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# MYANMAR

## Beyond Politics to Societal Imperatives

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# MYANMAR

## Beyond Politics to Societal Imperatives

Edited by

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# Preface

Professor David Steinberg, one of the contributors to this volume, had organized an international conference at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, in Washington, D. C. in November 2002. The theme of the conference was “Burma: Reconciliation in Myanmar and the Crises of Change”.<sup>1</sup> Among the participants were three of the contributors to this volume in addition to Professor Steinberg.<sup>2</sup> This was one of innumerable such conferences which have been held in Asia, Europe, and North America since the late 1980s to discuss the current political, economic, and societal issues of Myanmar. Unlike most of these conferences which go over the same ground again and again, this one challenged participants to think of new initiatives and departures which might be constructive in attempting to open up and understand the seemingly intractable nature of Myanmar’s problems and issues. Coming fourteen years after the political upheaval, which led to the coming to power of the current military government, and twelve years after the annulled election, which many once saw as a first giant step towards that end, that challenge was most appropriate.

One of the ideas which emerged from the discussions was that an academic conference should be held in Myanmar in order to try to understand how people within the country felt about the issues upon which so many thousands of words have been expended abroad. While since 1995 the Universities Historical Research Centre had been holding international conferences on social science and humanities issues at Yangon University, and a number of international scientific, commercial, and technical seminars had been held within Myanmar since the government had reopened the society to greater international exposure and joined many international organizations, many people assumed that the authorities would never permit independent discussions between foreign scholars and Myanmar citizens on the country’s sensitive issues.<sup>3</sup>

Thanks to the encouragement of Mr K. Kesavapany, Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), an opportunity to test that proposition was created in February 2003, when a proposal to hold

an eight-day workshop divided between Singapore and Yangon was submitted to the government of Myanmar. The title of the workshop was “Myanmar Issues and Myanmar Views: Searching for a Unified Perspective”. Word came back in April that such a workshop would be permissible with no prior conditions. Then the task of finding funds to bring together ten scholars, including two Myanmar nationals, and organize our meetings in Yangon. Thankfully, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) of Japan saw the purpose of our activities and provided financial support for the Yangon workshop while the Singapore end was supported by ISEAS funds. The editors went to Myanmar in December 2003, and again in January 2004, to meet with prospective participants. We are very grateful to the Rev. Dr Saboi Jum, Alan Saw Oo, U Chan Lan, U Min Kyaw, U Kyaw Win, Karin Eberhardt, and others for their assistance in making contact with many of the organizations and individuals with which we wished to meet. Dr David Koh’s valuable contribution in interpreting a crucial meeting with some ethnic nationals is much appreciated and the editorial assistance of Ms Anette Bastnes (ISEAS intern) is noted with thanks.

In February 2004, the ten scholars who have come together in this volume met together for one day of discussions at ISEAS where a series of papers were presented. Following the Singapore meeting, we all flew to Yangon where meetings were held with more than a hundred individuals from twenty-one different groups of people representing twenty-five different organizations over five days. Included among them were groups representing women, business, research and education, economic and human development non-governmental organizations, religions, charitable activities, ethnic minority/ceasefire/peace groups, political parties, and two spokespersons from the government. On the third day of our meetings in Yangon we hosted a dinner for all those invited to meet with us at which more than a hundred persons attended. We are most grateful to the staff of the Traders Hotel, Yangon, for their assistance in hosting the seminar and dinner as well as the Myanmar-Britain Business Association. Special thanks are also due to Professor Tun Aung Chein who admirably served as our interpreter and facilitator. At the conclusion of our five days of meetings, the foreign participants flew back to Singapore for a final wrap-up discussion before returning home to either revise their papers or write new papers which are now gathered together to form this book. The editors would like to thank the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for their financial support towards the publication of this book.



In this book, Myanmar is used for the name of the country (previously Burma) as well as that which describes its citizens (previously Burmese), while Bamar (previously Burman) is used for the most populous ethnic group in the country in accordance with the official nomenclature instituted in 1989, except when referring to proper names and direct quotations. Similar usage also applies to the names for other ethnic nationalities (for example, Kayin instead of Karen; Rakhine instead of Arakanese) and for place names (Yangon for Rangoon).

## Notes

1. A report on the conference has been published as “Burma: Reconciliation in Myanmar and the Crises of Change” (Washington, D. C., 2003), and is also available via the Johns Hopkins SAIS website at <[www.sais-jhu.edu](http://www.sais-jhu.edu)>.
2. Kyaw Yin Hlaing, Martin Smith, and Robert Taylor.
3. The late Martin Baumann had proposed a similar seminar several years earlier but met with objections before he submitted the idea. This led him not to persist with the idea at that time.



# Abbreviations

AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BADP	Border Areas Development Programme
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCP	Burma Communist Party
BIA	Burma Independence Army
BIMST-EC	Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Co-operation
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSSTB	Civil Service Selection and Training Board
CSW	commercial sex workers
DFID	Department for International Development
DSI	Defense Services Institute
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FDI	foreign direct investment
GCBA	General Council of Burmese Association
GDP	gross domestic product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDU	injecting drug users
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
KMT	Chinese Nationalist Kuomintang
KNU	Karen National Union
LDC	Least Developed Country
MGC	Mekong-Ganga Co-operation Project

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MOGE	Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise
MTA	Mong Tai Army
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
NLD	the National League for Democracy
NSC	New Security Concept
NUP	National Unity Party
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
RC	Revolutionary Council
SAC	Security and Administrative Committee
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SR	Socialist Republic
SSA	Shan State Army South
U.K.	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDCP	United Nations Drug Control Programme
UNDOC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Assistance
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
VOA	Voice of America
WHO	World Health Organization
YMBA	Young Men's Buddhist Association

## Contributors and Editors

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**Kyaw Yin Hlaing** is Assistant Professor at the Political Science Department, National University of Singapore. His research and teaching interests range from political and social movements and democratization to state–society relations and political culture. His area of specialization is mainland Southeast Asia. Currently he is conducting research on the apprehension of Muslim Myanmar by Buddhist Myanmar, state–society relations in Myanmar, and ethnic politics in Myanmar.

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**Martin T. Smith** is a writer and analyst who has reported on Burma/Myanmar for a variety of media, academic, and non-governmental organizations since the early 1980s. His most recent publications include *Burma (Myanmar): The Time for Change* (Minority Rights Group International, 2002); “Army Politics as a Historical Legacy”, in *Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy* (Zed Books, 2002); and “Burma: The Karen Conflict”, in *Encyclopedia of Modern Ethnic Conflicts* (Greenwood Press, 2003).

**David I. Steinberg** is Distinguished Professor and Director, Asian Studies, at the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University. He is the author of four books on Burma/Myanmar, the latest being *Burma: The State of Myanmar* (Georgetown University Press, 2001). The author of over forty-five articles and book chapters on that country, he also writes extensively on Korea. Professor Steinberg was educated at Dartmouth College, Lingnan University (China), Harvard University, and the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London. His latest research is on contested legitimacies in Burma/Myanmar, and on the tensions between entourage and ideological political parties in South Korea.

**Robert H. Taylor** was a former Pro-Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Retired Vice-Chancellor, Buckingham University, U.K., and Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. He authored *The State in Burma* (Hurst, 1987), and edited *Handbooks of the Modern World: Asia and the Pacific* (Facts on File, 1991) and *Burma: Political Economy under Military Rule* (Hurst, 2001). He lives in London from where he provides consultancy services on Myanmar and Southeast Asian affairs.

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