

Relocating the interlocutor

Taw Sein Ko (1864–1930) and the itinerancy of knowledge in British Burma

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Abstract: Taw Sein Ko, born in Moulmein in 1864 to a merchant from Fujian and a Shan princess, rose to a high position in the British colonial administration in Burma. A talented linguist and a prolific writer, his views on Burmese society, archaeology, ethnology, Buddhism, law and history circulated in English-language journals, books and pamphlets in Burma, China and Britain. This paper, seeking to draw out the role of non-Europeans as both cultural intermediaries and knowledge brokers in colonial South East Asia, sees Taw Sein Ko as a translator, negotiator and interlocutor between and across cultures – Burmese, Chinese and Western. His writings reveal a man who modelled himself in the Confucian tradition of the enlightened civil servant, while rejecting all that had corrupted that tradition in Qing China; in his economic outlook he embraced the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill; while in his love for, and appreciation of, Burmese literary and material culture, together with his promotion of Buddhist education, he showed himself to be an early proponent of ‘Asian values’.

Since John Smail exhorted scholars of South East Asia to give a back seat to the indigenous, the ‘European’, the ‘Hindu or the Chinese’ in new studies of the region, room for manoeuvre between these once mobile categories has given way to plural autonomies.¹ Studies of overseas Chinese and colonial studies expanded as separate knowledge industries, demarcated in the first instance by considerations of ethnicity, and in the second by the boundaries of imperial geography. Over 30 years ago, the pioneer of overseas Chinese studies, C.P. Fitzgerald, recognized the place of the Chinese in late nineteenth and early twentieth century South East Asia as an ‘inter-colonial community’, referring to their ability to communicate with other Chinese across national

¹ Smail, J. (1961), ‘The possibility of an autonomous history of Southeast Asia’, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol 2, No 2.

boundaries.² But the role of the Chinese as third-culture conduits of intellectual and cultural change *within* colonial regimes, in their communications with Europeans and those South East Asian peoples whose autonomy Smail wished to highlight, has received little attention. Similarly, colonial studies of South East Asia continue to revolve around interactions between European colonizers and the dominant colonized ethnic group, leaving little space beyond clichéd references for Chinese, Indians and others. This essay aims to re-entangle these spheres by focusing on the role of non-Europeans as both cultural intermediaries and knowledge brokers in colonized South East Asia. Its chief protagonist is Taw Sein Ko (1864–1930), a Burma-born individual of Chinese descent who reached high rank in the Indian Civil Service and whose lifespan coincided with three significant vectors of change in South East Asia: namely the high tide of European colonialism, the rapid consolidation of wealth, power and community by the southern Chinese diaspora, and the intense encounter between indigenous societies and modernity.³

Born in Moulmein to a merchant from Fujian and a Shan princess, Taw Sein Ko was probably first named by his father as *Du Cheng Gao* (Du-Success-Imperial Mandate), from whose rendering in Burmese as Taw Sein Kho (Taw-Diamond-Dove) the English transliteration came. This multiple naming well suited a person who defied the simplifying labelling practices of European colonialism, and whose fluency in diverse cultures and languages enabled him to act as a broker between Burmese, Chinese and European domains of knowledge. Although unusual in the rank he attained, he was far from unique.⁴ Most cross-cultural traffic in colonized South East Asia was and remains between people from the region – between Burmese and Indians, Cambodians and Siamese, and Vietnamese and Chinese, to name a few of the almost endless permutations. In considering colonial encounters, it is therefore important not to allow the re-colonization of South East Asian intellectual history by stressing only European influence.⁵ Examining how new forms of knowledge arose calls

² Fitzgerald, C. P. (1993), *The Southern Expansion of the Chinese People*, White Lotus, Bangkok, p 165.

³ *Ibid.*, p 164; Keyes, C. F. (1995), *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland South East Asia*, Hawai'i University Press, Honolulu, pp 96–99.

⁴ Beaulieu, J., and Roberts, M., eds (2002), *Orientalism's Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture and Photography*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, pp 3–4.

⁵ Historian John Cady, for example, reads the moves to stimulate a cultural and national renaissance in British Burma as generated by 'Westernized factors' and 'traditional social forces'. Cady, J. (1938), *A History of Modern Burma*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

for a continuing, and expanded, examination of non-European sources and influence and for fresh attention to the transmission of these visions, perceptions and know-how and their incorporation into indigenous thought-worlds and knowledge practices. In a rare allusion to the positioning of such individuals, anthropologist Charles Keyes has pointed to the fact that not only Europeans and Burmese, but also Indians recruited to serve in Burma, were expected to engage with Western conceptions of governance, and to behave as 'modern bureaucrats'.⁶

During his career, Taw Sein Ko's portfolio straddled archaeology, Buddhist affairs and Sino-Burma relations. A talented linguist and prolific writer, his theories on Burmese society, archaeology, ethnology, Buddhism, law and history circulated in English-language journals, books and pamphlets in British India, China and Britain. Despite the high status and several imperial decorations he attained in his career, he remained painfully conscious of his position as a subaltern scholar, and privately bridled at what he called 'the doctrine of infallibility of European views on all Asiatic matters'.⁷ Educated in a mixture of Burmese, Chinese and English schools, at Cambridge University, London's Inner Temple and Peking, and conversant in Burmese, Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Hindustani, Shan and English, Taw Sein Ko was both a polyglot and a polymath. He not only possessed far greater linguistic proficiency than most of his European peers, he was also far more *broadly* educated, having been exposed to several different ways of structuring, thinking about and valuing knowledge. In many ways, he fits James Clifford's description of 'cultural interlocutors' – 'those complex individuals made to speak for "cultural" knowledge'.⁸ Taw Sein Ko was one such individual, and yet he was not only speaking for 'local' knowledge, but from the interstices of diverse cultures and knowledge systems. As the French writer Marguerite Duras wrote so evocatively of Indo-China, the Chinese in South East Asia resisted colonization, and their mobility was a source of constant exasperation to colonial administrations.

In the past 15 years or so, anthropology has increasingly moved away from place-framed analyses in its responses to contemporary trans-

⁶ Keyes, *supra* note 3, at p 97.

⁷ Taw Sein Ko (1909), 'Confidential to J. H. Marshall, DSA (Department of the Survey of Archaeology), 30 December' I am grateful to U Thaw Kaung for bringing this correspondence to my attention.

⁸ Clifford, J. T. (1997), *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, and London, p 19.

nationalism. George Marcus has posited a 'multi-sited ethnography' of 'chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtaposition of locations'; James Clifford has called for an ethnology on the move; and Linda Basch *et al* have urged scholars of migration to abandon the bipolar vision of 'opposite orientations' between society of origin and settlement, and to treat migrants' social and geographic itineraries as part of a single social experience.⁹ While ethnology has displaced place, history, art history and cultural studies have increasingly begun to set a premium on location in analyses of colonial experience. In their work on 'Oriental Orientalists' in the Middle East, art historians Mary Roberts and Jill Beaulieu have stressed the importance of reading inter-location as 'inter-locus, between localities'.¹⁰ Writing largely of colonial India and post-colonial Britain, literary critic Homi Bhabha encourages us to focus on 'the "inter" – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture'.¹¹ To Taw Sein Ko – who wrote privately of the 'heat and burden of the day' and of the 'labours' in which he and other 'native scholars on the spot' engaged, against the 'encrusted prejudice imported from Europe' – the 'burden' of translation was no mere metaphor.

The late cross-cultural researcher Minoru Hokari has emphasized the significance of sites of convergence in mapping colonial histories, and was at the forefront of a small group of scholars in Australia who are shifting their attention from European–indigenous relations, to those involving Chinese, Japanese, Afghans and Indians.¹² As Taw Sein Ko's story shows, for those who moved in the 'right' circuits (from Rangoon College to Cambridge University to Peking and then again to West Moat Road, Mandalay), mobility was more than an 'alien stigma'.¹³ While 'nomadic' tribes were stigmatized as uncivilized in much colonial discourse, worldliness, like the great tour undertaken by wealthy Europeans, was considered an asset. By travelling the same circuits

⁹ Marcus, G. E. (1995), 'Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol 24, pp 95–117, specifically p 105; Basch, L., *et al* (1994), *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Post-Colonial Predicaments*, Gordon and Breach, Basel, p 6.

¹⁰ Beaulieu and Roberts, *supra* note 4, at pp 5–6.

¹¹ Bhabha, H. K. (1994), *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, p 38.

¹² Hokari, M. (2003), 'Anti-minorities history: perspectives on Aboriginal–Asian relations', in Edwards, P., and Yuanfang, S., eds, *Lost in the Whitewash: Aboriginal Asian Encounters in Australia, 1901–2001*, Humanities Research Centre, Canberra, pp 85–101.

¹³ Ludden, D. (2003), 'Presidential address: maps in the mind and the mobility of Asia', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol 62, No 4, pp 1057–1078, specifically p 1064.

as their colonial overlords and colleagues, albeit not in the same 'class', indigenous interlocutors and cross-cultural brokers such as Taw Sein Ko accrued cachet, so purchasing a limited parity with Europeans, which translated into an enhanced social mobility. In the late 1990s, Thongchai Winichakul called for a 'history at the interstices' as a means of resurrecting 'narratives of non-national subjects' that had become 'displaced or suppressed'.¹⁴ More recently, historian David Ludden has emphasized the need to think outside both national borders and the abstraction of a world without borders, and to locate research at the 'intellectual intersections of mobility and territorialism'.¹⁵ Increasingly, cultural theory about diasporic as well as colonial experience has become trapped in language that 'signifies the spatial but does not assess its meanings and empirical contexts', nullifying the specific dynamics of space and place.¹⁶ One effect of this 'ungrounded' scholarship has been to produce a 'historically undifferentiated and essentialist Overseas Chinese identity', and yet, as Michael Charney argues, its nemesis – state-centred histories that focus on such groups as 'the Chinese in Burma' – is no less problematic in its tendency to create 'exuberances' by reading too much into 'Chinese' as an ethnic and not a locative identity.¹⁷ By taking an individual as my focus and his itinerancy as my locus, I hope to avoid such problematics, and to move towards a reconceptualization of the largely dichotomous readings of colonial encounters while re-territorializing histories of diasporic identity.

Remembering Taw Sein Ko

A bilingual plaque announces the Du clan house on a quiet side-street in downtown Rangoon, a few blocks from the bustling Hokkien temple on Strand Road (Figure 1). The white-haired custodian of the house unlocks the metal grille gates, which concertina open on to a dark,

¹⁴ Thongchai Winichakul (1999), 'Writing at the interstices: Southeast Asian historians and post-national histories in Southeast Asia', paper presented at the Conference on Southeast Asian Historiography since 1945, July, Penang, Malaysia, cited in Baker, C. (2002), 'Afterword: autonomy's meanings', in Chutintaranond, S., and Baker, C., ed, *Recalling Local Pasts: Autonomous History in Southeast Asia*, Silkwood, Chiangmai, pp 167–182, specifically pp 170, 181.

¹⁵ Ludden, *supra* note 13, at p 1070.

¹⁶ Ma, L. J., and Cartier, C. (date?), *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility and Identity*, Rowman and Littlefield, London, pp 6–7.

¹⁷ Charney, M. (1999), 'Problematics and paradigms in historicizing the overseas Chinese in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Straits and Burma', *Journal of the Southseas Society*, Vol 54, pp 93–106, specifically p 93.



Figure 1. Qingfugong Temple, Rangoon, 2004.
Photo copyright Penny Edwards.



Figure 2. Du Fu and Taw Sein Ko, Du Clan House, Rangoon, 2004.
Photo copyright Penny Edwards.

elongated room. Hundreds of male faces in framed portraits of various dimensions run the length of the wall to my left. Among the portraits, one double bill stands out. It is a standard composition, the kind reserved for married couples, parental portraits, and kings and queens. But its subject fits none of these categories, and its contents are in mixed media. On the left side is a line-drawing of a celebrated Tang Dynasty poet. To the right, boxed within the same no-nonsense black frame, is a black and white photo of a square-jawed man with stern features, a steady gaze and close-cropped, bristly grey hair (Figure 2). A Chinese inscription announces the 'Tang Dynasty Poet and Sage' as 'Du Fu, the 'Glory of our clan in ancient times' and his modern descendant as the 'Scholar of Archaeology', 'Du Cheng-gao, Glory of our clan who travelled to Burma'. British colonialism is conspicuously absent from both the visual and verbal rhetoric. There is no mention of Taw Sein Ko's title, his office in government, and no trace on his plain, mandarin-collared shirt, of the various trappings and decorations pinned upon him by the British, nor of the Western fashion accessories, which run from bow-ties to smoking jackets and spectacles, adorning other Du luminaries on the wall. A second, Burmese inscription running the lower length of the frame reveals the identities of this Du duo as 'Archaeologist Taw Sein Kho' and 'Tang poet Tu Fu'. If Taw Sein Ko had a hand in how he was pictured for posterity, it is clear that he wished to be remembered by the intended audience of this memorial – his ancestors and his descendants – neither as a senior civil servant nor as a conduit of British influence, but for his connection to both his ancestral genesis and to Burmese antiquity, as a scholar of stone inscriptions: a man of letters and a gentleman-scholar (*junzi*) in the Confucian tradition.

If the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting, as Milan Kundera once wrote, then it is equally true that we have no power over how we are remembered. Ironically, while commonly remembered in Burmese scholarly circles as a man of letters, Taw Sein Ko's name conjures up different associations in Rangoon's contemporary Sino-Burmese community, where he is remembered more as a man of clout than a man of letters. In what must have been the 1920s, two business partners from Patheingyi, one from the Du clan, had gone to Rangoon seeking permission to establish their business, the Liu-Du company. After hearing their case, Taw Sein Ko had told them, to their great disgruntlement, to go sightseeing. They returned a few hours later to find the permissions granted and all the paperwork to

hand. The story illustrates the power of Taw Sein Ko within the British administration, and also the longevity of a reputation that has escaped the frame of the carefully crafted memorial in the Du hall.

But the Du ancestral portrait is one of plural memorials. Taw Sein Ko published two collections of essays written in English and published in Rangoon. As far as we know, they were never translated by him into Chinese, and were designed with an eye to posterity, as a public monument for the English-speaking world. While their variously dense and eloquent collection of essays lays out before us significant opinions and events in his life, Taw Sein Ko's description of these works as 'fugitive' pieces, the 'musings of a recluse', captures something of both the scattered trail this prolific polymath left behind him, and the bitterness lacing some of his personal and unpublished works, that serious scholarly recognition had eluded him. While his writings offer several versions of himself for public consumption, the most 'true' to his inner perception – and one that intersects with his portrait in the Du clan house – is probably that found in a confidential letter in 1909, in which he described himself as an 'Oriental scholar' with a 'firmly established' reputation. Here and elsewhere, he was identified as a 'native'. Sometimes his writings situated him as 'Burmese', but at other times, his debates on such subjects as 'Burmese Buddhism' distanced him from Burmese culture and heritage. His entry in a *Who's Who of Burma* from the late 1920s includes the same photo as that displayed in the Du clan house, and gives his address as Peking Lodge, West Moat Road, Mandalay.¹⁸ The address in itself is a clear statement of his home away from home, in which Peking becomes subordinate to Mandalay. We are left to wonder whether geomancy, a good land bargain or his own British leanings drew him to the *west* side of the moat, but the unspoken palatial subtext of his address – the Royal Palace – was in itself a complex symbol of Burmese high culture and colonial conquest (Figure 3). By the early 1900s, West Moat Road had emerged as a residential area for all Europeans, including both civil servants such as Taw Sein Ko's colleague, Charlese Duroiselle, and merchants, while its proximity to a couple of cemeteries rendered it too *amingala* for Burmans.¹⁹ Other than the Burmese funereal biography written by his

¹⁸ *Who's Who in Burma* (nd, but published some time between 1925 and Taw Sein Ko's death in 1930), p 123.

¹⁹ I am most grateful to Colleen Rustomjee for taking the trouble to read an earlier version of this paper, and providing these insights, based on her childhood memories of Mandalay.



Figure 3. Plan of Fort Dufferin (the Royal Palace) Mandalay, showing West Moat Road.

Source: from George W. Bird, *Wanderings in Burma*, 1897. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

friend, a civil servant named U Tin, and the *Mahana Janaka Jataka*, a textbook prepared for use in schools, Taw Sein Ko seems to have left little in the way of monuments for a Burmese audience.

The British scholar J. S. Furnivall (1935) remembered him after his death as a highly cultured Burmese 'who provided yeoman service at the vanguard of the move to preserve and stimulate interest in, Burmese culture', while his peer, U May Oung, a founding member of the Burmese Research Society, toasted him in mid-career as 'a well preserved ancient monument...a veritable tower of strength standing for all that was best in the sphere of education'.²⁰ To his colleague Charles Duroiselle and to more recent observers, Taw Sein Ko was the pioneer of Western archaeology in British Burma.²¹ The distinguished British scholar, Gordon Hannington Luce, a great fan of G. Lewis Dickinson's *John Chinaman*, saw him as just that – 'a Chinaman' – perhaps reflecting his own interest in cataloguing and identifying Asian languages and the contemporary European proclivity – despite Luce's own cross-cultural marriage – for pigeonholing races. Some 50 years later, a Burmese scholar of epigraphy described him as a 'Burma-born Chinese'.²² Taw Sein Ko's obituarist, the retired colonial civil servant, U Tin, who had known him since they were both in their early twenties, fondly remembered his wisdom and his gentle, patient temperament. Despite acknowledging him as a brother and

²⁰ Taw Sein Ko (1913), 'A plea for a university for Burma' (Speech at Old Rangoon Collegians Annual Dinner, 20 January 1912), *Burmese Sketches, Volume I*, Government Printing Press, Rangoon, pp 246, 257.

²¹ Duroiselle, C. (1938), *Report of the Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey for the Year 1937–1938*, Government Printing, Rangoon, p 17; Strachan, P. (1990), *Imperial Pagan: Art and Architecture of Burma*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, p 4; Stargardt, J. (2002), 'The city as symbol in early Pyu Buddhism: defining sacred space', paper presented at the Burma – Burma Research and its Future Conference, 21–25 September, Gotheburg, Sweden.

²² Luce, G. H. (1948), 'A century of progress in Burmese history and archaeology', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol 32, No 1, pp 79–94; my notes from unpublished ms in Luce 6574/5/113, p 3. Luce sent his father a copy of *John Chinaman* on 21 March 1922 from Leiden, Holland, and wrote: 'It is a beautiful little book, and though written by an Englishman (disguised as a Chinaman, at the time of the Boxer Troubles), it puts the case of the East against the West better than any book I know. It is of course only one side of the picture, but it is the most important side, for it is the side we English are too prone to ignore. Most of it applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Burma, with the exception of course that Confucianism is very different from Buddhism.' National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA), manuscripts (ms), 6574, Luce Collection, Box 1. U Tin Htway (1996), 'Burmese epigraphy: G. H. Luce's legacy yet to be unearthed', paper prepared for the 1996 Southeast Asia Archaeology Conference, Leiden. I am grateful to Dr Pamela Gutman for bringing this paper to my attention.

recognizing his mastery of Burmese and his proficiency in Burmese Buddhist oaths, U Tin's posthumous portrait described him as 'Chinese'.²³ The Australian sinologist G. E. Morrison called him a native of Fujian. Closer to the mark, and more in keeping with Taw Sein Ko's official positioning in the Du firmament, is Li Mou, China's leading historian of Burma culture, who bills him as 'Burma's famous archaeologist of Chinese descent (*huayi*)'.²⁴

Knowledge and its colonial archaeologies

Since Foucault's path-breaking analysis of the relationship between knowledge and power, 'knowledge' has been the object of significant debate. Where Foucault questioned the archaeology of knowledge, a number of scholars have since focused on archaeology *as* an arena of colonial knowledge production. Bernard Cohn, Partha Chatterjee, Homi Bhabha and Ron Inden have all critiqued history, ethnology, archaeology and museology as sites for the accumulation and exercise of colonial power and the construction of 'national narratives'. Part of the importance of such narratives lay in their potential for legitimating the colonial project, through a common emphasis, which cut across diverse countries and continents, on a golden age, 'decline and fall', followed by the myth of colonial salvation. To date, however, little attention has been paid to a key, transitional period in the development of indigenous, secular forms of knowledge in Burma, and their intersection with external influences, namely the era of high colonialism, from circa 1880 to 1930. During this period, knowledge was a hotly contested domain and a heavily guarded arena, over which the colonial administration sought, and failed, to retain sovereignty. Of particular concern was not the acquisition of knowledge *per se*, but the possibilities of a growth in learning about, and knowledge of, Burmese language, literature, history and culture *by* the colonized. Both Burmese reformists and European sympathizers encountered this closed mentality. J.S. Furnivall's first moves to establish the Burma Research Society were

²³ U Tin, KSM, ATM (1930), *A Biography of the Late Former Superintendent of Archaeology Mr. Taw Sein Ko (CIE, ISO, KIH)*, Rangoon. Written in Burmese, this 13-page pamphlet was privately printed for distribution at Taw Sein Ko's funeral, and contains personal reminiscences, biographical data and Buddhist prayers. I am grateful to Emeritus Professor U Thaw Kaung for bringing this pamphlet to my attention, and to my Research Assistant Khin Mar Mar Kyi for her translation (p 11).

²⁴ Li Mou and Jiang Yongren (2002), *Mindian Wenhua Zonglun [An Overview of Burmese Culture]*, Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, Beijing, p 354.

vetoed by a senior administrator on the grounds that such a society might incite nationalist sentiment. D.G.E. Hall, Gordon Hannington Luce and others battled long and hard to change the mindset of a colonial administration strongly opposed to the incorporation of 'Oriental' studies in the curriculum of Rangoon University.²⁵

The British administration in Burma, which lagged far behind its French counterparts in Indo-China in the conservation of indigenous heritage and monuments, did eventually outpace it in the provision of fully trained archaeologists and historians. This apparent paradox can be traced to the divergent cultures of knowledge in Britain and France, as analysed by Edward Said, who contrasts the 'social structure of French knowledge' with 'England's amateurish, often démodé intellectual life'. Where the 'great institutes of learning in Paris' had a 'dominating influence in the rise of archaeology, linguistics, historiography and French Orientalism', the language of British Orientalism, Said argues, was one of 'casual observation', fashioned by the British overseas; even in colonial 'experts' such as J.S. Mills, one found a 'studied but basically unincorporated and unofficial attitude'.²⁶ These sentiments were voiced by the British poet and educator Matthew Arnold who, writing five years after the birth of Taw Sein Ko, noted the absence, in England, of 'any centre of taste and authority' comparable with the French Academy. Arnold's observation was embedded in his treatise on education, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), in which he argued that 'civilization' had become 'mechanical and external' and that culture should be conceived of as a state of higher education and refinement.²⁷

Arnold's bookish conception of culture tallied with the strong textual emphasis of Britain's nineteenth-century school of Buddhist studies and Indology. As the century wore on, partly as a result of colonial conquest of a monumental Orient, and a corollary rise in heritage movements in Europe, this textual bias began to give way to an emphasis on material embodiments of culture. However, even this concession to monuments often stressed their use as textual sources, through inscriptions, steles and tablets. While such inscriptions were seen as valuable keys to the deciphering of the pre-colonial history of occupied territories,

²⁵ Tinker, H. 'Gordon Hannington Luce'; D. G. E. Hall (1980), 'Obituary: Gordon Hannington Luce', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol XLIII, No 3 pp 581–588.

²⁶ Said, E. (1994), *Culture and Imperialism*, Knopf, New York, p 99.

²⁷ Arnold, M. (1963, first published in 1869), *Culture and Anarchy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp 7–8, 49, 110.

a prime example being Egypt's Rosetta Stone, temples, palaces, mosques and other sites were also seen, particularly by the military wing of the nineteenth century British Empire, as simply structures whose value lay not in their history but in their convertibility to defence posts, barracks and offices. Following the second Anglo-Burmese war, tensions began to emerge between Sir Arthur Phayre, the Chief Commissioner of British Burma, who acted in several instances to protect native sacred sites at the request of monks and temple guardians, against the depredations and demolition plans of a range of actors, including military commanders, engineers, civil settlers, American Baptist missionaries and Indian military police. These tensions led to the earliest British draft charter on preservation of religious buildings in Burma, penned as a memo by Phayre in the late 1850s, and prompted by his personal indignation at the desecration and commandeering of both secular and religious property, including 'sacred buildings' whose 'destruction . . . excited universal attention and approbation among the inhabitants of the country'.²⁸ If Phayre showed the sensitivity to the built indigenous environment and its sacred spaces, he failed to enforce his vision. His memo remained just that, and never became policy. A small museum, the first established by the British, was named after him in Rangoon, quarantining his conservationist efforts to a building that subsequent administrations failed to expand. The violent upheaval of the third Anglo-Burmese war, along with the destruction of palace records, and other officially sanctioned as well as random acts of looting, signalled a new era of military utilization and colonial expropriation of sacred sites and relics.

By the appointment of Lord Curzon as Governor-General of India in 1900, Burma had become the archetype of Said's notion of British imperialism as the ruthlessly pragmatic antithesis of French colonialism. Where the latter developed a romantic fascination with 'suggestive secrets' and 'forgotten ruins', the former was more concerned with the strategic conversion of monumental structures, however sacred. Such spatial transformations reiterated the hierarchy of the ruling power and established, in a twisted sense, its 'divine' status as a power answerable only to itself. Dubbed 'the era of vandalism' by Curzon, this was by no means unique to Burma, but was the standard *modus operandi* of British engineers, soldiers and entrepreneurs, as reflected in plans to

²⁸ National Archives Department of Myanmar – henceforth NADM (1868), Acc. 1/1 (A) 1255 1868, File 182, 'Commissioner of Pegu to Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of British Burma, Rangoon, Arthur Phayre, Commissioner of Pegu, 8 July'.

auction off the Taj Mahal and the 1857 desecration of the Moghul palace by British troops.²⁹ By this time, Nicholas Dirks has argued, India had emerged as an 'ethnographic state', and 'knowledge of peoples and cultures' – in other words, 'anthropology' – had 'supplanted history as the principal colonial modality of knowledge'.³⁰ In India and Indo-China, archaeology developed somewhere between these two disciplines. Although, as Keith Orr has argued, archaeology in Burma was more an 'antiquarian archaeology' than the 'anthropological archaeology' associated with prehistoric finds, the results of archaeological enquiry were often transposed to ethnographic knowledge, as a source of information about particular peoples, cultures and societies.³¹ What distinguished antiquarian archaeology, Orr argues, was its reliance on epigraphy as the basic tool. This reliance was in turn tied up with the earlier mentioned nineteenth century Orientalist emphasis on text rather than practice.

However, in the domain of colonial archaeology, even these two distinct French and British knowledge cultures were entangled, reflecting the saliency, over a century ago, of Aihwa Ong's contemporary formulation of the 'geo-politics of cultural knowledge'.³² In the early 1900s, Curzon ordered a number of photographs of Angkor Wat from Saigon, indicating his possible interest in gauging the state of play in Angkor.³³ Conversely, when establishing the École Française d'Extrême-Orient in 1901, its first director, the Indologist Louis Finot, stressed the need to catch up with the progress made by Britain and other imperial powers, citing the Archaeological Survey of India. Such scholastic ambitions correlated with nostalgia for France's eighteenth century loss of its Indian empire to Britain, as reflected in popular French depictions of Cam-bodia and its monuments as 'France's India'.³⁴ Here is the background to France's funding of joint excavations at Sriksetra in Prome,

²⁹ Lord Curzon (1900), 'On ancient monuments in India: address at the annual meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal', 7 February.

³⁰ Dirks, N. (2002), 'Annals of the archive: ethnographic notes on the sources of history', in Axel, B. K., ed, *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and its Futures*, Duke University Press, Durham, pp 47–65, specifically p 57.

³¹ Orr, K. G. (1951), 'The place of anthropology among the social studies of Burma', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol 34, No 1, pp 7–39, specifically p 17.

³² Aihwa Ong (1999), *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality*, Duke University Press, Durham, p 329.

³³ Office of the India and Oriental Records Collection (1893), Eur Mss Photo 430/86, L. Talbot, Saigon to Monsieur Curzon, 22 February 1893, OIORC, London. These photographs predated French conservation activity at Angkor.

³⁴ See Edwards, P. (2004), 'Taj Angkor: enshrining l'Inde in le Cambodge', in Yee, J., and Robson, K., eds, *France, India and 'Indochina': Cultural Representations* (in press), Lexington Books, London.

in 1906, between Taw Sein Ko and the French General, Leon de Beylié. Described by Luce as 'a great expert in Indian archaeology', de Beylié had conducted several studies of Angkor, and later authored *Prome at Samara*.³⁵ Several leading French Indologists were trained in British India, among them members of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, the Pali Scholar Charles Duroiselle, who succeeded Taw Sein Ko as Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey in 1915, while British scholars, such as Luce, received some academic training from Finot and the French sinologist Paul Pelliot in the 1920s.³⁶ Although such linkages between French and British theatres of colonial knowledge are significant, they are only part of the story. By focusing solely on the competing 'cultures' of the colonizing power, we risk obscuring the cultural nuances that distinguished, for example, Burmese knowledge traditions from their Cambodian counterparts.

It was *satras*, or religious scriptures, and not spiritual sites, which formed the major site of monastic opposition to both modernization and colonial intervention in Cambodia. Senior monks in Cambodia resisted the introduction of print media to the Buddhist world in the 1910s, but French conservation projects in Angkor and elsewhere were generally welcomed. In Burma, the reverse held true. Despite the similar perspectives within both countries on the sacred, magico-religious properties of the written word in traditional palm-leaf or concertina manuscripts, the Burmese *sangha* appears to have more readily embraced a modern print-based culture. But when Curzon declared the era of vandalism over and ushered in a new period of conservation, this secular intrusion into the religious domain galvanized unexpected resistance. The common belief that sponsorship of the construction of a *cetiya*, or reliquary shrine, was a path to rebirth at the time of Sri Ariya Maitreya, the next Buddha, in whose presence one would attain enlightenment, laid fertile grounds for protest in Burma for a clash over ways of seeing and managing sacred sites.³⁷

³⁵ Myint Aung, (2002), 'The development of Burma archaeology', *Burma Historical Research Journal*, Vol 9, pp 11–29, specifically p 18; Luce, G. (1948), 'A century of progress in Burmese history and archaeology', *Journal of Burma Research Society*, Vol 32, No 1, pp 4–6. After what Beylié described as a good beginning, writes Myint Aung, the excavations at Sriksetra continued under the guidance of Taw Sein Ko and his successors, and yielded major finds, including fifth-century south Indian manuscripts.

³⁶ Strachan, *supra* note 21, at p 5; Hall, *supra* note 25. Luce trained in the 1920s, under Finot and Pelliot, at the Sorbonne. Hall mistakenly describes Finot as a sinologist.

³⁷ By contrast, in Cambodia, Laos and Siam, a more common passage to rebirth was the act of listening to the entire sermon concerning the life of Prince Vessantara, the last incarnation of the Buddha before his rebirth as Siddhatha Gottama. Keyes, *supra* note 3, at pp 89–90, 94.

Where colonial archaeology came to perceive sites such as Pagan as a means of accumulating knowledge, and their preservation as a means of both marking historical time and enhancing a global, imperial 'heritage' to rival that of competing empires, both Buddhism and the popular religion of nat-worship valued temples and shrines for their dynamic properties as conduits of spirituality, gateways to change in individual circumstance, and – through their construction and embellishment – as generators of merit. The colonial 'restoration' of monuments, and their relocation to anterior time, often involved the levelling of indigenous forms of expression and belief that had, until the formalization of the colonial conservation programme, remained one of the major arenas of action outside of direct British intervention and control. The Archaeological Survey's investment in imperial knowledge thus constituted a direct divestment of localized, spiritual power. Conversely, colonial authorities considered local practices of 'investment' in the present and future of the donor by 'adding on' to existing monuments through new glass mosaics, coats of paint and electric lighting as a defacement of the 'original' and a divestment of historical value.³⁸ From circa 1890–1915, as Chief Government Archaeologist, Taw Sein Ko acted as a knowledge broker between these two belief systems, attempting to purvey the values of 'conservation' to lay preceptors, Buddhist monks and temple guardians, among others, along with documenting archaeological remains and determining which historic sites were worthy of preservation for the colonial authorities.

Although working in the service of a colonial regime all too conscious of the power to be derived from knowledge, Taw Sein Ko, like many other indigenous scholars whose lives intersected with, and were shaped by, British colonialism, was not necessarily pursuing knowledge *as power per se*. As his writings indicate, his quest for knowledge was driven by a mixture of genuine curiosity, intellectual vanity, a fascination with the European exotic, a frustration with the limitations of European knowledge about Burma, the desire to build bridges across cultures, Burmese cultural pride, Chinese linguistic proficiency and his own professional zeal. Indeed, the purchase on power that knowledge gave indigenous scholars within colonial institutions was all too limited. This fact was increasingly, and painfully, made plain to Taw Sein Ko, whose private writings indicate a struggle between his genuine interest in his research, his discomfort at the ends to which his endeavours

³⁸ Orr, *supra* note 31, at pp 18–21.

were being put, and what was essentially, beneath the glory of his office, titles and duties, 'the position and status of a mere clerical-subordinate data-gatherer' in a colonial knowledge chain.³⁹ His impressive list of Imperial decorations did not constitute a reward for excellence in scholarly endeavours, and as such, could not confer the intellectual recognition for which Taw Sein Ko yearned. They were, pure and simple, badges of good *service*, elaborate reminders that he was in the employ of European masters.

Taw Sein Ko: curriculum vitae

Taw Sein Ko was born on 7 December 1864 at Moulmein, a small trading town near the border with Siam, in Mon territory, which had been annexed and incorporated into British Burma in 1852, following the Second Anglo-Burma War. He described his ancestors as hailing from Amoy (now commonly known as Xiamen, in Fujian, southern China), a place of massive outmigration during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴⁰ At the time of his birth, his father, Taw Sein Sonn, was apparently already well established in Burma as part of a Chinese merchant family. His mother, Ma Nu, was described by U Pe Tin as the daughter of a *saw bwa*, or Shan chieftain. After the outbreak of the Mingun Rebellion in Mandalay in 1866, the family moved to Prome, a small trading town on the Irrawaddy adjacent to the ruins of the ancient city of Pyu, where Taw Sein Ko was enrolled at an English school. In 1871, his parents moved to Mandalay to resume their business in the city, and Taw Sein Ko enrolled at Dr Mark's School, alongside 57 pupils including the sons of noblemen, a number of Shan princes and the sons of King Mindon, among them the future King Thibaw.⁴¹ Founded

³⁹ Private communication with F. K. Lehman, December 2003.

⁴⁰ Taw Sein Ko (1920), 'The career of Mr. Taw Sein Ko', in *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 2, British Burma Press, Rangoon, pp 219–222; see also *Burma Gazette* (1919), 'History of services of Gazetted officers in Burma', 6 December.

⁴¹ A school still functions on this site, as witnessed by the author in June 2003. The neighbouring Christchurch Cathedral, originally of wood, was burnt to the ground and rebuilt in 1920. It contains a marble font, still in prime condition, donated by Queen Victoria in the late 1860s as a mark of respect for King Mindon, who greatly impressed the Queen with his display of tolerance and interest in the Christian religion. Information on the history of the school is here taken from J. Talboys Wheeler (1871), *Journal of a Voyage up the Irrawaddy to Mandalay and Bhamo*, London, Rangoon, pp 52–53, and Thant Myint-U (2001), *The Making of Modern Burma*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p 114. See also Marks, E. (1917), *Forty Years in Burma*, London.

in 1870 by King Mindon for the education of his sons, funded by the Burmese government and run by Dr Marks of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), the school was not far from the royal palace, adjacent to a plot of land that King Mindon had donated to the church for the erection of Christchurch Cathedral in 1864. The SPG was the most active of the Anglican missionary groups in Myanmar, and one that was strongly committed to the spread of Christian education. Here, the young Taw Sein Ko apparently thrived on a school diet of English, history, geography, arithmetic, mathematics and Latin, and was reportedly praised by Dr Marks as someone who would go far in life and had the makings of a great man, a remark that apparently stuck to him and was well known in his circles.⁴²

In 1875, when Taw Sein Ko was 11, his father died in Bhamo, in north-eastern Burma, presumably in the course of travelling for business, and was given a traditional Chinese funeral and burial. The main trading post between Burma and China, the great river port of Bhamo was the headquarters of the cotton and orchid trade between India and China, and was used as a garrison for Indian troops.⁴³ A thriving entrepot for trade, Bhamo was the major link for the overland Chinese community to Yunnan. Its straggling skyline merged the spires and airy roofs of pagodas and monasteries with Chinese temples (Figure 4), and its ethnic mix inspired excitement and confusion in European visitors. Visiting in 1896, one woman traveller noted a 'Chinese quarter', where 'John Chinaman reigns supreme', and wrote of 'Chinese Shans' and 'Burmese Shans', by which she was probably referring to the Dai of Yunnan (*tai moe*) and the Shan of the Shan state (*tai tay*).⁴⁴ Here, as R. Talbot Kelly wrote in 1905, Indian and Chinese joined in garrison sports, while in architectural and cultural terms, 'Burmese and Chinese jostle and intermix, each partaking a little of the character of the other'.⁴⁵ But such mixed sites were not only to be found on Burma's geographic borders. Burma shared with the Siam studied by Craig Reynolds a 'polyethnic past' and 'polyethnic communities'.⁴⁶

⁴² U. Tin (date?), 'The biography of the late former Minister of Archaeology Taw Sein Ko (CIE, ISO, KIH)', translation by Khin Mar Mar Kyi (unpublished), pp 3–4.

⁴³ Morrison, G. E. (1972, first published in 1895), *An Australian in China: Being the Narrative of a Quiet Journey Across China to Burma*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, p 284.

⁴⁴ Gascoigne, G. T. (1896), *Among Pagodas and Fair Ladies: An Account of a Tour through Burma*, A. Innes & Co, London, pp 189–194.

⁴⁵ Kelly, R. T. (1912 reprint of 1905 original), *Burma Painted and Described*, Adam and Charles Black, London, pp 34–35.

⁴⁶ Reynolds, C. (1998), 'Globalization and cultural nationalism in modern Thailand', in Kahn, J., ed, *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, pp 115–145, specifically p 121.



Figure 4. Chinese Temple, Bhamo, 1920.

Source: from the album of Edith Marjorie Thom. Courtesy of George Miller.#

After his father's death, Taw Sein Ko moved back to Prome with his mother, and enrolled at an Anglo–Chinese school. In 1878, he passed his Middle School exams with flying colours and was awarded a scholarship to study at Rangoon College. In addition to its (in)famous colonial clubs, Rangoon possessed two Chinese clubs (in Latter Street and Canal Street) and a Hong Kong club (in China Street).⁴⁷ Even the Shwedagon Pagoda was a polyethnic site of worship, with Indians, Shans, Muslims, Burmese, Chinese and others thronging the steps and shrines. Colonial schools were similarly mixed. By 1894, Rangoon College counted four Europeans and over 540 Asians and Eurasians, including Chinese, Karens, Kachins, Shans, Hindus and Malays, 'both pure' as one observer commented in the language of the time, 'and blended with the Burmese race'.⁴⁸ After one year at Rangoon College, Taw Sein Ko became the youngest student to matriculate, winning a second scholarship to study the FA (Indian Civil Service) exams. We can only speculate that his mother approved of his move to Rangoon College and recognized his potential as a link with the new order. If so, she was not to be disappointed. In 1881, at the age of 17, Taw Sein Ko travelled to Calcutta University to take the FA exams, and passed them with distinction.

After the outbreak of the third Anglo–Burmese war in November 1885, Taw Sein Ko was appointed Assistant Translator, and assigned to join the 'Expedition' to Upper Burma.⁴⁹ As a member of this expedition, he prided himself on belonging to an office working in such turbulent climes that a sword and pistol were standard items of uniform, and apparently demonstrated little empathy for the Burmese monarchy and ministers evicted from their palace, nor sympathy for victims of the British campaign, although he may well have been present at such atrocities as that recounted by Herbert Thirkell White, Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner to the Secretary of the Government of India, when his expedition 'set alight an entire civilian village'.⁵⁰ In 1886, he became part of the new occupancy of the Palace,

⁴⁷ Bird, G. W. (1897), *Wanderings in Burma*, Bournemouth and London, pp 292–294. Bird was probably referring to Chinese dialect associations or *Hui Guan*.

⁴⁸ Morrison, *supra* note 43, at p 289.

⁴⁹ Accompanying Herbert Thirkell White on the 1885 expedition to 'pacify' Upper Burma, Taw Sein Ko would have witnessed, and probably participated in (at some level) the violence inflicted by British troops. As later recalled by White, the troops showed no sign of remorse: and indeed he stressed the necessity of the event, as when he set alight an entire civilian village.

⁵⁰ Thirkell White, H. (1913), *A Civil Servant in Burma*, Edward Arnold, London.

working with Thirkell White in his office in the *hlutdaw* (former Burmese Ministers') building, where 'We had our own little printing press, and published our own gazette'. Thirkell White, to whom Taw Sein Ko dedicated his first volume of essays in 1913, stayed on for 30 years in Burma, and remembered Taw Sein Ko as 'my only qualified assistant' at this time.⁵¹ Taw Sein Ko was soon producing his own documents, including a lengthy note on the political relations between Burmese and Shan states.⁵² By his very entry into the Civil Service, Taw Sein Ko had identified his future with that of the new order installed in Burma by the British annexation, and had become an instrument of the colonial regime.

In 1888, Taw Sein Ko was promoted to Government Translator. The following year, in 1889, he married at the age of 26.⁵³ Highly confident and driven, Taw Sein Ko appeared to be motivated in particular by a quest for 'knowledge' in the spirit of the well known sonnet by John Donne. Although he staked his lot with the occupying power, it is possible that, with the confidence of highly educated youth, he believed in his ability to make a difference as an intermediary. Certainly, his obituarist U Tin later stressed how Taw Sein Ko had successfully represented the opinions of Buddhist monks in dealings with the British in the 1890s. In 1890 he was placed on special duty to examine and organize for publication the antiquarian and historical researches of the German archaeologist, Forchhammer, who had served as Government Archaeologist from 1881 to 1890, during which time he had conducted preliminary research on sites at Akyab and Rangoon.⁵⁴ In 1891, under instructions from the government, Taw Sein Ko completed his first archaeological tour through Mon country, then known as the 'Mon Country of Burma'. His detailed report, published in Bombay in 1893, advocated the preservation of rare languages through the conservation of manuscripts at the Bernard Free Library, as well as various tablets for the Phayre Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, and the British Museum.⁵⁵ In 1892, Taw Sein Ko was sponsored by the British government to spend a year in England, where he taught Burmese at Christ's College, Cambridge, and joined the Inner Temple in London,

⁵¹ White, *supra* note 50, at p 144.

⁵² NADM (1886), 'Mr. Taw Sein Kho's note on Political Relations between Burmese and Shan States', Series: 1/1 (A) Acc No. 1845, File 61, pages 122, Box 1886.

⁵³ U Tin, *supra* note 42, at p 12.

⁵⁴ Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 40, at p 227.

⁵⁵ Taw Sein Ko (1893), *Notes on an Archaeological Tour through Rammannadesa (The Mon Country of Burma)*, Education Society's Steam Press, Bombay, pp 7, 10.

a popular dining club and haunt of imperial protégés enrolled as teachers or students at British universities.

He returned to Burma in 1893 to take up the posts of Assistant Secretary and Government Translator. In 1894, the Australian sinologist George Morrison visited Burma and was introduced to a man in the Intelligence Department fitting Taw Sein Ko's description, whom he describes as 'the chief Chinese interpreter, a Chinaman with a rare genius for languages. He is a native of Fuhkien province, and of course, speaks the Fuhkien dialect; he knows also Cantonese and Mandarin, French, Hindustani, Burmese, Shan and Sanskrit, and in an admirable translation of a Chinese novel into English, he frequently quotes Latin.'⁵⁶ In 1896–7, Taw Sein Ko's former supervisor, Thirkell White, was appointed Her Majesty's Commissioner for demarcating the boundary between Burma and China, and a joint commission was appointed to review the boundary line drawn by the Chinese in 1893, which had proved 'most unfavourable to Burma'. In 1896, Taw Sein Ko was sent to Peking to study Chinese language and Chinese affairs, and also followed courses in Chinese literature and history. After a long stay in Xiamen, 'home of his ancestors', he journeyed to Shanghai, made a telling pilgrimage to Qifu, the birthplace of Confucius, and also visited Tianjin. He became acquainted with the veteran statesman Li Hung Chang, and wrote a series of articles on 'Suggested reforms for China', which first appeared in the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* and were subsequently reprinted and circulated in English and Chinese. Taw Sein Ko also played a significant role in negotiations for the Sino–Burmese Boundary Commission, which assembled at Bamaw, under Thirkell White, for four months in 1897. He returned to Burma in 1898 and passed the Chinese language examinations as set by the British colonial service. The following year, he was appointed Examiner in Chinese and Acting Advisor on Chinese Affairs, a position that he held on the outbreak of the Boxer rebellion in 1900.

Locating Taw Sein Ko as 'Chinese'

The era of high colonialism, which we can roughly date as 1885 to 1930 in Burma, French Indo-China and the Philippines, can be understood as a time of 'transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside,

⁵⁶ Morrison, *supra* note 43, at p 284.

inclusion and exclusion'.⁵⁷ Situated in this in-between space, Sino-communities and individuals were ideally positioned to play the role of go-betweens. This was particularly so in Burma, where Europeans and Indians were both referred to as *kala*, a contemptuous term for outsider or foreigner, but Chinese and Siamese were called 'cousins', reflecting the traditional Burma conception of the relationship between Burma and China as brothers or relatives (*swe-myo pauk-phaw*), with *pauk-phaw* (birth companion) kinship.⁵⁸

In recent studies of diaspora and transnationalism, the trope of the rootless, male Chinese traveller as a contemporary figment of globalization who is 'forever crossing, traversing, mixing, translating linguistically and culturally' has been contrasted with 'the nineteenth century sojourner, forever yearning to return to China, to go home, in mind or in body'.⁵⁹ Such attempts to isolate the present from the past proliferate in much current literature on globalization, and stem in part from the long-standing bias in the study of Chinese overseas on their role as economic intermediaries, and a corresponding tendency to negate or elide their role as cultural translators, political interlocutors and vectors of new ideas. Although the current opportunities afforded by rapid technology and the post-colonial diminishment, if not eradication, of attitudes of Western and racial cultural superiority have broadened opportunities for such intermediation, there are also bases for comparison between current currencies of cultural power and those available to Chinese diaspora in the era of high colonialism. Where American college degrees today provide prime 'symbolic capital' to Chinese from South East Asia, participation in colonial education systems also provided a comparable guarantee that graduates of such schools, such as Taw Sein Ko, possessed the 'cultural knowledge, skills and credentials that enable the transposition of social status from one country to another'.⁶⁰

As Jacques Népote has noted of colonial Cambodia, Sino-Khmers

⁵⁷ Bhabha, *supra* note 11, at p 1.

⁵⁸ For a useful introduction to the textual and historiographic relations between Burma and China, see the Introduction to Sun Laichen (date?), 'Chinese historical sources on Burma: a bibliography of primary and secondary works', *Journal of Burma Studies*, Vol 2. Thirkell White, *supra* note 50, at p 18, notes the usages of *kala* and its connotations, and the different terms for Chinese and Siamese.

⁵⁹ Chan, K. B. (date?), 'A family affair: migration, dispersal and the emergent identity of the Chinese cosmopolitan', *Diaspora*, Vol 6, No 2, pp 195–213, specifically p 207.

⁶⁰ Ong, *supra* note 32, at p 90.

played a pivotal role, during the era of high colonialism, in negotiating the crossing from the social and cultural *status quo ante* to modernity. Occupying beaches of 'cross-cultural' mixing, Sino-Khmers were perfectly positioned to act as intermediaries, to cooperate with Westerners and 'to manage the necessary synthesis between traditional forms which were increasingly obsolete...and condemned to disappear, and the necessities of a modern world provisionally dominated by western images and canons'.⁶¹ Elsewhere, Richard Chu has emphasized the 'multiple, fluid and ambiguous' identities of the 'Chinese mestizo' (born of Filipino and Chinese parents) in the late nineteenth-century Philippines and the capacity of this Creole community to transgress the boundaries ordained for them by other groups, while G. William Skinner has highlighted the importance of 'intermediate creolized' Chinese societies in Java and Malaya.⁶²

Burma's common border with China, and its positioning as part of the British Empire, made its experiences of Chinese settlement unique in South East Asia in that they were generated along three core axes of movement and settlement, which mitigated against the formation of a single, Chinese community. The first, and most historic, axis was that comprising overland, usually temporary, trade-related migration from the south-western province of Yunnan, notably by Hui Muslim caravaneers. This community was concentrated around upper Burma, but even there it never emerged in sizeable form as a fixed or settled community in the colonial period (Figure 5). Many Yunnanese Chinese commonly maintained a home in China, with the exception of a Panthay community that settled in Mandalay in the 1860s and 1870s in the wake of the massacre and mass exodus of Panthay Muslims following the Panthay rebellion in Yunnan (1856–73).⁶³ The second group

⁶¹ Népote, J. (1995), 'Les nouveaux Sino-Khmers acculturés: un milieu social perturbateur?' *Peninsule: Etudes disciplinaires sur l'Asie du Sud-Est Péninsulaire*, Vol 30, No 1, pp 133–154, specifically p 149.

⁶² Chu, R. (2002), 'Rethinking the Chinese mestizos of the Philippines', in Shen Yuanfang and Penny Edwards, eds, *Beyond China: Migrating Identities*, Centre for the Study of Chinese Southern Diaspora, Australian National University, Canberra, pp 44–74, specifically pp 73–74; Skinner, G. W. (1996), 'Creolized Chinese societies in Southeast Asia', in Reid, A., ed, *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, pp 51–93.

⁶³ Maung Maung Lay (1999), 'The emergence of the Panthay community at Mandalay', *Studies in Burmese History: Essays Given to Than Tun on his 75th Birthday*, Thein Htiye Yadana Press, Yangon, pp 90–103. For a recent account of the rebellion, see Atwill, D. G. (2003), 'Blinkered visions: Islamic identity, Hui ethnicity, and the Panthay Rebellion in Southwest China, 1856–1973', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol 62, No 4, pp 1079–1108. As Atwill explains, the term 'Panthay' appears to be an Anglicization of the Burmese term for Muslims, *pa-ti*.



Figure 5. A Chinese Muleteer, 1920.

Source: from the album of Edith Marjorie Thom. Courtesy of George Miller.

consisted of the seaborne diaspora or Nanyang Chinese from the south and south-eastern Chinese provinces of Chaozhou (Teochiu), Fujian (Hokkien), Guangdong (Canton) and Hainan island, which was analogous to the Chinese presence in Cambodia, Siam, the Philippines and other South East Asian colonies and states. Encompassing urban occupations as well as market gardening and coolie labour, this group aggregated around cities and trade centres and was represented in both upper and lower Burma by the end of colonial rule. The dominant dialect groups to emerge in Burma were Hokkien and Cantonese, and over time these developed occupational specializations: Cantonese niche industries were carpentry, shoemaking and skilled craftsmanship, as well as the coolie trade and farming, while Hokkiens aggregated around shops and small businesses.⁶⁴ These distinctions were reflected in Burmese language terms, with *leto* (literally, short sleeve) denoting Cantonese, and *letshe* (long-sleeve) denoting Hokkien and their proclivity for blue- and white-collar work.⁶⁵ A third community arose by dint of Burma's incorporation into British imperial trading networks, and centred on Penang, which was a major transmigration point for Chinese moving from or through the Straits Settlements to Burma. Strong commercial relationships between Penang and Burma were the major driving force behind the growth of the Chinese community in lower Burma, notably Rangoon and Moulmein, much of which arose through 'autonomous movements in Chinese' between the lower Malay peninsula to Tavoy and Tenasserim.⁶⁶ These migratory patterns, which by the turn of the century often involved a two to three-year stay in Penang by Straits Settlement Chinese en route to Burma, gave rise to a fourth, *pa-shu* community, which scholars U Thaw Kaung and Daw Win

⁶⁴ Lintner, B. (date?), 'Illegal aliens smuggling to and through Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle', in Nyiri and Saveliev, *Globalizing Chinese Migration*, (publisher and place?), pp 108–119, specifically p 110. Historically concentrated in and around Bangkok in Siam, Teochiu Chinese found new opportunities for northward migration with the expansion of the railways in the 1920s, leading thousands to settle in Chiang Mai. It is likely that many moved onward to Burma in the 1930s to escape stringent anti-Chinese legislation, as did thousands of Teochius who moved to and through Battambang in the 1940s, soon taking over from the Cantonese and Hokkien as the largest ethnic Chinese group in Cambodia. See Penny Edwards and Chan Sambath, 'Chinese in Cambodia', in Collins, W., ed (1995), *Ethnic Groups in Cambodia*, Center for Advanced Studies, Phnom Penh, pp 109–175, specifically pp 123–124.

⁶⁵ U Thaw Kaung and Daw Win (2003), 'Preliminary survey of Penang–Myanmar relations from mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries', paper presented at the Shared Histories Conference, 30 July–3 August, Penang, Malaysia, p 4.

⁶⁶ Michael Charney, *supra* note 17, *passim*.

describe as an 'indigenised hybridised Chinese community with links to Penang', comparable with the Baba Nonya of the Straits Settlements.⁶⁷

As G.E. Morrison declared in the 1890s, the various races represented in Burma had 'intermarried with the native Burmese', forming 'mixed populations that became more mixed down generations'. Perhaps evincing the pro-China bias of an established sinologist, Morrison penned lavish praise for Burma's Sino-Burmese population, and emphasized the willingness of Burma women to intermarry, alleging that 'No one treats her so well as the Chinaman . . . who is of a cognate race to her own, is hardworking, frugal, and industrious, permits her to live in idleness, and delights her with presents, loving her children with that affection which the Chinaman has ever been known to bestow upon his offspring'.⁶⁸ For first- and second-generation Chinese descendants in the nineteenth century, as was the case in Thailand and Cambodia, it was commonplace for the sons of a Burmese mother and Chinese father to be dressed and educated as Chinese, and their sisters as Burmese.⁶⁹ This strategy had several economic advantages: Burmese society tended to be matrilocal, meaning that the Burmese daughter's husband would join, and contribute to, her parents' household upon marriage, while the Chinese son could travel to China to seek a bride, or establish a family through intermarriage, as had Taw Sein Ko's father, and accrue the advantages of business access. In some cases, several wives and families were established in diverse locations. As one 1890s observer put it, 'the boy so brought up can rely upon the aid of his father's fellow-countrymen, and a Burmese girl can always make her way in the world'.⁷⁰ These systems of adaptation cohered with Chinese diasporic

⁶⁷ U Thaw Kaung and Daw Win, *supra* note 65, at pp 1–3.

⁶⁸ Morrison, *supra* note 43, at pp 289–291.

⁶⁹ Sir George Scott (1 ed 1906, 2 ed 1911), *Burma: A Handbook of Practical, Commercial and Political Information*, (publisher and place?), p 458. On Siam, see Tejapira, Kasian (date?), 'Pig-tail: a pre-history of Chineseness in Siam', *Sojourn*, Vol 7, No 1, pp 96–121. On Cambodia, see Edwards, P. (date?), 'Restyling colonial Cambodia: (1860–1954): French dressing, indigenous custom and national costume', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, Vol 5, No 4, pp 389–416, specifically p 398. As a child, Taw Sein Ko's own attire was probably influenced not only by his descent but by his Chinese schooling. The early death of his father, after which he was sent to a European school, may have encouraged him to shun some or all Chinese attire or coiffure for European clothing in his teenage years, a trend probably exacerbated after his later entry to the colonial civil service. However, as his photograph in the earlier cited 1920s *Who's Who in Burma* indicates, he preferred Chinese to European attire on at least some occasions.

⁷⁰ Cuming, E. D. (1893), *In the Shadow of the Pagoda: Sketches of Burmese Life and Character*, W. H. Allen, London, p 4.

regimes of mobilized masculinity and localized femininity, which often saw not only the father but also the offspring making return visits to China for schooling and as a means of honouring the ancestors. In the colonial era as today, it was not uncommon for the first-generation Chinese migrant to establish a second wife in his South East Asian country of destination.⁷¹ In a revealing remark made some years after his father's death, Taw Sein Ko expressed his support and acceptance of the practice of some Chinese men who had two wives, one in Burma and one in China. His illustration to this observation included a 'China-man, his wife from China, and their small son'.⁷²

Burma's positioning within the British Empire also opened it, like Australia, to a number of migrants or re-migrants from Singapore and Penang. By the 1880s, some 13,000 Chinese from Singapore, Canton and Fujian had settled in Burma, intermarrying with Burmese and becoming permanent citizens of the country.⁷³ These southern Chinese, seaborne migrants were more likely than Chinese from Yunnan to stake out a position in colonial power structures, possibly because the latter had different loci of identity, embracing Shan and Dai Buddhist networks as well as Muslim circuits of traffic, trade and *hajj*, whose centre was neither London, Beijing nor Yangon, but was much more strongly grounded in the immediate region. As we have seen, a third core group of Chinese sojourners in British Burma included Chinese who had transmigrated via Penang and the Straits Settlements, but who tended to aggregate in lower Burma. These diverse origins mitigated against the centralization of the identifiable Chinese 'communities' that coalesced around dialect group associations or 'congregations' elsewhere in colonized South East Asia and the earlier mentioned clubs in Rangoon. Instead, numerous Chinese who travelled to, and in some cases died in Burma, like Taw Sein Ko's father, were highly mobile, settling and resettling as business opportunities or adverse circumstances dictated, and integrating with Burmese society through intermarriage. This layered complexion of the Chinese presence in Burma probably meant that Taw

⁷¹ See Ong, *supra* note 32, at p 20. Although, generally speaking, those from Fujian (Hokkien), Guangdong (Canton) and Chaozhou (Teochiu) do not, there were and are exceptions to this rule, with some male émigrés maintaining and establishing two or more homes, which might span Rangoon, Penang and southern China. Private communication with F. K. Lehman

⁷² Taw Sein Ko (1921), *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 2, Government Printing Press, Rangoon, p 325.

⁷³ Colquhoun, A. R. (1883), *Across Chryse, Being the Narrative of a Journey of Exploration through the South China Border Lands from Canton to Mandalay*, Simpson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, London.

Sein Ko, although of Fujian descent, was connected with the overland community in upper Burma, and suggests that his father was part of the 'commercial interface' between these overland and seaborne communities, which centered on Mandalay.

With this paternal background, his Shan mother, and his civil service posting to upper Burma, Taw Sein Ko was ideally positioned between this overland and seaborne community. Soon after joining H. Thirkell White's team, he was quick to secure his niche as an intermediary between the British, the Burmese, Chinese traders and the Shan, and showed considerable initiative in suggesting courses of action and producing written reports, most of which were sympathetic to both the Shan states and to the needs of Chinese traders passing through them. Uncertainty about the situation in Mandalay was compounded by the short-lived capture of Bhamo by Chinese troops in 1885. In 1886, Taw Sein Ko pushed for a British expedition to the Shan states, without which, he argued, 'there can be no hope of any peace in the Shan country, and the frequent contests would reduce the people to a state of misery'. One of his earliest tasks was the study of *Hlutdaw* records, and Taw Sein Ko's analysis of some 10 *parabaik* (palm-leaf manuscripts) formed the basis for his 'Note on the political relations existing between Burma and the tributary Shan states prior to the British annexation'.⁷⁴ In his summary, Taw Sein Ko described the Shans as a once great nation, some of whose states still abound in mineral wealth, and an exporter of silk, whose *sawbwas* and *myozans* King Mindon had conciliated by presenting them with gold umbrellas, grandiloquent titles and gifts, and by marrying their sisters and daughters.⁷⁵ To enhance his skills as an intermediary between the British administration and the Shan states, he undertook three months' intensive training in the Shan language.⁷⁶ In 1901, Taw Sein Ko took up the case of suggested would-be 'Chinese Shan' settlers from across the 'Chinese Shan state of Santan', proposing the provision of agricultural advances to allow them to move to nearby Bhamo and Myitkyina.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Taw Sein Ko (1886), 'Note on the political relations existing between Burma and the tributary Shan states prior to the British annexation', 1/1 Accession No 1845, File No 61 (8), NADM, p 67.

⁷⁵ Taw Sein Ko (1886), 'In his marginalia, CB suggested adopting the first course of action, but "scarcely" the latter', 1/1 No 1845, File 61 (8), NADM, note, p 79.

⁷⁶ U Tin, *supra* note 23, at p 9.

⁷⁷ NADM (1908), 1/1 (B) Acc. No. 6487, 1908 IC-43. Political Department Notes, File No. 1C-43. An anonymous note on file, dated 14 and 15 July 1908, and prepared for Thirkell White, Governor of Burma, and C. C. Lewis, Officiating Chief Secretary to the Governor of Burma, refers to an earlier, unarchived note by Taw Sein Ko in which he made these representations on behalf of the settlers from the 'Chinese Shan states'.

From the British perspective, one of the most damaging effects of the third Anglo–Burmese war was the disruption to trade into upper Burma from China, which had only recently revived following a near halt during the Panthay Rebellion of 1856–73, despite continued attempts by the Chinese authorities to harass the traders and keep the roads closed.⁷⁸ The hostilities of 1885 had left traders hesitant to venture near Mandalay, and the fact that they were traditionally armed aroused suspicions among British authorities in outlying areas. Taw Sein Ko quickly stepped in to assure a smooth transition from the procedures for vetting caravan traffic used under the Burmese regime, to a new system. In 1886, Taw Sein Ko recorded a statement of two Chinese traders heading a caravan of 120 pack mules and 56 men, who had made it to Mandalay from Yunnan after an eight-day journey through the Shan states. ‘There are a great many other Chinese traders who dare not come down to Mandalay’, reported Taw Sein Ko, and, to encourage a stabilization of trade, he recommended providing the Chinese traders with ‘assurances from the British government that they will be free to come and free to go with their arms’.⁷⁹

The diversity of the Chinese presence in Burma was further complicated by a debate that arose in the late nineteenth century, pitting the ‘Chinese Buddhist’ against the ‘Chinese Confucian’. From 1881 to 1953, this latter category escaped the comprehensive legal system established in British Burma, which, as in British India, held that each racial or religious group had the right to its own laws in the matters of religion and custom.⁸⁰

In Cambodia’s transition to modernity, Népote suggests, Sino–Khmer communities were critical in introducing the linear, progressive time commonly ascribed to European influence, and which contrasted with Khmer cyclical, ritual time/world-view, which, like its Burma counterpart, was accentuated by notions of karma and of the circulation of merit.⁸¹ Although the Indic-derived, Burmese Buddhist notions of time did not make quotidian secular conceptions of time non-linear, their broad, cyclical sway differed from common Chinese conceptions of time as both deep and vertical. These notions were compounded by a

⁷⁸ Wheeler, *supra* note 41, at p 82.

⁷⁹ NADM (1886), 1/1 (B) Acc. No. 1845, File No. 61, 1886(8), Taw Sein Ko, 22 April, ‘Statement of the Chinese traders Li Sinse and Ye La Ba’.

⁸⁰ JSAS (1990), ‘The “Chinese Confucian” and the “Chinese Buddhist” in British Burma, 1881–1947’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol 21, No 2, pp 384–401.

⁸¹ Népote, J. (1995), ‘Liaisons Nouvelles Sino–Khmers’, *Péninsule*, (Vol No?), pp 138–151.

strong sense of lineal descent, were literally underwritten by ancestor tablets, genealogical records, were further underpinned by the social and professional hierarchies set out by Confucius, and were spiritually underscored by the 13-storey structures of heaven and hell. Such notions were easily adapted to nineteenth-century European historical thought and modern literary forms, as reflected in the novels of the mid- to late Qing (such as *Rulin Waishi* [The Scholars] and *Shuihuji* [The Water Margin]), which were in circulation by the time of Taw Sein Ko's stay in China.⁸² Writing of colonial Cambodia, Népote has suggested that the development of modern literature owed more to Chinese than to French literary influence. As Craig Reynolds has noted, Chinese classics also gained currency in Siam at a similar juncture.⁸³ By contrast, Chinese literature was introduced comparatively late to Burma, and with the exception of a translation by a Burmese author and an ethnic Chinese in Burma, in 1894, of *Selected Tales* of Liao Zhai into English, little is known about Chinese works in circulation. Traces of Chinese stylistic influence and storytelling forms evident in Burma works from the 1910s indicate that some Chinese novels were in circulation, including possibly the works of the Chinese nationalist writer, Lu Xun.⁸⁴ In Burma's case, exposure to modern Indian literature was probably more critical than Chinese.

On the back of his early schooling in Chinese, Taw Sein Ko appears to have furthered his Chinese studies even after his father's death. Certainly, after his higher Chinese language training in what was then known as Peking, he would have returned to Burma able to read the Chinese literature then in circulation. The government reaped a further dividend on their investment in Taw Sein Ko's Chinese language education, in the form of annual reports, which he prepared from at least 1913 until 1918, on Chinese newspapers published in Rangoon.⁸⁵ These detailed reports, which reveal more of Taw Sein Ko's views on China

⁸² See Benedict Anderson (1991), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, New York and London, for a discussion of the role of the time sequence and chapter arrangements in the modern novel as a reflector and vector of notions of linear time and national space.

⁸³ Reynolds, C. (1998), 'Globalization and cultural nationalism in modern Thailand', in Kahn, J., ed, *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, pp 115–145, specifically pp 122–123.

⁸⁴ Li Mou and Jiang Yongren, *supra* note 24, at pp 356–357.

⁸⁵ NADM 1/1 (A) 9244, 3945, 4049, 4102, 4141, 'Annual Report(s) Published by Mr. Taw Sein Kho on the Chinese Newspapers Published in Rangoon for 1913, 1914, 1916, 1918 and 1919', NADM, Yangon.

than the precise content of Chinese media in Burma, appear to have been designed as a platform for his political opinions and diplomatic recommendations on matters pertaining both to Sino–Burmese relations and to the future of China.

Written as confidential communiqués to the British authorities, these documents act as a parallel strand with his Archaeological Reports, offering important insights into Taw Sein Ko's opinions and identifications vis-à-vis China. He emerges as an economic rationalist and conservative reformist, who saw slow and steady political change, guided by Western advice, and the realization of China's agricultural and commercial potential, as the best path for China's future development. Virulently opposed to the 'corrupt', 'fossilized conservatism' (1912) of the 'old, decrepit officials of the late Manchu dynasty' (1916), he is also a staunch opponent of the 'arch conspirator' (1912) and 'stormy petrel' (1916) Sun Yatsen, whom he credits with 'rabid radicalism' (1912), 'abortive political disturbances' (1916), 'intrigues and machinations' (1917). A primary casualty of these disturbances is 'valuable property' (1916); stability will bring to China a 'marked commercial prosperity'; 'financial recuperation' can be maintained if the Chinese market is 'exploited to its full extent' (1919).

As compared with the detailed canvas of his writings on archaeology, these reports are broad-brush, thin on social insights or cultural information, and lack the enthusiasm evident in his work on the history and culture of Burma. They also reveal a sense of self-importance, and hint that recognition as the most informed spokesman for Sino–Burmese affairs mattered as much to him as any identification as Chinese.

A central concern throughout the reports is the state of the Sino–Burmese frontier, which he repeatedly declared 'undisturbed' (1912), unlikely to be disturbed, with 'every possibility that the relations between Burma and Yunnan will be more satisfactory than they ever were before' (1914), and 'the continued entry of Chinese caravans onto British territory' constituting a 'good sign of the peaceful condition of Yunnan and the provinces beyond' (1916). Throughout the reports, he aligns himself with the paper's readership: he wrote that 'we, in Burma, are concerned with only two things', these being the future stability of China, as related to the prospects of Japanese intervention and international revolution, and possible ructions on the Sino–Burmese frontier.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ NADM 1/1 (A) 4049 1916 IC-6, 'Annual Report of Mr Taw Sein Ko of the Chinese Newspapers in Rangoon'; 1/1 (A) 4102 1917 5 1917 (2), 'Annual Report by Mr. Taw Sein Ko on the Chinese Newspapers Published in Rangoon'; 1/1 (C) 9244 1913

Although Taw Sein Ko lost his father at a relatively early age, the imprint of his paternal upbringing and his early Chinese education would mean that he brought Chinese cultural practices and valorizations of knowledge into the conversations between European administrations and their South East Asian dominions. As Talbot Kelly discovered in 1905, Taw Sein Ko was intimately familiar with Chinese life in Rangoon. Kelly, who was probably introduced to Taw Sein Ko by his host, Herbert Thirkell White, describes him as 'a cultured gentleman of charming and agreeable manner' who escorted him to Chinese dwellings and to a Chinese temple in the north of the city.⁸⁷ During this visit, Taw Sein Ko not only openly identified with the Chinese, stating that 'we' like to have lots of children, in contrast to 'Europeans', but also displayed his own ethnographic bias, contrasting 'Chinese tolerance' with the attitude of 'Mohammedans and Hindus', a point that Taw Sein Ko elaborated on in his writings.⁸⁸ Soon after, on a visit to Lashio, echoing the Darwinian preoccupations of his day, Kelly alleged that there 'is springing up a new race in which Burmese characteristics are fast disappearing'.⁸⁹

Clearly, Taw Sein Ko's sense of 'Chineseness' was sufficiently fluid to allow him at once to identify as 'native' when it suited him, and to take a distance from the 'natives' in the pursuit of his scholarly research. Indeed, within colonial power relations, his identification as a 'native' and as a 'non-British' may have overridden any compartmentalized sense of identity as either Burman or Chinese. Twice commissioned to furnish material on Burma racial origins for the Burma sections of the India census, Taw Sein Ko insisted on the fluidity of ethnic identifications in Burma. Unlike either India or British colonial society, with their rigid racial and social segmentation, Taw Sein Ko enthused, Burma had 'no iron bond of caste' and the Burmans were not at all 'scrupulous as to the nationality of their associates'.⁹⁰ The census takers of 1901, 1911 and 1921 were less enthusiastic about this purported propensity for mixing, and repeatedly expressed exasperation at the difficulty in naming and labelling the peoples of Burma, and bemoaned

1C-4 Box 108, 'Annual Report by Mr. Taw Sein Ko on the Chinese Newspapers Published in Rangoon'; 1/1 (A) 4141 1919 K-3 1919 (1), 'Annual Report by Mr. Taw Sein Ko on the Chinese Newspapers Published in Rangoon'.

⁸⁷ Kelly, T. (1912, reprint of 1905 ed), *Burma Painted and Described*, Adam and Charles Black, London, pp viii, 35–37.

⁸⁸ Kelly, *supra* note 87, at p 37.

⁸⁹ Kelly, *supra* note 87, at p 244.

⁹⁰ Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 72, at p 322.

the alacrity with which 'tribes' intermarried. The trend of moving from one group to another, bemoaned the writer of the 1921 census, was most acute at Burma's borders. This ease of racial mixing, coupled with the rise of Darwinism and the popularity of 'extinction' theories in numerous colonized countries, fuelled beliefs among a number of Europeans in Burma, noted Taw Sein Ko, that 'the Burmans are a doomed race and that, during the next fifty years, they will become as extinct as the dodo', a fear expressed by Kelly in his 1905 prediction that 'the pure Burman is destined to disappear in favour of a hybrid race'.⁹¹ Taw Sein Ko countered this grim prediction with his own racial stereotype of 'The Burmans [as] a virile and prolific race, not quite ready to commit racial suicide. . .' and instead predicted that Chinese, Indians and others would, in several generations, 'be absorbed by the indigenous population' and would eventually be 'proud to be classed as Burmans'.⁹² This view is partly borne out by a delegation from the League of Nations, who commented in 1930 on the extent to which Chinese had been assimilated into the Burma population.⁹³

As Chinese historian Li Mou points out, on the surface there are few traces of Chinese cultural influence on Burma, as compared with Indian influence, a primary reason being that Burma was under British control from 1885 to 1947.⁹⁴ Taking Li Mou's argument further, we could also suggest that Britain had a vested interest in playing up Burma's Indian cultural identity and historic influences so as to tie Burma more closely to the colonial map of India, of which it remained a 'province' until 1937. Moving outside of the British Empire to the broader domain of European scholarship, this emphasis on Burma's Indian heritage was a natural continuum in the text-centric, Indian bias and origins of Buddhist studies in Europe, which saw scholars such as Mabel Haynes Bode, who drew heavily on Taw Sein Ko's work, consulting with Sylvain Lévi, Louis Finot and other Indologists for her late nineteenth-century dissertation on Burmese Buddhism.⁹⁵ At the same time, the strategic

⁹¹ Taw Sein Ko (1919), 'Burma: a melting pot of races', in *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 2, pp 322–325, specifically p 323.

⁹² Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 91, at p 323.

⁹³ League of Nations (1932), *Commission of Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the Far East: Report to the Council*, League of Nations Publications 4 and 8, Geneva, pp 357–360.

⁹⁴ Li and Jiang, *supra* note 24, at pp 354–355.

⁹⁵ Mabel Hanes Bode (1898), *A Burmese Historian of Buddhism*, dissertation presented to the philosophical faculty of the University of Berne for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Unwin Brothers, Woking and London, pp 7, 17.

deployment or voluntary migration of hundreds of thousands of Indians from within British India to Burma also served to emphasize and enhance Burma's Indian heritage. In this context, Taw Sein Ko's attempt to situate Burma vis-à-vis a regional, non-colonial power and to highlight Chinese influences might be seen as a form of subaltern historiography, a subtle assertion of the existence of other orbits and forms of cultural power outside British imperial spheres. Although his rise through the ranks of the Indian Civil Service negates notions of his 'subaltern' status, we can guess that he enjoyed higher social stature within Burmese and Chinese communities than within Burma's European community.

Taw Sein Ko's first arguments for a place for Chinese influence in the development of Burma Buddhism, and to the presence of Mahayana Buddhism in medieval Burma, were linguistic. In the 1900s, Taw Sein Ko compiled a list of Chinese loanwords in the Burmese language, which was printed in England in *Indian Anthropology*, and submitted by the journal editor for approval to Chinese scholars, alongside Taw Sein Ko's description of 'Chinese influence' as 'Mahayanism,' whose medium is Sanskrit, which, he argued, had an influence in the development of the Burmese alphabet. The list provoked a critique of Taw Sein Ko by a Dr Kurnow, whose publication without Taw Sein Ko's prior knowledge in the Archaeological Annual Report for 1906–07 prompted Taw Sein Ko to write a furious letter to J. Marshall, Director of the Archaeological Survey, demanding that he be given the right of public reply. In particular, Taw Sein Ko was shocked at the 'temerity' of Kurnow for commenting on the history, antiquities, religions, languages and literatures of Burma and China when he had neither linguistic knowledge nor had received public recognition as an authority. Telling the Director of the Archaeological Survey that he felt smitten 'hip and thigh' by Kurnow's criticisms and their public circulation, he compared the scholarship of those in Europe's 'cloistered hall' with 'native scholars on the spot' who 'are in personal truck with the living languages and religions dealt with by them'.⁹⁶ Dismissing the 'flagrant error' of Kurnow's view that Chinese and Burmese languages were closely connected, Taw Sein Ko wrote that 'Chinese influence cannot have played any role in the development of the Burmese alphabet', and described Burmese and Chinese languages as belonging to different 'families', but of the same 'stock'. Taw Sein Ko's explorations of Sino-Burmese connections were

⁹⁶ Taw Sein Ko (1909), Confidential to J. H. Marshall DSA, 30 December.

later taken up by Luce, who studied Chinese in Paris in the 1920s, published a survey of early Chinese texts as sources of Burma history in the *JBRS* in 1924, and later compared the early Burmese language with the clarity, swiftness and good style of Chinese, eschewing the 'extravagant and bombastic styles of Indian literature' and their influence on Burmese.⁹⁷

Elsewhere, Taw Sein Ko referred to monuments and movement as witness to Chinese influence on early Burma, apparently influenced by his reading of Wu Chengen's classic *The Journey to the West*, which tells of Prince Tang's journey from China to India to fetch the Buddhist scriptures. In an article for the *Asiatic Journal*, Taw Sein Ko argued that Burma must have featured on the route to and from China, and in the passage of the 'eight immortals' (*ba xian guo hai*).⁹⁸ In his *Archaeological Notes on Pagan* (1917), he blamed 'the Mongols and Chinese' under Kublai Khan for shattering and subverting the Pagan Empire, and suggested that Burmese art and architecture, which had reached their climax in the thirteenth century AD, had 'never recovered' from the 'cataclysm of the Chinese invasion', which was recorded in the erection of the Tayok Pyi Pagoda, or 'Pagoda of Flight from the Chinese'.⁹⁹ However, as Chen Yi-Sein pointed out in his later analysis of a thirteenth-century Chinese inscription at Pagan, the fact that the text ran horizontally from left to right indicated that Chinese cultural means of expression also became Burmanized.¹⁰⁰

In both cases, Taw Sein Ko was on shaky ground. The Burmese alphabet was of south Indian derivation, and although reminiscent of Mahayana forms, was of uncertain provenance. Although the ancient undercurrent of Mayahana was most probably influenced by Chinese Mahayana, Chinese Mahayana was in part influenced from South East Asia, and was of Indian origin. Similarly, while China had claims on Burma, this never led to cultural influence of lasting significance, and it could be argued that the very strength and proximity of Chinese political power and culture militated against it.¹⁰¹ But while the facts

⁹⁷ Hall, *supra* note 25, at p 583; Luce, G. H. (1932), 'Burma's debt to Pagan', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol 22, No 3.

⁹⁸ Li and Jiang, *supra* note 24, at pp 354–355.

⁹⁹ Taw Sein Ko (1931), *Archaeological Notes on Pagan*, Government of India, Central Publications Branch, Calcutta, pp 1, 12–13; on the Tayok Pyi Paya, see Major C. M. Enriquez (1921), 'Pagan', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol 11, pp 10–14, specifically p 12.

¹⁰⁰ Chen Yi-Sein (1960), 'The Chinese inscription at Pagan', *Bulletin of the Burma Historical Commission*, Vol 1, No 2, pp 153–157.

¹⁰¹ I am indebted to F. K. Lehman, in private communication, for this critique of Taw Sein Kho's critiques.

might have been disputed, the direction of his arguments seemed to be about recognizing the depth of historic regional cross-flows, and making at least an equivalent space for China as for colonial Britain, in Burma.

We can only speculate that Taw Sein Ko, educated and conversant with several cultures – Burmese, British and Chinese – felt more comfortable in exercising multiple identities, and in seeing himself as part of intersecting networks in a global imperial order. The circuits in which he travelled in London, Peking, Rangoon and Mandalay were elite, class-bound itineraries, into which his status as well as his adoption of certain European prescriptions for ‘advancement’ would have bought him entry. But Taw Sein Ko’s Chinese affiliations did not preclude other identifications.

As might be expected from his Victorian leanings and his identification with a nation crippled by Britain’s export of opium, Taw Sein Ko was also a vociferous opponent of the traffic of the drug from Yunnan into British Burma, and here he identified far more closely with the interests of the Burmese than with the fortunes of either Chinese traders or Yunnanese farmers. In 1908, in a series of confidential communiqués, he recommended more stringent regulations on the transportation of Yunnanese opium, arguing that without such restrictions, Burma risked becoming a ‘happy hunting ground for the poppy growers of Bengal and Yunnan, who will wax fat and rich at the expense of the moral and physical degradation of the Burmese race’.¹⁰²

This sense of moral mission had further cultural dimensions. Taw Sein Ko’s Confucian background and exposure to Mahayana Buddhist principles and practices may have helped him in his quest to bring some Buddhist principles to modern society, and may also have helped him to alleviate a personal and professional dilemma vis-à-vis members of the *sangha* (monkhood), whom he simultaneously praised as custodians of Burmese cultural knowledge and the rightful moral tutors of the Burmese nation, and criticized for their failure to contribute to society in the material sphere. Fluent in spoken and written Burmese, conversant with the Jataka tales, and a promoter of Pali education, Taw Sein Ko was deeply familiar with the lore and legend of Burma, and

¹⁰² His proposals met with a lukewarm response from the British administration, and were apparently filed without further action. NADM, 1/1 (B) Acc. No. 6487, 1908, 1C-43, Demi-Official Letter from Taw Sein Ko, Esq, Examiner in Chinese, Burma, to C. C. Lowis, Esq, ICS, Official Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, No. 78, CA-17, 25 May 1908, p 1.

particularly enamoured of the literary culture of upper Burma. In what follows, I focus on Taw Sein Ko's role as a cultural translator in two key domains, both of which were strongly implicated in early Burmese nationalism, and became contested sites in the colonial encounter: Burma Buddhism and colonial archaeology. In its intersection with indigenous belief structures, the agenda of the Archaeological Survey of India, and its Burmese subdivision, entailed a clash between European conceptions of monuments as repositories of historical, scientific knowledge and signifiers of a 'national' style, and Buddhist valorizations of monuments as repositories of 'merit' and spiritual substance.

Interestingly, while professing great pride in Burmese literary culture and material heritage, Taw Sein Ko's interest in this domain, and in particular that of the preservation of past customs, was often coloured by an elusive blend of Victorian priggishness and Confucian morality.

Taw Sein Ko as a 'native' advocate of Burmese education and Buddhist rights

The British annexation of Mandalay in 1885 dealt a severe blow to the *sangha* by terminating royal support for the monkhood via the annihilation of the monarchy as an institution, and the exile of King Thibaw and Queen Suppayalat. It also severely undermined the office of the Buddhist patriarch, or *Thathanabaing*, while the erection of a parallel system of education, which eventually supplanted the Buddhist temple school system in terms of its 'utility' to pupils, by maximizing their chances of employment in the colonial government or economy, created competing 'cultural orientations' between the graduates of either system.¹⁰³

At Rangoon College, Taw Sein Ko had made a particularly favourable impression on his Pali Professor, Dr Emil Forchhammer (1851–90), who predicted fame and honour for him. By a bizarre turn of events, Forchhammer's own demise hastened the realization of his prediction: at the time of his death in 1890, Forchhammer had served eight years as Government Epigraphist and head of the Archaeological Department of the Province of Burma, and he left behind him many unfinished papers.¹⁰⁴ Taw Sein Ko was appointed to set his papers in order, and

¹⁰³ Keyes, *supra* note 3, at pp 101, 102.

¹⁰⁴ Hans Bernd-Zoellner (date?), 'Germans in Burma (1826–1945)', *Burma Historical Research Journal*, Vol 7, pp 75–100, specifically pp 85–86.

this was his entrée into the archaeological department. Forchhammer had also instilled in Taw Sein Ko a keen awareness of the value of Pali, not only as a research language, but as a cultural vehicle. A year after his graduation, Taw Sein Ko wrote an essay on *Moral Education* (1884) in which he welcomed the expansion of state schools under British rule, but expressed grave concern that pupils at those schools were receiving no religious tuition of any kind and learning nothing of Buddhism. Burma's traditional books of morals were passing out of circulation, he moaned, and were being replaced by new books, which 'instead of serving to instruct [young Burma males] in morals, initiate them how to play the gallant in social gatherings'. As an antidote to what he saw as the immorality, hedonism and vanity of Burmese youths, Taw Sein Ko advocated 'moral training'.¹⁰⁵ He saw in women the solution to this problem, and looked forward to the day 'when Burmese mothers will instil high principles into their children'. From around this time, Taw Sein Ko began to produce numerous articles for British India's English-language media, promoting educational reform and popularizing knowledge of Burma culture and history.¹⁰⁶

Although working for Governor Thirkell White, Taw Sein Ko's duties included interaction between the *Thathanabaing* and other high-ranking monks, and the British government. According to his biographer, U Tin, he used this role to negotiate rights for the monks and abbots in the face of British desires to reduce their autonomy and freedom. As a result of this work, he began to master Buddhist religious rights, principles and methods, won respect in the *thanghha*, and struck up a friendship with an officer, U Shwe Taun, from whom he studied Burma traditional law.

In the preface to his 1898 Burmese language manual for aspiring colonial officials, Taw Sein Ko stressed the beauty of Burmese language and literature: 'The popular impression among most foreigners is that the Burmese language is devoid of literature', he wrote. 'This is not true. It has an extensive literature, and its poetry is exceedingly beautiful.' A tireless promoter of education, he recommended that 'more prominence... be given to Burmese literature in the curriculum of studies in the province'.¹⁰⁷ To this end, he compiled a version of the Burma Jataka tale, *Maha Janaka Jataka*, for use as a textbook in local schools.

¹⁰⁵ Taw Sein Ko (1884), *Moral Education in Burma*, pp 227–233.

¹⁰⁶ Taw Sein Ko, *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 1, Government Press, Rangoon, p 232.

¹⁰⁷ Taw Sein Ko (1898), 'Preface', *Elementary Handbook of the Burmese Language*, Government Printing, Rangoon. p v.

Perhaps influenced by his place of birth, Taw Sein Ko was also a great admirer of the 'unique literature' of Mon, and declared the Burmans and the Mons the only peoples of Burma to have any history of note. A keen advocate of the creation of linguistic and literary education in Mon, he hinted at the need for a government grants-in-aid scheme to that end, seeing particular historic value in the potential of the Mon manuscripts to shed light on questions concerning 'Pali and Sanskrit philology and letters'.¹⁰⁸

As indicated in his writings, Taw Sein Ko saw vocational training, secular schools and universities as new training grounds to complement, but not to replace, the role of monasteries, and to effect the 'steady advance of civilization'.¹⁰⁹ To this end, he emerged as one of the earliest and leading proponents of the establishment of a university for Burma. In a rare, explicit attack on a British government official, Taw Sein Ko described Lord Curzon's reception of a deputation of the Educational Syndicate in Jubilee Hall during his 1901 visit to Burma, and Curzon's 'most unsympathetic speech vetoing the proposal'. In those days, Taw Sein Ko wrote, 'the air was surcharged with ideas of Imperialism and Centralization, and the Viceroy did not favour any view that savoured of innovation or decentralization'.¹¹⁰

Stressing the positive influence of *pongyis*, a 'valuable asset to the Burmese [Burma] nation' whose *kyaungs* are 'seminaries' which 'remain the safe repositories of Burmese [Burma] learning and wisdom', Taw Sein Ko went on to condemn colonial, secular schooling, which left its pupils with 'a smattering . . . of English', inflated by 'the little secular knowledge' they have received, ignorant of Buddhist doctrines and apt to 'despise their national religion'. To Taw Sein Ko, knowledge was a 'means of attaining intellectual and moral excellence', and not simply 'a stepping stone' to service with the government. 'Perhaps', he wrote shortly after the formation of the Educational Syndicate in British Burma in 1881, 'we shall see a University in Rangoon'.¹¹¹ His vision was realized in 1920, and, as an active member of the 'Burma University Committee' from 1917–18, he succeeded in securing the

¹⁰⁸ Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 55, at p 2.

¹⁰⁹ Taw Sein Ko (1917), 'Correspondence on Buddhist wills', *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, Vol 7, No 1, p 65.

¹¹⁰ Taw Sein Ko (1913), 'A plea for a university for Burma' (speech at Old Rangoon Collegians Annual Dinner, 20 January 1912), *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 1, Government Press, Rangoon, pp 14–16.

¹¹¹ Taw Sein Ko (1913), 'Education in Burma: from a native point of view', *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 1, pp 224–225.

recognition of Burma language and literature in the university curriculum, although it would be many years before they gained the centrality they deserved.¹¹² Once the government had sanctioned such a university, he began lobbying for a second university, at Mandalay.¹¹³

Taw Sein Ko was also one of a number of 'learned men in Burma' whose 'kind contributions and advice' were instrumental in shaping the first anthology of Burmese literature compiled for use in Burmese schools by editor, Myaung Kyaw Dun, in 1917. This rich anthology was the unlikely result of a committee formed under a 1916 government resolution 'to examine how the Imperial Idea could best be inculcated in Schools and Colleges in Burma'. An advisory board of seven Burmese, including U May Oung and one British professor of English, was appointed to compile 'an anthology of Burmese literature' to 'impart[...] instruction on the lines of the Imperial idea' through extracts from Burmese literature relating to 'loyalty, patriotism, love of country, description of natural features' deemed to be relevant to the Imperial Idea. But as time progressed, in a creative interpretation of this theme, the anthology widened from an 'imperial' compilation attuned to British conceptions, to a 'national' one reflecting the recommendations of Burmese men of letters from across the country. The resultant 'storehouse of the best specimens of Burmese literature', as described by editor Maung Kyaw Dun, was intended as a resource book for the compilation of Burmese school and college textbooks.¹¹⁴

The problem of the new English schools, Taw Sein Ko argued, was that people send their children to *kyaungs* to learn the Burmese alphabet or to serve as a novice for a very short time, and then immediately send them on to English schools, as an education there promises a future income for their children. As a result, 'poor Burman youths' were ignorant of the most basic precepts and texts of Buddhism, and 'left to their own resources with regard to moral or religious training'. Moreover, 'books on morality in the Burma language' were also lacking, and Taw Sein Ko thus recommended the establishment of 'an Oriental faculty for the encouragement of vernacular studies', whose curriculum would incorporate canonical Burmese literature on Buddhist morality, and suggested that the local educational Syndicate, following

¹¹² Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 40, at pp 219–223, specifically, p 222.

¹¹³ Taw Sein Ko, 'A university for Mandalay', *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 2, p 27.

¹¹⁴ Maung Kyaw Dun (1917), 'Preface', *Anthology of Burmese Literature: Volume I*, Government Printing, Rangoon, pp i–iv.

the 'Hanlin Board in China', be authorized to examine such classics.¹¹⁵

However, Taw Sein Ko also subscribed to the common European, colonial and utilitarian view that Buddhist monks, not being engaged in economically productive enterprise, represented a drain on society. Here it is worth noting that in China, with the exception of those areas of the south-western provinces inhabited by the ethnic Dai and other groups who practised Buddhism, Buddhist monks commonly held much lower social status than their counterparts in South East Asia. In an 1893 report on Mon country, Taw Sein Ko wrote of the 'burden' of supporting monks, who 'do very little in return for their maintenance' and who, due to the efficient functioning of lay schools, 'idle away most of their time'.¹¹⁶ These disparaging remarks should not be seen as mere parroting of colonial discourse, but also revealed something of a Confucian disregard for monks in China itself. The observation by one nineteenth-century missionary, that monks were 'generally very ignorant and little considered...despised by the people and held up to contempt and ridicule', often 'persecuted by the Emperors of China, and obnoxious to the literati' hardly constitutes admissible evidence, given the bias of the writer. However, within Han Chinese culture, generally speaking, due to the high status of Daoist and Confucian religions, Buddhist monks were less widely represented among the population and national institutions, less critical in the perpetuation and guarding of the country's high literary culture, and therefore were perceived in a different light from that common in Theravadin societies.¹¹⁷ Despite such views, Taw Sein Ko was mindful of the esteem in which monks were held within Burma.

From 1886 onwards, Taw Sein Ko was called upon as a mediator, scribe, interpreter and conciliator between the British and the *sangha*, in matters ranging from internal management disputes at the Arakan and Mahamuni pagodas, to the donation by the British of a new bell from Mingun for the *Thathanabaing* and complaints by senior monks against British soldiers' removal of temple property, to requests to post police or troops to guard monasteries.¹¹⁸ In 1895, the year in which the

¹¹⁵ Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 105.

¹¹⁶ Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 55, at p 2.

¹¹⁷ Richard, L. (1908), *Comprehensive Geography of the Chinese Empire and its Dependencies* (translated into English, revised and enlarged by Richard Kelly), Tsuewei Press, Shanghai, p 333.

¹¹⁸ See the numerous interjections, marginalia, translations and reports on activity signed 'TSK' in assorted documents in the following files: NADM File No. 360, Arakan Pagoda Sacred Lands; 1/1 (A) File No. 358, Acc. 2078, Present of a Bell from Mengoon



Figure 6. Portrait of H.E. the Thathanabaing of Burma.

Source: from the December 1903 issue of *Buddhism: an Illustrated Quarterly Review*.

incumbent *Thathanabaing* (supreme monk and ruler of the *sangha*) passed away, Taw Sein Ko successfully lobbied for the revival of the Pali Examinations in Buddhist Theology. Some years later, from 1902–03, he also assisted with the election, recognition and installation of the *Thathanabaing*, and may well have acted as an intermediary attempting not only to represent the wishes of the Burma *sangha* and

to the Thathanabaing of Burma; 1/1 A Acc. No. 2055, 22 June 1886, Proclamation by Pakasadow that Pagodas, Kings and Religious Buildings be guarded and preserved; 1/1 A Acc. No. 2055, File No. 269, Complaint of the Pakansadow of the Alumashi Taik against British Soldiers, etc.

laity in their choice of candidate, but also to realize the wishes of the British government for the *sangha* to drop differences in their desired choice of a *Thathanabaing*.¹¹⁹ As a gifted interpreter conversant in Pali and with a background in dealing with Buddhist monks on behalf of the administration, Taw Sein Ko is also likely to have assisted with the conveyance of Lord Curzon's message to the Assembly of some 2,000 monks in Mandalay in 1901. Immediately after the *Thathanabaing's* installation, the *Thathanabaing* (Figure 6) agreed to become the patron of Burma's first secular, non-governmental, Burma–European society for the study of indigenous cultural knowledge, namely the Burmese chapter of the International Buddhist Society, the *Buddhasasana Samagama*.¹²⁰

Founded in 1903, three years before the YMBA and seven years before the Burma Research Society, the *Buddhasasana Samagama* was initially based in a pagoda near Shwedagon, and later moved its editorial offices to premises not far from Shwedagon. Based in Rangoon, but with Burma sub-Representatives in Katha, Kyaukpyu, Meiktila, Moulmein, Pegu, Tharawaddy and Thaton, the *Buddhasasana Samagama* brought together Burma monks and European scholars of Buddhism, and had an indigenous antecedent in Taw Sein Ko's birthplace in the form of the Sasanadara Society of Moulmein (1897), a group dedicated to social improvement through educational advancement, which founded a Buddhist Anglo–Vernacular High School.¹²¹ Taw Sein Ko contributed an article on British Burma's Pali Examinations to the first edition of the society's journal, *Buddhism: An Illustrated Quarterly* (1903).¹²² Edited by Britain's first Buddhist monk, Ananda Metteya (1872–1922), the journal's contributors included Thomas W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922), founder of the Pali Text Society.¹²³ By this time, as Taw Sein Ko would have been pleased to note, two private Anglo–

¹¹⁹ Taw Sein Ko, *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 2, p 222.

¹²⁰ This last *thathanabaing* of Burma was the maternal uncle of U Pe Maung Tin and his sister, Daw Tee Tee, who married Gordon Hannington Luce.

¹²¹ Bikkhu Ananda Metteya, ed (1903), *Buddhism: An Illustrated Quarterly Review*, Vol 1, No 2, p 5; Maung Maung Pye (nd, circa 1951), *Burma in the Crucible*, Khittaya, Rangoon, pp 3–4; Cady, *supra* note 5, at pp 178–179.

¹²² Taw Sein Ko (1903), 'A brief account of the Pali examinations held under the auspices of the Government of Burma', *Buddhism: An Illustrated Quarterly Review*, Vol 1, No 1, pp 59–60.

¹²³ For more background on Buddhism in turn-of-the-century Europe, see Baumann, M. (2002), 'Global Buddhism: developmental periods, regional histories, and a new analytical perspective', *The Journal of Global Buddhism*, Website: www.globalbuddhism.org.

Vernacular Buddhist boarding schools had been established in Rangoon, one for boys and one for girls, providing Buddhist religious and moral instruction, and the *Buddhasasana Samagama* had begun to publish Burmese and Pali bilingual editions of the Buddhist Scriptures. The society also acted as a small Buddhist library, and received Pali palm-leaf manuscripts from several donors in Rangoon, Ceylon and Mandalay, as well as several Pali grammars.¹²⁴

But the society's and the journal's interest in Buddhism extended from the textual realm to religious monuments, as reflected in an editorial on the ruins of Anuradhapura in Ceylon, which reproached the 'modern Singhalese' for leaving care of their heritage to the Government Archaeologist, and exhorted the Buddhists of Ceylon to 'preserve the Cetiya and Buddharaupas, to clear the former of the jungle that covers them, and to surround the latter with appropriate shrines'.¹²⁵ The Buddhist Society also applauded the government of British Burma's long overdue decision to protect and conserve Burma's ancient monuments and cultural sites, under a Bill to provide for the preservation of ancient monuments and objects of archaeological, historical or artistic interest in October 1903. Noting not only acts of looting and vandalism at Pagan, but also at Mingun, by European 'globe-trotters', the article applauded the belated motion to protect the heritage of India, including Burma, but acknowledged that: 'Mr. Taw Sein Ko has been working under difficulties in the past, owing to the want of a proper staff of expert assistants, but some relief has now been afforded him by an Archaeological surveyor'. As the journal editor asked, 'why afford him some relief only? Why not employ a sufficient and competent staff at once, and have all that remains rescued... It is next to useless to ask an expert to work with an insufficient, probably inefficient staff', the journal continued, and urged the administration, under Lord Curzon and Sir Hugh Barnes, to give Taw Sein Ko 'all the assistance he needs, for inspecting and reporting on sites to be conserved and where excavations may be carried on'.¹²⁶ Although published and mentioned in the journal, we do not know if Taw Sein Ko was a member of the society. What is clear is that this society contributed in part to the identification of Burma culture as a field for preservation, study and acquisition, and helped to circulate such notions beyond elite European enclaves through its Burma language publications. This notion of

¹²⁴ (Author?) (1903), 'Ourselves' and 'Books received', *Buddhism*, pp 314, 337.

¹²⁵ (1903), 'Ourselves', *Buddhism*, pp 318–319.

¹²⁶ (1903), 'News and Notes', *Buddhism*, pp 341–343.

cultural conservation, and the packaging of culture as a curio, were in keeping with heritage-building trends elsewhere in turn-of-the-century South East Asia, notably Siam and French Indo-China, and were intimately allied to notions of the importance of entrenching and preserving cultural and environmental markers of difference around and between discrete ‘races’.

How he saw himself: Taw Sein Ko as ‘native scholar’ and ‘Orientalist’

Shortly after joining Thirkell White’s office in 1886 – a year that he later remembered as the ‘most anxious and strenuous days of the annexation of Upper Burma and the Shan States’ – Taw Sein Ko wrote *Maung Po: A Product of Western Civilization*, a novella whose protagonist appears to be partly modelled on himself. Maung Po is a young Burmese man educated at a colonial school. Discouraged from attending Calcutta University by his father, a clerk in the Indian Civil Service, the protagonist is ‘A sharp lad... Boyish, full of spirit and...fun...more of an English boy, than a Burman boy born and bred in the enervating tropics’. Maung Po marries a respectable Burmese woman who encourages him to pursue a life of secular intellectual engagement, through education and writings, so that he might ‘become the radiating centre of an influence that would benefit, refine and elevate your fellow countrymen, who sadly need preaching regarding the cultivation of the Spirit of Patriotism’. This dichotomy between what he interpreted as the passive meditation of Buddhist monks and those equipped to make, and write the ‘secular history’ of the nation, is a theme he continued to develop in his writings.¹²⁷

The year 1898 saw publication of Taw Sein Ko’s *Elementary Handbook of the Burmese Language*, a practical colloquial course in Burmese for Indian Civil Service candidates undergoing their probationary training in England. His pro-British position was nicely illustrated in one of the ‘Miscellaneous questions and answers’ in the primer: *Aso:ya a-hmu-dou htan gyin-ba-de*, ‘(I) wish to serve the Government’.¹²⁸ The following year, the scope for his involvement in cultural service to the government grew with his appointment as the Superintendent of Archaeology

¹²⁷ Taw Sein Ko (date?), ‘Burmese historical writings’, *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 1, pp 278–281.

¹²⁸ Taw Sein Ko (1898), *Elementary Handbook of the Burmese Language*, Government Printing, Rangoon, p 29.

for Burma. But it was not until December 1901, with Lord Curzon's visit to Pagan and Mandalay, that the Department was really set in motion.

It has been speculated that Taw Sein Ko was a British intelligence agent, whose Archaeological hat was one of several that helped to disguise this status.¹²⁹ Taw Sein Ko's possible affiliation with the Intelligence Office is lent weight by Morrison's encounter with him in 1890s Rangoon, and might explain the number of Imperial honours conferred upon him during a time when the Archaeological Survey was held in such disregard that its budgets were cut and its facilities neglected. But Taw Sein Ko, although lacking in formal archaeological training, clearly attended to his duties with enthusiasm and perseverance, and saw a particular and important place for the unearthing and documentation of a linear history, as well as the preservation of a particular past, in Burma. When Taw Sein Ko visited China in 1896, it was in the dying throes of the late Qing and far from possessing a national-heritage consciousness. However, reformist intellectuals had begun to talk about a 'national' style and to locate it in such emergent icons as the Summer Palace, whose bombing by Anglo-French forces in 1860 had sparked fierce animosity, but whose physical impairment could not scar the 'solid . . . monument' constituted by the 4,500 imperial poems on the Palace.¹³⁰ The sinologist Pierre Ryckmans has argued that Chinese notions of heritage and monuments are centred more on text – on inscriptions – than on actual buildings.¹³¹ This view certainly coheres with Taw Sein Ko's summary of his tour of inspection of Mon country:

I have now traversed through the whole of the ancient Mon Kingdom of Ramannadesa proper. The stone inscriptions are the chief of many objects of archaeological value.¹³²

The tools on which Taw Sein Ko relied for his scattered works on 'Burmese ethnology' were 'comparative philology, comparative religion,

¹²⁹ Author's conversation with Dr Pamela Gutman, Sydney, May 2000.

¹³⁰ Barmé, G. (1996), *The Garden of Perfect Brightness: A Life in Ruins*, The Australian National University, Canberra, p 112.

¹³¹ Ryckmans, P. (1989), 'The Chinese attitude towards the past', *Papers on Far Eastern History*, Vol 39, No 3, p 2. See also Jeremy E. Taylor (2001, 'From "Hello Kitty" to hot-springs: nostalgia and the Japanese past in Taiwan', *Cathay Skripten*, No 18, Ruhr-Universität, Bochum, p 10.

¹³² Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 55, at p 10; this passage is also cited in Orr, *supra* note 31, at p 20, although Orr misrepresents him slightly, writing 'the stone inscriptions are about the only objects of archaeological value', and dates the report as 1913.

and anthropometry'.¹³³ Although he expressed a strong textual interest in Burmese culture and Pali Buddhist scriptures, insisting on the beauty of Burmese poetry, the advanced state of its literature, and the need to include these in school and university curricula, early on in his career he expressed a view in keeping with both Chinese Confucian and Anglican Protestant assumptions about the value of investing in education. 'Unlike in India', he wrote, 'a Burman here would sooner make a splendid donation to the monasteries than found scholarships, lectureships, &c', citing the example of a Burma lady who donated 3,000 Rupees worth of 'priestly furniture' to *pongyis*.¹³⁴ This stance, which valued the accumulation of knowledge over merit, made Taw Sein Ko the perfect intermediary in the translation of European heritage values to British Burma.

As his career progresses, we see him wearing European aesthetic standards and notions of 'heritage' more comfortably. In his 1891 report of Mon, Taw Sein Ko, perhaps in part because he still had a strongly 'textual' view of monumental heritage, had been quite happy to leave 'religious buildings worthy of conservation' in the care of 'the people'.¹³⁵ But by 1901, following Curzon's intervention and stress on the need to conserve monuments as material manifestations of national art and character, he is enforcing a government ban on using temple maintenance funds for gilding or *pwe* – both traditional merit-seeking activities.¹³⁶ This was the beginning of a dual tendency in Taw Sein Ko's writings, which would become more pronounced: the celebration of Burma culture, as lived, and the parallel call for its conservation and museumization. In other words, the Burma culture of which he wrote, and from which we might guess he became increasingly divorced in his daily practice, increasingly became an abstract reification, which should be the object of museums and school curriculum.

In 1904, the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act was passed, and in 1906, Taw Sein Ko spent four weeks in northern India, where he was 'initiated into the mysteries of excavation work and enjoyed the privilege of studying on the spot the methods and principles employed in conserving Moghul architecture'.¹³⁷ Among his conservation projects

¹³³ Taw Sein Ko (date?), 'Burmese ethnology', *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 1, p 4.

¹³⁴ Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 111, at pp 224–225.

¹³⁵ Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 55, at p 10.

¹³⁶ Taw Sein Ko (1903), *Report of the Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey for the Year Ending 1902 to 1903*, Government Publishing, Rangoon, p 2.

¹³⁷ Taw Sein Ko (1907), *Report of the Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey of*

in 1907–08, Taw Sein Ko cleared the precincts of the Nanpaya temple, Pagan, of ‘vegetation and debris’ and crowned its summit with ‘a watertight coping of concrete’. During this year, he also oversaw reparations to the shelter over the Mingun bell, and the replacement of its cement flooring with flagstones, and supervised the start of conservation works at Prome, where three pagodas were selected for conservation. Of these, the Bawbawgyi pagoda, ‘covered with thick jungle near the base’, with ‘passages cut into it by treasure-hunters’ was cleared of vegetation and debris.¹³⁸ Apart from the use of concrete coping, which sat oddly beside the government ban on ‘new additions’ to religious structures, these methods were markedly similar to those used by the EFEO at Angkor. By 1910, he was championing more active state intervention in religious conservation, indicating that the preservation of the ‘national culture’ had become more important than the active practice of religion, and denying permission for one ‘pious layman’ to go about traditional merit-seeking activities by embellishing and re-gilding two shrines at Bagan.¹³⁹

As Government Archaeologist, a post that he held in conjunction with other posts until 1919, Taw Sein Ko researched and authored 10 elaborate annual reports, tabulating and detailing his activities, his plans and his suggestions for improvements to the mandate and management of Burma’s Archaeological Department. Each of these reports, the only such detailed reports to be published at this level by a ‘native’ employee of the colonial civil service in Burma, is prefaced by a ‘Resolution’ by the Lieutenant-Governor General. This stamp of white authority acted as a report on the report, a validation of the ‘Truth’ offered up by the ‘native’ – an authentication of indigenous history. More of a school report than a book review, these Resolutions were often harsh in their criticism of the structure, scope and style of Taw Sein Ko’s report and activities. They occasionally recognized his positive qualities, as in one reference to the ‘zeal and interest displayed by Mr Taw Sein Ko’

Burma for the Year Ending 31 March 1907, Government Publishing House, Rangoon, p 4.

¹³⁸ Taw Sein Ko (1908), ‘Notes on conservation in Burma’: Private Papers of Sir Bartle Frere, Office of the India and Oriental Records Collection (hereafter OIORC), British Library, London, Mss Eur. F81/59. These notes, pp 33–37, appear to be an extract from the *Report of the Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey of Burma [RSASB] for the Year Ending 31 March 1908*.

¹³⁹ Taw Sein Ko (1910), RSASB, p 3. Citing the policy of the Archaeological Department, he advised him to ‘leave glass mosaic work entirely out of his programme of renovation’.

(1906) and his 'devotion . . . to the cause of Archaeology in Burma' (1911).¹⁴⁰ But such praise usually served as a postscript to rambling paragraphs berating Taw Sein Ko for not structuring his report in the proper manner, or for spending too much time touring and not enough conserving. Not until 1912, when the French curator Charles Duroiselle took over from Taw Sein Ko on his long-service leave, did the tone of the Resolutions change to one of unqualified endorsement.

Taw Sein Ko's reports were not without their own barbs. He issued a number of complaints about the poor facilities provided, and the lack of offices, which hindered his task, and made repeated calls for archaeological scholarships to train Burmans in Burma epigraphy and archaeology. Another subtext to Taw Sein Ko's reports are his interpolations on the dire state of his office, and suggestions for improvement. In 1906, he reported bouts of staff sickness in Rangoon (1905) and Mandalay (1906), following the outbreak of plague and due to the 'generally unhealthy nature of the climate'. From 1899 to 1906, he complained that five office moves had interfered 'materially with the progress of archaeological research'. Taw Sein Ko requested permanent accommodation in Mandalay or Moulmein, but two years later, funds earmarked for such an office in the 1908–09 Civil Works Budget were slashed, 'due to heavy retrenchments made under the orders of the Government of India', and the future of such an office was in doubt. This theme of governmental neglect, underfunding and understaffing continued in the Reports of the Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey into the 1930s, well after Taw Sein Ko's retirement, and was also taken up by G.E. Scott in 1911.¹⁴¹ From 1905 to 1911, Taw Sein Ko persisted with recommendations for the establishment of a 'scholarship in archaeology' specifically for Burma, for Pali and Burmese speakers, to supplement the existing scholarship at Calcutta University for Sanskritists and Persianists.¹⁴² In a confidential communication to the Director General of the Government Department of the Survey of Archaeology in 1909, Taw Sein Ko aired what must have been long-

¹⁴⁰ Resolution (1906) on the *Report of the Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey of Burma for the Year Ending March 31 1906*, Government Publishing, Rangoon, p 3; and Resolution (1911) on the *Report of the Archaeological Survey of Burma for the Year Ending March 31 1911*, Government Publishing House, Rangoon, p 2.

¹⁴¹ 'It is one of the blots on our administration', wrote Scott, 'that not enough money is devoted to archaeological research'. George Scott (1911), *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Commercial and Political Information*, (publisher?) p 341.

¹⁴² Taw Sein Ko (1906), *supra* note 140, at p 17, and Taw Sein Ko (1908), *supra* note 138, at p 8.

simmering frustrations at the inequities of colonialism's knowledge complex, when he contrasted the 'preconceived solution' and 'encrusted prejudice' imported from the 'cloistered halls of Europe' with the 'labours of native scholars on the spot, who have borne the heat and burden of the day, and who are in personal truck with the living languages and religions' of the region.¹⁴³ There is no doubt where Taw Sein Ko positioned himself in this hierarchy.

In 1910, the Burma Research Society (BRS) came into being. A joint initiative of J.S. Furnivall, U May Oung and others, it offered Burma's new generation of secular literati, like Taw Sein Ko, an equal role in the delineation and identification of a Burmese culture. The British Financial Commissioner had vetoed the first moves to establish the BRS out of concern that it might be a scheme to 'encourage nationalist and subversive tendencies', and perhaps also through an unarticulated fear that the Burmese might become too knowledgeable about themselves, robbing the colonial regime of its standing as the leading 'authority' on Burma. The Society's initial mandate called for more attention to Burma's archaeology, reflecting the possible input of Taw Sein Ko, but this clause was deleted by Governor White when he approved the Society on the grounds that it might be seen to be too critical of the British government.¹⁴⁴ Two years before Taw Sein Ko's death, the British administration's predictions about the nationalist potential inherent in 'self-knowledge' were borne out by Furnivall himself who, in 1928, praised the BRS for 'invigorating nationalist sentiment' and for being 'one of the earliest, and not the least unhelpful, of national movements in Burma'.¹⁴⁵

Elsewhere, Taw Sein Ko uses the dry language of the annual report as a platform for his own oblique criticisms of the British appropriation of Burmese antiquities. In 1910, recording the recent 'discovery' of an ancient Burmese temple bell in Madras, he juxtaposes the fact and act of its looting and uprooting by a British officer in the Madras army with the function of bells in Buddhist ceremonies, 'to call upon the spirits of the sky, air and earth to bear witness to such meritorious deeds'.¹⁴⁶ The following year was marked by personal tragedy in Taw

¹⁴³ Taw Sein Ko (1909), 'Confidential to J.H. Marshall, DSA', 30 December, p 13.

¹⁴⁴ Furnivall, J. S. (1935), '25 years, a retrospect and prospect', *JBRS*, Vol 25, pp 40–42; Cady, *supra* note 5, at p 180.

¹⁴⁵ Furnivall, J. S. (1928), 'As it was in the beginning', Speech to a Public Meeting of the Society, 15 August, University College, Rangoon.

¹⁴⁶ Taw Sein Ko, *supra* note 139, at p 22.

Sein Ko's life, with the death of his wife, with whom he had had nine children (seven sons and two daughters, one of the daughters having died earlier of sickness). After this time, despite reported overtures by women interested in marrying him, Taw Sein Ko threw himself even more wholeheartedly into his intellectual pursuits, and lived out his remaining 20 years studying and researching.¹⁴⁷

In 1913, Taw Sein Ko lauded Lord Curzon's policies of conservation: the government's adoption of kingly responsibilities, he reasoned, had greatly increased the people's loyalty.¹⁴⁸ It is not clear whether this was blatant propaganda or self-delusion, but matters came to a head two years later when Taw Sein Ko published a list of protected monuments in the *Burma Gazette*, which 'roused the religious susceptibilities of the Buddhist population of Burma and provoked objections against the monuments being declared protected'. So strong was this backlash against colonial, secular intrusion in this area, that, after repeated attempts to 'explain' the policy, the 1915 lists of protected monuments were withdrawn.¹⁴⁹ Yet when fresh controversy broke out in 1917, Taw Sein Ko further distanced himself from those Buddhist practices, which he himself presumably observed to some extent, and the decline of which he had decried in his earliest writings. Specifically, he chastised members of the Bôkda-garu-garawa Society, a local association for showing respect for religious buildings, for erecting notices on the Shwehmawday Pagoda in Pegu in 1917 forbidding the wearing of shoes. Here, Taw Sein Ko may not only have been representing European views, but also reflecting a variety of practices in China and among Chinese in South East Asia concerning the wearing and removing of shoes when entering temples. Taw Sein Ko stressed that Europeans showed their respect when entering sacred places by taking off their hats, and thus emerged as perhaps the only Burmese spokesman for the British right to ride roughshod over Burmese beliefs, arguing that

¹⁴⁷ U Tin, *supra* note 23, at p 12.

¹⁴⁸ Taw Sein Ko, *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 1, p 56.

¹⁴⁹ Duroiselle, C. (1921), *RSASB for the Year Ending 31 March 1921*, Government Publishing, Rangoon, pp 7–8. Five years later, Taw Sein Ko's successor Charles Duroiselle declared that 'the general feeling of the population is not yet allayed' and advised against 'reviving the controversy of 1915 by again notifying these monuments as protected. Regretting that these monuments should pass out of our control altogether', Duroiselle predicted 'calmer times . . . when it will be possible to persuade the people that the Act is not against but, on the contrary, in favour of their own religion . . . I have no doubt that the time is not far off when the people, grasping thoroughly the meaning of the Act, will have no more objections, in the very interest of their religious buildings, to their being placed under protection.'

Europeans visiting pagodas should be allowed to remain shod. 'It is scarcely politic or expedient', he argued, 'for the Buddhists of Burma to attempt to set up a barrier, which would exclude their European friends and sympathisers from the sacred precincts of their pagodas and monasteries, especially at this juncture, when union, co-operation and harmony are so urgently required between all *classes* of people in the land'.¹⁵⁰

In the same year, he aligned himself with the forces of 'progress', which to him were intimately allied with questions of property ownership, by supporting the introduction of a will or testament, a proposal that ran against the grain of Theravadan Buddhist beliefs, and was rejected in toto by leading figures in the *thatanaa*, but which correlated with certain Chinese religious beliefs. In a series of correspondence on Buddhist wills between himself and U Shway Thwin, Taw Sein Ko stressed the need for Burmese Buddhists to adopt 'testamentary power', or the right to bestow property under a will, advising that it would give them an edge in the 'struggle for existence' by stabilizing wealth among the Burmans, securing 'capital and combination', and thus providing Burmans with the same socioeconomic advantages as Europeans, Indians and Chinese. Here as elsewhere, he squarely allied himself with the British, and firmly positioned himself, and Burma's future, with modernity. 'The world is advancing and Burma with it', he wrote, 'and with the new generation tradition has lost its hold'.¹⁵¹ Here also, Taw Sein Ko appeared to be advocating a form of Mahayana Buddhism.¹⁵² In light of his own views on the early Mahayana influences in Burma, he might have seen a reformed Buddhism as an arena for reconciling the agendas of British colonialism, Burmese nationalism, and what he clearly regarded as Chinese mercantilism. Such statements, published in the twilight of his career with the Indian Civil Service, are in keeping with his identification with new intellectual and political forces at play as a teenager. Taw Sein Ko retired from government service in 1919. In 1923, he became a member of the British Legislative Council, and gave evidence before various courts and committees.¹⁵³ He also

¹⁵⁰ Taw Sein Ko (1919), 'Wearing shoes on pagoda platforms', in *Burmese Sketches*, Vol 2, British Burma Press, Rangoon, pp 142–143 [my emphasis]. A recent earthquake had attracted numbers of Europeans and Burmans to the pagoda to survey the structural damage.

¹⁵¹ Taw Sein Ko (1917), 'Mandalay, 12 January to U Shway Twin, Moulmein, reproduced along with other letters in 'Correspondence on Buddhist wills', *Journal of the Burmese Research Society*, Vol 7, No 1, pp 56–57.

¹⁵² Private communication with Michael Charney, Melbourne, July 2000.

¹⁵³ *Who's Who in Burma*, *supra* note 18, at p 123.

remained on the General Committee of the *JBRS*.¹⁵⁴ He died on 29 May 1930, and was given a Burma Buddhist funeral, at which his friend U Tin presented the short biography, followed by Buddhist blessings, on which this article has drawn heavily for details of his personal life.

With his Sino-Burmese parentage, his British education, and later sojourns in London and Peking, Taw Sein Ko aroused discomfort in some Europeans as an interloper between cultures, races and status. In their snide asides and schoolmasterly condemnations of his lack of structure or substance, penned in their prefaces to his *Archaeological Reports*, several of Taw Sein Ko's superiors reduce him to the figure of a mimic-man, the equivalent of Rudyard Kipling's ethnologist Hurree Babu, the 'ontologically funny native' whose achievements can never quite match up to 'real' Europeans in his field, and who, like Taw Sein Ko, aspires to publication in the *Asiatic Quarterly Review*.¹⁵⁵ In this vein, a 1918 diary entry by the British missionary Sarah Morris describes Taw Sein Ko's future obituarist, U Tin, then Nyaungu Subdivisional Officer, as 'a funny old Burman' who escorted her to a museum near the Ananda Pagoda.¹⁵⁶ Conversely, those Europeans who were themselves cross-cultural interlocutors, such as Taw Sein Ko's colleague Charles Duroiselle, a French scholar from the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* who was socially marginalized due to his marriage to a Burmese woman, showed sincere respect for Taw Sein Ko and his findings, as indicated in the form and text of one joint publication.¹⁵⁷ Equally, Taw Sein Ko would have taken pride, in 1920, in the description of him by the Superintendent of the *Archaeological Survey* as a 'shining example' whose 30 years' service to archaeology had elucidated 'many historical and artistic problems presented by the growing collection of inscriptions and of archaeological discoveries in Burma'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ *JBRS* (1922), Vol 12, No 3, p 177.

¹⁵⁵ Said, *supra* note 26, at pp 152–153; Kipling, R. (date?), *Kim*, (publisher, place?) pp 258–259. Unlike Taw Sein Ko's work, Hurree Babu's notes to the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* are rejected.

¹⁵⁶ OIORC (1918), Mss Eur C399, 'Diary of Mrs Doris Sarah Morris (née Easton), Diary Entry, 10 September', OIORC, London.

¹⁵⁷ Taw Sein Ko, Superintendent, *Archaeological Survey of Burma* and Charles Duroiselle, Assistant *Archaeological Superintendent for Epigraphy*, *Burma Circle* (1919), *Epigraphia Birmanica*, Government Printing, Rangoon, especially pp 4, 15.

¹⁵⁸ Resolution (1920) of the Government of Burma on the *Report of the Superintendent, Archaeological Survey of Burma for the Year 1919–20*, Government Printing, Rangoon.

Conclusion

By focusing on such figures as Taw Sein Ko, we can liberate the template of colonial knowledge production from the commonly accepted notion of a bilateral transaction, however skewed, between Europeans and non-Europeans. As an 'Oriental' ethnographer whose subaltern position within colonial hierarchies rendered him 'on the margins', Taw Sein Ko complicates the notion of ethnographic practice as a 'colonial means of producing disparate peoples',¹⁵⁹ and ensured that knowledge production in colonial Burma was more of a 'triologue' than a 'dialogue'. This three-way traffic resonates with Taw Sein Ko's entry for 'nationality: Lu-myo' in his 1898 primer, which was followed by a long list, headed with, 'Burman, Englishman, Chinaman'.¹⁶⁰ In her work on Orientalist architecture, Zeynep Çelik uses the notion of 'triangulation' – a technical term borrowed from map-making and engineering and adopted by sociology as a research tool – to offer the possibility of 'multiple readings of history' by approaching Orientalism 'from the "other" side, the side of "Orientals"'. Studied from this unconventional angle, writes Çelik:

Orientalism reveals a hitherto unknown dynamism, one that is about dialogue between cultures and about contesting the dominant norms. When the Oriental artists and intellectuals speak and begin shaping the terms of the debate, the Orient as represented by the West sheds its homogeneity, timelessness, and passivity, and becomes nuanced and complicated.¹⁶¹

Borrowing from this work, Homi Bhabha's notion of a 'Third space', and more recent speculations about the identifications of 'Third Culture Kids' (TCKs), we can read Taw Sein Ko and others like him as 'third culture interlocutors'. By focusing on his positioning in a Third Space, as a translator, negotiator and interlocutor between and across cultures, we can avoid reducing Taw Sein Ko to the restrictive figure of 'the hybrid,' a label that risks mis-translating Taw Sein Ko as a Kiplingesque figure who has 'lost his own country and not acquired any other'.¹⁶² Kipling's configuration of the 'monstrous hybridism of

¹⁵⁹ Axel, B. (2002), *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and its Futures*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, p 20.

¹⁶⁰ Taw Sein Ko (1898), *Elementary Handbook of the Burmese Language*, Government Printing, Rangoon, p 29.

¹⁶¹ Zeynep Çelik, 'Speaking back to Orientalist discourse', in Beaulieu and Roberts, *supra* note 4, at p 23.

¹⁶² Kipling, *supra* note 155, at p 341.

East and West' cohered with late Victorian fears of racial, cultural and social degeneration. The hybrid was viewed with horror by European elites, precisely because it threatened to destabilize the striation of English and native, white and non-white, British Burma and French Indo-China, on whose maintenance and entrenchment the continuation and justification of imperial rule and its global *realpolitik* depended.

Taw Sein Ko was the product of a pre-nationalist era in identifications and social relations. In his lifetime, room for the ethnic manoeuvrability on which he prided Burmese society diminished with the hardening of ethnic boundaries, both through colonial legislation and through early ethno-nationalist prescriptions for the cultural and racial 'purity' of China and Burma. The rise of nationalism in late nineteenth century Europe stoked beliefs in the specificity of national cultures and races and the notion that the assimilation or adaptation of one race or culture to another would result in its 'vanishing' or 'disappearance', as projected on to the colonies through the visions of local cultural and racial erasure postulated by Kelly *et al.* At the same time, Taw Sein Ko's predictions for the assimilation or absorption of Chinese and other cultural groups to the Burman 'race' became less realistic with the rise in female immigration from China, which reduced the extent of Sino-Burman intermarriage. By 1921, there was a ratio of 46 Chinese women to 100 Chinese men in Burma.¹⁶³

Figures such as Taw Sein Ko reveal the falsity of popular imperial notions of the time, which maintained that the marrying of one country or culture with another would result in a mutual vanishing and reduction of the shared ground between the two to an empty hyphen. Taw Sein Ko was more than a hyphenated space, an interface between Burma, Britain and China; nor is the metaphor of the 'hyphen' one that had any meaning in Burmese and Chinese languages during his lifetime. In many respects, he was a colonial version of Salman Rushdie's notion of migrants both as 'translated' and as *translating* men. As Rushdie observes, while it is 'normally supposed that something gets lost in translation', something can also 'be gained'.¹⁶⁴ For Taw Sein Ko, whose intellectual outlook reveals him to be as much a Victorian as a Confucianist or Buddhist, what could be gained by emphasizing his Chineseness to European audiences was the kudos of association with what many Europeans still considered a superior, more ancient, more

¹⁶³ League of Nations, *supra* note 93, at p 360.

¹⁶⁴ Rushdie, S. (1991), *Imaginary Homelands*, Granta Books, London, p 17.

impenetrable and thus more *knowledgeable* civilization: that seen to be embodied not solely in 'John Chinaman' but also in such cultural figureheads as Du Fu. His success, like that of the contemporary travellers across Sino-Burmese borders analysed by Mika Toyota, stemmed from his ability 'to create a multi-faced identity and establish social networks across national and ethnic boundaries'.¹⁶⁵ However, this was no empty posturing: his writings reveal a man who modelled himself in the Confucian tradition of the enlightened civil servant, while rejecting all that had corrupted that tradition in Qing China; in his economic outlook, he embraced the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill, while in his love and appreciation of Burmese literary and material culture, and in his promotion of Buddhist education, he showed himself an early proponent of 'Asian values'.

Taw Sein Ko was also a journeyman between two eras, that of the indigenous, traditional literati, or the 'old order' constituting the Holy Trinity of king-monkhood-laity, and the new one that emerged following the exile of the Burmese monarchy in the Third Anglo-Burmese War. As a novice clerk in the British administration, he participated in this brutal act of disestablishment, so denying Burma nationalists the Holy Trinity of 'nation-religion-king' (*jiet-sasenna-sdech*) around which nationalists in Cambodia and Siam coined their new conceptions of nation. In Burma, language took the place of 'kingship', as reflected in the mantra of the Young Men's Buddhist Association's phrase, *amyo ba-tha tha-thana* (race-language-religion).¹⁶⁶ Language and literature – their retrieval, revival and placement on state and university school curricula – became central preoccupations of the young, Western-educated elite. Their efforts to identify and conserve a body of specifically Burman cultural and national traditions, and the textual interpretation of the nation, owed much to such associations as the International Buddhist Society and the Burma Research Society, and to individuals such as Taw Sein Ko. Alongside numerous other gifted Burmese intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Taw Sein Ko acted as a bridge-maker between the cosmologies of kingship and those of the secular nation state. As such, his story points to a more complex geology of indigenous, other Asian, and European

¹⁶⁵ Toyota, 'Changing Chinese identities and migration in the borderlands of China, Burma and Thailand', in Nyíri and Saveliev, *supra* note 64, at pp 189–207, specifically pp 203–204.

¹⁶⁶ Ba Maw (1968), *Memoirs of a Revolution, 1939–1946*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, pp 8–9.

intellectual intersections than has been commonly assumed in analyses of both Burma and other colonial regimes in Theravadin South East Asia. In many ways, Taw Sein Ko personified a period of high colonial transformation, which saw the state take over from individuals, whether merchants or monarchs, as a patron and sponsor of a culture, a development whose imprint of culture with a national hallmark would have lasting ramifications for post-colonial nationalisms. More specifically, he made way for such figures as Pe Maung Tin and later veterans of Burmese epigraphy, archaeology and history who helped to map the contours of the conceptual, cultural Burmese 'nation' on which nationalists built their visions, and who acted in significant ways as translators of cultural knowledge about Burma to Western audiences in a post-colonial world.

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