

Introduction to a New Academic Journal in Burma

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It is with great pride that we present this, the first issue, of the *Journal of Burmese Scholarship* (*Thi saq myin hnan* သီစာမျက်နှာ) to public intellectuals and scholars of Burma. We hope, with this and the issues to come, to make a significant contribution to the many admirable efforts now underway in Myanmar to create a vibrant, daring, and critical public sphere of the highest standards.

The formula that we begin with is designed to foster a long-lasting intellectual community and civil debate around critical themes of central concern to Myanmar's public life and future development. Each issue of the *Journal* is the culmination of one or more thematic workshops bringing together scholars, journalists, novelists, poets, scientists, and public intellectuals who have had something original and important to say on the topic. At a workshop, these participants present their work to one another, absorb what the other participants have to say through discussion and debate and then revise their own work accordingly. The result, in Burmese and in English, is then edited and published, both digitally and physically. It is especially fitting, then, that our first thematic issue is devoted to poverty in Myanmar, its sources, its extent and,

above all, the lived experience of poverty among ordinary citizens.

It is our intention to let the light come in from any and all intellectual windows: the arts, fiction, verse, lyrics, social science, economics, anthropology, history, memoirs. Our premise is that no discipline or specialty has a monopoly on truth or insight, and that the more carefully crafted perspectives we can accommodate the more light we will shed.

Among the other themes/workshops either underway or contemplated are:

1. Intellectuals, Technocrats and Rulers
2. Military Memoirs and Burmese History
3. Popular History from Below and Marginality
4. The Development of Burmese Arts and Letters 1930-2010
5. Student Activism: Aspirations, Representation and Prospects from Colonialism to the "Opening."
6. Federalism, Ethnic Identity, and Nationalism
7. History of Prisons and Prison Literature from the Colonial Period to Today.

In some respects we see ourselves as reviving, under a new name, the precious tradition of the *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, founded in 1910 and abolished in 1979 by the military regime. For the better part of a century, that journal was an open forum for scholars, professional and amateur, Burmese and non-Burmese, historians, social scientists, literary critiques, archeologists and we value the opportunity to recreate, for a new era, the open bazaar of quality work that its journal represented. The idea for such a journal arose in October 2011 at a meeting of seven Burmese scholars in the diaspora and three Western scholars of Burma, before the "opening." Once it became clear that political conditions might allow us to operate in Myanmar with open participation, we

added six members to the organizing committee and now plan to publish a physical journal based in Yangon.

We have all observed, first-hand, the tremendous intellectual energy and organizational initiatives (little societies, discussion groups, NGOs, charities, etc.) that have burst into the open over the past several years. We hope that our small initiative will contribute in a small way to this hopeful and energetic public culture.