



Australian
National
University



THE MON IN MYANMAR 2018 AND BEYOND

22 JANUARY 2018

Myanmar
Research Centre

ANU College of
Asia & the Pacific



Program

8:45-9:00am: CONFERENCE OPENING

- Nicholas Farrelly, Director, Myanmar Research Centre
- Siri Mon Chan, President, Australian Mon Association

9:00-10:30: KEYNOTE

- **Keynote 1:** Nai Hong Sa, Vice-Chairman of New Mon State Party and Chairman of United Nationalities Federal Council
- **Keynote 2:** Nai Maung Thaung, Elder and Founder of the Canberra Mon Community
- **Keynote 3:** Ashley South, Chiang Mai University

10:30-11:00: MORNING TEA

11:00-12:30: PANEL 1: PEACEBUILDING, TRUST AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Unsolved Human Rights Issues in Ethnic Mon Areas of Myanmar

- Nai Kasuah Mon, Executive Director, Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) / Editor-in-Chief, Mon News Agency (MNA)

The Civil Society Movement in Mon Society: Improving Women's Participation in a Post-Conflict Setting

- Mi Kun Chan Non, Vice Chairman, Mon Women's Organisation (MWO)

The Power of Symbolic Measures: Recognizing Local Identity

- Cecile Medail, University of New South Wales/ADFA

12:30-1:30: LUNCH

1:30-3:00: PANEL 2: ELECTORAL REFORMS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

The Role of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) in Mon National Politics

- Saw Chit Thet Tun, Independent Karen consultant, Ethnic Peace Resources Project (EPRP)

Innovations and Changes in Mon Organisations and Political Parties

- Siri Mon Chan, President of the Australian Mon Association (AMA)

Young Women's Participation and Representation in Political Parties in Mon State, Myanmar

- Mi Sar Yar Poine, Mon Women's Organization (MWO)

3:00-3:30: AFTERNOON TEA

3:30-5:00: PANEL 3: EVERYDAY LIVES AND POLITICS

Enhancing Municipal Governance in the Future Democratic Federal State of Myanmar: A Case Study of Thanbyuzayart Township, Mon State

- Tun Myint Kyaw (Minn Latt), Mayor, Thanbyuzayat, Mon State

Everyday Justice Provision in Southern Mon State

- Mi Thang Sorn Poine, Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF) and Helene Maria Kyed, Danish Institute of International Study (DIIS)

International Labour Migration and its Consequences: A case study from Mon State, Myanmar

- Min Zar Ni Lin, Khadija H. Nasirova and Nan Kyi Hust, Center for Economic and Social Development Myanmar (CESD)

Abstracts

Mon Nationalism in the New Millennium

Dr Ashley South, Chiang Mai University, Centre for Ethnic Studies and Development

Dr Ashley South's first book *Mon Nationalism and Civil War in Burma: The Golden Sheldrake* (2003) explored the political history of the Mon - from the pre-colonial period through the early years of independence, the long years of military rule in Burma, and the first decade following the 1995 New Mon State Party (NMSP) ceasefire. His conference presentation will bring the story up to date, analysing the identities and interests of key stakeholders, including the NMSP and other armed groups, Mon political parties, the dynamic Mon civil society (including the *sangha* and women's groups), and the situation 'on the ground' in Mon villages. He will focus in particular on developments in the spheres of political and civil society, in the context of Myanmar's transition to a military-backed government (in 2011), and the present NLD-led regime (since 2016). Dr South will examine how different stakeholders are engaged with the peace and wider political processes, and the impacts of peace - and continued conflicts - in different sectors. The presentation will draw on my various publications (www.AshleySouth.co.uk), and my work from 2012-2015 as a Senior Adviser to the Norwegian government-led Myanmar Peace Support Initiative, and in 2017-2018 as Lead Researcher for the Myanmar Interim Arrangements Research Project.

Unsolved Human Rights Issues in Ethnic Mon Areas of Myanmar

Nai Kasuah Mon, Executive Director, Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM)/
Editor-in Chief, Mon News Agency (MNA)

Over the last five years Myanmar has seen many significant changes. Importantly, under the Thein Sein government (2010-2015), the government established the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) alongside the nationwide ceasefire process. While Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) government has continued these processes, many human rights issues remain unresolved in ethnic regions of Myanmar, including Mon State. In particular, there has been very little effort to promote and protect the social, economic and cultural rights of ethnic people. The growth in land grabs in Mon state also adds to these concerns. While the Myanmar government is pushing the New Mon State Party (NMSP) to sign the NCA, there are fundamental questions that remain unresolved. In this paper, I will discuss the importance of adopting international guidelines on human rights in Myanmar to help resolve some of the concerns of ethnic armed groups and their constituencies. While fulfilling the basic social, economic and cultural rights of ethnic people is challenging, I argue for the development of strong legal and policy reforms which help strengthen national human rights institutions, like the MNHRC. In doing so, I suggest that ethnic people and ethnic armed groups will have more confidence in the peace process.

The Civil Society Movement in Mon Society: Improving Women's Participation in a Post-conflict Setting

Mi Kun Chan Non, Vice Chairman, Mon Women's Organisation (MWO)

In conflict-affected areas of south-eastern Myanmar, Mon civil society organisations and networks have been very active in the preservation and promotion of Mon literature and

culture, as well as rights-based issues, social welfare and development. However, while women amount to more than half of the total Mon population, women's participation in decision-making, especially in politics, remains very low. Although there are some women who have reached top decision-making positions in Mon civil society, the majority of female leaders still struggle to gain their role in political decision-making, especially in the current peace process. Even though women-led CSOs play an essential role in filling the needs of the community, recognition by the government as well as other stakeholders, particularly Mon political parties and ethnic arms organisations (EAOs), is weak and not supportive.

This paper argues that promoting women's participation in decision-making on issues affecting their daily lives is crucial to the current post-conflict recovery and the sustainable development of Myanmar, especially in the local context of war-torn Mon communities. I examine some of the traditional and cultural practices that are hindering the active participation of women in the political decision-making process. This paper argues the need for a two-layer approach: overcoming the traditional and cultural practices and recognition of representation of the ethnic women in the political decision-making process. I conclude, by making recommendations for building up the skills and capacity of Mon women so as to better protect the rights of women in Mon society, as well as in Myanmar as a whole

The Power of Symbolic Measures: Recognizing Local Identity

Cecile Medail, University of New South Wales/ADFA

It has now been over six months since the new bridge across the Thanlwin (Salween) River in Mon State was officially renamed after General Aung San, despite local people's desire for a name that is relevant to the area. Although some time has passed, the bitter feelings that the naming controversy created are still vivid in people's minds. Drawing on several months of fieldwork in Mon state, this paper examines the 'Bridgegate' controversy, highlighting the voices of Mon people and how the naming incident has impacted minority-majority relations. Unsurprisingly, many feel that little has change under the NLD government, as they see democracy as the rule of the Bamar majority group. I demonstrate how, for many people, the 'Bridgegate' controversy vividly illustrates the way that the NLD government fails to acknowledge the importance of symbolic measures for ethnic minorities. I argue that symbolic measures supporting the recognition of local identities are essential to support the creation of an inclusive national identity.

The Role of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) in Mon National Politics

Saw Chit Thet Tun, Independent Karen consultant, Ethnic Peace Resources Project (EPRP)

The New Mon State Party has been a critical player in Mon national politics since 1958. According to recent interviews with Mon people, the NMSP remains in the leading position, and its contributions are vital for Mon politics, economics and social issues in Mon State, particularly in NMSP controlled areas. The political situation in Mon State has stabilised since 1995, when they signed a ceasefire agreement with the military regime. However, the situation changed in 2011, after the NMSP's rejection to transform into a Border Guard Force under the Tatmadaw's control. In 2015, after refusing to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord, tensions between the NMSP and the Myanmar Army dramatically increased.

Consequently, in 2016 the Burmese Army imposed a restriction on NMSP activities and seized the NMSP's liaison office and military bases. More recently, the Myanmar Army has also been deploying soldiers in NMSP controlled areas. This situation has escalated the concerns of Mon people including Mon political parties and Mon National CSOs. In this paper, I will examine the current political situation facing the NMSP and its contributions to Mon national politics based on my recent interview with a diverse group of Mon people. I will provide recommendations for the NMSP and its stakeholders to adopt better policies which support the goals of Mon national politics in the future.

Innovations and Changes in Mon Organisations and Political Parties

Siri Mon Chan, President of the Australian Mon Association (AMA)

Innovations and changes in organisations have gained increasing attention in scholarship in recent years. People are increasingly aware that political organisations and parties that fail to implement appropriate and effective innovation will not survive over time. Randall and Coakley (2007), for example, stress that due to the changing of strategic and political environments, organizations require frequent innovation and adaptation in order to survive. Indeed, appropriate, effective and timely innovations and changes are critical for all sectors. A number of Mon organizations and political parties were formed after a multiparty system was introduced in Burma in 1988. The objectives of Mon organisations and political parties at that time included the establishment of a genuine federal union in Burma in which Mon people can have greater political autonomy. In recent years, Mon people's support to Mon organisations and political parties has declined rapidly. This stems from many deep-seated issues. However, in this paper, one of the main reasons I examine is the failure to innovate in line with the ever-changing environment and circumstances. Drawing from Borins (2002), I argue that Mon political parties require innovations that re-engineer basic processes, replacing centralized functional structures with geographically decentralized structures, with more autonomy and power to lower-ranking party members. I also suggest that changes in culture, attitudes and mindsets will also help to build more support amongst Mon people.

Young Women's Participation and Representation in Political Parties in Mon State, Myanmar

Mi Sar Yar Poine, Mon Women's Organization (MWO)

This paper explores the perceptions regarding the participation and representation of young women in political parties in Mon state, Myanmar. Although the Myanmar government signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other international conventions to prevent women's rights violations within the country young women still face poor participation in all fields. This article examines how Mon political parties have failed to promote and enhance young women's participation and its impact on society. I argue that while there is a general tendency for young women to participate in every sector, young women find it difficult to report women's issues and even to raise the importance of women's roles in political organisations and parties. This is partly because young Mon women are extremely underrepresented in political parties, especially in positions of leadership and decision-making. There is also a mixture of cultural, religious and social reasons for this, including their lack of knowledge about women's rights and other international conventions. I suggest that Mon political parties and civil society leaders need to implement policies which better support young women to participate more fully in political

parties. The recommendations include the need to conduct trainings, inform policy makers and political parties leaders about the importance of young women's participation in political parties.

Enhancing Municipal Governance in the Future Democratic Federal State of Myanmar: A Case Study of Thanbyuzayart Township, Mon State

Tun Myint Kyaw (Minn Latt), Mayor, Thanbyuzayat, Mon State

Although it is highly controversial in many aspects, the 2008 constitution of Myanmar offered some degree of decentralisation to the State and Regional Governments for the first time in Myanmar's modern history. Under Article 188 of the constitution, regional and state parliaments possess the power to draft and approve municipal laws and the authority to administer municipal affairs in their respective territories. However, despite encouraging changes there is still much that needs to be done to better implement decentralisation. Whereas it used to be an autonomous governing institution in the colonial time and during the short-lived parliamentary democracy rule, it is now under the direct control of the Ministry of Development Affairs of the sub-national government. Rather than as a local administrative body with the decentralised administrative power, it is a mere local-level service provision department. While it is the only self-administering departmental agency at the local-level and are closely dealing the daily lives of local population, it still needs further decentralisation and reform to become a genuine democratic, autonomous institution of local governance. This paper examines the current situation in Thanbyuzayart Township Municipal Department and suggests recommendations as to how this might be achieved under the strict limitations of the 2008 Constitution.

Everyday Justice Provision in Southern Mon State

Mi Thang Sorn Poine, Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF) and Helene Maria Kyed, Danish Institute of International Study (DIIS)

This paper explores everyday justice provision in a Mon village in southern Mon state. The Myanmar government officially administers the village, but over the long decades of armed conflict, the villagers have had close contact with the main Ethnic Armed Organization in Mon State, the New Mon State Party (NMSP). Based on ethnographic fieldwork in 2016-2017, we show in the paper, how the NMSP also continues to exert influence when it comes to the resolution of disputes and crimes. Although the villagers are supposed to report cases that cannot be resolved at village level, to the official Myanmar justice system, they frequently prefer to go to the NMSP. The village tract administrator, who is officially part of the Myanmar state hierarchy, allows people to choose between the Myanmar and the NMSP systems. On many occasions, people use a mixture of these systems, or 'forum shop' (von Benda-Beckmann 1997) between them to get a satisfactory outcome. In the paper, we draw on a large arson case study to illustrate this form of legal pluralism and forum shopping. The case also illustrates how many people refrain from going through the formal justice system, because of language barriers, high costs, time, lack of knowledge of legal procedures, and fear of communicating with state officials. Conversely, the case also shows that it is also risky to go through the NMSP system, because according to Myanmar law, it is illegal, and thus the NMSP judges are sometimes reluctant to put a lot of pressure on the accused. As this

paper demonstrates, these complicated relations between the two justice systems mean that people generally prefer village-level dispute resolutions.

International Labour Migration and its Consequences: A case study from Mon State, Myanmar

Min Zar Ni Lin, Khadija H. Nasirova and Nan Kyi Hust, Center for Economic and Social Development Myanmar (CESD)

This study examines the process of labour migration and its consequences, both positive and negative, to households and communities in Mon state by exploring its regulations and the role of remittances in their development. Mon State has one of the highest percentages of out-migration in all of Myanmar. The results are based on a survey of 1680 households from 10 townships of Mon State in 2015 using the sampling framework adopted in the population census of 2014 as well as qualitative interviews on Mon State that provide key insights on migration. This study demonstrates that the majority of migrants are in their working age and have less interest to pursue higher education. Not only at individual-level, but also at the household levels, household members from the migrant households have less motivation to complete high school and above education level comparative to non-migrant households. It also shows that a significant number of migrants from Mon state prefer illegal migration channels due to the smaller cost, less time consumed and the lack of registered recruitment agencies in the region. Moreover, the information obtained through the personal communications (especially from families/friends) plays an important factor in making the decision to migrate. More than 75% of migrant families from Mon state receive money from household member(s) residing abroad within the last 12 months and most of them received cash through informal remittance channels. Despite the risks involved in migration and labour shortages for family businesses, the status of assets ownership (such as agriculture land) and income levels of migrant households are higher than non-migrant households.

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Notes

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