cleansing campaign that targeted the Rohingya civilians, and severe human rights violations occurred in the Rakhine State. Rohingya were brutally cracked down on, mass killed, arbitrarily arrested, and their villages were set on fire.

Additionally, hundreds of Rohingya girls and women have been raped, gang-raped, and subjected to different forms of sexual violence and sexual harassment during the crisis. This persecution forced more than 700,000 Rohingya, including women, children, and men, to seek refuge and asylum in the neighboring country of Bangladesh. Thousands of Rohingya are still living in Rakhine State (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Rohingya people have been systematically displaced and forcibly relocated to the squalid camps in the capital city of Rakhine, Sittwe, since 2012. Rohingya people are brutally discriminated against, violently oppressed, and persecuted by the State. Rohingya are denied the right to citizenship and restricted their freedom of movement is restricted. They are essentially under house arrest, living in squalid open-air prison-like camps. Rohingya IDPs are systematically detained en masse without sufficient humanitarian aid for their livelihoods and movement. This increases the rate of malnutrition and health problems (ALJAZEERA, 2020). As a result, most of them are dependent on humanitarian aid for their survival from local and international donors, and they have become the most vulnerable and oppressed group.

On May 14, 2023, Cyclone Mocha struck Myanmar, particularly in the western region, and it was one of the most powerful storms in the country Cyclone Mocha also caused significant damage to infrastructure, including bridges, roads, public buildings, and homes. The most impacted areas

included Rakhine State, especially Sittwe, where thousands of Rohingya live. Mocha Cyclone devastated thousands of households, and the storm flooded farmlands and livestock. Additionally, the cyclone damaged key infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, communication lines, and roads (Regan & Watson, 2023). More than two million people, including Rohingya who have lived under inhuman movement restrictions in camps since the 2017 crackdown, were affected by the storm. Most of the housing in Rohingya displacement camps was destroyed by Cyclone Mocha, and around 400 people, including Rohingya, died, according reports from the ground. However, the military TV channel reported that just more than 100 people had been killed, and fewer damages were mentioned (ALJAZEERA, 2023). It is undeniable that the military sought to hide the casualties and damages of Mocha as well as deny the right to access humanitarian aid for affected communities in Rakhine State, especially Rohingya IDP communities through travel restriction. These restrictions delayed the distribution of relief items such as basic foods, hygiene kits, bamboo, and tarps for repairing buildings and shelters for affected communities (MSF, 2023). In addition, the donors and aid workers were required to report and request travel authorization from the State Administration Council (SAC) to deliver humanitarian assistance. This has led to a shortage of humanitarian aid, creating a crisis for hundreds of affected communities, especially Rohingya IDPs. Humanitarian actions must be human, neutral, impartial, and operationally independent during and after conflicts or natural disasters. The suffering of people must be addressed and relieved whenever it occurs. Humanitarian aid aims to save lives and health and restore personal dignity. Humanitarian action is based on the urgent need of the crisis without discrimination of religion, belief, nationality, gender, political opinion, or class. Humanitarian actors must avoid taking sides avoid taking sides in political, racial, religious, or ideological conflicts. Humanitarian actors must be independent without interference from politics, economics, or the military (OCHA, 2011). However, the military denied the right to humanitarian assistance after Mocha. Denying the right to access humanitarian assistance during and after a natural disaster is a human rights violation. Therefore, this study examines the situation and challenges of accessing humanitarian aid for Rohingya IDPs in Sittwe, Rakhine State. It explores the military's early warning measures within Rohingya IDP camps and the trust issues between the Rohingya people and the military.

2. Research Methodology

The qualitative research method was applied, with in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. Semi-structured interview questions were used to gather more information from the participants. Non-probability sampling methods were specifically chosen to select respondents, with the purposive and snowball sampling methods being used. The purposive sampling method was applied because the researcher chose the Rohingya camps in Sittwe. Then, the snowball sampling method was used to get the participants with the help of participants who met the research requirements. All the interviews were conducted through direct phone calls due to political instability, which prevented participants from accessing the internet during the data collection

period. Secondary data, such as the articles, journals, and academic papers published by different organizations, were reviewed.

The research areas were four Rohingya camps (Tha Chaung, Dapaing, Thet Kae Pin, Baw Du Ba) in Sittwe, Rakhine State. Sittwe is the most affected area by the Mocha Cyclone, and many Rohingya people have been affected. Most of the shelters for Rohingya displaced persons were devastated and destroyed by the cyclone. Ten participants, who are camp leaders and camp management team members, were interviewed. The selected participants provided detailed information about the camps, including the populations of IDPs, health care, shelters, basic foods, education, water, and sanitation because these participants take the role of camp coordination and monitoring the provision of assistance of the camps. Nine male participants and one female, all camp leaders, were involved in the camp management team[1]. The researcher hired a research assistant, a Rohingya youth, to contact relevant and possible participants and assist with some interviews. The research assistant played a key role in arranging the interviews, facilitating the engagement between the participants and the researcher, and ensuring the smooth flow of the research process[2].

2.1 Ethical Considerations

The researcher emphasized the "Do No Harm principle" research ethics for this research. Informed consent was obtained to record the interviews, take notes, and use the data from the discussions for this research. The personal information of the participants, such as name, age, and gender, will not be revealed to eliminate any risk of loss of privacy. The interview process was very flexible, and the participants had the right to withdraw and skip the questions if they were uncomfortable. The raw interview data will be kept confidential and secure for the security of the participants and researcher because the risk level is very high. For data analysis, the researcher used numbers or pseudonyms (A, B, C) instead of the participants' real names for their privacy and security. After the data analysis, the data was destroyed after the data analysis due to security concerns for participants and researchers.

2.2 Limitations

Political instability was one of the main limitations of this research, especially during the data collection process. The researcher planned to conduct interview through online platforms such as Zoom and Signal. However, the military shut down internet access in the research area; therefore, the researcher changed switched to conducting interviews via direct phone calls based on the

[1] The researcher believes the participants' gender does not affect the study results and findings, as this research focuses solely on accessing humanitarian aid and does not examine how gender affects this access.
[2] This included; contacting Rohingya youth from the research areas and explaining the objective of the research to get the participants; contacting the recommended participants, explaining the research background and objective, and then asking for informed consent for the interviews, as well as arranging the interview time and engagement between the participants and the researcher.

participants' request. For this reason, the researcher encountered challenges in trust building with the participants. According to the researcher's observation, some participants were uncomfortable and did not trust the researcher enough to openly share the actual situation and sensitive issues regarding the military. For example, some participants claimed that the military fully supported humanitarian assistance after Mocha, but when data was checked with other participants in the same camp, the flow of information was inconsistent. The researcher noticed the contradictory data that came out among the participants and decided to redesign the interview approach and flow of interview questions. After a two-day break, the researcher restarted with new approaches, such as informal conversations, and the participants were not asked questions one by one as in formal interviews. After that, the interviews went well, and the participants seemed more comfortable sharing the information.

3. Findings

3.1 Humanitarian Aid before Mocha

Insufficient humanitarian aid for Rohingya Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) before the Mocha Cyclone was one of the most significant challenges. The crisis of Rohingya in Myanmar is one of the most severe human rights violations, leading to ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Several waves of violence against Rohingya have occurred over decades, like in 1942, 1978, 1991, 1996, 2012, 2016 and 2017. The 2017 crisis was the most significant (Haar et al., 2019), when more than 700,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh. Around 142,000 Rohingya remained as IDPs, while Rohingya IDPs have been living in squalid camps since 2012. Rohingya IDPs cannot return to their original homes and the places they choose (UNHCR Refugee Agency, 2021). Living in the squalid camps for Rohingya amounts to systematical mass detention or house arrest in Sittwe Township, the capital of Rakhine State in the west of Myanmar. A male respondent from Thae Chaung Camp stated, "*We are restricted to go another place like we are in the jail and struggling with tremendous difficulties and challenges in the camp"* (Respondent A, November 5, 2023).

The Rohingya IDPs have become the most vulnerable group living in the camps and mainly depend on humanitarian aid for their livelihood. Based on the interviews, the World Food Program (WFP) is one of the leading organizations that has been providing regular humanitarian assistance, especially basic food, for Rohingya IDPs before the Mocha Cyclone. Other organizations such as Solidarity International, the International Rescue Committee, the Danish Refugee Council, and Save the Children have also supported essential foods, shelters, water, and sanitation by delivering hygiene kits and raising awareness. Nevertheless, since 2021, WFP has been delivering cash instead of basic foods. The cash is insufficient for the Rohingya to survive the whole month as they lack proper job opportunities in the camp or near the camps. A camp leader from the Baw Du Ba camp mentioned:

> *We have a population of more than 1500 in the camp. Only the World Food Program supports rice for IDPs, but there is no other humanitarian aid in the camp. They have not distributed*

> *basic foods since 2021 and deliver cash for the basic foods. It is difficult for the family to survive the whole month with that cash* (Respondent B, November 24, 2023).

Additionally, the findings of this research indicate that health care is another challenge for IDPs. Rohingya IDPs only have access to basic health care services, for instance, pregnant women and children, medicine for headaches, seasonal flu, and diarrhea, but these services do not cover other significant health care in the camp. It is challenging to get health care outside without freedom of movement. Rohingya IDPs have been living in poverty and facing discrimination for over a decade in the squalid IDP camps with various limitations in Sittwe. However, the Mocha Cyclone has added another wave of humanitarian crisis and intensified the vicious cycle of poverty for Rohingya IDPs.

3.2 Mocha Cyclone and Emergency Aids Crisis

On May 14, 2023, at around 1:30 PM, the extremely severe Cyclonic Storm Mocha began to hit Myanmar, especially in Rakhine State, including Sittwe. It was one of the most powerful storms in the country, and the most impacted areas were Sittwe and other parts of Rakhine State. As mentioned earlier, Mocha damaged infrastructure and affected more than two million people in its path, including Rohingya. Even though most of the housing in Rohingya IDP camps was destroyed, and around 400 people were killed, the military TV channel reported just over 100 death and fewer damages (Aljazeera, 2023). On May 13, 2023, the WFP announced that it had prepared enough food to support the needs of more than 400,000 people for one month in Rakhine state and its neighboring areas. Not only food for emergency response but also relief supplies such as vehicles and emergency relief equipment were prepositioned with its partner organizations (WFP, 2023). However, the military restricted travel to Rakhine State after Mocha. Humanitarian organizations need permission to travel for aid distribution, specifically to Mocha-affected communities. This delayed the delivery of assistance to affected communities, increased hunger, and heightened the risk to many lives. A respondent from Thet Kae Pin, the camp leader, stated in the interview:

> *The organizations were restricted and not allowed by State Administration Council to help Mocha affected communities so that they cannot provide and help us as soon as possible* (Respondent C, November 24, 2023).

The local media also reported that the Mocha-affected Rohingya IDPs from Sittwe are facing hunger and urgently need humanitarian aid. The United Nations and its partner organizations provided some assistance to Rohingya IDPs and the Rakhine people; however, they cannot effectively support them due to the requirement of permission from the military council (Western News, 2023), causing a humanitarian crisis for affected communities. Another participant from Thet Kae Pin camp highlighted the humanitarian situation after Mocha in the camp:

> *We did not get emergency humanitarian aid after Mocha, and we received it four or five days later. During those days, we tried to survive even though we did not have food to eat. The*

> *commodity price also suddenly increased. For example, we get goods with 100 kyats before the Mocha but suddenly increase to 500 or 600 kyats after the Mocha. Additionally, there was no drinking water because the sea level increased, and full of seawater in the camp. Therefore, drinking and using water was difficult because the seawater includes salt, which is not good for drinking and cooking* (Respondent D, November 24, 2023).

All Myanmar Muslim religious councils delivered rice, tarpaulin, drinking water, and some clothes to the Rohingya IDPs after a week of the Mocha. During the first week of Mocha, some IDPs did not have food to eat; therefore, some IDPs asked for help from relatives from abroad or other parts of Myanmar. On the other hand, the SAC pro-media reported that they delivered emergency humanitarian aid to the Mocha-affected communities. Nonetheless, the interviews evidently highlighted that SAC provided a very small amount of emergency aid to the Rohingya IDPs, such as one package of instant noodles, one piece of soap, four cups of rice, and tarpaulin per family. A participant from Dapaing camp stated:

> *They provided four or five big packages of rice for our camp, and it was difficult to cover all the households in the camp. Therefore, a family gets a small amount of rice, which is equal to four cans of milk. It did not reach the communities even though they said they provided emergency aid to Mocha-affected communities* (Respondent E, November 25, 2023).

Two or three weeks after Mocha, some NGOs delivered tarpaulins and basic foods, but the assistance was insufficient. The UNOCHA also reported that the organization delivered vital aid to the Mocha-affected communities despite humanitarian limitations and restrictions. UNOCHA delivered shelters and other essential relief materials in Rakhine and other regions. Almost 380,000 affected people received food aid, and only 12,500 received health care in Rakhine (UNCHOA, 2023). Nonetheless, the humanitarian crisis is ongoing for the Rohingya IDPs in Sittwe, including the challenge of rebuilding shelters.

3.3 Shelters after Mocha

Thousands of Rohingya have been living in temporary shelters, which makes it difficult to resist Mocha Cyclone in the IDP camp. Most shelters were destroyed due to the storm in the four IDP camps selected for this research. An official of Thae Kae Pin Rohingya IDP camps stated to Radio Free Asia that the Mocha destroyed all shelters in the camp. IDPs rebuilt the houses on their own, but only a few houses with minor damage could be rebuilt due to the higher price of zinc and other materials (RFA, 2023). The interview results of this study indicate that SAC instructed IDPs not to depend on help from donors or SAC to repair the shelters. Therefore, some IDPs covered the costs by pawning or selling their ration books. However, the repairs were primarily temporary due to financial constraints. For example, they could only rebuild one of the four walls and prioritized repairing roofs instead of floors. Some IDPs who have many children did not dare to mortgage their ration book because they were worried about daily survival. Therefore, some IDPs requested shelter help from the DRC and IRC, and the organizations provided temporary tarpaulins. A respondent from the Thae Chaung camp leader stated:

> *Almost all shelters were destroyed, especially the roofs in our camp. We renovated and rebuilt as much as we could, and no organizations have helped us with our shelters yet. Therefore, our IDP situation is very pitiful; we cannot sleep while it is raining, and the whole family members are sitting and waiting to stop raining at night. The roofs leak during the rainy season* (Respondent F, November 22, 2023).

Households with nine or ten family members cannot stretch their legs in the tiny room under a tarpaulin. At the time of the interview, it had been six months already since Mocha struck. Nevertheless, most shelters had not been rebuilt and repaired, and few had been completed. According to the report of Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF), the restrictions included food, personal hygiene products, and bamboo tarpaulins, which were much needed for the construction and repair of the shelters (MSF, 2023). Living in deteriorating conditions, especially in the rainy season, is a nightmare for the IDPs. Some respondents sadly mentioned that they could not sleep if the rain was heavy at night because the roof was leaking. They had to wait until the rain stopped. In the daytime, it was hot without an entire roof and wall; cooking was also difficult. In most cases, the roofs were destroyed, and other parts of the shelters were damaged. Some organizations had planned to rebuild the shelters before Mocha hit the camp, but this was not implemented. A respondent from Thet Kae Pin camp, who is a member of the camp management team, revealed:

> *For me, I couldn't renovate and rebuild my shelters, and now I am staying with my relatives. I don't have enough money for it. Compared with other people in the camp, I still have a regular salary because I am also working at the humanitarian organization, but I still can't do anything for shelter. So, you can imagine the difficulties of other people in the camp who are unemployed. Based on my observations and experiences, no organization has been helping rebuild the shelters. Maybe there is, but I haven't seen it yet; the organizations are building houses or shelters* (Respondent G, November 23, 2023).

The interview confirmed that nothing has progressed in the living conditions of Rohingya IDPs after Mocha, and it got even worse. One of the local media also reported the situation of the affected community in Rakhine State, and nothing has changed. Affected communities were still suffering from the rising price of goods after the cyclone, facing more difficulties in maintaining shelters and rebuilding houses. No organizations had yet provided assistance to rebuild the houses, even though the organizations promised to support the shelters. The military does not support the Mocha-affected communities. It is challenging to build a new shelter by themselves; therefore, no construction has yet started in the camp. On the other hand, IDPs are more worried about security, and the shelters are no longer safe (Mi Khine, 2023). Additionally, all water sources were damaged in the camp, causing various health issues, especially diarrhea. DRC and SI provided water supply, raised awareness, and distributed hygiene kits, but it did not cover all the IDPs.

3.4 Emergency Health Care after Mocha

Emergency health care services are crucial for injured people during and after Mocha. Many IDPs sustained major or minor injuries due to Mocha, but did not receive emergency health care, even

though the intensely injured IDPs. The clinic from the camp provided only primary and for only minor injuries. IDPs with serious injuries had to go to the nearest pharmacies and clinics on their own without any support. However, financial problems are among the main obstacles and challenges to accessing health care. Therefore, some asked for donations and help from their relatives, and some even sold their ration books to get treatment. A participant from Thae Chaung Camp stated:

> *13 IDPs were killed, including seven children out of 13, and a lot of people were injured due to Mocha. Honestly, there was no health care provided by organizations for the injured people. So, they must go to the nearest pharmacies and clinic for the health care on their own* (Respondent F, November 22, 2023).

The healthcare situation in the camp has not progressed since the time of the interviews for this research. The IDPs with major injuries are still suffering the consequences due to a lack of health care because of financial limitations. Furthermore, the restricted freedom of movement is also another challenge for accessing major health care outside the camp. A respondent from the Dapaing camp highlighted:

> *Our rights are being restricted by the state. If we want to go to another township, we must give money to the official. Therefore, we want citizenship because our ancestors have been living in Myanmar. Additionally, we want the same rights as other ethnicities and would like to live like a family with them. We urge to take action for 2017 genocide at the ICJ* (Respondent H, November 25, 2024).

According to this participant, Rohingya IDPs truly have a concern for justice and accountability crimes against humanity committed against the Rohingya in 2017 by the military junta in Rakhine State.

3.5. The Difference Humanitarian Aid before and after Mocha

The lives of Rohingya IDPs in the camp are getting worse and worse with the absence of sufficient humanitarian aid as well as the lack of proper job opportunities. Rohingya IDPs entirely depend on humanitarian aid for their livelihoods. However, the findings of this study confirm that the aid after Mocha was decreasing because of travel restrictions and political instability in Rakhine. During the interviews conducted for this research, the armed conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar military renewed in some parts of Rakhine. This renewed armed conflict has created challenges for support from local and international organizations, and delayed delivering aid. As a respondent from the Dapaing camp explained, *"It is not because local and international organizations are not capable of supporting us, and it is because of the armed conflict between AA and the military now"* (Respondent H, November 25, 2023).

Another quotidian challenge for Rohingya IDPs is the increase of commodity prices and inflation rates after Mocha in the camps. The aid is inadequate to purchase food for the family. When the participants mentioned humanitarian aid in the camps, all participants had serious concerns about

increasing commodity prices within and near the camps. As a result, living in the camps for Rohingya is compounding the quotidian challenges in their daily life. According to the interviews, the WFP increased the cash delivered for basic foods. Even though WFP provides 1,000 kyats of food per person as daily rate, the aid is insufficient because the commodity price is increasing daily. Therefore, most IDP families cannot eat meat even though they really want it. A respondent from the Dapaing camp stated:

Another daily challenge for Rohingya IDPs are the rising commodity prices and inflation rates after Mocha in the camps. The aid provided is inadequate to purchase food for the family. When the participants mentioned humanitarian aid in the camps, all expressed serious concerns about the increasing commodity prices within and near the camps. As a result, living in the camps has compounded the challenges in their daily lives. According to the interviews, the WFP increased the cash assistance for basic foods. Even though the WFP provided 1,000 kyats per person per day for food, this aid was insufficient because commodity prices were rising daily. Therefore, most IDP families could not eat meat. A respondent from the Dapaing camp stated:

> *We received 30,000 kyats for one person since November 2023. However, it is not enough to survive because the commodity price is double that before Mocha. For example, one big package of rice now has more than 100,000 kyats. We IDPs buy basic foods like rice, oil, and salt, and it is inadequate to cover the whole month because of increasing commodity prices. For example, we must pay 600 kyats for an egg in the camp. We do not have money even though we would like to have a meal with beef* (Respondent H, November 25, 2023).

These findings indicate that the humanitarian situation of Rohingya IDPs in the camps has deteriorated further after Mocha. While the Rohingya IDPs already suffered from various challenges and barriers, including inadequate humanitarian aid prior to Mocha, the cyclone added an additional layer of challenges and difficulties to their living conditions. The cyclone and the renewed armed conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) and the military have driven the Rohingya IDPs into a cycle of struggle and poverty. Escalating commodity prices have also contributed to increased hunger among the IDPs.

3.6 Early Warning and Trust Issue

Early warning and evacuation are critical steps in mitigating and reducing the risk of natural disasters. It includes disseminating information to the individual, society, and community and providing help to mitigate risks. At the same time, the interview revealed that they had lost trust in the military because of being oppressed and discriminated against for many years. On May 7, 2023, the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology of Myanmar announced that the Mocha could hit the country between May 9 and May 14, 2023. The military issued letters of warning within the military offices and departments to prevent and reduce the risk of the Mocha. The information was publicly available on social media (BBC, 2023). Then, most media continued posting early warnings about Mocha and ways to prepare. At the same time, local and international weather agencies reported that the Mocha was heading towards the Rakhine coast and Bangladesh,

and would cross from Sittwe into the country on May 14, 2023. The Mocha was expected to reach a stronger level on May 12, 2023. Civilians living in the pathway of Mocha were asked to prepare for must prepare for emergency supplies and medicines and keep an eye on the updated information on cyclones (RFA, 2023). The civilians started the evacuation process with the help of the AA, SAC, and local and international organizations in Rakhine State. The news and photos of the evacuation appeared on the pages of various local media. According to the AA spokesperson, they provided emergency materials, such as medicines and lifesaving jackets. They raised awareness of Mocha for those who do not want to move elsewhere.

More than 11,080 people from 21 villages have been successfully evacuated to safe places that were likely to be badly affected by the Mocha (Western News, 2023). However, Rohingya IDPs in Sittwe had challenges with the evacuation process. According to the interviews, all participants revealed that they got information about Mocha from the military to alert them and evacuate them to a safe place. Rohingya IDPs did not receive any help from SAC, such as transportation and a place to evacuate. Therefore, very few IDPs who had relatives outside of the camp evacuated. IDPs were evacuated to the Mocha shelter with the help of the DRC. On the other hand, the transportation fee also increased after Mocha was announced within Rakhine State. A participant from Thet Kae Pin camp stated:

> *SAC soldiers came and announced with loudspeakers in our camp that Mocha would come, so be alert and prepared for Mocha. However, they did not say anything about the evacuation process. The other camp SAC ordered moving to another place but did not provide any support for that, such as transportation and place. So, IDPs had to evacuate by themselves without any support, even disabled and old aged people. Therefore, very few IDPs move to their relatives in our camp. The rest of the IDPs left in the camp because we did not have money to evacuate the place* (Respondent G, November 23, 2023).

It is undeniable that the systematic displacement and forced relocation of Rohingya individuals in squalid camps led to increased fatalities and injuries during Mocha. One of the findings of this research highlights that decades of oppression and persecution have eroded the Rohingya IDP communities' trust in the state. This raised concerns that they may be forcibly relocated, and that the military would confiscate their properties if they evacuated like others. A participant from the Dapaing camp stated:

> *Most Rohingya IDPs did not evacuate because they were worried that if they did, their shelters and properties would be confiscated and occupied by SAC. Because our IDPs had experienced like this in the past* (Respondent H, November 25, 2023).

This fear is one of the factors that contributed to more Rohingya IDP fatalities and casualties during Mocha. Participants also shared their assumptions about why the military did not provide help with the evacuation process during the early warning period. A participant from Thae Chaung Camp said:

> *We believe that the military does not like our Rohingya people. The military would like to do ethnic cleaning for our Rohingya people. We Rohingya people were forcibly relocated to this camp in 2012, and before that, we had our own land and homes. The military restricted our Rohingya people without any right of citizenship even though we have proof of residence of residents in Myanmar. Therefore, we face challenges when traveling without any documents* (Respondent F, November 2023).

The findings of this study indicate the Rohingya IDP's lack of trust in the military institutions. Conversely, it is evident that a high level of trust between the community and government institutions is crucial for natural disaster protection and risk reduction. Trust between the community and authorities enhances residents' cooperation and participation in the evacuation process, and without trust, the community hesitates to follow the authorities' instructions.

4. Conclusion

The Rohingya IDPs face various challenges and difficulties in the squalid camps, including insufficient humanitarian aid, inadequate health care, and restricted freedom of movement. Thousands have been confined in Sittwe, Rakhine State, without sufficient aid since 2012. They have struggled with the impacts of various forms of oppression and persecution.

The Mocha Cyclone has compounded the existing challenges and added another layer to the vicious cycle of poverty. Rising commodity prices have placed an additional burden on the livelihoods of the IDPs. With regard to humanitarian aid, there has been no substantial change in the camp before and after the Mocha Cyclone. Furthermore, the renewed armed conflict between the AA and the military has imposed emergency and humanitarian relief restrictions after Mocha. One of the findings highlights that the Rohingya IDPs received no support or help for the prevention and evacuation during Mocha. Moving to designated places without help was impossible because they have been suffering the impacts of restrictions on freedom of movement. This situation leads Rohingya IDPs to be the most vulnerable group during the natural disaster. On the other hand, it is also evident that the Rohingya IDP community has lost trust in the military council, and thus, was reluctant to evacuate before Mocha.

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The Influence of Indic Languages on Burmese

Aung Myint Oo

Abstract

This article aims to examine the importance of Indic languages as part of the role of foreign languages in the development of the Burmese language. Burmese, with a documented history of one thousand years, bears the influence of foreign languages from its very first texts, particularly in its vocabulary. Foreign elements in Burmese are crucial indicators of language development and contact with other cultures. However, they also highlight the role of the Burmese language as a bridge between cultures, a testament to its unique cultural significance. This paper presents the influence of Indic languages on Burmese languages in two parts. Part 1 covers the period from early Myanmar's history to the end of the monarchy. Part 2 covers the period from the British colonial period to the present. In part 1, Pali and Sanskrit play a significant role in the influence of Indic languages on Burmese. In this section, influence via religion and influence via astrology are presented as the two primary sources of influence of the Indian language on the Burmese language. There are four main reasons for influence via religion: faith and belief, mindset and conduct, wisdom, and human affairs. Hindi and Hindustani languages play a significant role in part 2. The primary sources of these influences are divided into two categories: Influence due to food and influence due to social issues. This study presents the theory of language contact from sociolinguistics, based on historical linguistics.

Keywords: Burmese, Pali, Sanskrit, Hindi, Hindustani, Language Contact

Introduction

This study examines the profound historical significance of the influence of Indic languages on the Burmese language. India, a neighboring country sharing a border with Myanmar to the west, has contributed to linguistic, religious, cultural, and trade exchanges since the era of Myanmar Kings. Even before that, Mon was a significant player receiving Indian influence before Bagan. Indic languages have entered the Burmese language through these interactions. When the British colonized Myanmar and India, they incorporated Myanmar into the administrative framework of British India. During this period, the interactions between Indian and Burmese people increased, leading to more linguistic exchanges, a connection that is deeply rooted in history.

As a result, Indic vocabulary has become an integral part of the Burmese language. This comprehensive study is divided into two parts, covering the period from early Myanmar history

until the end of the monarchy and from the British colonial period to the present. It thoroughly explores the theory of language contact from sociolinguistics based on historical linguistics, offering a wealth of knowledge on the subject.

In this paper, Burmese words were written using the Burmese script, and the International Phonetic Alphabet was used to make Burmese words as close as possible to the original Burmese pronunciation. This choice of using different alphabets for representing Burmese words has significant implications for understanding the phonetic nuances and preserving the original pronunciation. Indic languages such as Pali, Sanskrit, Hindi, and Hindustani use the Romanized alphabet to describe words. The Myanmar-English Dictionary (2011), compiled and approved by the Myanmar Language Commission, is a reference used to describe Hindi and Hindustani sources in the Burmese language. It is important to note that some phonetic alphabet symbols have different pronunciations than their Romanized counterparts. For instance, the /j/ symbol represents the 'y' (y from yes) sound in the phonetic alphabet, whereas in the Roman alphabet, /j/ represents 'j' (j from joy). In our exploration of the sources of loanwords in Burmese from Sanskrit, Hindi, and Hindustani, we have made a concerted effort to present words from the original languages as accurately and respectfully as possible.

The IPA system for Burmese uses the pronouncing system that is mainly used in the academic field of Myanmar. Burmese is a tonal language, and there are generally four types of tones: falling tone, level tone, rising tone, and creaky tone. Tones are represented by the (̀) symbol above the vowel for falling tone, the (́) symbol above the vowel for rising tone, and the symbol (-ʔ) after the vowel for creaky tone. No symbol is used for level tone.

Part I

Delving into the early period of Burmese history, as detailed in the first part, we uncover the significant influence of Indic languages such as Pali and Sanskrit on the development of the Burmese language. Pali takes center stage in this narrative. However, it is worth noting that while Sanskrit may not be as widespread as Pali, it holds sway in certain specialized areas, particularly in the field of astronomy. The integration of Pali and Sanskrit vocabulary into the Burmese language has enriched it and is evident in modern contexts.

The name "Pali" is pronounced in Burmese as "ပါဠိ" /pa lì / and is defined in the Myanmar-English Dictionary as "Pali, the Prakrit language of the Buddhist Scriptures" (MED, 2011, p. 255). In Burmese, Buddhist teachings are referred to as "ပါဠိတော်" /pa lì dɔ/. In Burmese language, "တော်" /tɔ,dɔ/ is a word that complements another word with the meaning of greatness. Pali is called "ပါဠိတော်" /pa lì dɔ/ because it is a unique language related to the Buddha, and it is the Buddha's teaching in Pali. Burmese words derived from Pali are called "ပါဠိသက်" /pa lì θɛʔ/. In Burmese "သက်" /θɛʔ/ means derived.

The name "Sanskrit," originating from the classical Indic language "*sakkarota*," is pronounced in Burmese as သက္ကတ /θɛʔ kə tà/. The Burmese pronunciation သက္ကတ /θɛʔ kə tà/ is also thought to

have come via the Pali pronunciation 'Sakata', from the term "*sakkarota*." In Burmese, the /s/ sound in Pali and Sanskrit regularly changed to /θ/. For example, "*sādhu"* is pronounced as "သာဓု" /θa dù/. This transformation is consistent for many Pali and Sanskrit words incorporated into Burmese.

In common daily expressions in Burmese, many loan words from Pali and Sanskrit are found. This usually happens in other Southeast Asian languages as well. Pali and Sanskrit vocabulary in Burmese often relate to religious and cultural contexts. Common expressions and phrases in Burmese, like greetings and thank you notes, have roots in Pali and Sanskrit. For example, the Burmese greeting "မင်္ဂလာပါ" /mĩ gə la ba/, derives from the Pali word "*Maṅgala.*" The original Pali word is defined as auspicious, prosperous, lucky, and festive (Pali-English Dictionary, PED, 2009, p.570). The term "မင်္ဂလာ" /mĩ gə la/ retains its original Pali meaning in Burmese, as defined in the Myanmar-English Dictionary (2011). To bring auspiciousness upon meeting, the Burmese people greet "mĩ gə la ba" to each other. The definition of "မင်္ဂလာ" /mĩ gə la/, which is used in Myanmar, is described as "1. the source of prosperity, blessing; 2. anything auspicious, joyous, festive" (MED, 2011, p.350).

Another common term of expressing gratitude is expressed as "ကျေးဇူးတင်ပါတယ်" /tɕe: zu: tĩ ba dɛ/ and "ကျေးဇူးပါ" /tɕé zú ba/ in Burmese. According to the research decision of Burmese lexicographers of the Myanmar-English dictionary, 'ကျေးဇူး' /tɕé zú/ originates from the combination of Sanskrit "Kartajñata" and Pali "Kataññutā" (Myanmar Dictionary, 2022, p. 24). The term "*Kartajñata*" in Sanskrit means "thankfulness, gratitude," and the term "*Kataññuta*" in Pali means "gratefulness" (PED, 2009, p. 206). The definition of the term 'ကျေးဇူး' /tɕé zú/, which is used in Myanmar, means "1. good deeds for others; 2. benefit; 3. gratitude" (MED, 2011, pp.29, 30).

The terms such as "မင်္ဂလာ" /mĩ gə la/ (auspicious) and "ကျေးဇူး" /tɕé zú/ (gratitude), which are commonly used in Burmese daily life, have been influenced by Indic languages for over 900 years. These words entered the Burmese language due to the influence of Indic languages. These words can be seen in Burmese inscriptions dating back to the Bagan period. For example, in the "Rajakumar" Stone Inscription (AD, the year 1112), which is one of the earliest Burmese inscriptions, the term "မင်းကြီးကျေးဇူး"/mĩ́ ʤí tɕé zú/ (king's gratitude) is inscribed on lines 15-16. Similarly, in the "Daryakar Thar Thupharit" Stone Inscription (AD, the year 1253), the term "သွီဉ်ဥတ္တမင်ဂလာ" /θ khĩ ouʔ tàmĩ gə la/ (name of the lord) is written on line 17.

In examining the influence of Pali and Sanskrit on the Burmese language over the past 900 years, two primary influential sources are found;

1. Influence via religion

2. Influence via astrology

When Buddhism and astrology from India were brought to Myanmar, a linguistic impact was also made on the Burmese language. The terminologies associated with these two fields entered the

Burmese language, expanding beyond their original meanings. These terminologies are currently widely used in various aspects of daily life in Myanmar.

1.1. Influence via Religion

Buddhism plays a crucial role in the spread of Pali and Sanskrit words in the Burmese language. In the early periods when Buddhism from India reached Myanmar, Burmese people who believed in Buddhism, including monks and scholars of the king began studying Pali and Sanskrit as part of their religious learning. As a result, many Pali and Sanskrit words related to Buddhism entered the Burmese language.

Words introduced through religious contexts mainly relate to:

1. Faith and belief
2. Mindset and conduct
3. Wisdom
4. Human affairs

These terms have become integral parts of the Burmese language.

1.1.1. Faith and Belief

Regarding faith and belief, the Burmese use the Pali word "*Buddha*" as "ဗုဒ္ဓ" /bouʔ dà/ in the same way as in Pali. The teaching of the Buddha is referred to as "သာသနာ" /θa ðə na/, which derives from the Pali word "*Sāsana*." The original meaning of the Pali "*Sāsana*" is "order, message, teaching" (PED, 2019, p.738). As mentioned above, the original Pali /s/ sound is pronounced as /θ/ in Burmese. Most Burmese people's belief is in "ဗုဒ္ဓသာသနာ" /bouʔ dà θa ðə na/ (Buddhism).

Burmese people use the Pali word "Dhamma" as "ဓမ္မ" /dã mà/, preserving its original pronunciation. The meaning of "ဓမ္မ" /dã mà/ is "1. Dhamma, law; 2. Teaching of the Buddha" (MED, 2011, p. 219).

The Pali word '*Cetiya*' is adopted in Myanmar as 'ဇေတီ' /se ti/. The Pali' c'/ʧ/ sound is pronounced as /s/ in Burmese. The meaning of 'ဇေတီ' /se ti/ is "shrine, sacred depository; pagoda enshrining sacred object" (MED, 2011, p. 111). Heaven in Pali is "*Nibbana*", which Burmese adapts and uses as 'နိဗ္ဗာန်' /neiʔ bã/. Hell, the opposite of heaven, is "*Naraka*" in Pali and Sanskrit, which Burmese adapts through sound exchange and uses as 'ငရဲ' /ŋə jɛ́/.

In Pali and Sanskrit, '*Dhāna*' means donation or giving. The Burmese language adopts the Pali' *Dhāna*', which has a similar pronunciation as 'ဒါန' /da nà/ and the connotation of "charity; beneficence; alms-giving" (MED, 2011, p.209). Myanmar people consider 'ဒါန' /da nà/ as a meritorious act, which means '*Kusala*' in Pali. Burmese adopts the Pali' *Kusala*' and uses it as 'ကုသိုလ်' /kù ðo/ which means "virtuous action, merit" (MED, 2011, p.10).

Buddhist teachings often refer to 'one's actions' and 'the consequences of one's actions.' These concepts, known as '*Kamma*' in Pali and '*Karma*' [कर्म] in Sanskrit, are deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of Myanmar. The Burmese language, for instance, uses the Pali term '*Kamma*' as 'ကံ' /kã/, a word that is not just a linguistic term, but also a cultural symbol. The implication of 'ကံ'/kã/ in Myanmar society is significant, encompassing 'one's deed, word or thought which predetermines one's future' and 'luck, fortune, lot' (MED, 2011, p.12). This cultural significance is further reflected in the combination of 'ကံ' /kã/ with the Sanskrit form '*karma*' as "ကံ◌ကြမ္မာ" /kã.ʧə ma/ in Burmese, a testament to the rich cultural heritage of Myanmar.

1.1.2. Mindset and Conduct

As essential aspects of Buddhism, such as cultivating the mind, behavior, and effort in practice, are deeply ingrained in Myanmar's society, terminologies from the religion have permeated both religious texts and daily expressions. This widespread use underscores the pervasiveness of Buddhist influence in Myanmar.

Goodwill is an essential term in Buddhism as well as Myanmar's society. In Pali and Sanskrit, goodwill is referred to as "*Cetanā*" which is used in the Burmese as "စေတနာ" /se tə na/ with the connotation of "goodwill; good intention; benevolence" (MED, 2011, p.111). Similarly, the term "ကရုဏာ" /gə jù na/, which means "compassion; sympathy" (MED, 2011. p.5) is derived from the Pali and Sanskrit term "*Karuṇā*." The term "မေတ္တာ" /mjiʔ ta/ which means "love; kindness; affection; benevolence" (MED, 2011, pp. 355-356) originates from the Pali "*Mettā*."

Negative mindsets, such as "လောဘ" /lɔ bà/ (greed, avarice) and "ဒေါသ" /dɔ ðà/ (anger), originate from Pali language. The former means "*Lobha*," and the latter means "*Dosa*" in Pali. The term "မောဟ" /mɔ hà/ (ignorance) is derived from the Pali and Sanskrit word "*Moha*." The term "မာန" /ma nà/ (conceit, vanity, arrogance, pride) comes from the Pali and Sanskrit word "*Māna*," and the word "အာဃာတ" /a ga dà/ (grudge) derived from the Pali and Sanskrit word "*Āghāta*."

In Burmese society, a commonly used word is "သောက" /θɔ kà/, which means "anxiety; grief" (MED, 2011, p. 501) that is adapted from the Pali word "*Soka*." Similarly, another frequently used term for human life and existence, "ဒုက္ခ" /douʔ khà/ is directly adopted from the Pali word "*Dukkha*" "Dukkha" /douʔ khà/, which entered the Burmese language during the Pagan period, is widely used in today's everyday speech. When faced with something uncomfortable, it is common to say "douʔ khà bɛ̂/." The opposite of "ဒုက္ခ" /douʔ khà/ (suffering), "သုခ" /θù khà/ is also derived from the Pali and Sanskrit word "*Sukha*" The meaning of "သုခ" is "happiness; pleasure; delight" (MED, 2011, p. 497).

The following table provides an example list of other loanwords related to mindset and conduct derived from the Pali or Sanskrit language that came to the Burmese via religion.

Table 1: Examples of Pali or Sanskrit loanwords concern with mindset and conduct

Terminology in Burmese	**Terminology in Pali or Sanskrit**	**Meaning**
ကိလေသာ/kì le θa/	Pali - Kilesā	passion; lust; evil desire (MED, 2011, p. 9).
စရိုက် /zə jaiʔ/	Pali - Sārita	1 nature (inhabit or acquire); trait of character. 2 way of life (MED, 2011, p.104).
စာရိတ္တ /za jeiʔ tà/	Pali - Sāritta	moral character
စောဒက /sɔ də kà/	Pali - Sāritta	1 [Buddhist ecclesiastical law] (a) inquisitor; (b) charge; indictment. 2 argument (MED, 2011, p. 113).
ဆန္ဒ /shã dà/	Pali - Chanda	1 desire; wish. 2 opium; view (MED, 2011, p. 144).
တဏှာ /tə hna/	Pali - Taṇhā	desire; lust; excessive craving.
ပါရမီ /pa rə mi/	Pali - Pāramī	completeness, perfection, highest state (PED, 2019, p. 505).
မုဒိတာ /mù dì ta/	Pali - Muditā	rejoicing at somebody's success prosperity.
မစ္ဆရိယ /miʔ shə rì jà/	Pali - Macchariya	envy
ရာဂ /ja gà/	Pali - Rāga	strong desire; passion; lust.
ဝီရိယ /wi rì ja./	Sanskrit - Virya + Pali - Viriya	effort; endeavor; striving.
သတိ /θə di/	Pali - Sati	mindfulness; attentiveness; caution (warning word) (MED, 2011, p. 486).
သိက္ခာ /θeiʔ kha/	Pali - Sikkhā	dignity
အာသာ /a θa/	Pali - Āsā	desire
ဥပါဒန် /ù pa dã/	Pali - Upādāna	1 attachment; clinging to existence. 2 obsession. (MED, 2011, p. 486)
ဥပေက္ခာ/ù pɛʔ kha/	Pali - Upekkhā	detachment; indifference.
ဩဇာ /ɔ́ za/	Pali - Ojā	power; authority; influence.

There are many other adopted words to sample in this section. However, due to the limitations of the paper, it will continue in the next section.

1.1.3. Wisdom

The essence of Buddhism lies in "knowledge and wisdom." Attaining omniscient wisdom (Sabbaññuta-ñāṇa) is described as achieving Buddhahood. The term 'ဉာဏ်' /ɲã/ (knowledge) is derived from the Pali word 'Ñāṇa.' The original meaning of Pali 'Ñāṇa' is "knowledge, intelligence, insight, conviction, recognition" (PED, 2019, p. 323), but in Burmese, it is modified as 'ဉာဏ်' /ɲã/, which means "intellect; wisdom" (MED, 2011, p. 155). Another associated term with 'ဉာဏ်' /ɲã/ is 'ပညာ' /pjĩ ɲa/, which is directly derived from the Pali 'Paññā.' Pali 'Paññā' means "intelligence, comprising all the higher faculties of cognition, reason, wisdom, insight, knowledge, recognition" (PED, 2019, p. 435).

Regarding knowledge and wisdom, the word for 'arts' is used in Burmese as 'ဝိဇ္ဇာ' /wei? za/ (Pali - 'Vijjā'), 'science' as 'သိပ္ပံ' /θei? pã/ (Pali - 'Sippa'), and 'discipline' or 'subject' as 'ဗေဒ' /be dà/ (Pali - 'Veda'). All these terms are derived from the Pali language. The term for a teacher, 'ဆရာ' /shə ja/ originates from the Pali word 'Ācariya.' The Pali word 'Takkasila' is modified in Burmese as 'တက္ကသိုလ်' /tɛ? kə θo/, meaning "an institute of higher learning or university" (MED, 2011, p.175). The original meaning of Takkasila (तक्कसिल) is the name of a city famous in ancient India for teaching wisdom (Buddhism).

While the Pali word 'sutesana' is adopted in Burmese as 'သုတေသန' /θù te θə nà/ with the connotation of "research," a research scholar or researcher is used in Burmese as 'သုတေသီ' /θù te θi/ (MED, 2011, p.497).

1.1.4. Human Affairs

In terms of human affairs, many associated loan words are found in Burmese. The following table presents an example list of words from Pali or Sanskrit.

Table 2: Examples of Pali or Sanskrit loanwords concerned with human affairs

Terminology in Burmese	**Terminology in Pali or Sanskrit**	**Meaning**
သတ္တဝါ /θa? tə wa/	Sanskrit - Sattva	'Living being' or 'creature'
သတ္တ /θa? tà /	Pali - Satta	'Living being' or 'creature'
မနုဿ /mə nou? θà/	Pali - Manussa	Human
မနုဿဗေဒ /mə nou? θà be dà/	Pali – Manussa + Veda	Anthropology
ကိစ္စ /kei? sà/	Pali – Kicca	'Business' or 'work to be done'

ဇာတိ /za tì /	Pali – Jāti	'Conception' or 'native'
ဇရာ /zə ja/	Pali - Jarā	'Old age,' 'decrepitude,' or 'decay'
မရဏ /mə rə nà/	Pali - Marana	Death
ပုဂ္ဂိုလ် /pouʔ go/	Pali - Puggala	Person
အာဟာရ /ə ha jà/	Pali – Āhāya	'Food' or 'nourishment'
ကာမ /ka mà/	Pali – Kāma	'Sensual desire,' 'carnal desire,' 'lust,' or 'carnal knowledge'
ဘာသာ /ba ða/	Pali- Bāsā	Language
ဗျည်း /bjí /	Pali - Byañjana	Consonant
သရ /θa rà /	Pali - Sara	Vowel
အက္ခရာ /ɛʔ khə ja/	Pali - Akhara	'Letter of an alphabet' or 'alphabet'

Loanwords incorporated into Burmese through religion or Buddhism have been discussed. Pali has a significant influence on the Burmese through religious means. The above list includes only a few examples commonly used in Myanmar daily life.

Like the Burmese language, the influence of the Indian languages, such as Pali and Sanskrit for religious purposes, is found in other Southeast countries. An example is the word 'ဘာသာ' /ba ða/ (language) mentioned in the table above. In Burmese, the word 'ဘာသာ' /ba ða/ is derived from the Pali word 'bhāsā', also meaning "religion" in Burmese. In Sanskrit, also the term 'bhāsā' [भाषा] is used. Most Southeast Asian countries adopt words derived from Pali or Sanskrit for 'Language.' Historically, 'Bahasa' meaning 'language' in Malay and Indonesian, is derived from Sanskrit 'Bhāṣā' [भाषा], it may also reflect Pali influences. 'Pheasaa' [ភាសា] in Khmer is derived from the Pali "Bāsā." 'Basa' is used in the Javanese; 'Phasa' [ພາສາ] is used in Lao; 'Ṗhāsā' [ภาษา] is used in the Thai language is derived from Sanskrit 'Bhāṣā' [भाषा]. The shape of the Khmer word suggests Pali, while the modern Thai spelling indicates a Sanskrit origin. Indian languages such as 'Bhaśa' [भाषा] in Bengali, 'Bhāṣā' [भाषा] in Gujarati, 'Bhāṣā' [भाषा] in Hindi, 'Bhāṣā' [भाषा] in Marathi, 'Bhāśā' [भाषा] in Punjabi, 'Bhāṣa' [भाषा] in Telugu also use words derived from Pali and Sanskrit. Therefore, it assumed that Myanmar's linguistic landscape, dominated by Indic languages, is similar to that of other Southeast Asian countries.

Next, the influence of Indian languages on Burmese through astrology will be examined.

1.2. Influence via Astrology

India has been a country with advanced astrology since ancient times. The terminology from Indian astrology has dramatically influenced the Burmese language. Many astrological terms in Burmese related to celestial bodies, the cosmos, the Earth, and the natural environment are derived from Indian languages, particularly Pali and Sanskrit. Especially in this area, Sanskrit has a more significant influence than Pali.

1.2.1. Planets and Asterism

The following table presents the words related to planets and asterism that were adopted in Burmese from Pali and Sanskrit. Terms such as 'ကမ္ဘာ' /gə ba/ and 'လောက' /lɔ́ kà/ are commonly used in Myanmar.

Table 3: Examples of Pali or Sanskrit loanwords concerned with planets and asterism

Terminology in Burmese	Terminology in Pali or Sanskrit	Meaning
ဂြိုလ် /ʤo/	Sanskrit - *Grahah* [ग्रहः]	Planets of the solar system, e.g., Earth, Saturn, Neptune, Uranus, etc.
နက္ခတ် /nɛʔ khaʔ/	Pali - *Nakkhatta*	Stars, asterism, lunar mansion (of which there are twenty-seven)
နက္ခတ္တဗေဒ /nɛʔ khaʔ tà be dà/	Pali – *Nakkhatta* + *Veda*	Astronomy
တာရာ /ta ya/	Pali and Sanskrit - *Tāyā* [तारा]	Constellation
စကြဝဠာ /sɛʔ ʧa wə la/	Sanskrit – *Cakravāla* [ब्रह्माण्ड]	Universe
အာကာသ /a ka θà/	Pali - *Ākāsa*	Sky, space: The original meaning in Pali - "air; sky; atmosphere; space" (PED, 2019, p.107)
သမုဒ္ဒရာ /θə mouʔ də ja/	Combination of Sanskrit - *Samudra* [समुद्रं] and Pali - *Samudda*	Ocean
ကမ္ဘာ /gə ba/	Pali – Kappa (MED, 2011, p.23)	The earth, world, or aeon where humans live
လောက /lɔ́ kà/	Pali and Sanskrit- *Loka* [जगत्]	World; Original meaning- "space; open space; world" (PED, 2019, p.651)

1.2.2. Zodiac

The zodiac is vital in astrology. In Burmese, the zodiac is called 'ရာသီ' /ja ði/. The term 'ရာသီ' /ja ði/ is derived from Pali' *Rāsi*'. The meaning of 'ရာသီ' is defined as "1. any one of the twelve signs of the zodiac; 2. season; 3. month; 4. period" (MED, 2011, p.392). House of the zodiac is called'ရာသီခွင်' /ja ði gwĩ/. Signs of the zodiac is called 'ရာသီရုပ်' /ja ði jouʔ/. The 'ရာသီခွင်' /ja ði gwĩ/ (zodiac) is the place where the planets and stars gather according to the seasons. 'ရာသီရုပ်' /ja ði jouʔ/ (seasonal picture) refers to captivating visualizations of the cluster of stars that appear in the celestial sky according to the seasons. For instance, in the season of 'မိဿ' (Aries), the constellations in the sky are believed to resemble a sheep.

There are twelve signs of the zodiac.

The first Myanmar zodiac sign 'မိဿ' /meiʔ θà/ (Aries), is derived from the Sanskrit 'Meṣa' [मेष], which means sheep (MED, 2011, p. 359).

The second Myanmar zodiac sign 'ပြိဿ' /pjeiʔ θà/ (Taurus), is derived from Sanskrit 'Vṛṣabha' [वृषभ], which means bull (MED, 2011, p. 293).

The third Myanmar zodiac sign 'မေထုန်' /me thoũ/ (Gemini), is derived from Sanskrit 'Mithuna' [मथुन]. 'Mithuna' means 'male and female zodiac sign' (MED, 2011, p. 344).

The fourth Myanmar zodiac sign 'ကရ္ကဋ်' /kə rə kaʔ/ (Cancer), is derived from Sanskrit 'Karkaṭa' [कर्कटः] which means crab (MED, 2011, p. 5),

The fifth Myanmar zodiac sign 'သိဟ်' /θeĩ/ (Leo), is derived from Sanskrit 'Siṃha' [संहः], which means lion (MED, 2011, p. 524).

The sixth Myanmar zodiac sign 'ကန်' /kã/ (Virgo), is derived from Sanskrit 'Kanya' [कन्या] that means girl (MED, 2011, p. 19).

The seventh Myanmar zodiac sign 'တူ'/ tu/ (Libra), is derived from Sanskrit 'Tulā' [तुला]. 'Tulā' means 'man holding scales.'

The eighth Myanmar zodiac sign 'ဗြိစ္ဆာ' /bjeiʔ sha/ (Scorpio), is derived from Sanskrit 'Vṛścika' [वृश्चिका]. 'Vṛścika' means scorpion (MED, 2011, p. 318).

The ninth Myanmar zodiac sign 'ဓနု' /də nù/ (Sagittarius), is derived from Sanskrit 'Dhanu' [धनु]. 'Dhanu' means bow (MED, 2011, p. 217).

The tenth Myanmar zodiac sign, 'မကရ' /mə kə rà/ (Capricorn), is derived from Sanskrit 'Makara' [मकारः]. 'Makara' means Capricorn (MED, 2011, p. 334).

The eleventh Myanmar zodiac sign 'ကုံ' /koũ/ (Aquarius), is derived from the Sanskrit 'Kumba' [कुम्बः]. 'Kumba' means a pot-carrying man (MED, 2011, p. 24).

The final twelfth Myanmar zodiac sign 'မိန်' /meĩ/ (Pisces), is derived from Sanskrit 'Mīna' [मीन]. 'Mīna' means fish (MED, 2011, p. 357).

In the Myanmar Dictionary and the Myanmar-English Dictionary, the names of the 12 months of the Burmese zodiac are defined as names derived from the Sanskrit language, except for the name of the seventh month, "တူ" zodiac. The seventh month, "တူ" zodiac, is described as a word derived from Pali. However, in Sanskrit, the zodiac has the name '*Tula*' [तुला], meaning 'man holding scales,' which symbolizes fairness. As the author of this paper, with my expertise in linguistic and cultural studies, I propose to consider the "တူ" zodiac as a Sanskrit source, aligning it with the other 11 months.

The special occasion for Myanmar people, which is the New Year time or Water Festival, is called 'သင်္ကြန်' /θɪ̀ ʤã/ in Burmese. This term is derived from the Sanskrit word '*Saṁkrānti*' [संक्रान्तिः], which means an auspicious time of astrological transition. The term 'သင်္ကြန်' /θɪ̀ ʤã/ is the festival or the term which Myanmar people highly value and cherish.

1.2.3. Time, Period, or Age

Many words adopted from Pali or Sanskrit are found in Burmese regarding time, period, or age. The following table presents a collection of the terms associated with time, period, or age.

In Burmese, time, period, and age are called 'ကာလ' /ka là/. The Myanmar word 'ကာလ' is a direct adoption of '*Kāla*' [काल] from Pali and Sanskrit. Season, climate, and weather are called 'ဥတု' /ù dù/ in Myanmar. 'ဥတု' /ù dù/ is a direct adoption of the Pali word '*utu*'. Age, period, and era are called 'ခေတ်' /khiʔ/ in Burmese. 'ခေတ်' /khiʔ/ is derived from the Pali word '*Khetta*.' However, its meaning differs slightly from the original. While it is used in Burmese as a connotation to express "age, period, or era", the original Pali meaning is "a field, a plot of land, arable land, a site" (PED, 2019, p. 268).

In Burmese, the words used to express past, present, and future - 'အတိတ်' /ə teiʔ/, 'ပစ္စုပ္ပန်' /pjiʔ souʔ pã/, and 'အနာဂတ်' /ə na gaʔ/ respectively - are also derived from Pali and Sanskrit. The term 'အတိတ်' /ə teiʔ/ (the past) is derived from '*Atīta*' [अतीतः] in both Pali and Sanskrit. The term 'ပစ္စုပ္ပန်' /pjiʔ souʔ pã/ (the present), is derived from '*Paccuppanna*' in Pali. In Sanskrit, it is '*Pratyutpanna*' [उपस्थितः]. 'အနာဂတ်' /ə na gaʔ/ (the future) is derived from '*Anāgata*' [भविष्य] in both Pali and Sanskrit.

1.2.4. Hour, Clock, Watch, Time

Many terms related to time in Burmese are also taken from Pali or Sanskrit. In Burmese, the words 'clock, watch, timepiece, hour' is called 'နာရီ' /na ji/, which is derived from Sanskrit '*naḍīka*' [घटकः]. Sanskrit *naḍī* 'time unit of about 24 minutes', which in Mon and Burmese became 'hour', in Thai 'minute' (*naːtʰiː*). '*Naḍīka*' refers to a pipe or tube. In ancient India, people used a small device to measure time, which included a pipe called '*Naḍīka*' with careful markings at the bottom and a separate water pot of a specific size. This time-measuring device with the '*Naḍīka*' pipe was called '*Naḍīka*' in ancient Indian language. In Burmese language, "One clock" and "Two clock" are said as "တစ်နာရီ" /tə na ji/ and "နှစ်နာရီ" /hnə na ji/ respectively. Similarly, "One hour" and "Two hours" are also said as "တစ်နာရီ" /tə na ji/ and "နှစ်နာရီ" /hnə na ji/ in the Burmese language.

The Burmese terms for days except 'တနင်္ဂနွေ' /tə nḭ̀ gə nwe/ (Sunday) and 'တနလ်ာ' /tə nḭ̀ la/ (Monday) are derived from Sanskrit. Burmese scholars consider 'တနင်္ဂနွေ' /tə nḭ̀ gə nwe/ (Sunday) and 'တနလ်ာ' /tə nḭ̀ la/ (Monday) as authentic Burmese.

- 'အင်္ဂါ' /ĩ ga/ (Tuesday) from Sanskrit '*Aṅgāra*' [मङ्गलवा].
- 'ဗုဒ္ဓဟူး' /bouʔ də hú/ (Wednesday) from Sanskrit '*Budha*' [बुधा].
- 'ကြာသပတေး' /tɕa ðə bə dé/ (Thursday) from Sanskrit '*Bṛhaspati*' [बृहस्पति].
- 'သောကြာ' /θauʔ tɕa/ (Friday) from Sanskrit '*Śukra*'[शुक्र].
- 'စနေ' /sə ne/ (Saturday) from Sanskrit '*Śani*'[शनि].

These Sanskrit names are the names of planets in astrology.

This section presents the influence of Indic languages on astronomy, with Sanskrit having the most significant influence. Next, the influence of Indic languages from the colonial era up to the present will be discussed.

Part II

This part discusses the words that entered the Burmese language from the British colonial era to the present. Among the Indic languages, which influenced the Myanmar language, Hindi has the most significant impact, followed by Hindustani. The influence of other languages is minimal. The way Indic languages entered the Burmese language in this period is very different from the first period. In the first period, the entry of Pali and Sanskrit languages was deeply rooted in Buddhist literature and academics such as astrology, showcasing a profound cultural influence. In the second half, the influx of Indic languages, led by Hindi, was based on everyday speech. Since those languages were not introduced based on literature, these adopted words are not found much in Burmese literature and are only used in everyday speech.

India is a large country with a rich diversity of languages and ethnicities. Hindi is the native language of the Hindi people who initially settled in northern India. It is one of the official languages of modern India. According to India's 2011 census, Hindi speakers comprise 57.09% of the population. Among them, 43.63% speak Hindi as their mother tongue or first language (Wikipedia, n.d.). Therefore, Hindi is an official language of India and is widely used by the public. As Hindi is the most commonly used language in India, it is assumed that among Indian words that have entered the Burmese language since the colonial era, Hindi is the most numerous.

Hindustani, an Indo-Aryan language spoken in northern India and Pakistan, is the region's lingua franca. It is also known as Hindi-Urdu, covering both Hindi and Urdu. Today's Hindustani is believed to have been significantly influenced by English. There may be ideological differences in the distinction between Hindi and Hindustani in the Burmese language. This paper refers to the Myanmar-English Dictionary (2011) and the Myanmar Dictionary (2023), two authoritative

sources compiled by members of the Myanmar Language Commission established by the Myanmar government. In those dictionaries, Burmese scholars clearly distinguish between the Burmese language's controversial Hindu and Hindustani roots.

Two main sources of influence are found in studying the influence of Hindi and Hindustani on the Myanmar language since the colonial era. They are:

1. Influence related to food
2. Influence related to social matters

2.1. Influence Related to Food

After the arrival of Indians in Myanmar, '*Paratha*', a pancake-like Indian food, became popular. '*Paratha'* [पराठा] is a Hindi word which is adapted in Burmese as 'ပလာတာ' /pə la ta/ with a phonetic exchange This food is called 'Roti' in Thai from another Hindi word. Like 'Paratha', other Indian foods such as '*Naan*' [नान] (Indian flat bread), '*Puree*' [पूड़ी] (Indian fried pancake), and '*Chapati*' [पोळी] (deep-fried crisp flatbread) are also popular among Myanmar people, and these are available in many restaurants in Myanmar. Myanmar people call '*Naan*' as 'နံပြား' /nã pjá /, '*Puree*' as 'ပူရီ' /pu ri/, and '*Chapati*' as 'ချပါတီ' /ʧha pa ti/ using phonetic exchanges.

Similarly, many food-related words from Hindi have entered the Burmese language. The Hindi word '*Malai*' [मलाई], which means 'cream', is called 'မလိုင်' /mə laĩ/ in Burmese. The Hindi word '*Dahi*' [दही], which means 'milk curd', is called 'ဒိန်' /deĩ/ in Burmese. 'Yogurt' is called 'ဒိန်ချဉ်' /deĩ ʧʰĩ/ (literally 'sour curd'), and 'cheese' is called 'ဒိန်ခဲ' /deĩ khɛ́/ (literally 'solid curd') in Burmese.

Popular snacks in Myanmar such as 'ဟလဝါ' /ha lə wa/, 'နံကထိုင်' /nã kə thaĩ/, and 'ဖာလူဒါ' /pha lu da/ also originated of India. The names of these snacks are originally Hindi words that Myanmar people adapted with phonetic exchanges. More examples can be seen below.

- 'ဟလဝါ' /ha lə wa/, a sweet dish made of flour, butter, sugar, etc., adapted from the Hindi word '*Halva*' [हलवा],

- 'နံကထိုင်' /nã kə thaĩ/, a kind of Indian cake made of flour, sugar, and butter, adapted from the Hindi word '*Naankhatai*' [नानख़ताई],

- 'ဖာလူဒါ' /pha lu da/, a sweet milk drink served with ice cream, sago, etc.., adapted from the Hindi word '*Faluda*' [फालूदा].

In addition, common vegetable names in the Burmese language including 'အာလူး' /a lú/ (potato), 'ဂေါ်ဖီထုပ်' /gɔ phi thouʔ/ (cabbage), 'ဂေါ်ဖီပန်း' /gɔ phi pá̃/ (cauliflower), and 'ဂေါ်ရခါးသီး' /gɔ rə khá ðí/ (chayote) are borrowed from Hindi. The term 'အာလူး' /a lú/ is taken from the Hindi word '*Aaloo*' [आलू], which is derived from Sanskrit. The term 'ဂေါ်ဖီထုပ်' /gɔ phi thouʔ/ is a combination of the Hindi word 'Gobi' [गोबी] and the Burmese word 'ထုပ်' /thouʔ/ (bag). The term 'ဂေါ်ဖီပန်း' /gɔ phi pá̃/ is a combination of the Hindi word '*Gobi*' [गोबी] and the Burmese word 'ပန်း' /pá̃/ (flower). The term 'ဂေါ်ရခါးသီး' /gɔ rə khá ðí / is a combination of the Hindi word '*Gurkha*' [गोरखा]

and the Burmese word 'သီး' /θi:/ (fruit). These terms are widely used in everyday conversations in Myanmar.

Hindi words related to food that entered the Burmese language have been examined. Despite Hindi, Hindustani words also entered the Burmese language. Adopting Hindi and Hindustani words in the Burmese language may be controversial. However, this paper refers to the Myanmar dictionary and Myanmar-English diction approved by the Myanmar Language Commission to distinguish between Hindi and Hindustani. An Indian food, *'Samosa*,' a fried stuffed pastry, is a popular snack in Myanmar. The Hindustani word *'Samosa'* [समोसा] is adapted as 'စမူဆာ' /sə mu sha/ in Burmese. Likewise, another food that Myanmar people enjoy is '*Dosa*' [डोसा], a kind of Indian pancake. The Hindustani term '*Dosa*' is adapted as 'တိုဇွန်' /to ʥe/ in Burmese, which is a food available at various teashops in Myanmar.

'*Masala*', an Indian curry powder, has been presented in Myanmar since ancient times. '*Masala*' is a Hindustani word. Myanmar people pronounce the Hindustani word 'Masala' [मसाला] as 'မဆလာ' /mə shə la/, which is close to the original pronunciation. Since Myanmar people like to use '*Masala*' in their cooking, the word 'မဆလာ' /mə shə la/ has become a term that is commonly used in everyday conversation in Myanmar.

2.2. Influence Related to Social Matters

In the late 19th century, when the British colonized Myanmar and placed it under the administration of India, social interactions between Indians and Myanmar people increased. As a result, Indic language terms related to social matters, such as clothing, personal accessories, and social relationships, have greatly influenced the Burmese language.

In Burmese society, a tall person is called 'လန်ဘား' /lã bá/. The word 'လန်ဘား' /lã bá/ is not a Burmese word. The Hindi word "*Laamba*" [लाम्बा] is adopted. Burmese people do not like being called 'လန်ဘား' /lã bá/. Burmese call people 'ဂန်ဒူး' /gã dú/ who are masculine and lack courage. The word 'ဂန်ဒူး'/gã dú/ makes some people angry. The word 'ဂန်ဒူး' /gã dú/ is also not a Burmese word. The Hindi word "*Gaandoo*" [गांदू] has entered the social sphere of Myanmar.

Also concepts related to clothing and fashion from the Hindi language entered the Burmese language. Burmese people call eye shadow 'ကာချယ်' /ka tɕʰɛ/, which originated in the Hindi word '*Kaajal*' [काजल]. The outer garment worn by Indian women, '*Sari*' [साड़ी] in Hindi, has become a direct loan word in Burmese.

The upper garment of Burmese people, such as a shirt, jacket, or coat, is called 'အင်္ကျီ'/ʔĩʤi/, which is derived from the Hindi word '*Angiya*' [अंगया]. The lower garment worn by Burmese people is called 'လုံချည်' /loũ ʤi/, which is derived from the Hindi word '*Lungi*' [लुंगी]. The terms 'အင်္ကျီ' /ʔĩ ʤi/ and 'လုံချည်' /loũ ʤi/ are used daily in Myanmar.

Many Hindi loanwords can be found in everyday objects. The following table presents some examples.

Table 4: Examples of Hindi loanwords related to social matters

Terminology in Burmese	**Terminology in Hindi**	**Meaning**
ပန်ကာ /pã ka/	Pankha [पंखा]	fan
ဝရန်တာ /wə rã da/	Verandah [बरामदा]	veranda
ပိပါ /pi pa/	Pipa [पीपा]	large metal barrel
ပရဆေး /pə rə shé/	Pansari [पानसरर]	medicinal ingredients

In addition to Hindi, many terms from Hindustani have been adapted into Burmese. In Hindustani, a writing instrument or "pen" is called 'Kalam' [कलम]. Burmese people have adopted the Hindustani word 'Kalam' with a similar pronunciation as 'ကလောင်' /kə laũ/. 'ကလောင်' /kə laũ/ is a commonly used term in Burmese. '*Kalam*' is combined with Burmese words to create terms like 'ကလောင်အမည်' /kə laũ ə mi/ for "pen name," and 'ကလောင်ရှင်' /kə laũ ɕĩ/ for "author or writer."

The Hindustani word 'khaki' [खाक], which refers to a light yellowish-brown color, is called 'ကာကီ' /ka ki/ in Burmese. In Hindustani, a container or tank for water, oil, etc. is called '*Tanki*' [टंकी]. Burmese people use this term as 'တိုင်ကီ' /taĩ ki/.

During the colonial era, India and Myanmar were under the British rule. Indians called Britain '*Wilarat*' [वलायत], which is a Hindustani word. This term '*Wilarat*' entered Burmese with slight phonic adaption as 'ဘီလပ်' /bì laʔ/. The term 'ဘီလပ်' /bì laʔ/ has been commonly used since the colonial era. Based on 'ဘီလပ်' /bì laʔ/, Burmese people call products from Britain such as 'cement' as 'ဘီလပ်မြေ' /bì laʔ mje/, and aerated water' as 'ဘီလပ်ရည်' /bì laʔ je/. Another common term, 'ပိုက်ဆံ' /paiʔ shã/, is derived from the Hindi word '*Paisa*' [पैसा], which means 'money'. When Burmese people talk about 'money', they use a slightly modified pronunciation of the Hindi '*Paisa*' and say 'ပိုက်ဆံ' /paiʔ shã/. 'ပိုက်ဆံ' /paiʔ shã/ (money) is a very commonly used word in daily Burmese life. To say, "I have no money" in Burmese, one would say "ငါ့မှာ ပိုက်ဆံ မရှိဘူး" /ŋà hma paiʔ shã mə ɕì bu:/.

Hindi and Hindustani have greatly influenced Burmese words related to food and social matters. During British colonization, there were significant linguistic and social interactions between India and Myanmar.

Conclusion

The influence of Indic languages on the Burmese language has been analyzed in two parts. The first part covers the early history of Myanmar from the 'Bagan Era', when Burmese kings ruled, until the end of the Burmese monarchy with British colonization. The second part covers the period from the 'Colonial Era' to the present.

During the first period, Indian languages left a profound mark on the Burmese language in two crucial contexts: religion and astrology. Pali, a significant influence, shaped the religious aspect, while Sanskrit, another major player, influenced the astrological context. These Indic languages, particularly Pali, established a strong foothold in the Burmese language, enriching its classical and everyday literary and linguistic vocabulary.

In the second period, the adaptability of the Burmese language to the influence of Indic languages in the contexts of food and social affairs is a testament to the resilience of the language. In this period, Hindi, followed by Hindustani, had the most influence. The influx of Indic languages into this segment was based on linguistic contact in ethnic interactions, leading to a significant shift in everyday speech. Most of the adopted words in the second half were from Hindi languages, showcasing the language's resilience and ability to evolve and adapt.

Comparing the first and second periods, influence via religion was the most significant and crucial in the first period. Pali words that entered through religious contexts are still used in various realms of Burmese society up to the present. The Burmese language has become more prosperous and richer due to Pali words. Even though Pali holds the most significant position, loan words from other languages, such as Sanskrit, Hindi, and Hindustani, are still widely used in Myanmar today.

The linguistic influences of Indic languages were not confined to Myanmar. They also had a significant impact on other Southeast Asian countries, such as Thailand, to different extents, demonstrating the broader influence of this linguistic exchange. The loan words from Indic languages presented in this paper are mere examples. Researchers can further study this topic in Myanmar dictionaries, Myanmar-English dictionaries, and abridged Myanmar dictionaries.

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Abbreviation

MED: The Myanmar-English Dictionary

PED: The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary

References

Myanmar

ထင်၊ မောင်။ (၁၉၈၇)။ *မြန်မာဆယ့်နှစ်လအကြောင်း*။ ပါရမီစာပေ။

ထွန်းမြင့်၊ ဦး။(၁၉၆၈)။ *ပါဠိသက်ဝေါဟာရအဘိဓာန်*။ တက္ကသိုလ်များစာအုပ်ပြုစုထုတ်ဝေရေးကော်မတီ။

ဖေမောင်တင်၊ ဦး။ (၁၉၅၈)။ *ဘာသာလောကကျမ်း*။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံဘာသာပြန်စာပေအသင်း။

ဖိုးလတ်၊ ဦး။ (၁၉၅၆)။ *မြန်မာနေ့အမည်နှင့် နှစ်အမည်များ*။ ပညာနန္ဒပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။

မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့။(၁၉၇၉)။ *မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်အကျဉ်းချုပ်၊ အတွဲ ၃ ၊ ပ -ယ*။ ရန်ကုန်၊ မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့ဦးစီးဌာန။

မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့။(၁၉၈၀)။ *မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်အကျဉ်းချုပ်၊ အတွဲ ၄ ၊ ရ -ဋ*။ ရန်ကုန်၊ မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့ဦးစီးဌာန။

မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့။(၁၉၈၀)။ *မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်အကျဉ်းချုပ်၊ အတွဲ ၅ ၊ အ*။ ရန်ကုန်၊ မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့ဦးစီးဌာန။

မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့။ (၂၀၀၉)။ *စာကိုးအဘိဓာန်၊ အတွဲ(၁)*။ မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့ဦးစီးဌာန။

မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့။(၂၀၂၁)။ *မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်အကျဉ်းချုပ်၊ အတွဲ ၁၊ က-စ* ၊ ဒုတိယ။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတိုင်းရင်းသားဘာသာစကားဦးစီးဌာန။

မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့။ (၂၀၂၂)။ *ခရီးဆောင်မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်*၊ တတိယ။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတိုင်းရင်းသားဘာသာစကားဦးစီးဌာန။

မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့။ (၂၀၂၂)။ *မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်*၊ တတိယ။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတိုင်းရင်းသားဘာသာစကားဦးစီးဌာန။

မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့။(၂၀၂၃)။ *မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်အကျဉ်းချုပ်၊ အတွဲ ၂၊ ဆ-န* ၊ ဒုတိယ။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတိုင်းရင်းသားဘာသာစကားဦးစီးဌာန။

ဟုတ်စိန်၊ ဦး။ (၁၉၉၉)။ *ပဒတ္ထမဉ္ဇူသာ ခေါ် ပါဠိ-မြန်မာ အဘိဓာန်*။ သာသနာရေးဦးစီးဌာန။

ဟုတ်စိန်၊ ဦး။ (၂၀၀၇) ။ *အများသုံး မြန်မာ - အင်္ဂလိပ် - ပါဠိ အဘိဓာန်*။ မဉ္ဇူသကစာပေ။

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

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Abstract

This paper examines the violation of privacy rights following the 2021 coup in Myanmar. Before the coup, the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008, and the Law for Protection of Privacy and Security of Citizens, 2017, guaranteed privacy rights to a certain degree. However, the State Administration Council (SAC) suspended some provisions of these laws following the coup. The main objectives of this paper are to describe and analyze violations of the right to privacy in the aftermath of the coup in Myanmar. This study applies a qualitative methodology, making a case study of three groups: those affiliated with the Civil Disobedience Movement, professionals and non-professionals in Maharaungmay District, Mandalay. This study explores the challenges faced by individuals in Myanmar under the SAC government and analyzes how the right to privacy of individuals is being violated. It also suggests potential solutions to the challenges of protecting privacy faced by these individuals. This study engages with two elements linked to the right to privacy: first, freedom of movement, constrained by searches and seizures, surveillance using CCTV and home searches controlled by way of guest lists, and, second, freedom of speech restricted by surveillance systems, such as the monitoring of telecommunications and online activity. The research outlines the predominant ways in which the right to privacy is violated in Mandalay and potential solutions to protect peoples' rights.

Keywords: Right to Privacy, Myanmar Coup, Mandalay

[3] Independent Researcher

Introduction

The right to privacy is a fundamental human right. Hence, every government or state has the duty or obligation to protect the rights of its citizens. In Myanmar, the State Administration Council (SAC) seized state power on 1st February 2021 by declaring a state of emergency in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008. However, the SAC has been violating human rights, especially the right to privacy, since the coup of February 2021, with citizens facing daily violations (Patel, 2023). Routledge (2024) mentions that following the 2021 coup, Myanmar finds itself once more in a volatile situation: an unexpected and threatening confluence of events whose outcome can not be predicted, but whose twists and turns can be described and interpreted. Routledge (2024) describes that almost three years after the coup, the military and the forces resisting the current authorities remain locked in an existential battle for the soul of the country, while the state and economy are collapsing and millions of people face a deepening humanitarian emergency. Citizens express their dissent throughout the country, both online and otherwise. In order to control anti-SAC activities and monitor citizens' political dissent, the SAC has suspended some legal provisions relating to the protection of privacy and the security of citizens provided in the Law for Protection of Privacy and Security of Citizens, 2017 (The Privacy Law, 2017). Moreover, immediately after the coup in February 2021 the SAC amended some provisions of the Electronic Transaction Law, 2004, to allow authorities to arbitrarily access personal data in the name of stability, tranquility, and national security.

Myanmar citizens' right to privacy is threatened by the state's system of surveillance (Mandalay Free Press, 2023). This study seeks to understand the nature of individual rights relating to the right to privacy under international human rights law and Myanmar's national legal framework, while articulating the government's duties to protect and respect the right to privacy. At the same time, it shares the most common tools and strategies of the SAC that violate the right to privacy. In this way, this study aims to improve citizens' awareness of how to both travel safely and access online resources securely. This study seeks to describe and analyze violations relating to the right to privacy since the coup in Myanmar. It aims to explore the challenges faced by individuals in protecting their privacy, analyze how the right to privacy of individuals is being violated, and provide potential solutions to these challenges.

Research questions addressed by the study are:

- How has the right to privacy been violated under SAC?
- What are the challenges faced by individuals to protect their privacy rights?
- What can be potential solutions for the challenges?

1. Literature Review

There is a significant literature engaging with the concept of privacy and laws around it. Jude Cooleyle has stated that privacy is synonymous with the right to be let alone (cited in Thaorey, 2021), while Chowdhury (2021) has pointed out that "privacy is something that does not interfere with other interests." Albakjaji and Kasabi (2021) have reported that one challenge is that the concept of privacy does not seem to have a uniform definition and is not accorded a straightforward legal treatment. Kuehl (2022) has stated that there is a connection or relationship between digital rights and privacy, and that connection needs to expand. Stepanovi (2014) has argued that the concept of privacy in International Human Rights Law needs to be reconsidered because there exists no precise definition of privacy. Floridi (2016) suggests that the protection of privacy should be based directly on the protection of human dignity. Kampmark (2014) mentioned that the march of technology has increased opportunities for state surveillance and interventions into individuals' private communications and, as a result, states are able to gather evidence to prosecute serious crimes and forestall national security emergencies. Hunter (1999) asserted that privacy rights and free speech rights are mutually interdependent.

Al Mukarramah (2021) described that the coup is considered a breach of international humanitarian and human rights law, prompting calls for international intervention. Calderaro (2015) stated that these events occur against the backdrop of Myanmar's ongoing telecommunications infrastructure development and related policy frameworks. While efforts have been made to build internet governance capacity with consideration for digital rights, including privacy and freedom of expression, the recent political upheaval threatens to undermine these initiatives.

Stepanovic (2014) proposes a solution to the conflict between privacy and security, in terms of ensuring security while at the same time minimizing violations of privacy. Payal Thaorey (2021) discusses how if CCTV cameras and other surveillance devices are present in all the public spaces to monitor, record and store people's information for public security, this would negatively affect people's right to privacy. Binoy Kampmark (2014) has noted State obligations to protect the right to privacy under Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as a positive obligation of the State not to invade a person's privacy, to adopt legislative and other measures to give effect to the prohibition against any interference or attack on this right. Richards (1936) explains that surveillance is harmful to the exercise of civil liberties and negatively impacts the power dynamic between the watcher and the watched.

The right to privacy is one of the fundamental human rights enshrined in International Human Rights Law, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and ICCPR. Thus, every state has the duty to protect the right of its citizens to privacy. Section 357 of the Myanmar Constitution commits to protect the security of citizens' home, property and communications. Moreover, the right to privacy is protected by the Privacy Law, 2017. However, the SAC suspended Sections 5, 7 and 8 of the Privacy Law following the coup, totally contrary to the

guarantee of the right to privacy in the 2008 Constitution. As a result of the suspension of these sections, the government has the right to enter a citizen's home to search without witnesses and to seize property, and intercept or disturb any citizen's communications. Citizens have lost their privacy rights, freedom of speech, and freedom of movement due to the suspension of these sections. Citizens' fundamental rights, as asserted in the Constitution, have been lost and the SAC government has failed to protect and safeguard these rights.

It can additionally be assumed that this is a direct violation of the right to privacy of citizens, interfering as it does with their rights to free movement, and to freedom of expression. Moreover, citizens also lost the rights prescribed in the ICCPR, although Myanmar has not signed the ICCPR. Privacy rights are not absolute rights according to Article 4 (1) of the ICCPR but an individual's right to privacy has to be protected by every government according to Article 17 of the ICCPR. In addition, no one has the right to interfere arbitrarily with a person's privacy, family matters, home or correspondence. Hence, a state has the duty to protect such rights of its citizens. However, the SAC has suspended and continuously violated privacy rights. Since the coup in Myanmar, authorities have arrested Facebook users who posted anti-regime content on the basis of an alleged intent to threaten national stability through their social media activity (Burma Human Rights Report, 2022, p. 21).

2. Methodology

This research used a case study approach and qualitative methods, engaging with both primary and secondary sources. It collected secondary data from reports, books, articles and media reports to create the literature review. To answer the research questions, 27 interviews were conducted with key informants from Mandalay. The choice of Mandalay, one of Myanmar's largest cities, as the research site was driven by the fact that Mandalay was a focus after the coup for security forces to check and stop vehicles and examine mobile phones and the data they contained (Mandalay Free Press, 2023).

The site for this research was Maharaungmyay district, which includes Chanayetharzan, Mahaaungmyay, Chanmyatharsiand Pyigyithagon Townships in Mandalay Town. Maharaungmyay district is the downtown area of Mandalay and violations of the right to privacy have been most frequent in this area (People's Spring, 2023). Every street corner was manned by police officers and other security agents, and many arrests were made. Mandalay is the third-largest population region according to the 2014 census report; a 2007 estimate by the UN puts Mandalay's population at nearly 1 million. Mandalay is connected with the Sagaing Division, Shan State and Magway Division, which have been conflict areas since early 2021, which has driven the SAC to monitor the entrance and exit from the city and the downtown area of Mandalay Division for security reasons.

This study uses semi-structured and structured questions in interviews with lawyers, teachers who are a part of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), jade brokers and shopkeepers (both online and physical) in Mandalay, seeking to understand participants' experiences and challenges faced

whenever they went out in Mandalay since the coup. Participants were selected based on snowball sampling from different types of professionals. A total of 27 interviews were conducted: 19 men and 8 women, who were from three different groups; CDM activists who were all active in opposing the SAC regime, including 8teachers and a nurse; a group of 5 lawyers and 13 non-professionals comprising 4 jade brokers, 4 shopkeepers, a company staff member, an English language teacher, a photographer, an IT manager and an NGO supervisor. All respondents had lived in Mandalay for at least 5 to 10 years and were purposively chosen because most were frequently targets of checks by SAC's forces, including their data and phones when they went out. Some of these were interviewed online and others in person. The interview questions focused on their occupation, and the challenges and difficulties they faced and their feelings when they were checked by security officers.

There was a clear potential security risk for both interviewees and the researcher in data collection and it was necessary to ensure that interview question papers and answers were not accessed by any security agent. Special arrangements were made for interviews, which were made face to face in a secure location. Some were done using Google forms but none was made by phone due to security concerns. Interviews were made by a team of two, with a research assistant taking notes during the interview. Given the potential security threats to interviewees, extreme care was taken to ensure data were kept securely and could not compromise respondents. After interviews, data were securely stored and once data was digitized, all notes were burnt. Names of respondents were anonymized with pseudonyms and data were only accessed by the mentor and co-mentor of the research. When data were collected online, they were kept in a University Google Drive, and stored data included only those elements relevant to research questions and objectives. Data from interviewees were pasted from the Google Drive to a memory stick and after all data were transferred, data in the Google Drive were destroyed. The interview data on the memory stick were destroyed only when the research paper was published and deleted after publishing the research paper.

The data were subject to thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were read and re-read, and then organized systematically. The significance of the theme search and the significance of the theme were characterized. The theme was then reviewed, modified and developed from preliminary data, which was identified in the next step. Finally, themes were refined and the findings written up (Maguire & Brid, 2017).

3. Legal Analysis

Denysov and Falalieieva (2020) mention that derogation from human rights obligations requires compliance with specific conditions and procedures as outlined in treaties like the ICCPR and ECHR. Milanović (2014) states that the possibility of extraterritorial derogations has been debated, with some arguing they are permissible and potentially necessary for the effective application of human rights treaties beyond state boundaries. Almukarramah (2021) described that the practice of derogation has been implemented by countries like Ukraine during armed conflicts and periods

of temporary loss of territorial control. The 2021 military coup in Myanmar has raised concerns about violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

The right to privacy is enshrined in international human rights instruments: Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, Article 17 of ICCPR, 1966, Article 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989, Article 22 of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), 2006 and article 14 of the United Nations Convention on Migrant Workers (CMW), 1990. Myanmar has only ratified the CRC in 1991 and the CRPD in 2011. Article 12 of the UDHR and Article 17 of the ICCPR prohibit the arbitrary or unlawful interference with an individual's privacy, family, home or correspondence as well as with their honor and reputation. In the view of the Human Rights Committee, the right to privacy must be guaranteed against all such interferences and attacks whether they emanate from State authorities or from others. The UN Human Rights Committee (2017) has commented that the obligations imposed by this article require the State to adopt legislative and other measures to give effect to the prohibition against such interferences and attacks on privacy as well as to ensure the protection of this right.

Privacy is asserted as a 'gateway' right that reinforces other rights, both online and offline, including the right to equality and non-discrimination, and freedom of expression. While privacy is not an absolute right and can be limited in some cases, such as when prison authorities search cells for contraband, limitations on privacy must be proportionate to the benefit to society (OHCHR, 2024). According to Article 4(1) of the ICCPR, it is clear that the right to privacy is not an absolute right and can be derogated in times of public emergency or the exigencies of the State's situation. Therefore, every State has positive duties for the protection of an individual's right to privacy, as provided by Article 17, as well as negative duties to refrain from arbitrary or unlawful interference, and to comply with the provisions of Article 4(1) of the ICCPR.

Myanmar is a member country of the UN and ASEAN, and it has an obligation to follow the commitments of both Declarations (UDHR and AHRD), although it has not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which upholds the right to privacy under Article 17. Under Section 8 of the Privacy Law (2017), all Myanmar citizens have legal obligations to respect and not invade the personal privacy and security of other Myanmar citizens, in accordance with Section 357 of the Constitution (2008). However, there are no specific laws relating to the right to privacy in Myanmar.

Thomas (2021) reported that as relevant laws were amended, the SAC gave security forces the authority to search, seize, detain and arrest individuals and to demand information from telecom operators, as well as to access and destroy personal data. However, Section 2 (c) of the 2017 Privacy Law defines privacy as freedom of movement, freedom of residence and freedom of speech and as such differs from the understanding of Article 17 of the ICCPR. The freedom of movement and freedom of residence are more closely related to Articles 13 (1) and 12(1) of the ICCPR, while freedom of speech is related to Article 19 of both the UDHR and ICCPR.

Section 357 of the Constitution, 2008, Section 3 of the 2017 Privacy Law reiterates that the "State has to fully protect citizens' privacy." The suspension of Section 5 of the Privacy Law however means that government agents can now enter people's homes for the purposes of search, seizure, and arrest without civilian witnesses. Section 7 of the Privacy Law provides that no one has the right to be detained for more than 24 hours without the permission of the court, except concerning matters permitted by the existing law. As a result of the suspension of Section 8, such actions by governmental authorities now appear to be lawful in Myanmar. A shopkeeper reported that security officials searched his phone who beat him on the arm three times, seized his phone and fined him 70000 kyats (US$31). Citizens have lost their privacy rights as a result of the sections of the Privacy Law that have been suspended.

However, Section 8 of the Privacy Law contains provisions regarding communications, telecommunications, and private correspondence. Section 19 of the Competition Law, 2015 refers to disclosing or using confidential information of a business. Section 27-A of the Electronics Transactions Law, 2004 (as amended in 2021) provides the role, as is conventional in contemporary data protection law, of a 'Personal Data Administrator' (PDA) who is responsible for maintaining, protecting, and managing personal data systematically and in accordance with the law. Section 69 of the Telecommunication Law, 2013, states that there is no right to disclose matters related to the telecommunication without having a court order. Section 13, 17 and 27 of the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law, 2012, which was amended in 2021 state that: households must inform ward or village tract administrators of the arrival and departure of overnight guests; administrators maintain and disclose a register of all overnight guests; and administrators take action against those who fail to report such guests, who will be fined. Section 16 of this law also enshrines the power of the SAC to appoint ward and village tract administrators. These amendments violate international human rights law (Altsean Burma, 2021). However, some provisions of this law were again amended by the SAC in 2021, such that Section 13 (g) of this law was substituted so that the village or tract administrator has the right to collect information for the guest list for overnight guests and fine those who do not share this information.

4. Empirical Findings

This research engaged with 27 interviewees, 19 male and 8 female. There are three groups: CDM people, professional and non-professional. Data collected from one man from the CDM group, three men from the non-professional group and one lawyer will be discussed here. Interview questions and comments concerned the differences in respect for the right to privacy before and after the coup can be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1: The differences in respect for the right to privacy before and after the coup

The interview questions	Experienced	Did Not Experience	Other facts
The differences in respect for the right to privacy before and after the coup	3 persons has difficulties to use the mobile phone, 3 persons had difficulty reporting the guest list, 7 persons were violated other human rights violations.	-	One person did not answer this question
The experiences on the differences before and after the coup	25 persons felt unsafe	One person did not experience this	One person did not answer this question
The experience of surveillance using telecommunication devices before and after the coup	13 people experienced insecure	10 people did not experience this	One person heard about it, and one person said not to monitor
The differences people faced when transferring money online for business	21 people experienced giving the causes of withdrawing money and many restrictions withdrawing the money and giving percentage to withdraw the money and one person said his friend experienced	One person did not experience this	One person did not answer

The ways the right to privacy is predominantly violated in Mandalay are through checking phones, checking guests, extorting money at night, arbitrary arrests, and killings by security forces. The challenges faced by individuals relating to privacy included difficulties with withdrawing money both online and from banks and ATMs, freedom of movement, searches and seizures, searches at home in which the guest list was checked by the authorities, surveillance of telecommunications and online. Concerning searches and seizures, 22 of the 27 respondents had been arrested when going out to work or shopping after the coup. The five who had not been arrested were all CDM

teachers whose anxiety and fear meant they were reluctant to go out, fearing they could be shot if they refused to be checked by the authorities. In one case, the interview with a CDM teacher was stopped due to his anxiety and fear. 17 of the respondents (4 professionals, 6 non-professionals and 7 CDM activists) faced difficulties with withdrawing money online or from a bank with ATM. 24 respondents (3 professionals, 13 non-professionals and 8 CDM activists) had been randomly stopped and had their phones or the list of guests in their home checked.

This article discusses Article 17 of the ICCPR, which protects the right to privacy, and its application in the context of state surveillance. While the right to privacy may be limited for public interest or to protect others' rights, determining appropriate limitations remains challenging according to Praditama and Ranawijaya (2023).The right to privacy is one of the fundamental human rights. Consequently, every government has the duty to protect these rights of its citizens. Section 357 of the Constitution of Myanmar describes the obligation to protect the security of the home, property and communications. This rest of the research discussion will be divided into two parts, the first addressing freedom of movement, including searches and seizure, surveillance by CCTV and home searches including guest-list checks, and the second, focusing on freedom of speech including surveillance of telecommunications and online activities.

5. Impact of Privacy Violations on Freedom of Movement

Existing international protocols uphold freedom of movement, freedom of association and freedom of speech. Article 12(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Article 5 (d.1) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) uphold the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of the state. Everyone has the right to movement and residence within the territory of the state under Article 13(1) of the UDHR. Anyone who is legally resident within the territory of a state has the right to move freely within the country and reside wherever they choose under Article 12(1) of the ICCPR, 1966. This article will discuss movement within the territory of the state.

5.1. Searches and Seizure

An IT Manager in Mandalay said that "the authorities checked his friend and they told him that they would arrest him because they found something they did not like, so they had to talk for about 2 hours the identity card holder who lives in Sagaing Division was also being delayed." Hence, the authorities violated Section 3 of the Privacy Law. A shopkeeper in Mandalay said that he had been arrested, his hands were put behind his back, and he was forced to sit down and was hit several times with a stick. He was released only after paying a significant sum. Again, the authorities violated Section 3 of the Privacy Law. An IT Manager in Mandalay said that when he traveled to Bagan, the officers and the policemen inspected all information on the phone, mainly checking Messenger, photos, Facebook, and the gallery. Hence, the authorities again violated Section 3 of the Privacy Law.

Section 8(a), (e) and (g) of the 2017 Privacy Law provide that a responsible authority has no right to enter into a citizen's private residence; nor to open, search or destroy a citizens' private correspondence; and not to seize citizens' moveable or immoveable property without legal remit. However, the authorities were able to search and seize the property of the individuals discussed above, due to the suspension of this section. If they had resisted the search, both might be shot or arrested. The authorities fined and seized the phone of the shopkeeper and neither he nor the IT manager enjoyed the protection of their privacy, despite Section 357 of the Constitution and Section 3 of the Privacy Law, representing the failure of the SAC to perform the duty of a government and contradicts the provisions of Article 17 of the ICCPR, representing violations of the right to privacy and the consequences of the suspension of Privacy law. Mandalay Free Press, 2022, reported that the military also searched, arrested and extorted money from youths who went out at night, and that the military and police have entered homes and taken property and arrested those in the house (Voice of Myanmar, 2021). This demonstrates that citizens are losing fundamental human rights, especially the right to privacy.

5.2. Surveillance with CCTV

An IT Manager in Mandalay said that before the coup there was a CCTV surveillance system throughout the city of Mandalay. Every shop on the main road was forced to install CCTV and to put it on the side of the road. He stated that when the soldiers and the officers came to his house, they asked for CCTV records. This is a violation of Section 3 of the Privacy Law. A teacher linked to the CDM said that during the protest period, there were people who were arrested following the examination of number plates of motorbikes from the CCTV footage in Mandalay. Because of that, CCTVs were destroyed. This represents a violation of Section 3 of the Privacy Law. This testimony implies that SAC's activities contradict Article 17 of the ICCPR, and violate Section 3 of the Privacy Law. Given the protection provided for personal data following the amendment of the Electronic Transactions Law, this appears to violate those obligations. Similarly, Section 8 (a) of the Privacy Law provides that a responsible authority has no right to enter into a citizens' private residence without legal justification. Therefore, the authorities have violated the right to privacy according to the provisions of those laws.

5.3. Searches at Home and Checking of Guest Lists

The declaration of Martial Law in February 2023by the SAC in 37 of the 330 townships across the country created an imbalance of power, which forces civilians to submit to the military or risk death (The Human Rights Foundation of Monland, 2023). The Burma Human Rights Report (2022) states that numerous local media reports documented regime security force roadblocks and random searches of private cars and taxis.

According to Article 289 of the 2008 Constitution, the administration of a ward or village-tract shall be assigned in accordance with the law to a person whose integrity is respected by the community. The Action Committee for Democracy Development and Progressive Voice, 2015, commented that the implementation and administration of the law fall under the General

Administration Department (GAD), which is a part of the military-controlled Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA). A shopkeeper in Mandalay reported that an elderly man in his community was beaten with guns and arrested while sitting in front of his house. The next day, he was shown on Myawati News on TV and charged with armed robbery; he spent 6 months in prison. Therefore, the authorities violated Section 3 of the Privacy Law (2017). An English Language Teacher in Mandalay stated that the authorities ordered him not to take photos; however, he took one and was held at gunpoint and insulted 3 times. Hence, the ward administrators and Ten-Householder Head violated Section 3 of the Privacy Law. A lawyer in Mandalay reported that soldiers and officers entered and searched his home at night. Therefore, the ward administrators, Ten-Householder Head, the ward administrators, Ten-Householder Head, and the authorities violated Section 3 of the Privacy Law. A CDM affiliated teacher said that after the coup, when he went to the ward office, they asked for 5,000 kyats per person and he paid 20,000 overdue fees. The authorities insisted on bribery. Hence, the authorities violated Section 3 of the Privacy Law, 2017. The authorities entered and searched homes, seized correspondence and threatened people, according to the testimonies of respondents.

The activities of authorities contradicted the provision of Article 17 of ICCPR. Therefore, the respondents did not have the fundamental rights of Sections 289 and 357 of the Constitution, 2008. These violations were the effects of the suspensions outlined in Sections 5, 7 and 8 of the Privacy Law (2017) and Section 13 (g) of the Fourth Amendment of the Ward or Village-Tract Administration Law, 2021. Thus, the suspension of the Privacy Law and the amendments to the Ward or Village-Tract Administration Law violate the right to privacy under Article 17 of the ICCPR. The authorities arrested nearly 100 villagers from a village in Patheingyi Township for failing to provide a guest list. Identity cards could not be collected because most of the villagers were fleeing the war (People Spring, 9 Feb 2024). Officers arrested 10 young people based on the addresses on their identity cards, although they informed the guest list in Mandalay (Mandalay Free Press, 27 Feb. 2024). The military, police, and ward administrators arrested at least 15 young people because they did not inform administrators in Mandalay about the guest list (RFA, Feb 27, 2022/ People Spring 26 Feb 2022). Those who did not have identity cards were searched, arrested and fined about 10,000 kyats in Yangon (Mawkum Magazine, February 23, 2024).

6. Impact of Privacy Violations on Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech is regarded as a necessary condition for societal progress and human development, as well as a fundamental component of any democratic society (Omowale & Okia, 2021). The relationship between freedom of expression and the right to privacy encompasses various issues that may conflict with these rights, including eavesdropping, sexual orientation, medical history, internet usage, social media, email, and personal lifestyles and data (Omowale & Okia, 2021). Although freedom of expression and privacy are sometimes in tension, and require proper balancing, the relationship between these two rights is not always adversarial (Centre for Law and Democracy, 2022). According to UN General Assembly Resolution 217A (III), 10 December 1948, the right to freedom of expression is guaranteed in very similar terms by both

Article 19 of the UDHR and Article19 (2) of the ICCPR. Article 24 of the AHRD relates to the right to freedom of expression.

6.1. Surveillance of Telecommunications

Rengel (2013) describes that technology can be both a threat and a solution for protecting privacy; it can provide powerful instruments for surveillance and privacy intrusion, but it can also enable effective control over privacy-invading technology. A CDM affiliated teacher in Mandalay said

> *I could not make calls with my phone's SIM card at all, so had to go to the phone office. They said that it was not their fault that he service was closed due to circuit damage. After restarting his phone, I only got 3G Internet. Before it closed, it was 4G*.

Hence, the authorities violated Section 3 of the Privacy Law (2017) because they had disabled 4G on his smart phone. An English Language Teacher in Mandalay said, "*I used to think about whether someone was listening in on the phone. However, it is never clear – it may just be a bad connection. I haven't experienced any major interruptions in calls*." Therefore, the authorities should have upheld Section 3 of the Privacy Law (2017). According to interviewees, the authorities' activities contradicted the right to privacy under Article 17 of the ICCPR and Article 19 (2) of the ICCPR. These violations were the effects of the suspensions of Section 5 and 8 of the Privacy Law (2017) and Section 69 of Telecommunication Law (2013) and the revisions of the Electronic Transaction Law (2004), which the authorities claim grant them the right to infringe on people's privacy. The short-term solution to these problems was to change to new SIM cards, while addressing privacy issues requires revising those laws.

6.2. Online Surveillance

States should respect users' decisions to remain anonymous online and to use encryption. States may, exceptionally, undertake necessary surveillance measures to trace or otherwise respond to criminal activities or national security threats (Centre for Law and Democracy, 2022). However, surveillance activity is an intentional attempt to observe individuals' private information without a search warrant as defined by Thomas B. Kearns (1999). A CDM affiliated teacher said that when his friend transferred the phone bill, the transferee was a member of the armed opposition People's Defence Force (PDF), so he was tracked from his phone and the person who transferred it was sentenced to 19 years imprisonment. Additionally, the online bank account of his friend was frozen. This demonstrates the risk of a businessman revealing information about this individual, which constituted a violation by the businessman under Section 19 of the Competition Law. Moreover, the SAC failed to ensure the protection guaranteed by Section 3 of the Privacy Law.

According to the testimony of the teacher, the authorities' activities contradicted the provision of the right to privacy under article 17 of the ICCPR, and violated Section 19 of the Competition Law. However, the authorities claim to have the right to violate privacy due to the effects of the suspension of the Privacy Law, 2017 and revision of Section 27-A of the Electronic Transaction Law, 2004. These are the challenges to the right to privacy and the effects of the suspensions of

Section 5 and 8 of the 2017 Privacy Law and Section 69 of Telecommunication Law, 2013 and the revisions of Electronic Transaction Law, 2004. Other violations have included a former individual who was searched and arrested by the SAC due to her comments in online posts concerning attacks on a camp by the SAC in Kachin State (Mandalay Free Press, 13 Oct 2023/Chindwin News Agency, 13 Oct 2023). These arrests were violations of Article 17 of ICCPR and Section 8 of the Privacy Law and fully diminished freedom of expression.

Conclusion

The suspension of provisions of the Privacy Law (2017), the amendment of the Electronic Transactions Law (2004), Telecommunications Law (2013), and the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law (2012) have undermined the guarantee of the right to privacy provided by Section 357 of the Constitution, as well as being unconstitutional. The SAC consolidated its authority in these laws to access personal data in the name of stability, tranquility and national security. These laws can constitute arbitrary interference with the individual's right to privacy and can serve to justify massive surveillance operations on political dissidents and regime opponents. These violations, suspensions, and amendments of laws in Myanmar are also contrary to Article 17 of the ICCPR. In order to undermine political dissent and opposition to the military coup, the SAC authorities have tracked citizens' telecommunications, social media use and movement. They have made searches and seizures on the road, in homes – including through checking guest lists and surveillance by CCTV, of telecommunications and online.

Potential solutions to the violations of privacy rights have two elements namely changing state practice and law, and citizens protecting their own privacy and security during the coup. The first part is that the SAC should ensure the protection of citizens' fundamental rights relating to privacy in accordance with Section 3 of the Privacy Law, and to revise the sections of the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law, 2021; the Law Amending the Electronic Transaction Law, and the Penal Code, and repeal the suspension of Sections 5, 7 and 8 of the Privacy Law. The SAC should protect the fundamental rights in Section 357 and Section 289 of the Constitution. The second part is that citizens should take care of their privacy and security themselves, and should not keep photos or videos relating to anti-SAC activity in their phone when outside, nor have property in their houses relating to anti-SAC activities; nor share text, photos or videos relating to anti-SAC activity on social media. If there are reasons to believe their devices make them unsafe, they should make new accounts on social media; not record CCTV footage; not articulate anti-SAC language, and they should commit to using code words when calling others; to take care of their communications equipment; and carefully maintain communication data when conducting business transactions using technology. Moreover, identity cards and biometrics could also constitute threats relating to the right to privacy in the modern age. Citizens should take care for their privacy and security regarding surveillance systems such as video surveillance and Unmanned Aerial Systems (i.e. drones), workplace surveillance, Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID).

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Policing Mobile Money Digital Financial Repression in Post-Coup Myanmar

Bradley

Gar Gar

Vox

Abstract

Mobile money and banking systems have become an integral part of daily life in post-pandemic Myanmar. However, following the military coup in 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. This article 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, it 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 like 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.

Keywords: Digital Repression, Finance Sector, Mobile Payments, Digital Coup, Surveillance

Introduction

"*Right after my mobile money account was frozen, my home got raided, my family had to legally disown me. After that, I also lost all my IDs and documents,*" said one 23-year-old respondent, recounting the severe repercussions of having her mobile money account frozen, which followed a home raid and the loss of all her identification documents. She is one among the estimated 18,000 people in Myanmar who have had their bank accounts frozen since shortly after the military coup, starting from June 2021.

The policing of mobile money and bank accounts is among the many fallouts of the military coup that occurred in Myanmar in February 2021, and the subsequent rise of armed resistance. The military junta has vigorously attempted to suppress funding efforts for the anti-junta resistance. This effort has resulted in the freezing of thousands of bank accounts, significantly impacting citizens and leading to numerous personal tragedies.

This study aims to unravel the surveillance mechanisms and the motivations behind the military regime's actions in the financial sector. It focuses on how the policing of mobile money has been used as a strategy, and its implications for account holders. Lastly, we offer some thoughts on how Myanmar citizens might respond to the surveillance and controls placed on their banking and financial transactions.

Myanmar citizens are currently grappling with unprecedented surveillance, censorship, and legal repercussions for expressing themselves digitally. According to Freedom House's 2023 report, Myanmar is the second-most repressed country in terms of internet freedom (Freedom House, 2023). This reflects a global trend where authoritarian governments actively work to divide the internet into oppressive segments (Blunt & Shahbaz, 2022), using techniques of digital repression which include surveillance, censorship, internet shutdowns, targeted persecutions of online users, and dissemination of manipulated information and disinformation (*New Digital Dilemmas: Resisting Autocrats, Navigating Geopolitics, Confronting Platforms*, 2023).

This is the complex landscape in which digital financial repression is unfolding – as one tool in a large toolbox of oppressive tactics. The Myanmar government's stranglehold on digital spaces is not an isolated incident but part of a larger, more concerning trend of digital repression across the globe. The situation in Myanmar serves as a stark reminder of the extent to which authoritarian regimes can go to curtail freedom and dissent in the digital age.

As digital rights researchers, we aim to explore the less-reported procedures, consequences, and impacts of these surveillance mechanisms. This brought us to the specific issue of policing mobile money, its underlying causes and impact. This resulting paper is based on key informant interviews with victims, surveillance experts, economic experts, and mobile money agents, supplemented by publicly available reports, analyses, and media resources. Our hope is for this paper to serve as a preliminary knowledge base for further exploration into this issue.

This research is conducted under a context of a repressive regime, which imposes restrictions on interviewing key stakeholders due to security and sensitivity concerns. There were challenges in finding and engaging with critical stakeholder groups such as legal experts, and banking personnel.

Findings

1. Low-effort, High-impact: Policing Mobile Money

The junta, with its control over state institutions including major internet service providers and banking systems, has worked diligently to cut off funding to resistance groups. Monitoring transactions and cash flows has become a priority for them, as it presents a low-effort, high-impact strategy.

The initial instances of freezing mobile wallets and bank accounts, as reported by the media, date back to the August 9, 2021, freezing of a KBZpay account that was crowdfunding assistance internally displaced people in Karenni region (Myanmar Pressphoto Agency, 2021). The earliest individual reports date to August 6, 2021 (CDM Medical Network, 2021). Anonymous sources also claim that the scrutiny of banking transactions started as early as a week after the coup, with this source saying that private finance institutions submit transactions data daily (Nyane & Lipes, 2021).

On August 13, 2021, the Central Bank of Myanmar issued a directive instructing banks, financial service institutions, and mobile money service providers to closely monitor and report any transactions suspected of involvement in the Spring Lottery fundraising organized by the parallel National Unity Government (NUG) (Khit Thit Media, 2021).

The vice-chairman of the Central Bank of Myanmar on August 17, 2021, announced on national television a close monitoring of mobile money wallets and financial activities. The bank also issued a warning against funding terrorist organizations and threatened financial institutions if they failed to report and comply with authorities (Nyane & Lipes, 2021).

Alleged meeting minutes from the Central Committee for Counter-Terrorism (CCCT), supposedly from December 2022, reported the closure of over 18,000 accounts in an 18-month period (The Irrawaddy, 2023). The state newspaper reported the freezing, closure, and seizure of accounts suspected of being linked to money laundering, violence, and financial support (*Questionable Bank Accounts to Be Frozen and Nationalized*, 2022).

The underlying motivation behind these severe actions against mobile money users is twofold: to impose high impact punishment on pro-revolution entities, and to reinforce the surveillance ecosystem.

2. Dire Consequences: High-impact Punishments

The freeze or closure of mobile money accounts can be seen as one part of a broader strategy by the Junta. This strategy includes raids on registered addresses, asset seizures, and threats of lengthy

imprisonment under the Counter-Terrorism Law. A common pattern emerged from our interviews: within six months of bank service termination, respondents said authorities often conduct raids on the addresses registered with the banks.

A significant number of these raids result in the seizure of immovable property assets. Some cases even escalate to imprisonment, or in some situations, victims are forced into exile or go underground to avoid arrest.

To evade asset seizure, victims may have to legally disassociate themselves from their properties, which can lead to estrangement from their families. The victims that manage to avoid arrest are typically forced into exile or hiding, while being charged under Sections 50(a) and or 50(j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law.

The aftermath of these actions severely limits the freedom of movement for the wanted victims, especially for those who are forced underground. This is due to their voided identity documents, such as National Registration Identity Cards (NRIC), which are required for local and international travel since all of these data are associated and verified with the Mobile Wallet Account along with phone numbers due to 'know your customer' (KYC) mandates and mandatory SIM registration.

In some instances, the Junta freezes or closes mobile money accounts as a means of persecuting dissenters. Those targeted, like journalists, find their mobile money and banking accounts suspended under the guise of the anti-money laundering law.

In one case, a journalist found all his accounts (KPAY, WAVE, and others) suddenly suspended, preventing him from logging in. He believes he was targeted due to his profession.*"I was framed! Everyone knows that I'm a journalist. My colleagues and I were not alone. Everyone in our office had their assets seized."* –KII-04

Now in exile, he faces charges under Section 50(j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law. He said his arrest was directed from Naypyidaw and was not related to his mobile money activities. In 2022, his colleagues at the major media house where he worked also experienced similar persecution, with their assets being frozen.

Another journalist, KII-02, reflected on a similar experience during 2023. She noted that everyone in her office had their accounts suspended. She suspects this was due to her employment at a specific media house.*"I think it's because I work at [omitted]. Everyone at the office got their accounts suspended."* –KII-02

Unfortunately, victims in some cases were deprived of their identities and nationalities or faced harsh sentences. The junta is known for making extreme threats. During a press conference on September 20, 2022, a junta spokesperson threatened potential death sentences for those providing financial assistance to resistance movements.

3. No Notification, No Redemption

The direst consequences for users normally come from sudden, unannounced account freezes, along with service providers not resolving inquiries and issues through their customer support channels. One of the major mobile money service providers, KBZpay, within their privacy policy, reserves the right to terminate service with or without notice to the customer. Keeping true to their policy, users are not informed about the suspension of the account through SMS, email or the mobile banking application. Users reported that account freezing is discreet in nature and that many of the features such as checking balance and login functions are still available after being suspended.

> *You cannot know exactly when your account is frozen, because you can still sign in/log in with your username and password, check balance and everything. Only when you try to complete a transaction will the app notify through a pop-up box that your account has been suspended. At first (when this happened), they replied to my emails, but after a while, I was altogether neglected.* –KII-03

Users are only informed and become aware of the account suspension when attempting to make a transaction using the application, even though adequate minimum support from the bank such as proper notification would still be in compliance with their privacy policy.

The Bank call centers responded to users about the account suspensions in accordance with the directives issued by the Central Bank of Myanmar. The usual response from the banks was to tell users to contact the Central Bank of Myanmar, there was no support from the banks in terms of these referrals.*"Well, so I called the next day asking them how to contact the Central Bank, and they said they don't know how."* –KII.02

4. Legislation: Unilateral Amendment of Legal Provisions

The junta has used their legislative power to acquire unbridled access to user data through unilateral amendment of legislation, by-laws and a series of regulatory requirements.

The digital rights expert interviewed for this study said:

> *We had (surveillance) infrastructure even before the coup, like social media monitoring team and AI CCTV under the guise of smart city projects, but back then we had legal protections like privacy laws, and we could use these for some level of protection.* –KII-09

Prior to the coup therefore, strengthening the surveillance framework was already in motion. Some regulations, such as mandatory SIM registration, were initiated by the civilian government in 2019 (Myanmar Now, 2020). Social media monitoring teams also were budgeted with opaque transparency (RFA, 2018).

Moreover, the 2014 Anti-Money Laundering Law and Counter Terrorism Law set a framework for policy making in the financial sector - defining KYC requirements, the formation of the Central

Body, Financial Investigation Unit and the Central Committee (later known as Central Committee for Counter Terrorism- CCCT), along with their duties and functions in scrutinizing, compiling, maintaining and disseminating of data, and in seizing, obstructing, controlling, freezing and searching of properties and assets. These legislative and policy frameworks took on a sudden and drastically stepped-up momentum after the February 2021 coup.

In less than three weeks, two existing laws were amended. On February 13, 2021, the law protecting the Privacy and Security of Citizens and the Electronic Transaction Law were altered, suspending fundamental rights, particularly data protection for the citizens. This enabled arbitrary surveillance, data requests, searches, seizures, and arrests without a court order. A subsequent amendment to the Electronic Transaction Law on February 15, 2021, allowed broad exceptions for government interception of personal data and restrictions on various types of online information (*Myanmar's New Electronic Transactions Law Amendment – Free Expression Myanmar*, 2021).

Moreover, in addition to legislative amendments, the junta has progressively tightened its grip on communication channels. Mandatory SIM card registration has been a key strategy in this endeavor. SIM card registration began in 2019 during the civilian government tenure and it became even more rigorous following the sale of the telecom company Telenor to the Lebanon-owned M1 group in 2022 (Mizzima, 2022). In September 2022, the Ministry of Transport and Communication announced the termination of unregistered SIM cards and verification with an e-ID system (RFA, 2022). SIM registration is still an ongoing effort by the junta, with multiple announcements and threats of imprisonment continuing through the end of 2023 (Ayeyarwaddy Times, 2023).

Other significant actions included the mandatory KYC requirement with Mobile Wallets issued in August 2022, which levied further requirements for mandatory registration with ID and other information. Mobile Wallets also came under surveillance with the introduction of further restrictions on KYC requirements in August 2022 by the Central Bank of Myanmar (RFA Burmese, 2023). Alongside mandatory registration with an ID, the directive included instructions for mobile money agents to record personal information of the customer and to install a CCTV system. On September 9, the Central Bank of Myanmar announced the verification of KYC information with the existing e-ID database and SIM registration database and the permanent termination of unverified Mobile Wallet accounts (Ayeyarwaddy Times, 2022).

A significant development was the March 1, 2023, amendment of the Counter Terrorism Law and the Lawful Interception Framework. Drafted by the Central Committee for Counter Terrorism (CCCT), this included a lawful interception framework that allowed the junta to intercept, block, and restrict mobile communications and triangulate accomplices of terrorist organizations (Myint, 2023).

The changes imply and help further enable mass surveillance and the systemic repression of users. The broad provisions of these laws, coupled with the absence of data and legal protection frameworks, have enabled what could be described as a rhizomatic type of systemic surveillance.

This form of surveillance, as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari, allows both private and government actors to conduct surveillance through "centers of calculations"; biometric data centers, eID databases, SIM registration databases and such (Galič, Timan, & Koops, 2017).

This strategy extends beyond policing mobile money to include initiatives like the registration of SIMs and electronic wallet accounts, threats of imprisonment for unregistered SIMs, verification of registration databases against e-ID databases, and the mandatory change of national IDs to Smart Cards. These activities clearly indicate a broader strategy to increase their surveillance capability.

5. Mechanism: Part of the Surveillance Ecosystem

Policing mobile money is part of the junta's broader surveillance framework. As usage data is usually the result of interactions on the given platforms, traditional institutions such as banks retain and verify data more intensively to prevent abuse, fraud, tax evasion, criminal activity, and money laundering. Verification and authentication processes with the banking and financial services are critically supported by a form of verification known as KYC or Know Your Customer/Client. Moreover, usage data with financial services are usually retained.

Since the coup, KYC requirements have become more stringent and scrutinized. An unnamed source told RFA that banks submit their online and offline submissions daily and monthly. Transactions are monitored and scrutinized based on the amount and frequency, with an escalation procedure framework in place, such as automatic flagging. It is reported that this scrutiny and monitoring of transactions began as early as February 2021.

The KYC process for Mobile Wallets requires national identification documents or passports, biometric data like in-app photographs of the user, and a phone number. Mandatory SIM registration strengthens user verification, potentially providing more sensitive data such as call records, communication content, online activities, and approximate real-time location through SIM triangulation enabled by the Lawful Interception framework.

Transaction monitoring reportedly includes daily submission of transaction records and monitoring methods such as flagging accounts with 10 or more daily transactions, or transferring more than 20 million kyats (RFA, 2023). Users have noted that the frequency and pattern of transactions are often seen as suspicious. *"If you do a certain number of repetitive transactions, let's say, at the start of each month, then surely they'll take notice."* –KII-01

The junta closely monitors sender and receiver data. Some interviewees reported security incidents like the arrest of payee account holders, followed by their own accounts being frozen.

Fundraising organizers use basic operational security tactics such as keeping their mobile money account off publicly available social media posts. In these situations, the junta has identified mobile money accounts by approaching fundraising organizers, donating small amounts of money, and using the transaction as evidence. One interviewee who coordinates crowdfunding programs

for political detainees reported a similar case before their bank account was frozen. *"That one account contacted our page, and I gave them my account number. They donated 1,000 MMK, and soon after, my account was frozen."* –KII-01

The system also monitors and scrutinizes transaction record descriptions. User complaints suggest keyword flagging of description records, but our interviewees could not confirm if having a plausible description or a lack thereof significantly impacted account freezes.

6. Back to a Cash-based Economy

"I'm not sure about freezing bank accounts and their procedures, but there's already a lack of trust in financial institutions because of a lot of factors." –KII-08

Prior to the 2013 telecom liberation, Myanmar's entire economy functioned on a cash basis. However, with the advent of the internet and mobile phones in 2017, Myanmar bypassed the traditional evolution of money markets. The country skipped the credit and debit card phase and transitioned from using banknotes directly to digital money (Loughnane, 2017). Mobile money became an accessible financial service, playing a pivotal role in addressing the challenges faced by those unserved by traditional financial institutions, particularly in rural areas. People started using their mobile payment wallets to manage their finances instead of going to traditional banks. As a result, Myanmar's mobile money wallet market saw considerable growth, increasing by 1% market penetration from 2016 to attain a remarkable 80% by 2019 (Kyaw, 2022)

However, following the junta's seizure of power in February 2021, public trust in the government and banking sectors was severely damaged. Fearful for their savings, people began withdrawing money from ATMs. This panic triggered cash shortages and led to mobile wallet agents charging additional fees for cash withdrawals. According to one interviewee: "*The cash shortage problem was challenging. I used to pay salaries to my staff through a bank payroll, but people couldn't withdraw cash from ATMs.*" –KII-10

Despite the rapid advancement of digital technology and the global trend towards establishing cashless societies, Myanmar's economy has reverted to being cash-based due to the failure of the banking system. This regression was exacerbated by several countrywide internet shutdowns, interoperability limitations, and a lack of accountability from private banks.

7. Circumvention: Alternative Ways are still in their Infancy

The military junta is imposing disproportionate penalties on those who refuse to participate in their state surveillance system. Citizens are resisting and finding ways to circumvent these measures. The abrupt restrictions on mobile money usage and suspensions of mobile wallets and bank accounts have led to the exploration of alternative solutions.

To evade the junta's surveillance, diaspora populations are resorting to Hundi services to transfer money into the country (informal moneylenders operating across borders). Other alternatives

include crypto- based platforms like NUG Pay and centralized exchanges like Binance. However, these come with their own set of challenges.

NUG Pay, although a viable alternative, requires users to know an agent before they can use the services. In other words, it requires some degree of human involvement, which could lead to trust issues. Centralized exchanges like Binance require a lengthy KYC process. Furthermore, Binance requires citizens to register with an ID, a document that many have lost due to home raids, fleeing, or other actions by the junta. Lastly, the use of crypto exchanges inevitably leads back to local mobile money services for cashing out transfers. This, coupled with the need for basic understanding of crypto exchanges, makes it a challenging option for the average Myanmar citizen, considering the digital literacy required.

As one interviewee (KII-04) stated, *"NUGPay is a safe alternative, particularly for donors. But for fundraisers, and for normal use, it's very limited. For example, should I need, say, 500,000 MMK, they would only be able to do 300,000 MMK in some cases."*

Furthermore, these circumstances have led to an increased investment risk, prompting the transfer of assets to other countries. The situation has also resulted in the proliferation of a black market for fake mobile money accounts.

Discussion

Our research has uncovered the characteristics of early techno-authoritarian states. The scenarios, events, and discourses discussed above revealed the conflict between techno-authoritarianism and techno-democracy in Myanmar. According to the Gerda Henkel Stiftung (n.d.), Myanmar is the first East Asian country where circumvention technologies, encryption, and social media play a crucial role in shaping a new form of civil war. In other words, the failing military junta is attempting to justify its failures by asserting superiority in cyberspace.

Second, the military's surveillance strategy is shifting from a panopticon to a post-panopticon surveillance strategy. From a contemporary surveillance theory perspective, the convergence of previously separate surveillance systems and a significant increase in surveillance capacity are key characteristics of the post- panopticon strategy (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2022). The panopticon, originally conceived by Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century, is a prison design that enforces self-monitoring among inmates, as they are constantly visible to a central watchtower. The concept was later popularized by Michel Foucault in his study of traditional centralized surveillance (Allmer, n.d.). In the digital age, this concept has evolved into the post-panopticon, where surveillance extends beyond a centralized authority to include more dispersed networks involving government, corporations, and individuals (McMullan, 2015). As discussed previously, we observed coordination between the junta and companies such as telecoms and banks in policing mobile money in Myanmar. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the junta is in the process of establishing a post-panopticon state surveillance system and is now emphasizing the omnipresence

of their surveillance system, which includes extensive data collection and analysis through well-established calculation centers.

Another critical aspect to discuss is that there are alternative technologies such as cryptocurrency available to opt out; however, those technologies are still in their infancy. Deliberately promoting these innovation platforms can empower individuals and communities to develop alternative technologies that can bypass state-controlled surveillance systems. By fostering spaces for collaboration and knowledge sharing, these platforms can encourage the creation and adoption of circumvention technologies that enable secure and private communication. Supporting and investing in such initiatives, including by donors supporting Myanmar peace initiatives, would contribute to a more resilient and decentralized digital ecosystem.

Last but not least, we must be mindful of the fact that it is crucial to establish resilient and decentralized internet infrastructures in Myanmar to counter the surveillance capabilities of the junta. Community-based initiatives can play a significant role in building and maintaining these infrastructures, ensuring that internet access and communication channels remain accessible even in the face of censorship or disruptions. By promoting local ownership and control over internet infrastructure, the people of Myanmar can reclaim their digital sovereignty and protect their rights to freedom of expression and information.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the junta's efforts to dominate cyberspace are effectively counteracted by the emergence of circumvention technologies and the pivotal role of social media in the ongoing civil conflict. This research has explored the motivations behind the regulation of mobile money usage in Myanmar and the effects it has on its users. While the current study is primarily centered on the consequences for users, future research should delve into the economic, technological, and political dimensions of this issue.

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

Brang Lat

Abstract

This article examines how ethnic food culinary practices preserve the identity of the Kachin people. Kachin State is part of Myanmar and comprises six sub-ethnic groups: Jinghpaw, Maru or Lhaovo, Rawang, Lachik, Zaiwa, and Lisu. Each sub-ethnic group has its own distinct cooking style, and culinary tastes vary throughout Kachin State. Kachin culture includes cooking and consuming traditional meals during Kachin community events like weddings, housewarming parties, and funerals. A distinctive feature of Kachin cooking is the use of water instead of oil. In addition, the ingredients used in traditional Kachin food 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 traditional cookery.

A large number of people settle in Myitkyina, the Kachin State capital for business, educational and social activities. It is also the only area where foreigners can visit freely. Furthermore, Kachin State shares borders with China and India, attracting people to discover its natural resources and ethnic customs. This mobility also facilitates access to adjacent nations' goods, plants, and spices.

Blending Kachin traditional dishes is also due to such circumstances. To preserve ethnic identity, Kachin family-run restaurants adjust dishes for international customers and foster cross-cultural engagement. Therefore, I decided to investigate the significance of family-run restaurants in Myitkyina, Kachin State, as cultural centers for maintaining and promoting traditional Kachin cuisine. I will also analyze 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 heads and Kachin food Vloggers will also be used.

Keywords: Kachin Ethnic Identity, Kachin Cuisine, Traditional Dishes, Family-run Restaurants, Myitkyina.

Background

Kachin State is situated in the northern part of Myanmar, also near the border areas of China and India. The Kachin ethnic people lived with their own political rules and territory before the British colonizers arrived in 1886. At that time, the Kachin resided in their domains with freedom; each area had its chiefs and ruled different parts of the Kachin hill, with autonomy in their original territory. Only some of the Kachin chiefs had connections with Burman kings. However, that the Kachin were subject to the political authority of the Burman King. Before General Aung San visited Kachin State in 1946, most Kachin chiefs still needed to meet with Burman leaders (Lagai Zau Nan, 2021). Kachin nationalists founded the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and its armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), in February 1961 to set up an independent Awmdawm Kachin land. The Burman government did not approve of the KIO and other ethnic armed organizations as political organizations and instead saw them as unlawful organizations, destructive elements, and terrorists. On 24 February 1994, the KIO and the Tatmadaw (military) signed a ceasefire agreement that lasted for 17 years. On 9 June 2011, that ceasefire was broken, two months after former military general Thein Sein became President of the first civilian form of government after a long decade of military governance which began in 1962 (Lagai Zau Nan, 2021).

Generally, Kachin people originate from the hill regions and are also widely settled in the lowlands. Kachin State is rich in natural resources, including timber, jade, gold, rare earth minerals, and wildlife. Most of the Kachin people practice a dry cultivation system. Kachin state has six sub-ethnic groups: Jinghpaw, Maru or Lhaovo, Rawang, Lachik, Zaiwa, and Lisu. Each sub-ethnic group has an own written language to display but shares many common customs within Kachin society (Gilhodes, 1996). Each sub-ethnic also cooks differently, and culinary tastes vary throughout Kachin State. Kachin culture includes traditional meals during community events like wedding ceremonies, housewarming parties, and funerals. The Manau Dance is a significant tradition symbolizing victory over enemies. This cheerful dance is traditionally required to be performed (Shichyang Zung Ting, 2018). Most Kachin people are Christian, some animist, and some Buddhist.

Kachin people primarily eat rice with some meat, including chili paste and vegetable soup. They eat rice with their hands and use a banana leaf as a plate. T In the past, they used bamboo containers and spoons for drinking soup. Everyone has their portion or package and does not share it with others. Before eating, leave a package for the husband or the house owner first, as a sign of respect for the family head (Awng, 2013). The Kachin people have a unique and authentic traditional cooking style using water instead of oil. In addition, the ingredients used in Kachin traditional food are also of utmost significance. These include garlic, chili, ginger, basil, coriander seeds, coriander, dry garcinia, Vietnamese coriander, and Kachin spices Magram, Machyang, mahkri jahkraw, and shalap. Kachin cuisine relies on these elements for traditional cooking. Besides, Kachin people have a unique way of packaging rice and grilling fish in banana leaves. This conventional method has been passed down from generation to generation. It is still used today (Interview Head of the Kachin Cultural Committee for 2018-2023, interviewed, 6 March 2024).

Myitkyina, the capital of the Kachin State, has a diverse population of Kachin, Myanmar, Shan, and other nationals, with a total population of 306,949 (The Republic of The Union of Myanmar, 2014; Myanmar Population and Housing Census, 2015). According to Kachin traditional culture, Kachin practices have led to a strongly patriarchal society. Therefore, men take leadership roles in positions of politics, religious institutions, and the community, such as village leaders. Women are merely service providers in the family and community (Lwin, 2018). They often volunteer for tasks like preparing food and assisting with community events.

Myitkyina also has numerous civil offices, military regiments, training schools, and universities. This has led to an increase in the number of consumers in the city, resulting in the availability of a wide range of regional products sold wholesale and retail in the markets. Shopkeepers in the markets of Myitkyina import a variety of daily-use goods such as pots, plates, grocery items, electrical goods, and construction materials, from lower parts of Myanmar and neighboring China to meet the demands of the local population. The markets also have many jewelry shops, reflecting the wealth of the Kachin State in terms of natural resources. Myitkyina is a vibrant city that offers a unique blend of cultural diversity and economic activities. The agricultural work in Wine Maw Township is extensive, with paddy fields and gardening works as the main supply of various vegetables for the markets in Myitkyina (Soe Soe Khin, 2020).

In Myitkyina, Kachin family-run restaurants play a significant role in preserving and promoting traditional Kachin cuisine as part of the effort to maintain Kachin ethnic identity. These restaurants adjust dishes for international customers while fostering cross-cultural engagement. They also serve as cultural centers for showcasing the unique flavors and culinary traditions of the Kachin people. Many Kachin people take pride in preserving their traditional culture, deeply rooted in their food, and many family-run restaurants in Myitkyina carefully prepare and sell these conventional foods. However, new people moving from another place to Myitkyina Township impact local food practices and eating styles. With the advent of globalization and modernization, the traditional cooking styles of the Kachin people have undergone significant changes. For example, a small amount of oil is now used. Despite the use of oil, Han Lu Ti never mixes ingredients or spices from China into her Kachin dishes, as she believes that it would dilute the authentic flavors of Kachin's traditional food (23 February, 2024).

On the contrary, Kachin traditional food depends heavily on specific cooking methods and rare ingredients. One of the significant Kachin ingredients or herbs is called Magram (in the Kachin language), which is also one of the main essential herbs in Kachin traditional authentic food. In the past, the Kachin community used banana leaves to serve traditional food during events and weddings. However, due to environmental impacts and the influx of migrant workers from lower Myanmar, it has become increasingly challenging to continue this tradition. Additionally, obtaining authentic Kachin spices like Magram has become difficult due to the ongoing civil war in the region.

Consequently, gathering these traditional ingredients from the deep forests has become increasingly risky, especially with the political instability in some parts of Kachin. As a result, the quality of Kachin's traditional cuisine has been compromised, posing a considerable

concern for the Kachin community. Research conducted in the Kachin community will greatly benefit the Kachin community's development and provide valuable references for future scholars. This research is significant, as no previous studies have been undertaken in this field within the Kachin community.

Methodology

For this research, I used qualitative methods to gather and analyze data. They included semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and data collection from Kachin food Vloggers. Additionally, I conducted interviews with restaurants run by Kachin families in Chiang Mai to compare and analyze their practices.

Research Questions

1. How do family-run restaurants in Myitkyina, Kachin State, contribute to sustaining and promoting traditional Kachin cuisine as part of Kachin identity?
2. How do family-run restaurants perceive the authenticity of Kachin ethnic food through their culinary practices?
3. From a political and economic perspective, what challenges do family-run restaurants in Myitkyina face in maintaining and sustaining ethnic identity through traditional Kachin cuisine?

Literature Review

This section will discuss the leading theory, collective identity theory, which has been selected as suitable and of high quality for the study

Collective Identity

According to Snow and Corrigall-Brown (2015), collective identity is defined as a shared and interactive sense of "we-ness" and "collective agency." It is emphasized that collective identity is a process rather than a property of social actors, involving recognizing oneself as part of a collectivity. Shared identity serves as a basis for generating a sense of agency and can influence collective action and shape interactions within a social context. The article discusses empirical manifestations of collective identity concerning gender, ethnicity, religion, nationalism, and social movements. It explores how collective identity can be expressed and asserted through symbolic means, reflecting the values, beliefs, and goals of a particular group or community (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015, p. 175).

Furthermore, according to Ulug et al. (2021), collective identity describes a sense of "we-ness" based on shared attributes, experiences, and culturally dependent characteristics within ecovillage communities. They emphasize the importance of shared values and collective action in group settings, highlighting the role of social connectedness in driving action towards shared ideals and ambitions. On the other hand, in a study of the complexities of identity re-making within the diaspora, the scholar describes the concept of collective identity as formed through the collaborative efforts of multiple individuals or groups focused on guiding their actions within a specific set of opportunities and limitations (Taş, 2022, p. 386).

The aforementioned scholars address collective identity in several different fields. First, Snow and Corrigall-Brown (2015) express that collective identity is described as a shared and interactive sense of "we-ness" and "collective agency," and as a process involving self-recognition as part of a group. Second, Ulug et al. (2021) describe collective identity in ecovillage communities as being based on shared attributes, experiences, and culturally dependent characteristics, creating a sense of "we-ness", highlighting shared values, collective action, and social connectedness in driving action toward common goals and ambitions within group settings. Lastly, according to Taş (2022), collective identity is formed through the collaborative efforts of multiple individuals or groups, directed toward guiding actions within specific opportunities and limitations.

For my research, I would like to focus on Snow and Corrigall-Brown's work (2015). The particular restaurant I focus on, as a family-owned establishment, can be seen as a place where people acknowledge and display their cultural heritage. The idea of "we-ness" holds great significance in a family-owned restaurant where food practices are collaborative, strengthening a feeling of togetherness and a shared cultural belonging. Moreover, the role of food within a restaurant environment impacts collective activities (such as preparing traditional dishes) and social exchanges (like serving patrons and sharing narratives about the cuisine), playing a fundamental role in preserving cultural identity.

Related Studies Reviews

This related review study is focused on how food practices maintain ethnic identity through traditional food. According to my understanding, there are three things: food preparation, production, and food consumption under food practices. Apart from that, food practices are interrelated with ethnic identity. Food, cooking, and dietary patterns play a fundamental role in every culture. The study of food, culture, and ethnic identity is interrelated and depends on the topographical context (Barua & Kikhi, 2016, p. 1).

Furthermore, food and how people consume it can often create notable social differences between communities. These differences can be due to various factors, such as cultural norms, religious beliefs, or economic status. However, at the same time, food can serve as a powerful tool for strengthening social bonds within a community. Sharing meals and cooking traditions can unite people, foster a sense of belonging, and promote cultural exchange. Overall, food considerably impacts social dynamics and relationships between individuals and communities (Barua & Kikhi, 2016, p. 2). Besides, food is also regarded as a symbol of cultural identity. It is an instrument in maintaining good relations among people, interactions between humans and their gods (i.e. myths) as well as a mode of communication (Barua & Kikhi, 2016, p. 2).

On the other hand, according to Reddy and Dam (2020), culture, race, and ethnicity are intricately connected, serving as important social identities for studying food and food practices because they allow researchers to understand the complex ways individuals make food choices. Still, food and food habits act as important marks of one's identity, ethnicity, and religion. Food consumption practices are clear indicators of cultural identity. Thus, the study of food, culture and identity is intricately interrelated (Barua & Kikhi, 2016, p. 14). The above passage highlights food's significant role in reflecting a culture's unique characteristics, an individual's

identity, or a group's shared experiences. Food is not merely a source of sustenance but also a means of expression, reflecting society's traditions, beliefs, and values. However, what is perhaps less studied is the maintenance of cultural food practices and the sharing of cross-cultural food practices by different cultural, racial, and ethnic groups within multicultural societies (Barua & Kikhi, 2016, p. 2).

Food Preparation

All animals eat, but humans are the only species that cooks. Therefore, cooking becomes more than a necessity; it is the symbol of our humanity, what marks us off from the rest of nature. In addition, because eating is usually a group event (as opposed to sex), food becomes a focus of symbolic activity about sociality and our place in our society (Fox, 2003, p.1). This discussion goes beyond the act of cooking, cooking conditions, how we cook, and how we connect through eating, as food is a central element where everyone can join, share meals, and engage in social activities that foster cultural identity.

Furthermore, cooking and eating hold significant cultural value for migrants living in multicultural societies. It not only symbolizes their ethnic identity but also represents a concrete way of preserving their culture. D'Sylva and Beagan (2011) noted that culinary practices are essential to maintaining a sense of connection to one's cultural roots while navigating a new cultural landscape. In the context of migrants, the discussion focuses on how cooking and eating can serve as a symbol of ethnic identity for migrants, representing their cultural heritage and tradition. Besides, by engaging in culinary practices from their home countries, migrants actively preserve their culture and their cultural origin. In addition, culinary practices help migrants feel a sense of belonging within their community as they share and celebrate their cultural heritage through food. According to Beoku-Betts (1995), there is a powerful urge among members of non-dominant cultures to maintain and celebrate their cultural heritage through their food practices. This desire to preserve their culture is powerful when their cultural identity is not the dominant culture in their society. Food plays a vital role in expressing and reinforcing cultural identity and is often used to connect with one's community and history.

In the context of Malay, Raji et al. (2017) state that Malay cuisine is usually halal. Malay cooking is unique; however, it has been assimilated into other influences such as Arab, Indonesian, Thai, Portuguese, Chinese, and Indian. Ainuddin (Raji, 2017) defined Malay food by five characteristics: (1) rich in herbs and spices; (2) coconut milk is one of the main ingredients; (3) usually spicy; (4) meat is usually stewed with a thick gravy; and (5) fried fish and seafood are usually seasoned with turmeric powder. Compared to using traditional Kachin cooking ingredients, this differs. The Kachin ingredients are mostly garlic, chili, ginger, basil, coriander seeds, dry garcinia, Vietnamese coriander, and Kachin spices such as magram and machyang. Scholars continuously discuss Malay cuisine as a blend of diverse influences, making it challenging to attribute it solely to one culture (Mrs. Hkawng Tawng, Head of the Kachin Cultural Committee for 2018-2023, in an interview at the Wunpawng Christian Church in Chiang Mai, Thailand).

However, Malays have adapted recipes to local tastes. Malay cuisines share similarities despite variations across Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. Each technique and ingredient

carries a distinct aroma and flavor, influenced by settlement areas and colonial legacies. Authentic Malay cuisine distinguishes itself using herbs, spices, traditional equipment, and cooking methods. Historically, ingredients were acquired from backyard gardens and woodlands, which enriched the culinary experience (Raji et al., 2017, p. 222).

Similarly, the Kachin also used ingredients from their farm to cook in the past (Awng, 2013). However, cooking and using ingredients differ from those used in Kachin and Malay. At the same time, it was mentioned that the availability of local resources in this country allows the creation of flavorful, delicious, unique, and authentic recipes (Raji et al. 2017, p. 223). On the other hand, Barua and Kikhi (2016) state that all cultures have recognizable cuisine and specific cooking patterns because of their unique ingredients and spices.

In the review, one of the paragraphs discusses how cooking is viewed as a symbol of humanity and sociality. Another section focuses on the culinary practices of migrants and how they relate to their cultural backgrounds. In addition, a paragraph highlights the characteristics of Malay cuisine and how it differs from other types of cuisine. The review also examines the adaptation and similarity in Malay cuisine, exploring how certain dishes have evolved to suit different tastes and preferences. Finally, a paragraph identifies the similarities in using ingredients grown in the backyard or on one's farm in the context of Malay and Kachin ethnic groups. The scholar did not discuss details of the cultural food processes and practices that can sustain ethnic identity.

Creating Identity

According to Tan et al. (2015), food plays a dynamic role in how people think of themselves and others. It also functions effectively as a communication system because everywhere human beings organize their foodways into an ordered system parallel to other cultural systems and infuse them with meaning. The scholar discussed how we think and eat food and how it impacts our identity. Thus, food preferences also serve to separate individuals and groups from each other. As one of the most powerful factors in identity construction, we physically, emotionally, and spiritually become what we eat.

According to Zaman (2022), food operates as a social construct, with considerable variation from one society to another. Cultural norms play a significant role in shaping food preferences and consumption patterns. Social and cultural factors heavily influence food choices and dietary habits. The author examines how food choices and culinary practices form ethnic identity. By drawing from their background as an Axomiya Muslim, Zaman illustrates how food plays a role in defining identity and serves as a cultural identifier within a particular context (Zaman, 2022, p. 89).

Furthermore, Montanari (2006) states that just like language, food reflects the culture of the people who make and eat it. It carries traditions and shows who we are as a group. Food is not just about nourishment; it is a way for different cultures to connect and understand each other. It is a way to show who they are and learn about others. As a result, food and food practices become a communication tool between individuals, and the maintenance of certain eating practices is thus part of that group's social identity (Reddy & Dam, 2020, p. 3). At the same time, Wise (2011) discussed food practices in Singapore, which facilitates the creation of a

hybrid, superordinate identity - that of the Singaporean food identity. Because food is often at the heart of intercultural contact, especially in a country like Singapore, which proudly claims its food diversity, the intermingling of different food practices also leads to the creation and maintenance of a solid national identity (cited in Reddy & Dam, 2020, p. 10).

In Malay, it was discussed that the Malay identity is manifested by their daily foods as a simple case of adopting Malay foodways because of cross-cultural interactions (Tan et al., 2015, p. 413). Furthermore, offering ancestral prayer meals is vital to this religious ritual. As previously said, these food offerings are prepared in such a way that they reflect either a strong Chinese food identity or symbolism that preserves the family lineage to express the fundamental identity of the Tirok and Pasir Parit Peranakan Chinese (Tan et al., 2015, p. 419).

On the other hand, the scholar discussed that food does not only generate cultural or group identity. Scholars like Wilson (2006) highlight that food is crucial in establishing gender roles, caste, and class associations in any society. In addition, Guptill et al. (2013) found that it might be a well-known fact to many individuals, including students, that there has always been some connection between food and gender. In reality, it may not be surprising for some to learn that a significant portion of the "feeding work," such as the planning, procurement, preparation, cooking, and serving of food, is still primarily carried out by females all around the world (cited in Ciliotta-Rubery, 2019). In essence, the scholar discussed how aspects of food, such as cooking preparation and planning, are interconnected with gender.

The review contains several paragraphs explaining how food influences people's thoughts and eating habits. The author argues that food serves as a means of sustenance and contributes to forming one's identity at the individual and national levels. For example, the daily food choices of Malays are seen as a reflection of their cultural background, which is shaped by a history of cross-cultural interactions. Furthermore, food has an essential part in determining gender roles and identities since the many duties involved in feeding, such as planning and acquisition, preparation, and serving, are frequently separated along gender lines.

A different academic also discusses the notion of establishing restaurants that serve ethnic cuisine in the international community. With its diverse cultural background, Indonesia boasts a wide range of ethnic dishes. Given the need to improve the country's global reputation, recognizing Indonesian ethnic dishes as a diplomatic tool is essential. The scholar continuously mentioned that ethnic restaurants, such as Indonesian ones in Australia, serve food associated with specific cultures or locations. Sharing unique foods helps to connect people from different cultures. For example, Indonesian restaurants in Australia provide foods that reflect Indonesia's rich culinary traditions, encouraging cultural understanding and respect among people from all backgrounds (Yayusman et al., 2023, p. 3). The findings emphasize the importance of Indonesian diaspora members in the success of ethnic food restaurants. Furthermore, they show that Indonesian restaurants have successfully connected with overseas clients and established a devoted customer base (Yayusman et al., 2023, p. 12).

In terms of conceptualization, Indonesians display diverse cuisine with unique culinary cultures, which has been known to be popular among foreigners in Australia. However, the success of ethnic Indonesian food restaurants largely depends on the diaspora's involvement.

Compared to the Kachin family-run ethnic food restaurant, the two environments are dramatically different, with one catering to domestic customers and the other to international ones. There is a massive gap between the two studies. However, this provides an opportunity for the Kachin family to learn from the Indonesian ethnic food display and use it to attract clients in their community. By learning and doing that, Kachin family-run restaurants can preserve and maintain their ethnic identity.

Interview Participants

No.	Name	Ages	Position	Place
1	Mrs. Shayu	50-60	Owner of Shayu Kachin Foods Restaurant	Tatkone, Myitkyina.
2	Ms. Lahkrang Pan	25-30	Family members of Green Bird Restaurant	Shatapru, Myitkyina.
3	Ms. Han Lu Ti	30-40	Owner of Myitkyina Thu	Chiang Mai, Thailand.
4	Mrs. Hkawn Tawng	60-70	Director of Wunpawng Christian Church Cultural Committee	Chiang Mai, Thailand.
5	Mrs. Nding Seng Tawng,	35-45	Teacher of Zet Let Community School	Takone, Myitkyina.

Analysis

Regarding research question number one, answers from participants 1 and 2 are below

Participant 1:

> *To display the Kachin ethnic restaurant or being Kachin of the Kachin identity through food practices, my restaurant name is written in the Kachin Language. Second, all the foods are wrapped with banana leaves even though the food menu is written in Burmese. Those signs can easily be understood and assume it is a Kachin food restaurant.*

Participant 2:

> *Our restaurant offers a fascinating Kachin culinary experience, incorporating traditional Kachin house design elements throughout the entire space. The restaurant is constructed using bamboo and thatch, creating an authentic and cozy atmosphere for our patrons*.

From my perspective, Kachin family-owned restaurants adapt their long-standing customs to align with the international market while upholding critical aspects of their indigenous heritage. This can be seen in their use of banana leaves, bamboo trays, and traditional cooking techniques, even in a non-native environment. This approach ensures that the true essence of Kachin cuisine is preserved, resulting in its distinct and genuine nature. It also displays how the Kachin-family-run restaurants adapt to localized and present in the global market.

Restaurants play a significant role in preserving and expressing Kachin's cultural identity. By using traditional cooking methods, ingredients, and presentation styles, they maintain a connection to their heritage. This practice helps reinforce a sense of belonging and cultural pride among the Kachin community abroad. Both participants use cultural signifiers such as language, food wrapping, and traditional materials to emphasize their restaurants' authenticity and cultural identity.

Furthermore, the focus is on creating authentic Kachin food experiences and expressing their ethnic identity through culinary practices and the physical environments of the restaurant. This holistic approach enables the preservation and showcasing of cultural identity to a broader public. These restaurants act as cultural hubs where the Kachin community can gather and celebrate their heritage. In addition, it provides a space for cultural exchange and fosters a sense of collective identity through shared culinary experiences. The pride restaurant owners have in being recognized for their Kachin cuisine highlights the importance of these establishments in community building.

Regarding research question number two, participants 1, 2, and 3 answered as follows:

Participant 1:

> *To talk about being Kachin foods or authentic Kachin foods are cooked without oil, it can be called authentic Kachin food. The second thing is that the ingredients and Kachin spices are essential to cooking natural Kachin foods*.

Participant 2:

> *From my perspective, the authenticity of Kachin food depends mainly on the absence of oil during the cooking process. To ensure authenticity, it's crucial to incorporate essential ingredients and adhere to traditional cooking methods*.

Participant 3:

> *From my perspective, whether Kachin food is authentic depends on using all the set ingredients when cooking it. I want to use a whole banana leaf for packing Kachin foods because it displays traditional values and is authentic. However, it is expensive to purchase in Chiang Mai. That's why I cannot use the complete set of banana leaves in food packaging but use some to show it is Kachin Foods. Using full banana leaves in food packaging is quite time-consuming and requires an extra person to take care of it*.

Participants 1 and 2 discussed the primary focus on preserving traditional cooking techniques, particularly avoiding oil and using Kachin spices. This focus indicates a commitment to local customs without explicitly acknowledging the impact of global practices or adjustments to new environments. Participant 3 addresses glocalization by mentioning the practical difficulties of using banana leaves in Chiang Mai. The participant admits the challenge and cost of attaining traditional materials in a new environment, resulting in a partial concession to using banana leaves. This describes adapting traditional practices to fit the local context, embodying the concept of glocalization. Likewise, participants 1 and 2 noted that the essence of Kachin cuisine is closely associated with specific cooking methods and ingredients, indicating a strong link to

traditional practices that define the collective identity of Kachin culture. Additionally, the focus on traditional cooking techniques and ingredients reinforces the collective identity, emphasizing that these elements are essential to what defines Kachin cuisine.

In summary, Participants 1 and 2 emphasize the traditional perspective of Kachin food without addressing adaptation to new contexts. At the same time, Participant 3 refers to the process of glocalization by applying traditional packaging practices to local limitations. Related to collective identity, all participants emphasize traditional elements, but participant 3 powerfully highlights the symbolic importance of these elements in preserving cultural identity.

Regarding research question number three, participants 1, 2, and 3 answers are below:

Participant 1:

> *There is not much challenge for acquaintance ingredients and some spices; however, getting banana leaves is quite expensive and challenging due to fighting between military regimes and other ethnicities*.

Participant 2:

> *There are fewer challenges in opening a restaurant serving Kachin traditional cuisine. However, we assume that as a challenge, sometimes customers request to put some MSG in preparing foods*.

Participant 3:

> *Searching for authentic raw materials is challenging in foreign countries because they are not readily available. I order most of the Kachin spices from Kachin State, Myanmar. Political instability is also one of the challenges in quickly ordering Kachin spices and some ingredients that cannot be found here, especially when causing fighting between military regimes and ethnic armed groups in Myanmar*.

Participant 1 expressed the difficulty of obtaining banana leaves due to the cost and the impact of military conflicts in Myanmar. Participant 3 also highlights challenges in obtaining authentic raw materials and Kachin spices, due to unavailability in foreign countries and the political instability in Myanmar affecting the supply chain. Participant 2 describes fewer overall challenges in opening a restaurant serving Kachin traditional cuisine but notes a specific challenge with customer requests for MSG, which may affect traditional preparation methods. A vital aspect of these restaurants is maintaining traditional authenticity and adapting to local tastes. For instance, although conventional Kachin cuisine is prepared without oil, modifications are sometimes implemented to satisfy customer tastes, like the occasional use of MSG. This negotiation is a dynamic process that reflects the fluid nature of cultural identity. In short, each participant presents unique challenges related to their specific context, ranging from ingredient sourcing and political instability to customer preferences and restaurant operations.

Findings

I have discovered some illuminating insights in my research. One of the aspects that stood out to most is the remarkable way Kachin's rich culinary traditions have assimilated into the global market while retaining their authentic essence. This phenomenon embodies the concept of glocalization. It can be observed that the Kachin people are upholding traditional cooking methods and utilizing authentic ingredients, which plays a crucial role in safeguarding their cultural identity.

Moreover, the complexities associated with sourcing Kachin spices and ingredients abroad, stemming from political instability and logistical issues, serve as reminders of the intricate nature of perpetuating cultural practices on a global scale. These obstacles shed light on the significance and efforts required to ensure the continuity of culinary traditions in a transnational context.

Kachin family-run restaurants are more than just places to eat; they are cultural hubs and community centers that nurture a sense of identity and belonging among the Kachin. These restaurants balance traditional practices with local tastes, showcasing their adaptability and lasting cultural importance.

Conclusion

There are several ways to express and sustain but the Kachin people are expressing their ethnic identity through family-run restaurants including family passing down recipes to serve not only Kachin customers but also the vibrant community through traditional cuisines. Kachin family-run restaurants are not just places but also display cultural heritage and the story of the Kachin people. Moreover, to have a concrete and sustained ethnic identity, political conditions are closely interrelated and represent important factors. In addition, the role of Kachin women is also crucial as they play a key role in maintaining identity within the Kachin patriarchal system. Overall, if Kachin family-run restaurants can maintain their functions through their family recipe, I assume it is beneficial for maintaining and sustaining the ethnic identity of the Kachin people.

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

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Mar Lar[5]

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Abstract

Myanmar has been plunged into darkness since the military coup on February 1, 2021. However, the Myanmar Spring Revolution period inspired poets and ordinary citizens to become revolutionary poets. Although the junta has killed some of them, their poems continue to live on in the hearts of Myanmar's revolutionaries. This research examines how the Myanmar Spring Revolution is depicted in poetry between 2021 and 2024. A collection of 106 poems by 22 poets, ranging in age from their 20s to over 70s, has been analyzed. While most of the poets are Bama, there are also contributions from Chin, Karen, and Mon ethnic groups. Thematic analysis reveals that the poems reflect five common themes: the people's revolution, strong determination, new leadership trends, diverse society, and community solidarity. All poems are written in Burmese, except for one bilingual poem in Burmese and English. Twenty-one poems were translated into English and are presented as examples of the respective themes.

Keywords: Myanmar Spring Revolution, Military Coup, Youths, Poems, Leadership

1. Introduction

Myanmar people have felt hopeless, lifeless, and without a future due to the military coup on February 1, 2021. Most citizens strongly reject the coup and passionately desire the return of a democratic government. The Myanmar Spring Revolution, involving all generations—X, Y, and Z—is more than a public movement aimed at overthrowing the military regime and reclaiming people's power. This revolution has transformed poets and ordinary individuals, including CDM (Civil Disobedience Movement) students, teachers, and actors, into revolutionary poets.

Their revolutionary poems reveal that the Myanmar Spring Revolution encompasses the people's revolution, strong determination, new leadership trends, societal diversity, and public solidarity. We collected over 100 poems by 22 poets from 2021 to 2024 and studied them for their portrayal of the Myanmar Spring Revolution realistically and artistically. These poets range from their 20s to over 70s, most between 20 and 40. While most are of Bama ethnicity,

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there are also contributions from Chin, Karen, and Mon ethnic groups. All poets are still writing except for two; one was killed by the military junta, and the other died of illness.

2. Objectives of the Research

This research has three primary objectives:

1. To illustrate the Myanmar Spring Revolution through poems written between 2021 and 2024.
2. To analyze the poetic imagination from philosophical, artistic, and aesthetic perspectives.
3. To highlight how these poems provide motivation and resilience to revolutionaries.

3. Literature Review

The ancient Myanmar poet Latwaethundra (1085-1161) composed two significant "Pyo" poems (long Myanmar poems akin to epics). "Pyo" poems are verse renderings of Buddhist stories and teachings that translate original Pali text into a Burmese context and enrich them with imaginative details and homilies (Hla Pe, 1985). Latwaethundra's notable works, "Thaeningabyuhar Pyo" and "Nandithaena Pyo," detail the rules and regulations for military conduct and the disciplines of good soldiers (Latwaethundra, 1993, pp. 151-174).

Historically, the military of ancient Myanmar kings adhered to these guidelines to ensure peace and prosperity for their citizens. These principles are still taught annually at the Defense Services Academy (DSA), Myanmar's premier military service academy, to instill national spirit and loyalty among the cadets. However, in stark contrast, the current Myanmar military has abandoned these guidelines and brutally oppresses the very citizens it is meant to protect.

Richard Furman (2007) articulated that poetry is a valuable tool in his research, effectively presenting people's lived experiences of complex existential principles and processes. He noted that revisiting poems years after they were written compelled him to reflect on their meanings at the time of their creation and in the present (Furman, 2007, p. 1). His article explores existential principles through autoethnographic poetry, demonstrating how poems can mirror real-life experiences.

According to the Pen America report (2022), a poignant collection of 10 short stories and 12 poems reflects the numerous acts of bravery and tragic losses following the 2021 military coup, paying tribute to the heroes of the Spring Revolution. These literary works showcase the relentless courage of Myanmar's people during the Spring Revolution. "Myanmar Spring Diary" by Pen America (2023) further illustrates how creative artists use poems and short stories as tools to depict the Myanmar Spring Revolution.

4. Method of Research

This study explores the use of poetry as a tool in qualitative research, offering deeper insights into real-world situations. This paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the Myanmar Spring Revolution by examining poems written during this period. The thematic

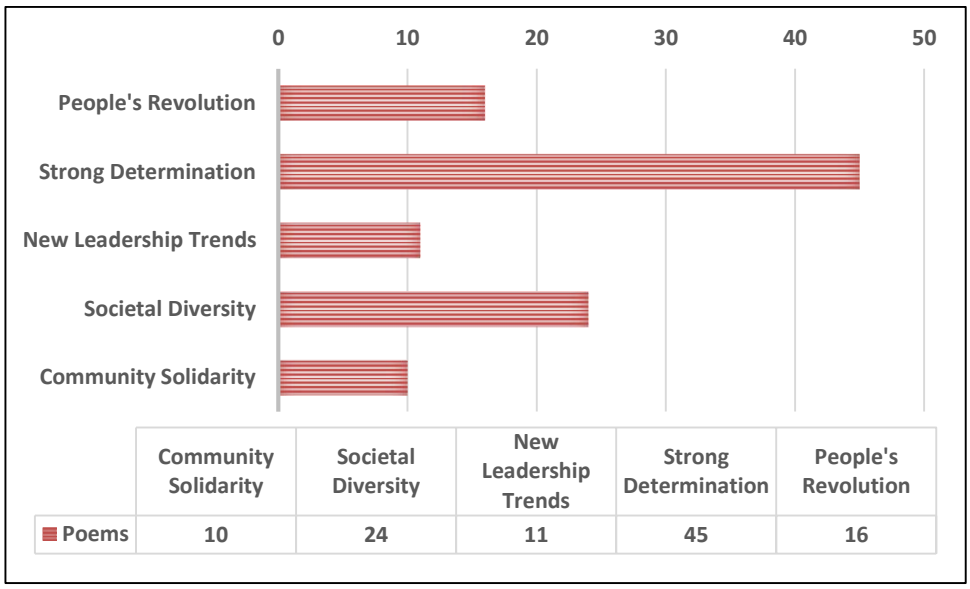
analysis identifies and classifies the common themes within these poems rather than focusing on exact facts and figures.

The analysis revealed five prevalent themes in the poems: the people's revolution, strong determination, new leadership trends, societal diversity, and community solidarity. All poems are written in Burmese, except for one bilingual poem in both Burmese and English. This bilingual poem and 20 additional poems translated into English serve as examples to illustrate the respective themes.

5. Myanmar Spring Revolution Manifested By Poems

During the Myanmar Spring Revolution, poets and ordinary citizens emerged as revolutionary poets. Drawing from their experiences in the revolution, the poems written between 2021 and 2024 reflect the nature, tempo, and characteristics of the Myanmar Spring Revolution in various ways. The poets included in this research actively participated in protests and the Civil Disobedience Movement. Their poetry flourishes with enthusiasm, artistry, philosophy, and aesthetics.

The study and analysis of 106 poems, collected from various sources, reveal that the poems manifest the Myanmar Spring Revolution in five distinct themes, as illustrated in Figure 1.



	Community Solidarity	Societal Diversity	New Leadership Trends	Strong Determination	People's Revolution
Poems	10	24	11	45	16

Figure 1: Themes of the Myanmar Spring Revolution illustrated by poems

As shown in Figure 1, the poems depict the Myanmar Spring Revolution through the following themes: the people's revolution, strong determination, new leadership trends, societal diversity, and community solidarity. The quantitative data of studied poems is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: The quantitative data of studied poems

Category	Quantity
Total poems analyzed	106
Number of poets	22
Age range of poets	20s to over 70s
Poems illustrating People's Revolution	16
Poems highlighting Strong Determination	45
Poems expressing New Leadership Trends	11
Poems describing Diverse Society	24
Poems reflecting Community Solidarity (Public-to-Public)	10
Poems in Burmese	105
Bilingual poems (Burmese and English)	1
Poems translated to English for the study	21

5.1. People's Revolution

The Myanmar Spring Revolution is a people's revolution, with individuals sacrificing their lives and professional careers to end the military regime. According to The Diplomat Asia (2022), the Myanmar Spring Revolution transcends a mere political movement aimed at regime change. The poems reflect this sentiment, with almost all Myanmar people participating enthusiastically in the revolution.

Among the 106 poems analyzed, 16 specifically illustrate the revolution as a people's movement. Five poems were selected for a more detailed study to understand how the Myanmar Spring Revolution embodies the people's spirit.

5.1.1. We All Are the One

Min Ko Naing is one of the prominent political leaders who played a key role in the 1988 Democracy Revolution. Following the February 1, 2021 coup, he stood with the revolutionary people, aligning himself with the People's Defense Forces (PDFs) in liberated areas. The PDFs quickly emerged in the wake of the coup to protect civilians and combat the military regime. Interviews reveal that Min Ko Naing is a poet and an artist, with his poems and paintings significantly supporting the revolution.

One of his poems, "We All Are the One," reflects the Myanmar Spring Revolution as a people's revolution. The poem powerfully embodies unity and collective action against the military regime in some excerpts as follows:

We All are the One

"The value of engineer himself ,
That of sewing female worker herself,
The hands holding car steer,
The hands holding chalk,
One cartoon on the wall street of present era
One Stanza in the poem, a picture,
The keyboard fighter with hypodermic syringe,
All are the engine drivers.

Now, on this revolutionary road
At the school, even opposite ones
call each other very friendly; "Brother in law (York Pha in Burmese), elder son (Tharyi in Burmese)"
In front of Monastery, Church and Mosque,
All together….

After eating the pieces of watermelon by the marched protests, "this is free of charge" was said by the young seller who is the first and till the last,
We all are the one.

We who do not put our luck on the winner horse,
As the winner horse himself or herself,
We ourselves are galloping.

Min Ko Naing
(19th February 2021)

This poem vividly illustrates the participation of the Myanmar people in the Spring Revolution, serving not just as poetry but also as a historical record of the movement. The revolution encompasses everyone, from street vendors and garment workers to educated professionals such as doctors, teachers, and engineers. Despite differing religious beliefs, the youth united on the same revolutionary platform, symbolized by the images of monasteries, churches, and mosques where they gathered and marched together.

The poet uses powerful imagery, such as the "engine driver" and the "galloping winner horse," to convey the strong revolutionary spirit of the people. These metaphors represent the unwavering and spontaneous resolve of the participants, reflecting their collective mental determination and resilience.

5.1.2. 1st February 2021

One of the revolutionary poets, Ko Beda (Chin Dwin), captures the aftermath of the military coup on February 1, 2021, in his poem. Using figurative language such as personification, he poignantly describes the consequences of that fateful day:

1st Day, 1st Day.

1st February
The day that Beauty of our Nation disappeared.
The day that nation was in prison.

Stealing Throne of nation just beyond the group
of human dogs' reach
The nation covered with ashes,
The youths brighten with strength.
Make revolution with strength and skill.
Eras changed,
The rivers flowed in reverse.

While the nation in darkness
When the educated persons are in jails
When non educated ones being the king
Rape the education
Real artists and educators are the absconders
from law.

Hands holding chalk
Hands holding hypodermic syringe
Behind the iron sticks in row.

Some passed away one by one.
Some run in a hurry.
Some hands hold the guns
instead of ball-pens.

Ko Beda (Chin Dwin)
(2021)

The poem features an exquisite example of personification, depicting the inanimate object "the Nation" as a human being imprisoned. Additionally, the military officers, called the military junta, are portrayed as a pack of human dogs, highlighting their worst traits. The phrase "rape the education" personifies the brutal actions of the military officers, illustrating the severe decline of Myanmar's education system under military rule.

The personification of "absconders from law" represents the oppressed people living under the military regime. The lack of rules and regulations under the junta has placed everyone's lives

at their mercy, leading people to unite in revolution. This collective uprising is powerfully highlighted in the poem.

5.1.3. Want to Remind

Many of the poets actively participate in frontline demonstrations. Drawing from real-life experiences, the poem titled "Want to Remind" reflects the essence of the Myanmar Spring Revolution:

Want to Remind
Be imitate Bayintnaung,
The storm will come surely
Do stop or go inside it?

For the stone pillar of revolution
Are you a sand or a brick?
Time's due that sharpened like the knife ourselves,

The script has been written.
Actor?
Supporter?
Every scene has to be perfect that you involve.
Not going to the death pathway
To future pathway.
Clearly, with strong determination
Wherever underground or city,
The most important is being the revolutionary pathway…

Htet Aung (Tet Kon)
(4th September 2021)

Htet Aung (Tet Kon) employs vivid metaphors and similes in his poem, such as the "revolution stone pillar" and "a sand or a brick," which serve as powerful metaphors. The simile "like a knife to be sharpened ourselves" further enhances the imagery. Through these images, the unwavering belief in and enthusiastic commitment to the Spring Revolution among the people become clear.

This poem also conveys that our place is less important than our decisions and actions. It emphasizes that we must stand united in the revolution no matter where we are. This idea shines brightly in the poem, highlighting the people's revolution.

5.1.4. Revolution Smile

Many poems from the early period of the Myanmar Spring Revolution depict the people's uprising. In the poem "Revolution Smile," the poet Min Nadi Kha uses vivid metaphors to express the essence of the people's revolution.

Revolution Smile

Coming out from the smoking bombs with smile
Coming from rubber bullets and real ones with smile
Coming from the loudly bombs with smile
Coming from the ambulance, the bloody wound with bandage carrying smile.

At today funeral cried sadly,
Tomorrow in the street with smile
On the way of Spring (Nway Oo in Burmese)
All Heroes are coming out with smile.

The late martyrs coming with smile at night strike pathway.
The slaves of dictatorship are shock and extremely afraid of these smiles.

Not sooner knowing that they'll fall in the deep ravine,
While seeing these smiles, barking and biting.

Whatever it is,
Bearing the smiles,
Singing the song of "Thwey thitsar" (the revolutionary song by Htoo Ein Thin in 1988)

Beating pots and pans at 8pm.
Closing their fists of no surrendered till the end of the world,
Covering the truth shield,
Smiling bloody….

Min Nadi Kha
(18th March 2021)

The poetic imagination in "Revolution Smile" brings together the deceased and the living as characters in the poem. It depicts people who have been killed by gunshots, car accidents, beatings, or wounds, all uniting to protest against the military junta. Each protester remains unwavering in their fight to reclaim people's power, demonstrating until their last breath with

a sweet smile. These smiles instill fear in the military officers, leading them to oppress the people even more. However, the greater the cruelty of the military officers, the deeper the people's commitment to the revolution becomes.

5.1.5. 21st Century Youth (2)

One of the revolutionary poets, Khit Thit Ein, explores the role of youth in his series of 15 poems titled "21st Century Youth (1) to (15)," which were posted on Facebook. He highlights the connection between the people, the National Unity Government (NUG), and Generation Z (GZ) in these poems. In one of his poems, he creates a powerful linkage between these groups as follows:

21st Century Youth (2)

The body of the gun is people.
The shooter is NUG.
The youth is the bullet that is in the heart
of enemy.

Khit Thit Ein
(26th October 2021)

In this poem, the Myanmar Spring Revolution is depicted as a people's revolution, uniting all generations towards a common goal. The strength of the people gradually builds an incredible revolution, illustrated through vivid metaphors such as 'the body of the gun,' 'the shooter,' and 'the bullet.' Here, the body of the gun represents the people, the shooter symbolizes the NUG, and the bullet signifies Generation Z (GZ). These metaphorical expressions evoke the revolutionary spirit of the people.

The poem highlights that the cooperation and collaboration between the people, the NUG, and the GZ can establish a new democratic regime while simultaneously suppressing the military regime. Thus, the Myanmar Spring Revolution is portrayed as the people's revolution.

5.2. Strong Determination

After the military coup in early 2021, the people of Myanmar, especially the youth, felt hopeless about their future. With their dreams shattered, they expressed extreme antagonism towards the military junta by taking to the streets and raising three fingers in a show of strong determination. Five poems have been selected to illustrate the people's strong determination during the Spring Revolution.

5.2.1. 21st Century Youth (3)

The young revolutionary poets deeply believe in the revolution, willingly sacrificing their belongings, including their lives, and taking immense pride in their actions. Despite their youth, the responsibility for the country's future flows in their veins. Their courage is vividly reflected in the poem by Khit Thit Ein:

21st Century Youth (3)

To revolute injustice
Before going outside, praying in Buddha
and ready to scarify life.
So proud of it!
Being in great trouble
In my whole live.

Khit Thit Ein
(27th October, 2021)

The poet conveys external realities, internal experiences, attitudes, and beliefs in this poem. Before the military coup, most youths in Myanmar were primarily focused on their studies and playing games. However, the oppressive actions of the military regime spurred them into political participation. They have shown remarkable bravery in pursuing their dreams and reclaiming people's power, even after experiencing a taste of semi-democracy during the last five years under the NLD government.

In this poem, the youth express their willingness to sacrifice their lives for a democratic Myanmar. They demonstrate resilience in the face of horrific experiences and take pride in participating in the revolution. This poem embodies the unwavering determination of the youth in the struggle for democracy.

5.2.2. 21st Century Youth (4)

The strong determination of the youth propels them towards victory as they passionately strive for freedom from fear. The young poet describes the essence of the 21st-century youth in the poem titled "21st Century Youth (4)" as follows:

21st Century Youth (4)

Whenever they destroy,
Not our belief.
We belong to nothing
The one whose hope is ruined
Come and touch!
The youth is the blasting cap
of the hand grenade!

Khit Thit Ein
(28th October 2021)

The youth firmly believe that real power comes from within and cannot be destroyed by external forces. The poem evokes strong feelings and emotions by metaphorizing "the blasting cap of the hand grenade." This vivid image allows us to feel the energy and determination of the youth. We can hear their defiant roar against the military officers and witness their boundless courage.

5.2.3. Pride

The Myanmar Spring Revolution aims to unite the country's citizens in strongly rejecting the coup and a call for the return of democratic rule (Global Voices, 2021). The poet is one such citizen; he is not only a CDM teacher (a teacher who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement) but also a writer and poet who strongly believes in the revolution and is fighting for a democratic future. His strong determination is clearly expressed in the poem titled "Pride" as follows:

Pride

Hopeless for paradise (Nirvana),
It's OK.
Never be the slave of Devadatta (an evil
and divisive figure in Buddhism)
And never say to him; "Yes, my majesty."

Ko Ko Lin (Mom's Home)
(11th February 2021)

The poet uses the historical character, the monk Devadatta, to express his strong determination. Traditionally, the ultimate goal of Buddhism is to attain paradise at the end of their lives. The direct meaning of the poem is that if there is still no hope for paradise on his way, the poet will be pleased rather than being a partner of Devadatta and saying "Yes, A Shin Phaya (my majesty)" to him. However, what the poet wants to say here is that even if there is no hope for a comfortable life in the Spring Revolution, he will keep on fighting and fighting, and he will never be a partner of the military junta, never stay on the same side of military junta.

5.2.4. Internal Battle

The Spring Revolution has transformed ordinary people into revolutionary poets. One such poet, Nyi Taryar, delves into the souls and minds of the Myanmar people in his poem "Internal Battle" as follows:

Internal Battle

The body is in the city
But it's a long time,
the soul and action are underground.

Nyi Taryar
(5th November 2021)

Although his body remains in the city, his mind and soul are in the liberated areas, standing against the military. This means he always supports the PDFs (People's Defense Forces) as much as possible and acts as a guerrilla against the military coup in urban areas. This poem evokes a deep sense of courage and the strong determination of the youth.

5.2.5. Spring Pride

During the revolutionary period, the conditions of the people deteriorated drastically across many sectors: education, health, economics, politics, and even daily life. Most villages, especially in the Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay regions—where predominantly Bama ethnic groups live—were set on fire by the brutal military, as were areas in Kachin, Karen, Karenni, and other ethnic regions. Consequently, many people abandoned their homes and belongings, striving to survive amidst these horrific experiences. The poet captures the strong determination of the revolutionary people who lost everything they possessed in the following poem:

Spring Pride

Smoke….
Seen one after another
Houses…
Disappeared one by one.

Barren of words
Dwelling in the heart
The anger smoke is freeze.

No more summer
The revolutionary Padauk (flowers) will blossom
Without home, but with high speed
We pledge with tear pouring water to the noble banyan tree; "Be in revolution till the end of life"

Min Myat Bone (Naung Lay Pin)
(21st March 2024)

The poet vividly describes the scene of burning houses alongside the resilience of the revolutionary people. He uses the metaphor "revolutionary Padauk," which is not only the national flower of Myanmar but also symbolizes the spirit of revolution. The stanza ends with "Be in revolution till the end of life," illustrating the people's unwavering determination.

5.3. New Leadership Trends

The Myanmar Spring Revolution has seen a new trend in leadership—collective leadership complemented by individual leadership. Young people play crucial roles in the revolution, whether in the armed forces, support roles, fundraising, or organizing protests in cities under brutal military control. Many of these leaders are in their twenties and early thirties, such as Dr. Tayzar San, Ms. Ei Thinzar Maung, and Mr. Wai Moe Aung. They initiated street protests that drew millions of participants and inspired thousands of civil servants to join various strikes.

Young women were highly visible on the protest front lines; by one estimate, they comprised 60% of protesters in the initial days after the coup. Most members of the PDFs and other anti-military armed groups are youths, often still in their teens or early twenties (Peace for Asia, 2021).

Regarding collective leadership, the Myanmar Spring Revolution youth leaders are interdependent and collaborate closely, emphasizing interactions to enhance the overall working process. According to Aye Chan (2023), numerous strikes have emerged, including the 8 PM pot and pan strike, honking strike, flower strike, watermelon strike, sleeping strike to symbolize a lack of future, silent strike, Thanakha strike, Khamauk strike, bullock strike, A Tar Oo strike, praying strike, Aungthapjay strike, tumbling kelly strike, candle strike, dawn strike, night strike, walking strike, sitting strike, egg strike, mask strike, stone strike, guerrilla strike, no man strike, and many others. All these strikes are nationwide events and activities carried out under the collective leadership of the youth.

5.3.1. The Way that Must Walk

The Myanmar Spring Revolution unites all generations and social statuses with a common purpose: to end the military regime. In his poem "The Way that Must Walk," the poet A Mon describes the youths leading various strikes and protests across the nation:

The Way that Must Walk

I roll the voice and shoot it
Mine touches with Hledan
and scatters.

With the spine of Hta Naung and the buds of Tamar,
The Spring, Nway Oo blossoms.
I grasp the sunbeam and cast it.

Town of Myaing proclaims loudly;
"We will win."
Our brothers
Our sisters
Wake us up while in half sleep
"Wake up!"

Here is Hlaingtharyar.
Here is Sanchaung.
Here is Kyuk Myaung.
Here is Mandalay.
Here is Nay Pyi Daw.
If I say that is it the whole country? …..
"We must win!" they said.

Cover with shield
Don't care of shooting bullet with a rude look.
The sand bags that blocked the street are the tears
of ours.
Say again..
We fight with heart.
Nway Oo will say;
Will give back the multiple
For our fallen blood.

A Mon (2021)

This poem clearly highlights young leaders' interactions and active skills, reflecting the enhancement of the revolutionary process they have fostered. The metaphorical expression "the blocked sandbags are their tears" evokes an emotional response from readers. Instead of using euphemisms, the poet directly condemns the bullets fired by soldiers. This poem asserts that the collective leadership of the youths will succeed in the revolution as they devote their heart and soul to it.

5.3.2. Having

Generation-Z and Millennials have been at the forefront of the movement, and their support remains crucial (Peace for Asia, 2021, p.15). The poem "Having" illustrates how young people are gaining more power and influence in the hearts of the people.

The poet expresses admiration for the youths who strive to end the military regime, and this sentiment inspired the composition of the poem as follows:

Having

Assets laid by
Sailing along the hillside.
They die we live
The storm occurs
in any season.

In the judgment circle
Injury arrow shoot to the target
To get the era
To own the era
We have the stars who can judge.

Lu Thit Moe Kyaw
(4th November 2021)

The metaphors "star," "storm," and "injury arrow" are used in the poem. The "star" represents the people, especially the youth, who sacrifice their lives for a democratic regime. This visible image illustrates the determination of the youth and the belief that they are the ones who can ultimately end the military junta. The "storm" implies the extreme attacks by the military, while

the "injury arrow" represents the resilience and courage of the youth, capturing their mental fortitude. These vivid images convey not only the collective leadership of the youth but also the country's faith in them during the revolution.

5.4. Societal Diversity

The Myanmar Spring Revolution has created two distinct communities: the revolution side and the military side. On the revolution side, there were doctors and nurses, office workers, teachers, administrators, bankers, and telecommunications staff who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Conversely, the military side includes government staff who did not join the CDM (Non-CDM). Five poems that illustrate the nature and behaviors of these diverse societies during the Spring Revolution were analyzed.

5.4.1. Some….

One of the revolutionary poets, Thura Min Kant, composed a poem titled "Some" to express the diverse society as follows:

Some….

Thinking about the different worlds…..
Some are wet in water.
Some are wet in sweat.
Some are wet in blood.

Thura Min Kant
(April 2024)

Based on real-life experiences, the poet describes the different kinds of people who are happy, unhappy, in great trouble, and so on. The visible images of "water," "sweat," and "blood" represent the diverse society, evoking strong feelings and emotions in the readers.

5.4.2. Difference

The late writer and poet, A Kyi Daw (Karen Ethnic), highlighted the distinctions within Myanmar society during the Spring Revolution in his poem as follows:

The Difference

Some are boosting for the chicken curry,
Some are eating with the leaf plate.

Some hate the high price,
Some hide their children holding hands tightly.

Some are happy with their sweet hearts,
Some are having the bamboo shoots and no murmuring.

Some are yearning for their relatives,
Some are walking in heavy rain.

Some are relaxing in comfort bed,
Some are fighting with their dignity.

It's the time not solving secretly
Whatever it is,
Let me have a pure conscience.

AKyi Daw
(14th Jan 2022)

As the poem mentions, some lives become homeless, comfortless, and cheerless, while others remain rich, comfortable, and cheerful. These contrasting situations lead to a diverse society split into sympathetic and selfish segments. Most people on the revolutionary side, including the poet, strive to maintain a clear conscience even in the face of great trouble.

5.4.3. The Parting Landmark

The famous writer Maung Sein Win (Pa Di Kone) is one of the revolutionary poets, and he wrote the poem "The Parting Landmark" as follows:

The Parting Landmark

I understand your belief and right
In diverse with full respect.

At the time of the others' sadness with tears,
Recite the ones giving sympathy to them
The ones with no hearts
Never together.

Fine art cannot quench the fire of the horrible mind
Any entertainment cannot put out any worries.

Therefore, I've already decided,
Leave former lovely friends on Facebook
With broken heart.

It's our parting landmark.

Maung Sein Win (Padikone)

(12th April 2023)

In his poem, the poet cannot accept his old friends who lead easy lives while the whole country suffers under the brutality of the military junta. He ultimately declares his decision to leave them behind. The Myanmar Spring Revolution tests people's ideologies, distinguishing between the selfish and the selfless. Those on the revolutionary side strive to create a selfless society, while those aligned with the military are seen as part of a selfish society.

5.4.4. Prostitute

Maung Hla Myo (Chin Chaung Chan) uses the metaphor "Prostitute" to represent the silent people who stay in their comfort zones, neglecting the revolution, as follows:

Prostitute

If they get what they want,
Whoever he is, whatever it is,
They keep silence.
Maung Hla Myo (Chin Chaung Chan)
(9th February 2021)

It is a clear expression of a diverse society that accepts whoever holds power in the country as long as they get what they want. The metaphor "prostitute" is a meaningful and effective expression for those who side with the military or remain silent about the military coup and the junta's brutality, as long as their own lives remain comfortable.

5.4.5. 2021 New I-Gyin

The last poem describing the diverse society is "2021 New I-Gyin," composed by a CDM professor. In this poem, she adorns "Nan" in various ways. Here, "Nan" refers to the Non-CDM government staff who did not join the Civil Disobedience Movement and continued working for the military junta, as illustrated in some excerpts as follows:

2021 New I-Gyin

Hey… beloved friends
Best friends …. Sisters in law…..
Nan… Nan…. Nan… Nan
Nan after Nan
Are you a Nan (Non-CDM) from upper hill
or lower?

Original Nan or Nan back from CDM?
What kind of Nan you are?

Non CDM cursed that CDM has no justice,
We, CDM, are the stupid group…
Aww How surprising it is!

Huge Nan, Middle Nan, Small Nan

Flat Nan,
Wet Nan, Dry Nan,
Mad Nan, Crest Nan

Wearing Nan flower,
Eating Nan fruit,
Embracing Nan tree,
Hanging Nan branch,
Smelling Nan smell,
Covering Nan leaf,
Hey …. Nan (Non CDMs), are you sure able to smile for the rest of your life?

Shin Myat Noe Oo
(13th October 2021)

The poet uses phonological and semantic embellishments in this poem, such as Huge Nan, Middle Nan, Small Nan, Flat Nan, Wet Nan, Dry Nan, Mad Nan, Crest Nan, Nan flower, Nan fruit, Nan tree, Nan branch, Nan smell, and Nan leaf. She also uses satire to criticize Non CDM, and the last stanza implies that a Non-CDM will realize that being a Non-CDM is full of shame and lack of dignity when the revolution is over.

5.5. Community Solidarity

The Spring Revolution generates a huge charity environment in Myanmar that is called Public to Public, and all of Myanmar people over the world are key players in it. In the Covid-19 period, our state counselor, Aung San Suu Kyi, often addressed that the people perform the most important role, and the people are the VIP for the country, and said "ပြည်သူသာအဓိက" /pyi thu thar adika/. Nowadays, numerous Myanmar people support the Spring Revolution in every way they can. Three poems written by Pi Ya Thwey (Monywa), Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Lin (Mom's Home) are selected and studied.

5.5.1. Help from Backline

For the victory of the revolution, all Myanmar locals or internationals are inclusive, which can be seen in the poem "Help from Backline" written by the poet Pi Ya Thwey (Monywa) as follows:

Help from Backline

It's the horrible time.
Let me urge; "Scatter the donation seeds"

Age of battle
Brutal military regime will be terminated.

"Come…., lady
Over there is my partner

Give meat and fish to him (the civic tiger)
that went underground to be a comrade.
Pi Ya Thwey (Monywa)
(9th November 2021)

This poem reflects the involvement of every individual in the public-to-public process of the Myanmar Spring Revolution. The poet vigorously believes that mutual support among the public plays a vital role in sustaining the fight and achieving success in the revolution. This poem clearly illustrates how someone can be part of this public-to-public process.

5.5.2. In my Nursery School

Min Ko Naing is a poet and a statesman who has been standing with the people throughout his life, from 1988 until now. Drawing from his real experiences, he created the poem "In My Nursery School" as follows:

In My Nursery School

With the guns
They came to get me.
My teacher said
Do not take him,
I will adopt him.
They dragged me out
I cried.
The whole school cried.
Our toys also cried.
Min Ko Naing
(1st April 2022)

The poem tells the story of a four-year-old boy arrested by soldiers at his nursery school, in front of teachers and other children. Despite his teacher's attempts to protect him, it was in vain. The poem uses personification, such as "our toys also cried," to convey the sorrow and terror experienced by the children. This story serves as further evidence that mercy or justice cannot be expected from the soldiers, and it underscores the need for the public to rely on each other to be resilient against the military junta.

1.5.3. Hello, Spring! (47)

Ko Ko Lin (Mom's Home) depicts the Myanmar Spring Revolution as a public-to-public movement based on his own experiences as follows:

Hello, Spring! (47)

Within these days,
Never ask, "What are you doing?"
We all gave up our jobs.

Within these days,
Never ask, "Are you OK?"

We left all good things far behind.

Within these days,
Never ask, "Are you healthy?"
Nation itself is not healthy.

To sacrificed ocean,
All the hearts of rivers flow together
Among the diverse infinity,
When all lives are equal,

Hello, Spring …..
We've already known the answers of all questions.
Not dare to ask….

Ko Ko Lin (Mom's Home)
(19th Dec. 2021)

The people involved in the revolution are facing numerous difficulties, such as having their houses burned or ransacked, personal belongings looted, and experiencing a lack of safety and stable places to settle. Consequently, the poet refrains from posing questions with obvious answers. In the poem, the poet employs personifications and metaphors to evoke an aesthetic effect on the readers. Phrases like "Unhealthy Nation," "Sacrificed Ocean," and "Hearts of Rivers" serve as metaphors and personifications to express the immense sacrifices made and the unwavering readiness of their souls and hearts to continue sacrificing.

1.5.4. Hands which will Write New History

As the years of revolution lengthen, daily life across Myanmar becomes increasingly difficult. However, most Myanmar people strive to survive amidst the daily brutalities of the military junta by supporting each other physically and emotionally. Min Ko Naing captures this resilience of the Myanmar people in the following excerpts of his poem:

Hands Which Will Write New History

What kind of news the world would like?
Participate in Guerrilla strike along the City streets
Take the photos with tattered phone when the village was burnt,
He is a citizen journalist.
One place of the world replied,
It was accepted….
This is the new crime record!

In 21st century, the army of land, navy and

air forces were fought back by percussion
lock firearm,
Which country experienced it?
Which history learned it?

Along the difficult journey,
never leave anyone,
warmly welcome.
People, people, …
our noble ones…..

Wherever we live,
Whatever we drink,
How far it is!
"It's urgent, our brotherhoods!"
Following one,
Hundreds, thousands, lakhs, millions,
millions and millions…
stretching our hands.
We can touch everything with our hands.
It is not metaphorical expression that
"it is writing new history"
Really! we are writing a very new world
history of revolution….

People…
Our great people…
Our noble people…

Min Ko Naing
(27th August,2022)

According to G.H. Luce (2014), it is evident that "out of sweetness comes forth strength, the strength of delicacy of one who knows and trusts his feelings and dares show them, of one who looks into his heart and writes." The poet listens to the people's voices, feels their emotions, and expresses them on their behalf. This demonstrates the public-to-public sharing, caring, and understanding of the suffering endured during the Spring Revolution

6. Discussion

106 poems from 2021-2024 were collected, classified, and analyzed to better understand the Myanmar Spring Revolution. The analysis revealed that the revolution manifested through various themes: the revolution of the people, strong determination, a new trend of leadership, a diverse society, and public-to-public interactions.

The revolutionary poets' courage is the fundamental reason for their artistic, philosophical, and aesthetic creations, based on their experiences following the 2021 military coup. Some poets, like Khet Thi and K Za Win, tragically lost their lives due to brutal military suppression, while others were forced to leave their homes. The diversity of the poets is summarized in Table 2, which reflects the general information given:

Table 2: General information on the diversity of poets

Characteristic	Description
Age Range	20s to over 70s
Most Common Age Group	20 to 40 years old
Ethnicities Represented	- Bama (majority)
	- Chin
	- Karen
	- Mon

As shown in Table 2, it does not provide specific numbers or percentages for each ethnic group, the exact distribution of ages within the 20-70+ range is not specified, and it just mentions that "most" poets are between 20 and 40 but does not give a precise number of percentage as well. While Bama is mentioned as the majority, the proportions of Chin, Karen, and Mon poets are not specified. This table provides an overview of the diversity among the poets based on the information available; for a more detailed breakdown, additional data collection would be necessary.

The analysis found that 16 of 106 poems emphasize the people's revolution, 45 highlight strong determination, 11 express collective leadership, 24 describe a diverse society, and 10 reflect public-to-public interactions. Most of the poems that were collected underscore the strong determination of the people and the diverse societies during the Spring Revolution.

The Myanmar Spring Revolution is a people's revolution, especially since the youths constitute most of the PDFs. The public largely boycotted military products, refused to comply with military junta directives, participated in every silent strike, and shared their properties and food with PDF groups and refugees. People are involved in every sector of the Spring Revolution, and their involvement and support significantly influence the revolution's tempo.

Nearly half of the poems, 45 out of 106, highlight the public's and the revolutionaries' strong determination. This indicates that they will never give up the revolution and are not concerned with when it will end; they are committed to continuing it until its conclusion. The PDFs, EROs, fundraisers, supporters, PDF gamers, clickers, YouTubers, and others are all involved in the revolution with unwavering determination.

The revolutionaries demonstrate their strong determination and resilience, initiating collective leadership. They ventured into areas controlled by various Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs), where they received military training and emerged as outstanding leaders and key players in the revolutionary forces. They are now winning one battle after another, fighting

alongside the EROs. This situation aligns closely with Lao Tzu's philosophy: "Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. However, with the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say, 'We have done this ourselves'" (Lao Tzu, 2014).

During the Spring Revolution, society became diverse in every sector, particularly among those who supported the revolution (revolution society), those who supported the military coup (military society), and the neutral society. Within the revolution society, there are also sub-groups based on their involvement. The selected poems effectively describe people's nature, attitudes, and characteristics within these diverse societies.

The public-to-public program exemplifies the trust, kindness, and sympathy between PDFs, CDMs, and revolutionaries. Support teams and groups play a vital role in this program, and their members are known as supporting comrades, or "Htout Poe" (ထောက်ပို့) in Burmese. They must work secretly to communicate and provide support to the necessary places, as military officers constantly trace them. Their stories are worthy of honor and have become the main themes of many poems.

7. Conclusion

This study explored the power of revolutionary poetry in different ways: 1). the multifaceted representation of the revolution – poems vividly capture the spirit, struggles, and hopes of the people, and five key themes provide a holistic view of the Myanmar Spring Revolution, 2). poetry as a tool for resilience – it provides strength, relief, and it serves as historical documentation of the revolution, 3). the emergence of new voices – it transforms the ordinary citizens into powerful revolutionary poets, with diverse age groups and ethnicities contributing to the narrative, 4). impact on revolutionary spirit – it reinforces determination and solidarity among participants and helps maintain momentum despite ongoing challenges, and 5). cultural significance – poetry becomes a form of resistance and preservation of democratic ideals and reflects the deep-rooted literary tradition in Myanmar society.

The legacy of revolutionary poetry endures by means of sustaining the revolution – the poems continue to inspire and motivate revolutionaries, for instance, the poem of the late poet Khet Thi; "They shot the head dead, but they don't know revolution dwells in the heart." It endures by means of the documentation for future generations as well – the studied poems will serve as powerful historical artifacts and provide insight into the emotional experiences of this pivotal time.

This study inspires a potential for further research on longitudinal studies regarding the evolution of themes over time and comparative analysis with revolutionary poetry from other contexts. This study highlights a call to action to preserve and share these poetic works and encouraging continued creative expression as a form of resistance. Therefore, it can be strongly presumed that the Myanmar Spring Revolution, as manifested in these poems, demonstrates the indomitable spirit of a people united in their quest for democracy and justice.

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English as the National Language: a Necessary Cultural Violence to Counter Burmanization?

Cho Cho[7]

Abstract

Much research has highlighted the long and complex legacy of Burmanization, particularly under the 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 various ethnic 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. Such a change 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.

Keywords: Burmanization, Language, Culture, Post-conflict

Introduction

In the aftermath of the 2021 coup d'état, the discourse on a federal structure for Myanmar took on new dimensions, with the claims of multiple ethnic groups edging closer to long-cherished dreams of greater autonomy from Burman control. However, the discourses themselves, including official published statements, constitutions, and policies were mainly published in Burmese language, and not in the languages of the groups represented, as this paper will present more explicitly in subsequent sections. This may simply be dismissed as linguistic pragmatism given that Burmese is the most commonly shared language. However, there is little evidence of any critical discussions on which language would be used for common documents such as a federal constitution; moreover, the seemingly unquestioned default use of Burmese points to the persistent and pervasive legacy of Burmanization.

This paper seeks to stimulate informed debate and discussion around the issue of language and power in post-conflict arrangements, with particular reference to the legacy of Burman hegemony. Much has been said of the enduring dominance of the Burmese language, culture and the legacy of Burmanization policy in subduing ethnic minorities' identities. However, the

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options in future federal structures are somewhat limited: retaining Burmese as the official language, and in doing so, perpetuating the legacy of Burmanization; establishing a form of linguistic pluralism, whereby a number of languages are equally recognized —an elegant but unwieldy solution; or substituting Burmese with another language, such as English, as the key reference language for official documents, acting as a kind of arbiter for a linguistic plurality.

This paper considers whether such a move represents a form of cultural violence against Burmese language and culture through the removal or displacement of Bamar-centric arrangements and structures, and if so, whether it is justified. Comparing the experiences of three different countries, which use English as an important language, I consider who may be advantaged or disadvantaged by using English as the national language in a new federal Myanmar.

For decades, Myanmar has suffered the effects of authoritarian military rule, not only in terms of education, but also in economics and politics. Particularly in parts of Myanmar where ethnic minorities are more populous, Burmese language, culture, religion and imposed histories of Burmese heroes have influenced daily life of ethnic people, resulting in Burmanization. Language inherently shapes the parameters of what can and cannot be expressed, understood, and owned by those involved. According to Kamwendo, "Whoever controls the language controls the culture." (Kamwendo, 2010, p. 323; Mishina & Iskandar, 2019, p.49). Myanmar is populated with diverse ethnic people and a multilingual society. In Myanmar, Burmese is the official and national language across all education levels and represents the most commonly spoken language by different ethnic groups. Language plays a pivotal role in communication within national contexts and permeating various aspects of daily life. According to Danladi, "the language includes a wide range of variation from a variety of human activities in a system of interacting with somebody, society, or culture. It also plays a crucial role in the social, political and economic life support of the people in a given geographic entity" (Danladi, 2013, p.2). Chumbow (2009) stated, "Language and culture are intimately related because language is a vector or carrier of culture. Language is the means by which people who belong to a common cultural community, express their belonging to that community. The loss of one language means a loss of part of the national cultural treasure" (p.27).

Myanmar Language Education (Government Curriculum Background) and Burmanization in Myanmar

After 1962, Burmese was affirmed as the language of instruction and, with occasional variances, little space was given to the inclusion of other indigenous vernacular languages. A narrative was developed in the curriculum during the military regime that focused on stressing the "Burman-ness" of the nation, stressing Burmese culture as the norm of national identity, and important for the sake of national unity (Walton, 2013; Salem-Gervais & Metro 2012, Shah & Cardozo, 2019, p.5). For decades, the Myanmar state education system has insisted on Bama saga (Burmese) being used throughout the national school system, to create a Myanmar national identity based on Bamar culture, with Burmese as a ''unifying'' language (Callahan, 2003; Watkins, cited in Simpson, 2007; South & Lall, 2016a, p.6). As a result, ethnic minorities experienced the dominance of the Burmese language, with limited opportunities to learn their

mother tongues and culture. Additionally, cultural traditions of these minorities are often neglected in the national curriculum, causing ethnic children to feel the impact of the Burmese language from an early age. This situation reveals how language is used by groups adhering to Burmanization policies to oppress ethnic minorities in Myanmar.

Myanmar is a diverse country, with the state recognizing more than one hundred ethnic groups. Forming roughly two-thirds of the population, ethnic Burmans, known as the Bamar, have enjoyed a privileged position in society and hold a majority of government and military positions. Many ethnic minority groups, on the other hand, have faced systemic discrimination, a lack of economic opportunities and development in their regions, minimal representation in government, and abuses at the hands of the military" (Maizland, 2022, p.6). From 1962 to 2011, state power under Ne Win and ensuing military juntas imposed what had come to be perceived as a "Burmanization" of society by moving away from foreign cultures and repressing autochthonous ethnic ones" (Bigagli, 2019, p.5).

Burmese (the majority language) became the sole language of governance and education, with ethnic minority (or 'ethnic nationality', as many groups prefer to be designated) languages suppressed and marginalized. The perceived 'Burmanization' of state and society has constituted one of the prime grievances of ethnic nationality elites, which have mobilized minority communities to resist militarized central government authority, in the context of the world's most protracted armed conflict (Smith, 1999; South, 2011; South & Lall, 2016a, p.3).

Another reason is "having mainly Bamar government teachers in government schools in ethnic states is likely to have contributed to the widespread sense of alienation felt among minority communities" (South & Lall, 2016a, p.4). Furthermore, the lack of support for education, transportation, and teachers exacerbates this issue. In ethnic areas, most teachers come from Burmese backgrounds, resulting in weak communication between teachers and children, which hinders effective education. In places like Chin State, where young children often do not speak Burmese, dropout rates are high due to the language barrier.

Curriculum and content are shaped to import Burmese linguistic, cultural and religious norms. This includes the promotion of Burmese behavioral and character values as a required standard, and features Bamar-centric history, including the exploits of Burmese warrior-kings in their campaigns to subdue other ethnic groups. Figure 1 and 2 show how ethnic groups experience education in daily life, with textbooks written in Burmese and incorporating Buddhist teachings. The root of the conflict between Burmese nationalism and ethnic minorities in Myanmar lies in the significant problems caused by language and religious oppression by the Burmese military. Ethnic minorities do not have the right opportunity to teach their language in the education system. In the next section, I will discuss the rights of ethnic people's education in Myanmar.

Figure 1: Myanmar reading textbook for Grade 1

Figure 2: Morals and civics textbook for Grade 1

By examining this situation, we can see that the Burmanization policy is being used as a tool to oppress ethnic minorities in various ways. Additionally, in a society with diverse religious beliefs, incorporating Buddhism into the curriculum extends the influence of religion into education. We can see this by looking at this curriculum.

Ethnic Minority Education

Since Burma achieved independence from British rule, the campaign of 'Burmanisation', or the colonization of indigenous minority cultures and languages by the majority's—Bamar/Burmese—culture, language, and religion has been enforced, neglecting the richness of cultural and ethnic diversity within the country (Anui & Arphattananon, 2021; Aung et al., 2023, p.5).

According to Lwin, while government public schools are the leading education providers across Myanmar, there are other schools that operate outside the government public school systems, such as schools managed by the education departments of the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) in their controlled areas, schools operated by religious institutions (e.g., monastery-based schools and church-based schools) and schools run by civil societies. These nongovernment schools, including monastery-based schools run by ethnic minority communities, mostly use students' mother tongues as the language of instruction in the classroom (Lwin, 2019; Aung et al., 2023, p.5).

For example, the Nyein (Shalom) Foundation (2012) conducted a study that found many learners at the school had difficulty understanding the content because the language of instruction was Burmese. This affected the average reading time per passage, and their performance on measures such as word recognition and recall. The study concludes that

Myanmar's current paradigm of using only Burmese as the language of instruction creates significant disadvantages in terms of schooling success and enhances dropout rates. A policy of using ethnic languages as much as possible in primary schools is recommended, reflecting the conclusions of educational research more widely (Shah & Cardozo, 2019, p.18). Ethnic peoples feel discriminated against because their cultures and languages are not included in the official national curriculum (Lall & South, 2018, p.491).

Shan and Cardozo (2019, p. 17) point out that "since 2011 there has been a reawakening of discussion around the role of languages other than Burmese in classrooms." Although the state government has carried out educational reforms regarding the mother tongue education of the ethnic groups, it has been seen that there are difficulties and restrictions in their language policy. While this section highlights how ethnic minorities are impacted by the Burmanization policy in government education, the next section analyzes the announcements made using the Burmese language.

Burmese as the Default Language of Federal Discourse: Announcement of the Formation of Chin Brotherhood

In the case of Myanmar, Lo Bianco points out that "language and ethnicity have been central to violent conflicts, which have arisen in response to the attempted creation of a singular Myanmar identity by a centralized military government" (Lo Bianco, 2015, p. 12; Shah & Cardozo, 2019, p.19).

Figure (3) shows the announcement of the formation of Chin Nyi Naung by Chin State committees. Even official statements by Chin nationalist groups nonetheless use Burmese language as the main mode of communication. Chin Nyi Naung refers to the Zomi Federal Union/ PDF-Zoland, Chin National Organization/ CNDF and Chin National Council (Mindat)/ CDF-Mindat. These three groups formed "Chin Nyi Naung" for military cooperation.

Figure 3: Facebook Social Media

By looking at the above announcement, if all discussions about federalism and then all documents like constitution, laws, etc. are in Burmese, does that not simply reinforce Burmese

language hegemony? It means that the specific meanings of terms used are largely controlled by those who control that language. It means that the interpretation of a law is largely governed by those who are in command of that language, and contestation remains internal. Prah (2003) stated that the language of instruction in any society is also the language of hegemony and power (cited in Plonski et al., 2013 p.20). Burmanization policy in the country of Myanmar has functioned like this.

As we move towards a future federal structure, recognizing the influence of linguistic expressions becomes crucial. The language used in federal discussions and decisions will shape the policies, norms, and collective understanding of the diverse groups involved. Ensuring inclusivity and comprehensibility across different linguistic backgrounds will be essential in fostering a fair and cohesive federal structure.

Language and Power

Language is a powerful tool of control used by colonial powers. Language forms a large part of the culture of people—it is through their language that they express their folk tales, myths, proverbs, and history (Picador et al., 1988; The African trilogy, Danladi, 2013, p.2). Mohanty et al. (2009) warn: "When language becomes the basis of power, control and discrimination, socioeconomic inequality is perpetuated; the language(s) that people speak or do not speak determines their access to resources" (Boruah & Mohanty, 2022, p.121).

This kind of language and power has been present in Myanmar for many years. The ethnic peoples of Myanmar have faced systematic oppression based on language, ethnicity, and other aspects under authoritarian regimes. The imposition of the dominant language and culture has marginalized minority groups, limiting their ability to express themselves and participate fully in societal and political life. Even today, the military's coup d'état in 2021 demonstrates the enduring influence and power of these authoritarian structures. The military's actions continue to suppress the rights and voices of ethnic minorities, highlighting the ongoing struggle against oppression and the critical importance of linguistic and cultural inclusivity in building a fair and just society. In the following section, I will discuss the historical significance of English in three different countries, focusing on its important role in international communication and its impact on people's life.

Methodology

This research employs a comparative case study methodology to examine the implications of prescribing English as the national language in the post-conflict period in Myanmar. Case selection criteria focus on three countries where English is utilized in diverse roles, including as an official language, national language, working language, lingua franca, bridge language etc. Through a critical analysis of both the legacy of existing linguistic hegemony and prior experiences of colonization, the study considers the feasibility of adopting English as the national language as a potential strategy to mitigate social injustice and reduce the dominance of the Burmese language. This study is conducted by using secondary data as a collection method. The data comes from previous studies or surveys as a comparative study. I will analyze the experiences of three different countries, illustrating the means by which language

hegemony exists within a complex framing of power and interests. India, Singapore, and Nigeria are chosen as case studies due to the rich variation in their language policies and socio-political contexts. Secondary data sources are utilized to explore the historical context, policy frameworks, and sociopolitical dynamics surrounding the adoption and implementation of English language policies in each country. Two key questions are proposed: "What will happen if English is prescribed as the national language in the post-conflict period in Myanmar?" And does it lead to reduce Burma-centric privilege in the future federal structures?" Also, I will analyze if English is prescribed as the national language in Myanmar, what kinds of situations will emerge, for example, who in the society would be power and who would be threatened by changing this policy.

1. The Importance of English Language in India

Based on census data from 1971, India has "1,652 languages belonging to five different language families: Indo Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burmese and Semito-Hamitic" (Meganathan, 2011, p.2). Three languages are regional languages, generally the majority language of the state, English and Hindi or another Indian language (Annamalai, 2005, p. 28).

As Jain and Patel, (2008, p. 11) note, English is of "national importance" because of its role as interstate communication language and also it is used as "the link language" and "the lingua franca" of the people to communicate across many parts of the country. Boruah and Mohanty (2022) point out that English is "the global knowledge explosion" for Indians (p. 59). "The route to power, prestige, and riches, even today, lies through English" (Tully, 1997, p. 159).

The Impact of English Language Dominance in India

English, as the imported language of the colonial powers, nonetheless retained its power and place after independence, entrenching existing elite power and privilege: "The present status of English in India gives enormous power to the elite, and they have yet to show they are willing to shed that power and share their knowledge with their fellow Indians" (Tully, 1997, p. 164). Meganathan (2011) agrees that today in India the language progress and development are admired and hated phenomena, on the other side, English is seen as a "killer" of the native or indigenous languages (p. 3).

Similarly, Ramanathan (2005) finds that the English-vernacular divide in India further inflicts the class- and caste- based social division. Her analysis shows that the current English medium education is a continuation of the British colonial legacy in which English is known as the language of the elites. The use of languages other than English is devalued, the English-only policy "suppresses [the] free speech" of students that results in a lack of creative and critical thinking in the learning process" (Piller & Cho, 2013, p. 40; Phyak, 2016, p. 203).

2. The Importance of English Language in Singapore

Singapore likewise gained independence from British colonial rule in the aftermath of World War II. In terms of ethnicity, the majority (over three quarters) are of Chinese heritage, with the remainder comprising Malays (13.4 %), Indians (9.2 %) and others (3.3 %) which include Eurasians and other foreign workers" (Department of Statistics, 2010). In Singapore, English opened doors to political and economic opportunities as well as social prestige besides it is viewed as human capital development that is not only unifying but also has divisive possibilities (Rubdy, 2005, p. 50). "The language policy that has evolved in Singapore is one of 'pragmatic multilingualism'. Based on the guiding principles of multiracialism (covering multilingualism and multiculturalism), which means equal status and treatment for all races, their languages and cultures" (Rubdy, 2005, p. 56). According to Bokhorst Heng (1999), there are three reasons why English is important in Singapore: First, English is a major international language; second, English is important at the individual level; third, English is important at the community level (p. 240) (Leong, 2016, p. 275).

Cavallaro and Ng cited by Li et al. (1997) mentioned that the change in Singaporean language practices is due to two main causes: "government policies and people's desire for personal gain and social mobility with both issues closely tied to language attitudes and language identity." The Singaporean language practices are caused by a desire for "personal gain and social mobility." In the past few decades, Singapore has had the significant experience of social and economic developments that brought about the government's emphasis on good English language skills (Cavallaro & Ng, 2014, p. 11).

The Impact of English Language Dominance in Singapore

In the late 1970s, the Singapore government perceived that under the influence of English education, younger Singaporeans had lost their Asian identity as they absorbed Westernized lifestyles and adopted an individualistic outlook (Ho & Alsagoff, 1998; Leong, 2016, p.269). Although the bilingual school policy produced English-knowing Chinese students and another outcome of this school policy was the decline of the mother tongue literacy in schools and decline in literacy, especially amongst ethnic Chinese (Leong 2016, p. 274).

Moreover, Tan and Ng (2010) found that feelings of loss and alienation existed among adult speakers who regretted not being able to speak their grandparents' language and were unable to build a meaningful bond with them and Ng's (2009) finding shows that there is a lack of communication between the grandparents and their grandchildren, and all of their routine tasks depend on their children because they do not speak the official language of English (Cavallaro & Ng, 2014, p. 9).

3. The Importance of English Language in Nigeria

Akinnaso (1993) listed three major types of language in Nigeria, namely, 1) about 400 indigenous languages, 2) three exogenous languages (English, French, and Arabic), and 3) Neutral language (Pidgin English). Among all these languages, English has taken its place as

the most important language due to its position as the official language and the language of education, mass communication, administration, trade, and global communication (Adriosh & Ozge, 2016, p. 207).

English in Nigeria is seen as a weapon because it provides an excellent representation of political supremacy. Because of its official and instrumental 'gate keeping' functions, English is the premier language that Nigeria's like their children to learn (Goke-Pariola, 1987; Danladi, 2013, p. 7). From the earliest stage to date, English has played dual roles as a contact language between "different ethnic groups" and "a medium of communication at international levels" (Ibrahim & Gwandu, 2016, p. 3). "In Nigeria, being a major language of communication in the global world, it offers the people of this nation the benefit of participating in global affairs." Njoku (2017) agrees, "English language provides a link to the global world and access to adequate information is gained on a global level" in Nigeria (p. 221).

The Impact of English Language Dominance in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the dominance of the English language has led to a reduction of the use of indigenous languages among children. Many languages or dialects are now facing the extinction and if the indigenous language are not spoken, they will die eventually (Ajepe & Ademowo, 2016, p. 13). Adriosh & Ozge, 2016 agree that the English language is dominant in the lives of Nigerian university students and is widely used as the main medium of communication most of the time (p. 211).

"Language and culture cannot be separated; therefore, the lack of use of indigenous languages by the younger generation has led to the gradual erosion of our cultures. The result of this is that the younger generation is beginning to lose the core values and virtues in their cultures. The dress culture of the younger generation is also taking after the dress culture of the people whose language they speak. The younger generation is reflecting the culture of the language they speak more by gradually and modifying their names to be pronounceable in English" (Ajepe & Ademowo, 2016, p. 12).

Analysis: English as a National Language

In these three countries mentioned above, English plays a crucial role. For instance, in education, its use has yielded positive outcomes, and in politics, it has become a means to unify the nation. The emphasis on English in education and language policies has also contributed to economic progress. The ability to speak English offers individuals and society as a whole more opportunities, particularly in international contexts.

However, this English language policy also disproportionately affects ethnic minorities and disadvantaged communities. The emphasis on English creates more opportunities for the elite, often benefiting those already in privileged positions. For example, private education systems, which emphasize English proficiency, create barriers for those who cannot afford such education. As a result, individuals lacking access to private education and English language skills face discrimination in employment, social status, and other areas.

In a multilingual community, people communicate and exchange thoughts using various languages, often relying on a common language for mediation. This common language is typically the mother tongue of the majority within the community. In Myanmar, the Burmese language is the common language, as the majority of the population belongs to the Burmese ethnic group. Consequently, the Burmese language is predominantly used in Myanmar's education system as the main medium of instruction.

However, this one-language policy has several implications. While it facilitates communication and unity across different ethnic groups, it also exerts significant linguistic influence on the mother tongues of ethnic minorities. These influences can lead to the erosion of linguistic diversity, as minority languages may gradually adopt Burmese vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Over time, this can result in the decline of the use and proficiency of minority languages, especially among younger generations who receive their education primarily in Burmese. This situation poses a challenge to the preservation of Myanmar's rich linguistic and cultural heritage, as the mother tongues of ethnic minorities are integral to their identities and traditions. In the next section, I will discuss the English language that already exists as the colonial heritage in Myanmar and later I will analyze if we use English as the national language in Myanmar what will happen and who is willing to accept or not.

The Role of English Language in Myanmar

Myanmar, previously known as Burma, also experienced colonial rule at the height of the British Empire, during which the formalization of broader national educational, political and administrative systems was conducted through the medium of English. It was framed around imported values and norms, which displaced or eroded the prior linguistic and cultural heritage. During the period of British rule (1886-1948), the status of Myanmar declined. English was adopted as the official language of public administration and the medium of instruction in education. In 1964, there was a major reform of the education system and Myanmar became the medium of instruction at all levels, with English taught only as a foreign language" (Ireland & Van Benthuysen, 2014, p. 151). Mar (2020, p. 419) points out that in the late 1970, English became emphasized as a modern language and the main medium of instruction in high schools and the language of instruction in universities.

In primary school, subjects included as part of the curriculum were Burmese, English, mathematics, history, and geography. Science was introduced as part of middle school with the same subjects continuing through high school. In general, this schooling curriculum and structure was deemed to give primacy to particular types of academic knowledge rather than the development of life, vocational, moral or citizenship skills (Lwin, 2000; Shah & Cardoza, 2019, p. 6).

Privileging and De-privileging: Potential Winners and Losers if English is Adopted as the National Language in Myanmar

In this analysis section, I will discuss what will happen if English language is prescribed as the national language in Myanmar by analyzing potential winners and potential losers in society. In addition, I will discuss a detailed analysis in each section, comparing the two large political

parties in Myanmar, cronies, ethnic arm groups, ethnic races, religions, and international and neighboring countries, especially ASEAN countries and China.

Potential Winners, Potential Losers and Why

When considering a policy of adopting English as the national language in Myanmar, various groups and entities can be identified as potential winners and potential losers. The two main dominant national political parties in Myanmar, the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), are examples where the impact of the English language policy differs.

NLD

"From 2011 to 2021, it appeared that the grip of the military was easing with new political leadership and proposed education reforms, however, that came to an abrupt halt in February 2021 when the military Junta overthrew the lawfully elected National League of Democracy (NLD) government and unleashed violence on its people" (Wong & Kareng, 2023, p.2). In terms of educational opportunities, compared to the days of the NLD elected by the people and the days of the military council, it is also found that under the NLD, there are good opportunities for ethnic minorities to learn their mother tongue and to communicate with foreign countries. In this change of English language policy, the NLD might support making English the national language in Myanmar to promote economic growth, modernization, and international integration. Not only that, proficiency in English can open up educational and business opportunities, attract foreign investment, and enhance global competitiveness, positioning the NLD as a progressive party focused on future prosperity.

USDP

"But experts say the Tatmadaw continued to wield much control. The 2008 constitution [PDF] includes several provisions to protect the military's dominance. For example, 25 percent of parliament's seats are reserved for the military, and any changes to the constitution need approval from more than 75 percent of parliament, effectively giving the military veto power over any amendment. In addition, the military's proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), maintained seats in the powerful defense, home affairs, and border affairs ministries" (Maizland, 2022, p. 5). As I mentioned earlier, I found that the military exerts substantial control over language and other aspects. In this context, putting English as the national language in Myanmar could diminish their power that also relies on using Burmese language. Because of that, they might be on the potential loser side. Similarly, the Business elite who have a close personal relationship with the military might also be on the loser side.

Ethnic Races

Let us consider the ethnic races in relation to putting English as the national language in Myanmar. In this context, teaching English to ethnic people is driven by the expectation of achieving positive outcomes. Adopting English as the national language would increase opportunities for them. The potential beneficiaries or those who are likely to accept this policy

include ethnic groups as the Kachin, Kayah, Karen, and Chin. This is because most of these groups are minority ethnic people in Myanmar who have experienced the effects of the Burmanization policy. Additionally, some ethnic groups have Roman alphabet scripts. According to South and Lall, "Most stakeholders agreed that ethnic nationality schoolchildren in Myanmar should learn Burmese (Bama saga) and perhaps English as a common language (lingua franca). There are also voices (for example, in Kachin) that reject teaching and learning in Burmese totally, wanting to replace Burmese with English" (South & Lall, 2016b, p. iii). Moreover, all these ethnic groups have been significantly contributing to the ongoing revolution, and many ethnic armed groups have been actively fighting against the military regime. For the Rakhine ethnic group, this policy also holds great potential to benefit as winners. If implemented, this policy could secure support from Western countries, aiding the revolution and improving poor and underdeveloped conditions in the country, ultimately leading to its development. On October 27, operations in Shan State (northern) began. TNLA and Arakan Army (AA) jointly announced. The operation, which was jointly announced by the three Northern Allies, was given the name "1027" (Eleven Media Group) (https://news-eleven.com/article/286354). Changes in English language policy changes in Myanmar will have a positive effect on the revolutionary groups and might remove the Burmanization impact on them.

"India is also a major actor in the region, with a long, multifaceted and changing history of engagement with Myanmar. India's foreign policy towards Myanmar has generally been marked both by concerns about democratization in Myanmar and by geostrategic interests centered on the Indian Ocean. India has provided active support for the pro-democracy forces that emerged in 1988, while also developing ties to the military rulers. The period since 1988 has seen a shifting balance between these primary interests, from the primacy of pro-democracy support to growing economic and diplomatic engagement with the SLORC/SPDC" (Egreteau, 2011; Stokke et al., 2018, p. 33). By adopting this approach, Myanmar could establish stronger connections with countries that use English as an official language, particularly western-orientated countries (such as Singapore, India, EU, and the US). In this way, changes of language policy could have a positive impact on the developing country.

China and ASEAN Countries

If Myanmar adopts English as the national language, it could disrupt their economic and business activities. Additionally, Myanmar's increased engagement with Western countries would create more opportunities for its neighboring countries to become potential losers.

China has been the most influential external actor in Myanmar since independence. Formal diplomatic relations between the two countries are based on principles of non-aggression and peaceful co-existence that have been in place since the 1950s (Li & Zheng, 2009; Zin, 2010; Stokke et al., 2018, p. 32). "The relationship between China and Myanmar has spanned many years up to the present day. China, which borders Myanmar, has been the country's largest trading partner and its closest diplomatic ally in recent years" (Maizland, 2022, p. 8).

Currently, due to the military coup in 2021, the people are experiencing losses in various aspects, including social, economic, and educational areas. According to political analysts,

China continues to collaborate with and support the military junta to this day. If Myanmar were to adopt English as the national language, it would significantly impact China's interests. Therefore, they are unlikely to favor this change. According to analysts at the Irrawaddy news agency, the military council declared the Chinese New Year Day in 2025 as a closed office day in Myanmar, stating, "Myanmar is China, Myanmar language is Chinese language, love China, respect Chinese people" (Irrawaddy, 2024). By looking at these facts, we can see how important China is in Myanmar by communicating with military councils. U Khin Ri, the chairman of the Union Strength and Development Party, publicly appealed to Russia to provide reinforcements to the military council headed by the dictator General Min Aung Hlaing, who was crippled in strength when he lost the Northeastern Military Headquarters in Lashio, Shan State, due to the offensive of the Kokang National Army and allied forces (Myanmar Now, 2024).

"Myanmar and Thailand have a strong tradition of cross-border trade, and Thai governments and businesses have long been financially involved in Myanmar. Thailand relies on Myanmar as a major supplier of energy (natural gas and electricity) and labor power, while Myanmar receives remittances, investments, loans and aid in return. Several infrastructure projects serve to integrate Myanmar and Thailand economically, strengthening Myanmar as a central region within Southeast Asia. Thailand's primary interests in Myanmar revolve around these economic dynamics, but security and regulation of the drug trade are also important" (Stokke et al., 2018, p. 33). Due to these facts, neighboring countries such as China, Southeast Asian ASEAN countries like Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos are likely to be potential losers. This information highlights the important role of language in a country's development and shows how language policy can change impacts on a country's economy, education, development, society and international relationships.

Religion

"The 969 movement was a monastic network established in late October 2012 in Lower Burma. On 27 June 2013, this movement largely morphed into a larger and better structured organization called Amyou-bhāthā-thāthanā-saung-shauk-yay-ahpwe (Organization for Protecting the Nation, Religion, and the Buddha's Dispensation, or Ma Ba Tha). The aim of the Buddhist nationalist movements was to protect the Buddhist nation and the sovereignty of the state of Myanmar against the perceived threat of Islamic expansion" (Foxeus, 2022, p. 276). This Buddhist nationalist conception was explicitly expressed in the slogan 'one race, one language and one religion' (Frydenlund, 2017; van Klinken & Su Mon Thazin Aung, 2017; Stokke, 2019, p. 9). Because of such information, the Amyou-bhāthā-thāthanā-saung-shauk-yay-ahpwe (Organization for Protecting the Nation, Religion, and the Buddha's Dispensation, or Ma Ba Tha) or Ma Ba Tha groups might not want English as the national language in Myanmar, which could bring influences of western culture to the youth, along with the language. They are a group formed to preserve Buddhism and nationalism among the Burmese people in Myanmar. At the same time, if the young people's thinking abilities become transparent, their influence over the people will be significantly reduced. According to the Stokke et al., "there are strong and complex links between Buddhism and politics in Myanmar" (Stokke et al., 2018, p.30). Therefore, the Ma Ba Tha group might be a potential loser.

For the Christian community in Myanmar, this kind of policy will give good opportunities. According to R. E. Silver (2002), "It was also a religious language, with Christianity strongly linked to English" (Ling, 1989; Clammer, 1989; Silver, 2002, p. 127). In Myanmar, Christianity is a major religion among ethnic nationalities (especially Chin, Kayah, Kachin and Kayin) (Gravers & Ytzen, 2014; Stokke, 2019, p. 1). These ethnic groups are on the potential winner's side. Therefore, if Myanmar adopts English as the national language, it would create good opportunities for the Christian community in the country.

Considerations when English is National Language in Myanmar

After identifying possible winners and possible losers, we will discuss and describe issues that may arise from having English as the national language in Myanmar. Myanmar is a country that was under English rule for many years. In this time, only English was used as the official language, and English-language schools were established. During colonial rule, the number of monasteries teaching in Burmese language decreased, and only English-medium Christian schools gained place.

Later, Myanmar gained independence from colonial rule and gained independence under the leadership of the Myanmar Army led by General Aung San. Since independence, the Burmese language became the official language in education, as announced by U Ne Win. This topic has been discussed above. Now, issues will be explored that may arise from having English as the national language in Myanmar, including how various individuals and organizations could be affected.

Looking at the history of Myanmar and the English language policy in the three countries described above, it can be assumed that implementing such an English language policy is likely to lead to better educational and job opportunities for young people. According to Mark "the world to be educated means to know English" and Crystal (2003) asserts, "access to knowledge is the business of education. When we investigate why so many nations have in recent years made English an official language or chosen it as their chief foreign language in schools, one of the most important reasons is always educational" (Plonski et al., 2013, pp. 3-4). It can be observed that English is very important for education; however, besides these benefits there are also potential pitfalls. In the three countries mentioned, besides considering opportunities for young people due to the English language, it is worth thinking about the impacts of language dominance that may arise due to this policy.

In Africa, a consequence of the English language policy was a lack of documentation for most indigenous languages. In addition, in Singapore, there is a decrease in communication between young people and adults, as well as a decrease in the perceived value of their mother tongue. In addition, reviews show that although the English language improves the country's economy and society, discrimination exists between those who can speak the language and those who cannot.

If we compare this to the situation in Myanmar, it is questionable whether the country will once again return to colonial rule. Additionally, since Myanmar is a multi-ethnic country, the Burmanization policy has already affected ethnic minorities.

It is worth considering how this policy might affect the people in contrast to the three countries mentioned earlier. If the goal is advancing the development of the country, according to Chew's view (1999), sometimes sacrifices are necessary for future gain. In Singapore, many grandparents are unable to communicate with their grandchildren due to the loss of their mother tongue. However, there has been little protest despite swift changes because there has been a shrewd willingness on the part of the older generation to sacrifice – accepting a personal inconvenience for the material well-being of the younger generation in a fast-changing world (Chew, 1999, p. 42; Rubdy, 2005, p. 59).

Conclusion

This paper highlights the legacy of Burmese language dominance as an element of Burmanization and the history of military junta in Myanmar and how the language policy has been implemented. Through a combination of primary research and literature reviews, we can see how language and education policy are deeply involved in ethnic conflicts in Myanmar until today. In Myanmar, one of the main conflicts between the military and ethnic minorities centers on the dominance of Burmese language and culture in their education system. Wong and Kareng (2023) cited by Metro (2021) confirm that the military-controlled government has used 'slave education' and 'fake history' for seven decades, ignoring the linguistic and ethnic diversity of its people (p. 1). This highlights the problem that if we consider English as the national language in Myanmar, there might be another kind of suppression, and language hegemony in Myanmar. Thus, we, we need to understand how to maintain or address those problems and how to reduce their impacts. Post-conflict, this type of language power is an important consideration in Myanmar, as Wong and Kareng (2023) suggested, "the impact of the February 1, 2021 military coup on education in Myanmar is substantial" (p. 3).

Because of this, Myanmar has been lagging behind compared to other countries. Therefore, if English becomes Myanmar's national language, it could benefit the national development and enhance international communication. English as the national language in Myanmar could potentially resolve the issue of continuous Burmanization and align language policies with the current revolutionary context. In addition, enhanced international connectivity could pave the way for Myanmar's development similar to that of the three nations described. A country's change of its official language or national language can have benefits, depending on the language change policy, as well challenges associated with this change. For example, in Singapore, in order to communicate with major countries and to develop the country, English is their official language and the country's economy and society have improved in areas such as education, allowing it to stand out as a country.

Empirical evidence generally suggests that economic growth has been the most effective tool for reducing poverty, but the extent to which it does depends largely on a country's circumstances and policies (Ahluwalia, Carter, & Chenery, 1979; Fields, 1989; Roemer & Gugerty, 1997; Findlay et al., 2016, p. 60). In addition, language policy plays an important role in the development of a country. By making English the national language in Myanmar, it is likely that we will see significant economic growth in future. That is why it is important to know how to deal with the potential issues that may arise due to the use of English in Myanmar. Finally, when engaging internationally, it is crucial to understand how to manage what changes,

and to think about how to preserve the good things that already exist. I would like to conclude with a question: to counter the dominance of Burmese language and culture, does the removal or displacement of Burma-centric arrangements and structures lead to cultural violence in the post-conflict period in Myanmar?

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Healthcare Reimagined: The Making of Mobile Health in Post-coup Myanmar

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Abstract

This paper looks into the history and nature of mobile health in Myanmar, particularly in response to the sociopolitical upheaval following the military coup in 2021. It traces the historical development of the health system from the British colonial era, through successive military regimes, to the current crisis characterized by infrastructure damage, manpower shortages, financial difficulty, and a fragmented health system among the military state, the government in exile, and local communities. Amidst this turmoil, mobile health, a flexible, organic, spontaneous, community-based health system that delivers medical services and other humanitarian needs directly to the people, has developed, addressing the urgent needs of the population, particularly in conflict zones and remote areas. Applying assemblage theory, this paper conceptualizes mobile health not merely as an alternative to institutional health, but as a dynamic, bottom-up system that adapts to the specific conditions of various localities. It functions both as a response to the collapsing institutional healthcare and as a grassroots activism against oppressive state control. Furthermore, this paper proposes a health consciousness change to lay a foundation for democratizing and decentralizing the health system in post-coup Myanmar, aiming to integrate mobile health into health practices as a parallel system with limited state control. These reforms attempt to create a health system that is not only more accessible, but also resilient and adaptable to ongoing and future sociopolitical turmoil.

Keywords: Mobile Health, Institutional Health, Healthcare in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), Community-driven Health Reforms, Post-coup Myanmar

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1. Introduction

In February 2021, Myanmar's Tatmadaw, led by Min Aung Hlaing, staged a coup, claiming election fraud by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). This coup ended the NLD's administration and the country's decade-long quasi-democratic governance. In response, the National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG) was formed, including NLD members, other political factions, and representatives from various ethnic groups, armed forces, and civilians. Amid widespread clashes, the health system and other public services have been severely compromised. Hospitals face manpower shortages and resource deficits, with daily increases in injuries and fatalities. In conflict zones, healthcare facilities have become targets, deterring injured soldiers and civilians from seeking hospital care. Mobile health services, set up by Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) medics in community areas, war zones, and remote locations, have emerged as a vital alternative. Despite limited equipment, these temporary facilities offer flexible, tailored medical services, providing crucial support as the institutional health system collapses.

Mobile health is crucial for saving the lives of combatants and civilians within the CDM, meeting essential medical needs as the state-run health system fails. These operations often go undocumented to avoid state surveillance and protect medics and patients from political assaults. This paper examines mobile health by studying its history, current development, and relationship with institutional health. The study addresses three questions: (a) under what conditions does mobile health emerge; (b) within what ecosystem does it exist; and (c) how could it potentially transform health consciousness in Myanmar?

This paper uses assemblage theory to explore the nature of mobile health, drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987). They argue that a network is not fixed but functions as emergent and spontaneous assemblages formed by interactions among its components. Applying this theory, the post-coup Myanmar social order can be seen as a project of diverse initiatives by many stakeholders, rather than being dominated solely by state power or anti-state forces. This paper redefines mobile health as services operating outside or alongside public and private health. It encompasses medical and humanitarian aspects, offering treatment, supplies, consultations, and health information directly to locals. It also provides essential resources like water and food, tailored to regional needs. Here, "mobile" signifies its flexibility, adaptability, temporality, spontaneity, and mobility, while "healthcare" includes facilities, medicine, personnel, patients, communities, equipment, environments, food, water, and other elements forming the health ecosystem. Accordingly, healthcare is not a fixed institution based solely on the state's blueprint; it is a bottom-up structure rooted in communities, constantly reshaped and transformed by the people's needs at specific times and places. Operating flexibly, it adapts to regional conditions and provides services directly to locals, frontliners, and those unable to access institutional health due to conflict or geographical barriers. This approach shows how the health system can function independently of state institutions, driven by immediate community needs.

This paper employs Foucault's concept of biopolitics to examine how institutional health disciplines and organizes bodies according to the regime's will (Foucault, 1974, 1995). By

applying this concept, the analysis highlights how state control over healthcare extends beyond service provision, using medical resources, healthcare access regulation, and health data manipulation to enforce political power and social order. In contrast, the paper explores how mobile health enables communities to regain power and autonomy over their health services. This decentralized, community-driven model challenges the state's control, offering flexible, tailored care adapted to local needs. Additionally, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialization explains how mobile health disrupts and disintegrates institutional health modalities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This approach allows for nomadism in healthcare, representing a non-linear, context-specific network that challenges rigid institutional boundaries (Deleuze, 1985). Understanding the sociopolitical background of each locality is crucial, as cultural narratives shape community-centric healthcare delivery, aligning with Charon's concept of narrative medicine, which integrates patient stories into health practices (Charon, 2006). Thus, this paper argues that mobile health revolutionizes institutional health and fosters a new form of imagined community. Unlike Benedict Anderson's concept of a community bound by media and language (2016), this "community of lives" is united by health.[10]

Methodologically, this paper analyzes mobile health in Myanmar from three perspectives: the dialectics between institutional and mobile health, the ontological and phenomenological aspects of mobile health, and its prospects. First, we map the history of both institutional and mobile health using sources such as scholarly articles, INGO reports, news articles, interviews, social media, and government websites due to the scarcity of academic work on Myanmar's healthcare history. Next, we outline three characteristics of mobile health through case studies, involving interviews with three mobile health frontliners: a CDM volunteer in Taunggyi, Southern Shan State; a leader of mobile clinics in Kayah State; and an exiled doctor in Chin State. Finally, we outline a future where mobile health becomes an essential part of Myanmar's healthcare system.

2. The Limits of Institutional Health

Public healthcare in Myanmar is managed by the Ministry of Health and Sport (MOHS), which oversees hospitals, medical supplies, research, training, traditional medicine, epidemic control, health information, and manpower.[11] Despite the MOHS's vision of affordable healthcare for all, specialist hospitals are mostly in major cities like Yangon and Mandalay, while peripheral and conflict zones only have primary-level facilities (Latt et al., 2016, p. 126). To improve state-level health provision, the government has recruited community health workers and local auxiliary midwives for emergencies (Becker, 2018). However, corruption, political instability,

[10] There have been a few scholars looking into expanding Anderson's concept of imagined community to other scopes that cross-influence society, such as Burton's idea of an imagined genetic community. He argues, "whereas Benedict Anderson conceptualized the nation as an imagined community produced by language and print capitalism, new scholarship argues that genetic science has refocused national imaginations toward biological kinship" (Burton, 2021, p. 8).

[11] See the State Administration Council's Ministry of Health and Sport's website: https://www.mohs.gov.mm

and geographic segregation challenge national healthcare services. Historically, the state has not prioritized public health, often favoring military hospitals. Consequently, the government relies on private healthcare facilities set up by health companies, foreign aid, local communities, or religious organizations (IPSOS, 2013). After the coup, public healthcare split into two systems: the MOHS run by the military junta and a separate entity established by the NUG to deliver healthcare to those affected by or involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement.[12]

Modern healthcare in Myanmar dates back to the 1890s during British rule in Lower Burma. During the early colonial period, Burma had high mortality rates, especially among infants, due to malnutrition, poor food security, and malaria (Richell, 2006). In response, the colonial state built hospitals in major cities, starting with Rangoon General Hospital, which featured the latest medical technologies like operation theaters, vaccination programs, and sanitation units. Traditional Ayurvedic medicine, however, was sidelined by the state. Following Burma's independence in 1948, there was a severe shortage of medical staff as most foreign experts left with the British, leading to the suspension of many healthcare units. The damage from World War II and the Japanese invasion had already crippled healthcare structures, worsening the situation. Prime Minister U Nu attempted to address these issues with the Pyidawthar Plan, aimed at strengthening infrastructure and attracting investment. However, the plan faced significant challenges, as the U Nu government struggled to administer large parts of the country during this turbulent period.

Healthcare, as part of state machinery, is deeply affected by political changes. The 1962 military coup brought General Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) to power, prompting many medical professionals to flee the totalitarian regime. Ne Win's administration then nationalized healthcare, integrating private hospitals into the state system. It aimed to decentralize authority by appointing medical officers and establishing rural health centers. The health system was structured along administrative lines, with services distributed across townships, districts, and regions. However, disparities persisted, with peripheral and conflict-affected areas receiving the least attention. Despite aiming for universal healthcare, the regime allocated only 1% of GDP to healthcare, resulting in inadequate resources and poor service delivery. Following the 1988 Uprising, the military regime transitioned to the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and later to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Under SPDC rule, policies largely remained unchanged, but the government increased out-of-pocket payments and introduced a community cost-sharing scheme to reduce its healthcare expenditure. This period saw more healthcare privatization, with private clinics and hospitals becoming more prominent in urban areas, while rural and remote areas continued to rely on underfunded public healthcare. Resource distribution remained uneven, worsening health inequalities between urban and rural or ethnic minority regions (Sein et al., 2014, pp. 33-35).

Democratic awakening in 1988 and worsening livelihoods led to civil unrest, challenging Than Shwe's leadership. In areas of state weakness, civil society began to provide alternative

[12] See the National Unity Government's Ministry of Health's website: https://nhcmyanmar.org

structures and support where the government failed (Lorch, 2008, p.154). Following the monk-led Saffron Revolution in 2007 and Cyclone Nargis, the regime agreed to a roadmap toward democracy, leading to the 2011 handover to reformist military leader Thien Sein, marking the start of Myanmar's liberalization. The quasi-civilian government aimed to democratize ministries, policymaking bodies, businesses, and electoral practices, though it operated under the unchanged 2008 constitution. Initiatives included increasing health expenditure, offering coverage for the poor through hospital trust funds and a community cost-sharing scheme, and reestablishing international connections to attract funds and investment (Risso-Gill et al., 2014). Thein Sein handed power to the civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, with Htin Kyaw as president, in 2016. Health system reform became more policy-driven, aiming to create a healthcare-friendly environment and universal health coverage (Ergo et al., 2019).[13]

Though this transitional period opened a policy window for structural health system building in Myanmar (Campbell et al., 2023), reforms halted when Htin Kyaw resigned as president due to health reasons in 2018 and was succeeded by Win Myint, an ally of Aung San Suu Kyi. Civilian leadership continued until Min Aung Hlaing staged a coup in February 2021, claiming the NLD's 2020 election victory was illegitimate. After the coup, Myanmar's health system nearly collapsed, with infrastructure, manpower, and supplies severely disrupted (Paddock, 2022). Over 70% of health workers left state-run hospitals, joining NUG facilities, becoming independent medics, or fleeing abroad (Krugman, 2024). Health facilities were targeted by both state and non-state actors, with 1,127 reported incidents of violence (Insecurity Insight, 2024), aiming to disrupt medical services for opposition supporters and instill fear in civilians.[14] State forces targeted healthcare to weaken resistance support networks, while non-state actors occasionally attacked military-affiliated facilities. The State Administration Council (SAC) blocked medical aid and food from reaching conflict zones and opposition-controlled areas, worsening the humanitarian crisis.[15] Foreign humanitarian aid was often misappropriated or blocked by the SAC. In response, the NUG, CDM, and communal health workers developed mobile health services to address medical needs.

3. The Rise of Mobile Health

Conventionally, mobile health involves medical care delivered directly to households, neighborhoods, or community areas by hospitals, clinics, or NGOs, including electronic health

[13] The Myanmar National Health Plan 2017-2021 highlighted its goal of advancing toward universal health coverage, see the full document here:
https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/resource/myanmar-national-health-plan-2017-2021.pdf

[14] Insecurity Insight is an international NGO based in Switzerland that reports on health, education, displacement, and more in conflict areas around the world. See their report on Myanmar's situation here: https://insecurityinsight.org/country-pages/myanmar

[15] There were incidents where the military fired on citizens transporting and queuing for oxygen tanks in Mandalay and Yangon during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. See the report here: https://phr.org/news/at-least-252-reported-attacks-and-threats-to-health-care-in-myanmar-during-six-months-of-militarys-crackdown/

and telehealth services (Shieh et al., 2008). This study expands on this idea, viewing mobile health not just as an extension of traditional services but as a dynamic network mobilizing medics, patients, and supplies to provide accessible and responsive care tailored to local needs. In this light, mobile health is a movement in two senses: physically, it is more flexible and accessible, providing tailored healthcare interventions depending on the needs and circumstances of the community; ideologically, it situates outside state and corporate healthcare machineries, offering medical care for the people on more affordable terms, politically and financially. In Myanmar, mobile health is essential due to political instability, geographical barriers, and cultural and linguistic diversity, making localized health provision crucial. This study argues that mobile health in Myanmar is not merely convenient but a community-empowering system that supports people on the move, in conflict zones, or at the margins of proper care.

Historically, mobile health services in Myanmar have been provided by traditional Ayurvedic medicine practitioners and midwives, often referred to as home visits or community health services, though not formally labeled as such. These practices focused on maintaining bodily equilibrium and treating patients with diet and herbal remedies. Practitioners typically worked within their communities, fostering close ties with patients, unlike modern medicine's emphasis on professionalism and standardization (Cohen et al., 2022). Traditional medicine remains popular in both rural and urban areas, leading the government to establish a department to monitor these practices and conduct related research (Awale et al., 2006).[16] Alongside the prevalence of traditional medicines, Western medical knowledge was promoted by the British following the establishment of Rangoon General Hospital. The British trained many local medics through their medical programs. However, many of these trained professionals left after independence in 1948 or following the military takeover in 1962 (Rao, 1968). Those who remained pursued various paths: some worked in government or private hospitals, others in clinics, and some ran home-based services. These medics often combined modern and traditional medical knowledge, offering flexible locations, prices, and treatments. Their services have become increasingly popular as healthcare costs rise and remain a crucial option for people in remote or conflict areas.

Logistically, mobile health in Myanmar operates with flexible and varied structures shaped by local-provider connections, unlike the rigid MOHS system. While some services have an online presence, most information about providers is undocumented and spread through word of mouth due to their small scale, side project nature, or desire to avoid state attention. Funding typically comes from the NUG, NGOs, overseas Burmese communities, local businesses, religious organizations, and private hospitals. Mobile health forms include mobile clinics, health stations, pharmacies, telemedicine, community health workers, midwives, nomad medics, traditional healers, emergency services, and medical supplies deliverers. Notable

[16] The Department of Traditional Medicine is under MOHS. See their website here: https://www.dtm.gov.mm/

international providers include Japan-based Daiichi Sankyo in Nyaung-U,[17] Jungle Health Clinics funded by Global Angel in Karen State,[18] and Première Urgence Internationale with a clinic in Kayin State.[19]

Politically, mobile health in Myanmar has become both a battleground for the resistance and a safety net for war-affected individuals. After the coup, many healthcare workers fled, while others turned to private hospitals, became CDM medical volunteers, or joined the medical teams of the People's Defense Forces (PDF) and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO) (Physicians for Human Rights, 2022, pp. 15-20). Past experiences with the military junta had prepared the civilian army and volunteers to quickly integrate medics into their movement. The CDM support network includes individuals from various sectors, helping medics acquire supplies and connect patients with private hospitals to maintain basic health services. Meanwhile, the NUG established a parallel Ministry of Health to provide medical support and information to resistance members. The NUG's funding mechanisms pool donations to finance private healthcare, emergency services, medical supplies, and logistics.

Medics, CDM networks, and NUG support create an ecosystem for mobile health, aiding those affected by war, poverty, and resistance movements. This ecosystem involves a coordinated effort among various actors and resources. Medics, including doctors, nurses, and volunteers, form the core of mobile health teams, often working in makeshift clinics set up in community centers, schools, private homes, or on trucks. These professionals are supported by extensive CDM networks, which include local volunteers handling logistics, transportation, and communication. They ensure the distribution of medical supplies, equipment, and necessities like food and water. The NUG provides financial assistance, strategic planning, and political backing to sustain and expand healthcare efforts. This decentralized, flexible arrangement allows mobile health to respond rapidly to changing needs, delivering timely medical services where institutional health has collapsed or is inaccessible.

4. The Nature of Mobile Health

Mobile health is not merely an alternative to institutional health; it embodies non-conformity and is inherently unstructured and unorganizable. Rather than viewing it as a static network that stabilizes over time, it should be seen as an assemblage that continually integrates and disintegrates, adapting to each new moment and locale. According to Manuel DeLanda (2016), an assemblage comprises various components and their interactions. This section examines the nature of mobile health in Myanmar through its ontological, phenomenological, and epistemological aspects. The analysis is supported by three case studies: a CDM network

[17] See Daiichi Sankyo's mobile clinic project in Nyang-U: https://www.daiichisankyo.com/sustainability/access_to_healthcare/capability/in_myanmar/

[18] See Global Angel's mobile clinic project in Karen State: https://globalangels.org/projects/mobile-health-clinics/

[19] See Première Urgence Internationale mobile clinic project in Kayin State: https://www.premiere-urgence.org/en/myanmar-a-mobile-clinic-brings-hope-to-families-of-children-with-congenital-disabilities/

around mobile health in Shan State, a mobile clinic team in Kayah State, and a CDM medic working in Chin State.

4.1 Mobile Health as a Network

Institutional health functions within a top-down, policy-oriented framework, heavily influenced by corporate culture, financial providers, donors, and shareholders. It operates as a business model strictly adhering to the MOHS's terms and conditions. In contrast, mobile health functions as a dynamic, adaptable network, following a bottom-up, community-oriented approach rooted in local cultures. It operates without standard procedures and often exists outside or even against the institutional system. This organic network highlights social cohesion through interdependent efforts and mutual support, emphasizing the importance of understanding local and rural connections over cosmopolitan and urban areas.

This section examines the CDM community network in Taunggyi, Southern Shan State, as a case study to understand the ecosystem connecting mobile health with the local population. Information comes from an anonymous CDM volunteer in Taunggyi, whose main role involves transporting messages, medicine, essentials, and patients to mobile health facilities or private hospitals. [20] These CDM networks are unstructured and unidentifiable to avoid state surveillance, with their operations known only through word of mouth. Despite this, they are comprehensive and cohesive, involving runners, volunteers, advertisers, donors, medics, hospitals, businesses, and officials from NUG, PDF, and EAOs. They work together to deliver medical supplies, set up mobile clinics, and provide care in conflict zones and remote areas. This CDM network supporting mobile health operates at multiple levels, from volunteers and medical practitioners to businesses and policymakers. Initially, these networks did not receive NUG assistance due to bureaucratic delays. Instead, local communities, volunteers, and grassroots organizations mobilized their own resources, allowing the network to form organically and adapt quickly to urgent needs. A generous donor often initiates the network by contributing funds and assembling volunteers. This team raises additional funds from local businesses and identifies individuals needing medical assistance. They establish relationships with private hospitals, mobile clinics, and international medical teams, ensuring those needing help are connected to professionals. Volunteers receive basic medical training from the NUG or the Red Cross, enabling them to perform basic procedures and prescribe medications. Over time, the community relies on this network for medical support, creating a foundation for mobile health.

In Taunggyi, mobile health has transformed local perspectives on health services. Traditionally, people sought treatment at hospitals and clinics, following a structured process. However, with government facilities halted, this system was disrupted. Initially, accessing medical care was challenging. During this desperate time, individuals, organizations, and

[20] The informant joined the CDM movement as a volunteer at the beginning of the coup in February 2021. She was recruited by an unnamed local donor to work as a fundraiser. Shortly after joining, she attended medical courses offered by the NUG and assisted with emergency cases, helping to connect patients with CDM medics and hospital wards. The interview was conducted in May 2024.

community representatives stepped forward to provide low-cost or free healthcare services. This community-driven health system is fueled by the urgent political and economic situation in Myanmar and a humanitarian mission to meet basic medical needs. The NUG later joined these initiatives, using these networks to disseminate health information and roll out programs like COVID-19 vaccination. This mobile health network has proven effective and will continue to thrive, serving as a practical model for healthcare in precarious times.

4.2 Mobile Health as Nomadism

Mobile health is inherently nomadic, while institutional health is stationary, occupying a permanent physical space with an address, managed within a rigid, top-down system involving multiple staff and collaborations with pharmaceutical companies and universities, all operating under state regulation. In contrast, mobile health is always on the move, set up temporarily under urgent circumstances for short-term purposes. Its mobility and adaptability reduce operational costs, bureaucracy, and procedural work, allowing it to serve various locations as needed. This flexibility, however, often comes with constraints regarding manpower, funding, and supplies. Deleuze and Guattari (2010) theorize nomadism as resisting the discourse of civility, challenging and destabilizing established boundaries. This concept is useful for understanding mobile health in Myanmar, which disrupts the conventional nation-like institutional structures of healthcare. Mobile health offers a flexible, responsive alternative that adapts to the immediate needs of various communities, especially in conflict zones and remote areas, operating outside the rigid frameworks of state institutions.

This section posits that mobile health in Myanmar follows a nomadic movement, as demonstrated by the Loyalty Mobile Team for Karenni, a mobile clinic founded by the CDM.[21] Active in Demoso Township and along the borders of Hpruso and Bawlakhe townships in Kayah State, this clinic treats around 30,000 internally displaced persons across 30 camps (Frontier Myanmar, 2022). In an online interview, team leader Ko Thitsar shared that the team was established after the CDM began, composed of doctors and nurses who left the Ministry of Health shortly after the military coup. The team faces challenges such as a lack of medical supplies, petrol, electricity, funding, and manpower.[22] Besides their medical mission, they organize campaigns to raise money and collect essential resources (Aung Aung, 2023). Unlike other mobile health services, the team operates on a fixed timetable, ensuring patients receive timely treatment and medication. They also distribute food, water, and daily supplies. The Loyalty Mobile Team for Karenni exemplifies a nomadic trajectory in medical practice after departing from government hospitals. These doctors and nurses, formerly part of the institutional health system, were thrust into a precarious journey as medical nomads by the coup, shifting from traditional career paths to engaging in the CDM with a significant humanitarian mission. Their movement now aligns with the trajectory of wars, social

[21] The Loyalty Mobile Team for Karenni has an online presence on Facebook, but they use this platform merely to raise funds and share their day-to-day operations without exposing their schedule. See their Facebook page here: https://www.facebook.com/loyaltymobileteam/

[22] Ko Thitsar briefly talked about the philosophy, missions, operations, challenges, and sources of fundings of the Loyalty Mobile Team for Karenni. The interview was conducted in April 2024.

instability, and civil upheaval, traveling across 30 locations in Kayah State and adhering to a tight schedule to save lives. This shift reimagines the movements of not just facilities but also medical practitioners themselves. Interviews with CDM members reveal that their roles are constantly evolving, with a focus on addressing the immediate needs of communities affected by conflict and displacement. Their commitment has driven them to innovate and deliver healthcare under extreme conditions, such as relocating frequently to avoid attacks on their "jungle hospital."

The health system in Myanmar, during times of conflict, is increasingly seen not as a rigid structure but as a dynamic movement, a local service, and a communal empowerment system. This new perspective allows civilians more leverage over healthcare. Medical nomads now represent a new form of health personnel, delivering services as part of community-driven projects or individual commitments to public health. These medical nomads and facilities may develop into a parallel health system alongside state and corporate institutions, although they still need to collaborate with hospitals for complex operations. Consequently, they form a connectivity network that complements the overall health system, enhancing accessibility in Myanmar's postwar landscape.

4.3 Mobile Health as Activism

This section examines mobile health as a form of anti-establishment activism through the case of an exiled medical professional, Aye Nyein Thu, who continues her practice in Mindat Township, Chin State.[23] By focusing on her efforts, this section demonstrates how mobile health challenges state power and offers an alternative system rooted in civil society.

Aye Nyein Thu graduated from medical school in 2020 and began practicing in Mandalay. Following the coup, she treated injured protesters involved in the CDM and witnessed the military's brutality, including shootings of protesters and prohibitions on treating gunshot wounds (Gallo, 2021; Thu & Diamond, 2021). This spurred her to leave her family and relocate to Chin State, where she raised funds to start a hospital in Mindat Township and set up mobile clinics in remote areas on weekends (Sahagun, 2023). Chin State, in western Myanmar, has one of the most defective health systems due to limited economic development, challenging geography, and poor transportation infrastructure, making basic healthcare inaccessible. Many residents rely on traditional remedies and seek hospital care only in critical conditions. Health indicators in Chin State are dire, with low rates of antenatal care, tetanus vaccination, skilled birth attendance, and birth registration.[24] Establishing a health facility in this context is difficult, but Aye Nyein Thu's initiative brought medical care to the town and remote areas

[23] Aye Nyein Thu is a distinguished young medic involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), and she was recognized as one of the BBC's 100 Women of 2022. Our team had the privilege of interviewing Aye Nyein Thu about her life and journey. The interview took place in April 2024. Additionally, our study tracks her experiences and updates shared on her Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/Dr.ANyein

[24] For detailed data on the health conditions in Chin State, see the reports prepared by UNICEF on their website: https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/chin-state

through her flexible mobile health system. Despite being on the junta's wanted list, facing seizures of medical equipment, and having team members arrested (BBC News, 2022), she rebuilt the hospitals, reacquired supplies, and continued her services, demonstrating resilience and commitment amid conflict. Aye Nyein Thu has created a new health model to cope with the limitations of traditional hospitals and clinics, which are primarily available only in towns and often have limited capacities. Her mobile health initiative brings essential care directly to those in remote areas. Though her influence is currently limited, her efforts highlight the health system issues faced by many other regions. Her approach challenges conventional healthcare methods and establishes an alternate, resilient system tailored to locals' needs, making a statement against governmental inadequacies and demonstrating that civil society can create independent support systems.

This case illustrates that healthcare in Myanmar has become a site where state power is wielded through ministries, national health committees, policies, and plans. Foucault (1995) argues that institutions, like hospitals, serve as machinery for state control, using the health system to exert biopower and regulate the population. Althusser (1970) suggests these institutions impose state ideologies, making institutional health a tool for dominance. In contrast, mobile health represents resistance against state control, emerging due to inadequate public health facilities. It creates an independent system within civil society, offering refuge to political dissidents and support to the poor by reducing medical costs and introducing payment flexibility. This aligns with Gramsci's (1971) concept of bottom-up activism, empowering civil society. Medics in the mobile health network actively resist the authoritarian state and address humanitarian crises. As Williams (1977) argues, emergent ideologies challenge dominant ones. Mobile health disrupts state control, fostering autonomy for civil society and becoming a battleground for power struggles between the state and civilian forces.

5. Possible Restructuring of Health System in Post-coup Era

More than three years since the coup, Myanmar's national health system has been heavily damaged. Hospitals face a mass departure of staff, shortages of medical supplies, and worsening finances due to international sanctions on the military government (Klyszcz & Chambers, 2024). With rising injuries and deaths from conflicts, many medical emergencies remain unmet, leading to increased fatality rates. Communities are establishing their own health systems marked by mobility, flexibility, and affordability, driven by humanitarian responsibilities. Although these mobile networks lack sufficient facilities and supplies, they have gained popularity and trust and are likely to continue developing post-coup. This paper argues that mobile health could reterritorialize health, moving in tandem with political developments, as healthcare needs to be liberated from state control or to allow certain levels of liberty to be exercised by civil society.

Two pillars of reform in post-coup Myanmar can revolutionize the health system: democratization and communalization, building on mobile health networks expanded by the CDM movement. Democratization involves efforts from both institutional and mobile health. The MOHS should recognize and legitimize mobile health without institutionalizing it, allowing it to act as a check and balance on the national health ministry. Allocating funding to

mobile health would enable it to scale up and collaborate with national healthcare. On the other hand, mobile health providers should build comprehensive networks that compete with institutional systems in technology, service, and pricing while maintaining community roots. They should prioritize a community-based approach, ensuring the focus remains on community needs rather than corporate interests. Communalization involves decentralizing health operations, policy-making, decision-making, and management from the state or towns to local communities. Despite government efforts to establish ethnic health organizations and rural centers, their capacity is limited due to lack of resources. Reports have shown that only 6% of their work is funded by the state, while 22% is funded by patients (Sommanustweechai, 2016). The government should strengthen connections with local health organizations, ensuring they have financial support and tools. It should also fund mobile health networks, consulting local leaders to ensure these facilities are within reach of all community members. On the other hand, mobile health providers should understand local contexts, including culture, history, language, and common illnesses, to better serve locals. They should build networks with hospitals, traditional healers, community health workers, and other stakeholders to ensure accessible medical treatment and communication of health information.

Liberating the health system in post-coup Myanmar involves three key aspects. Geographical liberation allows mobile health to extend beyond cities and towns to remote areas, shifting the center from urbanity to community. Ideological liberation lets public health operate outside governmental frameworks, not entirely subject to national health plans. Philosophical liberation challenges the traditional view of health professionals and facilities, as some health professionals become nomads, breaking away from career stability. This radical reterritorialization creates a new community of lives, where individuals tailor health services to community needs and bond over the shared experience of using community-based mobile health.

6. Conclusion

The first section discusses the evolution and challenges of healthcare in Myanmar, tracing its origins back to British colonial rule when modern facilities like Rangoon General Hospital were introduced. Post-independence, the health sector faced staffing shortages and resource constraints, impacting service delivery despite efforts like the Pyidawthar Plan aimed at national development. The political landscape, particularly the military coups of 1962 and 1988, further strained the system with forced nationalizations and inadequate funding allocations, affecting universal healthcare aspirations. The military's dominance continued to affect healthcare, with a significant decline during the recent coup in 2021, leading to a dual healthcare system: one run by the military and another by the NUG supporting those in civil disobedience movements. This period also saw the rise of mobile health as an essential service due to the ongoing conflict, geographical barriers, and political instability. Mobile health in Myanmar has evolved into a community-centric model that delivers services directly to people, moving beyond traditional hospital setups to include various providers like NGOs and private entities. It serves not only as a practical approach to healthcare given the country's challenging conditions but also as a political tool within the resistance movement against the military

regime. Despite these efforts, the health system faces immense challenges such as funding shortages, attacks on health facilities, and a significant exodus of medical professionals.

The second section explores the concept of mobile health, presenting it as a dynamic and unstructured alternative to institutional health, characterized by its non-conformity and adaptability. Mobile health in Myanmar is described as an assemblage that continually adapts to local needs and circumstances, rather than a static network. It functions through a bottom-up approach, deeply rooted in community involvement and local cultures, and operates outside the conventional healthcare system, often in opposition to state-controlled institutions. This section uses case studies from Shan State, Kayah State, and Chin State to illustrate how mobile health operates on the ground, highlighting its organic and interconnected nature. This network is sustained by a variety of stakeholders, including volunteers, medics, donors, and local businesses, all coordinated without formal structures to evade state surveillance and interference. This system not only delivers medical services but also builds resilience within communities, adapting to their specific health needs and circumventing governmental restrictions. Mobile health has acted as both a practical response to the inadequacies of the formal health system and a form of activism, challenging state authority and offering an independent avenue for delivering health services. It reflects a shift towards a more community-driven model of the health system, which is particularly crucial in conflict-affected and remote areas of Myanmar. This approach not only addresses immediate health needs but also empowers communities, making healthcare both accessible and adaptable to the changing political and social landscape.

The third section analyzes the impact of Myanmar's coup on its health system and proposes reforms for post-coup recovery. Since the coup, the health system has been severely compromised, with hospitals struggling due to manpower losses, supply shortages, and financial constraints worsened by international sanctions. The rising demand for medical care due to conflict-related injuries and fatalities has overwhelmed the remaining facilities, increasing mortality rates from untreated conditions. In response, community-driven mobile health networks have emerged, offering flexible, affordable, and locally managed healthcare solutions. These networks, while currently under-resourced, have gained popularity and trust within local communities and are poised to play a significant role in the healthcare landscape post-coup. My proposed reforms focus on democratizing and communalizing healthcare. Democratization would involve recognizing and integrating mobile health within the national framework without imposing institutional constraints, allowing it to serve as a complement and check on the state healthcare system. Communalization would decentralize healthcare management to empower local communities, ensuring they have the necessary resources and autonomy to address their unique health needs effectively. This section argues for a fundamental reimagining of healthcare in Myanmar, advocating for a system that is liberated from geographical, ideological, and philosophical territories traditionally defined by state control. This would entail a shift towards a community-centered model where healthcare is accessible everywhere and tailored to local needs, transforming it into a form of community empowerment and resistance against authoritarian control.

In summary, Myanmar's health system has undergone significant challenges and transformations from its colonial origins to the present. The recent military coup exacerbated existing issues, leading to the rise of community-driven mobile health as an alternative. This approach, characterized by flexibility and community involvement, has provided vital services amidst political turmoil and has emerged as a form of resistance against state control.

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Post-Revolution Strategies: Dismantling Gender Stereotypes and Empowering Women across Myanmar Societal Landscape

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Abstract

This study highlights the role of women in the Myanmar's revolutionary context, examining how the 2021 Myanmar Spring Revolution has transformed societal norms. It investigates how the conflict has reversed women's empowerment by addressing their ongoing efforts to challenge cultural stereotypes and promote gender equality through the social justice movement in the revolution. During the 2021 Spring Revolution, women have become key leaders in driving social justice movements and challenging long-standing patriarchal norms. This research employs qualitative methods, conducting in-depth interviews with 10 respondents from distinct backgrounds. It aims to provide valuable insights into cultural shifts, the revolutionary impact of the 2021 Spring Revolution on social norms and practices, and how these changes affect women's empowerment and promote gender equality across different societal levels. 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 to scholarly knowledge of how social justice movements and gender equality are connected to foster gender equality and empower women during and after the time of political upheaval.

Keywords: Myanmar Spring Revolution, Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Social Movements, Cultural Shifts

1. Introduction

One of the most ethnically diverse nations, Myanmar has a long history of patriarchy, conservatism, and social hierarchy. Traditional Myanmar practices, especially the military's top-down structure, strongly encouraged male dominance and prohibited women from engaging in politics and other social activities (Byrd, 2021). Under the sway of patriarchy in Myanmar, political authority was predominantly concentrated in the hands of elderly Bamar men. However, Aung San Suu Kyi, as the daughter of the nation's independence leader, Aung San, who completed Western education and was elected as the leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD), stood out as a prominent figure (Crisis Group Asia, 2023). Aung San Suu Kyi symbolizes both the democratic struggle and the potential for female leadership on national and international stages. Despite her visibility, the broader scenario for women in

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politics is challenging, with significant underrepresentation in government and political structures (Tan & Weiss, 2024).

Despite the limited representation of women in government positions, the enduring influence of male dominance and cultural stereotypes could not to stop women from engaging actively in political, economic, and social activities, supported by women-led organizations. The Burmese Women's Association, the first women's group, was created in 1919, resulting in the emergence of many female political leaders (Brighi, 2022). Furthermore, the Karen Women's Organization, founded in 1949, significantly contributed to organizing for democracy, human rights, and gender equality (ibid.). Additionally, the Women's League of Burma was formed in 1999 by twelve women's organizations to encourage women's involvement in politics. They gather evidence of crimes by the military junta and share it internationally (ibid.). Historically, women in Myanmar have actively mobilized against various forms of societal injustice, challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for women's rights under oppression whether during the military rule or civil war in Myanmar.

With this continuous effort, the youthful, mostly female generation is spearheading Myanmar's nonviolent and armed resistance against the military coup attempt on February 1, 2021. Women from Myanmar comprise about 70 to 80% of the movement's leaders, and they also make up about 60% of the protestors. Strikes have emerged among employees in the industrial zone, primarily young immigrant women, hospital staff, physicians, nurses, midwives, cleaners, civil servants, educators, university professors, and even women farmers in the ethnic communities (Byrd, 2021).

This research aims to explore women's involvement in the Spring Revolution and how the conflict provided an opportunity to advance women's empowerment. It looks at how women used this opportunity to challenge cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and discrimination against women across various societal levels. By addressing these objectives, the significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to scholarly knowledge of revolutionary social movements in challenging gender inequality and discrimination against women. The research findings will provide important insights into gender studies and social movements, informing strategies to promote gender equality and social justice during periods of political turbulence. Ultimately, this study illuminates how it enhances women's visibility in leadership positions.

2. Literature Review

Social movement theory is highly relevant to the women's participation in the social justice movement, which contributes to social change in Myanmar's 2021 revolution. Banks (1972) states that social movements are recognized as "social technologies" that bring about societal transformation. From the standpoint of political sociology, the concept of "social movement" encompasses a wide range of aspects, including collective action, networks, democracy, power, resistance, and citizenship (Millward & Takhar, 2019). Throughout Myanmar's history, women have always taken part in social movements against different forms of oppression and for women's rights. Due to their perseverance in collective action until the 2021 Spring Revolution, people in Myanmar gained awareness of women's contributions and competence

in revolutionary endeavors and political engagement, shattering the cultural norm that confined women to household chores and supportive roles for their husbands.

Furthermore, by leading efforts such as the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), women worked valiantly to prevent the consolidation of military control. Consequently, beyond the shared goal of eliminating dictatorship, women's participation in this social movement has reshaped Myanmar's social and political landscape by promoting inclusivity, elevating different perspectives, and establishing a more democratic future. Given the close connection between the structure of collective action and socio-cultural contexts, it is consistent that social movements embrace gender ideology to organize, legitimate, and inspire collective action, as gender is culturally constructed (Benford & Snow, 2000; Taylor, 1999). In their research, Millward and Takhar (2019) also explore the impact of mass movements, which have resulted in the inclusion of multiple populations, including African Americans through civil rights, women through voting rights, and black South Africans through the end of apartheid. Moreover, Blumberg (1990) and Lobao (1990) emphasize that women have actively participated in several significant social movements, including the civil rights movement since the 20th century. These instances demonstrate the circumstances underlying the start of a social movement.

In this regard, there is paradoxically emerging evidence to suggest that although gender inequality is associated with an increased risk of civil war or conflict, these devastating impacts on society turn into catalysts that encourage female empowerment mechanisms that can facilitate increased space and opportunities for women. There are some theories about how conflicts or civil wars can increase women's empowerment and reshape societal gender roles (Webster, Chen & Beardsley, 2019). Warfare can disrupt social structures and increase women's empowerment through changes in societal roles and political shifts caused by the conflict. Conflict or civil war can create opportunities for women to enter traditionally male-dominated positions, including taking up armed groups, leadership in grassroots mobilizing, humanitarian aid, and head of household. Likewise, it facilitates increased female participation in political decision making such as the female government position in NUG in the case of Myanmar. Besides, women's mobilizations such as protests and the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) can be recognized in Myanmar's context. Along with this, there is also more social cohesion and mobilization around key issues like conflict-related sexual violence and increased collective solidarity in response to these issues. All these are important catalysts for women's empowerment which conflict or civil war can catalyze.

Other studies have also found that women's political rights and their participation in politics often grow faster during times of conflict, crisis, and revolution. Hughes and Tripp (2015) show that the end of long-standing armed conflict in sub-Saharan African countries has had large positive impacts on women's political representation, above what can be explained by electoral institutions and democratization alone. The remarkable expansion of women's political representation in sub-Saharan Africa has been explained by various factors such as institutional factors, democratization, economic development, electoral institutions, and growing education.

Global comparative studies find a correlation between the end of conflict and women's representation (Hughes, 2009). Bakken and Buhaug (2021) also find that post-conflict

improvements in female empowerment occur primarily after high-intensity civil conflicts and when conflicts are terminated by peace agreements. The biggest progress in empowering women happens when peace deals include rules that focus on gender. These findings support calls for sustained efforts toward mainstreaming gender issues in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. The study by Hughes (2009) finds that "Longer, larger-scale wars that contest the political system or serve to alter the composition of the government have the best prospects for creating opportunities for women to gain parliamentary seats." Consequently, women's mobilization for peace can be a stepping-stone toward continued female mobilization and a normative acceptance of women's public engagement after the conflict or civil war, resulting in an increased share of women in formal political institutions and new opportunities for women to take part in peace-building processes.

Conflict or war disrupts both institutions and society but this disruption can create chances for women to improve their rights and foster women empowerment in the time of conflict. This research employs social movement theory as its conceptual framework, offering insights to illustrate how women's participation in the 2021 Spring Revolution defies traditional cultural norms that impose burdens on women in Myanmar.

3. Methodology

To conduct a comprehensive exploration of the topic, this study employed a qualitative research approach. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews conducted with 10 individuals knowledgeable about the present political climate and with experience in revolutionary activities, from rural and urban areas. Selected were respondents who were willing to share their comprehensive understanding of the Myanmar Spring Revolution, and those with firsthand experience of the revolution. These informants have distinct backgrounds, including government employees, university students, teachers, members of civil society groups, and non-governmental organizations, to ensure a wide range of perspectives. In addition, both male and female respondents were included in the study to enhance gender diversity and representation. Through the inclusion of participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences, this methodology intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted aspects of Myanmar's Spring Revolution.

In addition, secondary sources, including academic articles and media reports, were employed to provide additional information and a greater understanding of the background, context, and theoretical framework of social movement theory. This research was conducted through in-depth interviews using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. These interviews provided valuable insights into the experiences, perspectives, and strategies for mitigating gender discrimination and promoting gender equality, improving women's roles in all aspects of political, social, and economic domains. Throughout the process, pseudonyms were applied to maintain confidentiality of the interview material, with data collection occurring between December 22, 2023, and January 9, 2024.

4. Background

In the period of military rule in Myanmar from 1962 to 2011, the patriarchal societal structure delineated distinct roles for men and women, significantly influencing their engagement in both public and domestic spheres (Hedström, Olivius & Soe, 2023). Men typically held positions of economic and political power while women were predominantly assigned with domestic responsibilities (Hedström, 2016). Following this phase, Myanmar pledged to promote women's full and equal engagement in political processes by signing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 and ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997. However, there was a lack of legislation to support women and expand opportunities for women during that military ruling era.

Over the past decade, Myanmar has also committed to defending human rights, particularly in terms of inclusion, diversity, and gender equality, by adopting numerous international human rights agreements and establishing national legislation (Ebead & Hirakawa, 2022). The quasi-civilian government under President Thein Sein introduced encouraging initiatives such as the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW), which aimed to enhance gender equality and women's rights in governance while promoting their equal participation in decision-making roles at all levels of society through its long-term period plan from 2013 to 2022 (UNFPA, 2023). Although these commitments were mostly paper-based, progress towards inclusivity was made during the quasi-civilian rule that lasted from 2011 to 2016. In President Thein Sein's government, women occupied merely two out of thirty-three ministerial positions, with six women appointed to deputy ministerial roles (Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, et al., 2017). The resurgence of female ministerial appointments followed only 60 years after the initial appointment of Daw Ba Maung Chain from Karen State in 1953 (Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, et al., 2017; Brighi, 2022).

With the 2015 election, Myanmar had its first (de facto) female head of state (Minoletti, 2016). On the other hand, although there were more women elected to the national and state or regional legislatures, there were just two women among the 14 NLD members who served as chief ministers of the states and areas appointed by the president (Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, et al., 2017). This situation represented two steps forward and one step back (Hedström, Olivius & Soe, 2023), as women play an indispensable role in Myanmar's civil society, especially within grassroots and community-based organizations (Takeda & Yamahata, 2020). They actively contribute to a range of issues from healthcare to the advocacy of women's rights. Civil society organizations often represent the primary platforms for women to influence public policy and community welfare. This sector not only allows women to address social issues but also cultivates leadership skills, equipping them for more substantial roles in various facets of public life. Moreover, the active participation of women in diverse sectors, including peace processes and humanitarian efforts within ethnic communities, is gradually reshaping traditional gender norms in Myanmar.

In the November 2020 elections, an unprecedented number of women competed for parliamentary seats, and one in every six candidates was a woman (Hedström, Olivius & Soe, 2023). However, the military coup in February 2021 severely restricted the political arena,

particularly affecting women active in the National League for Democracy and other opposition movements. The suppression of political dissent and the marginalization of women from active political roles have led to a marked decline in gender inclusivity within the political domain (Tan & Weiss, 2024). Women's political engagement in Myanmar is historically notable yet fraught with difficulties (Matelski & Noan, 2022). Women's involvement in Myanmar's Spring Revolution challenges preconceived notions about their capabilities and roles, highlighting their proficiency in leadership and decision-making (Hedström & Olivius, 2023). This shift not only alters perceptions but also progressively modifies the structural opportunities available to women, promoting a more gender-inclusive approach in various professional and social settings. Ozgunes et al. (2023) state that after the coup, both international and local nonprofit sectors have focused on providing platforms for dialogue, resources for female-led initiatives, and support for their inclusion in peace and political processes. These efforts are vital for maintaining the momentum towards gender equality and ensuring that women's voices are integrated into international human rights dialogues.

5. Research Findings

5.1. Women's Collective Action and Empowerment in Post-coup Myanmar

In the days after the military took over the government on February 1, 2021, people filled the streets of Yangon and other big cities in Myanmar to protest. The widespread public involvement in the anti-coup movement, the Spring Revolution, and the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) became significant markers in history. People from various ethnicities, religions, genders, and the youth enthusiastically joined the nationwide protests and formed a collective resistance against the military dictatorship. Within the context of this extensive public engagement, women became prominent figures through their active involvement and leadership in nonviolent protest movements, by joining armed resistance groups in which women participated in front-line positions alongside males, and by performing vital roles in the delivery of services and humanitarian aid. Furthermore, women have taken on leadership roles in the National Union Government (NUG) and its parallel governance structure, where they advocate for gender equality and women's rights. Although Myanmar has a long history of women's movements and activism, their voices gained greater exposure throughout the revolution.

5.1.1. Women's Key Role in Nonviolent Protest Movements

Women have led the resistance movement following the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021 (Yidana, 2023). They have actively engaged in nonviolent actions, including fundraising, leadership, civil disobedience, and peaceful protests. On the first day of the coup, thirteen female groups declared their withdrawal from the Women Participation Technical Working

Group[26] and declined to offer technical assistance to the military until the civilian government returns to power (Brighi, 2022).

Women played key roles in organizing and leading many of the earlier demonstrations, which included teachers and students, health care providers, civil servants, factory workers, labor union leaders, human rights activists, young female immigrant workers, and ethnic minority women farmers and workers. A diversity of women's organizations and networks were mobilized to take part in protests through the establishment of "The Women's Alliance Burma" as a coordinating body (Hedsröm et al., 2024). Another newly established women's network, Sisters2Sisters, sought to bring attention to and demand accountability for the widespread sexual harassment and mistreatment of female activists and protesters by the Myanmar military (Ebead & Hirakawa, 2022). Women's groups and networks have also been crucial in mobilizing funds to support the anti-coup movement.

In addition, women were instrumental in forming and maintaining the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), which aimed to keep the military government from strengthening its hold on the populace and nation (Byrd, 2021). Encompassing people from various sectors, including civil society, government civil servants, universities, students, and private businesses, the CDM provides a new appealing outlet for political engagement that functions independently of more established political parties and groups. The CDM gained extraordinary public support, with nationwide rallies calling for the 2020 general election results to be respected, the release of the National League for Democracy (NLD) leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and to prevent the military administration from consolidating its authority over the populace and nation. The CDM includes about 20,000 university academics and administrators, with at least 75% female representation. Over 25% of basic education instructors became members of the CDM, and approximately 90% of teachers are female (Byrd, 2021).

Beyond the shared goal of eliminating dictatorship, women's creative protest movements have been used as a public strategy to draw attention to - and contest - dominant gender norms and stand in defiance of the patriarchal and misogynist ideologies of the military. In this way, women's participation in this social movement has sought to reshape Myanmar's social and political landscape by promoting inclusivity, elevating different perspectives, and establishing a more democratic future. On International Women's Day in March 2021, women demonstrators revealed their opposition using innovative tactics. They strung women's *htamein* (sarongs) across the roads, much like lights are hung for Chinese New Year or Christmas decorations, and some protestors raised *htamein* as a flag. For many years, men in Myanmar have believed that women's *htamein* and undergarments are untouchable, as it is considered unlucky to walk beneath them because it will destroy a man's *hpon*, or special masculine energy (Ferguson, 2023). For this reason, *htamein* has traditionally been washed separately from men's clothing, and this practice is still prevalent in many households in Myanmar today (Resistance Diary - Reflections on Women's Place in Myanmar, n.d.). Notably, many men

[26] The Women Participation Technical Working Group was established during the quasi-civilian government to address gender-related issues and promote women's participation in decision-making processes.

expressed solidarity by wrapping *htamein* on their heads and posting photos of themselves on social media (Lusan et al., 2021). These and other creative uses of feminine symbols in protest, such as sticking menstrual pads on photos of General Min Aun Hlaing, have been used by women to shame and challenge the male-dominated junta, but also to question widely held societal beliefs about women's impurity and to renegotiate gender norms. As a woman ethnic leader in Kayah State put it, "This revolution can significantly impact social norms against women. Now, men willingly accept women's participation and leadership and chant together for women's demands." (Lusan et al., 2021). Similarly, one informant stated, "The 2021 Spring Revolution evolved into a cultural revolution that opposed prejudices and discrimination against women" Mahar Tin (Personal interview, 22 Dec. 2023). Through their multifaceted engagement, women have played a transformative role in reshaping societal norms and driving the momentum of the 2021 Spring Revolution.

5.1.2. Women's Armed Resistance and Frontline Positions

The military's crackdown on protests and targeted post-coup arrests in Yangon and other major cities caused thousands of people, including many women activists, to flee to rural areas or cross the border to Thailand. However, the military's efforts to silence dissent backfired, causing armed resistance to erupt across the country and Myanmar to descend into civil war. While most of those enlisting in armed opposition are men, women have also joined in large numbers. Media reported women saying they had joined armed groups because they wanted to overturn traditional gender norms and ensure women play an equal role in building a new nation, or as a woman put it, "to show that women can do what men are doing" (Lusan & Fishbein, 2021). Another incident, described by an interviewee, illustrates women's determination to participate in the armed revolution: "*There was a female individual who courageously brought weapons amidst heavy military presence in our village disregarding her safety*."

Women's networks and groups have also been on the front lines delivering humanitarian aid and basic services in response to the multiple crises that have emerged in the wake of the coup, including increased violence, mass displacement of people, the breakdown of public health and other services, poverty and food insecurity. As noted by one informant:

> *Women performed a vital role in medical teams by showing incredible courage and resourcefulness in the face of adversity. Despite often being perceived as having an inferior role in many public hospitals, a large number of female nurses actively participated in the Spring Revolution, contributing to both the CDM movement and serving as crucial support within the frontline medical teams for defense* (Archi, Personal interview, 4 Jan 2024).

Ethnic minority women have also played a particularly important role in providing lifesaving aid in conflict areas, where women's networks could reach remote and dangerous parts of the country (Hedström, Olivius & Soe, 2023).

5.1.3. Women's Leadership and Participation in the National Unity Government

Women have also taken up leadership positions within the National Unity Government (NUG) and its parallel governance structure. Women head the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of

Women, Youth and Children, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and occupy deputy ministerial positions in the Ministries of Education, Health and Women, Youth, and Children (National Unity Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2023). Women's networks have also been involved in the National Unity Consultative Council, where they have advocated for policies to promote gender equality and women's rights in a future federal democratic Myanmar, as encapsulated in NUG's Federal Democracy Charter (Hedstöm et al, 2023).

Although the coup has in many ways compounded gendered insecurity and inequality across the country, the above examples also show how national crisis, civil war, and the rise of a resistance movement against military rule, have served as catalysts to shake up entrenched social orders and open up some space and opportunities for women's representation and empowerment. Due to the leadership experience that women expect and are expected to fill, women have achieved not only legitimacy as relevant actors in social and political spaces but have increasingly been recognized as indispensable actors in shaping visions for a more democratic and inclusive future for Myanmar. As noted by one interviewee:

> *In my opinion, the success of the revolution thus far can be attributed largely to the active participation of women. Without substantial involvement from women, the revolution is vulnerable to stumbling or collapsing entirely. I believe that the continuity of its advancement is contingent upon women maintaining a central role in this capacity* (Mahar Tin, Personal interview, 22 Dec 2023).

5.2. Key Challenges to Women's Participation and Empowerment

Although women have made substantial contributions to Myanmar's anti-coup movement in ways that have upended traditional social norms and undermined gender hierarchies, they nevertheless continue to face several obstacles in attaining equal rights and decision-making authority. This is evident in the ongoing limitations of female representation in key decision-making positions across various bodies such as local administrations, the National Unity Government (NUG) and National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), and in resistance armed groups such as ethnic armed or resistance organizations (EAO/ERO). NUG and NUCC have a wide range of political leaders from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Although women's involvement in NUG and NUCC can be regarded as a fundamental transformative role, opportunities for women in ministerial roles remain limited, with the majority of key positions occupied by men (Crisis Group Asia, 2023). Only three women are serving as deputy ministers out of a total of fifteen, while the cabinet has three female members out of seventeen, holding positions aligned with societal gender constructs including ministries such as women, youth and children, health, education, and commerce except for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Yidana, 2023). As a result, women's voices and perspectives are underrepresented in crucial discussions and policy-making processes, highlighting the enduring challenges to gender equality and women's empowerment in Myanmar's political landscape.

As explained by one interviewee,

> *In local governance settings, women's participation in village-level administration, municipal governance, and community decision-making is still notably low, revealing a*

> *clear gender gap often presenting ratios as imbalanced as 3:1 or worse. Although the NUG has been developing policies to encourage women's participation during the revolution, their actual application usually fails. There is an urgent request for more inclusiveness, with at least 30% representation of women sought, even if the ideal 50% goal remains unattainable* (Austin, Personal interview, 25 Dec 2023).

According to Nan (Personal interview, 30 Dec 2023),

> *To prevent the exclusion of underprivileged individuals and promote inclusivity, it is crucial for the future federal unit's efforts to ensure that women's representation reaches a minimum of 30% across all administrative levels utilizing a quota system.*

Currently, "*Certain communities, including men and women themselves, still hesitate to afford women significant roles in decision-making processes*" (Mahar Tin, Personal Interview, 22 Dec 2023).

The above interviews highlight major issues with gender representation and inclusion in governance settings. First, it exposes a significant gender disparity in several areas of governance, such as village-level management, local government, and decision-making powers at the national level of government. This points out that women's participation and influence in decision-making processes are still hampered by underlying structural imbalances. Second, the substantial gap between NUG's women's empowerment policy intent and its implementation during the revolution implies structural barriers or limitations to the effective implementation of these policies. It indicates that the procedures and enforcement of policies must be critically examined. Furthermore, concrete steps are required to close the gender gap and advance gender equity in decision-making bodies, which includes issuing targets of at least 30% representation of women in governance posts. In addition, cultural attitudes play an important role in the reluctance to assign women major decision-making roles, highlighting the need for more extensive societal reforms to tackle gender norms and stereotypes.

Interviewees also highlighted prevailing gender hierarchies among armed resistance groups and organizations, with few women serving on the front lines or in decision-making roles:

> *While some women in the resistance armed forces receive military training in combat techniques and strategies, they are often not allowed to participate in frontline combat because of their gender. Instead, they are assigned tasks such as cooking, sewing, and providing support to male fighters at the forefront* (Amara, Personal interview, 31 Dec 2023).

Mahar Tin (Personal interview, 22 Dec 2023) further stated,

> *Women increasingly participate in the armed resistance groups and play larger roles in fundraising and logistics. However, the cultural norms and physical differences between males and females have somewhat reduced women's involvement in the armed resistance compared to earlier periods of the Spring Revolution.*

While sexual abuse and violence against women have long been a strategy of the military junta to quell dissent, gender-based violence has also been reported among male-dominated

resistance armed forces, which is in direct violation of the Military Code of Conduct issued by the NUG in 2021 (Frontier Myanmar, 2023). Of particular concern is that instances of gender-based violence have seldom been properly investigated by male leaders, perpetuating a culture of complicity and impunity for male perpetrators, and leaving victims with few avenues for redress. As explained by one interviewee:

> *Women are underrepresented in armed organizations, which are predominantly male-dominated. In situations where leaders lack an understanding of gender and sexual harassment, there is a risk of inadequate response to such issues. For instance, a leader in Karen State was reported to have committed sexual harassment, highlighting the potential for abuse of power. Depending on their authority, leaders may engage in various forms of sexual harassment, with other related issues likely unexplored. Unfortunately, victims often hesitate to report incidents due to cultural barriers and fear of consequence*s (Austin, Personal interview, 25 Dec 2023).

Moreover, there has recently been the issue of sexual harassment by the National Unity Government's diplomatic representative to India, Isaac Khen, who served as a municipal minister for the Chin State government. Women Advocacy Coalition Myanmar urged the NUG to end the impunity granted to Isaac Khen, investigate the matter, and hold him accountable (Women's Action Committee Myanmar, 2024). Although the activists called on the NUG for his accountability and compensation for the victim, the NUG has not responded to this matter.

The prevalence of such incidents highlights the critical need for comprehensive sex education, sexual harassment, and the importance of quality education for the general public, as well as implementing policies to address gender dynamics and promote gender equality within armed groups. Furthermore, efforts should be made to challenge and shift public ideas about gender roles in the military to foster a more inclusive environment that recognizes all individuals' contributions, regardless of gender. In addition to women's challenges related to limited decision-making bodies, the escalation of violence, arbitrary arrests, and systemic harassment of women have been significant. The coup has exacerbated ethnic conflicts, disproportionately impacting women, especially in minority regions, and amplifying vulnerabilities such as sexual violence and economic deprivation. Women's economic participation is essential for their empowerment. Despite a high engagement rate in the labor force, women often find themselves in lower-paid and less secure employment sectors. Economic downturns, exacerbated by the military's takeover, have intensified these disparities, undermining women's economic independence and security. This economic vulnerability restricts women's autonomy and their capacity to effect broader societal changes (Hedström, Olivius & Soe, 2023).

5.3. Cultural Shifts in the Post-2021 Spring Revolution

While the societal landscape is experiencing a notable change toward addressing gender discrimination and promoting women's empowerment, a complete cultural shift remains a work in progress. On the one hand, there has been significant progress in attitudes towards cultural practices and gender norms. Slogans such as 'Our Htamein, Our Victory' "*demonstrate the increasing acceptance of women's empowerment, which has been spurred by women's solidarity and joint efforts to eliminate prejudices that take time to break down*" (Austin,

personal interview, 25 Dec 2023). "*Organizations like the Salween Institute's Manel exhibition campaign and support from academics and NGO communities have also been crucial in challenging gender stereotypes by giving women a platform to demonstrate their abilities*" (Mahar Tin, personal interview, 22 Dec 2023). Finally, women's inclusion in the NUG, in addition to prominent public figures, "*has been instrumental in promoting gender equality*." All these examples highlight the significance of collective efforts in the anti-coup movement to promote constructive social transformation.

On the other hand, women's engagement is hampered by gender barriers, which include cultural norms and societal attitudes. Strong gender stereotypes mean that people trust men more than women to take charge and make decisions, and society expects women to follow male leadership roles. Cultural norms, profoundly embedded in cultures and frequently derived from historical, cultural, and religious contexts, sustain ideals such as female subjugation and patriarchal supremacy (Kiley, 2018).

As explained by an informant: "In society, there is an ongoing societal issue in which women are frequently viewed as weak, and this belief also has an impact on women's self-confidence in their ability to assume responsibility, especially in the face of opportunities. We need to confront this difficult situation because it prevents women from reaching their full potential and making valuable contributions to society" (Amara, personal interview, 31 Dec 2023).

6. Discussion

Conflicts often disrupt traditional societal structures and create unique opportunities for women to step into roles of power and engage more effectively in social and political arenas. This dynamic was notably evident during the Myanmar Spring Revolution. The urgency and fluidity of the situation have necessitated broader inclusion of capable individuals and allowed women to assume leadership positions and responsibilities typically dominated by men. The breakdown of established social norms in such environments enables women to demonstrate their leadership and organizational skills and challenges traditional gender roles by redefining societal perceptions. Conflict also results in the formation of new governance structures such as transitional governments or unity governments and provides fresh platforms for women to participate in political processes and influence policy decisions. The inclusion of women in these emerging governance frameworks ensures the representation of their perspectives and rights in the new political landscape. The establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG) provides opportunities for women to assume key ministerial roles and advocate for gender equality and women's rights although there are still some limitations to women's decision-making power.

The need for effective leadership and diverse perspectives becomes paramount in conflict situations. Women's involvement in strategic planning and decision-making processes is often crucial in addressing the comprehensive needs of affected communities such as healthcare, education, and social services. This necessity for diverse leadership opens avenues for women to engage more meaningfully and assert their influence in key decision-making processes. In the context of Myanmar, women have played significant roles in organizing and leading

protests, highlighting their capacity to contribute significantly to the movement's strategic direction.

Conflicts can unite communities around a common cause and foster solidarity and collective action. In Myanmar, women have organized and participated in protests, advocacy, government positions, and resistance movements to amplify their voices and push for gender equality. This collective action not only empowers women individually but also helps building a sense of community and shared purpose. Women's active participation in the Myanmar's Spring Revolution has illustrated that collective action plays a powerful role in social change and drives the momentum toward more inclusive and equitable norms.

Additionally, women's participation in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction can lead to a redefinition of social norms. By stepping into roles traditionally reserved for men, women challenge and change societal perceptions of gender capabilities. This redefinition can have a lasting impact and encourage more inclusive and equitable norms that recognize and value the contributions of women. The Myanmar Spring Revolution verifies that women are taking up frontline positions in both nonviolent protests and armed resistance thereby showcasing their capability and resilience on the battlefield. Thus, a gender mainstreaming policy should be considered to maintain and further strengthen the current state of gender equality and further improve it within Myanmar society. By disrupting traditional structures and creating urgent needs for diverse leadership, women gain unique opportunities to enhance their power and engage more effectively in social and political spheres in the Myanmar revolution. Recognizing and supporting the transformative potential of Myanmar women's involvement in conflict fosters lasting change and achieves true gender equality during and after the revolution.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research emphasizes the significant role of women in Myanmar's 2021 Spring Revolution, highlighting their efforts to challenge and transform entrenched societal norms and gender stereotypes. Through qualitative analysis and in-depth interviews, the study reveals how the revolution has created opportunities for women to demonstrate leadership roles and promote gender equality. Despite historical patriarchal constraints, women have become central characters in the social justice movement, advocating for democracy, human rights, and gender equality. This active participation in the revolution has proven their capacity to lead and effect social change, reshaping perceptions of gender roles in Myanmar. Moreover, their involvement has revealed the essential role of diverse leadership in terms of the comprehensive needs of affected communities, including healthcare, education, and social services. The findings also emphasize the transformative power of collective action in dismantling gender stereotypes and empowering women.

While the study shows the crucial role of women's collective action in the Myanmar Spring Revolution, it brings valuable insights into the intersection of social justice movements and gender equality, offering practical ideas for fostering an inclusive society during and after political upheaval. By disrupting traditional structures and creating urgent needs for diverse leadership, the revolution has enabled women to enlarge their influence in social and political spheres, advocating for lasting change and genuine gender equality in Myanmar.

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Forced Recruitment of the Kachin Independence Army in Myanmar

Gum San Seng[27]

Abstract

In this study, I examine the forced recruitment implemented by the Kachin Independent Army (KIA), the armed wing of the Kachin Independent Organization (KIO), an armed resistance group in Kachin State. KIA-led forced recruitment has created human insecurities in the KIO-controlled territory. Therefore, many Kachin youths affected by forced recruitment have questioned the legitimacy of the KIO. To analyze the understanding of the Kachin youths of the KIA's forced recruitment, I employ the concepts of human security and rebel society. I argue that the KIA, in some cases, has implemented forced recruitment 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's legitimacy. Existing literature on resistance societies in Myanmar primarily examines how exogenous factors such as the Myanmar government-led ceasefire agreements have influenced the relations between resistance elites and their grassroots. By scrutinizing the endogenous factor of forced recruitment, this article can broaden our understanding of and enrich the literature on resistance societies in Myanmar.

Keywords: Kachin Independent Army (KIA), Forced Recruitment, Human Security, Resistance Societies, Kachin Youths

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1. Introduction

Recruitment is an essential practice to satisfy military manpower needs. The militaries utilize many recruitment strategies to enhance their military development. In the existing literature, scholars have discussed diverse definitions of military recruitment. First, conscription generally can be understood as a recruitment practice to satisfy military manpower needs. The recruitment practice can be defined as "conscription" when the basic approach of recruitment consists of the application of force, whether by legal means (e.g., mandatory enlistment) or illegal measures (e.g., forced enlistment), where people are not allowed to refuse military service (Toronto, 2005, p. 3). In contrast, the recruitment practice is considered to be "volunteer" when people enter the military with their individual freedom of decision without force and obligation (Toronto, 2005, p. 3). They join the military in terms of their aspiration and motivation. In contrast, Suparna Chaudhry has used the term conscription to define a legal practice in the recruitment process whereas Nathan Toronto, as mentioned before, has included legal and illegal means under the conscription.

According to Chaudhry (2021), conscription is a recruitment strategy where military-aged citizens are enlisted by legal law to serve in the military and the authorities can punish and fine non-compliant citizens by law (Chaudhry et al., 2021, p. 917). Moreover, Chaudhry has applied the term "forced recruitment" to refer to illegal means in the recruitment exercises. The strategy of forced recruitment consists of forcibly engaging people to serve the military through unlawful means without following the legal series of steps or individual consent (Chaudhry et al., 2021, p. 917). It often comprises the action of violence. Unlike conscription, which stresses legal means, forced recruitment includes direct enforcement or oppression. In this way, Chaudhry described conscription and forced recruitment as relying on legal means and illegal measures.

Furthermore, Alon Peled (1994) discussed three recruitment strategies in his article, Force, Ideology, and Contract, The History of Ethnic Conscription. Peled (1994, p. 62) suggested that governments and military groups always apply three recruitment methods: conscription-by-force, conscription-by-ideology, and conscription-by-contract. The first one, conscription-by-force, is a practice where military-aged subjects are pressured by law to join the military service (Peled, 1994, p. 62) while conscription-by-ideology is a practice where individuals are legally obligated to serve in the military, yet their aspiration to obey derives from individual belief and conviction (Peled, 1994, p. 65). The third one, conscription-by-contract, is a practice where constituents of an ethnic group or a community are legally required to join military service because of a previous negotiation and agreement between the elites of their group and the government (Peled, 1994, p. 68).

Conscription and military recruitment are contentious issues in Myanmar. According to an article released by Radio Free Asia (RFA) on February 12, 2024, a conscription law was enforced on February 10, 2024. "In this law, all citizens reaching the age of 18 must join the military service for at least two years. Men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27 are required to serve in the junta military for two years. Professionals, such as engineers, doctors, and technicians, aged 18-45 for men and 18-35 for women, must also serve, but their terms can be

extended to five years, depending on the country's state of emergency" (RFA, 2024, February 12).

The announcement of the conscription law presents potential benefits for the junta. Since the military coup in February 2021, ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and civilian armed forces called the People Defence Force (PDF) across the country have resisted the junta until now (Ministry of Defence, NUG, 2024, May 27). At the time of this writing, the junta has lost a thousand of its troops' lives in combat zones. During the fighting between January and May 2024, 2,869 military junta soldiers, including policemen, were killed and 2,813 were wounded, while 405 were killed and 903 were injured on the side of the revolutionary forces (Khit Thit Media, 2024, June 17). Therefore, the timing of the conscription announcement reflects a direct outcome of the 2021 military coup. The conscription law indicates that the junta wants to enhance its military strength and recover its lost manpower on the battlefield.

However, this recruitment practice has negatively affected the young generation's lives. The conscription law is terrifying youths in Myanmar. As reported by Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) on February 20, 2024: "On the morning of February 19th, passengers arriving from Yangon were sent to the soldiers at Sittwe Airport. The airport police arrested them and brought them to the Loka Nanda Pagoda in Sittwe for inspection. Among the arrested passengers, staff and the elderly have been released by the authorities, while most of the young people are still being held. This might have a connection to conscription" (DVB, 2024, February 20).

As a consequence of the conscription law, many young people are fleeing to ethnic insurgency areas and neighboring countries. Moreover, in some cases, conscripts are resorting to suicide to avoid military service under the junta. Hence, it can be said that the launch of the conscription law negatively impacts the younger population.

Interestingly, conscription and recruitment for the armed forces or military are not new practices in Myanmar. The practices have been implemented nationwide since resistance and civil wars emerged. Ethnic resistance groups, such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) (Davey, 2023, p. 63) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) (Steinmüller, 2019, p. 515), have governed the country's peripheries and have been employing different kinds of recruitment practices for their military developments.

The KIA, an armed wing of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) controlling Kachin State, has engaged in armed conflict with the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) since the 1960s, fighting for greater autonomy. The KIO/KIA has played a crucial role in leading the state-building of the Kachin society. For the KIO/KIA and Kachin people, state-building refers to the process of building governance structures, institutions, and mechanisms of administration in the Kachin territory, exemplified by governing resource management, running humanitarian and development projects, protecting Kachin culture, identity, values, and aspirations, and offering public services, including education, healthcare, and transportation development.

As a resistance force, the KIA strengthens its military's manpower through different types of conscription and recruitment strategies. Within the ceasefire period, the KIA established its youth wing called" Education and Economic Development for Youth (EEDY)" for their endeavor in 2002 (Brenner, 2018a, p. 11). The primary purpose of this youth wing is to recruit

Kachin youth around the Kachin state and Myanmar, especially colleges and universities students in the government-controlled area by empowering military skills, knowledge on educational development, and Kachin politics. This platform has become one of the strategic recruitment strategies under the KIA's conscription practice. Next, the KIA has been running a military academy and several military service programs to strengthen its military power. Additionally, the KIA applies conscription advocacy tactics through media entertainment, including movies, songs, and dancing. The KIA attempts to establish close relations and mutual trust with the Kachin community, mainly the young generation. In doing so, the KIO/KIA has enhanced its revolutionary status and legitimacy by encouraging military services at the same time.

2. Statement of the Research Problem and Justification

In 2009, conflicts escalated between the KIO/KIA and the Myanmar military when the KIO/ KIA rejected the military government's instruction regarding transforming into a Border Guard Force under the Myanmar military's command. Since then, the Kachin region along the China border started deadly confrontations again, resulting in remarkable casualties on both sides and the displacement of 100,000 civilians (Ho, 2022, p. 640). Simultaneously, the KIA's youthful leaders tried to rebuild the reputation of their revolutionary status and legitimacy that they almost lost during the ceasefire period. They attempted to collaborate with the grassroots institution that preserved solid recognition among local communities—the pivotal Kachin churches. These young leaders aimed to transform the KIO's engagement with its grassroots and to establish trustful relations between the KIO and the wider Kachin population.

Together with the political transition of Myanmar from a merely military dictatorial government to a semi-democratic government, the conflict between the KIA and the Myanmar military significantly increased in the 2010s (Woods, 2011). The ceasefire agreement between the KIO and the military government collapsed in 2011 because the military government's economic counterinsurgency and military state-building through land acquisition across the Kachin landscape threatened the KIO's authority in its controlled territory, triggering strong local resistance.

One of the notable examples is the Myitsone hydropower dam in Myitkyina, Kachin state. The project was started in 2006, within the ceasefire period, by agreeing only between the Myanmar and Chinese governments, without any notification to and intervention of the public and KIO (Chan, 2017; Kiik, 2016). Such territory and land issues created tension between the Kachin state residents and the military government. Lanyaw Zawng Hra, the former KIO Chairman, delivered a warning letter to former Chinese President Hu Jintao, stating that "the KIO would not be responsible for the Civil War if the war broke out because of this Hydro Power Plant Project" (Brenner, 2018a, p. 21). Even if it meant potentially escalating war and conflict with the Myanmar military, the KIO stood against the dam projects. Subsequently, a 17-year-long ceasefire agreement collapsed, and several civil wars erupted across the Kachin region.

To fight back against the Myanmar military energetically, the KIA started to enrich its military power by enhancing human resources and material development. For the manpower in the armed forces, the KIA upgraded the standard of its military academy and reinforced

recruitment. As mentioned above, the KIA conducts systematic recruitment through military academies, EEDY, and other military services, such as the two-year army service program called "*Lahkawng ning masing*." Anyone who passes the matriculation exam from both KIO education and Myanmar government education is allowed to attend the military academy. After two years of academic and military training, a student is assigned as a high-ranked soldier in related military bases. Next, the EEDY program warmly welcomes any Kachin youth in Myanmar, particularly higher education students. The training usually takes nearly two months, and then the participants return to where they come from, and they need to be ready as reserve soldiers if needed. Moreover, the KIA recruited soldiers across the Kachin territory. Interestingly, these ordinary and standard conscription methods with willing recruits were not always practical for armed resistance groups. Therefore, KIA practiced forced recruitment for manpower increasing in both their control areas and the government-dominated areas. Dara Kay Cohen's article (2013) showed that around 30% of contemporary civil wars include forced conscription and forced recruitment by the states, not even by armed resistance groups. Thus, the practice of forced recruitment by the armed resistance forces is unsurprising.

The application of forced recruitment practice during the war can affect military productivity and cause human rights violations. The practice causes human insecurity at both individual and community levels in the Kachin region. Many Kachin people at the village level depend on small-scale agriculture. The agricultural workforce has declined as more men are conscripted into the KIA, leaving women responsible for household work and farming. This situation has created household livelihood and economic insecurities (Asia Justice and Rights, 2015). Furthermore, forced recruitment is carried out in immoral and unethical ways, and Kachin youths fear forced recruitment, especially in the countryside of Kachin State.

The KIA's forced recruitment warrants further study. Regarding resistance and rebel society, literature has shown that exogenous factors, such as ceasefire agreements and joint venture investment projects, have negatively affected the relations between resistance leaders and their grassroots in the Kachin society (Brenner, 2017, p. 419). However, endogenous factors should not be overlooked either. These factors, often linked to the KIO's governance, play a significant role. I argue that the KIA has implemented forced recruitment through extra-legal means, involving violent recruitment without individual consent in some cases. These oppressive measures have led to various forms of human insecurity, including the degradation of well-being in affected households and the destruction of prospects of youths affected by forced recruitment, both of which are crucial for supporting the KIO's legitimacy. In this study, the young populations affected by recruitment are those who were forcibly recruited by KIA and those who are trying to escape from forced recruitment.

3. Research Questions

1 How has the KIA conducted forced recruitment in its territory, and how has this practice created human insecurities in Kachin society?

2 How have the affected Kachin youths perceived the KIA's forced recruitment practices and how have they responded to KIO's legitimacy?

4. Research Objectives

1. To explore the KIA's forced recruitment behavior in the Kachin region and human insecurities caused by the behavior.

2. To analyze the understanding of the affected Kachin youths regarding the KIA's recruitment practices and their responses to KIO's legitimacy.

5. Literature Review

Scholarship of resistance and rebel societies usually analyze the dynamics of resistance and rebel societies through exogenous factors. Exogenous factors can be ceasefire agreements and joint ventures where resistance elites interact with external actors such as foreign investors, other armed groups, and the original state. David Brenner's research (2018) on the KNU and the KIO is an excellent example of exogenous factors.

5.1. Karen Society and Exogenous Factors

The Karen National Union (KNU) was founded in 1947, a year before Myanmar's independence from the British colony, and fourteen years before the establishment of the KIO in 1961. The KNU is Myanmar's oldest ethnic resistance organization, with over 10,000 skillful warriors (Brenner, 2018b, p. 85). The KNU's armed wing is the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), which has seven brigades across the Karen State in Myanmar. The KNU resisted the Tatmadaw's ceasefire engagement the whole time between the 1990s and 2000s until the political transition with a semi-democratic government in Myanmar in 2011 (McCarthy & Farrelly, 2020, p. 152). Eventually, the KNU signed the bilateral ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government in 2012 and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015.

According to Brenner (2017), the exogenous factors greatly impacted the resistance societies and caused a legitimacy decline for the resistance elites (Brenner, 2017, p. 419). In the case of the Karen society, the resistance grassroots questioned the leadership of the KNU authorities because of the ceasefire capitalism-like practice after the ceasefire agreement period. Since the ceasefire agreement with the KNU, the government approached the purchase of their insurgency through economic incentives. According to Karen News, U Aung Min, a railway minister of the government, declared that the conflicts occurring in the Karen enclave could be addressed by enhancing economic development (Brenner, 2017, p. 417). The financial strategy persuaded the insurgency leaders of the government. From the sight of the Karen grassroots, their resistance leaders were developing a closer relationship with the government through many top-secret movements, becoming more prosperous beyond the ceasefire agreement (Brenner, 2017). The growing engagement of the rebel leaders in commercial activities, along with the resulting corruption within the upper ranks of some KNU brigades, has presented significant difficulties for the social identities of their grassroots insurgents. This has led to the eroding legitimacy of the KNU leaders.

SieSue Mark's article (2022) also reflected the importance of the exogenous factors in the KNU-controlled society. After signing the national ceasefire agreement, the KNU believed that

the Myanmar government and they had a mutual agreement on the four principles related to land, p. "(i) land under each authority will title that land, (ii) in mixed areas, titling will depend on which authority can gain access, (iii) post-ceasefire, land documented by the KNU will be recognized, and (iv) support will be given to the resettlement of internally displaced people and refugees" (Mark, 2022, p. 234). However, the Myanmar government tried to expand its control over a more extensive area of the Karen territory by issuing cheap and easily accessible land certificates. It did not recognize the KNU government's land documents. Thus, even if the people had already received a valid land document from the KNU, the document was not recognized by the national government (Mark, 2022). Many people in Karen State distrusted the Myanmar government and questioned the KNU's role in the peace process (Mark, 2022). The reconciliation between the high-ranking officials in the KNU and the Myanmar government undermined the KNU's legitimacy.

5.2. Kachin Society and Exogenous Factors

In Kachin society, the Kachin resistance occurred as one of Myanmar's oldest and most formidable revolutionary societies (Brenner, 2018a, p. 10). The KIO, formed in 1961, represented a diverse coalition of Kachin factions, including university students in Yangon, intellectuals in Myitkyina (the capital of Kachin State), and Kachin veterans from World War II (Brenner, 2015, p. 341). The headquarters of the KIO is based in Laiza, a town bordering Kachin State, Myanmar, and China. This uprising was sparked by oppressive government measures that marginalized ethnic minorities. The KIA has engaged in armed conflict with the Myanmar military for decades, fighting for greater autonomy and control over Kachin State.

The Myanmar military's strategy of gentle persuasion of the Kachin resistance elites, also known as the ceasefire strategy, to reform them from resistance to business people was initiated in the late 1980s, and it achieved some success (Woods, 2016, p. 129; Brenner, 2015, p. 340). In 1994, the KIO/ KIA willingly became involved in this ceasefire agreement and performed ceasefire capitalism activities by teaming up with different stakeholders and investors, even though the initial purpose of the ceasefire agreement was to improve the Kachin society's social economy and develop the Kachin region. The KIO/KIA leaders got enormous benefits from businesses based on natural resource exploitation, such as timber logging and jade mining, and they built a good partner relationship with the Myanmar military and Chinese investors (Woods, 2016; Brenner, 2015; 2017). Chinese enterprises initiated mega gold mining projects by the side of the shores of the Irrawaddy River and its two headwaters, the Mali and N'mai. Tariffs on these mining companies reinforced the monetary resources of the KIO, and illegal bribery in these mining activities bolstered the income of the Kachin resistance leaders. In doing so, the KIO/KIA's resistance status turned into business. Unfortunately, the process of KIO-led state building in Kachin was almost destroyed due to some Kachin resistance elites' immoral activities. KIA's rank-and-file soldiers became aimless, and the Kachin people came to distrust their resistance leaders (Brenner, 2015, 2017, 2018a). The KIA-governed Kachin society was on the verge of collapse.

5.3. Resistance Societies and Endogenous Factors

We should not overlook the endogenous factors when examining resistance societies, as they convey insight into their foundational fabric. They are a pathway to acquiring the inner condition of such resistance societies. Therefore, this study will add novel insight regarding the endogenous factors of the Kachin society to existing literature. In contrast, previous literature has paid more attention to the exogenous factors of that society.

I argue that endogenous factors are essential to determine the sustainability and vulnerability of resistance societies. Endogenous factors in this context refer to the governance of a resistance elite within their society through taxation, conscription, and provision of public services (education and health), and so on. When looking at the revolutionary journey of the KIO/KIA, taxation plays a crucial role in sustaining its resistance movement. The grassroots households are located at the center of the funding sources of the KIO, and the grassroots pay tax through various forms, such as rice, money, and jade (Hedström, 2017, p. 585). In addition, the provision of public health services at the grassroots can impact the revolution's sustainability and give resistance leaders legitimacy. The KIO intervened in public health issues through the "war against drugs" campaign by teaming up with the Pat Jasan movement in the Myanmar government-controlled areas to defend its society in the 2010s (Brenner & Tazzioli, 2022, p. 7). By way of that biopolitical approach, the KIO shaped its grassroots populations into a community in an opposite position to the ruling nation-state (Brenner & Tazzioli, 2022).

Marie Lall and Ashley South's research (2014) also reflected the importance of understanding the endogenous governance within a resistance society. They focused on KNU's and the New Mon State Party's (NMSP) education management. The KNU initiated educational services in its liberated areas in the 1950s and all the education projects and activities have been conducted by the Karen Education Department (KED) since the 1970s. Likewise, the Mon national education system was initiated by the NMSP Central Education Department in NMSP's territory in 1972. Then the school system was upgraded and put under a new umbrella named Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) in 1992. The significant difference between these two education systems is that KNU education does not try to integrate with the national government system, while NMSP education expands its school system by mixing with the government system. However, grassroots members from both societies feel that attending non-state schools taught in their mother tongue can avoid discrimination, which usually occurs in government schools, and they believe the schools are teaching quality education to their children (Lall & South, 2014, p. 317). From the KIO and KNU to the NMSP, endogenous factors in resistance societies have shaped the development of relationships between grassroots members and rebel leaders. Among these endogenous factors, conscription is essential and can influence the dynamics between the resistance grassroots and elites. However, few studies explore this theme in the scholarship on resistance societies and broader conflict and peace studies.

In my research, I intend to demonstrate why forced conscription is essential and how it links to human insecurity and the legitimacy of resistance leaders. What we have seen is that the

resistance groups in Myanmar conduct forced conscription to sustain the state-building process. However, this practice may have undermined their legitimacy when the grassroots experience the side effects of the practice. First, the exercise of forced conscription can cause human insecurities within the affected society. In the case of Wa, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), one of the prominent ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, controlling a typical periphery of the eastern part of Myanmar, conducts forced conscription in its liberated territory (Steinmüller, 2019). This practice causes human insecurity in the Wa grassroots community. In the case of Sam Lao, one resident in the Wa region, his eleven-year-old son was forcibly recruited by the army to replace the position of his deserter brother (Steinmüller, 2019, p. 516). In this instance, the way the forced conscription was practiced in the Wa enclave aggressively attacked individual youths' security and human rights.

A case that happened in Syria tells us about the different adverse impacts of forced conscription. Because of the Syrian war, the military-aged Syrian men fled to neighboring countries to avoid conscription and the forced conscription of the military led by the Assad regime. Although they escaped from serving in the military by working in these neighboring countries, they are required to pay US$ 8,000 as an exemption fee for military service (Monroe, 2020, p. 278). This sum represents an obvious financial tribulation for ordinary-income persons to pay in a lump sum. It affected their economic well-being and financial security. Such human insecurities caused by forced conscription can result in undermining the legitimacy of rebel groups in rebel societies.

6. Analytical Framework

6.1. Human Security

The concept of human security emerged in the early 1990s, criticizing the notion that traditional security was narrowly interpreted as security of territory from external invasion, protection against nuclear threats, and preservation of national interests in foreign policy. Traditional security concepts stress that nation-state security is more important than people's security because "citizens are secure only if the state itself is free from external threats" (Chu, 2017, p. 1089). Interestingly, Nicolas Thomas and William Tow (2002) support the statist approach to security and suggest narrowing down the concept would be greater and more accurate for policy means. Their ideology is criticized for excessive Westernization and state-centralism (Bellamy & McDonald, 2002). The Western-oriented approach of states as agents of security is not a model for every region of the world. This method cannot be an appropriate pathway for the nations of the Global South because many states in the third world are agents of human insecurity rather than security. Therefore, the concept of human security should be broader and pay more attention to individual people rather than states (Bellamy & McDonald, 2002). Furthermore, the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (1994, p. 22) also advocates that the human security concept should be broad and more focused on individuals' security. Protecting children from death, reducing disease spread, growing employment rates, decreasing ethnic tension, and having freedom of movement can be considered security issues. Thus, human security is not only for the nation-state's security from external invasion but also for the security of humans living in a country.

The UNDP (1994) categorizes human security into seven areas: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. Economic security ensures an individual's basic income, financial well-being, and employment. In contrast, food security stresses the sustainability of individuals' healthy lives through the availability of enough nutritious food (UNDP, 1994, p. 25-27). Health security means defending individuals' health from diseases and enhancing healthcare services. In contrast, environmental security focuses on the sustainability of the ecosystem, on which human beings' livelihoods and well-being depend, and on reducing ecological issues, including climate change and pollution (UNDP, 1994, p. 27-28). Ensuring individuals' safety and freedom from conflict, oppression, violation, and human rights abuses belong to personal security, and enhancing resilience and social cohesion within communities is part of community security (UNDP, 1994, p. 30-31). Finally, political security involves strengthening individuals' rights to political representation and freedom (UNDP, 1994, p. 32).

In the context of Kachin society, human security issues become significant and warrant further attention. Since the ceasefire agreement between the KIO and the Myanmar military broke down in 2011, civil wars have been escalating across the Kachin region. In response, the KIO/KIA has been strengthening its armed forces by increasing manpower through various forms of recruitment, including military academy and forced conscription, aimed at ensuring the security of their controlled territory. Although the state-building process in Kachin State remains ongoing, the concept of nation-state security here can be interpreted as the security of the Kachin State and the territories under the control of the KIO/KIA. Unfortunately, the practice of forced conscription, involving violence and extra-legal means under the guise of so-called nation-state security, undermines the human security of individuals within the Kachin grassroots. For many youths living in the KIO-governed society, the state [the KIO] is "more often part of the problem than the source of the solution" (Bellamy & McDonald, 2002, p. 373). The concept of human security can help shed light on the role of the KIO/KIA and the human security challenges faced by Kachin youths.

6.2. Rebel Society

Rebel society is a concept that underscores the dynamics of insurgency movements in the realm of insurgency studies. It can generally be understood as a society with a dynamic interaction of two social forces, i.e., rebel leaders and rebel grassroots. This concept represents an insurgent society characterized by a strong interdependency between its grassroots and elites (Brenner, 2017). These social forces conduct an insurgency movement by interplaying and interdepending on each other. Wendy Pearlman (2010) describes "…insurgency as composite-actors, comprising of differently situated incumbent leaders, aspirant elites, and grassroots."

In a rebel society, the rebel elites build their authority through several alternative strategies during rebellious times. One common way is to instill fear to the grassroots population, and another is to provide good public services, such as education and healthcare. Although fear can be a significant element in maintaining power within an insurgency period, it is not the best way to keep authority in the long run (Zelditch, 2001). Similarly, the public recognition and trust do not only come from public services provided by the rebel elites (Mampilly, 2011). The

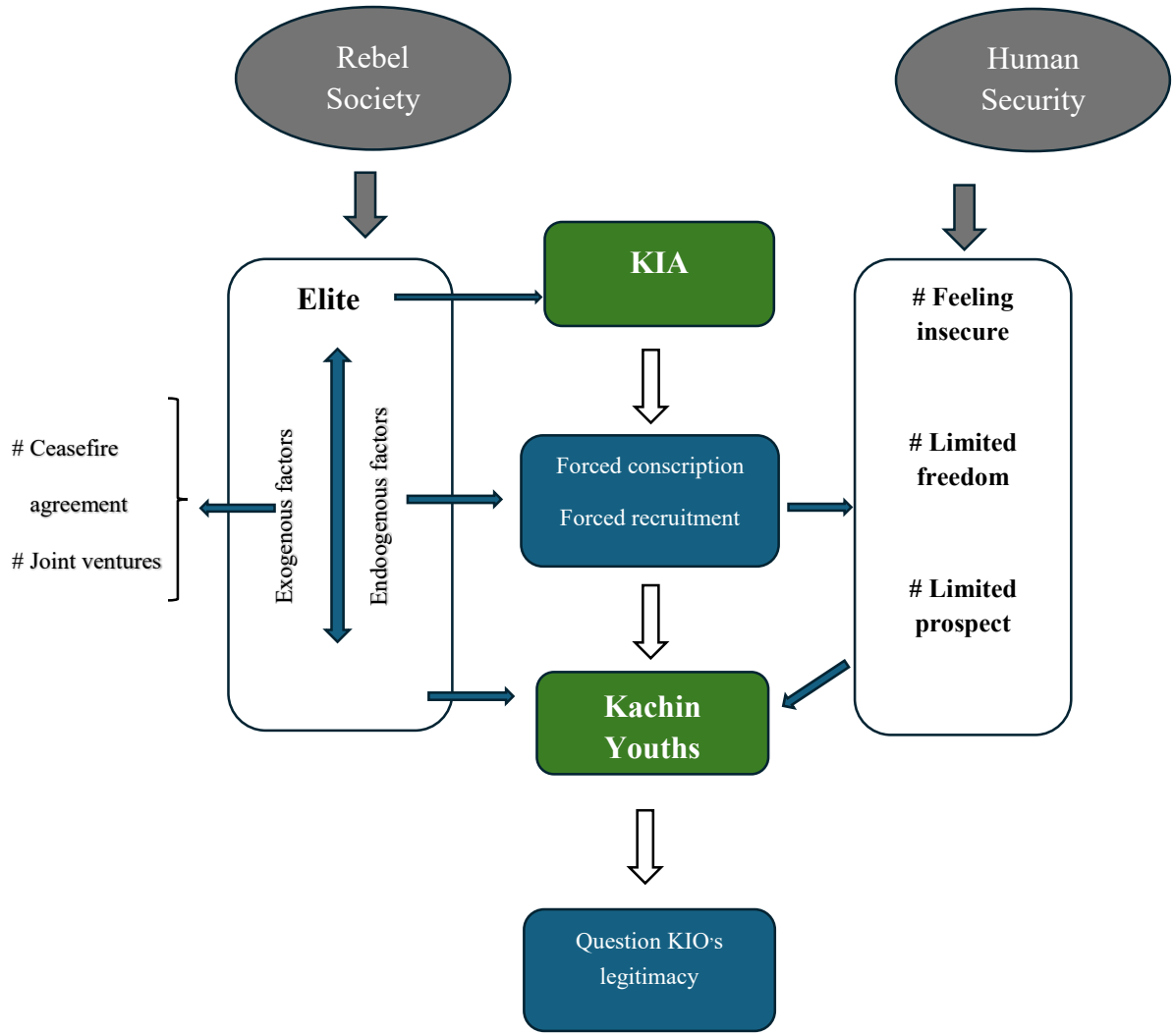
rebel leaders' legitimate authority and recognition of the public also depend on how much they can protect and implement grassroots interests and needs.

Within a rebel society, the support of the grassroots is crucial for the rebel elites because the existence of the rebel groups and their communities integrates similar to the relationship between fish and water. To be a successful insurgency movement and contested government, insurgency structures should be well embodied into the existing social structures of the grassroots community (Mampilly, 2011, p. 12). This homogenization of the insurgency mechanism and the local social structure helps build the legitimate authority of the rebel group, and this integration strategy helps sustain insurgency activities and state-building.

When looking deeply into a rebel society, rebel elites and grassroots are interplaying in the insurgency movement. However, the scholarship on conflict and rebellion studies has paid more attention to rebel leaders than the rebel grassroots (Pearlman, 2009). To understand rebellion movements well, we cannot overlook rebel grassroots, because rebel leaders have to rely on their compliance to maintain their legitimacy and confidence. Therefore, James Scott (1979, p. 98) convincingly argues that in conflict and resistance studies, it is essential to not only examining the ideologies and actions of rebel leaders but also the underlying aspirations and sentiments of the grassroots. Therefore, the concept of a rebel society has been applied to the study of the Kachin resistance society.

In the case of the Kachin society, forced conscription tends to create tension between resistance grassroots and resistance elites. The concept of a rebel society, as previously mentioned, represents an insurgent society characterized by a strong interdependency between its grassroots and elites. However, the practice of forced conscription by the KIA has disregarded the security and well-being of their community, negatively impacting the legitimacy of the KIO/KIA. The concept of rebel society can help us explore the voices and opinions of the Kachin grassroots and analyze their response to the legitimacy of the KIO.

7. Conceptual Framework



This conceptual framework shows how human security and rebel society concepts are integrated into the study of forced conscription in Kachin society. In this case, Kachin society consists of two social forces: the Kachin resistance elite (KIO/KIA) and the Kachin resistance grassroots (Kachin youths). In this resistance society, the elite and the grassroots interact through exogenous and endogenous factors. Kachin society's political grievances and political agenda center on self-determination and self-autonomy, without staying under the oppression and discrimination of the Myanmar Union government. In this revolutionary process, KIO acts as a state-like government, competing with the existing national government by building legitimacy within Kachin society. As a contested government, the KIO also enhances the KIA's

human resources through conscription. Conscription and recruitment are conducted through endogenous governance. Moreover, KIA has also implemented forced recruitment, creating human insecurities among the Kachin grassroots, especially youths. Eventually, this kind of forced recruitment practice has encouraged the Kachin youths to question the KIO's legitimacy.

8. Research Methodology

This study was conducted prior to my MA thesis, with most of my findings, discussion, and interpretations based on my initial data. Additionally, I also conducted a life history interview with a Kachin youth studying in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and I integrated these insights into the following findings and discussion sections.

9. The Role of KIO/ KIA in Kachin State, Myanmar

State-building under the name of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is seen as an unsuccessful phenomenon. The dynamic between ethnic minority groups in the peripheries and the central government has played a crucial role in molding the state-building process in the aftermath of the 1948 independence of the country. The 1947 Panglong Agreement was intended to speed up the departure of the British and lay the groundwork for a new nation founded on federalism. However, after the tragic assassination of General Aung San in the same year, Prime Minister U Nu and a select group of Bamar leaders assumed control. Tensions escalated due to the failure to implement the Panglong Agreement and the boosting of Burmese culture within the state (Oosterom et al., 2019).

Myanmar gained independence in 1948, living in a brief period of parliamentary democracy that lasted until 1962 when General Ne Win seized power. Ne Win's socialist government strongly opposed the concept of authentic federalism, perceiving it as a threat to the union. The hopes for increased self-governance for non-Burmese communities within the Union of Burma diminished with the rise of General Ne Win's military takeover in 1962 (McCarthy & Farrelly, 2020, p. 145). Under his leadership, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) sought to enforce a strict socialist system across territories. This involved centralizing administrative power and striving to assimilate diverse populations into a uniform socialist framework, thereby diminishing the prospects for autonomy among ethnic groups like the Kachin and Karen. Furthermore, Ne Win's regime implemented policies that marginalized ethnic minority communities, such as the promotion of Burma's culture and language. This fueled resentment and further entrenched divisions between the central government and ethnic minorities. Consequently, many ethnic insurgency armed groups emerged across the country, such as the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and the Karen National Union (KNU).

The Kachin resistance occurred as one of Myanmar's oldest and most formidable insurgencies, similar to the KNU (Brenner, 2018a, p.10). Formed in 1961 under the name Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), one of the key features of the KIO is its armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). The KIA has engaged in armed conflict with the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) for decades, fighting for greater autonomy and control over Kachin State. The KIO/KIA plays a crucial role in leading the state-building of the Kachin society. For the

KIO/KIA and Kachin people, state-building refers to the process of building governance structures, institutions, and mechanisms of administration in their territory, for example, governing resource management, running humanitarian and development projects, protecting Kachin culture, identity, values, and aspirations, and offering public services, including education, healthcare, and transportation development. In short, the Kachin people advocate self-determination and self-authorization, "Awmdawm" in Jinghpaw (Kachin) language, in their territory, without any intervention from the central government or not staying under the Burmese-dominated governance mechanism. This is the backbone agenda of the emerging Kachin resistance movement in Myanmar.

The KIO/ KIA's contribution to the Myanmar political playground through political leadership, ideology, and armed movements ensures the sustainability and significance of the Kachin insurgency. Having an armed force named KIA can strengthen the ability to protect the national and state security of the Kachin society. Mr. Awng, my interviewee, mentioned, "*a nation without soldiers is very oppressed and excluded in Myanmar's contemporary context*." To be a strong resistance armed organization, moreover, the support of the public and grassroots population should not be neglected. Their role is essential. The KIO can implement its political agenda effectively and stand in a respectful position in Myanmar's political negotiation process because of its powerful enough army, the KIA. This army consists of thousands of soldiers from the Kachin grassroots population. This population is the main source for manpower of the KIA. Without the participation of the grassroots, the KIA cannot be powerful, leading to a decline in the KIO's influence in the country's political process. Hence, the KIA has conducted several recruitment strategies, including forced recruitment to satisfy its military development. The existence of KIO/ KIA benefits the protection of the Kachin nation and state security from the threats of the Myanmar military, and the Kachin grassroots is a primary supporter of the KIO/ KIA.

10. National and State Security Causes Individual Insecurities

After paying too much attention to national and state security, human insecurities issue have emerged in the Kachin society. Over six decades, the KIO/ KIA has been engaging in warfare with the Myanmar military to preserve its security and Kachin identity. During this wartime, one of the significant strategies of the KIO/ KIA to defend against the threat by the Myanmar military has been to enhance human resources and development for its armed forces. Consequently, KIA has emphasized the attentive enlistment of people, especially youths, to maintain its military capacity. Unfortunately, this activity encourages several human insecurity problems at the grassroots level. When exploring the recruitment methods applied by the KIA, various approaches can generally be identified, such as conscription-through-ideology, forced recruitment, volunteer recruitment through the military academy, and recruitment through short-term military training like EEDY. However, in line with the study's focus, an emphasis is placed on forced recruitment practices conducted by the KIA. First of all, Mr. Awng told me that when he was a teenager, living in a mining village in Phakant, Kachin state, he experienced forced recruitment by the KIA. The KIA soldiers forcibly entered houses and grabbed young men. If the young men refused to follow, the soldiers behaved violently against them. Then he continued that one night, he and his friends came back to their houses from a video station in

their village. The KIA soldiers were waiting on the road and arrested people. As soon as they saw them, they ran away from them. It was a frightening situation. Those kinds of forced recruitment practices were often seen in villages and the countryside, but they are now also occurring in cities around the Kachin region. Kachin youths are recruited forcibly in restaurants, recreational areas, and so on. These are visible examples of forced recruitment of the KIA around the Kachin region.

As a consequence of the forced recruitment exercises in the Kachin region by the KIA, many insecurities occur in the lives of the Kachin young generation. While the lives of youths should be full of energy, innovation, and freedom, many young Kachin are living with fear and are facing restriction. Mr. Aung described that there was a hole in the ground in the backyard of his house. He and his brothers always ran there whenever they heard information about conscription. Sometimes, they slept in the hole at night, sometimes they hid in bushes. Moreover, whenever he saw a man who was suspected of being a KIA-related person in the village, he did not sleep at home that night. He had to be alert and fearful in his young age. Additionally, the KIA's forced recruitment also disrupts Kachin youths' future prospects. By the time he was around 13, a young man was in his neighborhood in Phakant. He was attending distance education at university. One night, KIA soldiers came into his house and tried to recruit his younger brother. However, the young man followed the soldiers instead of his brother. Fortunately, he was able to continue his university education with the KIA's financial support by serving in the military simultaneously. However, he lost his youthful life and dreams. Returning to Mr. Awng's story, his parents sent him to their relatives' house in Mogaung town, a developed town in Kachin state, to escape from forced recruitment and pursue his further education. These stories illustrate how forced recruitment restricts Kachin youths' prospects and pushes them to remain in a state of fear.

In addition, forced recruitment results in increased family hardship. In many cases, fathers are treated as family men and heads of families in Kachin society, and all of the family's well-being, livelihood, and money-making are categorized as the responsibility of fathers. The Kachin mothers are responsible for childcare and housework (e.g. cooking and washing). In this customary practice, Kachin grassroots families have faced obstacles after the family men were recruited to serve in the KIA. In some cases, conscripts are released after a couple of months due to their families' requests, but some are not. According to Mr. Awng's experience, after 2011, when war broke out again between the KIA and the Tatmadaw, his family received a military conscription letter from the KIA. His elder brother decided to join the military instead of his younger siblings. If no one joined the military to serve, anyone from their family would be conscripted forcibly. When the elder brother joined the military, his wife and two daughters were left behind. The wife had to take the role of family head while working as a housewife. Consequently, she could not take care properly of her children's well-being, attitude, and education. Hence, they provided financial support for her children's education. Mr. Awng's experiences are highlightening these suffering and human insecurities faced by families caused by conscription.

11. Does Forced Recruitment Undermine KIO's Legitimacy?

When considering the Kachin public perspective regarding the KIA's forced recruitment practice, they generally understand this practice serves military development and state-building. As mentioned before, forced recruitment can be considered an effective strategy for the KIA to satisfy the human resources of its armed forces to support the KIO-led state-building process. The reason for emphasizing its military development is to secure Kachin's national and state security. Through forced recruitment, KIA can recruit a thousand rank-and-files and lower-level soldiers. They are the backbone to implement military movements against the Myanmar military. Volunteer recruitment methods like the military academy and EEDY (short-term military training) are not as effective as forced conscription to increase the manpower of KIA. The military academy only raises high-rank generals who automatically become one-star generals after completing the academy. The EEDY is training reserve soldiers in the community, not full-fledged soldiers. The main strengths and power of the KIA comes from the rank-and-file population. While this reflects the Kachin public's acknowledgment of the KIA's forced recruitment, it does not mean they do not have any concerns or questions regarding the practice.

From the Kachin grassroots perspective, several questions have been raise on how KIA manages the forced recruitment exercises on the ground. Is the practice applied to everyone? How have the KIA generals conducted the forced recruitment? In some cases, groups of Kachin youth are conscripted together; however, while some are released a month or a couple of months, others are sent to the military training ground to become soldiers. The public is curious about the rules and regulations of the conscription process. A group of Kachin people, especially youths, are investing their lives in the KIA armed forces by giving up their dreams, while others are killing their time in unproductive ways, such as going to bars and clubs and abusing drugs. Some recruitment-affected families are facing challenges and disintegration due to livelihood degradation after the family men are conscripted. These conditions can encourage families and individuals affected by forced recruitment to question the KIO's legitimacy. Consequently, the trust and support of the Kachin grassroots for the state-building mission may decline and be undermined in the long run.

12. Conclusion

In this study, I examined the forced recruitment exercises implemented by KIA by applying the concepts of human security and rebel society. Preliminary data show that many cases of human insecurity cases caused by KIA's forced conscription have emerged at the grassroots level across the Kachin region. The KIA's forced recruitment is carried out through extra-legal measures, including coercive recruitment without respect for individual consents and rights. While the Kachin grassroots acknowledge that KIA's forced recruitment aims at strengthening national and state security, they questioned the approach taken by the of KIA because of unequal application of practice and unsystematic rules and regulations. Moreover, even though the forced recruitment practice is aimed at national and state security, it has resulted in individual human insecurities. It disrupts Kachin youths' prospects and causes the degradation of well-being and livelihoods of affected families. If KIA continues forced recruitment

practices without reforming regulations and ensuring equality, its legitimacy and state-building mission may be undermined by the Kachin grassroots, as it occurred in the ceasefire period. This study still has several limitations because most of the findings and the discussion rely on preliminary data. Moreover, it should extend the range of research participants to gain a broader and more diverse perspective from various Kachin youths.

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

Hein Htet Aung

Abstract

Following the military coup on February 1, 2021, peaceful protests were violently cracked down by the Myanmar military at the end of March 2021, leading to the deaths of numerous protesters. Many activists and CDM officers were chased and charged under Section 505 A. Large numbers of activists, CDM officers, and CDM students, along with their families, fled to neighboring Thailand, especially to Mae Sot. Many of them entered this border town illegally via pre-existing smuggling routes, with the help of local ethnic organizations or brokers, in the hope of being sent to third countries or resettled in Thailand, where they appear to enjoy greater security and access to basic human rights. These forcibly displaced people struggle to survive in a new environment, in a context culturally and socially different from their own, and in "a state of exception" where they have to employ various strategic tools to avoid deportation or to negotiate other rights and greater mobility. Mae Sot, as a "state of exception" in which different organizations and stakeholders share state power, enables these individuals to access social security and freedom of mobility through the support of pre-existing communities and organizations. As a consequence, these forcibly displaced people have various options for increasing their security and mobility by claiming different types of documentations. Based on in-depth interviews, this study presents three case studies of forcibly displaced persons, including either themselves or their family members who fled to Mae Sot together and are a part of the CDM. For many of Myanmar's resistance fighters, forced displacement may be the only option for safety. Still, they have to adopt the documentation regime as a strategic tool to claim their basic human rights to access education, secure job opportunities, and to obtain mobility and citizenship.

Keywords: CDM, Activists, Forcibly Displaced People, Formalization, Documentation

1. Introduction

The initial steps of this research were made after the Thai government announced on July 5, 2022, that the pink card and work permit would be opened for registration for illegal migrants. This news also brought a dilemma for the CDMers[28] and activists residing in Mae Sot, who had to choose between obtaining Thai legal documents or waiting for the UNHCR's process to be sent to a third country. Mae Sot has been described as a town of migrants (Miyajima, 2018,

[28] CDMers is an acronym for persons who participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement, referring to public servants from Myanmar who refuse to work under the military regime.

p. 307), where the basic rights and welfare of both legal and illegal migrants are supported by CSOs and NGOs along with the state authorities. Accordingly, the arrival of this new wave of displaced people from Myanmar was met with mixed reactions. While local CSOs and NGOs tried to set up aid systems, the Thai authorities regularly conducted raids in the areas where Myanmar migrants live and conducted surprise checks on the roads for legal documents.

Myanmar migrants often live in fear of being detained and deported; under these conditions, obtaining legal documents appears as a powerful tool for negotiating basic rights, healthcare, education, mobility, and employment opportunities in the community of forcibly displaced people from Myanmar (Pobsuk, 2017, p. 2). The study I conducted on the formalization of Myanmar migrants in Mae Sot took place from July 2022 to July 2024. During this time, distinct changes in the practice of various forms of identification processes in the community of forcibly displaced people were discovered. These practices and the agency of the forcibly displaced people, along with the context of Mae Sot, were examined through three case studies of the forcibly displaced people in Mae Sot, using mainly ethnography, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. This study aims to explore the agency of the forcibly displaced people in obtaining identification and how they use these powerful tools for their resilience, resettlement, and further migration within Thailand. The way formalization is performed among forcibly displaced people comes in different forms, including pink cards and work permits, which need a CI (Certificate of identity) or a passport for annual extension, 10-year cards or highlander cards, organization cards, and border passes, while no instances to attain citizenship by the new migrants were discovered in the study.

2. Conceptual Framework of this Research

This paper uses a conceptual framework focused on three main concepts. Firstly, Mae Sot is described as a "state of exception" where various organizations and stakeholders share power to build an atmosphere of negotiation and establish a semi-legal social system. This context of Mae Sot leads to unique identification systems for migrants, and this research shows how these forcibly displaced people adapt to pre-existing social systems to claim these identifications as a tool of power for protection and mobility.

The second concept addresses the agency of the new community formed by forcibly displaced people in Mae Sot after 2021, and how they utilize different types of identification through various networks to reclaim their basic rights to health, education, work, and mobility.

The third concept focuses on how forcibly displaced people claim their legal or semi-legal status and negotiate power through the official routes and the networks of pre-existing community-based organizations (CBOs) and other organizations. By integrating these three concepts, this research explores how forcibly displaced people in Mae Sot navigate their identities, exercise agency, and negotiate power dynamics within a complex socio-legal environment. It contributes to broader discussions on refugee studies, social identity theory, and governance in exceptional contexts, providing insights into resilience, adaptation, and the pursuit of rights among vulnerable populations. This conceptual framework was applied to highlight the interplay of identity construction, agency, and negotiation strategies among forcibly displaced individuals in Mae Sot.

3. Methodology

This research used ethnographic methods, including in-depth interviews, individual interviews, and participant observation to collect data. Three in-depth interviews were conducted to highlight three case studies, and 12 interviews to explore the ways how participants survive in Mae Sot, address their documentation problems, and the impact of their documentation on job-seeking and livelihood issues. The researcher participated in the formalization process to be able to deeply study its challenges. Inform consent was sometimes not obtained in written form, but rather in a conversational form, depending on the interviewee. The researcher thoroughly explained the aim of the research and asked for voluntary participation. This paper explores the different formalization methods employed by forcibly displaced people while questioning the challenges they still face after they get legal documentation.

4. Literature Review

Since the coup, the CDM has attracted support from professional revolutionaries, led by medical and healthcare workers. Bankers, lawyers, teachers, and engineers across the nation have demanded that the military restores the elected government to power, refusing to return to work[29]. Myanmar's revolution has shifted from peaceful protests to armed revolution, as acting NUG President Lashi La announced in a formal statement and a post in Facebook on September 7, 2021, that "a people's war against the military junta" has led to a public revolution "within entire Myanmar[30]." Thus, some supporters of the revolution have transitioned into the armed revolution rather than the Civil Disobedience Movement. Most people who join the CDM are meeting their basic needs, with the high risk of being arrested at any time by the security forces (Sai Kyi Zin Soe, 2023, p.4). In its first annual report issue, on April 16, 2022, the NUG stated that it had provided 229 million kyats (U.S. $190000) in financial support to CDM staff. However, NUG officials said, at a press conference, that the focus of their financial support had shifted to military expenditures and acknowledged that this shift had led to a decline in the number of supporting CDM members[31].

CDM members who no longer feel secure or are being chased by the military government tend to migrate to the border regions. Most of them have to use illegal routes as on 19th September 2022, the military announced that border gates were also checking for CDM supporters. Apart from those migrating to the Indian or Chinese borders, most of the CDM officers and their families migrated to Mae Sot, a contested space that includes contradictory aspects such as trading, traveling, displacement, and confinement (Pobsuk, 2016). Mae Sot has a long history

[29] Walkers, T. (2021). How Myanmar's civil disobedience movement is pushing back against the coup. *Voice of America*. https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_how-myanmars-civil-disobedience-movement-pushing-back-against-coup/6202637.html.
[30] Scott, D. (2021). Myanmar's shadow government formally declares war. *Asia Times.*
[31] Lips, J. (2021). Myanmar civil disobedience movement 'losing steam' amid junta crackdowns. *Radio Free Asia.*

of migration; Myanmar's politicians and activists from previous uprisings fled to escape the repression of their democratic movements by the military.

While the rule of law in Thailand is meant to protect citizens, forcibly displaced peoples are often seen as "being out of community" (Decha, 2023; 2008). They frequently exercise their agency in unique ways, such as by performing their cultural traditions, creating their 'own place', navigating opportunities, voicing critical political opinions, displaying resilience, and setting future goals (Ross, 2015, p.6). As the migrant population grows, also the number of organizations supporting it increases, some of which are founded by well-connected and well-educated political leaders fleeing into exile from Myanmar.

Migrants can attain some access to healthcare, register the births of children, acquire locally-recognized ID cards, and seek help from CBOs/NGOs when workplace problems arise (Loong, 2019). Over the past three decades, these cards have become the strategic tool used by the state to differentiate between Thai citizen and non-Thai individuals. Due to Thailand's changing citizenship law and its varying enforcement, migrants from Myanmar arriving in different waves have acquired various legal statuses (Grundy-Warr, 2004, p. 233). However, many Burmese migrants are lacking documentation, even though they have been staying in Thailand for a decade or more. Issuance and revocation of cards for cross-border migrants have become common state practices. While registered workers are theoretically exempt from arrest and deportation by the Thai authorities, those without a registration card remain vulnerable to arrest[32]. Even though migrants lack legal status in these borderlands, the border town is a living environment with which they develop close relationships in their everyday lives (Lee, 2007). Over the past three decades, migrants and their families have relied on an informal social system, comprising NGOs, CSOs, and religious organizations to access education, healthcare, and other social services, even though most of these organizations remain unregistered with the Thai government (Lee, 2007; Soe Lin Aung, 2014). Statelessness limits freedom of movement across international borders and can pose a permanent obstacle to repatriation or legal migration to a third country. It also results in lifelong difficulties, such as being unable to enroll in school, gain legal employment or marriage, and access to government assistance programs (Ball & Moselle, 2015).

This state of exception has led to the practice of categorizing displaced persons living in border towns and labeling them as refugees, migrant workers, undocumented people, and illegal people (Pobsuk, 2016). Despite the clear stamp of official state regulations, Mae Sot remains a border area at the margins of Thailand, where police, military and para-military forces, and local government authorities, exercise significant, though often de facto, autonomy from Bangkok. These actors have sought ways to manage the movement and presence of migrants.

[32] Amnesty International June, 2005

5. The Context of Mae Sot

Mae Sot, located on the Thai-Myanmar border in the Tak District of Thailand, separated from Myanmar only by the Moei River, has been a town occupied by Myanmar migrants and democracy activists since the 1980s. These illegal border crossers have faced exploitations and violations of human rights and have been struggling to maintain their agency in their social systems through their cultural and ethnic networks. As a town with a large population of undocumented migrants, the basic rights of these migrants have been supported by migrant clinics, migrant learning centers, missionaries, CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs that focus on protecting the rights of migrants, children, and women. These organizations, many of which are founded by the exiled politicians and activists from Myanmar who fled to Thailand after previous uprisings, or with the support of ethnic organizations, also take part in the quasi-state regime and contribute to the neo-liberalist context of Mae Sot.

Although Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, the country is still bound by international human rights laws and continues to accept refugees fleeing to Thailand under its decamping strategy. According to UNHCR, there are about 96000 refugees in 9 camps along the Thai-Myanmar border (90,337 as of June 2022, under re-verification). These refugee communities have been exercising their agencies by overcoming the limitations set upon them, with some of them claiming citizenship or obtaining another kind of registration card, which allows them to seek further opportunities in Mae Sot or other places in Thailand.

Unlike registered refugees, forcibly displaced people are more vulnerable and lacking basic rights, as IOM registration is only available to a small number of the population that fled to Thailand after the military coup in Myanmar. "*If you are not a famous person in the revolution or a person working for the NUG as a higher standing, there is no chance for you to go to a third country via UNHCR processes*," explained a CDM officer who arrived at Mae Sot in 2022, after his house was raided by SAC forces. Most forcibly displaced people in Mae Sot, being stateless, started to build their digital communities, including Facebook and Signal groups, which allowed them to stay connected without going outside.

Through these digital communities, CSOs in Mae Sot can provide support, including safehouses for forcibly displaced CDM officers and political activists residing in the area. But there are always risks both for the organizations and the displaced people who will accept help. For example, there was a raid at an organization that was going to share house leasing fees for the CDMers and activists residing in Mae Sot, and another raid at the safe house offered by an organization for displaced people. In both cases, no one was detained and deported, but it was traumatic for the children and women involved, as they were asked about the routes they had traveled to enter Thailand and the legal documents they had.

Such events increased the awareness among the forcibly displaced community, leading them to apply for official documents issued by the Thai government or to seek identification cards from pre-existing semi-legal organizations. According to the findings, several kinds of identifications are held by the displaced people residing in Mae Sot, including police cards,

migrant clinic cards, migrant education cards, student cards, missionary cards, pink cards, CI passports, passports, 10-year cards, and border passes.

6. Different Kinds of Identification Cards Used by the Forcibly Displaced People

Among the various types of cards, police cards are the least secure and easiest to get. One only needs to pay two license photos and 300 baht per month, to brokers to apply for one. Then the brokers will give their names and phone numbers to contact when the person is stopped by the police and asked for documentation. However, this method is no guarantee for the migrants to avoid detention, extortion or further legal problems.

> *These police cards never worked. When I got pulled over, I tried to call the broker but she didn't pick up my phone. Then, I was brought to the police station, where I had to negotiate with the translators, and I was asked to pay 5000 Baht, but they finally agreed to release me for 2000 Baht. If I didn't pay any money there, I might have been imprisoned and deported later. I think my life insurance is more valuable than the money which I can get back later*,

shared a 30-year-old activist residing in Mae Sot, describing his experience of being stopped on his way home from 7/11 after buying groceries for his family.

Migrant clinic cards, and migrant education (teacher) cards hold some power compared to police cards. However, they can only be claimed when a person works at certain organizations or has a network that can help to get an organization card. Forcibly displaced people with these organization cards can more easily avoid problems in police controls, but they are still questioned whether they are working for the organization.

> *When I showed my organization card to the office, they asked me for a picture of myself working at the clinic. Luckily, I had one in my phone and also my colleague passing by that place guaranteed it for me*, a 25 years old CBO worker shared his experience.

There are also certain rules and regulations for organization card holders, such as not being allowed to go out later than 10 pm, not going outside when drunk, or not holding two different kinds of identification cards (such as holding both a CI and an organization card) to prevent legal issues. This is because most of these organizations are not legally registered in Thailand and it could lead to issues when the employer's names on the CI or pink card identification are differ.

Many youths in Mae Sot, including former university students and basic education students who were displaced either individually or along with their CDM and activist parents, are attending the migrant schools in Mae Sot. These schools offer GED programs, which they believe to be useful for applying for scholarships, as well as basic education programs in line with Myanmar curriculum. These migrant schools issue student IDs that allow mobility for the students within Mae Sot. Also, displaced people who attend the Kaw Saw Naw Education (Kaansuksaa Nawk Rongrian- Education Outside of School) program, in which also non-Thai citizen can enroll for a high school diploma, are also issued student ID cards. They believe to

be issued 10-year cards after they finish their education, which could also give them access to higher education.

The most common identification cards found among the forcibly displaced people community are pink cards, CI (certificate of identity), and work permits. The Thai government introduced pink cards in 2008, allowing illegal migrant workers to work legally in Thailand. Subsequent issuances were in 2016 and 2020, each providing a two-year validity for work permits. With the economic recovery post-COVID-19 and an increasing influx of migrants from Myanmar, the Thai government announced it would resume issuing pink cards and work permits starting July 5, 2022. However, unlike in previous times, the new work permits will only be valid for one year, and pink cardholders must apply for a Certificate of Identity (CI) to extend their work permits. This announcement has sparked a dilemma among newcomers, who must decide whether to obtain the pink card, an affordable option for legal residence in Thailand, or to avoid registering for one due to concerns that their biometric data could be shared with the Myanmar military government.

To apply for a pink card, migrants need an employer. For forcibly displaced individuals without jobs or employers, they have to turn to brokers. The annual pink card registration fee is 1,000 baht, covering the application at the district Department of Employment. The total cost, including medical check-ups when applied through an employer, is approximately 6,500 baht. Those relying on brokers, however, can expect to pay between 10,000 and 13,000 baht, which will help them in getting a pink card and work permit. Furthermore, obtaining a CI involves additional costs exceeding 12,000 baht, which includes visa fees for two years (until February 13, 2023) and transportation expenses to designated CI centers in other districts, such as Chiang Mai, according to brokers and interviewees.

There are also certain cases in which the legal documents of the forcibly displaced people were not handed over to them by their employers until they had fully paid back the cost of these documents. Employers and agents are known to withhold migrant workers' documents, such as ID cards or passports and work permits, yet are rarely ever charged or prosecuted for these actions (12th Session of the Universal Periodic Review, October 2011).

The Thai authorities had to extend deadlines for the migrants several times to complete their registration processes. For example, the deadline for illegal Myanmar workers in Thailand to apply for a Certificate of Identity (CI) that legitimizes them in Thailand has been extended until May 15, 2023, according to Thai media outlets[33]. Most migrants relied on brokers, and there were several issues regarding incomplete documentation and a lack of understanding of the processes. In July 2023, the Thai government allowed the registrations of pink cards again; however, this time the visa fees were significantly reduced compared to the previous wave of registration, to only 500 baht for the non-LA (blue-collar visa), while it had cost 2500 baht in the previous year. There are also certain options for individuals who bring their Myanmar passports, which they can use to get the non-immigrant LA visa without a CI passport.

[33] Thai registration process for Myanmar migrant workers extended. *Mizzima news,* Burma News International (bnionline.net).

Figure 1: An advertisement of a pink card broker on Facebook

The ad explains the steps for applying for the legal documents required for migrant workers. The first step is name listing, where brokers usually request half of the cost and then issue the name list for the pink card. This paper can also be used as a temporary legal document for mobility within the local area, but travel to other districts remains restricted. Then, they will take the migrant workers for medical check-ups to local hospitals (e.g., the Mae Sot General Hospital), and get health insurance. Afterwards, the workers will be brought to the immigration office for biometric registration to complete their work permit registration process. These steps are only to obtain the pink card and work permit. If one wants to extend a work permit, a CI or Myanmar passport is needed, which allows them to apply for the non-LA visa.

The case of the 10-year cards is slightly complicated, as they are formally issued for so-called hill tribes and ethnic minorities who have been living on the border for more than a decade. There are also different capabilities among the 10-year cards depending on the ID numbers. Cards with the number 89 in the middle, which were issued in 2010, allow holders to apply for a driving license and to have more freedom of movement, compared to the 10-year cards, which were issued after 2010 with lesser capabilities. With the higher price compared to the pink cards and work permits, bribery in the process also increases and becomes a persistent issue for the authorities.

In three months, three officials in Mae Sot issued an average of 15–20 ID cards per day, demanding bribes between 40,000–100,000 baht for each card, resulting 28–30 million baht (*Bangkok Post: Bribes for pink ID cards,* 2023), leading to transfers to nonactive posts and further investigations. Rumors spread in the migrant community in Mae Sot that the 10-year cards issued during this period of corruption would be revoked by the Thai authorities. Without the need to deal with the Myanmar government authorities at CI centers, the 10-years card offers greater dignity compared to the pink card and CIs, which are issued for blue-collar workers. They give access to certain basic rights, such as healthcare, banking, and social securities, making them an option for the forcibly displaced individuals. "*I am lucky that I*

applied for my 10-year card at a district far from Mae Sot. According to the current news, 10-year card holders are all concerned that their cards might be revoked," a CDM medical officer shared his thoughts on the news about the 10-year cards. He also mentioned that he has to get an approval letter from the district office whenever he wants to travel outside of Tak district. The interviewees stated that certain banks do not allow the new 10-year cardholders to open new bank accounts. However, most of the 10-year cardholders can use Kasikorn Bank.

For migrants who do not have any CI, 10-year cards or organization cards, the border pass is an option for their legal status after the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge 1 reopened on January 12, 2023. This process was somewhat challenging for the CDMers, as they had to navigate the Myanmar immigration on the Myanmar side. To get the temporary border pass, it costs 2000 MMK at the Myanmar immigration and 40 baht at the Thai immigration for a one-week pass for those without a household list in Myawaddy and a two-week pass for those with a household list.

> *We have to cross back to Myanmar for 700 baht, then we come back to Mae Sot through the Friendship Bridge. We were worried at first, but at that time, immigration was not that strict and they only had the list of CDMers in a handbook*, a 40-year-old CDM officer shared her experience.

She also mentioned that it is cheaper and safer than getting a police card monthly, as it offers no guarantee and legitimacy. However, recent rumors about the immigration officers getting access to the list of CDMers as an application on their phones discouraged CDMers from applying for the border passes, as they were afraid of being detained and sued by the SAC government.

7. What are They Practicing with these Power Tools on the Ground?

In Thailand, identification documentation refers to individual existence, serving as evidence proving legal identity within the nation-state system (Pobsuk, 2014). For an illegal migrant, being undocumented and thus, without access to basic human rights, poses significant problems, while the fear of detainment and deportation often additionally affect their mental well-being. As mentioned earlier, the police cards seem to offer less negotiation power, and most individuals with police cards had pay bribes whenever they got pulled over. In comparison, organization cardholders are normally better able to negotiate with the police, and sometimes they can contact their organization to guarantee for them. "*I even traveled to Mae Hong Son with my organization card and travel documents on an occupational trip. During the checkpoints, I only had to show these two documents to the officers*", a former CDM officer at a CBO stated. However, these organization cardholders have no power regarding other access rights and the cards are only used to identify the person for whom they work. Additionally, not all displaced people can get these organization cards. "*Before I got the documents, I didn't dare to go outside, I couldn't meet my friends, I couldn't attend in-person workshops despite I would like to join them*", shared a CDM lecturer. Now, she has a pink card and CI passport, which she can use to open a bank account, register her SIM card, and get WIFI for her home.

Due to the instability on the other side of the border, many refugees from Myawaddy fled to Mae Sot, causing increased demand for the real estate in the area.

> *Unlike the previous time, landlords request legal documents before they lease their properties to us, it's getting difficult for the ones without documentation to lease a house or an apartment. Sometimes we have to hire a person, who can speak Thai and has legal documents such as 10-year cards to nominate as the property leaser*,

an activist in Mae Sot shared, describing her experience in renting a house for her family, even though she got the pink card and CI, when she had to pay an extra 1000 baths to hire a broker to find a suitable house and to contact the house owner, as she does not speak Thai. According to most of the interviewees, obtaining legal documents can somehow reduce the vulnerability of forcibly displaced people; however, there are still hardships to overcome to become resilient, such as language barriers and issues with cultural adaptation.

In terms of migrant rights, freedom of movement seems to be the most important factor in the community of forcibly displaced people. Young displaced people in Mae Sot seem particularly enthusiastic about migrating to other places in Thailand, such as Bangkok or Chiang Mai, or joining events, programs, and workshops organized by various organizations in Mae Sot. Many try to understand the system of legal documentation to navigate more complex steps in the documentation process, for example, how to convert a CI passport to a PJ passport, allowing them to migrate to other cities in Thailand, or even other countries through scholarships or independently. Some individuals choose to renew their old passports and use them with the documentation for the pink card, instead of applying for a CI.

According to the findings, pink cards and work permits, plus CIs, have become escape routes for several CDMs, activists, and youths living in Mae Sot. Also, sharing the clear information and networks of trusted broker have become crucial in the community of forcibly displaced people in Mae Sot, as scams and financial loss due to irresponsible brokers who left their clients despite an incomplete documentation process. It was found that individuals whose employers or organizations arrange their pink card application process get their identification cheaper and easier than those who apply through brokers.

The pink card and work permit have some advantages; however, certain issues need to be considered. For example, the pink card is only issued to blue-collar workers so the cardholders are limited to certain jobs and some jobs are prohibited for both pink card and 10-year cardholders. In addition, most of the cards are obtained through brokers, so the cardholders need to know well about their documentation, including who their employer is and what occupation is listed on their card, in case the authorities might question it. Due to these limitations, even entrepreneurial individuals are facing difficulties, as they have to nominate Thai nationals to do business activities, such as opening a restaurant or buying a car for freelance taxi service. However, for individuals who want to do freelance jobs, remote jobs, volunteering, or online studies, or those who require mobility in the town for social interactions and networks, including participating in workshops, campaigns, and activities, the pink card, work permit or 10-years card are still a viable choice.

7.1. Case Study 1

For this case study, an interview with a CDM officer from the education sector was conducted in Mae Sot. Even though he refused to provide any details about his story before he migrated to Mae Sot, he shared his experience with the process of his documentation. Like other forcibly displaced people in Mae Sot, he applied for a pink card and CI in 2022. Later that year, he was hired for a position at an NGO. However, the HR team suggested getting a passport instead of the CI passport, as the CI passport is only eligible for the non-LA visa, and according to his work position, he needed to get a white-collar visa or Non-B visa.

> *Then I went to the Myanmar embassy to change my CI passport to a PJ passport, but the officer there told me that my name was on the ban list and they started saying they were going to detain me in the embassy. Luckily, my Thai colleague who came along with me spoke to them and got me free. I was too lucky to be back to Mae Sot, but I do not dare to try that way again,* he said.

He also suggested that people who assume to be on the blacklist of the Myanmar SAC government should avoid dealing with these services as much as possible.

7.2. Case Study 2

This case study is about a 21-year-old migrant woman, who is now working as a volunteer at a CBO in Mae Sot. She received a 10-year identification card in 2022, after arriving in Mae Sot in 2021. Before the military coup, she was a foundation-year student at Yangon University, and her mother worked as a lecturer at Dagon University. Like other youths, her life was safe and stable under the regime of the Democratic government, until the COVID-19-pandemic and the coup disrupted the lives of the Myanmar people.

With the hope of being sent to a third country, she and her mother illegally crossed the border in July 2022, which cost them around 10,000 baht from Yangon to Mae Sot. When they arrived at Mae Sot, they tried to contact UNHCR through email, describing their story. Their dream of resettling to a third country vanished soon after the first phone call from UNHCR and no further investigations on their case for several months.

Fearing to be detained, as there were frequent raids at the places of Myanmar migrants and numerous checkpoints on the roads, they started considering getting legal documentation in Thailand. After doing some research about the different types of legal documents in Thailand, she and her mother decided to apply for the 10-year card. Their friends, who had been working at an NGO in Mae Sot since the 2000s, suggested getting a 10-year card rather than the pink card and CI, as it does not require to deal with the Myanmar authorities. At that time, there were also rumors spreading in the community of forcibly displaced people that CDMers were being rejected at CI centers by the Myanmar authorities after they found out the identities of the CDMers.

It cost her and her mother 40000 baht each, and they had to wait six months to complete all the processes for the 10-year card application. With the 10-year card, they no longer had to worry about being pulled over when they went out. However, as the new 10-year cards do not allow

them to apply for a driver's license, she still had to pay the broker 1000 baht every month to prevent being detained for driving a motorcycle without a driving license.

"*Everything went quite well with my 10-year card until I tried to apply for the Universities after finishing my GED*", she said. After finishing her GED exam at a migrant learning center in Mae Sot, she started applying for scholarships and universities in Thailand. However, her applications were rejected because the name on the 10-year card is not the same as the one on her GED certificate, as she took the GED exams using her Myanmar national ID card.

"*Now I am stuck in the middle of nowhere, we are also not in a financial situation for me to sit GED again*", she said. Currently, she is working as a volunteer at a CBO in Mae Sot, and her organization informed her that they would get a work permit for her 10-year card when she becomes a permanent staff member. About the rumors of revoking the 10-year cards, she said "*I won't be worrying about my 10-year card being revoked until the officials announce the cards issued though bribing are illegal*".

7.3. Case Study 3

This case will focus on a 35-year-old CDM medical officer who used the pink card process as an escape route for her further migration. After being wanted by the military government, she had to hide in several places in Myanmar. She applied for the pink card in 2022, and then she got the non-LA visa on her Myanmar passport that she brought with her. As a medical officer, the border represented a narrow space for her with many limitations, as she could not do any treatments and procedures without a legal medical license.

> *As a doctor, treating patients is a pleasure, but I have been away from my profession since the coup. Living in Mae Sot is a lot safer than living in Myanmar; however, during the times without documents, I didn't dare to go out. I am scared to be deported if I am detained by the police*.

Luckily, her husband, who lives in the United Kingdom, tried to bring her to his place. She had to sit for the IELTS exam online and then went to Bangkok to apply for the UK visa. The visa was approved, and she is currently living in the UK.

> *I was lucky that I have a blank passport and I could also apply for the pink card. With my passport not having an entry stamp, I was too frightened to go through immigration at the airport but it somehow worked for me. I am glad that I didn't trust these rumors and kept staying in Mae Sot*, she said.

Through the case studies, it was discovered that certain forms of identification, such as the pink card and CI, can still be affected by the Myanmar military government and still hold risks for the forcibly displaced people. However, they remain an escape route for individuals who have blank passports with validity. The 10-year card can still be an option, but it is crucial to consider the possible limitations and discrepancies in the information.

8. Conclusion

Mae Sot has always been a destination for every wave of refugees displaced from Myanmar during various eras of conflict, and it has been adapting to different kinds of identification systems for its quasi-state regime. The newly displaced community, formed by former government officials, medical doctors, students, teachers, and their families, has fled from Myanmar trying to build their resilience through the practice of legal documentation as their power tools for mental and physical security, rights, and further migration routes. Compared to the earlier days, the lives of forcibly displaced people in Mae Sot seem to be more secure and accessible to legal documentation. However, this research argues that the formalization methods are still not fulfilling the needs of forcibly displaced people, as there are still certain limitations that hindering them to work in their previous careers and obtain access to education and the rights and freedom of movement. It is also obvious that rights to citizenship or state protection for these communities are still far from reality.

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

Hsan Aung Bu

Abstract

The military coup in Myanmar in 2021 caused a significant change in the political landscape, prompting widespread resistance and mobilization across the country. In this turmoil, Kachin civil society 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 to forge 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 the KPICT to confront oppressive power structures and adapt to political adversity. The study investigates the efficacy of the 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 study aims to provide significant insights into the complex dynamics of community agency, resilience, and political mobilization within the Kachin community and Myanmar's political landscape. A mixed-methods approach is employed, 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 highlights the resilience of the Kachin people and the significant contribution of grassroots initiatives like the KPICT in advancing the broader struggle for federal democracy and human rights in Myanmar.

Keywords: Political Resilience and Resistance Dynamics, Federal Democracy, Ethnic Politics, Political Agency, Humanitarian Aid

1. Introduction

Myanmar has a historical record of military coups that have often disrupted its progress towards becoming a democratic system of government. The military coup in February 2021 resulted in widespread protests and led to the emergence a Civil Disobedience Movement across Myanmar. The populace showed resistance and voiced their desire to restore democratic administration. Nevertheless, the State Administration Council (SAC), under the leadership of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, responded with acts of violence and suppression.

In the wake of the coup, the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT), representing the Kachin ethnic community, has become a prominent actor in this adverse environment. It advocates for the Kachin's political aspirations and promotes a system of federal democracy. For a long time, the Kachin have desired more autonomy in a nation where power was traditionally centralized under military authority.

This research aims to analyze the complex processes of political resilience and resistance within the Kachin population and the techniques used by the KPICT to navigate the political landscape in Myanmar after the coup in 2021. The investigation focuses on the specific strategies employed by the KPICT to confront the military junta and promote federal democracy in Myanmar. It also examines how the KPICT's interactions with the shadow government, ethnic political coordination institutions, civil society groups, and the international community influenced the progress of federal democracy in the country.

The study employs interviews, documents, and theoretical frameworks of resistance and resilience to comprehend the KPICT's operations and impact on Myanmar's political trajectory. Moreover, it analyzes the outcome of the efforts, illustrating the impact of ethnic minority groups like the Kachin on Myanmar's political development during this critical period.

2. Literature Review

This part will discuss resistance and resilience since as two major concepts. They were chosen as an appropriate framework for analyzing the various features of Kachin ethnic politics, particularly their political resilience and resistance to the military coup in Myanmar. In addition to resistance and resilience, the concept of federalism is also essential for analyzing the ethnic crisis in Myanmar. Federalism offers a potential framework for addressing the complex dynamics of ethnic politics and power relations within the country. It can provide a foundation for understanding and potentially resolving the challenges and tensions related to ethnic diversity and autonomy in Myanmar.

2.1. Power Dynamics and Resistance Theory

Resistance theory refers to the act of opposing authority, injustice, or oppression through nonviolent protest, civil disobedience, or other actions. In her article, "The Definition of Resistance", Mona Lilja (2002) defines resistance as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a wide range of activities aimed at challenging power structures and advocating for change. This includes political activism, social movements, individual acts of

disobedience, and organized campaigns, which serve to safeguard rights and promote social justice (Lilja, 2022, pp. 202–220).

James C. Scott, a prominent political scientist and anthropologist, has contributed significantly to the study of resistance, particularly through his concept of "everyday forms of resistance" (Scott, 1985). In his book, "Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance," Scott explores how marginalized and oppressed groups use subtle and daily acts of resistance to undermine the power of dominant groups. This type of resistance may not always be overt or violent but is nonetheless a critical form of opposition.

Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and social theorist, was also a key figure in the philosophy of resistance. Foucault's concept, "where there is power, there is resistance," emphasizes the inherent link between power dynamics and acts of opposition (Foucault, 1978). Foucault argues that resistance is unavoidable and persistent wherever power exists, illustrating the constant struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. His work highlights the subtle, often hidden, forms of resistance within social structures governed by power imbalances.

These scholars—Lilja, Scott, and Foucault—share common themes in their views on resistance. They all focus on the agency of individuals and groups to oppose domination, critique power structures, and explore various forms of resistance, whether through subtle, everyday actions or organized movements. While their approaches may differ, they emphasize how power and resistance are intertwined.

Resistance Dynamics within the Kachin Community

The Kachin community in Myanmar has a long history of resistance in its struggle for autonomy and self-determination. This resistance has taken many forms, both violent and nonviolent, as the Kachin people have sought to challenge military rule and political oppression. Scott's theory of "everyday forms of resistance" provides an essential lens for understanding the Kachin struggle. The Kachin engage in subtle acts of defiance through cultural preservation, political mobilization, and negotiations with state structures (Sadan, 2013, pp. 254–306). Moreover, through KPICT initiatives, the act of defiance persists, including covert educational programs and establishing legal systems and independent social structures despite state repression. These subtle acts of resistance are critical in undermining the power of the Myanmar military regime.

Foucault's concepts relating to the relationship between power and resistance also apply to the Kachin case. As Foucault argues, where there is power, there is resistance, which is demonstrated by the continued fight of the Kachin people against a military dictatorship. Every act of government repression is met with a corresponding form of resistance, whether through armed conflict or peaceful protests. The Kachin resistance is characterized by its resilience and adaptability in the face of shifting power dynamics within Myanmar's political landscape, particularly in response to the military's control over the government.

In line with resistance theory, the establishment of the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT) exemplifies organized resistance against the oppressive power of the Myanmar military regime. The KPICT is a coordinating body to promote the Kachin's political

aspirations. Through political activism, advocacy, and social mobilization, the KPICT challenges the military dictatorship and attempts to promote federal democracy in Myanmar. The KPICT's efforts align well with the broader theoretical framework of resistance by actively engaging in organized initiatives to protect the rights and interests of the Kachin community against an authoritarian regime. Their actions demonstrate a cohesive response to domination, reflecting the resilience and agency central to resistance dynamics.

2.2. The Theory of Resilience

According to Suniva Luthar and other academics (2015), resilience is the underlying capacity of people and societies to adapt to and successfully recover from difficult situations. Yates, Tyrell, and Masten (2015) have significantly contributed to the concept of resilience, highlighting its ability to cultivate strength and positive development in people, communities, and societies when faced with different challenges (Yates et al., 2015). Their work and related literature investigate the many aspects of resilience and its relevance in various circumstances.

In the past several years, this idea has undergone substantial developmental changes. Considering this concept brings to light the inherent capacity of human beings to endure hardship and bounce back fast after experiencing failure. The authors Charles Redman and Ann Kinzig extend this viewpoint by highlighting the dynamic character of resilience and bringing attention to its function in supporting adaptation and transformation in response to changing environments (Redman & Kinzig, 2003).

David Chandler, a notable player in resilience studies, offers an insightful viewpoint on the concept of resilience, describing it as a "post-liberal" term (Chandler, 2014, pp. 1-16). The concept of resilience, as seen from this perspective, extends beyond the conventional ideas of individualism and self-sufficiency, concentrating instead on the capacity of a group to "withstand" and "bound back" an adverse situation. Chandler (2019) gives a more complete examination of resilience, showing its effect on constructing political agendas, policy responses, and governance frameworks. In addition, he provides a more extensive definition of resilience (Chandler, 2019). According to this point of view, resilience is both a personal trait and a necessary component of society's adjustment in response to various challenges, including climate change and economic crises.

Furthermore, Clemence Humbert and Jonathan Joseph illuminate the complex character of resilience, particularly emphasizing its proactive side (Humbert & Joseph, 2019). They argue that resilience is not just the act of passively adapting to new circumstances; instead, it is the process of actively making changes to shield areas of one's life from the consequences of hazards that come from the outside.

Mechanisms of Resilience in the Context of the Kachin

In the literature, resilience is frequently associated with adapting, recovering, and thriving in the face of challenges and adversities. This concept is particularly relevant when considering the capacity of the Kachin community and the KPICT to withstand political and social pressure.

To comprehend the Kachin community's capacity to adapt and withstand adversity, resilience is an essential component to understand. According to Luthar (2000; 2015) and Redman and

Kinzig (2023), resilience is defined as the ability of people and groups to adjust to new circumstances, recover from setbacks, and recover from adversity. This perspective is essential in comprehending the Kachin community's capacity to uphold unity and resistance against the military. The Kachin community demonstrates resilience in the face of political oppression and conflict by effectively mobilizing resources, building social networks, and preserving its cultural identity despite external threats.

According to Chandler (2014, 2019), resilience is considered "post-liberal" since it focuses on the collective ability to withstand and bounce back from the effects of external challenges. Applying Chandler's understanding of resilience to the situation in Kachin State shows how resilience in this context is not just about enduring adversity; instead, it is about actively developing social and political systems to improve their chances of survival and maintain their self-determination. Kachin activists and organizations are strategically engaging in their social networks and community ties to fight the military coup and give support to persons who have been impacted by violence and displacement. The concept of proactive resilience, which involves making adjustments to reduce the impact of external threats, is emphasized by Humbert and Joseph (2019).

In the context of the Kachin people, this may impact the formation of self-sustaining economic practices, the structure of local administration, and educational programs that encourage communal solidarity and self-reliance. To appreciate the Kachin community's ability to endure political turbulence and express its rights in the face of ongoing conflict, it is essential to have a solid understanding of the mechanisms of resilience present within the Kachin context. Additionally, this content complies with the ideas of community resilience theory, which emphasizes the ability of people and communities to adapt and recover from adverse circumstances.

The KPICT's collaboration with education departments and universities to facilitate education initiatives reflects efforts to strengthen community resilience by empowering and mobilizing the Kachin community. This collaboration aims to build human capital, enhance the community's ability to withstand political challenges, and pursue long-term resilience. The partnership between the KPICT and education departments of the KIO and university instructors to promote education initiatives demonstrates a commitment to enhancing community resilience by empowering and mobilizing the Kachin community.

2.3. Federalism

Federalism is a form of government that divides political power between a central government and constituent political units, such as states or provinces, while allowing for a significant degree of autonomy for each unit. This division of powers creates a "dual system of government," where the central government and regional entities have a substantial amount of autonomy within their domains (Riley, 1973, pp. 90-91). Federalism balances centralized governance and local control, offering a framework for maintaining unity while respecting the diversity and distinct interests of various regions.

Several scholars have explored federalism as a concept, examining its origins, evolution, and various forms. Daniel Elazar (1987) and Ronald Watts (1997) are prominent figures who have developed theoretical frameworks to explain the federal systems (Elazar, 1987; Watts, 1997). Elazar's work focuses on the division of power between central and regional governments, emphasizing autonomy and unity. Watts, on the other hand, examines how federalism influences democratic governance by promoting institutional balance between different levels of government. Both scholars have contributed to a deeper understanding of federalism's potential to provide stability and accommodate diverse populations within a single political framework.

Federalism is not only a demand from ethnic minorities but also an essential tool for managing ethnic diversity and mitigating conflicts in deeply divided societies. Scholars like Ronal Watts (1997) and Liam Anderson (2012) have further explored the complexities and benefits of federal systems, highlighting how federalism can provide a framework for managing diverse communities within a single political entity (Anderson, 2012; Watts, 1997). Anderson, in particular, has highlighted the concept of "ethnofederalsim" as a model for managing ethnic conflicts. Ethnofederalism is a form of federalism that grants ethnic regions greater autonomy, allowing them to govern themselves while preserving national cohesion. Anderson argues that ethnofederalism enables regions to exercise self-governance in cultural and administrative matters, promoting stability and reducing tensions within a unified state (Anderson, 2016, pp. 1-24).

Federalism in the Context of Myanmar

In Myanmar, federalism is a key political concept, especially for ethnic minority groups, including the Kachin people. Federalism has been viewed as a potential solution to the country's long-standing ethnic conflicts and demands for self-determination. The theoretical perspective on federalism aligns with the aspirations of ethnic groups in Myanmar who demand greater self-determination. Ethnic groups like the Kachin have long advocated for a federal system of governance, which they believe would better accommodate their political aspirations and cultural identities within a unified Myanmar (South, 2008).

The Kachin, one of the dominant ethnic groups, has played a significant role in promoting federalism in Myanmar since before the country gained independence from the British colony through the Panglong Agreement[34] (Htung, 2022, pp. 31-56). The KIO, one of the prominent ethnic armed organizations, has been advocating and actively pursuing federalism, emphasizing that a federal system is crucial for effectively accommodating ethnic diversity and addressing the political aspirations of ethnic groups in Myanmar. This demand for federalism reflects a broader push among ethnic minorities for a governance system that accommodates their distinct identities and needs while maintaining national cohesion.

[34] The Panglong Agreement was a political agreement between the Proper Burma and the Frontier Areas, particularly the Shan, Kachin, and Chin, and was signed in February 1947. Wikipedia website accessed August 3, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panglong_Agreement

The concept of federalism is worth considerable attention as a potential solution to the deep-rooted ethnic conflicts in Myanmar. The idea of ethnofederalism is particularly relevant, as it offers a framework for balancing regional autonomy with national cohesion. This system could address the long-standing issues of ethnic diversity and conflict by granting more autonomy to ethnic regions while also safeguarding the unity and stability of the state.

3. Background and Overview

3.1. Historical Context

Myanmar is located in Southeast Asia and a member of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), sharing borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, and Thailand. It is one of the most diverse countries, characterized by rich cultural and religious traditions, a wealth of natural resources, and a significant ethnic diversity. With an estimated population of 50 million people, according to the 2014 census, it comprises seven states and seven regions[35], and the Burman ethnic group account for over half of the population.[36].

Myanmar is one of the British colonial countries that gained independence on January 4, 1948. However, the country's history after independence has been marked by instability and civil war, with long-standing efforts for ethnic rights and self-determination. Myanmar was under the leadership of a military junta from 1962 to 2010, and a progressive liberalization process occurred after 2011, ultimately resulting in free elections in 2015 and 2020. The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory in those elections. However, the military retained significant power under the 2008 Constitution and maintained control over key government institutions.

3.2. Recurring Military Coups and Resistance to the Coup

On February 1, 2021, the Myanmar military staged a coup d'état and seized power when democratically elected representatives of the NLD were prevented from starting their second term of government. A military statement was issued on February 2, 2021, formally announcing a one-year state of emergency. This declaration transferred control to Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who became the commander-in-chief and established a "caretaker government" known as the State Administration Council (SAC) (Maizland, 2022).

Consequently, many anti-coup movements emerged and mobilized in public spaces, like non-violent protests, civil disobedience, and the ringing of pots, pans, and car horns[37]. Members of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), a notable movement among them, refused to go to

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[35] Seven states are Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan States, and the seven regions are Ayeyarwady, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Sagaing, Tanintharyi and Yangon regions. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Administrative_divisions_of_Myanmar#Regions,_States,_and_Union_Territory

[36]Wikipedia website, accessed January 16, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar.

[37] BBC News and Reuters website accessed February 3, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-55927816 and https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-politics-protests-arrest-idUSKBN2A40N5/.

work until the elected government returned to power, with healthcare professionals, bankers, engineers, teachers, attorneys, railroad workers, and individuals participating in a nationwide labor strike[38]. Civil disobedience and non-violent protest continue to play a central role in resistance (Anonymous Author, 2021). Many scholars and academics have shown that examples of these forms of protest have had significant success, like a protest against British colonial rule in India (Taylor, 2023; Watkins, 2005), a boycott of the Montgomery bus system in the United States (Paters, 2005), an anti-apartheid protest in South Africa (Stephen Zunes, 1999), and a protest against the East German Communist regime in Germany (Bleiker, 1993).

The peaceful protests were disrupted when the military used traditional tactics of violence to suppress them (Paddock, 2022). Tens of thousands of people were killed, including journalists, medical workers, politicians, and activists, and many people were arrested and detained (Maizland, 2022). Additionally, the press was being controlled and cracked down[39]. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (AAPP), 26,908 people have been arrested; 20,627 people are still detained, including those sentenced; 5,315 people have been killed; and 6,281 people are reassessed, up to now[40].

3.3. Resilience, Resistance, and Adaptation

As the casualities increased among those opposing the military regime, many people, including those who joined the CDM, elected Members of Parliament (MPs), and people who were involved in strikes, fled to rural regions, particularly those controlled by the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) to continue their struggle against the military coup. Some university students and comedians even established localized armed resistance forces: the People's Defense Forces (PDF), mainly joined by Generation Z, and the Local People's Defense Force (LPFD), founded by local people to defend their areas (Kyaw, 2021). These groups and entities get help from well-established EAOs who have been fighting for self-determination and federalism for a significant period (Bynum, 2021, pp. 1-17).

There is widespread political and military cooperation among various organizations to challenge the military coup. The coup d'état has significantly altered the conflict landscape of the nation, halting the peace process that had been ongoing for a decade and causing an outbreak of bloodshed (International Crisis Group, 2022). Some Nationwide Ceasefire

[38] BBC News website accessed February 3, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55906536 and https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55963895.

[39] Aljazeera, Radio Free Asia, BBC News, and Human Rights Watch website accessed February 3, 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/19/two-reporters-including-bbc-journalist-detained-in-myanmar, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/journalists-in-hiding-10172022174501.html, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55889565, and https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/02/myanmar-military-blocks-internet-during-coup.

[40] Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) website accessed June 25, 2024, https://aappb.org.

Agreement (NCA) signatories [41] have started their armed conflicts again and resumed revolutionary warfare. Hostile fights have resumed in regions that were previously peaceful for many decades and have spread by the heat of conflict. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are 2,420,300 internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Myanmar[42] following the 2021 coup d'état.

The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) was established by elected legislators in the 2020 election to form political and military partnerships with the EAOs. One of the anti-coup factions, known as a shadow government, the National Unity Government (NUG), aims to defeat the junta using armed resistance and establish a federal democracy (Paddock, 2022). The NUG intends to cooperate with ethnic armed groups to overthrow the military junta (Vrieze, 2022).

Furthermore, individuals from diverse states and ethnicities have come together to establish their political entities. These include the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC) in Kaya State, the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC) in Chin State, the Mon State Interim Coordination Committee (MSICC) in Mon State, and the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT) in Kachin State, which are state-based political coordination bodies within their states, and the Ta'ang Political Consultative Committee (TPCC), which represents an ethnic-based political organization (South, 2022, pp. 27-28). The NUG actively participates in political collaboration and engagement with all relevant stakeholders, working towards fostering positive and inclusive relationships with each of them (Brenner, 2021; Graceffo, 2024).

4. The Kachin and their Resistance and Resilience

4.1. Historical Context, Ceasefire Dynamics, and Resumption of the Coup

The Kachin ethnic group is a minority population residing in Kachin State in the northernmost part of Myanmar. Additionally, some Kachin people live in the Northern Shan State. A diversified and multiethnic population is one of the unique characteristics of Kachin State, which also has natural resources.

The Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA) is an insurgent group founded in 1961 to establish an autonomous region over their historically sovereign land territories (Htung, 2022). The KIO entered into a ceasefire deal in 1994 with the military junta, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), took formal administrative authority over its control areas, and obtained responsibility for the development, including healthcare, education, and agriculture, by managing civilian hospitals and Kachin language-centered schools, and initiating infrastructure project field (International Crisis Group, 2013, pp. 4-5).

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[41] *The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement between the Myanmar government and the EAOs*. 10 ethnic insurgent groups have signed the NCA. Wikipedia website accessed February 3, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationwide_Ceasefire_Agreement.

[42] UNHCR website, accessed February 19, 2024, https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/106826.

The Kachin State has been characterized by numerous armed groups, including resistance groups, militias, and the Border Guard Forces (BGF). This has been a defining characteristic of the state's trajectory. The KIO/KIA is the only leading resistance group in Kachin State fighting for political rights and autonomy. The ceasefire agreement that had been in place for seventeen years came to an end in 2011, and the KIO/KIA immediately resumed hostilities with the Myanmar military (Htung, 2022, p. 33). Following the 2021 military coup, the degree of hostility in Kachin State intensified and worsened a direct consequence.

People in Kachin State also demonstrated their opposition to the military coup by using various strategies, including participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement and organizing non-violent protests. According to the KPICT, 5,532 public officials from different ministries and departments in Kachin State joined the CDM. In contrast, the military forcefully suppressed these movements by using aggressive gunfire. Consequently, several persons who had participated in the CDM were arrested and detained, and their properties were destroyed and confiscated[43].

Additionally, people involved in the protests were subjected to arrest, detention, violence, and arbitrary arrests[44], and faced assault and charges under Penal Code 505a[45]. The crackdown on non-violent protests and the deterioration of the human rights situation has exacerbated the vulnerability of activists and forced them to seek refuge. As a result, many people sought shelter in the KIO control areas to guarantee their safety. The primary duty of the KIO is to offer social assistance and sanctuary for individuals who seek refuge in their control areas. This includes ensuring the accessibility of shelters and social services. The gaps, which include those related to health, education, and humanitarian aid, are addressed mainly by community-based organizations, which play a significant role throughout the process.

5. The Role of the Kachin Political Interim Consultative Team

5.1. Emerging of the KPICT and its Works

Formation and Objectives

The Kachin community has faced challenges due to the need for more political negotiation, particularly when the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) prioritized combat as its primary responsibility. This has raised concerns within the community regarding the absence of political discussions during the interim period. To address this, the Kachin community, comprising both local individuals and the diaspora, held a three-day meeting from March 9 to

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[43] Myitkyina Journal website accessed on March 16, 2024, https://www.myitkyinanewsjournal.com/hpakant-mp-aung-hein-mins-house-sealed-and-destroyed/.

[44] Myanmar Now website access on March 16, 2024, https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/teenagers-among-14-arrested-in-crackdown-on-anti-coup-protests-in-myitkyina/.

[45] The Penal Code 505a was amended to prohibit causing fear, spreading false news, and agitating crimes against government employees, punishable by up to three years in prison. Wikipedia website accessed on March 16, 2024.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar_Penal_Code#:~:text=In%20the%20aftermath%20of%20the,under%20section%20505(a).

11, 2021, and subsequently formed the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT) to negotiate and coordinate interim political activities on behalf of the Kachin people with both local and global institutions sharing the same vision.

The KPICT comprises five dominant community-based organizations: the Kachin National Consultative Assembly, the Kachin Political Consultative Team, the Kachin Sub-State Assembly, the One Hundred Kachin Delegates Team, and the diaspora community-based organization, the World Kachin Congress (WKC) (Htung, 2022, p. 50). The primary goal of the KPICT is to overthrow the autocratic military regime, establish an authentic federal democracy, and support the political aspirations of the Kachin people through advocacy and representation. These goals include ensuring that national sovereignty originates from the people, eradicating authoritarianism, establishing a genuine federal union, and collaborating with like-minded local and international groups.

The KPICT comprises five community-based organizations, each contributing distinct perspectives and expertise. Every organization plays an active role in the decision-making process and contributes to leadership decisions. The KPICT emphasizes inclusivity and collaboration by involving all member organizations in thorough discussions and consultations when making important decisions. The team's approach prioritizes seeking consensus among the member organizations before progressing with significant initiatives, ensuring that all perspectives are considered and valued in the decision-making process.

While the KIO regulates governance in its controlled areas, primarily focusing on maintaining security in the Kachin region, the KPICT's primary responsibility is to engage in political negotiation and cooperation, particularly in establishing an interim democratic governing body. The KIO is a key stakeholder and actively collaborates with the KPICT to address various interim issues.

> *The KIO is a confrontational insurgent organization that functions as a government in its jurisdiction. It serves as the primary opposition to the current military coup in the Kachin region. In order to enhance the success of establishing the federal union and achieving our political goals, we must engage in discussions with the KIO* (respondent 1, 2).

Activities and Implementation

Every organization is required to assign five dedicated and knowledgeable representatives, who will commit fully to the effective implementation of the KPICT and the successful meeting of the KPICT's objectives within their organizations. The secretariat team, consisting of two dynamic and driven secretaries, has enthusiastically initiated the comprehensive implementation of the KPICT's multifaceted initiatives. Concurrently, the chairperson has taken on the responsibility of providing strategic guidance and steering the formulation of policies that will underpin KPICT's overarching goals.

The KPICT formed a Think Tank, which comprises highly knowledgeable academics, each holding Master's and Ph.D. degrees across various fields. This diverse and accomplished team is responsible for strategic planning and providing professional advice. The primary tasks include reviewing political, legal, and socio-economic and offering expert views, guidance,

and strategic support to the KPICT. Additionally, the secretariat office is dedicated to supporting the successful implementation of all KPICT initiatives and ensuring the effective and efficient achievement of all objectives.

Furthermore, KPICT has actively engaged and integrated enthusiastic young volunteers in its implementation activities. Currently, the KPICT is supported by more than 130 passionate and motivated volunteers who are fully committed to KPICT's overarching mission and vision, strengthening the organization's ability to bring about significant and transformative change.

Legal Team

The KPICT has established a legal task force comprising experienced attorneys and legal professionals from the local community. This team has developed comprehensive laws and regulations by extensively referencing the KIO's rules and regulations and other legal documents. Their main objective is to efficiently address human rights violations and other critical issues within the community. The KPICT legal team employs a cooperative strategy and actively collaborates with the KIO legal committee to guarantee that the legal framework is comprehensive and adaptable to the community's needs. This collaborative effort serves to protect the rights and welfare of people and promoting a fair and impartial society.

Media and Advocacy

The Data Unit (DU) mainly supports the KPICT in managing and implementing activities by gathering data on current political occurrences and significant initiatives. The Data Unit's activities involve collecting, maintaining, analyzing, and presenting information every two days, covering various topics such as political news, military movements, war updates, civilian casualties, protests, and news regarding the NUG, CRPH, NUCC, and critical foreign events. Additionally, the unit regularly stores information and records for timely access when needed.

The News and Information Unit (NIU) is actively working to increase awareness of the KPICT by sharing information and organizing public events. Its goals include supporting the KPICT's objectives through effective information dissemination, informing the public about the KPICT's political policies and programs, building public trust and support, and ensuring the timely and accurate distribution of information.

Additionally, each member organization is accountable for leading the dissemination of information on establishing the KPICT and its undertakings. Community stakeholders from religious groups, influential individuals, and community-based organizations are invited to the KPICT's secretariat office and informed. One of the KPICT's members, WKC, is primarily responsible for informing foreign governments, UN diplomats, and other stakeholders.

Humanitarian Assistance and Community Mobilizing

The KPICT has supported individuals who joined the CDM from several areas, including parliament, education, health, defense, and home affairs. It offers provisions for housing, sustenance, and health assistance. One of the respondents shared his experiences in providing support to CDMers:

> *Our KPICT is assisting the CDMers by offering shelter, food, and other necessities. KPICT, together with NUG, offered support to the CDMs in the XXX place. KPICT*

> *provides meals, housing, and other necessities to CDM lecturers teaching at the Kachin State Comprehensive University (KSCU), medical schools, and other institutions* (respondent 1).

KPICT has established communication with the KIO to ensure the CDMers can leverage their expertise and become employed in appropriate KIO departments, such as hospitals and educational institutions. The KPICT facilitates higher education for the local community via collaboration with the KIO education department, the NUG education department, and the CDMer university lecturers. Additionally, it facilitates the connection and collaboration between donors eager to fund health initiatives and the key individuals and organizations involved in the health sector. Moreover, the KPICT has recruited many volunteers to participate in establishing federal democratic governance.

Moreover, the member organizations of the KPICT have been developing long-lasting relationships with the local community. Thus, the KPICT's political actions and federal democracy activities need human resources and have the potential for prompt inspiration. The KPICT's three-member groups initially focus on providing humanitarian relief, including emergency support, education, and other services.

The CSOs' representation and dedication to the KPICT offer an opportunity for women and youth to engage in the mainstream of political negotiation. The majority of the KPICT members hold leadership positions within the communities they represent. One of the respondents shared her experience with her participation in the KPICT:

> *The involvement of women and the participation of all citizens are essential for advancing Kachin's political ambitions. However, owing to the limitations of in-person interactions, we now face a shortage of fostering confidence opportunities* (respondent 3).

Considering that all of the persons who take part in the KPICT are volunteers and do not get any payment for their work, the political will and engagement of the Kachin people are inspiring.

Collaborations with Various Stakeholders

On May 27th, 2021, an interim agreement was successfully negotiated between the KPICT and the CRPH to establish an interim democratic government in the Kachin region. One of the critical components of this agreement involves collaboration on a wide range of significant issues.

Notably, the KPICT has been actively involved in supporting the National Unity Government (NUG) through the issuance of bonds and the facilitation of digital payments (NUG Pay). Furthermore, in a show of commitment to inclusivity, the KPICT has appointed Kachin representatives to the positions of vice president, minister, and deputy minister, thus ensuring that the Kachin people have a substantive voice in the governance structure. As part of its efforts to pursue a comprehensive approach, KPICT has sent three representatives to the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) to negotiate Charter Part I and II.

Moreover, the KPICT has been actively coordinating and promoting collaboration with the KIO. Recognizing the KIO's expertise in governance, particularly in their liberated areas, the

KPICT has established close working relationships with the KIO's education department, the NUG's education department, and university lecturers who are part of the CDM. This collaboration aims to enhance the level of education at the Alen Bum Bordering High School and lay the groundwork for establishing the Kachin State Comprehensive University (KSCU), ensuring that education in the region meets required standards.

Efforts in Promoting Federal Democracy in Myanmar

The Kachin people have a rich history of involvement in the Panglong Agreement, a crucial moment in Myanmar's history, and are deeply committed to establishing a genuine federal democracy. This vision is simultaneously supported by the KPICT, which is dedicated to advancing the cause of federal democracy through advocacy and lobbying efforts. The KPICT proactively collaborates with individuals and agencies who share the same objective of achieving a federal democracy, emphasizing the importance of collective action and cooperation.

As a crucial stakeholder in the political landscape, the KPICT plays a significant role in the complex negotiations involving the Kachin community. These negotiations with diverse stakeholders include the CRPH, the NUCC, the NUG, various ethnic political coordination bodies, civil society organizations, and the international community. The primary objectives of these negotiations are to advocate for the political aspirations of the Kachin people, forge strategic alliances, and make a substantial contribution to the broader opposition to the military administration, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the challenges and opportunities involved.

6. Discussion

The study demonstrates the multifaceted and complex role of the KPICT in promoting federal democracy in post-coup Myanmar through a blend of resilience, resistance, and strategic initiatives. The ability of the KPICT and the broader Kachin community to withstand the devastating consequences of the military coup has played a significant role in their ability to survive it. Despite the increased suppression, aggression, and political adversity, the KPICT has effectively preserved its frameworks and sustained its advocacy initiatives. This resilience is defined by their capacity to adapt to new obstacles, including working undercover when needed, using assistance from the diaspora, and utilizing modern communication tools to organize actions and share information. Their resilience is shown in their ability to sustain political engagement, coordinate community mobilizations, and uphold the liveliness and significance of their movements in the face of ongoing threats and adversities.

KPICT has used a variety of diversified and complex resistance techniques, including nonviolence, political advocacy, and strategic alliances. It has effectively engaged in diplomatic initiatives, seeking support from the international community and global civil society to pressure the military regime. Their resistance is not limited to physical demonstrations, but it extends to legal challenges, lobbying efforts, and strategic communications aimed at delegitimizing the junta and mobilizing local and international support for federal democracy.

Moreover, the KPICT has played a significant role in advancing federal democracy, mainly through its strategic role as a political agent with bridging strategies and its functions as a hub for humanitarian assistance and civil society initiatives. These roles highlight the significant influence of the KPICT in building resilience and resistance in post-coup Myanmar, which is essential to advancing democratic values in political adversity.

6.1. Impact on Federal Democracy Efforts

The Kachin community's and the KPICT's collaborative efforts in fortifying resilience and resistance, providing emergency support, and engaging in political engagement have played a crucial role in sustaining the ultimate goal. The KPICT, established in early March, is the first body for an ethnic political consultative agency. Other ethnic groups, such as Chin, Karenni, Ta'ang, Mon, and Pa-O, have also formed similar bodies and functioned at the council level. One of the respondents expressed his opinion:

> *The fundamental principle of federalism is the mutual exchange of knowledge and the collaborative development of an improved system* (respondent 4).

A federal state is a sovereign nation with robust internal jurisdiction, mutual assistance to its constituent units, and a capacity to model and adopt positive actions from one another. An excellent example of the KPICT's establishment and other ethnic groups establishing political agencies like KPICT in their regions is a good initiative in the context of federalism.

Political Agent and Bridging Strategies

The KPICT, a politically prominent agency, has been at the forefront of political negotiations and lobbying for the Kachin people. The KPICT significantly influences politics and represents the voice of Kachin's political aspirations on domestic and global platforms. Their advocacy efforts involve engaging with national and international stakeholders to promote policies and activities that uphold the values of federal democracy and protect the rights of ethnic minorities. This has enhanced the role of the KPICT as a critical agent integrating the Kachin community with the broader political landscape.

6.2. Grassroots Mobilization and Civil Society Engagement

The KPICT has played a crucial role in channeling humanitarian assistance to the Kachin community, significantly impacted by the violence and political turmoil. Efforts include distributing shelter, food, medical support, and education to the CDMers and local communities in need. The KPICT's efforts, including political engagement and humanitarian assistance, have empowered communities to overcome the current crisis.

Challenges and Resilience

The Kachin region shares a border with China and has experienced significant casualities in its revolutionary activities. Compared to Thailand, individuals from Myanmar come to Thailand for various purposes, including as revolutionaries, migrant laborers, education students, businesspeople, and others (Supatsak Pobsuk, 2016). In addition, many Myanmar citizens have sought refuge in Thailand following the military coup.

Despite these obstacles, the Kachin resistance has not diminished, but shown resilience. Civil society organizations have collaborated to overcome these challenges, demonstrating that they possess the capacity to execute revolutionary efforts. For instance, students who refused to go to schools under the State Administration Council (SAC) administration choose instead to attend schools operated by the KPICT and other community-based organizations (CBOs) located in areas controlled by the Kachin.

7. Conclusion

The study of the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT) highlights its essential role in promoting federal democracy in Myanmar after the coup. With the help of the KPICT, the Kachin community demonstrates remarkable endurance as they successfully adjust to the challenging circumstances of military oppression while maintaining their political and social structures. The KPICT's strategic approach involves the establishment of alliances, political advocacy, and non-violent resistance to challenge the legitimacy of the military regime and to secure support for federal democracy, both locally and internationally.

KPICT's programs emphasize the significance of mobilizing at the local level and involving civil society. They ensure the continuation of their movement and the safety of their community by providing crucial humanitarian aid and maintaining political participation. The combined efforts of the KPICT and the Kachin community underscore the importance of volunteering and political determination in the struggle for federal democracy.

The establishment of KPICT as an ethnic political consultative body has served as an inspiration for the development of similar organizations among other ethnic groups, which showcases its influence on the broader movement advocating for federal democracy in Myanmar. The collective efforts of these organizations enhance the opposition to the military regime and promote the aspiration for a federal democratic unity.

The study's findings have implications for politicians, activists, and academics. Policymakers should acknowledge the crucial significance of ethnic political formations such as the KPICT in advancing federal democracy. Supporting these organizations through policy measures, financial aid, and diplomatic backing can enhance their capacity to advocate for federal democracy and provide humanitarian assistance.

Further study should investigate the evolving political landscape in Myanmar and the role of ethnic minorities, including analyzing the lasting effects of KPICT's initiatives and comparable organizations on the progress towards democratic government and the resolution of conflicts. Developing frameworks to support ethnic minority groups in their democratization efforts is also crucial, including creating platforms for dialogue, promoting inclusive governance models, and providing technical and financial assistance to strengthen their organizational capacities.

In conclusion, the KPICT's comprehensive strategy for resilience, resistance, and strategic advocacy demonstrates the crucial role of ethnic political agencies in advancing federal democracy in Myanmar, as well as protecting and empowering their communities during times of political adversity.

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Social Dynamics of Internally Displaced Persons along the Karen State-Thai Borderline

Htee Eh Hsoe[46]

Abstract

Complexities and forms of insecurities arising from various plights have persisted for decades, and the recent 2021 military coup has further worsened the migration experience of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar. The military operations by successive dictatorial governments have resulted in multiple generations of IPDs, sustaining a legacy of conflict in Karen State and along the border with Thailand. This study aims to explore how the IDPs along the Karen State-Thai border have created spaces of networking to address their humanitarian issues since the 2021 coup d'état. Therefore, it 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 found sharing capital among the IDPs and host villages including relatives, friends, and existing humanitarian networks along the riverbank, mitigates the impacts of displacement. While livelihood, education, and healthcare resources do not secure all the basic needs, they have become critical survival options. Additionally, the development of information technology has facilitated the displacement journey with a quicker information system, and the efforts of IDPs to navigate the complexities of conflict-induced displacement. This paper shows the importance of considering the capacities of IDPs, and of respecting and acknowledging their decisions and inclusiveness existing at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Military Coup, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Karen State-Thai Borderline, Capital, Conflict-Induced Displacement

Introduction

For more than 70 years, Myanmar has faced an ongoing crisis marked by internal conflict, with insurgencies in the ethnic areas existing for a long time, and a strict dictatorship system exercised by successive military juntas (Kaicome, 2019). Right after gaining independence in 1948, an ethnic armed revolution was initiated by the Karen people in 1949, and later followed by other ethnic groups. Established in 1962, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) under General Ne Win initiated a counter-insurgency plan, which designated territories into "black," "brown," and "white" - indicating areas controlled by ethnic armed groups, to those

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under partial control, and those fully controlled by the government - and involved widespread clearance operations across the areas.

Additionally, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) regimes (KHRG, 2022b, p. 32) employed scorched earth tactics. Especially in Karen State, villagers suspected of supporting the ethnic armed groups were forcibly relocated; in some cases, they were sent to the concentration camps. Over the course of their lives filled with loss and suffering, many internally displaced persons (IDPs) in ethnic-controlled areas have fled[47] their villages or sought refuge along the country border. Even though the country transformed into a quasi-democratic system, the military's influence in politics remained firmly rooted. The government of U Thein Sein initiated the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), which was signed by 10 big ethnic armed groups (ISDP, 2015), and the Panglong Peace Conferences were conducted through Daw Aung San Su Kyi's government (Kipgen, 2017). Nevertheless, many conflict-affected areas still did not experience peace (Hedström & Olivius, 2022, p. 507).

With the 2021 military coup led by General Min Aung Hlaing, not only did people in the ethnic minority areas experience violent conflict, but also those in central Myanmar. Armed resistance against the oppression of the State Administrative Council (SAC), formed by the military junta, began shortly after the coup. Ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) were joined by resistance groups such as the National Unity Government (NUG), established in April 2021, and the People's Defence Force (PDF), which operates under NUG's Defence Ministry and was established in May 2021 (Cross et al., 2021; Maizland, 2022, p. 6). To date, the conflict situation has worsened, with the number of displaced persons increasing[48] (Ye Myo Hein, 2022; KHRG, 2022a, p. 22).

IDPs in Karen State experience numerous hardships. As they flee to inaccessible areas in the jungle to escape the military, their camps are often encounter landmines and sometimes are targeted by air attacks and artillery strikes. Without basic protective resources, IPs also often face gender-based violence, forced recruitment, trafficking, killing, and the risks of landmines. During the rainy season, all they have is plastic, bamboo, and tree branches as shelters from the rain, often standing on flooded ground. This "lack of protection — especially without international observers – and limited provision makes the IDPs among the most marginalized groups in Myanmar" (Akhtar & Choo 2021). The insecurities are climbing up and people

[47] Before the military coup, there were an IDP camp, Ei Htu Hta which was established in 2006 and nine refugee camps in Thailand territory which Thai government called temporary shelters. As of the data collection period, there were five more IDP camps, established in the early 2022, along the Karen State and Thailand border.

[48] According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' updates of the Myanmar Emergency Overview Map and Statistics (2023), 328,000 IDPs before the 2021 military coup increased to 1,628,000 in 28 August 2023, which is during the data collection period. By June 2024, the total estimated number of IDPs in Myanmar reached to 2,898,200 with 210,200 in Karen State (UNHCR, 2024). This indicates the intensifying conflict situation in Myanmar and the need of emergency assistance.

always seeking shelter where they can temporarily be (KHRG, 2022a, pp. 22-23). Since restrictions severely limit humanitarian assistance within Myanmar, and registration poses significant risks for organizations, these organizations are providing aid with low profile through local and border-based partners Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). However, in many cases, the local CSO/CBOs are unregistered organizations, so they are ineligible for funding which delays the emergency support where it is most needed (KHRG, 2022a, p. 43).

For people in Karen State, it is not the first time to flee as they have been suffering from violent conflict for many decades. These experiences were all marked by suffering but became the foundation of resilience after the 2021 military coup. The Myanmar-Thai border also served as a host for IDPs, even though the assistance is not enough. According to the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) report (2022a), IDPs were seeking shelter along the Thaungyin River, which has been the safest place both before and after the 2021 coup.

This research provides new insights into the experiences of different IDP generations living under successive military juntas, from the era of the BSPP Party to the current period. Specifically, the Karen State-Thai border along the Thaungyin River near Mae Sot is worth studying due to its longstanding insecurity and its role as a host for IDPs and refugees for more than seven decades. In particular, the study explores how IDPs along the Karen State-Thai border create networking spaces and use their capital to meet their needs since the 2021 coup d'état. In this context, it examines how experience sharing between generations contributes to the capital utilized during their displacement.

Research Methods

The analysis and arguments presented in this article derive from qualitative research conducted by the author between July to November 2023, supported by a literature review on human capital in general, including displacement in the Karen area, as part of a Master's thesis. The research area was Site -3 of an IDP camp on the Thaungyin River Bank on the Myanmar site.

To understand how participants came to this IDP camp, they were asked how they made the decision to move, what motived them to settle at the border, and how they managed their settlement in the camp. Meanwhile, the author also looked at how the village leaders and local service providers collaborated throughout the displacement. Additionally, participants were asked about their insecurities, how they use their capital to address these, and what they contribute to the camp in order to share their capital.

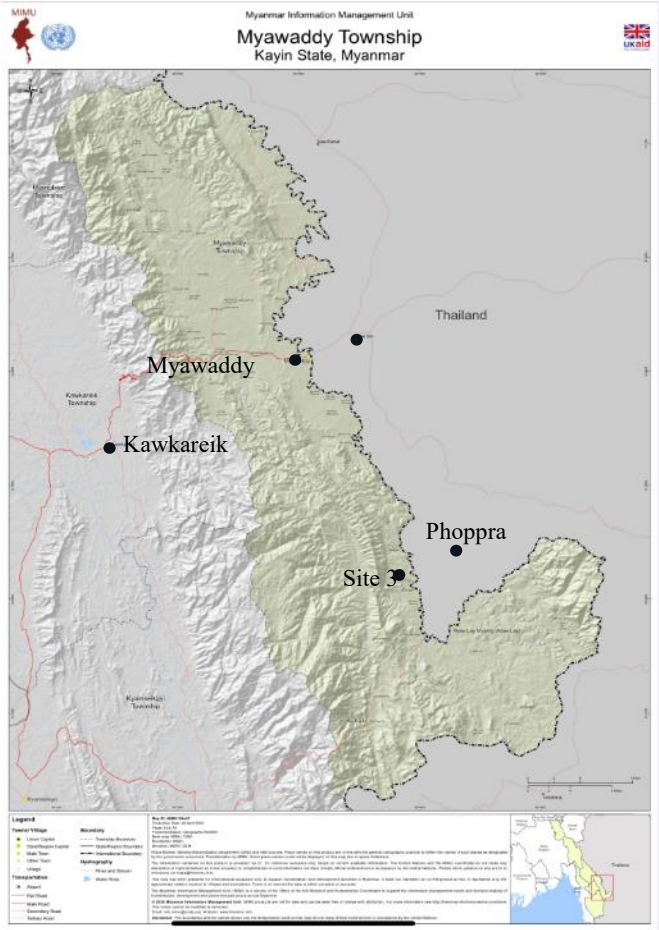

Fig.1: Map of Karen State-Thai borderline with Site-3 IDP camp (Source: MIMU).

To understand the utilization of social capital among the IDPs, the author employed different interview methods, such as three focus group discussions with different age groups: those who experienced the military rule from 1962 until its end, those who experienced the transition to quasi-democracy and a ten-year civilian period, and a younger group newly experiencing displacement. Additionally, nine key informant interviews were conducted with people from different organizations, professionals, and leaders were conducted, categorized into those working intensively at the local level with IDP on-site, and those networking with local leaders to support in different fields of interest.

Moreover, four life story interviews were conducted, with two males and two females. One male participant had experienced forced labor as a porter before the civilian government, another one was doing casual labor in the camp and had not faced prior displacement. The two women who were using their capital in the camp to address livelihood and education needs, one had previously experienced displacement, for the other, it was the first time.

Human Capital, Social Capital

In terms of capital, the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) is well known. According to Bourdieu (1986), there are different forms of capital, cultural and social capital. Cultural capital refers to what people know and have, while social capital refers directly to who people know. Within cultural capital, there are three states: embodied state, objectified state, and institutionalized state. The embodied state is the quality of mind and body, including what someone inherits. The objectified state pertains to material belongings and their influence people in their surroundings. The institutionalized state refers to qualifications, such as academic qualifications (pp. 17-21). Different people will be in different stages or possess different cultural capital, but the sharing of these forms results in collective identity, ultimately leading to social capital.

Social capital, on the other hand, is about acquiring one's self-capital through social relationships and exchanging capital. In this aspect, networking is important. First, the amount of social capital depends on the social network, which can be achieved in two ways: connecting with a group of people or building a relationship with a few people who have the capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 22). The second approach to building relationships is more powerful since having power means having the ability to achieve something bigger. Therefore, social capital, in terms of advantage, has two main benefits: (1) becoming a member of the group increases your power, and (2) as a result people approach you to gain access to your network and acquire capital (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 23-25).

How social capital works is interesting. James Coleman (1988) examined three forms of social capital: obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms. Obligations and expectations are essential parts of social capital. With obligations, expectations and social norms are built. Information channels are also important in social relations. In terms of information channels, we also see the importance of obligation and trustworthiness within social capital (p. 104).

Bonding, bridging, and linking are also other key functions of social capital (Colletta et al., 2002, p. 283). Bonding resembles the bond between family members, religious members, and ethnic communities, while bridging involves relationship building between the bonding groups. In linking, these communities of bonding and bridging connect to the state and markets to access opportunities, raise their voices for rule of law and gain inclusion (Colletta et al, 2002, p. 283). With regard to how social capital results in social cohesion, integrity or disintegration, this study explores the IDPs community in terms of who participates in which activities, how they form brides and share resources, and the relationship between them and external actors.

Sharing Capital among IDPs; Arriving at the Destination and Settling

After the military coup in 2021, IDPs along the Thaung Yin River sought refuge to avoid the indiscriminate shelling and air strikes. In addition, the border is not free from fighting[49] and

[49] Armed groups presented in this border area are Karen National Liberation Army, Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, People's Defence Force, Kawthoolei Army, Border Guard Force.

when they arrived at this site, they still faced threats from the military and ongoing conflict. The study found that armed groups are present in the area, and their movements can be observed on a daily basis. The issues that force them out of the village include proximity to military camps, aerial attacks, shootings, and heavy weaponry a including the military present in the village. The participants noted different ways[50] to arrive at Site -3 and to establish their settlement.

The Arrival

Firstly, according to the participants, IDPs used their network to get to this place. For instance, they often choose the place where they know someone, like a local CSO member, volunteer, village leader, or relative. Sometimes, individuals had previously lived or worked in the area**.** The study shows that IDPs have travelled a long journey, facing restrictions and difficulties. However, their networks and the sharing of capital among them proved to be beneficial during their displacement, e.g. with regard to their travel, their stay, the establishment of the camp, and access to livelihoods, education, and health care in their daily lives.

The IDPs chose places where they knew someone. For example, one participant shared:

> *At first, we thought that we would go to another village but as we do not know anyone there, I discussed it with my niece. She suggested us to come here because her medic trainer is here. He welcomed us by greeting us at the entrance of the village and arranged food and places for us to stay. Later, we united with the IDPs here. Even though there was no IDP camp here, he was welcoming us to stay at his house.*

Participants who knew the village leader noted:

> *I knew the village leader according to my brother, who worked here during the peaceful period. As he traveled back and forth from our village to this village, he knew him well. The village leader asked an armed group to greet us. I did not notice their badge was but I am sure it was a Karen group.*

A participant who just fled to this camp for the first time described: "*My uncle is the cousin of the village leader, so he went up to the hilltop to call him via phone and connect me, and got me to this place*." Participants also mentioned that '*We did not have any tractor*[51] *to come here, so the village leader came with two cars to carry us to this place*.'

Participants also noted that their arrival was facilitated by members of Karen CSOs.

> *At first, the village leader did not know we would come here. My family came here with a friend. He stays on the Thai side. He works at 'I am Kanyaw.' I told him … Kwar, I am afraid to stay here, I will come to you. He agreed and arranged a place on the riverbank*

[50] Participants used tractors, motorcycle, car, crossing rivers and border on foot to arrive this destination. Sometimes, they had to spend overnight in the resistance group's camps, in the bunkers, riverbank, forests, and under trees.

[51] A tractor is well known in this area for carrying goods and has space for five to ten people to sit in the back.

and prepared food for us. Since the initial place we stayed was close to the army base camp, he arranged for us to move again. After two days, the village leader got our information and we ended up here.

The first group of IDPs to arrive at this camp also helped other IDPs who came later. An FGD participant explained:

When we first settled in this camp, we had 16 families together. As soon as we arrived, two trucks of assistance came with clothes and blankets. But it was not enough, so we had to share. At first, people brought cooked rice, and fried rice for us. We registered our names. We got rice from households. When we knew that new IDPs were coming, as we acknowledged that it would be difficult for them to settle, we prepared and cooked meals for them, so that when they arrived, it would be ready to eat.

Settling in the Camp

It was a long process to establish the camp, achieved through the cooperation of village leaders and IDPs. When they first arrived, they stayed on the Thaungyin riverbank, facing various challenges, such as flooding and insect bites. Back then, the tents had tarpaulin roofs. After discussions with the village leader, they received permission to collect bamboo and leaves to build temporary shelters, located around 100 meters from the river, after crossing some cornfields. The area's owner is the brother of the village leader and the latter rents the land for 10,000 Baht per year. It was previously a cornfield but is now filled with temporary shelters for around 50 families. As one of the FGD members described,

This place (the IDP camp) was previously a cornfield. They gave us a place to stay here. These houses did not exist before. Only after we arrived did the village leader plan for us to stay here. He managed the food for us. However, we built these houses by ourselves. The village leader gave us permission to go to the hill near the village and cut bamboo, and we carried them here to build these. We collectively built these houses together. If we built our own house, what should the widowers do? Some families have little children, some do not have husbands, and some are elders alone. So, we helped each other to cut and distribute bamboo and build together.

Tents in the camp were also shared among IDPs when newcomers arrived. According to a participant, one tent has already been used by one family from another village. That family had already left when they arrived. Some of them have relatives on the Thai side of the river and they were looking forward to crossing the river if they faced any attack.

As I am here at the border, I have people I know from my relatives and friends. But if something happens, I will stick to my neighbor here who has relatives on the Thai side and I will rent a house there for a month or two. I hope that the leaders will find a place for us to stay. I think it will make us secure.

Village Leader, Aids, and IDPs

IDPs were given the option to join the workforce as fighting intensified over time and the IDP population rose. The village leader, who has been hosting and arranging support for IDPs, mentioned that villagers from three villages contacted him after their area was hit by heavy

weapon, as the villages are located near army base camps. He served as the primary person for different individuals and organizations to contact and to provide aid to the IDPs. However, as fighting and the IDP population continued to increase over time, but the aid decreased, he encouraged the IDPs to also find their own income from what was available in the new environment. He said:

> *I told them that they cannot always rely on the assistance. They also have to rely on themselves. I also told them about the situation since they arrived. As they are fleeing as an emergency, not the legal refugee like in Thailand, the aid will come only when there is fighting sound and emergency. I encourage them to find their own income. If not, it will be difficult. They are free to choose to join as daily laborer, because then they can get 100-200 Baht per day and support themselves.*

According to the FGD participants, the relationship between the host village and the IDPs has been very positive so far. They noted,

> *Villagers here come to visit us often. Some people knew each other before. Some of us just knew each other upon arriving. We make friends. Sometimes, they come to ask for labor if they need it in their work, such as collecting corn in the fields.*

While the assistance comes from the Thai side, with the Royal Thai Army checking along the route to the border, he seeks help from his relatives and friends in a Thai village on the riverbank to arrange the aid coming to the camp. He mentioned:

> *I have friends and relatives on the other side. If anything happens, we secretly arrange and carry it to the camp. However, we cannot carry the goods full of a truck so we arrange one or two packs of rice each time. The Thai army does not like us bringing food to the IDPs. They do not like using their roads. They do not like seeing one or two trucks full of aids. So, we put the rations for IDPs at a migrant school before the checkpoint and then we carry it little by little to here.*

The journey and the settlement were not easy for the IDPs. However, the networks and capital that they had and built on the way to the camp helped ease some of the burdens faced during their trip. Despite the insecurity and the prolonged living in this camp, without all the necessary basic needs being met, having each other made it better to access and reach the destination.

Insecurities and Accessibility

When asked about the insecurities they are facing in the camp, IDPs identified three main issues: livelihood security, education security, and health security. In this setting, the study shows that they also build their resilience and share resources to jointly meet these basic needs.

Livelihood

While the study found that IDPs are using their own capital and sharing it among themselves, it is interesting to see how livelihood dynamics are developing in the camp, even though these opportunities do not meet all the basic needs arising from displacement. Both men and women share labor in the household. According to the research, IDPs are addressing some basic needs through activities such weaving, livestock raising, wage labor, teaching, carpentry, planting

some vegetables for daily consumption, picking vegetables in the forest, leasing land, and managing small shops.

The major livelihood option available for the IDPs at the border is working in the cornfield[52]. Farmers on both sides of the border grow seasonal crops, but mostly they plant corn twice a year. It was also observed that beans are planted in the winter. Furthermore, some IDP members take the risks of renting land to plant corn. For example, some families rent land for around 10,000 Baht per year, taking on debt so that they will get some income during harvesting time. However, newcomers and some IDPs were afraid to take these risks, also because of the intensifying situation of being surrounded by armed groups.

Secondly, weaving traditional Karen cloth and sharing weaving skills were often mentioned by both male and female participants. Some women in the IDP camp already had weaving skills and previously taught young people in their home village. Others acquired the weaving knowledge from the elders back in their home village. Therefore, in the daytime, women in the camp often weave or learn weaving, borrowing weaving tools from each other. Thus, the study found a kind of "weaving culture" among them. The price of woven cloth[53] varies by size, and income from selling these items helps making pocket money for their children and families.

Finally, basket weaving is a skill that can be found in two to three households in the camp. Some people can weave bamboo baskets. While working as a daily laborer on the farm, they usually sell the baskets in the local village shops to cover the living expenses of their family. The baskets have different patterns and sizes and can be used in various ways, e.g. for carrying corn or tools.

However, even though they are very hardworking in this camp, jobs are not available every day, and their income is not sufficient for their daily living. Moreover, as they are on the border, Thai Baht is the only currency that can be used, and commodities are more expensive than in their home villages. Thus, they must carefully consider what they can afford for each meal. Since the village leader and host village do not prohibit them from collecting vegetables in the forest, they can forage for their meals.

Access to Education

The different ways in which IDPs apply their capital for education in challenging situations found are interesting. The study found that some students in IDP camps attend school in the host village, while others cross the river to attend a volunteer or migrant school in the nearest city, using ferryboats to cross the river. Attending school inside Thailand, they have to wear Thai student uniforms to avoid that they are being targeted due to their undocumented status.

Parents were also encouraging their children to attend school. Instead of children seeing their children caught the conflict, they are glad to see them attending school in peace. One of the

[52] According to the village leader, around 80% of the camp community participate in the casual labor in the cornfield.

[53] As the participant explained, if the cloth is a big size, it will be around 600-700 Baht, small size is 300 Baht, child cloths are 200 baht. A bigger kid size is 400. If it is good quality, 1,000 baht.

participants explained, "*It is better to attend a school that is far from bullets so that children can attend school peacefully*. *We heard that we can access medicine, and school here. So, we came here*." Another participant noted that fleeing to this place gave their children access to school while their own village was under attack.

The study shows that IDPs believe that education is important for children, and that they see a continuous education as necessary. When the camp was first established, children studying on the Karen side had to learn under the trees and cross the river to study at the monastery during attacks. But when the Thai soldiers drove them out of the village, they returned to the riverbank to study under the trees. According to a key informant, the school built for IDPs in the camp is often used by them to dry clothes. Observation revealed that the host village school is surrounded by bunkers. Some IDP members were also teaching in the school as well.

Apart from migrant schools, there are informal schools in houses in the Thai village for IDP children, run by individual volunteer teachers. It is usual to hear children reading texts aloud. On Sunday, children from both sides of the border attend Sunday School lessons, filling the assembly hall of the church of the Thai side. Since the Thai village is mainly composed of Karen, with some of them being migrants or married to local Thai citizens, this community has become a connecting point for IDPs on the Myanmar side.

Access to Health

Since durable conflict occurs along the Karen State-Thai border, several CBOs/CSOs were established that provide health care services. The closer to the border, the better the health care is that can be accessed, compared to plain areas. According to the study, healthcare providers[54] in the area are the Backpack Health Worker Team (BPHWT), SMRU (Shoklo Malaria Research Unit), and KDHW (Karen Department of Health and Welfare). According to the participants, diseases like malaria and dengue fever, as well as injuries from workplace and from attacks and fighting are frequent in the area. Due to this new environment and sometimes unsafe water conditions, IDPs encounter skin allergies and irritations.

Some healthcare services are also available for IDPs in Site 3. Both clinics of SMRU and KDHW are present there to address general health needs. Maternal and health care service for IDPs are provided by the SMRU clinic in the host village, and general treatment is available at the IDP clinic run by the KDHW. Volunteers in the KDHW clinic are IDP members. Compared to the IDP clinic, the SMRU clinic has more space and a better building with breaks and small wards, while the IDP clinic is built with bamboo and leaves. However, according to the study, the IDP clinic performs numerous activities, from taking care of outpatients and inpatients, to transfers of major cases to Thai hospitals, e.g. in Poppra and Mae Sot, by providing a KDHW referral letter with the history of the patient.

[54] BPHWT provides health care assistance to difficult to access areas, in the conflict zones, and in the jungles while SMRU provides quality health care to the marginalized populations at the border. KDHW, which is a department of Karen National Union, provide health care services in KNU controlled seven districts.

In addition, the IDP clinic has links with different donors to assist patients to be referred to Thai hospitals. The management of patients' referral was explained by the informant:

> *We divide the patients into two categories. If the patient is a soldier, IRC directly takes care for their medical expenses. If it is a civilian, both IRC and the Karen Department of Health and Welfare take responsibility for their expenses. So, we have to tell exactly what the background of the patient is. For referrals, since this IDP clinic is running under KDHW, we use a KDHW referral letter.*

Despite playing an important role in medical support for the IDPs, their security is not guaranteed. Therefore, consultation with local authorities during the trip is essential. While there are restrictions[55] on the transportation of medicine on both sides, Karen State and Thailand, they find ways to hide medicines from soldiers by getting help from trusted local people. The medicines used in the IDP clinic are mostly ordered from a Myawaddy pharmacy store, and all the purchases are done online via messenger. Hence, IDP clinics and SMRU clinics greatly benefit the IDPs amidst their plight.

Resilience Builds among Generations

The dynamics of displacement between different generations are compelling. People who have experienced displacement before have passed down experiences to the next generation, e.g. valuable sayings and knowledge gained. Since the IDPs have different experience of displacement, these passed down insights have helped them in their struggle. Additionally, advancing information technology benefits their displacement journey while previous displacement seemed have used it less.

Passing Down Experience among Generations

A common experience shared by older IDPs was repeated displacement, and the different journeys each displacement brings. They outlined that they could sometimes address the hardships faced during displacement with the knowledge and skills they acquired in the process. Even though none of them is happy with this precarious journey, this passing down and sharing of experience has become a resilience strategy among them. As one participant described:

> *I have never experienced war before, but once my grandma told me that, as I become a human being, I need to hold on to the 'mound' very firmly. I interpret that the mound means livelihood or something that provides food for you, which is the most important thing in life. And even though we experience hardships, survival is the most important thing, so we must firmly hold onto at least one of our mounds. For example, I work as a kindergarten teacher in the host village, and it is my mound.*

[55] According to the informant, the SAC soldiers usually check people in the car. They do not usually check the medicines because they are usually hidden under the goods of the truck that carry other goods. Fighting also delays the transportation of medicines.

The study found several strategies that IDPs usually uphold. These range from recognizing the signals of a shooting to finding a safe place. Participants often try to have important things at hand when they are going to be displaced. As the start of fighting is usually sudden, parents usually ask their children to grab something that is important and necessary for them, such as a slippers, blankets, and important documents. They also learned about protective measures, e.g. that trees and rocks can protect people from bullets and serve as shelter, or how to observe an aircraft during the fighting. As one participant explained, "*I have an aunt who said that if the aircraft bends its position, it is ready to shoot*."

Moreover, related to how to behave in the case of shooting, a participant described:

> *Old people said that we should not run during the shooting. If we hear the shooting, we have to wait and listen while finding a hiding place near us. If there is no more shooting sound, we have to run. Then, if we hear the sound again, we have to stop and listen. The elders said that we should also not lay on the ground while there is a heavy weapon hitting, because the ground will shake and it can hit our chest, or affect our health. I have never experienced that myself, but I just heard it from elders. Now, I experienced it by myself, and it is real.*

Alarm System

The advanced communication technology has a positive effect on the information systems used in conflict areas. This development helps to provide a quicker update on current displacements. The difference between traditional signals and the modern technology is evident. For example, in the early 2000s, gongs from the village monasteries were used to alert the villagers to hide from the fighting, and radios to follow the news. But nowadays, phones and social media provide information and serve as early warning systems. Older participants of the FGDs who experienced the four cuts strategy and the 88 uprisings, reflected;

> *In the past, there was no phone. People used buffalo horns to send signals to each other. We had watchmen on the hilltops. They contacted each other by playing buffalo horns, which sounded Oo…Woo…Oo…Woo (making sound). These watchmen were especially tasked to give signals for men and young boys, who were vulnerable for being conscripted as porters, so that they could run to the jungle to hide before the military column arrived.*

> *We knew it when they (Myanmar soldiers) were coming. There were people who saw them coming on the way. Villages were close to each other. Some people did small trade between villages, and some rode bicycles on the road. Some villages had their own village security persons. They informed like, ' …hey… Aunty, tomorrow, Burmese soldiers will come to the village. ' Then, Aunty went to the village head and informed him. Then the village head informed the whole village, and young and old men ran out of the village to avoid being conscripted as porters. By that time, you would only see women and girls left in the village.*

However, nowadays, access to phones and internet makes communication and information sharing easier for those displaced along the border. Mostly, households in the camp have at least basic keypad phones with Thai SIM cards to contact each other regarding camp visits or for their daily work. The accessibility to phones makes communication in the camp easier and

smoother, particularly since the cornfields where IDPs are working are often large and sometimes far away from the camp, with some checkpoints on the wa. Thus, they have to regularly check with responsible persons. According to one participant,

> *When we go to work, we have to regularly communicate with each other. We add villagers, secretaries, and others we know to our contact list and communicate with them. Mostly, we communicate about whether we can come back to the camp from work, how is the road condition, do we have to wait, things like that. If they reply that everything is fine and we can come back, then, we come back. If there is a road blockage on the way by fighting or something, and we come back, they will have to take responsibility for us. So, to ease the burden for them, we usually follow the communication. We listen to them.*

While IDPs in other areas face internet blackouts, IDPs at the border experience less challenge as they can access Thai mobile networks and the internet.

> *Previously, we did not have phone and internet. Now, we have it. We could not ask or call anyone to help us before. It was not also easy to get assistance. While people who are displaced inside will still have challenges, displaced persons at the border can easier get help thanks to their phones and internet.*

The New Generation of Displacement

The new generation, equipped with a standard level of education, share their capacity with the community as much as they could. Young participants, who have high aspirations, try to integrate into CSO communities at the border, e.g. in the fields of education, humanitarian, and health care, instead of only joining groups in the IDP camps. They aim for greater resilience rather than only running from conflict. One informant stated, *"I want to see myself taking a role in economic and public administration. Now, I am taking a course about it. Every country needs administration*." Another young IDP informant shared their vision as follows:

> *In the future, I want to see myself contributing to the field or department of education, for people in conflict areas. We don't know when the war will end, but education is what we always need. If you want to build a country, education is important. Without education, that country will not last long. Long-term sustainable development, or peace, all of this needs education. That is where I want to see myself in the future. I don't want future generations to think that they have to run and feel oppressed because of me. I myself am a displaced person helping displaced children with their education. Even if we do not become a big leader, if we can give a little help with what we can do, I am happy.*

> *As I am working on some projects related to humanitarian efforts, I think that international organizations should have a well-prepared humanitarian foundation that can distribute assistance both before and after the displacement. There should not be any delays.*

According to CSO workers for IDPs and refugees at the border, people in Karen areas have accepted the displacement as part of their normal lives, and especially ethnic minorities need to be educated about positive resilience and their rights. Related to how people perceived loss as something normal, an informant described, "*These sufferings have become normal for them. Things that they should cry about, they don't cry about them anymore. They do not see these*

experiences as something to feel sorry for. They are strong, but strong in a different way." Another informant shared his insights on the displaced population in the Karen areas:

> *They think that experiencing atrocities is right. They do not know that these are injustices. We have to make sure that they know that. They just build the wrong resilience. We have to open their eyes to see that they deserve to live a genuine life and that their children have the right to study in good schools, study in their own language. Their place must be peaceful, with freedom and stability.*

In this time of conflict, the complexities of Myanmar politics remain unpredictable. The experience of one generation, with the support of a changing world, opens their view on how they want to contribute to the community and be helpful with the capital they have. Hopefully, the new generation will build stronger resilience and create a community that encourages education, as well as a network that builds a solid foundation for displaced people in the future.

Discussion

This study shows that IDPs accumulate capital on their displacement journey. The formation of social capital through the sharing of cultural capital, as described by Bourdieu (1986), reflects the embodied, objectified, and institutionalized capital among the IDPs. The changing dynamics among IDPs along the border are particularly interesting because durable conflict has impacted the area, but the different generations have their own experiences, which build the foundation for the development of resilience. Relatives represent inherited culture capital, as their experience creates a form of belonging that non-IDPs do not have. Moreover, the networking and communication skills provide them with the institutionalized capital.

The networking found in this study aligns with Bourdieu's approach to the benefits of networking in terms of social capital. Connecting with social workers and authorities, who are represent an objectified and institutionalized state of culture capital, provides basic needs during this protracted displacement. Having good relationships with host villages is a beneficial to survive in the new environment. Engaging in education, health, and livelihood activities at the destination builds a strong link to social capital among the IPDs. This reflects the three forms of social capital as described by Coleman (1988), in a way that IDPs maintain their social and moral obligations in this journey of displacement, bringing along their expectations of settling in a new place with livelihood, education, and health care opportunities, while information channels from relatives and friends bring them there.

The additional feature described by this study is the function of social capital in this IDP community. Among themselves, they know that helping each other through bonding is crucial to maintain a strong displacement community. Since IDPs come from at least three villages in this site, again, they also create bridging among themselves. According to Colletta et al (2002), the final linking stage performed by IDPs does not seem to reach higher state levels. However, their voices reached the level of local authorities through their bonding and bridging, and then extended to CSOs and to access to humanitarian assistance.

Conclusion

The displacement journey of people along the Karen State - Thailand borderline can be traced back to 1962 when U Ne Win staged a coup and applied the "Four Cuts" strategy. The survival of people in the black and brown areas has been marked by suffering since then, for generations. During the quasi-democracy period, some people thought that the area was more stable, and they tried to start small businesses, such as opening shops. However, after the military coup in 2021, they lost all the properties due to the fighting and had to face displacement again. These displaced persons will not give up on their survival, regardless of how many times they face displacement.

The study was conducted in a time of ongoing and unstable displacement by meeting with IDPs in Site -3 established on the Myanmar side of the Thaugyin River. It highlights three key findings. First, it shows that the social capital among IDPs, host villages, and relatives and friends is utilized to help with the arrival and settling in the destination camp. Second, the application of capacities of IDPs is linked with access to available services related to basic needs in the camp. Finally, the study points out how the transfer of displacement experiences, including the dynamics of advancing information technology, created advantages during the displacement.

To conclude, this research focuses on the application of capital by IDPs without presenting misleading information about how they experience their displacement life. Inadequate jobs, depression, the loss of small businesses, unbearable displacement, loss of belongings and family members, as well as mourning can be witnessed across the camp. This study aims to appreciate the power of IDPs as experienced human beings, utilizing their knowledge of displacement and social dynamics at the border. The author hopes that the study will contribute to the discourse on forced displacement by offering a new perspective based on ground-level empirical findings.

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Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment in Southeast Myanmar: A Case Study of a Thai-Myanmar Border Communities

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Abstract

This paper investigates climate change vulnerability and exposure to natural hazards among Mon communities on the Thai-Myanmar border, which have faced long periods of conflict and displacement. The communities have experienced what Vigh (2008) refers to as a 'chronic crisis' for more than seven decades, exacerbated by recent civil conflict, limited access to basic needs, poor service delivery, and the introduction of rubber plantations, leading to pervasive depletion of natural forests and biodiversity. On top of this, the community is now dealing with the effects of climate change, including more severe floods, forest fires, storms, droughts, and landslides, which have affected their ability to survive off the local environment. This paper explores climate change vulnerability among the Mon border communities, based on a study conducted in 2024 that draws on a mixed methods analysis, triangulating precipitation and temperature data with surveys and ethnographic fieldwork. The author examines rising temperatures and changes in precipitation as well as natural hazards, elaborating on people's vulnerabilities, which are further exacerbated by the chronic crisis. Moreover, adaptation options within this context are discussed. 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.

Keywords: Climate Change, Vulnerability Assessment, Impacts Chain, Socio-economic Conflict, Resettlement Communities

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1. Introduction

Global communities are confronting physical, social, economic, and environmental threats due to climate change impacts, including rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and extreme weather events. In recent years, there has been growing acknowledgment of the significant impacts that climate change poses to vulnerable communities across the Global South. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasizes the need for addressing these impacts and assessing community vulnerability. Rising global temperatures, altering precipitation patterns, and increasing sea levels are creating challenges for communities worldwide. According to the IPCC (2022), Asia is currently identified as one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change, particularly concerning extreme heat, floods, sea level rise, and unpredictable rainfall. According to the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA), Myanmar is the second-most vulnerable country to climate change (*Myanmar Gears Up*, 2020) and has consistently ranked in the top ten for two decades from 2000 to 2019 (Eckstein et al., 2021). The NAPA from 2019 outlines the urgently required actions with 32 priorities for climate change adaptation to address the actual and potential impacts, including increased temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns. The Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) (2021), which was drafted by the previous government, also mentions frequent intense and widespread extreme weather events: cyclones, floods, heavy rains, droughts, and high temperatures. However, due to the current crisis, following the military coup of February 1, 2021, Myanmar faces significant challenges in implementing climate change mitigation and adaptive strategies (Sharon & Elodie, 2022). In fact, almost all the activities planned before the coup, as well as international funding for climate change, have halted (see Kyed & Chambers, 2023). Due to the political instability, there is also a lack of job opportunities, poor infrastructure, and a massive number of internally displaced people (IDPs). Ethnic conflicts and ceasefires in Myanmar have long been closely intertwined with exploiting natural resources, driving and financing war in some areas and increasing during ceasefires as military actors used the halting of combat to engage in various businesses (Woods, 2015, 2019). The current crisis fueled by the military coup has exacerbated this trend as reports of increased mining, illegal logging, and unplanned developments multiply (Frontier, 2022; Sharon & Elodie, 2022; South, 2023).

In low-income countries like Myanmar, and particularly in conflict-affected contexts that have experienced prolonged and ongoing conflict, climate change impacts intersect with and exacerbate existing challenges to communities, negatively impacting their resilience and increasing vulnerabilities. In this paper, I show how three villages in Mon state, on the Thai Myanmar border, are further made vulnerable to climate change due to the current political crisis. These villages were already vulnerable following the 1995 ceasefire between the Myanmar military government and New Mon State Party (NMSP) – the main Mon Ethnic Armed Organization – but now they face even greater adversity.

Based on measured and observed impacts of climate change, a survey addressing climate-related natural hazards, and ethnographic observations, this paper analyzes the vulnerability of these villages and the challenges to adaptation. The paper argues that people's vulnerabilities are exacerbated by decades of chronic crisis (Vigh, 2008) and that the situation following the

military coup has further intensified this trend. The author further discusses adaptation options within this context. 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.

There have been very few community-level studies of the impacts of climate change in Myanmar. Research from other contexts highlights the importance of studying community-level perceptions of climate change and local adaptation initiatives, and this paper draws on this literature to discuss vulnerability to climate-related natural disasters (Rehman et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2022). I contribute to this literature by exploring how political instability and conflict affect vulnerability.

The article is structured into four sections. First, it begins with a literature review on climate change vulnerability providing a foundation for the analysis and contributing to new knowledge on prolonged conflict-affected communities. The second section outlines the methodology used in the study. The third section presents the results and discussion analyzing the empirical findings and exploring how the communities adapt to the compound impacts of climate change. Finally, the conclusion examines the climate change vulnerabilities of these communities, suggests practice ways to improve existing adaptation plans, and highlights the ongoing challenges faced by conflict-affected communities.

2. Literature Review: Climate Change Vulnerability

Climate change poses risks to human and natural systems on a global scale (IPCC, 2022). Over the past three decades, substantial research has been conducted on attributing extreme weather events to climate change, i.e., to determine to what extent anthropogenic climate change has contributed to the events' likelihood and strength (Shah et al., 2022; Aung Tun Oo et al., 2018). Understanding the relationship between the human-induced climate crisis and extreme weather events is essential for mitigating the risks and preparing for these types of events. Additionally, more knowledge is needed to understand how underlying factors contributing to extreme weather are influenced by global warming. In its "Fifth Assessment Report," published in 2014, the IPCC stated that the risks associated with extreme weather events will continue to increase as the global mean temperature rises. Many studies conclude that the observed frequency, intensity, and duration of extreme weather events have changed as the climate system has warmed. Furthermore, increasing evidence links extreme El Niño events to global warming. Cai et al. (2018) found that the robust increase in the variability of sea surface temperatures is largely influenced by greenhouse-warming-induced intensification of upper-ocean stratification in the equatorial Pacific, which enhances ocean-atmosphere coupling. Extreme weather events and related risks are not the only types of risks aggravated by the influences of climate change. In addition, slow-onset processes and related hazards, such as rising sea levels, desertification, or biodiversity loss, are triggered or reinforced (IPCC, 2019; Global Climate Risk Index, 2021).

Despite this growing body of research, there remain gaps in the knowledge of people's vulnerability to climate change in many parts of the world, especially those affected by conflict. Climate change projections suggest that people in low-income countries face significantly

higher risks than those in developed countries. Research especially highlights the impacts on agricultural livelihoods and food security (Campbell et al., 2016; Harrison et al., 2019; Yadav et al., 2019). In addition, areas affected by violent conflict are among the most vulnerable to climate change (Chambers & Kyed, 2024). Pandey et al.'s (2012) study in India and Shah et al.'s (2022) study in Pakistan analyze communities' perceptions of climate risks to lessen the livelihood vulnerability and the capacity for coping with future risks. Climate change vulnerability varies significantly in different places, according to geography, topography, and agricultural livelihoods. Therefore, assessing climate change vulnerability at the local level becomes crucial to understanding how climatic impacts influence the level of vulnerability in different communities. A household study conducted in two townships in Myanmar's delta region prior to the military coup revealed that inadequate access to basic infrastructure, limited income sources from both the farm or other sources, and a heavy reliance on agriculture caused high sensitivity to the detrimental impacts of climate change (Aung Tun Oo et al., 2018). As a result of changing global temperatures, communities reported biodiversity loss, which impacted their primary source of income. Furthermore, the highest risk of climate change vulnerability is exposure to natural hazards, and those who fail to adopt any adaptive strategies are more vulnerable (Aung Tun Oo et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2022).

Even before the military coup, Myanmar, as one of the least developed nations, was considered one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change and sea level rise (Eckstein et al., 2021; UN & UNCTAD, n.d., 2022). Over the past three decades, Myanmar has experienced increasingly severe cyclones, flooding, and droughts. More than 60% of people in Myanmar rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. However, in-depth knowledge of farm households' climate change vulnerability and adaptive capacity in Myanmar is still lacking (Aung Tun Oo et al., 2018; SIPRI, 2024). The primary challenge to studying vulnerability in Myanmar is the limited data available, which is largely due to the long history of military rule (1962-2010). In addition, large parts of the country have been controlled and contested by non-state ethnic resistance organizations (EROs), which has meant that central government policies, climate research and initiatives have seldom reached these areas. Between 2010 and 2021, there was increased international support for climate-related research and adaptation and mitigation programming, but this largely halted after the military coup in February 2021 (South, 2023; Kyed & Chambers 2023). In addition to these challenges, the complexity of vulnerability as a concept and the comprehensive factors contributing to vulnerability mean that any indicators used to measure vulnerability must be compared. Previous studies used different single or multiple indexes to assess climate change vulnerability. However, in Myanmar, there is no such assessment in the long-term conflict-affected areas to analyze climate change impacts and vulnerability to understand what drives the impacts, the dynamics of vulnerability, and how communities respond and adapt to these challenges.

Few qualitative studies exist that assess climate change vulnerability before the coup. One exception is the study carried out in 2020 by anthropologist Jennifer Leehey (2020), who explored resilience at the community level in northern Shan State on behalf of Dan Church Aid and Norwegian Church Aid. Northern Shan State is an extremely complex conflict zone where rural populations have long suffered from frequent displacement, disrupted livelihoods, and human rights abuses. Rural people there face multiple threats to their security and livelihoods,

including exposure to fire, landmines, and abuse by armed actors. This study was based on interviews with community members, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and civil society workers. The interviews explored stakeholder experiences, motivations, and strategies for survival, self-protection, and livelihoods in crisis contexts. The study differs from other resilience studies in the international development context by avoiding a top-down approach and exploring what 'resilience' means to people who experience shocks and disruptions to their livelihoods (Leehey, 2020). The research highlighted a disconnect between the international NGO's understanding of 'resilience' and the local meaning of 'resilience/endurance.' In northern Shan State, the crisis is chronic and a part of daily life, so the focus in the study was on enduring hardships, rather than abrupt changes and 'bouncing back' mechanisms. In the eyes of the villagers, endurance involved mental grit, resourcefulness, determination, and stoicism, as well as safeguarding cultural identity and dignity. It was associated with retaining traditional practices and cultural knowledge that are endangered. The study also emphasized the importance of 'capital' that drives resilience, which is challenging to measure. This includes human capital (local leaders, relationship histories, informal networks), symbolic capital (multiple language abilities, other kinds of skills and know-how), and cultural capital (charity and solidarity drawing on ethnic identities and generated in rituals and social gatherings) (Leehey, 2020).

The study by Leehey demonstrates that vulnerability in rural Myanmar cannot be entirely captured in quantitative indicators and that consideration must be given to the differing understandings of resilience across locations. In practical terms, the study also highlights the challenge of gathering consistent or accurate information in conflict-affected areas (Leehey 2020). Although climate change is a global process, vulnerability is very site-specific. Many scholars have argued that localized climate change vulnerability assessment is essential to understanding vulnerability (Luckerath et al., 2023; Peter et al., 2023). Hahn et al. (2009) and Deressa (2011) recommend testing climate change vulnerability at the community level to compare the vulnerability of communities within a district or region. Moreover, Pandey and Jha (2012) highlighted that respondents' perceptions about climate change could be compared with historical weather data to ensure the validity of perception indicators in a vulnerability index, focusing on livelihood and socioeconomic factors.

In this study, respondents' perceptions of the adverse effects of climate change will be examined alongside other indicators to assess vulnerability of households in conflict-affected areas to climate change. Research in other contexts shows that specific policy interventions can significantly impact vulnerability, e.g., the development of rural credit markets, provision of basic infrastructure, sanitation equipment, accessible marketplaces, safe drinking water, and the distribution of mosquito nets. In addition, policymakers, stakeholders, and development managers need to carry out a rigorous assessment of farming and the effects of past disasters and natural hazard events so that they can intervene with the necessary preventive measures and policies aimed at promoting adaptive capacity and reducing the climate change vulnerability of farm households. Farm households' exposure to natural hazards is the highest indicator of climate change vulnerability (Yang et al., 2022, Aung Tun Oo et al., 2023; Minh et al., 2023, Bedo et al., 2024). Therefore, this study will contribute to new knowledge by focusing on conflict-affected communities and on the specific context of "returned refugees"

– communities who, after many decades of fleeing to various places to escape from the conflict, did not return to their original hometowns (South, 2005 & HUROM, 2009). Furthermore, they continued to settle in the resettlement sites and established villages. In addition, the lack of early warning systems and climate information (the priority of Myanmar, NAPA, 2019) is also a significant indicator of climate change vulnerability of farm households to saltwater intrusion and natural hazards.

2.1. Background to Research Contexts

The research was conducted in the three villages – Kani, Pai and Htee – along the Thai-Myanmar border within the Three Pagoda Pass Township, which has trade links to the town of Sangkhlaburi in the north of Kanchanaburi Province of Thailand. These communities are unique due to their historical context: decades of conflict displaced people from various parts of Myanmar, particularly from Mon State, leading many to eventually settle in this area after the New Mon State Party (NMSP) reached a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar military government (HURFOM, 2012; South, 2023; Ba Nyar Oo, 2024). These studied villages are a cluster of a resettlement site, specifically established for returned refugees, one of three resettlement sites in Mon State. As is typical of the resettlement site, the population has been unstable since the humanitarian aid halted three years after the resettlement. The aid organizations' push for self-reliance combined with lack of job opportunities, has led to a heavy reliance on the forest for survival. The population demographics of the villages are Kani with 155 households, Pai with 130 households and Htee with around 100 households. However, these numbers have changed over time, particularly since the military coup. Many have left in search of job opportunities while others from inside the state-controlled areas have fled to these villages to avoid or escape the conflict.

In recent decades, climatic changes have affected people's livelihoods, which have simultaneously been impacted by an unstable peace process and hybrid governance structures, putting them under the control of the ethnic armed organization, the New Mon State Party (NMSP). The area was covered with natural forest before the 1995 ceasefire agreement and became a resettlement site for internally displaced people escaping conflict (Ba Nyar Oo, 2024; South, 2013, pp. 250-254). Regarding their survival, villagers have traditionally relied on upland rice cultivation, as well as forest and river resources. However, rapid deforestation, driven by business elites and local leaders, combined with increasing pressure from a growing population due to cycles of conflict and displacement, have put pressure on these livelihoods, alongside the impacts of climate change.

Given the study's location at the Thai-Myanmar border, the community operates under a mix of customary practices, particularly in land use and traditional forest management, influenced by the NMSP's administration and partially under state control. Additionally, the community uses Thai currency, weather forecasts, and, in some cases, temporary identities tied to Thailand. However, the focus of this paper is on the climate change vulnerabilities faced by these communities, rather than a deeper analysis of the wider historical context.

3. Methodology

A multidisciplinary and bottom-up approach was used, combining both qualitative and quantitative research to assess the vulnerability of the rural upland communities. A combination of primary and secondary data sources were utilized to identified relevant indicators to assess the climate and socioeconomic impacts and analyze the level of vulnerability to their associated impacts. The primary data from 227 household surveys were collected using structured interviews (questionnaires), and 20 interviews were conducted w a semi-structured interview guide with 6 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), 3 Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and 11 in-depth interviews, mainly in Pai and some in Kani villages, as the study focused on Mon" returned refugee" communities. The sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane sample size calculator available on the Classgist website. A random sampling approach was used for household survey data collection, and after and during conducting household survey questionnaires, the snowball and purposive sampling methods were used for qualitative interviews. Although the study initially focused on Pai village, the rapid emigration of young people, particularly men, first due to socio-economic challenges and then in 2024 also to the military junta's conscription law, reduced the number of available respondents. Many of these young people had left for Thailand to work and send remittances back to their families. To address the shortage of respondents in Pai village, the author extended the survey to two neighboring villages, Kani and Htee, one Mon village and one Karen village. Given the limitation of a two-week timeframe and security concerns due to political situation, the author decided to include additional village surveys in the household survey collection and acknowledged the limitation of the research. Thematic analysis was used for qualitative interviews. This household survey was meticulously designed to validate the predicted impacts of climate change by juxtaposing them with the actual impacts reported by the community. Through this comparative analysis, the study aims to substantiate the hypothesis that the community is actively experiencing and being exposed to climate related adversities. This methodological approach not only enhances the empirical robustness of the findings but also provides a nuanced understanding of the real-world implications of climate change on local populations.

An analytical tool called Impact Chain Analysis (IC) ("Using Impact Chain Analysis", n.d.) (see Figure 1) was used to understand and build evidence-based knowledge of climate change impacts by following four steps 1) drivers; temperatures and precipitation were identified as significant indicators, 2) climate-related hazards; floods, drought, storms, wildfires, forest fires, landslides, and erosion 3) the exposure pathways; community, animals, plants, rubber plantation, crops, agriculture, and infrastructure, and 4) actual climate-related impacts; poor health, lower income and immigration.

Figure 1: Steps in the impacts chain analysis (*Regional Resources Center for Asia and Pacific, RRC.AP*)

The secondary data sources, such as historical and projected climate data on temperature and precipitation, as well as RCP 4.5 and 8.5 climate scenarios were obtained from sub-national Thailand, Kanchanaburi Province (Department of Climate Change and Environment, 2023). The author plotted graphs using annual mean, maximum, and minimum to visualize temperature and precipitation trends and changes under the RCP 4.5 and 8.5 climate scenarios. The data from Kanchanaburi is considered reliable, as the local population in the target area frequently relies on the Thai weather forecast channel, in addition to using more traditional methods of predicting the weather by observing natural species of plants and animals, as they did not have access to any information from the State. Myanmar climate data from Myanmar Department of Meteorology and Hydrology station was not accessible; therefore, information from academic literature and the World Climate Portal was used to verify the annual mean temperature and precipitation to understand the climate change impact in the country. Descriptive analysis was used for climate data and Excel was employed to run the graphs.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Climate Trends and Changes in Myanmar and Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand

In this study, I analyze climate data from Myanmar (secondary sources), focusing on historical and projected changes in temperature and precipitation. Due to data inaccessibility and limitations, I also draw climate data from the neighboring Kanchanaburi Province in Thailand (Department of Climate Change and Environment, 2023) to provide a comprehensive analysis. This approach is particularly relevant as the studied community is located near the Thai-Myanmar border, making regional climate trends crucial for understanding local impacts.

Over the past decades, the study area has experienced notable shifts in climate patterns, significantly impacting the community's daily life. From 1961 to 2015, Myanmar's mean annual temperatures increased by approximately 0.2°C per decade. The frequency and intensity of hot extremes have risen. Projections indicate that by 2050, mean temperatures will rise by 1.5°C under a high greenhouse gas concentration scenario, according to Shared Socioeconomic Pathway 5-8.5 (SSP5-8.5), IPCC (AR6)[58], and by 1-1.5°C under a low scenario, SSP2-4.5. Maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to increase, with more intense and prolonged heatwaves. Additionally, the number of very hot days (above 35°C) is projected to rise significantly (RCCC, 2024). RCCC 2024 highlights that the frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall events have increased while overall trends in mean annual rainfall patterns are ambiguous. However, projections indicate an approximate 5-10% increase in annual precipitation under both SSP5-8.5 and SSP2-4.5 by 2040 to 2060.
The observed and projected changes in temperature and precipitation patterns in Myanmar and Kanchanaburi province indicate a potential for more frequent and severe weather events, such as heatwaves and heavy rainfall. These changes could significantly affect agricultural practices, water availability, and the overall livelihood of communities in both regions (Wang et al.,

[58] AR6_Factsheet_April_2022.pdf (ipcc.ch)

2024). Figures 2 and 3, produced by the author, reflect the sub-national climate data analyzed from Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand.

Figure 2 shows the historical annual temperature from 1970 to 2005 averaged 23±0.23℃. Under the RCP 4.5 scenario, a moderate projection indicates a temperature increase of 1℃ by 2099, resulting in an average temperature of 24±0.49℃. In contrast, under the RCP 8.5 scenario, a more pronounced warming of 2℃ is projected, leading to an average annual temperature of 25±1.07℃ by 2099. Additionally, the historical maximum temperatures from 1970 to 2005 averaged 35±0.53℃. Projections under the RCP 4.5 indicate these temperatures will rise by 2℃ to 37±0.76℃ from 2006 to 2099. Under RCP 8.5, the maximum temperatures are anticipated to increase by 4℃ reaching 39±1.22℃ within the same duration. Historically, this region experienced relatively stable weather conditions which respondents recalled predictable seasonal patterns. However, village's chairmen, secretaries, and many elder respondents in Pai and Kani villages had noted significant temperatures changes over a decade. Summers have become unbearably hot and long while winters have warmed to the extent that people can comfortably bathe even at midnight. In contrast, winter temperatures were so low that people typically bathed by 4PM, as the water became too cold to touch later in the evening (elder respondents' interviews). Figure 3 shows projections indicating a moderate to significant increase in precipitation under both scenarios, with potential levels reaching up to 1800 mm under the RCP 8.5 scenario in the same duration.

This significant rise in temperatures and precipitation poses serious threats to communities and the environment, leading to more frequent and severe heatwaves and heavy rainfall that adversely affect public health, agriculture, and ecosystems. The increased heat stress can exacerbate health issues, reduce crop yields, and burden water resources (IPCC, 2022). Additionally, summer monsoon precipitation is expected to increase with greater interannual variability, and heavy rainfall events are anticipated to become more frequent and severe, potentially leading to increased flooding and soil erosion (Figure 4). Initially settling near the Thai-Myanmar border after returning as refugees from the prolonged conflict in Myanmar, they observed notable environmental shifts. These temperature changes underscore the pressing environmental challenges faced by these communities. The respondents' concerns are evident when comparing the significant temperature and precipitation changes in their communities over the past three decades.

Furthermore, the subsequent discussion will examine the impacts of rising temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns, emphasizing how these climate change effects exacerbate community vulnerabilities, by employing impact chain analytical tools to build evidence demonstrating that these are indeed climate change-related disasters and impacts.

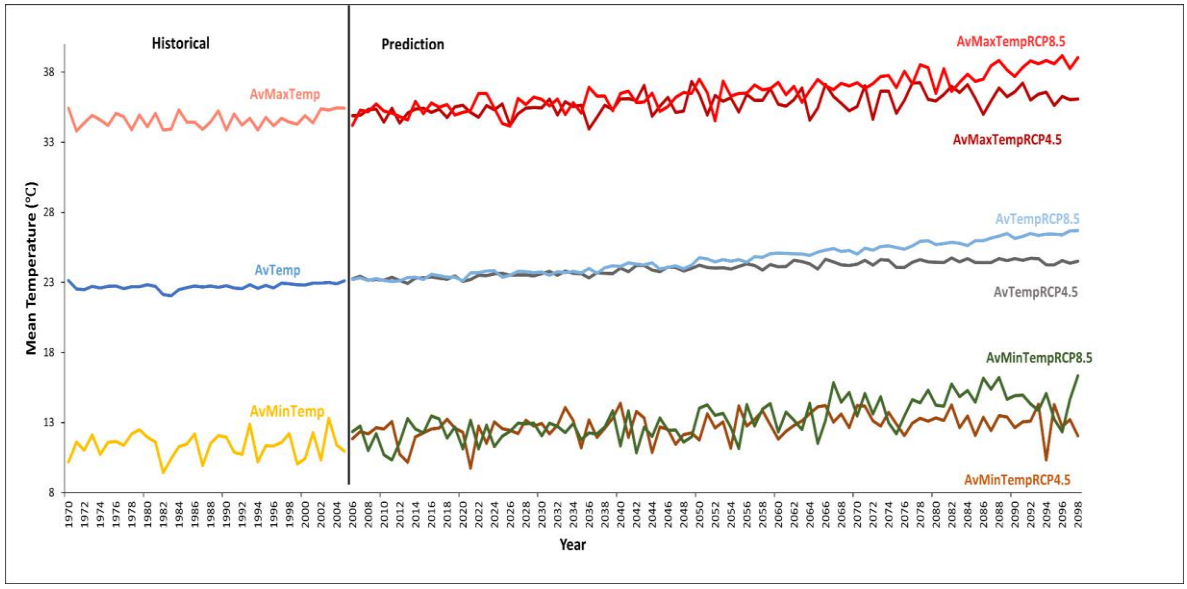

Figure 2: Climatology of annual mean, max, min temperature in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand: historical (1970-2005) and projected (2006-2098) trends and changes under RCP 4.5 and 8.5

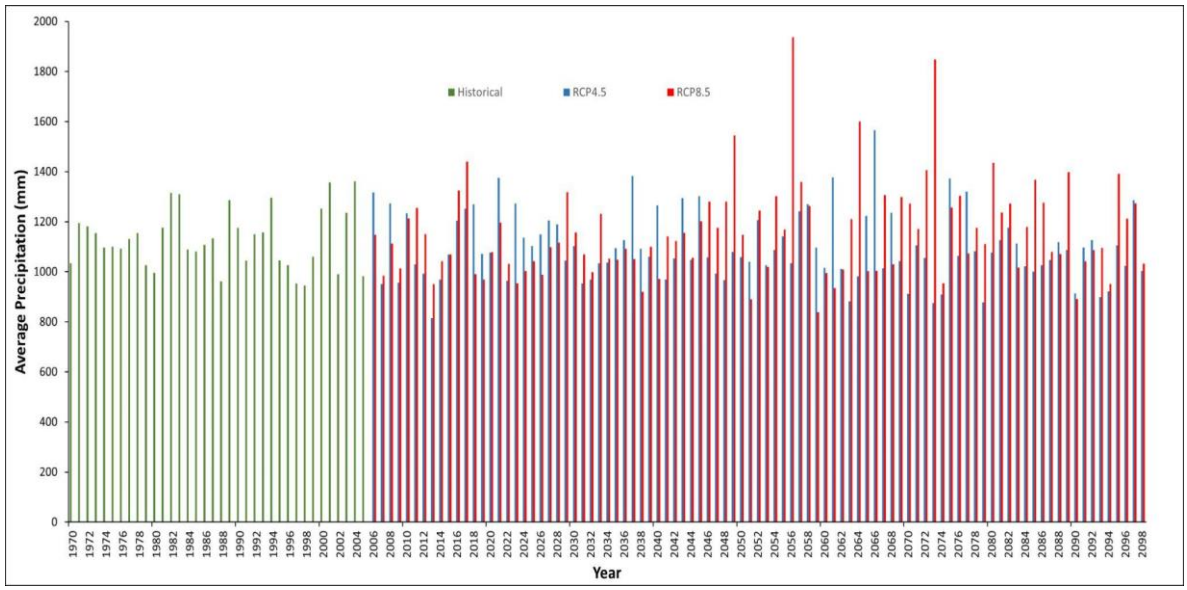

Figure 3: Climatology of annual mean, max, min precipitation in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand: historical (1970-2005) and projected (2006-2098) trends and changes under RCP 4.5 and 8.5

4.2. Climate Change-Related Disasters Experienced by the Communities

4.2.1. Impact Chain Analysis: Predicted vs. Actual

The two core impact chain analyses were discussed to verify and validate climate change-related impacts using an evidence-based approach to assess community vulnerability. The predicted impact chain diagram (see Figure 4) was developed through a combination of

personal experiences in the study areas and extensive literature reviews. The diagram illustrates four steps to elucidate the relationships between the impacts affecting the communities.

Step 1: Identify and understand the drivers of climate change impacts. Temperature changes and precipitation fluctuations are the main drivers, leading to five primary hazards: drought, frequent tropical storms, and floods. These primary hazards can trigger secondary hazards such as wildfires/forest fires and landslides/erosion.

Step 2: Explain the causes of these hazards to understand their interrelationships. Rising temperatures increase evaporation rates, reducing soil moisture and water availability, which can lead to drought. Drought conditions dry out vegetation, making it highly flammable and increasing the likelihood of wildfires or forest fires. Even a small spark can ignite the dry vegetation, leading to rapid and widespread fire spreading. Thus, drought acts as a catalyst for secondary hazards like wildfires or forest fires driven by increased temperatures. Rising sea surface temperatures and fluctuating precipitation patterns increase atmospheric moisture and instability, fueling the formation and intensification of tropical storms, leading to more frequent tropical storm hazards. Fluctuating precipitation can cause heavy rainfall, saturating the ground and leading to increased runoff and potential flooding. Floods can generate landslides and erosion, especially when the ground is saturated and compacted due to increased temperatures, reducing its ability to absorb water.

Step 3: Identify exposure pathways from hazards in the context of community vulnerability. The diagram maps the relationships between all primary and secondary hazards and their exposure to various community elements, including animals, plants, rubber plantations, agriculture, crops, infrastructure, and upland rice cultivation. Color-coding is utilized to indicate the specific hazards impacting the community and ecosystem.

Step 4: Identify climate change-related impacts on the community. Primary impacts include loss of property, death, disease, water resource depletion, crop damage, and reduced rice quality. Secondary impacts include poor health, reduced income, and migration. These impacts are addressed, and adaptation strategies are suggested in this study.

To validate the predicted impact chain, household surveys and interviews were conducted, and data were collected on the actual impact of climate change in the study area (Figure 4).

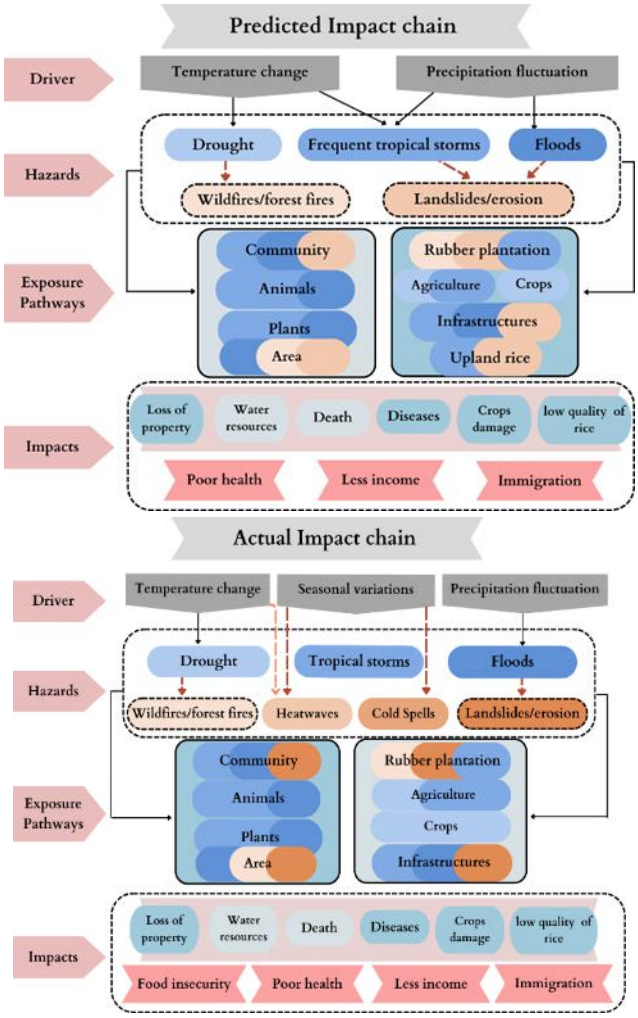

Figure 4: Predicted impact chain (left), and actual impact chain (right)
The colors in the diagram illustrate the interrelationships between different steps. This color-coding helps to visually trace the connection and its relationship across the different steps.

The diagrams "Predicted Impact Chain" and "Actual Impact Chain" illustrate the sequence of climate change impacts, from drivers to final outcomes. Both diagrams aim to map out the relationships between temperature changes, precipitation fluctuations, and their subsequent effects on communities and ecosystems. They identify temperature change and precipitation fluctuations as primary drivers of climate change impacts and share common primary hazards, including drought, frequent tropical storms, and floods. The exposure pathways highlighted in both diagrams are consistent, focusing on community, agriculture, and infrastructure. Additionally, both diagrams recognize primary impacts such as water scarcity and food insecurity, along with secondary impacts like poor health and increased migration.

The actual impact chain incorporates seasonal variations as an additional driver, reflecting findings from empirical studies and community experiences. In terms of hazards, the actual impact chain expands to include heatwaves and cold spells, which were not initially predicted. The exposure pathways have also been updated; specifically, upland rice cultivation has been replaced by more plantations due to rising temperatures and land use changes. Furthermore,

the actual impact chain reveals an increased impact on food insecurity and highlights additional secondary impacts such as increased migration among youth.

The comparison between the predicted and actual impact chains demonstrates that while the core elements remain consistent, empirical data and community feedback have refined the understanding of climate change impacts. The inclusion of seasonal variations and additional hazards like heatwaves and cold spells underscores the dynamic nature of climate change. The changes in exposure pathways and the heightened impact on food insecurity and migration emphasize the need for adaptive strategies to address evolving climate challenges. This analysis highlights the importance of continuous monitoring and adaptation to effectively mitigate the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities.

The survey revealed that all five studied natural disasters—floods, droughts, storms, wildfires/forest fires, and landslides/erosions—are experienced by the communities. As depicted in Figure 4, 94% of the survey respondents identified wildfires/forest fires as the most frequently experienced hazard, followed by landslides/erosion (84%), floods (81%), and storms (80%). Droughts were the least common, with only 15% of respondents reporting exposure. These results highlight that communities are generally prone to natural disasters.

The frequency data shows that wildfires/forest fires had the highest frequency of occurrence at 72%, followed by landslides/erosion at 44%, floods and storms both at 42%, and droughts at 30%. Although droughts are less common in the studied communities, they are more prevalent in nearby villages situated in more uphill or mountainous areas.

Despite the frequent exposure to these hazards, the impacts are generally mild and not very severe. This is partly because the majority of the community members (91%) are casual laborers. Additionally, the prolonged political crisis and the military coup have forced many young people and male residents to work abroad, sending remittances to support their families. Consequently, 70% of the survey respondents are female, indicating that families largely rely on remittances. This reliance on external income sources exacerbates the challenges posed by climate change. Furthermore, due to security concerns, community members can no longer freely access forest resources, which have also declined due to climate change-related stress.

In this study, I examine the impacts of climate change-related disasters on local communities through a comprehensive household survey and ethnographic fieldwork in March 2024. The survey revealed that all five studied natural disasters—floods, droughts, storms, wildfires/forest fires, and landslides/erosions—are experienced by the communities. As depicted in Figure 4, 94% of the survey respondents identified wildfires/forest fires as the most frequently experienced hazard, followed by landslides/erosion (84%), floods (81%), and storms (80%). Droughts were the least common, with only 15% of respondents reporting exposure. These results highlight that the communities are generally prone to natural disasters (Figure 5).

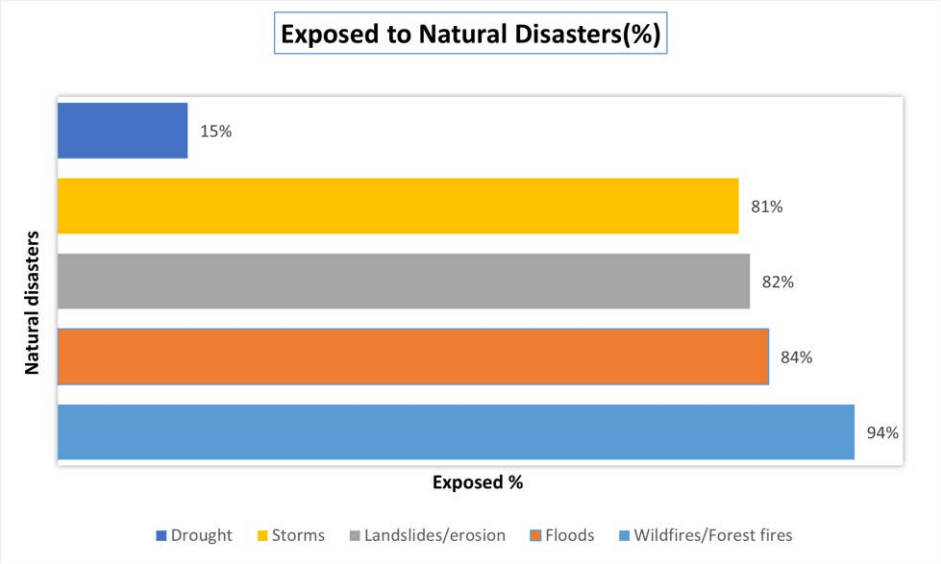

Figure 5: Distribution of communities exposed to five selected studied natural disasters

The study reveals a significant gap in external assistance for communities affected by natural disasters. A striking 92% of respondents who experienced wildfires reported receiving no support or assistance. This lack of support was also evident for other disasters: 79% of respondents received no assistance following floods and landslides/erosion, 76% for storms, and 13% for droughts. Although some NGOs and relatives working in Thailand provided limited support, a substantial portion of respondents reported receiving no assistance for any of the disasters they faced.

The survey included questions about support from NGOs, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), state government, religious organizations, as well as relatives and family in Thailand. Among those affected by floods and storms, only 1% reported receiving support from these sources. This gap in external assistance can be attributed to the ongoing conflict and the lack of governing bodies in the area, especially following the military coup. The absence of external support further exacerbates the vulnerability of these communities to climate-related disasters.

This analysis underscores the critical need for improved disaster response mechanisms and support systems to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters on vulnerable communities.

4. Conclusion

The findings presented in this paper underscore the significant vulnerabilities of local communities affected by chronic crisis and ongoing conflict in the face of climate change. Substantial changes in temperatures and precipitation have led to natural hazards such as heatwaves, floods, droughts, storms, landslides/erosion, and forest fires. These hazards severely impact humans and the environment, causing damage and disrupting agricultural activities. Due to the specific context of conflict, where communities receive no aid or support from government bodies, their vulnerabilities to climate-related hazards are magnified. For most people, this means that the only option is to either migrate or rely on remittances from family members who have migrated. This situation calls for more robust disaster management

and support systems to mitigate the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities affected by conflict and displacement.

The empirical insights in this paper can inform strategies for enhancing the adaptive capacity of marginalized communities facing interconnected challenges. This necessitates innovative solutions adapted to the current context of ongoing conflict and displacement, rather than standard climate change adaptation programs. Considering the unique context of the rural mountainous community living in the Thai-Myanmar border area, adaptation strategies should prioritize the community's specific needs and circumstances. Given the community's reliance on the forest for livelihoods and their history of displacement and conflict, recommendation for adaptation strategies could include;

- Agroforestry practices that promote sustainable forest management and enhance ecosystem resilience.
- Community-based early warning systems for extreme weather events, utilizing local knowledge and traditional practices.
- Support for climate-resilient agriculture, including crop diversification and conservation agriculture.
- Community-led Forest restoration and reforestation efforts, incorporating native species and traditional forest management practices.
- Directly supporting civil society groups with localized climate funding is crucial for reaching vulnerable populations in conflict-affected areas, including those controlled by non-state armed groups. This approach ensures aid reaches those most in need and empowers local communities to build resilience (Chambers, 2024).

Additionally, the implementation of community-based monitoring systems for disasters can significantly enhance preparedness and response. These systems should leverage local knowledge and traditional practices to ensure timely and effective action during extreme weather events. By integrating these strategies, the adaptive capacity of the community can be strengthened, helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change and improve resilience in the face of ongoing conflict and displacement.

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