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Editor's Note

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Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 25, Number 1, June 2021, pp. iii-v
(Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jbs.2021.0000>

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Editor's Note

A warm welcome to the first issue of the *Journal of Burma Studies* for the year 2021. With a peep beyond the horizons of the year 2020, this issue offers journeys of the imagination in terms of literature, representation, ethnicity, and history.

For the first paper in this issue, Saw Alwyn considers the relationship between one influential book in Sgaw Karen and its ongoing influence as part of Karen nation-building and national-imagining among generations of Karen people. In his article, "The Historiography of Saw Aung Hla and Its Influence on the Modern Karen History Curriculum," Saw Alwyn examines Saw Aung Hla's book, *Karen History*. The book was originally published in 1939 and has been actively taught in Karen schools across contentious historical contexts. Though it was suppressed during the Ne Win regimes, its contents were tenaciously held onto by Karen teachers in borderland refugee camps and among diasporic populations. The history, as presented in Saw Aung Hla's book, situates the Karen nation as inclusive of religion, and also places Karen people in the Irrawaddy Delta regions before other groups such as the Mon and Bamar arrived. The book has been instrumental for the Karen nation in establishing a sense of history and a nation for decades, and this article offers useful translation to consider how this historiography would be able to operate in such a context.

From Karen histories, the next article takes us to another kind of instrumental form of examining Burmese history and culture. In Andrew Selth's article, "Geoffrey Gorer and the Study of Burma's 'Personality,'" we learn of a British social anthropologist's commission to describe the "Burmese personality." The article weaves together the biography of Gorer with the strategic military directive to compile and brief the US Office of War Information with psychological profiles, as they were described, of the peoples of the countries of interest. Gorer's report on Burma offers insight into both Freudian archetypes of personality formation and extant work and

observation about Burmese culture. Gorer's influence on later studies is instructive to consider, especially since the "culture and personality" school of anthropology has largely moved on but is sometimes manifest in new forms in strategic studies today, or the popular guides for working in cross-cultural settings.

Where culture and personality social anthropology produces certain kinds of archetypes, literature can communicate similar ideas as well, though with the tantalizing veil of fiction and fancy. In his article, "Burmese Women in the Colonial Imaginary: Gendered Representations in Kipling's 'Mandalay' and Croker's *The Road to Mandalay*," Sean P. Smith offers a comparison of the representations of Burmese women in colonial-era literature, namely, Kipling's famous poem, "Mandalay" and the lesser-known Anglo-Indian romance novel of a similar name, *The Road to Mandalay*. Each, in its own way, reflects a gendered expectation for the Burmese women, not only in their economic activities, but also in their relationships and roles within their colonial society in relations with a colonizing Other with its own gendered expectations and proprieties.

Moving Southeast from Mandalay, and fast-forwarding several decades, we are taken to the edge of the Shan plateau in Martin Michelin's article, "Tourism, Ethnicity, and Territory Appropriation in Post-Dictatorial Myanmar: The Case of the Inle Lake Region." As a form of "strategic essentialism," during the Ne Win years, the Intha people emphasized their connection to Burmeseness, putting emphasis on a historical narrative and linguistic similarities that place them closer to the cultural hegemony of the Burmese state in the twentieth century. In this sense, they were able to edge out some of the historic Shan cultural ownership of the territory. Later, as part of the State Peace and Development Council years and ceasefire negotiations, the Pa-O were able to assert their cultural and territorial power over the area. However, through the power of tourism, the Intha re-assert their uniqueness through performances on the lake and through tourist iconography.

Returning from anthropology to literature, in this issue, Kenneth Wong excites our imagination with the historical possibility that Oscar Wilde was a Burma enthusiast. In his "Scholarly Curiosity" essay, Wong explores the play attributed to Wilde, *For Love of the King* for its cultural references and unique observations of Burma, a place that Wilde had never visited, but seems to be able to demonstrate some fascinating insider knowledge about the place and the culture. Through triangulating some of "Wilde's" idiosyncratic romanizations, Wong discovers some other appearances of these spellings in works by another. Mystery solved? This savvy imposter clearly did not place great importance on being earnest about the provenance of the work.

Thank you for your continued support for the *Journal of Burma Studies*.

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