

SOJOURN Symposium

***On Mapping Chinese Rangoon: Place and Nation among the Sino-Burmese* by Jayde Lin Roberts. University of Washington Press, 2016.**

Review essays by Yew-Foong Hui and Wen-Chin Chang, with a reply from Jayde Lin Roberts.

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Review Essay I: Yew-Foong Hui

“Burma lingers” — so begins *Mapping Chinese Rangoon* by Jayde Lin Roberts. One has to agree. Burma’s presence on the global stage, from its political ups and downs to the economic promise of its massive natural resources, cannot be ignored. At the same time, its challenges, from the transition to civilian rule to how it manages its ethnic minorities, remain intractable. Perhaps this has to do with its position as a frontier — at the crossroads of South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia — where it is elusively difficult to chart exactly what is happening. Indeed, even where Southeast Asia studies were concerned, Burma/Myanmar became the new frontier in the 2000s, as access to the country became easier for researchers and graduate students.

But *Mapping Chinese Rangoon* is a contribution not only to Southeast Asia studies; it also brings the frontier of Chinese overseas studies from the far reaches of Latin America and Africa back to Southeast Asia.¹ And Roberts’s book is not alone, for in the span of three years two other significant books on Chinese in Myanmar have

appeared. One covers the transnational linkages of the Yunnanese in Upper Burma (Chang 2014), and the other the history of Chinese in colonial Burma (Li 2017*b*). Together with these books, Roberts closes the gap in our knowledge by outlining contemporary developments among Sino-Burmese in the Lower Burma primate city of Rangoon/Yangon.

In what follows, in the spirit of a *SOJOURN* Symposium, my purpose is neither to summarize Roberts's book nor to heap accolades on her, since others have already beaten me to doing these things. Rather, I seek to engage and respond to Roberts's arguments within a slightly larger comparative frame, thinking through the condition of Sino-Burmese as part of the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia.

Indeed, the experiences of Sino-Burmese are comparable to those of Chinese in other parts of Southeast Asia. Like other Chinese communities in the region, they played crucial roles in the colonial economy — except that in colonial Burma they had to play second fiddle to Indian merchants, who had the advantage of numbers and the colony's proximity to the Indian subcontinent. Nevertheless, as foreigners who prospered in their middleman role during colonial times, ethnic Chinese are often embedded in an ambivalent position vis-à-vis indigenous populations in post-colonial states. Characterizations such as “a people in between” (Roberts 2016, pp. 6–9), “essential outsiders” (Chirot and Reid 1997), “sojourners/settlers” (Reid 1996), “strangers” (Hui 2011) and contemporary Chinese transnationals (Ong and Nonini 1997) all allude to the hybrid subjectivity of the Chinese diaspora. In the case of Sino-Burmese, they are not only “early settlers but *pauk-hpaw* (kinsfolk) to the Burmese” (Roberts 2016, p. 17), and they had to “become as Burmese as possible without losing themselves” (Roberts 2016, p. 4).

Hybridity can be useful, but in moments of national self-consciousness it can become a liability. In negotiating their identities, Chinese in post-Second World War Southeast Asia faced significant challenges. As former colonies gained independence and became new nations, the problem of nationality for non-indigenous populations

such as the Chinese became salient. For these Chinese communities, the issue was not simply whether they should pledge their loyalty to these new nations or to China, but also whether they were politically oriented towards the Republic of China or the new People's Republic of China. This bifurcation within Chinese communities was found not only among Sino-Burmese but was prevalent throughout Southeast Asia in the post-war decades (Skinner 1951). Indeed, it was the overt support for Maoist China among Chinese Rangoonites that triggered the anti-Chinese riots of 1967 (Roberts 2016, pp. 81–82). However, this aspect of Chinese subjectivity, in which the foreignness of Chinese populations diminished their standing in modern nation-states that valorized autochthony, is not unique to Burma. Oftentimes in Southeast Asia, Chinese were marginal to national narratives, treated as lesser citizens, and in the worst-case scenarios subjected to ethnic discrimination and violence (Aguilar 2001; Hau 2000; Purdey 2005).

Like their cousins in other parts of Southeast Asia, then, Sino-Burmese found security in the accumulation of wealth. As Roberts astutely observes, “[d]efined as foreigners in the nation-state of Burma/Myanmar, they view financial success as a way to protect themselves and exercise some control over their lives” (Roberts 2016, p. 92). Here, Roberts has effectively distilled the position of Sino-Burmese, which very much reflects dynamics common to Chinese minorities in other parts of Southeast Asia. The next step in our comparative analysis is to ask where Sino-Burmese differ.

With regard to this question, Roberts foregrounds the perspective of Sino-Burmese: they are marginal not only to the Burmese nation but also situated on the periphery of the Chinese diaspora. Burma was seen as the last outpost for Chinese sojourners, who as third-class foreigners in colonial Rangoon had limited access to business opportunities, such that “none became powerful enough to be known throughout the overseas Chinese network” (Roberts 2016, p. 95). Subsequently, in post-socialist Myanmar, when the country opened up to global trade, Sino-Burmese did not have the connections to the military that would allow them access to the most lucrative industries.

Some people of Chinese descent had such access, but they were Yunnanese new to Yangon or Burmanized Chinese who no longer practised Chinese customs, and Sino-Burmese in Yangon² see these groups as being different from themselves. Therefore, Sino-Burmese lament their lack of opportunities to grow impressive conglomerates that would put them on the global map of Chinese businesses, but they nevertheless hope to end their isolation and to reconnect with large enterprises within the Chinese diaspora (Roberts 2016, p. 108).

This depiction, on the part of Sino-Burmese, of their peripheral position within the Chinese diaspora seems contrived; it demands further investigation. The narrative is selective and has lapses. Burma/Myanmar is not without its Chinese business legends. Consider Aw Boon Haw and, more recently, the property magnate Serge Pun. Nor have Chinese global conglomerates left the country totally isolated. Kerry Logistics and Shangri-La Hotels, each part of the Kuok/Kerry Group founded by Malaysia-born billionaire Robert Kuok, are active in the country. Furthermore, the articulation of this peripheral position from the perspective of Sino-Burmese, along with the narrow definition of this group to the exclusion of the Yunnanese and Burmanized Chinese, neglects the larger social ecology of Burma/Myanmar that shapes the position that ethnic Chinese can occupy in the country. That the Sino-Burmese studied by Roberts subscribed to such exclusions in the context of relating to an entity — the Chinese diaspora — that tends to be inclusive and porous makes it important for us to understand the dynamics among the different Chinese communities in Yangon.³ Finally, this depiction or articulation of the peripheral position of Sino-Burmese privileges wealth. While Chinese business networks are important and have attracted much media and scholarly attention, the factors that mediate the flows and connections within the Chinese diaspora go beyond capital.

The last point is demonstrated by Roberts's ethnographic account of the revitalization of the lion dance in Yangon. Spurred by the impressive acrobatic feats that they had seen performed by Malaysian and Singaporean lion dancers during competitions, members of the

Sino-Burmese community formed new lion dance troupes, and lion dance became a regular feature of the streets during the Chinese New Year season. Here, the revitalization of this cultural sport bespeaks a cultural flow rather than the flow of capital.⁴ Moreover, as Roberts importantly observes, the flow here originated from other nodes in the diaspora, such that “China is not the center that determines Chineseness for the diaspora in the periphery” (Roberts 2016, p. 133). Thus, although China served as the original point of dispersal for the Chinese diaspora, the diaspora has become decentred, and cultural flows are multi-nodal.

Because Myanmar was long closed to the rest of the world, Sino-Burmese feel that they have been isolated and need to catch up with members of the Chinese diaspora elsewhere. However, what is seen as a periphery is also a dynamic frontier region. The complex relationships among different Chinese communities in this frontier region and between those communities and the rest of the Chinese diaspora will continue to be important for the study of Chinese in Myanmar, especially in view of the most recent rise of China and the influx of new Chinese migrants into the country. Roberts’s excellent study opens up the ethnographic terrain, gives us a map and invites us to explore this evolving frontier. For this reason, Burma still lingers.

Review Essay II: Wen-Chin Chang

The study of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia has been a prominent field, treating the long history of Chinese immigration into the region and its significant economic, cultural and political impacts on Southeast Asian societies. While numerous publications have extended our understanding and knowledge of diverse groups of ethnic Chinese living in different parts of Southeast Asia, certain groups in certain countries have been better researched than others. Owing to decades of military rule in Burma and then Myanmar and to the country’s resultant isolation from the outside world, Sino-

Burmese unfortunately belong to the neglected category. Jayde Lin Roberts's 2016 book *Mapping Chinese Rangoon: Place and Nation among the Sino-Burmese* is a welcome ethnography that provides an easy read and a lively portrayal of the Hokkiens in Rangoon/Yangon from the British colonial period to the present day. With a focus on these people's spatial emplacement, the book asks how the city's Hokkiens have understood themselves and made a place for themselves in response to an array of challenges under different regimes — British colonizers, Japanese occupiers, the government of newly independent Burma, the military juntas of the post-1962 decades, and democratically elected governments since 2011.

Confronting their complex history, Roberts consciously adopts a comparative lens to examine the lifeworld of Hokkien Rangoonites in relation to other Sino-Burmese, Burmese of South Asian origin, indigenous Burmese and Chinese in neighboring countries. The result is a concrete and revealing portrayal of the Hokkien community of Yangon. The built environment and Chineseness are two key concepts underpinning the book. Despite continuously facing trying economic, political and social circumstances, Sino-Burmese have, Roberts argues, dynamically and flexibly emplaced themselves in the city by means of native place and clan associations, Chinese temples and schools, personal relationships and Chinese festivities. While sustaining their cultural heritage, they have absorbed new elements from the host society and neighbouring countries, thereby enriching their Chineseness with a hybrid dimension and coming to seem “both Chinese and Burmese” (Roberts 2016, p. 20). This liminal position, though reflecting the marginal status of Sino-Burmese as resident aliens, also grants them “more room to maneuver, to tactically create opportunities in the interstices” (Roberts 2016, p. 143).

The five main chapters of the book elaborate on the different aspects of the engagement with place through which Yangon Hokkiens anchor their emplacement and shape their Chineseness. Following the book's introduction, chapter 1 examines the life of Sino-Burmese during British colonial times. On the basis of scientific principles, the colonizers designed a rational hierarchical grid of streets in Rangoon

in order to control and reduce the spread of bodily and social diseases, and to facilitate government scrutiny of the population. Against this backdrop, Sino-Burmese carved out local niches coinciding with their native-place identities, whether Hokkien or Cantonese. While indigenous Burmese might find the layout of the city alienating, Sino-Burmese founded a variety of Chinese institutions — clan and native-place associations, secret societies, and temples — to assist in ethnic networking and business development and to care for the welfare of their countrymen.

Chapter 2 introduces the Hokkien Kuanyin temple, which is the centre of belonging “where the Hokkiens gather to worship, interact, and remember their ancestral home” (Roberts 2016, p. 70). Tracing the history of the foundation of the temple, its subsequent development, and Hokkiens’ daily performance of rituals there, the author argues that native place loyalty outweighs pan-Chinese nationalism among Hokkiens, and that the homeland has always been a significant source of motivation for their everyday actions and group solidarity.

Chapter 3 centres on the history of Chinese education in Rangoon/Yangon, a story that has witnessed a series of struggles against both internal and external factors. The former factors included Sino-Burmese native-place affiliations and political identification with either the Chinese Communists or the Chinese Nationalists. These factors led to competition and rivalry among Sino-Burmese. The latter factors originated in the implementation on the part of the Ne Win government (1962–88) of an array of discriminatory policies and laws applying to the “foreign” population; Rangoon also witnessed anti-Chinese riots in 1967. Under Ne Win, Chinese-medium education was banned, large-scale Sino-Burmese emigration occurred, and Sino-Burmese who remained in the country felt compelled to hide their ethnicity in the public sphere.

Chapter 4 highlights Sino-Burmese economic life and includes a valuable comparative history of Chinese and Indian roles since the colonial period. This comparison serves to illustrate the differences between these two foreign communities, their economic ethos and

endeavours in relation to their subject positions under successive political regimes. The chapter also showcases the City Mart enterprise operated by a Hokkien family and underlines the importance of personal networking among Sino-Burmese.

Chapter 5 presents the celebration of Chinese New Year, the most important Chinese festival in Yangon's Chinatown. Looking into the spatial arrangement of the Chinatown market and into the lion and dragon dance troupes involved in the celebration, the author not only makes clear the vigorous attachment of Sino-Burmese to their cultural heritage but also sheds light on the community's pragmatism in integrating new elements from external sources, local and transnational, that contribute to the configuration of its Chineseness.

Mapping Chinese Rangoon is a brief but beautifully written book, suitable for undergraduates as well as members of the general public interested in knowing about Chinese overseas and Burmese society. As the first ethnography on the Hokkiens of Yangon, it illuminates a range of crucial facets of these people's lives. Each chapter lays a strong foundation for further thematic research. I would like here to engage in dialogue with the author on two important issues, each implicit in the book and neither fully explored.

The first issue relates to the notion of "Chineseness". Numerous publications have tackled this topic, especially since the second half of the 1980s, such as Chun (1996), Duara (1993), Ong (1999), Reid (1996), and Wang (2001). Most of them have argued against essentializing interpretations of Chinese culture and history and have refuted presumptions of cultural homogeneity and its continuity throughout history. In other words, it has been generally agreed that "Chineseness" has diverse faces and that this diversity has related to socio-political conditions during different periods of time in different places. To comprehend its formation and transformation, we have to pay attention not only to China but also to all sorts of connections beyond China.

Research on ethnic Chinese abroad provides a meaningful touchstone that can enrich our understanding of this broad concept.

One of the merits of *Mapping Chinese Rangoon* is Roberts's perceptive discussion of the Hokkiens' pragmatism in adjusting their self-representation in the face of contextual adversities, paralleling similar stories among ethnic Chinese communities in other Southeast Asian countries. While embracing the dimension of hybridity in their Chineseness, the book as a whole nevertheless emphasizes the continuity of these people's Chinese cultural heritage, as seen in their observance of daily rituals, their involvement in Chinese education, their personal relationships, and their celebration of Chinese festivals. However, it is known that many descendants of ethnic Chinese have merged into or mingled with local populations through intermarriage and assimilation. Chineseness no longer matters to these people, even though they may remember that they have Chinese ancestors.⁵ While it is easier to locate and research people who are visibly Sino-Burmese, and to highlight their agency in sustaining their ethnicity, how do we interpret the lifeworld of those with Chinese descent who are invisible? And how do we understand the disappearance of their Chineseness? Can we rethink the intriguing notion of "Chineseness" beyond cultural heritage?

The second issue concerns gendered geography. While space is a central concept of the book, the issue of gender and space as they relate to each other is not investigated. In my own research on Yunnanese Chinese migrants in Thailand and Myanmar (Chang 2005 and 2014), I have observed that migration has resulted in a blurring of the formerly strict divide between the public and domestic spheres among members of this migrant group. In practical terms, Yunnanese women migrants enjoy a greater degree of spatial mobility than their forebears in Yunnan. They are therefore able to conduct different types of economic activities, including long-distance trade. Nevertheless, this change has not really affected the group's asymmetrically gendered structure. While contributing economically, women continue to shoulder domestic responsibilities, with familial tensions and feelings of ambivalence concerning their identity.

In Roberts's research, the endeavours of Yangon Hokkiens to sustain Hokkien tradition are illustrative. Hokkien women must play

an important role in the observance of rituals. How does gender difference relate to spatial engagement in the maintenance of a traditional way of life or, more specifically, to the cultural organization of Yangon Chinatown's landscape? And what can we observe in other life domains that may relate to gendered geographies?

No one book is comprehensive, especially as studies of ethnic Chinese in Burma/Myanmar are still at an initial stage. By raising these two issues, I hope to give the author of *Mapping Chinese Rangoon* an opportunity to provide us with reflective guidance for future research.

Author's Response: Jayde Lin Roberts

As so succinctly phrased by Yew-Foong Hui, Myanmar is situated in a frontier region between South, Southeast and East Asia, and investigations into the lives and histories of the various Chinese populations in the country remain at the frontier. So much remains obscured or in flux that I wanted to write *Mapping Chinese Rangoon* as an opening into some important themes. The process and product were to delineate a set of intersecting social, physical and temporal places, to serve not as the definitive map of downtown Yangon but rather as a spatial ethnography that provided a clear narrative and could spark further inquiry. Therefore, the foundation of my research was the contemporary life of Tayout or Sino-Burmese.⁶ Their practices and self-representations between 2006 and 2009 directed me towards historical and other sources in an effort better to understand their ethos, but the focus of my research was their everyday way of living.

Drawing from Edward Casey (1997), Hannah Arendt (1998), Jeff Malpas (1999) and Robert Mugerauer (1994), I used the theory of place to discuss located fields of meaning that are grounded but not reified. By focusing on those who self-identify as Tayout and their creation of a sense of belonging, I did not seek evidence of essentialized Chineseness. Instead, I sought sets of dynamic and

yet coherent practices discernible through time, or in more poetic language, a nebula wherein there is sufficient gravitational pull to create localized areas of density but the entire phenomenon is continually in flux. These practices are charged sites that bring people together and exhibit a sense of liveliness and meaning. In addition, I see these practices, rooted as they are in specific places, as forms of agency. Self-identified Tayout consciously and unconsciously select different practices of Chineseness from Singapore, Malaysia (Roberts 2016, pp. 39–49, 111–34), Taiwan and China to shape their lifeworlds. Although they profess to be Tayout, their interactions with China have led to numerous disappointments. They shape their way of living, not as some un-altering tradition (Roberts 2016, p. 111) but as means of creating community.

The choice of Sino-Burmese to represent themselves as Tayout is significant because being Chinese in Myanmar means being foreign and therefore being excluded from the rights and protections afforded to Myanmar citizens. As discussed in my introductory chapter, national belonging in Myanmar is strictly limited to those defined as indigenous. Contestation over indigeneity has resulted in prolonged violence and warfare. Although some Tayout have claimed *taingyintha* (ethnic nationality) status or asserted that Chinese “naturally became one of the ethnic nationalities in Burma” (Roberts 2016, p. 16), the Myanmar government denies this claim. As the threat of insecurity is still present, their self-representation and decision to remain in Myanmar are noteworthy.

Hui rightly points out that this state of precarity is not unique to Tayout. Many times throughout history, Chinese in Southeast Asia have been treated as lesser citizens and subjected to ethnic discrimination or violence. Further research and comparisons with other Mainland Southeast Asian countries is necessary, but something is likely to be unique to the story in Myanmar. My book focused on Tayout in Yangon because Tayout in Upper Burma are notably different. They are more immediately associated with Yunnanese, whom Burmese in turn see as more foreign than Yangon Tayout. Further, the perceived category of Yunnanese includes officially

recognized *taingyintha* such as Akha and Kokang, groups whose members are sometimes Chinese and sometimes not. And so-called Yunnanese have been in Burma/Myanmar for many centuries, having arrived through travel and trade on the Tea Horse Road and through other forms of migration. The divide between Tayout in Upper and Lower Burma might therefore be greater than the divides among various groups of Chinese in Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam or Cambodia. I would welcome comparative research with scholars who have focused on the Peranakan, Haw, Totok or other groups of hybrid or so-called Chinese.

Hui is also right to question my depiction of Tayout in Yangon as marginalized in the Chinese overseas network. Further research will tell, but my fieldwork did not reveal contemporary connections originating in Yangon that linked businesses there to, or saw them becoming, Southeast Asian conglomerates. Aw Boon Haw is a faint memory in the city. None of my informants could locate an Aw family member or any traces of his life or work in the built environment. Serge Pun, on the other hand, is known by all. His businesses, such as the Pun Hlaing Golf Estate (Roberts 2016, p. 20), are famous among members of all ethnic groups. Nonetheless, non-Tayout do not know Pun as Chinese, and most Yangon Tayout see him as someone beyond their reach. Pun does business at the national and international levels, whereas my informants focused on the local and, at best, national levels. Of course, the business landscape in Myanmar has changed dramatically since the time of my fieldwork.

Before 2011, Chinese global conglomerates had to seek ties with Myanmar's military — known as an ethnic Burman institution — in order to do business in the country, because all large investments were routed through the military-controlled Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC). Therefore, involvement in the Shangri-La Hotel and other high-profile projects would have been limited to a select pool of investors. To date, there is simply not enough research to comment on the influence of Chinese businesses in Myanmar. Future scholarship might show that Myanmar, like Indonesia or the

Philippines, has an inner circle of ethnic Chinese businesspeople who have profited by supporting the authoritarian regime. Whether this circle includes long-term Sino-Burmese or is made up of relative newcomers has not been investigated. As yet, the secrecy of the MIC and the pervasive lack of transparency in Myanmar has left everyone guessing.

The larger social ecology of Myanmar and the positions of the various groups of Chinese within the country are indeed important. Although my first research proposal stated that I would compare the ethos of the Chinese in Mandalay and Yangon, I soon learned that undertaking two in-depth spatial ethnographies in cities six hundred kilometres apart from each other was not feasible. A pair of other circumstances made larger-scale analysis impractical.

One circumstance was that *taingyintha* or *lumyo* (race) politics dominates the social ecology of Myanmar. The ambiguous position of Tayout in Upper Burma, particularly near the Sino-Myanmar border, where there are numerous and contradictory claims to *taingyintha* status, demands a patient, considered and long-term study. In addition, the paucity of scholarship on Tayout meant that there were very few verified sources for their history. Li Yi was also undertaking her research between 2006 and 2009 and had yet to publish *Chinese in Colonial Burma* (Li 2017b) by the time that I submitted my manuscript in 2014. These limitations compelled me to write a more closely bounded ethnography.

Indeed, so much more could be written about Tayout. Now that Myanmar is undergoing transition and its universities are rebuilding a research culture, it should soon be possible to collaborate with Myanmar researchers to delve deeper into the lives of Sino-Burmese. Wen-Ching Chang is right, for example, about the role of women in the marketplace. I could not, however, gain institutional review board permission from the University of Washington to conduct research in homes or other private spaces during my fieldwork. Undertaking ethnographic research during military rule also made it difficult to build enough trust with street vendors to gain a profound understanding of their lives. These conditions limited my ability to

discuss gendered geography. Fortunately, there are a few promising researchers in Yangon now completing degrees in feminist studies, and they should be able to help advance the field.

There is also a need to delve more deeply into Chinese-medium education and the role of literature among Tayout (Roberts 2013). Up until the early 1960s, several Chinese-language newspapers were influential in shaping the Tayout ethos in Rangoon. Most of these papers are available at Xiamen University, where they await the attention of an historian. Under military rule after 1988, there were also two Chinese-language newspapers published in Myanmar, some copies of which are available at the Myanmar Overseas Chinese Library in Yangon.

As national reform continues in Myanmar, the status of Tayout might become more formalized and more easily analysed with reference to questions of citizenship or ethnicity. However, I argue that Yangon's Tayout manoeuvred in realms below and between nation-state politics in pre-2011 Myanmar; they were largely excluded from the opportunities available through the practice of flexible citizenship (Ong 1999). They were grounded not only in the sense of practices rooted to a specific place, but they were also grounded by their inability to escape. Since the introduction of the One Belt One Road undertaking of the People's Republic of China, there has been much speculation about the possibility that Myanmar Chinese might align themselves with China or benefit from this well-financed initiative. But future analysis needs to take into consideration the different groups of Chinese in Myanmar, and particularly the divide between Upper and Lower Burma Tayout, along with the tensions and connections between the so-called Yunnanese and other Tayout groups. These groups hold different allegiances and have differing degrees of access to the power players who continue to serve as gatekeepers for large-scale foreign investment in the country. Myanmar and its Tayout remain at the frontier, and interpretation of their contemporary actions and their histories will require multiple observers looking in multiple directions. China has and continues to exert a tremendous influence on Myanmar, but different groups

of Chinese in the country will continue to exercise as much self-determination as they can.

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NOTES

1. In the last one or two decades, Africa and Latin America have become the new frontiers of Chinese overseas studies. See, for example, Lai and Tan (2010), Thunø (2007) and González (2017).
2. I use “Yangon” here in accordance with the preference of the editors of *SOJOURN*. However, I see in the use of “Rangoon” in *Mapping Chinese Rangoon* a historical mind-map that articulates a sense of continuity between the colonial and the post-colonial for Sino-Burmese.
3. See Li (2015) for a brief study of such dynamics in Yangon.
4. Li (2017a) also shows that, beyond the accumulation of wealth, the Chinese in Rangoon were concerned with their literary heritage.
5. Fan Hongwei points out that Chinese who arrived in Burma by sea prior to the twentieth century mostly married local women and became submerged in Burmese society (Fan 2016, p. 46). The oppressive rule of the Socialist period also contributed to the erasure of ethnicity among many ethnic Chinese in Rangoon; see Ma Thida (2014). I also have some Burmese

friends who mentioned having Chinese blood, but in their daily practices and narratives, traces of “Chineseness” simply do not exist.

6. For an explanation of the term “Tayout” (*tayok*), see Roberts (2016, pp. 6ff.).

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