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INTRODUCTION

An International Conference on the theme "Re-orienting Myanmar Studies in Myanmar" was held in Yangon on 5-6 February 2018. The Conference brought together a large gathering of scholars and ten papers were presented. Each paper had its own perspective on the theme but all provided interesting insights.

John N. Miksic of the Department of Southeast Asia Studies, National University of Singapore, entitled his paper "Palaces of Southeast Asia: Archaeology and Symbolism." Based on his vast experience in the archaeology of Southeast Asia, Miksic provided a panoramic view of the remains of historical palaces scattered throughout Southeast Asia and noted that in the diversity of structure there was also the common theme of palaces as replicas of the dwelling of Indra-Sakra on Mount Meru. He called for a further study of the historical palaces both in terms of architectural design and of function in providing the setting for court life.

Geok Yian Goh, Associate Chair of History of the School of Humanities, Nanyang Technological University, provided a study focused on a single historical palace site in her "The Anawrahta-Kyauzitha Palace Site: Relative Importance of Architecture and Artifacts." The paper described the work done by the Myanmar-Singapore Archaeological Training Project (MSATP) since 2014 and the study made of ceramics recovered at the site.

Dr. Marja Leena Heikkilä-Horn of Mahidol University International College in her paper provided a study of St. John the Baptist Church in downtown Yangon, an Armenian church whose cornerstone was laid in 1862. The study also provided the background of the Armenian community in Myanmar whose roots went back to the 18th century.

Liu Yun, an independent researcher, provided a study of the conflict in 1277-78 between Myanmar and China which led to the end of the Bagan dynasty. Studying the conflict from the viewpoint of Kublai Khan, the founder of the

Yuan dynasty, Liu Yun noted that for Kublai Khan, the war with Myanmar was part of the effort to establish a divinely ordained supremacy of the world.

Patrick McCormick, a specialist in Mon studies as well as linguistics, provided a paper, "The Burmese Dialects: A Reconsideration of Language and Identity." Observing that ethnicity tended to be associated with language in Myanmar, McCormick examined a number of minority dialects and noted a trend towards individualizing and atomizing of ethnic groups on the basis of language identification.

Yin Ker, an academic specializing in art history, studied Myanmar art history in her paper, as well as the review and appreciation of contemporary Myanmar art and artists provided to the general public by authors of literary eminence in such monthly periodicals as *Myawadi*, *Ngwetayi* and *Shumawa*. She welcomed this effort, noting that art should not be for the elite and the professionals but serve a social purpose, promoting the expansion of human consciousness and the betterment of the world.

Dr. Mandy Sadan of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, presented a paper with a strong focus on the theme of the Conference, advocating a reform in the history curriculum of higher education institutions in Myanmar. She did this on the basis of her experiences regarding the teaching and learning of history in the Kachin areas, recalling how the young people there faced challenges and had high expectations of their local histories and experiences being included in a reformed Myanmar Studies curriculum.

Gustaaf Houtman, who teaches at the School of Oriental and African Studies and is editor of *Anthropology Today* for the Royal Anthropological Institute, presented a paper in which he studied the role of the *beiktheik saya*, ritual specialists performing the life cycle ritual, essentially Brahmanic, which is disallowed to Buddhist monks by the Vinaya. He finds the parallel existence of this Brahmanic culture in Myanmar Buddhism as testimony to the latter's

tolerance and expressed his hope that Myanmar leaders will rediscover such tolerance as an asset and a strength in today's polarized world.

U Hla Thein, a former member of the Myanmar Historical Commission, presented a paper with the title "Orde Charles Wingate, the Irregular Soldier: A Casual Glimpse of his Military Exploits in Burma." The paper recounts how Orde Wingate was introduced into the Burma Campaign by Maj. Gen. Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief, British Army in India, on the basis of the war tactics employed by Wingate in restoring Emperor Haile Selassie to the throne of Ethiopia; how Wingate employed the innovative tactic of operating deep behind enemy lines, and how Wingate's force named "Chindits" carried out the operation code-named Operation Thursday.

U Tun Aung Chain, a well-known scholar who has written widely on Myanmar history, entitled his keynote speech, "The Shift from Chronicle to History: Three Early Efforts." The keynote speech studied the shift in Myanmar historiography from the traditional *yazawin* form, as represented by the *Hmannan Mahayazawin* (Glass Palace Chronicle), to the new form of history, as represented by G. E. Harvey's *History of Burma*, during the course of the late 19th and early 20th century, with the study focusing on three works: Arthur P. Phayre's *History of Burma*, John Stuart's *Burma Through the Centuries* and J. George Scott's *Burma from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*.

The ten papers, differing in their approaches and covering a wide range of subjects, were well received by an appreciative audience; probing questions were raised and sharp comments made. It is hoped that the publication of these ten papers will raise as sharp an interest and stimulate further efforts towards re-orienting Myanmar studies in Myanmar.

