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Editor's Note

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Welcome to the second issue of *The Journal of Burma Studies* for 2021. This issue promises a tour de force of ethnic histories, spirit worship, histories of Burma studies, and finally large-vehicle transport.

In his article, "Ethnocentrism or National Reconciliation: Rethinking Ethnic Relations and the History of Karenni," Tadayuki Kubo takes us through the fractals of ethnic complexity in what is now the Kayah State, but also incorporating the history of the Karenni ethnonationalist movement, the competing scripts and literacies in the diverse areas, and the changing claims for cultural right and sovereignty. Despite the ethnic movement's claim of inclusivity, other groups within the Karenni movement, namely, the Kayan have felt that the political nation had been dominated by Kayah interests, and these were reflected in the politics of language education and assertion of Kayah as a lingua franca, a language facility not necessarily shared by all groups. Kubo raises the important problematic related to the attempt to establish a counterhegemonic ethno-national script: when it resists Burmanization, does that make it representative of certain relatively empowered groups at the cultural expense of others?

From the Kayah State, our next article takes us to village-based ethnography of *nats* in the Bago Region. In her article, "*Nats* in the Land of the *Hinth*," Keziah Wallis explores how local residents' belief in and propitiation of household-, compound-, and village-based *nats* offers an additional layer of understanding to the dominant pantheon of the thirty-seven *Min*, well known in both the Upper Dry Zone of Burma and by scholarship and popular literature about *nats* in the country.

Through Wallis' article, we learn that Bago villagers not only use the *nats* and harness their power through their sovereignty of place but also create their sense of personhood and ancestry, both in terms of rebirth and to connections with notions of ethnic histories as well.

From ethnic histories to histories of Burma studies, our next article, "Burma/Myanmar Studies in the USSR/Russia: Continuity and Change," by Ksenia Efremova offers a historiography of Russian "Birmanists" whose context for academic inquiry, as with those of area studies scholars from other countries in the twentieth century, was crucially framed by the political directives under which they worked. Soviet political imperatives funded research about Burma in the 1950s, and there was a revival of Russian support for such area studies work in the past decade.

Moving from the engine for area studies to forms of movement across different kinds of terrain, the next two articles explore the locomotive worlds of work and transport, as driven by elephants, then trains. For urban or touristic impressions of elephants in Southeast Asia, the elephant is an iconic work animal of the past. However, as Jacob Shell demonstrates in his article, "Elephant Riders of the Hukawng Valley, Kachin State: Evasive Mobility and Vadological Geography," trained elephants in Kachin State are particularly skilled at helping people and cargo traverse varied muddy, alluvial geographies, making them more effective than cars or boats.

From transport by wading through uneven terrain to riding the rails, Lindsay C. Stubb's article, "A Statistical Overview of the Railways in Burma," discusses the material history of these crucial infrastructures and, in particular, the kinds of investment that have been taking place in recent years, from the acquisition of rolling stock

from multiple international manufacturers to issues of repair to the implications of the development of new rail lines and the potential uneven benefits that these might have. Although railways and other large-scale infrastructure projects carry with them huge profit-making potential and issues for foreign investment and international relations, it is important to bear in mind—as Stubbs carefully notes—that many people’s everyday livelihoods crucially depend on some of these linkages.

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

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